

**Authority, Authenticity and Audience:  
The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's Adaptation to the Digital  
Museum**

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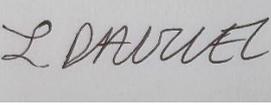
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## Declaration of Authorship

I, Imogen Elaine Judith Dalziel, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented within is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: 

Imogen Dalziel

Date: 28/06/2020

## Abstract

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has faced numerous challenges and, at times, a need to adapt to new and changing realities. As the institution built upon the largest former Nazi concentration and extermination camp, where Jews and other persecuted peoples from all over Europe were murdered, it remains a site of contested history, memory, politics and education. In recent years, however, the Auschwitz Museum has been presented with another challenge: how to incorporate the modern museological practice of engaging and empowering visitors via the digital museum. In this context, the digital museum refers to all public-facing technologies both in and away from the physical museum space.

Previous research has considered representations of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum only on social media, primarily from the perspective of its visitors. This study is therefore the first comprehensive investigation of how the institution itself has adapted to the digital museum, from the launch of its official website in 1999 to its reliance on its online resources during the 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic. This is explored through three case studies: the (lack of) digital technology onsite; the 360-degree panoramic virtual tour on the Museum's official website; and the institution's use of social media, primarily Twitter.

This thesis shows that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is caught in a duality between retaining traditional twentieth-century museological practices, and communicating and connecting with contemporary visitors (and the wider public) in the digital realm. There are three elements of adaptation that best illustrate this dichotomy: authority, authenticity and audience. The Museum asserts its institutional authority, instructing visitors on both what to learn and remember about Auschwitz and how to do so, and occasionally attempts to engage visitors in dialogue and feedback. It also utilises the digital museum to promote its concept of curatorial authenticity, whilst acknowledging visitors' perceptions of an authentic Museum experience and the modern ways in which this experience is captured. Finally, the Museum wishes to reach as global and diverse an audience as possible, communicating universal messages of education and moral responsibility, yet still targets specific groups or demographics within that audience.

Though not designed solely as a criticism of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, this study nevertheless highlights the Museum's need to redress the tension between keeping its outdated notions of static museological presentation and unassailable institutional authority and including the visitor in shaping the contemporary Museum experience. The present investigation also raises wider questions regarding 'ownership', and censorship, of

the history and memory of Auschwitz. Furthermore, it forms part of the foundation for future research to explore how such representations may continue to change as the number of camp survivors decreases whilst the use of digital technologies increases.

## Acknowledgements

Although the completion of a doctoral thesis is a solo endeavour, it is quite astounding how many other people are involved through research, feedback, inspiration and support. My thanks must firstly go to my supervisor and colleague, Professor Dan Stone. His encyclopaedic knowledge, openness to interdisciplinarity and continued support have very much helped to steer me over the course of the last few years. He has always supported my efforts to present at conferences, have my research published and undertake both freelance and voluntary work – whilst being careful to remind me that I could sometimes say ‘no’! I am also indebted to Professor Stone for giving me the opportunity to work as the part-time Administrator for Royal Holloway’s Holocaust Research Institute (HRI). This position has enabled me to meet many wonderful people with fascinating and diverse research interests, not least through the biennial Summer Institute on the Holocaust and Jewish Civilisation.

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I was privileged to know the late Professor David Cesarani for two years, as a Master’s student, in which he offered me the Administrator position for the 2014 Summer Institute, supported my successful application for Northwestern University’s 2015 Summer Institute and inspired me with his infectious passion for the subject. I was even invited to one of the Cesaranis’ famous summer parties! No doubt he and I would have had many discussions (and debates) regarding my doctoral research. He is missed.

Thank you to Sir Mick and Lady Barbara Davis, who generously provided funding for the first three years of my doctoral research, and whose wider financial support for the HRI created the role of Administrator that I have held for the last five years. I am also very grateful to Professor Anna Reading and Dr Lisa Pine for examining this thesis and offering their guidance and support in my future academic endeavours.

This thesis may seem critical of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, but I am in awe of the work carried out by its staff and their unwavering dedication to teaching as many people

as possible about this history. A big thank you to Paweł Sawicki for giving up much of his time to answer my questions. Patrycja Gruca was my lifeline during a volunteering/research trip to the Museum in January 2020, when I was bedridden with a chest infection! Her insistence on bringing food, medicine and a friendly face meant I was eventually well enough to conduct one of two interviews that were crucial to this thesis. *Dziękuję bardzo za pomoc.* Thank you also to Dr Jacek Lachendro, Łukasz Lipiński, Katarzyna Odrzywólek, Monika Pastuszka-Nędza and all the Museum guides I have worked with over the years.

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I would not have started on this journey if it were not for the fantastic staff of the Holocaust Educational Trust. Since 2009, I have progressed from a participant on the 'Lessons from Auschwitz' (LFA) Project, to a Regional Ambassador, to an Outreach and LFA Educator. In that time, the Trust have made it possible to me to attend study courses at Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; co-curate an exhibition at The Wiener Library; and even meet royalty! Thank you to all former and current staff, but especially Amy Gee, Tom Jackson, Anna Lloyd, Alex Maws, Anita Parmar, Karen Pollock CBE, Clementine Smith, Martin Winstone and Kirsty Young.

Through my work at the Trust, I have had the privilege to work and make friends with a number of Holocaust survivors. I have the utmost admiration for Kitty Hart-Moxon OBE who, on many occasions, has invited me round for lunch and discussed her experiences both in and after Auschwitz, or phoned me just to see how I am getting on. Kitty, you are a true role model. Thank you also to Susan Pollack MBE, Zigi Shipper BEM, the late Gena Turgel and Mala Tribich MBE for encouraging me to keep going. Your stories will continue to be told, I promise.

Finally, I have always been blessed with the unconditional love and support of my family and those closest to me. To my partner, Aaron: not only have you had to put up with my long working hours, my frustrations and fatigue, but you have had to do so during three national lockdowns in a global pandemic! Thank you for your patience, sense of humour and care. To Marina, Iain, Maddie and Alex: thank you for sharing in the good times and supporting me through the difficult times.

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## **Author's Note**

This thesis was completed in lockdown conditions during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020-21. Due to the closure of libraries, it has not been possible to check some references against their physical copies, and some online sources have been cited in place of physical ones. Therefore, whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of page numbers, some errors may remain. The author apologises for any inconvenience caused.

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## Introduction



Figure 0.1. A screenshot of one of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s Tweets from 25 February 2020. Source: Twitter.

This is one of 15 Tweets published by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (hereafter also referred to as the Auschwitz Museum, or simply the Museum) on 25 February 2020 commemorating the birthday of an individual who died at the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp.<sup>1</sup> The text is accompanied by a black-and-white photograph of Janos – a

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<sup>1</sup> The Museum is referred to (and refers to itself) by different variations of (mostly) the same name. When it was officially opened in 1947, the Museum was called ‘Państwowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu(-Brzezinka) [State Museum in Auschwitz-Birkenau]’. Over time, the Polish name was changed to ‘Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu’ to remove any Polish association with the camp. Contemporarily, in English the Museum’s official website refers to the Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau; its social media, the Auschwitz Memorial (although its Twitter handle is @AuschwitzMuseum); its publications, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. As it remains a state museum, however, and is not officially referred to as a memorial, the name Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is used in this thesis. Jacek Lachendro, *Auschwitz after Liberation*, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 222; Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), xv, 247n2; *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/> (accessed 28 June 2020); “Auschwitz Memorial and Museum,” *Instagram*, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/auschwitzmemorial>

personal portrait, rather than the prison photographs that are often included alongside victims' biographies – showing a smartly dressed little boy, gazing skywards, smiling. At the time of writing, the post had been retweeted 1,881 times and 'liked' by 5,486 users.<sup>2</sup>

What does it mean to 'like' content that highlights the murder of a four-year-old child? Is it the acknowledgement that Janos would be celebrating his eightieth birthday, were he still here? Does 'like' translate – as the Museum insists it does – to 'remember'?<sup>3</sup> Or did this post simply appear in a Twitter user's news feed and receive an obligatory 'like' as they scrolled down the page?

People's motivations for interacting with this type of content are inevitably varied and personal. Yet it is worth considering how such posts came to be published in the digital world in the first place. This thesis explores the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's adaptation to the digital museum – focusing specifically on digital resources utilised by museums and designed for use by visitors – between the years 1999 and 2020, from the launch of the Museum's official website to its reliance on social media during its physical closure due to the global COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak. The central argument is that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's adaptation to the digital museum highlights a dichotomy between wishing to retain traditional, didactic Museum practices and expand into new ones. This is demonstrated through three salient elements: authority, authenticity and audience. Firstly, the Museum upholds what Peter Walsh terms the 'Unassailable Voice'; the impersonal 'tone and attitude' of institutional authority.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, this concerns not only what the visitor should learn and commemorate about Auschwitz, but also how this education and remembrance should take place. Elements of the digital museum, particularly those offsite, have given the Museum a greater opportunity to assert this voice outside its physical confines. Occasionally, visitors are invited to participate in dialogue, debate and discussion; mostly, however, the Museum shows a need to have the final word on representations of the history and memory of Auschwitz. Secondly, the Museum describes itself as an 'authentic site', a concept which itself contains many paradoxes and

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(accessed 28 June 2020); "Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz," *Facebook*, online at: <https://www.facebook.com/auschwitzmemorial> (accessed 28 June 2020); "Auschwitz Memorial," *Twitter*, online at: <https://twitter.com/auschwitzmuseum> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>2</sup> As of 28 June 2020. Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1232243986238144514> (last modified 25 February 2020, 10:00am).

<sup>3</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1031200047038431232> (last modified 19 August 2018, 4:23pm).

<sup>4</sup> Peter Walsh, "The Web and the Unassailable Voice," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 229.

contradictions (see Chapter Two).<sup>5</sup> As the below discussion will show, this constitutes notions of curatorial authenticity; that is, objects or places deemed authentic through objective or scientific measures. The average Museum visitor, however, does not necessarily perceive the Museum in the same way, but rather through personal experiential authenticity – the feeling of authenticity elicited from their visit. The Auschwitz Museum therefore uses the digital museum to promote its curatorial authenticity, whilst also recognising visitors’ notions of experiential authenticity and how they capture and reflect upon their experience. Finally, the digital museum facilitates the possibility to connect with a global audience, an extension of the process of internationalisation that has gradually developed at the Museum since the 1950s. Whilst the institution is keen to establish a diverse community, it nevertheless targets specific groups within this audience, whether welcoming tourists on day trips from Kraków, providing educational resources for website users, or criticising writers’ work via social media. In other words, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is caught between adapting to the needs and expectations of contemporary museum visitors – creating accessible digital content and opening up (some) dialogue with them – and retaining traditional practices of asserting its authority over those visitors whilst resisting any new elements that might be seen to compromise notions of its own authenticity.

This thesis contributes to the interdisciplinary literature on Holocaust studies, museum studies and digital humanities in three specific ways. Firstly, it explores the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s onsite digital museum, which is an area of study that is currently significantly under-researched. Secondly, it investigates two primary offsite aspects of the Museum’s digital museum: the website (which is yet to feature in published academic research) and its social media, studies into which are increasing but largely focus solely on Instagram and/or the public’s content rather than the Museum’s. Finally, the present study brings these aspects together to provide the first comprehensive overview of the history and development of the Auschwitz Museum’s digital museum. As the largest former concentration camp and, now, the most visited Holocaust museum, an analysis of the Museum’s digital evolution is a significant contribution to research relating to Holocaust memory and representation in the digital age, and may provide a framework for other, similar museums looking to expand digitally.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, “Basic Information on Auschwitz,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/press/basic-information-on-auschwitz> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>6</sup> In 2018, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum received 2,152,610 visitors. In the same year, the second and third most visited Holocaust museums were the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem, with 1,643,035 and 1,010,000 respectively. Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2018*, 25; “2018-19 Annual Report,”

Digital technology has revolutionised the way we work, communicate, learn, play and travel. One can sit in the comfort of one's own home, watching a film whilst messaging friends and receiving reminders from one's wristwatch to keep active. On a more global scale, business transactions are completed with a few clicks of a computer mouse; debates are started with complete strangers on the other side of the world; and one can 'sit in' on a meeting via video link, regardless of time differences. 'As crucial components of our relational infrastructure and our social life', writes Roger Silverstone, 'new media are challenging what it means to be human'.<sup>7</sup> As well as the more routine aspects of life, however, institutions that serve to educate, entertain or inspire us, or to ask difficult questions of our societies and moralities, have also found an online presence. One such institution – one of the world's most (in)famous and renowned – is the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

The site the Museum now occupies was the epicentre of the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews of Europe, and the murder and persecution of thousands of others who did not fit in with Nazi Germany's plans for a new world order. Operational from 14 June 1940 until 27 January 1945, the camp where approximately 1.1 million people lost their lives was officially declared a museum of the Polish state on 2 July 1947.<sup>8</sup> Initially concealed behind the Iron Curtain, Auschwitz came to prominence in global memory through political change, media representations of the Holocaust, the growth of formal Holocaust education and an increase in tourists visiting Poland. The Museum is now one of the most visited museums in Europe and, with an increase in interest, funding and an awareness of its presence on the international stage, it is of little surprise that it now also connects with hundreds of thousands of physical visitors and Internet users through a range of digital resources.<sup>9</sup> Together, these resources form the visitor-oriented part of what shall here be referred to as the digital museum. Thus, the primary question to be answered in this thesis is: how has the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum adapted to this digital museum?

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*United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, online at: <https://www.ushmm.org/online/annualreport> (accessed 28 June 2020); Susan Weisberg, ed., *Achievements and Challenges: Annual Report 2018, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2019), 7.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Silverstone, "Regulation, Media Literacy and Media Civics," *Media, Culture & Society* 26:3 (2004): 440.

<sup>8</sup> Lachendro, *Auschwitz after Liberation*, 5, 6, 27-31.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Luty, "Leading 20 Museums in Europe in 2018, Based on Attendance," *Statista*, online at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/747942/attendance-at-leading-museums-in-europe> (last modified 9 August 2019).

Many general histories of Auschwitz have been written and, undoubtedly, many more will follow.<sup>10</sup> Thus far, there has been only one comprehensive history of the Museum (although its scope does not extend beyond the fall of Communism, despite the significant changes that took place regarding visitor services and victim estimates during the 1990s).<sup>11</sup> Its immediate post-war beginnings, however, have been studied extensively by Museum historian Jacek Lachendro, whilst scholars such as James Young, Jonathan Webber, Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt have also mentioned the Museum's origins and elements of its internationalisation in their research.<sup>12</sup> None of the Museum's Directors have written published accounts of their time in charge or the developments they oversaw, though the current Director, Dr. Piotr Cywiński, briefly recalls his personal journey to directorship of the Museum in his collection of essays, *Epitaph*.<sup>13</sup> As so little literature has been published on the evolution of the Museum, particularly since the collapse of Communism, it is therefore unsurprising that the Museum's digital elements have also hardly been examined academically.

Digital humanities has existed in some form since the first computers were built in the 1940s. The field was more commonly referred to as 'humanities computing' until approximately 2006, when curricula that had predominantly focused on text-based analysis shifted to begin exploring images, videos, audio and games.<sup>14</sup> Inevitably, the emergence and popularity of more developed websites, video games and social media have resulted in a

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<sup>10</sup> For the sake of brevity, these examples do not include survivor memoirs, though these are certainly no less important than historians' monographs; indeed, these often allow more insight into the camp's operation than objective historical sources. Nevertheless, see Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 163-353; Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994); Waław Długoborski and Franciszek Piper, eds., *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp*, 5 vols., trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2000); Franciszek Piper and Teresa Świebocka, eds., *Auschwitz: Nazi Death Camp*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Douglas Selvage (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2002); Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz: The Nazis & the 'Final Solution'* (London: BBC Books, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*.

<sup>12</sup> Lachendro's works include *Zburzyć i zaościć...? Idea założenia Państwowego Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w świetle prasy polskiej w latach 1945-1948* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2007); and *Auschwitz after Liberation*. Examples of other scholars' research include James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 128-54; Jonathan Webber, "The Kingdom of Death as a Heritage Site: Making Sense of Auschwitz," in *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, ed. William Logan, Máiréad Nic Craith and Ullrich Kockel (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 115-32; Dwork and van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 354-78.

<sup>13</sup> Piotr M. A. Cywiński, *Epitaph*, trans. Witold Kościa-Zbirohowski (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 25-32.

<sup>14</sup> Julianne Nyhan and Andrew Flinn, *Computation and the Humanities: Towards an Oral History of Digital Humanities* (Cham: Springer, 2016), 1-4; Lisa Spiro, "Knowing and Doing: Understanding the Digital Humanities Curriculum," PowerPoint presentation, online at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/8f15/5abedf0ad4cb9ecf8bbe0219b3a59670e70d.pdf> (last modified June 2011).

plethora of related research, although these fields, and notions of how best to study these aspects, are still in their infancy.

Interdisciplinary studies that combine digital humanities with Holocaust studies are no exception, though this field is steadily growing. Collaborations between historians and geographers, for example, have resulted in visual representations of death march experiences and 3D models of Auschwitz to better understand how its landscape would have looked during different phases of construction.<sup>15</sup> At a time when only a small number of Holocaust survivors remain alive, efforts to capture and preserve their testimonies have become inextricably linked with digital media, whether through video recordings or initiatives such as The National Holocaust Centre and Museum's Forever Project and the University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation's New Dimensions in Testimony, a project that creates survivor holograms.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, research into purpose-built applications (or apps) and websites that teach about aspects of the Holocaust in public spaces is steadily entering academic discourse. Resources have been developed, for example, to provide more information about Holocaust victims commemorated in *Stolpersteine*, cobblestone-like memorials that can be found across several European countries.<sup>17</sup> Encountering these blocks 'induces self-enquiry' and encourages 'active commemoration', which is further facilitated by using audio guides or apps such as *Stolperwege* to learn more about those memorialised by the project.<sup>18</sup>

This is certainly not the first study of digital elements specific to one Holocaust museum or exhibition, and several other examples will be highlighted throughout this thesis. The following studies discuss technology within the physical exhibition spaces, but do not allude to the online presence of any of these case studies. Much has been written, for

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<sup>15</sup> Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole and Alberto Giordano, eds., *Geographies of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); "The Forever Project," *The National Holocaust Centre and Museum*, online at: <https://www.holocaust.org.uk/foreverproject1> (accessed 28 June 2020); Wulf Kansteiner, "Genocide Memory, Digital Cultures, and the Aesthetization of Violence," *Memory Studies* 7:4 (2014): 403-4; Maria Zalewska, "Holography, Historical Indexicality, and the Holocaust," *The Spectator* 36:1 (2016): 25-32.

<sup>17</sup> For a brief overview of the *Stolpersteine* project – and its controversies – see Ryan W. Heyden, "Humanizing Remembrance, Reproducing Contention: The Stolpersteine Project and the Nazi Past in Reunified Germany," *German Studies Review* 43:2 (2020): 331-52.

<sup>18</sup> Heyden, "Humanizing Remembrance," 347-8; Alicia Hernández-Grande, "Stumbling over History: *Stolpersteine* and the Performance of Memory in Spain's Streets," *Theatre Research International* 45:1 (2020): 7-12; Alexander Mehler et al., "Stolperwege: An App for a Digital Public History of the Holocaust," in *HT'17: Proceedings of the 28th ACM Conference on Hypertext and Social Media, Prague, 2017*, ed. Peter Dolog and Peter Vojtas (New York: The Association for Computing Machinery, 2017), 319-20. Further research is required to determine how widely such apps are used.

instance, about the use of audio-visual elements within the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, both by its curators and external academics.<sup>19</sup> It is important to note, however, that the Exhibition gained a great amount of attention as it was the first permanent exhibit in London relating to the Holocaust. Furthermore, only basic technology was incorporated into the exhibition space so as not to overwhelm or distract the visitor, but also because more advanced digital elements simply did not exist when the Exhibition opened in 2000. The number of audio-visual elements will increase with the refurbishment of the Holocaust Exhibition and its merging with the Museum's Second World War Galleries, scheduled to be completed in 2021. The avoidance of providing distractions or forms of edutainment, however, means that most of these will still use only basic technology.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews (POLIN), which opened in the heart of the former Warsaw Ghetto in 2013, is replete with videos, projections, digitally-manipulated backgrounds and touchscreens, all of which can be found within its Holocaust gallery 'Zagłada [Holocaust] (1939-1945)'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is described by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, its Core Exhibition Programme Director and performance and Jewish studies specialist, as a 'multimedia narrative museum' and a 'theater of history'.<sup>22</sup> POLIN's reliance on technology and minimal use of original artefacts, however, has not gone without criticism.<sup>23</sup> Other Holocaust museums and exhibitions that have been used as case studies regarding their digital elements include Yad Vashem – The World Holocaust Remembrance Center (Yad Vashem) in Jerusalem, the Sydney Jewish Museum, Los Angeles' Museum of

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<sup>19</sup> This includes: Suzanne Bardgett, "Film and the Making of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition," in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, ed. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 19-25; Annie Dodds, "Preparing the Video Displays for the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition," in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, ed. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 26-32; Andrew Hoskins, "Signs of the Holocaust: Exhibiting Memory in a Mediated Age," *Media, Culture & Society* 25:1 (2003): 7-22.

<sup>20</sup> "New Second World War and Holocaust Gallery Plans Unveiled," Imperial War Museums, online at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/new-second-world-war-and-holocaust-gallery-plans-unveiled> (last modified 29 August 2019); James Bulgin (Content Leader, Holocaust Galleries, Imperial War Museum), correspondence with author, 26 March 2020.

<sup>21</sup> In Polish, the word 'Zagłada' with a capital 'Z' is translated to 'Holocaust'; a lowercase 'z', however, is more commonly translated as 'destruction' or 'annihilation'. Paweł Sawicki, correspondence with author, 26 March 2020. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Inside the Museum: Curating between Hope and Despair: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews," *East European Jewish Affairs* 45:2-5 (2015): 216-7, 227.

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Museum of the History of Polish Jews: A Postwar, Post-Holocaust, Post-Communist Story," in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 275, 267.

<sup>23</sup> Abigail Morris, "The Empty Museum..." *The Jewish Chronicle*, online at: <http://www.thejc.com/arts/arts-features/126106/the-empty-museum> (last modified 27 November 2014); Kirshenblatt-Gimblett justifies the lack of artefacts in terms of their expense, difficulties securing loans, and the fact that many original items simply have not survived. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Inside the Museum," 226-7; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Museum of the History," 277.

Tolerance and the Information Centre below The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.<sup>24</sup> A number of these examples are also employed in this thesis to provide context regarding the digital museum in Holocaust museums, and where the Auschwitz Museum stands in relation to other institutions in this regard.

When categorising Holocaust museums, three separate groups are proposed: *distant association*, *partial association* and *direct association*, with regards to their proximity to a site of industrialised mass murder. The first category includes Holocaust museums that are physically and geographically removed from sites of the Holocaust. The second relates to museums in cities or areas where ghettos were established and/or deportations took place; although Jews were murdered through shootings, starvation and lack of sanitation in these places, no fixed killing centres were established.<sup>25</sup> Finally, direct association concerns museums that have been created at former labour, concentration and death camps. Given the complexities of some sites, these categories are by no means concrete; this distinction is made, however, to illustrate the differences in technology between these categories, and to consider to what extent these variations are influenced by the proximity of the site to acts of genocide. The former camps in particular must be investigated separately because their incarnation as museums is only secondary. Furthermore, due to a myriad of political, social and educational factors, their development into multi-faceted sites of memory, learning and tourism has been gradual.

The case studies mentioned above have one aspect in common: they are all purpose-built museums, either distantly or partially associated with sites of the Holocaust. The literature surrounding former Nazi camps and their digital museums is almost non-existent, primarily because most of these institutions contain little or no digital technology. There are a

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<sup>24</sup> Rachel E. Perry, "Holocaust Hospitality: Michal Rovner's Living Landscape at Yad Vashem," *History and Memory* 28:2 (2016): 89-122; Avril Alba, *The Holocaust Memorial Museum: Sacred Secular Space* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 180-1; Anna Reading, "Digital Interactivity in Public Memory Institutions: The Uses of New Technologies in Holocaust Museums," *Media, Culture & Society* 25:1 (2003): 67-85; Theodore O. Prosis, "Prejudiced, Historical Witness, and Responsible: Collective Memory and Liminality in the Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance," *Communication Quarterly* 51:3 (2003): 351-66; Irit Dekel, "Mediated Space, Mediated Memory: New Archives at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin," in *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, ed. Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 265-77.

<sup>25</sup> These categories do not propose a hierarchy of importance or of suffering. They are not designed to undermine the importance of the deaths in the ghettos, or the executions that took place in the former Soviet Union, but instead to reflect the differences in museological representation at the former camps compared to other Holocaust-related sites. Even in the cities in which they were established, narratives of the ghettos are often included within other museums, such as POLIN and the Uprising Museum in Warsaw; others, such as the Riga Ghetto and Latvian Holocaust Museum, are located outside the former ghetto boundaries. Furthermore, many execution sites and former camps that have been identified in countries such as the Baltic States are marked (if at all) by physical memorials which do not use digital technology, and so are not explicitly referenced in the present discussion.

few exceptions, such as the monitors and projectors embedded in the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum's Jewish exhibition (housed in a former barrack which was the target of an antisemitic arson attack in 1992) or those in the Belzec Museum and Memorial's purpose-built exhibition space.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial's Documentation Centre contains several computers and monitors, whilst visitors can borrow iPads to take around the site that include an augmented reality app with survivor testimony, photographs and a 3D model of the camp (further explored in Chapter Two).<sup>27</sup> This is particularly significant in visitors gaining an understanding of the camp's size and layout, as no original structures remain.

Although the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is, arguably, the most stringently preserved former Nazi camp, it does now contain a few digital elements onsite. Much of this technology can be found behind the scenes; thus far, research linking the Museum with digital aspects centres around its conservation processes. This literature focuses on scientific procedures conducted to determine the composition of physical materials and their preservation; only one recent article, concerning the computer imaging used to decipher more of the texts written by *Sonderkommando* member Marcel Nadjari, is written for a broader academic audience.<sup>28</sup> The present discussion, however, focuses on elements of the digital museum created for use by the visiting public (both on- and offline). . There are currently no published works – in the English language, at least – that use the Auschwitz Museum's onsite digital museum as a case study, nor have any of these elements been discussed or analysed theoretically.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the present study is the first of its kind in researching digital elements at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum that are specifically designed for the benefit of its visitors.

The digital museum that can be found offsite has received more attention in recent years. Firstly, several studies have been published concentrating on Holocaust education and

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<sup>26</sup> "Jewish Inmates in Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp 1936-1945," *Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen*, online at: <https://www.sachsenhausen-sbg.de/en/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions/jewish-inmates> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>27</sup> See Victoria Grace Walden, *Cinematic Intermedialities and Contemporary Holocaust Memory* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 205-9.

<sup>28</sup> For recent examples, see Michał Szocinski, Andrzej Miszczyk, and Kazimierz Darowicki, "Condition of Reinforced Concrete Structures and Their Degradation Mechanism at the Former Auschwitz Concentration and Extermination Camp," *Studies in Conservation* 64:3 (2019): 174-86; Gunn Pöllnitz et al., "Uncovering the Illegible: Multi-Analytical Approach to Reveal Paint Stratigraphy of Corroded Signposts from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum," *Heritage Science* 7:1 (2019): 1-12. Pavel Polian and Alexander Nikitjaev, "Deciphering a Mystery: Digital Technology and the Revelation of Handwritten Texts by Marcel Nadjari and Other Members of the Jewish Sonderkommando in Auschwitz-Birkenau," *East European Jewish Affairs* 49:3 (2019): 220-9.

<sup>29</sup> Examples in other languages have not been found, but may exist.

commemoration on the Internet. These include both general examples, such as Google and Wikipedia, and websites established by Holocaust museums and educational organisations.<sup>30</sup> The latter, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and Yad Vashem, have created numerous online resources for both academics and the general public, as will be further explored in Chapter Three. Although the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has the most extensive website of the former Nazi camps, as with onsite elements, its official website's development or current features have not yet received any critical discussion.<sup>31</sup>

By far the largest and fastest-growing field of relevant literature relates to the representation of the Holocaust on social media. In general terms, this includes users' reflections on survivor testimony; the ethics of online Holocaust representation; and wider questions of the place of the Holocaust in 'digital memory studies' and the 'anxiety' its inclusion can provoke.<sup>32</sup> One forthcoming monograph examines Holocaust memory in 'the digital mediascape', investigating users' posts on a variety of different social media platforms.<sup>33</sup> Most studies, however – and a plethora of articles written online and/or in the international press – concentrate on the use of social media at specific Holocaust museums. The personal, 'privatized and interiorized' nature of these media means people's motivations for, and interpretations of, their use are rendered 'inaccessible' to others, creating 'moral anxieties' for the average observer.<sup>34</sup> In the public sphere, therefore, the focus lies primarily

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<sup>30</sup> Derek S. Symer, "The Internet and the Study of the Holocaust," in *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*, ed. Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 223-38; David Klevan and Margaret Lincoln, "The Use of the Internet in Teaching and Studying About the Holocaust," in *Essentials of Holocaust Education: Fundamental Issues and Approaches*, ed. Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg (New York: Routledge, 2016), 76-98; Anna Reading, "Clicking on Hitler: The Virtual Holocaust @Home," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 323-39; Eva Pfanzelter, "At the Crossroads with Public History: Mediating the Holocaust on the Internet," *Holocaust Studies* 21:4 (2015): 250-71.

<sup>31</sup> The funding that these larger Holocaust museums receive in comparison to other sites – whether distantly, partially or directly associated – must also be taken into consideration when analysing their websites.

<sup>32</sup> Stéphanie Benzaquen, "'Add Review': Holocaust Testimonies on Social Media," paper presented at The Future of Holocaust Testimonies IV Conference, Akko, Israel, 8-10 March 2016; Victoria Grace Walden, "New Ethical Questions and Social Media: Young People's Construction of Holocaust Memory Online," *Frames Cinema Journal* 7 (2015): online at: <http://framescinemajournal.com/article/new-ethical-questions-and-social-media-young-peoples-construction-of-holocaust-memory-online>; Wulf Kansteiner, "The Holocaust in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Digital Anxiety, Transnational Cosmopolitanism, and Never Again Genocide without Memory," in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), 113, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Jennifer Evans, Meghan Lundrigan and Erica Fagen, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Mediascape* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> Sonia Livingstone, "The Challenge of Changing Audiences: Or, What is the Audience Researcher to do in the Age of the Internet?" *European Journal of Communication* 19:1 (2004): 85.

on criticising photographs taken at these sites.<sup>35</sup> Much debate, for example, has centred on Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (or Berlin Memorial). A culture of 'naming and shaming' people who take personal photographs at the Memorial has developed, from a blog highlighting profile photos used on the dating app Grindr to the controversial 'Yolocaust' project, in which photos shared on social media of Memorial visitors taking selfies, juggling and jumping between the stelae were superimposed onto graphic archival photographs from the liberated camps.<sup>36</sup> This criticism and shaming often extends into the media, with little room for discussions of censorship, ownership, and how 'inappropriate' content can be objectively defined. Unsurprisingly, given the number of visitors to the site (many of whom are young people, still in education), social media content created after visits to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – usually concentrated on the phenomenon of selfies – features prominently in these articles.<sup>37</sup>

Academic literature is growing around social media use at the Auschwitz Museum. Rachel Dubrofsky has written about the 'Auschwitz selfie' taken by American teenager Breanna Mitchell in 2014 and the global condemnation it received.<sup>38</sup> This research, however, is part of a larger investigation into the representation of women in popular culture, rather than an exploration of contemporary Holocaust memory practices.<sup>39</sup> The author's own research has briefly explored the reasons visitors edit, upload and share their photographs of the Museum on Facebook and Instagram, though this also sits within the wider context of a study exploring visitors' photography at the Auschwitz Museum.<sup>40</sup> Stefanie Samida's short

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<sup>35</sup> Kate Douglas, "Youth, Trauma and Memorialisation: The Selfie as Witnessing," *Memory Studies* 13:4 (2020): 385-7.

<sup>36</sup> *Totem and Taboo: Grindr Remembers the Holocaust* (blog), online at: <http://grindr-remembers.blogspot.com> (last modified 21 November 2014). Shahak Shapira, creator of 'Yolocaust', has now removed all 12 images after being contacted by each 'shamed' person who asked for their removal. The website is still live, displaying an explanatory message from Shapira and a selection of people's reactions. *Yolocaust*, online at: <https://yolocaust.de> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>37</sup> See Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2016* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2017), 39; Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2018*, 23. For recent examples of articles about selfies at the Auschwitz Museum, see Nick Parker, "No Selfie Respect: Ignorant Tourists Insult Holocaust Victims with Sick Selfies at Auschwitz," *The Sun*, online at: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/8693167/ignorant-tourists-holocaust-auschwitz-rail-track> (last modified 22 March 2019); Sarah Hucal, "When a Selfie goes Too Far: How Holocaust Memorial Sites around Europe Combat Social Media Disrespect," *ABC News*, online at: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/selfie-holocaust-memorial-sites-europe-combat-social-media/story?id=62025268> (last modified 30 March 2019). It is worth considering, however, that many of the news sources reporting on this issue are less interested in academic discussion, as a narrative of sensationalism will often attract more readers.

<sup>38</sup> Rachel E. Dubrofsky, "Frayed Edges: Selfies, Auschwitz, and a Blushing Emoticon," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 33:3 (2018): 598.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 598.

<sup>40</sup> Imogen Dalziel, "Capturing 'Auschwitz-Land'? Motivations and Distribution of Contemporary Visitors' Photography at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum," (Master's thesis, Royal Holloway, University of

article on selfies at the Auschwitz Museum agrees with the conclusion of visitor photographs as, to quote Barthes, ‘a certificate of presence,’ and stresses the ‘bottom-up’ approach public discourse has taken around the issue which ‘must be observed and analysed’ by scholars.<sup>41</sup> Due to its brevity, however, the piece does not venture further into which form this analysis might take. Daniel Reynolds mentions visitors’ use of social media both at former camps and some of the larger, purpose-built Holocaust museums in his monograph on Holocaust tourism (though this is also discussed through the lens of tourist photography and, even then, given the book’s primary subject matter, appears surprisingly few times).<sup>42</sup>

Several recent studies have focused on representations of the Auschwitz Museum on Instagram. Robert-Jan Adriaansen investigates how the multimodality of social media may benefit history education by examining users’ posts about the Museum and the historical significance attributed to them. The primary reason for its inclusion appears to be the large number of posts available to analyse; users’ perceptions of this significance, for example, are not discussed.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Ewa Stachura and Marta Mantyka explore visitors’ Instagram posts to assess how well the Museum communicates its message to its audience, consequently providing recommendations for its modernisation and improvement.<sup>44</sup> Yet even in the new proposed main exhibition at the Museum, it is unlikely that such recommendations will be considered, as Director Piotr Cywiński has previously stated his disapproval at the inclusion of modern elements, such as digital technologies, onsite.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Gemma Commane and Rebekah Potton examine Instagram posts including the hashtag ‘#Auschwitz’, exploring both the positive and negative aspects of this content via two case studies. On one hand, Commane and Potton conclude that Instagram can be used to create ‘a consistent narrative which actually helps to preserve remembrance through a moving and affective dialogue,’ and a space where users can express their emotions, reactions and support for others.<sup>46</sup> On the other

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London, 2015), 52-4; Imogen Dalziel, “‘Romantic Auschwitz’: Examples and Perceptions of Contemporary Visitor Photography at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum,” *Holocaust Studies* 22:2-3 (2016): 185-207.

<sup>41</sup> Dalziel, “‘Romantic Auschwitz’,” 190; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 2000), 87; Stefanie Samida, “Doing Selfies in Auschwitz?” *Public History Weekly* 7:25 (2019): online at: <https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/7-2019-25/selfies-auschwitz>.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel P. Reynolds, *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 77, 94-95, 235, 258n36, 260n59.

<sup>43</sup> Robert-Jan Adriaansen, “Picturing Auschwitz: Multimodality and the Attribution of Historical Significance on Instagram,” *Journal for the Study of Education and Development* 43:3 (2020): 654-5.

<sup>44</sup> Ewa Stachura and Marta Mantyka, “Guidelines for the Rearrangement of Auschwitz Museum Based on Web Pictures Analysis,” in *Congreso internacional: Inter photo arch ""Interferencias""*, celebrado en Pamplona, los días 2 al 4 de Noviembre de 2016, ed. Rubén A. Alcolea and Jorge Tárrago-Mingo (Pamplona: Servicio de Publicaciones Universidad de Navarra, 2016), 212-23.

<sup>45</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 91.

<sup>46</sup> Gemma Commane and Rebekah Potton, “Instagram and Auschwitz: A Critical Assessment of the Impact Social Media has on Holocaust Representation,” *Holocaust Studies* 25:1-2 (2019): 178, 161-4.

hand, examples of the trivialisation of, and deliberately provocative humour about, Auschwitz and the Holocaust illustrate some users' desire to garner more reactions to their content, as well as questioning the need for social media companies to exercise greater moderation around newly published content.<sup>47</sup>

The above studies each contribute an analysis of Auschwitz Museum visitors' (or, in Commene and Potton's research, also the general public's) reactions to their experience, expressed through the content they choose to upload to social media. What is largely missing, however, is an investigation of what Samida terms the 'top-down' approach; that is, the way the history and memory of Auschwitz is represented and mediated on these channels by the Museum itself.<sup>48</sup> Commene and Potton do acknowledge the 'legitimacy' afforded by the Museum when its official account posts responses to other users' photographs, highlighting both its authority in the 'acceptance' of this form of representation and the positive validation this gives users.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in her thesis on Holocaust memory on social media, Meghan Lundrigan dedicates a chapter to representations of the Auschwitz Museum on Instagram. This includes a discussion on the Museum's authority and the virtual community it has created.<sup>50</sup> Lundrigan mentions the Museum's presence (and authority) on other social media platforms, yet highlights only the official Pinterest and YouTube accounts.<sup>51</sup> Although this is illustrative of Lundrigan's focus on visual content, no examples are given from the Museum's posts on Twitter or Facebook, despite the fact these platforms (along with Instagram) are where the Museum is most active. Indeed, as many of the above studies show, Instagram remains the focal point of most research into the Auschwitz Museum on social media – whether this involves a top-down or bottom-up approach – although Twitter has become the main platform for both Museum content and interaction with other users. Thus far, discussions in this area have predominantly appeared in the press, alongside regular news articles reporting on the Museum's Twitter interactions and reactions to others' content.<sup>52</sup> This thesis, therefore, sheds a more analytical light on the Auschwitz Museum's wider social media strategy but retains a particular focus on the Museum's use of Twitter, considering its

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 173-7. Such content is removed only if reported and determined to breach Instagram's Community Guidelines.

<sup>48</sup> Samida, "Doing Selfies."

<sup>49</sup> Commene and Potton, "Instagram and Auschwitz," 166-8.

<sup>50</sup> Meghan Lundrigan, "Holocaust Memory and Visuality in the Age of Social Media," (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2019), 79-84, 206-7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 81-2.

<sup>52</sup> See the latter sections of Chapter Four for some examples.

high levels of activity on this platform and the attention it has garnered from criticising and debating other users, companies and media outlets through its Tweets.

In summary, this thesis is the first to comprehensively explore the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's digital museum, a study which, given the Museum's renown and 21-year presence in the digital sphere, is long overdue. It does not suggest recommendations or guidelines for digital museological presentations of the Holocaust; rather, this study is positioned at the developing intersection of Holocaust studies, digital humanities and museum studies, and is a contribution towards further research in this field. The time period investigated in this research was initially to be a rounded period of 20 years – from 1999 to 2019, when the Museum launched a campaign to reach 750,000 Twitter followers in time for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the former camp's liberation in January 2020. This was slightly extended, however, due to the unprecedented nature of the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 and the Auschwitz Museum's sole dependency on its offsite digital museum during this time. This thesis uses the concept of the digital museum broadly, focusing on visitor-oriented elements but including examples found onsite and those only online (as explored below).

The remainder of this Introduction first outlines some of the terminologies used in this thesis, namely the use of 'digital' as opposed to 'virtual'; the inclusion of both the terms 'visitor' and 'user'; and the description of Internet features as 'offsite'. Next, the three key concepts of authority, authenticity and audience, and their use in this thesis, are explained. Each category is explored in relation to digital media more generally, as well as how each can be applied to the Auschwitz Museum and its adaptation to the digital museum. The Introduction then provides an overview of the history of the digital museum and how different aspects have been implemented into museums more generally. Next is a focus on the utilisation of the digital museum within memorial museums of various kinds. This discussion provides a richer context to the examples of digital technology in Holocaust museums explored at the beginning of Chapters Two to Four. These explorative sections are followed by an explanation of the methodology used in this thesis, predominantly interviews, the researcher as critical visitor/user and source analysis, and their strengths as well as limitations. The Introduction concludes with a detailed thesis chapter plan.

## Terminologies

### *'Digital' or 'Virtual'?*

The terms 'digital' and 'virtual' are often used interchangeably, particularly in the media, yet what each represents differs significantly.<sup>53</sup> The concept of virtuality greatly predates modern technology – the idea has been considered and discussed for centuries. At its core, virtuality is primarily concerned with simulation of, and immersion into, other worlds or realities; these may be 'delivered through the human imagination' or comprise of more corporeal multisensory experiences.<sup>54</sup> In terms of contemporary technologies, this commonly translates to virtual reality (VR), which attempts to place users – wearing equipment such as VR headsets and gloves – into lifelike environments.<sup>55</sup> As Mark Grimshaw asserts, 'Digital technology simply provides new ways to conceptualize, to use, and to experience [...] virtuality.'<sup>56</sup>

The technology that makes VR possible is part of the digital world. In its simplest form, the digital consists of 'all that which can be ultimately reduced to binary code' of 0s and 1s.<sup>57</sup> This numerical data is transformed into the analogue 'cultural form[s]' with which we are familiar, such as audio recordings, written text, photographs and moving images, presented via devices such as televisions, computers and smartphones.<sup>58</sup> Conversely, the process of digitisation (or digitalisation) converts analogue signals or media into a digital format, so that they can also be viewed and shared on platforms such as the Internet.<sup>59</sup> Although the virtual is its own phenomenon, it has therefore become a subsection of the 'overarching' concept of digitality – that is, the digital culture in which we now live.<sup>60</sup>

The difference between these two concepts is pertinent to this discussion as much literature is written about the 'virtual museum'. In many cases, this is entirely applicable, such as research into VR installations or collections uploaded to online simulated

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<sup>53</sup> Victoria Grace Walden, "What is "Virtual Holocaust Memory"?" *Memory Studies* (2019): 1, online at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698019888712>.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Damer and Randy Hinrichs, "The Virtuality and Reality of Avatar Cyberspace," in *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*, ed. Mark Grimshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 18-9.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Hassan, "Digitality, Virtual Reality and the 'Empathy Machine'," *Digital Journalism* 8:2 (2020): 196.

<sup>56</sup> Mark Grimshaw, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*, ed. Mark Grimshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel Miller and Heather A. Horst, "The Digital and the Human: A Prospectus for Digital Anthropology," in *Digital Anthropology*, ed. Heather A. Horst and Daniel Miller (London: Berg, 2012), 3, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Martin Lister et al., *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 16.

<sup>59</sup> Stuart D. Lee, *Digital Imaging: A Practical Handbook* (London: Facet, 2002), 3; Miller and Horst, "The Digital," 4.

<sup>60</sup> Hassan, "Digitality," 198; see Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

communities such as Second Life.<sup>61</sup> Often, however, elements such as standard museum websites and their collections, devoid of immersive qualities or activities, are also classified as ‘virtual museums’.<sup>62</sup>

The inspiration to use the term ‘digital museum’ for this thesis came from the edited volume *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*.<sup>63</sup> Although this phrase is not explicitly defined in the book, the collection of chapters demonstrates the variety and breadth of digital museum services; from internal data processing and collections management to visitor-oriented websites, online games, and apps for mobile devices. This range further illustrates how the ‘virtual museum’ only partially represents the ways in which museums now use digital technology.

In the present discussion, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s digital museum is examined through three visitor- or public-facing case studies: digital elements installed on the physical site; the virtual tour on the official website; and the Museum’s social media channels. (The phrase ‘virtual tour’ is used here as this is the name given by the Museum itself. Nevertheless, it is still considered under the wider element of the digital museum).

### *The Visitor and the User*

When discussing the digital museum, another issue of terminology arises from the description of whether the museum audience constitutes ‘visitors’ or ‘users’. Attending a physical museum is considered a visit, yet so is the conscious decision to navigate to a particular website (even if only casually). In the context of museum websites, it can certainly be argued that a visit is paid to the digital museum. Conversely, most aspects of the digital museum explored in this thesis – smartphone apps, websites and social media – are used by the people interacting with them. Thus, the application of each term is dependent upon the context that is being discussed.

In Chapter Two, all those touring or experiencing the physical Auschwitz Museum are considered visitors, including people who view the ‘Shoah’ exhibition (the digital

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<sup>61</sup> Otmar Moritsch, “Museums and Virtuality: Bridging the Gap between the Physical and Virtual,” *Icon* 10 (2004): 139-44; Lawrence Swiader, “Promoting Social Change through Technology,” in *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, ed. Herminia Din and Phyllis Hecht (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2007), 157-65; Stella Sylaiou et al., “Exploring the Relationship between Presence and Enjoyment in a Virtual Museum,” *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 68:5 (2010): 243-53.

<sup>62</sup> Erkki Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 121-2.

<sup>63</sup> *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, edited by Herminia Din and Phyllis Hecht (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2007).

applications utilised in the space are not ‘used’ in the same way, as they do not involve any degree of tactility on the part of the visitor). Visitors who engage with the QR codes, however, are also referred to as users. Chapter Three uses the descriptors ‘visitor’ and ‘user’ more interchangeably, as one can both visit and use a website. More emphasis is placed on the visitor regarding the virtual tour, though, due to the framing of this element as an extension of the physical museum, and its accommodation as a ‘visit’ to the site for those who are unable to travel to the Museum in person. In this chapter, the phrase ‘virtual tourist’ is also utilised in relation to the tour, indicating people participating in the act of touring the site rather than fulfilling tourist activities. Finally, in Chapter Four, the term ‘user’ is preferred, particularly as this term ‘suggests a more active and inclusive community’ which, in the case of the Auschwitz Museum, is most prevalent on its social media.<sup>64</sup> People use these platforms to interact with the Museum (in terms of liking, retweeting or commenting on posts) and may access its content from their general feed rather than directly accessing the Museum’s profile. The primary exception in this chapter is the discussion of visitors that have gone to the physical Museum and shared their experiences via social media.

### *‘Offsite’ Technology*

Whilst the case studies in this thesis have been separated into ‘onsite’ and ‘offsite’ elements, in reality the distinction is not so clear. Chapter Two discusses visitors bringing aspects of the digital museum to the former camp by taking photographs and using social media while visiting the Museum. There is also a mobile version of the virtual tour explored in Chapter Three that could theoretically be used onsite. The decision to describe these as ‘offsite’ lies in the fact the website and social media are primarily used by visitors whilst away from the Museum. The virtual tour is designed primarily for those who cannot travel to the physical Museum, or for students preparing for an educational visit. Moreover, the institution discourages museumgoers using their digital devices whilst touring the grounds, concerned that they will not fully see and appreciate the physical site. Visitors still use their cameras and smartphones for photography; due to the pace of guided tours and the congestion that stopping for pictures can create, however, these are generally captured quickly.

Furthermore, social media content demonstrates that many users post about their visit retrospectively. On Twitter, for instance, many Tweets contain a variation of the phrase ‘I

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<sup>64</sup> Selma Thomas, “Introduction,” in *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, ed. Herminia Din and Phyllis Hecht (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2007), 6.

visited Auschwitz yesterday' and, in some cases, reflect on the anniversary of their visit.<sup>65</sup> Although it is now common to see visitors taking pictures, it is rare (in the author's experience) to observe museumgoers using their devices for other activities. This highlights a difference in visitor behaviour (and expectations of this behaviour) at the Auschwitz Museum compared to places presenting lighter subject matter.<sup>66</sup> Out of respect for the site, perhaps, visitors choose to share their impressions only once they have left the grounds. Reflections on past visits to the Museum also demonstrate a processing of the experience and its significance. The principal engagement with the Museum's online elements away from the site therefore constitutes their inclusion as 'offsite' aspects in the present discussion.

### **Exploring Authority, Authenticity, and Audience**

Two of the three categories through which the Museum's digital museum is explored emerged from the research itself. The significance of the audience in relation to digital elements, particularly social media, is apparent from the wealth of literature this topic occupies. Similarly, the importance of museological authority and the audience towards which this is directed was highlighted when studying the development of museums and their changing relationship with both new technologies and the public. As will be demonstrated throughout the rest of this chapter, many museums have shifted to a more conversational tone with their visitors and looked for ways in which to expand their target audience(s). Whilst some efforts have been made to interact further with visitors, however, the Auschwitz Museum – with its predominantly authoritative tone and targeting of specific groups within its desired universal audience – remains something of an anomaly in the contemporary museological landscape. The themes of 'authority' and 'audience', therefore, grew organically from the research, each becoming more salient as the case studies moved away from the physical site.

The desire to investigate authenticity in the context of the Museum, on the other hand, predated the current enquiry. As shall be discussed in Chapter Two, the notion of the 'authentic site' (as the Museum describes itself) is relatively abstract, with little academic research undertaken to explore it. An investigation of the Auschwitz Museum's digital museum thus provided an opportunity to analyse this concept in relation to both its physical

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<sup>65</sup> For examples, see Lucy, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/lucyj342/status/1325052066637746179> (last modified 7 November 2020, 12:26pm); Nobody'sGirl, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/MacNobodysgirl/status/1308824105550979072> (last modified 23 September 2020, 6:42pm).

<sup>66</sup> Reynolds, *Postcards*, 64.

and online spaces, particularly as the Museum places such great emphasis on the irreplaceability of a corporeal visit.

### *Authority*

Despite the wide range of functions they are now expected to perform, education and information remain the priority for museums. The dissemination of knowledge is rewarded by public trust – that is, ‘the public’s willingness to place confidence in the museum’ – and recognition of such institutions as reputable, reliable sources of information.<sup>67</sup> This reliability leads to perceptions of authority. When considered authorities in their subject area, museums can advise their visitors on what should be seen, learned and regarded as significant.<sup>68</sup>

Digital content implemented in physical museums is considered reliable, alongside other resources and objects within the space. Although touchscreens, for example, may have been programmed by an external company, the information they present has been curated by museum staff. Problems with authority can arise, however, concerning museum websites and social media. It has been suggested that the difference in format means that museum authority does not automatically transmit to the Internet, but must instead be earned over time.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, museums may consider an online presence an easy method of sharing their authority and information with a broader audience, yet their authoritative narrative may still (unintentionally) exclude, and appear ‘austere’, to certain groups.<sup>70</sup> Museum studies scholar Suse Anderson questions if institutions can even be regarded as authorities, particularly on the Internet, where articles ‘could have been written by a work experience kid who happens to be good with words and Google’.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> James N. Wood, “The Authorities of the American Art Museum,” in *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, ed. James Cuno (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 104.

<sup>68</sup> R. David Lankes, “Credibility on the Internet: Shifting from Authority to Reliability,” *Journal of Documentation* 64:5 (2008): 680.

<sup>69</sup> Claire Bailey-Ross, “Key Questions and Take Always [sic] from Hacking the Museum: Museum Computer Network Conference 2011,” *Claire Bailey-Ross* (blog), online at: <https://clairebaileyross.com/2011/12/02/key-questions-and-take-always-from-hacking-the-museum-museum-computer-network-conference-2011> (last modified 2 December 2011).

<sup>70</sup> Dominic Walker, “Decentering the Discipline? Archaeology, Museums and Social Media,” *Online Journal in Public Archaeology* 1 (2014): 91-2; Suse Anderson, “Initial Takeaways from MCN2011,” *Museum Geek* (blog), online at: <https://museumgeek.xyz/2011/11/22/initial-takeaways-from-mcn2011> (last modified 22 November 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Suse Anderson, “Why Should I Believe Anything You Tell Me, You Nameless and Faceless Institution?!?” *Museum Geek* (blog), online at: <https://museumgeek.xyz/2011/12/03/why-should-i-believe-anything-you-tell-me-you-nameless-and-faceless-institution> (last modified 3 December 2011).

The issue therefore seems to be one of personalisation. If museums present disembodied information online, there is a lack of connection with Internet users and a subsequent feeling of mistrust or disregard for their authority. This may explain why Paweł Sawicki, the Press Officer who manages the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's online operations, chooses to run the Museum's social media as though they are voiced by 'a person that is called Auschwitz Memorial'.<sup>72</sup> The reliably standard content, language and occasional informality of posts may encourage users to acknowledge the institution's authority, even in a space far removed from the brutal post-camp landscape. Additionally, Sawicki makes no secret of his identity; several interviews conducted in the last few years reveal him as the man behind the Museum's online operations.<sup>73</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter Four, however, there is no absolute confirmation for followers that this content is always composed by the same person. Sawicki does not include his name, for example, in Museum posts. Furthermore, the articles about Sawicki have not been publicised by the Museum's channels, so many followers will still not know who manages these accounts. There is therefore still a distancing between the user and 'the person who presents the unfortunate's suffering', which means trust is not guaranteed and must still be earned.<sup>74</sup>

Much of this trust undoubtedly stems from the Museum's renown. The institution is not a new, developing museum with a small audience; one can safely assume Anderson's concerns of inexperienced staff publishing content would not be permitted by a place of such importance and meaning. Additionally, as shown in Chapter Four, Sawicki is determined to ensure the accuracy and reliability of all information posted about Auschwitz from all sources.

The significance of factual accuracy is another reason for museums to establish channels primarily for use offsite. Due to environmental concerns, demand for self-service and greater accessibility, people increasingly turn to this technology for all types of information.<sup>75</sup> Yet the Internet is not simply operated by recognised organisations; anyone

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<sup>72</sup> Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>73</sup> See Cnaan Liphshiz, "The Auschwitz Museum Has a Twitter Account, and This Ex-Journalist Runs It," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, online at: <https://www.jta.org/2017/01/06/global/the-auschwitz-museum-has-a-twitter-account-and-this-ex-journalist-runs-it> (last modified 6 January 2017); Heather Adams, "Never Forget: Remembering the Holocaust on Social Media," *Baptist Standard*, online at: <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/world/never-forget-remembering-the-holocaust-on-social-media> (last modified 13 March 2019); Daniel Spielberger, "How the Auschwitz Memorial's Twitter Account Became the Internet's Holocaust Fact-Checker," *Insider*, online at: <https://www.insider.com/auschwitz-memorial-museum-twitter-internet-holocaust-fact-checker-paul-sawicki-2020-1> (last modified 27 January 2020).

<sup>74</sup> Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151.

<sup>75</sup> Lankes, "Credibility," 668.

can create a website or social media account and post content which has been falsified or misinterpreted, or contains prejudicial or inflammatory material. The nature of widely-used Internet services, such as Google searches, and distribution within social media networks often means such content can be given equal weighting alongside more reliable sources. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, disinformation and conspiracy theories regarding events in history, politics, science and other topics represented in museums can be found across digital media. (This is discussed within the context of Holocaust education at the beginning of Chapter Three). Although identifying less credible sources is a largely straightforward process – checking for seals of approval, public reviews, the quality of spelling and so forth – some websites and posts still appear legitimate.<sup>76</sup> It is therefore imperative that museums establish and maintain their online platforms.

Whilst credibility and reliability remain integral to museological practice, the authoritative tone of museums has largely shifted over the course of the last few decades. Previously, most museums presented their narrative through what Peter Walsh terms the ‘Unassailable Voice’.<sup>77</sup> This ‘Voice’ is a ‘tone and attitude’, a ‘projection of timeless authority’ that can be found not just in displays and exhibitions, but also museum publications, audio guides, multimedia and other forms of communication with visitors, and has been part of the museum experience for many years.<sup>78</sup> According to Walsh, ‘it is usually not a true human voice, connected to a real identity and personality, but a bureaucratic composite’.<sup>79</sup> In the modern museum, however, expertise no longer ‘inherently confers authority and power’, and institutions increasingly turn to museumgoers to provide feedback and share personal knowledge.<sup>80</sup> As R. David Lankes states, ‘knowledge is gained through conversation’; museums’ authority remains unchallenged, yet the reliable information they pass on is now imparted to visitors more through informal dialogue than unquestionable

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<sup>76</sup> Ben Shneiderman, “Building Trusted Social Media Communities: A Research Roadmap for Promoting Credible Content,” in *Roles, Trust, and Reputation in Social Media Knowledge Markets*, ed. Elisa Bertino and Sorin Adam Matei (Cham: Springer, 2015), 35.

<sup>77</sup> Walsh, “The Web,” 229.

<sup>78</sup> Walsh acknowledges that, for the largest part, the ‘Unassailable’ element of this ‘Voice’ is a ‘myth’, as it conceals many debates between museum staff behind the scenes. These discussions, however, remain private, and so visitors still perceive this narrative’s unassailability. *Ibid.*, 229-31.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>80</sup> Kathleen McLean, “Whose Questions, Whose Conversations?” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 72.

instruction.<sup>81</sup> This change can be observed even in museums that are less preoccupied with ‘edutainment’ and similar pursuits.<sup>82</sup>

In physical museums, this ‘conversation’ has expanded both literally and metaphorically. Where a museum visit was once predominantly a passive, visual experience, with museumgoers instructed to “‘look, but don’t touch!”” many institutions have now embraced the use of a ‘multisensory perspective’.<sup>83</sup> Visitors are encouraged to adopt a hands-on approach: asking questions, interacting with exhibition elements (both analogue and digital) and, in some instances, handling real or replica artefacts.<sup>84</sup> History and culture are thus brought to life more vividly and appeal to various learning types, allowing the visitor to feel more involved in their museum experience. Museums also ask visitors for their feedback on displays and exhibitions, demonstrating the value they ascribe to their audience’s opinions and ensuring their voice is heard.

Walsh originally published his article on the ‘Unassailable Voice’ in 1997, before most museums had created a website. He surmised that the new, interactive World Wide Web would ‘render the old, content-based Unassailable Voice obsolete’.<sup>85</sup> This is, to a large extent, true. Whilst there is still a focus on museum collections and information, many institutions allow Internet users to play games, examine objects and ‘walk’ through the galleries on their website. Platforms such as Twitter host Q&A sessions with curators or invite debate and discussion amongst followers, often highlighting a diversity in opinion and interpretation that would not necessarily be found in the physical museum. Kris Wetterlund asserts that interactions on social media demonstrate that ‘there is more than one way of knowing about something’, an idea with which museum curators are already familiar, and that users’ involvement doesn’t remove museums’ authority, ‘but rather adds value to it’.<sup>86</sup>

The Auschwitz Museum has begun to create a more open dialogue with its visitors, especially via its social media, similarly encouraging discussion and inviting user’s

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<sup>81</sup> Lankes, “Credibility,” 682.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Pierre Balloffet, François H. Courvoisier, and Joëlle Lagier, “From Museum to Amusement Park: The Opportunities and Risks of Edutainment,” *International Journal of Arts Management* 16:2 (2014): 4-18.

<sup>83</sup> Simon Lacey and K. Sathian, “Please DO Touch the Exhibits! Interactions between Visual Imagery and Haptic Perception,” in *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space*, ed. Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 3.

<sup>84</sup> The updated First World War Galleries at London’s Imperial War Museum provide a good example of this museological shift. See Ashlee Godwin, “Remembrance Transformed,” *The RUSI Journal* 159:3 (2014): 84-9; Emily Martin, “Imperial War Museum, London, First World War Galleries,” *FX* (2014): 40-6. Some museums’ physical activities have been withdrawn or suspended, however, due to the coronavirus pandemic.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Walsh, “The Web and the Unassailable Voice,” *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11:2 (1997): 85.

<sup>86</sup> Kris Wetterlund, “The Voice of Authority,” *The Journal of Museum Education* 37:2 (2012): 90, 89.

comments and suggestions. Unlike most contemporary museums, however, the Museum has not yet relinquished its ‘Unassailable Voice’, either onsite or online.<sup>87</sup> Although the institution has tried to develop a persona across its accounts, this authoritative voice prevails in its exhibitions, publications and interactions with the public.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates that the Museum expands Walsh’s theory beyond *what* the visitor should learn and remember to include *how* they should learn and remember. Depending upon the aspect of the digital museum, the Auschwitz Museum asserts its museological authority over how the visitor (and, with its offsite platforms, the world) should view the site, how they should behave there, and how they should commemorate this history (including what to read and even what to buy to do so).

‘Authority is about expert knowledge,’ writes Wetterlund, ‘but in the past it has also been about control’.<sup>89</sup> It is clear that the Auschwitz Museum retains this traditional notion of authority and, as *the* authority on the subject, is reluctant to lessen its control over the history and memory of the former camp.<sup>90</sup> This thesis will therefore illustrate how the Auschwitz Museum has retained its authoritative voice whilst occasionally attempting to engage with the public more directly and collaboratively as part of its digital adaptation.

### *Authenticity*

The concept of authenticity has long been debated and discussed in numerous fields.<sup>91</sup> Its applicability to heritage sites, especially regarding their conservation, was initially recognised by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and its preceding associations.<sup>92</sup> ICOMOS assisted UNESCO in writing the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which has been used to assess additions to the UNESCO World Heritage List since the first 12 sites were agreed upon in

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<sup>87</sup> Walsh, “The Web,” 229.

<sup>88</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020. The terms ‘Museum’ and ‘Memorial’ are often used interchangeably by the Museum, noting its duality as a site of education and remembrance.

<sup>89</sup> Wetterlund, “The Voice,” 89.

<sup>90</sup> Lankes, “Credibility,” 680.

<sup>91</sup> For examples, see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); Richard Handler, “Authenticity,” *Anthropology Today* 2:1 (1986): 2-4; Regina Bendix, “Diverging Paths in the Scientific Search for Authenticity,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 29:2 (1992): 103-32; Theo Van Leeuwen, “What is Authenticity?” *Discourse Studies* 3:4 (2001): 392-7; Jane Lovell and Chris Bull, *Authentic and Inauthentic Places in Tourism: From Heritage Sites to Theme Parks* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>92</sup> “The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments – 1931,” ICOMOS, online at: <https://www.icomos.org/en/167-the-athens-charter-for-the-restoration-of-historic-monuments> (last modified 11 November 2011); “History,” ICOMOS, online at: <https://www.icomos.org/en/about-icomos/mission-and-vision/history> (accessed 28 June 2020).

1978.<sup>93</sup> The phrase ‘heritage site’ often conjures images of monuments of ancient civilisations, or natural formations that have evolved over millions of years. From the very beginning, however, the List has included a variety of national parks, natural wonders, historic city centres and structures such as cathedrals and tombs. ‘Auschwitz Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945)’ (as it is now named by UNESCO) was one of the first additions to the List, its nomination approved in 1979.<sup>94</sup> Heritage sites provide ‘particularly rich case studies’ for investigations of authenticity, as past events which have taken place at each site are beyond the visitor’s physical experience and must therefore be mediated in other ways which still embody a connection between the visitor and the site.<sup>95</sup>

To be considered a site of Outstanding Universal Value and accepted onto the List, each nominated place must adhere to certain criteria; this includes meeting ‘the conditions of integrity and/or authenticity,’ outlined in ICOMOS’ 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity.<sup>96</sup> Yet no singular definition is ascribed to the concept as, according to the Document, it is ‘not possible to base judgements of values and authenticity within fixed criteria’ due to cultural and transnational differences.<sup>97</sup> Authenticity itself cannot be understood as a ‘heritage value’, but instead must be assessed via the ‘information sources’ relating to a particular site, and whether those sources are ‘understood as credible or truthful’.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Jukka Jokilehto and Paul Philipott, formerly of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), define authenticity in the conservation of heritage sites as ‘a measure of truthfulness of the internal unity of the creative process and the

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<sup>93</sup> UNESCO, *Trousse d’information sur le patrimoine mondial* (Paris: Centre du patrimoine mondial UNESCO, 2008), 8.

<sup>94</sup> “Report of the Rapporteur on the Third Session of the World Heritage Committee,” (CC-79/CONF.003/13. Paris, 30 November 1979), UNESCO, online at: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/repcom79.htm#31> (accessed 28 June 2020). For a more detailed exploration of the former camp’s inclusion on the World Heritage List, see Chapter One.

<sup>95</sup> Chaim Noy, “Embodying Ideologies in Tourism: A Commemorative Visitor Book in Israel as a Site of Authenticity,” in *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society*, ed. Phillip Vannini and J. Patrick Williams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 220.

<sup>96</sup> UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2019), 26; Raymond Lemaire and Herb Stovel, eds., “The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994),” ICOMOS, online at: <https://www.icomos.org/en/179-articles-en-francais/ressources/charters-and-standards/386-the-nara-document-on-authenticity-1994> (last modified 11 January 2012).

<sup>97</sup> Lemaire and Stovel, “Nara Document,” 47.

<sup>98</sup> Jukka Jokilehto, “Viewpoints: The Debate on Authenticity,” *ICCROM Newsletter* 21 (1995): 6. The Document defines these sources as ‘all material, written, oral and figurative sources which make it possible to know the nature, specifications, meaning and history of the cultural heritage.’ Lemaire and Stovel, “Nara Document,” 46-7, 48.

physical realization of the work, and the effects of its passage through historical time.’<sup>99</sup> In other words, the authenticity of a heritage site and its attributes must be treated individually, within its respective cultural context, but each can only be truly regarded as authentic if its provenance, history and cultural significance are easily ascertainable, and the site has not been subject to contemporary reconstruction or modification. Issues regarding the authenticity of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum will be more thoroughly examined in Chapter Two.

Authenticity is also a topic for debate in museums, whether connected to a heritage site or purpose-built (in the latter case, the focus remains on the museum’s collections). Definitions of authenticity in this regard have largely centred on art museums and the works displayed therein. For instance, Lionel Trilling rather cynically states that authenticity amounts to

persons expert in such matters [testing] whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them – or, if this has already been paid, worth the admiration they are being given.<sup>100</sup>

David Phillips, on the other hand, takes an approach more consistent with ICOMOS’ interpretations, stating that artefacts in art museums ‘seem guaranteed if [they] are authenticated in terms of identification and condition,’ but recognises that such items may have their perceived authenticity validated simply by being ‘appropriately displayed in a museum’.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, in their study comparing perceived authenticity in an archaeology museum versus an art museum, Brida, Disegna and Scuderi discovered that socio-demographic factors such as education, occupation and place of residence affected participants’ perception of each institution’s authenticity. Whilst both museums were considered authentic, the art museum was accredited with authenticity in relation to its status as a ‘cultural attraction, and not as a mere tourist attraction’.<sup>102</sup>

The perceived authenticity of artefacts appears to originate in their materiality; they denote ‘aura, evidence, passage of time, [...] authority, knowledge, and privilege’.<sup>103</sup> Digital

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<sup>99</sup> Jokilehto, “Viewpoints,” 7.

<sup>100</sup> Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, 93.

<sup>101</sup> David Phillips, *Exhibiting Authenticity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>102</sup> Juan Gabriel Brida, Marta Disegna, and Raffaele Scuderi, “The Visitors’ Perception of Authenticity at the Museums: Archaeology versus Modern Art,” *Current Issues in Tourism* 17:6 (2014): 532-3.

<sup>103</sup> Paola Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, Fabrizio Galeazzi and Valentina Vassallo, “Introduction: Why Authenticity Still Matters Today,” in *Authenticity and Cultural Heritage in the Age of 3D Digital Reproductions*, ed. Paola Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, Fabrizio Galeazzi and Valentina Vassallo (Cambridge: McDonald Institute, 2018), 2.

replications, by contrast, are often considered ‘surface, temporary, modern’ and ‘fake’, which creates a dilemma for institutions building digital museums.<sup>104</sup>

In physical museum spaces, the aura of objects is not lost. Installations such as touchscreens and computer kiosks can therefore enhance the visitor experience by providing more information on certain artefacts and create a mediated interaction with them. Digital content itself can become an ‘artefact’; virtual reality theatres, for example, and screened projections can let museumgoers ‘dive into virtual worlds and [...] wander through computer-generated spaces’.<sup>105</sup> Concerns lie more with elements primarily used offsite, and if users regard websites, apps and other digital aspects as accurately representing institutions and their collections, providing an ‘electronic approximation of the “real”’.<sup>106</sup> Whilst viewing artefacts on a screen is not equivocal to a corporeal encounter with “‘The Real Thing’,’ Jennifer Trant argues that if museums present extensive supplementary content, as well as opportunities to explore objects’ ‘physicality’ online, this will establish users’ trust, which will lead to perceptions of authenticity.<sup>107</sup> Discovering museums and their collections online can also encourage Internet users to visit the physical institution and view these items in person.<sup>108</sup> Whilst studies demonstrate the irreplaceability of a real visit, further research is required to determine to what extent users perceive authenticity in digital museum spaces.<sup>109</sup>

Discussions of authenticity at Holocaust museums remain sparse. In her monograph on Nuremberg’s confrontation of its Nazi past, Sharon Macdonald notes comparisons between visiting locations such as the city’s infamous Rally Grounds and concentration camps like Dachau, namely that the latter have been deemed more ‘authentic’.<sup>110</sup> Yet Macdonald does not explore visitors’ understanding of authenticity, other than a brief suggestion that this

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 2; Sarah Kenderine, “Foreword: The Era of Digital Replication,” in *Authenticity and Cultural Heritage in the Age of 3D Digital Reproductions*, ed. Paola Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, Fabrizio Galeazzi and Valentina Vassallo (Cambridge: McDonald Institute, 2018), xi.

<sup>105</sup> Moritsch, “Museums,” 141.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas, “Introduction,” 1; Deborah Seid Howes, “Why the Internet Matters: A Museum Educator’s Perspective,” in *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, ed. Herminia Din and Phyllis Hecht (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2007), 67.

<sup>107</sup> Jennifer Trant, “When All You’ve Got is ‘The Real Thing’: Museums and Authenticity in the Networked World,” in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 309, 311.

<sup>108</sup> Howes, “Internet Matters,” 68, 73.

<sup>109</sup> Yves Evrard and Anne Krebs, “The Authenticity of the Museum Experience in the Digital Age: The Case of the Louvre,” *Journal of Cultural Economics* 42:3 (2018): 358-9; Carla Everstijn, “The Digital Presence of Museums and the Implications for Collective Memory,” *MW2019: MuseWeb 2019*, online at: <https://mw19.mwconf.org/paper/the-digital-presence-of-museums-and-the-implications-for-collective-memory/> (last modified 26 January 2019); Paul F. Marty, “Museum Websites and Museum Visitors: Digital Museum Resources and their Use,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23:1 (2008): 91.

<sup>110</sup> Sharon Macdonald, *Difficult Heritage: Negotiating the Nazi Past in Nuremberg and Beyond* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 170.

notion has roots in their ‘emotional impression(s)’.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, both Ana Souto and Jan Penrose assert the significance of ‘experiential authenticity’ – that is, visitors’ perceptions of the authenticity of sites based on their personal experiences and feelings – in their studies on the Otto Weidt Workshop for the Blind Museum and the Jewish Museum Berlin, and the Anne Frank House, respectively.<sup>112</sup> This is a particularly key concept to this thesis, as will be demonstrated throughout, and the literature on experiential authenticity will be discussed shortly. Souto’s and Penrose’s research, however, concentrates only on partially associated places of hiding (or, in the case of the Jewish Museum, exhibition contents relevant to the Holocaust) and not sites of genocide. Xenia Tsiftsi has also recently explored the effects of architecture and spatial design on what she terms ‘existential authenticity’ in Holocaust museums, focusing on purpose-built institutions away from the former camps. Tsiftsi notes that one visitor to Budapest’s Holocaust Memorial Center admitted feeling ‘indifferent’ compared to visiting the camps, ‘where the real facts took place’ – yet, thus far, there is very little literature addressing visitors’ perceptions of authenticity at the latter.<sup>113</sup> Conversely, previous research that *has* explored authenticity in the context of Nazi concentration and extermination camps has done so using a more abstract framework, with the issue only briefly mentioned and the term ‘authenticity’ itself – though shown to have a flexible definition – rarely deconstructed.<sup>114</sup> Unsurprisingly, authenticity in Holocaust museums’ digital spaces is also yet to be investigated.

One of the central objectives of this thesis, therefore, is to investigate theories of authenticity within the context of a site of the Holocaust – in this instance, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – and, furthermore, how authenticity is framed both within and away from the physical site. Initially, deconstructing the authenticity of a site of genocide may

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>112</sup> Ana Souto, “Experiencing Memory Museums in Berlin. The Otto Weidt Workshop for the Blind Museum and the Jewish Museum Berlin,” *Museum and Society* 16:1 (2018): 1-27; Jan Penrose, “Authenticity, Authentication and Experiential Authenticity: Telling Stories in Museums,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 21:9 (2020): 1245-67.

<sup>113</sup> Xenia Tsiftsi, “Rethinking Authenticity of the Holocaust Experience through Museum Architecture,” *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies* 6:10 (2018): 23, 17.

<sup>114</sup> John J. Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (London: Continuum, 2000), 50, 62-3, 166; John J. Lennon and Dorothee Weber, “The Long Shadow: Marketing Dachau,” in *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation*, ed. Glenn Hooper and John J. Lennon (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017),; Gregory J. Ashworth and John E. Tunbridge, “Death Camp Tourism: Interpretation and Management,” in *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation*, ed. Glenn Hooper and John J. Lennon (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 84-5; Andrew Charlesworth and Michael Addis, “Memorialization and the Ecological Landscapes of Holocaust Sites: The Cases of Płaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau,” *Landscape Research* 27:3 (2002): 240, 246; Daniel Reynolds, “Consumers or Witnesses? Holocaust Tourists and the Problem of Authenticity,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 16:2 (2016): 334–53.

seem insensitive, as though the integrity of the place and the nature of the crimes committed there are being brought into question. This study, however, focuses solely on the Auschwitz Museum in its present incarnation as a museum, memorial site and place of education; it does not seek to criticise the management or presentation of the Museum, nor to classify the Auschwitz Museum as either wholly authentic or inauthentic. Rather, the study is designed to contribute towards an understanding of perceptions of authenticity around the best-known site of the Holocaust and how these perspectives might be challenged, or expanded upon, through use of the digital museum.

### Types of Authenticity

Authenticity within museological and tourist settings has often been categorised into, or specified in, different forms. Primarily, these focus upon the authentic in terms of the objective and the experiential, which are largely relevant to two specific groups; museum staff and/or curators, and visitors. The differentiation between these two audiences will form part of this thesis' approach.

'Objective' or 'historical' authenticity concerns the scientific, museological perception of authenticity regarding artefacts, buildings or places.<sup>115</sup> This category refers to the history of an object and 'its connection to a valued person, place, or event'; according to Kent Grayson and Radan Martinec and their similar theory of 'indexical authenticity', such objects must be verified as real, rather than a copy, and spatiotemporally linked to a point or event in time.<sup>116</sup> In the case of the Auschwitz Museum, for example, most items in the collections were discovered on the grounds of the camp upon liberation in January 1945 (though some have also been donated by survivors and relatives after the fact). This included several tons of human hair, a sample of which was forensically tested and found to contain traces of hydrogen cyanide, thus providing proof of murder by poison gas and, therefore, the hair's authenticity.<sup>117</sup> Hede et al. stress that these type of proofs, and 'to what extent it [the museum] develops and shares knowledge with visitors in a truthful and open manner', are

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<sup>115</sup> Ning Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience," *Annals of Tourism Research* 26:2 (1999): 351; George E. Newman, "The Psychology of Authenticity," *Review of General Psychology* 23:1 (2019): 9-10.

<sup>116</sup> Newman, "Psychology," 9; Kent Grayson and Radan Martinec, "Consumer Perceptions of Iconicity and Indexicality and Their Influence on Assessments of Authentic Market Offerings," *Journal of Consumer Research* 31:2 (2004): 298.

<sup>117</sup> Andrzej Strzelecki, "The Liquidation of the Camp," in *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp: Epilogue*, ed. Danuta Czech et al., trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2000), 5:55; information board in the permanent exhibition, Block 4, Auschwitz I.

essential to the basic authenticity of a museum.<sup>118</sup> The presentation of these artefacts in the Museum's permanent exhibition might also encompass Ning Wang's notion of a separate category, 'constructive authenticity' (which marketing scholar George Newman quotes but uses to describe 'categorical authenticity'), whereby meaning is 'projected onto toured objects by tourists or tourism producers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preference, beliefs, powers, etc.'<sup>119</sup> A display case full of human hair, shoes or prayer shawls might elicit a physical or emotional response from a visitor but, as Jonathan Webber asserts, without a proper explanation as to their significance, the visitor could otherwise find these objects to be somewhat devoid of meaning.<sup>120</sup> Grayson and Martinec propose a similar theory in the form of 'iconic authenticity', whereby an individual will deem an object authentic if they believe its appearance fits with their preconceptions or expectations – even if the object was not used at the time it represents. This is also exemplified at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. As part of the guided tour, for example, visitors are informed that the freight car standing on the railway tracks in Birkenau was placed *in situ* only in 2010; it may not actually have been used to deport people to Auschwitz-Birkenau, though it is German-made and of the same period.<sup>121</sup> As this style of freight car or cattle wagon has become something of a 'Holocaust icon', however, visitors are more likely to perceive this object as authentic, even though it may never have travelled to the camp during its operation.<sup>122</sup> Given the reliance on scientific measures, objectivity and/or curatorial decisions, in this thesis these categories shall be grouped under *curatorial authenticity*.

Wang proposes one final category; that of 'existential authenticity'.<sup>123</sup> This type of authenticity has little or nothing to do with viewing objects, whether or not they are real or of the relevant time period. Instead, Wang suggests that

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<sup>118</sup> Anne-Marie Hede et al., "Perceived Authenticity of the Visitor Experience in Museums: Conceptualization and Initial Empirical Findings," *European Journal of Marketing* 48:7-8 (2014): 1397.

<sup>119</sup> Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity," 351. Newman also presents a third category, 'values authenticity', but this was deemed unsuitable for the present study as it concentrates more on connections with performances, goods and consumer products. Newman, "Psychology," 10.

<sup>120</sup> Grayson and Martinec, "Consumer Perceptions," 298; Jonathan Webber, "Foreword," in *Representations of Auschwitz: 50 Years of Photographs, Paintings and Graphics*, ed. Yasmin Doosry (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 1995), 10.

<sup>121</sup> Bartosz Bartyzel et al., eds., *Report 2009* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2010), 17.

<sup>122</sup> For more on the cattle wagon/freight car as an icon of the Holocaust, see Oren Baruch Stier, *Holocaust Icons: Symbolizing the Shoah in History and Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 32-67..

<sup>123</sup> Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity," 352.

tourists are preoccupied with an *existential state of Being* activated by certain tourist activities. To put it another way, existential experience is the authenticity of *Being* which, as a potential, is to be subjectively or intersubjectively sampled by tourists as the process of tourism unfolds.<sup>124</sup>

Existential authenticity, therefore, is a non-scientific, individual category of authenticity, whereby the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the visitor determine their perception of the authenticity of their surroundings. According to Dean MacCannell's frequently-cited work on tourism and the tourist, this perception is key, as the very act of sightseeing is a quest for an authentic experience.<sup>125</sup> Far from passively viewing exhibits, visitors are now 'active participants' in museums and touristic experiences.<sup>126</sup> Even in a setting such as the Auschwitz Museum, where the majority of exhibits lie behind glass and tactile interaction is discouraged, the experiences and reactions of the visitor have contributed to a shift in ideas of authenticity as an objective, real-or-not-real phenomenon.<sup>127</sup> Yet Wang's theory is limited only to the field of tourism and, thus, may be restricted only to the physical confines of the Museum. For Wang, existential authenticity in tourism is an opposing state of being to the inauthenticity of everyday life; tourism is 'a route to fulfilment' of 'the authentic self'.<sup>128</sup> For the purposes of brevity and specificity, this thesis shall not consider wider Heideggerian notions of existentialism, either in tourism or in the concept of being at large.<sup>129</sup> Jamal and Hill, however, argue that existential authenticity 'relates more to the everyday life of the tourist,' and that 'perceived authenticity [...] is a characteristic of tourist *experience*' which must be distinguished from larger questions or notions of existence.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, the similar theory of *experiential authenticity* – as used by Penrose, Souto, Andreas Wesener and others – will be employed here.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 359 (emphasis in original).

<sup>125</sup> Dean MacCannell, "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *American Journal of Sociology* 79:3 (1973): 593.

<sup>126</sup> Hede et al., "Perceived Authenticity," 1397.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 1397.

<sup>128</sup> Wang, "Rethinking Authenticity," 361; Lorraine Brown, "Tourism: A Catalyst for Existential Authenticity," *Annals of Tourism Research* 40 (2013): 177.

<sup>129</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010).

<sup>130</sup> Tazim Jamal and Steve Hill, "The Home and the World: (Post)touristic Spaces of (In)authenticity?" in *The Tourist as a Metaphor of the Social World*, ed. Graham M. S. Dann (Oxford: CABI, 2002), 89 (emphasis in original).

<sup>131</sup> For examples, see Penrose, "Authenticity," 1252; Souto, "Memory Museums," 1; Andreas Wesener, "Adopting 'Things of the Little': Intangible Cultural Heritage and Experiential Authenticity of Place in the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23:2 (2017): 142; Liuhe Jin, Honggen Xiao and Haili Shen, "Experiential Authenticity in Heritage Museums," *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 18 (2020): 1-11, online at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100493>. The terms 'experiential' and 'existential' authenticity are occasionally used interchangeably (e.g. Alan A. Lew,

Experiential authenticity is an extremely significant factor in visits to museums and other sites of touristic interest. At least one discussion has found that the ‘best’ tourism places are those at which individuals felt the highest degree of experiential authenticity, whilst Li Wang and Pertti Alasuutari assert that the similar, personal concept of ‘experientialisation’ is a significant part of contemporary tourism.<sup>132</sup> MacCannell goes further, believing that authenticity in tourism is not just a quest for authenticity of the self, but is a ‘collective ritual’, whereby the individual feels part of the wider community by ‘connecting one’s own marker to a sight already marked by others’.<sup>133</sup> In the author’s research on visitors’ photography at the Auschwitz Museum, this desire to connect ‘markers’ to a recognised site was clearly demonstrated by numerous participants.<sup>134</sup> Whilst the present study will place greater emphasis on the individual’s experience of visiting the Museum in person, the notion of authenticity through collective ‘ritual’ and interaction does play a part in the Museum’s online campaigns, particularly its social media.

