CAMP AND FIELD: NOTES ON THE POLISH LANDSCAPE

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This article will attempt to outline, through examples from the Polish landscape that bear witness to Nazi occupation, ways of comprehending architecture as a means of political control or, conversely, of cultural expression. It will deal with two very distinct, and even contradictory traditions of building. The first is an ordering of space with the intention of controlling, nay producing, a consequent style of events. The second is an intervening response to events that occur within a preexisting space. The first part of the article defines these two traditions as "camp" and "field" respectively, presenting the Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz as a study of the former and the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw as a study of the latter. The second part presents a set of more subjectively perceived transformations that have occurred within the Polish landscape since World War II.

THE WORD CAMP HAS ITS ORIGINS IN THE LATIN campus meaning level field. The Campus Martius in Rome was the place for athletic practice and military drills. The flatness suggested, above all, fairness to all sides. The camp was the field-in-the-city or, in the case of mobile military camps, the city-in-the-field. Stated differently, the camp was the transformation of the field into the city, or Polis. But the form of the city, which had evolved for several centuries primarily as a search for a higher moral agenda and as a symbolic confrontation with the mortality inherent in nature, gave way during the Enlightenment to the domain of the police and of politics, both inherently beholden to their location within the Polis. And while the word champ in French retained the meaning of field as countryside without the overtone of competition, the adaptation to campaign, meaning strategy, introduced the connotation of sides, and shifted the focus from the place of battle to identification with one of the competitors, which suggests...
in turn the presence of the enemy. (This is carried forth in today's colloquial political usage: "Which camp are you in?") The Nazi camps combined these meanings of place and enemy: they were the place in which the enemy was concentrated, exterminated. Its political agenda was the raison d'être of the camp.

The etymological root of the original Latin campus derives from the Greek kepos, meaning garden. The field and the garden share the sense of domesticking the landscape through cultivation, which shares its root, cult, with culture. While cult has now acquired a meaning that is not unlike camp in referring to a group that shares a one-sided belief system, the widely accepted definition of culture as "a web of belief" suggests that it is not unlike a field, tenacious because it has roots, and structured by a non-hierarchical, apolitical framework that nurtures the spontaneous and unexpected. An academic field, unlike a political camp, is a non-adversarial group which shares an interconnected set of inquiries (though each field certainly contains its camps). In the field, structure and action, events and spatial form are interdependent. The nature of the field, inherently, is to cultivate.

In the following pages I will demonstrate that the architectural strategies at Auschwitz and Treblinka gave three-dimensional form to the absolute political agenda of the camps, while the architectural context of the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw evolved into a field condition in which the tenacity of culture was given a chance.

**CAMP**

The city as the spatial expression of the totalitarian world has been a frequent theme in the twentieth-century genre of fiction that has come to be known as the dystopian novel. Both prior to and since 1941, when the first extermination camps went into operation, writers have invented exaggerated forms of the city in which architecture itself becomes an agent of political control and intimidation. These cities are characterized by nothing so much as the idea of separation: first, the separation of the city itself from the domain of nature; second, the separation of people within the city from each other; third, the separation of the present from the past. All of these characteristics are shared with the Nazi camps.

Consider, for example, the novel *We*, written in the 1920s by the Russian author Yevgeny Zamyatin. The mathematician D-503 of the futuristic Onreatest narrates the story of his own self-discovery: that he is afflicted with a most serious malady, know as a "soul." Throughout the novel, he wavers between his acknowledgement of feelings and his conviction that the city's separation from nature is of the highest aesthetic order:

> Oh, great, divinely bound wisdom of walls and barriers! They are, perhaps, the greatest of man's inventions. Man ceased to be a wild animal only when he built the first wall. Man ceased to be a savage only when he built the Green Wall when we had isolated our perfect mechanical world from the irrational, hideous world of trees, birds, animals.

