

**(MIS)PERFORMING THE HOLOCAUST:  
A STUDY OF THE SHIFTING NARRATIVES AND  
TABOOS OF TOURIST SELF-PORTRAITURE AT  
AUSCHWITZ MUSEUM**

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# Abstract

Auschwitz Museum is simultaneously a site of one of the darkest points in modern history, and a popular tourist attraction for millions of international visitors. Academic literature, as well as Auschwitz Museum's own materials, depicts the site as the ultimate example of 'dark tourism', where tourists can learn about and reflect on the horrors of the Holocaust. Such literature also suggests that visitor behaviour is governed by the seriousness of the site's history, pre-existing Holocaust narratives, and a Foucauldian sense that they are being watched and judged. However, for several years, mass media commentary has focused on tourists' inappropriate behaviour when visiting Auschwitz Museum, particularly the ways that younger tourists take selfies and pose for self-portraits, just as they would at any other site of mass tourism. This mismatch leads one to ask whether Auschwitz Museum is a site of dark or mass tourism, what impact tourism and social media have on existing Holocaust narratives and taboos about visual depictions of the Holocaust, and whether selfies and self-portraits are as widespread as mass media would suggest or as non-existent as seen by academics.

This thesis examines the impact that tourism has on existing Holocaust narratives and taboos about visual depictions of the Holocaust. It does this by looking at the conflict driven by the Museum's educational mandate, which requires its acceptance and encouragement of tourism, and the extent to which signifiers of mass tourism suggest to tourists that they can behave as they would at any other mass tourism destination. It studies previous examples where there have been public debates about taboo-violating tourist photography at Auschwitz Museum, and qualitatively and quantitatively examines six months of Auschwitz Museum visitor selfies and self-portraits posted on photo and video sharing app Instagram, finding three themes: self-placement, witnessing, and rebellion.

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# Introduction

Holocaust memory narratives are maintained by a set of rules and taboos designed to protect memories of victims and communicate a particular narrative of the past. These rules and taboos are governed by elite actors in the media, religious communities, and national governments, and have historically been at odds with the depiction of the Holocaust as portrayed in popular culture. Current mass media commentary suggests that elite efforts may be losing ground, and that there is a significant ongoing renegotiation of Holocaust memory narratives, evidenced by the volume of ‘disrespectful’ selfies and self-portraits taken at sites of Holocaust memory like Auschwitz Museum. Such commentary typically blames the commodification of the self via social media, mass tourism, and a younger generation’s lack of knowledge or sensitivity for behaviour that defies existing taboos governing visual representations of Holocaust narratives. For several years, there has been ongoing public debate about acceptable ways to interact with Holocaust narrative on social media, suggesting that taboos are eroding and Holocaust memories are not being treated with the respect that society feels they are due.

Academia typically views sites of Holocaust memory as examples of ‘dark tourism’, visited by individuals who seek to confront their anxieties about modern life, and whose photography is limited by a Foucauldian assumption that they are being watched or judged, and therefore must govern themselves accordingly.<sup>1</sup> Till Hilmar’s academic analysis of tourist photography at Auschwitz Museum is driven by the idea that tourists’ ethical considerations limit the types of photographs that they feel comfortable taking during their visit, and accordingly, the only types of photography he observes at Auschwitz produces images that are serious and solemn, keeping with general themes of commemoration, memorialization, and an

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, “‘Panopticism’ from *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*,” *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 2, no. 1 (2008): 1–12.

urge to ensure that such atrocities never happen again.<sup>2</sup> Studying tourist behaviour at Holocaust memorials, Daniel Reynolds “observed no posed photos with friends or family smiling at the lens. Were tourists to take such photos at places like Auschwitz or Treblinka, they would no doubt earn disapproving looks from fellow tourists.”<sup>3</sup>

By focusing on elite-driven Holocaust narratives and taboos that create a ‘firewall’ around visual depictions of the Holocaust, is academia missing the extent to which social media and mass tourism is reshaping Holocaust narratives, or is mass media over-emphasizing the number of selfies and self-portraits that tourists take when visiting sites of genocide as part of a broader narrative criticizing social media and millennial behaviour? While Hilmar and Reynolds may not have observed any self-portraits in their research, these photos do exist on Instagram, and have attracted the attention of Auschwitz Museum, as well as numerous journalists, academics, and social media users.

In 2014, a teenage Twitter user was publicly criticized by an online mob for posting a selfie taken at Auschwitz. Since then, various artists and social commentators have collected selfies and self-portraits taken at spaces of Holocaust commemoration in order to make a statement about the erosion of Holocaust memory narratives online, and the casual, disrespectful ways that tourists govern themselves at sites of Holocaust memory. In March 2019, Auschwitz Museum tweeted a warning to visitors warning about unacceptable behaviour and photography at Birkenau. In response to digital memory project @eva.stories, which asked viewers to consider what it would be like if Instagram had existed during the Holocaust, critics warned in May 2019 that such a project was only a short step away from “selfies at the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau.”<sup>4</sup> Yet according to mass media criticism, these photographs already

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<sup>2</sup> Till Hilmar, “Storyboards of Remembrance: Representations of the Past in Visitors’ Photography at Auschwitz,” *Memory Studies* 9, no. 4 (October 2016): 455–70.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Reynolds, “Consumers or Witnesses? Holocaust Tourists and the Problem of Authenticity,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 16, no. 2 (July 2016): 339.

<sup>4</sup> Cristina Burack and Dana Regev, “‘Eva Stories’: Remembering the Holocaust with Instagram,” DW.com, May 2, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/eva-stories-remembering-the-holocaust-with-instagram/a-48580311>.

exist, are evidence that young people “now tend to approach the Holocaust without... a default position of veneration,”<sup>5</sup> and are widespread enough to draw censure from Auschwitz Museum itself.

This thesis will ask what is the significance of such photographs with respect to Holocaust narrative. It will use Auschwitz Museum as a case study to re-examine assumptions about Holocaust memorials as sites of dark tourism, and will analyze six months of Instagram photographs taken at the Museum in order to better understand tourism’s role in shaping narratives about the Holocaust. By examining a six-month sample of Auschwitz Museum tourist photography posted on Instagram, it will quantify the extent to which tourists are taking selfies at Auschwitz Museum in order to understand if we are witnessing a widespread cultural shift in visual representations of the Holocaust. It will also contribute to academic literature by creating a classification system for self-portraits taken at sites of genocide and mass atrocities.

Chapter 1 will consider how Holocaust narratives are depicted in mass culture, and examine how the act of tourism can shape memory narratives. Chapter 2 examines how Auschwitz Museum has become a major ‘mass’ tourist destination and what impact this has had on the visual depiction of Holocaust narratives in mass culture. Chapter 3 examines the themes prevalent in six months’ worth of tourists’ Instagram self-portraits taken at Auschwitz Museum in search of evidence of renegotiation of taboos regarding Holocaust memory narrative.

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<sup>5</sup> Simone Schweber, “‘Holocaust Fatigue’: Teaching It Today,” *Social Education*, February 2006, 48–49.



# Chapter 1 – Theories of trauma and tourism

The narrative of trauma associated with the Holocaust has undergone dramatic shifts in Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and North America. Just as Europe did not simply wake up one morning to embrace the anti-Semitism and racism that made the Holocaust possible, global acceptance of the Holocaust as the primary symbol of evil in the 20<sup>th</sup> century required a series of ongoing narrative shifts that continue today.<sup>6</sup> Narratives in Central and Eastern Europe continue to focus on national experiences of occupation and victimization, viewing Stalinism and Nazism as equally bad experiences foisted on an unwilling population, while Western European and North American narratives focus on the plight of Jews and minorities, and ensuring that such atrocities never happen again.<sup>7</sup> Germany's post-War experiences are entirely unique. For the Holocaust to take its rightful place as the 20th century trauma of Europe, Europeans have to move beyond their own feelings of war victimization, in order to examine their role – active or passive – in allowing the Holocaust to happen.<sup>8</sup> These narratives play out in education, but also in mass culture, and are governed by taboos that limit the ways Holocaust narrative can be used in order to protect the memories of Holocaust victims.

## 1.1. Cultural depictions of the Holocaust

As a vehicle for perpetuating Holocaust narratives, cultural depictions of the Holocaust have been evolving since the moment of allied victory in 1945. With debates ranging from what words to use when referring to the Nazis' mass extermination of Jews, to how acceptable

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<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The 'Holocaust' from War Crime to Trauma Drama," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (February 2002): 5–85.

<sup>7</sup> Annabelle Littoz-Monnet, 'The EU Politics of Remembrance: Can Europeans Remember Together?', *West European Politics* 35, no. 5 (September 2012): 1182–1202; Stefan Berger, 'Remembering the Second World War in Western Europe, 1945-2005', in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, Studies in Contemporary European History, v. 6 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 127-29.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2012): 15.

it is for artists to take creative liberties when telling the Holocaust story, to whether art is even still possible after such a trauma, Holocaust memory narratives are continually being debated, with many of the debate participants falling into one of two camps. The first can be thought of as “memory truthers” who seek to honour the memory of victims by witnessing exactly their memories, without embellishment. This includes directors like Claude Lanzmann, as well as memory organizations like Auschwitz Museum and Yad Vashem, that seek to educate, rather than entertain. The second can be thought of as “mass marketers” who use cultural genres like historical fiction to bring Holocaust stories to the general public by appealing to tropes of drama, romance, and rebellion popularized in mass culture. While “memory truthers” are largely successful in defining the Holocaust narrative and maintaining taboos around it, “mass marketers” have brought stories of the Holocaust to millions who would have otherwise not given this era in history a second thought after the completion of their formal education.

### 1.1.1. Depictions In film, television, and literature

Discussing his movie *Shoah*, director Claude Lanzmann addresses how the Holocaust occupies a unique place in history, having “created a circle of flame around itself, a boundary not to be crossed, since horror in the absolute degree cannot be communicated.”<sup>9</sup> Lanzmann’s idea that any fictionalization of the Holocaust story to appeal to mass audiences is to deny its victims their rightful justice places him firmly in the “memory truthers” school of thought. The Holocaust, for Lanzmann, was simply too terrible to attempt to tell a story that involves even the slightest fictionalization. “Memory truthers” would argue that mass market fictionalizations of the Holocaust like *Schindler’s List*, *Life is Beautiful*, and *The Holocaust* violate this taboo because they involve dramatized retellings of the Holocaust story that take liberties with facts in order to appeal to mass audiences, and because the search for uplifting stories that can be

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<sup>9</sup> Claude Lanzmann, “From the Holocaust to ‘Holocaust,’” in *Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah: Key Essays*, ed. Stuart Liebman (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.

consumed by mass audiences involves an ahistorical focus on “ordinary people” saving Jews, leading the viewer to falsely believe that resistance to Nazism was widespread.<sup>10</sup> Lanzmann acknowledges that this taboo leads to a conundrum: the Holocaust is so horrible that to attempt to communicate about the Holocaust is necessarily to trivialize it, but remaining silent about the past allows history to be repeated.<sup>11</sup> For Lanzmann, authenticity can only be accessed through direct memory. Even the slightest amount of fictionalization for dramatic purposes is taboo, and only through direct witnessing can the Holocaust story be told. Authenticity is the only way to truly protect and honour the memory of those who were murdered, and to ensure such atrocities do not happen again.

This is not to suggest, however, that Lanzmann would say that all dramatic depictions of the Holocaust are forbidden. His praise for the 2015 Hungarian film *Son of Saul*, where director Laszlo Nemes tells the story of the personal rebellion of a member of the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando*<sup>12</sup> suggests that there is a ‘tasteful’ way to tell Holocaust stories. In this case, it becomes acceptable to focus on the complexity of one man’s experience, without searching for heroes, looking for an uplifting message, or making use of cinematic tools to evoke an emotional response from the viewer.<sup>13</sup> It could also suggest that the taboo in question evolved in the years between the release of the two films.

While Lanzmann’s taboo continues to find a supportive audience among Holocaust scholars, mass culture has not adhered to the solemn reverence and careful depiction of the Holocaust that such elites demand, nor, argues film scholar Lawrence Baron, should it stick to

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<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present: The Changing Focus of Contemporary Holocaust Cinema*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010): 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*: 30.