Although there are differences in experiential and existential authenticity, experience is an indisputable part of existence (alternatively, one might argue that existence is, in itself, experience). This is acknowledged by Wesener, who stresses that “‘experiential authenticity’ [also] refers to people’s place-based experiences as part of their daily lives and routines’.<sup>135</sup> Increasingly, Silverstone argues, ‘everyday life [...] becomes inseparable from the mediations that guide us through it’.<sup>136</sup> As this thesis explores Museum resources used away from the physical space which it occupies, Wesener’s use of experiential authenticity will thus be expanded to include ‘places’ within the digital realm. In the case of the Auschwitz Museum, this is most prevalent in the space occupied by its social media.

Another important aspect of authenticity emerges from social media: authenticity of the self. Research has demonstrated that appearing real and true to oneself online is greatly valued by both those who produce and consume content.<sup>137</sup> Platforms like Twitter are often

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“Understanding Experiential Authenticity through the Best Tourism Places,” *Tourism Geographies* 13:4 (2011): 570-5) but ‘experiential’ should still be understood as a part of the broader term of ‘existential authenticity’.

<sup>132</sup> Lew, “Experiential Authenticity,” 572; Li Wang and Pertti Alasuutari, “Co-Construction of the Tourist Experience in Social Networking Sites: Two Forms of Authenticity Intertwined,” *Tourist Studies* 17:4 (2017): 398-9; Thomas Thurnell-Read, “‘What’s On Your Bucket List?’ Tourism, Identity and Imperative Experiential Discourse,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 67 (2017): 59.

<sup>133</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 137.

<sup>134</sup> Dalziel, “‘Romantic Auschwitz’,” 188-91.

<sup>135</sup> Wesener, “Adopting,” 143.

<sup>136</sup> Roger Silverstone, “Regulation, Media Literacy and Media Civics,” *Media, Culture & Society* 26:3 (2004): 443.

<sup>137</sup> Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience,” *New Media & Society* 13:1 (2010): 119; Joon Soo Lim et al., “Online

used, for example, to ‘create and market a “personal brand”,’ maintaining one’s own identity and narrative whilst aiming to gain followers.<sup>138</sup> This is, of course, a challenge for actual brands and organisations with an online presence. As Susan Fournier and Jill Avery assert, ‘social media was made for people, not for brands’.<sup>139</sup> The key to appearing authentic in these spaces mirrors that of maintaining authority: constructing a persona or engaging as a real person rather than using ‘corporate-speak’.<sup>140</sup>

Social media has given museums a ‘recognisable face’, and many have integrated more personal ways of communicating with their followers.<sup>141</sup> Techniques include sharing behind-the-scenes photos, commenting on current affairs and using affective hashtags.<sup>142</sup> Although these methods are not as salient on the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s social media, Sawicki still consciously presents a persona. The ‘person that is called Auschwitz Memorial’ does not just serve as a figure of authority, as discussed above, but is also designed to communicate the Museum’s authenticity, both personally (as a trustworthy source) and curatorially (as a site).<sup>143</sup> This identity is primarily constructed ‘through conversations with others’.<sup>144</sup> The opportunity for followers to ‘talk’ to the institution in this manner thus creates another form of authentic experience for them, combining the authenticity of the Museum with the authenticity of their ‘daily lives’ on social media.<sup>145</sup> It will thus be shown that, although the Museum promotes its curatorial authenticity via the digital museum, it is perceived experiential authenticity that primarily affects visitors and users of the Museum’s materials in each setting.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that curatorial authenticity and experiential authenticity are not entirely separate or opposing entities but are in fact inextricably linked. A visitor’s experience of visiting a place such as the Auschwitz Museum is both ‘object- and

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Authenticity, Popularity, and the “Real Me” in a Microblogging Environment,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 52 (2015): 132-43; Leonard Reinecke and Sabine Trepte, “Authenticity and Well-being on Social Network Sites: A Two-wave Longitudinal Study on the Effects of Online Authenticity and the Positivity Bias in SNS Communication,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 30 (2014): 95-102; Minseong Kim and Jihye Kim, “The Influence of Authenticity of Online Reviews on Trust Formation among Travelers,” *Journal of Travel Research* 59:5 (2020): 763-76.

<sup>138</sup> Marwick and boyd, “Tweet Honestly,” 119.

<sup>139</sup> Susan Fournier and Jill Avery, “The Uninvited Brand,” *Business Horizons* 54 (2011): 193.

<sup>140</sup> Marwick and boyd, “Tweet Honestly,” 127.

<sup>141</sup> Jenny Kidd, “Enacting Engagement Online: Framing Social Media Use for the Museum,” *Information Technology & People* 24:1 (2011): 68.

<sup>142</sup> Jullaya Vorasuntharosoth, “Instagram and Online Presence Among Art Museums - An Investigation of Instagram Content on Audience Engagement,” (Master’s thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2018), 35-6, online at: <https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/44401> (accessed 16 January 2021).

<sup>143</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>144</sup> Marwick and boyd, “Tweet Honestly,” 124.

<sup>145</sup> Wesener, “Adopting,” 143.

subject-related’ and includes ‘inherent and constructed factors’.<sup>146</sup> Viewing objects or artefacts in a museum and/or historical place adds to the visitor’s overall experience and encourages cognitive or emotional reactions. These objects are not placed randomly or accidentally, however; they have been deliberately arranged, positioned and highlighted. The display cases of victims’ possessions at Auschwitz I, for instance, mostly contain somewhat indistinguishable masses of items such as shoes, cooking equipment, brushes and prostheses, yet several artefacts that have been carefully cleaned and conserved are placed individually in the front of the displays. This provides the visitor with a focal point on which to project their feelings, often prompting questions about the person who once owned the item and their fate.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, given the highly subjective nature of authenticity, curators themselves will inevitably possess their own notions of what is authentic; which objects and layouts will contribute to the visitor experience; and how these should be presented. There is, therefore, an ‘intersubjective dialogue’ between the two approaches, which constitutes a blending of objectivity and subjectivity; curation and intuition; and the original and reconstructed.<sup>148</sup>

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum itself recognises that there is more than one interpretation of authenticity available when considering the site and its resources. As an institution, the Museum acknowledges two primary authenticities: ‘the authenticity of the physical remains,’ and ‘the authenticity of the words of the survivors’.<sup>149</sup> The former relates specifically to this thesis’ adopted notion of curatorial authenticity, whilst the latter can heighten visitors’ experiential authenticity. Both aspects will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

### *Audience*

The World Wide Web – the collection of information facilitated by the Internet – was not originally intended to have an audience. The Internet was designed to create communication and information-sharing between people, yet it was not envisioned to become a mass medium like television or radio.<sup>150</sup> Timothy Roscoe refutes the idea of ‘technological determinism’ that suggests the construction of this audience was inevitable, highlighting the fact that

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<sup>146</sup> Wesener, “Adopting,” 143.

<sup>147</sup> For an example, see Dalziel, “‘Romantic Auschwitz’,” 191.

<sup>148</sup> Lovell and Bull, *Authentic and Inauthentic*, 2.

<sup>149</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>150</sup> Timothy Roscoe, “The Construction of the World Wide Web Audience,” *Media, Culture & Society* 21 (1999): 673.

creating and publishing Web content was initially cheaper and easier than it was to view.<sup>151</sup> Instead, he asserts, the growth of the Internet as a mass medium was driven by ‘poor media coverage’ founded on ‘poor general knowledge [...] of the technology’, which increased public interest in this new mode of communication.<sup>152</sup> Gradually, the ‘one to one’ communication offered by the Internet (using emails, for example) expanded to include ‘one to many’ (such as websites) and, more recently, ‘many to many’ (social media).<sup>153</sup> Additionally, as Sonia Livingstone states, one might consider plural audiences, given the numbers, individualisation and diversity of the people reached.<sup>154</sup>

Physical museum audiences are relatively simple to ascertain. Staff have been conducting demographical surveys in British museums, for example, since the 1960s.<sup>155</sup> Furthermore, museumgoers’ reactions and feedback are more easily gauged in face-to-face interactions, and exhibitions are catered for specific audiences rather than “‘the general public’”.<sup>156</sup> The anonymity offered by the Internet, however, presents a ‘faceless mass’; online audiences and their responses are, to some degree, unknown or ‘imagined’.<sup>157</sup> In some ways, museum staff must think like television producers, assessing ‘their experiences with audiences from previous [interactions], their personal projections about who their audience is, and their knowledge of the industry they work in’ to create suitable and engaging content.<sup>158</sup>

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s onsite audience has both grown and changed exponentially, particularly since the fall of Communism in Poland.<sup>159</sup> The majority of visitors remain Polish, but through a combination of factors such as educational curricula, affordable tourism and media coverage, large numbers also arrive from (predominantly) the Western world.<sup>160</sup> Certain groups frequent the Museum: British students on the Holocaust Educational Trust’s ‘Lessons from Auschwitz’ Project; Israeli youth, draped in their national

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 673, 677.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 678.

<sup>153</sup> Livingstone, “Challenge,” 76-7.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>155</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, “Museums and Communication: An Introductory Essay,” in *Museum, Media, Message*, ed. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), 3.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>157</sup> Marwick and boyd, “Tweet Honestly,” 129, 115; Eden Litt, “*Knock, Knock*. Who’s There? The Imagined Audience,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56:3 (2012): 331.

<sup>158</sup> Paul Espinosa, “The Audience in the Text: Ethnographic Observations of a Hollywood Story Conference,” *Media, Culture & Society* 4:1 (1982): 85.

<sup>159</sup> For a history of the end of Communism in Poland, see, for example, Andrzej Paczkowski, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Poland, 1980-1989: Solidarity, Martial Law, and the End of Communism in Europe*, trans. Christina Manetti (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015). This period, and its impact on the Auschwitz Museum, is discussed in Chapter One.

<sup>160</sup> See Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2019* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2020), 27.

flag; retired American holidaymakers pursuing a cultural experience. The Museum is thus familiar with most of its physical audience and tailors its educational services accordingly. This can involve extended study visits; the organisation of commemorative or religious events; teachers' or educators' input on the guided tour; or simply an awareness of the level of explanation different visitors may require.<sup>161</sup>

The 'faceless mass' of the digital museum, however, translates to an undefined global audience with even greater variances in pre-existing knowledge, age, culture and motivation.<sup>162</sup> The Museum attempts to avoid this challenge by aiming to 'reach everyone'; due to its international nature and universal message of morality, the institution targets a singular audience, irrespective of the multiplicities highlighted by Livingstone.<sup>163</sup> In reality, however, different groups within this audience – or audiences – must be acknowledged and catered for.

At a basic level, there must be 'a more specific conception of audience than 'anyone' to choose the language, cultural referents, style, and so on that comprise online identity presentation'.<sup>164</sup> One must also be mindful of the integration of digital media across different national and cultural contexts to even begin to understand who, exactly, is being reached.<sup>165</sup> The Museum's digital museum does illustrate an awareness of these factors. The official website and social media, for instance, provide a means of access to those who cannot visit the physical museum due to financial, geographical or mobility issues. The 'E-learning' section of the website contains 20 lessons on a variety of subjects, some available in several languages, created to appeal to different levels of knowledge and learning styles.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, the content the Museum publishes on social media, particularly on Twitter, often relates to the victims murdered at the former camp. As well as sharing the faces and names behind the statistics, Tweets focused on individual victims reflect the individuals that

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<sup>161</sup> This latter point is particularly relevant at the Museum for visitors with visual or hearing impairments, or those with special educational needs. See Tomasz Michalik, "People with DisABILITIES at the Museum: From Cognitive and Ethical Challenges to Hope for a New Version of History," in *Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust at Authentic Memorial Sites: Current Status and Future Prospects*, ed. Piotr Trojański (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2019), 152-66; Piotr Kondratowicz, "Emotions in the World of Silence: The Deaf at the Authentic Memorial Site – Auschwitz, where Silence may Mean More than a Thousand Words..." in *Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust at Authentic Memorial Sites: Current Status and Future Prospects*, ed. Piotr Trojański (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2019), 201-6.

<sup>162</sup> Marwick and boyd, "Tweet Honestly," 129.

<sup>163</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020; Livingstone, "Challenge," 76-7.

<sup>164</sup> Marwick and boyd, "Tweet Honestly," 115.

<sup>165</sup> Hallvard Moe, Thomas Poell, and José van Dijck, "Rearticulating Audience Engagement: Social Media and Television," *Television & New Media* 17:2 (2016): 101-2.

<sup>166</sup> "E-learning," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/education/e-learning> (accessed 6 January 2021).

collectively make up the reactive audience. Conversely, the Museum sometimes contradicts this perceived universality by explicitly targeting groups within this audience, such as writers, visitors and retailers, attempting to control online representations of Auschwitz by highlighting journalists' mistakes, for instance, or criticising some visitors' behaviour.

From a digital perspective, moreover, it is unlikely that the Auschwitz Museum reaches 'everyone', even amongst their own followers. It is impossible to say, for example, how many people 'like' or 'follow' the Museum on their social media platforms without pausing to read the posts whilst scrolling through their news feed. Some may not even receive these notifications due to the platforms themselves. As Eden Litt states, channels such as Facebook and Instagram 'influence the potential audience by using an algorithm that ultimately decides which contacts will receive users' broadcasted posts'.<sup>167</sup> Despite its large following on social media, therefore, the Museum may sometimes only be addressing a smaller core audience that is already invested in its history and educational mission.

Mass media creates an additional role for the audience: that of witness. The phenomenon of 'media witnessing' consists of three elements:

audiences become witnesses themselves, vicariously experiencing events that happen elsewhere; they become witnesses of the witnessing victims, the people that give testimony of their suffering on the screen; and, finally, they are witnesses of the witnessing texts, [...] that bear witness to the events taking place.<sup>168</sup>

Confronted with the 'painful knowledge' of 'distant suffering', and somewhat falsely led to believe they are 'fully engaged' with those in crisis, the viewer or user may feel compelled to help alleviate this injustice – at least, until they recognise the complications of the temporal or geographical space between themselves and what they are witnessing.<sup>169</sup> Luc Boltanski proposes this can be overcome by a commitment to speech, telling others what has been witnessed and the emotions this evoked. This speech does not have to be verbal, but can be expressed through written or recorded media (such as, to bring Boltanski's argument into the present, websites and social media posts).<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Litt, "Knock, Knock," 337. See also Kelley Cotter, "Playing the Visibility Game: How Digital Influencers and Algorithms Negotiate Influence on Instagram," *New Media & Society* 21:4 (2019): 895-6, 898-9.

<sup>168</sup> Maria Kyriakidou, "Media Witnessing: Exploring the Audience of Distant Suffering," *Media, Culture & Society* 37:2 (2015): 217.

<sup>169</sup> John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 11; Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*, xv; Roger Silverstone, "Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life," *New Literary History* 33:4 (2002): 777.

<sup>170</sup> Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*, xv-xvi.

Media witnessing is a key part of ‘Holocaust witnessing’, and has been since survivors’ testimonies were recorded for a project at Yale University in 1979.<sup>171</sup> The emergence of new technologies over the last several decades, including holograms, smart devices and the Internet, has cemented Holocaust representation in mass media and popular culture. There is, furthermore, an emphasis on the audience ‘bearing witness’ to this history through reading or listening to survivor testimony or, to some degree, visiting former Holocaust sites.<sup>172</sup> One becomes witness to the witnesses, predominantly those who survived the genocide but also the artefacts that attest to those who did not.<sup>173</sup> This witnessing is not only about factual education; it has implications for the audience’s moral responsibility. People are taught about past atrocities such as the Holocaust in order to recognise the potential for future catastrophes and act against them. Such forewarnings are imparted by mass media, where ‘all is visible’, and the proliferation of media means one cannot claim ignorance ‘as justification for inaction’.<sup>174</sup> Media witnessing is therefore ‘a continuation of Holocaust witnessing by other means, bearing out the imperative of speaking against evil and misfortune wherever and whenever they might occur’.<sup>175</sup>

The Auschwitz Museum utilises its digital museum, particularly social media, to create witnesses of its audience. This was particularly relevant during the coronavirus pandemic, when the physical site was closed to the public for more than five months.<sup>176</sup> The virtual tour, for example, was recommended *in lieu* of a corporeal visit, whilst the Museum has increasingly used social media to draw attention to Auschwitz victims – the silent witnesses – and their suffering. Such content is published to move the user to action. In the short term, this may involve sharing the Museum’s posts to raise awareness amongst their followers; the underlying aim, however, is ‘to take people out of this historical world, and somehow have them think about today and the future’, and their part in bettering society.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski, “Introduction: Why Media Witnessing? Why Now?” in *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4.

<sup>172</sup> Reynolds, *Postcards*, 56; “The Holocaust: Bearing Witness,” *Facing History and Ourselves*, online at: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/holocaust-bearing-witness> (accessed 15 January 2021); Annabel Pattle, ““I Am Your Witness”,” *Holocaust Educational Trust*, online at: <https://www.het.org.uk/news-and-events/810-i-am-your-witness-a-regional-ambassador-alumni-s-thoughts-on-ambassador-conference-2020> (accessed 15 January 2021).

<sup>173</sup> Nicholas Chare, “Material Witness: Conservation Ethics and the Scrolls of Auschwitz,” *symploke* 24:1-2 (2016): 81-97.

<sup>174</sup> Frosh and Pinchevski, “Introduction,” 6.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>176</sup> “Exceptionally Difficult Year. 502,000 Visitors at the Auschwitz Memorial in 2020,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/exceptionally-difficult-year-502-000-visitors-at-the-auschwitz-memorial-in-2020-,1461.html> (last modified 5 January 2021).

<sup>177</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

Unlike television or other mass media, the Internet also provides users with the opportunity to be ‘audience and performer at the same time’.<sup>178</sup> As well as consuming and reacting to published content, people can produce their own, in turn establishing their own audience. This can consist of a small group of friends, family and acquaintances, or develop into a global following. Furthermore, this technology provides the opportunity for events in the life of the average user to ‘go viral’ in a matter of minutes or hours, a phenomenon that is now ‘ubiquitous’ in digital media culture.<sup>179</sup>

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has felt the effects of this virality on multiple occasions, both from its own published content and posts uploaded by individual users.<sup>180</sup> Most of its audience’s performative aspects, however, are found in more ordinary social media content. Visitors upload material to platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, sharing the experience of their Museum visit and their reactions to this history. Before the Internet, the institution had far more control over public representations of Auschwitz and its post-camp operations. Visitors’ photographs largely remained in private, printed photo albums; lightweight devices with which to take pictures or record video were simply unavailable. Responding to user-made online content, therefore, and relishing some of this control is still a relatively new aspect of the Museum’s media management. This shall be further explored in Chapter Four.

Finally, the Internet provides space for direct connection and reaction to content. Web 2.0 – the term for platforms that require user-generated content, such as social media – encourages ‘enhanced interactivity and bidirectional communication’.<sup>181</sup> Published posts are liked, shared and commented upon, whether or not the user agrees with the material posted. Thus, as Marwick and boyd argue, ‘the idea of the ‘audience as a stable entity [...] has been displaced with the ‘interpretive community’ [...] and ‘participatory culture’.<sup>182</sup> On one hand, the Auschwitz Museum has embraced this more dynamic interaction on social media,

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<sup>178</sup> Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1998), 73.

<sup>179</sup> Karine Nahon and Jeff Hemsley, *Going Viral* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 2.

<sup>180</sup> For examples, see Sonam Sheth, “‘It’s Not a Stage’: Louisiana Congressman Sparks Criticism for Filming Himself at Auschwitz,” *Business Insider*, online at: <https://www.businessinsider.com/clay-higgins-auschwitz-holocaust-memorial-video-2017-7> (last modified 5 July 2017); “Barrage of Abuse for Teen who Posts Smiling Selfie at Auschwitz,” *Jewish News*, online at: <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/barrage-abuse-teen-posts-smiling-selfie-auschwitz> (last modified 22 July 2014).

<sup>181</sup> Tim O’Reilly, “What is Web 2.0?” *O’Reilly*, online at: <https://www.oreilly.com/pub/a//web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (last modified 30 September 2005); Bojana Suzić, Miroslav Karliček, and Václav Stříteský, “Adoption of Social Media for Public Relations by Museums,” *Central European Business Review* 5:2 (2016): 6.

<sup>182</sup> Marwick and boyd, “Tweet Honestly,” 129.

particularly with its Twitter followers. Users are occasionally invited to enter into discussions on topics such as respectful visitor behaviour, and provide feedback regarding the Museum's social media content, to establish the perceived value to its followers. At times, therefore, the Museum's authority is slightly relaxed, and its audience is made to feel part of a collaborative and participatory community. On the other hand, as this thesis will demonstrate, the Museum's authoritative, 'Unassailable Voice' still appears online, when users' comments are refuted and their interpretations criticised.<sup>183</sup>

Thus, although the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is insistent that its message is for a singular global audience, there are inevitable differences and challenges in the ways in which it communicates with various groups. Whilst the needs of every prospective and actual visitor or user must be considered, the Museum must work around certain demographics to provide visitors with a valuable experience (and that experience's perceived authenticity) and establish how best to use its own authority to communicate the Museum's history and aims with them. Although the notion of audience is arguably a less significant part of this thesis' three key elements, it nevertheless plays an important role in exploring the Museum's adaptation to the digital museum.

## **The Development of the Digital Museum**

In 1951, André Malraux – novelist, art theorist and former French Minister of Cultural Affairs – presented the notion of the 'museum without walls' (*'le musée imaginaire'*, or 'the imaginary museum') that permeated twentieth-century Western culture. This was achieved, according to Malraux, by the possibility of high-quality reproduction; full colour photographs of museum exhibits were printed and reprinted on such a large scale that one need not travel to the Louvre or the Galerie d'Orleans to become acquainted with famous masterpieces.<sup>184</sup> Although Malraux was referring exclusively to art museums and galleries, this concept now applies to almost all different types of museums. As Antonio Battro states, however, the current state of the 'museum without walls' has expanded significantly further than Malraux could ever have envisioned.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Walsh, "The Web," 229.

<sup>184</sup> André Malraux, *Les voix du silence* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1951); André Malraux, *Museum Without Walls*, trans. Stuart Gilbert and Francis Price (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967).

<sup>185</sup> Antonio M. Battro, "From Malraux's Imaginary Museum to the Virtual Museum," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 136.

The integration of digital aspects in museums has been a slow, somewhat hesitant process. Initial attempts at museum computerisation began to emerge in 1967, but this early endeavour focused only on management of internal information systems and cataloguing rather than enhancing visitors' experiences.<sup>186</sup> Mini-computers and micro-computers were launched in the 1970s and 1980s respectively, but remained highly complex machines that could only be operated by data processors.<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, even at this early stage, museums were under pressure from the 'television generation' to "'jazz up" their acts' and present their information in 'a sharp, snappy, modern manner'.<sup>188</sup> This heralded a shift in museums' role in society; rather than remaining object-centred, museums were required to become "'people-centred", attentive to visitors' own experiences and values'.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, twentieth-century museums increasingly found themselves in a competitive market, not just with other institutions but also in a battle for relevance alongside cinema, television and more interactive leisure attractions. The most popular museums began to implement more appealing, exciting exhibitions that created opportunities for active visitor participation. The emphasis on a hands-on approach was first seen in science-focused centres and museums, but gradually spread to institutions concerned with the arts and humanities.<sup>190</sup> The results were exhibitions and galleries making use of both analogue and digital elements, inviting the visitor 'to hear, touch, smell' and enjoy displays 'to talk to and interact with'.<sup>191</sup> Within a relatively short space of time, museums shifted from monologue to dialogue, communicating with visitors and encouraging them to interact with exhibitions and the information displayed within the museum space. The onsite digital museum has thus introduced opportunities for visitor activity and empowerment, illustrating museum management's increased consideration of the visitor experience.

Up until the early 1990s, museums' capacity to educate, reach and engage with their visitors was limited to the physical exhibition space. Expansion in communication was granted, however, by the emergence of 'the strange new world of the Internet'.<sup>192</sup> The World Wide Web was originally designed for communication between scientists, but the software

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<sup>186</sup> Ross Parry, *Recoding the Museum: Digital Heritage and the Technologies of Change* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), xii.

<sup>187</sup> David Williams, "A Brief History of Museum Computerization," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 16, 18-9.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>189</sup> Michelle Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 91.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>191</sup> Bella Dicks, *Culture on Display: The Production of Contemporary Visitability* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), 165.

<sup>192</sup> Johnny Ryan, *A History of the Internet and the Digital Future* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 115.

was brought into the public domain in 1993 and fully opened to commercial traffic after the National Science Foundation Network was decommissioned in 1995.<sup>193</sup> Yet, despite the potential the Internet created for museums, many institutions approached this new software with trepidation. A 1998 global survey, for example, found that only 54 per cent of participating museums had launched a website since 1995; a minimal budget was allocated for its maintenance; and the website's upkeep was the responsibility of only one staff member.<sup>194</sup> Technological advances such as the Internet, however, led to the growth of the 'information society', the importance of which was increasingly emphasised by both governments and the public during the 1990s and into the 2000s.<sup>195</sup> This change in visitor expectations was reflected in the establishment of conferences such as the annual Museums and the Web, the first gathering of which was held in 1997, and networks including the European Museums' Information Institute.<sup>196</sup> Individually, museums responded by developing digital access resources (including digitising their internal collections databases), creating and strengthening external networks, and utilising information professionals to handle the increasing difficulty and complexity of their digital output.<sup>197</sup> By 2004, for example, 88 per cent of American museums had a website; this growth was slower in the UK, but by 2018, 92 per cent of British museums had established an official online presence.<sup>198</sup> Despite their initial misgivings, museums have had to embrace these technological developments to avoid being perceived as 'redundant' by their visitors and 'abandoned in favour of other types of information-providing institutions'.<sup>199</sup>

There are several reasons that museums reacted to the development of an online presence with some resistance. On one hand, museums might have been cautious about investing heavily in a new technology that may not have proved successful. On the other hand, there was certainly concern regarding a potential clash between the physical museum

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<sup>193</sup> "The Birth of the Web," *CERN*, online at: <https://home.cern/topics/birth-web> (accessed 28 June 2020); Alice Gribbin, "A Brief History of the Internet," *New Statesman*, 15 August 2011, 30.

<sup>194</sup> Klaus Müller, "Museums and Virtuality," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 296.

<sup>195</sup> Andrew Roberts, "The Changing Role of Information Professionals in Museums," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 25.

<sup>196</sup> David Bearman and Jennifer Trant, "Interactivity Comes of Age: Museums and the World Wide Web," *Museum International* 51:4 (1999): 20; Roberts, "Changing Role," 26.

<sup>197</sup> Roberts, "Changing Role," 25-7.

<sup>198</sup> Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Status of Technology and Digitization in the Nation's Museums and Libraries* (2006), 33, online at: [https://www.imls.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Technology\\_Digitization.pdf](https://www.imls.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Technology_Digitization.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2020); Museums Association, *Museums in the UK: 2018 Report* (London: Museums Association, 2018), 24.

<sup>199</sup> George F. MacDonald and Stephen Alford, "The Museum as Information Utility," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 72.

space and the online world. As Deborah Howes suggests, ‘the Internet appeared antithetical to the core of museum identity; museums are about the real while the Internet is about the virtual: how could they possibly work together?’<sup>200</sup> Museum curators worried that the lack of physical contact with artefacts and historical sites would generate less impact for digital visitors. Furthermore, some felt the online presence of museums would, in fact, discourage people from travelling to the institutions themselves.<sup>201</sup> Whilst the number of onsite visitors has largely been eclipsed by those online, this concern has proven to be unfounded; museums still attract vast numbers of people.<sup>202</sup> Indeed, museum websites appear to gain ‘credibility and authority’ from their physical counterparts, and many visitors access institutions’ webpages solely to find information relating to planning a corporeal visit, such as opening times and admission prices.<sup>203</sup> A study of museum website users conducted by Paul Marty, for instance, found that over 92 per cent of respondents preferred to visit the physical museum to view both permanent and touring exhibitions, whilst 66 per cent disagreed that a website could substitute such a visit. Yet this does not mean that the online museum holds no significance for visitors; the majority of participants felt that museums’ online spaces should ‘present unique experiences that cannot be duplicated’ onsite.<sup>204</sup> Museum programmes of digitisation – scanning or photographing collections and uploading them to visitor-oriented online spaces – have also proved extremely useful for researchers and students in particular.<sup>205</sup> The importance of museum websites was felt particularly during the coronavirus pandemic, when institutions across the world were forced to close for several months and conduct all activities and engagement online.

As well as building a greater rapport with existing visitors and the general public, museums have also realised the benefits of creating online materials in terms of funding and sponsorship. Whether public and state-funded, or private and independent, cultural institutions look to museumgoers, private foundations and corporate organisations to donate money, equipment or exhibits.<sup>206</sup> As will be discussed in the next chapter, this thesis’ case

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<sup>200</sup> Howes, “Internet Matters,” 67.

<sup>201</sup> Thomas, “Introduction,” 3; Ross Parry, “The Practice of Digital Heritage and the Heritage of Digital Practice,” in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 1.

<sup>202</sup> Paul F. Marty, “Digital Museum,” 84.

<sup>203</sup> Thomas, “Introduction,” 3; Paul F. Marty, “Museum Websites and Museum Visitors: Before and After the Museum Visit,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 22:4 (2007): 347.

<sup>204</sup> Marty, “Digital Museum,” 89-91.

<sup>205</sup> See Melissa Terras, “Cultural Heritage Information: Artefacts and Digitization Technologies,” in *Cultural Heritage Information: Access and Management*, ed. Gobinda Chowdhury and Ian Ruthven (London: Facet, 2015), 63-88.

<sup>206</sup> See John Zarobell, *Art and the Global Economy* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 35-56; Carole Rosenstein, “When is a Museum a Public Museum? Considerations from the Point of View of Public

study of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum relies heavily on the Polish government, the public and private donors to conduct its operations. Individuals donate to museums for several reasons: interest in the institution's area of focus; a desire to ensure the preservation of heritage; to create a legacy; and to honour the memory of those who worked in similar fields or advocated public forms of education. Organisations providing financial or material donations may harbour similar motivations (as well as, more cynically, the positive public relations that such philanthropic activity generates).<sup>207</sup> Nevertheless, in order to secure further funding, museums must demonstrate that their activities are relevant, inclusive and of communal benefit.<sup>208</sup> Just as contemporary museums hire renowned architects to create buildings designed as 'showpieces', so elements such as apps, websites and social media can provide platforms for institutions to highlight their news, recent acquisitions and efforts to contribute to visitors' knowledge and museum experience.<sup>209</sup> As Livingstone notes with television, museums are therefore constantly 'diversifying [their] forms, extending [their] scope, penetrating further into public and private life'.<sup>210</sup>

Physical and digital museums, therefore, should not be seen as separate entities, but rather as complementary to one another. The knowledge and experiences gleaned from an onsite visit can be expanded upon using digital technologies, whether this content is accessed whilst in, or away from, the physical museum. Many museums have thus embraced this duality – now considering online audiences as important as those physically present at the museum – and in recent years, the digital museum has been expanded in numerous ways.<sup>211</sup>

### **The Multiple Aspects of Digital Museums**

The visitor-facing digital museum encompasses a wide range of different elements, both on- and offsite. These can be primarily visual, aural or tactile, and serve various functions in terms of engaging visitors and users. Many museums have also utilised a combination of both older and more recent digital elements (particularly onsite), bringing their exhibitions to life

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Finance," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 16:4 (2010): 449-65; Katja Lindqvist, "Museum Finances: Challenges beyond Economic Crises," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27:1 (2012): 1-15.

<sup>207</sup> Prestige can also be a factor in individual donors, particularly amongst those who give larger sums. William T. Harbaugh, "What Do Donations Buy? A Model of Philanthropy Based on Prestige and Warm Glow," *Journal of Public Economics* 67:2 (1998): 269-84.

<sup>208</sup> Alexandros Apostolakis and Shabbar Jaffry, "An Analysis of Monetary Voluntary Contributions for Cultural Resources: The Case of the British Museum," *Tourism Economics* 19:3 (2013): 631-51.

<sup>209</sup> Zarobell, *Art and the Global Economy*, 41.

<sup>210</sup> Livingstone, "Challenge," 76.

<sup>211</sup> Parry, "Practice," 1.

and creating more dynamic experiences for museumgoers. Whilst the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum does not use every aspect of the digital museum discussed here, this wider exploration demonstrates how the Auschwitz Museum's digital presence compares to other historical and cultural institutions, and why it may have focused on certain elements when considering its authority, authenticity and audience.

Film has been embedded in museum galleries for several decades, primarily as a response to the 'visually literate society' in which they are now located.<sup>212</sup> In many museums, this initially took the form of a cinema on the premises, but has steadily evolved so that clips from documentaries, archival footage, interviews or fictional representations of events are screened on televisions or monitors, or projected onto walls and other surfaces around the space.<sup>213</sup> Every hour, on the hour, for example, the Imperial War Museum North dims its gallery lights and projects its Big Picture Shows, 360-degree films that highlight various aspects of war.<sup>214</sup> These attempt to humanise the abstract concept of conflict by touching upon themes such as the human spirit, children affected by war and the loss of loved ones. Internal projections can therefore create a sense of atmosphere, enveloping the visitor in their museum experience and perhaps eliciting particular emotions. Exterior displays, on the other hand, are primarily designed either to showcase visually attractive imagery (such as the Grand Palais in Paris) or to highlight issues of importance to passers-by (as in the case of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which projected images of the genocide in Darfur onto its façade in November 2006 to raise awareness of the ongoing conflict).<sup>215</sup>

Tactile interaction in museum spaces is encouraged through computers and handheld devices. The first computers introduced into exhibitions were bulky, static machines that required the standard mouse-and-keyboard setup to operate. As more advanced and appealing technologies have become accessible, however, these have been replaced by touchscreens. These take the form of either standalone kiosks, operable by one visitor at a time, or large table-top, multi-touch screens with which a group can interact.<sup>216</sup> Touchscreens are now looked upon favourably in museum settings by both visitors and curators. Unlike static

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<sup>212</sup> Steve Humphries, "Unseen Stories: Video History in Museums," *Oral History* 31:2 (2003): 77; John Oliver, "Archival Film and Museums in the UK," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 11:1 (1992): 61.

<sup>213</sup> Oliver, "Archival Film," 67-8.

<sup>214</sup> Raymond Powell and Jithendran Kokkranikal, "From History to Reality – Engaging with Visitors in the Imperial War Museum (North)," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 29:1 (2014): 44; "Big Picture Show," *Imperial War Museums*, online at: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/events/big-picture-show> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>215</sup> Swiader, "Promoting Social Change," 161.

<sup>216</sup> Tom Geller, "Interactive Tabletop Exhibits in Museums and Galleries," *IEEE Computer Graphics and Applications* 26 (2006): 6.

analogue displays, touchscreens allow museumgoers to ‘accomplish a larger range of operations than ever before’, such as pressing buttons, zooming in and out of images and turning pages.<sup>217</sup> Visitors can therefore ‘gain responses and “feedback” from exhibits’, providing a greater sense of connection with artefacts and related information.<sup>218</sup> The multi-touch function of table-top screens also promotes the social aspect of many museums, encouraging ‘a homier, more-familiar, collaborative atmosphere’ that allows visitors to learn and/or play together, particularly amongst families.<sup>219</sup>

Handheld devices provide a connection between the physical and digital spaces of the museum. Some institutions lend visitors portable equipment, such as tablets, containing both educational and entertaining content. These include floor plans, games, personalised tours, comprehensive glossaries and opportunities to share artefacts of interest on social media, amongst others.<sup>220</sup> Alternatively, visitors can use their own smartphones to download and access museums’ apps.<sup>221</sup> The latter also means that visitors can learn more about the museum and its collections before and after, as well as during, their visit. Such applications allow visitors to gain a more personalised experience from the museum; in the physical space, these apps act as a unique tour guide, enabling the visitor to choose the route and duration of their visit whilst receiving more detailed information relevant to their specific interests.<sup>222</sup> Offsite, the visitor has the opportunity to learn more about specific items, artists or historical periods that are included in the museum’s collections and can share their highlights with friends and peers via social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter.

There are also numerous tools created or published by museums that are primarily designed to be used away from the physical institution. The limitless size of museum websites, for example, allow for the inclusion of a significant amount of different useful and interesting

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<sup>217</sup> Alberto Gallace and Charles Spence, *In Touch with the Future: The Sense of Touch from Cognitive Neuroscience to Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 215.

<sup>218</sup> Dicks, *Culture on Display*, 165.

<sup>219</sup> Geller, “Interactive Tabletop Exhibits,” 9; Andrew Lewis, “What Can We Learn from Watching Groups of Visitors using Digital Museum Exhibits?” *Victoria and Albert Museum*, online at: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/digital-media/digital-exhibits-observational-research> (last modified 25 September 2014).

<sup>220</sup> Henry Tsai and Kelvin Sung, “Mobile Applications and Museum Visitation,” *Computer* 45:4 (2012): 95-8; Loïc Tallon, “Introduction: Mobile, Digital, and Personal,” in *Digital Technologies and the Museum Experience: Handheld Guides and Other Media*, ed. Loïc Tallon and Kevin Walker (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008), xiv.

<sup>221</sup> Robin Dowden and Scott Sayre, “The Whole World in Their Hands: The Promise and Peril of Visitor-Provided Mobile Devices,” in *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, ed. Herminia Din and Phyllis Hecht (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2007), 35-6.

<sup>222</sup> Tallon, “Introduction,” xviii.

elements. Hosting an official website allows institutions to provide practical information about visiting; ‘showcase’ their collections to museumgoers and non-museumgoers alike; communicate with a wide audience; and demonstrate outreach and impact activities to their funders and sponsors.<sup>223</sup> Moreover, most large museum websites host an online shop, allowing institutions an opportunity to promote their merchandise and branding on a global scale. Charles McIntyre describes physical museum shops as ‘an extension of [the museum] experience’ – this is an aspect, therefore, which can be further expanded upon in the online world, also enabling the museum to benefit financially.<sup>224</sup>

In keeping with contemporary museological trends, many museum websites grant visitors a greater sense of empowerment, as they are given the opportunity to access museums’ ‘processes in practice’ and explore artefacts without spatial or temporal constraint.<sup>225</sup> Moreover, advancements in digital technologies mean that these websites can consist of hundreds (if not thousands) of pages and include a variety of content, further refuting the idea of museums as ‘static storehouses’ that are ‘boring, private, and irrelevant’ spaces and instead showing them to be ‘fluid and responsive, dynamic, shaping, political, particular and complex’.<sup>226</sup> On the contemporary Metropolitan Museum of Art website, for instance, visitors can zoom in on over 406,000 high-resolution images, allowing them to study each item in more detail than is often possible during a physical visit.<sup>227</sup> In a more abstract offering, The British Museum partnered with Google Arts & Culture (formerly the Google Cultural Institute) to create The Museum of the World, a website that lets the visitor ‘travel’ through time and place, viewing artefacts connected via categories such as ‘Living and Dying’ and ‘Religion and Belief’.<sup>228</sup> Finally, many museums utilised their online

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<sup>223</sup> Brian Maidment, “Writing History with the Digital Image: A Cautious Celebration,” in *History in the Digital Age*, ed. Toni Weller (London: Routledge, 2013), 115; Katerina Kabassi, “Evaluating Websites of Museums: State of the Art,” *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 24 (2017): 184; Margee Hume and Michael Mills, “Building the Sustainable iMuseum: Is the Virtual Museum Leaving our Museums Virtually Empty?” *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 16:3 (2011): 276.

<sup>224</sup> Charles McIntyre, “Designing Museum and Gallery Shops as Integral, Co-Creative Retail Spaces within the Overall Visitor Experience,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 25:2 (2010): 196, 183.

<sup>225</sup> Kali Tzortzi, “From the Real to the Virtual: The Re-Presentation of the Spatiality of the Museum on Its Website,” *DigitCult@Scientific Journal on Digital Cultures* 1:2 (2016): 79-80.

<sup>226</sup> Hume and Mills, “Sustainable iMuseum,” 280; Simon Knell, Suzanne MacLeod and Sheila Watson, “Introduction,” in *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and Are Changed* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), xx.

<sup>227</sup> “The Met Collection,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, online at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>228</sup> “The Museum of the World,” *The British Museum*, online at: <https://britishmuseum.withgoogle.com> (accessed 28 June 2020). Many museums – including the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – have created online exhibitions and lessons with Google Arts & Culture. As these lie outside their official websites, however, they are not included in the present discussion. *Google Arts & Culture*, online at: <https://artsandculture.google.com> (accessed 28 June 2020).

resources in the wake of the global coronavirus pandemic in 2020: establishments such as The Smithsonian launched a full programme of online events and webcasts, designed for a wide range of ages and interests, to ensure physical closures did not result in a total absence of public interaction.<sup>229</sup> Institutions' digital museums are thus creating innovative experiences for online visitors, some of which cannot actually be experienced within the physical museum. Many museum websites are not simply a reflection of their real counterparts but, in some ways, have developed a life of their own.<sup>230</sup> Museum exploration is no longer confined to physical opening hours; Internet users across the globe can 'visit' museums at any time of day, throughout the year, for as long as they like.<sup>231</sup> As mentioned above, however, physical attendance at museums remain high, whilst visitors enjoy the benefits of museums both onsite and online, often using the website to plan ahead before their arrival or to expand their knowledge afterwards.<sup>232</sup>

Additionally, museums began establishing official social media presences as soon as the popularity of these platforms grew.<sup>233</sup> The global nature of social media means that the number of followers a museum account has can vastly outweigh the number of physical visitors it receives per year.<sup>234</sup> These platforms also demonstrate many other benefits for the museum sector. From an economic perspective, for example, museums must build and strengthen relationships with current and potential visitors, especially when sources of income are challenged by global economic downturns such as the financial crisis of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.<sup>235</sup> Institutions must also strive for inclusivity, highlighting their message to as wide an audience as possible, such as those who may not be able to visit

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<sup>229</sup> "Online Events," *Smithsonian Institution*, online at: <https://www.si.edu/events/online> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>230</sup> Antonio M. Battro, "Malraux's Imaginary Museum," 146. Not every museum website translates to a 'virtual' or 'digital' museum; some – particularly those of smaller, independent museums – do not offer the same range of features and resources. Huhtamo, "On the Origins," 122.

<sup>231</sup> Parry, *Recoding the Museum*, 98; Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine, *Museum Basics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 165.

<sup>232</sup> Marty, "Before and After," 337-60; Marty, "Digital Museum," 81-99.

<sup>233</sup> Juan Francisco Salazar, "'MyMuseum': Social Media and the Engagement of the Environmental Citizen," in *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed. Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 267.

<sup>234</sup> Aimee Dawson, "Which Museums Have the Biggest Social Media Followings?" *The Art Newspaper*, online at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/museum-masters-of-the-social-media-universe> (last modified 31 March 2020).

<sup>235</sup> Maintaining relationships proved particularly vital during the pandemic, as thousands of museums closed their doors and relied on their digital museums to connect with their audience. Adrienne Fletcher and Moon J. Lee, "Current Social Media Uses and Evaluations in American Museums," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27:5 (2012): 506.

the physical museum due to issues of mobility or finances.<sup>236</sup> Web 2.0 (which is dominated by social media) has been described as ‘software that gets better the more people use it’.<sup>237</sup> It is in museums’ interests to publish content that interests and engages all its visitors, as well as acknowledging feedback to adjust this content accordingly. This element may thus inspire certain types of museums to create more varied and playful content, such as writing humorously, personifying museum artefacts and publishing quizzes and polls. Furthermore, the collaborative, participatory nature of social media can provide a more relaxed learning environment and one which – thanks to the portability of smartphones and other devices – can be conducted anywhere. As Mark Sandle asserts, in relation to history, these ‘technological innovations [...] have begun to change the landscape of the study of the past’.<sup>238</sup>

The digital museum, therefore, takes numerous forms both on- and offsite. Its importance in contemporary practices of visiting and engaging with physical museums cannot be understated; the creation of staff roles specifically concentrated upon maintaining and developing digital museums, as well as the co-operation required between different teams within these organisations, attests to the sincerity with which museums now operate digitally.<sup>239</sup> As Müller states, ‘Digital objects, online visitors, and virtual communication are redefining the museum, both online and on site.’<sup>240</sup>

## Digital Memorial Museums

Digital technology – especially elements which encourage active participation and interactivity – are generally associated with museums targeted at families, science museums perhaps providing the best example. Other types of museums, however, have also begun to engage with various forms of digital media, including memorial museums.

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<sup>236</sup> Conversely, creating and regularly checking a social media account requires Internet access; furthermore, the elderly population are much less likely to use digital technology than younger citizens. Graham Black, *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement* (London: Routledge, 2005), 78, 89.

<sup>237</sup> Charalambos Tsekeris and Ioannis Katerelos, “Web 2.0, Complex Networks and Social Dynamics,” in *The Social Dynamics of Web 2.0: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Charalambos Tsekeris and Ioannis Katerelos (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 1; James Governor, Duane Nickull and Dion Hinchcliffe, *Web 2.0 Architectures* (Sebastapol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2009), 62.

<sup>238</sup> Salazar, “‘MyMuseum’,” 268; Mark Sandle, “Studying the Past in the Digital Age: From Tourist to Explorer,” in *History in the Digital Age*, ed. Toni Weller (London: Routledge, 2013), 144.

<sup>239</sup> Herminia Din and Phyllis Hecht, “Preparing the Next Generation of Museum Professionals,” in *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, ed. Herminia Din and Phyllis Hecht (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 2007), 11.

<sup>240</sup> Müller, “Museums and Virtuality,” 304.

The ‘memory boom’ that has emerged over the last few decades has seen the proliferation and significance of memory and memorialisation in society.<sup>241</sup> In the UK, for instance, this is most prominently expressed through remembrance of war and conflict. Commemorations of the centenary of the First World War established a renewed public interest in this history, evidenced by the popularity of the Imperial War Museum’s renovated galleries and the major art installation ‘Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red’, displayed at the Tower of London between July and November 2014.<sup>242</sup> Moreover, celebrations of the mythical ‘Blitz spirit’ during ‘Britain’s Finest Hour’ are expressed through special concerts, documentaries and wartime-themed events, particularly during anniversary years; and, more relevant to this thesis, the number of events commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day (first established in 2001) have grown exponentially year-on-year.<sup>243</sup> More generally, however, this ‘memory boom’ has been coupled with a ‘museum boom’, particularly with regards to memorial museums.<sup>244</sup> Since the early 1990s there has been an ‘upsurge’ in the creation of permanent museums that focus exclusively on war, genocide, state repression and mass suffering.<sup>245</sup> This is perhaps best demonstrated by the rapid increase in museums about the Holocaust. In 1989, there were just over 30 Holocaust museums and/or memorials worldwide; by mid-2017, there were over 30 in the United States alone.<sup>246</sup> The establishment of such museums has not, of course, been dictated only by public opinion and commemorative practices, but also through changes in political regimes and more recent, large-scale conflicts.<sup>247</sup> Many memorial museums, however, have developed alongside

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<sup>241</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 14.

<sup>242</sup> The Museum’s First World War Galleries were visited by almost one million people within the first six months. Imperial War Museums, *Annual Report and Account 2014–2015* (London: Imperial War Museums, 2015), 6; Joe Murphy and Mark Blunden, “All-Night Vigil to See Poppies,” *The London Evening Standard*, 11 November 2014, 1.

<sup>243</sup> Darren Kelsey, “The Myth of the ‘Blitz Spirit’ in British Newspaper Responses to the July 7th Bombings,” *Social Semiotics* 23:1 (2013): 84-6; David Cesarani, “Seizing the Day: Why Britain Will Benefit from Holocaust Memorial Day,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 34:4 (2000): 63. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, established in 2005, has recorded the number of related activities every year since 2006. See, for example, Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, *Holocaust Memorial Day 2018 in Review* (London: Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 2018), 2-3.

<sup>244</sup> Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory*, 16.

<sup>245</sup> Williams, *Memorial Museums*, 8-9, 21.

<sup>246</sup> Fath Davis Ruffins, “Revisiting the Old Plantation: Reparations, Reconciliation, and Museumizing American Slavery,” in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 399; “Holocaust Museums, Monuments and Memorials around the World,” *New Jersey Government*, online at: <http://www.nj.gov/education/holocaust/resources/world.pdf> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>247</sup> The Srebrenica Genocide Memorial, for example, was established in 2000 (though it was officially opened in 2003), whilst the Kigali Genocide Memorial was opened in 2004. Lara J. Nettelfield and Sarah E. Wagner, *Srebrenica in the Aftermath of Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1, 307n1; Amy Sodaro, “Politics of the Past: Remembering the Rwandan Genocide at the Kigali Memorial Centre,” in *Curating*

advances in digital technology; it is unsurprising, therefore, that these technologies have been incorporated into these museums from the beginning.

Most have at least a basic online presence, primarily through official websites, but also use elements within their actual exhibitions to construct the narrative and further engage visitors. Silke Arnold-de Simine notes that memorial museums are ‘usually object-poor because the people, whose plight is exhibited, were dispossessed and the traces of their existence have been eradicated’, and so ‘highly visualized, multimedia-based narratives’ are produced to compensate for this absence.<sup>248</sup> Additionally, technology in the memorial museum space can be used to take the process of remembrance to ‘its literal extreme’ as it asks visitors ‘to identify with other people’s pain, adopt their memories, empathize with their suffering, re-enact and work through their traumas’.<sup>249</sup> This is particularly evident, she asserts, in the use of large-scale projections and interactive installations; film is used not only to illustrate the history presented in the museum, or to give a voice to the survivors of atrocities, but also to create an empathic experience for the visitor. Although Arnold-de Simine advocates this approach as important to allow museumgoers a better understanding of a past they did not experience, there are obvious tensions that arise from the use of immersive, interactive technology in memorial museums.<sup>250</sup> Colin Davis, for example, dismisses the idea of empathy in witnessing trauma, as the ‘responsibility of the witness is not to become the victim [...] it is to regard the other’s pain as something alien, unfathomable, and as an outrage which should be stopped’.<sup>251</sup> Similarly, commenting on Sparacino et al.’s idea of ‘wearable computers’ in physical museum spaces, Anna Reading questions the suitability of visitors being presented with ‘the immersive experience of an extermination camp selection’.<sup>252</sup>

Digital technology has also been utilised to promote social change among memorial museum visitors. A former example was the USHMM’s *From Memory to Action: Meeting the Challenge of Genocide* installation, which encouraged visitors to pledge to take action

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*Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, ed. Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E Milton and Monica Eileen Patterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 72.

<sup>248</sup> Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory*, 10.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 92.

<sup>251</sup> Colin Davis, “Trauma and Ethics: Telling the Other’s Story,” in *Other People’s Pain: Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics*, ed. Martin Modlinger and Philipp Sonntag (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), 30.

<sup>252</sup> The article originally cited by Reading is no longer available, but a similar version has been uploaded: Flavia Sparacino, “The Museum Wearable: Real-Time Sensor-Driven Understanding of Visitors’ Interests for Personalized Visually-Augmented Museum Experiences,” *Museums and the Web*, online at: <https://www.museumsandtheweb.com/mw2002/papers/sparacino/sparacino.html> (accessed 28 June 2020); Reading, “Digital Interactivity,” 74.

against genocide. As well as using a table-top touchscreen to learn more about genocides that occurred after the Holocaust, visitors could scan in a personal pledge card to join the ‘permanent pledge collection’ and view these on the museum’s website after their visit.<sup>253</sup> A longitudinal study by Sather-Wagstaff and Sobel concluded that the *From Memory to Action* installation had a significant impact upon participants’ motivations, reflections and social action one year after their visit (yet, as this study did not involve a control group of USHMM visitors who had not used this technology, it is difficult to ascertain how much influence the installation had compared to the information presented in the permanent Holocaust exhibition).<sup>254</sup>

Thus far, however, many memorial museums have kept to a more passive presentation of digital technologies. Despite concerns from scholars such as Reading and Davis, there appears to be no desire for memorial museums to integrate ‘lived’ experiences into their exhibitions to place the visitor in the shoes of the victims.<sup>255</sup> Although certain displays or types of multimedia may be utilised to try and evoke empathy from the museumgoer, most are designed to create atmosphere, contextualise the narrative, or simply to create a more interesting, multi-layered experience for visitors. As this thesis’ example of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum will show, many museums remain hesitant to develop this basic presentation further, particularly those established in locations directly related to genocide and mass suffering. Whilst adaptations to the digital museum have been made onsite, therefore, these do not necessarily correspond to the general museum trend of updating digital elements in exhibits as new forms of technology become available.

Conversely, memorial museums are not wholly ‘outmoded’ or ‘operating at the opposite pole from the stream of sound-bite digital media’ as Williams suggests.<sup>256</sup> Indeed, some memorial museums exist only in a digital format. The Digital Monument to the Jewish

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<sup>253</sup> The installation was unveiled in 2009 and replaced by an exhibition on the Cambodian genocide in 2015. “United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s New Exhibition From Memory to Action: Meeting the Challenge of Genocide,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, online at: <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/united-states-holocaust-memorial-museums-new-exhibit-from-memory-to-action-> (last modified 18 May 2009); “Museum Opens Cambodia 1975 – 1979 and “I Want Justice!” Exploring Khmer Rouge Atrocities,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, online at: <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/museum-opens-cambodia-1975-1979-and-i-want-justice> (last modified 15 May 2015); Joy Sather-Wagstaff and Rebekah Sobel, “From Memory to Action: Multisited Visitor Action at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *Museums & Social Issues* 7:2 (2012): 183.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>255</sup> There are, however, some virtual reality apps connected to the history of the Holocaust, as explored at the end of Chapter Three.

<sup>256</sup> Paul Williams, “Hailing the Cosmopolitan Conscience: Memorial Museums in a Global Age,” in *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed. Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 228.

Community in the Netherlands was established in 2005, commemorating at least 104,000 Dutch Jews murdered in the Holocaust.<sup>257</sup> In 2010, linking with the Jewish Monument Community website enabled users to add and exchange information about the victims remembered in the Digital Monument.<sup>258</sup> The homepage originally consisted of thousands of coloured pixels; further examination revealed these pixels to be grouped into families, the colours representing the age and gender of those commemorated. Each small pixel represented one Dutch Jewish victim of the Holocaust. Clicking on a group of pixels led the user to a page about that particular family, and details including their biographies, addresses and household inventories (if known) were included. In 2017, however, the website's design was updated so that the names of victims appear as soon as the page has loaded (although users still have the option to zoom out and pixelate this feature).<sup>259</sup> The Digital Monument thus encourages remembrance on both a micro and macro scale, commemorating individuals whilst reminding the user of the widespread devastation caused to the Dutch Jewish community. Furthermore, the website allows family members of the deceased to participate in public commemorative practices that are not restricted by factors such as age, personal anxieties and location.<sup>260</sup>

In addition to their commemorative function, memorial museum websites are used for educational purposes. An online presence is particularly significant in presenting narratives of events or atrocities that have little or no remaining direct eyewitnesses. Very few, if any survivors of the Armenian genocide of 1915-1918, for instance, are alive today; organisations such as the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, therefore, have established websites containing documentary materials, survivor testimonies and other resources with which the public can learn about the genocide, even if they are unable to visit the Museum itself.<sup>261</sup> Furthermore, many have a focus on appealing to younger generations, due to both the loss of survivors of historical events and the prevalence that digital technology has in the everyday

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<sup>257</sup> Laurie M. C. Faro, "The Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands: A Meaningful, Ritual Place for Commemoration," *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 21:1-2 (2015): 166.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>259</sup> "About the Jewish Monument," *Joods Monument*, online at: <https://www.joodsmonument.nl/en/page/571160/about-the-jewish-monument> (last modified 28 March 2017).

<sup>260</sup> Faro, "The Digital Monument," 178-81.

<sup>261</sup> John Saroyan, "Suppressed and Repressed Memories among Armenian Genocide Survivors," *Peace Review* 27:2 (2015): 237; *The Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute*, online at: <http://www.genocide-museum.am> (accessed 28 June 2020). For more on the physical museum, particularly in comparison to purpose-built Holocaust museums, see Rebecca Jinks, "Situating Tsitsernakaberd: The Armenian Genocide Museum in a Global Context," *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 1:1 (2015): 39-52.

life of the so-called ‘millennial generation’.<sup>262</sup> This is largely regarded as a positive initiative: in their evaluation of major Holocaust museum websites, Klevan and Lincoln argue that use of the Internet amongst students (to learn about the Holocaust but also history more generally) promotes the development of communication, networking and problem-solving skills, as well as enabling to students to feel ‘that their work *matters* and can make a *difference* beyond the walls of their classrooms.’<sup>263</sup> Moreover, Reading’s research has demonstrated that websites with a physical, ‘real’ counterpart are more trusted than those without.<sup>264</sup> Thus, she asserts the importance of organisations such as Holocaust museums establishing a strong online presence ‘amidst the confusion of web-sites that dress up anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial as historical truth’.<sup>265</sup> (This particular element of the digital museum will be explored in more depth in Chapter Three).

Many memorial museums, therefore, have not had to adapt and improve to become part of the digital museum sphere; as the majority have been established in the last 30 years, digital technology has been an integral part of their exhibitions and outreach from the planning stages. The concept of the Holocaust museum is not as recent, as a number of sites were turned into museums in the immediate aftermath of the genocide (including this thesis’ case study). Yet public museums and memorials about, or including, the Holocaust are still being created and opened around the world. Some, therefore, have had to adjust to the use of digital technology, whilst numerous purpose-built museums have always included this component. As will be shown later in this thesis, the types of technology used and the motivations for their implementation vary between Holocaust museums.

## **Methodology**

This thesis utilises a holistic approach with regards to its research methods, representing an institutional perspective; the author as critical visitor/user; and, to a lesser extent, other visitors or users.

The main objective of this research has always been to provide a greater institutional voice regarding Holocaust museums’ digital museums. Towards the beginning of the research, before the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum was chosen as the primary case

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<sup>262</sup> See, for example, David D. Burstein, *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation is Shaping Our World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2013).

<sup>263</sup> Klevan and Lincoln, “Use of the Internet,” 94 (emphasis in original).

<sup>264</sup> Reading, “Clicking on Hitler,” 334.

<sup>265</sup> Reading, “Digital Interactivity,” 72.

study, correspondence was conducted with staff at several different Holocaust museums and exhibitions including the Imperial War Museum, the Bergen-Belsen Memorial and the POLIN Museum. Many examples have also been taken from the author's visits to various Holocaust-related sites and use of websites, apps and social media. Taken together, these provide a broader contextual and comparative analysis to emphasise the need for more institutional perspectives and highlight where the Auschwitz Museum sits in the wider field of Holocaust museums in terms of the technology it does (and does not) use.

Later, interviews were conducted with Paweł Sawicki, Press Officer, spokesperson and tour guide at the Auschwitz Museum. Before each interview, Sawicki provided his informed consent and was reminded of his right to end the interview and to request the withdrawal of his answers if deemed necessary.<sup>266</sup> Director Piotr Cywiński was also contacted (via his secretary) regarding the possibility of an interview; this was declined for reasons of scheduling and Cywiński's lack of direct involvement in management of the Museum's digital resources.

These interviews were handled with a certain degree of sensitivity. Asked about the Polish 'Holocaust bill', for example, Sawicki felt unable to give his personal opinion; one must be mindful of the potential consequences of a state museum employee publicly criticising the government, particularly in the country's current political climate.<sup>267</sup> Whilst Sawicki provided detailed, important information that forms the foundation of much of the thesis' research chapters, there may therefore be an absence of contemporary contextual information in places. The transcriptions of these interviews can be found in the Appendices.

In this research, the author also assumes the role of critical visitor/user. Actual visitors and users of the Museum's digital museum were not surveyed or observed; in addition to the ethical implications of such methodologies, this would change the framing of the thesis and its focus on the institution itself. All the digital elements investigated in this thesis were used by the author on multiple occasions to understand how they operate and gauge their intended usage by both physical and digital visitors.

Onsite, the researcher visited the 'Shoah' exhibition in Block 27 of Auschwitz I alone in July 2017 and July 2019, taking photographs and making notes regarding each digital element. She has also witnessed others' responses to these elements whilst guiding relatives

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<sup>266</sup> "OHA Core Principles," *Oral History Association*, online at: <https://www.oralhistory.org/oha-core-principles> (accessed 28 June 2020); "OHA Statement of Ethics," *Oral History Association*, online at: <https://www.oralhistory.org/oha-statement-on-ethics> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>267</sup> See Chapter One.

and peers around the Museum, and as an Educator on the Holocaust Educational Trust's 'Lessons from Auschwitz' Project. Another solo visit was made in July 2019 to test the six QR codes located around the site. For Chapter Three, the Wayback Machine of the Internet Archive was utilised to ascertain the appearance of the Museum's website in its various versions.<sup>268</sup> The current interface has also been accessed frequently, especially to explore the virtual panoramic tour. Finally, the Museum's Facebook and Instagram accounts were checked for new content every few days. As the Museum is more active on Twitter, daily notifications were set up on the author's phone to read each new Tweet and categorise its function in relation to the thesis' three primary themes (see Chapter Four).<sup>269</sup> Of the social media networks discussed here, Twitter is also the most useful in terms of its search capabilities. If further examples or past discussions were required for reference, Twitter's Advanced Search was used, locating content either through key words or between time periods.<sup>270</sup>

Elements of this research, such as using the QR codes, were new to the researcher and presented a different perspective on moving around the Museum space. It must be acknowledged, however, that the author is very familiar with the Auschwitz Museum and its history, having visited over 20 times, and carries knowledge and experience that would not be shared by many other visitors. Furthermore, whilst features such as the virtual tour were used extensively for this research, it is likely that many users briefly view one or two areas and leave.<sup>271</sup> These subjective observations therefore cannot be wholly applied to 'the audience'.<sup>272</sup> Further research investigating how visitors currently use these digital resources, conducted particularly within the fields of anthropology, sociology, museum studies and tourism studies, would therefore be extremely beneficial.

Although the Auschwitz Museum's visitors and online followers have not directly participated in this research, they are still partially included through their involvement in

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<sup>268</sup> "Wayback Machine," *Internet Archive*, online at: <https://archive.org/web> (accessed 28 June 2020); see Robert Rogers, *Digital Methods* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013), 61-82.

<sup>269</sup> At the time of writing, the Auschwitz Museum posted up to three new images on its Instagram account every few days; one or two posts on its Facebook page every day; and 10 or more Tweets on its Twitter account every day. This does not, however, include separate interactions with specific users. "Auschwitz Memorial," *Instagram*; "Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz: Posts," *Facebook*, online at: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/auschwitzmemorial/posts> (accessed 18 January 2020); "Auschwitz Memorial," *Twitter*.

<sup>270</sup> "Twitter Advanced Search," *Twitter*, online at: <https://twitter.com/search-advanced?lang=en-gb> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>271</sup> David Walsh et al., "Characterising Online Museum Users: A Study of the National Museums Liverpool Museum Website," *International Journal on Digital Libraries* 21 (2020): 75.

<sup>272</sup> Livingstone, "Challenge," 81-2.

other studies and their social media content. In Chapter Two, the concept of experiential authenticity is explored through Museum visitors' responses in other researchers' work; in Chapter Four, users' Tweets exemplify sections of the audience the Museum addresses and/or the ways in which the institution challenges criticism and asserts its authority over the history and memory of Auschwitz. Informed consent regarding inclusion in this research has not explicitly been granted; this is mitigated, however, by the public nature of this content and its fair usage as content for analysis. Furthermore, in cases where individuals' content is cited, they are referenced only by username.

The research methods employed in this thesis are subjective, qualitative, and open to interpretation. Analysis has not been conducted, for instance, on thousands of Museum Tweets; therefore, quantitative methods such as word frequency analysis or data scraping have not been used. The present study is designed to lead towards an understanding of Holocaust museums and their digital museums (using the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum as its primary case study), rather than provide definitive conclusions regarding their development and efficacy. Further research, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, is required (and encouraged) to explore this relationship and its various aspects more thoroughly.

It is also important to note that all the sources consulted for this research are English-language only, as English is the *lingua franca* for most of the Auschwitz Museum's international audience; indeed, in March 2020 the Museum established a new Polish-language Twitter account, so that the majority of its audience will now only receive English-language content if they so choose.<sup>273</sup> Furthermore, the majority of the Museum's physical visitors come from Western countries, and an average of 19% of its recent visitor population arrive from the United Kingdom or United States.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> "Muzeum Auschwitz," *Twitter*, online at: <https://twitter.com/muzeumauschwitz> (accessed 28 June 2020); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1244227100472750082> (last modified 29 March 2020, 12:37pm). As of September 2019, at least 74% of the Museum's Twitter followers came from English-speaking countries. Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1170772801713790977> (last modified 8 September 2019, 7:56pm).

<sup>274</sup> As the overall number of visitors has increased, however, this percentage has gradually fallen. Yet this may be a higher or lower figure as in 2019, for example, 32% of visitors did not provide any data on their country of origin. Nevertheless, as Paul Williams notes, 'political and economic factors mean that global tourism, and visitation to memorial museums, is asymmetric, and remains a predominantly Western privilege'. Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2017* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2018), 25; Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2018*, 25; Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2019*, 27; Williams, "Hailing the Cosmopolitan," 229.

## Chapter Plan

Although the content of each chapter is chronological, the thesis' structure is primarily thematic. The first chapter provides context to, and framing of, the Auschwitz Museum's position in history and society. The second focuses on the Museum's activities onsite, whilst the third and fourth explore its largely offsite digital presence. Furthermore, whilst the website was the first digital element to be introduced, the physical Museum itself obviously predates any aspects of the digital museum, and so exhibits onsite are discussed before the creation of its official Internet channels.

Before exploring how the Museum has adapted to the digital museum, the thesis establishes how this adaptation has been made possible. Chapter One, 'Contextualising the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum', concentrates on certain elements that have enabled the Museum to install (some) digital technology onsite and connect with a much wider following online. Firstly, a brief history of the Museum is given. This can be described in four separate phases: the immediate post-war years, until the unveiling of the permanent exhibition in 1955; and the subsequent directorships of Kazimierz Smoleń, Jerzy Wróblewski and Piotr M. A. Cywiński. Significant changes have taken place at the Museum under each man's leadership, and each is explored in turn. The chapter then considers the Museum within the context of contemporary Polish politics, particularly in reference to the Law and Justice Party's narrative of historical revisionism and emphasis on expelling the myth of 'Polish death camps'. Whilst the Museum has largely supported the latter, even changing its website URL from [www.auschwitz.org.pl](http://www.auschwitz.org.pl) to [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org) to avoid confusion, it has become a target for nationalists, revisionists and Internet trolls. Thus, whilst the Museum uses its digital museum to promote factual accuracy and align with government initiatives, it must now also utilise this platform to challenge its critics and dispel any notions of fake news or disinformation.

Next, the importance of the Auschwitz Museum on the international stage is considered. Historical events such as the creation of the International Monument and the formation of the International Auschwitz Committee are described, as well as the Museum's inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List; partnerships with other museums and memorial sites; and its physical attempts to reach a wider audience through loans and exhibitions. This outreach has been largely replicated through its use of the digital museum, primarily through the Museum's official website and social media, but also through the publication of the online magazine *Memoria*, which includes news and events from other

Holocaust museums and relevant organisations. The Auschwitz Museum therefore also utilises the digital museum to connect with institutions and individuals on a global scale, whilst retaining its authority and identity as the largest and most notorious of the former Nazi camps. Chapter One also explores the impact of tourism upon the Museum and the subsequent ‘branding’ that has ensued. Whilst the Museum does not actively advertise itself, the creation of a new logo under Dr Cywiński that is prominent across its publications, educational materials, shuttle buses and digital resources suggests an awareness of the importance of the Museum’s public image, and being presented as a reliable, reputable institution. This chapter also briefly explores the financial means by which the Museum has built its own digital museum; whilst state funding and revenue from visitors provide the majority of the Museum’s budget, donations from numerous governments and companies have resulted in greater funds available for the development of elements such as the digital museum. Subsequently, the Museum has paid external companies to design, for example, a more modern and multi-layered website, in turn helping with its branding and allowing potential visitors to find information about the Museum and its history in one place. Together, the Introduction and Chapter One therefore illustrate changes in technology, museums and politics which, for the Auschwitz Museum, have led to the evolution of their audience(s), partnerships, funding and branding. Within these developments, the Museum has perhaps better understood its visitors’ notions of authenticity and its own authority, and how each can be promoted and expanded through the digital museum. The adaptation to the digital is thus a direct result of these factors.

Chapter Two, ‘Authenticity and the Digital at the Physical Museum’, focuses on the Museum grounds and minimal digital resources that can be found there. An overview of onsite digital technology at Holocaust museums such as London’s Imperial War Museum, the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust and the Bergen-Belsen Memorial is provided. This discussion also includes examples of mobile apps created for use away from museums, including the USC Shoah Foundation’s IWalk app and the Auschwitz Jewish Centre’s Osphitzin app. The history of the Auschwitz Museum’s permanent exhibition – which has changed very little since its installation in 1955 – is then outlined. An emphasis on both curatorial authenticity and the Museum’s ‘Unassailable Voice’ is apparent in the exhibition, as visitors are given few opportunities to actively engage with any exhibits or participate in a complete dialogue with their tour guide (if they have one).<sup>275</sup> There are, however, two

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<sup>275</sup> Walsh, “The Web,” 229.

primary examples of the digital museum at use within the physical space of the Museum. The first relates to the ‘Shoah’ exhibition, the national pavilion in Auschwitz I opened in 2013, curated by Yad Vashem and dedicated to the fate of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Large-scale projections and multiple screens provide the visitor with a more immersive experience and, in some ways, perhaps also a more memorable one. Yet the Auschwitz Museum can avoid uncomfortable questions about a possible compromise of the site’s curatorial authenticity as the ‘Shoah’ exhibition – as with the other national pavilions – is positioned as a ‘micro-museum’, and a European extension of Yad Vashem. Moreover, with the inclusion of the national exhibitions – designed by external committees – the Museum is allowing more input from other groups and organisations and somewhat relaxing its authoritative voice, whilst keeping control over how the rest of the Museum is viewed and toured by its visitors.

The second onsite element discussed in Chapter Two is the six QR codes located at significant points around Auschwitz I and Birkenau. Visitors with smartphones can scan each code and discover videos of survivor testimonies, some of which have been recorded in the very location in which the visitor stands. The inclusion of survivor testimony, according to Paweł Sawicki, adds another layer of authenticity in addition to the authentic physical remains: ‘the authenticity of the words of the survivors.’<sup>276</sup> Conversely, however, QR codes are now seen as an outmoded digital resource; those at the Museum are also hard to find unless one already knows where they are, and some no longer work. Thus, this element of the digital museum appears as little more than a token gesture to illustrate the Museum’s acknowledgement of the increase in digital technology in other museums, including those related to the Holocaust.

The Museum’s reticence to adapt more fully to the digital museum onsite is explored through their own definition of ‘the authentic site’. Whilst much literature relating to the Museum refers to its authenticity, this concept is rarely explored, so this section of the chapter highlights the challenges of defining the site’s authenticity through factors such as the time period the Museum aims to represent; the relationship between the Museum and its surroundings; and the conservation process of the former camp’s buildings and artefacts. Nevertheless, it is the visitors’ experience and their perception of authenticity which is arguably of greater significance. Previous studies have shown that, for many visitors, the simple act of standing in the former camp is enough to warrant an authentic experience.

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<sup>276</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

Furthermore, capturing their visit via digital devices, namely cameras and smartphones, is now a significant part of this experience. Therefore, there *is* a digital museum onsite at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, but this has been primarily adapted by external organisations and visitors rather than Museum staff. This means the Museum can distance itself from implementations of this technology and stick to its narrative of authenticity, in turn prescribing how people should see and visit the site.

Chapter Three, 'Viewing Auschwitz at Home: The Creation and Use of the Museum's Virtual Tour', discusses the evolution of the Auschwitz Museum's official website, taking as its case study its panoramic virtual tour. It begins with an explanation of the need for Holocaust-related museums and charitable organisations to expand their presence online. As the Internet has developed and become an everyday tool in people's lives, it has become a primary source for education and research. Unfortunately, due to the difficulties in monitoring website creation, this also means antisemites, Holocaust deniers and conspiracy theorists can upload content that seeks to challenge the established facts and confuse Internet users. This is the most basic reason that museums such as USHMM, Yad Vashem and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (notably all large institutions with greater funding) have developed a wide variety of online resources. The chapter then focuses specifically on the Auschwitz Museum's official website, from its launch in 1999 to the present day. The evolution of the website has been made possible due to factors such as the general development of technology, branding and funding. Next, the website's audience will be briefly considered. The Museum must cater for both physical visitors (that is, people planning to visit the Museum or who have already been) and digital visitors who are unlikely to gain an experience from the physical grounds. In addition to providing basic visitor information, therefore, the Museum has adapted its website to contain content for those who may never set foot in the Museum itself.

The primary case study from the website examined in this chapter is a 360-degree panoramic virtual tour of the site accompanied by explanatory text, survivor testimony and recommendations of Museum publications. Using this tool, digital visitors can 'walk' through the Museum and look more closely at certain elements using the zoom feature, though they cannot yet view exhibition artefacts. Whilst the virtual tour is not designed to replace a physical visit, the Museum has utilised this technology to give website users a sense of what it is like to visit the former camp – as shown in Chapter Two, visitors' presence onsite is a significant element of their perceived authentic experiences. Furthermore, although the panorama does not operate in the same way as a guided tour, some elements of a Museum

visit are simulated through the inclusion of written historical context and witness accounts, and even a ‘browse’ through the Museum bookshops located at the entrances to each physical site. In terms of authority, the digital visitor is encouraged to use directional arrows and view places deemed to be of significance by the Museum’s curators. On the other hand, online visitors are also given the freedom to select the order in which they view different places and how much or how little they choose to see, whilst being provided with a limited amount of information on each location. The virtual tour, therefore, provides the best example of the paradoxes in the Auschwitz Museum’s acknowledgement of both curatorial and experiential authenticities, and elements of its institutional authority that are either heightened or relaxed depending on certain features of the tour.

The tension within this authority is also evident in its social media presence, the focus of Chapter Four, ‘The Auschwitz Museum on Social Media: Validation, Criticism and Community-Building’. As with previous chapters, this begins with a historical overview of the Museum’s foray into social media, and the remarkably spontaneous form this took. Despite the growth of both social media and the Auschwitz Museum’s followers on these platforms, however, the institution has retained the model of one-person management used from the very beginning of creating these accounts. The fact that the Museum’s social media is managed by an existing member of the Press Office, and that such a large and well-known institution does not employ a dedicated Social Media Manager, further indicates the Museum’s reticence to fully adapt to more modern museological practices. The primary content shared by the Museum via its three main social media channels (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook) is described; as the Museum uses Twitter most frequently and in the most varied way, however, it is this platform that will be explored in the greatest detail in this chapter. Posts include details of significant events and anniversaries; details of transports that arrived at Auschwitz on the same date; individual biographies, normally accompanied by a prisoner photograph; and encouragement to engage with the Museum’s website, specifically aspects such as the virtual tour and E-learning lessons. The Museum particularly relied upon its online resources during the global COVID-19 outbreak, when the physical Museum was closed and Twitter followers were instead advised to ‘#StayAtHome & #LearnAtHome’.<sup>277</sup> What is shared by the Museum is therefore curated, meaning that the curatorial authenticity of the site, its artefacts and its stories, is projected globally through the digital museum. As

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<sup>277</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1241325566160244736> (last modified 21 March 2020, 11:27am).

with the website, the utilisation of social media is not an attempt by the Auschwitz Museum to replicate or simulate the experience of visiting the former camp. Here, therefore, Wesener's broader concept of experiential authenticity regarding 'people's place-based experiences as part of their daily lives' is adopted.<sup>278</sup> The creation of social media ensures that the Museum's existence, and/or social media users' experiences of visiting the site, remains firmly within both personal and global consciousness.

Chapter Four also briefly discusses the use of social media by those who have been to the physical Museum and have encapsulated their experiences through photographs and other content uploaded to their digital accounts. As Meghan Lundrigan shows, the volume of social media content created and shared by visitors to Holocaust museums and sites warrants its own digital archive.<sup>279</sup> Publishing this content serves to authenticate the visitor's experiences, particularly when validated by their peers through 'likes' and comments. The main focus of this section, however, is to demonstrate how this image or text – and perhaps, therefore, the experience – is further validated, and even approved, by the Museum itself, as it occasionally shares visitors' photographs or personal reflections on visiting the site. This combination of Museum and public input means that this aspect of the digital museum is a complicated mixture of history and memory, camp and Museum, and prisoner and visitor stories. Conversely, the sharing of others' content relating to the Museum allows the institution to present a model of how the site should be seen and reflected upon.

This 'virtual community' (as described by the Auschwitz Museum) also takes the form of active campaigns and dialogue with social media users.<sup>280</sup> For instance, Sawicki envisioned the Museum's Twitter account reaching 750,000 followers by 27 January 2020, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the camp. Through Twitter posts and retweets by well-known figures, the Museum surpassed this goal and reached one million followers by 25 January.<sup>281</sup> Users are also occasionally invited to express their opinion on issues regarding the Museum-visitor relationship. The more positive aspects of this community, however, are juxtaposed with criticisms of certain groups within the Museum's audience, mainly visitors displaying behaviour deemed inappropriate, writers and retailers.

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<sup>278</sup> Wesener, "Adopting," 143.

<sup>279</sup> Lundrigan, "Holocaust Memory," 22-3.

<sup>280</sup> 'Help us to remember & build this amazing virtual community' has become part of the Museum's mantra when directly addressing new followers (another method of approval and validation). For example, see Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1240367010522988545> (last modified 18 March 2020, 7:58pm).

<sup>281</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020; Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1221098891900334082> (last modified 25 January 2020, 3:53pm).

Thus, on one hand, the Museum has relinquished some of its ‘Unassailable Voice’ and adapted to more modern museological practices of engaging with visitors directly.<sup>282</sup> On the other hand, however, the Museum’s use of social media is another marker of their authority – and the authority of only one person – as the Museum acts as a referee regarding the history and memory of Auschwitz online. Despite Sawicki’s attempts to bring a personality to the account, the Museum’s social media remains, for the largest part, a nameless institution that directs other users in how to discuss, learn about and remember Auschwitz.<sup>283</sup> Therefore, the Auschwitz Museum has adapted to the social media element of the digital museum by creating a virtual community with which it presents both its own curatorial authenticity and the validation (or modelling) of visitors’ authentic experiences, retaining a focus on the history and memory of the Auschwitz camp. In addition, it engages with those who follow its social media accounts directly, whether positively or critically; its response is mostly dependent upon the person or organisation being addressed. Whilst the opinions of its virtual visitors are welcomed, however, the Museum also displays its authoritative status and remains prescriptive towards public education and commemoration of Auschwitz.

This thesis shall therefore demonstrate how the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s adaptation to the digital museum acknowledges and/or combines curatorial and experiential authenticity; heightens or relaxes its institutional authority, dependent upon respective digital aspects; and appeals to as wide an audience as possible (whilst occasionally targeting certain groups within this audience). The duality of each element illustrates both the relative newness of the digital museum, compared to its physical counterparts, and the ongoing tension of the Auschwitz Museum in trying to merge its traditional museological formats with those of the digital age.

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<sup>282</sup> Walsh, “The Web,” 229.

<sup>283</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

## Chapter One: Contextualising the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

*Auschwitz cannot be encompassed. It is difficult to manage something you can never fully comprehend.*

Piotr Cywiński, *Epitaph*

Just as the concentration and extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau served a complex variety of functions and imprisoned a number of different persecuted groups, so today the site remains a place of conflicting memories, narratives and meanings. As Jonathan Webber states:

Auschwitz is [...] not a museum, even though it seems on the surface to be a museum; it is not a cemetery, even though it has some features of a cemetery; it is not just a tourist site, even though it is often full to overflowing with tourists. It is all these things at once.<sup>1</sup>

A booklet published by the Museum agrees with Webber's multi-layered concept, stating its various interpretations as 'a cemetery, [...] a place of memory, a monument [...] a memorial institute, a research and education centre on those who were killed', highlighting the Museum's capacity to fulfil 'all of these functions, as they do not cancel out, but rather complement one another'.<sup>2</sup>

However one conceives of the historical site, it is clear that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum must cater for – and meet the standards of – survivors; visitors seeking education and/or a touristic experience; the Polish state; and the international community. It must present itself as a place of learning, commemoration and discovery, as well as acknowledging its role in political and commercial spheres. The Museum's adaptation to the digital museum, therefore, enables this multifaceted representation to reach a global audience, whatever their interest in the site.

Before investigating how the Auschwitz Museum has evolved its digital presence for visitors, however, it is important to establish how this has been made possible. This chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Webber, "The Future of Auschwitz: Some Personal Reflections," *Religion, State and Society: The Keston Journal* 20:1 (1992): 84.

<sup>2</sup> Teresa Świebocka, Jadwiga Pinderska-Lech, and Jarko Mensfelt, *Auschwitz-Birkenau: The Past and the Present*, trans. Adam Czasak (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2011), 13.

explores the various factors that have allowed the Auschwitz Museum to develop its digital museum to retain its authority, appeal to a worldwide audience and promote notions of authenticity (whether curated or experienced) to all those who use its digital elements.

The chapter begins with a brief history of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, primarily through the changes that have occurred under three of its five Directors. As will be shown, the processes of internationalisation, modernisation and funding initiatives have been most successful since Piotr Cywiński took up this position in 2006 (although one must be mindful, of course, of the changes in global museums and digital technology as a whole during this time). The discussion then moves to the place of the Auschwitz Museum in contemporary Polish politics. Historical debates about the country's role in the Holocaust are briefly examined before an exploration of the current government's methods of historical revisionism and propaganda is undertaken. The latest campaign orchestrated by the ruling Law and Justice Party includes the introduction of a new law challenging claims of Polish complicity in the Holocaust. This has incited a renewed public outcry against the use of phrases such as 'Polish death camps' and has led to the creation of hashtags such as '#GermanDeathCamps' and '#RespectUs'. This section will then discuss the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's own campaign against 'Polish death camps' (which predates the current governmental action) and how this has been channelled through its digital platforms, even when recently faced with accusations of being 'anti-Polish' by nationalists and Internet trolls. The digital museum thus allows the Museum to show public support for the state (its primary funder) whilst responding to false accusations from malicious or uninformed accounts.

The place of the Auschwitz Museum in contemporary Poland is then contrasted with its inclusion on the world stage. This section outlines historical Museum initiatives to raise global awareness of the site, such as the design competition for the International Monument at Birkenau and the admittance of the former camp to the UNESCO World Heritage List. In recent times, however, the Museum has expanded outside the physical site through loans to other Holocaust museums and temporary and travelling exhibitions. Furthermore, it has utilised digital technology to emphasise the international nature of the site; volunteers have previously translated Museum content into several different languages on social media, whilst the online magazine *Memoria* presents the latest projects from related institutions across the globe.

