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Reinstated Dignity – Continued Silencing

Violent, Gendered Imagery in Holocaust Web Exhibitions[1]

Abstract: This paper examines how and to what effect recent trends regarding the use of violent imagery in exhibitions on Nazi mass atrocities transpire online. Analysing 87 web exhibitions by the three internationally most influential museums on the Shoah, it becomes evident that these museums avoid displaying graphic images of violence. However, an analysis of imagery that exhibitions produce linguistically unearths apparent dissonances. On the one hand, the aim of restoring the dignity of victims and giving them a voice marks a central feature of all examples. On the other hand, online exhibitions on the Shoah largely rely on stereotypes in gendered perceptions and narratives of extreme violence. The paper traces the impact of tropes that invoke gendered concepts of power and agency and argues that they limit curators' ability to explain and analyse the pretext and events of the Shoah.

Keywords: museums, representation, Holocaust education, gender, digitalisation, visual analysis

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Digital spaces as museums

A museum in everyone's hand: digitization of everyday life came with the promise of expanding the space in which cultural institutions operate. Long before the online exhibition boom surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic,[2] institutions dedicated to Holocaust education discovered the web as a relevant space of action (under the – arguably flawed – premise that form, as opposed to content, would make it easier to address certain age groups).[3] To analyse how museums create impressions, emotions, knowledges, and images of Nazi persecution online is thus promising because it allows to access how they have been creating meaning about this past over two decades.[4] This is true even if they, and especially their online formats, impact an audience smaller than that of other formats of public history, such as documentaries.[5]

For visitors' reception of web exhibitions, historically 'authentic' objects are of central importance (together with design and narrative), so it is especially the representation of digitized, that is photographed or scanned, artefacts which requires as much, if not even more, analytical scrutiny than in traditional, material exhibitions. "Perceptions of what is or should be regarded as 'genuine' are being blurred as a consequence of changes in technologies."[6] This notion of distortion of medial forms, of 'authenticity' and 'originality', plays to museums' strong side, but it demands a consideration of mediality:[7] not only do museums routinely attribute 'originality' and

2 João Pedro Amorim/Luis Miguel Lopes Teixeira, Art in the Digital during and after COVID. Aura and Apparatus of Online Exhibitions, in: Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities 12/5 (2021), doi: 10.21659/RUPKATHA.V12N5.RIOC1S1N2.

3 On earlier trends: Michael Gray, Contemporary Debates in Holocaust Education, Basingstoke/New York 2014, 99–103; Hannes Burkhardt, Social Media und Holocaust Education. Chancen und Grenzen historisch-politischer Bildung, in: Anja Ballis/Markus Gloe (eds.) Holocaust Education Revisited, Wiesbaden 2019, 371–389, doi: 10.1007/978-3-658-24205-3_20, 372–373.

4 Interestingly, practitioners as well as academics have mostly focused their efforts and discussions on online art exhibitions, even though technical, cultural, or social museums have not been less active. An overview is provided by: David England/Thecla Schiphorst/Nick Bryan-Kinns (eds.), Curating the Digital. Space for Art and Interaction, Wiesbaden 2016; Santos M. Mateos-Rusillo/Arnau Gifreu-Castells, Museums and Online Exhibitions, in: Museum Management and Curatorship (2016), doi: 10.1080/09647775.2015.1118644.

5 Web exhibitions are yet to become a subject of broad academic reflection, which still mostly focuses on beaten paths of digitization, for example Anja Ballis, The Impact of Digitization on Tour Guiding, in: Anja Ballis (ed.), Tour Guides at Memorial Sites and Holocaust Museums, Wiesbaden 2022, doi: 10.1007/978-3-658-35818-1_11. On the impact of television on public history see for example Judith Keilbach/Béla Rásky/Jana Starek (eds.), Völkermord zur Prime-Time. Der Holocaust im Fernsehen, Vienna/Hamburg 2019.

6 Martin Woolley/Kristina Niedderer, Real or Unreal? Crafting Authenticity in the Digital Age, in: Craft Research 7/2 (2016), 159–164, doi: 10.1386/crre.7.2.159_2.

7 Roman Weindl, Die Aura des Originals im Museum. Über den Zusammenhang von Authentizität und Besucherinteresse, Bielefeld 2019.

ensure that visitors gain insight through objects and thus see them as special;[8] they also have the expertise to identify what differences various (material) forms make and to relate this to a broad public. In recent decades, they have clearly set a trend in highlighting photographs as a central category of objects in online exhibitions on the Shoah. Understood superficially as transmitters of evidence, they "are intended to dispel the last doubts".[9] Their position and function in museums' online activities are therefore comparable with their first use in re-education measures immediately after the end of Nazi rule.[10] Sometimes, photographs are even wrongly assumed to be the only existing objects that tell the story of mass atrocities.[11]

Regarding the display of violence, these online exhibitions render visible new standards established over the recent decades. These include a hesitancy towards the use of perpetrator sources and a general reduction in the use of graphic photographs and videos of violence. Furthermore, they increasingly consider the impact of displaying an image on the dignity of the individual victim depicted, or whether it fuels voyeurism.[12]

I argue that material and online exhibitions on the Shoah are championing this cause while they only reluctantly follow surrounding questions in similar areas. To complicate my argument, I will claim that critical media standards established by the *visual turn*[13] are yet to become hegemonic in Shoah exhibitions in general – web exhibitions mostly remain oblivious to them. These include treating visual material as objects (thus neither as part of the design nor as an illustration), considering the interdependency of meaning and context (thus relating their production, and ideally,

8 See Christine Gundermann et al., Schlüsselbegriffe der Public History, Göttingen 2021, 29.

9 Gerhard Paul, Das visuelle Zeitalter. Punkt und Pixel, Göttingen 2016, 336. This and all following translations from German are from the author. See also: Jens Jäger, Überlegungen zu einer historiografischen Bildanalyse, in: Historische Zeitschrift 304 (2017), 655–682.

10 Cornelia Brink, Ikonen der Vernichtung. Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945, Berlin 1998; Susan L. Carruthers, Compulsory Viewing. Concentration Camp Film and German Re-Education, in: Millennium 30/3 (2001), 733–759, doi: 10.1177/03058298010300030601; Ulrike Weckel, "People Who Once were Human Beings Like You and Me". Why Allied Atrocity Films of Liberated Nazi Concentration Camps in 1944–46 Maximized the Horror and Universalized the Victims, in: Johannes Paulmann (ed.), Humanitarianism and Media. 1900 to the Present, New York/Oxford 2019, 107–125.

11 For instance, an exhibition text in a digital exhibition by Yad Vashem oddly claims the Lilly Jacob Album to be "the sole witness", https://yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/last-moments.asp (17 December 2021).

12 See generally the excellent summaries by Ljiljana Radonić in this volume or by Ulrike Koppermann, Challenging the Perpetrators' Narrative, A Critical Reading of the Photo Album 'Resettlement of the Jews from Hungary', Journal of Perpetrator Research 2/2 (2019), 101–129, doi: 10.21039/jpr.2.2.38116.

13 Jäger, Überlegungen, (2017); Paul, Das visuelle Zeitalter, 2016, 330–346; Gerhard Paul, Visual History, Version: 3.0, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, http://docupedia.de/zg/paul_visual_history_v3_de_2014, doi: 10.14765/zzf.dok.2.558.v3 (3 January 2022); Thomas Thiemeyer, Geschichtswissenschaft. Das Museum als Quelle, in: Joachim Baur (ed.), Museumsanalyse. Methoden und Konturen

reception), and sensitivity towards their medial forms (thus embedding them in information regarding the original content, size, ratio, materiality, techniques etc. – and refraining from changing them arbitrarily, without notice). Finally, I will discuss that moral sensitivity seems to be limited to the use of visual objects, while exhibitions continue to violate the dignity of the victim by language and verbal imagery.