<sup>12</sup> Rachel Donadio, “In ‘Son of Saul,’ Laszlo Nemes Expands the Language of Holocaust Films,” New York Times, December 14, 2015, accessed May 13, 2019, [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/15/movies/in-son-of-saul-laszlo-nemes-expands-the-language-of-holocaust-films.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/15/movies/in-son-of-saul-laszlo-nemes-expands-the-language-of-holocaust-films.html?_r=0); Richard Brody, “‘Son of Saul’ and the Ungraspable Horrors of Auschwitz,” The New Yorker, December 30, 2015, accessed May 13, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/son-of-saul-and-the-ungraspable-horrors-of-auschwitz>.

<sup>13</sup> Naomi Pfefferman, “‘Son of Saul’: A Holocaust Film through a Different Lens,” Jewish Journal, October 29, 2015, accessed May 13, 2019, <https://jewishjournal.com/hollywood/179034/>.

such a singular means of depicting one of the greatest atrocities in modern history.<sup>14</sup> The goal of Holocaust filmmaking, according to Baron, should be to encourage an emotional or thoughtful response in the viewer, not to adhere to one particular standard of storytelling.<sup>15</sup> Popularized depictions of the Holocaust, like Stephen Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, or novels like Heather Morris' *The Tattooist of Auschwitz* bring a story of the Holocaust to a broad audience, but are widely criticized by "memory truthers" for presenting dramatic depictions as fact to an audience that may not have enough knowledge to distinguish the difference, and for exploiting the suffering of millions for commercial gain.<sup>16</sup> However, one can also argue that they are much more successful than Lanzmann or Nemes' films at bringing the story of the Holocaust to the wider public.

As Holocaust survivors pass away and as the Holocaust slips further into history, understanding it as something outside of a cinematic, academic, or broad mass cultural representation becomes more difficult, especially for younger generations. The commercial success of movies like *Schindler's List* also makes it easier to use the Holocaust as a backdrop for other artistic projects; as the Holocaust is seen more often in mass culture, its ongoing use as a backdrop or storytelling device becomes more widespread, and more acceptable to consumers of mass culture. Adhering to Lanzmann's taboo becomes that much more difficult, but the widespread use of the Holocaust as a cinematic depiction of absolute evil also ensures that its memory is transmitted around the world – even to countries with a minimal link to Jews who died in the genocide – and to future generations.<sup>17</sup>

While television and movies remain the dominant form of media consumption for tweens and teens, social media, and mobile and online gaming take up an increasingly larger

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<sup>14</sup> Baron: vii-ix.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*: vii.

<sup>16</sup> Alison Flood, 'The Tattooist of Auschwitz Attacked as Inauthentic by Camp Memorial Centre', The Guardian, 7 December 2018, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/dec/07/the-tattooist-of-auschwitz-attacked-as-inauthentic-by-camp-memorial-centre>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*: 10-11.

amount of young people's time.<sup>18</sup> While this suggests a shift into digital space for media consumption overall, it also mirrors the shift from books and school to television and cinema as a source for knowledge about the Holocaust seen in American adults in the 1990s.<sup>19</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Holocaust memory would bleed over into the digital space, and be represented in video games and on social media. Yet what has actually happened is a reinvigorated debate about the taboo around Holocaust representation, with certain depictions widely understood as acceptable, like the Shoah Foundation's database of digital recordings of more than 50,000 survivors; depictions considered unacceptable – which have for the most part, failed to make it to market – like video games taking place in concentration camps;<sup>20</sup> and the use of Holocaust narratives on social media, where the taboo is actively being debated in real time.

## 1.2. Online media

Online media is emerging as the newest battlefield in the ongoing debate between “memory truthers” and “mass marketers” over Holocaust memory narrative. While traditional spaces of mass culture storytelling, like cinema, television, and literature have a high barrier to entry, the online space is more democratic. Digital media can be created and shared widely by anyone with a smartphone. Concerns about digital depictions of the Holocaust are roughly the same as those in other forms of media, ranging from concerns about exploitation of Holocaust memory for personal gain, the promotion of false narratives or factual inaccuracies, and a lack of sensitivity in the handling of Holocaust memory, but it seems as though the low barrier to

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<sup>18</sup> Vicky Rideout, “The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens” (San Francisco, CA: Common Sense, 2015), accessed 14 April 2019, [https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/census\\_researchreport.pdf](https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/census_researchreport.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Baron: 6.

<sup>20</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, “Transnational Holocaust Memory, Digital Culture and the End of Reception Studies,” in *The Twentieth Century in European Memory*, ed. Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (Brill, 2017), 331–34.

entry into the digital space stokes fears within the “memory truther” community about the appropriateness and care that will be used with Holocaust memory across online platforms. One such concern, which could apply to television as well as digital media, is the appearance of Holocaust memory alongside less serious content and advertisements.<sup>21</sup> Another, is the use of the Holocaust or Holocaust memory for self-promotion.

This concern with self-promotion is related to the concept of ‘instafame’, the idea that it is possible for non-celebrities to achieve a form of micro-celebrity online, cultivating a large base of followers despite their relative unimportance offline. Alice Marwick describes instafame as a method of online self-presentation where users purposely behave in an attention-seeking manner, as though they were already celebrities, in order to cultivate a following.<sup>22</sup> As the content created by these micro-celebrity accounts is so large, they set trends for the broader Instagram user base, which then disseminate onto other online platforms and mass culture more broadly. For example, according to Hu *et al*’s 2014 study of a random sample of photographs on Instagram, nearly half of the photographs in a random sample of Instagram posts were selfies or groups of friends,<sup>23</sup> which can be seen as self-promotional. Jonas Larsen notes that “people have learnt the importance and the pleasure of exhibiting themselves in a world in which the consciousness of one’s constant visibility has never been more intense.”<sup>24</sup>

As one *raison d’être* of social networking sites is to share thoughts and experiences in exchange for likes and follows, sharing self-portraits online can be seen as a form of consumerization of the self for status. While photography was once primarily used to document

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<sup>21</sup> Brandon Wardell and Jack Wagner, “Episode 138: Mmmm Chocotle Feat. Will Meneker,” Yeah, But Still, accessed May 21, 2019, <https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/yeah-but-still-2/yeah-but-still>.

<sup>22</sup> Alice E. Marwick, “Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy,” *Public Culture* 27, no. 1 75 (January 2015): 138.

<sup>23</sup> Yuheng Hu, Lydia Manikonda, and Subbarao Kambhampati, “What We Instagram: A First Analysis of Instagram Photo Content and User Types,” *International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media; Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 2014, <https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM14/paper/view/8118/8087>: 597.

<sup>24</sup> Jonas Larsen, “Geographies of Tourism Photography: Choreographies and Performances,” in *Geographies of Communication*, ed. Jesper Falkheimer and André Jansson (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2006), 243–61.

moments in time, online, self-portraiture suggests a turn away from the creation of photographs as memory vehicles, and towards a way to package a moment of the self for the consumption of others.<sup>25</sup> Sharing self-portraits allows users to publicly share their stories by creating a sense of intimacy with an audience invited to participate in a moment that would have otherwise been private.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, as sharing new knowledge, information, photographs, or experiences is a common use of social media; when social media users learn about the Holocaust, whether it is in school, by watching a film or reading a book, after talking to a survivor, or while visiting a museum or memorial, they may feel compelled to share the what they have learned or experienced with their networks on online.

Similar to the proliferation of the Holocaust as a setting or backdrop to storytelling in mass culture, the more Holocaust narratives are seen online, the more normalized they become on those platforms. While a user might have the best intentions when expressing an idea or opinion that is new or meaningful to them, presenting the Holocaust in the same style and alongside complaints about one's day, photographs from the weekend, or other attention-seeking behaviour causes hand-wringing among those in the "memory truther" community, who fear exploitation or commodification of the Holocaust for social media users' micro-celebrity status.

### 1.3. Tourism

Tourism is one area in particular where online photography and micro-celebrity have an impact in shaping behaviour. There are numerous indications that tourists look at social media – particularly Instagram – when planning holidays. Boards of tourism work with influencers to promote off-the-beaten-path destinations, there is an increased use of mobile

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*: 140-41.

<sup>26</sup> Larissa Hjorth and Sarah Pink, "New Visualities and the Digital Wayfarer: Reconceptualizing Camera Phone Photography and Locative Media," *Mobile Media & Communication* 2, no. 1 (January 2014): 42–45.

phones at tourist locations, reproduction of iconic tourism images are seen across numerous unrelated Instagram accounts, and news stories often appear about the ‘dark side’ of Instagram tourism, highlighting instances where tourists have fallen to their deaths attempting to take a photograph, or damaged fragile ecosystems in order to capture their own reproduction of an iconic image.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.3.1. What do tourists want?

There are different sub-groups within the broad category of ‘tourism’, corresponding to the various reasons that people travel. Aurelia Poon observes a primary distinction between ‘old’ or ‘mass tourism’, and ‘new’ or ‘alternative’ tourism. ‘Old’ or ‘mass tourism’ consists of the standardized, package experiences that became popular after World War II as a result of increased availability of airline travel and franchised businesses, multinational corporations entering into the tourism space, the development of the middle class, and paid vacations; ‘new’ or ‘alternative tourism’ began in the 1990s with the deregulation of the airline industry, the rise of mobile communications technology, and a greater understanding of the negative effects that mass tourism can have on host communities.<sup>28</sup> Erik Cohen envisions a typology of four kinds of tourists: the organized mass tourist, who is the least involved when it comes to organizing their own experiences, instead appreciating all-inclusive packages where they do not have to make decisions or go beyond their familiar bubble unless they choose to do so; the individual mass tourist, who also appreciates someone else make decisions, but is not specifically attached to a tour group; the explorer, who likes to experience the comforts of home while taking control of their own arrangements and experiencing as much that is new as possible; and the drifter,

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<sup>27</sup> Carrie Miller, “How Instagram Is Changing Travel,” National Geographic, January 26, 2017, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/travel-interests/arts-and-culture/how-instagram-is-changing-travel/>; Kerry Sanders and Laura Ratliff, “The ‘Instagram Effect’ on Tourism Brings More Business, More Concerns to Some Spots,” Today, January 13, 2019, <https://www.today.com/news/instagram-effect-tourism-brings-more-business-more-concerns-t146643>.

<sup>28</sup> Auliana Poon, “Competitive Strategies for a ‘New Tourism,’” in *Classic Reviews in Tourism*, ed. Christopher P. Cooper, Aspects of Tourism, 3 [i.e. 8] (Clevedon: Channel View Publ, 2003): 131-33.



who tries to completely immerse themselves in their new environment, appreciating novelty and a new sense of community.<sup>29</sup> The first two would be considered ‘mass tourists’ by Poon, while the last two could be seen as ‘alternative tourists’.

Each type of tourism has its devotees. Mass tourism lowers the logistical bar, making it easy for travellers who want to experience something new while also being able to access the comforts of home. Alternative tourism, in contrast, occurs when tourists willingly seek out scenarios that are dissimilar to what they would normally experience, and are often purposefully foreign. For alternative tourists, this could include immersing themselves in a particular culture, learning about a particular place or point in history, exploring personal curiosities, or having experiences that are unavailable or taboo in their home cultures. Tourists seek out the experiences they want, and tourist sites send signals to tourists, through advertising, infrastructure, and accessibility, about the kinds of tourists they expect to receive.

### **1.3.2. Mass tourism**

Globalization and capitalism encouraged a range of factors leading to the popularization of mass tourism. These include the rise of a middle class with disposable income and paid vacation; the development of communication and travel technologies that make the logistics of travel easier; and a sense from mass culture that under certain circumstances, ‘the other’ can be exciting, rather than threatening.<sup>30</sup> While the mass tourist’s goals are driven by the desire to experience sights and occurrences different from those of their everyday, they do not feel comfortable completely abandoning their own cultures and customs; rather, they wish to have new experiences without abandoning the relative comforts of home.<sup>31</sup>

Sites of mass tourism are relatively easy to spot. Industry springs up around them to facilitate the arrival and experience of tourists. Sites are developed in a way to be able to

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*: 166-68.

<sup>30</sup> Erik Cohen, “Toward a Sociology of International Tourism,” *Social Research*, 1972, 164-66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*: 166.

support large numbers of visitors, adding infrastructure like parking, food services, interpretive guides, physical security, online ticketing, and interpretive information. The communities around sites of mass tourism also develop accordingly, building lodging, opening restaurants, and facilitating transit between the site and major travel hubs. These signs of mass tourism inform tourists that they are in a location of tourism, and they can then govern themselves accordingly: acquiring tickets in advance, standing in line, dressing for the activity, allowing their bags to be searched by security guards, and so on. Signs of tourism also might prompt certain expectations: service in English, the ability to use credit cards, the purchasing or acquisition of souvenirs, feelings of happiness or adventure, and the permissibility and appropriateness of photography.