The Green Wall isolates Onestate spatially from the world, the Table of Hours isolates it temporally. The rhythms of waking and sleeping, eating, walking, writing and working are each determined by the Table. Even sex has its designated time slot: a quarter-hour interval during the Personal Hour, twice a week. In disregard of the solar cycle, the streets are brilliantly illuminated all of the time. Darkness, which we may equate with privacy, is thus non-existent. This homogeneity, in rendering all individuals at the same time alike and yet isolated from one another (though totally dependent on the Benefactor), is enhanced by the transparency of the buildings. Everyone, under constant surveillance, is thus vigilant in her obedience to the Table, to the norm, and to the unspoken vow of essential solitude.

At home I stepped hurriedly into the office, handed in my pink coupon, and received the certificate permitting me to lower the shades. This right is granted only on sexual days.

At all other times we live behind our transparent walls that seem woven of gleaming air — we are always visible, always washed in light. We have nothing to conceal from one another. Besides, this makes much easier the difficult and noble task of the Guardians.

In the universe of the Onestate, evolution is not an ongoing process; it has already taken place. The past is severed from the present, and the future exists only as an agenda for subtle improvements on that separation. The world of the Ancients (our own world, incidentally), with its eccentric clothing, opaque walls and doors, and imaginative music is confined within a museum. Such an institutionalized and propagandized reminder cannot be confused with memory, which is itself obsolete. The reduction of the past to an architectural oddity represents a cynical nostalgia, the only function of which is to reaffirm the superiority of the present: "I cannot imagine a city that is not clad in a green wall; I cannot imagine a life that is not regulated by the figures of our Table of Hours."6

The Nazi extermination camps bore resemblance to Zamyatin's fictional Onestate in both intentions and architectural form. The first principle of separation — that of the camp from the world — was achieved architecturally through both artifice and transparency. The truth about the camp was disguised, while the life outside was revealed. Thus there was artifice in the architecture of arrival: the ramp; and transparency in the architecture of boundary: the fence.
At Auschwitz, the architectural propaganda that began at the official gate (FIG. 1), where a sign proclaimed “Arbeit Macht Frei,” was continued in the design of the train station. Traditionally, the building type of the train station symbolizes the reciprocal nature of travel. Every arrival is balanced by a departure. Tadeusz Borowski, Polish novelist and survivor of Auschwitz, describes his arrival there at the ramp, where “a cheerful little station, very much like any provincial railway stop” disguised both the reality of that arrival as one from which there could be no departure, and also the specific location of that arrival in a larger geographical picture. Not unlike OneState, the camps were conceived as complete and generic places, whose location was a dislocation in both time and space:

The prisoners . . . might not even know where in Europe their lager was situated, having arrived after a slaughterous and tortuous journey in sealed boxcars. They did not know about the existence of other lagers, even those only a few kilometers away.

The architecture of the ramp presented an illusory image which did not function so much to deceive as to suspend disbelief. At Treblinka, one of the so-called Operation Reinhardt camps — the sole purpose of which was extermination (there was not the buffer of the work camp, complete with factories and barrack) — this architectural artifice included the “funnel,” which led from the selection area at the train platform directly to the gas chambers:

It was about thirteen feet wide. . . . On each side were palisades [of] barbed wire. Woven into the barbed wire were branches of pine trees. You understand? It was known as camouflage. There was a Camouflage Squad of twenty Jews. They brought in new branches every day from the woods. So everything was screened. People couldn’t do anything to the left or right. Nothing. You couldn’t see through it. Impossible.

Thus the arrival at the gas chambers, themselves disguised even on the inside with benches for undressing and pegs for clothing, as in a bathhouse, was a highly controlled and even predictable sequence of spaces and events. Overt panic was suppressed. The architecture simplified the operation of the Nazi machine.

In keeping with the first principle of separation, the fence surrounding the camp served to segregate the camp from the world of nature and imagination. It did not deceive, but rather revealed through the transparent screen of posts and barbed wire (the same scaffolding used for the camouflage of the ‘funnel’) the normal world left behind. Visible to the inmates was the landscape of agriculture — for the camps had been sited away from cities and within the more anonymous terrain of the fields — and visible to the farmers were the inmates. One of the villagers in present-day Treblinka, recalling the proximity of his farm to the camps, described working his field not one hundred yards from the barbed wire. For the glances he stole when the backs of the Ukrainian guards were turned, there must have been reciprocal glances from the interior towards the fields. In contrast to the characteristic of illusion in the architecture of the ramp and funnels, the fence provided a psychologically coercive perimeter that, in openly revealing the outside world, proclaimed a superiority over the inmates beyond the need for either the strength of walls or the deceit of camouflage.

