Zuzanna Dziuban

Museum-Cemetery:

(Infra)Structural Violence Against Human Remains[1]

Abstract: In this paper, I investigate Polish memorial sites and museums established at former Nazi extermination camps, defined by the presence of human remains of their Jewish victims, through a conceptual prism of *museum-cemetery*. Museum-cemetery is construed here as a concept (an analytic category), a practice, and a dynamic cultural/political space, extending to include the burial sites curated by the memorial institutions. In my reading, museum-cemetery is a transformative and politically productive *infrastructure* that instantiates a material and spatial articulation of hierarchies and social norms as well as one of structural violence, and a complex politics of dead bodies. Acknowledging that not only living bodies but also those of the dead are subject to sovereign power, through various social and material practices, I argue that museums and memorial sites partake in the production and undoing of the dead. But they are also carriers of necroviolence: violence against human remains. Analysing the post-war history of Polish sites of memory at former Nazi extermination camps and the practices and infrastructural transformations that arise around them – including robbery of the dead, archaeological research, work on commemoration, musealization – I discuss the forms of necroviolence that affect dead bodies, from immediate physical violence to violence of abandonment.

Keywords: Holocaust, memorials, museum-cemetery, human remains, necroviolence, infrastructural violence, abandonment

No Exit

When thinking about Polish memorial museums at the sites of the Holocaust, I like to return to Jochen Gerz's installation *Exit/Materialien zum Projekt Dachau*. I do so because Gerz's *Exit* offers a critical, deeply political perspective on contemporary museums and memorial sites established at the sites of former Nazi camps. *Exit* was first exhibited in 1972 in Sammlung Kunstmuseum in Bochum. It consists of twenty chairs and tables carrying identical photo albums, bound in wooden covers and filled with images taken by Gerz at the former concentration camp in Dachau. Seated at two parallel rows of tables, lit by the dim glow of naked light bulbs, visitors to the installation are confronted with photographs documenting several dozen written instructions carefully shaping behaviour and regulating the spatial practices of people visiting the museum at the former camp. The albums open with a photograph of the exit sign, which subtly sets up the interpretive frame of the work, followed by images of memorial site regulations, detailed information about the museum's operation, and many specific prohibitions imposed on visitors: "no smoking, no dogs, no baby strollers, no litter, no straying from the path," no writing on the walls, no touching the exhibits, no entry, no exit. Gerz's installation does not centre, therefore, on the memory of the atrocities committed and commemorated at Dachau. The subject of the work is the very infrastructure of the museum and the experience of its visitors, carefully governed by the spatial and discursive organization of the site.[2]

In 2011, the work was shown in Poland, in the Krakow Museum of Modern Art. As it was in Germany, in Poland it was framed as a "argument against the very idea of memorial museum."[3] *Exit* was read as a critique of discursive and "visual legislature"[4] and the regulatory dimension of Holocaust museums and memorial sites, which, according to some, reduces the idea of such museums *ad absurdum*.[5] In my view, there is nothing absurd about Gerz's installation. Its meanings, too, cannot be circumscribed to its unveiling and critically unpacking "the mechanisms of surveillance and control governing the ostensibly secure space."[6] One could argue that security, as much ontological as epistemological, does not (and, for that matter, should not) structure the narration and experience of the museums established at

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2   Jochen Gerz/Francis Levy, Exit. Das Dachau-Projekt, Frankfurt am Main 1978.

3   Dorora Jarecka, Muzeum bolesnych pytań, in: Gazeta Wyborcza (19 May 2011), https://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,9622673,Muzeum_bolesnych_pytan.html (10 March 2020).

4   Jochen Gerz, Bemerkungen zu Exit, in: Gerz/Levy, Exit, 1978, 137.

5   Horst Bredekamp, Akty Obrazu jako świadectwo i werdykt, in: Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), Historia wizualna. Obrazy w dyskursach niemieckich historyków, Warsaw 2020, 208.

6   Joanna Chludzińska, MOCAK – Nowe oblicze sztuki, in: Zwierciadło (9 September 2011), https://zwierciadlo.pl/kultura/sztuka/mocak-nowe-oblicze-sztuki (10 March 2021).

the formed concentration and extermination camps. Nor can the work's meaning be curtailed to what James Young described as a "critique of the Holocaust memorial museum as a formal, if ironic, extension of the authoritarian regime it would commemorate."[7] Rather, Gerz's installation points to a deeper paradox inscribed in the organizational structure, and infrastructure, of an institution aimed at memorializing the crimes committed by the Nazis at Dachau. Choosing an *in-situ* museum to juxtapose the functionality of prescriptions and prohibitions at the Dachau concentration camp and the Dachau museum, Gerz meant to illuminate an essential continuity binding the murderous regime of the former with the disciplinary regime of the latter. "The linguistic organization of the KZ Dachau only seemingly contradicts the linguistic organization of the Dachau Museum; on the contrary, they complement each other, one as a project of the other,"[8] he observes. Violence permeates and organizes both categories of space.

In Gerz's provocative work, this resemblance between two institutions, the museum and the camp – surely fulfilling radically distinct political and cultural functions – reflects the continuity of certain aspects of Nazism in post-war German law, politics, and culture, including the prevalence of antisemitism, and the ways in which they still affect the "daily functioning of administrations, governmental institutions, and museums."[9] Gerz also speaks (indirectly) to the site's complex post-war history, its reuse as a prison in the early post-war years, its transformation by German authorities into a housing project for refugees, its long neglect, and the near demolition of its remaining structures, prevented only when the site was reclaimed by survivors and transformed into a memorial in 1965.[10] Building on this and on his artistic license, Gerz's installation ironically challenges the notion that the museum established at the site signals a decisive 'exit' from this continuity. Instead, the work could be seen as a fierce denunciation of museums and memorial sites as structures of exclusion and discipline, as arenas of production and undoing of subjectivities, carrying traces of past violence, maintained and silently articulated in the post-war infrastructures – even those meant to critically engage with this violence such as museums and memorial sites established at former Nazi camps.

In my view, *Exit* served, therefore, as a powerful artistic anticipation of a critical debate in the field of museum studies initiated by Eilean Hooper Greenhill in

7   James E. Young, At Memory's Edge. After Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture, London 2000, 124.
8   Gerz, Bemerkungen, (1978), 137.
9   Gerz/Levy, Exit, 1978, 147.
10 For a detailed account of the history of the site, see Harold Marcuse, Legacies of Dachau. The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933–2001, Cambridge 2001. Such dynamics are not specific to Dachau; many other former Nazi camps in Germany were reused after the war and subjected to neglect and demolition, even vandalism, before finally being commemorated.

the 1980s and picked up by Tony Bennett and others in the 1990s.[11] Thinkers in this field assess the disciplinary dimensions of museums as means of producing docile subjects under/through constant guidance and surveillance. This found, later, strongest articulation in discussions on the decolonization of museums and a deep reflection on how the museum has come to perpetuate structural violence – the violence of othering, racism, and colonization, supposedly past, but in fact continuously present – through rules, curatorial decisions, discursive and visual framing, and the narratives structuring exhibitions.[12] While, at first, this reflection pertained primarily to subjects visiting the displays, it soon extended to the exhibited objects, among them human remains shown by museums in the Northern Hemisphere and beyond. Critics interrogated the violence from which such remains originated, to which they are subjected through display, and to which they testify in their continued presence in museums – as objects misappropriated from indigenous cultures or violently collected for the purposes of racial research and never returned to affected communities.[13] Now it is the very institution of museum that comes under scrutiny due to its provenance in nationalist and colonial projects, and the various forms of violence it incorporates and perpetuates: direct, symbolic, structural, epistemic.[14]