### 1.3.3. Dark tourism

Dark tourism is a form of alternative tourism that focuses on travel to places that are representative of dark periods in history. Academic literature locates a variety of reasons that travellers might engage specifically in dark tourism, including, but not limited to: *schadenfreude*, the contemplation of death, curiosity, entertainment, empathy, a quest for knowledge, and a sense of social responsibility.<sup>32</sup> Visiting dark sites can be the sole motivation for a trip, but dark tourism often overlaps with other forms of tourism.

With the Holocaust being one of the darkest periods in 20<sup>th</sup> century history, it is logical that academic literature discussing tourism at Auschwitz Museum uses the lens of dark tourism when approaching this ‘darkest of dark sites.’<sup>33</sup> Dark tourism can be positioned within a post-modernist structure consisting of an increased dependence on technology, as well as the sense of unease that accompanies life during late capitalism – attracting tourists to sites that reflect

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<sup>32</sup> Avital Biran, Yaniv Poria, and Gila Oren, “Sought Experiences at (Dark) Heritage Sites,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 38, no. 3 (July 2011): 825; Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley, “Consuming Dark Tourism: A Thanatological Perspective,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 35, no. 2 (April 2008): 590.

<sup>33</sup> For example, see: William F.S. Miles, “Auschwitz: Museum Interpretation and Darker Tourism,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 29, no. 4 (October 2002): 1175–78; Sarah Hodgkinson, “The Concentration Camp as a Site of ‘Dark Tourism,’” *Témoigner. Entre Histoire et Mémoire*, no. 116 (September 1, 2013): 22–32.

their anxieties about modern life.<sup>34</sup> A general acceptance of the commodification of everything makes it permissible for tourists to visit sites associated with dark periods in history, and makes it acceptable for local communities to reap the accompanying economic benefits. A. V. Seaton traces the beginnings of dark tourism – what he calls ‘thanatourism’ – back to the start of the Middle Ages through to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when people would travel to witness public executions, visit graves and battlefields, and view the sites of natural disasters.<sup>35</sup> He anchors this obsession with death in Christian culture, and notes that prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, thanatourism was a primary motivation for travel; it is only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to a “secular, moral discourse” that such voyeurism became taboo.<sup>36</sup>

Sites of dark tourism also have their own set of signs that act as behavioural signifiers for tourists. These sites may be less developed with respect to physical or transportation infrastructure, suggesting to tourists that they should arrange their own transportation, be prepared to walk long distances, bring their own meals, or be prepared to ‘rough it’ when it comes to lodging and personal hygiene. They may have visual signs of death like graves or commemorative monuments, which would tell tourists that this is a solemn place that requires respectful behaviour. Some have signifiers of conflict and are off limits entirely. They may be located in areas or countries that are currently experiencing or have recently experienced conflict or natural disaster. These signs let tourists know how to behave appropriately and safely.

#### **1.3.4. Auschwitz Museum: A site of mass or dark tourism?**

While many academics consider Auschwitz Museum as the ‘darkest’ of dark tourism sites,<sup>37</sup> it is one of the most visited and most logistically well-developed tourist sites in Central

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<sup>34</sup> J. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism*, New ed. (Andover: Cengage Learning, 2010): 11.

<sup>35</sup> A. V. Seaton, “Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2, no. 4 (December 1996): 234–39.

<sup>36</sup> Seaton: 236–44.

<sup>37</sup> For example: Peter Hohenhaus, ‘Auschwitz’, Dark-Tourism.com, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190413144110/http://www.dark-tourism.com/index.php/15-countries/individual->

Europe, suggesting its popularity as a site of mass tourism. The Museum offers tourists seeking a ‘dark tourism experience’ with the opportunity for solemn reflection on the finality of death and the evil that lies within humanity, but it has also removed most of the logistical barriers that would discourage mass tourists from visiting. There are numerous signifiers of tourism that communicate to tourists that this site is as accessible and as worthy of visiting as any other site they may seek out while on holiday.

A 2011 study by Avital Biran *et al* found four factors motivating tourists’ decisions to visit Auschwitz Museum: a desire to learn and understand, the need to see Auschwitz in order to better grasp the atrocities of the Holocaust, wanting to visit a famous site of mass death – which includes a desire to empathize with victims, and wanting to have what the authors describe as an “emotional heritage experience”.<sup>38</sup> These findings, according to the authors, are similar to the motives driving mass tourism to non-dark heritage sites, specifically: education, emotional involvement, identity formation, and seeking authenticity.<sup>39</sup> For Biran *et al*, this suggests that tourism to Auschwitz should be viewed as heritage tourism at a dark site, rather than dark tourism more generally, as tourist motives are varied, and an interest in death specifically on the part of the tourist is less a driver than those interests driving mass tourism.<sup>40</sup>

#### 1.4. The tourist as a photographer

Photography is an indispensable element of tourism, so intrinsically connected to the practice of tourism that the ‘tourist gaze’ cannot be disconnected from the act of leisure travel.<sup>41</sup>

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chapters/529-auschwitz; Sarah Hodgkinson, ‘The Concentration Camp as a Site of “Dark Tourism”’, *Témoigner. Entre Histoire et Mémoire*, no. 116 (1 September 2013): 22–32; William F.S. Miles, ‘Auschwitz: Museum Interpretation and Darker Tourism’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 29, no. 4 (October 2002): 1175–78; Rachael Raine, ‘A Dark Tourist Spectrum’, ed. Avital Birn, *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 7, no. 3 (2 August 2013): 242–56.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*: 828–31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*: 836–37.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*: 836.

<sup>41</sup> Larsen, ‘Geographies of Tourism Photography: Choreographies and Performances’: 243–46.

“People travel in order to see and photograph what they have already consumed in image form,”<sup>42</sup> says Jonas Larsen. The ritual of tourist photography not only makes tourists – with a camera hanging around their neck or smartphone raised in hand – identifiable, and photographs become a souvenir that says ‘I saw this’ and ‘I was there’.<sup>43</sup> Tourist photography is a self-perpetuating practice: tourists see other tourists taking photographs, see others’ vacation photographs, and feel that photography is an essential part of performing tourism, to be repeated on their own trips.<sup>44</sup>

Tourist photography turns tourist sites into stages of performance where “in addition to looking at landscapes, tourists enact them corporeally, playing, acting, directing, and posing. [Places are] woven into the webs of stories and narratives people produce when they sustain and construct their social identities.”<sup>45</sup> People experience things and places through photography; anything worth seeing or doing is also worth photographing and sharing, because photography is a way to make an experience last forever.<sup>46</sup> Yet the disconnect between the moment being photographed and the moment when the photograph is consumed means a great deal of context is lost, including emotion and adjacent events, while the viewer adds their own opinions to their interpretation.<sup>47</sup>

Increasingly, social media is the means by which people see others’ vacation photographs, and in many cases, amateur tourist photography shared online has a similar aesthetic. Tourists attempt to recreate classic photographs at well-known locations, use similar tactics of framing notable objects, capture image souvenirs or other memory aids that provide them with an opportunity to tell a broader story at a later date, or highlight the foreignness of

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*: 249.

<sup>43</sup> Mike Robinson and David Picard, *The Framed World: Tourism, Tourists and Photography* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub., 2009): 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*: 7.

<sup>45</sup> Larsen, ‘Geographies of Tourism Photography: Choreographies and Performances’: 252.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*: 7-8.

<sup>47</sup> Mark Neumann, “The Traveling Eye Photography, Tourism and Ethnography,” *Visual Sociology* 7, no. 2 (September 1992): 29.

their experiences by contrasting themselves or their companions with a local environment.<sup>48</sup> By framing photographs with identifiable locations or visuals in the background, the photograph can serve as a memory object of a particular trip to a particular destination in a way that a photograph without landmarks cannot.<sup>49</sup>

### **1.5. A clash of tourism and memory**

With the impacts of tourism and social media in mind, one can ask how relevant Lanzmann's taboo is today. While Lanzmann's *Shoah* may be the gold standard when it comes to telling the story of the Holocaust, dozens of films and television shows have come since, few of which have followed Lanzmann's firewall, and all of which have been and currently are much more accessible to consumers of present-day mass culture. The distrust of mass cultural engagement with the Holocaust respects Lanzmann's firewall around the Holocaust, but it constructs a second one that prevents all but the most scholarly, the most contemplative, the most sensitive "memory truthers" from interacting with the topic, making it inaccessible to the broader public. However, the rise of digital media and tourism at sites of Holocaust memory is democratizing Holocaust narrative, making it more accessible to consumers of mass culture, and also giving users the ability to interact with the memory narrative through the creation of their own media.

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<sup>48</sup> Robinson and Picard: 17-19.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*: 20-23.

## Chapter 2: Tourism shaping Holocaust narratives

After the end of World War II, Nazi concentration camps Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II, and Birkenau were transformed into a site of tourism, history, education and memory. In 1947, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum was established to commemorate the memory and document the extermination of victims of the Holocaust, to educate the public about these atrocities, and to protect the site and its archives.<sup>50</sup> In its first year of operation, more than 170,000 people visited the former death camp; over two million visited in 2018.<sup>51</sup> This includes individual tourists, as well as school groups, participants on trips like International March of the Living<sup>52</sup>, individuals and delegations to conferences taking place in Poland, groups of Israeli Defence Force soldiers, Holocaust survivors, families of victims, and politicians.<sup>53</sup>

Auschwitz Museum's website and its social media posts suggest that the Museum's ideal visitor is an alternative tourist "pilgrim"<sup>54</sup> who comes prepared to spend time at the site building on their existing knowledge, 'witnessing' history, and paying respect to Auschwitz's victims and survivors. However, record numbers of visitors and a media narrative concerned about tourist behaviour suggests that despite the Museum's preference for 'pilgrims', its goal of educating as many people as possible transformed it into a mass tourism site.

While a Nazi death camp may not seem like an obvious site of mass tourism, Auschwitz Museum has become a 'must-see' travel destination. Frommers travel guides says that a "trip

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<sup>50</sup> "Regulation of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage of 19 February 2013 on Granting of Statutes to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim," accessed April 23, 2019, <http://auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/auschwitz/inne/statut.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> "Visitor Numbers," Auschwitz.org, accessed April 22, 2019, <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/history-of-the-memorial/the-first-years-of-the-memorial/visitor-numbers>.

<sup>52</sup> The International March of the Living is an annual conference and education program that has brought more than 250,000 individuals to Poland and Israel to learn more about the Holocaust. Established in 1988, participants in the March walk from Auschwitz to Birkenau each year on Holocaust Remembrance Day as a tribute to victims of the Holocaust.

<sup>53</sup> "International March of the Living," accessed April 11, 2019, <https://motl.org>; "Return to Auschwitz: Israel Keeps Holocaust Memories Alive," *BBC News* (Oświęcim, Poland, June 24, 2013), accessed 11 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-23030550/return-to-auschwitz-israel-keeps-holocaust-memories-alive>.

<sup>54</sup> Białecka, *European Pack for Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum*: 163.

to Kraków provides an excellent opportunity to visit the former Nazi concentration and extermination camps at Auschwitz”, is an “easy daytrip”, and is “the most moving experience you’ll have in Poland, [with] the impressions you form here [lasting] a lifetime.”<sup>55</sup> More than two million people have followed such advice and visited the Museum each year since 2016.<sup>56</sup>

While Holocaust narratives have historically been driven through top-down elite forces and broader mass culture like cinema, literature, and television, tourism has a bottom-up influence over the ways Holocaust narratives are interpreted and disseminated through society. Armed with a smartphone or camera, the tourist can interpret, rewrite, and share new or modified narratives with an international audience that once was only reachable by elites with significant financial backing of production companies, publishing houses or national governments. While it can be argued that individual tourists still do not have direct access to global audiences, the level of outrage that ensues when tourists violate taboos or push the boundaries of existing narratives suggests that the tourist’s role in shaping Holocaust narratives is worth examining. This chapter will echo the conclusion drawn by Biran *et al* – that Auschwitz Museum is a site of mass tourism – by focusing on the impact that the Museum’s educational mandate has had on its development as a tourist destination, the kinds of tourists who visit as a result, and the ways that they interact with Holocaust narratives on- and offline.