The second principle of separation — the separation of people from each other — was the result of a spatial disenfranchisement, an organization of people in space through both intimi-
dation and physical placement that precluded the spontaneous communication between individuals. David Rousset recalls one inmate saying, “There are hundreds of thousands of us here, and we are all living in absolute solitude.”

In the watchtowers and the barracks, the Nazis crafted architectural accomplices in this program of isolating individuals from each other.

In the plan at Auschwitz, which was typical of all the concentration camps, the watchtowers framed the axes of space between rows of barracks (Fig. 2). The camp was the orthogonal version of the Panopticon model of control (where the cells are continually monitored by a guard who, enclosed within the central tower, himself remains invisible). At Auschwitz, the guards were visible not only in the towers but on the grounds of the camp. The architectural structure was the symbol of the man in uniform, who in turn was the chief source of intimidation. Yet the watchtowers themselves declared Auschwitz to be an inverted citadel, a citadel turned inside out. At Auschwitz II-Birkenau, the largest and most “efficient” of the camps, the arrival by train passed directly under the grand central watchtower. The purpose of the camp was thus immediately proclaimed. Architecture was to play a major role in the technology of discipline through surveillance.

As in the society of futuristic OneState, all inmates of the camps were numbered according to the order of their arrival. First naked, heads shaved and all possessions taken away, then tattooed with a number and clothed in identical striped outfits, those not selected for immediate extermination were assigned to a small sliver of sovereign space in one of the barracks. These barracks were in some sense a microcosm of the entire camp. As a building occupying an organized position in the orthogonal and numbered plan of the complex, each prisoner, herself numbered within the totality of the Final Solution, was further numerically and spatially organized within the barracks building. Thus one was assigned not only to a building, but to a bunk; not only to a space in the plan, but to a vertical tier within the three-layer system. To further economize on space, and to further the commodification of each prisoner as a source of labor — and perhaps a few gold teeth, two people were assigned to each bunk and required to sleep in the geometrically efficient head-to-foot pose. Bunkmates called each other “pallet-neighbors.” One’s sovereign spatial domain, one’s “house,” was only half the width of a single bunk.

Should anyone doubt the pervasiveness of the Nazi propaganda that reduced Jews and other “undesirables” to the status of goods, she has only to consider an official document such as this, advising authorities of modifications to the gassing vans at the Chelmno camp:

The van’s normal load is usually nine per square yard. In Saurer vehicles, which are very spacious, maximum use of space is impossible, not because of overload, but because loading to full capacity would affect the vehicle’s stability. So reduction of the load space seems necessary. It must be absolutely reduced by a yard, instead of trying to solve the problem, as hitherto, by reducing the number of pieces loaded. Besides, this extends the operating time, as the empty void must also be filled with carbon monoxide. On the other hand, if the lead space is reduced, and the vehicle is packed solid, operating time can be considerably shortened.

Crowding together is, as Hannah Arendt explains, a dominant technique of totalitarianism, the purpose of which is to isolate people from each other, paradoxically, “...by destroying all space between men and pressing men against each other.”

The combination of the crowding in the barracks and the disciplinary organization of people in space accomplished this purpose in the Nazi camps. Psychologically and spatially disenfranchised, the inmates were reduced to insignificant and identical bodies. As Borowski describes it:

If the barracks walls were to suddenly fall away, many thousands of people, packed together, squeezed tightly in their bunks, would remain suspended in mid-air. Such a sight would be more gruesome than the Medieval paintings of the Last Judgement.

This “packing together” reached a maximum efficiency in the crematoria.