This paper aims to trace these apparent dissonances by transferring analytical methods established for identifying gendered narratives[14] and other representations of difference[15] in material exhibitions to the examination of online exhibitions. Applying perspectives of image and discourse analysis derived from visual analysis[16], reader response theory,[17] and feminist text analysis,[18] I will look especially into the use, presentation, and reception of visual material (in all medial and technical forms) and link these with inquiries into how gendered (visual) language and narratives shape the representation of extreme violence on the nexus of power, voice, and agency.

New standards of recent decades: sample and overview

Historical exhibitions are often a means of communicating the context in which violence takes place, its causes, and its ramifications. But increasingly, they are themselves seen as a means of violence, given the extent to which museums are complicit in structural and concrete violence – including reification of violence in

eines neuen Forschungsfeldes, Bielefeld 2010, 73–94; Jens Jäger, "Bilder und Historische Wahrheit", in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 67/13 (2017), 34–39.

14 Heidrun Zettelbauer, Das Begehren nach musealer Repräsentation. Geschlecht und Identität in musealen Inszenierungen zum "Gedankenjahr" 2005, in: Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften 18/1 (2007), 137–153; Roswitha Muttenthaler/Regina Wonisch, Gesten des Zeigens. Zur Repräsentation von Gender und Race in Ausstellungen, Bielefeld 2006; Thomas Thiemeyer, Geschichtswissenschaft. Das Museum als Quelle, in: Joachim Baur (ed.), Museumsanalyse. Methoden und Konturen eines neuen Forschungsfeldes, Bielefeld 2010, 73–94.

15 Sharon Macdonald/Gordon Fyfe, Theorizing Museums. Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World, Oxford 1996; Sabine Offe, Ausstellungen, Einstellungen, Entstellungen. Jüdische Museen in Deutschland und Österreich, Berlin/Vienna 2000; Thiemeyer, Geschichtswissenschaft, (2010).

16 Jens Jäger, Fotografie und Geschichte, Frankfurt am Main 2009, 91–103.

17 Mieke Bal, Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide, Toronto 2002, 19, 53, 70, 180; Christoph Hamann, Wechselrahmen. Narrativierungen von Schlüsselbildern – das Beispiel vom Foto des kleinen Jungen aus dem Warschauer Ghetto, in: Werner Dreier et al. (eds.): Schlüsselbilder des Nationalsozialismus. Fotohistorische und didaktische Überlegungen, Innsbruck/Vienna/Bolzano 2008, 28–42; Gundermann et al., Schlüsselbegriffe, 2021, 266–274.

18 Heidrun Zettelbauer, Unwanted Desire and Processes of Self-Discipline. Autobiographical Representations of the Reichsarbeitsdienst Camps in the Diary of a Young Female National Socialist, in: Zeitgeschichte 45/4 (2018), 537–574.

displays and the exclusion or silencing of marginalized communities,[19] – including museums dedicated to the memory of the Shoah.[20] Online exhibitions are also a product of structures shaped by these characteristics, so questions of power must also be reflected on when analysing web exhibitions. Specifically, I will focus on two questions: what position do the museums create for historical subjects and how do they represent their agency? Do the exhibitions perpetuate or even reify the violence mediated in stories and artefacts? I will follow these questions in an analysis of online exhibitions by the three internationally most important and influential museums dealing with Nazi mass violence, especially the Shoah: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC (abbreviated USHMM), the Państwowe Muzeum (State Museum) Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim, Poland (PMAB), and the World Holocaust Remembrance Center at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem (YV). Between them, they have 87 online exhibitions publicly available as of 2022,[21] a corpus large enough to trace established standards emerging over recent decades. However, most of the exhibitions are not stating curators or dates of publication[22] and some have been reworked over time,[23] so my aim is not to analyse developments, but rather of the status quo of the available exhibitions, which I will briefly discuss quantitatively and then use as a backdrop for analysing the visual language in eleven prototypical cases. Thematically, the exhibitions cover a wide range of topics, reflecting the institutions' different programmes. The USHMM has by far the fewest exhibitions online, but they are also the most general, covering large topics of political history (created as a spin-off to material exhibitions), and following the most analytical questions (such as on complicity or propaganda). Two museums published exhibitions focusing on the persecution of specific victim

19 Johnetta Betsch Cole/Laura Lott (eds.), Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion in Museums, Washington 2019; Stefan Benedik/Eva Meran/Monika Sommer, Haus der Geschichte Österreich. Das zeitgenössische Museum als Diskussionsforum und Prozess, in: Rainer Wenrich et al. (eds.), Zeitgeschichte im Museum. Das 20. und 21. Jahrhundert ausstellen und vermitteln, Munich 2021, 79–94, 80–81.

20 Zuzanna Dziuban, (Re)politicising the Dead in Post-Holocaust Poland. The Afterlives of the Human Remains at the Belzec Extermination Camp, in: Elisabeth Anstett/Jean-Marc Dreyfus (eds.), Human Remains in Society. Curation and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Genocide and Mass-Violence, Manchester 2016, 38–65.

21 Texts of two additional exhibitions are available, but all the displayed files seem to be broken and could thus not be considered. Three of the USHMM's exhibitions are based on outdated software but were included as the content seemed to be mostly accessible and aspects of design and user experience feature with low priority in this paper.

22 Most of the exhibitions do not have a publication date, but it is implicit that the earliest date back to the late 2000s and there are none produced in recent months. Only PMAB names the digital curators and other staff involved in the exhibitions' creation.

23 As an example see https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/kristallnacht/index.asp (12 February 2023); https://web.archive.org/web/20110204025604/http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/kristallnacht/video.asp (recorded data of 13 November 2011).

groups (homosexuals in the USHMM and Romani people in the PMAB). These two museums also include perpetrator history in their online programme (at YV this is only the case in the exception of the Eichmann trial), while the PMAB and YV are similar in that they offer many site-specific exhibitions, making the history of either ghettos, camps, or Jewish urban communities relatable.[24]

Structurally, almost all the exhibitions I analyse in the following (and in fact most online exhibitions also beyond Nazi history) feature a non-dynamic build and a linear and unidirectional setup. This is important to mention because it means that these exhibitions do not mirror the construction of material exhibitions (which are effectively always multidirectional[25]), and because a linear narrative achieves homogenization and teleology more easily.[26] Additionally, the lack of options for visitor engagement is striking, lagging behind the standards of material exhibitions. Most online exhibitions share a static character that, anachronistically, does not make use of the dynamic aspects which are key to digital media.[27] As the historian Wulf Kansteiner points out: "Consumers have generally no power over the conceptual framing, narrative emplotment, and visual display of the violent pasts which they are urged to remember. In this important respect, digital memory culture is stuck in the past and has not yet decisively advanced beyond the age of film."[28] Within the sample of this paper, only the USHMM makes use of dynamic exhibition formats (a forum for text contributions in *Anne Frank the Writer* and in *Some Were Neighbours*)[29] and a feedback option (once, in an exhibition on *Americans and the Holocaust*).[30] As I

24 Formally, presentations based on collection databases are an exception (this approach is mostly used by Yad Vashem, with one by the PMAB). Most exhibitions are hosted by the museums themselves, with only some of the PMAB's content being published on the commercial but freely available Google Arts and Culture platform.

25 Because visitors have always more than one option in a three-dimensional space even if architects and curators try to direct them.