Gerz's work acts for me as a call to turn a similarly interrogative gaze at *in situ* museums and memorial sites established at the former Nazi extermination camps in Poland and to attend to the forms of violence they perpetuate – a task rarely undertaken. But my analysis centres not on visitors to these sites but to the remains of Jewish victims – killed by the Nazis and then burnt, dumped into body disposal pits, and still located at the sites and subjected to various practices, including those of memorialization. While the violence against those remains unquestionably differs from the violence examined in *Exit* and, for that matter, in decolonization debates,

11 Eilean Hooper Greenhill, The Museum in the Disciplinary Society, in: Susan Pearce (ed.), Museum Studies in Material Culture, Leicester 1989; Eilean Hooper Greenhill, The Disciplinary Museum. Museums and Shaping of Knowledge, London 1992; Tony Bennett, The Birth of the Museum. History, Politics, Theory, Oxon 1995; Piotr Piotrowski, Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe, London 2012.

12 Two recent and, in my view, particularly important voices in this debate are Dan Hicks, who, in *The Brutish Museum*, proposes a compelling "necrography" (death writing) of Pitt Rivers Museum – tracing violence and death behind the objects on display, and arguing that their continuous display is an exercise in violence; and Cornelia Kogoj and Christian Kravagna, who critically analyse the presence of structural racism in US exhibitions devoted to chattel slavery. Dan Hicks, The Brutish Museum. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution, London 2020; Cornelia Kogoj/Christian Kravagna, Das Amerikanische Museum. Sklaverei, Schwarze Geschichte und der Kampf um Gerechtigkeit in Museen der Südstaaten, Berlin 2019.

13 Ciraj Rassol, Human Remains, the Disciplines of the Dead, and the South African Memorial Complex, in: Derek Peterson/Kodzo Gavua/Ciraj Rassool (eds.), The Politics of Heritage in Africa. Economies, Histories, and Infrastructures, London 2015, 133–156.

14 Shahid Vawda, Museums and Epistemology of Injustice: From Colonialism to Decoloniality, in: Museums International 71/7 (2019), 72–79.

it, too, can be traced in the history of the sites, in the trajectory from wartime and the immediate post-war period to the moment of their transformation into museums and memorial sites.

In my paper, I look at this trajectory through the lens of a "*violence continuum*," proposed by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois.[15] In the anthropological perspective of Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, violence takes many forms but cannot be reduced to direct physical force and assault; instead, it should be considered on the level of the cultural, the social, and the normative. For the authors of *Making Sense of Violence*, "wartime violence" (a notion that also includes war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide) sometimes smoothly transitions into "peacetime violence", blurring the distinction between the two. This transition is, obviously, never entirely smooth; it is a complex process in which violence dulls its blade and becomes (for some) less discernible and palpable. In this process, violence resides in social relations, social and symbolic structures, and normative social spaces.[16] There it is neutralized and often rendered invisible *as* a form of violence, though it still operates to dehumanize and exclude. Such invisible violence is structural violence.[17] It materializes in, and through, the daily functioning of governmental institutions and in infrastructures of memorial sites and museums. It remains "hidden in the minutiae of 'normal' social practices" whose "everydayness and familiarity" often results in their being misrecognized.[18]

The notion of *misrecognition*, which Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois borrow from Pierre Bourdieu,[19] is pivotal for their conceptualization of a *violence continuum,* allowing them to attend to modalities of violence customarily overlooked by researchers and others. Importantly, the violence continuum encompasses forms of violence that are simply denied this status or rendered invisible, both in academic writing and in the social and cultural orders that enact them. To look at the dynamics between the former camp and the museum through the prism of a violence continuum is to pay attention to the productivity of space as a locus of violence, both physical and structural – and to foreground the (dis)continuity and structural presence of violence that ostensibly is not there.

In the case I analyse, the invoked continuum does not stand for the persistence of the Nazi camp's structural logic. Instead, I locate it in the historically, geographi-

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15 Nancy Scheper-Hughes/Philippe Bourgois, Introduction. Making Sense of Violence, in: Nancy Scheper-Hughes/Philippe Bourgois (eds.), Violence in War and Peace. An Anthropology, Oxford/Carlton 2004, 1–31.
16 Ibid., 19.
17 Paul Farmer, An Anthropology of Structural Violence, in: Current Anthropology 45/3 (2004), 305–325.
18 Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois, Introduction, 19 and 20.
19 Pierre Bourdieu, Pascalian Meditations, Cambridge 2000.

cally, and politically narrowed specificity of the Holocaust as it unfolded in Poland, and to its equally Polish-specific afterlives. In other words, the violence continuum I address in this article speaks to the persistent dynamics of antisemitism, exclusion, and violence that shaped the life of Jews in Poland before, during, and after the Holocaust. Already before the Holocaust, Jews in Poland were deprived of equal rights and access to social resources and spaces (universities, state administration, the army); they were subjected to direct and indirect discrimination and to physical, economic, and symbolic violence.[20] This violence translated into Polish complicity in the Holocaust and violent dispossession of the Jews during and after the Second World War. It now finds its spatial and material articulation in the form of *necroviolence*: violence against human remains at the sites of the former extermination camps and at the museum-cemeteries. I further argue that Polish Holocaust research still largely misrecognizes this modality of violence, rendering it invisible and unacknowledged as violence.

This discussion serves, therefore, primarily to direct attention to this overlooked modality of violence and to reclaim its status as violence. I do so by analysing the post-war dynamics of *in situ* memorial sites established at the former extermination camps and the practices and infrastructural transformations that arose around them – which include robbery of the dead, archaeological research, work on commemoration, memorialization, and musealization – in order to elaborate on various forms of necroviolence, from physical violence to the violence of abandonment, and the infrastructural articulations of such violence, extending to include the burial sites curated by the memorial institutions. All those practices materially underpin memorials established at the former Nazi camps in Poland, rendering them vehicles of structural violence that affects human remains but, for the most part, remain invisible to visitors of the hegemonically closed museums and memorial sites. In this paper I propose, moreover, that human remains ought to be understood as subjectivities made or undone by (politically) productive material practices and special operations, in this case those of cemeteries, museums, and memorial sites.[21] Analysing those practices and infrastructural transformations evolving around the former extermination camps in Poland from the end of the war to today, I posit, therefore, that the very logic of those sites renders them a constitutive part of the violence continuum. Even after

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20 Instead of quoting a long list of publications addressing this topic, I refer to a recent, and particularly convincing, book: Konrad Matyjaszek, Produkcja przestrzeni żydowskiej w dawnej i współczesnej Polsce, Kraków 2019.

21 Zuzanna Dziuban, Repoliticising the Dead in Post-Holocaust Poland. The Afterlives of Human Remains at the Bełżec Extermination Camp, in: Jean-Marc Dreyfus/Elisabeth Anstett (eds.), Human Remains in Society. Curation and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Genocide and Mass-violence, Manchester 2017, 38–65.

death, the camps' victims remained susceptible to desubjectification, dehumanization, and exclusion effectuated by the spatial order in which they are positioned.