The crematorium at Auschwitz represented the dominant institution of the Nazi polis. If the watchtower could be understood as the inward-looking version of the citadel tower, the crematorium chimney declared, as boldly as the campanile of the medieval cathedral did for its town, the unambiguous and absolute value system of the camp. The camp could thus be understood as an idealized “city,” a cosmology or city-of-the-world, but one holding death as its most magnificent achievement. In particular, it was a death that achieved significance through quantity and anonymity (if there are no individuals, there could be no mourning). Thus death was renamed extermination, a negative form of production, and so the buildings borrowed not only from sacred images but also from industrial ones. The crematorium was the missing half of the train station, the departure terminal, from which one left, only as smoke.

As we have seen, the death camp at Treblinka was efficiently organized as a spatial sequence directly from the ramp to the crematoria. There were no barracks (except for those housing guards and functionaries), for the only purpose of the camp...
was to exterminate. There was, however, another significant space in this sequence, closely linked to the process, yet 50 kilometers away. This space was the Umschlagplatz, the assembly place just outside the wall of Warsaw’s Jewish Ghetto, where the selections were made for the deportations “to the East.” The threshold between ghetto and camp was not the train journey to Treblinka, but only the thickness of the wall. Without was the camp; within was the ghetto.¹⁹

FIELD

If the camp was a fabrication, a microcosm of the universe that in its psychic and architectural dimensions effectively removed people not only from each other but from their past and from nature, the Warsaw Ghetto became a fabric within which the spirit of collective culture managed to survive. For every architectural strategy of the camp discussed so far relative to its ability to dehumanize through the principles of separation, there evolved a corresponding condition in the ghetto that supported the connective tissue of Jewish life.²⁰ The effects of separation in the camps were contrasted here with effects of connection: of the urban landscape to nature, of the present to memory, of people to each other.

The Warsaw Ghetto was instituted in November 1940 by Nazi decree (FIG. 3). Although located in a section of Warsaw that contained the city’s largest Jewish population, it also occupied an area that had many Christian residents and churches — while thousands of Jews and Jewish institutions, such as the hospital, were located outside it. The preexisting structure, a medieval/industrial hybrid of urban form, was a geographical

contingency that did not lend itself easily to the establishment of a boundary. Christians argued against their streets being inside the ghetto (naturally, they didn’t want to move), while groups of Jews argued that their streets should be included (for the same reason). Emmanuel Ringelblum, whose extensive journals provide unsentimental documentation of this period, describes the confusion that ensued: “Heard about someone who moved seven times because the ghetto boundaries kept shifting. Another person, four times — turned out of Hoza Street, Freta Street, 68 Grzybowska Street, and another place.”

Thus, in contrast to the camp which was designed from scratch and sprang full-blown into rectilinear form like Athena from her father’s head (Hitler fancied himself a deity), the ghetto was inserted into a complex structure that had evolved across centuries, its boundary reflecting the chaotic circumstances of both past and present. After the ghetto was formally established, surrounded by a wall, and the gates “sealed” with guards from the Jewish and German police, the Nazi program shifted from one of containment to one of humiliation, for example, forcing Jews to perform impossible calisthenics on a certain street corner: “To avoid the Zelazna-Chlodna corner, you have to go way down Chlodna, then through 29 Chlodna Street into Krochmalna Street. But they found out about this bypass and walled up the passageway through the 29 Chlodna Street courtyard.”

Chlodna Street was like a river, or a ravine, cutting the ghetto into a large and small part. The street existed as part of the Aryan section so the Chlodna Street trolley could operate undisturbed. Eventually a bridge was built over it to connect the two parts. The bridge is noteworthy because it was the only place in the city where Aryans and Jews were openly visible to each other. Like skew lines, these two groups of Varsovians passed each other every day, in crowds, without acknowledgement.

Once the wall was completed, its opacity provided for a time a safe haven for Jewish life. Because during the first two years of its existence the orderly functioning of the ghetto was the responsibility of the Jewish police, the culture was able to operate independently of Nazi surveillance. In spite of extreme hardship, family life and ritual events managed to survive in the familiar context of the courtyard houses. Even when the program for eventual extermination became more than a vague rumor, the Jews collectively embodied a faith in the continuity of the daily life:

Chess tournaments, yes. There’s theater, a children’s festival, there’s everything going on until the last moment. These outward cultural activities, these festivals, they’re not simply morale-building devices, which is what Czerniakow identifies them to be. Rather, they are symbolic of the entire posture of the ghetto, which is in the process of healing or trying to heal sick people who are soon going to be gased, which is trying to educate youngsters who will never be growing up, which is in the process of trying to find work for people and increase employment in a situation which is doomed to failure. They are going on as though life were continuing. They have official faith in the survivability of the ghetto, even after all indications are to the contrary. The strategy continues to be: ‘We must continue, for this is the only strategy that is left. We must minimize the injury, minimize the damage, minimize the losses, but we must continue.’ And continuity is the only thing in all of this.”

