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MEMORIAL SITE AS SPACE OF ENGAGEMENT. IDEOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC CONCEPT OF THE MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL IN SOBIBÓR

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Memorial sites and monuments that accompany them located on the sites of former extermination camps for the population of Jewish descent are a physical trace of collective commemoration of the traumatic events of WW II. The concept of the 'memorial site' forms an integral part of the official name of the institution established on the area of the former German Nazi Sobibór (Sobibor) death camp, and it can be related directly to specific space, a place of history, which, however, as Aleida Assmann explains, does not find its continuation, it was interrupted, and this deep fissure is manifested in the remaining ruins and relics.¹ In turn, the concept of the *lieux de mémoire* of the French historian Pierre Nora, as seen in a broader theoretical perspective, undoubtedly dynamizes the debate on memorial sites whose materiality incidentally cedes in his approach to their metaphorical meaning, significantly extending this research field, and approximating the historical space-time from the side of collective awareness.² The concept of the 'memorial site' in Nora's understanding has transformed over the years, and has not had exclusively topographical references, covering apart from tangible also intangible signs and traces recalling the past from collective memory.³ What is formatively important for addressing the topic in the present paper is the observation of the French researcher that *lieux de mémoire* are created because of the conviction that spontaneous

memory does not exist, thus it is necessary to purposefully create archives and celebrate anniversary ceremonies, or otherwise *without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away otherwise without a watchful commemoration they will soon be swept away by history.*⁴

As remarked by Katarzyna Chrudzimska-Uhera, presently *witnesses to the Holocaust are already ceding place to the next generations, while this tragic chapter in history is moving to the realm of the history of national myths of culture. Today's monuments have to serve the formation of the so-called post-memory.*⁵ The subsequent generations whose knowledge of their ancestors' war experience is based exclusively on memories, records, or archival documents, are separated from the actual events by an ineffaceable distance. Researchers have for years been asking questions referring to the capacity or incapacity of presenting the Holocaust, what kind of monuments Survivors need, and how art reflected the experience of the Shoah.⁶ Soon after WW II, at least several important projects were completed: the first monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw (by Leon Marek Suzin, 1946) and the second one located nearby (by Natan Rappaport and Leon Marek Suzin, 1948), or the monument to the Victims of the Treblinka II Extermination Camp (by Adam Haupt, Franciszek Duszeńko, and Franciszek Strynkiewicz, 1955/1964).

For Polish artists creating memorial projects on the sites of former concentration camps the concept of *The Road Monument* by Oskar Hansen and his team from the late 1950s remained for long an important benchmark. Hansen's idea had anticipated the concept of the *counter-monument* by James E. Young.⁷ Hansen's design submitted for the Competition for the International Monument to the Victims of the Birkenau Camp in 1957 was highly appraised by the international jury headed by the British sculptor Henry Moore, yet it was never implemented. It can be justifiably stated that, inciting extreme and emotional reactions, it served as a milestone in the process of the redefinition of the concept of a monument and commemoration means, whereas each subsequent design was created to a degree 'with reference to' the concept of the author of *Open Form*.⁸ In 1965–1969, on the site of the former camps: KL Stutthof and KL Lublin at Majdanek two monumental symbolic-expressionist monument complexes by Wiktor Tolkin, former Auschwitz prisoner, were raised. As observed by Magdalena Howorus-Czajka, the sculptor's monographer, Tolkin as an artist and a former prisoner of the extermination camp did not agree with the concept of commemorating Nazism victims by allowing Nature to rule over the former camp site.⁹ For him the preserved camp facilities became the reference point, a relic in the *terra sacra* and the testimony to history. He, however, did use the concept of the road, transforming it in his way (the Road of Homage and Remembrance as the fragment of the commemorative complex at Majdanek and the road and square in front of the Forum of the Nations at Stutthof).

The transformation over years of the thinking about a monument, which imperceptibly had stopped being a static creation, turning into a landscape-spatial project engaging the spectator in a physical and individual way, is demonstrated by the recent (2004) memorial complex on the site of the former extermination camp at Belzec designed by Zdzisław Pidek, Marcin Roszczyk, and Andrzej Sołyga. The area of the mass tombs was covered there with a layer of cinder, cut into with a gradually deeper crevice, which impedes (...) placing oneself outside the work, being, instead, an incessant placing of the viewing in the corporal (...) dependence on space, on material and time extracted through an intimate relation of the participant with the landscape.¹⁰

The tendencies revising the status of monuments were aiming at overcoming their canons according to which James E. Young noticed *the essential stiffness* of monuments, *shared with all other images*.¹¹ Not only did memorial sites become *organized architectural space*.¹² In my view, this definition of Jerzy Olkiewicz from 1967 emphasising the importance of the synergy of the work of a sculptor and an architect, in effect yielding *an overall spatial design*, emphasising the elements of architecture and united with the surrounding space, should be extended with the concept of 'space of engagement' non-existent without an active presence of the beholder. I shall later return to the source of the concept I propose in this paper's title.