The question remains: which concepts and theoretical perspectives can make discernible the invisibilized violence inscribed in infrastructures of spaces housing human remains? Polish research on the afterlives of Holocaust sites to a large extent falls into two main theoretical perspectives, one structured around *trauma* and the other around *nature*.[22] The former, based on conceptual paradigms developed in the US and Israel, draws from psychoanalysis but reconsiders trauma in cultural and historical terms as an experience that resists incorporation into the realm of perception and representation.[23] Since the late 1990s, the trauma-theoretical framework has become central to the discursive realm of Holocaust studies in Poland. It has come to organize most readings of sites associated with the Holocaust, cast as traumatic sites due to the events they witnessed and the presence of human remains violently disposed of by the Nazis and denied burial rites.[24] These readings stabilize (if not essentialize) the meaning of the former camps as sites of death that cannot be worked through: they are constructed as "authentic landscapes of trauma"[25] or "sites structurally marked by trauma,"[26] and rendered disturbingly static and depoliticized. But this is not the only reason I find this take on the afterlives of the former camps a highly problematic and inadequate analytical tool for interpreting their post-war dynamic. In the last decade, the notion of trauma in the context of the Holocaust in Poland has been a subject of critical debate; it is cast as a (mis)appropriation of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, meant to occlude the complex reality of anti-Jewish violence in Poland before, during, and after the Holocaust, and thus unsuitable for articulating the positionality of non-Jewish Poles towards the Holocaust.[27]

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22 For important exceptions, consult the critical work of Elżbieta Janicka on the space of the former Warsaw ghetto, and Konrad Matyjaszek's work on the construction of "Jewish space" in post-Holocaust Poland, or Joanna Tokarska-Bakir's on early post-war Kielce, which do not fall under the banner of the two categories and, instead, focus on the modalities of violence underpinning those spaces in post-Holocaust Poland. Elżbieta Janicka, Festung Warschau, Warsaw 2011; Konrad Matyjaszek, Produkcja przestrzeni, 2019; Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, Pod Klątwą: Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego, Warsaw 2018.

23 Dominick LaCapra, History and Memory after Auschwitz, Ithaca/London 1998; Dominick La Capra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, Baltimore 2001; Cathy Caruth, Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative and History, Baltimore/London 1996. See also Aleida Assmann, Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses, Munich 1999, 328–334.

24 Roma Sendyka, Sites that Haunt. Affects and Non-Sites of Memory, in: Zuzanna Dziuban (ed.), The "Spectral Turn". Jewish Ghosts in the Polish Post-Holocaust Imaginaire, Bielefeld 2019, 85–106.

25 Małgorzata Fabiszak/Michał Owiński, Wstęp, in: Małgorzata Fabiszak/Michał Owiński (eds.), Obóz-muzeum. Trauma we współczesnym wystawiennictwie, Kraków 2013, 5–12, 7.

26 Ewa Domańska, Recenzja wydawnicza, in: Małgorzata Fabiszak/Michał Owiński (eds.), Obóz-muzeum. Trauma we współczesnym wystawiennictwie, Universitas, Kraków 2013, back cover.

27 For a criticism of the category of trauma in the Polish discourse on the Holocaust, see Elżbieta Janicka, Pamięć przyswojona. Koncepcja polskiego doświadczenia zagłady Żydów jako traumy zbio-

The second dominant theoretical perspective is structured around the notion of nature. It forefronts the significance of the material presence, and material transformations, of human remains, cutting across the nature-culture divide.[28] The post-anthropocentric, environmental history of the Holocaust referenced here conceptually recovers the processuality of Holocaust landscapes, cast as complex ecosystems composed of networks of human and non-human actors (soil, animals, air, plants, water), and examines the mutual impact of human remains – the 'posthuman' organic and inorganic material – and their environments. The sites of the former camps are established, in this perspective, as dynamic, multispecies archives, and as material witnesses to the Holocaust. While I tend to distance myself decisively from conceptualizations organized around the notion of trauma, because of their depoliticizing essentialism and highly problematic operationalization of category, I have also some trouble with this second take on the former camps. Though much closer to my line of thought, the second perspective, structured around nature, also seems inadequate as an analytical tool for research (and visibilizing) of modalities of violence governing the spaces of Holocaust museums and memorial sites. The naturalization of human remains, on which this perspective is based, and which it performatively enacts, categorizes human remains not so much as social and political entities but as organic or inorganic matter. This analytical perspective suggests, for instance, the need to refocus attention on processes of "dehumanization through decomposition […], [the] unbecoming humans and 'becoming soil,'" among others, as a way to protect human remains "from politicization and commercialization"[29] – and thus results in their outright depoliticization. To inscribe human remains in the order of nature (and construct them as posthuman) epistemologically erases their continuous presence in the political order as forms of subjectivity susceptible to violence. This occludes, in fact, the very question of violence, its local complexity, and one's complicity in it.[30]

That is why, instead of thinking of the former camps and their memorial sites and museums as traumatic landscapes or as complex ecosystems, I draw from

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rowej w świetle rewizji kategorii świadka, in: Studia Litteraria et Historica 3/4 (2014–2015); Konrad Matyjaszek, Not Your House, Not Your Flat. Jewish Ghosts in Poland and the Stolen Jewish Properties, in: Dziuban (ed.), The "Spectral Turn," 2019, 185–208.

28 See, primarily, the recent special issue of the Journal of Genocide Research on the Environmental History of the Holocaust edited by, and with contributions from, Ewa Domańska, Mikołaj Smykowski, Jacek Małczyńsk, and Agnieszka Kłos.: Journal of Genocide Research 22/2 (2020).

29 Ewa Domańska, The Environmental History of Mass Graves, in: Journal of Genocide Research 22/2 (2020), 241–255, 241 and 251.

30 A similar critique of this perspective and how it is deployed by Polish scholars to avoid dealing with the questions of agency and Polish complicity in the Holocaust, was published by Omer Bartov in response to the special issue mentioned above. Omer Bartov, What is the Environmental History of the Holocaust?, in: Journal of Genocide Research 2021, 419–428, doi: 10.1080/14623528.2021.1924587.

Tomasz Kranz (with a heavy dose of critical distance) and frame them here as "museum-cemeteries".[31] Introducing the notion of museum-cemetery, Kranz considered the former camps as historical spaces serving as "real and symbolic cemeteries",[32] actual locations of human remains framed symbolically through memorialization and musealization. In my reading, *museum-cemetery* conveys a somewhat different set of meanings. It is at once a concept (an analytic category), a practice, and a dynamic cultural/political space – one that makes and unmakes dead subjects within its confines. This space stands for a transformative and irreducibly (politically) productive *infrastructure* that instantiates a material articulation of hierarchies and social norms as well as of structural violence.[33] It is therefore a space in and through which death is permanently, symbolically, and materially worked through. In my reading, the notion also conveys processuality: moving beyond the understanding of the museum-cemetery as a hegemonically closed "resting place," I consider it as a dynamic infrastructure, which operates through a multitude of material and spatial practices evolving around dead bodies – whose political subjectivity can, consequently, be a matter of redefinition and negotiation. This kind of space should be thought of as thoroughly (literally and figuratively) political and partaking in the continuum of violence – violence enacted both by the state and its institution and the society at large. In other words, (infra)structural violence names the continuity of structural violence manifesting in/through memorial infrastructures.