It is such continuity that identifies the spatial and temporal structure of the field — and that most strongly distinguished the ghetto from the camp. If one of the purest characteristics of the camp was its segregation from nature in spite of its location in the midst of the agrarian countryside, one of the most noteworthy interventions in the ghetto was the introduction of agriculture in spite of its location in the midst of the city:
The Toporol society did a lot this year. They planted flowers and vegetables in 200 courtyards. . . Where the Hospital of the Holy Spirit used to stand before it was burned down, there is now a broad field sown with various vegetables. . . Now the places where the ruins used to be are blooming. They’re even breeding hens in incubators. A row of plots where the prison used to stand has been seeded on Gęsia Street. Twenty agronomists are employed. House gardens, balconies have been seeded. But we’ve still a long ways to go before the ghetto turns green.24

The garden has always been a symbol of domestication: the cultivation of an inhospitable terrain. This concept was understood even by the children at the ghetto orphanage:

Little Janusz and Irka built a garden in the sand, and a little house, and flowers, and a picket fence. They carried water in a matchbox. They took turns. Then they conferred: and built another house. Then they conferred: and added a chimney. They conferred: and added a well. They conferred: and added a doghouse.

The dinner bell rang. Moving toward the dining room, they turned back twice to put on the final touches, to have one more look.25

So the children, too, manifested the faith that Hilberg called "official."

When the massive deportations to Treblinka had emptied the ghetto of nine-tenths of its population, the ghetto boundary had been adjusted many times, squeezing the remaining population into an increasingly smaller area (FIG. 4). When small fighting groups formed to actively resist the final "liquidation," the relationship between this cultural continuity and the continuity in the architectural fabric became explicit. Connections to the past that had been expressed through ritual in familiar surroundings gave way to memory of a different sort: a spatial memory that allowed ghetto fighters to navigate the complex three-dimensionality of their world: from the rooftops to underground bunkers, without detection by the Nazis.26

The rooftops of the ghetto buildings, like the watchtowers at Auschwitz, served the function of observation, in this case not for the oppressors but for the oppressed. The David-and-Goliath situation took advantage of the young runners’ knowledge of the intricate rooftops to deliver messages among the fighting groups, and the steeply pitched configuration to effect a see-without-being-seen surveillance of the Germans in the street below. Crevices between roofs, chimneys, and spaces between rafters were all used for hiding.

Equal to the advantage of surveillance were the possibilities for hiding, and even more importantly, for clandestine communication underground. The construction of hiding places began as early as 1939, and was a major activity in the ghetto during the years 1940 through 1943. Older buildings were more adaptable to hiding, for irregularities in the plan could not be traced conveniently. “Modern” buildings were not so well suited; nevertheless, ghetto residents devised ingenious architectural tricks to modify existing structures:

As everyone know, modern apartment houses are so constructed that all the apartments in the same line have the same layout. Wallowing up an alcove in one apartment does not provide an adequate housing place, because it is quite easy to find the same alcove on a higher or lower floor in the same line of apartments. The way out of this dilemma was for all the persons living in the same line to wall up their alcoves. In one house, the residents all walled up one corner of the room, built an entry through a bakery oven, and put in a passageway from one floor to the next through a chain of ladders pushed through holes cut into the floors. An impressive hideout like that accommodates up to sixty persons.27

Even more significant were the underground bunkers: an elaborate urban plan below ground with its own system of connections to other bunkers, to the system of Warsaw’s sewers, and hence also to the “Aryan” side. An overall plan of the bunkers has never been drawn and is impossible to accurately reconstruct, but written documentation tells us that their organization deliberately contradicted the above-ground pattern in order to avoid detection.28 At 18 Mila Street, the headquarters of the resistance group, a series of large underground rooms, ironically named after the extermination camps, housed several hundred people in a crowded but self-governing circumstance. In spite of the incredibly demoralizing conditions, the constant deportations and humiliations, the fear, epidemic disease, and disloyalty that constantly threatened the ghetto’s social fabric, such interventions in the ghetto landscape were evidence of a level of cultural continuity that was simply not possible in the camps. It was only when the Nazis resorted to methodical destruction of the ghetto buildings with explosives and the injection of poisonous gas into the bunkers that the resistance could hold out no further.