According to Young, the author of the *counter-monument* concept, a static passive monument of concretized form can absorb our memory, and, as observed by Anna Ziębińska-Witek by performing for us the *work of remembering*, it can paradoxically cause the memory's effacing.¹³ When analysing the 1994 light installation by the sculptor Norbert

Radermacher commemorating prisoners of the Nazi labour camp in the Berlin Neukölln District, Young remarks that its creator reminds us about the essential, though often automatic, participation of the beholder-passer by in setting off memory: *the site alone cannot remember, (...) it is the projection of memory by visitors into a space that makes it a memorial. The site catches visitors unaware, but is no longer passive and intrudes itself into the pedestrians' thoughts*.¹⁴ It is therefore the active participation of the addressees in the remembering process that is of major importance for Young.¹⁵ In this particular case we have to do with a site whose history remained obscure to many passers-by, and it was only thanks to the intervention of Radermacher's light inscriptions that the past of the WW II vicissitudes of hundreds of forced labourers was revealed.

In this aspect the area of the former Sobibor Death Camp, whose commemoration form constitutes the topic analysed in the present paper, has been permanently secured from being forgotten. The change has occurred in the commemoration mode. I do, however, agree with Young that the essence of commemoration lies today in an active, multi-sensual participation of visitors in the perception of the memorial. I therefore propose the concept of 'space of engagement' which I derive from Quentin Stevens and Karen A. Franck and their monograph *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement. Design, Use and Meaning*.¹⁶ In their publication, authors explore various manifestations of the activity of people when confronted with contemporary monuments, basing themselves on the observation that the commemorated sites, devoid of traditional symbols and figural sculptures, are characterized by a less evident message and thus require more intense cognitive engagement. They are mainly focused on monuments as public sites, freeing in people action and creativity, as well as on the impact of their spatial arrangement on the activity of the space users.¹⁷ My goal will be the reflection on the means with which the currently organized architectural and spatial Museum and Memorial in Sobibor, including the exhibition opened to the public in late October 2020 in the newly-raised Museum, become 'space of engagement' for contemporary visitors on different perception levels. Before, however, focusing on the present day, let me recall the main facts related to history and the Camp's operations.

Soon following the conclusions of the Wannsee Conference on the *final solution to the Jewish question*, held near Berlin on 20 January 1942 at the instigation of and chaired by SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, one of the main war criminals responsible for the Holocaust, the construction of death camps in the occupied territories, including the SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor, was begun. The Sobibor Camp located close to the Lublin–Chełm–Włodawa train line was in operation from early May 1942 to October 1943. Such a location, similarly as was the case of other camps, secured reliable transportation of thousands of future victims of the 'annihilation industry' over brief time. The majority of the Jewish population brought here, not only from Poland, but also from many occupied European countries (e.g. Austria, Slovakia, France, the Netherlands, Germany, and the USSR) were headed for immediate extermination. The exact number of the victims remains unknown. Historians estimate that from spring



1. Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, Mieczysław Welter, statue of a mother-prisoner with a child (monument's second version), red sandstone, 1977



2. Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, *Memory Avenue*, 2003

1942 until autumn the following year, in the gas chambers of the Sobibor Camp between 150.000¹⁸ up to over 300.000 individuals, almost exclusively of Jewish descent, perished.¹⁹ Following the famous revolt which broke out in the Camp on 14 October 1943, and a successful escape of quite a numerous group of around 300 prisoners, the Germans decided to liquidate the Camp and erase all the traces of its existence: the buildings were dismantled or blown up, the terrain ploughed, and a forest planted on the site with the victims' ashes. The tragic history of this area remained obscure for long. In the 1960s, the Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites launched a widespread campaign to commemorate such places, which included Sobibor. In 1965, as part of the project designed by Romuald Dylewski the following were raised here: a symbolic mound, an obelisk, and the monument of a prisoner mother with a child cuddling to her arm; made of reinforced concrete, severe in its expression, the monument of furrowed surface was designed by Mieczysław Welter.²⁰

The mound hides three out of eight tombs with ashes localized by archaeologists. The monument and the obelisk symbolizing a gas chamber were placed where one of them had once stood.²¹ The much more recent history of the site on the 50th anniversary of the Camp's prisoner revolt (1993) included the foundation of the Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibor as a branch of the Łęczyńsko-Włodawskie Lakeland Museum in Włodawa. Subsequently, in 2003, another commemoration of the Camp's victims took on the form of the *Memory Avenue* with trees planted along and stones bearing memory plaques, symbolizing the last way the prisoners had to cover.

The competition to work out a new ideological and artistic concept of the memorial launched in January 2013 by the State Museum at Majdanek in Lublin,²² was aimed at selecting the best design which could constitute the basis for elaborating the appropriate design documentation for visitors' centre with a permanent historical exhibition, taking into account, first of all, a dignified protection of the mass tombs. As can be read in the competition's assumptions: *The Project is to serve both the commemoration of the victims, as well as to consolidate the awareness that what happened at Sobibor was a direct effect of the aggressive anti-Semitic Nazi ideology of the Third German Reich. This awareness must not disappear, although the traces and proofs of those operations were almost entirely removed by the perpetrators. The Sobibor Death Camp was erased from the face of the earth already in late 1943, and since then nature has been retaking hold of it.*²³