## 2.1. Tourism and education

The International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, co-located at the Auschwitz Museum, has a mission to “provide a learning experience... further a deeper understanding of the origins of intolerance, racism, and anti-Semitism [and] foster reflection

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<sup>55</sup> “Things to Do in Auschwitz-Birkenau,” Frommer’s, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://www.frommers.com/destinations/auschwitz-birkenau>.

<sup>56</sup> “Attendance,” Auschwitz.org, 2018, <http://auschwitz.org/en/visiting/attendance/>.



about the meaning of personal responsibility today, in Europe and beyond.”<sup>57</sup> Tourism becomes necessary in order to meet this mandate. Approximately 80% of visitors participate in a guided tour led by a Museum Educator,<sup>58</sup> and these tours fulfill a tourist’s desire to understand and contextualize their experiences, help the Museum to maintain an orderly flow of visitors, and to ensure that tourists receive a baseline, in-language experience, see ‘important’ exhibits,<sup>59</sup> and receive relevant information that fits within the narrative that Auschwitz Museum wishes to perpetuate.

However, there is an inherent conflict at the heart of this mandate. In order to educate as many people as possible, the Museum must encourage tourism. It must develop tourist infrastructure, which can act as a signifier to tourists that they are in another site of mass tourism, rather than somewhere to be studied or revered. The mandate also means accepting that there will be visitors with varying levels of emotional maturity and historical knowledge. The Museum sees this as a potential site of conflict, lamenting that “unfortunately, many [visitors] treat Auschwitz like a typical tourist attraction. These people come to the museum interested only in visiting another attraction in the canon of important and fashionable places to visit.”<sup>60</sup> Such a tone suggests the Museum views itself as different from other sites of mass tourism, yet in order to fulfill its educational mandate, it finds itself in a place where it must act like other sites of mass tourism in order to encourage visitor attendance.

Confusion over the type of experience one can expect at Auschwitz Museum cannot just be blamed on visitors’ limited emotional sensitivity or lack of historical knowledge. The Museum and the tourist industry that has developed around it cater to Cohen’s first three types

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<sup>57</sup> ‘Mission Statement’, Auschwitz.org, 2018, accessed May 23, 2019, <http://auschwitz.org/en/education/iceah-general-information/mission-statement/>.

<sup>58</sup> “Attendance.”

<sup>59</sup> This includes stops at the Museum’s permanent exhibitions and buildings in the main Auschwitz camp, as well as the prisoner barracks and unloading platforms at the Birkenau camp.

<sup>60</sup> Bialecka, *European Pack for Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum* 163.

of tourists: organized and individual mass tourists, and explorers.<sup>61</sup> There is an extensive number of tour packages on offer by private industry, catering to all types of tourists. The Museum and tour operators have embraced the use of technology, specifically as a way to make travel arrangements. There is a well-developed tourism industry in neighbouring communities of Oswiecim and Krakow to support tourism, and the developed tourist infrastructure at and around the Museum. All of these act as signifiers to tourists that they are experiencing a site of mass tourism, and suggest a set of behaviours that would be appropriate at other mass tourism sites, but can be in conflict with the emotional and historical seriousness of the site.

## 2.2. Auschwitz Museum as a site of mass tourism

Funded by significant financial investments made by private donors and governments, the Museum has well-developed tourist facilities, including car and coach parking, a free shuttle bus between the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps, online ticketing, tour guides, washrooms and water fountains, a restaurant, a bag check, a movie theatre, and a bookstore, all of which are amenities seen at most tourist sites. Perhaps one of the most indicative signs of mass tourism is present in the restaurant located adjacent to the Museum, catering directly to the palates of western tourists by offering nine different types of pizza, English-style breakfast, pork products, and vegetarian and vegan dishes.<sup>62</sup> The Museum itself is a hybrid of modern and historical buildings, maintained and upgraded to adhere to building codes, but presenting itself as a journey back in time. The layout of the Museum does not adhere to historical accuracy, but visitors are allowed to believe that the *Arbeit macht frei* gate marks the camp's entrance and that the crematorium they see was really in use, when it is a replica located

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<sup>61</sup> Cohen, "Toward a Sociology of International Tourism."

<sup>62</sup> "The Restaurant by the Museum," accessed April 28, 2019, <http://restauracja-oswiecim.info/en/>.

over a kilometre away from the actual crematorium's ruins.<sup>63</sup> This kind of knowledge would shatter the dramatic effect of passing through the gate or feeling as though you are walking in the footsteps of the *Sonderkommando*, but it does provide the entertainment that tourists expect while on holiday.

Another signifier of mass tourism is the Museum's reliance on the internet as a means to facilitate tourism. The Museum strongly encourages visitors to use their website to book entry and tour tickets in advance of their visit. Ticketing and logistics can present significant challenges for visitors, particularly during peak tourist times. As of late April 2019, the first available pair of tickets for an English-language guided tour via the Museum website required booking at least 22 days in advance, while it is possible to book a tour and round-trip transportation for the next day using a private operator.<sup>64</sup> While urging potential visitors to book tickets on the Museum's website increases the likelihood that tourists will read some of the educational materials before their visit, it also facilitates tourist's use of private tour operators, particularly if the Museum's cannot offer tickets during the desired date of visit, or if tourists do not feel up to the challenge of navigating the public bus or train systems, where information is not readily available in languages other than Polish.

Tour companies have removed nearly all logistical challenges, whether they are related to the limited availability of tickets, or an inability or unwillingness on the side of the tourist to arrange their own transportation. Experiences on offer from private companies are, for the most part, tailored to mass tourists. Tour companies offering day trips to Auschwitz Museum are abundant in the tourist areas of Kraków; all potential visitors need do is ask their hotel concierge, stop at one of many kiosks in the tourist district, or approach tour operators outside other tourist sites. A Google search for "visiting Auschwitz" results in multiple advertisements

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<sup>63</sup> Anne-Sophie Halbertsma, "Managing the Masses and Handling History: How Auschwitz-Birkenau Handles Mass Tourism," *Sojourn* 2, no. 1 (2018): 24-25.

<sup>64</sup> Search for a pair of English language guided tour tickets via [visit.auschwitz.com](http://visit.auschwitz.com) conducted on 23 April 2019.

for an ‘unforgettable trip’, ‘safe pick-up from your hotel’, ‘top-rated tours’, and ‘VIP entry’ at various price points.<sup>65</sup> Low cost options provide entry and tour tickets, as well as private transportation between Kraków and the Museum.<sup>66</sup> Tourists willing to spend more money can get round-trip transportation, entry and tour tickets, plus a four-stop pub crawl in Kraków for \$40 USD.<sup>67</sup> For \$62 USD, tourists can book a “five-star” full-day tour that includes hotel pick-up, lunch, and the ability to “skip the entrance lines” and:

*Visit two of Poland’s UNESCO-listed sites in a single day on [as part of a] combo tour from Kraków [where they will be able to] pay tribute to victims and survivors of the Holocaust on a guided tour of the Auschwitz-Birkenau former concentration camp, and then descend deep underground to explore the fascinating chambers and tunnels of the historic Wieliczka Salt Mine.*<sup>68</sup>

One British company offers Museum visits as part of a bespoke stag weekend, alongside activities like a visit to a gentleman’s club, a football match, paintball and go-karting.<sup>69</sup> The €129 ticket price for a two-day conference of social media influencers included an Auschwitz Museum visit and features footage of participants on the tour in an advertisement for next year’s conference of workshops guaranteed to help online influencers build and monetize their personal brands.<sup>70</sup>

While none of these experiences prevent an educational experience, and the tourist infrastructure at Auschwitz Museum does not take away from the site’s historical seriousness, they do signal to tourists that Auschwitz Museum is a mass tourism site, which has an impact

<sup>65</sup> Search conducted on 23 April 2019 via google.com

<sup>66</sup> “From Kraków: Auschwitz-Birkenau Tour with a Guidebook,” Get Your Guide, accessed April 23, 2019, [https://web.archive.org/web/20190423130141/https://www.getyourguide.com/krakow-l40/from-krakow-auschwitz-birkenau-tour-with-a-guidebook-t222072/?referrer\\_view\\_id=289a103d778121a6e42622f98b0c3e4d&referrer\\_view\\_position=0](https://web.archive.org/web/20190423130141/https://www.getyourguide.com/krakow-l40/from-krakow-auschwitz-birkenau-tour-with-a-guidebook-t222072/?referrer_view_id=289a103d778121a6e42622f98b0c3e4d&referrer_view_position=0).

<sup>67</sup> “Auschwitz Day Trip,” Civitatis, accessed April 23, 2019, [https://web.archive.org/web/20190423131204/https://www.civitatis.com/en/krakow/auschwitz-birkenau-day-trip?aid=100&cmp=en\\_RESTO&cmpint=PaidSearch&gclid=CjwKCAjw7\\_rlBRBaEiwAc23rhpMtVklvoWg6gWMDZm62FnQlgAtOlclIfrepXT06AfxVZGvobPfnxaRoC0h0QAvD\\_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds](https://web.archive.org/web/20190423131204/https://www.civitatis.com/en/krakow/auschwitz-birkenau-day-trip?aid=100&cmp=en_RESTO&cmpint=PaidSearch&gclid=CjwKCAjw7_rlBRBaEiwAc23rhpMtVklvoWg6gWMDZm62FnQlgAtOlclIfrepXT06AfxVZGvobPfnxaRoC0h0QAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds).

<sup>68</sup> “Full-Day Tour to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Wieliczka Salt Mine from Kraków,” Viator, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190423125419/https://www.viator.com/tours/Krakow/Full-Day-Tour-with-Guided-Visits-to-Auschwitz-Birkenau-and-Wieliczka-Salt-Mine-from-Krakow/d529-24963P13>.

<sup>69</sup> “Krakow Stag Do Weekends,” The Stag and Hen Experience, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190423192650/https://www.thestagandhenexperience.com/location/stag/krakow>.

<sup>70</sup> “TIS Krakow,” Trablin, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190423134008/https://trablin.com/tis-krakow/>.

on tourist behaviour. The combination of a visit to the site with pub crawls, stag weekends, conference experiences, or even commodities as banal as a private bus ride, pizza lunch, or the conveniences of booking tickets online communicates to tourists that they are primarily engaged in an act of tourism, rather than one of education.

Photographer Roger Cremers' depiction of tourists visiting Auschwitz captures subjects in this act of tourism: Orthodox Jewish men talking on cell phones while looking at their watches, tourists crouching or lying down to take photographs, families posed and smiling for a cell phone camera, selfies, graffiti, and notes wedged into the Birkenau train tracks reading 'free Tibet'.<sup>71</sup> Cremers' photography suggests that scholars like Hilmar and Reynolds do not capture the full spectrum of tourist behaviour at the site. The historical significance of the site itself, the narratives and stories told by Museum-certified guides, and the Museum exhibits can act as checks on mass tourist behaviour, but they cannot govern it entirely, because the infrastructure and the means by which tourists arrive at the site all suggest mass tourism.

Understanding that tourism allows it to fulfill its education mandate, the Museum tolerates tourist behaviour, like the desire to take photographs, ask questions, rest, wander off, and be passive consumers of information and experience, while also producing an amount of drama that makes visitors feel as though they are travelling back in time. While there are prohibitions against eating, drinking, and smoking within the Museum, and photography of certain exhibits is forbidden, rules around tourist behaviour are vague, and include suggestions like dressing and acting appropriately, leaving it up to the tourist to interpret, as to not discourage potential visitors. This level of tolerance ensures that the site will remain a tourist destination, allowing the Museum to continue to educate the public about the Holocaust, but also suggests that tourists' behaviour will continue to trend toward that which is acceptable at

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<sup>71</sup> Roger Cremers, "Auschwitz Tourist Behaviour," Roger Cremers, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://rogercremers.com/world-war-two-today/tourist-behaviour-in-auschwitz/>.

other mass tourism sites, challenging rules and taboos about how one should act at one of the world's deadliest sites

### **2.3. Tourist photography as an indication of narrative conflict**

Just like the Museum has vague rules about appropriate behaviour, officially, Auschwitz provides few photography-related guidelines for tourists, using their website to inform visitors of the following policy:

*Taking pictures on the grounds of the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oswiecim for own purposes, without use of a flash and stands, is allowed for exceptions of hall with the hair of Victims (block nr 4) and the basements of Block 11. Material may be used only in undertakings and projects that do not impugn or violate the good name of the Victims of Auschwitz Concentration Camp.*<sup>72</sup>

Signs asking visitors to refrain from flash photography, or prohibiting photography of certain exhibits are located sporadically around Museum grounds, but the general rule for visitors is be respectful, remember the seriousness of where they are and what happened there, and govern oneself accordingly. However, 'governing oneself accordingly' is influenced by a variety of signs and signals that the tourist receives from the location, including the conflicting signifiers of mass tourism. The resulting behaviours are popular topics for mass media commentary (particularly if they can be used to suggest that younger generations are insensitive or ignorant in comparison to older generations), as tourists struggle to navigate a scenario that simultaneously reminds them that they are at a site of mass genocide and a site of mass tourism.