A web of belief is a cultural field, or more precisely a field of cultivation, in which visible cycles are held continuous by invisible roots. In agriculture such roots may have a rhizome structure,29 a horizontal network of interconnecting tubers below the ground. These roots may be compared to the underground routes used by the Jewish fighters in the spring of 1943. In the rhizome root structure, and in this architectonic underground, the network could mirror the density
of the field above ground (in the garden, the plants; in the
ghetto, the buildings). Thus what could appear orderly and
predictable above could be subversively chaotic below. So
certain structures flourished for a time — passageways be­
tween carved-out bunkers, tunnels connecting to the sewer
system, and clandestine escape routes — beneath the orderly,
but unearthly, quiet of the Nazi-occupied streets.

But even beyond these characteristics of form, the field is
above all the congruence of a space and the human events
within that space. Referring to a field in nature, John Berger
says: "The field that you are standing before appears to have
the same proportions as your own life." This subjectivity,
coupled with the consequent manipulation of a physical space,
cultivated a field condition in even the most "urban" situation.

TRANSFORMATIONS

The confinement of the Jews within the city of Warsaw and
their banishment to the camps in the countryside represented
a curious reversal of the rituals of discipline and exclusion that
had developed in Europe during the Middle Ages. The exclu­
sionary rites once practiced on the lepers cast them outside
the city and into a subculture that existed autonomously and
without control — much as the ghetto existed during its first
two years. And overcrowding led to disease of epidemic pro­
portions while the separation of the subculture from the rest
of Warsaw was assumed to be absolute. Yet the social distance
that separated the lepers from the urban population was, in
Warsaw, reduced to the thickness of a masonry wall.

The camps, on the other hand, while located away from city,
internally resembled the architectural response to the plague
that arose within the medieval city, and which held order,
control, surveillance, and the elimination of personal au­
tonomy as their primary objectives. Michel Foucault calls the
adjustments of the city in time of plague "a segmented,
immobile, frozen space [in which] each individual is fixed in
his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life,
contagion, or punishment." This describes the violent space
of Auschwitz well. The Jews in the ghetto, like the lepers,
were symbolic outcasts. In the camps, the program of humili­
ation became, instead, one of extermination.

This reversal of the historic forms of discipline and exclusion
has, in the contemporary Polish landscape, acquired an even
greater complexity. Is it coincidence or inevitability that has
transformed field to camp on the site of the Warsaw Ghetto,
and camp back to field at Treblinka?

When the Russian army entered Warsaw in 1945, they found
the site of the former ghetto as the Germans had left it:
mounds of rubble, the charred remains of buildi­
ngs where the population of the highest density in the history of the city had
lived. The newly appointed Polish state architect, under the
direction of the Soviet authority, began to plan the rebuilding
of the city:

The area of the former ghetto became the site for the big
residential development, Muranow, with more than 60,000
inhabitants. Most of the houses stand on high, grassy
elevations. These are the mounds of rubble left from the
former buildings.

During the first years of reconstruction we lacked the tech­
nical means for removing the mountains of rubble. We
leveled off terraces and built the new houses on them. We
erected these houses from building elements made of the same rubble. Only the streets remained on the former level, and their names are the only reminders of pre-war Warsaw in that part of the city.33

This program of rebuilding, in retrospect, bears some comparison to the architecture of the camps. True, the agenda, as expressed, was not overtly sinister. Yet within the rubble which provided the building material for the Soviet-inspired housing was the Jewish population itself, and their remains have now been folded back into an urban form that bears astonishing geometrical resemblance to the barracks that housed the inmates at Auschwitz (FIGS. 5,6). The scale has changed: what was the size of a bunk (the size of a man) is now the size of a flat (the size of a family). And the symmetrical authority of the watchtower, a symbol of Nazi tyranny over the camp, is now mimicked ironically in the form of the Palace of Culture and Sciences — “gift” of the Soviets to the people of Warsaw (FIGS. 7,8). The field of the ghetto has been transformed into an urban camp.