26 I suggest a typology of analysis according to the visitors' position (84 expect visitors to be solely passive, 1 uses interactive modes, 1 offers feedback options and 2 encourage visitors to write reflections which are then published as user-generated content), options for reception/interaction (28 are linear, 19 linear with options for extended reading, 36 multi-linear, only 1 is multidirectional, and none is multidimensional) and different formats (47 collections of articles, 16 stories/long reads, 14 slideshows, 9 compilations based on collection databases, and no three-dimensional visualizations of material spaces or working tables etc.). I benefit here greatly from other models for analysing digital exhibitions according to a matrix based on "design of the interaction", [type of] "content", and "degree of correspondence", see: Mateos-Rusillo/Gifreu-Castells, Museums and Online Exhibitions, (2016), 5.

27 Franziska Mucha/Kristin Oswald, Partizipationsorientierte Wissensgenerierung und Citizen Science im Museum, in: Henning Mohr/Diana Modarressi-Tehrani (eds.), Museen der Zukunft. Trends und Herausforderungen eines innovationsorientierten Kulturmanagements, Bielefeld 2022, 295–328.

28 Wulf Kansteiner, Genocide Memory, Digital Cultures, and the Aesthetization of Violence, in: Memory Studies 7/4 (2014), 403–408, doi: 10.1177/1750698014542389, 405.

29 https://www.ushmm.org/online/comments/online_exhibitions/annefrank/; https://somewereneighbors.ushmm.org/#/reflection (all 10 January 2022).

30 https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main (10 January 2022).

have argued elsewhere, such a small number is not due to a lack of technical proficiency but rather to scepticism towards more democratic curating. Museums consider exhibitions more as products than as processes.[31]

Before focusing on examples from eleven exhibitions in the paper's main part, I start with an overview in classifying the entire sample into four categories. In terms of how these museums display the contexts and events of the Shoah in online exhibitions, I see the following criteria as most relevant:

Firstly, authorship: The question of the origin of the presented material (whether made by victims or perpetrators) has been heatedly debated since the beginning of Holocaust research as the use of perpetrator sources has frequently been criticized for perpetuating the Nazi perspective, silencing victims, and obstructing historical context.[32] For a long time, the visual language coined by perpetrators has been central to the memory of the Shoah. One of the most prominent examples of this material is the so called *Auschwitz-Album* or *Lilly-Jacob-Album*, a collection of annotated photographs by perpetrators (SS members Bernhard Walter and Ernst Hofmann), documenting the arrival and selection of Hungarian Shoah victims and how they are round up for either forced labour or murder. In a key paper on this album, Ulrike Koppermann stresses the complexity of their critical reception. "Some view the album as a 'weapon' against revisionists and a testimony to the terror of the camp. Others stress the absence of pictures showing physical violence and refer to the album as an 'alibi' or 'Nazi camouflage' which deliberately covers up the mass murder."[33] In this regard, the analysed 87 online exhibitions embody an early onset of a critical reflection of perpetrators' material: half of them seem to have been published at least ten years ago or earlier.[34] It is remarkable that all of them present far more objects created or reappropriated by victims than by perpetrators,

31 Stefan Benedik/Monika Sommer, Ein neues Zeitgeschichte-Museum. Bedingungen und Chancen einer transmedialen Vermittlung von NS-Geschichte, in: Markus Stumpf/Hans Petschar/Oliver Rathkolb (eds.), Nationalsozialismus digital. Die Verantwortung von Bibliotheken, Archiven und Museen sowie Forschungseinrichtungen und Medien im Umgang mit der NS-Zeit im Netz, Göttingen 2021, 35–46; Stefan Benedik/Lisbeth Matzer, Public History, in: Marcus Gräser/Dirk Rupnow (eds.), Österreichische Zeitgeschichte – Zeitgeschichte in Österreich. Eine Standortbestimmung in Zeiten des Umbruchs, Vienna/Cologne 2021, doi: 10.7767/9783205209980, 367–389, 387–388.

32 See for example Federico Finchelstein, The Holocaust Canon. Rereading Raul Hilberg, in: New German Critique 96 (2005), 4–48, 38–39; Cornelia Shati Geißler, Individuum und Masse. Zur Vermittlung des Holocaust in deutschen Gedenkstättenausstellungen, Bielefeld 2015, doi: 10.1515/9783839428641.

33 Koppermann, Challenging the Perpetrators' Narrative, (2019), 116.

34 Of 87 exhibitions, none are visibly dated, but 41 have at least been indexed/archived in or before 2013, the oldest in 2003, the newest in June 2022. For a detailed description of the analysed sources see my supplementary text "Sexualising Trauma: How web exhibitions reiterate victims' representations of Nazi violence", published online for this issue, at https://doi.org/10.25365/oezg-2023-34-1-18.

and that they mostly display Nazi bureaucratic sources only in combination with a narrative that highlights either individual victims or the individuality of persons within victim groups, as will be discussed later.

Secondly, display of explicit violence: Recent museological debates highlight how images of graphic violence reify what they show, substitute a critical approach with the tendency to shock viewers, often rob the victims of individuality, and tend to humiliate, denigrate, and expose the victims[35] – even where such images were meant to document ("liberation photography").[36] This change in awareness has established new standards of museums' practice.[37] For instance, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance has since 2019 advised educators to "[b]e reflective about purpose and rationale when using written and visual materials – especially those of a graphic nature" as well as to avoid the depiction of victims as an anonymous mass or of perpetrators as monstrous.[38] This connects to "the imperative of empathy" that "has emerged not simply as a burgeoning object of historical investigation, but also as a methodological requirement and as a normative horizon of inquiry".[39] Such normative approaches have seldom been discussed openly[40], yet they have fundamentally transformed representations of the Shoah and introduced the simple cogency of considering the victims' integrity by exploring morally more justifiable and sensitive approaches.[41]

Of the 87 exhibitions, only a small minority of 17 include graphic depictions of violence, most of them in visual testimony of survivors (mostly drawings). This might come as a surprise given that historically memorial museums (re-)created

35 Weckel, "People Who Once", (2019), 116; Paul, Das visuelle Zeitalter, 2016, 324–325, 336–347.

36 Carol Zemel, Emblems of Atrocity. Holocaust Liberation Photography, in: Shelly Hornstein/Florence Jacobowitz (eds.), Image and Remembrance. Representation and the Holocaust, Bloomington 2003, 201–219.

37 See on the use of violent imagery in general Ralf Raths, Knöcheltief Blut im Museum? Einige Gedanken zur musealen Verwendung von expliziten Gewaltbildern, in: Martin Clauss (ed.), Vom Umgang mit den Toten. Sterben im Krieg von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart, Paderborn 2021, 307–326; Jörg Echternkamp/Jens Jäger, Representing the Second World War in German and European Museums and Memorials, in: Jörg Echternkamp/ Jens Jäger (eds.), Views of Violence, Representing the Second World War in German and European Museums and Memorials, New York/Oxford, 2019, 1–26.

38 IHRA, Recommendation for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust, 2019, https://bit.ly/3KBCrs0 (10 January 2022), 28, 29.

39 Samuel Moyn, Empathy in History, Empathizing with Humanity, in: History and Theory 45/3 (2006), 397–415, 397.

40 See in general Michael Rothberg, Traumatic Realism. The Demands of Holocaust Representation, Minneapolis 2000; Hannah Holtschneider, The Holocaust and Representations of Jews. History and Identity in the Museum, Abingdon-on-Thames 2014; Angi Buettner, Media Representation of Catastrophe, Holocaust Imagery, and the Politics of Seeing, in: MEDIANZ: Media Studies Journal of Aotearoa New Zealand 11/1 (2008), 1–14.