In what follows, I provide a more in-depth conceptual grounding in the notion of necroviolence and address its various modalities, placed on a continuum from physical violence to the violence of abandonment. I then consider the articulations of necroviolence in the infrastructure of the museum-cemetery. Some of the practices I analyse – for instance, the violence of robbing the dead or of neglecting their remains – predate the establishment of memorials and museums at the sites of the former extermination camps, yet they condition, predefine, and materially underpin these later infrastructures. Because the violence, albeit in different form, is carried on, I conceptually subsume them under the dynamized category of *museum-cemetery*. I also trace various politically productive processes and operations leading to memorialization and musealization of the sites, including archaeological research,

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31 Tomasz Kranz, Muzea martyrologiczne jako przestrzenie pamięci i edukacji, Małgorzata Fabiszak/ Michał Owiński, Obóz-muzeum. Trauma we współczesnym wystawiennictwie, Kraków 2013, 51–54, 53.

32 Ibid., 53.

33 I take the notion of infrastructure and infrastructural violence from Dennis Rogers and Bruce O'Neill, who conceptualize it as an ethnographically graspable and materially manifested articulation of social processes of marginalization, exclusion, dispossession – or, in other words, of structural violence manifesting in/through (urban) infrastructures. Dennis Rogers/Bruce O'Neill, Infrastructural Violence. Introduction to the Special Issue, in: Ethnography 13/4 (2012), 401–412.

construction work, and erection of memorial and museum buildings. I consider this attentiveness to the material dynamic that preceded but underpinned the site as essential for the construction (and analysis) of the identity of the museum-cemetery as a carrier of infrastructural violence. I frame it in terms of critical taphonomy: that is, analysis of (violent) processes to which human remains were, and are, subjected at the former Nazi extermination camps in Poland from the early post-war period until the present day.

Necroviolence and abandonment

The moment when violence against human remains was granted the status of violence, at least in academic debates, can be traced to discussions, unfolding since the 1970s, around repatriation of indigenous and aboriginal human remains, which had been assembled in the nineteenth century for anthropological and archaeological collections in the Northern Hemisphere.[34] Those debates not only established the looting of graves as a form of practical racism but also strongly affirmed the necessity of protecting the (corporeal) dignity of the dead. Further, as material practices around human remains from various episodes of political violence have become increasingly important, the search for bodies, their exhumation, identification, and reburial have been recategorized as forms of care.[35] Such care constitutes a strong opposition to – and symbolically undoes – the violence that perpetrators commit against the remains. Hiding corpses, burying them in unmarked mass graves, or leaving them unburied, mutilating them, destroying them (for instance, thorough cremation), looting them, or collecting body parts as trophies all posthumously objectify and dehumanize the dead. This is how such practices are experienced by the loved ones of the dead and, quite often, framed by the law. On a theoretical level, the incentive to (re)conceptualize this modality of violence accompanied the advent of research on the politics of dead bodies,[36] necropolitics,[37] and necrogovernmentality.[38] These perspectives made it abundantly clear that not only living bodies but

34 See, for instance, Devon Mihesuah (ed.), Repatriation Reader. Who Owns American Indian Remains? Lincoln 2000; Cressida Fforde/Jane Hubert/Paul Turnbull (eds.), The Dead and Their Possessions. Repatriation in Principle, Policy and Practice, New York/London 2004.
35 Adam Rosenblatt, Digging for the Disappeared. Forensic Science after Atrocity, Stanford 2015.
36 Katherine Verdery, The Political Life of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change, New York 1999.
37 Francisco Ferrándiz/Antonius Robben (eds.), Necropolitics. Mass Graves and Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights, Philadelphia 2015.
38 Isaias Rojas-Perez, Mourning Remains. State Atrocity, Exhumations, and Governing the Disappeared in Peru's Postwar Andes, Stanford 2017.

also those of the dead are subject to sovereign power, to politicization and depoliticization, to inclusion in and exclusion from political-legal communities, through a multitude of social and material practices. Recognizing that the exercise of power extends to encompass the reality of death, these theories established dead bodies as political subjects.

It is in this field that the category of necroviolence could be developed – necroviolence understood as a politically and culturally charged violence after death. I borrow this notion from Jason de Leon, who introduced it in *The Land of Open Graves*, a book on the lives and deaths of migrants on the border between the US and Mexico. Necroviolence is, according to de Leon, "violence performed and produced through the specific treatment of corpses that is perceived to be offensive, sacrilegious, or inhumane by the perpetrator, the victim (and his or her religious group), or both".[39] De Leon foregrounds the religious underpinnings of the notion. Virtually all cultures have clearly defined prescriptions and prohibitions pertaining to dead bodies. I mention here only some of potential relevance in the Jewish context: necroviolence makes it impossible for the family and the community of the dead to handle human remains in accordance with religious laws (proper burial, marking the grave, visiting the dead at the cemetery), and also breaches the rules that secure the afterlife (admittance to heaven and resurrection after the final judgement). The physical integrity of the corpse and its burial context – whether a Jewish cemetery or a disposal pit into which Nazis dumped cremated remains – plays a pivotal role in Jewish law.[40] Even more significant, as I see it, is the political dimension informing the perpetrators' violence against human remains. De Leon and other scholars have established necroviolence as a practical and performative articulation of racism, nationalism, and classism that accompany and strengthen other forms of physical and political violence, and that are often a direct expression of structural violence.[41] More often than not, it is the body of the socially and politically excluded, devalued, dehumanized other that is subjected to necroviolence.

While the violent disposal and destruction of bodies in the Nazi extermination camps – the burning of corpses, the grinding of bones that survived incineration, the removal of gold teeth from the jaws of the dead – unquestionably can be cast as necroviolence, I also see in this terms the long-term, systematic robbery of the dead, structurally founded in antisemitism, by local Polish populace that continued at the sites of the former extermination camps of Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka. The prac-

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39 Jason de Leon, The Land of Open Graves. Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail, Oakland 2015, 69.
40 Martin Lamm, The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning, New York 2000.
41 See, for instance, Franny Nudelman, John Brown's Body. Slavery, Violence, and the Culture of War, Hill 2004; Simon Harrison, Dark Trophies. Hunting and the Enemy Body in Modern War, Oxford/New York 2012.

tice developed immediately after the camps ceased to operate and lasted until the 1960s, when they were finally commemorated. (Museums were opened at the sites quite late –1993 in Sobibór, 2004 in Bełżec, and 2010 in Treblinka.) By now, the practice of looting the former extermination camps has been extensively covered by scholars and journalists alike.[42] I will only mention that representatives of the local Polish communities dug out and sifted through body disposal pits, pulled out gold teeth, cut off the heads of the dead, searched through bodily orifices, and transported human remains outside the confines of the camps to search through them without risking discovery by the police. These practices, which took place on a mass scale, and which have been described by scholars as a normalized social practice, performatively established the identity of museum-cemeteries prior to their transformation into memorial sites. It could not be stopped even by sporadic police raids and criminal trials, nor by the fact that robbing the dead was a crime in both pre-war and post-war criminal codes.