#### **2.3.1. Selfies and self-portraits**

While photographs serve as memory markers, Washington Post writer Caitlin Dewey remarks at how easy it is to misunderstand self-portraits as:

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<sup>72</sup> 'Organisational Rules of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum', Auschwitz.org, 15 June 2009, accessed April 19, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190412130050/http://auschwitz.org/en/public-information/organisational-rules-of-the-auschwitz-birkenau-state-museum/>.

*a flagrant show of narcissism or a plea for attention, [which] may mean something different to the taker... [Selfies and self-portraits are] less a matter of self-glorification than self-documentation – ‘I was here.’ ‘This is who I was that day.’ ‘This happened.’*<sup>73</sup>

Author Jennifer Outlette believes selfies are an attempt to “place oneself in a context, to understand how we fit into a bigger picture.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, when asked how he felt about visitors taking selfies at Auschwitz, Museum social media director Pawel Sawicki provided the following response:

*I think that there is some universal tendency in us—people—to document, and a self-portrait made in a place that you visit is a kind of a proof that ‘I was there.’ Family albums are full of such pictures. But there are photographs being made—not only selfies—with a different motivation. If they just use the site as a background, if they are meant to be funny or are disrespectful in any way or they are manipulative, etc.—then of course this is simply wrong.*<sup>75</sup>

Sawicki acknowledges the all-too-human desire to place oneself within a historical context but also touches on the ‘wrongness’ that some feel when looking at self-portraits taken at Auschwitz Museum, especially when viewers can interpret a disrespectful, manipulative, or self-promotional tone. These could be completely acceptable at other locations – more than half of tourists in one study said they take photographs on vacation ‘very often’<sup>76</sup> – but viewers could be uncomfortable seeing the world’s largest graveyard used as a stage for performance and self-promotion. Erving Goffman speaks of this discomfort by comparing the viewer to a theatre patron catching an actor in an out-of-character behavior backstage, in a gaffe, or a *faux pas* that “discredit[s] or at least weaken[s] the claims about the self that the performer was attempting to project,”<sup>77</sup> and warns that such gestures are usually unintended and are the result of the individual not being able to predict the consequences of their behaviour.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Caitlin Dewey, “The Other Side of the Infamous ‘Auschwitz Selfie,’” *The Washington Post*, July 22, 2014, accessed April 13, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/22/the-other-side-of-the-infamous-auschwitz-selfie/?utm\\_term=.fbc209d57091](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/22/the-other-side-of-the-infamous-auschwitz-selfie/?utm_term=.fbc209d57091).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Leah Finnegan, “Instagrams from Auschwitz,” *The Awl*, June 12, 2014, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.theawl.com/2014/06/instagrams-from-auschwitz/>.

<sup>76</sup> Esther Konijn, Nienke Sluimer, and Ondrej Mitás, ‘Click to Share: Patterns in Tourist Photography and Sharing: Patterns in Tourist Photography and Sharing’, *International Journal of Tourism Research* 18, no. 6 (November 2016): 529.

<sup>77</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Repr (London: Penguin, 1990): 204.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*: 205.

There is a notable degree of concern in mass media and social commentary about selfies and self-portraits taken at Auschwitz Museum. Criticising Instagram account @eva.stories for asking what it would be like if a teenage girl had Instagram during the Holocaust, Haaretz columnist Yuval Mendelson writes that to introduce such narratives to social media platforms will open a floodgate of Holocaust narratives and depictions, including selfies at the Auschwitz gate.<sup>79</sup> This is a strange conclusion considering that discussion of the appropriateness of selfies at Auschwitz Museum has been a popular topic in social commentary since at least 2014, when Alabama teen Brenna Mitchell was the victim of online bullying and death threats after posting a selfie taken at Auschwitz Museum.<sup>80</sup> Mitchell's selfie received heavy media coverage, particularly after she became the victim of harassing messages and death threats online. Mitchell refused to apologize for her photograph, saying her behaviour was motivated by the memory of her deceased father, with whom she had bonded with over a mutual interest in World War II history.<sup>81</sup> Despite her public shaming, Mitchell uses the same Twitter username, and continues to refer to herself as the 'Auschwitz selfie teen'.<sup>82</sup> Her *faux pas* became a badge of honour.

Since Mitchell's selfie attracted worldwide attention, tourist photography at Holocaust memory sites like Auschwitz Museum has become a popular subject for visual artists and social commenters wishing to add to the discussion about the interaction between modernity and history. There are numerous social media accounts and photo compilations of tourist

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<sup>79</sup> Anna Scanlon, "'Eva.Stories' Uses Instagram to Connect Today's Youth With a Holocaust Story", *Jewish Journal*, 15 May 2019, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://jewishjournal.com/culture/arts/298657/eva-stories-uses-instagram-to-connect-todays-youth-with-a-holocaust-story/>.

<sup>80</sup> Caitlin Dewey, 'The Other Side of the Infamous "Auschwitz Selfie"', *The Washington Post*, 22 July 2014, accessed May 22, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/22/the-other-side-of-the-infamous-auschwitz-selfie/?utm\\_term=.f8e209d57091](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/07/22/the-other-side-of-the-infamous-auschwitz-selfie/?utm_term=.f8e209d57091); Ruth Margalit, 'Should Auschwitz Be a Site for Selfies?', *The New Yorker*, 26 June 2014, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/should-auschwitz-be-a-site-for-selfies>.

<sup>81</sup> Dewey, "The Other Side of the Infamous 'Auschwitz Selfie'"; Margalit, "Should Auschwitz Be a Site for Selfies?"

<sup>82</sup> Breanna Mitchell, "Twitter Post," July 22, 2014, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://twitter.com/PrincessBMM/status/491449455913078785>; Breanna Mitchell, "Twitter Post," January 30, 2015, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://twitter.com/PrincessBMM/status/561012083899514884>.



photographs that are perceived to be disrespectful, including now-deleted Facebook page “With my Besties in Auschwitz”,<sup>83</sup> and artist Shahak Shapira’s *Yolocaust*, which combined selfies and captions posted on social media from the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin with historical photographs taken at concentration camps.<sup>84</sup> Shapira described his project as one that “explored our commemorative culture,”<sup>85</sup> but the project also served as a form of public shaming that ransomed people’s reputations by refusing to remove their photographs from the website until they deleted the pictures from their accounts and contacted him to apologize.

Shapira’s bottom-up attempt at policing memory narrative and tourist behaviour received heavy media coverage, and the artist was contacted by owners of all of the photographs featured, all of whom apologized and deleted the posts from their accounts. While all the photographs have since been removed, included on the present-day version of the site is an email from one of the subjects, who apologizes, but also asks that “if you could explain to BBC, Haaretz, and aaaalllll the other blogs, news stations etc. etc. that I fucked up, that’d be great,”<sup>86</sup> lending credibility to Goffman’s suggestion that the consequences for a *faux pas* are significant.

## 2.4. An evolving taboo

Not only do these forms of social commentary prove the existence of taboo-breaking photographs that were not seen in Hilmar’s and Reynolds’ research, they show some of the challenges that sites of memory have as mass tourist destinations, including a lack of control over their own narrative. Whether a person enjoys the kind of notoriety experienced by Brenna Mitchell, or they regret their choices after being called out in a project like *Yolocaust*, the fact

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<sup>83</sup> Ruth Margalit, “Should Auschwitz Be a Site for Selfies?,” *The New Yorker*, June 26, 2014, accessed 10 April 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/should-auschwitz-be-a-site-for-selfies>.

<sup>84</sup> Shahak Shapira, “Yolocaust,” *Yolocaust*, 2017, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://yolocaust.de/>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

that these kinds of photographs existed in the first place, and were shared publicly online, suggest that taboos around photography at Auschwitz Museum are in transition. W.J.T. Mitchell perceives images as “active players in the game of establishing and changing values [that are] capable of introducing new values into the world and thus of threatening old ones.”<sup>87</sup> Leah Finnegan shares a conversation between herself and other journalists on a 2014 trip to Auschwitz Museum, recalling that the group was divided as to whether it was acceptable to post their photographs from Auschwitz on Instagram.<sup>88</sup> Notably, there was no discussion of whether or not it was appropriate to take photographs, just if it was acceptable to post them.

The performance of tourism in photography, much like the performance of gender, for Judith Butler, or performance of the self for Jean-Paul Sartre and Erving Goffman, requires elements like a stage, script, interpretation, and an actor. The actor is the tourist. Their performance of witnessing reinforces the character that they play for their online audience. The aesthetics and the infrastructure of the Auschwitz stage, combined with even the most basic knowledge of the Holocaust, makes it easy for tourists to get lost in their own experience of the place; this is reinforced by Museum Educators who interpret or point out ‘important’ details that can then seem worthy of being photographed. Combined with the tourist’s knowledge of what kind of photos get ‘likes’ on Instagram, history acts as a script, encouraging performative witnessing, in order to use the platform as a way to share one’s experiences while chasing micro-celebrity.<sup>89</sup>

While Lanzmann argues that there is a taboo around such performance by those who did not experience the Holocaust first-hand, Daniel Reynolds believe that there still can be relevant performative witnessing through tourism that can serve a net good,<sup>90</sup> as it allows the

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<sup>87</sup> W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Nachdr. (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010): 105.

<sup>88</sup> Finnegan, “Instagrams from Auschwitz.”

<sup>89</sup> Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 516-27.

<sup>90</sup> Reynolds: 343.

“never again” message to be communicated to a broader global audience. Visitors become ambassadors, transforming the past from words in a history book to the experience of a present-day peer. Even Auschwitz Museum takes the approach that visiting the site, or at least seeing it, in the case of its virtual tours, is necessary for humanity to understand the atrocities of the Holocaust and ensure widespread resistance to similar events in the future.

The Holocaust was a horrible event, and the way it is depicted on social media – particularly if used in a way to develop micro-celebrity – can bring about Goffman’s feeling of *faux pas*. For others, though, a selfie is just a selfie, and sharing one can be a way of saying ‘I was here, I visited’. It can spark a discussion or reflection among a broader network about what the visitor saw and felt, resulting in a scenario where people leave the interaction better informed and more aware of the Holocaust than they were before. By placing themselves at Auschwitz Museum, sharing such photographs on social media may invite discussion about the terror of the Holocaust and how important it is to not permit such atrocities to occur today, fulfilling a significant part of Auschwitz Museum’s educational goals.

While there are occasions in the past where the Museum has publicly commented on the appropriateness of visitor photography, recently, they have taken a more proactive approach with respect to commenting on what is and is not acceptable. While the Museum did not acknowledge Brenna Mitchell’s selfie, it did comment in 2017 on US Representative Clay Higgins’ five-minute-long selfie-style video from inside and around Auschwitz’s gas chamber, tweeting that “inside a former gas chamber, there should be mournful silence. It’s not a stage.”<sup>91</sup> Like the subjects of Shapira’s *Yolocaust*, Higgins deleted the video. Auschwitz Museum tweeted to its more than 300,000 followers in March 2019 that:

*When you come to [Auschwitz Museum,] remember you are at the site where over 1 million people were killed. Respect their memory. There are better places to learn how to walk on a*

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<sup>91</sup> David Caplan and Benjamin Siegel, “Congressman Apologizes for Recording Video in Auschwitz Gas Chamber,” ABC News, July 5, 2017, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/auschwitz-memorial-condemns-rep-clay-higgins-gas-chamber/story?id=48442634>.