41 Rothberg, Traumatic Realism, 2000; Carolyn J. Dean, The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust, Ithaca 2006.

graphic representations of Nazi violence in influential and iconic ways. A noteworthy but tiny fraction of the online exhibitions uses photographs that clearly humiliate the victims, among them four exhibitions using perpetrator photography and two displaying shots by Allied photographers.[42] Even among these, none instrumentalizes violence, hence avoiding the possibility of fuelling voyeurism. As there is no difference in this regard between newer and older online exhibitions, it seems reasonable to argue that these three leading institutions have been critical of images that reiterate or even reify violence – right from the start of their online activities.

Thirdly, mediality: I examine questions of medial form and 'authenticity', as the visual turn has encouraged the practice in museums to treat photographs as actual objects, highlighting contexts of production, reception, and their medial character (information, proportions, size, materiality etc.). In this regard, the sample reveals a gap between academic debate and curatorial practice: for instance, only a minority of 31 out of 87 analysed exhibitions mentioned the author of at least one of the many images displayed. They rarely discuss the contexts of image production; those of visual reception and public perception practically never.[43] This is no surprise considering how late material exhibitions have been scrutinized in this regard[44] and additionally, how rarely online formats have been the subject of academic debate.

Fourthly, modes of narrative: I specifically ask how verbal imagery in general and gendered language in particular constrict historical agency, limit the analytical potential and understanding of historical context, symbolically exonerate perpetrators, silence victims and subject them to othering or even dehumanization. After all, an image is also "a figure of comparison, a kind of metaphor […] of course rendered in language".[45] Analysing imagery of violence thus requires asking which visuals are created by texts and whether they reproduce the language of perpetrators and/or graphic violence. As I will explain later, all museums I examine here published online exhibitions that degrade and de-individualize victims in exhibition texts by echoing the language of perpetrators and/or using verbal imagery of violence. These aspects account for a habit of voyeurism that has for so long been constitutive for the visual memory of the Shoah even though it "problematize[s] the emotive and

42 With one exception which provides the name of the executed and thus gives them individuality, https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/museum_photos/index.asp (10 January 2022).

43 Which would be useful for propagating an anti-intentionalist interpretation that makes use of reader response theory. Bal, Travelling Concepts, 2002, 19, 53, 70, 180; Hamann, Wechselrahmen, (2008).

44 Jäger, Bilder, (2017); Thiemeyer, Geschichtswissenschaft, (2010).

45 Bal, Travelling Concepts, 2002, 56.

connective value of [the] norms of atrocity remembrance", as Janet Jacobs has put it so powerfully.[46]

Beyond othering: shifting representations with violent and silencing effects

When comparing the standards applied in these online exhibitions on the Shoah created by the major international museums with other examples of public history, the difference becomes immediately obvious. While television documentaries still represent Nazi atrocities[47] by excessively exploiting nudity and representation of corpses[48] and online resources by professional journalists or citizen scientists still employ images of execution scenes or dead bodies on a massive scale,[49] online exhibitions have visibly desisted to other the victims in this way.[50] Arguably embedded in the increase of attention towards moral standards in museums (such as humili-

46 Janet Jacobs, Gender and Collective Memory. Women and Representation at Auschwitz, in: Memory Studies 1/2 (2008), 211–225, doi: 10.1177/1750698007088387.

47 See in general Aleida Assmann, Transnational Memory and the Construction of History through Mass Media, in: Lucy Bond/Stef Craps/Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), Memory Unbound, Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies, New York/Oxford 2017, 65–82; Angela Keppler, Mediale Gegenwart. Eine Theorie des Fernsehens am Beispiel der Darstellung von Gewalt, Frankfurt am Main 2006; Laura Saarenmaa, Circulating Nazi imagery. Wars, Weapons, and Generational Layers of Cultural Remembrance, in: Marie Cronqvist/Lina Sturfelt (eds.), War Remains: Mediations of Suffering and Death in the Era of the World Wars, Falun 2018, 189–213; Jovan Byford, Picturing Jasenovac: Atrocity Photography Between Evidence and Propaganda, in: Hildegard Frubis/Clara Oberle/Agnieszka Pufelska (eds.), Fotografien aus den Lagern des NS-Regimes, Beweissicherung und ästhetische Praxis, Vienna 2018, 227–248, 234–235.

48 Although this is not within the scope of this article, it seems beneficial to mention that a current example shows the contours of a similar shift in television. For instance, the German public broadcaster ZDF produced a large TV series called *The German Abyss* (*Der deutsche Abgrund*) in May 2021, featuring graphic images of violence of half-naked victims even in the intro and using them frequently, especially in the episode *Krieg und Holocaust* by directors Dagmar Gallenmüller and Karl Alexander Weck, but hardly out of context. In comparison to other documentaries by this broadcaster, which is known for its bold storylines and voyeuristic visual language in Nazi-related productions, one could argue that there is increased sensitivity towards this topic. See: Tobias Ebbrecht, History, Public Memory and Media Event, in: Media History 13/2–3 (2007), 221–234; Yvonne Ehrenspeck/Achim Hackenberg, Zum performativen Charakter von Filmen, in: Christoph Wulf/Jörg Zirfas (eds.), Ikonologie des Performativen, Munich 2005, 232–246, 239.

49 To take just the Buchenwald images stored at the USHMM, they are used throughout Wikipedia, and mostly out of their specific context on prominent pages such as https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/End_of_World_War_II_in_Europe; https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holokaust; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_prisoners_of_Buchenwald; https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler; https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Adolf_Eichmann (all 2 January 2022).

50 Images are still available in the respective databases and are not necessarily contextualized more thoroughly there, but their use in digital exhibitions and educational materials is visibly marginal. See for example https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/photo/a-pile-of-corpses-in-the-buchenwald-concentration-camp (2 January 2022).

ation, fairness, equality)[51], dehumanizing photographs of victims after liberation, which were once so present in material exhibitions, are rarely shown. The images of piles of corpses or starving and naked people reduced to a mere human-less body seem to be no longer (as) iconic, at least not in the online work of the internationally most influential museums.[52] To take one institution, the USHMM hosts only one online exhibition in which liberation images of corpses are used,[53] even though the museum's publicly accessible databases offer 115 of such examples, which other public history institutions (but not museums) use widely online.[54]

The absence of violent photography becomes particularly clear when compared to the display of a body of photography with similar moral implications that is still widely used: perpetrator sources. Material produced as part of the bureaucratic process of persecution, in the interest and under the ideological and visual premises of institutions of persecution frequently shows up in online exhibitions. This leads to the logical conclusion that – under the condition of contextualization – its use is still deemed acceptable. Prominent visual examples for this are the already mentioned *Lilly-Jacob-Album* or the famous visual report on the atrocities after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising prepared by Nazi official Jürgen Stroop. Photographs from both are prominently exhibited online by all three museums discussed.[55]

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51 See Ljiljana Radonić, From "Double Genocide" to "the New Jews". Holocaust, Genocide and Mass Violence in Post-Communist Memorial Museums, in: Journal of Genocide Research 20/4 (2018), 510–529, doi: 10.1080/14623528.2018.1522831; Ljiljana Radonić, Opfer ausstellen. Individuelle und kollektive Opfernarrative in postsozialistischen Gedenkmuseen, in: Eva Binder (ed.), Opfernarrative in transnationalen Kontexten, Berlin/Boston 2020, 49–72, 51–55; Emily-Jayne Stiles, Holocaust Memory and National Museums in Britain, Cham 2022, 81–99; Pavlos Kotsonis, Overcoming Humiliation and Embracing Global Contribution? A Visit to the Museum of Resistance, in: Research Institute for European and American Studies, 2018, https://rieas.gr/images/asia/cotsonispavlos.pdf (10 January 2022); Harold Kaplan, Conscience and Memory. Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust, Chicago 1994, ix–xiii; Lynn Maranda, Museum Ethics in the 21st Century. Museum Ethics Transforming into Another Dimension, in: icofom study series 43 (2015), 151–165, doi: 10.4000/iss.443. As an example for the public debate see: Holland Cotter, Making Museums Moral Again, in: The New York Times, 17 March 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/17/arts/design/making-museums-moral-again.html (10 January 2022).