Since the collapse of Communism in Poland the site has increasingly become a tourist hotspot, now catering to around two million visitors a year. This means that the Museum has

had to develop both its visitor services and its own brand, which can be observed through its logo on tour badges, publications and shuttle buses. The digital museum allows for an extension of this brand by reaching out to potential visitors and providing regularly updated digital content to keep users interested. Furthermore, a brief discussion of the Museum's current funding programme shows that donations of money and goods have allowed for the Museum to invest in elements such as a modernised website created by an external company, whilst free social media platforms have also bolstered its profile. The importance of addressing visitors, funders, government and critics, and the provision of different types of assistance and collaboration, have therefore led to the Auschwitz Museum's adaptation to the digital museum.

### **The History of the Museum**

The idea of establishing a memorial at Auschwitz first emerged whilst the camp was still in operation; prisoners discussed the need for the creation of a “sacred space” on the grounds of the camp after liberation.<sup>3</sup> Some survivors have even stated that, whilst still incarcerated, some prisoners clandestinely drew up plans and designs for this memorial.<sup>4</sup> On 1 May 1945 – just a few months after the Red Army liberated Auschwitz, and even before the end of the Second World War – the Polish Provisional Government designated the Ministry of Culture and Art the responsibility for securing the site and planning a museum on its grounds.<sup>5</sup> Preparations did not begin immediately, however, as the site was initially used as a military field hospital for liberated prisoners and a German prisoner-of-war camp.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, it was not until February 1946 that a government commission approved plans for the establishment of an onsite museum and memorial; a group of former prisoners had assumed control of these preparations by mid-April.<sup>7</sup> The leader of this taskforce, Tadeusz Wąsowicz,

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Krystyna Oleksy et al., “Difficult Returns...The Auschwitz Museum in Reminiscences of Survivors” panel, Awareness – Responsibility – Future International Education Conference, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Poland, 4-5 July 2017.

<sup>5</sup> “The Effort to Create the Museum,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/history-of-the-memorial/from-liberation-to-the-opening-of-the-memorial/the-effort-to-create-the-museum> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Jacek Lachendro, *Auschwitz After Liberation*, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 48, 199.

<sup>7</sup> In her brief monograph *Auschwitz: A History*, Sybille Steinbacher states that the Polish authorities and former prisoners' organisations ‘came up with an initiative’ to establish a museum at Auschwitz only in March 1946. These plans, however, were already in motion; Steinbacher is thus assumedly referring to blueprints created by the Ministry of Culture for the actual layout and features of the museum around this time. Sybille Steinbacher,

became the Museum's first Director, retaining this position until his death in 1952.<sup>8</sup> From the very beginning, visitor services were included in blueprints for the Museum alongside the important tasks of preserving the camp's structures and displaying evidence of the Nazis' crimes. It was decided, for instance, that one of the blocks in Auschwitz I would serve as a hostel for museumgoers.<sup>9</sup> Although many of the Museums' first visitors were relatives of survivors (or victims), the inclusion of a hostel may also have signalled the desire for wider internationalisation of the site, as will be discussed later in this chapter.<sup>10</sup>

The State Museum in Oświęcim (*Państwowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu*), as it was then known, encompassing most of the former camps of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz-Birkenau, was officially opened by Polish Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz on 14 June 1947.<sup>11</sup> This date was significant, as it marked precisely seven years since the first prisoner transport – a group of 728 Polish political prisoners previously held at Tarnów Prison – arrived at Auschwitz.<sup>12</sup> Several weeks later, on 2 July, the Polish Sejm passed a law formally acknowledging the existence of the Museum as 'a Monument to the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and Other Nations'.<sup>13</sup> The grounds of the Museum were, however, open to the public to visit before 1947. 100,000 people flocked to the site in 1946, and 170,000 the year after.<sup>14</sup>

The effects of Poland's post-war political situation soon affected the site. Władysław Gomułka, leader of the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR) had effectively been ousted from his position by January 1949, resulting in Communist rule that adhered more strictly to the Soviet model.<sup>15</sup> Around this time, there

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*Auschwitz: A History*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin, 2005), 132; Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 62-3; "The Effort to Create," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

<sup>8</sup> Paweł Sawicki, "10 Years of Work of Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński as the Director of the Memorial," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/10-years-of-work-of-dr-piotr-m-a-cywinski-as-the-director-of-the-memorial,1220.html> (last modified 1 September 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 62.

<sup>10</sup> "The Opening of the Museum," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://www.auschwitz.org/en/museum/history-of-the-memorial/from-liberation-to-the-opening-of-the-memorial/the-opening-of-the-museum> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 32; Piotr M. A. Cywiński, *Epitaph*, trans. Witold Kościa-Zbirohowski (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 71.

<sup>12</sup> Irena Strzelecka, "Die ersten Polen im KL Auschwitz," *Hefte von Auschwitz* 18 (1983): 5-144; Irena Strzelecka and Piotr Setkiewicz, "The Construction, Expansion and Development of the Camp and Its Branches," in *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp: The Establishment and Organisation of the Camp*, ed. Aleksander Lasik et al., trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2000), 1:65.

<sup>13</sup> Isabel Wollaston, "Negotiating the Marketplace: The Role(s) of Holocaust Museums Today," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4:1 (2005): 63; Kazimierz Smoleń, *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Guidebook through the Museum* (Katowice: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1981), 114.

<sup>14</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 83; Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 44.

were calls to close the Museum entirely. According to former Auschwitz prisoner and Museum Director Kazimierz Smoleń, this was either for the land to be used for agricultural purposes, or to save the Soviet authorities any embarrassment caused by the Polish population comparing German crimes to those committed by their liberators.<sup>16</sup> Public outcry at these proposals, however, soon put an end to such plans. Instead, the exhibitions at the Museum were subject to approval by the PZPR; the narrative swiftly changed from focusing on the Germans' wartime crimes to warning visitors of the dangers of fascism and Western imperialism.<sup>17</sup> These exhibits remained in place until 1954 when, 'anticipating the "thaw" associated with [the] process of destalinization in Poland', the PZPR and Ministry of Culture 'initiated a thorough renovation of the site, providing it with a new director, a radically increased budget, an improved comprehensive exhibition, and, most importantly, an unprecedented degree of stability'.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, it was the establishment of the International Auschwitz Committee and the appointment of Kazimierz Smoleń as Museum Director around this time that helped to shape the site into the institution it is today.<sup>19</sup> Within the first few years of his directorship, Smoleń established an onsite archive and library; secured increased funds for activities such as the creation of a documentary film, and the publication of the historical journal *Zeszyty Oświęcimskie* (*Auschwitz Notebooks*); and pressed for the construction of a permanent exhibition and monument at Birkenau.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, in recognition of the post-Stalinist 'thaw' and gradually improving relations with the West, the permanent exhibition changed in 1955.<sup>21</sup> More than 60 years later, many elements of this exhibition remain in place at the Museum, in particular the displays of victims' possessions.

Between the 1950s and 1970s there was a definitive shift towards the internationalisation of the Auschwitz Museum. The defining elements of this process were the introduction of the national exhibitions in Auschwitz I, the creation of the International Monument at Birkenau, and Pope John Paul II's visit to the site in 1979. An increase in

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<sup>16</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 90.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 91, 95, 100; Jacek Lachendro, "The First Two Exhibitions at the State Museum in Auschwitz," paper presented at the European Association for Holocaust Studies Second International Conference: Current Research on Auschwitz History and Memory, Kraków, Poland, 14-16 November 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 106-7.

<sup>19</sup> Smoleń replaced Stefan Wiernik, who directed the Museum from 1952 to October 1955. Sawicki, "10 Years".

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 112, 142-3.

<sup>21</sup> Eleonory Gilburd argues that the year 1955-56 was particularly significant regarding Soviet-Western cultural relations (Eleonory Gilburd, "The Revival of Soviet Internationalism in the Mid to Late 1950s," in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, ed. Eleonory Gilburd and Denis Kozlov (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 364-6). For more on the policies of destalinisation, see the work of Polly Jones, notably Polly Jones, "From Stalinism to Post-Stalinism: De-Mythologising Stalin, 1953-56," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4:1 (2003): 127-48; Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

international interest in the Museum, as well as mounting opposition to Communism in Poland (due in part, at least, to the influence of a Polish Pope), cleared the path to Auschwitz becoming a world-renowned symbol of the Holocaust and genocide.<sup>22</sup> This ‘*Polish religious period*’ of the Museum, as termed by Marek Kucia, was quickly followed by ‘*a period of Jewish-Polish controversies over Auschwitz*’.<sup>23</sup> Incidents such as the debate surrounding the Carmelite convent established in Auschwitz I’s Old Theatre in the mid-1980s, therefore, were aired on the international stage.<sup>24</sup> At a time when the Polish population felt emboldened by the Catholic Church in the face of the oppression imposed by their occupiers, the Poles were finally forced to publicly confront the issue of Jewish suffering and genocide at Auschwitz, which for decades had been ‘an inconvenient irrelevance best left to one side’ in the narrative of Polish martyrdom that had dominated Auschwitz since the camp’s liberation.<sup>25</sup>

Smoleń retained directorship of the Museum until 1990, when Jerzy Wróblewski succeeded him.<sup>26</sup> Wróblewski began his leadership of the Museum at a time of huge political upheaval in Eastern Europe. Following years of industrial unrest and strikes, partially-free parliamentary elections were held in Poland in June 1989; the labour union *Solidarność* (Solidarity) emerged victorious.<sup>27</sup> By August, political parties previously partnered with the PZPR declared their support for *Solidarność*. General Czesław Kiszczak, the Communist Prime Minister of Poland, resigned to allow the formation of a non-Communist government.<sup>28</sup> Poland’s revolution – and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev’s refusal to countenance such resistance to Communism with force – initiated the ‘Autumn of Nations’, which saw the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November and Czechoslovakia’s ‘velvet revolution’ by the end of the same year.<sup>29</sup> After years of protests, and declarations of

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter 6 of Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*.

<sup>23</sup> Marek Kucia, “The Meanings of Auschwitz in Poland, 1945 to the Present,” *Holocaust Studies* 25:3 (2019): 221 (emphasis in original).

<sup>24</sup> For a much more detailed analysis of the convent controversy (up until 1991), see Władysław T. Bartoszewski, *The Convent at Auschwitz* (New York: George Braziller, 1991). The Carmelite nuns eventually relocated to a site just outside the Museum grounds in 1993. Wollaston, “Negotiating the Marketplace,” 72.

<sup>25</sup> Webber, “The Future of Auschwitz,” 85.

<sup>26</sup> “Kazimierz Smoleń (1920-2012),” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/kazimierz-smolen-1920-2012,890.html> (last modified 31 January 2012); “Legion of Honour for Former Director of the Auschwitz Museum,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/legion-of-honour-for-former-director-of-the-auschwitz-museum,967.html> (last modified 18 October 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Jack M. Bloom, *Seeing Through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution: Solidarity and the Struggle Against Communism in Poland* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 372.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 373; John Tagliabue, “Poland’s Premier Offering to Yield to Non-Communist,” *The New York Times*, 14 August 1989, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Adam Michnik, “Independence Reborn and the Demons of the Velvet Revolution,” in *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and their Aftermath*, ed. Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismaneanu (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 85; Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe since 1945*

independence by many countries formerly under Soviet domination, the Soviet Union was formally dissolved on 25 December 1991.

Against the background of the newly democratic Poland, the early 1990s also saw several significant changes take place at the Auschwitz Museum. Western tourists travelling to the former Eastern bloc resulted in a steady increase of Museum visitors, accelerating sharply after the 60<sup>th</sup> liberation anniversary.<sup>30</sup> The release of films such as *Schindler's List* (1993) and the opening of other Holocaust museums and exhibitions encouraged Westerners to visit Kraków and the Auschwitz Museum to engage in what has been termed 'Schindler tourism' or 'Holocaust tourism'.<sup>31</sup>

Responding to the increase in international visitors, between 1994 and 1995 the Auschwitz Museum installed information panels and granite stones marking the locations of human remains, primarily around the Birkenau site.<sup>32</sup> These were inscribed in Polish, Hebrew and English (with the addition of Yiddish for the stone markers). Their inclusion was timed for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the camp's liberation, the significance of which was bolstered by wider global commemorations of the end of the Second World War. Plans for the Museum's future developed further after the 1996 election of President Alexander Kwaśniewski and his proposal for the Polish chancellery to prepare *Program Oświęcimski*, a programme regarding the town's economic and urban development that, unsurprisingly, would primarily be fuelled by the Museum's activities.<sup>33</sup> According to Dwork and van Pelt, the programme envisaged the development of Auschwitz 'into a "world class memorial," a center for meetings and conferences supported by the usual infrastructure of luxury hotels'.<sup>34</sup>

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 220-1; Robin H. E. Shepherd, *Czechoslovakia: The Velvet Revolution and Beyond* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 36-7.

<sup>30</sup> Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2019* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2020), 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg (Universal Pictures, 1993); G. J. Ashworth, "Holocaust Tourism: The Experience of Kraków-Kazimierz," *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* 11:4 (2002): 363, 365.

<sup>32</sup> "Memorial Timeline: 1990-1999," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/history-of-the-memorial/memorial-timeline/years-1990-1999> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Kwasniewski's victory over former President Lech Wałęsa was partially due to his criticism of Wałęsa's initial refusal to acknowledge Jewish suffering in the Holocaust during the commemorative events of January 1995. When Wałęsa faced re-election, Kwasniewski made this mishandling and its negative international response into an 'election issue'. Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, "The Politics of a Strategy for Auschwitz-Birkenau," *Cardozo Law Review* 20:2 (1998): 688.

<sup>34</sup> Dwork and van Pelt acted as consultants for *Program Oświęcimski* for a short time, revising the chancellery's plans and proposing elements such as a Visitor Centre halfway between Auschwitz I and Birkenau and a 'landscaped visitor promenade' leading to Auschwitz I. Dwork and van Pelt eventually withdrew from the programme amidst the furore over religious symbols erected at the Museum during the late 1990s. Their plans for Oświęcim, and the Museum, were never realised. *Ibid*, 688-91; Robert Jan van Pelt, "Strategy for the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau," *Cardozo Law Review* 20:2 (1998): 699, 723.

Whilst these plans never came to fruition, this demonstrates the government's acknowledgement of the Auschwitz Museum's significance; they were willing to invest vast sums of money to keep attracting visitors, generating income for the local economy and showcasing their guardianship of the site.

The Museum's internal operations, external partnerships and visitor services were brought into the twenty-first century when Dr. Piotr Cywiński took over from Wróblewski as Director in September 2006. Cywiński, a medieval historian, had joined the International Council of the Museum (later the International Auschwitz Council) as Secretary in 1999 and Wróblewski himself chose him as his successor.<sup>35</sup> Under his leadership, many significant developments have taken place at the Museum. Cywiński has spearheaded the campaign for ongoing Museum funding, primarily through co-founding the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation in 2009.<sup>36</sup> Increased funding and donations have also resulted in, for example, the acquisition of an historic German railcar, improved onsite security and the expansion of the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust (ICEAH) and its activities.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the Auschwitz Museum has increasingly made use of digital technology in its backstage operations, primarily through the installation of a fibre-optic computer network, a steady increase in the number of computers onsite, and improved facilities in its Preservation Department.<sup>38</sup> Audio headphones for tour groups were also introduced in 2008.<sup>39</sup> What is apparent, however, is Cywiński's recognition of the digital museum as an important tool in creating and imparting experiences of the 'authentic site' to visitors, both physical and digital; asserting the Museum's authority far beyond its geographical confines; and reaching as large and wide an audience as possible. The Auschwitz Museum's adaptation to the digital museum has clearly helped to solidify the former camp's global iconography and notoriety, securing its place, according to the Museum

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<sup>35</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 28-31.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>37</sup> Bartosz Bartyzel et al., eds., *Report 2009* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2010), 17, 31; "Memorial Timeline: 2010-2016," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://www.auschwitz.org/en/museum/history-of-the-memorial/memorial-timeline/years-2010-2016> (accessed 28 June 2020); Andrzej Kacorzyk, ed., *Report 2006* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2007), 5.

<sup>38</sup> "Fiber-Optic Computer Network at the Museum," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/fiber-optic-computer-network-at-the-museum,34.html> (last modified 30 July 2007). Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, "Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum 2006-2018," *YouTube* video, 04:38, 8 May 2018, online at: <https://youtu.be/SmHiCwFsOTc> (accessed 28 June 2020); Paweł Sawicki, "15 Years of Conservation Laboratories of the Auschwitz Memorial," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/15-years-of-conservation-laboratories-of-the-auschwitz-memorial,1319.html> (last modified 29 June 2018).

<sup>39</sup> Bartosz Bartyzel et al., eds., *Report 2008* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2009), 11.

itself, ‘in the world’s heart’.<sup>40</sup> The shift towards digital technology in various aspects of the Museum also suggests an awareness of the duality of the Auschwitz Museum as a static historical site in a modern society reliant on fast communication and information exchange (although, as this thesis demonstrates, this dichotomy has yet to be fully harmonised). Yet, to develop and maintain its digital aspects, the Museum must rely on a number of groups, including the current Polish government.

### **The Place of the Museum in Contemporary Polish Politics**

Auschwitz has been at the centre of Polish identity and politics since 1945. It has been upheld as the ultimate symbol of Polish martyrdom; used as a propaganda piece to express pro-Soviet, anti-Western sentiments; and, in recent years, become a focal point for both Poland’s relationship and dialogue with the international community. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s digital presence has undoubtedly contributed to this dialogue, albeit in an increasingly controversial political situation.

A narrative of Polish suffering at the hands of the Germans has survived in the country’s collective memory ever since the end of World War II. The Poles undoubtedly experienced tremendous losses in terms of territory, population and civil liberties after the 1939 Nazi invasion. Yet, for decades, the incarceration and murder of Polish civilians was equated with the Nazis’ targeted genocide against Europe’s Jews. Furthermore, the question of Polish complicity – even collaboration – in the Holocaust was never publicly examined. Wartime crimes were described as ‘German’ or ‘Hitlerite’; use of the term ‘National Socialism’, it was feared, could bring attention to ideological sympathisers in Poland, as well as detract from the post-war promotion of socialism.<sup>41</sup> As Michael Steinlauf asserts,

discussion of the Holocaust, like so much of postwar Polish discourse, evolved in an atmosphere so politically charged, so constricted by labyrinthine political manipulation, that what counted as a rule was not what was said but who said it and what force they represented. Meanwhile, collective psychic and moral dilemmas that the war had seared into Polish consciousness, problems that, as nowhere else in postwar Europe, cried out for an airing, for a long and necessarily painful public exploration, were instead driven underground to fester.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2017* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2018), 23.

<sup>41</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 55.

<sup>42</sup> Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, x-xi.

Each time such a debate has arisen, it has quickly been counteracted by the familiar narrative of Polish martyrdom, rescue and resistance. In the 1960s, for instance, the West was perceived to be propagating an attack on ‘Polish attitudes towards Jews during the war’.<sup>43</sup> A campaign ensued to protect Poland’s good name; accounts of Polish indifference or hostility towards the fate of the Jews were revised, whilst works such as Leon Uris’ *Mila 18* were heavily criticised.<sup>44</sup>

20 years later, Polish historian and literary critic Jan Błóński published ‘The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto’ in *Tygodnik Powszechny* magazine. Błóński stressed the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes in Poland and the need to ‘acknowledge our own guilt, and ask for forgiveness’ from the Jewish population regarding general conduct during the Holocaust.<sup>45</sup> Its publication sparked a flood of angry letters to the magazine’s editors and an impassioned response from Władysław Siła-Nowicki, a lawyer who was actively involved in the wartime resistance movement. His reply, published in the same journal just over a month later, defended Poland’s actions during the Holocaust, highlighting ‘the heroism of Poles [...] under occupation’ and the punishments delivered – by Poles – to those who denounced Jews.<sup>46</sup> The cyclical nature of these debates, therefore, means that a thorough examination of Polish-Jewish relations under the Nazi regime – particularly their negative aspects – has still not taken place within Poland.

Under the current Polish government, the narrative of Polish martyrdom, heroism and resistance has again risen to the surface. Since their re-election in October 2015, the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) have imposed their right-wing, populist agenda onto the country – with increasing support – in part by attempting to revise and politicise the historical record concerning wartime Poland.<sup>47</sup> Subsequent commemorations, for example, of the National Day of Remembrance for Victims of the German Nazi Concentration Camps and Extermination Camps, held annually on 14 June have developed ‘a strong state character’,

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<sup>43</sup> Michael C. Steinlauf, “Poland,” in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman and Charles H. Rosenzweig (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 123.

<sup>44</sup> Leon Uris, *Mila 18* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> Jan Błóński, “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto,” in “*My Brother’s Keeper?*” *Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, ed. Antony Polonsky (London: Routledge, 1990), 45.

<sup>46</sup> Michael T. Kaufman, “Debate over Holocaust Stirs Passions in Poland,” *The New York Times*, 8 March 1987, 14; Władysław Siła-Nowicki, “A Reply to Jan Błóński,” in “*My Brother’s Keeper?*” *Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, ed. Antony Polonsky (London: Routledge, 1990), 61.

<sup>47</sup> Aleks Szczerbiak, “Why is Poland’s Law and Justice Party Still So Popular?” *EUROPP* (blog), *London School of Economics*, online at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2019/10/01/why-is-polands-law-and-justice-party-still-so-popular> (last modified 1 October 2019).

with top state officials attending ceremonies at the Auschwitz Museum.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, in 2017 the government took control of preparations for the new Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk. In the face of vocal opposition and (initial) legal obstacles, Museum Director Paweł Machcewicz was dismissed and replaced by Karol Nawrocki, who was appointed by the Ministry of Culture. The Museum's exhibitions have consequently been made increasingly Polish-centric; an exhibit on contemporary conflicts was replaced by an animation about the post-war history of Poland, whilst prominence has been given to Poles who helped Jews during the occupation.<sup>49</sup> In the context of this thesis, however, Law and Justice's most relevant attempt at historical revisionism is a renewed campaign to underplay Polish complicity in the Holocaust.

On 6 February 2018, Polish President Andrzej Duda signed into law a bill stating that any Polish or foreign citizens who denounce Polish involvement in Nazi crimes – 'publicly and contrary to the facts' – could be fined or imprisoned for up to three years.<sup>50</sup> (In June of the same year, however, after talks between Poland and Israel and pressure from America, the law was amended so that prison sentences have been scrapped, but fines can still be issued).<sup>51</sup> The most notable interpretation of the bill on the international stage is against those who use the phrase 'Polish death camps' when describing Nazi camps that are located in present-day Polish territory. The bill is an extension of the national narrative of Polish wartime martyrdom that has existed since 1945, and is designed, according to former Deputy Prime Minister Beata Szydło to 'defend the good name of Poland,' as well as to recognise the

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<sup>48</sup> Marek Kucia, "Auschwitz as a Symbol of Martyrdom of the Polish Nation, 1947 and 2017," *Holocaust Studies* (2019): 6, online at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1625113>. For more on this National Day of Remembrance, see pages 3-5.

<sup>49</sup> David Clarke and Paweł Duber, "Polish Cultural Diplomacy and Historical Memory: the Case of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 33 (2020): 57-60; Volha Charnysh and Evgeny Finkel, "Rewriting History in Eastern Europe: Poland's New Holocaust Law and the Politics of the Past," *Foreign Affairs*, online at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/hungary/2018-02-14/rewriting-history-eastern-europe> (last modified 14 February 2018).

<sup>50</sup> The wording of the bill itself is vague, but implications of Polish collaboration or complicity included in the arts or research are exempt. Vanessa Gera and Monika Scislowska, "Poland's Holocaust Law Signed," *The Washington Post*, 7 February 2018, A12; Marek Kuchciński, *Act of 26 January 2018, amending the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, the Act on War Graves and Cemeteries, the Act on Museums and the Act on the Responsibility of Collective Entities for Acts Prohibited under Penalty*, trans. Michał Hara (Warsaw, 3 February 2018), 2, online at: [https://germandeathcampsnotpolish.com/772\\_act\\_en.pdf](https://germandeathcampsnotpolish.com/772_act_en.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>51</sup> "Poland Holocaust Law: Government U-Turn on Jail Threat," *BBC News*, online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-44627129> (last modified 27 June 2018).

suffering of non-Jewish Poles under the Nazi regime.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the national rhetoric has changed little, if at all, in at least the last 50 years.<sup>53</sup>

The bill has also had a profound effect in the digital world, solidifying sentiments expressed long before its acceptance and further sustaining them since its admission into law. The government itself has utilised social media, for instance, to promote this narrative. On the day that President Duda approved the new bill, the Ministry of Justice launched its own website, *German Death Camps Not Polish!*<sup>54</sup> Moreover, use of the hashtag ‘#GermanDeathCamps’ significantly increased in the wake of the new bill, promoted by both the government and some Polish citizens.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, the ‘#RespectUs’ campaign highlights the rescue of over 100,000 Jews by the Polish people during the Second World War. A small group of Polish grassroots campaigners started promoting use of the hashtag on Twitter in 2018 and, shortly afterwards, launched a website.<sup>56</sup> Following the Institute of National Remembrance’s example, the group filmed and shared several videos illustrating Polish heroes, such as Captain Witold Pilecki, and their deaths at the hands of the Nazis or Soviets. This digital action was also brought into the physical world, and to wider international attention, by the deployment of lorries around Western Europe emblazoned with the message, ‘#RespectUs – During WW2 Poles saved over 100,000 Jews’.<sup>57</sup>

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has always officially supported the campaign against the phrase ‘Polish death camps’. In 2011, for instance, the Museum’s website address changed from [www.auschwitz.org.pl](http://www.auschwitz.org.pl) to [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org).<sup>58</sup> Other memorial museums at

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<sup>52</sup> Justyna Pawlak and Lidia Kelly, “Polish Lawmakers Back Holocaust Bill, Drawing Israeli Outrage, U.S. Concern,” *Reuters*, online at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-poland-usa/polish-lawmakers-back-holocaust-bill-drawing-israeli-outrage-u-s-concern-idUSKBN1FK3EL> (last modified 31 January 2018).

<sup>53</sup> For more on the recent ‘politics of history’ in Poland, see also Jörg Hackmann, “Defending the “Good Name” of the Polish Nation: Politics of History as a Battlefield in Poland, 2015–18,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 20:4 (2018): 587-606.

<sup>54</sup> *German Death Camps Not Polish!*, online at: <https://germandeathcampsnotpolish.com> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>55</sup> “#germandeathcamps,” *Twitter*, online at: <https://twitter.com/hashtag/germandeathcamps> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>56</sup> “Search: #respectus Poland,” *Twitter*, online at: [https://twitter.com/search?q=%23respectus%20poland&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23respectus%20poland&src=typed_query) (accessed 28 June 2020); #RespectUs, online at: <http://www.respectus.pl> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>57</sup> Alice Cuddy, “Polish #RespectUs Campaign Sends Trucks across Europe to Spread Message on Nazi Crimes,” *Euronews*, online at: <http://www.euronews.com/2018/02/28/polish-respectus-campaign-sends-trucks-across-europe-to-spread-message-on-nazi-crimes> (last modified 28 February 2018); Kamil Nieradka, “Kampania #RespectUs ruszyła w stronę zachodniej Europy,” *Radio Szczecin*, online at: <http://radioszczecin.pl/1,367794,kampania-respectus-ruszyła-w-stronę-zachodniej-e> (last modified 2 March 2018).

<sup>58</sup> “Memorial Timeline: 2010-2016,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

former camps, such as Majdanek and Stutthof, also changed this element of their URLs around the same time.<sup>59</sup> According to Press Officer Paweł Sawicki, this was in response to ‘historically inaccurate’ beliefs about the location and operation of the Nazi camps.<sup>60</sup> Alternatively, this may also be seen as an attempt to emphasise the international nature of the victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Nevertheless, in the context of contemporary Polish politics, even web addresses must comply with a historically accurate (and, in line with the current government’s message, ‘pro-Polish’) narrative. This is particularly significant in relation to the museums at former camps such as Auschwitz, Majdanek and Stutthof, all of which are state museums that rely on the government for funding.

Furthermore, in February 2016, the Museum launched ‘Remember’, a free downloadable programme that highlights phrases such as ‘Polish death camp’ in texts and suggests replacements such as ‘German Nazi concentration and extermination camp’.<sup>61</sup> The programme is available in 16 different languages and is supported by the Directors of all other former Nazi death camps.<sup>62</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter Four, the Museum also makes frequent use of social media, especially Twitter, to publicly correct journalists when there is any mention of ‘Polish death camps’ or similar phrases in their written content.

Under the current government, one would assume such efforts would be welcomed, particularly by the Polish population; it would surely be in the government’s interest, therefore, to provide and encourage funding for such programmes to be incorporated into the Museum’s digital strategy. Yet, since the establishment of the new law, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has been the target of ‘a wave of “hate, fake news and manipulations”’ by Polish nationalists, right-wing radicals and so-called trolls.<sup>63</sup> Far from recognising Polish suffering in Auschwitz, the Museum has been accused of promoting an ‘anti-Polish’, ‘foreign’ narrative, especially through its guided tours.<sup>64</sup> Most of this abuse has been published on Twitter, meaning that Sawicki, who manages the Museum’s social media,

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<sup>59</sup> Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “Remember,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <https://correctmistakes.auschwitz.org> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid; “There Were No “Polish Death Camps”. There is a Simple Tool, to Prevent this Mistake from Recurring,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/there-were-no-polish-death-camps-there-is-a-simple-tool-to-prevent-this-mistake-from-recurring,1192.html> (last modified 16 February 2016).

<sup>63</sup> Christian Davies, “Poland’s Holocaust Law Triggers Tide of Abuse against Auschwitz Museum,” *The Guardian*, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/07/polands-holocaust-law-triggers-tide-abuse-auschwitz-museum> (last modified 7 May 2018).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

has confronted such users publicly, citing examples that contradict these claims.<sup>65</sup> After the attacks against the Museum were announced in the media, Sawicki was also careful to affirm the support received from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, quoting a Ministry webpage that praises the staff of ‘martyrdom museums in Poland’.<sup>66</sup>

The Museum, Sawicki maintains, does not get ‘involved in politics [...] but out of respect to all of the victims we have an obligation to defend the memory and the history of this place, and to protect it from attempts to use or exploit it in any way’.<sup>67</sup> This outlook is in stark contrast to the explicit politicisation of the Museum that occurred during the 1950s; yet, given the current government’s instrumentalisation of historical revision regarding the Holocaust, and the global notoriety and universal symbolism of Auschwitz, involvement in politics is somewhat inevitable. More than 70 years after its establishment, therefore, the Auschwitz Museum still finds itself embroiled in public debates regarding memory, responsibility, and nationalism. The Museum has thus adapted to aspects of the digital museum not only for its visitors. On one hand, the Auschwitz Museum can publicly show its support for the government-orchestrated campaign against ‘Polish death camps’, emphasising the historical inaccuracy of the phrase whilst carefully acquiescing to at least one element of the PiS’ ‘pro-Polish’ narrative. On the other hand, keeping a digital presence means the Museum can also directly engage with its most vociferous critics, countering false accusations if and when necessary.

### **The Museum ‘in the World’s Heart’<sup>68</sup>**

Whilst there has been another definitive shift towards populism and introversion in Polish politics, knowledge of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and its history as a camp remains an international affair. It is recognised as a ‘truly continental’ site of mass murder and suffering, and is commemorated as such.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See Chapter Four for some examples.

<sup>66</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/993421173504532480> (last modified 7 May 2018, 10:23am); “Komunikat MKiDN dotyczący wybranych muzeów martyrologicznych w Polsce,” *Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego*, online at: <http://www.mkidn.gov.pl/pages/posts/komunikat-mkidn-dotyczacy-wybranych-muzeow-martyrologicznych-w-polsce-8137.php> (last modified 8 February 2018); author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>67</sup> Davies, “Poland’s Holocaust Law”.

<sup>68</sup> Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2018* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2019), 23.

<sup>69</sup> Raul Hilberg, “Auschwitz and the “Final Solution”,” in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 81.

Attempts at internationalisation of the site began in earnest in the 1950s and 1960s. The International Auschwitz Committee (IAC) was established in 1954; its board consisted of former prisoners of the camp.<sup>70</sup> The following year, in time for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the camp's liberation, the Committee proposed 'a patronage committee made up of notables from various countries' to sponsor the commemorative ceremony and garner international support for the Museum.<sup>71</sup> Members of foreign delegations did indeed attend the ceremony, but the daily operation of the Museum remained in Polish hands.<sup>72</sup> In January 1957, however, a meeting of representatives from 14 countries established a museum commission to oversee the Museum's development, meaning a reduction in Polish dominance of the site and, therefore, its exhibitions. This resulted in the opening of national exhibitions in several barracks in Auschwitz I during the 1960s and 1970s. International conferences and commemorative ceremonies organised by the IAC further helped to raise the Museum's international profile.<sup>73</sup> The Monument to the Victims of Fascism (as it was originally known) was also planned, designed and unveiled during this period. After a nine-year struggle with the choice of a suitable memorial design, funding and construction, the Monument to the Victims of Fascism was unveiled between gas chambers II and III in Birkenau on 16 April 1967.<sup>74</sup> In stark contrast to the lack of interest and financial support over the previous 10 years, the unveiling garnered enormous attention from abroad and was, according to Jonathan Huener, the first truly 'international' event held at the Museum.<sup>75</sup>

A crucial element of the camp's history, however, was almost entirely absent from the unveiling: the recognition of Jewish suffering in Auschwitz. Those that were murdered for being Jewish were simply absorbed into the larger figures of the dead, as had been the case in Polish narratives of the camp since its liberation. This was somewhat rectified in 1968, when the 'Martyrology and Struggle of the Jews' exhibition opened as a national exhibition in Block 27, Auschwitz I. Ironically, the opening of the exhibition coincided with the peak of the government's 'anti-Zionist' campaign, but it meant that the uniqueness of the

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<sup>70</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 147. The IAC website, however, states that the Committee was founded in 1952. "The History of the IAC," *International Auschwitz Committee*, online at: <https://auschwitz.info/en/the-committee/the-iac-history> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>71</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 114.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>73</sup> The idea for national exhibitions was agreed upon as early as December 1946, but these did not come to fruition until the international community was more widely involved in the Museum. *Ibid*, 147, 72, 150; "National Exhibitions," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/national-exhibitions> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>74</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 156-60.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 163-4.

genocide against the Jews was finally publicly recognised by the IAC and the Museum.<sup>76</sup> This surge in internationalisation at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum meant that, by the end of the 1960s, the Museum was ‘better funded, better managed, and better maintained’ than before.<sup>77</sup>

Conversely, the emergence of Auschwitz onto the world stage – as opposed to other nations making their mark upon the physical site – did not gain momentum until the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the public sphere, whilst recognition of Auschwitz was attained in the 1960s through events such as the English-language publication of Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and the Adolf Eichmann and Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, the former camp’s ‘iconic meaning as the Holocaust’s paradigm camp’ came from filmic representations of the Holocaust.<sup>78</sup> Most crucial to this new public awareness of Auschwitz was the TV miniseries *Holocaust* (1978), though others, including Hollywood blockbuster *Sophie’s Choice* (1982) and Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985), also helped solidify the former camp in international consciousness.<sup>79</sup> Culturally speaking, however, a turning point in the Museum’s internationalisation came when the former camp was included as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979.

The addition of a former concentration and extermination camp to a list which, as Piotr Cywiński asserts, focuses upon the ‘beautiful architecture, the stunning richness of flora and fauna or the amazing effects of various geomorphological processes’ of its included sites, initially seems paradoxical.<sup>80</sup> Admittance to the World Heritage List, however, is granted to ‘man-made and natural resources of ‘outstanding universal value’,’ whether their perceived historical value is ‘positive or negative’.<sup>81</sup> When the World Heritage List was first created in

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 145-6.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>78</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Stella Rodway (New York: Hill & Wang, 1960); Ellen S. Fine, *Legacy of Night: The Literary Universe of Elie Wiesel* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1982), 10; Steinbacher, *Auschwitz*, 146; Rob van der Laarse, “Beyond Auschwitz? Europe’s Terrascapes in the Age of Postmemory,” in *Memory and Postwar Memorials: Confronting the Violence of the Past*, ed. Marc Silberman and Florence Vatan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 72.

<sup>79</sup> For the significance of *Holocaust* see, for example, Jeffrey Herf, “The ‘Holocaust’ Reception in West Germany: Right, Center, and Left,” in *Germans and Jews since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 208-33; Andrei S. Markovits and Rebecca S. Hayden, “‘Holocaust’ Before and After the Event: Reactions in West Germany and Austria,” in *ibid*, 234-57; Siegfried Zielinski, “History as Entertainment and Provocation: The TV Series ‘Holocaust’ in West Germany,” in *ibid*, 258-86. *Holocaust*, directed by Marvin J. Chomsky (CBS, 1978); *Sophie’s Choice*, directed by Alan J. Pakula (Universal Pictures, 1982); *Shoah*, directed by Claude Lanzmann (New Yorker Films, 1985).

<sup>80</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 76.

<sup>81</sup> Julia Röttger, “Safeguarding “Negative Historical Values” for the Future? Appropriating the Past in the UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site Auschwitz-Birkenau,” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2015): 136; UNESCO, “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Paris, 16 November 1972,”

the late 1970s, any site considered for inclusion was required to relate to at least one criterion from four natural and six cultural criteria. The ‘Auschwitz Concentration Camp’, as it was first registered, was admitted due to its adherence to the sixth cultural criterion: ‘each property nominated should [...] (vi) be most importantly associated with ideas or beliefs, with events or with persons, of outstanding historical importance or significance.’<sup>82</sup> Once the former camp was added to the List in 1979, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee specified that it was to be the only such site included on the List, becoming a ‘unique [symbol]’ through which ‘all other sites of the same nature [would] be symbolised’.<sup>83</sup> The vague description of ‘sites of the same nature’ leads one to question if this means all Nazi camps, or other, unrelated sites of suffering, such as the Soviet gulags or the killing fields of Cambodia.<sup>84</sup> One could argue, however, that this type of elusiveness is precisely what has allowed Auschwitz to become *the* symbol of the Holocaust, genocide and persecution. The sole inclusion of Auschwitz on the UNESCO World Heritage List, therefore, has further cemented its status as a place of international concern, increasing global interest in the site and possibly encouraging other countries and organisations to assist financially in its long-term maintenance.<sup>85</sup>

After the collapse of Communism in Poland in 1989, the international community became increasingly involved in the Museum and its future. The Polish Minister of Culture and Art established an International Council of the Museum in 1990, composed of former

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online at: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-en.pdf>, 2 (accessed 28 June 2020); Michel Parent, “Comparative Study of Nominations and Criteria for World Cultural Heritage,” (CC-79/CONF.003/11 Annex. Paris, 11 October 1979), online at: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1979/cc-79-conf003-11e.pdf>, 21 (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>82</sup> In keeping with the political distancing of Poland from the concentration camps, in 2007 the listing formally changed to ‘Auschwitz-Birkenau. German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940-1945).’ “Change to the Auschwitz Entry on the UNESCO World Heritage List,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/change-to-the-auschwitz-entry-on-the-unesco-world-heritage-list,450.html> (last modified 28 June 2007); UNESCO, “Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. Paris, 1977,” (CC-77/CONF.001/8 Rev. Paris, 20 October 1977), online at: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1977/cc-77-conf001-8reve.pdf> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>83</sup> Parent, “Comparative Study,” 21, 24.

<sup>84</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 77. The Archive of the International Tracing Service, a collection of over 30 million documents and objects primarily relating to those missing or displaced during and after the Second World War, was entered into the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2013. The Register is the documentary equivalent of the physical sites on the World Heritage List. Dan Stone, “The Memory of the Archive: The International Tracing Service and the Construction of the Past as History,” *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust* 31:2 (2017): 69-88; “Memory of the World Register: Archives of the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany,” *UNESCO*, online at: [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/multimedia/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination\\_forms/archives\\_of\\_the\\_international\\_tracing\\_service.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/multimedia/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/archives_of_the_international_tracing_service.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2020); “Inscriptions of the Documentary Heritage in 2013,” *UNESCO*, online at: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/access-by-year/2013> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>85</sup> Alyza D. Lewin, “The World Heritage Convention and the Future of Auschwitz,” *Cardozo Law Review* 20:2 (1998): 680.

prisoners, historians and other experts, including representatives of the Jewish and Roma and Sinti communities.<sup>86</sup> In addition to its previous duties, the Council was granted the responsibility of advising the Polish Council of Ministers regarding other ‘Monuments of Extermination’ located on Polish soil.<sup>87</sup>

Yet not only survivors, academics and cultural organisations have benefitted from the Museum’s internationalisation. Each year, hundreds of thousands of people, from several dozen countries, visit the Museum in various capacities: as pilgrims; as tourists; as students; and as those with familial connections. In keeping with the museological shift towards greater interaction with visitors, such a large and diverse population must feel included in the Museum’s wider mission of education and invitation to explore Auschwitz’s history. In recent years, the Auschwitz Museum has thus reached out to, and partnered with, numerous different organisations to bring this history closer to a worldwide audience. This is particularly ‘to the benefit of those who cannot make the journey to Auschwitz’.<sup>88</sup> In the 1990s, for example, the Museum loaned numerous items, including half a wooden barrack from Birkenau, to the USHMM for its permanent exhibition; once the loan period had expired, approximately a thousand more objects were sent to America.<sup>89</sup> Other artefacts from the Auschwitz Museum are also currently on display at Yad Vashem and the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust.<sup>90</sup> In 2017, the Museum held an exhibition of prisoners’ artwork at the National Museum in Kraków, to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Auschwitz Museum’s official opening. Furthermore, in December of the same year, a travelling exhibition about Auschwitz co-created by the Museum – the very first travelling

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<sup>86</sup> The International Council is separate from the International Auschwitz Committee; the latter was established in the 1950s and its members are mostly survivors of the former camp. See “History of the IAC,” *International Auschwitz Committee*.

<sup>87</sup> Świebocka, Pinderska-Lech, and Mensfelt, *Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 15; Jonathan Webber, “Personal Reflections on Auschwitz Today,” in *Auschwitz: A History in Photographs*, ed. Teresa Świebocka, Jonathan Webber, and Connie Wilsack (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 1995), 283.

<sup>88</sup> Kazimierz Smoleń, “Auschwitz Today: The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum,” in *Auschwitz: A History in Photographs*, ed. Teresa Świebocka, Jonathan Webber, and Connie Wilsack (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 1995), 263; Webber, “Personal Reflections,” 288.

<sup>89</sup> Paweł Sawicki, “Loaned Historical Barrack Returned to Poland,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/loaned-historical-barrack-returned-to-poland,1056.html> (last modified 29 December 2013); Philip Kennicott, “Holocaust Museum at Risk of Losing Auschwitz Piece,” *The Washington Post*, 17 February 2012, A1; “Auschwitz Objects to be Displayed in Washington,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/auschwitz-objects-to-be-displayed-in-washington,553.html> (last modified 31 March 2009).

<sup>90</sup> “Accessibility,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/historical-collection/accessibility> (accessed 28 June 2020).

exhibition of its kind – opened in Madrid.<sup>91</sup> ‘Auschwitz: Not Long Ago. Not Far Away’ proved so popular that its run was extended from June 2018 until February 2019, before transferring to the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York in May of the same year.<sup>92</sup> It was hoped that the exhibition would visit 14 different cities in Europe and North America by 2024; because of the global coronavirus pandemic, however, this timeframe will undoubtedly be extended.<sup>93</sup> The lending and exhibition of objects from the Auschwitz Museum can therefore be interpreted as a method of bringing more people into contact (or, rather, close proximity) with historical objects deemed authentic both by curators and exhibition visitors, an experience that cannot be fully replicated online.

In addition to these physical exhibitions, however, the Museum has utilised the digital museum to present ‘exhibitions’ including photographs and detailed historical information to as broad and global an audience as possible. Of particular note is its virtual tour of the Museum site, designed primarily for those who cannot visit the real Museum, as well as preparation before a corporeal visit. This example will be explored in Chapter Three. Moreover, in addition to its Polish and English content, the Auschwitz Museum’s Twitter account (discussed in Chapter Four) has occasionally posted in languages such as German, Italian, Spanish and French through a network of distance volunteers that responded to a Museum appeal for assistance with translations.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, to connect with Holocaust museums and institutions across the world, the Museum launched an online monthly magazine, *Memoria*, in October 2017. Paweł Sawicki states that the idea for the magazine came from a seminar for staff at ‘historical museums and memorial sites in Poland’, allowing these institutions to keep each other informed about projects and exhibitions about which they might otherwise not learn.<sup>95</sup> Shortly afterwards, however, he realised ‘this is not the issue of Poland. This is the issue of the planet. There are so many institutions doing so many different things and people don’t know about it.’<sup>96</sup> Thus,

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<sup>91</sup> The exhibition was co-created with Spanish exhibition company Musealia and, in addition to the Museum’s collections, involves loans from over 20 other museums, institutions and private collections. Luis Ferreiro, “...As to the Heart of the Matter,” in *Auschwitz. Not Long Ago. Not Far Away.*, ed. Robert Jan Van Pelt, Luis Ferreiro and Miriam Greenbaum (Madrid: Musealia/Editorial Palacios y Museos, 2017), 16.

<sup>92</sup> Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2017*, 19; Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2018*, 17; Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2019*, 11.

<sup>93</sup> Paweł Sawicki, “New International Travelling Exhibition on the History of Auschwitz Opened in Madrid,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/new-international-travelling-exhibition-on-the-history-of-auschwitz-opened-in-madrid,1268.html> (last modified 1 December 2017).

<sup>94</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/815096163527430144> (30 December 2016, 11:24pm).

<sup>95</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

*Memoria* was designed for institutions to share their news, but in a format suitable for a general audience.

Although published by the Auschwitz Museum, however, it is considered something of a separate entity. According to Sawicki:

I believe that the role of *Memoria* is to be outside of Auschwitz. We are doing it because we came up with the idea. No one has ever done a similar magazine. There was no place either in the published or online world where some kind of a project of gathering information [had been] done. I think it's new, maybe I'm wrong, but I really think that nothing of this kind has been done in our little world of the museums and memorials.<sup>97</sup>

Both Sawicki and Piotr Cywiński have previously stated that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is a museum about Auschwitz, not the Holocaust.<sup>98</sup> In distancing *Memoria* from the Museum's other activities, this distinction – and, perhaps, exclusivity – is retained, enabling the Auschwitz Museum to connect with similar organisations worldwide whilst still focusing upon its notoriety and prominence as a site of Holocaust education remembrance. The fact that *Memoria* is not physically printed means there is also a literal separation between the physical Museum and activities involving other Holocaust-related institutions and organisations. This creates a duality in the Museum's process of internationalisation; whilst the global community is inspired to visit, fund conservation projects and commemorate Auschwitz's victims onsite, the Museum wishes to maintain its own identity in the digital museum, despite co-operating with other institutions in a globally accessible format. The increasingly international element of the Auschwitz Museum has thus allowed for an extension of the institution's audience, as well as an opportunity for the Museum to further assert its authority outside its physical confines.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. In May 2020, the State Museum at Majdanek launched its own online magazine, *Varia*. The contents of the first issue suggests, however, that the magazine will relate only to the history and memory of Majdanek and the Museum's 'branches' at Sobibór and Belżec. "Varia. Magazine/No 1/May 2020," *State Museum at Majdanek*, online at: [http://www.majdanek.eu/en/page/varia\\_\\_museum\\_magazine/253](http://www.majdanek.eu/en/page/varia__museum_magazine/253) (accessed 28 June 2020); "About Museum," *State Museum at Majdanek*, online at: <http://www.majdanek.eu/en/mission> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>98</sup> Author conversation with Paweł Sawicki, 17 May 2016; Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 83. The Museum is considered a Holocaust museum in this thesis, however, as the site cannot be separated from the broader narrative of the Holocaust, as is also the case with other former camps and sites of killing. Furthermore, the public perception of the Auschwitz Museum is intrinsically linked with the wider history of the Holocaust; indeed, the gates of Auschwitz have become such 'icons' that, for many people, they represent the entirety of the genocide.

## Tourism and the Auschwitz 'Brand'

The advent of the digital world, particularly social media, has meant that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – and, more specifically, its visitors – has frequently been mentioned in global media outlets over the last several years. Primarily, this news coverage has explored young tourists' behaviour at the former camp, often in highly critical terms.<sup>99</sup> Yet curious visitors descending upon the site for the sake of 'checklist tourism' is not a new phenomenon.<sup>100</sup> Far from the image of the silent tourist walking 'draggedly' around the site as depicted in a 1958 *New York Times* article, Imke Hansen's research, for example, has highlighted visitors posing for photographs in locations such as atop the ruins of the crematoria in Birkenau during the first few years of the Museum's existence.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, by the time another *New York Times* article had been published in 1974 – before the influx of Western tourists observed some 20 years later – the Museum had been publicly criticised for turning into 'a modern tourist centre' with an atmosphere that was beginning to 'create an impression vaguely reminiscent of weekends at New York museums'.<sup>102</sup> The Museum had incorporated a hotel, an ice cream kiosk, a café and the opportunity to purchase souvenirs on-site at Auschwitz I: "All that seems to be lacking," one disenchanted visitor remarked, "is a stand selling souvenir bones and ashes."<sup>103</sup> Birkenau, on the other hand, remained desolate; the journalist surmised that the 'ruined condition' of the site and its lack of tourist facilities failed to engage visitors, despite its significant role in industrialised murder.<sup>104</sup>

Whilst the shops and snacks have remained, nowadays groups from all over the world travel to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum for a much wider variety of reasons.<sup>105</sup> In his

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<sup>99</sup> See footnote 37 in the Introduction for recent examples.

<sup>100</sup> See Danielle M. LaSusa, "Sartre's Spirit of Seriousness and the Bad Faith of "Must-See" Tourism," *Sartre Studies International* 19:2 (2013): 33-6.

<sup>101</sup> A. M. Rosenthal, "There is No News from Auschwitz," *The New York Times*, 31 August 1958, SM5; Imke Hansen, "'What Auschwitz Should Be': Expectation and Experience between Silence and Thrill," paper presented at the Beyond Camps and Forced Labour Conference, London, 10-12 January 2018; Imke Hansen, "Nie wieder Auschwitz!" *Die Entstehung eines Symbols und der Alltag einer Gedenkstätte: 1945-1955* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 187.

<sup>102</sup> Erich Kuby, "Zoppot, Weltbad ohne Welt," *Stern* 23:35 (1970): 42-9, quoted in Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 189; "At Auschwitz, a Discordant Atmosphere of Tourism," *The New York Times*, 3 November 1974, 14.

<sup>103</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 194-5; "Discordant Atmosphere," *The New York Times*.

<sup>104</sup> "Discordant Atmosphere," *The New York Times*. Poland was still under Communist rule at this time; Birkenau revealed the reality of the extermination of the Jews, so the focal point remained on Auschwitz I and its narrative of Polish suffering. Furthermore, shuttle buses were not in operation between the two sites as they are today.

<sup>105</sup> In recent years, a number of studies have explored visitors' motivations for, and feelings after, visiting the Auschwitz Museum. Examples include Mikołaj Grynberg, *Auschwitz: What Am I Doing Here?* (Kraków: Pauza Foundation for the Development and Promotion of Contemporary Art and Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2009); Thomas P. Thurnell-Read, "Engaging Auschwitz: An Analysis of Young Travellers' Experiences of Holocaust Tourism," *Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice* 1:1 (2009): 26-52; Avital Biran, Yaniv

1998 *Strategy for the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, for instance, Robert Jan van Pelt accurately noted the likelihood of increased educational visits due to the growing number of courses in Holocaust history and genocide studies being offered at various institutions.<sup>106</sup> He also acknowledged, however, that implementation of the plan, with its new Visitor Centre, shuttle buses and improved infrastructure between the Museum and the town of Oświęcim, would equal ‘the success of the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a tourist destination’.<sup>107</sup>

According to Director Cywiński, a visit to the Auschwitz Museum ‘is increasingly becoming an experience not to miss’.<sup>108</sup> Whilst this is partly due to representations in film, media and school textbooks, the rhetoric of the multiple tour operators in central Kraków also explains a rise in visitor numbers. The storefronts of these operators display large, bright signs advertising trips to ‘Auschwitz’ or ‘Auschwitz-Birkenau’ (with very little mention of its museological incarnation) in a desperate attempt to appeal to passers-by.<sup>109</sup> Promises of luxury, hassle-free transport, low prices and special offers are designed to tempt backpackers and holidaymakers to visit ‘the most well known (sic) cemetery in the world’ where visitors can ‘imagine the gruesome and appalling conditions of the prisoners’.<sup>110</sup> Trips to the Auschwitz Museum have even been offered as part of some organised stag dos.<sup>111</sup>

Onsite, the Museum has responded to the growth of tourism by adding more facilities, such as a left luggage room, several bookshops, a post office, and a currency exchange office. The local municipality of Brzezinka also opened a dedicated Visitor Centre and car park at the Birkenau site in 2012, a few hundred metres away from the existing car park near the main gate, to prevent conservation issues caused by vehicles driving too close to the site.<sup>112</sup>

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Poria and Gila Oren, “Sought Experiences at (Dark) Heritage Sites,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 38:3 (2011): 820-41.

<sup>106</sup> Van Pelt, “Strategy,” 714.

<sup>107</sup> Van Pelt, “Strategy,” 701.

<sup>108</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 16.

<sup>109</sup> This no doubt accounts for the fact that, as observed by Jonathan Webber, ‘tourists tend to speak about visiting “Auschwitz” rather than visiting “the Auschwitz museum”.’ Webber, “The Kingdom of Death as a Heritage Site: Making Sense of Auschwitz,” in *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, ed. William Logan, Máiréad Nic Craith and Ullrich Kockel (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 128.

<sup>110</sup> Cracow City Tours promotional leaflet, 2016; “Auschwitz Tour,” *Krakow Trip*, online at: [https://www.krakowtrip.com/auschwitz\\_tours/](https://www.krakowtrip.com/auschwitz_tours/) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>111</sup> Thomas Thurnell-Read, “Masculinity, Tourism and Transgression: A Qualitative Study of British Stag Tourism in an Eastern European City,” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2009), 19; Matthew Holehouse and Maurice Chittenden, “What a Stag Do: Strippers, Booze, Auschwitz,” *The Sunday Times*, 14 March 2010, 18.

<sup>112</sup> Webber, “Personal Reflections,” 282. In 2019, a new road was built further away from the site, reducing vibrations caused by heavy vehicles which could damage nearby structures. Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018; Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2019*, 69.

Guided tours of the Museum grounds are also available in 17 different languages.<sup>113</sup>

Although the Auschwitz Museum does not explicitly advertise visits to the site – the aforementioned factors of education, media coverage and tourism ensure there is no need for this – as with other museums, it must operate a well-maintained ‘brand’ that will appeal to both those who are considering a visit and those who have already been. This is apparent in two ways.

On one hand, the infamous gates of Auschwitz I and Birkenau indirectly function as visual brands for the Museum. Countless books and DVDs feature photographs of the gates, promoting the notoriety of the objects and the post-war meanings bestowed upon them. Furthermore, these symbols are explicitly used in others’ advertising and merchandise. Leaflets and window displays of Kraków’s tour operators, for instance, feature the gates prominently, with no other images of the Museum, reasserting their status as ‘Holocaust icons’ and ‘leaving the appearance of the rest of both sites something of a mystery for the visitor’.<sup>114</sup> Shops close to the Museum premises sell souvenirs such as fridge magnets, plates, thimbles and crudité dishes, each adorned with either the ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ sign or the Gate of Death.<sup>115</sup>

On the other hand, the Museum has also made a deliberate effort to create a brand for itself and promote its museological activities in addition to its custodial role over the site of the former camp. A rapid corporatisation of museums occurred at the turn of the twenty-first century, although this became most evident at the Auschwitz Museum at the time that Piotr Cywiński became Director in 2006.<sup>116</sup> Firstly, following the trend of many other major global museums, changes in the Museum’s ‘structure, organisation, and orientation’ have taken place over the last 12 years.<sup>117</sup> This period has seen the establishment of a Press Office, a Volunteer Office and a Legal Services Department; the creation of a new security plan for the site; and an increase in the number of Museum employees.<sup>118</sup> The Museum’s willingness to

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<sup>113</sup> “Guided Tours Options,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/guides/> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>114</sup> Oren Baruch Stier, *Holocaust Icons: Symbolizing the Shoah in History and Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Imogen Dalziel, “Book Auschwitz, Get a Free Lunch: The Ethics of Advertising Holocaust Sites to the Public,” paper presented at the Dark Tourism Sites Related to the Holocaust, the Nazi Past and World War II: Visitation and Practice Conference, Glasgow Caledonian University, UK, 28 June-1 July 2017.

<sup>115</sup> The author has found such souvenirs on several visits to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum between 2016 and 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Andrea Fraser, “A Museum is Not a Business. It is Run in a Businesslike Fashion.,” in *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, ed. Nina Möntmann (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 88.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>118</sup> Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, “Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.”

co-operate with other institutions to promote its work is demonstrated by its recent partnerships with organisations such as Musealia and the National Museum in Kraków, in addition to its long-standing relationships with numerous academic, humanitarian and commercial enterprises.

The visitor-oriented profile of the Museum has also been significantly redeveloped since 2006. Cywiński changed the Museum's official logo – showing the eyes of nine-year-old Zeilek Jacob, staring out at the viewer shortly before his selection for the gas chambers – to match the image given to the ICEAH. This logo can presently be found on guided tour stickers, the covers of Museum publications, educational materials and its postcards and posters.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, the visitor shuttle buses that run from Auschwitz I to Birkenau carry an advertisement for the Museum's online bookshop, promoting their sale not just to those boarding the bus, but any drivers who happen to pass the bus along its route. 'Branding,' as art historian Julian Stallabrass asserts, 'is a shorthand assurance of quality'.<sup>120</sup> The use of the Museum's official logo on these materials thus confirms their reliability and trustworthiness, implying the high level of research and training that has been put into their publications and guiding programmes. The digital museum is an extension of this brand. The Auschwitz Museum has created an online presence to appeal to those who have not yet visited; to maintain contact with those who have; and to reach out to those who cannot. The international nature of the genocide, and the site's present-day international audience, is thus acknowledged through an international brand.<sup>121</sup> To demonstrate its dedication to customer service and self-presentation, and to keep visitors interested, the Museum must ensure these digital outlets are regularly updated and display new, relevant or interesting information. As will be explored in Chapter Three, since its launch in 1999 the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has unveiled – and therefore rebranded – its official website twice. As Derek Symer asserts, these updates are in response to the dilemma of 'balancing a stimulating visual and interactive environment with the seriousness of the subject matter'.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 37-41.

<sup>120</sup> Julian Stallabrass, "The Branding of the Museum," *Art History* 37:1 (2014): 150.

<sup>121</sup> Tanja Schult, "To Go or Not to Go? Reflections on the Iconic Status of Auschwitz, its Increasing Distance and Prevailing Urgency," in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era*, ed. Diana I. Popescu and Tanja Schult (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 126.

<sup>122</sup> Derek S. Symer, "The Internet and the Study of the Holocaust," in *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*, ed. Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001), 231.

## Funding the Digital Museum

Insofar as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum functions in a business-like manner, it also retains the charitable status that has seen millions of *złoty*, Euros and other currencies donated to its long-term maintenance and operation. In stark contrast to the chronically low levels of financial aid the Museum received in its first few decades, the Museum's budget has almost tripled in the last 10 years alone, whilst grants and funds from outside Poland currently constitute 14.8% of the Museum's annual budget.<sup>123</sup>

The primary reason for funding is the ongoing conservation and preservation work at the site. In 2009, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation was co-founded by Cywiński, Władysław Bartoszewski and Jacek Kastelaniec 'to guarantee resources for the conservation of the Museum and Memorial so as to permit future generations visiting the remains of Auschwitz to witness with their own eyes this place of crimes perpetrated by the Nazis during World War II'.<sup>124</sup> At the time of its launch, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk sent a letter of appeal to over 40 countries; presently, 38 countries support the Foundation, alongside 18 Pillars of Remembrance (organisations and individuals) and other donors.<sup>125</sup> Unsurprisingly, Germany has donated the greatest amount to the Foundation (€60 million), followed by the USA (\$15 million), Poland (€10 million) and France (€5 million).<sup>126</sup> The results of this funding can already be observed in areas such as the upgrade of Museum artefact storage facilities and the three-year plan to conserve five wooden barracks in Birkenau.<sup>127</sup>

The Auschwitz Museum also benefits from numerous partnerships and donations from external companies. Volkswagen AG, for instance, has worked with the Museum for over 30 years, donating buses for the shuttle service and vehicles for the use of

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<sup>123</sup> Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, "Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum." The majority of its current budget – 56.8% - is generated by the Museum's income, whilst the remainder is provided by funding from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, the EU, and private donors. Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2019*, 85.

<sup>124</sup> "Foundation Founders," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*; Świebocka, Pinderska-Lech, and Mensfelt, *Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, *Substantive Report on the Activities of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation in 2018*, (Warsaw: Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, 2019), 10, online at: [http://www.auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/\\_public/2019\\_news/fab\\_substantive\\_report\\_2018.pdf](http://www.auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/_public/2019_news/fab_substantive_report_2018.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>126</sup> Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2019*, 78.

<sup>127</sup> See "Work has Been Completed on the Modernisation of the Warehouses for Post-Camp Textiles," *Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation*, online at: <http://www.foundation.auschwitz.org/index.php/news/75-work-has-been-completed-on-the-modernisation-of-the-warehouses-for-post-camp-textiles> (accessed 28 June 2020); Bartosz Bartyzel, Jarek Mensfelt, and Gabriela Nikliborc, eds., *To Preserve Authenticity: The Conservation of Five Wooden Barracks at the Former Auschwitz II-Birkenau Concentration Camp* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2012).

conservators.<sup>128</sup> In terms of digital technology, IBM, the British Embassy and private German donors have provided computers for staff use, whilst website analysis software was donated by consultancy group Rent-a-Guru in 2001.<sup>129</sup> In 2004, American communications company True Data Technology responded to the Museum's appeal for financial support to establish a new server to cope with the increased interest in its website, donating new equipment worth over \$2,500.<sup>130</sup>

Funding the Museum's digital presence is relatively inexpensive. As the next chapter will explore, there is very little digital technology in the physical museum, meaning software and maintenance costs are avoided. Furthermore, the mission of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation is to garner capital in order to conduct extensive conservation of existing structures, rather than create new elements for visitors. Offsite, however, although donations of technology have not specifically contributed to the Museum's digital presence, they have certainly provided the tools with which Museum staff can expand its online profile. The money saved on computers and a high-quality Internet server have enabled the Museum to install a fibre-optic network onsite and commission external companies to design the most recent website.<sup>131</sup> Perhaps more importantly, however, the social media networks that the Auschwitz Museum uses are free of charge. In contrast, however, none of the Museum's budget has been allocated to employing a Social Media Manager, suggesting a reluctance to formally incorporate digital aspects into its traditional staffing structure. The Museum shares news and significant anniversaries and engages in a dialogue with users of these platforms

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<sup>128</sup> Paweł Sawicki, "30 Years Involvement [sic] of Volkswagen AG at the Auschwitz Memorial," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/30-years-involvement-of-volkswagen-ag-at-the-auschwitz-memorial,1288.html> (last modified 12 December 2017); Paweł Sawicki, "Bus from Volkswagen for the Auschwitz Memorial Site," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/bus-from-volkswagen-for-the-auschwitz-memorial-site,1017.html> (last modified 12 June 2013); Paweł Sawicki, "A Gift from Volkswagen to the Auschwitz Memorial," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/a-gift-from-volkswagen-to-the-auschwitz-memorial,1173.html> (last modified 28 September 2015).

<sup>129</sup> "Fiber-Optic Computer Network," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*; "Geoffrey Hoon in Auschwitz. A Computer for the Archives," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/geoffrey-hoon-in-auschwitz-a-computer-for-the-archives,260.html> (last modified 10 February 2001); "HTTP-Analyzer for the Museum. A Gift from Rent-a-Guru," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/http-analyzer-for-the-museum-a-gift-from-rent-a-guru,263.html> (last modified 2 January 2001).

<sup>130</sup> "The Overloaded Auschwitz Museum Server," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/the-overloaded-auschwitz-museum-server,330.html> (last modified 6 May 2003); "A New Internet Server for the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/a-new-internet-server-for-the-auschwitz-birkenau-state-museum,357.html> (last modified 26 February 2004).

<sup>131</sup> "Website Auschwitz.org," *Ideo*, online at: <http://www.ideoagency.com/our-work/website-auschwitzorg,218.html> (accessed 28 June 2020).

without having to pay. Its income can thus be concentrated on maintenance of the site and physical visitor services.

## **Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, numerous factors have led to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's adaptation to the digital museum. The changes so far made under Director Cywiński's leadership have promoted greater modernisation of the site as an institution (though this is more noticeable offsite than at the Museum itself); an increased drive in branding and self-presentation; and a desire to bring the Museum and its collections to a global audience. Through the establishment of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation and private donations, the Museum's direct income can also be spent on projects concerning visitor services and technological development.

As will be shown throughout the rest of the thesis, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's adaptation to the digital museum has proved increasingly important in retaining and asserting its authority outside its walls, in the digital age; recognising visitors' online representations of the Museum space; and appealing to those who have visited, will visit, and cannot visit. Moreover, the Museum's digital presence enables a demonstration of adherence to the current Polish government's campaigns (which is particularly crucial, given its status as a state museum) as well as a space to challenge Internet users who promote fake news and accusations about the Museum. External help and donations, combined with the free nature of social media, have allowed the Auschwitz Museum to maintain and update its digital museum cheaply, thereby connecting with potential visitors around the world whilst retaining focus on the management and preservation of the physical site.

## Chapter Two: Authenticity and the Digital at the Physical Museum

*Authenticity lies, admittedly, in details, but not necessarily in material details.*

Imre Kertész, “Who Owns Auschwitz?”

This chapter focuses on the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s adaptation to the digital museum (or lack thereof) within its physical grounds. It begins with an exploration of how other Holocaust museums of direct, partial and distant association have utilised elements such as film, projections, touchscreens and mobile apps onsite, and how these are designed to promote education and remembrance. There then follows a brief outline of the Auschwitz Museum’s permanent exhibition’s development. Much of the current exhibition has remained unchanged since 1955; furthermore, the use of headphones in Auschwitz I and the absence of opportunities for dialogue whilst touring the Museum results in a primarily static, isolating experience. Peter Walsh’s concept of the ‘Unassailable Voice’ – the objective, disembodied ‘tone and attitude’ of museum texts, denoting authority – is used to explain this prescribed, two-dimensional way of interacting with the exhibits (and, to some degree, the tour guides).<sup>1</sup> The Museum’s traditional museological approach also provides an indication of its reluctance to incorporate digital elements into the visitor experience onsite.

There are, however, two exceptions to the absence of the digital. The first can be found in most of the 10 national exhibitions situated in Auschwitz I; the most notable of these is ‘Shoah’, a pavilion curated by Yad Vashem and opened in 2013, dedicated to all Jewish victims of the Holocaust, which uses projections, videos and screens to provide the visitor with a sense what was lost as a result of the genocide. The exhibition’s layout is briefly described before it is argued that the national pavilions function as ‘micro-museums’, or as smaller museums within the larger Museum structure. Although the Museum has the final word on the content of each exhibition, the curation and design are the charge of external ministries and organisations representing each country or group, so the Museum can distance itself from the inclusion of digital technology and maintain its authority over the rest of the site.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Walsh, “The Web and the Unassailable Voice,” in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 229.

The second exception is that, in 2015, six QR codes were installed on the side of several information plaques in both Auschwitz I and Birkenau, after discussions with survivors' associations. Scanning the codes allows the user to access video testimonies of Auschwitz survivors (in Polish, English or French) and accessibility is granted through a site-specific Wi-Fi network. Yet the Museum does not promote use of the codes for either guided or independent visitors, and the codes are not well maintained, resulting in some simply failing to load. Although such non-invasive technologies could be used to enhance and extend the educational resources onsite, the Museum's concern that digital devices can distract from fully experiencing the site means they are ignored. This suggests the codes' installation was primarily a token gesture towards the survivors' associations rather than a step towards more active engagement with visitors. This also relates to the Museum's 'Unassailable Voice' in instructing museumgoers regarding how they should view the historical site.

The reluctance to add the digital museum onsite stems from the notion of preserving and maintaining the 'authentic site'.<sup>2</sup> This is, however, an inherently complex and problematic phrase. In the next section, the Museum's concept of authenticity is examined, highlighting the various forms which this authenticity may take, such as the site's appearance, the proposed 'zone of silence' around the former camp, and the chemical treatment of artefacts and structures. It is suggested that the more simplistic consideration of the authentic site as its physical, geographical location is most suitable, particularly when considering visitors' perception of an authentic experience at the Auschwitz Museum.

The visitor experience is framed and created by different factors: previous knowledge of Auschwitz and/or the Holocaust; the group in which they visit; their emotional reactions and thoughts on viewing artefacts and so on. Increasingly, part of this framing is conducted via digital means. Actions such as taking photographs, 'checking in' on Facebook and uploading content to other social media platforms are now an integral part of visits to all museums, so it is of little surprise that these form part of many visitors' experiences at the Auschwitz Museum. This can occasionally lead to behaviours of which some are critical, including taking selfies and playing games such as Pokémon GO. Nevertheless, this illustrates a tension between the Museum and its visitors – the institution's refusal to incorporate digital technology onsite, and the use of personal digital devices for museumgoers to record and reflect upon their authentic experience. It is thus shown that the

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, "Basic Information on Auschwitz," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/press/basic-information-on-auschwitz> (accessed 28 June 2020).

Museum's onsite adaptation to the digital museum has been led by external organisations and its visitors. Furthermore, the official reluctance to implement such technology highlights the Auschwitz Museum's desire to remain as 'authentic' as possible, whilst also asserting authority over the ways in which visitors tour and view the site.

As this chapter focuses on the physical Museum space, authenticity is the primary category explored. The institution's reluctance to formally accept or integrate digital technology onsite, however – even when it is already present – means that authority is also an important aspect of this discussion. The audience category is less prevalent here as, unlike its online resources, the Museum does not use this chapter's case studies to target specific groups within its visitor population.

### **Onsite Technology at Holocaust Museums: Modes of Witnessing**

Although most Holocaust museums remain primarily 'artefactual', many have utilised digital aspects in their onsite exhibitions for various purposes.<sup>3</sup> Television screens, monitors and projectors – the earliest forms of affordable technology – can be found in many Holocaust institutions. These often show recorded survivor testimonies – a plethora of examples can be found in the Imperial War Museum's (IWM) current Holocaust Exhibition, USHMM and Yad Vashem, most of which included video testimonies from the very beginning – but also in a number of former concentration camps, such as the Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen and the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial Site.<sup>4</sup> Presently, the only former purpose-built Nazi extermination camp to integrate videos into its exhibition is the Bełżec Memorial; the small museums at the Treblinka and Chełmno Memorials primarily focus on recent archaeological excavations, whilst a new building for exhibitions and visitor services is currently being constructed at the Sobibór Museum.<sup>5</sup> The films in the Bełżec Memorial Museum, however, feature survivors from other concentration camps and notable figures such as Jan Karski, due to the fact that almost nobody survived the death camp and those that did were not filmed giving their testimony.<sup>6</sup> Here, the absence of direct testimony relating to

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<sup>3</sup> Anna Reading, "Digital Interactivity in Public Memory Institutions: The Uses of New Technologies in Holocaust Museums," *Media, Culture & Society* 25:1 (2003): 71.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 39.

<sup>5</sup> "The Implementation of the Permanent Exhibition at the Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór," *Muzeum i Miejsce Pamięci w Sobiborze*, online at: [http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/the\\_implementation\\_of\\_the/1242](http://www.sobibor-memorial.eu/en/news/the_implementation_of_the/1242) (last modified 6 May 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Only two inmates are known to have escaped: Rudolf Reder and Chaim Hirszman. Hirszman was murdered in March 1946; Reder (later Robak) provided a written statement of his experiences in Bełżec but died before

Bełżec highlights the scale of the crime committed at the camp yet, the re-humanisation of Holocaust victims requires a voice, or a face, to speak for the hundreds and thousands who were murdered.

The inclusion of filmed survivor testimonies contributes to the visitors' 'journey' through the exhibition. According to Silke Arnold-de Simine:

Digital recording and presentation technologies are important as narrative devices which draw visitors into an imaginative encounter with the past, helping them to gain access to a time they have not experienced themselves by identifying with individuals and their personal stories.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, despite the difficult content of the exhibition, the use of testimonies provides museumgoers with several familiar faces from beginning to end, in whose stories the visitor can become invested; they are able to leave the museum or exhibition with a knowledge that extends beyond abstract figures and statistics and underlines the human aspect of the genocide. These videos clearly have a deep impact on many visitors; comments left in guest books at the IWM, for instance, speak of the 'brave, courageous people who talked on the videos' which '[allow] the visitor to empathise. It is like listening to a friend.'<sup>8</sup>

Archival footage also features prominently in many Holocaust museums. Museums presenting Jewish life before the Holocaust often feature videos of private, homemade films depicting Jewish families engaging in religious ceremonies, celebrations, holidays and family gatherings. One striking example is an 'exhibit' at the entrance of the Holocaust History Museum in Yad Vashem entitled *Living Landscape*.<sup>9</sup> The projected multimedia installation, created by artist Michal Rovner, interweaves archival photographs and film from the pre-war period, challenging notions of homogenous, stereotyped views of the Jewish population by showing 'Bundists, Zionists, Hasidim, the Ostjuden of the shtetl and the assimilated cosmopolitan, migrants and nationalists, secular and religious'.<sup>10</sup> This not only serves to

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large-scale projects to interview Holocaust survivors were implemented. Martin Winstone, *The Holocaust Sites of Europe: An Historical Guide* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 260; "Rudolf Reder's Testimony about the Mechanisms of Crime," *Muzeum i Miejsce Pamięci w Bełżcu*, online at: [http://www.belzec.eu/en/news/relacja\\_rudolfa\\_redera\\_o\\_mechanizmie\\_zbrodni/1258](http://www.belzec.eu/en/news/relacja_rudolfa_redera_o_mechanizmie_zbrodni/1258) (last modified 18 May 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, "Film and The Making of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition," in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, ed. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Rachel E. Perry, "Holocaust Hospitality: Michal Rovner's Living Landscape at Yad Vashem," *History and Memory* 28:2 (2016): 90.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

signify the variety and diversity within the Jewish community, but its fragmentary nature provides a metaphor for the destruction of this community during the Holocaust. Rachel Perry argues that *Living Landscape* is an example of ‘Holocaust hospitality’; that is, the first exhibit that greets visitors when they enter the Museum and provides a way into engagement with the subject matter.<sup>11</sup> By portraying the different aspects of Jewish life, the installation also re-humanises the ‘inhospitable past’ of the genocide and its victims.<sup>12</sup> The use of pre-war archival footage for ‘hospitality’ purposes is an approach favoured in other Holocaust exhibitions and museums, such as the IWM, the Budapest Holocaust Memorial Center and the Illinois Holocaust Museum. Films presenting pre-war Jewish life, however, are not used in former Nazi camps (with the exception of the ‘Shoah’ exhibition in Block 27 of Auschwitz, as discussed in this chapter). Whilst some permanent exhibitions focus on the background to the creation of the Nazi concentration camp network, most concentrate on the specific history and operation of the former camp which is being visited. Purpose-built Holocaust museums, or exhibitions within other institutions, have the task of outlining events before, during and after the genocide; it appears that those who visit the former camps are assumed to have at least some prior knowledge of the Nazis’ campaign against the Jews. Furthermore, as preservation of the original site is often an integral part of the educational and memorial process, most former camps have little space with which to install exhibitions, meaning the significance of life before the genocide is often absent from these presentations.

Historical footage from the Second World War and the Holocaust, on the other hand, is screened across all types of Holocaust museums, confronting visitors with the reality of the atrocities committed. The Holocaust Gallery at the POLIN Museum in Warsaw, for instance, uses only historical footage to immerse the visitor in this history, constructed through ‘a continuous visual narrative’.<sup>13</sup> Arek Dybel, Creative Director of the core exhibition’s audio-visual content, emphasises that the use of ‘raw archival footage’ from the time provides the visitor with a stronger connection to the time and place.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, contemporary survivor testimonies are not included in the exhibition because former POLIN curator Justyna Majewska argues that, as most of the Jews of Poland were murdered, testimonies from those who survived the Holocaust are not wholly representative of this history.<sup>15</sup> Instead, digitally-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Inside the Museum: Curating between Hope and Despair: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 45:2–3 (2015): 226.

<sup>14</sup> Arek Dybel, correspondence with author, 3 January 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Justyna Majewska, correspondence with author, 3 January 2017.

altered wartime photographs and moving scenescapes are used, particularly in a section that shows life on both sides of the ghetto wall. POLIN's Holocaust Gallery also includes narrative films, a mix of archival photographs and film, on topics such as 'economy', 'disease' and 'culture' so that the visitor 'can understand how people lived under the special circumstances of the ghetto'.<sup>16</sup> Digital technology is therefore used to involve the visitor more fully in the museum experience, making the past feel more connected to the present.

Conversely, the use of screens and monitors can also create a distance between the visitor and the events shown in the film; this is particularly evident with the inclusion of atrocity footage shown in some Holocaust museums. At various points in USHMM's permanent exhibition, for example, museumgoers can watch clips of Allied liberation films, shielded behind privacy walls to avoid causing distress to those who do not wish to view them. Other Holocaust museums dismiss this subtle presentation, instead projecting atrocity films onto walls or screens that are almost inescapable from the visitor's gaze. Notable examples of this explicit representation include Yad Vashem and the Budapest Holocaust Memorial Center. In these particular cases, the size of these displays may relate to the political narratives of both Israel and Hungary; not just highlighting the fate of the Jews, but emphasising the brutal treatment of their citizens at the hands of the Nazis.<sup>17</sup>

Currently, film clips are seldom shown at former camps, but graphic photography forms part of many permanent and temporary exhibitions.<sup>18</sup> This may be due to practical issues, such as avoiding structural modification and bottlenecks of groups, but also reflects the lack of footage of the camps during their operation. As each museum displays archival sources relevant only to the camp in question, this means that, unlike Holocaust museums in other locations, footage of executions or ghettos outside the camp is not played. Moreover, most museums at former camps draw very little attention to their liberation, focusing instead

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<sup>16</sup> Dybel, correspondence with author, 3 January 2017.

<sup>17</sup> One might consider, for example, the large-scale projections of atrocity footage in Yad Vashem's Holocaust History Museum and their juxtaposition with the 'redemptive' views of Jerusalem offered at the end of the exhibition, as one emerges from the Museum (Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 69, 74). Furthermore, presentations in both Budapest's Holocaust Memorial Center and the House of Terror (displaying the "double occupation" of two consecutive foreign-imposed regimes) are deliberately graphic, each aestheticizing 'the affective phenomenology of historical victimisation'. Julia Creet, "The House of Terror and the Holocaust Memorial Centre: Resentment and Melancholia in Post-89 Hungary," *European Studies* 30 (2013): 29, 30.

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed discussion on Holocaust photography and scholarly responses to its use, see Ana Carden-Coyne, "The Ethics of Representation in Holocaust Museums," in *Writing the Holocaust*, ed. Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Daniel Langton (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 172-5.

on their establishment and day-to-day conditions; thus, footage of the arrival of the Allies is also largely absent.

Computers and touchscreens have also been integrated into numerous partially and distantly associated Holocaust museums' exhibitions. At the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, for instance, visitors can insert a plastic card into a computer and receive information about a particular child involved in the Holocaust (essentially an electronic version of the Identification Cards museumgoers receive at USHMM). The Information Centre at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin (or Berlin Memorial) also contains a room with a number of computers whereby visitors can search the Information Portal to European Sites of Remembrance.<sup>19</sup> This innovative database allows the public to view Holocaust memorials and museums all over the continent, from the very small to the very large. Visitors at the Centre, standing in the city in which explicit Nazi persecution of the Jews began, are thus better able to observe the continental scale of the Holocaust and, subsequently, its commemoration.

With the swift evolution of technology, however, touchscreens have become much more commonplace and designed to be more user-friendly than point-and-click computers. One of the first places to install these was the Holocaust Exhibition at the IWM (Figure 2.1). Conscious of the exhibition not becoming “a book on the wall”, basic touchscreens were implemented towards the end of the exhibition so that visitors who wish to learn more about subjects such as the Holocaust in specific countries, the persecution of different groups, and controversial debates such as the failure to bomb Auschwitz, can do so.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See *Information Portal to European Sites of Remembrance*, online at: <https://www.memorialmuseums.org> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>20</sup> “Professor David Cesarani OBE 1956-2015,” *Holocaust Studies* 21:4 (2015): 211.



Figure 2.1. Touchscreens in the IWM's Holocaust Exhibition. Source: All photographs in this chapter author's own, unless otherwise stated.

The most salient example of this technology, though, can be found in the LA Museum of the Holocaust (LAMOTH). The Museum makes use of both standing kiosks for individual use and a large table-top surface for multiple visitors to access simultaneously. In one room, museumgoers are confronted with 18 kiosk-style touchscreens, each focused on a specific camp.<sup>21</sup> Information about the location of each camp, as well as its architecture, living conditions and number of victims, is displayed. The table-top, multi-touch screen, called a Memory Pool, is positioned in the middle of the first room, entitled 'The World That Was' (as with the first room of the 'Shoah' exhibition discussed later). Pre-war photographs 'float' around the screen; touching one enlarges the photograph and provides the visitor with more information about the individual(s) shown. These extra details are displayed using other photographs, text or video extracts, the audio of which can be accessed through the Museum's audio guides.<sup>22</sup> In this way, the Museum provides visitors not just with photographs of those affected by the Holocaust (whether they perished or survived), but presents them in a more tactile, interactive format. There is very little trace of at least some of the people shown in these photographs; in fact, these pictures may be all that remain. The pictures, as with other historical artefacts in the Museum's collection, may be too fragile to

<sup>21</sup> "Interactive Exhibits," *Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust*, online at: <http://www.lamoth.org/exhibitions/interactive-exhibits2> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

handle, or still in the possession of relatives. Visitors can feel closer to past events and people when in the presence of related objects; therefore, although unable to handle the physical objects, museumgoers may feel a stronger connection to this history if they are able to ‘touch’ the photographs on the screen, or at the very least to learn about this history in a tactile manner.<sup>23</sup> Through the use of these interactive touchscreens, then, LAMOTH has created a more tangible link to these people, and to this past.