The winners of the first prize, the Warsaw architects: Marcin Urbanek, Piotr Michalewicz, and Łukasz Mieszkowski, based their design on the concept that I would myself define as an 'impossible way'. The contrast between the beauty of indifferent nature and the history of this site provoked the authors to design a concrete wall meant to exert a double function. It will separate the area of the mass tombs, and will delineate the course of the road, cynically dubbed *Himmelfahrtstraße* (road to heaven) by the Germans, which the prisoners from Lager II had to cover to reach the gas chambers of Lager III,²⁴ but at the same time it will separate the death zone emphasizing its gravity and importance as space whose status is absolutely unique and inaccessible to the world



3. Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, location of mass graves

of the living represented by visitors. The wall will become a physical barrier impossible to cross, accentuating the inaccessibility of yet subsequent stages of the torment in the area of the former camp, but at the same time it will make visitors realize the closeness of the inaccessible mystery hidden for decades in the Sobibor forest.²⁵ Like a loop, the wall will encircle the sites of the mass tombs, the area finally identified after years of archaeological research, currently marked out with a belt of granite rocks. In compliance with the Jewish tradition, rocks were initially used for practical purposes to protect a grave in the desert; subsequently, stones turned into an expression of the memory of the dead, symbol of a good deed. The area with tombs with the ashes is covered with white: the colour of purity and chastity, but also a sign of the absence of life killed within this space, the zone inaccessible to visitors, yet physically so close.

It is a concept different from that adopted by the authors of the memorial in Belzec. There visitors follow the same pathway that the victims had to cover. The entrance inside the slit that is lowering gains the status of the *memory archaeology*,²⁶ this wanting to approximate visitors to the perspective of the witness and creating, as observed by Grzegorz Rytel, *the aura of apparent, since impossible after all, empathy*.²⁷ In the Sobibor concept the road leading to the gas chamber, marked out with the wall, becomes the integral part of the symbolic zone of the dead. *The possibility of following this pathway is excluded*, explain the design authors; *the idea that contemporary visitors would recreate the last steps of the Holocaust victims seems immoral*.²⁸ The intention of the authors can be seen as the emphasis on the distance between visitors living at present and the traumatic

WW II events. Today visitors can merely reconstruct them through remembering about them. Thus the Sobibor Project confirms the impossibility of being a participant and approximating the experience of the Shoah victims. Furthermore, symbolically including their last way within the zone of the dead turns this section into a *holy place*, similarly as the area of Jewish cemeteries hiding the remains of the ancestors.²⁹ According to tradition, the ashes of the deceased should stay untouched until the coming of the Messiah who will restore them to life.³⁰ That is why the avenue planned for visitors is designed in a certain distance, culminating in the plaza where both the wall and the borderline of mass tombs meet the place where the gas chamber was once placed.

Direct witnesses to the Holocaust and scarce Survivors can no longer be addressees of this space whose history the torturers tried to erase destroying the material traces of the committed crime. This concept presents the perspective of the victims, the desire to respect the unimaginable tragedy as well as the century-old tradition. However, the meaning of the wall can be read as if looked upon from the other side. The wall encircling the ghetto, separating the Jewish community from other citizens of the countries occupied by Germany in a stigmatizing manner, meant to hide the crime committed behind it. Władysław Pans put it as follows: *A wall divided people into Jews and non-Jews. The founding act of differentiating, founding gesture for a real and symbolic, material and spiritual division (...) The wall and the whole extensive system of signs and distinctions: camp's wires, armbands, stripped uniforms, tattooed numbers, separate legal systems in the occupied territories*.³¹

In the Sobibor design the image of the memory of the Holocaust is constructed for future generations out of scraps, pieces hard to put together, yet because of this engaging visitors more strongly in the process of post-remembering. After the Project has been completed, the extensive opening covered with white rocks, now entirely exposed to human eyes from the perspective of the wide asphalt avenue leading to it and bearing information plaques, will be accessible only through a crack, an opening in the wall surrounding the tomb area. This split may become the sign of hope, the spot for reflection, while for contemporary followers of Judaism visiting this place it may turn into a symbolic crack in the Western Wall, the remains of the destroyed Jerusalem Temple.³² The experiencing of this isolated zone will be fragmentary, while the impossibility of the road that will become the visitor's feeling will make his or her personal experiencing more acute.

The integral part of the Sobibor Memorial is the Museum building in which the Exhibition 'SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor. German Death Camp 1942–1943' was opened in October 2020.³³ It will most likely be the first point of the visit to the former death camp, though its function has been subdued to the historical place. The one-storeyed horizontal edifice of an elongated plan resembling a trapezium does not intrude on the space with its presence, while the colour-scheme of different shades of brown and the way of treating the walls with vertical narrow panels dialogue with the surrounding forest.

The building's orientation has been meticulously planned, revealing a different fate of Sobibor prisoners through views from the windows in gable elevations. The southern façade remains open to the view of the former plaza on which the prisoner revolt, described above, culminating in their escape, began; there the wood: shelter for the lucky runaways, can be seen too. The northern wall views are designed differently: here the view will remain blocked by the concrete wall marking out the torture pathway of the prisoners to be exterminated.³⁴

Inside, the most important educational role is played by the permanent exhibition showing the Sobibor Camp in a broader historical perspective. It sufficiently secures the teaching background, providing a good balance of the most important pieces of information. Visitors learn about the organization and infrastructure of the genocide industry, but first of all they discover micro-stories contained in the testimonies of the Survivors and personal objects that belonged to the victims. The designers made the horizontal 25-m-long glass showcase running across the whole display hall the axis of the exposition.