52 On the gendered character of these representations see Amy H. Shapiro, Patriarchy, Objectification and Violence in Schindler's List and Angry Harvest, in: Myrna Goldenberg/Amy H. Shapiro (eds.), Different Horrors, Same Hell. Gender and the Holocaust, Washington 2013, 79–98, 87.

53 https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main (10 December 2021).

54 Of all 2552 items available to date in its image database, 115 are liberation photographs showing corpses, https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/en/a-z/photo (8 January 2022).

55 Yad Vashem covers the report in a chapter of its online exhibition on Photographs from the Warsaw Ghetto and introduces it with a media-critical text, but fails to meet its own standards when displaying the album, https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/warsaw_ghetto/collection.asp (15 March 2021); USHMM and PMAB include the report in online resources, but not as part of an online exhibition, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/?q=STROOP%20REPORT&search_field=Photo%20/%20Film%20Keyword; https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/artifact/stroop-report-cover; http://www.auschwitz.org/gfx/auschwitz/userfiles/auschwitz/edukacja/zrozumiec_holokaust-ksiazka_pomocnicza.pdf (all 8 January 2022).

Since text also constitutes images, and visual language is also created or at least shaped by written language, the question of the dehumanization of victims also requires an analysis of texts. Through the texts of web exhibitions, museums even encourage empathy with the perpetrators, for instance when they give space to the complaints of *Einsatzgruppen* soldiers' "of battle fatigue and mental anguish caused by shooting large numbers of women and children", while denying the victims individuality and emotion when they explain that "gassing also proved to be less costly" or that sites of mass killing such as Chełmno were "the most efficient way of achieving the 'Final Solution.'"[56] Similar wording objectifying the victims can be found in the online ressources of all three institutions, for example when their texts use the passive voice, describing mass murder merely as the consequence of a selection "which resulted in some of them being killed"[57], or when they adopt the technical language of the "most efficient"[58] murder ("packing" victims "tightly" into gas chambers),[59] again from the perspective of the perpetrator. Typically, the seeming neutrality of such language also conveys a lack of empathy for the victims and reiterates the violence inherent in the bureaucracy of persecution: "it was equipped with several extermination facilities and crematoria. Extermination was carried out by means of Zyklon B gas".[60] The absence of an explicit actor introduces the Nazi perspective as the norm and perpetuates the bureaucratic narrative aimed at stripping the victims/opponents of their agency.[61]

A related problem is the framing of historical language, both in pictures and texts, that functions as a cover-up for brutal violence. Euphemisms are famously widespread in Nazi bureaucratic language and often have a strong visual component, for example the term "resettlement". Yad Vashem decodes this phrase as a euphemism in a caption in its material exhibition on the *Lilly-Jacob-Album*[62], but decided to cut out the cover page with this problematic title altogether in the cor-

56 https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/gassing-operations (5 March 2022).

57 https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A?hl=en-GB (8 January 2022).

58 https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/through-the-lens/until-the-last-jew.asp; https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/auschwitz-birkenau.asp (all 3 December 2021).

59 https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/gassing-operations; see also https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/st-louis/search/research/resource12/schoen.htm (all 8 January 2022).

60 https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/final-solution/auschwitz.html (8 January 2022).

61 For instance, a paragraph in the PMAB's exhibition on the *Sonderkommando* describing the events of the revolt in October 1944 entirely adopts perpetrators' perspectives, starting with the sentence "In the autumn of 1944, the SS embarked on the gradual liquidation of the *Sonderkommando* prisoners." This is followed by further sentences such as "After control over the situation was regained, a selection was conducted among the surviving members of the *Sonderkommando*, which resulted in some of them being killed.", https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A?hl=en-GB (8 January 2022).

62 https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/ready2print/pdf/auschwitz-album-all-panels.pdf (5 March 2022).

responding online exhibition.[63] Such deciphering of the obscuring Nazi terminology or avoiding its perpetuation is however not very common in online exhibitions, thereby posing a risk of "seeing the victims as the Nazis saw them – objectified, degraded, and dehumanised" even if avoiding perpetrators' sources.[64]

Illustration, not object: the obliviousness towards material integrity in digitized objects

In the background a dark blurry picture of a damaged door, the only remaining artefact from the gas chambers of Birkenau, superimposed with the quotation "We have a dark premonition because we know".[65] Given this entry to the PMAB's online exhibition on the *Sonderkommando*, visitors might a expect focus on authenticity regarding objects. However, the following exhibition – as most of the analysed exhibitions – does not consider mediality. Formally, the argument of something being 'authentic' or told in an 'authentic' way makes the historical context relatable in public history applications.[66] In terms of content, authenticity has been a highly relevant concept when teaching or discussing the Shoah as there is a close connection to the concept of evidence. Given this importance, it is instructive to look at the media qualities in two exhibitions. In doing so, I will argue that these two cases are prototypical of online exhibitions on the Shoah in how they treat images as illustrations rather than as objects. This is a relevant deficit as it prevents visitors from understanding them as historical material, carrying meaning, and requiring interpretation. Most importantly, exhibitions fail to critically embed the objects medial aspects, which, first, enables visitors to understand the context and shift their focus to questions of representation and agency. Second, exhibitions thus do not pursue an agenda of discussing documentation and communication that would also touch upon ethical questions as the erasure of evidence/memory was part of the crimes themselves.[67]

The lack of sensitivity towards the mediality of digital objects is transparent in all the 87 exhibitions examined in the way visual material is usually cropped for design purposes (mostly to fit a ratio dictated by the design, sometimes going so far as to

63 https://yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/index.asp (8 January 2022).
64 https://2015.holocaustremembrance.com/educate/teaching-guidelines/how-to-teach-about-holocaust-in-schools (8 January 2022).
65 https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A?hl=en-GB (8 January 2022).
66 Gundermann et al., Schlüsselbegriffe, 2021, 35–37.
67 Nicholas Terry, Covering Up Chelmno. Nazi Attempts to Obfuscate and Obliterate an Extermination Camp, in: Dapim. Studies on the Holocaust 32/3 (2018), 188–205, doi: 10.1080/23256249.2018.1524632.

reduce the object to a random detail, while the actual content is only visible in object databases, not in exhibitions[68]). While these attitudes may also have shaped material exhibitions until recently, sometimes unquestioned standards of professional material exhibitions are not met, in examples that range from the altering of recent photographs to make them look older[69] to 3rd degree reproductions (photographs of reproductions of historical photographs/documents in publications).[70] This applies to a vast majority of online exhibitions on the Shoah, including even iconic images of evidence, such as the clandestine *Sonderkommando* photographs,[71] a series of four shots, two of them of corpses being burned outside a Birkenau's gas chamber, which are reduced to illustrative purposes more than once.[72] The online resources of Yad Vashem and the PMAB on this specific set of evidence and resistance photography are interesting cases to compare, as they highlight how far critical approaches to visual material extend: in the PMAB case, the images presented are intact, but lack contextualization, thus obliterating the background of production and transmission.[73] Yad Vashem has published an insightful critical essay on these contexts, which

68 To mention only one illustrative example from each institution: https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/warsaw_ghetto/collection.asp, https://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/olympics/, https://artsandculture.google.com/story/tAXhqVSFcCutLw (all 8 January 2022).