Tactility in Holocaust museums, however, is a controversial issue, perhaps best exemplified by the lack of computers and touchscreens available to visitors at museums located at the former camps, including the Auschwitz Museum.<sup>24</sup> One could argue that the main responsibility of these museums is to present evidence of the crimes committed onsite – including, in many cases, hundreds of thousands of belongings once owned by the victims, accessible only to conservators – and so there is no need for interaction beyond the boundaries of seeing (and witnessing) this evidence. The former camps have been preserved, as best as possible, to speak for themselves; the absence of technology such as computers and touchscreens attests to the fact that, although visitors are in the same place in which these atrocities were perpetrated, they do not have direct access to this history and so cannot ‘touch’ the events themselves.<sup>25</sup> As Patrizia Violi states:

In contrast with other forms of memorial sites, trauma sites exist factually as material testimonies of the violence and horror that took place there. [...] Although we, as visitors, are located in a different time with respect to the traumatic events that took place at the site, a direct link with the past seems to be activated by the indexicality of the places and the objects present there: they are signs of a very particular nature – traces of the past, imprints of what actually happened there.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, the inclusion of tactile digital technology at former camps – sites that began not as purpose-built museums, but specifically for mass incarceration and murder – may be perceived as edging too close to edutainment.<sup>27</sup> The social aspect of multi-touch learning might also prove problematic in Holocaust museums; such sites are treated with a

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<sup>23</sup> Nina Levent and D. Lynn McRainey, “Touch and Narrative in Art and History Museums,” in *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory and Space*, ed. Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 79.

<sup>24</sup> Computers are available for public use at the Bergen-Belsen Documentation Centre, a purpose-built structure that does not infringe upon the original site.

<sup>25</sup> Camp survivors are a notable exception, but experiences of incarceration inevitably vary between individuals and places, so some aspects of the museologised camp may still be unfamiliar or inaccessible.

<sup>26</sup> Patrizia Violi, “Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory: Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica Museum,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 29:1 (2012): 37, 39.

<sup>27</sup> Carden-Coyne, “Ethics of Representation,” 167.

certain degree of reverence, considered by some as ‘sacred space’, meaning that social interaction – especially concerning forms of technology that could be viewed as primarily entertaining – would be considered a disrespectful and inappropriate way to learn onsite.<sup>28</sup> Even during the creation of the IWM’s Holocaust Exhibition, Creative Director Suzanne Bardgett wrote, ‘There is a strong expectation of this type of display device, but there is something distasteful, we feel, about effectively playing computer games in the same space as one is learning about mass deportation and death,’ arguing that the screens eventually used in the exhibition provide only ‘a vehicle for the authentic historical evidence to do its own work of telling the visitor the story’.<sup>29</sup> Such an expectation would likely be even more pronounced at a site where genocide actually took place. Moreover, as will be shown in the context of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, implementing new exhibition features at sites of the Holocaust may be seen as compromising their authenticity.

Further developments in technology, however, have resulted in the creation of apps for digital devices, such as smartphones and tablets. Such resources allow the visitor to create a more individualised experience, often selecting particular content to view or listen to, and discovering more information about places or items of interest. (Alternatively – as the Auschwitz Museum would argue – encouraging the use of digital devices may create a distraction and lead to activities unrelated to the visit, such as checking social media). Mobile applications (referring to their portability, rather than mobile phones specifically) have been integrated into several partially associated sites. QR codes, for instance, are inlaid into the ground around the edge of the Berlin Memorial. Scanning the code allows iPhone owners to download an app which plays a composition from a 2008 concert performed at the Memorial. At the concert, the musicians were seated in different places around the site, resulting in a unique musical experience for each member of the audience. The ‘Virtual Concert’ seeks to recreate this experience for visitors; in 2012, the instruments were re-recorded and geo-co-ordinates were assigned to each instrument. As the visitor walks around the Memorial, their smartphone’s GPS system provides their location and changes the sound and dynamic of the performance as they move around the space.<sup>30</sup> This ensures that different visitors will have varied experiences of the performance as they walk through the stelae.

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<sup>28</sup> Isabel Wollaston, “Negotiating the Marketplace: The Role(s) of Holocaust Museums Today,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4:1 (2005): 66.

<sup>29</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, “The Genesis and Development of the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition Project,” *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 7:3 (1998): 34, 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Virtuelles Konzert*, online at: <http://virtuelleskonzert.com> (accessed 28 June 2020).

Moreover, as it has been suggested that music can evoke and enhance emotional responses, the accompaniment of the piece can perhaps also create a space with which visitors can reflect upon and observe their perception of the Memorial itself and what it represents.<sup>31</sup> The abstract concept of the Memorial, however, is not disturbed by this use of technology; the history of the Holocaust is kept within the subterranean Information Centre, separating the facts and stories and the artistic response to them.

Other Holocaust-related mobile apps have been developed away from the physical museums, focusing on the history of the pre-war Jewish population, and the genocide, through the eyes of its witnesses. For example, the USC Shoah Foundation's IWalk app uses clips from its own Visual History Archive and is designed to complement guided tours of European cities such as Prague, Budapest and Warsaw and memorial sites in America.<sup>32</sup> Participants in these tours use their devices to watch videos of survivor testimony related to the places which they visit. In Prague, for instance, the IWalk comprises of eight specific stops including a synagogue, Jewish orphanage, and flats once occupied by Jewish families.<sup>33</sup> In 2016, the USC Shoah Foundation also launched an IWalk tour of the Babi Yar ravines in Kiev where 33,771 Jews were murdered in 1941; survivor testimonies present the context of occupied Kiev, the killings and the struggle for their commemoration.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, the mobile website Memento Vienna allows users to see where Jewish residents of the city lived before they were deported and murdered, as well as the location of Jewish organisations that provided support and means of flight.<sup>35</sup> Users can search for specific people or addresses, or view city maps and discover former residences in the local area. Additionally, in the town of Oświęcim, only a few kilometres from the Auschwitz Museum complex, visitors can download the Auschwitz Jewish Centre's 'Oshpitzin' app, highlighting points of significance related to the town's Jewish history. Making use of

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<sup>31</sup> See Stefan Koelsch, "Towards a Neural Basis of Music-Evoked Emotion," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 14:3 (2010): 131-7.

<sup>32</sup> Monika Koszyńska, "Visiting using Witness Testimony as a Unique Educational Experience," paper presented at the Awareness – Responsibility – Future International Education Conference, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 4-5 July 2017; Rob Kuznia, "USC Shoah Foundation Launches New IWalk App," *USC Shoah Foundation*, online at: <http://sfi.usc.edu/news/2019/04/24836-usc-shoah-foundation-launches-new-iwalk-app>. (last modified 10 April 2019).

<sup>33</sup> "IWalks in Vinohrady and Radiotr, Czech Republic, Published Online," *USC Shoah Foundation*, online at: <https://sfi.usc.edu/news/2015/03/8779-iwalks-vinohrady-and-radiotr-czech-republic-published-online> (last modified 11 March 2015).

<sup>34</sup> "USC Shoah Foundation Debuts IWalk and IWitness Activity for 75th Anniversary of Babi Yar," *USC Shoah Foundation*, online at: <https://sfi.usc.edu/news/2016/09/12273-usc-shoah-foundation-debuts-iwalk-and-iwitness-activity-75th-anniversary-babi-yar> (last modified 26 September 2016); Jessica Rapson, *Topographies of Suffering: Buchenwald, Babi Yar, Lidice* (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 83.

<sup>35</sup> Wolfgang Schellenbacher, "About the Project," *Memento Vienna Wien*, online at: <https://www.memento.wien/about> (accessed 28 June 2020).

Google Maps, the app contains information about specific sites, historical and contemporary photographs and QR codes that, when scanned, create 3D models of pre-war buildings such as the Great Synagogue.<sup>36</sup>

The non-invasive aspect of mobile apps means that some directly associated Holocaust museums have experimented with, and implemented, their use onsite. Similar to the IWalk app, a 90-minute audio guide consisting only of survivor and witness testimony is available at ‘*das unsichtbare Lager*’ (‘the invisible camp’) of Gusen, where no original structures remain.<sup>37</sup> As will be examined shortly, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has also placed QR codes around the site that, when scanned, play videos of survivors recalling their experiences of their imprisonment in the camp. The most developed example of an onsite application, however, is now an optional part of a visit to the Bergen-Belsen Memorial. The Bergen-Belsen camp was razed to the ground shortly after its liberation; all that physically remains to testify to the camp’s existence are the numerous mass graves around the site.<sup>38</sup> To enable visitors to learn more and better visualise the layout of the camp, therefore, in 2012 the Bergen-Belsen Memorial launched an iPad application for visitors to use (Figure 2.2). The app displays two 2D maps and two 3D virtual reconstructions of the camp: the first from an Allied aerial photograph taken on 13 September 1944, and the other from 15 April 1945, based on ground-level photographs and eyewitness testimonies.<sup>39</sup> As the user moves the iPad around the space, the landscape changes to reflect its appearance on the date selected. At certain points, small thumbnails of photographs and testimonies appear related to a particular building or area, which can then be enlarged if the visitor wishes to see or learn more. The designers of the app stress, however, that the reconstructions are not ‘an attempt at reality’

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<sup>36</sup> Maciek Zabierowski, “The Story of Jewish Oświęcim,” paper presented at the It Happened Here! Workshop, Simon Wiesenthal Institute, Vienna, Austria, 1-2 April 2019. See also Victoria Grace Walden, *Cinematic Intermedialities and Contemporary Holocaust Memory* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 180-96.

<sup>37</sup> *Audiowalk Gusen*, online at: <http://audioweg.gusen.org> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>38</sup> Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 104.

<sup>39</sup> Author conversation with Stephanie Billib and Sytse Wierenga, 2 August 2016.

and are based on a common map model; the buildings, therefore, remain grey and undetailed, and there are no people included.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, variances in witness testimony means that the maps may not be entirely historically accurate, and as such, they should be shown more as representations of what once stood on the site.<sup>41</sup>

Despite these challenges, preliminary research at the Belsen Memorial illustrates the usefulness of the app in visitors' exploration of the site. The iPad application includes a tracker that shows the route the visitor has taken; initial results showed that visitors using the iPads went three or four times further in the camp space than those either on their own or



Figure 2.2. The iPad application at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial.

with a tour guide.<sup>42</sup> Although this application is not immersive – visitors are not made to feel as though they are in the camp, but rather imagine what it might have looked like – it appears that the model encourages further exploration of the site, even when there are few physical traces to be found.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid; Walden, *Cinematic Intermedialities*, 206.

<sup>41</sup> Author conversation with Billib and Wierenga, 2 August 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

The app is also used alongside educational programmes for school groups. According to designer Sytse Wierenga, the app helps to spark questions and interest from participants, as well as allowing tour guides to better understand the needs and existing knowledge of each group.<sup>43</sup> The Bergen-Belsen Memorial, therefore, has utilised the digital museum to present the history of the concentration camp to its visitors in lieu of physical remains. Those using the app can better locate themselves in or around places of significance – which, as this chapter will demonstrate, is of great importance to many visitors – and add to the perceived authenticity of their experience.

The emphasis on survivor testimony in these applications speaks of a larger concern present in Holocaust museums: that of representing survivors' stories when survivors themselves are no longer alive to recount their experiences. Many Holocaust museums, from large institutions such as USHMM to smaller ones such as The National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Nottinghamshire, still organise onsite survivor talks for both public and school groups. In other cases, some museums facilitate trips to Holocaust sites with a survivor; until her death in 2019, for example, Eva Mozes Kor, Auschwitz survivor and founder of the CANDLES Holocaust Museum in Indiana, made annual trips to both Romania and Poland to share her story with groups in the places in which the events occurred. As the death of the last survivors results in a severance of this physical connection to the past, Holocaust museums and associated organisations are seeking innovative methods other than standard recorded testimonies with which to tell their stories. Moreover, these apps are mostly used in spaces with a pronounced absence: at the Gusen Memorial, this translates to the absence of the camp buildings, whereas IWalks around cities in Europe, particularly those in Poland, emphasise the 'objective' and 'discursive' absence of the Jewish community, as well as the more recent 'contemporary creation of absence' through 'mnemonic projects' such as public acknowledgement and signposting of sites associated with Jewish cultural life and the Holocaust.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, museums are turning to more advanced digital technologies, such as apps that utilise survivor testimony at historical locations, to re-establish a sense of presence and history in what are now, in many cases, dramatically different landscapes.

Digital applications focusing on other empty former camps are also being developed, primarily sub-camps where no material evidence remains. Recent examples include an app highlighting the location of Sachsenhausen's sub-camps, in and around Berlin, and another

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Geneviève Zubrzycki, "The Politics of Jewish Absence in Contemporary Poland," *Journal of Contemporary History* 52:2 (2017): 251.

prototype relating to those connected to Mauthausen. The purpose of the Sachsenhausen app is to illustrate to the user how closely camp prisoners and forced labourers were to Berlin's residents and workers, dispelling the myth that ordinary citizens had no knowledge of the Nazis' exploitation and mistreatment of minority groups. The Mauthausen app wishes to explore not only the spatial distance between the sub-camps and their vicinities, but also the temporal distance between what once existed on those sites and what is present today.<sup>45</sup> Yet the latter is not solely focused on sub-camps; in fact, the current prototype is mainly engaged with the Mauthausen Memorial itself. Once in use, the app will contain a map indicating points of historical interest, memorials and visitor facilities around the site. It will also feature an audio guide, taking the visitor on a 24-stop walk detailing the camp's history.<sup>46</sup>

Many original structures of the camp are still present at Mauthausen, including some of the barracks, the entrance gate and the infamous 'Stairs of Death' in the nearby quarry. In contrast to the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, this challenges the idea that former Nazi camps need to be empty in order for digital content to be used productively. The creation of the app – and the Mauthausen Memorial's adaptation to this element of the digital museum – means that visitors will be able to explore the site at their own pace, alone if they wish, and with a greater opportunity for contemplation and reflection.

Conversely, interaction with digital technology at sites of direct association with the Holocaust does not need to be undertaken individually. The memorials at Neuengamme and Dachau have previously trialled 'Tweetups' with some of their visitors. As part of a guided tour, participants were encouraged to use their smartphones and Tweet about their visit to the former camps, whether posting photographs, historical information or their reactions and impressions. Moreover, they were encouraged to comment on elements that appeared unusual, reflective or inappropriate, which facilitated a wider discussion regarding symbolism, commemoration of the sites and the dichotomy between the past and present appearance of the former camps. According to Neuengamme's Press Officer, Iris Groschek, this activity meant participants thought more mindfully about what they should post and how, resulting in a wider variety of content less likely deemed to be offensive by others (such as

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Irmer, "Satellite Camps - A New App on Satellite Camps of Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp in Berlin," paper presented at the It Happened Here! Workshop, Simon Wiesenthal Institute, Vienna, Austria, 1-2 April 2019; Christian Dürr, "Virtual Interventions in Public Social Space. Digital Resources of the Mauthausen Memorial and the Linking of Space and Memory," paper presented at the It Happened Here! Workshop, Simon Wiesenthal Institute, Vienna, Austria, 1-2 April 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Dürr, "Virtual Interventions."

taking selfies).<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, although only 15 people participated in the Memorials' walks, a total of 55,108 were reached on Twitter through tweets and retweets using the hashtag '#MemorialWalk'.<sup>48</sup> This demonstrates not only the outreach opportunities of social media – as will be explored in Chapter Four – but the influence visitors' content can have on the public and other potential visitors.

At present, partially and distantly associated Holocaust museums use considerably more digital technology onsite than those directly associated with the genocide. Furthermore, many of these museums use several different digital aspects to present the complex history of the Holocaust to the visitor, through viewing historical footage, using touchscreens or accessing mobile applications. The utilisation of various digital technologies is designed to create an interesting museum experience, and also gives the visitor a higher degree of freedom to choose the ways in which they learn about and memorialise the Holocaust. Including multiple aspects of the digital museum illustrates the methods used to record and explain the Holocaust whilst also suggesting there is no prescribed way to educate visitors about this history. This is not necessarily the case, however, with directly associated museums. Their relatively sparse use of digital devices onsite can be ascribed to several factors: a desire for the former camps to speak for themselves; issues such as ethical representations of victims, tactility and edutainment; practical factors, primarily funding (as discussed in Chapter One); and, as explored in this chapter, notions of authority as to how one should experience the site. It is also important to remember, however, that many former camps have no physical exhibition space in which to include digital technology, and some apps, such as IWalk, are used in everyday urban locations. Thus, such applications may provide benefits for visitors in terms of establishing a clearer picture of the history, layout and individual experiences in areas where physical traces are absent.

In contrast, as the largest and best-preserved former Nazi camp, there is little at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum left solely to the visitor's imagination. The next section shall explore the evolution of the institution's permanent exhibition and how it has always

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<sup>47</sup> Angelika Schoder, "Social Media in Gedenkstätten: Probleme und Chancen," *mus.er.me.ku*, online at: <https://musermeku.org/social-media-in-gedenkstaetten> (last modified 27 January 2016).

<sup>48</sup> Iris Groschek, "Tweeup and Instaswap at Concentration Camp Memorials? Experiences with Social Media Used for Educational Purposes at the Memorials Neuengamme and Dachau," paper presented at the Dark Tourism Sites Related to the Holocaust, the Nazi Past and World War II: Visitation and Practice Conference, Glasgow Caledonian University, UK, 28 June-1 July 2017.

retained an authoritative voice regarding what should be seen at the Museum and how it should be viewed.

### **The Permanent Exhibition: An Overview**

The Auschwitz Museum's narrative has always focused on evidence of the torture and mass murder committed at the site. Since its official opening as a Museum in June 1947, Block 11 of Auschwitz I has been open to visitors, whilst victims' personal items were originally exhibited only in Block 4a.<sup>49</sup> Initially, both exhibitions were presented without any written explanation.<sup>50</sup> The rationale behind this absence was that the cells and artefacts would speak for themselves. Yet, as has been asserted by Dwork and van Pelt, this may have caused confusion for the average Museum visitor, as there was no reference to the fact that most of the killing was perpetrated at Birkenau.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, only a small percentage of the public visited Birkenau in the early years of the Museum's operation. This was due to its distance from Auschwitz I; the absence of transport provided between the two sites; and the role the base camp held in Polish popular consciousness as the site of Polish martyrdom.<sup>52</sup> Despite the fact that Auschwitz I played little role in the Jewish genocide, the artefacts associated with this crime were presented to emphasise the plight of Polish, not Jewish, suffering. Only since the fall of the Iron Curtain have the Museum's information panels and guided tours addressed this imbalance, explicitly presenting the history of the murder of the Jews at Birkenau – given the absence of a curated exhibition on that site – within Auschwitz I, whilst highlighting the base camp's role in the persecution of the Polish population.<sup>53</sup>

In 1948, however, as concerns over the Museum's future were raised, the permanent exhibition was criticised by journalists as being 'a sanitized memorial incapable of impressing anything upon the visitor resembling the horror of the camp'.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the question was asked: 'Would the totally uninformed visitor deduce, on the sole basis of the external appearance of Auschwitz I, that it was [a] place of torture, disease, starvation, and murder?'<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 69-70, 77. Personal possessions of the victims are now displayed in Blocks 4a, 5 and 6 of Auschwitz I, as well as the Sauna building at Birkenau.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

<sup>51</sup> Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 359, 365.

<sup>52</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 29.

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter One for a more detailed description of the changes both in Polish politics and the Museum from 1945 to 1989.

<sup>54</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 87-9, 120; Kazimierz Koźniewski, "Drażliwy problem," *Przekrój* 179 (1948): 3.

<sup>55</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 120.

It was suggested that a simple exhibition of material evidence alone did not say enough, and this potential ambiguity – in addition to the restructuring required in the aftermath of Polish Stalinism – led to the creation of the 1955 permanent exhibition.<sup>56</sup> 65 years later, the content and layout of the exhibition remains largely unchanged.<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of the politics surrounding its creation and development, from its founding in the late 1940s the Auschwitz Museum has utilised the ‘Unassailable Voice’, as described by Walsh, asserting its museological authority and telling the visitor how they should view and experience the physical site.<sup>58</sup> This translates to a two-dimensional presentation that rarely encourages the visitor to interact or engage in any form of dialogue. Whether with or without a tour guide, visitors are invited to look at photographs, documents, buildings and thousands of personal items – and invited *only* to look. No questions are asked of the visitor, and there are no displays that prompt interactions of a tactile nature.<sup>59</sup> In Auschwitz I, the potential isolation intensifies as the headphones provided to tour groups create a barrier between other visitors and, to some extent, the guide.<sup>60</sup> Although the headphones are designed to make listening to guides ‘more comfortable’ and clear, they are also, as Susan Henderson and Lindsay Dombrowski argue, ‘intended to “hold stable” and control how knowledges are communicated by guides’ whilst ‘marshaling’ visitors through the Museum space.<sup>61</sup> In theory, visitors have the opportunity to ask questions of their tour guide, yet there is no explicit time given for this, so the tour can often feel one-sided. Additionally, the use of headphones means that visitors can find themselves physically separated from their guide, sometimes even standing in different rooms. Thus, although most visitors to the Museum are

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>57</sup> A new permanent exhibition, however, is due to open in three parts over the next decade. Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 11 May 2018; Sarah Judith Hofmann, “New Permanent Exhibition at Auschwitz-Birkenau to Open,” *DW*, online at: <https://www.dw.com/en/new-permanent-exhibition-at-auschwitz-birkenau-to-open/a-18494130> (last modified 3 June 2015).

<sup>58</sup> Walsh, “The Web,” 229.

<sup>59</sup> Conversely, lack of touch does not stop some visitors literally leaving their mark upon the Museum. The ‘scratches’ in the gas chamber of Auschwitz I, for example, often assumed to be left by victims, were in fact created by some museumgoers. Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/992506196971216901> (last modified 4 May 2018, 9:48pm).

<sup>60</sup> This also relates to Walsh’s theory that the ‘Unassailable Voice’ can alienate visitors from ‘the entire experience of the museum’. Walsh, “The Web,” 230.

<sup>61</sup> Andrzej Kacorzyk, “What is Appropriate Behaviour While Visiting Auschwitz?” in *European Pack for Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum: Guidelines for Teachers and Educators*, ed. Alicja Białecka et al. (Strasbourg: Polish Ministry of Education, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and Council of Europe, 2010), 158; Susan Henderson and Lindsay Dombrowski, “What Can Onto-Epistemology Reveal about Holocaust Education? The Case of Audio-Headphones at Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum,” *Holocaust Studies* 24:3 (2018): 314. Henderson and Dombrowski also highlight the potential ‘dislocation’ of the headphones, however, through breakages and technical issues. Ibid, 314-5.

guided by an individual, the Museum's 'voice' can still seem 'impersonal and disembodied'.<sup>62</sup>

A visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is thus heavily prescribed, as the guided visitor is instructed on where to go, what to see and how to see it. This is most apparent in the Museum's resistance to incorporate the digital museum onsite. Inclusion of digital content would not only compromise the perceived 'authenticity' of the site (explored in more detail below), but would also detract from the Museum's authoritative, 'Unassailable Voice' that guides the average visitor through the grounds.<sup>63</sup> Yet elements of the digital museum do appear onsite, with or without the Museum's explicit approval. Their most prominent implementation can be found in a few the national exhibitions housed in some of the blocks in Auschwitz I.

### **'Shoah' and the Micro-Museum**

The greatest museological change at the Museum since the 1950s has been the installation of the national exhibitions located in Auschwitz I. Their inclusion was agreed upon by the Museum's planning committee as early as December 1946, but the first exhibitions did not come into being until the late 1950s and early '60s.<sup>64</sup> As geographical and political boundaries have changed, so respective exhibitions have been updated. More recent refurbishments have included a wide variety of media: photographs, artefacts, documents and analogue sound effects are most commonly utilised, but a number of exhibitions also use digital content. Visitors to the Russian exhibition, for example, can view original documents on monitors, the pages of which 'turn' automatically. The Dutch exhibition contains archival footage of Jews, Roma and Sinti boarding a train in Westerbork, destined for Auschwitz, whilst the Hungarian presentation projects collages of photographs from the Holocaust onto the walls. The most numerous examples of the use of digital technology in these exhibitions, though, can be found in the 'Shoah' exhibition in Block 27.

'Shoah', opened on 13 June 2013, was created by a team of scholars from Yad Vashem to show the suffering of all Jews involved in the Holocaust.<sup>65</sup> As with the displays in

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<sup>62</sup> Walsh, "The Web," 229.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>64</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 72; "National Exhibitions," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/national-exhibitions> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>65</sup> "Shoah - Block 27," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/national-exhibitions/shoah-block-27> (accessed 28 June 2020).

Yad Vashem’s History Museum, and unlike the other national exhibitions, the narrative is irrespective of the victims’ countries of origin. It replaced the previous ‘dilapidated and neglected’ Communist-era Jewish exhibition that had been on display in the same building since the 1960s.<sup>66</sup> Avner Shalev, Director of Yad Vashem, curated the exhibition and Israeli design company Studio de Lange – which has previously developed exhibits for Yad Vashem itself – was charged with creating its layout.<sup>67</sup> The project took three years to plan and involved consultations with historians, sound technicians, conservationists, architects and others.<sup>68</sup>

The materials used, and the atmosphere created, in the exhibition are entirely different from both the Auschwitz Museum’s permanent displays and the other national pavilions. Passing through the entrance hall, where one hears a Holocaust-era version of the Jewish



Figure 2.3. Part of the 360-degree montage in ‘The World That Was’.

<sup>66</sup> Avner Shalev, “Shoah: The New Permanent Exhibition in Block 27 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum,” *Yad Vashem*, online at: [http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/pavilion\\_auschwitz/intro.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/pavilion_auschwitz/intro.asp) (accessed 28 June 2020); “Opening of New Permanent Exhibition SHOAH in Block 27 at Auschwitz-Birkenau,” *Yad Vashem*, online at: <https://www.yadvashem.org/events/13-june-2013> (last modified 13 June 2013). The Jewish pavilion was closed, however, after the Six-Day War in 1967, and only reopened in 1978. James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 130.

<sup>67</sup> “Block 27, Jewish Pavilion, Auschwitz, Poland,” *De Lange Design*, online at: [http://delangedesign.com/portfolio\\_page/yad-vashem-block-27-2010-2013](http://delangedesign.com/portfolio_page/yad-vashem-block-27-2010-2013) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>68</sup> “Designing the Exhibition: The Challenges and the Solutions,” *Yad Vashem*, online at: [http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/pavilion\\_auschwitz/design.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/pavilion_auschwitz/design.asp) (accessed 28 June 2020).

prayer *Ani Ma'anim* ('I Believe'), visitors enter 'The World That Was'. The room primarily consists of a 360-degree montage of photographs and films showing Jewish families in Europe and North Africa before the Holocaust (Figure 2.3). Countries and years are displayed alongside the clips, some of which are in colour, a rarity for 1930s film. The room 'envelopes the visitor with the sights, sounds and experiences' of the families shown, and the culture and communities that were lost.<sup>69</sup> An illuminated map on the wall shows the pre-war Jewish population of each European country.

Moving upstairs, one enters 'Ideology for Murder'. Screens fixed to the ceiling play clips of Hitler, Goebbels, Göring and Streicher expressing antisemitic sentiments in front of large, cheering crowds (Figure 2.4). Their words are translated into Hebrew, Polish and English on respective screens. Two rows of speakers stationed at either side of the room play the original audio, creating the effect of being surrounded by those in the footage. According to Yad Vashem, this presentation is intended to 'assault the senses and purposely engender an atmosphere of the terror and aggression that characterized Nazism'.<sup>70</sup> The visitor is thus invited to imagine themselves in Nazi Germany and empathise with the victims of their



Figure 2.4. The 'Ideology for Murder' room. Source: Paweł Sawicki, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

<sup>69</sup> "A Profound Ethical-Cultural Dimension of Holocaust Remembrance," *Yad Vashem*, online at: [http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/pavilion\\_auschwitz/exhibition\\_tour.asp](http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/pavilion_auschwitz/exhibition_tour.asp) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

persecution. This is in stark contrast to the static displays employed by the Auschwitz Museum, where attempting to imagine the victims' plight is strongly discouraged.<sup>71</sup>

Later rooms make less use of digital elements but include items such as a slideshow emphasising (in graphic detail) the ways in which Jews were murdered; videos of survivor testimony and extracts from diaries and letters written by victims; and contemporary photographs of Holocaust survivors with their families, situated in 'photo frames' in which the pictures change. This last example, however, is rather overshadowed by the monumental Book of Names, a physical installation containing approximately 4.2 million victims' names (Figure 2.5).<sup>72</sup> Thus, while survival of the Holocaust is celebrated, the emphasis throughout the exhibition is on the Jewish community's decimation and loss.

Professor Chanan De Lange's exhibition concept of 'simplicity and the senses' is clearly dominant throughout the exhibition.<sup>73</sup> Shalev felt it was important that the new exhibition was not simply historical, but provided 'the very deep ethical and cultural dimensions of the memory of the Holocaust'.<sup>74</sup> He acknowledges that visitors may only spend around half an hour in the space – it is not included in the standard guided tour, and is primarily accessed by Jewish youth groups or study groups – and so the exhibition 'calls on the visual sphere, so that visitors will make the most of it and leave thinking about what they have seen'.<sup>75</sup> It presents only 'the main elements of the Holocaust', but places Auschwitz-Birkenau in the wider context of the Nazi genocide.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The purpose of this empathetic engagement is not entirely clear. Is the visitor supposed to imagine themselves 'in the shoes' of Nazi victims to better understand their suffering? Does feeling these negative emotions invoke a greater sense of morality, and a desire to learn the 'lessons' of the Holocaust (whatever they may be)? Or is this – as suggested by some people's recommendation that the Auschwitz Museum should install 'life-size dummies [...] of SS guards with dogs or standing in watchtowers and blinding visitors with a searchlight' – merely a form of edutainment? Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 82. For discussions on empathic learning and the 'lessons' of the Holocaust, see N. Ann Rider, "The Perils of Empathy: Holocaust Narratives, Cognitive Studies and the Politics of Sentiment," *Holocaust Studies* 19:3 (2013): 43-72; Brandon J. Haas, "Bearing Witness: Teacher Perspectives on Developing Empathy through Holocaust Survivor Testimony," *The Social Studies* 111:2 (2020): 86-103; Michael R. Marrus, "'Lessons' of the Holocaust and the Ceaseless, Discordant Search for Meaning," in *Holocaust Scholarship: Personal Trajectories and Professional Interpretations*, ed. Christopher R. Browning et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 170-86.

<sup>72</sup> "Designing the Exhibition," *Yad Vashem*.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Paweł Sawicki, "'Shoah'. New Exhibition in Block 27. Light of Remembrance for Avner Shalev," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/shoah-new-exhibition-in-block-27-light-of-remembrance-for-avner-shalev-,1016.html> (last modified 13 June 2013).

<sup>75</sup> "New Permanent Exhibition at Auschwitz-Birkenau," *Culture.pl*, online at: <http://culture.pl/en/event/new-permanent-exhibition-at-auschwitz-birkenau> (last modified 14 June 2013).

<sup>76</sup> "Opening of New Permanent Exhibition," *Yad Vashem*.



Figure 2.5. The Book of Names in the last room of the ‘Shoah’ exhibition.

The first point of separation between the ‘Shoah’ exhibition and the rest of the Museum is that, whilst ‘Shoah’ highlights other sites of persecution and genocide in the Holocaust, the Museum’s permanent exhibition focuses only on the history of the camp. Director Piotr Cywiński defends this decision by stating:

There is little sense in recounting in Auschwitz the histories of Treblinka, Babi Yar or Mauthausen. It is not the place which *per se* can tell the entire history of Nazism, the Second World War or even the complex history of the Shoah. Museums recounting such comprehensive narratives have been founded in many cities of the world and may they serve their purpose well. Auschwitz, however, should focus on Auschwitz.<sup>77</sup>

Whilst it is true that Auschwitz was not *the* site of the Holocaust, it has come to symbolise the genocide through its global notoriety and is subsequently the most-visited former camp, at the cost of other sites of Holocaust history and memory.<sup>78</sup> One might argue,

<sup>77</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 83.

<sup>78</sup> In 2019, for instance, the Auschwitz Museum received 2.32 million visitors, a record in the Museum's history. By comparison, the second most-visited former Nazi camp, Dachau, is annually visited by around 800,000 people. Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2019* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum,

therefore, that the Auschwitz Museum has something of a duty to at least mention the former camp in the context of the continent-wide genocide, which is not currently a part of either the permanent exhibition or the standard tour script. Yet one might also consider spatial and temporal constraints within the Museum, particularly on the standard guided tours, which last approximately three-and-a-half hours and give the visitor access to only a fraction of the entire site. Nevertheless, as an institution that focuses on the whole history of the genocide, Yad Vashem decided to present Auschwitz in the wider context of the Holocaust, rather than the Museum's current narrative of presenting the Holocaust in the context of Auschwitz.

Following Yad Vashem's 'philosophy' of recognising every single Jewish individual killed in the Holocaust, furthermore, the exhibition focuses greatly on re-humanising the victims, largely avoiding impersonal facts, figures and lists and instead using family photographs and witness testimony to put faces to names and emphasise the ordinariness of those who were lost.<sup>79</sup> This dynamic is not part of the Auschwitz Museum's current exhibition; whilst each individual artefact on display tells the story of one person, the emphasis is placed more on the murder of groups, and how each individual death contributes to the larger figure. Another contrast between 'Shoah' and the Museum's permanent exhibition is that 'The World That Was' and 'The Human Spirit', the exhibition rooms in Block 27 dedicated to individual lives and stories, include videos from both before and after the Holocaust as well as photographs. This reanimation of victims (and survivors) adds to their re-humanisation, underlining the fact that they once lived and experienced, just as the visitor does. The absence of digital technology in the Museum's permanent exhibition means the victims remain frozen in time; moreover, the only photographs on display show them solely as victims, whether through the rows of prisoner photographs lining the corridor of Block 6, static and frightened, or the last photographs of people from *The Auschwitz Album*.<sup>80</sup> The pace of the tours and crowds in the permanent exhibition blocks also means one has very little time to engage with these pictures, in contrast to the videos in the 'Shoah' exhibition, which invite the visitor to pause and watch. Focusing solely on the history of Auschwitz means that life before the camp's operation and after its liberation is not explored.

Furthermore, unlike the more 'redemptive' narrative offered at Yad Vashem's Holocaust History Museum, standard tours at the Auschwitz Museum end either at the ruins

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2020), 25; Sandra Zerbin (Press and Public Relations Officer, Dachau Memorial), correspondence with author, 21 November 2017.

<sup>79</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>80</sup> Yisrael Gutman and Bella Gutterman, eds., *The Auschwitz Album: Story of a Transport* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005).

of gas chambers II and III or the Sauna building in Birkenau, where new arrivals were registered and processed.<sup>81</sup> Thus, although the tour guide describes the liberation, the visitor is left – temporally and physically – at a site of mass death, or at the place where prisoners began their incarceration. Practices of re-humanisation are largely imparted by the guides, who occasionally recall the stories of notable prisoners or events.

‘Shoah’ contains no physical historical artefacts and relies almost exclusively on digital installations, rather than text panels and display cases, to construct its narrative. This presentation is entirely opposite to the Auschwitz Museum’s permanent collection. Rather than letting victims’ possessions speak for themselves, as is greatly stressed by the Museum, the ‘Shoah’ exhibition tells the stories of both the survivors and the murdered via a thoroughly modern format. Interaction with the visitor is also encouraged; the first two rooms in particular are designed to ‘envelope’ visitors, whilst staining on the Book of Names attests to how many visitors have looked through its pages.<sup>82</sup> Walsh’s ‘Unassailable Voice’ is less present here; the dynamic, more immersive experience of ‘Shoah’ may allow visitors the time and space to explore their own thoughts and feelings as they are surrounded by the sights and sounds of this history, in contrast to the static displays and controlled way of seeing the rest of the Museum.<sup>83</sup> There is also a dedicated space at the end of the exhibition to allow for reflection or small memorial ceremonies, an aspect that is not explicitly facilitated anywhere else onsite.<sup>84</sup>

One might question why the Auschwitz Museum permitted such a drastically different exhibition, that does not align with its own curatorial principles, to be installed onsite. There are multiple reasons for its inclusion. Firstly, due to the Museum’s increasingly strict policy on conservation and the development of materials and technologies to improve this process, the decision was taken to construct ‘Shoah’ on panels that are installed just in front of the walls of the original structure, so that they can be easily uninstalled if necessary without damaging or changing the building in which they are contained.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, the ‘authenticity’ of the structure is maintained. Secondly, the Auschwitz Museum may have taken a more relaxed approach to the content of ‘Shoah’ – and to the national exhibitions

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<sup>81</sup> Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory*, 66-7.

<sup>82</sup> “Ethical-Cultural Dimension,” *Yad Vashem*.

<sup>83</sup> Walsh, “The Web,” 229.

<sup>84</sup> Although ceremonies do, of course, take place at the Museum; there are not spaces reserved specifically for these events, unlike the area in the ‘Shoah’ pavilion.

<sup>85</sup> Author conversation with Paweł Sawicki, 17 May 2016; author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

more generally – as they are not included in the basic guided tours.<sup>86</sup> Far fewer visitors will pass through them, meaning the majority will receive a standardised narrative that focuses on Auschwitz and not themes or events that lie outside its history. Those that do visit the national exhibitions are often educational groups, particularly young people, exploring the Museum on a deeper level.<sup>87</sup> In the digital age, the use of such technology may help to engage these younger visitors, providing their educators with ‘a tool to use, because using the videos that people respond to is a possibility [for the educator] to talk about many other things’.<sup>88</sup> Around the wider site, however, implementation of digital technology is seen to compromise and distract from the site’s authenticity, as will be discussed later.

Ultimately, however, there is a separation between the permanent exhibition and the ‘Shoah’ exhibition because the national pavilions are treated as separate entities within the Museum space. The national exhibitions are not curated or designed by Museum staff; although the Museum must check and approve the historical information contained within them, all other factors are at the discretion of the external committees representing the relevant country or group.<sup>89</sup> ‘The national pavilions,’ according to Paweł Sawicki, ‘are *not our exhibitions*’; thus, the Museum’s preferred curatorial methods do not apply.<sup>90</sup> This rhetoric has also been applied to temporary exhibitions that have been displayed in the former laundry building in Auschwitz I in recent years. Examples include touchscreens as part of the NS-Dokumentationszentrum Köln’s exhibition ‘Auschwitz: Death Factory’, hosted by the Museum in 2016 (Figure 2.6), and video installations as part of the 2017 exhibition ‘The Engineers of the ‘Final Solution’: *Topf & Söhne* – Builders of the Auschwitz Ovens’.<sup>91</sup> The latter was created by the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, in

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<sup>86</sup> “Guided Tours Options,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/guides> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>87</sup> This is evident from the ‘selected national exhibitions’ offered as part of the Museum’s one- or two-day study tours. *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>89</sup> “National Exhibitions,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*; author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018; Bohdan Rymaszewski, *Generations Should Remember* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2003), 101; “Discussion,” in *Preserving for the Future: Material from an International Preservation Conference, Oświęcim, June 23 – 25, 2003*, ed. Krystyna Marszałek, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2004), 125; author’s visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 4 July 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018 (emphasis added).

<sup>91</sup> Gideon Greif and Peter Siebers, *Todesfabrik Auschwitz: Topografie und Alltag in einem Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager = Death Factory Auschwitz: Topography and Everyday Life in a Concentration and Extermination camp = Fabryka śmierci Auschwitz: topografia i życie codzienne w obozie koncentracyjnym i zagłady* (Köln: Emons, 2016); Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2016* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2017), 19.



Figure 2.6. Part of the ‘Auschwitz: Death Factory’ exhibition in situ at the Auschwitz Museum, including one of several touchscreens. Source: NS-Dokumentationszentrum Köln.

connection with the Auschwitz Museum and the Jewish Museum Berlin.<sup>92</sup> The Museum’s ‘Voice’ does not affect this content as it is externally produced and designed.<sup>93</sup> In this way, each national pavilion and temporary exhibition can be interpreted as a micro-museum within the larger Museum complex. Micro-museums are generally defined as small, independent museums, concentrating on topics more specialised than those in larger institutions and not sponsored or government funded.<sup>94</sup> Here, however, the term describes smaller museums within a larger institution, each established by a different committee and design team, but still in the care of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Additionally, as the only national pavilion prepared by another Holocaust education institution, ‘Shoah’ serves as a remote, European extension of Israel’s Yad Vashem. The Auschwitz Museum can therefore distance itself from these national and temporary exhibitions, and the digital technology used within them, because they are not an integral part of the institution. Furthermore, the inclusion of

<sup>92</sup> “The Exhibition ‘The Engineers of the ‘Final Solution’. Topf & Sons - Builders of the Auschwitz Ovens’,” *Topf & Söhne*, online at: [https://www.topfundsoehne.de/ts/en/exhibitions/permanent\\_exhibitions/the\\_engineers/index.html](https://www.topfundsoehne.de/ts/en/exhibitions/permanent_exhibitions/the_engineers/index.html) (accessed 28 June 2020); Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2017* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2018), 9.

<sup>93</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018 (emphasis added).

<sup>94</sup> Fiona Candlin, *Micromuseology: An Analysis of Small Independent Museums* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 1; Helen Gregory and Kirsty T. Robertson, “No Small Matter: Micromuseums as Critical Institutions,” *Canadian Art Review* 43:2 (2018): 90.

exhibitions curated by other organisations appears as a relaxing of the Auschwitz Museum’s authoritative voice, though this is firmly retained regarding visitors’ experiences around the rest of the site.

Although there are digital elements on the Museum grounds, then, this is not a direct adaptation to the digital museum by the Auschwitz Museum. Other external organisations are permitted to use modern technologies to express their narratives, whilst the Museum is seen to retain its policy of originality and authenticity in relation to the areas it curates.

### **Scanning Auschwitz: QR Codes and Survivors’ Voices**

The Museum is not wholly without digital technology in its principal space, however. In May 2015, a series of QR codes were unveiled at six significant points in both Auschwitz I and Birkenau (Figure 2.7): in Auschwitz I, these appear near the ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ gate and the roll-call square; in Birkenau, QR codes can be found at the unloading ramp, the entrances to the men’s and women’s camps, and the gas chambers and crematoria.<sup>95</sup> These were added to



Figure 2.7. A QR code next to the ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ gate, Auschwitz I.

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<sup>95</sup> Paweł Sawicki, “Testimonies of Auschwitz Survivors Available in the Authentic Space of the Memorial,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/testimonies-of-auschwitz-survivors-available-in-the-authentic-space-of-the-memorial,1156.html> (last modified 29 May 2015); author’s visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 4 July 2019.

the site as a result of discussions with groups including Auschwitz survivors' associations.<sup>96</sup> When standing near a code, visitors can connect to a remote Wi-Fi network (allowing access only to the relevant webpages) and scan the code to load videos of survivor testimonies. Most videos correspond to events that took place within the vicinity of the code's location, or present aspects of the survivor's experiences as a prisoner (such as sleeping conditions or their work detail). These are currently available in Polish, English and French.<sup>97</sup> Some of the videos were filmed onsite, whilst others appear to have been recorded in the survivor's home, and include testimonies filmed by organisations such as Yad Vashem and *Union des déportés d'Auschwitz* (Union of Auschwitz Deportees).<sup>98</sup>

The content revealed by the QR codes adds an important dimension to the visitor experience at the Museum. Whilst the tour guides do tell stories related to prisoners, and the Museum bookshops are stocked with survivor memoirs, there is otherwise no opportunity for many visitors to hear about survival in Auschwitz from the perspective of someone who experienced the camp whilst it was operational. This is despite the fact that the Museum acknowledges survivor testimony as an additional facet to its own authenticity.<sup>99</sup> The voice of the survivors is almost entirely absent from the Museum's permanent collection; it is exhibited only through former prisoner Mieczysław Kościelniak's series of drawings, *A Day in the Life of a Prisoner*, and photographs of anonymous, emaciated prisoners recently liberated from the camp (and those who are shown in these pictures may not have survived much past early 1945).<sup>100</sup> When the Museum first opened, the guides themselves were survivors of Auschwitz; more than 70 years later, however, most are now too old and frail to return to the site.<sup>101</sup> In their absence, the video testimonies – like the 'Shoah' exhibition – bring the history of the site to life, and acknowledge the survival of prisoners whilst also

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<sup>96</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>97</sup> The limited choice of available languages is a result of the institutions involved in the project, namely the Auschwitz Museum, Yad Vashem and the French Union of Auschwitz Deportees. Sawicki, "Testimonies"; "Meeting XXIV: June 17-18, 2013," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/auschwitz-council/iac-meetings/meeting-xxiv-june-17-18-2013,22.html> (last modified 21 June 2013).

<sup>98</sup> "'Arbeit Macht Frei' Gate," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau* (QR link), online at: <http://qr.auschwitz.org/e1277a548c95dc86dd6cd2a27e4cbb64> (accessed 5 July 2019). Available onsite only.

<sup>99</sup> Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>100</sup> Immediately after liberation, several Soviet field hospitals and a Polish Red Cross hospital were established on the former camp grounds. Jacek Lachendro, *Auschwitz after Liberation*, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 58-60; see also Andrzej Strzelecki, "The Liquidation of the Camp," in *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp: Epilogue*, ed. Danuta Czech et al., trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2000), 5:48-50.

<sup>101</sup> Lachendro, *Auschwitz after Liberation*, 222.

commemorating those who were murdered in the camp.<sup>102</sup>

The use of onsite technology such as QR codes can provide visitors with greater access to educational materials as they tour the grounds. As previously discussed, installations and apps have been, and are being, developed for use at other sites connected to the Holocaust. Although the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum differs from the examples given at the beginning of this chapter in terms of size, preservation and location, there are elements of each which could benefit onsite learning and experience. For example, the QR codes could be used as a gateway to discovering more about survivors' experiences before the war, similar to the IWalk and Oshpitzin apps, which would require no modifications to the permanent exhibition. Furthermore, the lack of time for pausing and absorbing sights or information is a common criticism of the Auschwitz Museum's guided tours; the inclusion and promotion of an app or the QR codes, then, may provide this chance to visitors wishing to view the site alone, or once their tour has finished.<sup>103</sup> This would also result in a break from the Museum's 'Unassailable Voice' and allow visitors a greater interaction with, and perhaps deeper understanding of, the former camp.<sup>104</sup> As an online reservation is now required to guarantee entry to the Museum, the availability of the QR codes could be highlighted as part of this process.<sup>105</sup> Alternatively, as the end of this chapter will discuss, visitors are already bringing their own digital devices to the Museum to capture elements of their visit that they deem significant. This could be utilised in a similar way to the 'Tweetups' conducted at the Dachau and Neuengamme Memorials, which would in turn fulfil the Museum's desire to interact more with those who cannot visit the site in person (as discussed in the next chapter).

All these possibilities are available to the Auschwitz Museum, yet their implementation is very unlikely. The Museum is concerned that too many digital elements

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<sup>102</sup> In keeping with the general narrative of the Auschwitz Museum, the survivors do not discuss their lives before or after their imprisonment, so the focus remains on the history of the site itself.

<sup>103</sup> For examples, see Nic Hilditch-Short, "Reflections on Auschwitz and How to Visit," *The Roaming Renegades* (blog), online at: <https://theroamingrenegades.com/reflections-on-auschwitz-how-to-get-there> (last modified 28 October 2018); "Visiting Auschwitz Concentration Camps, Travel Tips & Tourist Information," *Screw the Average* (blog), online at: <https://screwtheaverage.com/blog/visit-auschwitz-concentration-camp-poland-online-tickets-tour-tips> (last modified 10 November 2018). Furthermore, many reviews of the Museum describing the tour as 'rushed' and 'hurried' with 'no time to reflect' can be found in the 'Average', 'Poor' and 'Terrible' categories of the Museum's TripAdvisor page. "Panstwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau," *TripAdvisor*, online at: [https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction\\_Review-g274754-d275831-Reviews-Panstwowe\\_Muzeum\\_Auschwitz\\_Birkenau-Oswiecim\\_Lesser\\_Poland\\_Province\\_Southern\\_Polan.html](https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g274754-d275831-Reviews-Panstwowe_Muzeum_Auschwitz_Birkenau-Oswiecim_Lesser_Poland_Province_Southern_Polan.html) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>104</sup> Walsh, "The Web," 229.

<sup>105</sup> Given that it is part of the Museum's official website and is visitor-oriented, the online booking process is considered an aspect of the digital museum.

would encourage visitors to see the site only through their smartphone or tablet screen, which would ‘disturb [the] experience’ and distract them from the physical exhibits.<sup>106</sup> The use of personal digital devices means that, to some extent, this is already happening, but the Museum does not wish to officially sanction this behaviour through adding its own digital technologies. This is already apparent from the absence of promotion and maintenance of the QR codes. The Museum acknowledges that the codes are somewhat outdated, and that those currently positioned around the site are almost ‘invisible’ to most visitors.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, during fieldwork, the author’s testing of the QR codes prompted many looks of confusion from visitors, and some were later seen examining the sides of other information panels, presumably looking for more codes.<sup>108</sup> For these reasons, it appears that the majority of individual visitors (those without a guide, or those who stay onsite after their tour) do not use the QR codes.<sup>109</sup> At the Museum’s own seventieth anniversary conference in 2017, the question was raised as to whether the codes had been removed from the Museum altogether, so unnoticeable is their presence.<sup>110</sup> Despite these difficulties, however, the Museum does not work to promote the codes in any significant way. In fact, it is clear that visitors are discouraged from using them; unlike the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, the Museum does not offer to loan devices with which the codes can be viewed, meaning the visitor can only access these testimonies if they have brought their own compatible device.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the localised Wi-Fi network, ‘QR Memorial’, is not well maintained, as the signal is extremely intermittent and some codes do not load at all.<sup>112</sup> Visitors to the Museum are not informed about the presence of QR codes at any point during the reservation process or as part of their tour. One can therefore conclude that the Museum felt obligated to install the QR codes, particularly after its discussions with survivors’ associations, but would rather forget about their presence.

Therefore, although visitors are technically provided with an option to engage with

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<sup>106</sup> Author conversation with Sawicki, 17 May 2016; author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>108</sup> Author’s visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 4 July 2019.

<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, several emails to the Museum regarding these statistics went unanswered.

<sup>110</sup> ICEAH Director Andrzej Kacorzyk confirmed that the codes were still in place, but admitted that very few visitors find or use them. Anna Miszewska et al., summary panel of the Awareness – Responsibility – Future International Education Conference, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 4-5 July 2017.

<sup>111</sup> One must consider, however, the number of visitors at the Auschwitz Museum annually compared to the Bergen-Belsen Memorial – over two million and 250,000 respectively – and the subsequent need for tickets, security checks and distribution of headphones. Not only would it be difficult and expensive to provide digital devices for visitors, but it would also add yet another element to the entry process. “Visiting,” *Gedenkstätte Bergen-Belsen*, online at: <https://bergen-belsen.stiftung-ng.de/en/your-visit> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>112</sup> Author’s visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 4 July 2019.

the digital museum onsite, it is kept as subtle and understated as possible. In the words of Sawicki, this is primarily to ensure that those onsite do not ‘go [around] for three hours with their telephones or tablets covering their eyes, [so] that they would not notice anything around them’.<sup>113</sup> This control and expectation of visitor behaviour again relates to the Museum’s authoritative voice; that, in order for visitors to truly *see* and understand the site, they must follow a prescribed way of looking, and be dissuaded from more explorative methods such as tactile interaction with digital devices. Thus, although the QR codes present an opportunity for a form of adaptation to the digital museum onsite, they appear to have been installed only as a token gesture towards a more modern museological approach. The Museum’s lack of promotion of the codes further indicates their resistance towards digital content being used in the physical space.

### **The ‘Authentic Site’**

The Auschwitz Museum already includes onsite aspects of the digital museum, yet either distances the wider institution from them or does not mention them to its visitors. What is the reason for this determined avoidance? The Museum’s reluctance is justified by Director Piotr Cywiński, who has previously stated:

Here there should not be any of the multimedia interactivity, technical and educational novelties so popular in other museums, including historical museums. These would be miserably ineffective attempts, blocking out the natural spirit of the Place, of no use to the historical record or those visiting. People do not come here to see the most interactive screen in the world. But if such a screen were installed, it would only hinder experiencing what is most important. It would conceal the truth and therefore have to be removed.<sup>114</sup>

Here, the ‘concealment of truth’ refers to the Museum’s sole defence against modern additions or modifications to its content – the preservation of ‘the authentic site’.<sup>115</sup> This phrase – or similar – can be found throughout the Museum’s annual reports, online content and publications, and refers to the curatorial authenticity bestowed upon the grounds and all buildings and artefacts included therein.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 91.

<sup>115</sup> The Museum’s ‘second’ authenticity of survivor testimony is not explored here, as the present discussion concerns physical museological practices. Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Recent examples include Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2019*, 41, 77, 85; “Mission Statement,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/education/iceah-general-information/mission->

One of the conditions for sites to be added to the UNESCO World Heritage List is that each ‘should meet the test of *authenticity* in design, materials, workmanship and setting’; presumably, the Museum’s 1979 inclusion has helped to emphasise its claim to authenticity, without this term being fully explored.<sup>117</sup> The authenticity of the Auschwitz Museum has also been mentioned or acknowledged in scholarly works without interrogation as to what this concept actually means contextually.<sup>118</sup> The following sections shall therefore analyse notions of the site’s authenticity, before considering how the Museum’s theories correspond to those of its visitors.

Authenticity at the Museum is here examined through three primary factors. The first is which time period the Museum is designed to most closely represent. Arguably, the quest to keep the site ‘authentic’ was lost before the grounds even opened as a museum. As Huener states, ‘One need only consider the sheer size of the grounds, the disastrous material conditions in war-torn Poland, the lack of funds for preservation work, and the inability – despite the presence of armed guards – to protect Birkenau from looters.’<sup>119</sup> The Soviet authorities in charge of the site after its liberation also burned down some barracks in Birkenau to control the spread of disease, or stripped them and sold off the materials.<sup>120</sup> It was not until 1957 that the Museum produced its first conservation plan for the entire grounds, although thorough landscape maintenance (especially around Birkenau) did not take place until the 1980s.<sup>121</sup>

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statement (accessed 28 June 2020), “Preserving Authenticity: Nine Tasks for the Years 2012-2015,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/preservation/projects-eu/project-auschwitz-preserving-authenticity> (accessed 28 June 2020). See also Julia Röttjer, “Safeguarding “Negative Historical Values” for the Future? Appropriating the Past in the UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site Auschwitz-Birkenau,” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2015): 156n87.

<sup>117</sup> UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, Paris, 1977 (CC-77/CONF.001/8 Rev. Paris, 20 October 1977), online at: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/1977/cc-77-conf001-8reve.pdf>, 3 (accessed 28 June 2020) (emphasis added).

<sup>118</sup> For instance, see Jonathan Webber, “Making Sense of the Holocaust in Contemporary Poland: The Real and the Imagined, the Contradictions and the Paradoxes,” *Jednak Książki* 6 (2016): 15; Isabel Wollaston, “Negotiating the Marketplace: The Role(s) of Holocaust Museums Today,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4:1 (2005): 66; Tanja Schult, “To Go or Not to Go? Reflections on the Iconic Status of Auschwitz, its Increasing Distance and Prevailing Urgency,” in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era*, ed. Diana I. Popescu and Tanja Schult (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 121. The Auschwitz Museum’s authenticity in regard to its inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List is considered in more detail in Röttjer, “Safeguarding,” 130-65.

<sup>119</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 63.

<sup>120</sup> Jacek Małczyński, “The Politics of Nature at the Former Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 22:2 (2020): 199; Young, *Texture of Memory*, 128.

<sup>121</sup> Małczyński, “Politics of Nature,” 205.

Since then, the Museum has made a concerted effort to make the site appear authentic; in the early 1990s a plan was drawn up ‘to re-create as far as possible and within acceptable limits the built environment of the camp in 1943/44’, particularly concerning its landscaping.<sup>122</sup> This has included the refurbishment and preservation of certain key buildings, chemical weeding and conservation of trees that have stood since at least the 1940s. Conversely, the ruins of the gas chambers (destroyed in late 1944 and early 1945) have been left intact, whilst the absence of wild flowers and presence of vast grasslands stand in contradiction to survivor testimony regarding how Birkenau appeared during the camp’s operation.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, however, the degree to which authenticity can exist at all in a site that simultaneously ‘presents and represents history’, through its original and contemporary purposes, must be considered.<sup>124</sup> Whilst stressing the authenticity of the site, it is important to note that the Museum acknowledges that it is *not* ‘Auschwitz’ (though many visitors refer to it as such), frequently underlining the grounds as ‘the Memorial Site’ or ‘the post-camp space’.<sup>125</sup> This does, however, call into question the necessity of conducting works to make aspects of the site appear as they did during the camp’s operation.

Secondly, the boundary between the Museum and the outside world is a point of contention regarding the Museum’s authenticity. Cywiński himself admits, ‘From the very beginning the Museum was to be a symbol representing the whole. *Pars pro toto*,’ hence the demolition of the former Auschwitz-Monowitz site and more than 40 other sub-camps.<sup>126</sup> In many cases, there remains no sign that these satellite camps ever existed. After its inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List, a 300-metre ‘zone of protection’ around the former camps was extended to 1,000 metres, intended to create a ‘silent zone [...] to make the area

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<sup>122</sup> Andrew Charlesworth and Michael Addis, “Memorialisation and the Ecological Landscapes of Holocaust Sites: The Cases of Auschwitz and Płaszów,” *Landscape Research* 27 (2002): 239-40. See also Bohdan Rymaszewski, “The Limits of Intervention in Museum and Conservation Practice at the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum,” in *Preserving for the Future: Material from an International Preservation Conference, Oświęcim, June 23 – 25, 2003*, ed. Krystyna Marszałek, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2004), 24-34.

<sup>123</sup> Andrew Charlesworth, “The Topography of Genocide,” in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 222; Charlesworth and Addis, “Memorialisation,” 247; see Kitty Hart, *Return to Auschwitz* (London: Panther Books, 1985), 154-5.

<sup>124</sup> Alasdair Richardson, “Site-Seeing: Reflections on Visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum with Teenagers,” *Holocaust Studies* (2019), 3, online at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1625121> (emphasis in original).

<sup>125</sup> Webber, “Making Sense,” 13; Bartyzel and Sawicki, *Report 2017*, 13, 23.

<sup>126</sup> Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 71. See also Małczyński, “Politics of Nature,” 203-5.

surrounding the camp much as it was during the occupation'.<sup>127</sup> Yet the creation of hotels, restaurants and souvenir shops only several hundred metres from the entrance to Auschwitz I attests to this goal's failure. As Victoria Nesfield argues, 'the most frequently encountered narratives of the Holocaust do not prepare the visitor for the dual function to the site as it is presented now'.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, many visitors express surprise (and, often, disapproval) at the large crowds around the Museum.<sup>129</sup>

Furthermore, even that which remains of the camp does not encompass the whole of Auschwitz I or Birkenau; some former barracks near Auschwitz I, for instance, have been repurposed for low-income housing.<sup>130</sup> Visitors arriving at the car park to Auschwitz I do not realise they are actually already in the middle of the site as it was in 1945.<sup>131</sup> The iconicity of the famous entrance gates – established from early post-war Soviet photography and developed as *the* symbols of the genocide – has misled the public regarding the boundaries and total area of the camps. As Dan Stone states, 'These things were of course important parts of the camp, yet they are not the camp but only how we wish to keep seeing it' (and, given the infamy that has built around them, perhaps also how the Museum wishes us to keep seeing it).<sup>132</sup> Thus, noble though the intention to keep such a large area silent and uninhabited may be – presumably not just for purposes of authenticity, but as a sign of respect for the nature of the site – the contemporary Museum must also balance its maintenance and protection with spatial practicalities and the lives of nearby residents, who already face the challenge of living in a town associated with genocide.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Röttjer, "Safeguarding," 157; UNESCO, "World Heritage List: Nomination Submitted by Poland; Auschwitz Concentration Camps," (CC.77/WS/64. Warsaw, 6 June 1978), online at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000037749> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>128</sup> Victoria Nesfield, "Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant in a Changing Landscape: Seventy Years On," *Research in Education* 94 (2015): 47-8.

<sup>129</sup> For examples, see "Everything You Need to Know about Visiting Auschwitz," *Rucksack Ramblings* (blog), online at: <https://www.rucksackramblings.com/visiting-auschwitz-faq> (last modified 23 August 2016); "Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau," *Travelling with Nikki* (blog), online at: <https://www.travellingwithnikki.com/2017/10/visiting-auschwitz-birkenau> (last modified 28 October 2018). Online resources could help reduce visitor numbers and, therefore, the rate of conservation works; this would, however, contradict the Museum's emphasis on travelling to the site to truly understand the history of Auschwitz.

<sup>130</sup> Dwork and van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 358.

<sup>131</sup> Dwork and van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 358.

<sup>132</sup> Dan Stone, "Chaos and Continuity: Representations of Auschwitz," in *Representations of Auschwitz: 50 Years of Photographs, Paintings and Graphics*, ed. Yasmin Doosry (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 1995), 29.

<sup>133</sup> See, for example, Zygmunt Kruczek and Agnieszka Nowak, "A Town Overshadowed by a Museum: Problems of Tourism Development in Oświęcim," *Tourism* 29:1 (2019): 43-51; Cristina Maria Andriani and Jody Russell Manning, "'Negotiating with the Dead': On the Past of Auschwitz and the Present of Oświęcim," *Psychology and Society* 3:1 (2010): 42-58.

The third factor regarding notions of authenticity relates to the buildings, ruins and artefacts stored and conserved at the Museum. Across both sites, the Preservation Department is responsible for the conservation of 155 buildings, over 300 ruins, 3,600 concrete fence posts and two kilometres of railway track, amongst other physical and environmental remains.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, thousands of ‘movable objects’, once belonging to both victims and perpetrators, remain in the Museum’s collections.<sup>135</sup> The preservation of these structures and artefacts means, according to Sawicki, that ‘people can come here and they can understand what happened here, even without much explanation. This is the power of authenticity.’<sup>136</sup>

Thousands of victims’ personal possessions are displayed within the Museum, almost wholly in Auschwitz I.<sup>137</sup> They are framed in a narrative of extermination and plunder by large-scale photographs from *The Auschwitz Album*, their significance explained by the Museum tour guides and a few panels of text.<sup>138</sup> In contrast to Sawicki’s assertion, however, the exhibition was curated this way due to the aforementioned concerns that those with no knowledge of this history would not understand the differing functions of the main camps.<sup>139</sup> Similarly, piles of everyday items can only be interpreted as witnesses to the genocide of millions if their provenance is properly contextualised for the visitor.<sup>140</sup> Given the ruinous state of Birkenau compared to the solid brick-and-mortar buildings in the main camp, and the post-war narrative of the former as ‘the voice of silence’, it is easy to see why Auschwitz I would be chosen as the exhibition section of the Museum.<sup>141</sup> Yet a large number of the objects on display were discovered in Birkenau, where the majority of the extermination process took place. The relocation of this property, therefore, and its permanent storage in the

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<sup>134</sup> Teresa Świebocka, Jadwiga Pinderska-Lech, and Jarko Mensfelt, *Auschwitz-Birkenau: The Past and the Present*, trans. Adam Czasak (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2011), 14-5; “Preservation,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/preservation> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>135</sup> Piotr M. A. Cywiński and Magdalena Emilewicz-Pióro, preface to *Auschwitz Legacies*, ed. Magdalena Emilewicz-Pióro and Piotr M. A. Cywiński, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 4.

<sup>136</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>137</sup> The main exceptions are an exhibition of photographs in Birkenau’s so-called Sauna building, opened in 2001, and a small glass case in the former *Kanada* complex containing items that have been found in the area since liberation. “Sauna Building Open to Visitors. New Permanent Exhibition,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/sauna-building-open-to-visitors-new-permanent-exhibition,252.html> (last modified 24 April 2001).

<sup>138</sup> Gutman and Gutterman, *Auschwitz Album*.

<sup>139</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 120.

<sup>140</sup> Jonathan Webber, “Foreword,” in *Representations of Auschwitz, 50 Years of Photographs, Paintings and Graphics*, ed. Yasmin Doosry (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 1995), 10.

<sup>141</sup> Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland*, 140.

main camp may call notions of authenticity into question.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, objects belonging to survivors that have since been donated to the Museum have also been relocated. Perhaps a child's jumper, for example, or a rosary made of bread loses its perceived authenticity if it has not remained onsite since liberation.

The final point regarding structures and artefacts, and their authenticity, concerns the conservation works to which they have been subjected. Several barracks, for example, have been dismantled, cleaned, reinforced and chemically treated.<sup>143</sup> Various preservation methods have also been applied to other structures throughout the site, whilst victims' possessions are routinely cleaned and treated to slow their deterioration.<sup>144</sup>

Bohdan Rymaszewski, former Head of the International Auschwitz Council Preservation Committee, wrote that conservation of the Auschwitz site adheres to the principle of "conserve, not restore." It is an unequivocal rejection of reconstruction.<sup>145</sup> Yet Rymaszewski contradicts himself by discussing the reconstructed chimney on top of the gas chamber in Auschwitz I in the same book.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, since its theft and dismantling in December 2009, a replica of the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gate has hung in place of the original.<sup>147</sup> In the immediate post-war period, strict guidelines regarding reconstruction at the site had not been established; furthermore, the survivors involved in creating the Museum wanted visitors to see 'the instruments of crime' for themselves.<sup>148</sup> Yet the Auschwitz Museum is not always transparent in highlighting these reconstructions to its visitors during guided tours. This may be out of fear of accusations from deniers; alternatively, perhaps knowing the infamous

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<sup>142</sup> A conscious decision was taken not to create a formal museological exhibition at Birkenau, however, 'in consideration of the fact that the majority of Auschwitz victims were murdered [there]'. Świebocka, Pinderska-Lech, and Mensfelt, *Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 23.

<sup>143</sup> Bartosz Bartyzel, Jarek Mensfelt, and Gabriela Nikliborc, eds., *To Preserve Authenticity: The Conservation of Five Wooden Barracks at the Former Auschwitz II-Birkenau Concentration Camp* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2012), 11-5.

<sup>144</sup> See Rymaszewski, *Generations*, 125-32.

<sup>145</sup> Rymaszewski, *Generations*, 83.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>147</sup> The original gate is currently held in the Preservation Department. "'Arbeit Macht Frei' Sign Stolen – 100,000 PLN Reward," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/arbeit-macht-frei-sign-stolen-100-000-pln-reward,652.html> (last modified 18 December 2009); "'Arbeit Macht Frei' Sign Found," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/arbeit-macht-frei-sign-found,654.html> (last modified 21 December 2009); "Conservationists at the Memorial Put the Arbeit Macht Frei Sign Back Together," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/conservationists-at-the-memorial-put-the-arbeit-macht-frei-sign-back-together,826.html> (last modified 18 May 2011).

<sup>148</sup> Rymaszewski, *Generations*, 95.

‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ gate is not original would affect the museumgoer’s perception of the ‘authentic site’.<sup>149</sup>

The UNESCO criteria for authenticity states that, ‘authenticity does not limit consideration to original form and structure, but includes all subsequent modifications and additions, over the course of time, which in themselves possess artistic or historical values’.<sup>150</sup> The question remains, however, as to how authentic these items can be considered if they have been dis- and reassembled, and/or exposed to chemical processes, many of which would not have been available during the camp’s operation. This is particularly significant given the fact that the Museum strives to use the same materials used in the construction of the camp wherever possible.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, whereas the SS had little concern for the items left behind, as they were of minimal financial value, these are now stored in museum displays and conservation studios using carefully controlled lighting and temperature regulators.<sup>152</sup>

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum holds many elements of curatorial authenticity; that is, aspects that are historically and scientifically original or intrinsically connected to the site’s history. Yet the issue of authenticity at the Museum is clearly complex and multi-layered. It is difficult to know how best to define such a term when it encompasses so many elements and has so many different interpretations. Perhaps Jonathan Webber’s reflections on Holocaust memory in contemporary Poland – its ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ elements, as well as its ‘contradictions and [...] paradoxes’ – are also applicable to notions of authenticity at the Auschwitz Museum.<sup>153</sup> Alternatively, one might simplify this theory of the ‘authentic site’ to focus solely on the geographical locations occupied by Auschwitz I and Birkenau. As this discussion has demonstrated, the term ‘authentic’ cannot be applied as a one-size-fits-all concept to cover every aspect of the Museum and its maintenance. The concept of authenticity, however, is undoubtedly utilised by the Museum to assert its authority as a prominent site of Holocaust remembrance, as a symbol of the genocide, and an example of how the visitor should view, respect and (attempt to) understand its history.

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<sup>149</sup> For more examples of ‘simulacra’ around the site, see Chris Keil, “Sightseeing in the Mansions of the Dead,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 6:4 (2005): 490.

<sup>150</sup> UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines*, 3.

<sup>151</sup> Guided tour of Auschwitz I with Paweł Sawicki, 17 May 2016.

<sup>152</sup> Rymaszewski, *Generations*, 124.

<sup>153</sup> Webber, “Making Sense,” 24-5.

## There, But Not There

Most museum visitors and tourists ‘entertain concepts of ‘authenticity’ which are much looser than those entertained by intellectuals and experts, such as curators and anthropologists’.<sup>154</sup> This is not to belittle the tourist or visitor experience, but it does highlight that the notion of authenticity and its interpretation is likely to be of less concern to those visiting the Auschwitz Museum, particularly in light of the complexities and contradictions just discussed.

No two visitors will experience the Auschwitz Museum in the same way. Factors such as age, nationality, pre-existing knowledge about the Holocaust and even personal preferences can result in people within the same tour group interpreting their visit very differently. In terms of the site itself, as Julia Röttjer states, ‘What is perceived as “authentic” in a particular section [...] or the site as a whole depends on the prioritized narrative and functional context’; some may interpret neatly mown grass, for instance, as ‘fitting’ in the same way lawns are kept short in English graveyards, whilst others may find this aspect too sanitised.<sup>155</sup> Visitors travel to historical sites for ‘an unmediated encounter with history’, which is often not possible due to methods of preservation or, in the case of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the changing landscape of the site over the decades.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, as Penrose argues, it is not just about the Museum itself, but aspects such as who accompanies the individual to the Museum; others’ reactions; and moments that may resonate individually due to a visitor’s background, culture or personal experiences.<sup>157</sup>

Further research is required to establish precisely how visitors interpret the Museum’s authenticity, but the current literature suggests that the simpler designation of the ‘authentic site’ as relating to its physical, geographical location is one way to understand visitors’ perceptions. For many, it is evident that simply being on the site itself constitutes an authentic experience. Even if authentic experiences are hard to define, as Paul Williams argues, the ‘experiential sense of some shade of existential transformation is known when it is felt’, and this is perhaps best encapsulated by visitors’ reactions to visiting the physical grounds.<sup>158</sup> In

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<sup>154</sup> Erik Cohen, “Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 15 (1988): 383.

<sup>155</sup> Röttjer, “Safeguarding,” 155.

<sup>156</sup> Diana Barthel, “Getting in Touch with History: The Role of Historic Preservation in Shaping Collective Memories,” *Qualitative Sociology* 19:3 (1996): 345.

<sup>157</sup> Jan Penrose, “Authenticity, Authentication and Experiential Authenticity: Telling Stories in Museums,” *Social and Cultural Geography* 21:9 (2020), 1252.

<sup>158</sup> Paul Williams, “Hailing the Cosmopolitan Conscience: Memorial Museums in a Global Age,” in *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed. Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 230.

his study of young backpackers visiting the Auschwitz Museum, for example, Thomas Thurnell-Read found that almost all those interviewed stressed the visit itself as being integral to furthering their understanding of the Holocaust.<sup>159</sup> “I just think there was something about walking the same path that someone else did on the way to death, the judgment, the execution, right there,” commented one participant, whilst another said, “You stop and think, on this exact spot...this is where it happened [...] this is what everyone talks about [...] right here[,] or every piece of literature you read is talking about this.”<sup>160</sup> Similarly, writing about his personal experience of visiting, psychologist Jon Mills stated that, ‘When one is standing on this land, in the flesh, one’s reason is embattled by an obscene refusal to believe this was possible, a grotesque reality the mind is not prepared to encounter. *Who could do this to other human beings?*’<sup>161</sup>

The significance of a physical visit to the site has also been upheld by educational organisations. The premise of the Holocaust Educational Trust’s ‘Lessons from Auschwitz’ (LFA) Project – which has taken almost 40,000 students and teachers to the site since 1999 – is that ‘hearing is not like seeing’, suggesting that young people can only truly understand the Holocaust (and its undefined ‘lessons’) if they visit a place such as Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>162</sup> Furthermore, in 2012 the Auschwitz Museum acknowledged this impact by publishing a book of photographs, *The Place Where You Are Standing*, contrasting photographs from *The Auschwitz Album* with contemporary images, taken from exactly the same spot and viewpoint wherever possible.<sup>163</sup>

Scholars have also stressed the importance of corporeal encounters with sites such as Auschwitz. Adam Musiał notes that ‘visitors often feel that the remembrance site they are visiting speaks to them, and in places of such liminal and extreme historical experience as Auschwitz, the awareness of pain is more acute’.<sup>164</sup> The material elements of the site are also integral to the visitor. James Young writes of the ‘magic of ruins’ that are ‘seemingly charged with past events’, whilst artist and writer Paul Antick observes:

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<sup>159</sup> Thomas Thurnell-Read, “Engaging Auschwitz,” 42.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 40, 43.

<sup>161</sup> Jon Mills, “On Found Objects: Reflections on Auschwitz,” *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* 12:2 (2015): 222 (emphasis in original).

<sup>162</sup> “Lessons from Auschwitz Project,” *Holocaust Educational Trust*, online at: <https://www.het.org.uk/lessons-from-auschwitz-programme> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>163</sup> Paweł Sawicki, ed., *Auschwitz-Birkenau: The Place Where You Are Standing...* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2012); Gutman and Gutterman, *Auschwitz Album*.

<sup>164</sup> Adam Musiał, “An Online Lesson Preparing for a Visit to the Auschwitz Memorial: The Authors’ Reflections and Remarks,” in *Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust at Authentic Memorial Sites: Current Status and Future Prospects*, ed. Piotr Trojański (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2019), 129-30.

One can run one's fingers along the rough stone walls of the women's barracks at Birkenau, stand alone in what was once a gas chamber at Majdanek, traipse around an empty field that is all that remains of the death camp at Chelmno. As if, in short, one really is there, which of course, in one sense...Where one is, in fact, is at the representational epicenter of what is now, literally, no longer present; incarceration, humiliation, slaughter, genocide.<sup>165</sup>

There is, therefore, at least one element to experiential authenticity at the Auschwitz Museum that concerns simply being in the place where these historical events occurred.

Antick, however, raises an important issue concerning experiential authenticity at former Nazi camps. An authentic experience does not translate to an empathetic experience or a reconstructed historical experience. Authentic experience is not related to what the visitor thinks imprisonment in the camp would have been like; notions of authenticity rely solely on the visitor as they are experiencing the Museum for themselves. Yet the other most prominent feature of visitors' expressions of experiential authenticity concerns the emotional impact of the stories they are told during their tour around the Museum and, at times, identification with the victims. Alison Landsberg's example of a 'prosthetic relationship' between visitors and Holocaust victims' shoes best illustrates this point: 'At the very moment that we experience the shoes as *their* shoes – which could very well be *our* shoes – we feel our own shoes on our feet.'<sup>166</sup> The piles of shoes, in their curated presentation, do not necessarily correspond to Landsberg's notion of visitors taking on past memories which they have not lived through, but they do present an opportunity to 'identify with people from the past' and 'emphasize their position in the present' as they learn about this history.<sup>167</sup>

Individualising the victims is also key to visitors' experiences. One museumgoer, for example, took pictures of inmates' photographs as 'I could not believe that the numbers all had a face. [...] I wanted to look at each one, to honour them.'<sup>168</sup> Participants on the LFA Project have similarly been affected by the process of individualisation that the programme and (at times) the Museum try to communicate, with one student commenting, "'Everybody had a life, everybody had a dream. They were all individuals... they all had their own lives.'<sup>169</sup> Thus, experiential authenticity is not only related to the experience of seeing the

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<sup>165</sup> Young, *Texture of Memory*, 119; Paul Antick, *Itourist? Journeys through the Holocaust* (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 2007), 10.

<sup>166</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 135.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>168</sup> Imogen Dalziel, "'Romantic Auschwitz': Examples and Perceptions of Contemporary Visitor Photography at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum," *Holocaust Studies* 22:2-3 (2016): 194.

<sup>169</sup> Richardson, "Site-Seeing," 6.

site and its artefacts in person, but also the affective impression these leave upon the visitor. In this sense, ‘authenticity influences the level of personal identification with, and internalization of and/or embodied connection to, the stories being told’, which can last long after the physical visit and even subsequently shape individuals’ attitudes and perspectives.<sup>170</sup> A moral message of combatting prejudice and intolerance, and refusing to be a bystander, is something that the Museum wishes to impart to its visitors; therefore, the process of individualising the victims and making their lives and stories relatable is perhaps even more important than preservation of the objects they carried with them to Auschwitz.<sup>171</sup>

In her study on the value of objects excavated from Nazi camps, Gilly Carr presents a model demonstrating how the value of a prisoner’s food bowl changes, from an item of survival to an inmate, to a bowl that is either sold by a looter, given to the deceased’s family, or kept in a museum for its ‘pedagogical value’.<sup>172</sup> To the museological outcome should be added the emotional or affective value such an item might have on a visitor to a former camp. The displayed objects are vehicles for the stories, emotions and identification discussed here. For instance, Vicky Wasylewsky took a photograph of a prosthetic leg, initially for aesthetic reasons (“‘This leg was almost white. The rest looked grey, darker. To me it was almost illuminated’”). Soon afterwards, however, she felt unable to take any more photographs: “‘It just hit me that this belonged to someone. Somebody once wore this, stood on this leg [...] it was too much for me to take.’”<sup>173</sup> In a similar example, Penrose’s research into students at the Anne Frank House demonstrated that viewing the places where the events in Frank’s diary had taken place – and particularly the diary itself – was of the utmost importance to them, as it allowed them to feel closer to the teenager, a power that the facsimile diaries sometimes exhibited simply do not possess.<sup>174</sup>

Authenticity for a visitor, then, does not necessarily lie in materiality and physical structures, as it does for the curators and conservationists of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.<sup>175</sup> That is not to say, however, that the buildings and artefacts at the Museum do not have a profound impact on many visitors. They also consider them authentic – one factor in a holistic, authentic experience – but visitors appear to frame their perceptions of such objects

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<sup>170</sup> Penrose, “Authenticity,” 1247.

<sup>171</sup> “Mission Statement,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*; Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1138861412351193089> (last modified 12 June 2019, 10:31am).

<sup>172</sup> Gilly Carr, “The Small Things of Life and Death: An Exploration of Value and Meaning in the Material Culture of Nazi Camps,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 22:3 (2018): 533-5.

<sup>173</sup> Dalziel, “‘Romantic Auschwitz’,” 191.

<sup>174</sup> Penrose, “Authenticity,” 1250.

<sup>175</sup> Imre Kertész, trans. John MacKay, “Who Owns Auschwitz?” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14:1 (2001): 271.

differently. Rather than commenting on, for example, the excellent preservation work that has been conducted, or amazement at how such fragile objects have stood the test of time, the average individual is much more concerned with moving around the historical site itself, and the emotional impact of items such as the personal possessions on display.<sup>176</sup>

### Seeing and Experiencing via the Digital

Although the Auschwitz Museum controls the visitor's experience in terms of curated exhibits, a scripted tour and methods to make the site look more historically authentic, individual perceptions are unique to each museumgoer and thus cannot be prescribed or changed. Moreover, curatorial and experiential authenticity work together, as being in close proximity to historical objects and places produce cognitive and emotional reactions in the visitor. Tensions arise, however, regarding the ways in which some Auschwitz Museum visitors try to encapsulate and solidify their authentic experiences of touring the site.

In 2015, two English schoolboys were arrested, fined and put on trial for attempting to take home items they had found lying around in the former *Kanada* complex, allegedly as 'souvenirs'.<sup>177</sup> Yet both before and after this incident visitors have been caught trying to steal other items from *Kanada*, as well as pieces of barbed wire, bricks and part of the Birkenau railway track.<sup>178</sup> It is difficult to ascertain, particularly between individual cases, the motivation for such thefts. As with some visitors scratching messages into the barracks and bunk beds, these might be pure vandalism; alternatively, they could indicate a 'certificate of presence' at one of the world's most famous sites.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, they could be taken for financial gain, to sell on sites such as eBay; or, for those who feel a deep connection with or

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<sup>176</sup> This is mostly likely because, as James Young observes, the emotional impact of such items means 'we lose sight of the fact that they are framed for us by curators in particular times and places'. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 128.

<sup>177</sup> Carr, "Small Things," 531; "British Teenagers Face Trial Over 'Auschwitz Theft'," *BBC News*, online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-35194290> (last modified 29 December 2015).

<sup>178</sup> See Matthew Day, "Auschwitz Museum Hit by Thefts as Visitors Remove 'Souvenirs' from Nazi Death Camp," *The Telegraph*, online at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/10808868/Auschwitz-museum-hit-by-thefts-as-visitors-remove-souvenirs-from-Nazi-death-camp.html> (last modified 5 May 2014); Peter Stuble, "US Tourist Caught Stealing Artefact from Auschwitz," *The Independent*, online at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/auschwitz-us-tourist-theft-rail-track-poland-police-a8848206.html> (last modified 31 March 2019). The 2009 theft of the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gate was not simply to gain a 'souvenir'; as one of the most recognisable items of the Holocaust, its removal was both criminally and politically motivated.

<sup>179</sup> Day, "Auschwitz Museum"; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 2000), 87. As Carr argues, artefacts from the larger Nazi camps, such as Auschwitz, appear to be attributed more value – not just by visitors, but also by the country or local district. Carr, "Small Things," 536-7.

response to the site, a way of prolonging the experience.<sup>180</sup> Owning real pieces of the former Auschwitz camp could serve, as Carr states, as ‘bonding objects’ between visitor and inmate, the living and the dead, and could therefore give the visitor a sense of having captured part of their unique, authentic experience.<sup>181</sup>

Incidents of visitors attempting to take physical remnants of the site with them are rare, but encapsulating the Museum visit in some form is of obvious importance to many people. In the twenty-first century, this has primarily manifested itself in using personal digital devices. Visitors use smartphones, tablets and/or digital cameras to further individualise their experience and create lasting memories. Photographs are taken, edited and shared; videos are recorded; and social media is used to share the visitor’s location and reactions to the Museum.<sup>182</sup> Instead of obtaining physical souvenirs, whether from the camp or purchased from retailers (see Chapter Four), museumgoers thus create ‘personal digital souvenirs’ with which to remember their visit to the Auschwitz Museum.<sup>183</sup> Despite the Museum’s reluctance to implement technology onsite, therefore, visitors are already viewing at least some elements of the site through a screen. One can observe dozens of people photographing the ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ gate, for instance, or panning their smartphone around the seemingly endless grounds of Birkenau, on a daily basis.