At Treblinka, near the town of Malkinia, the Nazi death camp has been virtually erased, replaced with a contemplative field of stones that proclaims its intention to deny order. We may question the emotional success of this sort of “designed chaos,” for the charge of remembering is certainly no more powerful here than at Auschwitz, where everything has been preserved intact. Nevertheless, the intentions are clear — to represent, on the same piece of ground, the exact opposite of what the camp was. The design evokes the familiarity of a Jewish cemetery — a crowded one like the cemetery in Warsaw, or the well-known layered cemetery in Prague, where centuries of stones have been piled like strata to establish a miniature topography and now crowd together without order or alignment.

In fact, Warsaw has three Jewish cemeteries: the first existed for generations before the war and continues to be revered as a sacred city of the dead. The second is the elevated Muranow, the site of the former ghetto, within which the two or three markers to commemorate the ghetto fighters do little to express the magnitude of what went on there. The third is Treblinka (FIGS. 9—II)

The return to the field at Treblinka represents a kind of entropy. The extermination camps, unlike the ghettos, were located within the agrarian landscape. As Borowski wrote in 1943:

Where Auschwitz stands today, three years ago there were villages and farms. There were rich meadows, shaded country lanes, apple orchards. There were people no better nor worse than any other people.34

The ashes from the crematoria were even sometimes used to fertilize the fields. This return to the field at Treblinka is no more than the continuation of this entropic process. Yet it is more than a natural process, or a natural order; it is an expression of cultural continuity as well.

As the Poles are the first to point out, the Jews were not the only ones to suffer on Polish soil during the war. Poland’s position in world geography and world history is perhaps best expressed by her native son Czeslaw Milosz:

For many years I have had variations on the same dream. Uniformed men have blocked the only way out of a tall building and are making arrests . . . their uniforms are German, or sometimes Russian . . . . 35

And Joanna Rostropowicz Clark, in her introduction to Tadeusz Konwicki’s _The Polish Complex_, writes: “If the history of Poland were reduced to a fable, it would tell the story of a strong free kingdom surrounded by greedy neighbors and ruled by cruel kings.”36 The record of Poland’s sober defeats and tenacious survival is engraved in her landscape, the field.

A single map of Poland,37 about two feet square, shows all the country’s roads, even dirt lanes only passable by farm wagon.
FIG. 7. (ABOVE) Watchtower at Birkenau.
FIG. 8. (TOP RIGHT) Palace of Culture, Warsaw.
FIG. 9. (MIDDLE RIGHT) Jewish Cemetery, Warsaw.
FIG. 10. (BOTTOM RIGHT) Housing on ruins of Warsaw Ghetto.
FIG. 11. (FACING PAGE, TOP) Memorial at Treblinka.
FIG. 12. (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM) Map of Poland, 1989. Drawing courtesy of ORBIS.
Every town and village is there, even the one-family village that is no more than a cluster of buildings on a farmstead. Every gas station is on the map, every church, every castle ruin, every family campground. Also represented are the sites of the Nazi atrocities. All the camps and ghettos are marked with a symbol, a stylized cross of resistance, of memory (FIG. 12).

To the left on the map, ironically, is Germany. To the right, Russia. We may wonder whether the sites of Soviet infamy (far more subtle than that of the Nazis) are soon to be added to this tourist document, itself a web of beliefs that includes the far past, the recent past, and the present equally. It becomes clear that culture, like cultivation, is not a project but a result of collective enterprise. The timelessness that reads in the Polish landscape has nothing to do with fixed points of reference, like mountain peaks and memorable coastlines. Its boundaries seem fluid, the texture more homogeneous and of a smaller scale. Buildings and landscape are unified not by the materiality of the vernacular, but by the size of the pieces. Everything is creature-like, almost anthropomorphic.