69 https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/43-vieille-du-temple-street/summer-1942.asp (8 January 2022).

70 Not all of PMAB's digital curators appear to have had access to scans of the originals, so the state in which they are presented digitally obscures their original form and their contexts of production and provenance, or raises questions of authenticity when pictures are represented in oddly cropped black-and-white photographs for no obvious reason. For example, three pictures of Crematorium IV and V, taken by the SS, appear remarkably different from each other, one of which is probably a scan from a publication, https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/crematorium-iv-photograph-taken-by-the-ss-in-1943/KgGG7tqqSFlryA (10 January 2022).

71 Dan Stone, The Sonderkommando Photographs, in: Jewish Social Studies 7/3 (2001), 131–148; David Patterson, Sonderkommando Photo 4 and the Portrayal of the Invisible, in: Navras J. Aafreedi/Priya Sing (eds.), Conceptualizing Mass Violence. Representations, Recollections, and Reinterpretations, Abingdon/New York 2021, 153–166.

72 The cropped version used by Yad Vashem appears in various contexts of professional and non-professional use, see https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/epicenter-horror-photographs-sonderkommando.html, https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about/final-solution/auschwitz.html; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genocide; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Holocaust, https://bit.ly/3tWaR1S (all 8 January 2022). Interestingly, it is a page in the citizen science encyclopaedia Wikipedia that, while not problematizing the cropping as omission of content, at least provides a comparison. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonderkommando (8 January 2022).

73 Only three of the Sonderkommando photographs are shown here, all of them cropped. What I consider problematic is how only two of the three individual entries in Google Arts and Culture's object database mention the authorship at all, and only one of them points to the clandestine character of the photography. The two others feature the following titles "Photograph showing women taken to the gas chamber. Photo was made by the Sonderkommando group near Crematorium V." or even only "Photograph showing the burning of corpses on the pyre near Crematorium V." The exhibitions' use of material contradicts its aim to highlight the merits of the Sonderkommando's members and to inform about their acts of creating testimony as resistance.

even explicitly calls the cropping problematic,[74] but shows the objects exactly as criticized: instead of displaying the whole series, the online essay presents only two out of four photographs, thereby omitting necessary context; they are cropped and even altered with a white frame that misleadingly mimics the white border in traditional photo prints.[75] This striking disconnect between text and photograph in both exhibitions points to a lack of curatorial reflection on the mediality of digitized objects and on how content follows form in online exhibitions.

A different example of positions towards mediality can be seen in an online exhibition by Yad Vashem on the *Lilly-Jacob-Album*. It is an almost unique case which offers online visitors an opportunity to take a critical perspective on the medial form, showing the entire album and almost each page, not only the photographs, before going into detail. Yet, a critical discussion of visual language is almost absent,[76] making the exhibition fail in substantially challenging the impressions of order and serenity that visitors might feel as a result of the bureaucratic visual language.[77] Furthermore, the exhibition makes the uninformed visitor reiterate the narrative produced by the perpetrators by means of sequence, choice/selectivity, and composition.[78] In its analysis of the photography, however, the exhibition systematically deconstructs the album's content[79] and clearly lives up to recent demands to "move beyond the notion of visible, physical violence in order to address the brutality condensed in

74 Franziska Reininger, Inside the Epicenter of the Horror. Photographs of the Sonderkommando, in: https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/epicenter-horror-photographs-sonderkommando.html (8 January 2022).

75 https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/epicenter-horror-photographs-sonderkommando.html (8 January 2022). The article mentions a slide show of the uncropped version at the Auschwitz Birkenau State museum's webpage, which appears to be offline as of December 2021.

76 The position of the photographers is hinted at, but even the much discussed questions of the photographers' interaction with the depicted and the extent to which the photographs were staged are not raised, although the brief captions in some of the related pictures would have provided enough space to do so. Koppermann, Challenging the Perpetrators' Narrative, (2019), 117; https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/kanada.asp (7 January 2022).

77 "What lies behind the impression of 'order' is nothing else than a forcefully achieved scene of heteronomy and collectivisation.", Koppermann, Challenging the Perpetrators' Narrative, (2019), 118.

78 The only aspect that has been changed drastically is the sequence, which seems to follow an earlier book publication by Yad Vashem, later also adopted by a video exhibition at the German Historical Museum in 2020, https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/ (7 January 2022), Israel Gutman/Bella Gutterman (eds.), The Auschwitz Album. The Story of a Transport, Yad Vashem/Oświęcim 2002; See also: Raphael Gross, Sheindi Ehrenwalds Aufzeichnungen, 2020, https://www.dhm.de/blog/2020/01/27/sheindi-ehrenwalds-aufzeichnungen/ (3 February 2023). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for pointing me towards this aspect.

79 The exhibition texts relate spatial and temporal contexts and continuously describe and embed the motifs into a narrative of the procedure. Redundancies in the descriptions seem a missed opportunity as imminent details in the pictures (for example the involvement of *Funktionshäftlinge*) are left out or only explained later. See https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/arrival.asp (7 January 2022).

these pictures" and to communicate that the images themselves are visual violence.[80] In general, the texts inform visitors about the process of mass murder and add what is missing, for example the position of the (in most cases visibly absent) perpetrators, while enabling modes of reading empathetic with the victims. In some cases, the exhibition even identifies individual victims by name and, less often, town of residence.[81] Moreover, the exhibition refrained from providing a translation of the German captions, which deviates from the media-sensitive approach of showing the album as an object, but can be interpreted as a curatorial strategy to subvert the authority of the perpetrator-producers (providing an alternative in the form of the more accessible exhibition texts).[82]

Viewing agency: The gender of rebellious heroes versus silenced victims

When inquiring into how exhibitions create imaginations about a (violent) past, it is not enough to just look at the representation of photographs. In line with the broader understanding of visual language as introduced above,[83] I want to dedicate the remainder of this paper to an analysis of verbal imagery, arguably the most powerful structure of imagery in these online exhibitions. In general, the language of victim and perpetrator archetypization in Shoah remembrance has long been identified as a historically problematic one that is difficult to avoid.[84] When exhibitions make it a priority to verbalise emotional grounds for empathy and identification, they often gravitate towards obscuring the structural dimension of Nazi persecution; in contrast, when their texts focus on structural aspects, political or discursive questions, there is a tendency to deny victims their individuality and agency.[85]

80 Koppermann, Challenging the Perpetrators' Narrative, (2019), 121.

81 https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/selection.asp (7 January 2022).

82 Evident for example in the application of entirely new semantics for the individual chapters such as "Assignment to Slave Labour" instead of "Nach der Entlausung" ("After Delousing") or "Kanada" instead of "Effekten" ("effects" as in property), https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/assignment-to-slave-labor.asp (7 January 2022).

83 Bal, Travelling Concepts, 2002, 56.

84 Mark A. Drumbl, Victims Who Victimize, in: London Review of International Law 4/2 (2016), 217–246. Conceptually, I draw heavily on feminist criticism developed in the mid-1990s, for example Zillah Eisenstein, Hatreds, Racialized and Sexualized Conflicts in the 21st Century, New York/London 1996; Claudia Breger, Ortlosigkeit des Fremden, "Zigeunerinnen" und "Zigeuner" in der deutschsprachigen Literatur um 1800, Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, 9–10, 379. Furthermore, the victim/perpetrator-binary relies on racialization developed in colonialism, Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather, Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest, New York/London 1995. For an example of recent advancement of those theories see Zettelbauer, Unwanted Desire (2018).