In publications that most prominently brought these practices into focus – Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska Gross's *Golden Harvest* and Paweł Reszka's *Płuczki* [Scrubbers] – its violent character made visible. And yet, in the vast majority of Polish Holocaust research, the practice of looting the dead has been predominantly framed as motivated by greed and wartime demoralization, and conceptualized as a form of *szaber* (scrump)[43] or a "gold rush",[44] or explained away. Such framings, naturalizing, and universalizing the looting as a simple attraction to gold and easy profit, have effectively erased the political dimension of the practice. By fetishizing wartime and post-war demoralization and poverty as the main (if not sole) structural context for the looting of the dead, Polish scholars have not only explained it away but, again, obscured its political dimension as a form of violence against human remains and a practical articulation of antisemitism, one that breaches the ontological distinction between an object and a (dead) subject who becomes an object of radical dehumanization.[45] Thus, in Polish Holocaust research, necroviolence is still largely epistemologically, ethically, and politically misrecognized, invisibilized, and unacknowledged,[46] as it was within the post-war cultural

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42 Jan T. Gross/Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Golden Harvest. Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust, Oxford 2012; Martyna Rusiniak, Obóz zagłady w Treblinka II w pamięci społecznej (1943–89), Warsaw 2008; Zuzanna Dziuban, The Politics of Human Remains at the Peripheries of the Holocaust, in: Dapim – Studies on the Holocaust 29/3 (2015), 154–172; Paweł Reszka, Płuczki. Poszukiwacze żydowskiego złota, Warsaw 2019.

43 Marcin Zaremba, Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys, Kraków 2012, 225–306.

44 Rusiniak, Obóz, 2008, 29–39; Daniel Lis (ed.), Wokół 'Złotych żniw'. Debata o książce Jana Tomasza Grossa i Ireny Grudzińskiej-Gross, Kraków 2011.

45 I advance this argument in: Dziuban, The Politics, (2015).

46 Scheper-Hughes/Bourgois, Introduction, 8.

universe in which it was perpetrated. But, according to de Leon, it is enough that the victims cultural group perceive such treatment of human remains "to be offensive, sacrilegious, or inhumane" for it to be recognized as necroviolence. And so it is.[47]

Once one recognizes the status of this modality of violence as violence and locates it in the broader conceptual framework of a violence continuum, it becomes easy to reconsider its (infra)structural underpinnings and articulations. It is a fair point to argue that the practice of looting the dead might never have developed were it not for the Nazi genocide, the camps established near Polish cities and towns, and the Nazi mutilation, burning and hiding of corpses to erase traces of their crimes. But those material conditions do not suffice as exculpation and, again, run the risk of depoliticizing necroviolence and the spaces in, and through, which it unfolds. The cultural and political frame in which this violence must be located is the pre-war, wartime, and post-war antisemitism, discrimination, othering, and exclusion of Jews from citizenship and from the normative categories of the living. Moreover, the practice of looting the dead was also conditioned on the fact that, until the 1960s, the sites of former extermination camps had not been properly marked and memorialized. Unlike Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek, they were perceived as sites of Jewish martyrdom and thus excluded from the Polish nationalist narrative.[48] When questioned in court or interviewed by researchers, post-war looters cited this lack of marking or memorialization as legitimization for, or silent acquiescence with, the practice – and the courts often acknowledged this justification as valid.[49] Those explanations should be treated with a critical distance, but they do indicate what position former extermination camps occupied in the pecking order of sovereign power of the Polish state, in its various political incarnations. This lowly position had direct implications for the functioning of the sites as politically productive infrastructures, in which the dead were rendered susceptible to practical dehumanization and objectification. But the lack of marking and memorialization of the sites yields, too, an interpretation in terms of governance and violence, which operates through devaluation of certain categories of (dead) subjects – that is, the *violence of abandonment*.

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47 For a powerful condemnation of grave robbery and other violent practices unfolding at former extermination camps in Poland, see Rachela Auerbach, Treblinka. Reportaż, in: Daniel Lis, Wokół 'Złotych żniw'. Debata o książce Jana Tomasza Grossa i Ireny Grudzińskiej-Gross, Kraków 2011; Mordechaj Canin, Przez ruiny i zgliszcza. Podróż po stu zgładzonych gminach żydowskich w Polsce, Warsaw 2018.

48 This is not to say that the areas of the former camps Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau were not looted, they were. Yet their early commemoration and transformation into national memorial sites in 1947 significantly constrained the practice. See, for instance, Zofia Wóycicka, Przerwana żałoba. Polskie spory wokół Pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych I zagłady 1944–1950, Warsaw 2009, 270–272.

49 Reszka, Płuczki, 2019, 181–183.

I borrow this notion from Graham Denyer Willis and his conceptualization of abandonment that circumscribes both life and death, and its material by-products, dead bodies. His analysis centres on the practice, and the space, of the *potter's field* – an uncertified cemetery, such as Hart Island in New York, historically dedicated to lynched enslaved people, paupers, and all those located at the bottom of the social hierarchy or excluded from the codes of citizenship and belonging. Denyer Willis extends this category to encompass the locations of clandestine burial of the victims of organized crime in contemporary neoliberal Brazil. The potter's field is a neglected space, "abstracted from the public view"; a practice of burying bodies in mass graves; and a name for "kinds of bodies in space" – the bodies of excluded and expandable subjects, of the "abandoned and devalued life", of people who would die or "kill each other nonetheless". [50] The potter's field is, therefore, "a cemetery that is not a cemetery",[51] because instead of (re)humanizing the dead, it only contributes to their further dehumanization. It does this not only through the fact of burial in an unmarked mass grave but also through the practices to which the dead are subjected after death; bodies and body parts from mass graves at Hart Island were stolen for dissection as part of medical research.

In my reading, Denyer Willis's potter's field is, in every way, an infrastructure that materially and spatially articulates social norms and hierarchies or, in other words, an example of structural violence. This violence is articulated through abandonment, first, at the level of culture, deeming certain categories of subjects disposable, worthless, killable, excluding them from the notion of care, then extending to their dead bodies, and finally allowing space for violent practices against them, such as looting of the dead. Culpability for such necroviolence can easily be externalized to and/or inferred with other social actors or entirely nullified, so that, both in life and in death, those subjects are left to fend for themselves. This is where the notion of a potter's field as a non-cemetery begins to resonate strongly with de Leon's descriptions of necroviolence unfolding at the border between Mexico and the US: in the desert, where undocumented migrants die, this violence is not even direct and does not take the form of human intervention. Instead, it is outsourced to nature, the heat, the animals preying on decomposing dead. But there is nothing natural about the presence of those bodies in this particular environment – they are pushed off to the desert and often left to die there by the US border regime, and, therefore, the violence to which they are subjected should be considered political: "the seemingly 'natural' physical, chemical, and biological processes of decomposition show them-

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50   Graham Denyer Willis, The Potter's Field, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 60/3 (2018), 539–568, 539 and 540.
51   Ibid., 541.

selves to be political facts representative of the value placed on the lives and deaths of undocumented people", argues de Leon.[52]