*balance beam than the site which symbolizes deportation of hundreds of thousands to their deaths.*<sup>92</sup>

A follow-up tweet suggested visitors refer to Auschwitz's official Instagram account for examples of more appropriate examples of Auschwitz photography. With the exception of photographs of official visits by politicians, the Museum's Instagram account contains only six original photographs featuring visitors since June 2016, comprising 1% of all photographs.<sup>93</sup> Without explicitly stating new rules, Auschwitz Museum is reinforcing photographic taboos prohibiting dramatization of the Holocaust, redirecting photographers to objects, buildings, and other archival materials, but it is doing so in a way that does not discourage potential tourists from visiting.

When considering the Museum's recent statements on Twitter, it is important to remember that the Museum is not commenting on the photographs themselves, but on the behaviours depicted. However, the behavioural prohibition is *de facto* extended to include photography of such behaviour. In communicating this message over social media, rather than interrupting the behaviours in real time, they are creating a photographic taboo. Judging by the backlash felt by victims of online mobs like Breanna Mitchell and the subjects of *Yolocaust*, it is likely that this sentiment is shared by a vocal percentage of the general public.

While this taboo is not reflected in the Museum's official rules governing visitor photography, it is an example of a taboo that is being actively negotiated. Visitors are conducting themselves in a problematic way frequently enough that Auschwitz officials felt the need to comment, suggesting that while the elite narrative-keepers feel this behaviour is inappropriate, there is a significant percentage of people believe such behaviour is acceptable. Yet for the most part, without prompting from an outside actor like the Museum, there is little

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<sup>92</sup> Auschwitz Museum, "Twitter Post," March 20, 2019, <https://twitter.com/AuschwitzMuseum/status/1108337507660451841>.

<sup>93</sup> Calculations my own, as of April 12, 2019.

attempt by the Instagram community to police the self-portraits taken at Auschwitz, other than in the most egregious of cases, as will be shown in the next chapter.

The newsworthiness of taboo-bending social media photographs, and the resulting commentary that springs up around them by artists and members of the memory community suggests that most visitors are behaving appropriately when they visit. When viewed individually, so-called ‘inappropriate’ photographs might appear distasteful; when viewed as a collection, they give the impression that there is an epidemic of disrespectful tourists striking poses and flirting with the camera at sites of Holocaust commemoration. However, if the majority of Auschwitz Museum visitors were behaving in this way, it would indicate that the taboo no longer exists; the elimination of a taboo might be interesting for academics, but would not be newsworthy, as there would be no offended party. Instead, there were hundreds of news stories worldwide following Auschwitz Museum’s March 2019 tweet. The very fact that such photographs evoke an emotional response in viewers worthy of news attention, social commentary, and an online mob sending death threats and demands that users like Brenna Mitchell take down their selfies suggests that a taboo is still in place, while the existence of such photographs suggests that the existing taboo is under negotiation.

## Chapter 3: Holocaust narratives on Instagram

### 3.1. Methodology

Looking at Instagram users' photographs from Auschwitz is one way to observe how narratives and taboos about Auschwitz and the Holocaust are being renegotiated through self-portraiture online. For this study, all of the publicly-available<sup>94</sup> images from June 23, 2018 through March 20, 2019, geotagged on Instagram to "Auschwitz Memorial / Muzeum Auschwitz" were obtained<sup>95</sup> in order to quantify to what extent self-portraiture at Auschwitz Museum is taking place, and to qualitatively examine themes expressed in such photographs.

The 11,641 photographs were divided into two categories: 'self-portraits/selfies' or photographs with people as the subject – consisting of 1,370 photographs or 11% of all photographs, and photographs with another subject – consisting of 10,274 photographs, or 89%. The latter category includes photographs of the Museum exhibits, displays, and grounds; while some of these photographs did include people, in order to qualify as a 'self-portrait/selfie', photographs needed to contain at least one visitor who is intentionally the subject of the photograph. Photographs that were not categorized as 'self-portraits/selfies' were set aside for the remainder of this analysis.

The percentage of photographs with people as the subject (11%) and photographs with a different subject (89%) represent a significant departure from Hu *et al*'s study, which saw people as the subject of roughly half of all Instagram posts, suggesting that there is a taboo specifically with respect to Auschwitz Museum that keeps selfies and self-portraits to a minimum. There are significantly more self-portraits within the publicly-created set than there were on Auschwitz Museum's official Instagram page (1%, as previously mentioned), and the

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<sup>94</sup> Instagram accounts can be public – where anyone can view the contents – or private, where only pre-approved accounts have access. Therefore, it is impossible to view all of the photographs geo-tagged to Auschwitz Memorial, as some may be posted to private accounts.

<sup>95</sup> Due to a technical issue on Instagram, photographs from before June 23, 2018 were unavailable.

existence of such photographs at all is in contrast to Hilmar's research, which did not see any such photographs. This suggests that while taboos around visual depictions of the Holocaust are in flux, there is some restraining factor pervasive in society that limits the number of selfies and self-portraits taken by Instagram users, but there is also something encouraging at least some users to take self-portraits or selfies.

### 3.2. Themes

The 1,370 self-portraits that remained were then analyzed and grouped into four thematic categories based on the content, images, and when necessary, captions. The themes that emerged were: self-placement, witnessing, rebellion, and miscellaneous. Each category will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter, with the exception of the miscellaneous category. This category consisted of photographs that fit the "self-portrait" classification but are unable to be visually placed at Auschwitz Museum or do not fit the other categories. As these are a small percentage of the total photographs in the set, they will not be discussed further.

*Figure 1: Self-portraits by category*

Category	Number of photographs	Percentage of self-portraits	Percentage of total photographs
Self-placement	908	66%	8%
Witnessing	360	26%	3%
Rebellion	68	6%	<1%
Miscellaneous	34	2%	<1%

#### 3.2.1. Self-placement

Self-placement photographs are the largest category of portraiture in the photo set. As a vehicle of memory, these photographs inform or remind the viewer of the subject's visit to Auschwitz Museum. This is accomplished by having the subject face the camera in front of something that visually communicates "Auschwitz". The viewer is not asked to accompany the

subject on their journey, they are merely informed that the tourist was in a particular place, at a particular time. These could be thought of as a typical ‘tourist photo’ where the subject is positioned in front of a visual landmark. In this respect, all of the self-portraits considered for this study are effectively self-placement photographs, as they communicate to an Instagram audience that the subject of the photograph is at Auschwitz Museum.



Figure 2: Examples of self-placement photographs<sup>96</sup>

Facial expressions in these photographs display a broad spectrum of emotions. A few people take “Instagram influencer” style portraits where they strike a pose mimicking that of a fashion model, typical of other self-portraits on Instagram. While these photographs may not visually communicate more than the subject’s presence at Auschwitz, they can be used as part of a broader narrative about the trip or the subject, or incorporate other means of communication – like captions or hashtags – in order to discuss the subject’s experience or feelings.

Elements of mass tourism are present in these photographs, including other tourists, families, and selfie- rather than portrait-composition. Unlike ‘witnessing’ photographs, where the subject is often the only person in the photograph, these photographs often include other tourists in the background. Subjects are often wearing the headsets distributed on guided tours,

<sup>96</sup> Photographs, from left to right: @nikgoulis, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, June 22, 2018, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BkURMWUnmGe/>; @ash\_blum, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, June 28, 2018, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bkj74RBva-/>; @ellen.missotten, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, September 10, 2018, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BnjL2lQAdBS/>; @ioanabirau, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, September 30, 2018, accessed March 20, 2019, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BoWKA\\_fh90a/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BoWKA_fh90a/).



and many of the photographs are staged under the *Arbeit macht frei* sign, where guided tours begin. The sign is, for most, the first familiar Auschwitz visual that they see upon their arrival inside the Museum. Taking this particular photograph ensures the visitor will have a souvenir of their visit, even if the rest of the tour does not go according to plan. Other than these photographs having been taken at Auschwitz Museum, there is little to differentiate them from photographs seen across Instagram or from other photographs taken at mass tourism sites.

For this reason, the captions accompanying these kinds of photographs are particularly important in communicating the emotional weight of ‘performing Auschwitz’. A photograph of a young black man standing in the road between two buildings at Auschwitz might not communicate more than that this individual visited the Museum. However, when accompanied by the following caption, the viewer understands his broader understanding of the Holocaust and his ability to relate the struggles of the victims to those of other minorities throughout history:

*Heard stories about how the Jews were slayed but getting the chance to be there and see how this happened was something else, really emotional just like the slave trade. #travel #poland #ivsa #history #krakow*<sup>97</sup>

Captions are also useful in communicating personal messages that would otherwise be difficult to express visually. One user posing beneath the *Arbeit macht frei* sign says that visiting Auschwitz Museum was an emotional experience, and one she undertook in order to honour her grandmother, although nothing about the photograph that would suggest either.<sup>98</sup> Other users are less personal, but still use captions to communicate emotion, like “#neveragain #auschwitz”<sup>99</sup>, or “Sad place #roadtrip”<sup>100</sup>.

<sup>97</sup> @andydebrah, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, July 19, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BlapBo4HrCR/>.

<sup>98</sup> @gregariousgiggler, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, July 14, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BIOFCgBnSRX/>.

<sup>99</sup> @marindomjan, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, July 6, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bk5hV1tjXc/>.

<sup>100</sup> @anttihautaviita, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, July 10, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BIDcrt8gI77/>.

One quote in particular – “Those who do not the past are condemned to repeat it” attributed to George Santayana is a popular caption for Auschwitz Museum Instagram portraits. Two percent of the overall set of photographs are accompanied by captions including the quote, providing a thoughtful-sounding accompaniment that allows the creator to portray themselves as intelligent enough to know of the thinker and reference his quote. While the quote is on display at Auschwitz Museum, and all guided tours pass by it, Santayana’s aphorism does not refer to the Holocaust, as it was included in a volume published in 1905, and therefore written at least 40 years before the liberation of Auschwitz. The use of this quote as an accompaniment to self-portraits on Instagram is suggestive of the elements of mass tourism and the performative nature of the social media platform: users perform thoughtfulness or intelligence by including the quote, which they know about because they saw it at the Museum. While relevant to the overall “never again” theme of Holocaust education more broadly, considering the universe of quotable material directly referencing the Holocaust, its repeated use as a caption accompanying Auschwitz portraiture is suggestive of the commodification of the Museum as a site of mass tourism, where potential images come pre-packaged with captions for easy content creation.

This conflict between Auschwitz Museum as a site of mass tourism and a site of memory is acknowledged by one user who posts a selfie with the caption:

*When you do not know whether to smile or be serious in a selfie. #selfie #auschwitz #concentrationcamp #auschwitzbirkenau #girl #travelgirl #smile #polska #instakrakow #instapolish #europe #europe\_ig #ig\_europe #igerseurope #instaurope #summertrip #travelgram #travel #krakow #poland #ig\_poland #total\_selfies*<sup>101</sup>

Nearly all of the photographs posted to this account are selfies or self-portraits taken at tourist sites; at Auschwitz Museum, the user is behaving as she would at any other site of mass tourism, while acknowledging that there is something different about this location in particular.

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<sup>101</sup> @ms\_kplan, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, August 1, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, [https://www.instagram.com/p/BI8hwv\\_grUK/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BI8hwv_grUK/).

Whatever it is that she might feel is different, though, is not enough to prevent her from taking a selfie sharing it online, and using hashtags to chase micro-celebrity.

### **3.2.2. Witnessing**

The second-largest category of photographs was witnessing. Witnessing differs from self-placement in that the subject of the photograph is seen observing or interacting with the site in some way beyond their physical presence. The viewer is brought along on a journey and given a ‘behind-the-scenes’ peek of what they would have seen had they attended in real life. This commodification of the subject is reflective of Marwick’s understanding of online celebrity and serves a dual purpose of storytelling and attempting to leverage experience for online status.