The bright, intensely-lit interior of the showcase contrasts with the predominantly dark colour-scheme of the walls and boards. Isolated artifacts, grouped in categories, arranged neatly, with utmost precision, sometimes allow to identify their owners completely unaware of what the future held for them when they were leaving freight wagons.

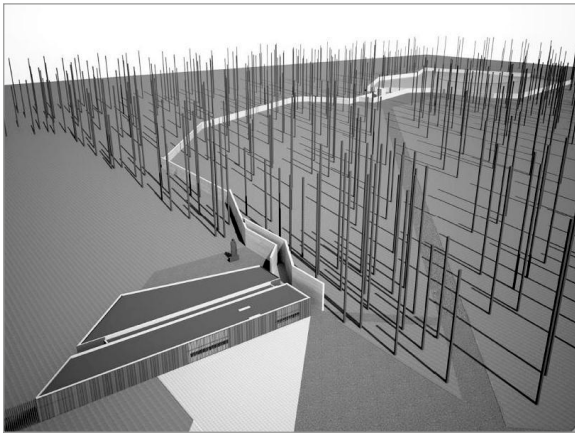
Single destroyed mementoes individualize the victims, not permitting an indifferent eye of the beholder.³⁵ According to the designers this showcase was built to resemble laboratory tables serving a thorough forensic study of crime evidence.³⁶ By placing it slightly diagonally, they disturbed, but also dynamized the display space divided also thanks



4. Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, location of mass graves

to lighting of varied intensity. Niches and recesses hiding respective thematic panels distort the regular rhythm of visiting. Visitors begin to actively meander, finding their individual way across the display. The Exhibition's narrative allows to redirect visitor's attention away from the showcase, which dispassionately, step by step, reveals subsequent traces of the victims' life and death at the same time. The reality of the objects is enhanced by selected photos of the victims taken before the Shoah which, as remarked by Anna Ziębińska-Witek, present a *frozen in time fragment of their life before the Holocaust and personalize the Shoah which is to facilitate empathy in visitors*.³⁷

What remains an important, though time-wise distant reference for the study of form of memorial projects on the sites of former concentration and death camps is *The Road Monument* by Oskar Hansen and his team from 1957. It overcomes the canons of a monument statue by taking into account not only the physicality of the space tarnished with traumatic history, but also by referring to non-material aspects, such as the category of memory. Bearing in mind the time that passed between the moment of the liquidation of the Sobibor Camp to working out the latest concept of commemorating its victims, we confront, in this respect, a different situation than in the competition for the Auschwitz monument. Controversial, though finally unimplemented, despite having been judged the best by the jury, the design by the team of Oskar Hansen, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, and Julian Pałka assumed letting destructive time affect the majority of the preserved remains of the camp that not long before had been operating. What worried the former prisoners of the KL Auschwitz if *The*



5. Visualisation of the new concept of the Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, repr. after: M. Urbanek, P. Michalewicz, Ł. Mieszkowski, Design of the Commemoration of the Victims of the Sobibór Death Camp. First Prize in the International Competition to elaborate a new ideological and artistic architectural-landscaping concept of the Memorial Site on the premises of the Former Nazi Extermination Camp in Sobibór, 11 unnumbered pages, <https://www.polin.pl/template/gfx/sobibor.pdf>



6. Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, Museum building

Road Monument were accepted for implementation, was the effacing of the traces of the genocide which the course of time and nature's activity would inevitably lead to; at Sobibor this process had happened through the conscious acts of the perpetrators still during the war. As already said, after the famous prisoner revolt and the escape of around 300 prisoners on 14 October 1943, the Camp was liquidated. Using labour of the prisoners brought for the purpose from the Treblinka Death Camp, the barracks and storage buildings were dismantled, the gas chambers demolished, and the area ploughed and planted over with trees.³⁸ It was the task of the generations to come to keep reminding of what happened here by creating the 'space of engagement'. *The evil that Sobibor symbolizes did not start at the moment when the Camp's gates opened; neither did it finish when it was liquidated. The Shoah conducted in this manner revealed yet another facet of contemporary civilization: it showed that if mass industrialized genocide could happen once, it can happen again, since it fits within human capacity. This anxiety does not allow to forget about Sobibor and several other places of the Holocaust; it warns against relativizing their importance.*³⁹



7. Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, central display case of the permanent exhibition

The question asked reiteratedly since the end of WW II about the possibility or impossibility of representing the Holocaust has in recent years given way to more day-to-day issues, such as the impact of the mass media message on the commemorating process, or the drastically decreasing number of Survivors who can provide their personal testimony. The most important aspect, however, is the phenomenon observed over the last three decades: almost an 'outburst' of new Holocaust museums and memorials worldwide, particularly in Europe and the USA, whose potential both teaching- and commemoration-wise seems incomparably greater than of other media (e.g., film or literature).⁴⁰ There exists no single model to represent the Holocaust and commemorate all the places connected with it. Marcin Owsieński lists three equivalent spheres of their impact: the sphere of symbolic landscape, as well as statal and educational ones.⁴¹ They interpenetrate, with each remaining equally important. Furthermore, let us emphasize one more aspect which Owsieński calls *regionalism at a memorial site*:⁴² it is the factor of the local unique history that decides upon the uniqueness of each of those places and directly affects forms of commemoration. The one of its kind story of the SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor, placed close to a small locality, next to the meeting point of three borders: of Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine, is succinctly told by the new permanent exhibition mounted in the Museum building.