The ideas developed by Denyer Willis and de Leon inspire me to think of the sites of former extermination camps in Poland, too, as infrastructures produced by the violence of abandonment. Here state inaction also had its spatial and material outcome in desubjectified and dehumanized dead; and here this outcome was also depoliticized (after all, the dead had been killed, burned, and disposed of by someone else). The direct violence against human remains here has also been largely outsourced to animals, soil, and air, as incinerated human remains constantly resurface and disperse. Indirectly, certainly against the will of the state, but because of the abandonment it enacted by failing to mark and memorialize the sites, it provided grounds for the practice of looting the dead. Instead of quoting again from de Leon's definition of necroviolence, which also includes deprivation of a burial considered proper by the victim and their religious group, I will give voice to a journalist, Mordechaj Canin, who visited the former extermination camps in 1946–1947. In terms similar to those developed by Denyer Willis and de Leon, Cain not only framed the practice of grave robbery but also the fact that, when he visited them, the camps had not been marked and commemorated:

> "Thus far nobody thought of about putting a makeva [monument] here, about leaving a mark – because it is Sobibor, because only Jews died here […]. Maybe when the people advance, when a Jew becomes fully human to a non-Jew, maybe than someone will erect a makeva at the Sobibor sacrificial altar, will lay flowers, and light a candle on All Saints Day, as is customarily done in Poland at the graves of martyrs and heroes – non-Jews."[53]

(In)human taphonomies

The transformation of the terrains of former extermination camps into marked and protected memorial sites cannot be reduced to a merely symbolic process; this transformation also involves a series of material practices and spatial operations. These practices and operations, including marking the boundaries of body disposal pits, covering them with concrete, framing them through monuments – and, thus, redefining them as graves – are politically productive. Kevin Levis O'Neill discusses the political productivity of a cemetery, considered as a social and spatial infrastructure. Analysing practices pertaining to dead bodies at Guatemala City's public cemetery,

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52 De Leon, The Land, 2015, 72.
53 Canin, Przez ruiny, 2018, 455 and 466.

O'Neill argues that a cemetery is never merely a repository for human remains. It is, instead, a means of (re)establishing normative categories of subjects, redrawing relations between the state and its citizens, and redefining the political subjectivity of the dead. "The cemetery does not simply catch the dead; the cemetery, rather, contributes to the very construction of what it means to be dead. [...] [The] cemetery as infrastructure extends a kind of personhood to the corpse, and with this personhood generates a range of potentialities."[54] Those potentialities encompass postmortem inclusion in the community unfolding through the distribution of bodies in the space of a graveyard, no less than a variety of practices and processes through which the dead are subjected to hierarchization and/or devaluation and exclusion. O'Neill writes about *insult* and *injury* to which the dead are susceptible, both as material bodies and as materialized political subjects. An example he cites is the practice of disinterring bodies from individual graves and disposing of them in unmarked mass graves, dictated by, among other factors, the neoliberal politics of land in urban Guatemala.[55] Although mass burial was standard before the early nineteenth century, with the rise of modern cemeteries this practice gave way to individual burial, conveying the notion of citizenship tied to individual personhood (and body), and also the corpse's right to belong. Thus, to disinter it and dump it in a mass grave is to render the body rightless, bare, abandoned.

To be sure, the social reality analysed by O'Neill is very different structurally from the one that, since the 1960s, governs the transformation of former extermination camps into cemeteries. Yet his notion of a cemetery as an infrastructure contributing to the production of (dead) political subjects and, occasionally, facilitating postmortem insult and injury against some of the dead, allows to see the cemetery itself as effectuating necroviolence. But it also foregrounds the fact that this infrastructure is inherently processual and dynamic, operating through a multiple, evolving material and spatial practices around dead bodies – whose political subjectivity can, consequently, be a matter of redefinition and negotiation. This allows us to move beyond an understanding of the cemetery as a hegemonically closed resting place, recasting it, instead, as a series of processes, unfolding before and after this hegemonic closure and thus destabilizing it. I think of these processes/practices in terms of taphonomies of the museum-cemetery.

Taphonomy, as a process, a category, and a scientific discipline, plays an important role in the perspective of the environmental history of the Holocaust (mentioned ear-

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54 Kevin Lewis O'Neill, There Is No More Room. Cemeteries, Personhood, and Bare Death, in: Ethnography 13/4 (2012), 510–530, 517.
55 O'Neill interprets this practice as a form of excluding the dead from a political community and, drawing from Giorgio Agamben, as a production of bare death, in which dead bodies are reduced to the status of trash, ibid.

lier), which casts the mass graves at former extermination camps as processual land-scapes – shaped by encounters and exchanges between various human and non-human actors.[56] Taphonomy is a branch of forensic science devoted to postmortem processes affecting human remains, those of decomposition, preservation, and decay but also those resulting from the interaction of corpses with soil, water, or animals; it allows us to establish how much time passed between death and discovery of the corpse, and to trace the dissolution of a dead body.[57] It equips post-anthropocentric researchers with tools to delineate the complex environmental processes to which human remains are subjected after death, and by means of which they become part of "multispecies collectives, [based on] relations between human and nonhuman life form[s]".[58]

Instead of challenging this perspective, I claim the notion of taphonomy in order to invest it with political potential, as a tool that can inform the analysis of material practices effectuating inclusion/exclusion of human remains. As de Leon makes abundantly clear, necroviolence can be outsourced to nature and its processes. Following de Leon and Shannon Lee Dawdy, I consider taphonomy a process that is at once natural and social,[59] and include in this term the grave robbery and archaeological research performed at former extermination camps, as well as the work leading to their memorialization and musealization (to be addressed later on). Framing these practices as taphonomic processes establishes the museum-cemetery as inherently dynamic. But it also unveils the many other invisible, or invisibilized, operations, constitutive to the identity of the museum-cemetery (and the subjectivity of human remains 'caught' within its confines), and places those operations in the violence continuum. Hence the taphonomies are both non-human and human/*(in)human* – that is, violent.

A detailed reconstruction of all (social) taphonomic processes that unfolded at the musealized and memorialized locations of former extermination camps is beyond the scope of this article. Elsewhere, I have reconstructed the post-war chronology of Bełżec and Sobibór.[60] The history of the memorial site and museum at

56 Ewa Domańska, Dehumanisation through Decomposition and the Force of Law, in: Zuzanna Dziuban (ed.), Mapping the "Forensic Turn". Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond, Vienna 2017, 89–104.

57 William Haglund and Marcella Sorg (eds.), Advances in Forensic Taphonomy: Method, Theory and Archaeological Perspectives, Boca Raton/New York 2002.

58 Domańska, Decomposition, (2017), 96.

59 I find it interesting that it is archaeologists and anthropologists who denaturalize and politicize categories derived from natural sciences, which, precisely as such, become the means through which researchers in the humanities effectively depoliticize their research. Shannon Lee Dawdy, The Taphonomy of Disaster and the (Re)Formation of New Orleans, in: American Anthropologists 108/4 (2006), 719–730; De Leon, The Land, 2015, 72–73.

60 Zuzanna Dziuban, Polish Sites of Memory at the Sites of Extermination. The Politics of Framing, in: Estela Schindel/Pamela Colombo (eds.), Space and the Memories of Violence. Landscapes of Erasure, Disappearance and Exception, New York 2014.