The opportunity and responsibility to witness is repeatedly communicated to tourists as one of the primary reasons that they should visit Auschwitz Museum. The act of witnessing not only fulfills the Museum’s mandates of commemoration and education, it enables tourists to position themselves in the present, relate backwards to the past, and look forward to a future where their lives have been changed or shaped by a tourist experience.<sup>102</sup> Witnessing also has a voyeuristic quality. The subject is captured in the act of doing something. They may be looking at a particular exhibit, gazing into the distance in thoughtful contemplation, or have their back to the camera as they experience the site around them. Through the viewer’s momentary inclusion in the trip to Auschwitz, they are not merely informed that the subject was in a place, they are included, permitted to view a behind-the-scenes moment of serious contemplation or observation that serves to entice them into believing that they are a privileged accomplice viewing something unique and private, and to encourage them to view the subject as thoughtful, contemplative, and respectful. These photographs are more dramatic than those

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<sup>102</sup> Britta Timm Knudsen, “Thanatourism: Witnessing Difficult Pasts,” *Tourist Studies* 11, no. 1 (April 2011): 56-57.

in the previous category, and for that reason could be seen as more exploitative of the site, and in greater violation of Lanzmann's taboo.

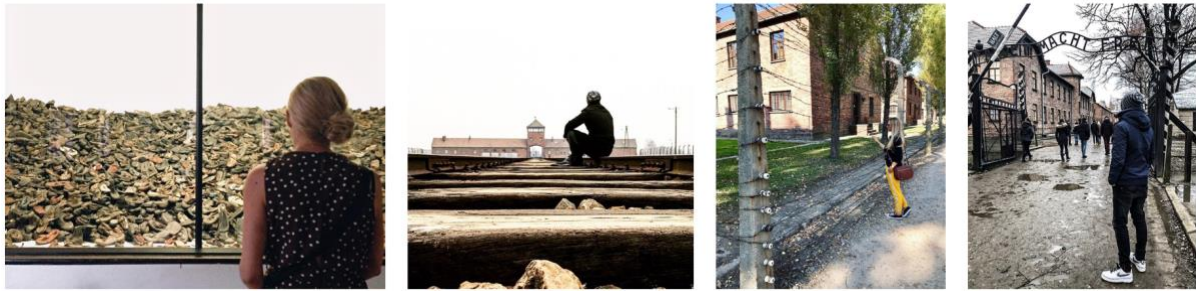


Figure 3: Examples of witnessing photographs.<sup>103</sup>

These photographs position the subject in a particular place at a particular time, as do those in the category of self-placement, and many of the witnessing photographs also include three specific locations: at the *Arbeit macht frei* gate, in one particular outdoor corridor where the subject is framed by barbed wire fencing on either side, or on the train tracks in front of the Birkenau death gate. The composition of these photographs is more stereotypically ‘Instagram influencer’ than a selfie or self-placement photograph, with users reproducing themes seen on the accounts of celebrities and micro-celebrities. There are many photographs where the subject is depicted from behind or the side, gazing out of the windows of one of the buildings at Auschwitz I, looking at the piles of shoes, or viewing photographs of mug shots of the dead.

That so many of the photographs were taken in a few specific places around the Museum grounds suggests that the performative nature of the photographs is tied to self-placement. The subject does not just want to be viewed as being in a particular place at a particular time, they want the viewer to understand that they are at a particular place at a particular time, and are thoughtful and sensitive enough to engage emotionally with their

<sup>103</sup> Photographs, from left to right: @malimslovimasvespojeno, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, July 10, 2018, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BIDuLfNA87f/>; @aguilar\_fitlife, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, January 27, 2019, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BtIoy5klr2J/>; @saritta\_s, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, September 21, 2018, accessed March 20, 2019, [https://www.instagram.com/p/Bn\\_uVv8hxyK/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Bn_uVv8hxyK/); @marcodonera, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, January 11, 2019, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BsgjET7gGgG/>.

surroundings. The viewer sees a private moment, experiences an emotional closeness with the subject via the photograph that allows them to feel the drama of the visit. There are no smiling, angry, or upset faces, only curiosity, inquisitiveness, and contemplation. When expressions cannot be seen by the viewer, they invite the viewer to consider the image and come up with their own emotions. When expressions can be seen, they privilege the subject by positioning them as an example, and invite the viewer to take a similar approach to the subject.

While ‘witnessing’ photographs attempt to communicate a message that resonates emotionally with the viewer, like self-placement photographs, the captions that accompany these photographs are important in reinforcing the photograph’s message and ensuring that it is seen by other Instagram users. One visitor, photographed on the camp’s main road, looking to the side while wearing a guided tour headset captions his self-portrait:

*About my day trip to Auschwitz : Yes, it did have an impact that I will feel for the rest of my life and maybe that’s even more profound. Maybe that’s what needed to keep that part of history alive. To make sure nobody ever forgets the horrific events of the Holocaust. #day2 #auschwitzbirkenau #auschwitz #poland ☺PL🌟 #asianguy #gaylife #gayworld #gaystagram #instagay #gaydude #gaypic #gayfollow #gaylikes #asianboys #gayshoutout #followgay #gaytravel #solotrip #instavacation #instatravel #gaypassport #solotravel #solovacation #gaytraveler #gayeurope #gayboy #gayasian #vacation #travel #wanderlust<sup>104</sup>*

The subject is captured in observation, and provides a caption commenting on the emotional weight of his experience, positioning his witnessing as part of a broader transnational memory movement, but the post also includes hashtags that will ensure the photograph is seen by more Instagram users than just those following his account. While he may self-identify as gay, there is nothing in the photograph with a sexual theme, nor are themes of wanderlust, beyond that of a person on vacation. The use of such hashtags suggests multiple purposes of such a photograph: to show the subject’s witnessing, to physically place them at Auschwitz on a certain date at a certain time, and to seek out micro-celebrity.

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<sup>104</sup> @nutella\_napoopoo, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, August 3, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BmBw6CRAbyV/>.

While some viewers may immediately dismiss these photographs as exploitive or overly dramatic, Britta Timm Knudsen argues that performative witnessing is an ethical act, as humans have a moral responsibility to respond to horrors in a way that invites others to behave similarly in an effort to ensure such atrocities do not happen again.<sup>105</sup> In this way, the tourist becomes a vehicle for communicating a message: this happened, it was terrible, I saw it and my reaction tells you that it should not be easily dismissed nor repeated. As tourists cannot witness directly the atrocities of the Holocaust, they make their best effort at staged sites like Auschwitz Museum, and use social media to share their experience more broadly.

One notable population of contemplative witnesses are Israeli schoolchildren – whose photographs can be identified by the matching sweatshirts or t-shirts they wear on organized school trips to Auschwitz Museum, the prevalence of other teens in the photographs, and the use of Hebrew in the caption text. Some of these photographs are actively rebellious and will be discussed in the next section. While this cohort's photographs communicate self-placement and witnessing, they also depict themes of adolescence, showing boredom, slightly sexual overtones, and carefree friendships. This reinforces Simone Schweber's sense that students today experience 'Holocaust fatigue,'<sup>106</sup> and that even a cohort that can relate most directly to the Holocaust experiences the Museum in a way not expected by the elite keepers of Holocaust narrative.

Photographs of politicians also portray witnessing. The set includes photographs of politicians from Scotland, Germany, the European Union, and the United States. These photographs are all serious, all depict subjects walking around the camp, paying respects, or interacting with other visitors. Nicola Sturgeon's photograph is most different from the other politicians, but most similar to other tourist-witnesses. She is depicted alone, standing on the

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<sup>105</sup> Knudsen: 59-60

<sup>106</sup> Schweber: 48-50.

Birkenau train tracks, looking off into the distance. All other politicians who appeared in this sample are seen interacting with other individuals or Museum exhibits. Auschwitz Museum includes photographs of visiting politicians on their social media feeds, so these kinds of photographs would be endorsed by the Museum, but this begs the question of why a self-portrait by a tourist could be considered taboo or self-promotional when the same pose by a politician is acceptable.

In some witnessing photographs, there is a sense of historical re-enactment or over-the-top posed performance. Several subjects are depicted sitting on the train tracks at Birkenau, as though sitting on train tracks is normal behaviour for someone deep in thought. One young woman sits in the middle of a walkway, between two barbed wire fences. Many subjects are photographed from behind, alone, looking up at the *Arbeit macht frei* sign. This is a high-traffic area where all tours at the camp begin, yet no other people are present, suggesting that the subject and photographer waited to capture an image that captures the dramatic interaction between subject and place, without any distractions. One user is photographed mid-step, walking towards the *Arbeit macht frei* gate. His back is to the photographer, and his jacket hood is pulled up over his head; there are no visible features that would allow even someone who knows this person in real life to identify them visually. The caption reads “Of those that walked through this gate, less than half barely made it out #auschwitz #scary #dead #livingdead #retracingsteps #deathmarch.”<sup>107</sup> The viewer sees the subject walking in, and through the caption acknowledges his realization that many who took these same steps did not live to walk out. In other photographs, subjects touch, grip, or peer through barbed wire fencing, even though there is no need to move the wires to see through the fence, as the purpose of the fence is to limit movement rather than obscure vision. Touching the fence can serve to ground the

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<sup>107</sup> @ihor55, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, July 13, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BILISeqniCM/>.

subject to a place, and is a way to visually communicate that the subject is engaged in the act of looking at something, searching for freedom, or trying to see what former prisoners saw. However, these photographs are stereotypical to what would be thought of as “Instagram influencer” portraits, suggesting that the subject’s behaviour is driven primarily by the desire to capture a photograph that will do well on the platform.

### **3.2.3. Rebellion**

A smaller, but more diverse category of photographs is that of rebellion, which consists of photographs that are either deliberately rule- or taboo-breaking, as well as photographs of Jewish rebellion. Rebellion is one of the Auschwitz Museum’s thematic focuses, with museum displays emphasizing resistance by the camp’s prisoners, in particular that of the Jewish *Sonderkommando*, escaped prisoners, and the broader Polish resistance movement. Rebellion is a theme echoed in a small percentage of the self-portraits at Auschwitz, but these photographs also contain elements – often props – that make them visually distinct from other photographs of self-placement or witnessing.

#### *3.2.3.1. Jewish rebellion*

The majority of photographs in the ‘rebellion’ category depict Jewish rebellion, as portrayed by the presence of an Israeli flag, an Israeli Defence Force soldier in uniform, the presence of a Holocaust survivor, rabbi, or Torah. Often, the Israeli flag is draped around the shoulders of the subject of the photograph, communicating a display of identity, a shield against history, and a rebellious gesture at a site constructed for the extermination of the Jewish people. Had the Nazi’s final solution been successful, the assumed-to-be-Jewish wearer would likely never have been born, and the state of Israel would not exist. The presence of both together, on the grounds of a former death camp, is an act of defiance and rebellion against anti-Semitism.

Photographs including the Israeli flag also incorporate themes seen in the witnessing and self-placement photographs. In some photographs, the subject faces the viewer, presenting



the Israeli flag. These photographs are taken in places that can be visually identified as Auschwitz – either under the main gate, on the train tracks, or in a corridor framed by barbed wire and camp buildings. The number of subjects also varies, with some photographs consisting of one person displaying the flag, while in others, a whole group is present.

The presence of Holocaust survivors also sends a strong message of rebellion. Like the Jewish or Israeli flag-wearer, they are a direct symbol of the failure of Nazism to eradicate the Jewish people, and they have returned to the scene of one of history's most notorious crimes to bear witness and educate future generations in order to prevent such atrocities from happening again in the future.

### 3.2.3.2. *Deliberate rule- and taboo-breaking*

The second category of rebellion photos include those that are either blatantly rule-breaking, disrespectful, or egregiously out of place in comparison to the rest of the photographs. This category encompasses the fewest number of photographs, but they are perhaps the most striking when compared to the broader set. Some photographs depict behaviour deliberately breaking the Museum's rules. These include a photograph of a pit bull on the Birkenau train tracks – which breaks the Museum prohibition against allowing pets on the premise, and is historically insensitive, as many victims were corralled or threatened by Nazi soldiers using dogs; a photograph advertising a private tour inside the Museum; and a photograph of a man riding a motorcycle down the Birkenau train tracks. The photograph of the dog is accompanied by a caption that, if accompanying any other photograph, would seem perfectly normal, and closer examination of the Instagram account finds that it is completely dedicated to tourism from the dog's perspective, suggesting that for this tourist, there is no distinction between Auschwitz Museum and other sites of mass tourism.