To conclude, let me remark that in the currently implemented concept of the Sobibor Memorial I do observe the potential for the form of 'engagement' as signalled in the paper's title of visitors on two essential levels. Firstly, by activating them intellectually: by stimulating their memory and post-memory. This occurs within such aspects as: symbolism of the place, emotional narrative, and arousing empathy through uncovering the micro-stories of the survivors: participants of the Sobibor revolt, and victims, which helps to restore the identity to the latter. The second level involves physical engagement, this boosted by the architectural arrangement throughout the whole Camp: the physical experiencing of the memory space emphasized by sensual and symbolic experiences created by artistic interventions and by the permanent display actively self-creating the visiting route adjusted to visitor's individual needs. The specificity of the experienced space makes the visiting a dynamic process in which it is the awareness of the visitor that creates its significance. Motoric engagement of visitors conditions their intellectual activity. A moving eye allows to incessantly vary the point of view stimulating its penetration, while the designed architectural barriers (partitions in the Museum interior, the wall) incite curiosity, aiding memory in its effort. Following the delineated avenue visitors will be able to e.g., localize places marked on the Camp's model displayed at the Museum.

In the future, hopefully not too distant, they will be assisted by the planned wall: the axis of the whole concept. It should be borne in mind that the Sobibor 'Memorial' is still *in statu nascendi*, and a portion of the archaeological works which yielded some new essential findings were conducted after the announcement of the competition results. This taken into consideration, it implies that the Memorial



8. Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, objects in the display case of the permanent exhibition



9. Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór, photo reproductions displayed in the permanent exhibition

remains space open to the engagement not merely of visitors, but also of those who are deciding upon its final shape. Therefore, conclusive observations on the impact of the Sobibor commemoration and its spatial arrangement on the kind of activity undertaken by the space users will be possible only once all the Project's elements have been completed.

Abstract: The implementation of the new ideological and artistic concept of the Museum and Memorial in Sobibór on the site of the former Nazi German death camp selected in the 2013 competition is discussed. The winning design is analysed; apart from the arranging of the area of the former camp, it also envisaged raising of a museum, the latter stage already completed with the building opened to the public in 2020. The concept of 'space of engagement' is proposed by the Author as best characterising a memorial site created on the premises of the former Nazi concentration camps and death camps for the people of Jewish descent. As a departure point, earlier examples of commemorating similar sites are recalled, beginning with the early monuments from the 1940s, through the 1957 competition for the International Monument to the Victims of the

Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp, the latter of major impact on the process of the redefinition of monuments. The then awarded design of The Road Monument by Oskar Hansen and his team, however unimplemented owing to the protest of former Auschwitz prisoners, became from that time onwards a benchmark for subsequent concepts. Also the mentioned memorial design on the area of the former Belzec extermination camp from 2004 is related to James E. Young's concept of a counter-monument.

The main subject of the paper's analysis is, however, the reflection on means thanks to which the currently mounted Museum and Memorial at Sobibór, including the permanent display at the newly-raised Museum, become 'space of engagement' for contemporary public on different perception levels of their multi-sensual activity essential in the process of remembrance.

Keywords: Museum and Memorial in Sobibór, 'space of engagement', monument, counter-monument concept.