Capturing memories through photography (and, increasingly, social media) is an established aspect of the ‘performance’ of touring and visiting sites.<sup>184</sup> Yet individuals’ use of personal digital devices around the Auschwitz Museum is, in part, a response to the way in which the Museum conducts tours around the site. Given the fast pace of the standard tour, for example, visitors’ compulsion to ‘stop, take a photograph and move on’ is somewhat understandable.<sup>185</sup> Without adequate time to pause and reflect, these pictures may allow for deeper processing at a later stage, or the triggering of memories and thoughts related to the

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<sup>180</sup> “Holocaust Memorabilia Listed for Sale on eBay,” *The Guardian*, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/nov/03/ebay-holocaust-items-listing-removed> (last modified 3 November 2013); Carr, “Small Things,” 534-5; see James Bulgin, “‘Item Condition: Used.’ Interpreting the Response to the Holocaust Being Offered for Auction on eBay,” (Master’s thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2014).

<sup>181</sup> Carr, “Small Things,” 543.

<sup>182</sup> Visitors’ social media content is discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>183</sup> Anna Reading, “Memobilia: The Mobile Phone and the Emergence of Wearable Memories,” in *Save As... Digital Memories*, ed. Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 88. On the perceived importance of visitors taking photographs of famous aspects of the Museum for themselves, see Dalziel, “‘Romantic Auschwitz’,” 189-90.

<sup>184</sup> See Jorgen Ole Bærenholdt et al., *Performing Tourist Places* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 69-103; Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen, *Tourism, Performance and the Everyday: Consuming the Orient* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 122-53.

<sup>185</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 10.

experience.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, the potentially isolating, disembodied aspects of the tour, such as the use of headphones and lack of opportunities for extended dialogue, means visitors use their digital devices to create a more personalised experience for themselves. There is, therefore, an increasing resistance towards the Auschwitz Museum's instructive ideas of how the site should be seen and experienced.

Conversely, it must also be acknowledged that the surge in Holocaust tourism over the last 20 years, and the 'bucket list' aspect of the Auschwitz Museum, has led to some visitors treating their time at the Museum no differently to that spent in museums and cultural institutions of a lighter nature. Whilst visitors take photographs for purposes of remembrance and education, they also capture images for their perceived aesthetic and iconic qualities.<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, the use of digital devices onsite has proved problematic in terms of legitimate distractions from the Museum's content; in 2016, for instance, both the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum requested to be removed from the augmented reality game Pokémon GO after visitors were able to 'catch' Pokémon characters on their grounds.<sup>188</sup> Such difficulties once again highlight the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's complexities as a site of education, remembrance, and tourism.

## Conclusion

Despite the official reticence of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum to adapt to the digital museum onsite, adaptations have been made – albeit instigated and led by others. External ministries and organisations have made use of digital content in Auschwitz I's national pavilions and temporary exhibitions, through videos, projections and touchscreens. This is most apparent in the newest exhibition, 'Shoah', which acts as an extension of Yad Vashem, the institution responsible for its curation. As such exhibitions are externally curated, however, and not viewed by all Museum visitors, they can be considered micro-museums that fall outside the remit of the Auschwitz Museum. The institution can thus retain its control over the ways in which visitors see and move through the rest of the site.

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<sup>186</sup> Richardson, "Site-Seeing," 10.

<sup>187</sup> Dalziel, "'Romantic Auschwitz'," 188-203.

<sup>188</sup> Jonah Engel Bromwich, "Where Pokémon Should Not Go," *The New York Times*, online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/technology/where-pokemon-should-not-go.html> (last modified 12 July 2016). This was deemed particularly insensitive at USHMM, as at least one visitor 'caught' a Koffing – a creature that emits poisonous gas – onsite. Gabe Friedman, "Pokémon Go Invades Auschwitz, US Holocaust Museum and More," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, online at: <https://www.jta.org/2016/07/12/united-states/pokemon-go-invades-auschwitz-us-holocaust-museum-and-more> (last modified 12 July 2016).

The Museum itself has made a small gesture towards a more modern museological approach by including QR codes at some of the most important sites in the former camp. The lack of publicity and maintenance around the codes, however, demonstrates that the Museum is dismissive of their potential educational role and would rather visitors not experience the site through means of their personal digital devices. The emphasis instead remains on seeing the ‘authentic site’ (which, as this chapter has shown, is not a straightforward designation) without using other resources or forms of representation. The official Museum narrative thus suggests that one can only truly understand the history of Auschwitz through an unmediated experience with the site.

Museumgoers are clearly appreciative of the impact a visit can have upon them. Research has illustrated how being onsite, in the places where historical events occurred, can create a meaningful, personal, authentic experience. This is further highlighted through learning about prisoners and victims, and the emotions elicited from these stories. To capture and remember their experiences, though, visitors themselves have introduced an aspect of the digital museum to the physical grounds. In whichever way museumgoers perceive of the purpose(s) of their visit, it is clear that digital devices have become an intrinsic part of most people’s experience of the Auschwitz Museum. Thus, although the Museum has essentially refused to adapt to the digital museum onsite, thousands of visitors certainly have.

Therefore, regardless of the Museum’s stance on bringing the digital museum onto the physical grounds, the digital museum has already found a way there. Even if the national exhibitions are considered as smaller museums within the institution, and the content created by individual visitors leaves the Museum with them, operation of the digital museum is still taking place. This is not fully acknowledged by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, however, as it does not fit the oft-repeated declarations of curatorial authenticity which characterise the site and allow the Museum to assert authority over how the history and memory of Auschwitz should be seen and interpreted.

## **Chapter Three: Viewing Auschwitz at Home: The Creation and Use of the Museum's Virtual Tour**

*It is one thing to think about Auschwitz from the comfortable distance of London, New York, or Canberra. It is quite another to do so in Auschwitz.*

Jonathan Webber, "Personal Reflections on Auschwitz Today"

The thesis now shifts to an exploration of resources created by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum primarily for use offsite. This chapter investigates the Museum's adaptation to the digital museum through its official website, notably its virtual tour, and how such features attempt to combine the Auschwitz Museum's traditional, authoritative practices with newer, visitor-oriented technologies.

Firstly, this chapter discusses the benefits and challenges of Holocaust education and awareness on the Internet and presents examples of each. Numerous websites have been created and maintained by individuals in an attempt to teach others about this history; yet these can be inaccurate, lacking academic references and favouring personal opinion or bias. Furthermore, the freedom of the Web means that websites promoting Holocaust denial and antisemitism have also been established. In their own ways, both types of websites can have a detrimental effect on Internet users' knowledge of the genocide. Thus, to ensure the dissemination of reliable information, presented in a user-friendly manner, many Holocaust-related organisations and charities – including most Holocaust museums – have set up modern, high-quality websites.

There follows an exploration of Holocaust museum websites and their primary functions: education, information, participation and commemoration. These themes are initially considered in the context of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and Yad Vashem websites, before turning to those belonging to museums at former Nazi camps. Many of the latter's websites present only basic features, emphasising onsite learning and practical information with few online resources or participatory activities. The majority of directly associated sites, therefore, do not see their websites as digital extensions of their physical counterparts. There are, however, some examples of the offsite digital museum being considered a standalone resource across all types of Holocaust museums, mainly in the form of virtual tours, which are discussed in this section.

By contrast, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has always acknowledged the usefulness of its website in research and education, and was the first former camp to add interactive features intended to reach a wider audience and bring elements of the Museum to the digital visitor. The evolution of the website and its various features are summarised before the chapter focuses on its main case study from the website: a 360-degree panoramic virtual tour of the Museum grounds.

The virtual tour is not designed as a simulation or replacement for a physical visit, but contains certain elements reminiscent of a corporeal guided tour. These include directional arrows, textual narration and links to the Museum's bookshop. Certain camera angles and optional manipulations also echo bodily experiences of visiting the site; such aspects, it is argued, can contribute to feelings of an authentic experience for the digital visitor (or at least, as much as this is possible from a distance). The similarities to a physical guided tour, however, mean that the Museum still controls how the site is seen, even by those online. Thus, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has adapted to the website aspect of the digital museum to expand its outreach to a global audience and promote the importance of the 'authentic site', both in terms of curatorial authenticity and a desire to connect with the digital visitor's perception of an online authentic experience. Conversely, the Museum is keen to emphasise that the virtual tour is not an exhibition tour, and demonstrates its rejection of a simulated visit by using aerial views, panoramas captured at different times of the day and year, and the addition of normally inaccessible areas alongside the exclusion of displays from the permanent exhibition. These elements, it is argued, are designed to emphasise the irreplaceability of a visit to the Museum, once again underlining the institutional stance that one can only really understand Auschwitz through a physical encounter with the site.

In this chapter, the discussion around authenticity therefore moves from the onsite Museum experience to an investigation of how this may be perceived and explored via an online representation of its grounds. Authority is also integral to this chapter; the virtual tour presents an example of the Museum retaining control of digital visitors' viewing of the site whilst allowing them some freedom in their 'tour' route and detail. Finally, the theme of audience is more prominent as the virtual tour was designed primarily for use by those who cannot access the physical Museum, as well as for more general educational purposes.

Some terminologies used in this chapter are not applicable to others and may initially appear contradictory. Firstly, websites are often referred to as 'sites'; to avoid confusion, however, the word 'site' is only used in the context of discussing the grounds of the Auschwitz

Museum. Secondly, although the phrase ‘Internet users’ is included, those on the virtual tour are also referred to as ‘visitors’, as one is generally considered to visit a website. This takes on a certain duality when associated with museum websites. In addition, although the Introduction stated that the term ‘digital’ would be used instead of ‘virtual’, this chapter refers to the Museum’s ‘virtual tour’ as this has how it has been named by the Auschwitz Museum. This also explains the use of the phrase ‘virtual tourist,’ which here acknowledges the act of touring the site rather than simply referring to those who may use it for the sole purpose of tourism and leisure.

### **The Holocaust and the Web**

The Internet has had a profound effect on Holocaust education and remembrance. The emergence of the topic into American and British school curricula, for example, combined with the introduction of the Web as an educational tool, has resulted in a plethora of websites, downloadable resources and ‘cybraries’ dedicated to teaching and learning about the Holocaust through a variety of disciplines.<sup>1</sup> As Nikolaus Wachsmann has stated, unlike historical books on the subject, the Internet allows for the growth of information, dialogue with users, and different forms of engagement.<sup>2</sup> A number of scholars have also noted the power of the Internet in connecting with younger generations, for whom use of the digital is a routine aspect of daily life. The Web can ‘assist in making this topic more tangible, more immediate, and more accessible’; grant students ‘access to primary sources and scholarly works previously open only to researchers in archives’; and perhaps offer ‘different possibilities for speaking the unspeakable and remembering the atrocious’.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, events such as International Holocaust Memorial Day focus on notions of community and collective remembering, on a national or international scale.<sup>4</sup> In addition to physical

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas D. Fallance, *The Emergence of Holocaust Education in American Schools* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 60-83; Anna Reading, “Clicking on Hitler: The Virtual Holocaust @Home,” in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 326.

<sup>2</sup> Nikolaus Wachsmann et al., panel discussion at ‘Challenging Myths and Misconceptions: Understanding the Nazi Camps and the Holocaust,’ London, 21 November 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Derek S. Symer, “The Internet and the Study of the Holocaust,” in *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust*, ed. Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2001), 224; David Klevan and Margaret Lincoln, “The Use of the Internet in Teaching and Studying About the Holocaust,” in *Essentials of Holocaust Education: Fundamental Issues and Approaches*, ed. Samuel Totten and Stephen Feinberg (New York: Routledge, 2016), 76; Reading, “Clicking on Hitler,” 336.

<sup>4</sup> “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on the Holocaust Remembrance (A/RES/60/7, 1 November 2005),” *United Nations*, online at: <https://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/res607.shtml> (accessed 28 June 2020).

ceremonies and reflective creative projects, commemorations have also developed in the digital realm, including television, radio and the Internet.<sup>5</sup> As with museums, this was even more prevalent during the coronavirus outbreak, when lockdown measures forced ceremonies commemorating Yom HaShoah and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen online.<sup>6</sup> These normally public events became privatised and domesticated, creating connection in the absence of physical closeness.<sup>7</sup> The evolution of the Web and its use by ever greater numbers of people, therefore, means the ‘online dimension’ of the Holocaust has become ‘a decisive aspect of the culture of remembrance’.<sup>8</sup>

The benefits of online Holocaust education and commemoration, however, are countered by two significant challenges. A multitude of websites, blogs and other creative content have been uploaded and shared by well-meaning individuals, in the hope of educating others about the Holocaust.<sup>9</sup> Many relate solely to the Holocaust; some are embedded within websites focused on the Jewish community, histories of the Third Reich or general world history.<sup>10</sup> Some pages are designed as digital memorials, whilst others comprise collections of hyperlinks to other Holocaust education resources. Moreover, research by Eva Pfanzelter shows that those who search the term ‘holocaust’ are initially most likely to consult Wikipedia, a ‘multilingual, web-based, free-content encyclopedia project [...] based on a model of openly editable content’.<sup>11</sup> In other words, any Internet user is free to modify or add

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<sup>5</sup> In Britain, for example, see the work of John E. Richardson, notably “‘Broadcast to Mark Holocaust Memorial Day’: Mass-Mediated Holocaust Commemoration on British Television and Radio,” *European Journal of Communication* 33:5 (2018): 505-21; John E. Richardson, “Mediating National History and Personal Catastrophe: Televising Holocaust Memorial Day Commemoration,” *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11 (2018): 465–85.

<sup>6</sup> For examples, see Yad Vashem, “Broadcast of Holocaust Remembrance Day Opening Ceremony 2020,” *YouTube* video, 1:09:44, 20 April 2020, online at: <https://youtu.be/fd7ZZQTeqi4> (accessed 28 June 2020); “Commemoration 2020,” *Gedenkstätte Bergen Belsen*, online at: <https://www.befreiung1945.de/en/75-years-liberation/commemoration-2020> (accessed 28 June 2020); Victoria Grace Walden, “Implications of Physical Distancing for Commemoration,” *Digital Holocaust Memory* (blog), online at: <https://digitalholocaustmemory.wordpress.com/2020/05/04/implications-of-physical-distancing-for-commemoration> (last modified 4 May 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Roger Silverstone, “Regulation, Media Literacy and Media Civics,” *Media, Culture & Society* 26:3 (2004): 442, 445.

<sup>8</sup> Eva Pfanzelter, “At the Crossroads with Public History: Mediating the Holocaust on the Internet,” *Holocaust Studies* 21:4 (2015): 265.

<sup>9</sup> This also relates to social media; see Chapter Four.

<sup>10</sup> In her study of Holocaust-related websites, Anna Reading gives numerous examples of pages created by individuals or small groups (Reading, “Clicking on Hitler,” 326-7). Many of these websites, however, have since closed down. Some more recent examples include Terry Lasky, “Orhei (Orgeyev), Moldova,” *JewishGen KehilaLinks*, online at: <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Orhei> (last modified January 2017); Geoff Walden, *Third Reich in Ruins*, online at: <http://www.thirdreichruins.com> (last modified 4 May 2020); *Remember.org*, online at: <https://remember.org> (accessed 28 June 2020) (a previous version of this website was included in Reading’s study).

<sup>11</sup> Pfanzelter, “At the Crossroads,” 255; “Wikipedia: About,” *Wikipedia*, online at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About> (last modified 22 April 2020).

text and images to Wikipedia's pages. Whilst this reinforces the universalism of this history, website content posted by individuals raises potential issues of quality and accuracy of information. No matter how learned the amateur historian, many sources on these websites are left uncited, or may even be assumed or speculated upon by the writer.<sup>12</sup> The margin for historical inaccuracy is therefore extremely wide (although a certain degree of human error must be accounted for in the case of any website, or the general creation of digital content).

On one hand, this has serious implications for individuals' understanding of the Holocaust. There is already evidence that non-digital sources, such as John Boyne's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, have created misconceptions amongst schoolchildren regarding the history and conditions of the genocide; misquoted or subjective online analyses can therefore add to the problem.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the concern regarding historical accuracy on the Internet reaches much further than potential mistakes in a student's homework. Holocaust-related websites created by individuals or non-institutional groups are easy targets for those who deny or distort the Holocaust. Deniers (or self-termed 'revisionists') enthusiastically scrutinise and dismiss established facts about the Holocaust, most notably the existence of gas chambers, but also focus on smaller details that they believe confirm their version of this history.<sup>14</sup> Incorrect information, unsourced research or personal opinions posted by Internet users can thus further embolden Holocaust denial or distortion online.

This, in turn, is problematic given the number of websites created by those who hold such beliefs, most of which are freely accessible to anyone browsing online. The entrance of the Internet into the public domain in the 1990s meant that a number of 'revisionist' websites that 'fetishise Nazism, reinforce antisemitic beliefs or deny the Holocaust's very occurrence' quickly emerged, and their number has steadily increased over time.<sup>15</sup>

The ease and freedom with which one can create and promote online content means, as Richard Evans asserts, that 'all websites are equal'.<sup>16</sup> Although search engines such as Google have taken steps to ensure Holocaust denial websites do not appear in users' results,

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<sup>12</sup> Eileen Mullan, "Information Inaccuracy Spells Trouble for User-Generated Websites," *Information Today* 32:3 (2009): 10-1.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Gray, "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas: A Blessing or Curse for Holocaust Education?" *Holocaust Studies* 20:3 (2014): 109-36. See also Chapter Four.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Solomon Wistrich, "Introduction: Lying About the Holocaust," in *Holocaust Denial: The Politics of Perfidy*, ed. Robert Solomon Wistrich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 1-4.

<sup>15</sup> Betty Landesman, "Holocaust Denial and the Internet," *The Reference Librarian* 29:61-2 (1998): 287-99; Adam Brown and Deb Waterhouse-Watson, "The Future of the Past: Digital Media in Holocaust Museums," *Holocaust Studies* 20:3 (2014): 6.

<sup>16</sup> Wachsmann et al., panel discussion, 21 November 2016.

these are sometimes missed by the algorithmic software, or are instead produced through image searches.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, some of these websites have adopted an ‘academic ethos’, publishing seemingly neutral mission statements and descriptions, as well as articles replete with footnotes and bibliographies.<sup>18</sup> To those who are new to academic research, these websites appear as credible sources and may influence or distort their perceptions of the Holocaust’s history and historiography. The nature of the Internet also means that such websites and forums are preserved years after their publication, even when considered inactive by their former moderators and contributors.<sup>19</sup>

There is thus one essential component missing from websites created by both well-intentioned individuals and Holocaust deniers: reputation. It is imperative that established organisations and institutions provide Internet users with objective and reliable information about the Holocaust. Webpages of physical museums and institutions related to the Holocaust are the most popular and appear to be most trusted by Web users, who are ‘reassured’ by their credibility and, therefore, their authority.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps, as Anna Reading argues, ‘visitors seeking memories and historical information on the Holocaust in cyberspace look for sites that are given legitimacy through a terrestrial anchor’.<sup>21</sup>

It is also Holocaust museums which have thus far developed the most extensive and technologically advanced websites in this subject area. Studies have shown that people spend longer on websites that are visually appealing and believe they will contain better quality information than websites that are less attractive.<sup>22</sup> This does not necessarily translate to websites that are designed for the purpose of entertainment, but rather those that display a certain level of professionalism, reliability and acknowledgement of the user’s needs – all aspects that official public-facing institutions and their web developers must consider. More significantly, however, the opportunities afforded by the digital museum vastly exceed those of brick-and-mortar sites, particularly at former Nazi camps, which curators can be hesitant to

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<sup>17</sup> Kaya Burgess, “Google Searches for Answer to Fake News,” *The Times*, 26 April 2017, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Shane Borrowman, “Critical Surfing: Holocaust Denial and Credibility on the Web,” *College Teaching* 47:2 (1999): 45-6.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Weitzman, “Globalization, Conspiracy Theory, and the Shoah,” in *Holocaust Denial: The Politics of Perfidy*, ed. Robert Solomon Wistrich (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 210.

<sup>20</sup> Anna Reading, “Digital Interactivity in Public Memory Institutions: The Uses of New Technologies in Holocaust Museums,” *Media, Culture & Society* 25:1 (2003): 72; R. David Lankes, “Credibility on the Internet: Shifting from Authority to Reliability,” *Journal of Documentation* 64:5 (2008): 681.

<sup>21</sup> Reading, “Clicking on Hitler,” 334.

<sup>22</sup> Examples include Gitte Lindgaard et al., “Attention Web Designers: You Have 50 Milliseconds to Make a Good First Impression!” *Behaviour & Information Technology* 25:2 (2006): 125; Thea Van der Geest and Raymond Van Dongelen, “What Is Beautiful Is Useful - Visual Appeal and Expected Information Quality,” paper presented at the 2009 IEEE International Professional Communication Conference, Waikiki, USA, 19-22 July 2009, online at: <https://doi.org/10.1109/IPCC.2009.5208678>.

combine with modern museological exhibitions and technologies (as seen in Chapter Two). Therefore, whilst it is important not to ‘make studying the Holocaust “fun” per se’, Holocaust museums can utilise websites to create content that is dynamic, interactive and experiential, engaging website visitors whilst maintaining their authority and curatorial authenticity.<sup>23</sup>

### **Holocaust Museum Websites**

Some Holocaust museums joined the wave of museums launching official websites towards the end of the 1990s.<sup>24</sup> These include the world’s two largest authorities on the Holocaust: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Yad Vashem. As with other types of museums, over the years both organisations’ websites have become more modern, more sophisticated and expanded to include much greater volumes and variety of content. They are both useful examples of how Holocaust museum webpages can serve several purposes – primarily information and education, similar to most museum websites – but also participation and commemoration.

USHMM’s website, for example, hosts the Holocaust Encyclopedia, an educational resource that consists of 850 articles explaining various aspects of the Holocaust. Many of these have been translated from English into 15 other languages, acknowledging both the United States’ multiculturalism and assisting a significant proportion of the world’s Internet users. In addition to detailed written descriptions, the Encyclopedia uses video testimonies, maps and photographs. Suggestions for further reading and critical thinking questions accompany each article, so that they are oriented as a classroom resource as well as for more general use. Yad Vashem, on the other hand, targets a specifically adult audience. Although the website does contain pages with a brief history of the Holocaust, use of educational information and resources is primarily directed towards educators.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, several free online courses created by scholars are offered, aimed at those looking for the flexibility of online study.<sup>26</sup> The materials on both websites therefore showcase the collections of each

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<sup>23</sup> Symer, “The Internet,” 224.

<sup>24</sup> Pfanzelter, “At the Crossroads,” 250. Erkki Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 121.

<sup>25</sup> “What Was the Holocaust?” *Yad Vashem*, online at: <https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about> (accessed 28 June 2020), “Education & E-Learning,” *Yad Vashem*, online at: <https://www.yadvashem.org/education> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>26</sup> “Online Courses,” *Yad Vashem*, online at: <https://www.yadvashem.org/education/online-courses> (accessed 28 June 2020).

museum and underline their authority as reliable sources on the Holocaust for learners across a wide age range.

Commemoration and visitor participation also form an important part of the USHMM and Yad Vashem websites. In 2004, for example, Yad Vashem uploaded its Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names.<sup>27</sup> The museum also partnered with Jewish organisations around the world to create The Names Recovery Project, appealing to the families and friends of the deceased to contribute names to the database.<sup>28</sup> At this time, Yad Vashem's Holocaust History Museum was closed for a total reconstruction and exhibition update; thus, until the physical site reopened the following year, the website became the focus of the institution's public remembrance of Holocaust victims.<sup>29</sup> The Central Database now forms an integral part of the Holocaust History Museum, and since its launch into the public domain, approximately 1.8 million more names have been collected.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, the USHMM website hosts the Database of Holocaust Survivor and Victim Names, yet this does not involve the same level of Web visitor participation.<sup>31</sup> Visitors can conduct searches but, unlike the Yad Vashem website, cannot submit names for inclusion. The Museum website does, however, combine remembrance and participation in other ways. The institution has partnered with Ancestry.com, for example, for the World Memory Project, whereby Internet users can help to make millions of documents searchable by individual names, and History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust, encouraging users to research American press coverage of the Holocaust.<sup>32</sup> Although these projects are 'glorified

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Getso, "Revisiting Holocaust Memorialization," *Peace Review* 19:2 (2007): 247.

<sup>28</sup> "Names Recovery Project," *Yad Vashem*, online at: <https://www.yadvashem.org/remembrance/names-recovery-project> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 64.

<sup>30</sup> Getso, "Revisiting," 247; "The Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names," *Yad Vashem*, online at: <https://yvng.yadvashem.org> (accessed 28 June 2020). It should be noted, however, that some of these names have been added through the work of Yad Vashem's historians and researchers. "About the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names," *Yad Vashem*, online at: <https://www.yadvashem.org/archive/hall-of-names/database> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>31</sup> "Database of Holocaust Survivor and Victim Names," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, online at: <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/resources-holocaust-survivors-victims/database-of-holocaust-survivor-and-victim-names> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>32</sup> "World Memory Project," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, online at: <https://www.ushmm.org/online/world-memory-project> (accessed 28 June 2020); "History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, online at: <https://newspapers.ushmm.org> (accessed 28 June 2020).

form[s] of data entry’, they have helped participants connect to the Holocaust ‘on a personal level, and in turn, to better understand its overall impact’.<sup>33</sup>

Museums and memorials located at former Nazi camps have largely followed the trend of updating their websites with more modern, user-friendly interfaces. Unlike USHMM and Yad Vashem, however, most have not yet taken advantage of the various features made available by the Internet. Pages have been created exploring the history of respective sites as both camps and museums, but the focus of many of these websites remains on practical information, such as planning a visit or booking onsite educational activities.<sup>34</sup> Most former camps’ websites contain little to no interactive or participatory elements, and there is also an absence of commemorative or ‘emotional’ information.<sup>35</sup> Though some make use of photographs of their collections, one cannot, for example, examine objects more closely through a zoom function, download educational resources, or search collections of related survivor testimonies. There are several likely explanations for this. Firstly, many of the smaller former camps are not well-known outside of their local communities. Whilst names such as Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Dachau have become globally infamous, many have simply never heard of Treblinka, Mechelen or Gusen.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, larger Holocaust museums, including USHMM and Yad Vashem, are recognised as symbols of national remembrance, reminders of national values and, especially for the latter example, part of national identity, situated in prominent physical locations in their respective countries’ capitals (in contrast to the many Nazi camps that were built in remote rural areas).<sup>37</sup> This means that, although most are supported by government funding, there is an imbalance in the amount of revenue and

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<sup>33</sup> Nina Simon, “Participatory Design and the Future of Museums,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 28-9.

<sup>34</sup> Yaniv Poria and Yaniv Gvili, “Heritage Site Websites Content: The Need for Versatility,” *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing* 15:2 (2007): 78.

<sup>35</sup> Poria and Gvili’s study of visitors’ expectations of the Yad Vashem website shows that, for some, the more the website moves them emotionally, the more likely they are to visit the physical museum with similar emotional motivations. *Ibid.*, 77-90.

<sup>36</sup> There are multiple reasons for this discrepancy, including the camps’ size; the large network of sub-camps; which Allied country liberated each camp; representations in media and popular culture; and the impact of Communism on post-war Central and Eastern Europe. In terms of visiting, the larger museums mentioned here are easily accessible from their closest cities. As David Cesarani observes, for instance, ‘It is easier to arrange one-day visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where an estimated 960,000 Jews were murdered, than to Treblinka, where some 860,000 Jews were killed in a shorter space of time.’ David Cesarani, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-49* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2017), xxv.

<sup>37</sup> Poria and Gvili, “Heritage Site Websites,” 77; “About the Museum,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, online at: <https://www.ushmm.org/information/about-the-museum> (accessed 28 June 2020). See also Amos Goldberg, “The ‘Jewish Narrative’ in the Yad Vashem Global Holocaust Museum,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 14:2 (2012): 187-213; Paolo Coen, “Moshe Safdie at Yad Vashem: Architecture, Politics, Identity,” *Pólemos* 13:1 (2019): 43-62; Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 37-64.

private donations across former Nazi camps, resulting in fewer staff and a smaller budget to maintain and update online resources. Furthermore, as these websites do not generate income – none of these websites benefit from advertising, for example – priority is given to the guided tours, educational programmes and book sales that ensure the funds to preserve and operate the site. (It should be noted, however, that this basic format is not only found on the websites of lesser-known, directly associated museums). Secondly, some of these websites have been established at the ‘behest’ of local or national governments.<sup>38</sup> The presence of an official website undoubtedly provides some publicity for museums at former camps and, from the wealth of practical information included, encourages physical visits. The lack of additional features, however, suggests a certain reluctance on the part of these museums to develop their webpages further than including aspects which may have been recommended or prescribed.

Sites with direct association to the Holocaust (that is, those located at a place of mass murder) may be more reticent to utilise more technical elements due to concerns over the potential entertainment factor of their websites. Inviting webpage visitors to manipulate photographs or scans of artefacts, for instance, may evoke accusations of insensitivity towards the victims and undermine the fragility of the possessions they left behind. In contrast, many partially or distantly associated museums – both large and small – have expanded their websites’ educational content to enhance the online visit experience. This has primarily focused on the presentation of exhibitions, with variations in the placement of the visitor. Museums such as the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre and the CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center, for instance, use two-dimensional, text-heavy content, accompanied by photographs, videos and documents.<sup>39</sup> These exhibitions are not spatially connected with the physical museum, and so emphasis is placed entirely on the sources rather than their location in the real world. Others, including the Holocaust Museum Houston and St Louis’ Holocaust Museum and Learning Center, use 360-degree 3D platforms to allow visitors to view their physical exhibition spaces.<sup>40</sup> Visitors have a certain

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<sup>38</sup> Reading, “Clicking on Hitler,” 326.

<sup>39</sup> “Online Exhibitions,” *Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre*, online at: <https://www.vhec.org/online-exhibitions> (accessed 28 June 2020); “The History of CANDLES Online Exhibit,” *CANDLES Holocaust Museum and Education Center*, online at: <https://candleholocaustmuseum.org/candles-history-online-exhibit.html> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>40</sup> “VIRTUAL – Bearing Witness: A Community Remembers,” *Holocaust Museum Houston*, online at: <https://hnh.org/exhibitions/bearing-witness-a-community-remembers> (accessed 28 June 2020); “Virtual Tour,” *Holocaust Museum and Learning Center*, online at: <https://hmlc.org/about-us/visit/virtual-tour> (accessed 28 June 2020).

degree of freedom in choosing the direction of their visit and can also zoom in to read and study exhibits, thereby fulfilling some aspects of the corporeal museum experience.

Moreover, in geographically more relevant locations, these online tours attempt to engage the visitor in an even greater immersive experience.<sup>41</sup> The Riga Ghetto Museum's 'Walk Among Memories' uses Google Street View to take the visitor through the city's former ghetto district.<sup>42</sup> Buildings and areas of significance are highlighted by a photograph and short description, whilst some feature audio clips of survivor Yakob Basner narrating his and others' testimony. Sound effects are also used: in many places, one can hear footsteps and the general din of a busy street; in locations connected with deportation or death, this changes to a dramatic, thunderous noise. The visitor does not see the actual Riga Ghetto Museum. Instead, the digital museum is utilised to expand the physical museum so it includes the sites where this history took place. Furthermore, the visitor is caught in a duality between the past and the present. Whilst they can see the contemporary streets of Riga, the photographs, sound effects and narration create a link with the past, emphasising the loss of the city's Jewish community and, thus, the presence of this absence.

Similarly, whilst hosting a panoramic tour of the museum's main exhibition, the Anne Frank House website also contains views of the Frank's original house and the furnished Secret Annex (in both a physical set and a computer-generated virtual reality app).<sup>43</sup> The visitor is thus taken back not just to the past, but to a reconstructed past. Although the Annex remains unoccupied, the addition of furniture in the now-empty space attempts to show what it 'would have looked like'.<sup>44</sup> This may present the visitor with a more tangible representation of this history, enhancing their understanding of conditions in the Secret Annexe – how crowded the space would have been, for example, for eight people – and further 'creating empathetic links' between the visitor and the figure of Anne Frank.<sup>45</sup> It has also been

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<sup>41</sup> For a brief overview of the problems of 'immersion' in relation to Holocaust sites, see Victoria Grace Walden, "Debunking Digital Myths," *Digital Holocaust Memory* (blog), online at: <https://digitalholocaustmemory.wordpress.com/2020/05/01/debunking-digital-myths> (last modified 1 May 2020).

<sup>42</sup> "Walk Among Memories," *Riga Ghetto Museum*, online at: <http://www.rgm.lv/in-their-shoes/?lang=en> (accessed 28 June 2020). At the time of writing, however, the Google Street View element was corrupted, so this tour may not currently be maintained.

<sup>43</sup> "The Anne Frank House Online," *Anne Frank House*, online at: <https://www.annefrank.org/en/museum/web-and-digital> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>44</sup> "Why is There No Furniture in the Former Hiding Place of Anne Frank?" *Google Arts & Culture*, online at: <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/why-is-there-no-furniture-in-the-former-hiding-place-of-anne-frank/DQICp8B2mXzPKw> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Gregory J. Ashworth and John E. Tunbridge, "Death Camp Tourism: Interpretation and Management," in *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation*, ed. Glenn Hooper and John L. Lennon (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 75.

suggested (in relation to the virtual reality version) that these digital tours may satisfy some people enough not to visit the physical house, thereby easing tourist congestion and reducing its potentially negative impact on the site.<sup>46</sup>

Despite preservation issues caused by physical footfall (one need only observe the tell-tale curves in the staircases within the blocks of Auschwitz I, for instance), for museums at former Nazi camps the focus remains on the importance of the physical site, and the experiential authenticity that visitors will attain from walking and learning around the space. Yet tentative steps towards varied educational website content are being taken by some of these museums. The Neuengamme Memorial's website hosts a digital version of its permanent exhibition (currently German-language only), including clickable photographs that enable visitors to view and read exhibition panels.<sup>47</sup> Neuengamme and the memorial sites at Bergen-Belsen and Westerbork are also currently collaborating with a team from the University of Leeds on the Virtual Holocaust Memoryscapes project. 360-degree photography of the sites will be combined with archival materials 'to create an interactive and immersive virtual environment', whether visitors are onsite or accessing these memoryscapes through the website or smartphone app.<sup>48</sup> Two prototypes of areas within the Neuengamme memorial site have been launched as part of the project's first phase.<sup>49</sup> As digital technology steadily becomes a regular feature of both general education and museological practice, it appears that some Holocaust museums are beginning to consider how they can use their websites to bring sites of the genocide to the visitor, wherever they might be.

## Welcoming Visitors Online

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum established an online presence in March 1999, at a

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<sup>46</sup> Yaniv Poria, "The Four Musts: See, Learn, Feel, and Evolve," *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 8:4 (2013): 347; Rudi Hartmann, "Virtualities in the New Tourism Landscape: The Case of the Anne Frank House Virtual Tour and of the Visualizations of the Berlin Wall in the Cold War Context," in *Tourism Fictions, Simulacra and Virtualities*, ed. Maria Gravari-Barbas, Nelson Graburn and Jean-François Staszak (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 213-6.

<sup>47</sup> "Exhibitions," *KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme*, online at: <https://www.kz-gedenkstaette-neuengamme.de/en/exhibitions> (accessed 28 June 2020); "Ausstellungen in der KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme," *KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme*, online at: <http://www.neuengamme-ausstellungen.info> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>48</sup> "Using Digital Technology to Preserve Holocaust Memory and Places," *Worldwide Universities Network*, online at: <https://wun.ac.uk/article/using-digital-technology-to-preserve-holocaust-memory-and-places> (last modified 29 January 2018).

<sup>49</sup> "Neuengamme: Brickworks," *Tom Jackson Photography*, online at: <http://tomjackson.photography/interactive/neuengamme/brickworks> (accessed 28 June 2020); "Neuengamme: Guardtower," *Tom Jackson Photography*, online at: <http://tomjackson.photography/interactive/neuengamme/guardtower> (accessed 28 June 2020).

time when less than half a million people visited the former camp grounds and only around 4% of the world's population used the Internet.<sup>50</sup> Although a website was not included in the *Strategy for the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau* that had been proposed in the late 1990s (only some of which was eventually realised), the suggested improvements to visitor services were most likely a factor in its launch.<sup>51</sup> The website was initially written only in Polish, reflecting both its post-war geographical location and the fact that most visitors were (and are) Polish, but by 2004, in response to the growing number of non-Polish visitors, it could also be accessed in English and German (Figure 3.1).<sup>52</sup>

As the Internet became more popular and globally accessible, so interest in the Auschwitz Museum's website quickly increased. The Museum's basic server, however, could not cope with this surge in Web visitors; by May 2003 it had become so 'overloaded' it was experiencing 'frequent bottlenecks and slowdowns'.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> "Memorial Timeline: 1990-1999," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/history-of-the-memorial/memorial-timeline/years-1990-1999> (accessed 28 June 2020); "More than a Million Visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum Website," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/more-than-a-million-visitors-to-the-auschwitz-birkenau-museum-website,385.html> (last modified 12 October 2004); "Attendance," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/attendance> (accessed 28 June 2020)..

<sup>51</sup> Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, "The Politics of a Strategy for Auschwitz-Birkenau," *Cardozo Law Review* 20:2 (1998): 688-90; Robert Jan van Pelt, "Strategy for the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau," *Cardozo Law Review* 20:2 (1998): 695-730.

<sup>52</sup> Due to the closure of the Museum following the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to obtain exact visitor figures by country before 2006. The Auschwitz Museum's annual reports, however, show both a consistent majority of Polish visitors as well as an increase in foreign visitors. "Museum Reports," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/museum-reports> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>53</sup> "The Overloaded Auschwitz Museum Server," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/the-overloaded-auschwitz-museum-server,330.html> (last modified 6 May 2003); "A New Internet Server for the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/a-new-internet-server-for-the-auschwitz-birkenau-state-museum,357.html> (last modified 26 February 2004).

Even at this early stage, it is clear the Museum understood the importance of the website in public communications and anticipated a continual rise in user numbers. The website was funded by the ‘modest budget’ of the Museum, relying on the ‘good will’ of volunteers for a number of its functions, and was operated entirely by Museum staff.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the Museum utilised the symbolism and significance of the site and appealed for ‘financial support’ to purchase a new server.<sup>55</sup> This was answered the following year by the donation of a new, ‘cutting-edge’ Internet server.<sup>56</sup> The benefit was immediate; in 2004, over a million users visited the official Museum website, a figure that physical visits to the Museum itself did not reach until 2007.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the official Museum website quickly became the first



Figure 3.1. The portal page of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum website as it appeared on 8 February 2005. Source: All images in this chapter from Internet Archive, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>54</sup> “More than a Million,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*; “Technical Page,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 5 August 2004, via Internet Archive, online at: [https://web.archive.org/web/20040805093356/http://www.auschwitz.org.pl/html/eng/s\\_techiczna/index.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20040805093356/http://www.auschwitz.org.pl/html/eng/s_techiczna/index.html) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>55</sup> “Overloaded Auschwitz Museum Server,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz Birkenau*.

<sup>56</sup> “A New Internet Server,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

<sup>57</sup> “More than a Million,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*; Bartosz Bartyzel et al., eds., *Report 2007* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2008), 26; “Attendance,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

result in Internet search engines, thereby providing Web users with an accessible, trustworthy source of information on the former camp.<sup>58</sup>

The first version of the Auschwitz Museum's website was similar to many contemporary websites hosted by museums at former Nazi camps in the simplicity of its information. Visitors could read about the history of the camp and the Museum; access practical visiting information; donate money; and browse (but not buy) Museum publications.<sup>59</sup> Unlike other camp museums, however, from the beginning the Auschwitz Museum saw its website as a complementary extension of the physical museum, aiming to '[provide] virtual access to the Auschwitz site'.<sup>60</sup> This concept was further realised with the launch of a new version of the website in 2008 (Figure 3.2).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> "More than a Million," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*. See also Fiona Cameron, "Introduction," in *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed. Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 5.

<sup>59</sup> *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 12 August 2004, via *Internet Archive*, online at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20040812093817/http://www.auschwitz.org.pl/html/eng/start/index.php> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>60</sup> "More than a Million," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

<sup>61</sup> "New Auschwitz Museum Website," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/new-auschwitz-museum-website,522.html> (last modified 17 November 2008). The German version of the website was not included in this revision.

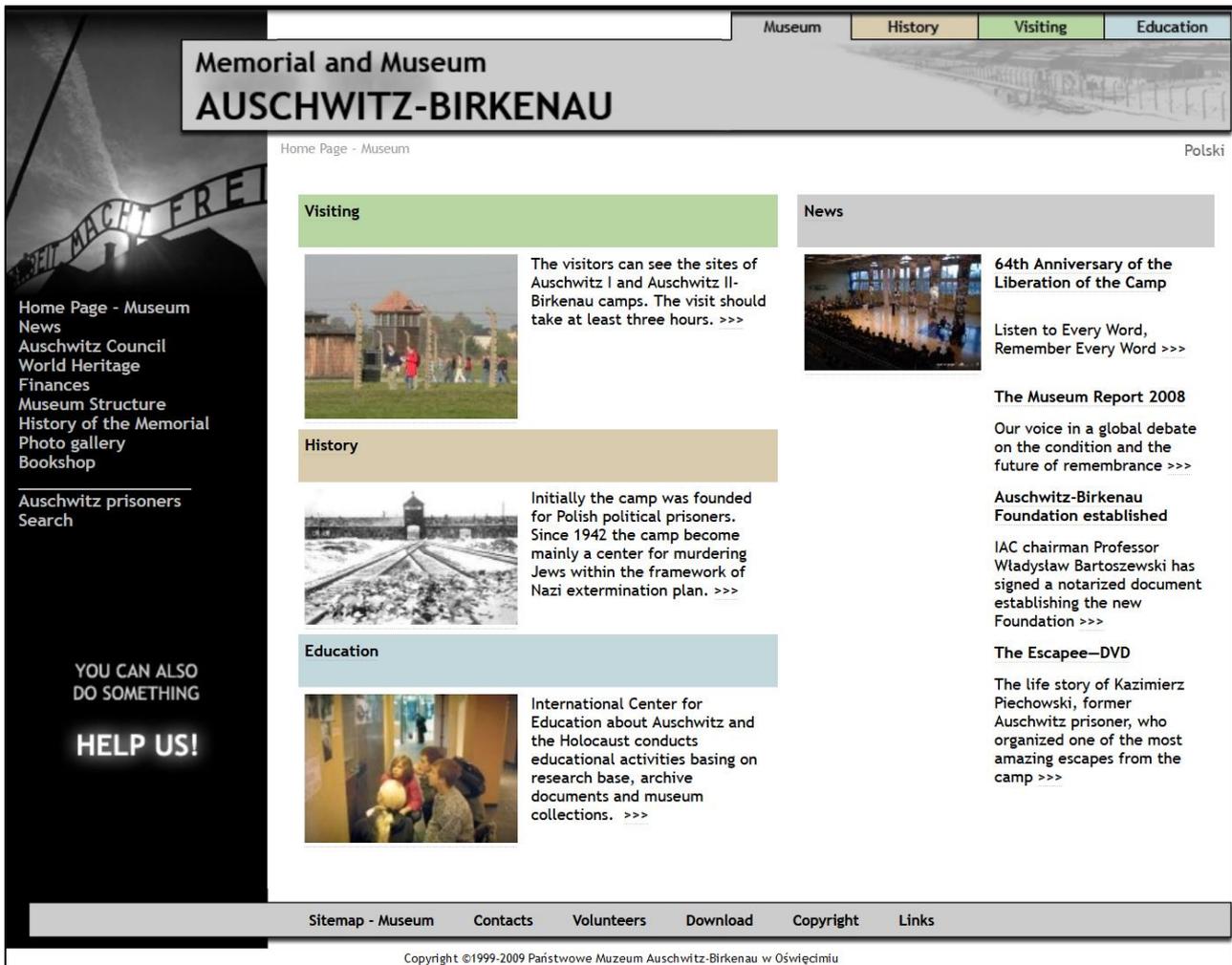


Figure 3.2. The English-language home page of the second version of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum website, as it appeared on 4 February 2009.

In addition to its previous content, new webpages included a searchable database of Auschwitz prisoners; digitised archival documents, historical photographs and contemporary images of Museum collections; buyable publications; some Museum staff’s contact details; and a more detailed history of the physical site, including a timeline. The website was therefore creating easier methods for visitors to learn and conduct research whilst also gradually opening avenues of communication between staff and Web visitors. Additionally, the relaunch included the first version of the ‘virtual tour’.<sup>62</sup> Users could select key sites from diagrams of Auschwitz I and Birkenau and explore a 360-degree view of each (see Figure 3.3).

<sup>62</sup> “Virtual Tour of Auschwitz Sites,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, 19 December 2008, via Internet Archive, online at: [https://web.archive.org/web/20081219102304/http://en.auschwitz.org.pl/z/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=8](https://web.archive.org/web/20081219102304/http://en.auschwitz.org.pl/z/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6&Itemid=8) (accessed 28 June 2020).



Figure 3.3. The menu of the Auschwitz I virtual tour, as it appeared on 31 January 2009.

For a brief period, there was also a live webcam stream of the ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ gate, a feature that is not uncommon amongst museums, zoos and other tourist attractions.<sup>63</sup> This was not only an (albeit short-lived) example of technology being used onsite for the public’s benefit, but also a stronger indication of the Museum’s objective to create a link between the individual and the physical site, regardless of global location, and bring the ‘authentic site’ into their home.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>63</sup> “New Auschwitz Museum Website,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*. Many of these are hosted by EarthCam – for examples, see *EarthCam*, online at: <https://www.earthcam.com> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>64</sup> As with the QR codes discussed in Chapter Two, however, one can interpret the presence of the webcam as a token gesture towards more modern museological practices, quietly dropped in favour of physical visits and the virtual tour.

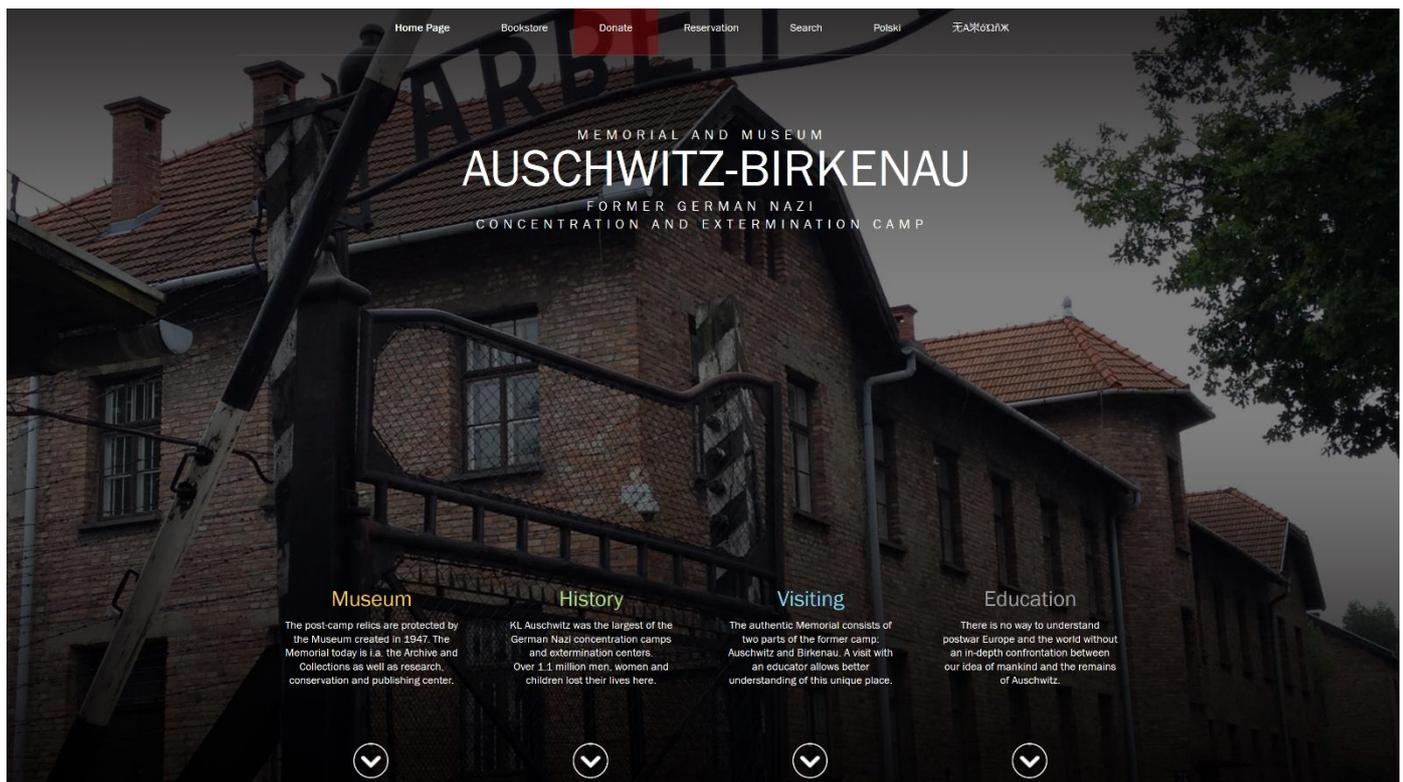


Figure 3.4. The English-language home page of the current Auschwitz Museum website, as it appeared on 14 May 2020. Source: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

The most recent upgrade to the website was launched in January 2015, in recognition of the seventieth anniversary of the liberation of the former camp (Figure 3.4).<sup>65</sup> In 2014, 12 million unique visits were made to the Museum website meaning that, as well as the need for clear and improved accessibility for such a large number of users, the Museum quickly recognised the importance of maintaining a modern website in terms of its effect on public perception of the institution.<sup>66</sup> Unlike the previous two versions, the current website was created by an external company; the allocation of Museum funds for this project is undoubtedly connected with the rebranding of the institution that has taken place under the directorship of Piotr Cywiński.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, after a steady increase in physical visitor numbers, and amid concern for the preservation of the site, the Auschwitz Museum

<sup>65</sup> In 2011, as mentioned in Chapter One, the Museum website's URL changed from [www.auschwitz.org.pl](http://www.auschwitz.org.pl) to [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org), as part of the campaign to counter narratives of 'Polish death camps'.

<sup>66</sup> "New [www.auschwitz.org](http://www.auschwitz.org)," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/new-www-auschwitz-org,1129.html> (last modified 22 January 2015), "Visitors to the Auschwitz Site," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: [http://70.auschwitz.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=82&Itemid=173&lang=en](http://70.auschwitz.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=82&Itemid=173&lang=en) (accessed 28 June 2020), Paul F. Marty, "Museum Websites and Museum Visitors: Before and After the Museum Visit," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 22:4 (2007): 352.

<sup>67</sup> Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 11 May 2018. See Chapter One.

introduced an online reservation system on its website just before its relaunch.<sup>68</sup> The official website, therefore, has become an integral part of a visit to the Museum, whether real or digital.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's website largely retains the 'Unassailable Voice' of the institution.<sup>69</sup> Although a number of staff members' emails are available, there is little opportunity for Web users to communicate directly with the Museum; this is instead prevalent on social media, as explored in the next chapter. Yet, unlike other former camp museums, there has been a recognition of the possibilities offered by the Internet, particularly in bringing the Museum to the visitor. Over time, the Auschwitz Museum has shifted its focus from only physical visitors to including those who might never be able to travel to the site, potentially gaining an entirely new audience.<sup>70</sup> This is particularly relevant at a time when the number of Auschwitz survivors decreases whilst (often Auschwitz-centric) education about the Holocaust becomes more widespread.<sup>71</sup>

As the former camp is so prominent in Holocaust education, particularly compared to many other former Holocaust sites and museums (and, perhaps, museums in general), it is important for the Museum to provide additional resources for students learning about Auschwitz and visiting the Museum which, as has been discussed, should be both educational and engaging. The Museum website, therefore, includes several resources to prepare people for their physical visit, and allow them to reflect upon, or learn more after, experiencing the Museum.

Additionally, these tools are also designed for use by those who cannot travel to the physical site for reasons such as accessibility issues, age or travel costs, but who wish to learn about the history of the camp and explore its different aspects.<sup>72</sup> The Museum has continually stressed its desire to create some form of 'virtual' access for those who are unable to visit in person.<sup>73</sup> This appears somewhat contradictory, however, to their official stance on the

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<sup>68</sup> Paweł Sawicki, "New System of Online Booking in the Auschwitz Museum," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/new-system-of-online-booking-in-the-auschwitz-museum,1116.html> (last modified 19 December 2014).

<sup>69</sup> Peter Walsh, "The Web and the Unassailable Voice," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 229.

<sup>70</sup> Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine, *Museum Basics*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 104.

<sup>71</sup> Peter Carrier, Eckhardt Fuchs and Torben Messinger, *The International Status of Education about the Holocaust: A Global Mapping of Textbooks and Curricula* (Paris: UNESCO, 2015), 35, 88.

<sup>72</sup> Although wheelchairs are available for loan, the Museum will not install ramps or lifts in order to 'preserve the historical authenticity of the site of the Memorial.' "Basic Information," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/basic-information> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>73</sup> Paweł Sawicki, "The Auschwitz Memorial in Virtual Panoramic Images," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/the-auschwitz-memorial-in-virtual-panoramic-images,1113.html> (last modified 23 November 2014).

importance of the physical site's authenticity. If visiting the Museum 'is increasingly becoming an experience not to miss', and a 'present-day *rite of passage*', how can this be reconciled on a digital platform for people who may never have this experience?<sup>74</sup> One answer to this paradox has been the creation of the Auschwitz Museum's virtual tour, which allows the Museum to promote the 'authentic site' and ways of seeing it whilst, in some ways, connecting with digital visitors' perceptions of how an authentic experience at the Museum would look or feel.

### **Walking Through the Museum?**

Shortly before the seventieth anniversary of Auschwitz-Birkenau's liberation, the Museum launched an updated, 360-degree panoramic 'virtual tour' of its grounds, hosted on an extension of the official website ([www.panorama.auschwitz.org](http://www.panorama.auschwitz.org)).<sup>75</sup> The tour consists of more than 200 high-definition, spherical photographs of Auschwitz I, Auschwitz-Birkenau and the *Alte Judenrampe*, taken over the course of three years.<sup>76</sup> In each view, the visitor can drag the camera in any direction and zoom in on any area. The panoramas are stitched together by a network of arrows which, when clicked upon, propel the visitor into the next (or back to the previous) view, though users also have the option to skip to specific panoramas from a photographic list for each respective site (Figure 3.5). In several locations, Giga-Pixel technology was also used, meaning that the resolution is high enough for visitors to read, for example, the captions accompanying the photographic exhibition in Birkenau's Sauna building.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Piotr M. A. Cywiński, *Epitaph*, trans. Witold Kościa-Zbirohowski (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 16; Bartosz Bartyzel, Jarosław Mensfelt and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2014* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2015), 5 (emphasis in original).

<sup>75</sup> Sawicki, "The Auschwitz Memorial."

<sup>76</sup> Monika Siorek, ed. *The International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2018), 27; "Przykładowe realizacje," *Agencja Interaktywna 360*, online at: [https://www.ai360.pl/realizacje\\_wirtualne\\_wycieczki.php](https://www.ai360.pl/realizacje_wirtualne_wycieczki.php) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>77</sup> Sawicki, "The Auschwitz Memorial".

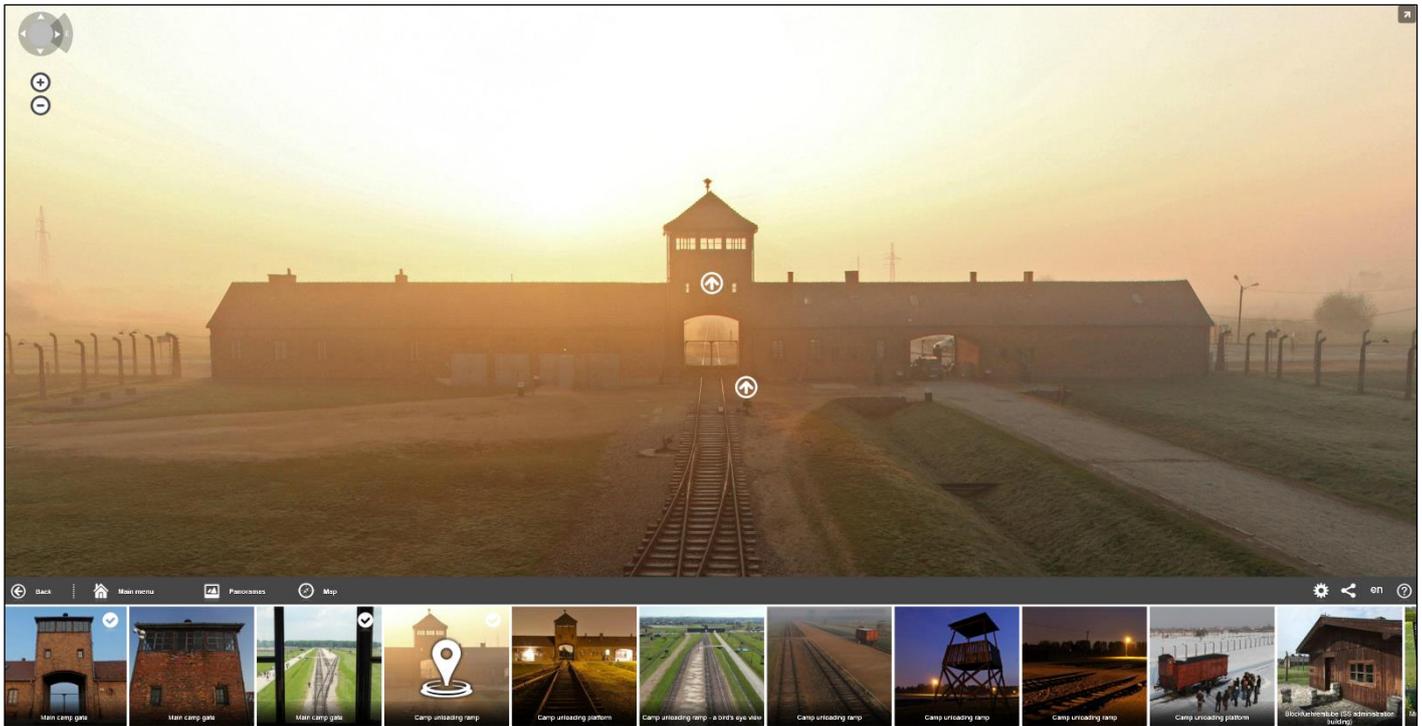


Figure 3.5. A view from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s virtual tour, illustrating the navigational arrows and the choice of panoramas. Source: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

The images were created by Spacery360 and Agencja Interaktywna 360, two Polish companies specialising in virtual tours and panoramas.<sup>78</sup> Their combined portfolios include the three residences of the Polish President and highlights of the cities of Zabierzów, Toruń and Bielsko-Biała. The Museum’s ability to hire such companies highlights the funding available for this type of project. Through its notoriety and symbolism and, therefore, the number of annual visitors and donations it receives, the Auschwitz Museum has a larger budget to spend on digital resources than, for instance, the State Museum at Majdanek, even though both are primarily funded by the Polish government.<sup>79</sup>

Each panorama includes a textual description and, in selected areas, the virtual tour also displays archival photographs, eyewitness testimonies, pictures of the Museum’s

<sup>78</sup> *Spacery360*, online at: [www.spacery360.pl](http://www.spacery360.pl) (accessed 28 June 2020); “Przykładowe realizacje,” *Agencja Interaktywna 360*.

<sup>79</sup> In 2019 the State Museum at Majdanek received the equivalent of only 10% of the total number of visitors that toured the Auschwitz Museum in the same year. This discrepancy can be explained by factors such as the internationalisation of Auschwitz (see Chapter One) and the emphasis on Kraków as a tourist destination. The Auschwitz Museum also charges more for guided tours of the site. Although much of the Museum’s revenue is put back into its operation and conservation projects, grants and donations from government ministries and other organisations mean that there are more funds to secure features such as the virtual tour. Katarzyna Boraca and Krzysztof Stanek, eds., *Raport Roczny 2019* (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 2020), 38; Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2019* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2020), 25, 85; “Guide Services,” *State Museum at Majdanek*, online at: <http://www.majdanek.eu/en/guides> (accessed 28 June 2020); “Guided Service - Price List,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: [http://www.auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/\\_public/visit/19\\_en.pdf](http://www.auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/_public/visit/19_en.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2020).

collections and recommended Museum publications or E-learning lessons. According to Paweł Sawicki, however, the initial version of the tour contained only the panoramic images; the tour's launch was put on hold for two years whilst Museum staff assessed which types of educational content to include, and where to include them. The Museum's primary concern was that, without these additional features, there would be 'absolutely no education [or] memory in it' and the tour would become only a shallow viewing experience.<sup>80</sup> From the start of the project, therefore, there was an element of prescribing how the digital visitor should see the site, as well as a comparison with physical visits and a consideration of how an authentic experience might be integrated into the tour. The purpose of the virtual tour is not to replace or simulate a physical visit, as the focus very much remains on people travelling to the real site wherever possible.<sup>81</sup> Yet, a closer examination of the two experiences' elements reveals a number of similarities, as well as differences, between individuals' corporeal Museum experiences and use of the virtual tour.

In some ways, the basic mechanics of the panoramic tour closely resemble a physical visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The white arrows create a semi-structured route for the visitor, similar to a guided tour. Although one can choose in which direction to go, the arrows signify specifically curated areas of significance. Thus, the visitor is not totally free to roam the site and must adhere to notions of curatorial authenticity and institutional authority – the places or buildings that the curators deem the most important – rather than consciously selecting those of aesthetic or emotional interest. On the other hand, the Museum partially relaxes its authority over the visitor's journey through the site by providing the option to flick between panoramas and the three sites featured. In this respect, the virtual tour creates a more customisable experience, allowing each visitor to decide upon the order and duration of their visit, thereby tailoring the visit to their individual needs and preferences.

The arrows are not, however, the only element reminiscent of a guide. Although there is no narrator or audio commentary in the virtual tour, the brief textual descriptions given for each panorama stand *in lieu* of a Museum tour guide. This absence-presence can also be applied to corporeal visits to Auschwitz I through the use of headphones, as discussed in the previous chapter. Although most visitors tour the Museum in large groups, as Alasdair Richardson argues, the headphones can leave the visitor 'entirely without conversation,

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<sup>80</sup> Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 30 January 2020; Morgan Schlesinger, "The Museum Wiki: A Model for Online Collections in Museums," (Master's thesis, University of San Francisco, 2016), 5.

<sup>81</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

secluded within their own thoughts’, with only the voice of the tour guide to direct and inform them.<sup>82</sup> The social aspect that may distinguish a physical Auschwitz Museum tour from a virtual one, therefore, is not always as distinct as one might expect. The virtual tourist physically experiences a solitary visit but, as with a real museum visit, shares some experience of being guided through each area. Moreover, the inclusion of excerpts of eyewitness testimony, detailing former prisoners’ arrival at the camp or the conditions in which they were forced to survive, echo the testimonies and stories that the Museum guides often impart, in order to humanise the bricks-and-mortar site and retain a focus on the victims. In contrast to the events the guides often retell, however – such as the escape of Mala Zimetbaum and Edward Galiński, or the martyrdom of Father Maximilian Kolbe – many of these extracts have been directly shared from the Museum’s archive.<sup>83</sup> This allows the virtual visitor to become acquainted with a wider range of testimonies and experiences, whilst simultaneously gaining some insight into the Museum’s curatorship. Thus, in terms of considering individuals’ authentic experiences, the Auschwitz Museum has chosen to recreate some elements of a physical guided tour, potentially producing similar reactions and emotions in the user to those walking through the grounds themselves, but from the comfort of their own home and with greater opportunities to learn about the former camp in more detail.

A final example of the mirroring of physical visits relates to the recommended Museum publications. These follow the historical written descriptions, and each book is hyperlinked to its respective page in the online bookshop, so that virtual visitors can purchase these during or immediately after the tour. The inclusion of these recommendations serves three functions. This is, firstly, a matter of practicality; providing links to only the Museum’s own bookshop guarantees further revenue for the institution. Secondly, the fact that only books that are published and/or sold by the Museum are recommended reasserts the institution’s authority, suggesting that these publications are the most reliable sources for information on Auschwitz. Finally, on an experiential level, the provision of links to the bookshop imitates a physical visitor browsing the Museum’s bookshops after their tour. Unlike many museums and exhibitions, one can leave the Auschwitz Museum without having

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<sup>82</sup> Alasdair Richardson, “Site-Seeing: Reflections on Visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum with Teenagers,” *Holocaust Studies* (2019): 7, online at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1625121>. Richardson’s article, however, focuses on groups participating in the Holocaust Educational Trust’s ‘Lessons from Auschwitz’ Project, which are accompanied by both a Museum guide and an Educator who regularly addresses the group and provides opportunities for discussion and support.

<sup>83</sup> See Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz*, trans. Harry Zohn (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 236, 219-20.

to exit through a shop, yet many visitors choose to supplement their newly-acquired knowledge and experience by doing so. This increasingly typical aspect of museum-going is thus translated into the digital museum, providing the virtual tourist with a better understanding (and, to a degree, an emulation) of the real experience.

The inclusion of the directional arrows, historical descriptions and links to the bookshop may make the visitor feel as though they have undertaken a type of guided tour of the site, which relates to the Auschwitz Museum's notions on how the grounds should be seen in the real world. For those who cannot physically visit, this might at least partially constitute an authentic experience of touring the Museum; for those who can, the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the site before visiting may enhance their onsite experience.

The online tour also differs from a physical visit to the Museum, and presents a number of opportunities that cannot be experienced onsite. The majority of physical visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum will take a 'general' guided tour, lasting around three-and-a-half hours and including the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gate, museum exhibits in Blocks 4-7 and reconstructed crematorium I in Auschwitz I, and the unloading ramp and ruins of crematoria II and III in Birkenau.<sup>84</sup> Such a short tour of such a large site is designed to ensure 'efficient movement around the entire Museum grounds and full information about the museum, the buildings and their history, and the exhibitions' and, in more practical terms, allows many groups to travel back to Kraków (or onto other excursions, such as the Wieliczka Salt Mine) the same day.<sup>85</sup> The virtual tour, however, enables users to view the grounds at their own pace, away from the crowds, with time to pause and reflect (an opportunity that is seldom available at the Museum, particularly during peak times). In this way, the virtual tour provides the visitor with the concept of 'walking through the museum' by themselves, 'stopping at interesting spots'.<sup>86</sup> Many of the starting vantage points are in positions in which the average visitor finds themselves; looking up at the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gate, for instance, or viewing the vast expanse of Birkenau from the top of the main watchtower.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the act of zooming in, particularly in locations covered by Giga-

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<sup>84</sup> Siorek, *The International Center*, 17.

<sup>85</sup> "Guided Tours Options," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/guides> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>86</sup> Andrea Bandelli, "Virtual Spaces and Museums," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 151.

<sup>87</sup> "Virtual Tour – 'Arbeit Macht Frei' Gate," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour1,2999,en.html> (accessed 28 June 2020); "Virtual Tour – Main Camp Gate," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour2,6698,en.html> (accessed 28 June 2020).

Pixel technology, recreates some of the process of a physical visit. Manipulating the camera within the Sauna building's photo exhibition, for example, can be compared to an individual walking closer to the panels, perhaps also bending down to look at the photographs and read their captions.<sup>88</sup>

The physical body is integral to tourist and cultural experiences; tourism scholars in particular have argued for its centrality in authenticity.<sup>89</sup> Chapter Two demonstrates the importance of standing in the Auschwitz Museum, experiencing the site, for many visitors. Yet the structure of the virtual tour, and options such as zooming in, suggests that some features of an authentic experience can be perceived without being physically present within the Museum space.<sup>90</sup> The body is, of course, required to use the tour: one moves through the panoramas by clicking their computer mouse, pressing their keyboard's arrow keys, or swiping the screen of their portable digital device. Moreover, one is fully aware that they are looking at images on a screen, situated within a home or academic environment. Perhaps the educational and emotional aspects of the visitor's experience, however, can still be elicited. One can certainly feel, for example, the 'imposing, disturbing presence' of the Gate of Death, or sadness upon learning the fate of the Koplowicz family, immortalised in the photographs they brought from their home in Będzin.<sup>91</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, and explored in Chapter Four, visitors to the Museum's physical site often capture their experiences through photography and/or social media, attempting to describe their thoughts and feelings through captioned images. The virtual tour's option to publish links to particular panoramas through Facebook, Twitter and Google+ illustrates that some elements may, similarly, create an impression on the user strong enough to warrant sharing with others.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, in the case of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, tours rely primarily on 'the act of looking and seeing'.<sup>93</sup> Although smell, sound, taste and touch can add to the overall experience of

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<sup>88</sup> "Virtual Tour – So-Called 'Sauna' Building. Family Photographs [sic] of Deportees," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour2,3078,en.html> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>89</sup> Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen, "The Body in Tourism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 11 (1994): 125–51; Paolo Mura, Rokhshad Tavakoli, and Saeed Pahlevan Sharif, "'Authentic but Not Too Much': Exploring Perceptions of Authenticity of Virtual Tourism," *Information Technology and Tourism* 17:2 (2017): 150.

<sup>90</sup> Mura, Tavakoli, and Sharif, "'Authentic'," 151.

<sup>91</sup> Jon Mills, "On Found Objects: Reflections on Auschwitz," *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* 12:2 (2015): 222. Conversely, some of these feelings are most likely influenced by the images themselves. The panoramas of Birkenau's Gate of Death, for example, were taken at sunrise, with no people in view and a low-lying mist visible (see "Virtual Tour – Auschwitz II-Birkenau – Main Camp Gate," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour2,2989,en.html> (accessed 28 June 2020)). Such atmospheric qualities enhance the Gate's presence, reinforcing the digital visitor's notions of its iconicity.

<sup>92</sup> This feature is not available on the mobile version.

<sup>93</sup> Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 24.

visiting, the Museum largely remains a ‘unisensory visual experience’.<sup>94</sup> Other senses take a secondary role in light of the artefacts kept behind thick glass and the discouragement of walking on or around original buildings that are in ruins, or require structural support to avoid collapse. Thus, in some ways, the virtual tourist experience is not impaired by an absence of sensorial aspects, such as touching displays or becoming acquainted with particular smells (which do characterise exhibits at some Holocaust museums).<sup>95</sup>

It is important to note, however, that the Auschwitz Museum’s virtual tour is not designed as an immersive experience, if one considers immersive spaces as ‘total environments’ that create ‘the sensation of entering a space that immediately identifies itself as somehow separate from the world’.<sup>96</sup> One is, of course, aware that they are not in the physical space of the Museum; unlike virtual reality (VR) programmes that require headphones or goggles, such as the Anne Frank House VR app, the virtual tourist is not surrounded by the digital images of the site, remaining conscious of the borders of their screen or device.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, as Reading notes, users can flick between websites, leaving the virtual tour (if only temporarily) to check ‘everyday’ or ‘present’ aspects such as the news or weather.<sup>98</sup> The Museum space, therefore, is not wholly separated from the visitor’s immediate surroundings, thus illustrating the limits of the digital museum in comparison to its physical counterpart. The Auschwitz Museum does not wish to dissuade its visitors from travelling to the physical site, as this would potentially undermine the authenticity ascribed to the grounds and its effect upon the visitor. Thus, the virtual tour is only a representation of what one can find at the Museum itself.

Certain elements of the tour also deliberately emphasise the rejection of a simulated physical visit. The panoramic images were captured over the course of several years, through different seasons and at different times of the day (and night). Additionally, several aerial views of the camp are included – not just from vantage points such as the watchtowers, but

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<sup>94</sup> Simon Lacey and K. Sathian, “Please DO Touch the Exhibits! Interactions between Visual Imagery and Haptic Perception,” in *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space*, ed. Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 3.

<sup>95</sup> One example is the shoes on display at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum . Edward T. Linenthal, “The Boundaries of Memory: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,” *American Quarterly* 46:3 (1994): 428.

<sup>96</sup> Alison Griffiths, *Shivers Down Your Spine: Cinema, Museums, and the Immersive View* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 285, 2.

<sup>97</sup> “The Anne Frank House in Virtual Reality,” *Anne Frank House*, online at: <https://www.annefrank.org/en/about-us/what-we-do/publications/anne-frank-house-virtual-reality> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>98</sup> Reading, “Clicking on Hitler,” 330-1.

bird's eye views that allow large areas of the site to be observed at one time.<sup>99</sup> These can either be accessed in sequence of the arrows or, as previously mentioned, in an order of the visitor's choosing. Whilst this enables the user to view the changing landscape of the Museum over the course of the year, rather than on one visit, and also view the site in ways impossible during a physical tour, this results in an interrupted, disjointed sequence of 'walking' through the Museum that reinforces the distance between the user and the space. Even if the act of looking is usually 'stubbornly delimited by the body', however, these alternative vantage points can still (and may be designed to) provoke reactions in the digital visitor.<sup>100</sup> Aerial perspectives, for instance, can highlight the scale of the former camps, an aspect that is often commented upon by those physically guided around the Auschwitz Museum but may not be appreciated by those who cannot visit.<sup>101</sup>

Earlier in this chapter, the lack of social interaction one can encounter whilst touring Auschwitz I, through using the headphones was mentioned. Yet, as Andrea Bandelli notes, 'One of the main characteristics of museums [...] is that they are social spaces', and the social aspect does not entirely disappear at any point during the Museum tour, even if only due to the physical presence of other visitors.<sup>102</sup> On one hand, although each experience is personal, the emotional aspect of perceived authenticity – which, as shown in Chapter Two, is key to many corporeal visits – is undoubtedly affected by sharing the experience with other people. In addition to the individual's perception of the Auschwitz Museum's authenticity being based on the place where they are standing and the historical objects they see, the people with whom they walk through the Museum can radically shape their experiences. An individual visitor assigned to a general tour group, for example, may perceive their visit differently to someone who arrives as part of a school group, or those who have travelled to the site with a survivor. The online tour may thus seem 'isolating and lacking in meaningful social contacts', as this factor cannot be replicated online.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the relative absence of people in the panoramic images does not recreate a real Museum visit where, during the

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<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the first panorama of Auschwitz I is an aerial view over the site. See "Virtual Tour – Panorama of Auschwitz I – Bird's Eye View," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour1,3636,en.html> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>100</sup> Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, 24.

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Richardson, "Site-Seeing," 8; Thomas P. Thurnell-Read, "Engaging Auschwitz: An Analysis of Young Travellers' Experiences of Holocaust Tourism," *Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice* 1:1 (2009): 37.

<sup>102</sup> Bandelli, "Virtual Spaces," 150.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

peak of visiting, a limit of 1,000 visitors entering Auschwitz I per hour has to be imposed.<sup>104</sup> Although the virtual tour does include groups walking around the site in its panoramas, the digital visitor does not experience the occasional pausing required to let groups pass, or views obstructed by other people.

Specific panoramas do, however, show parts of the Museum full of people, relating to commemorative events held there. These include views of participants on the March of the Living 2013 and survivors and dignitaries laying tributes at the execution wall in the courtyard of Block 11.<sup>105</sup> Such images demonstrate the Auschwitz Museum's desire for users of the virtual tour to not only experience the site as a representation (rather than simulation) of the Museum, but also as a Museum rather than an attempted representation or simulation of the site as a camp (though a panorama devoid of people would still illustrate this distinction, considering the thousands of figures present during the camp's operation). The inclusion of these particular events thus signifies the importance of the Museum in wider acts of remembrance and, to a certain degree, politics, as has been the case since its liberation.<sup>106</sup>

Finally, the virtual tour provides opportunities that are unavailable to the onsite visitor, yet also misses numerous exhibitions that are integral to the guided tour (and, to most visitors, their authentic experience). On one hand, in contrast to a physical visit, the virtual tourist is granted what might be considered a private tour of the Museum by means of accessing areas that are not open to the public. These include views from several watchtowers, the interior of Blocks 2, 3 and 10 (the site of sterilisation experiments) and cells in the basement of Block 11 in Auschwitz I.<sup>107</sup> This not only gives the user a glimpse into parts of the camp which have remained largely unchanged since 1945 – as attested to by, for example, prisoners' etchings on the cell walls – but means they can still be viewed without

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<sup>104</sup> Quoted from around 16:04 of Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, "Remembrance Awareness Responsibility: 70 Years of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum," *YouTube* video, 59:27, 3 July 2017, online at: <https://youtu.be/ZeeFrq7lHd4> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>105</sup> "Virtual Tour – March of the Living 2013," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour1,5598,en.html>; accessed 28 June 2020, "Virtual Tour – Execution Wall – Ceremony of the Anniversary of Liberation," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour1,3439,en.html> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>106</sup> The virtual tour as a representation of the Auschwitz Museum, rather than the camp, is reinforced further by these specific panoramas, as the digital visitor can see behind-the-scenes elements of these events. In this respect, the Museum is giving the visitor access to its 'back region', as theorised by MacCannell. Dean MacCannell, "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *American Journal of Sociology* 79:3 (1973): 597.

<sup>107</sup> For examples, see "Virtual Tour – Block 10. Dissection Room," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour1,2917,en.html>; (accessed 28 June 2020); "Virtual Tour – Block 11. Prisoner Cell," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://panorama.auschwitz.org/tour1,3267,en.html> (accessed 28 June 2020).

the risk of damage and erosion from thousands of visitors passing through.<sup>108</sup> These mostly unseen spaces are layered with both curatorial and experiential authenticity. The interiors of the blocks, for instance – untouched since the camp’s liberation, undamaged by visitor footfall – provide curators with more original, objective evidence of how the camp once looked, which in itself can feel more authentic and real to a visitor.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, the virtual tour includes panoramas of the *Alte Judenrampe*, the place where arrivals to Birkenau disembarked their trains before May 1944, when an extension of railway track into the camp became operational.<sup>110</sup> Given its location – situated approximately one kilometre from Birkenau’s main gate, down a narrow, residential street – only participants of Museum courses or intensive study tours visit in person. As a result, many visitors may not even be aware of its existence. The virtual tour thus grants access to this often-forgotten site, both for those who can and cannot visit in person.

Including areas that are normally off limits to the public demonstrates the Museum’s authority and control over how the site is viewed – primarily deciding what is (and is not) accessible to visitors – whilst granting the digital visitor a sense of freedom and empowerment in viewing areas that are normally undiscoverable. Highlighting these places also enables the Auschwitz Museum to further promote its notions of the former camp’s authenticity, given their largely untouched state, and communicate these to online users. Aspects such as these demonstrate the Museum’s desire to use traditional museological practices of authority and somehow incorporate these into a format that gives the visitor more freedom and choice.

On the other hand, the exhibitions in Blocks 4-7 of Auschwitz I, displaying artefacts such as victims’ shoes, suitcases, hair and personal items, are not included in the virtual tour. Out of respect for the victims, photography onsite is prohibited in certain places, such as the room full of women’s hair.<sup>111</sup> The exhibits’ exclusion from the virtual tour partially adheres to the same principles but, according to Paweł Sawicki, is also a practical matter. The current panoramas consist of hundreds of photographs, taken from only one perspective that cannot necessarily capture ‘tiny fonts’ on ‘flat displays’ that provide context to the exhibits.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> ‘Unchanged’ here means no major structural differences since 1945, as these etchings have been subject to the processes of conservation.

<sup>109</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>110</sup> Tadeusz Iwaszko, “Reasons for Confinement in the Camp and Categories of Prisoners,” in *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Central Issues in the History of the Camp: The Prisoners – Their Life and Work*, ed. Tadeusz Iwaszko et al., trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2000), 2:17.

<sup>111</sup> “Basic Information,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

<sup>112</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

Moreover, as the rooms containing these exhibits are not designed to be encapsulated by such technologies, the Museum believes this would create an ‘uncomfortable’ experience for the virtual tourist.<sup>113</sup> Yet omitting displays of victims’ possessions may also relate to the emotions and perceptions of the digital visitor. The sight of piles of intimate personal objects, particularly the hair, can prove distressing to physical visitors; the context and significance given to these artefacts might result in a need for emotional and pastoral support that is unavailable to the digital user.<sup>114</sup> These exhibitions might therefore be excluded as a form of duty of care.<sup>115</sup>

Alternatively, scholars have suggested that viewing artefacts up close has the greatest impact upon visitors. Nina Levent and D. Lynn McRainey assert that ‘just being in close proximity to objects, visitors feel a little closer to someone of the past’.<sup>116</sup> Real, historical artefacts possess an ‘aura’ and ‘power’ that cannot be replicated.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, before the advent of widespread digital technology, Nelson Graburn described the ‘reverential’ aspect of the real museum experience, drawing attention to ‘the visitor’s need for a personal experience with something higher, more sacred, and out-of-the-ordinary than home and work are able to supply’.<sup>118</sup> Even during the digital age, however, physical museum artefacts have retained their ‘numinous’ qualities, creating meaningful experiences for visitors that strengthen their connections with the past.<sup>119</sup> As well as providing evidence of Nazi atrocities, the inclusion of

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Richardson, “Site-Seeing,” 9; Aviva Mimouni-Bloch et al., “The Mental Health Consequences of Student ‘Holocaust Memorial Journeys’,” *Australasian Psychiatry* 21:4 (2013): 326-8. Conversely, the latter study addresses only Israeli students attending a March of the Living. Considering the emphasis on Holocaust education and remembrance in Israeli society, as well as potential familial links, any mental health difficulties experienced after visiting Poland may not have emerged solely from their Museum experience.

<sup>115</sup> Alternatively, the Museum may have feared criticism of the potential for voyeurism and exploitation of victims’ remains and possessions (although the same challenge arises from physical visitors viewing these exhibitions). Several scholars have discussed the voyeuristic, even ‘pornographic’ nature of visiting Holocaust museums and viewing their associated artefacts. See, for example, Michael Sorkin, “The Holocaust Museum: Between Beauty and Horror,” *Progressive Architecture* 74: 2 (1993): 74; Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History is Bought, Packaged, and Sold* (New York, Routledge, 1999), 97; Carolyn J. Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 24-6.