85 Radonić, Opfer ausstellen, (2020), 51–55; Emily-Jayne Stiles, Holocaust Memory and National Museums in Britain, Cham 2022, 81–99; Stefan Hördler, Sichtbarmachen. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Analyse von NS-Täter-Fotografien, in: Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte 65/2 (2017), 259–

In exploring this dilemma further, I will focus on gendered representations as they make visible the links between agency, subjectivity, voice, power (and gender, of course). Therefore, it is worth following the calls of feminist scholars to look into the construction of the premises of narratives about the Shoah as such, and to examine the impact of structurally binary narratives by identifying their underlying feminising or masculinising imagery.[86] Insights into a gendered "allegorical dimension might help us even better understand how the male/female construction sinks its teeth into the objectification of the Other"[87], and thus to shed light on how and why protagonists of such narratives evoke identification in recipients – or not.[88] In her substantial volume on gendered stereotypes in Holocaust films, Ingrid Lewis defined some of these archetypes, among them the tendency to depict women perpetrators as violent and erotic anti-women,[89] and the individual female victim as a "symbolic figure who embodies all the values of humanity: hope, generosity, kindness, dignity and love".[90] When female protagonists are thus constructed as a means of transmitting the universality of victimhood and suffering, it is crucial to note that the fabric used to do so is that of gendered signifiers.[91] Accordingly, the masculinized figure of a stereotypically sadistic perpetrator is also "not intended to construct individual portrayals of perpetrators, but, on the contrary, works as a symbol that encapsulates all the evils of Nazism".[92]

Gendered symbolism serves multiple purposes. It can apply a matrix of gendered positions like a cartography of individuals' agency and relationships to power – their likeliness of being harmed/harming others, being exposed/exposing others, being silenced/having a voice.[93] Inquiring about agency in this context should not be mis-

271; Hildegard Frübis, Die Evidenz der Fotografie und die fotografischen Erzählweisen des Judenmords, in: Bettina Bannasch/Hans Joachim Hahn (eds.), Darstellen, Vermitteln, Aneignen – Gegenwärtige Reflexionen des Holocaust, Göttingen 2018, 257–280.

86 Sue Andrews, Remembering the Holocaust. Gender Matters, in: Social Alternatives 22/2 (2003), 16–21; Johanna Gehmacher, Frauen, Männer, Untergänge. Geschlechterbilder und Gedächtnispolitiken in Darstellungen zum Ende des "Dritten Reiches", in: Johanna Gehmacher/Gabriella Hauch (eds.), Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte des Nationalsozialismus. Fragestellungen, Perspektiven, neue Forschungen, Innsbruck/Vienna/Bolzano 2007, 240–256.

87 Shapiro, Patriarchy, (2013), 86.

88 On the role of gender in Shoah memory generally see Gehmacher/Hauch, Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte des Nationalsozialismus, 2013; Elke Frietsch/Christina Herkommer (eds.), Nationalsozialismus und Geschlecht. Zur Politisierung und Ästhetisierung von Körper, „Rasse" und Sexualität im „Dritten Reich" und nach 1945, Bielefeld 2009.

89 Lewis, Women in European Holocaust Films. Perpretators, Victims and Resisters, Cham 2017, 83–100.

90 Ibid., 143.

91 Zettelbauer, Unwanted Desire, (2018).

92 Lewis, Women, 2017, 103.

93 Rada Iveković, Captive Gender, Ethnic Stereotypes & Cultural Boundaries, New Dehli 2005.

taken as an investigation into a person's actual ability to change historical events,[94] but highlight this person's positions as a subject and an individual, instead of a passive, silenced part of a collective.[95]

In the following, I will provide an overview of the implicit and explicit gendered codes used in the online exhibitions I analysed as attributions referring to agency and power. The main way in which Shoah exhibitions create agency is by positioning figures within the perpetrator/victim-matrix. To give but one example, when exhibitions completely obliterate the context of mugshots or SS identification documents, one wonders whether visitors are left unaware of the dynamics of power under which these objects were created.[96] This is an inherently gendered issue because, in a critically feminist reading, such a strategy appears feasible only on the basis of hegemonic gendered codes that automatically attribute individuality to subjects presented as male – and, conversely, represent victims in a feminized, silencing way as part of a collective that lacks individuality. A large number of the examples analysed manage to reinterpret such objects by including or even centring the voices of individual victims, thereby proving how easily the meaning of perpetrator images can be subverted.[97] In my sample of 87 exhibitions there was only a single case in which design measures were taken to attempt this. The PMAB takes this approach in *From Litzmannstadt Ghetto to the Auschwitz* [sic]: it visualizes their perspective, not only displaying victims' private photographs but also combining perpetrator photography and objects of bureaucratic origin with survivors' testimonies. By literally overwriting problematic sources with the text of the victims' narratives, the exhibition's design creates a palimpsest. It not only avoids reifying the discriminatory and violent language but also makes the survivors' perspectives the primary layer of reception.[98] Many other exhibitions also give victims a voice and manage to articulate often powerful messages from the victims' point of view. However, other than in *From Litzmannstadt Ghetto*, this curatorial approach is not supported by the design in any of these cases. Instead, it is achieved exclusively through texts that carefully seek to restore the individuality and agency of the victims.

Notably, most of the iconic images used in the exhibitions analysed have traditionally been perceived in an explicitly gendered way – for instance the *Sonderkom-*

94 Koppermann, Challenging the perpetrators' narrative, (2019), 120.

95 J. Maki Motapanyane, Notes on Agency, Empowerment and Feminist Consciousness, in: Nevi Sara Kali 2 (2010), 29–40; Nira YuvalDavis, Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging, in: Wendy Harcourt (ed.), The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development, Critical Engagements in Feminist Theory and Practice, Basingstoke/New York 2016, 367–381.

96 https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A?hl=en-GB (7 January 2022).

97 Koppermann, Challenging the Perpetrators' Narrative, (2019), 102.

98 https://artsandculture.google.com/story/mQXBioT78jXIKw (2 December 2021).

mando series or the "Warsaw ghetto boy" photograph from the *Stroop Report*.[99] In both examples, the gender of the perpetrator photographers is as important to the narrative as is the connection between suffering and gendered symbolism in creating of empathy. This might be seen as the sole reason why the *Stroop Report's* "Warsaw ghetto boy" photograph has become iconic: the child, void of any masculinity or sexuality, serving as the fundamental symbol for absolute innocence and victimhood, thereby making the actual context of an uprising invisible, as noted by Christoph Hamann in explaining its fame.[100]

Given this foundational fabric, the above-mentioned emotionalization by using gendered symbols is a core feature in many of the analysed exhibitions. They juxtapose feminized archetypes (child or women victims) with individuals carrying out masculine acts of resistance. Prototypically, the USHMM's exhibition *Some Were Neighbours* displays examples (mostly as photographs) of men (actively) resisting persecution and women in the context of (passive) rescue, hiding, or victimhood.[101] The exhibition overlaps gender of persons with gendered action in a way that reproduces sexist interpretations. This can be seen in the reactions of visitors to a photograph of Jeanne Damon, who organized the hiding of Jewish children in Belgium. One reads: "Forget superman, this woman is a true super hero"; another: "She must have a big heart"[102], thus interpreting the action of hiding children as an 'adequately' female form of heroism or associated with 'typically female' qualities. Along these lines, visitors frequently gender the emotions they attribute to Damon, commenting that she "acted like a mother", showed "woman's bravery" or the "courage of women".[103] While the exhibition does include examples of women collaborating with or benefiting from perpetration, it does not aim to transcend the victim/perpetrator binary. This becomes evident in the exhibition's final chapter, a collection of six photographs, strikingly gendered: male perpetrators juxtaposed with saviours, collaborators, onlookers, or victims who are either women or children.[104] In an attempt to illustrate Nazi violence and make it relatable on a more affective level, many of the online exhibitions in my sample use gendered symbolism or a construction based on symbolic gendered binaries. This structure creates mutually exclusive and contrary positions, such as perpetrator/victim, rationality/emotion

99 Hamann, Wechselrahmen, (2008); Batya Brutin, Holocaust Icons in Art. The Warsaw Ghetto Boy and Anne Frank, Oldenbourg 2020, doi: 10.1515/9783110656916.
100 Hamann, Wechselrahmen, (2008), 32.
101 https://somewereneighbors.ushmm.org/#/exhibitions (7 January 2022).
102 https://somewereneighbors.ushmm.org/#/reflection/470 (7 January 2022).
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.

or heroism/mute suffering, thereby allowing for visitors' identification, but obstructing understanding.