Endnotes

- ¹ A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsorte und Gedächtnislandschaften*, in: *Erlebnis – Gedächtnis – Sinn. Authentische und konstruierte Erinnerung*, H. Loewy, B. Moltmann (ed.), Frankfurt am Main-New York 1996, p. 16.
- ² See *Les lieux de mémoire*, Vols. 1-3, P. Nora (ed.), Paris 1984-1992. As observed by Andrzej Szpociński, Pierre Nora wrote about the idea of *lieux de mémoire* already in the 1970s, however, without going into the concept's definition – A. Szpociński, *Miejsca pamięci (lieux de mémoire)*, [Sites of Memory (*Lieux de Mémoire*)], 'Teksty Drugie' 2008, No. 4, p. 11. In the quoted paper the author briefly analyses how 'sites of memory' are understood and researched, while also studying the phenomenal career of the term, *ibid.*, pp. 11-20.
- ³ M. Delaperrière, *Miejsca pamięci czy pamięć miejsc? Kilka refleksji na temat uobecniania przeszłości w literaturze współczesnej* [Sites of Memory or Memory of the Sites? Some Reflections on the Manifestations of the Past in Contemporary Literature], 'Ruch Literacki' 2013, Vol. 54, fascicle 1 (316), p. 49.
- ⁴ P. Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, 'Representations', Spring 1989, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, p. 12.
- ⁵ K. Chrudzimska-Uhera, *Kamiennie piekło. Projekty Mirosława Nizio upamiętniające miejsca kaźni i zagłady: były niemiecki obóz koncentracyjny w Gross-Rosen oraz Mauzoleum Martyrologii Wsi Polskiej w Michniowie* [Stone Hell. Mirosław Nizio's Designs Commemorating Sites of Execution and Extermination: the Former Nazi Gross-Rosen Concentration Camp and the Mausoleum of the Martyrdom of Polish Villages at Michniów], 'Rzeźba Polska' 2008, Vol. 13, p. 116. The term *postmemory* was used by Marianne Hirsch, who confronted it with Pierre Nora's concept of memory; see M. Hirsch, *Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory*, 'Discourse', Winter 1992-93, Vol. 15, No. 2, Special Issue: The Emotions, Gender, and the Politics of Subjectivity, p. 8-9; also see M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London 1997. The overview of research optics into the issue of collective memory and postmemory, of extremely complex significance contents, as seen in the context of the development of monument art was presented by A. Gębczyńska-Janowicz, *Polskie założenia pomnikowe. Rola architektury w tworzeniu miejsc pamięci od połowy XX wieku* [Polish Monument Complexes. Role of Architecture in Creating Memorial Sites Since the mid-20th Century], Warszawa 2010, p. 18-29; there also more literature on the subject.
- ⁶ See G. Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All. Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, S.B. Lillis (English trans.), Chicago 2012. The question what monuments Survivors need was posed years ago by Małgorzata Kitowska-Łysiak as a reflection on the paper by Piotr Piotrowski addressing the issue of Holocaust representations on the example of the competition-winning *Road Monument* by Oskar Hansen et al.; see P. Piotrowski, *Auschwitz versus Auschwitz* [Auschwitz versus Auschwitz], 'Pro Memoria' 2004, No. 20, pp. 15-23; M. Kitowska-Łysiak, *Jakich pomników potrzebują ocalaeni? Glosa* [What Monuments Do Survivors Need?], in: *Wobec Formy Otwartej Oskara Hansena. Idea – utopia – reinterpretacja* [Facing Oskar Hansen's Open Form. Idea – Utopia – Re-interpretation], M. Lachowski, M. Linkowska, Z. Sobczuk (ed.), Lublin 2009, pp. 189-208. A slightly different, however, equally important issue can be found in the means of representing trauma in museum displays. This question was meticulously analysed by A. Ziębińska-Witek who identified three basic concepts of representing the Shoah in museums: real, imaginary, and symbolic death; *ead.*, *Historia w muzeach. Studium ekspozycji Holocaustu* [History in Museums. Study of Holocaust Displays], Lublin 2011, pp. 159-204. In harmony with this classification, the Sobibor Memorial under implementation falls both within the concept of real death (through the power of real place), and of symbolic death; the symbol may be understood here as *the sign which directs visitor's thoughts and emotions towards other unclear and non-literal contents*, *ibid.*, p. 200.
- ⁷ I speak more extensively about J. E. Young's *counter-monument* idea below.