In the choreography of haymaking the women assemble bundles that are approximately their own size. These bundles lean together in a stack: a family. Stacks assemble in the partially harvested field: a village. The distance between “villages” ebbs and flows with the seasons.

These are the evidences of camp and field in the contemporary Polish landscape.

**EPILOGUE: THE GAME OF CHESS**

The game of chess enjoys great popularity in Poland. In shops empty of almost all goods that we in the West consider essential, chess sets are for sale, elaborately carved in figures of real or abstract nobility. With calloused hands country laborers play seriously over a small table. It appears to be neither an intellectual game, however, nor a competitive sport, but rather a pastime, a vernacular entertainment in which each Pole can play out the drama of his country in miniature.

On a crowded night train from Berlin to Warsaw, crouched in the corridor, I played chess with a young Polish man from Poznan. Because he was extremely tired, he fell asleep after each move. Nevertheless, he was extremely skillful, and won the game. When I asked about his strategy, he explained to me that each move is an event, a response to an opponent, a safe and vicarious representation of the country’s history from the vantage point of a generic enemy. The sides are arbitrary; the board is the field of contention divested of ideology. Although he looks down on the board, the player never achieves omniscience. It is impossible to play both sides at once.

Poland is like a chessboard, contingent and fine-grained. Only the two sides ultimately exist: Germany and Russia. Each came onto Polish soil to make camp. The Nazis left Poland in 1945, the Soviets in 1990. Some of the Nazi camps are extant; others, like Treblinka, have been replaced with some per-
ceived antithesis. The Soviet housing that blankets not only Warsaw, but much of the rest of eastern Europe, bears witness to decades of economic control and a resulting environmental inertia. Thus is the history of Poland preserved in the architecture of her enemies; thus is the tradition of camp layered like scars over and under a more indigenous tradition of field. It may be this legacy that led Milosz to say in his Nobel Prize address, “There is perhaps no other memory than the memory of wounds.” It remains to be seen how the Polish landscape, now a field awaiting events, will cultivate its future.

REFERENCE NOTES

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2. Hitler’s autobiography, Mein Kampf, reveals the Germanic adaptation of the root to mean ‘struggle.’ Camp, on the other hand, is called lager in German.

3. In addition to Zamiatyn, We, such dystopian works include G. Orwell, 1984, R. Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451, A. Huxley, Brave New World; and J.L. Borges, “The Library of Babel.”


5. Ibid., p.18.

6. Ibid., p.11.

7. This term signifies, uniquely with respect to the Nazi camps, the area at the train platform where ‘selections’ were made.


11. Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor.


13. The lengthy testimony of Filip Muller in Lanzmann’s Shoah describes in detail the efforts to subvert panic.


16. Lanzmann, Shoah, p.103.

17. A. Arendt, Origns of Totalitarianism, p.478.

18. Borowski, This Way for the Gas, p.130.

19. The word ‘ghetto’ applies here to the Jewish quarter of the city. For a general introduction to the topic, see the introduction to L. Worth, The Ghetto (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

20. Although the subject material for this article is the literature of the Holocaust, the subject is architecture and the traditions of building. I would not presume to claim that the life in the ghetto was pleasant, or even bearable, nor that the Soviet housing that replaced the ghetto was less hospitable than was the ghetto itself. Still, the degree of control over the built environment was radically different in the ghetto than in the camp, and this is this distinction that I wish to emphasize.


22. Ringelblum, Notes, p.91.

23. Lanzmann, Shoah, p.185.


25. J. Kuczak, Ghetto Diary, p.91.


27. Ringelblum, Notes, p.343. Ringelblum also provides extensive descriptions of the hideouts, pp.338—344.


29. Umberto Eco uses this metaphor of the rhizome structure to describe the form of the modern labyrinth, Postscripts To The Name of the Rose, William Weaver, trans. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p.34.


32. The Ghetto population reached ten times that number.


34. M. Gaborowski, This Way for the Gas, p.132.


37. This map is obtainable through ORBIS, the official Polish tourist office with locations in major U.S. cities.

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