Other photographs depicting taboo-breaking rebellion occur on the margins of Auschwitz Museum, and also suggest a blurred line between Auschwitz Museum as a distinct

site and other sites of mass tourism. Subjects are depicted lying in the grass outside the Museum entrance, waiting for a bus or having a picnic, posing with friends, or clowning around on the shuttle bus between Auschwitz I and Birkenau. That they are at Auschwitz Museum is known by the Instagram geotag, and in some cases, being able to view the outer perimeter of the Museum in the background, but these are photographs of tourists experiencing the *ennui* that is normal at sites of mass tourism: waiting in line, waiting for transportation, and so on. The commodification of the self through social media means that boring moments are notable, so they are shared, just as they would be at other tourist sites.

The final category of deliberate rule- or taboo-breaking is the depiction of blatantly disrespectful behaviour. These subjects of photographs are captured performing behaviours that are insensitive at best, and anti-Semitic at worst. This includes subjects posing at various sites around the Museum giving a thumbs-up gesture, role-playing, including alt-right or anti-Semitic language in accompanying captions, or, wearing clothing with anti-Semitic or insensitive messages.

Posing for a photograph depicting performative rule-breaking begs a lot of questions, one of which is why go to Auschwitz Museum in the first place? In some of the most blatantly disrespectful photographs, other Instagram users commented on the appropriateness of the photograph or the geotag, however, only one of the photographs in this category has since been deleted from the user's account.

One Instagram user posts two photographs of himself at Auschwitz Museum: in one post, he is wearing a black t-shirt and black pants, posed in a self-placement-style photograph in front of a display before the Museum entrance, accompanied by the caption:

*A #strong message to future generations. Real insane and perceptive place fulfil intensive #vibes and #feelings. You must visit it if you want to be considered a human. Auschwitz-Birkenau 1940-1945 #auschwitz #birkenau #history #feelings #mood #blackonblack #thinks #berespectful #gatheringvibes*<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> @beat.bit, "Instagram Post," *Instagram*, October 13, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bo4B6wwiVMw/>.

This image has received 87 likes and no comments. In the second photograph, he is captured from behind talking on a cell phone, in a witnessing-style image, and the viewer sees that the back of his shirt has the word “WHITE” written in large text across it. That image is accompanied by the following caption:

*The history teaches us how to run the future. Can't do it wrong again. Can't forget. Feeling the life. #history #auschwitz #birkenau #ontour #feelings #vibes #mood #livingthepast*<sup>109</sup>

This image received 119 likes and 18 comments, 9 of which are negative, either asking the poster to take the photo down, or telling him he is disrespectful for wearing that shirt and taking a photograph of himself wearing it at a site of genocide. The captions for the two photographs are basically the same, but in one, the ‘WHITE’ t-shirt photograph invokes a strong negative sentiment from the audience that makes people feel the need to take a stand against this kind of perceived rule-breaking.

### 3.3. Shifting boundaries?

A majority of the photographs examined adhere to “memory truther” taboos against fictionalizing Holocaust narratives. While an in-depth analysis of the photographs that do not feature tourists is beyond the scope of this study, initial observations when dividing the self-portraits from other photographs suggest that these photographs capture elements of the Museum like exhibits, buildings, and landscapes. Similar photographs appear in Hilmar’s and Reynolds’ study of tourist photography. By not featuring a specific human subject, the photographers cannot be accused of taking advantage of the site or its history for self-promotion in the same way that someone posting a selfie or self-portrait could. Therefore, for

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<sup>109</sup> @beat.bit, “Instagram Post,” *Instagram*, October 22, 2018, accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BpPQYillJC1/>.

the majority of photographs taken at Auschwitz Museum, appropriate' behaviour is depicted and taboos remain in place.

Overall, the selfies and self-portraits depicted tourists engaging in the act of tourism, driven by a logic of Instagram that rewards a particular use of the platform: recreating images seen elsewhere, using the location to tell a story or share a message, and capturing souvenirs that can act as memory triggers. This is not surprising given the numerous suggestions tourists receive during their visit that the Museum is similar to other sites of tourism. The reproduction of themes seen throughout the Museum, especially in the captions of some of the photographs, suggests that while some visitors may be using the site for performance, they are also internalizing the Museum's narratives and reproducing them for their own online audience, helping the Museum achieve its educational mandate.

While some of the self-portraits and selfies seem performative, such is the nature of this kind of photography and of the Instagram platform. In every aspect other than the location, these photographs would fit in completely with others seen on Instagram, and tourist behavior would be acceptable at nearly any other mass tourism site in Europe. The treatment of Auschwitz Museum as 'just another tourist site' – where photography is acceptable – is accompanied by the use of captions that reproduce elements of Holocaust narrative seen in mass culture, including historical facts, the 'never again' sentiment, Holocaust-related quotes, and information from Museum exhibits or communicated via the guided tours. However, the existence of these photographs, the careful framing, posing, editing, and use of hashtags to attract attention can be interpreted as a renegotiation of the taboos around how to respectfully interact with a site of genocide and how to engage more broadly with Holocaust narrative.

Finally, it is worth noting that within the set of photographs studied for this thesis, there were no photographs like those used in *Yolocaust*. There were no yoga poses, no photographs of people jumping, nobody seen standing on top of various elements of the Museum. This

suggests that there is a distinction between community-based memorials like the Berlin site of *Yolocaust* photographs, and Auschwitz, a site of genocide. It can also suggest that the physical barriers that divide the Museum grounds from the outside world, which signify mass tourism, also cordon off the site from the rest of the world, drawing a line where some otherwise acceptable behaviours become unacceptable. While there were photographs that could be considered insensitive, inappropriate, or ridiculous by some viewers, there was a general level of decorum and seriousness displayed in nearly all of the images.

# Conclusion

Discussions about the renegotiation of Holocaust narrative has been ongoing since the end of World War II, recently moving to include online media as communications technologies advance and evolve in the digital space. While one might be led to believe from the level of mass media commentary about disrespectful selfies and behaviour at Auschwitz Museum, the majority of tourist photographs posted on Instagram follow existing narratives and taboos limiting dramatized visual depictions of the Holocaust. With respect to selfies and self-portraits taken at the site, there are significantly fewer seen within the six-month period of study than seen in a random sample of Instagram photographs studied by Hu *et al*, but significantly more than posted to Auschwitz Museum's official Instagram account. While this suggests that there is some renegotiation of Holocaust narratives, it is not as widespread as mass media would suggest, but also too frequent for elite Holocaust narrative-keepers and "memory truthers."

Tourist selfies and self-portraits from the Auschwitz Museum suggest a reshaping of Holocaust narrative to focus more on the visitor's experience at the site, rather than on the site itself. In this respect, it mirrors mass media use of the Holocaust, particularly television and cinematic depictions where the Holocaust serves as a backdrop for dramatic, relatable stories about the human condition. The democratized, performative nature of selfies and self-portraits has the potential to make viewers feel uncomfortable, as Auschwitz Museum and the Holocaust become stages for an actor seeking micro-celebrity to perform for an online audience.

This performance is of a dual nature: it communicates the subject's experience, which almost universally echoes the narratives expressed by the Museum and its exhibits, but also functions to portray the tourist in a particular, self-promotional way. The similarities between these photographs and those seen elsewhere on Instagram suggests that Instagram itself has a logic or culture of voyeuristic performance that bleeds into the way tourists interact with the

Museum, the photographs they take, and the narratives they reconstruct. By being photographed at Auschwitz, and by taking photographs of the space itself, the tourist not only affirms their physical presence, they are able to perform their own narrative and position themselves within broader world history. By showcasing their presence at Auschwitz Museum, by inviting others to join them in bearing witness, or by echoing the themes of rebellion communicated in the Museum's exhibits, visitors become ambassadors, able to witness first-hand about their experience and feelings.

However, tourist-like behaviours cannot be blamed solely on tourists. In an effort to attract as many visitors as possible in order to fulfill their educational mandate, Auschwitz Museum sends signals to visitors that they are visiting a site of tourism by creating the kind of infrastructure seen at other mass tourist sites, and by allowing a private tourism industry to develop in adjacent communities. Without firm rules governing behaviour, specifically with respect to photography, tourists are told to govern themselves in a manner the tourist feels is appropriate. Through mass tourism, tourists may understand that they are visiting a special place, but they are still repeatedly reminded that they are engaged in the act of tourism. They are expected to switch on or off feelings and behaviours based on their location, but also are simultaneously told through signifiers of tourism that all the locations they experience on vacation are similar.

Criticism of selfies or self-portraits at Auschwitz Museum is grounded in the misconception that the totality of the experience of visiting a site like Auschwitz Museum can be expressed in the photographs that tourists post online. While this does not mean that visitors should not and cannot be more sensitive or respectful of the site that they visit, blanket statements deriding 'selfies at Auschwitz' ignore the visitor's larger experience, as well as the possibility for discussion and witnessing that can occur as a result of other social media users personalizing the Holocaust story online. Viewing tourists as passive consumers, rather than

as individuals who “find a trail toward the real fictions, dreams, and legends that constitute their lives”<sup>110</sup> and are immersed in the surreal – but very real – nature of the site ignores that tourists use photography to remember, share, and interpret their experiences in the world.<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, concerns about performative behaviour ignore that in a significant number of the photographs collected, captions and hashtags accompanying selfies and self-portraits include information seen in Museum exhibits, or learned about during tours of the site. Providing ready-made photo opportunities for tourists, complete with information appropriate for photo captions is another way the site acts as one of mass tourism, but it also is a way of ensuring that information about the Holocaust is spread beyond just those who are able to visit, as tourists use this information to create the captions that accompany their posted photographs. Many of the self-portraits include captions that attempt to communicate a sense of commemoration or newfound knowledge about the Holocaust. If this is the first time a social media user has engaged with Holocaust narratives outside of the classroom, it is not surprising that they are unaware of the taboos around visual depictions of the Holocaust, yet still, even most performative photographs attempt to communicate some information about Auschwitz or the impression that a visit left on the subject.

While Museum officials, journalists, visual artists, and the ‘social media mob’ may attempt to maintain Lanzmann’s firewall around the Holocaust, tourists will continue to push boundaries and negotiate taboos about how one can appropriately express themselves at a site of mass atrocity. Notably, the drivers of major objections to tourist photography at the Museum has shifted from the broader public to “memory truthers”, again suggesting that for the public at large, a taboo is being renegotiated. In 2014, mass outrage directed at Brenna Mitchell was driven by an online mob. *Yolocaust* was instigated by a visual artist and sparked a near

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<sup>110</sup> Neumann: 28.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*: 29.



universal condemnation of the photographs it showcased. But recently, the Museum has had to instigate public discussion about the prevalence of inappropriate tourist behavior and photography. Responses online to their most recent efforts were mixed, and only after the Museum tweeted – and retweeted several times – their own message did a broader population take notice of the prevalence of selfies and self-portraits at the site.

The level of seriousness and the depth of material covered by Auschwitz Museum tour guides will continue to serve as a temperament to the kinds of images that are created, captured, and shared online in comparison to those seen more broadly on Instagram. Yet just as the Auschwitz Museum's rules about photography have changed over time in response to external factors like the need to maintain a flow of foot traffic, preserve artifacts, educate the public, and ensure visual depictions of the site are respectful of its victims, taboos will continue to change as tourists and social media users to interact with the site, share their experiences, position themselves in relation to history, replicate images seen elsewhere, and act as history's ambassadors by sharing their personal experience and understanding of the Holocaust with a broader audience online.

#### **4.1. Limitations and opportunities for further research**

This research contributes to academic examination of evolving Holocaust narratives, tourist photography, and Auschwitz Museum's positioning as a site of mass tourism. It creates a typology for classifying tourist photography at sites of mass atrocities and quantifies the number of selfies and self-portraits in order to measure whether outrage surrounding such photograph is as widespread as mass media commentary would suggest. However, access to photographs on private Instagram accounts, multiple user-driven geotags, and the short timeframe available online all limited the extent to which a large sample of photographs taken at Auschwitz Museum could be collected.

Future research could consider participant observation at Auschwitz Museum, or interviewing the subjects of selfies and self-portraits in order to get a more complete picture of their motivations for visiting Auschwitz Museum, staging photographs, and posting them online. Interviews with tour guides or other Museum officials could provide anecdotal evidence about direct ways the Museum works to police behaviour of individual tourists, rather than through mass media. Collecting photographs over time would allow for a longitudinal study to see if the number and themes of selfies and self-portraits is changing over time. Comparing Instagram photographs at Auschwitz Museum to those taken at other tourist sites would have allowed for a more complete understanding of the extent to which there is a modifying factor at Auschwitz Museum that is not present at other sites of mass tourism.

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