- ⁸ The design by Hansen and team boasts an extensive literature, therefore I do not discuss it in detail. However, it must be remembered that the concept of *The Road Monument*, distant from the traditional formula of commemoration with marking the site with a clear-cut monument mass, was not approved by the members of the International Auschwitz Committee, former prisoners who survived the Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp. The idea to petrify a part of Camp buildings and infrastructure within a selected section of the road, allowing the rest of the facilities fall prey to natural decay aroused anxiety that the significance of the place could blur. Finally, however, the decision was made to implement the concept by the team: Pietro Cascella, Giorgio Simoncini, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, and Julian Pałka. The competition and its impact on the question of Holocaust representation was addressed by J. Kozakiewicz, *Konkurs na Międzynarodowy Pomnik Ofiar Obozu w Birkenau* [Competition for the International Monument to the Victims of the Birkenau Camp], 'Miejsce. Studia nad sztuką i architekturą polską XX i XXI wieku' 2015, Vol. 3, pp. 101-132. The very design by Hansen and team was a separate topic researched into first of all in the context of Open Form; P. Juszkiewicz, *Przestrzeń i pamięć. Projekt oświęcimskiego pomnika Oskara Hansena* [Space and Memory. Design of Oskar Hansen's Auschwitz Monument], in: *Wobec Formy Otwartej...*, pp. 173-188; M. Kitowska-Łysiak, *Jakich pomników...*; M. Lachowski, *Nowocześni po katastrofie. Sztuka w Polsce w latach 1945-1960* [Modern after the Disaster. Polish Art in 1945-1960], Lublin 2013, pp. 265-275; P. Piotrowski, *Auschwitz versus...*
- ⁹ M. Howorus-Czajka, *Wiktor Tolkin. Rzeźbiarz* [Wiktor Tolkin. A Sculptor], Warszawa 2012, p. 67. I entirely omit the issue of the dichotomy and ideologization of memory characteristic of Communist Poland. This topic addressed in e.g., *ead.*, *Mitologia piastowska – forma, funkcja, kontekst w pomnikach okresu PRL na „Ziemiach Odzyskanych”* [Piast Mythology: Form, Function, Context in Monuments from the Time of Communist Poland in the 'Regained Territories'], 'Pamiętnik Sztuk Pięknych' 2018, Vol. 11. *Sztuka polska na ziemiach zachodnich i północnych w latach 1945-1981* [Polish Art in Poland's Western and Northern Territories in 1945-1981], pp. 52-53.
- ¹⁰ M. Lachowski, *Wobec pomników Zagłady* [Faced with Holocaust Monuments], 'Rzeźba Polska' 2008, Vol. 13, pp. 111-112.
- ¹¹ J.E. Young, *Memory and Counter-Memory. Toward a Social Aesthetics of Holocaust Memorials*, in: *The Holocaust's Ghost: Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education*, F.C. Decoste, B. Schwartz (ed.), Edmonton 2000, p. 176.
- ¹² J. Olkiewicz, *Pomniki – przestrzeń architektonicznie zorganizowana* [Monuments: Architecturally Organized Space], 'Architektura' 1967, No. 10, p. 398.
- ¹³ A. Ziębińska-Witek, *W stronę kontr-monumentu. Upamiętnienie „Lublin. Pamięć Zagłady”* [Towards Counter-Monument. Commemoration. 'Lublin. Memory of the Holocaust'], 'Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa; 2017, Vol. 71, No. 3, p. 132 – although the paper's goal is not a polemic with Young's concept of *counter-monument*, let us signal here that this idea does not exhaust concepts for the best, i.e., most active and efficient commemoration formula. Its weakness is observed by e.g., J. Balisz-Schmelz, *What Remains? Anti-Monuments of the Gerzes and Media Framework of Memory. Years Later: a Diagnosis*, in: *Rzeźba dzisiaj 4. Anty-pomnik: nietradycyjne formy upamiętniania / Sculpture Today 4. Anti-monument: Non-traditional Forms of Commemoration*, Orońsko 2020, pp. 219-230. The author actually defines some counter-monuments as *counter-effective*; *ibid.*, p. 229.
- ¹⁴ J.E. Young, *The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany*, 'Critical Inquiry' Winter 1992, Vol. 18, No. 2, p. 286.
- ¹⁵ On the question of the competition among collective memory of different social groups in the former Buchenwald Concentration Camp see M.I. Sacha, *Buchenwald jako przestrzeń zmiennej komunikacji* [Buchenwald as Space of Changeable Communication], in: *Obóz – muzeum. Trauma we współczesnym wystawiennictwie* [Camp – Museum. Trauma in Contemporary Exhibiting], M. Fabisiak, M. Owsieński (ed.), Kraków 2013, pp. 171-192.