<sup>116</sup> Nina Levent and D. Lynn McRainey, “Touch and Narrative in Art and History Museums,” in *The Multisensory Museum: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Touch, Sound, Smell, Memory, and Space*, ed. Nina Levent and Alvaro Pascual-Leone (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 79.

<sup>117</sup> Paola Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, Fabrizio Galeazzi and Valentina Vassallo, “Introduction: Why Authenticity Still Matters Today,” in *Authenticity and Cultural Heritage in the Age of 3D Digital Reproductions*, ed. Paola Di Giuseppantonio Di Franco, Fabrizio Galeazzi and Valentina Vassallo (Cambridge: McDonald Institute, 2018), 2.

<sup>118</sup> Nelson Graburn, “The Museum and the Visitor Experience,” *Roundtable Reports* (1977): 3.

<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth Wood and Kiersten F. Latham, *The Objects of Experience: Transforming Visitor-Object Encounters in Museums* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2014), 84-95; Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood, “Excursions into the Un-Remembered Past: What People Want from Visits to Historical Sites,” *The Public Historian* 22:3 (2000): 107-27; Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood, “Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past,” *Ethnology* 42: 1 (2003): 55-71.

victims' possessions in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's permanent exhibition (and other Holocaust museums) are undoubtedly linked to ideas of numinous experience (even if they do not always provide them).<sup>120</sup> Movable, everyday objects have become 'the Holocaust's dominant metonymy'; they 'fill in the emptiness' of the former camps and 'scream of the history' to which they are relevant.<sup>121</sup> The experience of encountering these objects – designed for life but symbolising death, their static presence highlighting the absence of their owners – is deemed irreplaceable.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on viewing the material possessions of Holocaust victims, particularly at (or from) sites such as the Auschwitz Museum, implies that one simply cannot understand this history without direct confrontation of the physical evidence.<sup>123</sup> The Museum therefore utilises its authority to control how such objects are viewed, dismissing anything but a corporeal encounter as a significant method of learning and remembrance. In this sense, the Auschwitz Museum relies on the idea that, as Marc Pachter argues, 'The electronic will draw us more to the physical'.<sup>124</sup> Whilst this may be useful preparation for a visit, especially alongside the Museum's other online materials designed for this purpose, this leaves those who cannot make the journey to the physical site at a disadvantage.<sup>125</sup> In the fast-paced world of technology, the methods and software used to create the virtual tour will soon seem 'old'; before too long, the Auschwitz Museum will begin to update this aspect of its digital museum.<sup>126</sup> Whether or not the permanent exhibition's displays will be added is uncertain. The example of the exclusion of these exhibits, however, signifies the Museum's authoritative stance and focus on the physical site as the centre of authenticity.

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<sup>120</sup> Such exhibits may initially shock the visitor but not create any sense of connection to this past and its victims, or elicit no particular emotion at all. Further research is needed to ascertain the effect of viewing these objects. Carr, "Small Things," 535.

<sup>121</sup> Bożena Shallcross, *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011), 1; Piotr M. A. Cywiński and Magdalena Emilewicz-Pióro, preface to *Auschwitz Legacies*, ed. Magdalena Emilewicz-Pióro and Piotr M. A. Cywiński, trans. William Brand (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 7.

<sup>122</sup> Shallcross, *The Holocaust Object*, 2.

<sup>123</sup> Cywiński and Emilewicz-Pióro, preface to *Auschwitz Legacies*, 7; Carr, "Small Things," 536-8.

<sup>124</sup> Marc Pachter, "Why Museums Matter," in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 334.

<sup>125</sup> Potential physical visitors are advised to consult an introductory Museum E-learning lesson ("Plan Your Visit," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/plan-your-visit> (accessed 28 June 2020)). An online lesson has also been created specifically for young people. "Preparation for a Visit to Auschwitz," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: [http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/31\\_przygotowanie\\_do\\_wizyty\\_en](http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/31_przygotowanie_do_wizyty_en) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>126</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

## The Future: Virtual Reality?

The Auschwitz Museum's virtual tour is not designed as an immersive experience. Yet, according to Sawicki, the Museum is considering how to bring educational content to those who cannot visit the real site via virtual reality (VR).<sup>127</sup> Several VR projects regarding Holocaust history have already been launched. These include the Anne Frank House Secret Annex app and *The Last Goodbye*, a 20-minute film produced by the USC Shoah Foundation in which Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter takes the viewer (watching the presentation through VR goggles) around the former camp at Majdanek on his final visit.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, an unofficial VR experience of the Auschwitz Museum, created by German broadcasting service WDR, has been uploaded to YouTube.<sup>129</sup> When played on a smartphone that can be inserted into a VR headset, the user can look and 'walk' around the grounds, whilst listening to survivor testimony. None of these are designed to show the spaces exactly as they once were; although furnished, the Secret Annex is devoid of people, whilst the former Majdanek and Auschwitz camps are shown in their present museological form. A future VR project created by the Auschwitz Museum, however, may attempt to create a guided tour that includes reconstructions of, for example, the destroyed crematoria in Birkenau, and the paintwork on the brick barracks.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, museological practices would be combined with a representation of how the site appeared during its operation – finally, perhaps, a clearer example of the 'authentic site' without the issues of conservation or landscaping. Sawicki is keen to emphasise, however, that such technologies would be for use only outside the Museum ('on the site people will not be using goggles') and that users would not 'just walk around and move from one place to another' but would be provided with a route and accompanying explanations.<sup>131</sup> Whilst historical commentary is crucial to education, this implies that – even in a virtual space away from the physical site, designed to more accurately represent the camp – the Museum would wish to retain control over how the grounds are experienced by the user.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> "Virtual Reality," *Anne Frank House*; "USC Shoah: The Last Goodbye," *Moving Picture Company*, online at: <https://www.moving-picture.com/what-we-do/ar-vr/usc-shoah-the-last-goodbye> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>129</sup> WDR, "Inside Auschwitz – English Version in 360°/VR," *YouTube* video, 9:36, 27 January 2018, online at: [https://youtu.be/EOM\\_CxAKB\\_Y](https://youtu.be/EOM_CxAKB_Y) (accessed 28 June 2020). Given the varied camerawork involved, this would have been produced with permission from the Auschwitz Museum. The Museum, however, has not promoted the video. This clearly works similarly to the national exhibitions onsite; as the content was not created by the Museum, the institution can keep its distance from the project and not be seen to encourage the use of newer digital technology on the grounds.

<sup>130</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The rise of the Internet has presented both challenges and opportunities for Holocaust museums and organisations. The contemporary reliance on the Web in education and research, as well as the presence of material published by Holocaust deniers and antisemites, means that these institutions have created their own websites and promoted Holocaust education and remembrance online. Numerous Holocaust museums have taken advantage of the features that hosting a website can offer, including elements such as online lessons and virtual tours on their webpages. Primarily, however, this has stemmed from partially or distantly associated museums (particularly those with greater funding and national significance); institutions located at former Nazi camps do not appear to regard their websites as extensions of their physical museum spaces. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is an exception to this rule. Whilst the physical site undoubtedly remains at the core of its work, the Museum recognises the potential to reach a global audience and bring some elements of the Museum onto the screens and into the homes of those who can visit only digitally. Moreover, the Museum utilises its authority to encourage past and future visitors to discover more about the site before and/or after their trip. The virtual tour is the greatest example of these efforts.

This aspect of the digital museum can, in some ways, be compared to a corporeal guided tour of the Auschwitz Museum. A (curated) recommended route and places of significance are highlighted; panoramas are accompanied by historical descriptions, akin to a guide's narration; and visitors are recommended to browse and purchase Museum publications. Furthermore, certain camera angles and the option to rotate and zoom into each view can emulate the experience of walking through the Museum. In contrast, the digital visitor is reminded that the virtual tour is not designed to simulate a visit or create an experience of immersion or staged reality. This is mainly illustrated through aerial views; panoramas captured during different seasons and times of the day; the lack of a social element; images of physically inaccessible parts of the former camp; and the exclusion of the displays of victims' possessions in the permanent exhibition. The virtual tour thus presents several online-only experiences, available to both physical and digital visitors.

The tour's heavily curated content demonstrates the Museum's retention of its authority. Virtual tourists are unable to explore every part of the site, and the exclusion of the permanent exhibition's displays suggests instruction regarding the way such objects should be viewed and interpreted. Yet some of this authority is relaxed in the virtual tour, as digital

visitors are not required to view the panoramas in order and can thus move around the Museum space more freely than following a physical guided tour. It remains to be seen how the Museum's concepts of authenticity and institutional authority might be integrated into a future virtual reality experience, reconstructing the camp space through a carefully designed guided tour.

It may be possible for those who use the virtual tour to attain some sense of an authentic experience. This can largely be found in the elements that echo a guided tour; even the more disembodied panoramas, however, can elicit emotional reactions and create strong impressions of the visitor's perception of the site. Yet the online tour is not designed as a total experience, or to replace a physical visit (for those who can travel to the Museum). Instead, the virtual tour might be described as a more sophisticated method of educating people about the site and its history, and a prompt for website visitors to experience the real Museum if and when they can.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has thus adapted to the website element of the digital museum by considering its Internet presence as an extension of the physical museum. This translates to producing and publishing features designed to enhance education about, and commemoration of, Auschwitz for as wide an audience as possible. Aspects such as the virtual tour present the 'authentic site' to the digital visitor, providing them with an idea of experiencing the physical space whilst emphasising the irreplaceability of the real thing. Yet the duality of the virtual tour showing the authentic site, whilst also obscuring some of its elements, illustrates the Museum's tension between retaining outdated museological practices whilst trying to adapt to contemporary ones.

## Chapter Four: The Auschwitz Museum on Social Media: Validation, Criticism and Community-Building

*For us, 'like' = 'I remember.'*

Auschwitz Museum Twitter post

This final chapter focuses on the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's adaptation to social media. All three elements of authority, authenticity and audience are prominent in this adaptation and, as will be shown, are utilised and promoted in several ways. The use of social media platforms is a total departure from the Museum's physical grounds and official website; these types of public fora consist of discussions and debates far removed from the history and memory of Auschwitz. Nevertheless, this chapter will show how the Museum primarily utilises this element of the digital museum to extend its authority to instruct users on how to learn about and commemorate Auschwitz outside the Museum – even though this aspect is managed by only one person.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Holocaust museums on social media. This aspect of the digital museum is mainly used for sharing museum information, but also for education and commemoration. Representations of the Holocaust on social media, however, have caused controversy; these stem less from official institutions than from well-meaning individuals. The examples of the 'Dancing Auschwitz' YouTube video and Instagram's 'Eva.Stories' used highlight issues of censorship, taste and Holocaust education in the digital age.

The discussion then moves to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and its initial foray into the realm of social media. Concerns about the appropriateness of establishing a presence on Facebook in 2009 were quickly dismissed after an overwhelmingly positive response from the platform's users. The Museum set up accounts on Instagram and Twitter in 2012. (Although the Museum also hosts profiles on YouTube and Pinterest, these are used far less frequently, so this chapter draws on examples from these three main social media.)

The next section explores the Auschwitz Museum's strategy development. Unlike other museums, the Museum's social media content has evolved informally in the last several years. Furthermore, only one person, Paweł Sawicki, oversees these channels, primarily for reasons of time, co-ordination and language skills. Yet this is extremely problematic in terms

of the Museum's assertion of its authority, as only one person is tasked with representing an entire institution that is now followed by at least a million social media accounts. Although the Museum possesses a budget that could be used to employ a Social Media Manager, the reluctance to do so implies a resistance to fully engage the Auschwitz Museum in digital museological practices. The absence of branding is then discussed: the Museum refuses to pay for followers or advertising out of respect for the victims, instead relying on word of mouth, often from notable celebrities and public figures. The former camp's notoriety inevitably precedes its presence on social media, and it has thus amassed a large following in a relatively short space of time.

Next, the type of content published on the Museum's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts is examined. Due to the nature of each platform, there are differences in the length and function of this content. Facebook is used to post detailed information, particularly relating to Auschwitz's history. Instagram, as a primarily visual platform, is utilised to publish photographs of the contemporary Museum site, particularly those already posted by Museum visitors. On Twitter, however, the content is much more diverse, and this platform is thus explored in greater detail. Sawicki's selection of information and consultation of historical sources means that social media acts as an extension of the Museum's physical exhibition – here, one that is more flexible and continuous. Social media thus allows the Auschwitz Museum to express its curatorial authenticity within a wider public sphere. This also connects with visitors' and users' experiential authenticity, not only by appearing on social media in the first instance, but by claiming space in social media users' everyday experiences, as asserted by Andreas Wesener.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, experiential authenticity on social media primarily comes from visitors themselves. The personal, private experience of encountering the Auschwitz Museum is transformed into a public one through the publishing of photographs taken onsite and written commentaries composed afterwards. These visitors therefore extend their experience of the Museum and highlight its importance to others. One of the reasons that such reflections are shared is to seek approval and validation of this experience, primarily from their peers but also from the Auschwitz Museum itself. The official institution often redistributes visitors' posts, particularly on Instagram, and uses them as examples of appropriate representations of

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<sup>1</sup> Andreas Wesener, "Adopting 'Things of the Little': Intangible Cultural Heritage and Experiential Authenticity of Place in the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23:2 (2017): 143.

the Museum. As well as validating visitors' experiences, the Museum thus asserts its authority regarding suitable responses to the site within the digital museum.

Next, the chapter turns to the 'virtual community of remembrance' that the Museum has established, predominantly on Twitter.<sup>2</sup> This remembrance takes multiple forms: remembrance of the victims of Auschwitz; considerations of how one should remember this history; and remembrance of atrocities such as the Holocaust in the prevention of future genocides. The Museum's followers are invited to participate in each of these elements, demonstrating a relaxing of the Museum's authority and a willingness to collaborate, as found in other contemporary museums.

Conversely, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum shows a desire to retain its authoritative voice as much as possible. On one hand, this involves disproving news and accusations spread by Polish nationalists or Internet trolls, or refuting claims of a Polish-centric, antisemitic narrative. On the other hand, the Auschwitz Museum is quick to criticise members of its virtual community. This chapter focuses on three examples within its audience: individual Museum visitors, writers (journalists and novelists) and retailers. A number of examples are utilised to illustrate how the Museum asserts itself as the ultimate authority on the history and memory of Auschwitz, advising its social media followers how to behave at the Museum, how to write about Auschwitz, and what (and what not) to purchase to commemorate its history.

Thus, this chapter shows that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has adapted to the social media aspect of the digital museum to reach beyond the confines of the physical grounds and position itself within an everyday narrative for its followers. This relates to emphasising the importance of this history as an 'everyday history', but also ensures the Museum retains its authority over various forms of representation of the former camp.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the institution is represented by only one employee, however, raises questions of ownership around the memory of Auschwitz, whilst also highlighting the Museum's outmoded ways of communicating with its visitors, even through newer methods.

Authority, as will be shown, is the most salient category examined in this chapter. The Museum's use of social media is the clearest example of the dichotomy between monologic, didactic practice and contemporary, participatory discourse. Furthermore, there is greater

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<sup>2</sup> Heather Adams, "Never Forget: Remembering the Holocaust on Social Media," *Baptist Standard*, online at: <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/world/never-forget-remembering-the-holocaust-on-social-media> (last modified 13 March 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

analysis of the Museum's audience in this chapter; whilst much of its social media content presents a universal message, some is targeted towards certain groups or individuals. The notion of authenticity is not as prominent in this case study yet still features, as the Auschwitz Museum uses these digital resources to present elements of the physical, 'authentic' site to its followers within the authentic experiences of their daily lives.

It is also necessary to include a note on terminology here. The difference between the terms 'visitor' and 'user' was discussed in the Introduction. The word 'visitor' has been used much more frequently in this thesis, as the act of going to the Museum or clicking onto the website both require a visit, whether physical or digital. In the case of social media, however, this is not as straightforward. Although those with social media accounts may directly access the Museum's pages (thereby 'visiting' them), this interaction may be more casual, as they are also very likely to read this content whilst scrolling through their own news feed, in which content from various accounts is contained. Thus, sometimes the Museum comes to the individual rather than vice versa. As this information may be obtained and engaged with during general usage of social media, and not for the specific purpose of viewing Museum posts, 'users' are referred to more in this chapter. The term 'visitor' will, however, be used regarding those who have visited the physical Museum and published their images and comments on social media. The word 'follower' is also used in the context of social media, as subscribing to an account on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter constitutes an act of 'liking' or 'following' that particular profile.

### **Representing the Holocaust on Social Media**

Many Holocaust museums, both large and small, have established themselves on social media, primarily encouraging education and conversation. Funding is not always an issue in this area, as the creation of accounts on the main social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) is free.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the challenges of branding and/or marketing are largely removed; as each account's page takes the same format, there is no pressure to build or maintain a modern interface, unlike an official website. Thus, one can find globally-recognised institutions such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Yad Vashem and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum on social media alongside

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<sup>4</sup> Depending on the size of the institution, however, a Social Media Manager may need to be employed – a position which, surprisingly, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is lacking.

Melbourne's Jewish Holocaust Centre, The Vilnius Gaon State Jewish Museum and Camp des Milles in France.<sup>5</sup> This includes the majority of the museums at former concentration camps.<sup>6</sup> Larger museums, however – such as USHMM – have even created full-time positions specifically for the management of their social media, such is the level of engagement they hope to attain with other users.<sup>7</sup> Similarly to other museums, Holocaust-related institutions post practical details, such as visiting information and upcoming events, but also provide content on the history of the genocide (and, if relevant, how it unfolded in their city, or what are now the museum grounds); share video testimonies of survivors; upload both historical and contemporary photographs; and invite questions or discussions from their followers.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in some cases, social media has become an experimental tool with which to engage visitors during their time at the physical site. In 2014, shortly after the creation of a smartphone app to complement its permanent exhibition, USHMM lifted the ban on photography in the exhibition 'to attract [the] digital generation'.<sup>9</sup> Since this policy reversal, thousands of photographs have been uploaded to networks such as Twitter and Instagram.<sup>10</sup>

In keeping with their subject matter, Holocaust museums also provide and facilitate a commemorative function on social media, concerning both victims of the genocide and survivors who have subsequently died. These largely focus on one individual at a time, relating to the principle of rehumanising the victims and moving away from unknown, foreign towns and incomprehensible statistics. An employee of Lublin's Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre Centre, for instance, garnered much media attention when he created a Facebook

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of each on various platforms, see "US Holocaust Memorial Museum," *Instagram*, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/holocaustmuseum> (accessed 28 June 2020); "Yad Vashem: World Holocaust Center, Jerusalem," *Facebook*, online at: <https://www.facebook.com/yadvashem> (accessed 28 June 2020); "Auschwitz Memorial," *Twitter*, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum> (accessed 28 June 2020); "JHC Melbourne," *YouTube*, online at: <https://www.youtube.com/JHCMelbourne> (accessed 28 June 2020), "Valstybinis Vilniaus Gaono žydų muziejus/Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum," *Facebook*, online at: <https://www.facebook.com/tolerance.center.lt> (accessed 28 June 2020); "Camp des Milles," *Twitter*, online at: <https://twitter.com/campdesmilles> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Stefania Manca, "Holocaust Memorialisation and Social Media: Investigating How Memorials of Former Concentration Camps Use Facebook and Twitter," in *Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Social Media, University of Brighton, UK, 13-14 June 2019*, ed. Wybe Popma and Stuart Francis (Reading: Academic Conferences and Publishing International, 2019), 191-2.

<sup>7</sup> Amelia S. Wong, "Ethical Issues of Social Media in Museums: A Case Study," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 26:2 (2011): 103.

<sup>8</sup> Manca, "Holocaust Memorialisation," 190.

<sup>9</sup> Menachem Wecker, "U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Adopts New Rules to Attract Digital Generation," *The Washington Post*, online at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/us-holocaust-memorial-museum-adopts-new-rules-to-attract-digital-generation/2014/10/03/a3ce4ef0-3ebb-11e4-9587-5dafd96295f0\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.455cd8e19897](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/us-holocaust-memorial-museum-adopts-new-rules-to-attract-digital-generation/2014/10/03/a3ce4ef0-3ebb-11e4-9587-5dafd96295f0_story.html?utm_term=.455cd8e19897) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Meghan Lundrigan, "Holocaust Memory and Visuality in the Age of Social Media," (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2019), 114-23.

page for Henio Zytomirski, a Jewish boy who was gassed in Majdanek in 1942 at the age of nine (the page has since been deleted).<sup>11</sup> Yad Vashem has also partnered with Facebook so that users can access the ‘IRemember Wall’, which matches users with the name of a Holocaust victim from the institution’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names.<sup>12</sup> The names and photographs (where possible) of both user and victim are then uploaded to the Wall with the caption ‘[User] remembers [victim].’ Facebook users can share information about the victim through their profile, but also through their Twitter and Pinterest accounts.<sup>13</sup> Finally, when a Holocaust survivor associated with USHMM passes away, the Museum posts their photograph, accompanied by their name, year of birth and year of death, on Instagram. A short biography is provided in the caption.<sup>14</sup> The commemorative function of Holocaust museums on social media may be the greatest example of seeking followers’ participation; as Edward Casey notes, ‘Commemorating, by its very structure, encourages and enhances participation on the part of those who engage in it.’<sup>15</sup> Such practices of remembrance encourage ‘a moral discourse which recognizes our responsibility for the other person in a world of great conflict, tragedy, intolerance and indifference’, which Roger Silverstone asserted as being fundamental to ethical media use.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, although projects such as the ‘IRemember Wall’ illustrate remembrance on the part of users as ‘separate beings’, the overall act of commemoration possesses a collective narrative that enforces our ‘social being’ – much like engagement in social media itself.<sup>17</sup>

Holocaust education and commemoration on social media, however, is not without its controversies and challenges. Most institutional content remains factual and neutral; those who manage these accounts clearly avoid confrontation or debate with others (in this respect, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is largely an exception, as will be discussed later in

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<sup>11</sup> Although the Centre does not describe itself as a Holocaust museum, its work primarily concerns the history of the Holocaust in Lublin and the subsequent absence of the city’s Jewish community. Linda Vierecke, “Young Holocaust Victim Has over 1,700 Friends on Facebook,” *DW*, online at: <https://www.dw.com/en/young-holocaust-victim-has-over-1700-friends-on-facebook/a-4908523> (last modified 19 November 2009); Michael Gray, *Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 104; “Henio Zytomirski Page – No Limited Profile,” *Facebook*, online at: <https://www.facebook.com/zytomirski> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>12</sup> “IRemember Wall,” *Yad Vashem*, online at: <https://iremember.yadvashem.org> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Eytan Halon, “Yad Vashem, Facebook Partner to Commemorate Holocaust Victims,” *The Jerusalem Post*, online at: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/yad-vashem-facebook-partner-to-commemorate-holocaust-victims-615250> (last modified 25 January 2020).

<sup>14</sup> For an example, see US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Instagram post, 2 April 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-cnVECFm-Y>.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Casey, “From *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*,” in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzsky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 184.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Silverstone, “Regulation, Media Literacy and Media Civics,” *Media, Culture & Society* 26:3 (2004): 440.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

this chapter). Amelia Wong, USHMM's first Production Co-ordinator for social media, has written about the ethical challenges of representing a Holocaust museum on these platforms. Issues such as transparency, appropriateness, authority and free speech, she asserts, must all be considered when museums (in general) expand into social media and begin creating strategies for their content.<sup>18</sup>

Such considerations, however, do not affect non-affiliated individuals or organisations and the social media content they create. The behaviour of Holocaust museum visitors in relation to their use of social media has been vociferously criticised in recent years, as has been demonstrated in previous examples involving selfies and the naming and shaming culture that has arisen around this issue. Yet even individuals' well-intentioned attempts at celebrating survival or remembering victims have been received with mixed responses. The 2010 YouTube video 'Dancing Auschwitz', which showed Auschwitz survivor Adolek Kohn and his family dancing to Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive' at various Holocaust sites, is one such example.<sup>19</sup> The short film quickly gained over half a million hits after being uploaded to the website. Some praised the video, 'regarding the joyfulness it inspired as a refreshing departure from the otherwise lugubrious tones of Holocaust remembrance', calling it 'beautiful' and 'a declaration of love to life after death'.<sup>20</sup> Others, including Kohn's fellow survivors, decried the film as insensitive, disrespectful and a trivialisation of the genocide.<sup>21</sup> Nine years later, Israeli billionaire Mati Kochavi and his teenage daughter created the Instagram account 'Eva.Stories'.<sup>22</sup> The profile is based on the life of Éva Heyman, a Jewish Hungarian girl who wrote a diary about the Nazi occupation of Nagyvárád (now Oradea, Romania) and was murdered in Auschwitz in October 1944.<sup>23</sup> Extracts from Eva's diary are brought to life through short clips ('stories') and illustrate how the situation escalated over

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<sup>18</sup> Wong, "Ethical Issues," 102-9.

<sup>19</sup> The original video was removed due to the song's copyright, but a 'silenced' version was uploaded shortly afterwards. Jane Korman, "I Will Survive?? Dancing Auschwitz. Silenced Version," *YouTube* video, 5:24, 12 August 2010, online at: <https://youtu.be/aaJPQw47iq4> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Paige L. Gibson and Steve Jones, "Remediation and Remembrance: 'Dancing Auschwitz' Collective Memory and New Media," *ESSACHESS: Journal for Communication Studies* 5:10 (2012): 108; Tony Paterson, "Auschwitz 'I Will Survive' Dance Video is Internet Sensation," *The Guardian*, online at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/news/auschwitz-i-will-survive-dance-video-is-internet-sensation-2027725.html> (last modified 16 July 2010); Henryk M. Broder, "'Dancing Auschwitz': Holocaust Survivor Becomes YouTube Star," *Der Spiegel*, online at: <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/dancing-auschwitz-holocaust-survivor-becomes-youtube-star-a-711247.html> (last modified 12 August 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Gibson and Jones, "Remediation and Remembrance," 109; Paterson, "'I Will Survive'."

<sup>22</sup> "Eva," *Instagram*, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/eva.stories> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>23</sup> There have been suggestions, however, that Eva's mother Ági – who survived the Holocaust, but committed suicide in 1951 – wrote or embellished parts of the diary before it was published. Louise O. Vasvári, "Hungarian Women's Holocaust Life Writing in the Context of the Nation's Divided Social Memory, 1944-2014," *Hungarian Cultural Studies* 7 (2014): 61, 63.

the course of the four months in which Eva recorded a journal. The project involved 400 actors and crew members, featured sets (such as the inside of a freight wagon for Eva's deportation to Auschwitz, which was not based on diary entries) and cost millions of dollars. Although its creation was akin to the making of a Hollywood film, Kochavi felt social media was the most appropriate channel with which to teach young people about the Holocaust: 'If we want to bring the memory of the Holocaust to the young generation, we have to bring it to where they are. And they're on Instagram.'<sup>24</sup> At the time of writing, 'Eva.Stories' was followed by almost 1.4 million Instagram accounts.<sup>25</sup>

As with 'Dancing Auschwitz', opinion over the project was strongly divided. In Israel, where 'Eva.Stories' was advertised on billboards and the stories streamed throughout Yom HaShoah, critics accused the project of being in 'bad taste', and 'dumbing [the Holocaust] down'. One user commented, 'I'm young, and nobody had to make the Holocaust more accessible for me. I took an interest on my own. This is genocide — not a PR project for Instagram. Do me a favour.'<sup>26</sup> Conversely, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Yad Vashem both spoke positively about the project, with the latter stating, 'the use of social media platforms in order to commemorate the Holocaust is both legitimate and effective'.<sup>27</sup>

Representations of the Holocaust, its history and memory on social media continue to cause what Wulf Kansteiner terms 'digital anxiety'.<sup>28</sup> These platforms – particularly Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the most popular social media – are associated with contacting friends, uploading holiday photos and sharing videos of temperamental pets. At first glance, content about the Holocaust seems totally discordant with social media's other functions. Yet, as noted by Drotner and Schröder, reducing social media to the 'binary' of 'a cause of celebration or concern' is too simplistic.<sup>29</sup> From a museum perspective, digital elements such as social media represent new possibilities for communication, allowing

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<sup>24</sup> Oliver Holmes, "Instagram Holocaust Diary Eva.Stories Sparks Debate in Israel," *The Guardian*, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/08/instagram-holocaust-diary-evastories-sparks-debate-in-israel>. (last modified 8 May 2019).

<sup>25</sup> As of 28 June 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Holmes, "Holocaust Diary"; Judy Maltz, "'New Genre of Memory': Holocaust Victim's 'Instagram Page' Draws Fire for Dumbing Down History," *Haaretz*, online at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-new-memory-genre-holocaust-victim-s-instagram-draws-fire-for-dumbing-down-history-1.7181971> (last modified 29 April 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Holmes, "Holocaust Diary."

<sup>28</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, "The Holocaust in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Digital Anxiety, Transnational Cosmopolitanism, and Never Again Genocide without Memory," in *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*, ed. Andrew Hoskins (New York: Routledge, 2018), 110.

<sup>29</sup> Kirsten Drotner and Kim Christian Schröder, "Introduction," in *Museum Communication and Social Media: The Connected Museum*, ed. Kirsten Drotner and Kim Christian Schröder (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

existing models to be challenged and connection with the average visitor to be enhanced.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that social media users are open to this type of communication; the number of followers, ‘likes’ and comments Holocaust museums receive on a daily basis suggests that users wish to incorporate this history and memory into their ‘personal community’.<sup>31</sup> Certainly, the controversy some of this content causes, if nothing else, repeatedly projects the memory of the Holocaust back into public consciousness. Furthermore, the examples raised here prompt questions that extend beyond representation on social media. How are commemorative practices changing within the digital age? How does one assess the representability of certain pasts? And to whom exactly does the memory of the Holocaust ‘belong’?<sup>32</sup>

Exploring the (potential) answers to these questions lies outside the scope of this thesis. Whether or not content related to the Holocaust should appear on social media, as Noam Tirosh states, ‘it’s there, and it’s not going anywhere’.<sup>33</sup> This is also acknowledged by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, whose website contains a page dedicated to using social media in Holocaust education:

Social media is so prevalent [...] that it cannot be ignored in Holocaust education or anywhere else. The important question, therefore, is not about the promise or pitfalls of the social media; rather, it is about how best to adapt Holocaust education to this new format, using its potential to limit any potential challenges.<sup>34</sup>

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is one of the most active Holocaust museums on social media and, over the last 12 years, has begun to refine its publishing strategy and interact with its followers more directly. It is towards this case study that this chapter now turns.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> Barry Wellman, “Physical Place and Cyberplace: The Rise of Personal Networking,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25:2 (2001): 227.

<sup>32</sup> Gibson and Jones, “Remediation,” 109.

<sup>33</sup> Allison Kaplan Sommer, “Tweeting the Holocaust: The Perils and Perks of Using Social Media to Remember the Shoah,” *Haaretz*, online at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-the-perils-and-perks-of-social-media-to-remember-the-holocaust-1.8434463> (last modified 22 January 2020).

<sup>34</sup> “Using Social Media in Holocaust Education,” *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, online at: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/educational-materials/using-social-media-holocaust-education> (accessed 28 June 2020).

## The ‘Experiment’<sup>35</sup>

The Auschwitz Museum made its first foray into social media with the creation of a YouTube channel in September 2008.<sup>36</sup> The majority of the uploaded videos are short news reports narrated by Press Officer (and former journalist) Paweł Sawicki about the activities of, and commemorative events at, the Museum. The launch of this account did not garner much attention as the Museum made no announcement regarding its creation and, until 2014, all its videos were in Polish, thus not attracting an international following.<sup>37</sup> This all changed, however, when Sawicki took the initiative of establishing a Facebook page. On one hand, hundreds of groups about Auschwitz and/or the Holocaust had already formed on the website, and perhaps needed guidance; on the other hand, Sawicki had read a number of posts espousing antisemitism and Holocaust denial.<sup>38</sup> Thus, he felt the Museum would be of benefit as a ‘resource for factual information’ on the website.<sup>39</sup> The Museum joined Facebook, the world’s most popular social networking platform, as ‘an experiment’ on 13 October 2009, the first former Nazi camp and/or Holocaust museum to do so.<sup>40</sup> At first, there were concerns that putting a site of the Holocaust on social media would undermine its importance, even trivialise its significance. Facebook’s format at the time, for instance, required users to click a ‘Become a Fan’ button to subscribe to all pages, including the Museum’s.<sup>41</sup> Yet, in a tentative step towards a dialogue with the public, the Museum consulted its new followers regarding its presence on Facebook.<sup>42</sup> Sawicki’s ‘experiment’ proved successful; six days after launching, the page was followed by more than 8,000 Facebook users, and its reception was

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<sup>35</sup> Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>36</sup> “Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau: About,” *YouTube*, online at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/AuschwitzMemorial/about> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>37</sup> “Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau: Videos,” *YouTube*, online at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/AuschwitzMemorial/videos> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>38</sup> Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz, “Auschwitz Memorial and Facebook – Initial Conclusions,” *Facebook*, online at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/auschwitz-memorial-muzeum-auschwitz/auschwitz-memorial-and-facebook-initial-conclusions/158629255447> (last modified 19 October 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Adams, “Never Forget,”; author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018; Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz, Facebook post, 13 October 2009, <https://www.facebook.com/auschwitzmemorial/posts/149707537774>.

<sup>40</sup> J. Clement, “Most Popular Social Networks Worldwide as of January 2020, Ranked by Number of Active Users,” *Statista*, online at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users> (last modified 14 February 2020); Manca, “Holocaust Memorialisation,” 194; author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018; Sommer, “Tweeting the Holocaust.”

<sup>41</sup> In April 2010, Facebook changed the ‘Become a Fan’ button to a ‘Like’ button, stating this would be ‘a more light-weight and standard way to connect’. Semantically, however, this is still problematic for institutions such as the Auschwitz Museum. Jessica Dye, “Facebook’s ‘Like’ Revolution,” *EContent* 33:6 (2010): 12.

<sup>42</sup> Raffi Berg, “Auschwitz Launches Facebook Site,” *BBC News*, online at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8307162.stm> (last modified 14 October 2009). The original ‘discussion board’ mentioned in this article is unfortunately no longer on the website.

overwhelmingly positive.<sup>43</sup> It appears that other museums at former Nazi concentration and extermination camps may have observed this reaction before establishing their own Facebook pages; the next account was created by the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site on 25 September 2010, with at least 13 others gradually following suit.<sup>44</sup>

As the popularity of other social media grew, so the Museum created accounts on other platforms, most notably Twitter (on 21 May 2012) and Instagram (on 5 December 2012).<sup>45</sup> Eight years later, the Museum now has more than 1.4 million followers across all its social media.<sup>46</sup>

### **Building a Strategy**

As more and more museums have joined social media, emphasis has been placed on creating an appropriate, impactful strategy to achieve goals such as engaging with users and expanding the museum's profile. Establishing 'a proficient team' and working with 'designers, communication experts and educationists' to develop such a strategy are recommended.<sup>47</sup> For a Museum that welcomes over two million visitors a year and now has a large online audience, one would infer the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum already had such measures in place. Yet, since the launch of its Facebook page 11 years ago, all the Museum's social media is managed by only one person: Paweł Sawicki. Although he receives help from his Press Office colleagues in responding to private messages and monitoring comments, and occasionally asks for advice from the Museum's historians or its Director, Sawicki is responsible for publishing the content on each account.<sup>48</sup>

There are a number of pragmatic (and personal) reasons given for this unusual museological practice. Firstly, unlike many other members of staff, Sawicki speaks fluent English, meaning he can publish content in both Polish and English simultaneously.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Manca, "Holocaust Memorialisation," 194.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 194; information obtained from the Instagram smartphone app.

<sup>46</sup> This does not necessarily equate to 1.4 million separate followers, as it is likely that many followers have accounts on multiple social media platforms. Sommer, "Tweeting the Holocaust."

<sup>47</sup> Bojana Suzić, Miroslav Karliček, and Václav Striteský, "Adoption of Social Media for Public Relations by Museums," *Central European Business Review* 5:2 (2016): 7; Lynda Kelly and Angelina Russo, "From Communities of Practice to Value Networks: Engaging Museums in Web 2.0," in *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed. Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 285.

<sup>48</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018; Daniel Spielberger, "How the Auschwitz Memorial's Twitter Account Became the Internet's Holocaust Fact-Checker," *Insider*, online at: <https://www.insider.com/auschwitz-memorial-museum-twitter-internet-holocaust-fact-checker-paul-sawicki-2020-1> (last modified 27 January 2020).

<sup>49</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

Secondly, management by only one person requires little or no co-ordination with others. This is particularly important for an institution of the Museum's size and notoriety, which receives many requests for information and responses to relevant news on a daily basis. The small Press Office team can therefore only dedicate a certain amount of time to updating social media. As Sawicki states, the ease of access provided by devices such as smartphones means social media can be monitored from almost 'anywhere in the world' and checking for updates 'just takes me a moment'.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, specialised publishing platforms allow posts to be scheduled for a certain date and time, and therefore organised in advance. Finally, for Sawicki, it is clear that maintaining the Auschwitz Museum's social media is a deeply personal mission: to educate as many people as possible about the history of the camp, whilst remembering the victims and honouring the survivors.<sup>51</sup> The personal reasons behind this educational drive also relate to the presentation of the authentic self on social media; though he is representing an institution, Sawicki's passion for education, commemoration and accuracy is clear throughout the content he posts, especially when interacting with other users.<sup>52</sup> Facts and stories related to this history are not described in a banal, wooden fashion; rather, the considerable emotional weight the subject matter carries is acknowledged, which in turn may create a more affective response in the Museum's followers.

Whilst Sawicki's motivation for this work is certainly evident, the designation of all the Museum's social media to one person is still problematic. Although the majority of content posted relates to objective, historical facts and events, an individual's interpretations of other users' comments and questions is inherently subjective. Paweł Sawicki is tasked with representing an entire institution, and one that is fraught with political, historical, social and commemorative connotations. Unsurprisingly, at least one social media user has objected to the notion of an 'official account for Auschwitz', as the Museum's online presence 'certainly [does] not represent the Auschwitz my family suffered in on this Instagram page, not in all of your posts so far'.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, having one person manage this content was logical when the Museum first experimented with a social media presence, as staff were unsure if they would keep the

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<sup>50</sup> Author interview with Paweł Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid; Sara Walther, "Der Social-Media-Manager von Auschwitz und der Hass im Netz," *Der Tagesspiegel*, online at: <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wirtschaft/erinnerungskultur-auf-twitter-der-social-media-manager-von-auschwitz-und-der-hass-im-netz/25475008.html> (last modified 27 January 2020).

<sup>52</sup> Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, "I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience," *New Media & Society* 13:1 (2010): 119.

<sup>53</sup> Craigy5000 in response to Auschwitz Memorial and Museum, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BVcugThltRe> (last modified 17 June 2017), Lundrigan, "Holocaust Memory," 79-80.

accounts and initially had only a small following. Since then, however, both the use of social media and the Museum's online audience has grown exponentially. Yet the Auschwitz Museum's approach to managing this now crucial element of modern museums has remained the same. Furthermore, unlike other prolific Holocaust museums, the Auschwitz Museum has not employed or created a role for a Social Media Manager. The resistance to adapt to these museological practices once again illustrates the Auschwitz Museum's determination to hold onto its familiar, twentieth-century practices whilst attempting to adapt to more modern methods of communicating with visitors and the wider public.

The Auschwitz Museum also does not have a formal written strategy for the management of its social media; research involving reading minutes of meetings, memos or other documents concerning social media could not be conducted for this thesis as they simply do not exist. Over the last several years, however, after observing social media trends and discussions, and the ways in which other museums use these networks, Sawicki has begun tailoring or altering content published on the three main social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram).<sup>54</sup> The Museum's social media are also considered an 'extension' of the physical institution, and thus adhere to the same guidelines of education and commemoration.<sup>55</sup> Each platform is used to post historical information about Auschwitz, but Facebook, he asserts, is the best place for more detailed 'historical narration' as, unlike other social media, there is no limit to characters or images published in one post.<sup>56</sup> Instagram is 'very visual', its format only permitting photographs accompanied by a short caption.<sup>57</sup> The Museum primarily uses Instagram to post pictures that visitors have taken, hence providing them with a sense of validation and approval regarding their Museum experience (which is further explored in this chapter). Finally, Twitter is the 'most interactive' of the social media, where discussion 'with the world' takes place.<sup>58</sup> Each account is frequently monitored for comments and responses, with most found on Twitter.

Sawicki claims that, when responding to other social media users, he wishes to portray the Museum 'as a person. A person that is called Auschwitz Memorial.'<sup>59</sup> As

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<sup>54</sup> Walther, "Social-Media-Manager." See Jenny Kidd, *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 50; Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, CA: Museum 2.0, 2010), 122-3.

<sup>55</sup> Cnaan Liphshiz, "The Auschwitz Museum Has a Twitter Account, and This Ex-Journalist Runs It," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, online at: <https://www.jta.org/2017/01/06/global/the-auschwitz-museum-has-a-twitter-account-and-this-ex-journalist-runs-it> (last modified 6 January 2017).

<sup>56</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

mentioned in the Introduction, whilst those who frequently engage with the Museum, particularly on Twitter, might suspect the content is written by one person through repetition of formatting and certain phrases, this approach is not explicitly highlighted. Unlike other companies and institutions that present a highly personalised format on their social media – with staff including their name at the end of Tweets, for example – no indication is given as to who is publishing the Auschwitz Museum’s content. In contrast to Sawicki’s assertion, therefore, as with other elements of its digital museum, the Museum remains a largely ‘disembodied’ entity on social media, distributing information and (as will be shown) instructing social media users on how to learn about and commemorate the history of Auschwitz.<sup>60</sup>

Sawicki maintains a few ethical principles regarding the Museum’s social media maintenance. Firstly, he insists that the Museum does not have a target audience:

Memory is for us. However harsh it sounds, the dead people do not need our memory. They’re dead. We need this memory. And it’s not [that] we should put it either on the survivors or put it on the future generations. This is why I think that the target group for me is everyone. It’s everyone who-, no, really, everyone. I want to reach everyone.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, as discussed in the Introduction, ‘everyone’ still does not guarantee universality. As will be shown, furthermore, there are distinctions between correspondences with certain groups and although there is significant engagement from those who have visited the Museum, one core objective is to ‘reach and educate people [...] who have never visited any Holocaust-related sites or museums’.<sup>62</sup> The Museum’s social media thus shares similar aims to its other online resources, such as the virtual tour. Whilst Holocaust remembrance is undoubtedly important, Sawicki is resolute in his mission to ensure this memory permeates public consciousness on an everyday basis, whether impacting upon those who cannot visit the Museum or trying to encourage an awakening of ‘moral responsibility’ in those who have visited and thus may consider their memory work ‘done’.<sup>63</sup> In addition to assertions of how

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<sup>60</sup> Peter Walsh, “The Web and the Unassailable Voice,” in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 229.

<sup>61</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Sommer, “Tweeting the Holocaust.”

<sup>63</sup> Rob Schmitz, “75 Years after Auschwitz Liberation, Survivors Urge World to Remember,” *NPR*, online at: <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/27/798480937/75-years-after-auschwitz-liberation-survivors-urge-world-to-remember> (last modified 27 January 2020).

visitors should see and interpret the physical site, therefore, the Museum uses social media to reinforce how this experience should inform visitors' decisions in other aspects of their lives.

In keeping with the Museum's wider branding or marketing strategy (or lack thereof), no advertisements or followers have ever been purchased on social media; to do so, Sawicki asserts, would be disrespectful. Instead, audience growth relies on word of mouth, particularly on Twitter.<sup>64</sup> Significant increases in the number of followers can be seen after famous figures have mentioned or retweeted the Museum, or encouraged their fans to do so; notable examples include singer Katy Perry, comedian Kathy Griffin and actor Mark Hamill.<sup>65</sup> Celebrities' endorsements can have an effect on their fans, especially younger generations; thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether many of the Museum's new followers subscribed to their Twitter feed out of a sense of morality, or simply because it had been suggested by a famous person they admire.<sup>66</sup> It is important to note, however, that these subsequent interactions with the Auschwitz Museum remain positive (though many people may simply click 'Follow' and never respond to the Museum's content); furthermore, followers have also been gained from Tweets published by figures such as former US Navy officer and author Malcolm Nance, and Parkland shooting survivor-turned-activist David Hogg.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, although the Auschwitz Museum acquires followers through genuine recommendations – rather than paying for followers to increase their account's visibility and profile – it still relies on the authority of well-known figures to increase its following and spread its message of education and remembrance. Recommendations from celebrities have been so effective, in fact, that the Museum has occasionally reached out to notable figures to assist them in their mission.<sup>68</sup> In the age of celebrity and the age of the digital, authority no

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<sup>64</sup> Adams, "Never Forget"; author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Katy Perry, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/katyperry/status/570705170448973824> (last modified 25 February 2015, 10:01pm); Kathy Griffin, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/kathygriffin/status/1078032278284947456> (last modified 26 December 2018, 8:58pm), Mark Hamill, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/HamillHimself/status/1174019202505555968> (last modified 17 September 2019, 6:56pm).

<sup>66</sup> Recent studies concerning celebrities' influence on social media have focused particularly on their opinions and influence on politics. See, for example, Sungjin Park et al., "The Network of Celebrity Politics: Political Implications of Celebrity Following on Twitter," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 659 (2015): 246-58; Brian D. Loader, Ariadne Vromen and Michael A. Xenos, "Performing for the Young Networked Citizen? Celebrity Politics, Social Networking and the Political Engagement of Young People," *Media, Culture & Society* 38:3 (2016): 400-19.

<sup>67</sup> These Tweets were also much more political in tone, both including variations of the phrase 'If you follow me, you should follow @AuschwitzMuseum'. Malcolm Nance, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/MalcolmNance/status/1078008360933490689> (last modified 26 December 2018, 7:23pm); David Hogg, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/davidhogg111/status/1078317857413492737> (last modified 27 December 2018, 3:53pm).

<sup>68</sup> These are as diverse as former US President Barack Obama (Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1246679133536608256> (last modified 5 April 2020, 7:00am)) and

longer stems only from the comments and visits of world leaders and politicians, and it is not only journalists and film-makers that create witnesses out of their audience; those in fields such as the entertainment industry also now hold this power. In this sense, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has shared some of its own authority with these figures, so that it is not only the institution giving social media users the instruction to ‘share our tweets [sic] & encourage others to follow @AuschwitzMuseum’.<sup>69</sup>

The rapid growth of the Auschwitz Museum on social media, particularly within the last few years, both illustrates and echoes the infamy of the physical site. Inevitably, in contemporary society, the very word ‘Auschwitz’ is associated with atrocity, sincerity and an urge for reflection and commemoration, which for many is further prompted by its presence on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. Thus, in part, the Museum has been able to rely on its global notoriety to attract a following without creating a formal strategy or a dedicated social media team, though this is generally recommended for museums both large and small. Gradually, however, the Auschwitz Museum is publishing more structured content – most of which promotes authority and ideas of authenticity, whilst some is also directly relevant to certain groups within its audience.

### **‘Faces, Facts, Documents and Stories’<sup>70</sup>**

The content published on the Museum’s Facebook and Instagram accounts is kept relatively simple. On Facebook, events and people in the camp’s history are described in detail, often accompanied by several archival photographs and links to the Museum’s website resources (Figure 4.1). Instagram is used to share pictures captured by Museum visitors; often, the original caption is included, alongside Museum hashtags and text highlighting the location (Figure 4.2). The content published on Twitter, however, is more varied. The Museum is also most active on Twitter and thus receives the most correspondence on this platform.<sup>71</sup>

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hairdresser and television personality Jonathan Van Ness (Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1252997088453025800> (last modified 22 April 2020, 5:26pm)).

<sup>69</sup> For one example of this phrase being used, see Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1127607635723919361> (last modified 12 May 2019, 7:13pm).

<sup>70</sup> Sommer, “Tweeting the Holocaust.”

<sup>71</sup> At the time of writing (8 June 2020), the Auschwitz Museum had one million Twitter followers and their Tweets were viewed at least 146 million times a month. Walther, “Social-Media-Manager.”

1945  
27.01  
2020  
#Auschwitz75

Auschwitz Memorial / Muzeum Auschwitz  
@auschwitzmemorial

Home  
About  
Photos  
Reviews  
Notes  
Videos  
Events  
**Posts**  
Groups  
Community  
Create a Page

Liked Following Share ...

Photo/Video Tag friends Get messages ...

**Auschwitz Memorial / Muzeum Auschwitz**  
26 April at 14:08 · 🌐

On the night of April 26/27, 1943 (at 2 am) a co-founder of camp conspiracy Witold Pilecki (4859) escaped from the camp together with Jan Redzej (5430) and Edward Ciesielski (12969).

Read more about escapes from Auschwitz: [http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/en\\_15\\_ucieczki/](http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/en_15_ucieczki/)

Read more about the resistance movement in Auschwitz: [http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/en\\_16\\_ruch\\_oporu/...](http://lekcja.auschwitz.org/en_16_ruch_oporu/) See more

4859  
Auschwitz

5430

Figure 4.1. An example of a post on the Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz Facebook page. Source: Facebook.



Figure 4.2. An example of an Auschwitz Memorial Instagram post, sharing visitors' content. Source: Instagram.

Thus, the Museum's Twitter activity will form the main case study for the remainder of this chapter.

Over the course of this research, the author received daily notifications from the Auschwitz Museum's Twitter feed on her smartphone, which were then categorised according to their content. The decision to categorise these grew organically, as Sawicki developed more thematic content and certain types of interaction became more easily identifiable. The Museum's posts have been grouped into the following nine primary categories regarding their function and how these relate to the themes of authority, authenticity and audience in this thesis (Table 4.1):

Category	Description
On This Day: Victims' stories	Victims' birthday (same date as published Tweet), nationality, profession, date of arrival at Auschwitz, camp number, date of death (dependent upon information available)
On This Day: Significant historical events	E.g., the <i>Sonderkommando</i> Uprising, Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler's escape (same date as published Tweet)
On This Day: Transport lists	Date of transport's arrival at Auschwitz (same date as published Tweet), origin of transport, number of people on transport, number of victims selected to be gassed, number of victims registered in the camp
Promotion/validation of other users' content	Welcome Tweets to new followers; retweets of individuals' comments; retweets of other Holocaust museums' content; promotion of relevant news articles
Criticism of other users	Requests for factual corrections; examples of 'inappropriate' photography; challenging users' comments (e.g., perpetrators being 'animals'); criticism of companies <sup>72</sup>
Invitations for discussion/participation	E.g., feedback on social media content; asking how 'visiting Auschwitz changes people' <sup>73</sup>
Promotion of online resources	Promotion of virtual tour, E-learning lessons, <i>Memoria</i> magazine; campaign to get more Twitter followers

<sup>72</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1093405957537890304> (last modified 7 February 2019, 7:07am), in response to Cindy Gutierrez, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/cinful911/status/1093403913942790144> (last modified 7 February 2019, 6:59am).

<sup>73</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1082372946964942849> (last modified 7 January 2019, 8:26pm).

Museum news	Number of physical visitors, origin country of both physical visitors and social media users, new Museum publications
Links to other genocides	Using examples (primarily from Rwanda and Myanmar) to highlight past and present genocides, and the importance of reacting early to warning signs

Table 4.1. Categories of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s Twitter account.

For example, the ‘On This Day’ categories illustrate Twitter as a continual exhibition, an extension of the Museum’s physical collection. These, therefore, relate to the institution’s promotion of curatorial authenticity. ‘Criticism of other users’ demonstrates the Museum’s assertion of its authority and public monitoring of representations of Auschwitz, while ‘Museum news’ is directed to all members of its audience (whilst highlighting their differences, such as the countries in which they live). These categories are by no means definitive, particularly in relation to comments the Auschwitz Museum leaves on other users’ posts. These include, for example, recommendations of survivor testimonies, usually prompted by Twitter users recommending novels such as *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (discussed later in this chapter). These categories also reflect the presentation of the institution’s duality; elements of the former camp’s history are chronicled daily, whilst Museum materials are promoted and its place in contemporary society is highlighted.

Auschwitz-Birkenau was operational for almost five years and over a million people passed through its gates. Thus, creating a day-by-day history of the camp – with only 280 characters available per post – is a seemingly impossible task. Sawicki acknowledges that one simply cannot publish hundreds of posts every day, so choices have to be made regarding the content published.<sup>74</sup> To decide upon which stories and people to include, he consults Danuta Czech’s *Auschwitz Chronicle* and the Museum’s *Księgi Pamięci* (*Memorial Books*), each containing information about the lives (and deaths) of prisoners and, in the latter, lists of transports from five districts of occupied Poland.<sup>75</sup> Once Sawicki has chosen relevant content, he contacts the Auschwitz Museum’s Archives for accompanying photographs, documents or

<sup>74</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid; Danuta Czech, *Auschwitz Chronicle, 1939-1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1997); Franciszek Piper and Irena Strzelecka, eds., *Księgi Pamięci*, 5 vols. (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2000-2013).

other materials; he also occasionally utilises sources from other institutions, such as Yad Vashem and USHMM.<sup>76</sup>

Whilst Sawicki posts the fates of individuals from a number of countries and of both genders (although a large proportion are Polish, due to the information in *Księgi Pamięci*), certain other conscious choices are evident.<sup>77</sup> For instance, many of the individuals highlighted are children, often only infants. Most were Jewish, and so were sent to the gas chambers immediately upon arrival. The fate of non-Jewish children, however, is also shared. In spring 2018, the face of one 14-year-old Catholic Pole, Czesława Kwoka, featured in the international press and across the Internet after the Museum shared a colourised version of her Auschwitz registration photograph created by Brazilian artist Marina Amaral (Figure 4.3).<sup>78</sup> The response to Amaral's work led to the establishment of Faces of Auschwitz, a project to colourise more registration photographs as well as tell the stories of those photographed.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the photograph of a visibly frightened Kwoka, her lip cut from a beating by an SS guard, has remained the image associated with the project, as well as become a symbol of the barbarity of Auschwitz. Kwoka has also, to some degree, come to represent the children who were persecuted and murdered by the Nazis (although not to the same degree as, for instance, Anne Frank).<sup>80</sup> Although the Auschwitz Museum did not share Kwoka's photograph for this purpose, the initial choice to include her story (and those of other murdered children) is a clear curatorial decision to evoke emotions in the Museum's followers, for them to witness this temporally distant suffering and encourage them to consider the senselessness of killing innocent children which, according to Museum Director Piotr Cywiński, 'goes beyond our verbal culture'.<sup>81</sup>

As with its website, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum does not consider its social media content to replicate or simulate a visit to the physical site. Yet the process of

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<sup>76</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>77</sup> The large number of Polish prisoners mentioned on the Museum's Twitter feed reflects the availability of transport lists that were salvaged after liberation, particularly compared to those from other countries.

<sup>78</sup> Marina Amaral, "In Memory of Czesława Kwoka," *Marina Amaral*, online at: <https://marinamaral.com/in-memory-of-czeslawa-kwoka> (accessed 28 June 2020); Tomasz Frymorgen, "An Artist Coloured in a Photo of an Auschwitz Victim and It's Heartbreaking," *BBC Three*, online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/7bc68edd-5fb6-4bab-8be3-77089227b8af> (last modified 15 March 2018).

<sup>79</sup> *Faces of Auschwitz*, online at: <https://facesofauschwitz.com> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>80</sup> "Media," *Faces of Auschwitz*, online at: <https://facesofauschwitz.com/media> (accessed 28 June 2020); Fergal Keane, "Returning to Auschwitz: Photographs from Hell," *Daily Mail*, online at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-447045/Returning-Auschwitz-Photographs-Hell.html> (last modified 7 April 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 163; Piotr M. A. Cywiński, *Epitaph*, trans. Witold Kościa-Zbirohowski (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2015), 141.



Figure 4.3. The colourised photographs of Czesława Kwoka. Source: Faces of Auschwitz/Marina Amaral.

selecting historical information to publish is certainly an extension of the Museum’s curatorial activities and, therefore, an expression of curatorial authenticity. The consultation and use of historical sources, and occasional collaboration with other Holocaust museums, results in a digital version of curating a museum exhibition – albeit, one that changes daily, and ‘doesn’t have to end’.<sup>82</sup> This also means that, in addition to his role as a Press Officer, Museum spokesperson and tour guide, Sawicki’s role has also developed into that of a curator. In terms of curatorial authenticity, Sawicki still adheres to the Museum’s ‘two authenticities’ – that of the physical remains, and that of the survivors’ testimonies – in using historical evidence to share the history of the Museum, including both witness accounts and details of those who did not survive the camp.<sup>83</sup>

The curation of posts, however, means that one could not ascertain a comprehensive history of Auschwitz – itself only a fragment of the larger, complex history of the Holocaust – from reading the Museum’s Twitter feed alone. As Dan Stone argues, social media (and media in general) provide only a ‘soundbite approach’ to the subject; scholars must therefore ‘fight against the Twitter effect and [...] explain that the Holocaust cannot be analysed in brief’.<sup>84</sup> Paweł Sawicki acknowledges that social media is only a starting point for learning about Auschwitz. The main goal of the Museum’s presence on social media platforms, he

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<sup>82</sup> Matthew Fisher and Bill Adair, “Online Dialogue and Cultural Practice: A Conversation,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 45.

<sup>83</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020; Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1148301978243653632> (last modified 8 July 2019, 7:45pm).

<sup>84</sup> Dan Stone, “The Contexts of Memory,” paper presented at British Association for Holocaust Studies Third Annual Conference: The Presence of the Holocaust in Society, Politics and Culture, c. 1970 – 2015, London, UK, 19-21 July 2016.

asserts, is ‘to provide education on the scale of the crime and what made it possible’, ensuring knowledge and remembrance of this history becomes ‘part of our lives’.<sup>85</sup> Yet the Auschwitz Museum’s use of social media is not designed to replace other forms of learning. The primary focus, of course, remains on people visiting the physical site; where this is not possible, social media followers are encouraged to use the Museum’s online resources. This was particularly prevalent during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak. On 11 March 2020, the Polish government announced all museums, cinemas, theatres, nurseries, schools and universities would close the following day to stop the spread of the disease.<sup>86</sup> Initially forecast to last for two weeks, the Museum was closed to the public for almost four months, with the majority of its staff required to work from home.<sup>87</sup> Thus, all the Museum’s educational activities were forced to rely on its digital museum. On Facebook and Twitter, Sawicki utilised the trending hashtag #StayAtHome (occasionally also using #LearnAtHome) to encourage users to use the Museum’s virtual tour and E-learning lessons and to read its online magazine, *Memoria*.<sup>88</sup> These resources were already being promoted, however, before the virus’ outbreak. For instance, areas not physically accessible during a guided tour but available on the virtual tour were highlighted, such as Block 10, where sterilisation experiments were conducted on female prisoners.<sup>89</sup> One Twitter post, containing a video showing the permanent exhibition’s display of victims’ prostheses, further demonstrated the power of social media, its outreach and its potential educational value (Figure 4.4):<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Liphshiz, “Auschwitz Museum”; Walther, “Social-Media-Manager.”

<sup>86</sup> Joanna Plucinska, “Poland Shuts All Schools, Museums, Cinemas for Two Weeks Due to Coronavirus,” *Reuters*, online at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-poland-education/poland-shuts-all-schools-museums-cinemas-for-two-weeks-due-to-coronavirus-idUSKBN20Y1K4> (last modified 11 March 2020).

<sup>87</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1237684599851028480> (last modified 11 March 2020, 10:19am); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1239469348084948992> (last modified 16 March 2020, 8:31am).

<sup>88</sup> For examples of each, see Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1241325566160244736> (last modified 21 March 2020, 11:27am); Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz, Facebook post, online at: <https://www.facebook.com/auschwitzmemorial/posts/10156720606516097> (last modified 5 April 2020).

<sup>89</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1185811133443256320> (last modified 20 October 2019, 7:53am).

<sup>90</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1249940152820121603> (last modified 14 April 2020, 6:58am).



Figure 4.4. Screenshot of an Auschwitz Museum Tweet, illustrating the platform’s potential reach. Source: Twitter.

In this sense, the Auschwitz Museum attempts to blend curatorial authenticity (the emphasis on the historical sources and structures) with visitors’ authentic experiences (here, the ‘walk’ through the Museum).

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s social media also engages with a wider sense of experiential authenticity, as employed by architecture scholar Andreas Wesener. As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, museumgoers and/or tourists often seek authentic, meaningful experiences that are removed from their everyday lives. Yet experiential authenticity can refer more simply to the authenticity of experience itself – including, Wesener notes, ‘people’s place-based experiences as part of their daily lives and routines.’<sup>91</sup> For most users, social media has become an inextricable part of everyday life, and now defines how the everyday is lived, experienced and acted.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the space

<sup>91</sup> Wesener, “Adopting,” 143.

<sup>92</sup> Roger Silverstone, “Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life,” *New Literary History* 33:4 (2002): 762.

created by social media can be both personal and private – with individuals selecting and viewing the content they choose – or public and collective, with opportunities to share and discuss content with others.<sup>93</sup> As with other, similar institutions, the Auschwitz Museum’s presence on social media expands the function of this digital element to include education and commemoration. This presence, however, also means the Museum enters both the private and public spaces of each user’s account, potentially garnering more interest and creating meanings ‘within wider cultural and social contexts’ whilst asserting authority in areas outside its traditional boundaries.<sup>94</sup>

Inevitably, this entry into the everyday lives of social media users presents its own challenges. The greatest concern is a potential trivialisation of this history, as posts highlighting the birthdays of the Nazis’ victims sit alongside more mundane or light-hearted posts from other accounts. Yet Sawicki argues that ‘this history is an everyday history’ that should be acknowledged not only on significant anniversaries or occasions such as Holocaust Memorial Day.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, he states that those who follow the Auschwitz Museum Twitter account interpret it as an extension of the Museum, and therefore treat it appropriately and respectfully.<sup>96</sup> From a wider museological perspective, aside from the sincerity of the subject matter, this may also be due to users reacting to the novelty of ‘interpreting history and objects routinely in their daily lives’, a responsibility that many ‘don’t take lightly’.<sup>97</sup> Social media therefore allows the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum to ensure its history is remembered as one that happened ‘not long ago, not far away, [...] in our world’; that the act of remembrance is perceived as continuous; and one that should be brought into the outside world rather than confined to the gates of the former camp.<sup>98</sup>

The Auschwitz Museum’s adaptation to the digital museum has provided an opportunity for its exhibitions to expand beyond its physical boundaries, and for its social media followers to learn more detailed information about its history (particularly its victims). Although its permanent exhibition is yet to be updated, social media enables new content to be selected and published, which can change day by day and year by year. Moreover, the

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<sup>93</sup> Juan Francisco Salazar, “‘MyMuseum’: Social Media and the Engagement of the Environmental Citizen,” in *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed. Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 266.

<sup>94</sup> Fiona Cameron, “Introduction,” in *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed. Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 3.

<sup>95</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018; Walther, “Social-Media-Manager.”

<sup>96</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>97</sup> Fisher and Adair, “Online Dialogue,” 55.

<sup>98</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1213575316133892096> (last modified 4 January 2020, 9:37pm).

Museum preserves its own notions of curatorial authenticity by producing content that presents historical elements such as facts, objects and the remains of the site. Its involvement in the digital museum also means that its educational activities can continue even when the grounds are inaccessible. Social media can be used to promote its website resources which, in some aspects, provide a bridge between the physical and the digital. Furthermore, this curatorial authenticity meets visitors' and users' experiential authenticity in two ways. Its very presence on social media can remind people of their experience of visiting the Museum, but in a more general sense, the Museum can also appeal to everyday experiential authenticities. The daily publishing of content illustrates that a visit to the Museum is not a singular event to be remembered by the visitor, but rather that the history of the site, and the memory of this history, is continuous. Moreover, regularly published content and the promotion of educational resources illustrate the Auschwitz Museum's authoritative voice, stressing a desire for its social media followers to incorporate education and remembrance regarding Auschwitz into their daily lives wherever possible.

### **From Personal to Public: Visitors' Photography**

Primarily, the concept of experiential authenticity in relation to the Auschwitz Museum on social media takes a bottom-up approach, stemming from its physical visitors. As highlighted in Chapter Two, the digital museum has been brought onsite more by those who are touring the Museum than by the institution itself. Increasingly over the last decade, when viewing the exhibits of victims' possessions or walking around the former camp, one often has to stop whilst those in front take pictures or film short clips of these sites on their cameras or smartphones. Whilst many of these photographs are used in private settings, such as educating family or creating personal reminders of the experience, a wide variety are also shared more publicly via social media.<sup>99</sup> The creation and publication of these posts add to what Anna Reading terms the 'global memoryscape'; that is, the global distribution of private memories through means of the digital.<sup>100</sup> The digital museum developed onsite, therefore, links directly to the Auschwitz Museum's offsite digital museum, and visitors play a large role in each. Due to its more visual format, visitors' content is more prevalent on Instagram than Twitter (although both are used to upload images, as well as Facebook and other,

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<sup>99</sup> Dalziel, "'Romantic Auschwitz'," 192.

<sup>100</sup> Anna Reading, "Memobilia: The Mobile Phone and the Emergence of Wearable Memories," in *Save As...Digital Memories*, ed. Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 82.

smaller social media such as Pinterest). Unlike explorations of content created by the Museum, therefore, Instagram will be used as the main case study in this section.

Searching the ‘#auschwitz’ hashtag on Instagram garners thousands of images, many of them quite similar in their composition and highlighting particular places.<sup>101</sup> A percentage of these posts indirectly relate to the former camp or Museum. Many users, for example, post pictures of Auschwitz-related books, such as survivor memoirs or novels. Others include the hashtag in posts about Holocaust victims (predominantly Anne Frank, who was incarcerated in Auschwitz before her deportation to Bergen-Belsen) or Auschwitz survivors.<sup>102</sup> The majority of posts, however, focus on the former camp and its various elements. The gates at Auschwitz I and Birkenau remain the focus of a large number of images, asserting their global iconicity and recognisability.<sup>103</sup> Other ‘symbols’ of Auschwitz and/or the Holocaust – the barbed wire fences, brick barracks, railway car and watchtowers – also feature prominently.<sup>104</sup> Some of the uploaded photographs of the former camp grounds are less ‘normative’, imbued with emotions and meaning: examples of these include elements of nature; objects of commemoration, such as flowers; and areas where photography is, in fact, prohibited, like the display of victims’ hair in Auschwitz I.<sup>105</sup> Finally, as discussed in the Introduction, the Auschwitz Museum has sometimes also been used as a backdrop for visitors’ selfies or photographs of each other, much to the disapproval of the international press and its commentators.<sup>106</sup>

As Silverstone argues, the ‘mediated images of strangers’ (and strangers’ mediated images) ‘increasingly define what actually constitutes the world’, and how places such as the

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<sup>101</sup> “#auschwitz,” *Instagram*, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/auschwitz> (accessed 28 June 2020). Although the use of hashtags is also prevalent on Twitter, searching ‘#auschwitz’ on this platform overwhelmingly produces results from the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum itself.

<sup>102</sup> David Barnouw, *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank*, trans. Jeannette K. Ringold (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), 10. The hashtag is also used in a small number of posts to be deliberately provocative or misleading. See Gemma Commene and Rebekah Potton, “Instagram and Auschwitz: A Critical Assessment of the Impact Social Media has on Holocaust Representation,” *Holocaust Studies* 25:1-2 (2019): 172-7.

<sup>103</sup> Paul Williams, “Hailing the Cosmopolitan Conscience: Memorial Museums in a Global Age,” in *Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums*, ed. Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 233.

<sup>104</sup> Oren Baruch Stier, *Holocaust Icons: Symbolizing the Shoah in History and Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 1-31; Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), 123, 131-54.

<sup>105</sup> Commene and Potton, “Instagram and Auschwitz,” 161, 162-6; Lundrigan, “Holocaust Memory,” 87, 90-7; Imogen Dalziel, “‘Romantic Auschwitz’: Examples and Perceptions of Contemporary Visitor Photography at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum,” *Holocaust Studies* 22:2-3 (2016): 191-7; “Basic Regulations,” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/basic-information> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>106</sup> This element of visitors’ photography is not explored here due to spatial constraints.

Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum are viewed and represented.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the thousands of images of the Auschwitz Museum, taken by visitors and uploaded to social media platforms like Instagram, constitute their own archive. This does not take the form of a more traditional archive, detailing the history of the Auschwitz camp (as the Museum does); rather, this is an archive of ‘living history created in our everyday online interaction’, representing the contemporary experience and perception of the Museum itself.<sup>108</sup> One might even consider this archive as its own digital museum, representing the Auschwitz Museum solely from the perspective of its visitors, albeit one that is somewhat subconsciously curated by multiple social media users. The digital age has undoubtedly changed the experience of visiting museums in general, not least touring sites of genocide and mass persecution: as Commane and Potton note, the use of platforms such as social media means that ‘Auschwitz is not just a physical location anymore.’<sup>109</sup> Through the simple search of one or several hashtags, one can access this archive and observe how perceptions of the Museum may have shifted over time, particularly when used alongside other participatory sources such as TripAdvisor.<sup>110</sup> Thus, the experiential authenticity expressed by visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, and the archive subsequently established, comprises part of the broader ‘digital and visual Holocaust archive’ that has been created through the advent of social media, and provides an insight into visitors’ journeys through, and reactions to, Holocaust museums in the twenty-first century.<sup>111</sup>

In uploading their images to social media sites, visitors reinstate their perceptions of the Museum, particularly aspects that created a strong impression or symbolised their individual experience of visiting the grounds, examples of which are discussed above. As

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<sup>107</sup> Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 4.

<sup>108</sup> Luke Tredennick, “The Making of History: Remediating Historicized Experience,” in *History in the Digital Age*, ed. Toni Weller (London: Routledge, 2013), 42.

<sup>109</sup> Commane and Potton, “Instagram and Auschwitz,” 178.

<sup>110</sup> TripAdvisor remains an incredibly under-researched source concerning visitors’ experiences of Holocaust museums, particularly those at former concentration and extermination camps. As with visitors’ selfies at the Auschwitz Museum, the tabloid press have been the first to concentrate on TripAdvisor reviews at directly associated Holocaust sites, particularly those with negative content (Rob Waugh, “Auschwitz: 9 Inappropriate TripAdvisor Reviews from Disappointed Visitors,” *Metro*, online at: <https://metro.co.uk/2015/01/26/auschwitz-five-awful-tripadvisor-reviews-from-disappointed-visitors-5036350> (last modified 26 January 2015); Maryse Farag, “‘Average...2 Stars’: The Shocking TripAdvisor Reviews for Concentration Camps,” *The Sun*, online at: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/200988/average-2-stars-the-shocking-tripadvisor-reviews-for-concentration-camps> (last modified 22 January 2016)). See, however, A. Craig Wight, “Visitor Perceptions of European Holocaust Heritage: A Social Media Analysis,” *Tourism Management* 81 (2020), online at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104142>; Imogen Dalziel, “‘Average, Nothing Compared to Auschwitz’: Issues with Rating and Reviewing Former Concentration Camps on TripAdvisor,” paper presented at the Lessons and Legacies XIV Conference: The Holocaust in the 21st Century: Relevance and Challenges in the Digital Age, Claremont, USA, 3-6 November 2016.

<sup>111</sup> Lundrigan, “Holocaust Memory,” 74.

Lundrigan asserts, in addition to visitors' photography at the Auschwitz Museum forming 'a method for confronting the traditional expectations of tourist behavior and experience', it is also 'a confirmation of [the] dominant act of memory making'.<sup>112</sup> Photography has long been a vehicle for the creation and retention of memories; advances in technology and its subsequent affordability have resulted in the act of taking photographs shifting from being an event in itself to capturing (or, arguably, distracting from) other events. Moreover, when paired with social media, the personal, private nature of photography can expand into the public domain. Far from photographs remaining in albums to be viewed occasionally, uploading content to social media means that (unless the user has selected more restricted privacy settings) this can be seen and shared by hundreds of thousands of others.

The decision to publish personal images of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum on platforms such as Instagram emphasises the visitor's perceived importance of the experience. Lundrigan observes that most photographs uploaded to Instagram come from first-time visitors, often confirming its status as 'the "place that everyone should see"'.<sup>113</sup> Yet the variation in content also provides an insight into the perceived authenticity of the experience. These photos are undoubtedly shared for a number of reasons; at their core, however, each speaks of a personal encounter with the Auschwitz Museum and its history, deemed significant enough by the visitor to share with a global audience. Moreover, the experiential authenticity encountered onsite is taken beyond the realms of the physical space and into the digital sphere, eliciting associated emotions and memories from the visitor and demonstrating their importance to other users. The personal, individual experience of the physical Museum thus becomes a shared one; the onsite audience members become online content producers. Alongside the official, objective narrative regarding the history of the camp presented by institutions such as the Auschwitz Museum, social media provides an insight into the affective experiences of the Museum's visitors, wishing to express their feelings regarding their encounter with the site. Although those who did not live through the Holocaust can discuss this history only 'within the limits of representation', this aspect of the digital museum is clearly an important tool for individuals to process both their memories of touring the site and the 'postmemory' of bearing witness to a place where the genocide was perpetrated.<sup>114</sup> Although these personal experiences are shared in a public domain, however,

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>114</sup> Commane and Potton, "Instagram and Auschwitz," 178; Lundrigan, "Holocaust Memory," 107; Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 220.

they are not wholly relinquished by visitors. The images uploaded illustrate the irreplaceability of a visit to the physical site, as discussed in Chapter Two. As Lundrigan argues, a barrier exists between the visitor and the non-visitor even when viewing this content, as the ‘authentic sublime’ of Auschwitz is ‘inaccessible’ to those who have not personally encountered its grounds.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, elements of the unique perceived authenticity of each visitor are retained, whilst others may be encouraged to make the trip to the Museum for themselves.

Despite this barrier, by sharing visit-related content on social media, those who have been to the Museum also seek a form of approval or validation from their peers. Scientific research has demonstrated that receiving ‘likes’ on social media platforms triggers neural activity in areas of the brain associated with social cognition, reward processing and motivation, whilst the social comparison encouraged by such platforms (perceiving others’ lives to be more exciting than one’s own) can enhance feelings of anxiety and depression, particularly in young people.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, users may feel a ‘pressure to present’ to their audience, however great or small.<sup>117</sup> Thus, one can conclude that, although social media users prioritise sharing content that is of personal significance and value, they may also publish images and comments that will generate the most approval from other users.

In the case of posts depicting the Auschwitz Museum, there are numerous examples of the juxtaposition between images designed to express certain difficult emotions or reflections and the positive reception from others. One user, cited by Lundrigan, shares a ‘beautiful’ photograph of Birkenau’s entrance gate framed by a sunset and a flower-filled patch of grass. Worried that the site is ‘misrepresented’ by the serenity of the surrounding natural elements, she interprets the sunset and flowers as aspects which ‘honour the 1.1 million who were murdered here’.<sup>118</sup> At the time of writing, the post had gained 227 likes whilst several comments praised the photograph, describing it as ‘cool’ or ‘awesome’.<sup>119</sup> The

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<sup>115</sup> Lundrigan, “Holocaust Memory,” 97-98. Lundrigan does not deconstruct the Museum’s concept of authenticity, but a wider reading of her thesis shows an interpretation of this term as relating to curatorial authenticity (that is, the originality of material artefacts and sites).

<sup>116</sup> For examples, see Lauren E. Sherman et al., “The Power of the Like in Adolescence: Effects of Peer Influence on Neural and Behavioral Responses to Social Media,” *Psychological Science* 27:7 (2016): 1031; Dar Meshi, Carmen Morawetz and Hauke R. Heekeren, “Nucleus Accumbens Response to Gains in Reputation for the Self Relative to Gains for Others Predicts Social Media Use,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (2013): 8-10; Chang Liu and Jianling Ma, “Social Media Addiction and Burnout: The Mediating Roles of Envy and Social Media Use Anxiety,” *Current Psychology* (2018): 1-9, online at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-018-9998-0>.

<sup>117</sup> Eden Litt, “*Knock, Knock*. Who’s There? The Imagined Audience,” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56:3 (2012): 335.

<sup>118</sup> Shreyajha, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqHvT5XAsqv> (last modified 13 November 2018); Lundrigan, “Holocaust Memory,” 90.

<sup>119</sup> As of 28 June 2020.

caption for another photograph of the gate, taken from inside the former camp, describes the creator's 'surreal experience' at the Museum, and her gratitude at having visited despite hearing 'mixed opinions' from others.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, this post received 243 likes, with other users giving positive feedback on the image and also sending the creator messages of love and support.<sup>121</sup> Other users, however, leave comments that relate more to the location or aspects of the image than its composition, expressing their own feelings of sadness, sharing their experiences of visiting the Museum, or paying tribute to the victims.<sup>122</sup> Such comments can reinforce the perceived importance of the visit to the user uploading this content; furthermore, together these shared experiential authenticities can create a sense of collective experience, even between strangers who did not tour the Museum at the same time. This shared experience is instigated solely in the digital realm, and thus perhaps another type of experiential authenticity in relation to the Museum – one that occurs after the visit, on a public platform – is developed.

Nina Simon states that input from museum visitors is only meaningful if the institution itself responds to their contributions. It is important for museums to 'share them, showcase them, and use them to affect the visitor experience' to strengthen and create a truly collaborative museum-visitor relationship.<sup>123</sup> The Auschwitz Museum is clearly mindful of this, as validation of visitors' experiences also comes from its official social media channels. On both Instagram and Twitter, the Museum demonstrates two different types of approval regarding users' content. The first involves communicating with individual users directly, leaving comments on Instagram posts with messages such as 'Thank you for sharing the picture and thank you for remembering. We hope that the visit at the Memorial was an important and valuable experience.'<sup>124</sup> In the second method, content shared by individuals is redistributed through the Museum's official accounts. This is also most evident on Instagram, which Sawicki describes as 'an exchange of photos' between the Museum and the public.<sup>125</sup> The overwhelming majority of photographs on the official Museum account were taken by its

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<sup>120</sup> Kyarolphx, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9pOORRpeVe> (last modified 12 March 2020).

<sup>121</sup> As of 28 June 2020.

<sup>122</sup> For some examples of these responses (in a number of languages), see *life\_according\_to\_ivett*, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-2eq1CnT0M> (last modified 11 April 2020); *\_esteban\_arancibia*, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-yUgbXJhlg> (last modified 10 April 2020); *flaneurskaleidoscopichorizons*, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9w2xvZpkNF> (last modified 15 March 2020).

<sup>123</sup> Simon, *Participatory Museum*, 22.

<sup>124</sup> Commane and Potton, "Instagram and Auschwitz," 168.

<sup>125</sup> Video embedded in *AFP News Agency*, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AFP/status/1250015693908496385> (last modified 14 April 2020, 11:59am).

visitors; Sawicki adds a basic description of the location, links the creator's account to the post ('Photo by [user]') and includes numerous hashtags and the user's original caption (if applicable).<sup>126</sup> Instagram posts are also occasionally shared to the Museum's Twitter feed. Primarily, however, the Museum retweets content regarding visitors' written experiences of visiting the site, and their encouragement of others to follow the official Twitter account. Both are often accompanied by poems, quotes or messages about the Museum's mission and its importance in the modern world.<sup>127</sup> Visitors' comments are therefore used to reinforce this importance and used as examples of the transformative effect a tour of the site can have.

Having their photographs and comments shared by the Auschwitz Museum – potentially reaching an audience of hundreds of thousands – may be the ultimate form of approval for the average visitor, for whom the 'sense of feeling valued is demonstrably important'.<sup>128</sup> In contrast to others being criticised for their published content, redistribution by an official institution signifies a validation of the visitor's experience and that, in addition to objective narratives, 'individual encounters with the Holocaust are worth sharing with the world'.<sup>129</sup> Given the authority and reputation of the Museum, this re-sharing may be even more impactful than comments from peers, particularly as the latter often focuses only on the composition of the published content rather than the visitor's experience as a whole. Furthermore, in the same way that creating posts related to a physical visit on social media can prolong the experience and its perceived authenticity, interaction with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in this digital space can also contribute to the individual's overall museum experience.<sup>130</sup>

As well as helping to confirm visitors' experiential authenticity, however, sharing and retweeting other users' content highlights the Auschwitz Museum's awareness and use of its own authority on social media. On one hand, by showcasing others' images and comments, the Museum invites others to submit their own content, 'welcoming Holocaust memory' on social media and demonstrating that this memory can be 'collaborative'.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, the

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<sup>126</sup> "Auschwitz Memorial and Museum," *Instagram*, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/auschwitzmemorial> (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>127</sup> Examples include Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1249355030349651968> (last modified 12 April 2020, 4:13pm); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1249988943287812097> (last modified 14 April 2020, 10:12am).

<sup>128</sup> Kidd, *New Mediascape*, 52.

<sup>129</sup> Lundrigan, "Holocaust Memory," 81.

<sup>130</sup> Bliss Jensen and Lynda Kelly, "Exploring Social Media for Front-End Evaluation," *Exhibitionist* 28:2 (2009): 19; Kelly and Russo, "From Communities," 285; Fisher and Adair, "Online Dialogue," 47.

<sup>131</sup> Lundrigan, "Holocaust Memory," 104, 81.

variety of content that is published – different views of the former camp and its exhibitions, recommendations of related books and expressions of a multitude of emotions – means that, as Lundrigan asserts, ‘virtually no aspect or perspective of Auschwitz’s space [is] unrepresented on social media’.<sup>132</sup> In this sense, the Museum shares some of this authority with the visitors themselves, recognising their individual experiences and showing gratitude for their decision to tour the site and engage in remembering the history of Auschwitz. The ‘Unassailable Voice’ is less significant here, and ‘expert and lay knowledge’ are given an equal stance from an official Museum platform.<sup>133</sup>

On the other hand, as both Lundrigan and Commane and Potton note, redistribution of visitors’ content is a convenient way for the Museum to provide examples as to what is considered ‘suitable forms of visual representation’ and ‘model appropriate engagement for future visitors to Auschwitz’.<sup>134</sup> Thus, although the Museum’s presence on social media signals that Holocaust remembrance is acceptable in the digital age, despite critics’ concerns, there are still representations which the institution perceives to be more ‘suitable’ than others.<sup>135</sup> The fact that the Auschwitz Museum shares content that it deems appropriate suggests that the Museum uses its authority – as the most (in)famous Holocaust site, and one of the world’s largest Holocaust museums – to its full advantage. Yet the judgement of this content and its approval (or disapproval) lies with only one person. It is predominantly Paweł Sawicki, not the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, that decides the suitability of visitors’ posts, particularly as the Museum does not have official guidelines concerning photography of the site (although, as previously stated, photography in some areas is forbidden). Whilst the majority of the Auschwitz Museum’s social media content is objective and factual, a small proportion remains subjective, and reflects only Sawicki’s personal interpretation of what can be classified as suitable representations of the camp. Moreover, not every visitor’s photographs or comments are shared by the Museum. This means that visitors’ experiences (or, at least, their post-experience reflections) are also curated, and approved posts form part of the social media aspect of the Museum’s digital museum. Therefore, although visitors are encouraged to publish their responses to the site and the ways in which they remember their visit, this content is, to a certain degree, curated and controlled by the Auschwitz Museum,

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>133</sup> Walsh, “The Web,” 229; Salazar, “‘MyMuseum’,” 276.