Treblinka is relatively well known.[61] All three sites were first commemorated in the 1960s – when the Jewish identity of their victims had been almost entirely erased[62] – and became subject to redesign and revaluation after 1989. Now the museums in all three sites narrate their wartime and Holocaust history. (The exhibition in the newly built Sobibór museum just opened to the public.) All three were scenes of archaeological research (Bełżec in 1997–2002, Sobibór since 2000, Treblinka since 2010).[63] Each of these moments of material transformation generated a "range of potentialities," rendering human remains vulnerable and susceptible to violence. Here I briefly discuss one instance of necroviolence in Sobibór.

It is 1963, and work on the first memorialization at the site is underway. Among other initiatives, a mound is created to collect incinerated human remains currently spread across the site. But it quickly becomes clear that what is being uncovered in the course of construction is not only ashes. The driver of a digger employed to create the mound unearths human bones, including skulls. A judge from the Central Commission for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland is called to the scene by authorities in nearby Włodawa (a standard procedure when human remains dating to the Second World War are found). Upon his arrival, the remains are no longer visible, as someone has covered them with a thin layer of soil. I will quote extensively from his report:

> "In line with the decision taken by local authorities, the site where the bones were found was covered with soil, especially since it was a source of unpleasant odour, which made the work impossible [this indicates the presence of decomposing or mummified remains – ZD]. As a side comment, one has to note that the Central Commission, after receiving the news from the Council for Protection of Monuments, requested over the phone that the work be continued. As already mentioned, when I arrived at the site, the location of bones was already covered over, and I couldn't investigate. […]
> Given the knowledge regarding the Sobibór camp, based on the materials in possession of the Central Commission, and after on-the-spot verification in the company of one of the local workers, who had information about the camp from the local population, I concluded that there are many places in this area which contain either ashes (many were dug out) or skeletonized bodies[.] But due to the already known nature of this site, I do not consider it advisable to exhume these remains and relocate them, for instance, under the mound [where all discovered remains were to be located and which was, after

61 Rusiniak, Obóz, 2008; Edward Kopówka (red.), Co wiemy o Treblince. Stan badań, Siedlce 2013; Edward Kopówka (red.), Treblinka. Historia i pamięć, Siedlce 2015.
62 Jewish bodies were not so much included in the national community as (mis)appropriated by this community.
63 Isaac Gilead/Yoram Haimi/Wojciech Mazurek, Excavating Nazi Extermination Centres, in: Present Pasts 1 (2009), 10–39; Caroline Sturdy Colls, Holocaust Archaeologies, New York 2015.

the camp was memorialized, seen as a site of burial – ZD] because it would be very time consuming to dig through the whole site and unearth them, and then move them and gather them in one location; that would entail high costs, not to mention that this would extend the work and prevent its completion in the prescribed period.

Apart from increasing the costs associated with the memorialization of this site, it would not yield any practical results, based on the existing evidence, it is already known how the victims were killed and how many, more or less, died at the site.

I was informed that the local populace is currently digging through the sites, in which the ashes are deposited, in search of gold. There were some attempts to catch them red-handed but this does not help. I was asked [by the employees of the Cultural Division in Włodawa – ZD] to report this to the Council to prevent future profanation of this site. In their opinion it would be advisable to cover the area around the mound with a concrete slab. In my opinion such investment would be too costly […]. [64]

Upon leaving, I ordered the Culture Department in Włodawa not to cease work in case of further discovery of human remains but to cover them with soil."[65]

The decision of the authority figure from Warsaw resulted in the suspension of attempts to protect a large part of the human remains in the camp – effectuating their exclusion from the political and symbolic space of the cemetery. (In the order of nature, obviously, they remain a part of it). The exhumations of uncovered burial pits had not been carried out, and there was no effort to locate and protect other pits, spread across the terrain of the former camp. This decision is all the more interesting because it was taken at a moment in which, as we read, the infrastructure of the museum-cemetery was still created through the forms of necroviolence (and taphonomic processes) effectuated by grave robbery and the violence of abandonment. This new politics of human remains can be read as a structural continuation of abandonment, and it is infrastructural abandonment through which it operates. And yet, the fact that it consolidated at a time at which the former camp was being transformed into a site of symbolic burial somewhat complicates this reading. We are, after all, looking at the process of rearticulation of the rapport between the state and its (dead) citizens, which (in the report) is assigned an undisputed value. One is

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64   In Treblinka, identified body disposal pits were covered with concrete slabs, based on the same reasoning. Henryk Białczyński, Jak powstał pomnik upamiętniający Zagładę Żydów w Treblince [On the creation of the memorial to the Holocaust in Treblinka], Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute, Dział Dokumentacji Zabytków, 7.

65   Sprawozdanie z wizytacji przeprowadzonej w dniu 27 czerwca 1963 r. w b. Obozie zagłady w Sobiborze [The report from the visit on 27 June 1963 at the former extermination camp in Sobibór]. Archive of the Council of the Protection of the Memory of Struggle and Martyrdom, 52/4, 1–3.

left to wonder: what is more important – the cemetery's establishment, or its timely and quick completion (and hegemonic closure)?

Economics were prioritized over care for the dead, restoring dignity to death, and its material results, and the subjectivity to the corpses. The temporal regime of timely completion came before the dead bodies that should have been at the centre of the work – bodies unprotected and unframed for almost two decades. A similar logic governed the prioritization of knowledge, which reduced human remains to evidence, apparently useless "due to the already known nature of the site" at which only Jews were exterminated. As a result, the human remains were subject to a multidimensional objectification, which blocked their disturbing and destabilizing potential as human remains, both at the political and the material levels. This rendered them, again, vulnerable to various forms of physical injury – through the illegal practice of grave robbery (which was not blocked even by the commemorative work) and through the material practices of construction workers unprepared to handle human remains properly, and who, therefore, violently exposed them with machines and tools and violated their material integrity. In a sense, those forms of injury (and, consequently, insult) are materialized in the very practice of memorialization of the camp and manifested in the spatial organization of the new museum-cemetery.

Paradoxically, even archaeological research explicitly meant to locate and protect the body disposal pits and finally transform them into properly marked graves – at Bełżec (1997–2002) and at Sobibór (2001) – turned particularly violent. It took the form of invasive archaeological research, instrumental for new memorializations, which located disposal pits by means of drilling. While augering has been used in archaeological and forensic contexts to direct and facilitate systematic exhumation of the dead – which involved a gradual uncovering of remains and their careful removal – in this case it served as the primary tool to establish the presence and location of the pits, whose contents were not to be exposed further.[66] Nevertheless the drill used to locate the body disposal pits penetrated the ground to a depth of eight metres. Driven into the ground manually, it required physical strength in the struggle against soil and, often, against tissue and bone. It extracted a cylindrical sample up to 25 centimetres long, a soil core providing information on the depth of the burial,

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66 Augering, followed by exhumation of the dead, was performed by archaeologists searching for the Polish victims of the 1940 Katyń massacre. The same team of archaeologists deployed this method to locate disposal pits at the former National Socialist extermination camps Bełżec and Sobibór. For a detailed account of this archaeological method and its application in the context of political violence, see Andrzej Kola, Archeologia zbrodni. Oficerowie polscy na cmentarzu ofiar NKWD w Charkowie, Toruń 2011; Andrzej Kola, Bełżec. The Nazi Camp for Jews in the Light of Archaeological Sources. Excavations 1997–1999, Warsaw/Washington 2000.

its thickness, the extent of decay and condition of the bodies, and, often, the form of their disposal. After penetrating through the body disposal pit, the drill withdrew layers of incinerated or fragmented bones, skeletal or organic remains in various stages of disarticulation and decomposition, human hair, and waxy residues of body fat in the form of adipocere.[67] In other words, it extracted from the ground decontextualized and dismembered fragments of human remains, again resulting in disturbance and injury. Afterwards, without further investigation, they were returned to the pits.