- ¹⁶ Q. Stevens, K.A. Franck, *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement. Design, Use and Meaning*, New York 2016.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6. At this point our research tracks part owing to the variety of human activities analysed in *Memorials as Spaces of Engagement*, not uncommonly observed as entirely inadequate to the character of place and commemorated events.
- ¹⁸ This is the figure given by Wolfgang Scheffler, and quoted by R. Kuwałek, *Nowe ustalenia dotyczące liczby ofiar niemieckiego obozu zagłady w Sobiborze* [New Findings about the Number of Victims of the Nazi Sobibor Death Camp], 'Zeszyty Majdanka' 2014, Vol. 26, p. 19.
- ¹⁹ These estimates presented by M. Bem, *Sobibór. niemiecki ośrodek zagłady 1942-1943* [Sobibor. Nazi Extermination Complex 1942-1943], Włodawa-Sobibór 2011, p. 721; M. Bem, W. Mazurek, *Sobibór. Badania archeologiczne prowadzone na terenie po byłym niemieckim ośrodku zagłady w Sobiborze w latach 2000-2011* [Sobibor. Archaeological Research Conducted on the Site of the Former Nazi Sobibor Extermination Complex in 2000-2011], Warszawa-Włodawa 2012, pp. 5-13.
- ²⁰ M. Bem, W. Mazurek, *ibid.*, pp. 40-44. Here drawings, archival photos and the technical description of the whole complex prepared by R. Dylewski. At present, the monument has been removed from its genuine location owing to the planned conservation.
- ²¹ Already at that stage such suppositions were formulated, which was taken into consideration when the whole complex was designed.
- ²² The Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibor became its branch as of May 2012.
- ²³ *Regulamin konkursu na opracowanie nowej ideowo-artystycznej koncepcji architektoniczno-krajobrazowej miejsca pamięci na terenie byłego niemieckiego nazistowskiego obozu zagłady w Sobiborze*, [Regulations for the Competition for Working out the New Ideological-Artistic Architectural and Landscape Concept of the Memorial on the Site of the Former German Nazi Death Camp in Sobibor] p. 4, http://www.majdanek.eu/media/files/bip/34/regulamin_konkursu_na_nowa_koncepcjesobibor.pdf [Accessed: 14 Nov 2020]. The competition results were given that very same year. The new commemorating form is to incorporate the already existing ones, thus the statute of the woman-prisoner with a child, the obelisk, the mound, and the *Memory Avenue*. In 2017, the works protecting the opening with mass tombs containing ashes of the Camp's victims were concluded. The next stage yielded the Museum building in which the permanent Exhibition 'SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor. German Death Camp 1942-1943', based on the script by the historians of the State Museum at Majdanek: Tomasz Kranz, Dariusz Libionka, and Krzysztof Banach, and mounted in the competition-winning artistic layout by the Kłaput Project Company, was opened to the public in October 2020.
- ²⁴ On the structure of the Camp see M. Bem, W. Mazurek, *Sobibór. Badania archeologiczne...*, p. 6. Here also the following pages on the first scientific research conducted on the Camp's site and findings re its topography.
- ²⁵ See M. Urbaneck, P. Michalewicz, Ł. Mieszkowski, *Projekt upamiętnienia ofiar obozu zagłady w Sobiborze. I Nagroda w Międzynarodowym Konkursie na opracowanie nowej ideowo-artystycznej koncepcji architektoniczno-krajobrazowej miejsca pamięci na terenie Byłego Hitlerowskiego Obozu Zagłady w Sobiborze* [Project Commemorating Victims of the Sobibor Death Camp. First Prize in the International Competition for Working out the New Ideological-Artistic Architectural and Landscape Concept of the Memorial on the Site of the Former German Nazi Death Camp in Sobibor], pages unnumbered 4, <https://www.polin.pl/template/gfx/sobibor.pdf> [Accessed: 10 Jan 2020].
- ²⁶ M. Lachowski, *Wobec pomników...*, p. 111.
- ²⁷ G. Rytel, *Czas zawarty w przestrzeni: architektura współczesnych założeń upamiętniających* [Time Encompassed in Space: Architecture of Contemporary Memorials], 'Politeja' 2015, Vol. 12, No. 3(35), p. 139.
- ²⁸ M. Urbaneck, P. Michalewicz, Ł. Mieszkowski, *Projekt upamiętnienia...*, pages unnumbered 8.
- ²⁹ One of the terms used by Jews speaking Yiddish described a cemetery as *haylike ort*, namely a *holy place*; See *Kilka słów o cmentarzach żydowskich* [Some Remarks on Jewish Cemeteries], in: T. Klimowicz, P. Sygowski, M. Tarajko, A. Trzciński, *Cmentarze żydowskie. Podręcznik dobrych praktyk w ochronie dziedzictwa lokalnego* [Jewish Cemeteries. A Manual on Good Practices in Preserving Local Heritage], Lublin 2017, p. 8.
- ³⁰ R. Szuchta, P. Trojański, *Zrozumieć Holokaust. Książka pomocnicza do nauczania o zagładzie Żydów* [To Understand the Holocaust. An Auxiliary Reading to Teaching on the Shoah], Warszawa 2012, p. 29.
- ³¹ W. Panas, *Pismo i rana. Szkice o problematyce żydowskiej w literaturze polskiej* [Writing and Wound. Essays on Jewish Issues in Polish Literature], Lublin 1996, p. 103.
- ³² The second name that has taken root in culture: the 'Wailing Wall' is said to have been given by *non-Jews, witnesses to the lamentation of Jews over the destroyed Temple and all that it represented*; W. Mędykowski, *W poszukiwaniu Yerushalayim de'Lita: historiografia izraelska dotycząca Europy Północno-Wschodniej w latach drugiej wojny światowej* [In Search of Yerushalayim de'Lita: Israeli Historiography Related to North-Eastern Europe during WW II], 'Studia Podlaskie' 2007/2008, Vol. 17, p. 181.
- ³³ See endnote 23.
- ³⁴ See M. Urbaneck, P. Michalewicz, Ł. Mieszkowski, *Projekt upamiętnienia...*, pages unnumbered 10.
- ³⁵ As can be seen from the research performed in recent years on the impact of memorial sites on visitors, it is the contact with authentic artefacts that visitors, particularly young people, are most impressed by; see T. Kranz, *Muzea martyrologiczne jako przestrzenie pamięci i edukacji* [Martyrology Museums as Spaces of Memory and Education], in: *Obóz – muzeum...*, pp. 59-62.
- ³⁶ For more on the Exhibition's concept and layout see T. Kranz, *Wystawa stała Muzeum i Miejsca Pamięci w Sobiborze/Permanent Exhibition of the Museum and Memorial in Sobibór*, 'Varia. Magazyn/Magazine' October 2020 (special issue), pp. 44-51, http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/pl/news/o_wystawie_stalej_w_sobiborze_w_magazynie_varia/1392, [Accessed: 10 March 2021].
- ³⁷ A. Ziębińska-Witek, *Historia w muzeach...*, pp. 200-201.
- ³⁸ The prisoners working on the liquidation of the Camp were shot; B. Małyszczak, *Zbrojne powstanie więźniów i likwidacja obozu zagłady w Sobiborze* [Armed Prisoner Revolt and Liquidation of the Sobibor Death Camp], 'Rocznik Lubelski' 2013, Vol. 39, pp. 178-179. Roma Sendyka speaks of the possibility of identifying such *non-places of memory*, as she defines the areas on which perpetrators made all the possible effort to efface traces of their crimes, e.g., resorting to scars present in the environment, such as deforestation, altered chemical composition of soils and water, or physical soil disturbance; R. Sendyka, *Nie-miejsca pamięci i ich nie-ludzkie pomniki* [Non-places of Memory and Their Non-human Monuments], 'Teksty Drugie' 2017, No. 2, p. 91. At Sobibor such example in the form of the remnants of the fencing, visible as white spots in an aerial photo, is quoted by M. Bem, W. Mazurek, *Sobibór. Badania archeologiczne...*, p. 87.
- ³⁹ M. Bem, W. Mazurek, *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ J. Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed. Museums and the Challenges of Representation*, New Brunswick, New Jersey 2014, p. 9. The author bases her observations on the data re the number of visitors to the United States Memorial Museum in Washington DC.

⁴¹ M. Owsiański, (Z)rozumienie historii (Muzeum Stutthof w Sztutowie) [Understanding History (The Stutthof Museum at Sztutowo)], in: *Obóz – muzeum...*, pp. 84-85.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

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