Bodies or voices: gendered symbolism and individuality

Another gendered (verbal) imagery prevalent in exhibitions on Nazi crimes (and probably a distinctive feature of Shoah memory at large) aims to translate the body into a metaphor. In this, victims as well as perpetrators are visualized as figures of comparison via an emphasis on (gendered) physical features, including visible individuality, or the lack thereof.[105] The most prominent example is the detailed and excessively voyeuristic exposure of the enfeebled bodies of victims represented in liberation photography. While exhibitions make less and less use of such denigrating photographs of naked and bodily de-gendered, and thus de-individualized, victims, the voyeuristic gaze on victims' bodies remains common in exhibition texts. Online exhibitions create such a bodily gendered imaginary by, for example, describing *Sonderkommando* prisoners through a rhetoric of masculinization, characterising them by "their fitness and physical prowess".[106] Museums are thereby perpetuating the criteria of the Nazi selection process and its characteristic voyeurism, including the reduction of individuals to their bodies.[107]

The very few graphically violent images included in the analysed exhibitions affirm the argument about the central relevance of gendered symbolism made so far. To discuss but one category, images of executions or of the scenes prior to gassing represent the victims in a feminized way, void of any agency, and silenced. Their – legitimate – appeal to empathy is based on connoted emotions that are heavily gendered, such as fear and despair. In line with hegemonic gender symbolism, the fact that all victims lack voice and agency corresponds with the tendency to display only photographs of women or children. Yet, people of all genders appear symbolically feminized in this vein, given that they are framed as de-individualized parts of a group selected to be murdered. Online exhibitions remove their agency altogether, combining the passive voice with an emphasis on gender rather than other markers of difference. For instance, in the PMAB's *Einsatzgruppen* exhibition, women are only mentioned as corpses or in phrases such as "women being sent to

105 Weckel, Allied Atrocity Films, (2019); Toby Haggith, The Filming of the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen and its Impact on the Understanding of the Holocaust, in: Holocaust Studies 12/1–2 (2006), 89–122, 93. For the context of publication and dissemination see: Paul, Das visuelle Zeitalter, 2016, 336–340.

106 https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A?hl=en-GB (2 December 2021).

107 https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/employment-card-belonged-to-prisoner-eliezer-eisenschmidt/2AFuvKEHoX9Nsg?hl=en-GB (2 December 2021).

their deaths"[108]; or, as in various other examples, the narrative of the murder of men ends with their separation from women and children, and only the gassing of the latter, not the men, is detailed.[109]

The relevance of text in the online display of violence also lies in its power to counter silencing: All of the institutions analysed here offer at least one (exceptional) exhibition in which they represent individuality by identifying victims in photographs of mass violence.[110] In representing people who act bravely or in resistance, exhibitions still draw on gendered stereotypes, connecting agency to heroism and thus masculinity, also when talking about people identified as women.[111] Hence, stories that offer (masculine) agency present the expected individual heroes, while the story of (feminized) suffering remains obscured in a collective fog and reduced to the goal of achieving symbolization.

A typical case for how exhibition narratives distribute agency along the female/male binary is the depiction of the context of the *Sonderkommando* photographs. For instance, whenever all three institutions portray the male members of the *Sonderkommando* who produced the unique photographs, they use – rightly – heroic language but leave out the vital participation of women in this clandestine action.[112] Instead of naming Helena Dantón, they attribute the smuggling of the photographs to "the Polish resistance" or hide the agent in the passive voice.[113] The PMAB's *Sonderkommando* exhibition even distinguishes between actions of male and female agents. Of the huge number of the latter, only Róża Robota is mentioned, and only in the description of an object, rather than in the main text. This exhibition frames efforts undertaken by men as active, such as "documenting", "initiating activi-

108 https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A?hl=en-GB (2 December 2021).

109 https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205886.pdf; https://www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies/behind-every-name-a-story/jakob-blankitny; in the case of the Lilly-Jacob-Album, the authors perspective is reiterated also in this regard: https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/last-moments.asp (all 5 February 2022).

110 https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/museum_photos/index.asp; https://somewereneighbors.ushmm.org/#/exhibitions; https://artsandculture.google.com/story/JAXRTeQR2E--LA (all 2 December 2021). These identifications are based on the surprisingly large number of individual deportees identified for example in the Auschwitz Album, see: Tal Bruttmann/Christoph Kreutzmüller/Stefan Hördler, The "Auschwitz Album". Between Object and Historical Document, in: Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire 139/3 (2018), 22–44, 24–25; also on the subject Nina Springer-Aharoni, Photographs as Historical Documents, in: Israel Gutman/Bella Gutterman (eds.), The Auschwitz Album. The Story of a Transport, Yad Vashem/Oświęcim 2002, 87–94.

111 https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1942-1945/auschwitz-revolt; https://www.ushmm.org/online-calendar/event/VEFBWMNRST0322; https://artsandculture.google.com/story/JAXRTeQR2E--LA; https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A (all 5 February 2022).

112 https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A?hl=en-GB (2 December 2021).

113 https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/epicenter-horror-photographs-sonderkommando.html;https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A;https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/sonderkommandos (all 2 December 2021).

ties", "starting a rebellion", "obtaining explosives", and "attacking the guards", while even the one caption that mentions a female actor linguistically separates her from the heroic act by referring to her as "involved in the acquisition".[114] Such typical narratives establish significance not based on the difficulty, scope, or danger of an act of resistance but rather on the gender of those carrying it out.

Conclusion

In recent years, photographs that graphically show violence have lost the central status they once held in exhibitions on Nazi mass atrocities. Although online exhibitions by the three internationally most influential museums on the Shoah clearly adopted these standards early on, they do not yet offer exhibitions that regard the mediality of objects (by treating them as more than mere illustrations) and at least partly they reiterate violent imagery linguistically. As a result, the caution these museums have adopted when it comes to photographs with graphic content does not prevent other forms of humiliation or even dehumanization of the victims: Strikingly, the exhibitions available as of 2022 still often reify the language of the perpetrator or, albeit rarely, even their perspectives. Additionally, tropes that invoke hegemonic gendered concepts of power and agency generally seem to replace the analytical framing of the mass violence and its representation. This can be seen in the way that gendered binaries, such as perpetrator/victim, rationality/emotion, or heroism/silent suffering, play a pivotal role in the online exhibitions examined: they structure how the narratives illustrate massive violence instead of explaining it. Consequently, many online exhibitions create a mixed image: while their choice of objects keeps the dignity of victims intact, they narratively create imagery that obscures contexts of the Shoah and silences the victims yet again.

List of Sources

A list of all the online exhibitions included in my paper's overview is available at https://doi.org/10.25365/oezg-2023-34-1-18

114 https://artsandculture.google.com/story/CwUhAksxfhgA8A?hl=en-GB (all 5 January 2022).