In Bełżec, the invasive archaeological research was followed by the equally invasive construction of the memorial site and adjacent museum. These were literally built over the remaining material structures of the camp, uncovered by archaeologists but immediately covered over by the memorial. Interestingly, it was the construction of the interstice cutting across the burial grounds and not the invasive research (which was not publicized) that, in 2002, sparked genuine outrage among Jewish religious authorities and the relatives of the Bełżec victims, who considered this a desecration of their loved ones' resting place.[68] As a result of this outrage, covered widely in the Polish and international press, Polish authorities placed further work on the memorial under strict rabbinical supervision – in fact, a Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries in Poland was established by rabbinical authorities to fulfil this task.[69] The religious prohibition against removing or disturbing graves resulted in their full protection, that is, sealing them off permanently. The area of the mass graves was "covered with a special, heavy-duty geotextile material […] covered with sand and drainage pipes to divert water away from the surface and, in turn, covered with the industrial slag."[70] The graves at Bełżec were protected in 2004, and in Sobibór in 2017 – after several years of non-invasive research carried out by a different team of archaeologists, which resulted in the discovery of many material structures of the camp, including the gas chambers and the path victims were forced to walk before being killed, the so-called *Schlauch* (Fig. 1).[71]

All this resulted in a spatial containment of the dead, in a hegemonical closure of the process of necropolitical inscription, and in a careful erasure of all traces of the sites' violent post-war history. The sense of politically saturated closure is exacerbated here by a permanent and technologically ensured confinement of the bodily remains, ensuring that bone fragments will not resurface and preventing vege-

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67 Kola, Bełżec, 2000, 13.
68 Avi Weiss, Let the Victims of Bełżec Rest in Peace, in: Jerusalem Post, 14 August 2002, 4.
69 Information provided by Alexander Schwarz from the Jewish Cemeteries Rabbinical Commission in Poland. Interview conducted by the author, 22 September 2014.
70 Bełżec. Nazi Death Camp, Vienna 2006, 25.
71 The memorial landscape at Sobibór is still being built. It, too, constitutes a quite invasive architectural intervention which, although meant to protect the uncovered material structures, occasionally leads to their destruction, as well as quite brutal uncovering of human remains.

Figure 1: Documentation of current construction works at Sobibór, photo by Wojciech Mazurek.

tation from taking root (Fig. 2). But both human remains and vegetation effectively resist the process. Although, at Sobibór, the protected areas are covered with chemical herbicide on a monthly basis, plants constantly reappear and nature reclaims the landscapes, challenging human attempts at control.[72] It is not difficult to imagine that those chemicals seep through the protective material, penetrate the ground and subject the vulnerable corporeality of human remains to human-made taphonomic change. Although the whole terrain of Sobibór was sealed off, human remains keep reappearing at its margins, in the forest surrounding the former camp and the memorial landscape established on its premises. So far, the inhabitants of nearby villages have directed archaeologists working at Sobibór to three such sites. It is believed that many more remain to be found.

These spaces containing human remains – which exceed attempts at spatial confinement and hegemonic closure of their meaning – unsettle the necropolitical framing established by the museum-cemetery. It is clear that those remains were not transferred to the woods by the Nazis when the camp was still operational, but by

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72 Information provided by an employee of the museum. Interview conducted by the author, 3 November 2019.

Figure 2: Protected body disposal pits at Sobibór, photo by the author.

members of the local populace looting the site in the post-war period.[73] The ashes were clandestinely transported to the forest, where they could be sifted through meticulously without discovery by the police. Their reappearance thanks to archaeological research is, nevertheless, effectively silenced by the museum authorities. While they are subject to vernacular memorialization by representatives of the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries in Poland (Fig. 3),[74] they are effectively excluded from the political and symbolic space of the museum-cemetery. In this way, as a series of infrastructural and material operations, the museum-cemetery becomes an instrument of reproduction of old forms of necroviolence and production of new forms – *no exit* from the violence continuum.

Conclusion

Inspired by Jochen Gerz's *No Exit*, and studies on museums as carriers of physical, structural, and epistemic violence, the intention of this paper was to direct a criti-

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73 Reszka, Płuczki, 2019.

74 Information provided by representatives of the Commission, 12 October 2017. Interview conducted by the author. The (re)discovery of those sites is also effectuated by the drying of swamps and heavy winds causing remains in shallow and hastily covered pits to surface. The enmeshment in nature and environmental phenomena foregrounds the messy *thingness* and uncontainability of human remains – their ability to resist necropolitical *making into* and control. The climate crisis and related phenomena, one can assume, will pose a constant challenge to the politics of dead bodies in Poland.

Figure 3: Location of human remains outside of the Sobibór memorial marked by representatives of the Rabbinical Commission for Cemeteries in Poland, photo by the author.

cal gaze at the Polish museums and memorial sites established at former extermination camps, and to interrogate the modalities of violence that underpin them, and which they perpetuate – violence directed against human remains governed in their confines. Taking as a vantage point the discussion of violent practices against the dead that took place at the sites of former extermination camps before they were subject to memorialization – both in the form of robbery of the dead, mutilation, and dispersal of human remains and in the form of violence of abandonment by the state –, I argued that also later processes and material practices unfolding at the sites can be framed within the notion of the violence continuum. In the case analysed, this continuum speaks to the lingering legacy of antisemitic discrimination and exclusion inscribed in spatial order and construction of those sites, considered complex memorial infrastructures partaking in the production and undoing of the dead. The notion of *museum-cemetery* served, therefore, to foreground the productivity of space as a locus of violence, both physical and structural – and to elucidate the structural presence of violence which ostensibly is not there. In my reading, the museum-cemetery is transformative, dynamic and processual, and irreducibly (politically) productive. The articulations of structural violence that it instantiates take place through a multitude of material and spatial practices evolving around dead bodies conceptualized in my paper in terms of (in)human taphonomies.

Quite a lot of the taphonomic processes that actualize those various modalities of necroviolence at the sites of former extermination camps remain invisible to visitors of the hegemonically closed museums and memorial sites. This pertains equally

to practices behind the first commemorations at the former camps, later invasive archaeological research, and more recent construction of new museums and memorials. Yet such practices materially underpin the museum-cemetery, rendering it a vehicle of (infra)structural violence against human remains. For this reason, tracing the processes leading to the creation of the museum-cemetery and essential to the construction of its identity can be framed as a form of critical taphonomy. The goal of this work is to sensitize us to the various modalities of necroviolence, and to make these epistemologically, ethically, and politically visible. Only once necroviolence is recognized as such can it finally be put to an end.