<sup>134</sup> Lundrigan, “Holocaust Memory,” 104; Commane and Potton, “Instagram and Auschwitz,” 168. This has essentially been confirmed in a Museum Tweet: Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1108419173590405123> (last modified 20 March 2019, 5:24pm).

<sup>135</sup> Commane and Potton, “Instagram and Auschwitz,” 168.

emphasising its authority and suggesting an inequality in suitable representations between institution and individual.

### **The ‘Virtual Community’**

Visitor participation is still being explored and developed across the museum sector in both its physical and digital elements. One of the greatest challenges, according to Nina Simon, is appealing to those who do not frequent museums, and ‘who might feel alienated, dissatisfied, or uninspired’ by museums.<sup>136</sup> Social media presents the possibility of connecting with a large, global audience, and inviting them to actively participate in museological practices of curation, interpretation and education. Many museums have grasped this opportunity; as Jenny Kidd writes, ‘more than ever before, [audiences are] implicated in the practice and process of history “making”: being engaged, consulted, collaborated with and, crucially perhaps, listened to’.<sup>137</sup> This is certainly true of the Auschwitz Museum. Whether it seeks to promote – or control – others’ representations of the former Auschwitz camp, social media has undoubtedly altered its relationship with the wider public. Before the digital age, the Museum was extremely limited in its correspondence with the world beyond the physical site; finding the correct contact details for journalists, for example, could take days, whereas social media provides opportunities for dialogue within a matter of seconds.<sup>138</sup> As the next sections will show, the evolution of the conversation with social media users has both inclusive and exclusive elements, and the authority of the Museum is either relaxed or heightened depending upon the type of interaction.

By creating and developing social media profiles for the Museum, Sawicki has utilised the ‘many to many’ communication these networks involve and established what he refers to as a ‘virtual community of remembrance’.<sup>139</sup> Museums have often used the term ‘community’ in reference to their social media followings, but the ‘value’ ascribed to this community has not always been clear.<sup>140</sup> In the case of the Auschwitz Museum, however, this value is found in the act of global commemoration, which takes several different forms. In

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<sup>136</sup> Nina Simon, “Participatory Design and the Future of Museums,” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 21.

<sup>137</sup> Kidd, *New Mediascape*, 41.

<sup>138</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>139</sup> Sonia Livingstone, “The Challenge of Changing Audiences: Or, What is the Audience Researcher to do in the Age of the Internet?” *European Journal of Communication* 19:1 (2004): 77; Adams, “Never Forget.”

<sup>140</sup> Kidd, *New Mediascape*, 44; Jenny Kidd, “Enacting Engagement Online: Framing Social Media Use for the Museum,” *Information Technology & People* 24:1 (2011): 73.

the first instance, the ‘remembrance’ element of this community can be interpreted as commemoration of the victims. This is most evident from content published regarding the fate of individual prisoners, and users are ‘invited to virtually participate in the [acknowledgement of] suffering of distant others’.<sup>141</sup> Many followers leave comments paying tribute to the murdered, posting images of candles and hearts, writing pledges to remember the person and expressing wishes for their eternal peace.<sup>142</sup> In this way, the Museum’s social media is used as a ‘virtual vigil’ for those who died in the camp.<sup>143</sup> In some cases, furthermore, users write about their personal connection with this history, primarily through family members or friends who survived (or perished in) Auschwitz.<sup>144</sup> This is just one example of how social media provides individuals with an opportunity to share different perspectives and interpretations of elements of the same history, thus imbuing them, as Matthew Fisher argues, with ‘greater meaning and deeper significance’.<sup>145</sup> The potential acknowledgement their comments can receive from others adds another layer to this virtual community: a place of support, and a sense of ‘digital intimacy’, between strangers whose common bond is in following the Auschwitz Museum and actively remembering its history.<sup>146</sup>

Indeed, the idea of commemorating and learning about Auschwitz as a group is heavily promoted by Sawicki. In recent years, he has initiated a Twitter campaign for the Museum account to gain as many followers as possible. When the campaign began in December 2018, the Museum’s Twitter profile had approximately 143,000 followers; after sending a Tweet to try and increase this number to 150,000, which was retweeted by notable

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<sup>141</sup> Maria Kyriakidou, “Media Witnessing: Exploring the Audience of Distant Suffering,” *Media, Culture & Society* 37:2 (2015): 215.

<sup>142</sup> Such sentiments can be found on each of the Museum’s social media accounts. For an example of each, see Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1250227404267761664> (last modified 15 April 2020, 2:00am); Auschwitz Memorial/Muzeum Auschwitz, Facebook post, online at: <https://www.facebook.com/auschwitzmemorial/photos/a.10150892453251097/10156733579281097> (last modified 9 April 2020, 7:16pm); Auschwitz Memorial and Museum, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B7xMNOopddp> (last modified 26 January 2020).

<sup>143</sup> Spielberg, “Memorial’s Twitter.”

<sup>144</sup> Most of these personal reflections can be found on Instagram, as the majority of posts on the Museum’s account contain more general views of the site and do not focus on individual victims. Kimfriedrichs\_ in response to Auschwitz Memorial and Museum, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B86lloPWzG> (last modified 23 February 2020); emma\_lee\_89 in response to Auschwitz Memorial and Museum, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B4sNq8wJSMY> (last modified 10 November 2019); anderssholz in response to Auschwitz Memorial and Museum, Instagram post, online at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B1OL3BeI2L8> (last modified 16 August 2019).

<sup>145</sup> Fisher and Adair, “Online Dialogue,” 55.

<sup>146</sup> Clive Thompson, “Brave New World of Digital Intimacy,” *The New York Times*, online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/magazine/07awareness-t.html> (last modified 7 September 2008).

public figures (as discussed above), the Museum received an additional 150,000 followers in three days.<sup>147</sup> A significant proportion of these new followers were also motivated to support the Museum in the wake of ‘a flurry’ of antisemitic Tweets.<sup>148</sup> Since then, a combination of this continuous plea and endorsement by those with their own large followings has resulted in an exponential growth of accounts following the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.<sup>149</sup> Sawicki aimed for another milestone in reaching 750,000 Twitter followers in time for the seventy-fifth anniversary of Auschwitz’s liberation on 27 January 2020.<sup>150</sup> By 25 January, however, the Museum account had acquired over a million followers, largely due to the support of actor Mark Hamill.<sup>151</sup> This emphasis on expanding the virtual community is indicative of Sawicki’s desire to reach ‘everyone’, as well as the influence that social media can have. Conversely, a more cynical interpretation of this campaign once again illustrates the Museum’s awareness of its own authority, and its wish to retain its prominence as one of the world’s leading institutions on the Holocaust. This is also made easier on Twitter by the fact that many other former Holocaust sites do not have an account on the platform, and those that do are far less active than the Auschwitz Museum.<sup>152</sup>

The most participatory element of the Museum’s social media is its occasional invitation for users to discuss and debate certain questions or provide feedback regarding the content of the Museum posts. As with asking Facebook followers whether or not the Museum should have an account on the network when it was first established in 2009, Sawicki has appealed to Twitter users regarding his developing content strategy. The daily publishing of posts commemorating individuals began gradually; by March 2020, however, the Museum was creating posts related to a dozen separate prisoners each day. Sawicki sent a Tweet asking for followers’ feedback: what was the value of these Tweets, and were too many being

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<sup>147</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020; Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1075827148357808133> (last modified 20 December 2018, 6:55pm).

<sup>148</sup> Adams, “Never Forget.”

<sup>149</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1193053695472209921> (last modified 9 November 2019, 6:32am).

<sup>150</sup> Twitter users have suggested that the Museum reach other symbolic milestones, such as 1.3 million people to commemorate the number of people deported to the camp, or 6 million to represent the estimated number of Holocaust victims. Sawicki, however, finds this concept ‘disrespectful’. Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid; Mark Hamill, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/HamillHimself/status/1174019202505555968> (last modified 17 September 2019, 6:56pm); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1221098891900334082> (last modified 25 January 2020, 3:53pm).

<sup>152</sup> Manca, “Holocaust Memorialisation,” 196-7.

posted?<sup>153</sup> The majority of responses were positive, with users citing the importance of remembering the faces behind the statistics and appreciating the ‘painful but necessary reminder’.<sup>154</sup> The reaction from the Museum’s Twitter followers emphasises the idea of the feed as a continuous vigil for the victims, and the significance of the remembrance element of the Museum’s social media. Furthermore, asking for user feedback highlights the ‘community’ aspect of the Museum’s presence on these networks; that the content posted is for the benefit of users, as well as the memory of the victims, and they are thus entitled to their collective input in shaping the ‘curatorial experience’ of this aspect of the digital museum.<sup>155</sup> Compared to a physical visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – where the permanent exhibition has changed very little since 1955, and the tour guides adhere to a particular script – this is therefore a much more collaborative experience between the institution and those who are interested in its work.

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<sup>153</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1237033185738981376> (last modified 9 March 2020, 3:11pm).

<sup>154</sup> Stripe, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/Justme10000000/status/1237033440379273216> (last modified 9 March 2020, 3:12pm).

<sup>155</sup> Fisher and Adair, “Online Dialogue,” 45.

Alternatively, the ‘remembrance’ aspect of this ‘virtual community’ can refer to the ethics and practice of remembrance itself.<sup>156</sup> As Fiona Cameron notes, ‘institutions are seen as [...] important gatekeepers for directing, opening up or closing down cultural conversations on topics of societal significance’.<sup>157</sup> One such example from the Auschwitz Museum took place in November 2019, when it shared a blogger and Twitter user’s photograph of a small rubber duck, positioned in front of the Gate of Death in Birkenau (Figure 4.5).<sup>158</sup>



Figure 4.5. A screenshot of the Auschwitz Museum’s invitation for followers to comment on the appropriateness of a mascot rubber duck. Source: Twitter.

Follow-up Tweets showed a translation of the original caption (which gave a history of Auschwitz) and an update stating that the post’s author had removed the image and issued an apology ‘to all the people who have felt offended’.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>156</sup> Adams, “Never Forget.”

<sup>157</sup> Fiona Cameron, “Introduction,” 1.

<sup>158</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1192165956849717248> (last modified 6 November 2019, 7:44pm).

<sup>159</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1192189554310164480> (last modified 6 November 2019,

Unsurprisingly, the Museum's Tweet garnered huge attention: it received 2,068 likes and was retweeted 901 times, suggesting followers were keen to spread awareness and discussion about the post with their peers.<sup>160</sup> Additionally, the Tweet (and the activity it generated) soon featured across international media. Despite the neutrality of the original post, these articles claimed the Auschwitz Museum had 'called the blogger out' and '[delivered] one of its occasional lessons in decorum', whilst also naming and providing links to the account in question (something the Museum itself had not done).<sup>161</sup> Although the press retained a critical, sensationalist tone, the debate and discussion by users on Twitter met precisely with Sawicki's objectives in posting the content. Sawicki shared the photograph in order to 'build awareness', but also to provide the Museum's followers with an opportunity for their opinions to be shared.<sup>162</sup> Though many felt the inclusion of the rubber duck was, indeed, inappropriate, others expressed more balanced views regarding the creator's motivation and the ethical questions that were clearly not based on the 'initial reaction' of shock and criticism.<sup>163</sup> As mentioned earlier in this thesis, very little discussion has taken place in either public, academic or museological spheres regarding the ethics of visitor photography and/or behaviour at Holocaust sites. This example, however, and the large amount of conversation it encouraged, demonstrates that institutions such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum do have the power and authority to conduct these discussions if they so wish. Moreover – and perhaps more importantly – such conversations can be facilitated with the wider public via platforms such as social media, so that those who visit these sites feel they have a voice in these types of decision-making. Inviting users to participate in such conversations also suggests an equality amongst all participants, including the institution, and 'builds trust' between museums and their supporters.<sup>164</sup> In this case, the Museum relaxed some of its authority, using a more informal tone (as is more common with other types of

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9:18pm); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1192381731057344513> (last modified 7 November 2019, 10:02am).

<sup>160</sup> As of 28 June 2020.

<sup>161</sup> "Blogger Sorry for Photo of Rubber Duck on Auschwitz Tracks," *The Times of Israel*, online at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/blogger-sorry-for-photo-of-rubber-duck-on-auschwitz-tracks> (last modified 12 November 2019); Kayla Epstein, "An Instagram of a Rubber Duck at Auschwitz Starts a Conversation about Photo Ethics — Again," *The Washington Post*, online at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2019/11/12/an-instagram-rubber-duck-auschwitz-starts-conversation-about-photo-ethics-again> (last modified 12 November 2019); Helen Coffey, "Travel Blogger Condemned for Posting Photo of Rubber Duck Outside Auschwitz," *The Independent*, online at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/instagram-auschwitz-rubber-duck-travel-concentration-camp-poland-a9197981.html> (last modified 11 November 2019).

<sup>162</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Simon, "Participatory Design," 20-21; Fisher and Adair, "Online Dialogue," 53.

museums on social media) and provided a platform for ‘a variety of voices and viewpoints’.<sup>165</sup> This is particularly significant, and relevant, when one considers the ‘cacophony of voices and multiple narratives’ regarding contested histories and memories of the physical former camp.<sup>166</sup>

Conversely, in an interview for *The Washington Post*, Sawicki stated that initiating such discussions amongst followers was part of the Museum’s strategy to ‘reinforce positive behaviour and images’.<sup>167</sup> On one hand, this ‘positive behaviour’ may refer to the act of debating and the more carefully constructed arguments that some users produced in response to the image. For the average visitor, due to time constraints, in-depth discussions, particularly with Museum staff, are simply not possible during a visit to the Museum; the institution’s presence on social media platforms, therefore, can be used to initiate and continue such conversations ‘outside of the classroom’ (or, in this case, the institution) regarding contemporary issues such as the ethics of representation of both the history of Auschwitz and those who visit its grounds.<sup>168</sup> Such discussions, in turn, could have much wider implications in relation to the experience of visiting places such as the Auschwitz Museum in the future. On the other hand, one can interpret this strategy in relation to sharing visitors’ photographs, as discussed above, as examples of suitable representations of the former camp. In the case of the rubber duck, this would suggest an existing disapproval of the photograph, particularly in comparison to approved images that have been shared with little or no commentary. By facilitating these conversations, the Museum thus grants its followers the opportunity to voice their opinions and participate in important dialogues, whilst retaining its authority in terms of notions of ‘positive behaviour’.<sup>169</sup>

Utilisation of the digital museum has allowed the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum to expand not only out of the physical space it occupies, but also to expand out of a wholly Auschwitz-centric narrative, occasionally addressing other genocides and related contemporary issues. This is significant given previous assertions that the Auschwitz Museum should focus only on Auschwitz.<sup>170</sup> It is not yet clear if this will remain the case

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<sup>165</sup> Kidd, *New Mediascape*, 50, 55; Fisher and Adair, “Online Dialogue,” 49.

<sup>166</sup> Jonathan Webber, “Making Sense of the Holocaust in Contemporary Poland: The Real and the Imagined, the Contradictions and the Paradoxes,” *Jednak Książki* 6 (2016): 17.

<sup>167</sup> Epstein, “Instagram.”

<sup>168</sup> The ‘average visitor’ here refers to those who have not visited the Museum as part of an educational group or project. Mark Sandle, “Studying the Past in the Digital Age: From Tourist to Explorer,” in *History in the Digital Age*, ed. Toni Weller (London: Routledge, 2013), 140.

<sup>169</sup> Epstein, “Instagram.”

<sup>170</sup> Author conversation with Paweł Sawicki, 17 May 2016; Cywiński, *Epitaph*, 83.

when the new permanent exhibition opens over the course of the next decade. Yet the narrative of the Museum's outreach activities has already shifted. Since 2015, Cywiński's introductions to the institution's annual reports have contained more references to 'the rise in populism, xenophobia, nationalism, anti-Semitism, terrorism, and wars' in the contemporary world.<sup>171</sup> In recent speeches and the Museum's official Christmas card, he has explicitly drawn attention to the genocides and human rights violations in Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar and China.<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, the 2019 edition of the Museum's biennial international conference was entitled 'Auschwitz – Never Again! – Really?' and focused on issues such as education about, and the prevention of, genocide.<sup>173</sup> For the first time, survivors of the genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia and Rwanda were invited to speak alongside survivors of Auschwitz.

According to Sawicki, the decision to mention post-Holocaust genocides was borne from the global 'silence' and 'indifference' in the wake of contemporary conflicts.<sup>174</sup> Yet the Museum was not as vocal during the genocides mentioned above, despite similar notions of global indifference. This change in outlook is likely due to several factors. Firstly, the ease and speed of accessibility to the news in the digital age means that developments reach social media users more quickly (and, in turn, the Museum can share and react to this news almost instantly). Secondly, this narrative links directly to Sawicki's personal mission to educate others not only about Auschwitz, but also their moral responsibilities; the 'moral code' that he has developed whilst working at the Museum encourages him to help people 'try to understand the world through this memory'.<sup>175</sup> Finally, highlighting instances of discrimination and human rights violations across the world may form a subtle response to the current Polish government's refusal to acknowledge any citizens' complicity in the Holocaust, as well as more widespread Euroscepticism and homophobia.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Bartosz Bartyzel and Paweł Sawicki, eds., *Report 2015* (Wadowice: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2016), 5. For more editions of the Museum's annual report.

<sup>172</sup> See, for example, from approximately 2:15:00 in Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, "75th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz [LIVE - ENGLISH]," *YouTube* video, 3:03:47, 27 January 2020, online at: <https://youtu.be/MTELKo26rqw> (accessed 28 June 2020); author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020. For the latest example of the Director's Christmas card, see Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1207978970429480960> (last modified 20 December 2019, 11:00am).

<sup>173</sup> Imogen Dalziel, "Auschwitz – Never Again! – Really? Oświęcim, 1-4 July 2019, Conference Report," *Memoria* 23 (2019): 4-69, online at: <https://view.joomag.com/memoria-en-no-23-08-2019/0263284001567072796/p4>.

<sup>174</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020; from 2:16:53, Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, "75th Anniversary."

<sup>175</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>176</sup> For a wider discussion of these issues, see Joanna Chojnicka, "Anti-EU and Anti-LGBT Attitudes in Poland: Considering Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence," *Baltic Journal of European Studies* 5:2 (2015): 30-55.

In addition to the facts of what happened at Auschwitz, therefore, education at the Museum has increasingly focused on how and why the camp and its murderous technologies were established. Concerned that visitors view their visit only from a historical perspective, some Museum staff now remind tour participants of the ‘universal lesson’ the site (amongst others) provides, for the present and the future, if certain prejudices and ideologies are left unchecked.<sup>177</sup> As Sawicki asserts, ‘I believe that we feel more and more obliged to make people feel uncomfortable.’<sup>178</sup>

Though the Museum has sought to remain largely apolitical, there are signs this may be changing on their social media. In September 2020, the Auschwitz Museum shared a letter written by Director Piotr Cywiński to Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, in which Cywiński requested the pardon of a 13-year-old boy sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment for blasphemy. ‘As the director of the Auschwitz Memorial [...] where children were imprisoned and murdered,’ he wrote, ‘I cannot remain indifferent to this disgraceful sentence for humanity.’<sup>179</sup> Cywiński even suggested that 120 adults – himself included – could each serve a month in a Nigerian prison on behalf of the defendant.

The Director’s call to action is emblematic of the Auschwitz Museum’s emphasis on moral responsibility at an individual level. Sawicki states that, although each social media post is seen by thousands of people, content is often created to ‘target individuals’.<sup>180</sup> This is evident in some of the language used in these posts: for example, encouraging users to ask themselves ‘What can I do to make our world a better place[?]’, as well as calls to ‘get engaged and be messangers [sic] of @AuschwitzMuseum’.<sup>181</sup> Silverstone expresses concern that ‘electronic mediation [...] has led to increasing privatization and individualization’ which affects the need ‘to act responsibly in relation to, ourselves, our neighbours and also the strangers among us’.<sup>182</sup> Sawicki utilises these potential issues, however, appealing to individuals within their private mediated spaces to consider this responsibility and learn from the past to achieve greater changes in the present and future, for everyone. This strategy also

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<sup>177</sup> Adams, “Never Forget.”

<sup>178</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>179</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1309451317581094913> (last modified 25 September 2020, 12:14pm).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1209562808842674177> (last modified 24 December 2019, 7:53pm); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1225842515154219014> (last modified 7 February 2020, 6:03pm).

<sup>182</sup> Roger Silverstone, “Regulation, Media Literacy and Media Civics,” *Media, Culture & Society* 26:3 (2004): 443.

relates to Zygmunt Bauman's theory that morality in the postmodern world relies more on the individual rather than the collective.<sup>183</sup> Sawicki states that he has seen for himself the changes that a visit to the Auschwitz Museum can make in one person's life. Thus, the purpose of the content he publishes on social media is linked to the more recent goals of tours around the Museum – to 'plant a seed' with followers so that they might remember that 'the Holocaust did not start [with] gas chambers' and consider their own moral responsibilities.<sup>184</sup> The 'affective nature' of this type of 'media witnessing', as well as its 'cultural endowment with a sense of responsibility to interfere with and act upon the suffering witnessed', means this moral education may still prove effective, even if the lessons are imparted from a distance.<sup>185</sup>

Therefore, the Auschwitz Museum uses its authority as a well-known site of genocide to highlight other, more recent conflicts and attempt to permeate public consciousness about current and future issues. Though these posts are not published on a daily basis, Sawicki clearly intends for the Museum's followers to incorporate these acts of morality into their everyday lives. The history of Auschwitz as 'an everyday history', therefore, possesses a duality: the daily occurrences in the operational camp, and the warning of man's potential for barbarity that its existence illustrates.<sup>186</sup> By encouraging its followers to reflect on the positive change they can create in the world, the Museum wishes to produce a virtual community that is active in both education and remembrance, so that Auschwitz is a lesson in not just history, but also ethics, politics and morality.

The Auschwitz Museum's posts regarding comparative genocide and/or the importance of moral responsibility do generate thousands of responses. Conversely, positive action on social media does not guarantee positive action in the world outside the digital. Social media 'are founded on social interaction rather than social participation'; Piotr Cywiński acknowledges this margin, emphasising that good deeds are not achieved by 'liking' posts or signing online petitions, although many users may deem these actions as satisfactory forms of engagement.<sup>187</sup> Research has yet to explore any 'deep political and civic

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<sup>183</sup> Cameron, "Introduction," 3; Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (London: Polity, 2007), 1-4.

<sup>184</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020; Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1067175336184606720> (last modified 26 November 2018, 9:56pm); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1200797688645799936> (last modified 30 November 2019, 3:24pm).

<sup>185</sup> Kyriakidou, "Media Witnessing," 216.

<sup>186</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>187</sup> Salazar, "'MyMuseum'," 270; from approximately 2:18:00 in *Miejsce Pamięci i Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, "75th Anniversary,"*; Silverstone, "Complicity," 777.

engagement’ instigated by social media, and if the average user is moved to active participation by content that they read on these platforms.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, most museums’ activity on social media currently consists of the ‘short-term diffusion of persuasion-driven messages’ as opposed to ‘long-term processes of dialogue and debate to foster [...] long-term social change’.<sup>189</sup> Although the Auschwitz Museum has initiated some debate, primarily via its Twitter feed, its content also fits the former category. Yet the desire to initiate and sustain a virtual community suggests at least one element of a longer-term strategy of engagement. In appealing to the individual (albeit from a collective platform) the Museum uses its museological authority to promote each person’s potential to create positive change within their wider, non-digital communities. This appeal is projected to its entire audience, regardless of whether or not they have visited the physical site. This emphasises both the importance of the message and provides an opportunity for ‘public empowerment’, a modern museological aspect which still needs addressing in other areas of the Museum.<sup>190</sup>

One element of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’s adaptation to the digital museum, therefore, has been to foster a supportive ‘virtual community’ that enables its followers to actively engage in the practice of remembrance. This includes both remembering the individual victims of Auschwitz and considering what forms remembrance of this history may take, specifically in relation to physical encounters with the former camp. In addition, this adaptation has seen the Museum expand not only outside its physical space, but also outside its Auschwitz-focused narrative to include raising awareness of more recent genocides and the questions of morality and individual action these elicit. This element places less emphasis on the Museum’s authority (although it is not entirely relinquished), allowing users to express their feelings and opinions on issues concerned with the institution, as well as provide acknowledgement and support to the Museum and, at times, each other. The Museum’s use of social media has thus started to encourage a shift in the institution’s relationship with the public, creating opportunities for collaboration, discussion and the potential for social media users to harness their personal authority.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Salazar, “‘MyMuseum’,” 265, 268, 270.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>190</sup> Graburn, *The “Full Service” Museum* (Berkeley: Manuscript, 1988), quoted in Deepak Chhabra, “Positioning Museums on an Authenticity Continuum.” *Annals of Tourism Research* 35:2 (2008): 427-47.

<sup>191</sup> Cameron, “Introduction,” 3.

## The ‘Holocaust Police’<sup>192</sup>

The Auschwitz Museum’s engagement with the public, however, is not always so positive. Appealing to as wide an audience as possible and inviting dialogue with this audience means some conflict is to be expected.<sup>193</sup> A large following on social media – particularly for a Holocaust-related account – results in the increased presence of Holocaust deniers, antisemites and other ‘trolls’.<sup>194</sup> Users espousing such views remain in the minority, and their comments are quickly deleted. Some accounts that publish deliberately provocative or ‘disturbing’ content – approximately 1,000 so far – have been blocked by Sawicki, whilst others receive a response “‘when we feel there is an educational possibility’”.<sup>195</sup> The most frequent confrontations, however, have concerned the politics surrounding the Museum. As mentioned in Chapter One, shortly after the implementation of the so-called ‘Holocaust bill’ in 2018, deflecting Polish involvement in the Holocaust, the Museum received a barrage of criticism from Polish nationalists. In addition to several onsite incidents, social media was used to accuse the Museum of banning Polish flags on the grounds of the Museum, not inviting Poles to participate in official commemorations, and downplaying Polish suffering in favour of focusing on Jewish victims.<sup>196</sup> These claims were publicly refuted by the Museum; photographs clearly showing Polish flags on display during the annual March of the Living, for instance, were posted in response. Social media has impacted greatly upon the ways in which news is written and shared, and the deliberate implementation of disinformation and ‘fake news’ means it is difficult to ascertain just how many of these accusations against the Museum were genuine.<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, the populist narrative disseminated by the Polish government, the historical controversies surrounding Polish memory at the Auschwitz

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<sup>192</sup> Sommer, “Tweeting the Holocaust.”

<sup>193</sup> Bernadette Lynch, “Challenging Ourselves: Uncomfortable Histories and Current Museum Practices,” in *Challenging History in the Museum*, ed. Jenny Kidd et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 90.

<sup>194</sup> This does not include those who engage in cyberbullying or post aggressive comments, but rather those who ‘actively and enthusiastically identify as trolls’, creating fake profiles with which to disseminate fictional news articles, propaganda or opinions designed to confuse and provoke others. Whitney Phillips, *This is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 2, 16-17.

<sup>195</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020; Adams, “Never Forget.”

<sup>196</sup> Christian Davies, “Poland’s Holocaust Law Triggers Tide of Abuse against Auschwitz Museum,” *The Guardian*, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/07/polands-holocaust-law-triggers-tide-abuse-auschwitz-museum> (last modified 7 May 2018). A number of the accounts from which accusations were posted have been suspended, but for some examples (in Polish), see Leszek Dąbrowa, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/LeszekDabrowa/status/984134223916339200> (last modified 11 April 2018, 7:20pm); ONR, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/1934ONR/status/1089854080674156544> (last modified 28 January 2019, 11:53am).

<sup>197</sup> John Brummette et al., “Read All About It: The Politicization of ‘Fake News’ on Twitter,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 95:2 (2018): 509-12.

Museum and its symbolism as a site of the Holocaust mean that the institution has become an obvious target for such criticism.<sup>198</sup> The Museum's adaptation to the digital museum – particularly social media – is therefore of vital importance for disproving such stories being spread by Internet trolls.

Conversely, the Museum has also been accused of siding with the Polish government and denying historical antisemitism within the country. In an article for *Haaretz*, writer Ariel Sobel reported on a 'Twitter war' she had experienced with the Museum after challenging their comments regarding an article entitled 'Auschwitz-Birkenau & Its Polish Roots'.<sup>199</sup> Sobel insisted that the Museum's apparent denial of Polish complicity in the Holocaust contributed to contemporary antisemitism. This resulted in the Museum (i.e. Paweł Sawicki) blocking her on Twitter, leading her to question if the Museum would 'regress back to the spirit of the times of its founding by Polish parliamentary decree in 1947, when it was established as a "Monument to the Martyrology of the Polish Nation and other Nations," with Jews out of sight and mind?'<sup>200</sup>

On one hand, Sobel's accusations appear rather extreme; the Museum has never explicitly denied Polish antisemitism or complicity in the genocide (although it has also never discussed these openly; one must consider, however, the political implications of a state-owned institution providing examples that are contrary to existing law). Furthermore, the article that sparked the debate clearly used a deliberately provocative headline. Though the author cites pre-war pogroms, and the murder of Polish Jews by their non-Jewish neighbours in Jedwabne and Kielce, to suggest a link between these attacks and the creation of the Nazi camp system is undoubtedly misleading.<sup>201</sup> On the other hand, blocking Sobel from contacting the Museum on Twitter was perhaps a disproportionate response. The Museum defended its actions, stating, 'Accusing the Museum of "rewriting history" and calling our account "a propaganda tool" is not only disrespectful to people who dedicate their lives to preserve the memory of all victims of Auschwitz. This is an insult close to defamation. A

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<sup>198</sup> See Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of these factors.

<sup>199</sup> Ariel Sobel, "Auschwitz Is Rewriting Holocaust History, One Tweet at a Time," *Haaretz*, online at: <https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/premium-auschwitz-is-rewriting-holocaust-history-one-tweet-at-a-time-1.6936533> (last modified 14 February 2019); "Auschwitz-Birkenau & Its Polish Roots," *The Jewish Voice*, online at: <http://thejewishvoice.com/2019/02/auschwitz-birkenau-its-polish-roots> (last modified 2 June 2019).

<sup>200</sup> Sobel, "Auschwitz."

<sup>201</sup> "Auschwitz-Birkenau," *The Jewish Voice*. For more on this history and related contemporary discussions see, for example, Jan T. Gross, *Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

block on twitter [sic] is a mild response.’<sup>202</sup> Whilst Sobel’s accusations against the Museum may have proved controversial, the decision to block her account suggests a desire for the Museum to silence its critics and preserve the authority of its narrative, particularly given the contemporary politics surrounding Poland’s relationship with the Holocaust. This action also highlights the issue of one person gatekeeping the Museum’s online community; ‘the instant judgements of a web-master’ (in this case, Sawicki) can exclude a user from the conversation if their opinion ‘does not ‘fit’ the desired narrative.’<sup>203</sup>

The Museum’s adaptation to the social media aspect of the digital museum allows its critics to target the institution more directly, whether these accusations relate to perceived pro-Polish or anti-Polish sentiments (though Sawicki feels that if the Museum is criticised from either side, ‘it means we are probably getting it right’).<sup>204</sup> Yet this has also meant the Museum is able to respond to these comments quickly and publicly, dismissing false claims and receiving support from the majority of its audience, thereby ensuring its authoritative position is not undermined.

Criticism is not reserved for opponents of the Museum, however. Even the large, supportive virtual community that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has established – and, in fact, social media users in general – are closely monitored by Sawicki for content regarding Auschwitz. Every day, he searches both the word and hashtag ‘Auschwitz’ on the Museum’s Twitter and Instagram (occasionally also searching Facebook) to check recently posted content.<sup>205</sup> While this simple method enables Sawicki to share the images and comments created by other users, primarily focused on their visit to the site, this monitoring mostly consists of looking for factual errors or highlighting perceived misappropriation of the history and memory of Auschwitz. This is occasionally helped by the virtual community itself, who will alert the Museum to content they perceive as offensive or inappropriate.<sup>206</sup> Increasingly, in addition to publishing its own content, the Museum’s social media (in particular its Twitter) has ‘assumed the role of a fact-checker’.<sup>207</sup> Calls for corrections or the removal of content is not conducted discreetly: ‘unlike many fact-checkers, the account conducts its

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<sup>202</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1096009492280561665> (last modified 14 February 2019, 11:33am).

<sup>203</sup> Silverstone, *Media and Morality*, 138; Shani Orgad, “The Internet as a Moral Space: The Legacy of Roger Silverstone,” *New Media & Society* 9:1 (2007): 38.

<sup>204</sup> Sommer, “Tweeting the Holocaust.”

<sup>205</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018; Spielberg, “Memorial’s Twitter.”

<sup>206</sup> Adams, “Never Forget.”

<sup>207</sup> Spielberg, “Memorial’s Twitter.”

work in full view of the public, as loudly as possible'.<sup>208</sup> The daily monitoring and public denouncement of others' content, particularly in the absence of similar activities from other Holocaust museums' accounts, has even earned the Museum's account the label of 'the "Holocaust police"' (although Auschwitz remains the primary focus).<sup>209</sup> Paweł Sawicki states that the objective of these criticisms, particularly regarding individuals' content, is 'not to shame, but to raise awareness'.<sup>210</sup> Whilst some attempts have indeed been made to create discussion and debate around the current naming and shaming culture, the dissemination of content deemed inaccurate or inappropriate to a large audience (even if the relevant people are not named) is still an aspect of this culture that the Museum utilises to assert its authority. Furthermore, contrary to Sawicki's claim that his posts do not target a specific audience, specific correspondence with three separate groups is examined here: individual Museum visitors, writers and retailers. These examples illustrate the Museum's need to retain control over public representations of Auschwitz – primarily in the fields of tourism, literature and retail – enacted solely through social media.

In the first instance, the Museum shares and comments critically on individual Twitter users' photographic reflections of visiting the site that do not fit its 'model' of onsite engagement, despite there being no official rules regarding visitor behaviour.<sup>211</sup> In March 2019, for example, the international media reported on another of the Museum's Tweets – a plea for visitors not to pose for photographs balancing on the railway tracks in Birkenau, alongside four separate photos of visitors doing so.<sup>212</sup> As well as receiving agreement from the virtual community, some responses – as was intended with sharing the photograph of the rubber duck later that year – created a debate, expressing support for visitors who posed on the railway tracks. 'Walking on it symbolizes that we're in a much better place right now. Let

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Even other Holocaust museums have been publicly corrected by the Auschwitz Museum. After the USHMM Tweeted about the *Sonderkommando* Uprising in Auschwitz, stating that Crematoria IV had been blown up, the Museum responded, clarifying that no explosion had occurred, but a fire had been started in the building's undressing room. US Holocaust Museum, Twitter post, online at:

<https://twitter.com/HolocaustMuseum/status/1048975742892216321> (last modified 7 October 2018, 5:38pm); Adams, "Never Forget." Manca, "Holocaust Memorialisation," 196-7; Sommer, "Tweeting the Holocaust."

<sup>210</sup> Beatrice Christofaro, "Auschwitz is Urging People to Stop Posting Photos of Themselves Posing on Railway Tracks that Carried Holocaust Victims to Their Deaths," *Insider*, online at: <https://www.insider.com/auschwitz-asks-stop-posing-railway-tracks-social-media-2019-3> (last modified 21 March 2019).

<sup>211</sup> Lundrigan, "Holocaust Memory," 104.

<sup>212</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at:

<https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1108337507660451841> (last modified 20 March 2019, 12:00pm). Examples include "Auschwitz Visitors Urged Not to Balance on Railway Tracks for Photos," *BBC News*, online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-47644553> (last modified 20 March 2019); Rebecca Staudenmaier, "Auschwitz Museum Asks Visitors Not to Balance on Train Tracks," *DW*, online at: <https://www.dw.com/en/auschwitz-museum-asks-visitors-not-to-balance-on-train-tracks/a-48006024> (last modified 21 March 2019); and Christofaro, "Auschwitz is Urging People."

people smile. Remembrance does not mean being solemn and stern all the time,’ wrote one user, whilst another chastised the Museum: ‘Different people deal with uncomfortable emotions in different ways – such as laughing at a funeral. Instead of criticizing – educate.’<sup>213</sup> In contrast to the rubber duck photograph, where the Museum allowed the debate to take place between its followers, the institution actively participated in this discussion, defending its criticisms as highlighting ‘less appropriate’ and ‘disrespectful’ behaviour.<sup>214</sup> One published response also quoted the Museum’s Visitor Regulations, which state that ‘Visitors to the grounds of the Museum should behave with due solemnity and respect.’<sup>215</sup> These terms are not further defined within the Regulations, meaning interpretation of ‘solemnity and respect’ is subjective and wholly dependent upon the reader. Nevertheless, the Auschwitz Museum’s criticism of such visitor action, and its staunch defence for highlighting it, is an example of how the Museum uses social media as a marker of its authority. Although some debate is encouraged, this is not always the case, and the Museum – or, rather, one staff member – is selective in which topics or posts are open for discussion. This creates a ‘novice-expert tension’ between followers and Museum staff; Twitter users are invited to participate in certain debates, but it is clear that their opinions will not be considered in certain matters, even those that directly impact upon the visitor population.<sup>216</sup> Thus, despite the Auschwitz Museum remaining ambiguous with regards to what constitutes respectful behaviour and photography, its ‘Unassailable Voice’ is utilised to condemn examples which it has deemed inappropriate.<sup>217</sup>

The Museum has sometimes also used social media as a method of policing and responding to visitors’ reactions to the physical site. As this chapter has previously shown,

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<sup>213</sup> Ostepz vostre lion: Fleur-de-lis blog historyczno-językowy, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/i/status/1108337507660451841> (last modified 20 March 2019, 12:08pm); Gseriously? Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/cgstohl/status/1108360013423226880> (last modified 20 March 2019, 1:29pm).

<sup>214</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1108346832449622016> (last modified 20 March 2019, 12:37pm); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1108340166329024512> (last modified 20 March 2019, 12:11pm).

<sup>215</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1108350840346165250> (last modified 20 March 2019, 12:53pm); “Regulations for Visitors and Persons Staying on the Grounds of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Valid from 02.01.2020),” *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: [http://www.auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/\\_public/visit/18\\_en.pdf](http://www.auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/_public/visit/18_en.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>216</sup> Kathleen McLean, “Whose Questions, Whose Conversations?” in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World*, ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 71; Fisher and Adair, “Online Dialogue,” 47.

<sup>217</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1108419173590405123> (last modified 20 March 2019, 5:24pm); Walsh, “The Web,” 229.

posts within what might be described as the expected narrative – expressions of shock, disbelief or sadness – are often retweeted from the Museum’s account. Conversely, the Museum will occasionally reply to users whose content may be interpreted as more light-hearted or tangential. For instance, after his visit, one young visitor Tweeted the following:

Went to Auschwitz today, absolutely shocking. But the most shocking thing I saw all day was a grown man with a selfie stick proper smiling his head off getting pictures where people got hung and that hahaha imagine[.]<sup>218</sup>

Within two minutes, the Auschwitz Museum responded:

If this was the most shocking thing you saw at the Auschwitz Memorial we kindly advice [sic] to visit again.<sup>219</sup>

Upon initial reading, it can certainly be argued that the visitor’s experience at the Auschwitz Museum is somewhat trivialised. Yet in this post, the visitor does evaluate his reaction to visiting the former camp (‘absolutely shocking’). Furthermore, the decision to focus primarily on the man taking selfies may be motivated by several factors. Commenting on this unexpected behaviour from another visitor might deflect some of the more difficult emotions experienced during the visit; the shock and incredulity (‘hahaha imagine’) of observing the man photographing himself in such a place draws attention away from the potentially distressing act of viewing the Museum’s exhibits. The humorous image of the ‘grown man with a selfie stick smiling his head off’ distracts from the surrounding environment of death and destruction, rendering this atmosphere ‘innocuous, and thus less threatening’.<sup>220</sup> Alternatively (or additionally), the issue of selfies in locations like the Auschwitz Museum is a more contemporary issue for younger visitors, particularly compared to the ‘abstract and invisible’ mass murder perpetrated onsite.<sup>221</sup> The visitor thus decides to share this with his peers, seeking similar reactions of disbelief (and, therefore, a validation of his experience, as previously discussed). Their own responses to the Museum’s criticism (‘You just got told off by Auschwitz bro hahahahaha’, ‘Hahaha you got shouted at by a

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<sup>218</sup> Connor Roberts, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/CRObs94/status/1093578035171864577> (last modified 7 February 2019, 6:31pm).

<sup>219</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1093578519869865986> (last modified 7 February 2019, 6:33pm).

<sup>220</sup> Keith F. Durkin, “Death, Dying and the Dead in Popular Culture,” in *Handbook of Death and Dying*, ed. Clifton D. Bryant (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 47.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

concentration [sic] camp’) also suggests a level of emotional immaturity, as well as surprise at a renowned institution’s intervention in a post designed to reach only a small group of followers.<sup>222</sup> Importantly, however, the visitor does not support this behaviour, and is expressing his shock at an example of a phenomenon which has been publicly criticised by many (including the Museum itself).

As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter Two, experiences of visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum can vary significantly between individuals. Factors such as pre-existing knowledge, personal history, age, nationality and level of education shape this experience, and some are surprised by the ways in which they do (or do not) react to the site.<sup>223</sup> Therefore, there cannot be only one way of describing a visit or its various components, even if some of these descriptions are at greater risk of being misconstrued or causing offence. Nevertheless, in examples such as the above Tweet, the Auschwitz Museum uses its social media presence to monitor visitors’ reactions and expresses official disapproval at those deemed inappropriate without engaging in a substantial dialogue with the individual concerned. This also suggests that there is a ‘right’ way to respond to visiting the site or, at the very least, how to share this experience with others.

Onsite, Museum staff have few opportunities to discuss visitors’ behaviour. The tour guides rarely pause their commentary and are often not looking at their groups, due to the use of headphones in Auschwitz I and the amount of walking required in Birkenau. The site’s security guards will intervene only in cases such as attempted thefts from the grounds.<sup>224</sup> Moreover, the Museum’s ambiguous guidelines on appropriate behaviour means condemnation of certain actions cannot be expressed (although some guides do ask groups not to take selfies, for their own personal comfort).<sup>225</sup> Indeed, the absence of official protocol causes some visitors notable distress.<sup>226</sup> Social media thus provides the Auschwitz Museum a platform with which to voice criticisms against particular behaviours and responses to the

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<sup>222</sup> Ryan Bateman, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/rbatez/status/1093581565794357248> (last modified 7 February 2019, 6:45pm) Sam Pimley-Jones, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/sampimleyjones/status/1093811400630247425> (last modified 8 February 2019, 9:45am).

<sup>223</sup> Alasdair Richardson, “Site-Seeing: Reflections on Visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum with Teenagers,” *Holocaust Studies* (2019), 9-10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1625121>.

<sup>224</sup> Due to the open nature of the site, this has become an issue at Birkenau in recent years. See Chapter Two.

<sup>225</sup> Author conversation with Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum tour guide, 17 July 2018.

<sup>226</sup> Such sentiments are often expressed on TripAdvisor. See, for example, gobofraggle, “This Isn’t a Tourist Attraction but Should be Compulsory Viewing for all!” review of Panstwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, *TripAdvisor*, online at: <https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g274754-d275831-r729678653> (last modified 29 November 2019); alexandriareviews, “Important but Very Poorly Executed and Not Properly Regulated...” review of Panstwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, *TripAdvisor*, online at: <https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g274754-d275831-r537439227> (last modified 31 October 2017).

Museum that may not otherwise be discussed with visitors. Many social media followers undoubtedly place their trust in the Museum deciding how visitors should behave onsite.<sup>227</sup> Yet this relatively new aspect of the digital museum is sometimes a vehicle for upholding more traditional museological practices; in this case, denying followers and/or visitors the opportunity to question the Museum's interpretations of such behaviour and, therefore, an element of its authority.

Writers – both journalists and novelists – have come under the Auschwitz Museum's scrutiny heavily. A search for the phrase 'please correct' from the Museum's Twitter account yields hundreds of results, most of them addressed to media outlets regarding implications that Auschwitz was a 'Polish concentration camp' or situated 'in Poland,' rather than Nazi-occupied Poland, during its operation.<sup>228</sup> Its calls for corrections also concern, for example, other Nazi extermination camps and claims that prisoners of war incarcerated in camps within the vicinity of the Auschwitz camp complex were 'Auschwitz survivors'.<sup>229</sup> Whilst these historical distinctions and terminologies are certainly important, the public nature of these clarifications has caused discomfort amongst journalists, who say that the Museum's Tweets have left them more vulnerable to attacks from Internet trolls.<sup>230</sup> Sawicki justifies his use of Twitter for this purpose by citing its 'efficiency' in enabling 'quicker responses – and corrections' and its potential to educate the Museum's followers, including other journalists.<sup>231</sup> In fact, the Museum is so concerned with the media's factual accuracy that it hosts an annual seminar for journalists, has created a 'basic information' page in its online press pack, and is considering establishing a fact-checking email address for those who require clarification before they publish their articles.<sup>232</sup> The meticulous searching and correcting of press articles suggests each must be Museum-approved, and that there is simply no room for human error when writing about this subject.

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<sup>227</sup> James N. Wood, "The Authorities of the American Art Museum," in *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust*, ed. James Cuno (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 104.

<sup>228</sup> "Search: please correct (from: auschwitzmuseum)," *Twitter*, online at: [https://twitter.com/search?q=please%20correct%20\(from%3Aauschwitzmuseum\)&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=please%20correct%20(from%3Aauschwitzmuseum)&src=typed_query) (accessed 28 June 2020).

<sup>229</sup> Specific examples include Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1054014714085289984> (last modified 21 October 2018, 3:21pm); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1113013647788445703> (last modified 2 April 2019, 10:41am).

<sup>230</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid; Spielberg, "Memorial's Twitter."

<sup>232</sup> "Basic Information on Auschwitz," *Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau*, online at: <http://auschwitz.org/en/press/basic-information-on-auschwitz> (accessed 28 June 2020); author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

The notoriety and symbolism of Auschwitz, and the wide variety of uncanny experiences to emerge from the camp, has in recent years generated the literary subgenre of ‘the Auschwitz novel’.<sup>233</sup> Examples of this genre include *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, *The Child of Auschwitz* and *The Librarian of Auschwitz*.<sup>234</sup> Such works declare themselves ‘historical fiction’, often based on the true stories of real survivors.<sup>235</sup> Critics have voiced concerns about the potentially redemptive narrative of many of these stories, and their popularity overshadowing the memoirs written by survivors of Auschwitz.<sup>236</sup> Furthermore, in the UK, Holocaust scholars and related institutions and organisations have warned against their use in formal education, particularly after misconceptions about the genocide generated by the 2006 ‘fable’ *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (also set in and around Auschwitz).<sup>237</sup>

Novels such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, that do not claim the same level of historical research as works in this newer subgenre, have been chastised for creating ‘distorted representation of the Holocaust’.<sup>238</sup> This more recent wave of Auschwitz novels, however – published at a time when the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is extremely active on social media – has been subject to vociferous criticism by the Museum. In November 2018, for example, the Museum dedicated 12 pages of its monthly *Memoria*

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<sup>233</sup> ‘Uncanny’ is used here in a Freudian sense, referring to familiar situations or events in unfamiliar or unsettling environments. In the case of Auschwitz, ‘uncanny’ might describe the prisoner orchestras, for example, or the dressmakers’ workshop. The latter element has itself been portrayed in novel form: Lucy Adlington, *The Red Ribbon* (London: Hot Key Books, 2017). Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), 123-62. For the orchestras, see Jacek Lachendro, “The Orchestras in KL Auschwitz,” *Auschwitz Studies* 27 (2015): 7-148, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, *Inherit the Truth 1939-1945: The Documented Experiences of a Survivor of Auschwitz and Belsen* (London: Giles de la Mare, 1996), 74-86. For the workshop, see Lore Shelley, *Auschwitz - The Nazi Civilization: Twenty-Three Women Prisoners' Accounts* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1992). Howard Jacobson, “A Feelgood Holocaust Exploits the Dead and Demeans the Living,” *The Guardian*, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/jan/23/howard-jacobson-holocaust-kitsch-auschwitz-75-years-after-liberation> (last modified 23 January 2020).

<sup>234</sup> Heather Morris, *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* (London: Zaffre, 2018); Lily Graham, *The Child of Auschwitz* (London: Bookouture, 2019); Antonio Iturbe, *The Librarian of Auschwitz*, trans. Lilit Zekulin Thwaites (London: Random House, 2019).

<sup>235</sup> Jacobson, “Feelgood Holocaust.”

<sup>236</sup> Ibid; author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020; Patrick Freyne, “Can a Work of Fiction about the Holocaust Be Inaccurate?” *The Irish Times*, online at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/can-a-work-of-fiction-about-the-holocaust-be-inaccurate-1.4135015> (last modified 11 January 2020); Menachem Kaiser, “The Holocaust’s Uneasy Relationship with Literature,” *The Atlantic*, online at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2010/12/the-holocausts-uneasy-relationship-with-literature/67998> (last modified 28 December 2010).

<sup>237</sup> John Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (Oxford: David Fickling Books, 2006), title page. For critiques of this novel, see, Michael Gray, “*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*: A Blessing or Curse for Holocaust Education?” *Holocaust Studies* 20:3 (2014): 109-36; Robert Eaglestone, *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139-58; Holocaust Educational Trust, *Teaching the Holocaust in English*, online at: [https://www.het.org.uk/images/downloads/Resources/Teaching\\_the\\_Holocaust\\_in\\_English.pdf](https://www.het.org.uk/images/downloads/Resources/Teaching_the_Holocaust_in_English.pdf) (accessed 28 June 2020), 12-5.

<sup>238</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Teaching the Holocaust*, 12.

magazine to an article written by Museum researcher Wanda Witek-Malicka outlining the inaccuracies contained in *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*.<sup>239</sup> These included incorrect prisoner registration numbers, locational errors and inconsistencies in the chronology of events. The article therefore dismissed the book's claim that 'Every reasonable attempt to verify the facts against available documentation has been made.'<sup>240</sup> It is not surprising that the Museum has also taken these criticisms to its Twitter feed, frequently dismissing positive reviews and recommendations of the novel whilst instead suggesting survivors' testimonies.<sup>241</sup> This condemnation is not reserved for one novel; in January 2020, for example, the Museum also had a public Twitter debate with John Boyne, author of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, after telling its followers the book 'should be avoided by anyone who studies or teaches about the history of the Holocaust'.<sup>242</sup>

Works such as *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* lie 'in some no man's land between fact and fancy'; one might therefore argue that a certain degree of artistic licence should be expected.<sup>243</sup> Yet the Museum remains adamant that any books written about Auschwitz must contain factual details wherever possible; otherwise, Sawicki states, they are 'rubbish' and cannot teach people about the camp.<sup>244</sup>

In criticising both journalists and novelists, the Museum reasserts its position as *the* authority on Auschwitz, whilst also upholding the importance of historical sources and challenging the entire concept of fictional literature regarding the former camp. Similar to criticism of some visitors' behaviour, its repeated call for clarifications in press articles and denouncements of related fiction demonstrate the construction of a model; in this case, how the history of Auschwitz should (or should not) be written. Furthermore, the Museum's social media is also utilised to exert authority over its followers in terms of what they read in relation to the former camp, thus attempting to impact upon their personal, everyday lives beyond the confines of the digital museum.

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<sup>239</sup> Wanda Witek-Malicka, "Fact-Checking 'The Tattooist of Auschwitz'," *Memoria* 14 (2018): 6-17, online at: <https://view.joomag.com/memoria-en-no-14-11-2018/0766192001543510530/p6>.

<sup>240</sup> Morris, *Tattooist*, copyright page.

<sup>241</sup> Examples include Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1249927152637788163> (last modified 14 April 2020, 6:07am); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at:

<https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1240143578548121600> (last modified 8 March 2020, 5:10am).

<sup>242</sup> Boyne later deleted his Tweets, but see Freyne, "Work of Fiction." Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>243</sup> Jacobson, "Feelgood Holocaust."

<sup>244</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

Finally, establishing a presence on social media has allowed the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum to monitor the sale of items related to Auschwitz – particularly those that appear to trivialise the site’s history. In addition to the searches Sawicki undertakes, the Museum’s followers also draw awareness to such items. Indeed, the first time the Museum made a successful public appeal for a product to be removed was after reading a Tweet a blogger had directed towards Amazon, asking for a prosthetic wound entitled ‘Holocaust wound’ to be renamed.<sup>245</sup> Sawicki utilised the authority of the Museum and its large following to put pressure on Amazon to ensure the removal of the offending product.<sup>246</sup> Since then, the Museum has Tweeted the company numerous times regarding the sale of items such as Auschwitz-themed Christmas ornaments, beach towels and mouse mats.<sup>247</sup> Some of these products may have been created through computer scripts and keyword searches. Conversely, companies such as Redbubble – an online marketplace for independent artists and designers – have also been denounced for selling Auschwitz-related merchandise.<sup>248</sup> This therefore draws attention to the fact that some Internet users are attempting to profit from the history and memory of Auschwitz, whilst others may be promoting ‘hateful or racist ideologies’ or, as is ‘prevalent among the young, online far right’, creating items for their own amusement.<sup>249</sup> There are no available statistics regarding the possible sale of these items, but comments left by the Museum’s Twitter followers demonstrate a majority opinion that these products are disrespectful and in bad taste.

The opportunity social media presents for the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum to publicly rebuke the sale of Holocaust-related merchandise prompts questions regarding the object-oriented commercialisation of the genocide. In the past, for instance, auction websites such as eBay have been criticised for permitting sellers to advertise historical items such as

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<sup>245</sup> A Week in Auschwitz, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/WeekInAuschwitz/status/871782155336241154> (last modified 5 June 2017, 6:33pm); author interview with Sawicki, 30 January 2020.

<sup>246</sup> Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/871797599208079360> (last modified 5 June 2017, 7:35pm).

<sup>247</sup> See, for example, Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1201069830553649153> (last modified 1 December 2019, 9:25am); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at: <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1201583746719322114> (last modified 2 December 2019, 7:27pm).

<sup>248</sup> Louise Matsakis, “How Auschwitz Christmas Ornaments Ended Up for Sale on Amazon,” *Wired*, online at: <https://www.wired.com/story/amazon-auschwitz-christmas-ornaments> (last modified 2 December 2019); Auschwitz Memorial, Twitter post, online at:

<https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1125814359391920129> (last modified 7 May 2019, 6:27pm).

<sup>249</sup> Matsakis, “Christmas Ornaments,” Joe Mulhall, “Holocaust Denial is Changing – The Fight Against It Must Change Too,” *The Guardian*, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/21/holocaust-denial-changing-antisemitism-far-right> (last modified 21 November 2018).

concentration camp uniforms, Star of David armbands and Nazi memorabilia.<sup>250</sup>

Alternatively, with the increase in ‘Holocaust tourism’ over the last two decades, companies have begun mass-producing souvenirs connected to visiting former sites of the Holocaust. These include a commemorative coin machine at the Terezín Memorial, Warsaw Ghetto fridge magnets sold in the city’s souvenir shops, and wooden tourist stamps at the Treblinka Memorial.<sup>251</sup> As the most-visited Holocaust site, it is of little surprise that there are also a plethora of examples related to the Auschwitz Museum. One could once purchase lapel pins and ballpoint pens from the Museum itself, and postcards have almost always been a staple of the bookshops at the entrance of Auschwitz I (where a small post office still operates).<sup>252</sup> Although the Museum shops are now primarily focused on selling books, items such as fridge magnets, pens and mounted pictures depicting the former camp’s gates can be found in independent shops adjacent to both Auschwitz I and Birkenau.<sup>253</sup>

Souvenirs are a traditional part of the tourism experience. In purchasing keepsakes associated with a destination, argues Susan Stewart, ‘the memory of the body is replaced by the memory of the object’; corporeal sensations that are verbally inexpressible are triggered by the sight or handling of souvenirs, long after the visit has occurred.<sup>254</sup> Furthermore, there is an excitement in removing these object from their “‘natural” location’ and bringing them home.<sup>255</sup> This is certainly applicable in the case of visiting Holocaust sites (and may explain some visitors’ desire to take objects from the Museum with them, as discussed in Chapter Two). As Daniel Reynolds notes, souvenirs from these sites can serve as ‘something tangible one can take away from a place that so often deals in abstract questions about history, humanity, and progress’, as well as confirmation of ‘bearing witness to the memory of the Holocaust’.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> See James Bulgin, “‘Item Condition: Used.’ Interpreting the Response to the Holocaust Being Offered for Auction on eBay,” (Master’s thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2014).

<sup>251</sup> The author encountered these examples visiting the Terezín Memorial in June 2016 and Warsaw and the Treblinka Memorial in March 2017.

<sup>252</sup> “At Auschwitz, A Discordant Atmosphere of Tourism,” *The New York Times*, 3 November 1974, 14; Paweł Szypulski, *Pozdrowienia z Auschwitz* (Kraków: Fundacja Sztuk Wizualnych, 2015); Daniel P. Reynolds, *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 2-3, 232-3.

<sup>253</sup> These shops, whilst selling official Museum publications, are not affiliated with the Museum. For instance, the Visitor Centre at Birkenau, opened in March 2012, is operated by the municipality of Brzezinka; this also explains its sale of more general, Polish-themed souvenirs. Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>254</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 133.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

<sup>256</sup> Reynolds, *Postcards from Auschwitz*, 233.

The popularity of Auschwitz-related souvenirs remains unclear, and further research is needed to investigate tourists' purchasing behaviour in relation to these items. Yet, although these products are sold by independent retailers, the Museum has conducted no public condemnation of their creation or physical proximity to the remains of the camp, or suggested that Museum visitors avoid buying them. Perhaps the difference between traditional souvenirs and online merchandise lies in their usability; fridge magnets and mounted photographs cannot be worn, hung on Christmas trees or taken to the beach, unlike the items sold on Amazon and Redbubble. In addition to the perceived distastefulness of wearing or using objects emblazoned with images of Auschwitz, then, is the idea that this history remains abstract and intangible to the average visitor, and associated keepsakes should reflect this. Moreover, although the Museum wishes for the history of Auschwitz to become 'an everyday history', the nature of this remembrance should focus on abstract concepts such as personal responsibility rather than become enmeshed in the material routines of everyday life.<sup>257</sup> Therefore, although there is general public agreement with this sentiment, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum also uses its social media to assert authority over representations of Auschwitz in the retail industry, primarily by highlighting products that its followers should not buy when commemorating the history of the camp.

In his criticisms and instructive narrative on learning about and remembering Auschwitz, Sawicki may be channelling the wider opinions of those who work at the Museum. At the very least, one can assume Director Piotr Cywiński is accepting of this content, as it has become so commonplace in everyday interactions with other social media users. Yet the fact that one person can represent an institution – and an institution steeped in a history, no less, which has often been described as 'unrepresentable' – raises questions of the ownership of this memory.<sup>258</sup> Who 'owns' the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum? Who may subjectively decide which representations are and are not appropriate? Furthermore, without determining their motivations, how can one person be critical of another's behaviours and actions (such as certain photographs being taken, or souvenirs being purchased)? Such questions do not necessarily have a definite answer. The Museum's decision to allow for this type of social media management, however, shows that despite its wider processes of internationalisation,

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<sup>257</sup> Author interview with Sawicki, 11 May 2018.

<sup>258</sup> See, for example, Rainer Schulze, *Representing the Unrepresentable: Putting the Holocaust into Public Museums* (Colchester: University of Essex, 2008); Jerry Schuchalter, "Representing the Unrepresentable: Victor Klemperer's Holocaust Diaries," *Nordisk Judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 19:1-2 (1998): 7-32.

the institution remains insular in its views on how the former camp should be seen and memorialised.

## **Conclusion**

Over the last 12 years, both the use of and response to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's social media has grown exponentially. Initially navigating unfamiliar territory, the Museum has begun to adapt to social media through the development of a multi-faceted strategy and, under certain circumstances, invited its followers to participate in the creation and distribution of its content. Yet the fact that this is all managed by one employee creates problems in terms of objectivity, suggesting resistance on the part of the Museum to fully adapt to current museological practice. The curation of posts relating to historical facts, artefacts and the physical site creates an extension of the Museum's exhibition possibilities, thereby disseminating its curatorial authenticity to a wider audience. Its social media presence also relates to the experiential authenticity of those who have visited by reminding them of their experience, whilst Sawicki's mission to demonstrate the history of Auschwitz as an 'everyday history' means that the Museum has a place in individuals' more porous daily experiences, such as checking their social media.

As part of their visit to the Auschwitz Museum, many people encapsulate their experiences and its perceived authenticities through photography and/or the use of digital devices. Some choose to upload these to their social media feeds, such as Instagram and Twitter, thereby extending their visit from a personal, authentic experience to one that is shared with others. Publishing content related to visiting the Museum also elicits approval and validation of these experiences, particularly when shared by the Auschwitz Museum's official channels. In turn, the Museum benefits from this redistribution by presenting reactions that are deemed appropriate forms of representation.

Furthermore, adaptation to social media has led to the creation of a 'virtual community of remembrance'. Whilst primarily focused on remembrance of the history and victims of Auschwitz, the Museum also encourages its followers to consider suitable practices of remembrance, as well as remembering atrocities such as the Holocaust to highlight each individual's moral responsibility in ensuring similar events do not occur in the future. The Museum appeals to the community to spread its message by campaigning for more followers, often utilising endorsements by famous public figures, and occasionally orchestrates opportunities for feedback and discussion, especially through its Twitter feed.

This participatory element illustrates a slight relaxing of the Museum's authority and a drive towards more contemporary museological practices of allowing visitors to assist in shaping the museum experience.

Conversely, although the Museum wishes to spread a universal message and reach a wide audience, its authority is displayed through criticism and policing of particular groups within this audience, most often Museum visitors, writers and retailers whose content is ruled unsuitable by the institution (or, rather, one member of its staff). Through sharing examples and directly targeting individuals, products or companies, the Museum utilises its authoritative voice to instruct others in how to behave at the Museum; how to write about the history of Auschwitz, and which (non-fiction) books to read on the subject; and how to remember this history in everyday life. Thus, unlike many other museums, the main benefit of adaptation to this element of the digital museum appears to be to enable the Auschwitz Museum to assert its importance and authority far beyond both the confines of the physical space it occupies and the historical period to which its history relates. In expanding its reach in this manner, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum publicly states that ultimate control over the history and memory of the camp shall always remain with one institution: the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

## Conclusion

This thesis contributes to the fields of Holocaust studies, museum studies and digital museum studies in several ways. Firstly, this research adds to the written history of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, past the collapse of Communism in Poland (the end point for many studies) and into the present day. Factors such as the rise in Holocaust tourism and digital media, and the shifting national and global political situation, since this time have ensured a new chapter in the Auschwitz Museum's development and adaptation. Furthermore, whilst Director Piotr Cywiński has reflected on his time at the institution thus far, and press articles have been written about Paweł Sawicki, this study is the first to analyse the changes that have occurred at the Museum through their involvement and management.

Previous research has investigated elements of the Auschwitz Museum's visitor-oriented digital museum, yet this has primarily focused on visitors and their responses to the Museum's digital resources. The present discussion thus provides a much-needed institutional perspective, using both the case study of the Auschwitz Museum and comparisons with other Holocaust museums and exhibitions. This is designed to lead towards an understanding of how museums (especially Holocaust museums) position the digital within their grounds; create content; develop digital strategies; and respond to both visitors and the public. This thesis has given some indication as to how the proximity of Holocaust museums and exhibitions to sites of industrialised genocide may affect their attitudes towards use of the digital museum, a subject which, as discussed below, can be greatly expanded upon. Moreover, this thesis is the first study to provide a comprehensive overview of the Auschwitz Museum's digital museum, as well as being the first to critically engage with its onsite elements, website and virtual tour. By bringing together the 'authentic site' and the digital, this thesis interrogates the concepts of authenticity, authorship and responsibility for memory in this context. As the last Holocaust survivors leave us and we become witnesses – through both the sites of their suffering and mediated representations – it is crucial to understand how the digital is changing the landscape of Holocaust education, commemoration and awareness, and how related institutions are responding to this change.

This thesis has shown that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's adaptation to the digital museum has not been a straightforward transition, but rather a largely experimental process that still contains numerous tensions and paradoxes. At its core, this adaptation demonstrates that the Auschwitz Museum recognises the importance of adhering to newer museological practices, yet remains reluctant to abandon the traditional methodologies it has

employed since it opened more than 70 years ago. This makes the Museum something of an anomaly compared to other large, public museums, which have largely sought to increase visitor participation, appeal to more diverse audiences and experiment with the boundaries of the authentic, both on- and offsite.

Of the three elements investigated in this thesis, the Museum's assertion of its authority emerged as the most significant. This authority is communicated in two ways. On one hand, the Auschwitz Museum emphasises that the only way to truly understand the history of Auschwitz is to visit the physical site. Although concessions have been made to those who cannot visit, this assertion is apparent in its frequent references to the site's authenticity; the restrictions imposed upon aspects of resources such as the website's virtual tour; and its validation and re-sharing of visitors' experiences on social media. This declaration is in itself a rejection of the concept of the digital museum. On the other hand, the Museum's authority is utilised to instruct visitors (and the wider public) on how the history and memory of Auschwitz should be represented. Onsite, this translates to static displays, scripted guided tours that leave little opportunity for visitor dialogue and an official distancing from exhibitions curated by external organisations. The consideration of the national pavilions as micro-museums, and the lack of publicity around the QR codes, ensures the Museum's narrative of presenting an 'authentic site' can be upheld without apparent contradiction. Offsite, although the Auschwitz Museum cannot wholly control public representations of Auschwitz, attempts are certainly made to do so. Social media in particular is used to instruct users not only on how to remember their experiences of visiting the Museum (if relevant), but how to learn about and commemorate Auschwitz in their daily lives, from the books they read to the associated items they may purchase. Images of a former Nazi camp decorating Christmas ornaments and beach towels are undoubtedly in poor taste, yet the Museum's persistent pursuit of the companies responsible for their sale (even if many are created by computer algorithms) highlights the extent to which the institution wishes to retain control of external representations of the site. Only occasionally is this authority relaxed, when the Auschwitz Museum invites visitors to engage in dialogue and feedback (also primarily through social media). For visitors to feel more included and empowered, and for the Museum to adapt fully to contemporary museological methods, this invitation for participation needs to be implemented more frequently.

This study has also illustrated the complexity of authenticity at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Affirmations of the site's authenticity facilitate the Museum's use of its authority: if what is presented at the Museum is authentic and reputable, one can assume

the same of its digital content, even that which relates to subjective interpretation. The remains of the camp serve as important evidence of the Nazis' crimes, particularly at a time when established facts are being questioned publicly and deniers and antisemites feel more emboldened to espouse their views. They are also a significant reminder of the consequences of unchallenged prejudice and indifference to others' suffering. Yet a closer examination of the Museum's fastidious emphasis on the site's authenticity reveals a multi-layered picture of reconstruction, replication, invasive conservation and local social and economic challenges. As has been shown, perhaps some of this work is simply not necessary. For many visitors, the site's authenticity is felt from the experience of being in the place where this history took place, and from hearing about the stories of people who are no longer there. The distinction between curatorial and experiential authenticities employed in this thesis is not designed as an evaluative measure, or to undermine the Museum's authority; the subjectivity of authenticity means there is no right or wrong interpretation. Instead, it illustrates the difference in perception between the Museum and its visitors. This is particularly relevant to the digital museum as visitors increasingly capture their experiences via digital means. The Auschwitz Museum must respect the ways in which visitors frame and remember their experiences whilst also stressing the scientific, objective authority of the site. The concept of authenticity shall continually be redefined, debated and contested, yet this distinction may prove a useful starting point for future studies that consider authenticity at the Auschwitz Museum, other Holocaust museums or heritage sites.

Finally, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum intends to reach as large and diverse an audience as possible. The physical site already caters to visitors from all over the world (though predominantly the West), who arrive with expectations and motivations rooted in education, pilgrimage, discovery and/or tourism. The advent of the digital museum, however, has enabled the Museum to reach those who cannot travel to the real site, as well as engage with the public more generally. On one hand, the Museum can promote the universal relevance of Auschwitz on a global platform, bringing elements of the site to digital visitors and illustrating that Auschwitz should not remain only in Jewish, Polish or German history, but in world history. On the other hand, elements such as social media have allowed the Museum to target particular groups within this audience more easily. Visitors, writers, retailers and others now find themselves susceptible to criticism from the Auschwitz Museum, and such aspects enable the Museum to extend its authority far beyond the confines of the physical space it occupies. Followers of the Auschwitz Museum's Twitter account may be particularly perplexed by the dichotomous narrative of a supportive virtual community that

is often publicly corrected or denounced by its founding institution. This will no doubt leave some people apprehensive about posting their reactions to the Museum or its history, unsure of the boundaries of suitable representation and fearful of making mistakes or causing offence. This may mean a large proportion of the Museum's visitor population remains unheard both on- and offsite.

Therefore, this thesis highlights numerous tensions present within the Auschwitz Museum's digital museum, which might illustrate tensions within the institution more generally. The Museum finds itself caught between the old and the new; between unassailable authority and external participation; between objective and subjective authenticities; and between broad and specific narratives. In many ways, these struggles are symbolic of a Museum that, over the course of its history, has had to contend with shifting political, social, economic and cultural landscapes.

It is important to note that this study is not designed as an attack on the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Many aspects of the digital museum are implemented efficiently and successfully. One need only read the messages of support and gratitude from the institution's social media followers to understand the impact the Museum's digital adaptation has had on many people. Moreover, those of us who are able to visit the physical Museum no doubt take this opportunity for granted compared to those who will, for one reason or another, never have the chance. This thesis is also not a criticism of Paweł Sawicki's work; his passion to educate as many people as possible about the history of Auschwitz, factually yet sensitively, is commendable. Yet it would be of great benefit for the Auschwitz Museum to redress the tensions and paradoxes in its digital museum. The contemporary museum visitor wishes to feel included, important and empowered. The digital museum presents an opportunity for institutions such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum to involve visitors in shaping the museum experience, particularly relating to a history that acts as a warning to all people, everywhere. In order to fully adapt to modern museological practices, the Museum must be willing to relax some of its authority, listen to its visitors and acknowledge individual interpretations of remembrance and reflection. Although there are no plans for digital technology to be integrated into the new permanent exhibition, perhaps its creation provides an opportunity for more collaborative, participatory elements to be included, allowing visitors to feel more involved in their experience of touring the Museum. This is of particular importance if the Auschwitz Museum wishes to continue its mission of questioning museumgoers' personal moral responsibility. Visitors will be far more likely to consider their part in creating a fairer, more peaceful society if they are invited, rather than told, to do so.

The opening of the new permanent exhibition over the course of the next decade will also invite further research into a more complete history of the Auschwitz Museum in which shifts in content and educational approach, as well as the ever-changing political climate in which the Museum operates, can be investigated.

This research topic initially developed from questions surrounding the Auschwitz Museum's construction of authenticity. Chapter Two provided an overview of the issues with the institution's framing of this concept, yet this was not a definitive investigation, nor does this discussion necessarily apply to other Holocaust museums and exhibitions. Future research could consider how authenticity can be understood in other related institutions, whether through the physical site, the collections on display, or the narrative of eyewitness testimony. Moreover, research into visitors' perceptions of authenticity at Holocaust museums would assist museum staff in understanding the educational and affective impact of certain aspects and displays curated by these institutions.

This thesis has also utilised broader contextual and comparative analysis to demonstrate how the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum's adaptation to the digital museum compares to other Holocaust museums and exhibitions. In many cases, these examples were based on the author's experience of corresponding with museums' staff, visiting the institutions (paying particular attention to their digital elements) or using their online resources rather than drawing upon previous research. As illustrated in the Introduction, there is still a dearth of literature reflecting institutional perspectives with regards to the digital museum. Further research, therefore, could conduct similar in-depth case studies to explore how particular Holocaust museums have (or have not) adapted to digital technology, and the reasons behind this. The categories of authority, authenticity and audience emerged as the most salient in the present discussion, yet these are by no means exclusive. Researchers from other fields could focus on numerous other elements, such as performativity, textual analysis or pedagogical approaches.

In addition to singular case studies, comparative analysis between Holocaust museums and exhibitions would be beneficial to understand how use of visitor-oriented digital technologies is developing across the field. Research examining two or three institutions could highlight digital museum practices at each whilst providing more context and comparison in terms of the history, politics, funding and geography of the relevant museums. If one considers Holocaust museums within the categories discussed at the beginning of this thesis – directly, partially and distantly associated to sites of industrialised killing – studies could compare sites within one particular association, or across multiple

categories. One could focus on the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, for instance, and contrast this more explicitly with the digital museum of the Bergen-Belsen Memorial, particularly as the latter is a former concentration camp which welcomes the use of digital devices onsite. Alternatively, research could consider similarities and differences between the digital presentations of institutions like the POLIN Museum in Warsaw and the forthcoming Second World War and Holocaust Galleries at London's Imperial War Museum. The attitudes and approaches towards implementing digital technology in museums that incorporate the genocide as part of wider histories may significantly differ from museums dedicated solely to the Holocaust.

Other memorial museums could also serve as comparative case studies. How does a site of twentieth-century genocide, for example, compare to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, an institution that presents a twenty-first-century event that unfolded across the world via digital media? Although both museums exhibit sensitive subject matter, and victims' remains are present in both spaces, perhaps there is less concern regarding tactility and interactivity at the September 11 Museum because the terrorist attack was filmed, broadcast and reported on whilst it was happening. Conversely, research could be conducted to investigate museums focusing on historical atrocities that have no living witnesses, such as the international slave trade, and to what extent this affects decisions to present information via digital means.

The conclusions drawn in this thesis regarding the use of each digital element primarily rely on the author's observations and interpretations. Future research could therefore also return to the bottom-up approach of studying museum visitors and exploring their use and impressions of the digital museum, whether at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum or other, similar institutions. Following on from the present study, participants could be observed using specific devices or features and asked to what extent the experience feels authentic; if they feel included in online discussions; and which emotions or feelings Holocaust museums' digital content evokes in them. This would provide a more rounded picture of how institutions such as the Auschwitz Museum have adapted to the digital museum, and how this adaptation is received by those who visit or follow these institutions on- or offsite.

Furthermore, the absence of participant-centred research in this thesis means further studies are needed to ascertain exactly who is receiving and responding to this content. The descriptions of 'the audience' or 'the public' in the present discussion are, admittedly, ambiguous. Although it is predominantly younger generations that engage most frequently

with social media, for example, does this change in the context of a Holocaust museum's followers? What are users' motivations for following these institutions online, and how do they respond to this content? Additionally, whilst the Auschwitz Museum has a large following and is the most vocal Holocaust museum on platforms such as Twitter, studies could investigate the audiences of smaller, lesser-known institutions to observe any differences in engagement or interaction. Having a better understanding of the real audience, their needs and impressions would undoubtedly assist Holocaust museums – and, indeed, museums in general – in producing and structuring content for their websites and social media.

This case study of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, however, raises several other issues. The Museum's policing of online representations of Auschwitz is, in part, certainly caused by wider tensions regarding Holocaust representation in the digital sphere. As explored in Chapter Four, there are still concerns over the appropriateness of including such a serious subject on platforms like social media, the content of which is often light-hearted and humorous. Its inclusion in the digital realm, however, is well established. Institutional anxieties about using digital technology have already been countered by Holocaust survivors, for instance, who have willingly recorded their testimonies for use as holograms, YouTube videos and virtual reality apps.

Digital elements – especially those on the Internet – are increasingly being implemented in education, communication and creative expression. They are intrinsic to the cultural language of people born in the twenty-first century (particularly those in the West) and their perception of the world. Where older generations initially encountered sites like Auschwitz through textbooks, newspaper articles and television programmes, young people are now more likely to become acquainted with such places through Google searches and social media posts. It is therefore imperative that institutions such as Holocaust museums are speaking the same language, exploring opportunities for digital Holocaust education and remembrance that engage and inspire younger learners.

A public conversation regarding ethical digital Holocaust representation is yet to take place. Thus far, only the media have commented on, for example, visitors taking selfies at the Auschwitz Museum, and these articles are consistently critical. As has been shown in this thesis, the Museum itself also sets certain prescribed boundaries for visitors' onsite engagement and is quick to correct or denounce its online followers. Yet the more visitors are berated and told not to behave in certain ways, read certain books or buy certain products, the

more likely these behaviours will continue as an act of protest (or indifference). Whilst some of the content published online is deliberately provocative, most – whether an edited photograph, a short Tweet or a longer Facebook post – is produced for a variety of reasons and purposes. This is partly why having the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum represented by one person on social media is so problematic; without knowledge of the motivations or context behind this content, it seems unreasonable for visitors' photographs and other content to be judged so subjectively and critically. Instead, the Museum should adopt an inquisitive approach regarding its visitors' use of photography and social media, inviting them to explain their choices of representation to better understand why less favourable content is sometimes created and published, as modelled in the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial's 'Tweetups'. The Internet also provides the opportunity to debate filmic and literary representations of the Holocaust; the Auschwitz Museum could promote survivor memoirs and non-fiction books and documentaries in a neutral fashion, without dismissing their followers' choice of viewing or reading fictional accounts. This would enable visitors and online followers to feel part of a discussion, rather than subject to a lecture, and allow them to help shape the Museum experience for others.

The time is fast approaching for this type of conversation, particularly in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. This global event may revolutionise the ways in which people learn about and commemorate histories such as the Holocaust. Fears over health and safety will undoubtedly decrease physical museum visitor numbers, at least in the short term, and sustain the online practices of education and remembrance that were introduced during lockdown conditions. Moreover, institutions such as the Auschwitz Museum may see a change in visitor behaviour once travel and educational programmes return to pre-pandemic conditions. Having spent many months learning and engaging in commemorative practices online – and being encouraged to do so – more visitors might feel extended use of digital devices at the physical Museum is permissible, even useful in consolidating the information they gained from the Museum's website or social media. Regardless of how Museum staff or the international press feel about this prospect, there is likely to be an increasing overlap between the physical and the digital now that so many people have adjusted to learning, communicating, performing and commemorating over the Internet.

The Museum's greatest concern is that the use of digital devices disrupts the connection between visitor and authentic site. Yet those who have visited the former camp will agree that the grounds hold a particular power, something of the aura described earlier in this thesis. The size of the site, the amount of victims' possessions on display and the

incredulity of visiting a place where such atrocities were perpetrated means this connection simply cannot be severed. The emotional responses of visitors, even those who have taken photographs or later shared their impressions online, attest to the power of this experience. It shall never be the case that, given the choice, people will choose the virtual tour over a visit to the physical Museum. Furthermore, if digital aspects can be used to enhance the visitor experience – especially when compared to behaviours such as stealing physical artefacts, as described in Chapter Two – they should surely be encouraged and explored. The Museum must therefore face this new type of engagement open-mindedly, lowering its authoritative voice and demonstrating a willingness to observe the effects of mediated education before passing judgement. As the benchmark of issues related to Holocaust tourism and representation, if the Auschwitz Museum were to openly address and challenge these negative assumptions, similar conversations in the wider fields of Holocaust education and commemoration would certainly follow.

Yet it is not only museums that should host such conversations. There is also a role for Holocaust survivors, academics and museum visitors themselves. One cannot definitively state which group (if any) ‘owns’ the memory of the Holocaust or has the power to decide upon ‘appropriate’ representations of this history. There is no single answer to the question of ownership and/or censorship of Holocaust representation. If the history of the Holocaust is indeed universal, however, these discussions should surely involve those who lived through it (whilst they are still present), those who write about and educate others on the subject, and those who visit the institutions that preserve traces of the genocide.

In the case of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum – a site of contested history, memory and politics, where over a million people were killed – there is undoubtedly a need for broader dialogue between the institution, its visitors and its online audience. The Museum must be clear on what, and how, it wishes to communicate with its visitors and, in turn, be receptive of their expectations, perceptions and opinions. Perhaps then we will better understand what it means to ‘like’ on Twitter a photograph of a four-year-old child, murdered in a gas chamber in 1944.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Transcript of Interview with Paweł Sawicki (Press Officer, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum), 11 May 2018, via Skype

Interviewer (Imogen Dalziel) = **Bold**

Interviewee (Paweł Sawicki) = Regular

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Okay, so how can I help you?

**Okay, so I have quite a few questions to ask you because, at the moment, as part of my thesis, I'm writing a kind of framing chapter about the Museum. A little bit about its history, and where it fits in terms of things like politics and funding, and also its digital strategy. Some of it's just kind of clarifying things and some of it-, you know, if you can give me your opinion on other things that would be really good. So just to say, from the outset, that obviously because it's research, I will send you a consent form, just to make sure that you're happy with it being included. You are free to say at any time that you want to stop the interview, and you're also free to ask for the information to be withdrawn if you would like to do so. Hopefully you won't, but if for any reason you do...! Hopefully it will take about an hour. I'll try not to take too much of your time, I'm aware you're really, really busy. If there are things that we don't cover here we can obviously rearrange something in the near future, depending on the baby and other things! But we'll try and get through the bulk of it today, if that's okay?**

Okay. It's okay.

**Great. So, just to start off with, if you can give me a brief description of your role within the Museum, that would be great.**

So within the Museum, where I have been working for over the last ten years, I'm basically a Press Officer and I am also an educator, which other people call a guide. So, a guide-educator. Within the Press Office, I'm basically responsible for most of the things my other colleagues are doing as well, which is the communication of the Museum on many different levels, which is on the one hand the website [and on the other hand] working with journalists who either contact us online or come to see the Memorial and to write-, or do a video or radio or whatever they are doing. We are also responsible for the media preparation for any official event, delegation, commemoration, which can be either an anniversary of the liberation, it can be a visit of a president, a Pope. We also have delegations like that, and they involve participation of the media. We are responsible for, for example, creating the annual report of the Museum, which is our most important communication, in a way, that is sent all around the world and tells about the activity of the Memorial. [We manage] the website, of course, and I am also responsible for the social media presence of the Museum, since the beginning of the social media presence of the Museum. Also, I'm the Editor-in-Chief of our monthly online magazine, *Memoria*, which, as you perfectly know, is on from September last year.

So, I think I've covered most of the things that I do here. I'm a photographer as well, so I also take pictures which are used in many of the communication things – the website, social media

– but I also published, for example, an album, *Auschwitz: The Place Where You Are Standing*, so the combination of the 1944 versus today images of the same places at Birkenau.

**Great. I should tell you, I have a copy of that book and I use it when I take people to the Museum. It's very, very useful, actually. Okay, great. So the first few questions are just about [things] onsite at the actual Museum. The first one is literally just to clarify: when was the Visitor Centre at Birkenau opened? The new one?**

You're asking me a difficult question because I can't remember. I think it was three years ago. I'm online so I'll try to be interactive and check.

**Okay, I looked on the Museum website and I couldn't find anything about it.**

No, you couldn't find anything about it because it's not our car park. It's not our centre. This is run by the local municipality which means that we have, in a way, nothing to do with this, and therefore we didn't put any news on the website. Okay, it was opened in March 2012, so I found it online.

**Okay, great. That was literally just to clarify that. Oh right.**

We wanted to have some kind of logistical infrastructure created a little bit further away from the Birkenau site, and that was due to the problem of buses driving too close to the gate. There are conservation problems with the gate and the little earth movements shaking that, you know, bus traffic can do, is one of the factors that we were afraid of. Because the number of visitors is increasing and our small car park, which was used before March 2012, was simply not enough, the project of the municipality, in a way, solved this problem. The traffic of buses is pushed away from the gate, that's one thing, and our little car park is now used for the staff. In the future, there is a plan of having a kind of ring road, so the traffic from the villages nearby will not go directly next to the Birkenau site, but there will be a new road built a few hundred metres away. So this is another solution, another part of the project of the logistical surroundings of the site of Birkenau.

**And that's in co-ordination, then, with the town of Brzezinka?**

With the village of Brzezinka, with the local municipality, right.

**Interesting. So now this is more related to the digital aspect of things. I know you've been asked this before, and apologies for making you repeat yourself, but what would you say is the main reason - or the main reasons - that there isn't much digital technology used on the site of the Museum?**

Our role is to talk about the history of Auschwitz. This is the role of the Memorial. Of course, we commemorate the victims, we do research, but one of the most daily activities that we do is working with people who come here to see the site. The authentic site is the most important thing for us. Thanks to the preservation of the buildings, roads, fences, rails, ruins (including the ruins of the crematoria and gas chambers) and many other aspects of authenticity which also involves documents and personal items, people can come here and they can understand what happened here, even without much explanation. This is the power of authenticity. The new technologies that, of course, give a lot of possibilities in other places, in museums that are built-, well, that's the issue, they are *built* museums, they help there, in their context. For

us, the new technologies that would be used on the site, in a way, would draw people's attention [away] from the site itself, and this is something which we don't want to happen. Therefore, we try to be as-, you can use the word 'aesthetic', you can use the words 'very simple'. Some people may also think that this is the wrong approach and that we should have all kinds of technology and screens and whatever possibilities [there] are now. So this is, of course, a question of interpretation.

However, our position is that too much technology here on the site would disturb this experience that people have, of walking through the authentic site, looking at the exhibition that only helps people to understand where they are, rather than take over the experience of, you know, being in the buildings, being on the site of the camp. Therefore, this is happening now, but this is also the main philosophy in the new project that we are doing right now, which is the new main exhibition. From the very beginning we were very strict about that; that whatever new technologies we may use regarding the presentation of authentic items – and I'm talking mainly about conservation issues, the new display cases, the new, very modern, high-tech boxes which will have no oxygen and will help to conserve the items presented – we use technology here, backstage, to show the authentic items. There will probably be only one video in the new exhibition, and again, this will be a video of an evacuation march, or rather, a train-, a video that was taken in the territories of [the] Czech [Republic] showing the evacuation transports. I believe this will be the only video used in the new exhibition. So, that's our philosophy. The site is the most important, the authenticities of the site create the experience for a visitor.

**Obviously in the national exhibitions, there are a couple of examples. In the 'Shoah' exhibition, there are quite a lot of projections and things like that. So I'm just wondering, was that something that was suggested by, for example, Yad Vashem, the other external organisations that helped put that exhibition together, or is that something that's collaborated-, or, at least, the Museum collaborates with them?**

So when we talk about the national exhibitions, the Museum is in the position that, of course, we are involved in the process of creation of the exhibition, but we are responsible for the actual content, which means, from our point of view, we need to make sure that the exhibition will be historically accurate. The choice of design is the choice of each of the partners that are actually preparing the exhibitions, because the national pavilions are not our exhibitions. Therefore, when you go through the national pavilions, you can see that every organiser, every institution, has a very different approach. When you compare, for example, the very simple Dutch exhibition and the very complicated (in the way technology is presented) Hungarian exhibition, for example. So, we can of course give advice, but we are not in the position to change the design. We only very closely monitor the content, and then, if there are problems in terms of historical interpretation, this is where we have our voice. Regarding Block 27 and the 'Shoah' pavilion created by Yad Vashem, I think it's a very interesting idea. What we are doing as a Museum is to use the authentic site to tell the story of Auschwitz. As you probably noticed, Block 27 does not tell the story of Auschwitz, in a way, at all, except a few testimonies that are presented there on the screens.

This is not an exhibition about Auschwitz. Yad Vashem decided that the story of Auschwitz is told within the Memorial, and what they want to do is to create a context of the story of Auschwitz, following, of course, the philosophy of Yad Vashem, which is showing the life before, humanising the victims, and so on, and so on. So, therefore, the use of multimedia there is-, and, again, as you can notice, it seems to be very extended because you have three

rooms where you have the visibility of the screens, but if you look more carefully, this is again very historical. The first room is the presentation of Jewish life before the war, so you have historical sources, something that they wouldn't be able to show-, of course, they could show some posters or objects that they also have in their collection, but they decided to have this experience that people are-, [with] the images surrounding them. Then you have, again, historical sources, the speeches and the propaganda images from the Third Reich, and then you have the testimonies of survivors. So, they decided to create an exhibition that will not touch the authenticity. It will not be another exhibition with posters, with a very chronological narration. They, in a way, give the educator who comes in a tool to use, because using the videos that people respond to is a possibility [for the educator] to talk about many other things.

So this is their approach. In a way, this is why this exhibition is a little bit more difficult for an individual visitor, because there is not much explanation in terms of the things you can read and things you can learn. However, this approach is interesting, but because it's not-, the technology uses the sources in a different way, the video sources, that we are not going to present because, again, when you talk about videos, except testimonies, there is not much video except the chronicle of liberation. It is an interesting approach, and certainly trying to be also very simple and aesthetic. This is not the fireworks of technology, the videos there [are not] too much because, again, you can sit for an hour and listen to testimonies and then you go to the children's memorial room, or you go to the Book of Names. So I think that here, the balance between how not to overdo the multimedia is also reached. But we can see that the technology here is used in a very interesting way that gives context to the story of Auschwitz.

**But the plans for the exhibition, they would have been approved by the Museum, is that right?**

The content of the exhibition, which means the historical outline, is approved by the Museum. In a way, we do not want to say that we don't like the design of the room. No. We need to approve the scenario of the exhibition.

**I think I remember you saying before that it's actually all built onto walls that can be taken away without damaging the actual building, is that right?**

Yes. So of course, the conservation issues when we talk about installations of the exhibitions inside historical buildings are important and therefore, when the old exhibition was removed, it was very important for us that the new exhibition will not harm the building in any way. Therefore, the original structures are presented – so you can see wooden beams, you can see some original paintings on the walls – but the whole exhibition is built within the original building so that it could be removed if needed. It doesn't involve much change in those original structures that need to be saved because, again, when you go to several exhibition buildings, you can see several changes have been made a long time ago, for example, the staircase in block number 27, which is not part-, again, we need to look at those original parts that need to be preserved, and there are some changes that have been done, for example, many years ago inside the exhibition spaces.

**Great. So shifting slightly, but still talking about onsite things: in terms of the QR codes that you can find on some of the information panels, do you know whose idea it was to install them?**

This came out of discussions that we had with different groups of people including, for example, some associations of survivors, for example, from France. They said that what is missing, in a way, in the site of the Memorial are voices of the victims who are the survivors, their testimonies. Of course, testimonies are used by our educators when they guide, and they talk about stories of individual people, but there were some voices [saying] that maybe we should find some way to bring in the sources, the voices of survivors. Again, we tried to do it in a very simple and balanced way, not to draw the attention from the site itself. So if you want to find those QR code signs, you will find them. You can use your phone or tablet to hear and see the very short clips, and they are in many different languages and there are subtitles as well. There is a special Wi-Fi network that we created, because what we didn't want to do is to have Wi-Fi all over the site, because it would tempt visitors to use it in many different ways. So there is a Wi-Fi network that is close to those QR codes that only allows you to enter this website. It doesn't allow you to use the Internet freely. So, on one hand, we give people the opportunity to use them if they want to hear those voices, and they are present in several of the very important parts, historically, of the site.

So you have a few QR codes in Auschwitz I which [are] the Arbeit Macht Frei gate, the roll-call square or the crematorium or, I think, Block 11, and then in Birkenau we have [them], again, [in] a few places there. On the one hand, it is putting voices [there], which is important, but it is done in a way not to make people go for three hours with their telephones or tablets covering their eyes, that they would not notice anything around them. So that was the concept behind it.

**Do you know, has there been much engagement with the codes by visitor groups, or visitors?**

Truly, I don't know, because I didn't see the information. First of all, with the groups it will be a little bit different, because this is mostly directed to individual visitors. Groups are guided and they have their educator to tell them stories, so within any kind of tour we have, whether it will be a standard tour or the most elaborate study tour, there'll be many voices presented. This is mainly a project directing the individual visitors that walk around the site themselves, but still there's a question - and we'll probably have to evaluate it in the next year or two - whether QR codes are the most efficient and the best way of, for example, putting-, I just don't think QR codes are so much used by people anywhere. I don't know what your experience is, but you don't go with your cell phone-, and there are QR codes present on bus stops and so on, but somehow this is, in a way, an easy way of doing this, and within the context of the authentic site, they are very, you could say, invisible. They don't disturb the landscape. But we know that technology changes and maybe there will be other ways of implementing such projects. We need to always think that we don't want to have an app that people will be downloading that will [guide] them through the Memorial because, again, there is a risk that they will concentrate too much on their phones or their tablets and less on the stories that we want to tell them. But, of course, it's a question for the future.

**That's great, thank you. Talking now about offsite digital technology; so first of all just a couple of questions about the website. Who's involved in updating the website?**

The Press Office. The Press Office co-ordinates everything, which means we have the access to the system, but of course, whenever needed we use the help of our departments, whether it's the Research Department or Educational Collections, Exhibitions. They need to prepare

materials for us that we can edit, that we can somehow prepare to be presented on the website, but of course we're not doing it alone. What we are doing alone as a Press Office is simply putting the material into the website system.

**The previous version of the website, I think, was launched in 2008. Was that created by an external company? I know the current website was made with-**

No, the 2008 website was created-, let me think. There was an outside involvement in terms of the technology but right now, Marek Lach, who was responsible for this, is now working in the Museum. I can't remember, I think he didn't work with us at that time, but this was done much more within the Museum than the next website, the version that is [live] right now.

**Is there any particular reason for more involvement with the other company, the external company?**

Can you wait a moment because Tomek Michałdo is at the door and he wants something from me, so can we just pause for a moment?

**Sure.**

*(Speaks Polish).* Okay, sorry about this.

**That's okay, no worries.**

Where were we? Ah, so the main reason why we do it [is] we are no IT specialists. We have no idea how to make a website, so someone needs to do it for us.

**Okay, that's fair! Last thing, just for now, about the website. I think I'm right in saying it was in 2011 that the URL changed from [auschwitz.org.pl](http://auschwitz.org.pl) to [auschwitz.org](http://auschwitz.org). If you could just give me a reason, or explain why it was changed?**

So this is one of the elements of the whole issue of 'Polish concentration camps', and there were voices already - as you know, this is not something that started a year ago, this has been going on for years - and there were voices that the org.pl website address shows that, if someone reads it, they can draw the conclusion that Auschwitz is in Poland and so on. So this is why it was changed, although you can also see that many other museums around that time - Majdanek, Stutthof and others - changed their domain names and domain addresses. In the case of Auschwitz, it was a little bit more difficult because we had to buy the domain from someone who had [auschwitz.org](http://auschwitz.org) registered. It was a success and we have [auschwitz.org](http://auschwitz.org), which makes it simpler in terms of the address. It was a tiny part within the whole context of the fighting with 'Polish concentration camps', and Auschwitz wasn't the only website that changed at that time.

**Can I ask, when you talk about voices expressing concern, was that individuals or was that groups?**

It's difficult for me to say right now because it was so long ago. I can't remember. But it was probably-, I can't remember because there were some emails getting to the Museum [saying] that 'maybe you should consider this' and these voices, I believe, were important enough and

visible enough that the Minister of Culture – because it came from the Minister of Culture and National Heritage that, in a way, runs the Museum, because we are a state museum – they decided that this little thing is necessary in all the other Memorials within the whole structure of memorials and websites. So this was done then. I believe that there were some voices that raised these concerns that, although it doesn't seem to be so significant, it will help drawing attention to the whole issue of mistakenly calling Auschwitz and other camps 'Polish concentration camps'.

**Okay, so moving onto social media. So, again, I think I know the answer to this question but just to have it on record - whose idea was it to get the Museum onto social media?**

That was my idea. (*Laughs*). I mean, it was a discussion, of course. It's not the situation that it simply happens, although it was an experiment that we started, whether we should be on social media, and we decided that it's a good idea. From the very beginning I was the main [person in] charge of this process.

**Is it still just you that is involved in updating the Museum's social media?**

I do all publishing, so all the posts published within Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Any other social media presence is myself. Right now another colleague of mine from the Press Office, Łukasz Lipiński, is helping me mainly with monitoring the comments, and also we have private messages through Facebook and Twitter, people asking different questions. So, again, this is something that he can answer himself. He does it so that I had a little bit more time doing other things. All the publishing is one person's project: mine.

**Is there any particular reason? Is that due to your role within the Museum or is it easier to navigate with one person?**

It's difficult to say because it's simply like this, and it started like this and it worked fine, although I noticed that sometimes there was too little time to manage everything and it is very involving work. On the other hand, when one person does it, it's very easy to co-ordinate. You don't have to ask if someone has already published this or not, or whenever there's any more co-ordinated action or project or whether I use whatever we publish on Instagram and I put it on Twitter or on Facebook, we have one person doing this. It's much easier to know what you did two weeks ago or one year ago or whatever. So this is the way the Press Office works, because we are responsible for communication with the outside world. You can also say that language skills are important here, because I can write in English (and hopefully there are not too many mistakes there) and I publish in English and Polish simultaneously, so I can do it quicker myself. Probably we will think of maybe doing some changes, but having a one-person control over such a sensitive issue, because of course social media is not only publishing information, it's also the interaction with the world, it should be-, the language that we use here is very important, that we always, on the one hand, need to be very respectful but, on the other hand, we discuss with public people and journalists. This also helps when it is within the one person that is doing this and knows the language and knows how we use social media.

But of course, it would be an overstatement to say that I always make the decisions myself, because whenever there is something that can be a conflict situation that we engage in a discussion with someone important, let's say, or whether the discussion goes too much into the area of politics, and we have to be very careful when we deal with that. Then, of course,

I'm always consulting my colleagues here, or the Director of the Museum if needed. But most of the everyday work is done by myself.

**We'll come back to the conflict and things in a little while, which you probably won't be surprised to hear. Do you have any kind of strategy when you're managing the digital content? Obviously there's quite a lot to manage. Twitter, I notice, is-, you're active all hours of the day, almost! So do you have a strategy, a way of managing these different outlets?**

Now you can tell me whether what I'm doing is a strategy or not! (*Laughs*). In a way, yes, because every social media we have is used in a completely different way. Facebook is the most historical narration. Because of how much you can write there, we can do longer things, we can post historical pictures, and this is the most things we put on Facebook; to remind people what happened in Auschwitz. On an everyday basis [there is] less interaction, but of course I also try to monitor what is happening on Facebook on different pages and sometimes also write some people some links and also react. And, of course, we have some news there, we have some interesting articles published there, but Facebook is, in a way, the most historical of all those social media. We have Instagram; it's very visual and usually we use the content that other people post, rather than posting things ourselves. Twitter is the most interactive part where we really discuss with the world, because this is where discussion is going on. So we try to use the different possibilities that each of the social media give us. Of course, most of the work over there in each of those media will be posting historical information about Auschwitz, commemoration, dates, photographs, everything, but each of those we use in a little bit of a different way.

So I presume you can call this a strategy although it's something that is very flexible and it's not something which has, you know, philosophy one, two, three, four, and is put in some kind of strategy points, elements that we follow. From the very beginning we wanted it to be a very flexible communication tool, that we are going to change, we're going to adapt, we're going to add elements if we see that we can do something more, and I think – I don't know if this is your experience as a user of our social media – but I think that this is what we're doing. So, there is a kind of strategy above it, but on an everyday run, we try to be just doing the work and trying to see if we can do something better or if we can change something. So it's an everyday process.

**Are you active, for example, in-, do you look for '#Auschwitz' and see what comes up, or is it less of a need to do that because people are interacting with you so often?**

No. With both Instagram and Twitter, I look not only at '#Auschwitz' but also the word 'Auschwitz'. I mean, on Instagram you have hashtags, on Twitter you can also search for the word without a hashtag, so this is what we do every day. On Facebook it's a little bit less [of] an issue because, first of all, hashtags didn't really enter Facebook so well. But again, we try to, from time to time, see what's going on elsewhere. So this is also a monitoring tool for us.

**When you share, for example, individual stories, people who came to the camp on this date, or they were murdered on this date – how do you decide which stories to share, and how do you go about saying 'Okay, on this date so-and-so was here'? Is that working in the archive, or-, how does that work?**

So, I'm more and more thinking that we should try - when we talk about these 'on this day' posts - that we should try to do as much as possible on the day, that there is so much information. On the other hand, we'll not be able to have 300 posts in a day because, again, it's not possible. So this is always some kind of a choice. Of course, one thing involves the historical material that we have. Luckily for me, when we talk about the chronology, we have Danuta Czech's calendar which is so far the most updated source for everyday information. It's going to be updated, but so far it's what we have. Also, Danuta Czech's calendar gives me information [about] where [I] should get more sources. And, of course, there is another publication that is not very well-known because it's only in Polish and is not easily accessible, the Books of Memory, *Księgi Pamięci*. The Books of Memory cover the deportations of pre-war Polish citizens from five districts of occupied Poland, and this is transport after transport and then it gives me whatever-, if we have photographs of this prisoner, whether we have some stories about them. So every transport is described there, and as you may have noticed, I haven't been using it for a long time, I started using it quite recently.

I simply learned that we can use this source in a very effective way, and then if I see something there then I contact the Archives and they send me photographs or materials. So this is something which really gives me a lot of information. But I also try to use other sources - Yad Vashem, Holocaust Museum in Washington, any other institution - if it's possible. I simply think that these everyday reminders are a very powerful tool, especially on Twitter, when it's shared and it's commented [on], and it makes people aware that this history is an everyday history. I think I'm going to use it more and more. And the issue of [which] stories I'll use? Again, it's my choice. I try to find-, because of course, it would be unfair to say that-, every story is important, but sometimes we know more about a person. Sometimes we have an interesting document. Sometimes we simply have some people that also help us to tell a broader story, so from one person that became a prisoner we can tell about a group, we can create some kind of more symbolic or more over-commemoration, so this is also the goal. But as you also noticed, sometimes I decide to publish photographs or information about a person that we know nothing about. We know a birthday, or we know an occupation, but nothing more.

So, again, I think it's also important to make people aware that, although the number of victims of Auschwitz is huge, among them we also have people about whom we don't know anything, and it's also important to commemorate them this way. So I've been also trying to find this balance between well-known stories and very important people within the context of the story of Auschwitz, but also reminding that, you know, a carpenter about whom we know nothing was also deported, became a prisoner and was murdered, for example. This is what I'm trying to do.

**Coming back to the idea of the everyday, as you said: when you think about Facebook in particular, maybe Twitter as well to some extent, because particularly Facebook's quite an intimate connection of friends and people that you know generally, so it can be quite a light-hearted kind of platform. People's newsfeeds are all photographs of holidays and people going out and things like this. Do you ever worry that, if someone follows the Museum on social media - Facebook or Twitter, again, to some extent - that it might trivialise that history or minimise it in any way, because it comes up in this newsfeed of lots of, as I say, very ordinary things and then something, as you say, that's quite harrowing? Is that a concern at all?**

Let me answer this way. First of all, people like our page or Twitter account or Instagram account and this is their choice. We're not forcing anyone to do that. We're also not paying for any advertisement. So you will not have promoted Facebook feeds or Twitter threads that are promoted and will pop up. That would be inappropriate from our point of view. Of course, we had this debate very early when we started Facebook, whether this story should be there. But because Facebook is a place where people talk about everything, I don't see why the history of Auschwitz should be excluded from there because it is a difficult story. In a way, it's going back to the question: should [the] Auschwitz Memorial be standing at all? It reminds people of this difficult story, and when people go with their children to the kindergarten, or when visitors come and they see the site and it reminds them of this difficult story. So I believe that telling about the story of Auschwitz is not disrespectful. On the contrary, any form - no, not any form, because you can do it in a bad form - but any tool of communication that we use that also people use can be a tool where you can talk about the story respectfully. The choice is among the users of social media. They can choose to like us and get this information, or they can choose not to, and that's their way.

I believe that we need to be present there because these are the tools that people are using, and it's our role to teach people the story of Auschwitz. So we need to reach to them in the way that they communicate. Now I'm going around myself a little bit (*laughs*), but that's the whole point. So, I really believe that what we are doing is not disrespectful to the story, and the language that we use, and the form that we're doing it tries to be very, very respectful in this matter. At the very beginning when we started our journey through Facebook, we asked this question to people: whether they find it inappropriate that, next to a kitten video or, you know, a music video or holiday pictures of their aunts and uncles, from time to time they will see something related to the story of Auschwitz. So far - how long has it been? - eight years or nine years of experience shows that people consider our virtual presence as the extension of the Memorial, and they respect this. So we'll never be super popular with millions and millions of followers because this is not the point. We are not racing against anyone. We try to reach people for whom this story will be important, relevant, and they will decide to make this click.

**Leading on from that, I suppose, obviously as well as the Museum putting a lot out there, people use social media now to document their own experiences of visiting the Museum, which is largely in a positive way and very reflective. But is there a concern that maybe the Museum being on social media, people might interpret that to mean that they can be more-, you know, when they take selfies and put that on social media, or maybe engage in behaviours that are seen as less appropriate, do you think there is any kind of connection or is there any concern that because the Museum is on social media, people will think it's more acceptable to-,**

No, I literally don't see any connection between the two. Quite the contrary, in a way. I see that, from the moment that the Museum became a little bit more active in criticising such use of social media (and there were also articles about it and there were different projects around this) I see that there are fewer examples of disrespectful usage of social media that I generally see. Of course, I will not see everything and I may be wrong. But, for example, when I look at Instagram. First of all, the cases where Instagram photographs are disrespectful is generally very limited. It's a very small number, that's one thing. But somehow, when I go through '#Auschwitz' in recent months, I see far fewer cases where some kind of disrespect is visible than it was, I don't know, two years ago when we either were not on Instagram at all or when we didn't highlight some of the problems that are connected with the use of social media and

the historical site, the connection between them. So it seems that speaking out – because this is what we've done in several cases – I think that people notice, or are slowly noticing, because it's of course a very long process. Again, I have too little data to be 100% if it's the result of this or something else, or people are changing. There are too many variables here.

However, what I can see – because I save on my computer every strange photograph that I encounter on Instagram, whether it's disrespectful or whether it's simply strange, because there are also cases of very interesting photographs that I want to save – and I notice that there are less and less problematic things.

**Yeah, I think in more recent times, as you say, other people calling it out as well, like the Yoloocaust project you might have seen, I think it was last year or earlier this year, and there's an Instagram account that I know of called 'How Not to Remember', which is just someone who finds pictures of people taking selfies or doing something stupid at Auschwitz and actually puts it on there and names and shames them. That's probably part of it as well.**

Not only in Auschwitz as you also may notice when you (*inaudible*).

**No, primarily but not just Auschwitz, that's true. So moving on, I've only got a few more questions, hopefully this won't take too much more of your time. Moving on to talk about the *Memoria* magazine. So what would you say was the main reason that *Memoria* was created, and do you know what the readership is like? How many people are looking at it, and where are they from, and so on?**

So first of all, why? I would go a little bit back in time, because one of the problems for us as the Museum in the world of media is that it's difficult - and there are many reasons for this, it's not time right now to open this discussion about the condition of journalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - but it is noticeable that the world of media today goes into, in a way, the negative content. This is true because this sells papers or this makes clicks. It's very easy to draw [the] attention [of] journalists whenever something difficult, negative, is happening at the Auschwitz Memorial. It's much more difficult to have journalists here when we have educational seminars, conferences, when we do our job and nothing happens, nothing negative happens. I'm a journalist myself, so I somehow feel comfortable criticising and telling this from my own perspective, because I was one of very few journalists that co-operated with the Museum on a very long-term basis doing radio programmes, and I had time and my radio allowed me to do so. It's a rare situation. So that's one aspect. The second aspect was the whole local context of the Museum and the town of Oświęcim, and due to different political tensions; there were some tensions on the border between the Museum, the institution, and the town and the surrounding area.

Because of those two things, I think in 2009 we created our first magazine, which was called *Oś: Oświęcim, People, History, Culture*, that spoke about the activity of the Memorial and spoke about also what other institutions in Oświęcim are doing, namely the International Youth Meeting Centre, the Centre for Dialogue and Prayer and the Jewish Center. So this was a very strong presence of the Museum and the information about the Museum in the local context: 5,000 copies distributed free among the people who live here. Also, it was online so people could read it. It was only in Polish, and we were talking about what happens around the memory of Auschwitz. Two years ago, we started talking about this and I somehow got to the conclusion that this mission is coming to an end. The problems in this local context have

evaporated and the co-operation between the Museum and the local surroundings is going quite well. Secondly, much more awareness within the local context, among the local people, of what the Museum is doing. So in a way the mission of *Oś* was achieved and we had to figure out what to do next: whether to continue this process or to do something else. I decided that we need to do something else, and this is where the idea of *Memoria* came into being.

The idea of *Memoria* I actually had in my mind for the last year and a half because every September we have a seminar in Stutthof Memorial, up in the north, where all the people from similar places, institutions, meet. So it will be concentration camp sites, extermination camp sites, but also other museums that somehow touch the story of the Second World War, the tragedy of people there, whether it was German occupation, Soviet occupation, and any other things. So the historical museums and memorial sites in Poland. There is also a delegation from the Holocaust Museum in Washington because there are people who speak Polish (because it's a Polish-language conference). So we met every year and somehow, when I was sitting there and listening about all those very interesting projects that are happening, I felt that it's somehow a shame that only us in this room, you know, those 50 people who worked in those museums, hear about it, because no one really knows about so many interesting things. That was the idea of *Memoria* at the very beginning. I thought that maybe we could prepare some kind of magazine that will be telling this. Then we started thinking that this is not the issue of Poland. This is the issue of the planet. There are so many institutions doing so many different things and people don't know about it.

We don't know about it in, let's say, the memorial environment. People who work in those memorials, we have so much work to do in our own places that we simply have no time to go and visit exhibitions that other museums create, go to so many conferences that are planned and this is very difficult. I mean, if I had time and the resources, I could travel all around the world all the year doing nothing but visiting new exhibitions and going from one conference to another conference. Probably many people in our world have the same challenge and problems, and you are obviously very aware of that too as a participant of many of the conferences and a person who goes to see exhibitions. So, then we decided that this is what we want to do: that *Memoria* is, on the one hand, a magazine that is made for people within this memorial environment. So, you can call it-, I don't know what the English word for *branża* is, 'business'. So this is directed to people who deal with this every day, but I wanted to do it in a way that will also be accessible for the general audience. It is not a very hermetic historical language, you know, texts of 30 pages that people will not read after reading the first three of them because there will be too many footnotes and so on. This is not a super historical research magazine. No. I wanted to make it simple, accessible to everyone, and that people who are interested in this story can read it, and they can learn every month what is happening.

Regarding the readership. So right now we have over 1,000 subscribers which for me is already a number, probably I thought it would be a little bit more popular, but this is just the first year, or first seven months. But I can see already that the presence of *Memoria* was noticed by people that I wanted to reach at first. People from other museums, researchers, historians and so on. I started getting feedback. In the very first four or five editions, basically all the articles were done because I asked people to do so, because I found information that something is happening and I asked them to prepare the material or I wrote it myself or asked someone from the editorial team to do it. More and more, I see that I started getting emails from different institutions that tell me, 'Hi, we are doing this interesting project, a conference, whatever, and maybe we could submit an article. Maybe you could write about this.' So,

probably for the first two or three years, this will be building the position of the magazine, building the awareness that *Memoria* exists and that, you know, I hope that in two or three years, in most of the museums of our world, whenever they'll be preparing the new exhibition, someone will say at the meeting, 'Oh, have we written the article for *Memoria*? We need to contact them because it's an obvious thing that, okay, we do it on our website, but we also prepare something for *Memoria*,' that people will be thinking this way.

That's my goal, and I hope that it will be achievable, but again we need years to do it. In terms of numbers of people that subscribe right now we have 1,100 people, but when we look at-, so I can tell you, for example, the March 2018 edition in English, because it's a full month. So, it's off from our website and this is a monthly magazine, it lives for about a month. When the new edition comes out, there are some people that reach to the archive materials but it's already gone, so we have for example, around 2,000 readers of one edition of the magazine. It's not bad for an online magazine, I think, for the beginning of this world. Again, something that is also interesting is that an average session is two minutes. Then we'll have people who read, you know, much longer because two minutes is just a statistical number. So again, people dedicate their time. They don't dedicate their money, this is a free magazine, so they don't have to pay for it. We ask them to dedicate their time to read, so I think-, well, I can prepare a few more statistics for you if needed but I think this is a good beginning for a completely unknown project from the project that is basically reaching a small group of people, but prepared for a larger audience. That's a good beginning.

**So, although it's published by the Auschwitz Museum, do you see it as almost a separate entity? Obviously the international and inter-organisational connections that the magazine has compared to the Museum on its own, and the fact that the Museum is very much about the history of Auschwitz rather than, you know, the history of the Holocaust or other organisations, is it quite a separate-,**

Yes, and when I look at this month, so I already have 1,700 readers of the English edition, which generally is more or less the same number as the previous one, and the average session, when I look at this now, is three and a half minutes. So you can see a change. You can see that it is changing, and I'm trying to see what's in here, and I can see that-, open up. Come on! (*Laughs*). Maybe it will load in just a moment, but the average session is three and a half minutes, so it's increasing. This is an ongoing process, and again, as in every project that we are doing, we are not struggling to get-, you know, the numbers are not important. We are not chasing anyone. But what you are asking, I believe that the role of *Memoria* is to be outside of Auschwitz. We are doing it because we came up with the idea. No one has ever done a similar magazine. There was no place either in the published or online world where some kind of a project of gathering information would be done. I think it's new, maybe I'm wrong, but I really think that nothing of this kind has been done in our little world of the museums and memorials. So we are publishing it and we have money for translation and the interesting thing about these two projects [is that] the money we spent on printing those 5,000 copies of the very local magazine is now spent to prepare the translations of all those texts, because we are doing it from our little budget and this is not a huge team of people doing it right now.

I hope there will be more, but still this is a project that I need to do among many others. I hope that one day it will be a little bit different, because I can see the connection between the time I have and also how much time I can dedicate to think about *Memoria*. It seems that it could be a project that would be a full-time job for someone. I'm satisfied with the quality,

I'm satisfied with how we are doing it, and we are learning, and you can also see that when you go through one edition to another edition. It's going to be more and more time-consuming if we really want to reach the variety that we want to get. It's a work in process, it's a very young project. I think that it's not the magazine of the Auschwitz Museum. It's not the magazine that talks about what we do here, and then we'll add a few words about what others do. This is the magazine of the whole world, of the whole memorial environment. Our role is only that we came up with the idea and we run the magazine.

**I've literally got two, maybe three questions left. Are you okay for time?**

Yes, I'm okay.

**Great, okay, I just want to make sure I'm not-, you've got lots of Twitter to check and you've got lots of things to do! The final topic that I wanted to talk about was the issue of the 'Polish death camps', which we touched on a little bit earlier. I know obviously things, more recently, have picked up speed but actually we were saying the whole thing about 'Polish death camps' has been going on for quite a while in terms of the website changing and things like that. So, how did the campaign against people using this phrase, or similar phrases, start at the Museum, and was it directed because of the political situation, because of the government, or was it more of an internal Museum decision? How did that come about?**

One of the roles of the Memorial is to make sure that people, when they talk about the story of Auschwitz, they do it in an accurate way, historically accurate language. In the whole issue of the 'Polish concentration camps', it's simply inaccurate, and our reaction is simply the result of this. This is a mistake, and it should be corrected. It's historically inaccurate. When we look at the general picture, the source of this phrase is basically journalists. This is the media. You will not find, you know, conferences or historians or, I don't know, public speeches and people will be-, unless they have their political agenda, that's another thing. This is basically, in most cases, a simple mistake that people make because they don't know history so well or because they're in a hurry and because they were in Poland, they saw the Memorial, they write about Auschwitz, it was a concentration camp, so they'll say 'Polish concentration camp'. This is one thing. Of course, in this sea of simple mistakes, you also have some more specified usages, that someone wants to write about this, wants to talk about a concentration camp in Poland or a Polish concentration camp, and we should react. I believe we should react the same as we should react when someone makes a mistake in a date.

I just was asked by a publishing house to write a review about a book, *Architects of Death*, the book about Topf & Sons. The approach of the author to facts was very surprising. (*Laughs*). There were plenty of mistakes. Mistakes that could be avoided very, very simply. So this is our role: to be the guard of the historical accuracy. Whether people will see our actions politically or not, it's their choice. For us, taking part in the debate – I mean, to fight against 'Polish concentration camps' – is not a political thing. It's a historical accuracy issue.

**This week in the news, in *The Guardian* and things, there has been attention drawn to these 'anti-Polish attacks' that the Museum has been getting from nationalists and probably quite a few trolls and things like that on social media. How is the Museum coping with that, I guess is the question I want to ask?**

(Sighs). So, *The Guardian* article shows again how difficult it is for journalists to talk about very complicated things in the language that they need to talk [in] because their editors tell them to do so. The Museum experienced the wave of trolls and attacks [saying] that it's [an] anti-Polish institution and it's based on several fake letters and things that were online. This is mainly online, between January and, let's say, mid-March. So, for example, the article published at the end of April is not writing about something that is happening right now, because it's rather a past thing. This wave, in a way, toned down and it re-emerges more or less. But if we talk broadly, another thing that I think the nuances that *The Guardian* article was missing, and therefore we decided to also react, that it is somehow connected to the whole controversy linked to the IPN law, because it was the trigger of very emotional discussion, not only here in Poland, but this was the stick that someone put into the ant pit, as we say. I don't know if it's an expression in English as well, but you know what I mean. That was the triggering, the domino tile that started [it], and it went into many directions.

Something that was missing here, that in this whole problematic situation for us – because it simply was a very painful situation for people who work here – it didn't connect with the work because it was only online, mainly unauthorised online articles or emails or telephones and so there was somehow a very limited number of people that were touched by this wave that we had. On the other hand, we are doing great work. We are working normally, there are people visiting. In a way, nothing changes in the way we do our work, we as the Press Department have simply much more work in explaining to people why those accusations are false, or the lies that are spread, and so on. What I think the article failed to mention is in this whole difficult time, we had full support of the government, of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, that they published, already in February, an article, a text that they fully-, how do you say this? What's the word I'm looking for?

### **Support?**

Yes, they fully support the work of all the memorial institutions, and the people who criticise the memorials have no idea what they're talking about, basically. This was made a few times in the last few months. So again, I believe that, on the one hand, of course it's very important to talk about this situation, because it is painful, and again it's important to speak out when you are being unfairly treated, attacked, and there are waves of manipulations or lies about the institutions. That's our work, and we are doing it. Somehow, there has been a little bit too much political sensation in this text of *The Guardian*, despite [the fact that] we spent a long time with the journalist here. On the other hand, I can understand the problem of the editorial and the editors. It's difficult to write about complicated things. But should we agree to this? Again, [it's a] very complicated story.

### **Have you been quite surprised by this reaction, considering things like correcting journalists on the 'Polish death camps' phrase and the Remember app and that kind of thing, or is it just the way that social media works and the fact that there's so much fake news about it?**

So, of course this analysis of what happens can go in a few different directions. You can say, on one hand, this kind of people who had those extreme views, whether it will be somehow [an] antisemitic trigger or there being [a] nationalistic trigger-, so this is what *The Guardian* correctly wrote, that there are manipulations, lies and fakeness. It doesn't talk about antisemitism so much because this is not so much [an] antisemitic campaign. This is something else that is within the Polish politics world and it is within this context. So

antisemitism is a part of this, but it's not the entire scope. [There are] layers here. This is, again, more complicated. So you may say that such people exist, and today social media gives them the possibility of talking, because something that I repeat is that we see [it] because it's loud. Then we need to think whether it's a few people that make a loud noise, or whether it's a problem, some kind of process, something larger than just, you know, a few accounts that will write a few comments online. You know, when you look at something like-, and of course, someone writes [to] you that 'The Museum is anti-Polish' or 'The Director is Jewish' or 'We're [not] allowed to bring Polish flags' or whatever, and then you see that this account has three followers.

So then we need to be aware of the perspective, and therefore again you can see in our social media strategy, let's say, that we respond to official accounts, to journalists. We stopped having conversations with individual trolls because it would take too much of our time and we decided it's irrelevant. It's better for us to put an article on the website simply saying that it's not true and explain the situation than engage in discussion with every single individual troll. That's one thing. So we had to make these priorities because, from our perspective, when you go and search for the word 'Auschwitz', you may have this impression that we are under siege. On the other hand, when I go out from work and I go shopping, no one looks at me and says, 'Oh, this is the person who works in the Museum and this is what the Museum is doing.' This is not a topic of public debate, in a way. So, it was present, and this is why we had to react. Whenever we see that it becomes a more global problem, that someone is doing it very publicly and a public figure or a television programme or a newspaper is simply lying or manipulating, then we should react. I think that what we also need to learn from things like that [is] that you don't have to discuss with everyone. It's the same with when you don't discuss with Holocaust deniers. You also don't have to discuss with every troll.

Then of course, there are many other aspects of this because there are some people who say 'Look at the hours where most of these accounts are active, and you can also have some conclusions in whether this attack is co-ordinated or not', or where it's co-ordinated from. There are many different interpretations. So again, I'm just saying that we are talking about a much more complicated thing than *The Guardian* wrote about. I don't know what your impression was when you read the article in *The Guardian*. Most of the things that are told there are accurate, because they tell about what happened, that there was a fake letter sent to the Prime Minister and the education person wrote something like this and Piotr Rybak [came] here, but I somehow feel that a person who has-, and this will be the audience of this article, because this is not the article that you will read or I will read but someone from Yorkshire, you know, buying their copy of *The Guardian* who has never been to the Memorial, who has never been to Poland, will read this. I somehow feel that the impression of that person will be 'Oh my god, what are they experiencing there?' That people here at the Memorial are doing nothing but standing at the gates defending themselves, you know, we're building walls! I don't know if this is the correct impression.

I don't know what you felt when you read the article, but again, this is the problem of the media today; that being complicated, writing about complicated things, is sometimes too difficult, because you have to have nuances. You need to explain the nuanced situation, and this is a challenge.

**Yeah, I mean when I read the article-, obviously I've seen a little bit of it on Twitter and my Polish is not exactly fluent yet, but I could tell that there was a lot of abuse and attacks and things, but I was kind of aware of it. I suppose I didn't know the fake letter**

**and things like that, I thought that was quite shocking, but I know what you mean in terms of people's impressions.**

It's the first impression that the person will get, but what can we do? We can do our work. We met with the journalists and we dedicated the whole day - and this may be more off the record than on the record - but again, he came here with some kind of things that his bosses told him to write, and then he tried to be a little more accurate. But again, he had [a] few hundred words and we've been talking about it for the last 10 minutes, it's already longer than this article and, again, I was talking to him for, like, two hours here, and we explained the situation. So, this is why we have *Memoria* and this is why we also need to have our own voice, because sometimes it's difficult to show how it really is. Although, of course, as I said, the scale of this wave is something that was unprecedented. It's something that is important, but we are not under siege. A few people maybe more, at the Press Office, the people who answer phone calls, but we don't have this experience [that] today visitors are coming to the Memorial and, you know, every second guide will be [asked] 'What are you doing here?' No, it's not like this.

**I have one last question. For you personally, how do you feel about this 'Holocaust law', as it's called, that's been introduced recently, particularly as someone who works in this field? What are your impressions of it?**

So, because I'm on the record, I can only say that first of all, right now we are waiting for the verdict of the constitutional tribunal, but what this situation is showing-, and there is the official statement of the International Auschwitz Council, that the Director of the Memorial is within the Council and the statement is [a] few official words that also are important. But what seems to be the important thing is that what this situation shows, is that when you try to prepare a law, which must be very accurate, you should do it in an accurate way. One thing you can see [with] this law [is] that people who read this do not really understand what it's all about. For example, if the narration given by the politician is that this law should be the law against the 'Polish concentration camps' issue, it's not in this bill. This phrase is not there. Secondly, it also shows that the story of Auschwitz - and you also know it very well - and the story of the Holocaust - and you also know it very well - is a very sensitive story, with multiple interpretations, with a very emotional approach and which will be different in different memories about the Holocaust or about Auschwitz. There is no one memory, there will be many different memories. When you deal with such a sensitive topic, discussion and debate is the key aspect, and this discussion and debate wasn't done before.

This is also one of the sources of the difficult situation that we can witness from the outside, because we are not outside of the law. Also, the whole story of Auschwitz is not actually part of this whole debate. What is the part of the debate is the story of the Holocaust outside of the camps. It's the story of what happened within occupied Poland, but not in the camps. So this is something very basic, but now we'll have to see what will happen, what will be the verdict of the constitutional tribunal.

**Okay, I think that is everything for now. Is there anything else that you'd like to add at all?**

No.

**We've covered quite a lot there.**

If you need any more, let me know of course, if you need something else and other things.  
I'm very happy to help.

**Thank you. *Dziękuję bardzo za pomoc* [Thank you for your help], I hope I got that right!**

Very right! *Bardzo proszę, nie ma za co* [You're very welcome].

**Appendix B. Transcript of Interview with Paweł Sawicki (Press Officer, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum), 30 January 2020, Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Oświęcim, Poland**

**Interviewer (Imogen Dalziel) = Bold**

Interviewee (Paweł Sawicki) = Regular

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**Obviously if there's anything you don't want to answer, you don't have to. If at any point you say you don't want to do it any more, that's fine. Okay, so ethics are covered. Some of it's following on from the interview from before, and then some bits are new things I've come up with in doing research. The first thing is when you talk about the 'authentic site', and the 'authenticity', how do you define that in the context of the Museum?**

Everything that remains. There [was] a very strict law creating the Museum in 1947, that we are supposed to preserve everything that remains. In this regard, this will be the foundation of something that we call the authenticity. Whether it will be a document, whether it will be an object, whether it will be a building, a ruin, a condition that we have-, I mean, of course sometimes the conservation is taken to the extreme. For example, on some of the suitcases that we have in storage, you will find mud. We know from testimonies that, at *Kanada*, many suitcases were lying outside, so this mud can also be a part of the authentic story of this object. You will see that the conservators are very careful with this, and this mud will stay on the object, because when we are not able to determine whether something is post-war or not post-war, then we'll leave it. When we cross-reference, use different sources, and we know from testimonies that it was possible that the conditions in Birkenau were like this, and mud was on the suitcases, this mud is becoming part of this authenticity. The same when you have the walls in Block number 2. You can see that there are scratches on the walls, and we know that they are there because there were three-level bunk beds, and when prisoners were going up and down, the beds were moving, and they were scratching the walls.

The scratches are not repaired. They are left there because they are part of this authenticity. So basically, when we talk about this, we talk about everything that remains, whether it's a destroyed object, a ruin, a building. I would define it like this.

**Is it a purely scientific kind of thing?**

Of course, when we go broader, authenticity will be [a] much larger thing than just a physical object. For example, I will always say that-, not only me, but this is also what the Director says, we have two authenticities. One authenticity is the authenticity of the physical remains. This is one authenticity of Auschwitz. People who come here walk through the authentic site. This is the experience, the-, Piotr knows French, but this is the *route de passage*, the act of walking through this place. And there's the authenticity of the words of the survivors: testimonies, memories, they're speaking to us. I had a survivor yesterday in my group. I met Irene Weiss, and when we were standing in the forest, and she was pointing to her mother in the photograph there, this is also an authentic situation. So, we have to preserve both authenticities. The site and documents tell us some story, we know a frame of the picture we have. There is chronology based on this. But the words of the survivors-, sometimes, you know, contradictory. Sometimes basing something on one testimony is a research problem,

but those words exist. If you, for example, go through testimonies, and you try to find out: what was the colour of the eyes of Mala Zimetbaum? You will not have one version of this.

People remember it differently. We are not able to determine [this] because, for example, we do not have the registration cards, where the Germans would write what is the colour of her eyes. This is memory, this is the authenticity of memory. I'm not saying it to judge. I'm saying human memory is subjective. We base our knowledge of this place on the two authenticities, and we are now in this moment where one of these authenticities is getting to a standstill. Soon, any interaction with living survivors will be impossible. They wrote a lot, they said a lot, we recorded thousands of testimonies and they're all around the world. These words, which are not physical remains, exist. We have the authentic site, and when we take these two things together, this is some kind of melting pot from which we get our knowledge of this place.

**This is something that I'm putting forward in my thesis: almost another type of authenticity for visitors. So, you have the kind of, what I would call curatorial – on the one hand, the science behind it, the objects, the documents – and then the experience of the place. So, people have that sense of authenticity.**

You are in the place where it happened and, by preserving-, and of course, when you go deeper into preservation, not everything will be authentic. For example, survivors decided to reconstruct the Wall. Sometimes we need to remove one piece of wood to save the entire object. When you go into conservational details, of course, this is-, but we are talking more meta, more universally symbolic. Of course, this stands.

**So, going on now to a bit about the website and the virtual tour. Obviously, we're talking about authenticity, being in the place where it happened. What would you say is the ultimate aim of the tour, for people who can't visit?**

When we had the photographs done, the company that did it for us prepared the whole tour with arrows and so on. Then we said, it's okay to go, but whether this should be the end of this project, and we stopped it for two years. What we felt [was] missing was that, okay, people will see the images, but there will be absolutely no education [or] memory in it. People will see the site, but as people come here to the authentic site and they are guided, or they go on their own but have a guidebook, or they simply read the plaques and absorb the knowledge [at] their own pace, we thought that we are not going to launch it as a gadget. I mean, that you'll be able to look left and right. So, then we stopped the whole project for, I think, about two years. Then we asked our colleagues, historians in the archives and ourselves, and [the] Educational Centre, to look at every panorama, every dot on the map, and then what can we put there? We need to have [a] historical description. When we have historical description, we can add a few testimonies. Maybe we have an object in the collection that we can show a photograph of, or a document that might be interesting, related to every individual place. Then we worked for about two years, and then we launched [panorama.auschwitz.org](http://panorama.auschwitz.org).

So, I think this is a crucial tool. In our thinking, on one hand we can open our triumphant horns and say, "Two million people! The most visited museum in Poland! We are doing a great job!" And that's true. But, at the same time, you have to go out of this bubble and look at this number. I don't know how many people there are in the world today, it changes all the time, seven billion or something? It means that in a year, approximately seven billion do not

visit the Museum and, even worse, in the last 70 years, I believe we had a little bit over 50 million visitors. When you take 70 years, this means that there are at least two or three generations, within those seven billion people, that changed. Should we say this is not important? I mean, we guide those 1.8 million people and this is enough? The answer is no. While 20 years ago, we had absolutely no tools except for publications and tools that we can send, the new technologies of the Internet allow us to do more. So, we started with the website, we have the virtual tour which, I believe, we are going to think about an update [on], because it's already five years, and five years in this world is like...old? We are thinking of something new, because there are new technologies of virtual reality.

Virtual reality is coming. The question is, should we just say, "We are against virtual reality" and leave it like this, or find someone who has the knowledge of how to use virtual reality, and will accept our point of view? Our perspective and our concerns? There is this vision already, that there is a company that has this vision, and they probably are going to listen to what we want to say, and maybe we can take a next step. This is the plan for the future. We need to find something, do something, to all those people who will never visit this site. Whether it will be translation of books, and people can order them in our online bookstore, whether it will be a virtual tour or social media, this is the way we can reach billions. Truly. I mean, this is-, if you say, okay, maybe 100 million visitors would come here a year. This is physically impossible. Simply, this is impossible. I mean, they can fly but they will not enter because of the preservation, but you can say that this is-, of course, probably it will never happen. But it is possible that online, we can reach a billion or two billion or three billion people. So, this is our aim. You know, step by step.

**So, when you talk about virtual reality, do you mean things like when you can put an app on your phone and put it in a headset and move around, that kind of thing?**

This could be possible. However, it's always the question of [making] it in a respectful, educational way. For example, something that we do not agree and will not agree [with], is to do any roleplay. That you'll, for example, that you'll put [on] the goggles, and you'll see dogs and prisoners. This is beyond-, on the other side of the border of respect. But for example, it's already doable to have a very accurate depiction of the site. The technology today-, and it's changing all the time, so for example the whole architecture, depiction of buildings. While physical reconstruction of the crematoria is not possible, it will never happen, virtually reconstructing the building and going inside to see how it looked, it's already possible. I think with the technology improving, we can already work with the accuracy level that will satisfy us. It will not be a gadget. It will not be used on the site, because on the site people will not be using goggles. However, it might be used with proper educational content, because you can do it with a guided tour. Not just give people a gadget to just walk around and move from one place to another, but actually, people have goggles and we can plan a route, and there will be an audio tour with it. Then people will be able to go to places, move around, and hear an explanation.

The possibilities seem to be countless, because in this VR, you can add video, you can add sound, you know, everything that we added in this virtual tour of this, we can embed into a new virtual reality thing. However, it's just a question of finding the platform, not to, for example, allow to do something, but to use it in our way, how we want to do it.

**And not just have it as a Museum – how it would have looked, perhaps, but without the people?**

Yes. Because we have blueprints. We have knowledge of the-, people do not know this, but barracks in Birkenau were not just brick, red. They were colourful. They were painted.

**Were they really? I didn't know that.**

They were painted, so you had barracks of different colours. Thanks to findings and traces of painting layers on the outside walls, we actually are able to more or less determine what the colours were. Again, when you look at the Gate of Death of Birkenau, in 1944 it was painted into camouflage screen colours. So, for example, when the Hungarian transports were coming in, they didn't see a red gate, as people see today. They saw it in camouflage green patches. This is tempting, that when you have amazing digital technologies today-, (*phone rings*) hold on, this is my wife. Tak? (*Recording paused*).

**Okay. That's amazing, I knew about the gate, I think, but I didn't know the barracks were coloured. Going back a little bit, actually, to the virtual tour. Obviously, there are some bits on there that people usually can't access, so Block 2 and Block 10 you can go and have a look around. Then the exhibits themselves aren't included. What's the decision behind that?**

Because it's not an exhibition tour. How to make a tour in the exhibition in such a tool, when you have documents on flat displays, where this changes? It will not give people-, reading through all those tiny fonts, it would not make any sense. This is why we simply decided that the virtual tour should give to all the people who will be using it-, you cannot replace it, but it should give them at least this feeling of looking at this authentic site, and this enhances the authenticity, with the testimonies, with the pictures, with the objects. It's all about showing the authentic space. Therefore, inside Block 2 or Block 10, you see the authentic space. You go into the cell in the basement of Block 11 where you can't enter. The only exception here is the room in the Sauna building where you have the photographs. We did the Sauna, and there we have the HD quality, so you can zoom in and you can see almost all those pictures. The angles are maybe a little bit odd. We decided that we're not going to document the exhibitions this way. These are two different realities in a certain way.

**So, the focus is just the site rather than [as if] you're walking through the Museum?**

Yes. To give people-, to look at the site from [a] different perspective, to learn the story, but it's not a tour in the Museum exhibition. This is why we have online lessons. This is how we try to create this content for [the] online user. However, I believe that even if we photograph these rooms, it would be extremely uncomfortable for the user to use an exhibition planned for a space in this way. I don't think it would work.

**Is there any element as well of respect in terms of, you know, not wanting to put the room full of hair online?**

I mean, we wouldn't put the room of hair probably there, and we do not show Block 5 and the objects. But, again, maybe with the new technology change that you can-, here, you just have just one picture taken from one perspective. Maybe with the new technology, when this is all virtual and not just a panorama made of hundreds of photographs, maybe we could do it in a better way. I don't think we are completely disregarding this, or saying no. We would

have to find a proper way of doing this. So far, in this particular project we decided not to. It doesn't mean that we will never do it in the future.

**In terms of the website more generally, I suppose this is a question that has lots of different answers, but what would you say are the main aims, the main goals of having the website?**

Truly? It seems, when we look at people search for, the most important aim of the website will be allowing people to visit the site. I mean, most people do not go through the-, of course, there will be historical content, and some people who find it will find it. The two most visited parts of the website are the 'Visit' part, so people will simply learn how they can get in, and the 'Gallery' part, where you have photographs. This is the language of the Internet today. First, images, and then [a] very pragmatic thing: "I want to visit Auschwitz, so I am going to visit their website because they will probably explain how to visit," and then you have [visit.auschwitz.org](http://visit.auschwitz.org). But I think education is the more and more important content there, therefore the online lessons seem to-, it seems that we are shifting the historical content from the 'History' part – you have 'History', 'Museum', 'Visiting' and 'Education' – where you have brief short texts about many different elements of the story of Auschwitz, and this part is more and more taken over by the e-learning and online lessons. Online lessons start with-, right now, [there are] over 20 online lessons, and [to] start, [they] simply cover what these brief historical notes-, and so I think we are going to change the website. We are going to start working on this this year, so hopefully the beginning of 2021 we will do a lifting.

It will not be a dramatic change like five years ago, where we changed completely the whole technological part, where we shifted from one system to another. Right now, we will rather be working on how to use the technology within the same digital environment that's changed in the last five years to make the website more accessible, cleaner, easier for the user. So, we are going to do this. I believe that it seems that we will have to talk between the Research Department and the Education Department, because most of the online lessons are actually large pieces, and whether they will, for example, want to do something for less advanced users. You know, that will be Plan A, and then when you want to read more, you go to the online lesson. Or maybe we'll have to replace-, that 'E-learning' will simply become part of 'History' because, you know, you really now have - starting from the general lesson, ending on the liberation and then the creation of the Museum – you basically have-, I know the E-learning is planning-, my wife is Head of E-learning so I have a little bit of insight of their planning, but I know that they are planning 'Perpetrators', 'Functionaries', they are filling in the gaps. It will come soon, within a year or two, where basically all the historical small text will have an equivalent of an online lesson. So, we will think about this.

So, I think 'Visiting' is one part, 'Gallery' is another part, and I think we also need to update it. 'E-learning' the way we do it-, because at the very beginning we thought we'll do something like classic 'E-learning', where you have a moderator and you have a class, it doesn't work because it's too much time for too little people. Then, when we have an online lesson like this, it really can be seen by thousands or hundreds of thousands of people. Some people will choose to go through five chapters and then they are bored and it's too much, but some people will simply see everything. Every exhibition should be peeled like an onion, and online lessons should also be. Either you'll read the caption, the big font, or you'll find-, and this is good. Not everything is for everyone.

**Are they getting a lot of use, do you know?**

Yes, and we use them on social media. We remind [people] we have lessons, because from one Tweet about an individual Soviet prisoner of war, we can immediately say, “Okay, you learned that name, you didn’t know that there were Soviet prisoners of war in Auschwitz, go and see the online lesson.” This is why five years ago we couldn’t do it, because there was only one. Right now, we have this whole variety and it goes deeper and deeper, and now we can use it in a completely different way.

**Next thing, about social media. First of all, congratulations on over a million followers on Twitter!**

This is the first million. This is the first step, yeah.

**First of all, when did you decide, “Oh, it would be great to get, first of all, 750,000 for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and then a million,” so when did you first decide that, and what was the motivation for that?**

The first moment where I noticed this possibility [was] a little bit after Christmas two years ago, 2018. You may remember there was a moment where I Tweeted - and do not quote it, because I was sitting on my carpet at home, with my phone – this is the end of the year, and I thought, “We are so close to 150,000 people. Why not-,” you know, we were like 7,000 people [off]. At that time, 7,000 followers-, you know, if you notice, it took us over five years to get to 50,000 people, so these are the numbers that, for me at that time, were very abstract. So, I thought, “We are so close. The year is coming to an end,” you can find this Tweet. “Maybe you can help us, maybe we can get to 150,000.” What happened after this was one of the biggest shocks I had. In three days, we had 150,000 more followers. We got to 250,000, because people responded with their engagement. This is the social element in social media that we didn’t expect to happen. That people will say, “It’s now up to us to do something,” and with [a] few important accounts, I believe at that time it was-, again you can find the names. There is one of the survivors of the shooting that is very active, Peter Hogg [David Hogg] or...you can look it up. He was the first one saying, “Help them get to not 150,000, but 250,000 people.”

Then there was an actress and comedian, and here we had people who we can call maybe not celebrities, but people who had a large amount of public trust – I would call it that way – who decided that they will use this trust to help us, to support us, and to trigger other people’s engagement. And it was like dominoes. You know, I didn’t know what was going on. You don’t see it coming, so that was the real moment where I had this imagination that this is possible. Of course, we ask people for engagement. And then I thought when we were preparing for the anniversary and so on, on social media, I thought – and we were at the level of 360,000. I said, “One million is too much.” First of all, I really tried hard not to get to a number that will link - because some people told us, “1.3 million because this is the number deported, or 6 million,” – never to say that the number of followers will at any point be linked with the number of victims, or something like this, because I find this disrespectful. So, then I thought, “I don’t think we’re going to get to a million.” I mean, when you see how the development of our numbers on social media [was], on Twitter, but then I thought, “One million is impossible, but maybe we can get to 750,000, because it’s the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.” I think it was in August that I started talking about this, and you have waves and we did it, finally.

A surprising thing happened. I remember, I was sat in the evening at home, and (*makes buzzing noise*) something is happening, and I tried to get to the source of this, and there is someone called Mark Hamill Tweeting that this is the most important account. And I asked myself, “Who is Mark Hamill? Never heard of him!” And I Googled [him], and it’s Luke Skywalker. I’m not a Star Wars person, I didn’t see it. And there was an Italian television programme that, live on television, said, “[The] Auschwitz Memorial is searching for 750,000 people. We will show you how to do it!” And it’s live, it’s watched by hundreds of thousands of Italians there, and they actually open our Twitter page on their screen, and there [was], like, 25,000 followers within two hours. So, we got to 750,000 people. Then I thought, “Okay, I’m letting it go,” but people started talking about it. I mean, “Why not one million?” This was the moment that I also decided to use our Twitter account this way. You know, people say maybe it’s too much of this pushing for numbers, but then I started thinking and I convinced myself, that I really want to have one million followers. No, that I really want to have as many followers as we can! When we think about the mission of the Memorial, and when we think that our mission is memory, numbers do not matter.

I will do exactly the same job I’m doing for five followers, 5,000 followers or five million followers. We will be guiding our tours, no matter whether we have five visitors, 50,000 visitors or 2,300,000 visitors, because this is the mission of memory. But memory is not the only mission we have. Our mission, we believe, is education, and here, the numbers matter. I really want to reach to-, we were talking about it with the Internet. Through this, through my little phone, or computer at my desk, I can reach billions of people, this is physically possible. So, then I thought, “No.” I can explain why we’re doing this, and I find this justified. I do not see anything disrespectful here, so you can see that somewhere in December I decided, “Why not? Okay, [let’s] try to get us to a million followers.” People did it, and Mark Hamill Tweeted again! Something that was very interesting for me is that, of course, this is some kind of media thing that Mark Hamill is doing, or some journalists are doing it, but you had hundreds and hundreds of Tweets – “I have only 43 followers, but I want to be part of this. I want to tell them, “Why are only half of you following the Auschwitz Memorial?”” and maybe the voices of those-, I’m not saying not important, but users of ours who find our work important, this is what matters.

This is the wave that went through this. Of course, Mark Hamill helped, and what other idea could unite a pizzeria from Italy, Canadian Armed Forces in the United States, a football museum in Munich, and a Bach choir? All these accounts, and many, many others, decided, “Come on people, Auschwitz Memorial is searching for a million, let’s-,” and this is human engagement. If you give people-, you want to be engaged. You want to do something. This is one thing you can do, but I always repeat, and this is very important. Following us is the first step. It’s not that you click ‘follow’ and your job is done, because this is where we start educating you. I mean, you’ll give us your permission to enter a little bit into your life, with facts, with faces, with names, and we also expect you to do a little bit more. So, you can see that, both after the 750,000 people and one million people I Tweeted something that is very clear. “Following us is the first step. The main question we are asking you – think what you can do to make our world better. What can you do? Start doing it now.” It’s not a game of numbers. There was someone who said, “Why are you-,” you know, this is not a game of numbers. We have a cause, and we are going to fight for it, because this is our mission.

**That actually comes on really nicely to my next question. I was thinking about this, because on Monday, Piotr Cywiński was talking about passive helping, you know, sign an online petition, ‘like’ this. And I read – I don’t know where it was, I’ve read so much**

**recently – but you said in an interview with someone about, “People come here, and they might just be like, “Okay, I’ve done it. I’ve put a flower down and I’ve remembered.”” So is there a concern that people go, “Oh, I’ve followed this account, and that’s it,” and even if you have that, as you put it, permission to educate them, they can scroll through their feed and whatever. Is that a concern, do you feel that there’s more the Museum could do, or perhaps even should do, to be active with it?**

Yes, I believe that we feel more and more obliged to make people feel uncomfortable. I think that this has been a tremendous change [in] the last five years, something like this. That if we had this conversation 10 years ago, I would say no. Our mandate is clear: we teach about the story of Auschwitz. Getting the message of other atrocities and genocides here seems to be a little bit problematic, but what started changing our mind is the world’s silence. We were witnesses of Congo, we witnessed what happened with the Rohingya people in Myanmar, and we are now witnessing what’s happening in Uighur in China. We are witnessing all those other things. Something that is very painful to us, to us people working here – because we live in this world – is the silence of the world. Okay, politicians whatever, but there are visitors who come here, and we also do not hear their voice. Somehow, we started asking whether we are focused a little bit too much-, of course, we need to tell the story of 1940-1945. We need to tell 1.3 million deported, 1.1 million victims, we need to tell the story. But maybe, in our education, we have to find a language that will make people leaving this place uncomfortable about their own role. I don’t think we can do it with all our visitors. We have to try to plant a seed, and then have people take it from there.

We need to start addressing it because the indifference-, and, you know, Marian Turski with, “You shall not-,” amazing speech. What Piotr was also saying, and we are also saying, is that we live in a more and more complicated time for us as bystanders. If we want to look at our faces in the mirror as people who preserve this memory, but also try to understand the world through this memory, we need to change something, and it’s not only the change that should be done here. This is why, when you participated in our annual conference, you could see already a change of tone and change of language, and a general reflection that maybe we as the institutions – Holocaust museums, other sites of the former camps, and others – we should take it into consideration. Maybe our voice should slightly change in terms of telling people that they are part of the challenges today. That this is not only about history. We feel more and more confident that this is the right path. It’s a difficult path, but as an individual, a person with some kind of a moral code that I’ve built working in this place, I simply wouldn’t be able to look at myself in the mirror. That would be hypocritical of me. If we wouldn’t try to find a way to change the world this way. I don’t think we can change the world, but what I believe is that we can change the individuals.

I was guiding a group of Holocaust museum friends, and I had a survivor, and I started the tour saying that, “Later in the tour, I will tell you about your own moral responsibility. I will tell you that you should do something. I’ll tell you that you should find a way to-,” because we as individuals have power to change things. Everything we see here, actually everything we see here, is because there was one man who had a vision. His name as Adolf Hitler, he was born in Branau-am-Inn in 1889, he changed a letter in his name because Hitler was more powerful, and this was indeed a man who had an idea. For years and years, only a small group of people were listening. But then, this small group of people, because of the political-, actually, we’re talking on the day when Hitler becomes Chancellor.

**Yes!**

Yes. At some point, those people with ideas who spoke about them in *Bierkellers* and so on, what they got into their heads was the power of the state. Then the state had to take over, I mean, was forced to take over these ideologies, and they started implementing [them] into real life. Then, of course, we get the SS, NSDAP, RSHA, you know, that's precisely-, this is the book about this (*picks up David Cesarani's Final Solution*). Amazing. I actually recently heard of the old *Third Reich in Power* by...I can't remember.

### **Richard Evans.**

Yes! He goes into all those legal things and others. But actually, when you think about it, it really starts with one person who created this idea, and started convincing people, and he had motivation to do something. I feel that we should search for motivation to do something in ourselves, because then we will leave all the activity and initiative to those people who have those bad intentions. And they're active, and they're working hard. I think that this is why we should work here to put our visitors from this safe zone of comfort: "I lit a candle, I said a prayer, I came here, I came visited, I learned a few dates and a few names and so on, and then I leave and go back to my life as [if] nothing changed." For many people, it will be like this, but I think we must try to at least plant a seed. I know this place has the potential to change people. I've worked here long enough, I've guided people who I met five years ago and their life [has] changed. I see that they have re-evaluated something, they change something, they made some decisions after this visit. Something will be small, but some things-, some of the decisions people [have] made are (*spread arms*) and so we have to try. We have to try to target individuals, so that they would think that we all have a moral responsibility. This is not just a story from 75 years ago.

You know, there will be people in new memorials in 30 years asking the same questions as some visitors ask today. Today they ask, "Why, in [the] 1940s, didn't they do more to help? Why was the world so silent? Why the bombing?" and so on. Someone will ask the same questions about us, in 30 years, in 40 years, in other memorials. They will be moved, there will be Educators, and this is why we need to make this change. To stay true to what we are doing, that we commemorate the victims of this place, we teach about the story of this place, but we have to find a little bit [of a] new, universal language to take people out of this historical world, and somehow have them think about today and the future.

**You were saying about changing language. So, you mean, kind of, small changes? I suppose from the Museum point of view, you can't put something on Twitter about what's happening in China, because it's-**

We did it.

**You have?**

We already did it. We have to be very careful, but we are already doing this.

**How do you get around that, either on the one hand, the politics of it, and people saying-**  
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No, so we again tried to be in a more universal language, to talk about dehumanisation, talk about ideologies of hatred, not getting into politics. I don't have our Christmas card, but on

our Christmas card you have a Uighur child. Actually, on every Christmas card that we send, there is something. We have migrants, we have Uighurs, we had other things. You could see that when some important articles were published about the concentration camps in China, we didn't say about them but we said that the voices that we start hearing seem to be too serious just to be silent. Also, we have to be very careful because we are not an institution that is able to check some of the sources. There is a lot of manipulation, a lot of propaganda from many sides, so we are careful. But we started...It's [a] very little part of our work, but I think we'll be doing this.

**Have you had any backlash or anything from people saying, "This isn't your place, you should be talking about Auschwitz and that's it," no?**

No. I think there was not much feedback. It didn't raise [as much] discussion as, probably, we hoped it would. We hoped that it would. Even with the "Should Auschwitz Memorial be-," no, I think that people went, "Ah, they're talking about something." There was not so many retweets. The reaction of people probably wasn't as we expected. This is the whole debate, whether our voice counts or not, whether people are going to listen to what the Auschwitz Memorial has to say, or they [people] will say, "Oh, they're just a museum of the story of Auschwitz." We're not going to push the world off the political tracks, probably, but again, I think that we need to address this. We need to find a language that is, again, respectful to what we are doing here, but we need to do it and we've started doing it.

**Going back to having a million followers now as well, and talking about people being negative and spreading things. Is there a way of monitoring who's following you? So, if you have a load of trolls, or Holocaust deniers, is that something that becomes a problem?**

Any Holocaust denier account that I note is blocked. So, there may be Holocaust deniers following us, but whenever I see even a Tweet unrelated to us, not a reply to our Tweet, if I see a Holocaust denier online, I report and block. I make a screen[shot] and block. So, there is no possibility of verifying this, there are too many people. It's rather if you see an activity of trolling-, but sometimes people also-, blocking is the last thing I want to do, but sometimes there is no other way. So, I do it. I think we have 1,000 users blocked until today. I do not have time to go through-, sometimes when you have 1,000 new followers a day, I don't look at the images. But sometimes people tell [us]. There is someone who has this kind of-, so people notice this. However, I try to dedicate quite enough time to search for the hashtag '#Auschwitz' or the word 'Auschwitz' on Twitter and other social media as well. Whenever I notice something disturbing, I react.

**How do you find time for all that?**

I work too much.

**When I see there's a Tweet at six o'clock in the morning, I'm like, "Oh, Pawel's awake and on Twitter!"**

No, sometimes you can see a rare Tweet at three o'clock in the morning because my son woke me up. Then I just look at the phone, and I put the phone down and I go back to sleep. If I have an opportunity. I try not to push too much the boundaries of-, you know, I have a life, but I had to accept, and my family had to accept, that this kind of work is not the kind of

work from seven 'til three. You just don't put your phone-, "This is the weekend, so it's not important what's happening." No, because the speed is important. If we react quickly, we can-, but sometimes, something is happening, so I say, "Okay, I need to do something," I write a Tweet and I put it back. It's not like I'm not on it all the time. It's not like I don't go to the cinema with my son, or I don't go to have dinner with my family, or we don't go to a museum, or we don't sleep. It was much more difficult when social media began, because the telephones were simply not-, you know, you had to have your computer. Today, with an iPhone, I can be at any place in the world and do it. Sometimes it just takes me a moment, to see if something important is happening, or when I start noticing that important things are happening, because usually there are verified accounts that start tagging us, or I get messages. This is also quite interesting, because people notice that we react, that we raise our voice, whether it will be a Muslim selling Christmas things or anything else, and they send things to us. They know that we may react, and most of our reactions [are] not coming because 24/7 I am monitoring the Internet. No. People noticed that we are active, so people decided they will let us know. Really, most of the interventions come because people decide to tag us, to send us a message, and this is again incredible. This is a huge bulk of trust from the online world, from people. They trust that we are-, they look at us as a trusted institution that can raise their voice to fix the world. It started with one of your-,

### **That Amazon thing, yeah.**

I still show it, now I have to update my presentation, but I still show your Tweet. I was sitting in a coach and I thought, "Oh, Imogen is doing this, but probably Amazon will not listen to her. Maybe we can help," and they took this product down. I know that this is not the most important thing that we do, but it's part of the story. So, whenever we can react, and we have legitimate information that people send us, we are going to do it. We are not going to fact-check all the articles because there is only myself and some of my colleagues that sometimes send me things. But it also doesn't mean that we should be doing this because we cannot do everything. We can do what we can do.

### **A couple more questions and then I promise we're done. In terms of the social media and creating that link between being online and being on Twitter and whatever, how do you see that? Where's the link there?**

I don't think there is a link at all, or a very, very limited link. I don't think that our activity on social media or creating [the] virtual tour changes-, there are people who said, "Oh, if you create a virtual tour, people will stop coming." We need to remember that, first of all, most people are on social media for completely different reasons. So, of course, some people may be engaged, and they will follow us on Twitter, but I do not see a global link of either people who visit us here immediately will start following us on social media, or vice versa: people who follow us on social media do not immediately buy plane tickets to come to the Memorial. I think these two realities are, maybe not completely disattached, but we live our lives in a different way than we act on social media. So, no, I don't think-, I haven't noticed a link that would be so visible that, maybe, no.

**I was going to say, on Twitter it's more about-, I think in the last 10 years there's been a real shift in dialogue between the Museum and its visitors. So before social media, everything was very much based here and you'd have your tours and you can interact with your guide and that's where it ends. Now, was it October or November, when there**

**was that picture of the little rubber duck, and I remember when you Tweeted and asked the question, ‘Is it appropriate?’ Do you think the shift in that dialogue is important?**

I mean, social media gives you the possibility to have that dialogue. We didn’t have that possibility before. It simply gives us the possibility to ask that question to those people who follow us, and that’s it. 20 years ago, we could ask the same question, we could post something on the website, but it didn’t have this interactive element. Somehow – and this is our strategy, or, I don’t know, an idea – that I really try to run this account as if the Museum is a person. This is always ‘we’ the Museum – ‘we the people, we the Museum’ – this is, of course, an official institution, but I don’t see many other institutional accounts behaving like this. I think that I’ve passed beyond the point whether it’s good or bad. I think it’s good. I think that the Museum replies to a person, and replies with respectful language, but it’s an institution that, in social media, behaves as a person. A person that is called Auschwitz Memorial. The person that can tell about historical facts, but also can ask a question. Of course, I don’t think people are stupid and they think “Oh, the Memorial has somebody-,” they know that there is a person, someone from the Memorial, doing this, but right now I don’t see any contradiction.

I think we found a way that is beneficial to us. For example, I sent this question not only to get 5,000 answers – I can’t remember how many answers were there, and some of them were problematic – but I did it to build awareness. Thanks to this visibility, the media started writing about it. They found the man who was from some Latin American country and so on, and he apologised and blah, blah, blah. That was one point. But another point [was] to make the debate. To start a debate, so that people would go beyond. What was interesting was that some people started asking, “Maybe it’s not entirely disrespectful? Maybe there are some other elements that we should take into consideration other than just our initial reaction of ‘a rubber duck in Auschwitz!’” And that was exactly the point, I think, more and more. That was also the question I thought – and I also spoke to some people who do social media in other places – “To what extent should we respond to everyone?” I think one of the answers that I got - and full credit to the person in the Jewish Heritage Museum in New York – I remember when we were sitting and talking about it, and she said, “You know, I think that we should respond where we see the educational opportunity.

When raising our voice-, you know, replying to a troll account or getting engaged in some kind of discussion which seems unimportant, it’s not just to have this conversation with someone. But when this conversation, this exchange of Tweets, will have some educational importance for all the people who can see it, because it’s all online, it’s all public.” I think that it caught what I want to do, and so this is why, for example-, and there were a few articles about Twitter and the fact-checking recently, and there are journalists who have concerns that our public correcting [of] them is causing trolls to attack them and so on and so on. First of all, I hope that we will simply not allow trolls and others to control the way we work, but when I correct any article, I always show why I correct them. I’m not saying “Oh, your article is bad.” I say, “This is the quote, and here is our response. I mean, you wrote this, and the correct version is this. And this, and this.” Sometimes people say this is too much detail and so on, but this is how we do it. It’s not only so that newspapers will correct the articles, but people can also learn from this. Other journalists can learn from this. We’re talking about it, and I think we’re going to have a new email: [factcheck@auschwitz.org](mailto:factcheck@auschwitz.org), and we’ll encourage it: “Okay, you write about Auschwitz? Send us an email. We can really help.”

It's not avoiding situations where you make mistakes, but I think there is a common interest. We want these articles to be written. We want people to read them because education and knowledge spreads. When there is a good article, we can share it. As a policy, I will not share an article with a factual error. I simply cannot do it. You know, even if the article is wonderful, if there is a historical error there, I will not put an official stamp of the Auschwitz Memorial [on it] by retweeting it. I'm really looking for 100% accuracy. This is why, also, when we correct an article-, when the article is completely bad, my reaction will be different, but I ask for correction of some tiny facts. But there is a link to the article and people can read it, because the story is important, but also, we should very clearly state, "This and this should be changed. This and this is simply incorrect." And it should be corrected! I think that the reaction of a journalist shouldn't be, "Oh, they're undermining my professional-," no! My reaction-, and I've learned it my whole life as a journalist, and I make mistakes. I make mistakes when I Tweet, you know, we are only human beings. The reaction to a correction that is justified is, "Thank you." Together we can make the world a little bit better. We removed one mistake from this world, and that's it! And I'm happy!

There aren't really a lot of "thank yous" from people that we correct. I'll have to live with this.

**People probably just take it too personally, don't they? I think the email would be a good idea.**

Of course, it is personal. Even if I made a spelling mistake in a date, you know, sometimes I [do] something wrong, but of course, I do not want to make those things. But somehow, I think a long time ago, I rejected this feeling that I should fight it, that I should give stupid excuses. "Oh, we haven't noticed. Oh, maybe I was right but I wanted to write something else." What for? You say, "Thank you very much for finding this, we are posting a new version," because we make mistakes! I also don't think that most of the mistakes that are done by journalists, or any other writer, come from bad will. It's simply [that] this is a very complicated history, and not everyone is supposed to know all these complicated things. This is our job. It's not their job. Of course, their job is to research more and so on. I was a journalist most of my life, so I know this. Then we correct it and there's also no bad will from our side. We simply want those articles to be correct, because people read them, or the books like *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, right? No, and we are going to more of this. I think we've already come to this conclusion in the Research Department, and there is one thing that one of my colleagues, a historian, Wanda Witek-Malicka said: "These books are pushing out the books of the survivors." This is the danger. This is real danger. I ask every group, "Have you read *Faithless* by Imre Kertész?" No, I haven't had one. Primo Levi, yes. Wiesel, yes. But, you know, "Have you read this or this?" Survivors' books that are very good. No. But then with this commercialism of this literature, that people notice, after *The Tattooist of Auschwitz*, that you can simply earn money on writing a fiction novel about Auschwitz.

**Just put 'Auschwitz' in the title, that's it, yeah.**

You know, you haven't seen too much 'of Stutthof', 'of Natzweiler-Stutthof', 'of Gross-Rosen', no.

**I've seen one 'of Dachau', and that's it.**

Yeah, there's one 'of Dachau', there's *The Photographer of Mauthausen*, and I believe that's it. So, there's a danger that those people who have very little historical knowledge, they can write, and they'll write books, because it simply sells. So, there can be bad books and good books, but I think that the whole new genre that is created is really-, people will buy this, but they have no idea, because they're not on the shelves. Go to any big bookstore in London, in Warsaw, and say, "I'm looking for Imre Kertész, I'm looking for *Fateless*." "Hmm, no, but – oh, Auschwitz! Auschwitz, we have plenty!" Because these books are low-circulation books, you know, finding Borowski, finding Charlotte Delbo, finding some other amazing books – people need to be told where to search. "Go to a library, you'll find it." Then they have this easy solution – I'm not saying John Boyne's *Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, I'm somehow quite satisfied [about] what we did with the recent discussion about *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. This is one problem, but people who are going to bookstores, they want to learn about Auschwitz, they'll find those books! This is the market. So, this is why we're going to do more and more historical reviews like this. We've already had these discussions within the Research Department that this is a new part of our mission. We have to respond to this.

**And put that on social media, presumably?**

Yes, *Memoria* too.

**I suppose, again, you've got to be careful again with the language, so that authors don't feel like they're being attacked or whatever.**

Right now, I have less and less-, this is sloppy writing, this is not fiction writing. I mean, I don't have any problems saying this. I'm not having any problems when we say [about] *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, "If you want to learn the story of the Holocaust, avoid this book!" I'm not saying this is bad writing. I'm not a literary critic. I'm not a writing critic, you can do beautiful language. But simply the facts are wrong in this book, and the book is rubbish, for us, in this sense. We will not recommend it to people who want to learn about Auschwitz.

**I found it quite ironic, actually, when John Boyne was saying about this genre, and all the damage it's doing.**

Oh yes, and this is why I sent this Tweet.

**Yeah, it was like, "Have you seen how much damage *you've* done to the UK school system?!"**

Yes! And then his responses were ridiculous, and then he deleted the Tweet. There is now a new great article that two Irish journalists wrote, and the [most] recent is just from yesterday. Really, it's good. Without this social media thing, we wouldn't be able to get engaged with that kind of discussion. No, 20 years ago-, because we can send a Tweet or write something more on Facebook or anywhere else, and it's visible immediately, and the outer [world] can see that. Social media basically changed the way we communicate, for good and for bad. So, we are simply using it.

**Going back, sorry, very quickly and very slightly, to when we were talking about the shift with the dialogue. If we think about 20 years ago – obviously, I know you weren't working here 20 years ago – but would you not think that maybe, even then, the**

**dialogue would have been different, in terms of the Museum would have been, perhaps, more, “This is it, this is how it was,” and then that’s it. But now, even with those tools, it’s moved to, “This is how it was, this is what you need to think about now. How do you feel about commemorating this? How do you feel about remembering?” Do you see what I mean?**

No.

**So, do you think we would still have had these kinds of conversations 20 years ago?**

We couldn’t have had this kind of conversation, because most of the things we’re talking about didn’t exist. I mean, we were correcting journalists 20 years ago. We were desperately trying to find some kind of a phone call somewhere. You know, we were writing mail, real mail, [to] London or somewhere, and then send[ing it], and then maybe 20 days after you would receive a reply. It all was there. We would probably try to say something, but not many people would listen. Today, when people ask me, do I find antisemitism is a problem of Twitter or something, I say, “Antisemites existed, but we didn’t hear them.” You know, it’s like some of the conversations you see on Twitter are like a conversation you can have at a table at a bar. You drink some shots, (*imitates drunk person*), you discuss, and you, “Oh, these Jews here...” So, 20 years ago, this conversation would stay at this table in a bar. Today, people at this table in a bar can take their phones and Tweet exactly the same thing that they said and the world can see that. This is the difference. But our voice is stronger because I can-, you know, it’s multiplied by the followers that we have and they share it, and also the same with this hateful language, and that’s it. 20 years ago, we simply weren’t aware that these conversations [took] place, and they did [take] place. Today, we are aware because people make it public, and that’s it.

**Good point! Okay, final question. Obviously, people come to the Museum for all sorts of different reasons, whether it’s tourism, or school groups, or whatever it might be. If it’s possible to, if you had to pinpoint your primary audience, in terms of digital resources, who would you say they are, or maybe that person is?**

Everyone. I don’t have a target group. Sometimes people say, when we say “Never again,” they think the survivors are leaving, the memory will fade away, and somehow, they put the responsibility to remember on the survivors. Or sometimes people say, “New generations should come here, young people should learn, we should organise school groups,” and they say the responsibility of memory is on the future generations. In both cases, they forget about...this is our world. This is our responsibility. Memory is for us. However harsh it sounds, the dead people do not need our memory. They’re dead. We need this memory. And it’s not [that] we should put it either on the survivors or put it on the future generations. This is why I think that the target group for me is everyone. It’s everyone who-, no, really, everyone. I want to reach everyone.

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