Title

An Outline of the History of Objects in Muranow. (Casus: a Pot)

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Abstract

The article outlines a very specific research proposal to write the history of objects related to Warsaw's Northern District (Muranow), and the history of its residents from the 18th century to the present day. A recent turn towards things, and towards materiality in the new humanities, and a turn towards topography all serve as a methodological inspiration here. Things and artifacts will be treated as particular kinds of witnesses of historical experience, but this will require re-defining the term "witness" and broadening categories of subjectivity and agency. In this article the author divides this history into two scenes: a bright history of things (up to the outbreak of World War II), and a dark history of things (the period of the ghetto and the Holocaust), focusing on the latter. Relating to testimonies written there and then, he traces a shift in perceiving the presence of things in the space of human experience. The basic determinant of this shift is moving underground, which is coherent with changes in the experience of ghetto inhabitants, who ultimately, during the uprising and at the climax of the liquidation of the closed district, literally went underground. For this reason, the main area of indepth research is underground Muranow: during the war, immediately after it, and throughout its entire post-war period. Muranow things stay under the ground, at times, however, they come to the surface due to some activities, either accidental or deliberate (building new houses, renovations of streets and pavements). Muranow things have also been excavated and professionally described in a systematic and organized manner by archeologists during excavations carried out when the edifice of the POLIN Museum was being raised. Selected artifacts will be presented within the exhibition "Here is Muranow" at this very museum.

I am interested in the specific subject of post-Warsaw-Ghetto space, in its underground sphere and everything in it that is hidden away from our sight, that which remains under the surface of the streets, squares, and yards of present-day Muranow. This is about post-Jewish things and post-Jewish debris. Yet this is only the climax of the centuries-long history of the place, one that became the most densely populated district in Warsaw to turn into a vestibule of the Holocaust hell for those who were deported, and those who stayed—to be buried together with their homes and their belongings. One day I would like to write the complete history of things in Muranow—from its Arcadian genesis to its apocalyptic end. In its central focus I would locate the place and the things that used to fill the space, and that still—one could say—inhabit it, creating—together with people

—multivariate relations. This is the maximal plan. For now, it will suffice to start with outlining the general view in order to focus on details and fragments at a later stage. To start with the period when the area of the ghetto falls into decline, and then is totally destroyed. This is when things moved underground and exist there with their own life after life.[1]

The Bright History of Things

At its genesis, the Muranow district in Warsaw is inscribed into the Arcadian landscape. In the beginning, there were orchards, vegetable gardens, and water. Lots of water: water mills and fishponds, backwaters and wetlands, small pools and bigger ponds, springs, streams, and creeks flowing right into the Vistula River. With time, the streams dried up, the ponds were encroached on by vegetation, and the claypits were drained. The area of the Muranow gardens started to shrink. Green areas were replaced with tenement houses. And these were built more and more extensively, some of them huge, with several yards, capable of accommodating the inhabitants of an entire shtetl. The greenery slowly diminished. It was still quite significant at Krasiński Garden, but—as some of the Warsaw residents complained at the end of the nineteenth century—this space was more and more "taken over" by Jews. The author of *Ilustrowany Przewodnik po Warszawie* [The Illustrated Guide to Warsaw] published in 1893 lamented: "The Krasiński Garden was full of its nearest neighbors—Jews from Nalewki who—with their frequent group strolls and obstreperous jabber—completely discouraged other residents of the city to spend their time in the garden."[2]

Before 1939, Nalewki Street and Muranow district were inhabited by 65% of Warsaw's Jews. The very core of the Jewish quarter was the area along the following streets: Nalewki, Świętojerska, Nowolipki, Zamenhofa, Miła, and Muranow Square—where over 90% of residents were Jewish.[3] The area became the promised land of the Warsaw Jews. This is the place with which we associate everything that is Jewish in Warsaw. Streets and corners, tenement houses, and yards. The characteristic atmosphere, inimitable local color, the one and only multilinguistic tumult. Jewish Warsaw created its own microcosm. It involved an infinite diversity of forms and signs of life, it encompassed enormous social and moral contrasts, it constituted the peculiar phenomenon of a city within the city.

Let's treat the period from the mid-17th century to September 1939 as its bright history which does not necessarily mean cheerful, carefree, or free from conflicts. This place, especially starting with the 19th century, was always affected by the darkness of hardship, poverty, detriment. It also had its underground regions. For instance, Niska Street. Located in kind of a hollow, a depression, stretched low just above the ground that remembered the smelly clay pits. The airy world inhabited by birds and sunrays had never been a domain of Niska and other streets of northern Muranow.

Niska existed in the telluric underworld. It was ruled by chthonic deities, masters of darkness and death, of decline and rebirth, of decay and procreation. The underworld of Niska was damp cellars, basements inhabited by rats and people, holes full of vermin, cells with windows below the pavement. Yet, this is still a bright history, and thus the time when things were still in their place**.**

Kitchen utensils obtained during archeological excavations at the construction site of the edifice of the Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN [POLIN Museum of History of Polish Jews]. The artifacts belong to the collection of POLIN and are stored in the warehouse of the Museum.

Pots were always necessary, that is why they needed to be made, used, sold and purchased, but also mended. In the late 18th century, on Nalewki Street at the property with mortgage number 2253 (according to police numbering, the former 41 Nalewki Street, today, more or less 25 Andersa Street), a potter Aleksander Kamieniecki had his home and his workshop.[4]

In 1905, on the market located in the narrow lane between tenement houses at 37 Nowolipie Street and 42 Leszno Street, pots were not only sold, but they were also used to cook on-site: “Everything here was happening close to the ground. Commodities were laying on spread out rags, people were squatting, and here and there, cinders were glowing in black, cast-iron pots half-covered with some metal sheets, on which peanuts and seeds heated with fire jumped and crackled among the pleasant puffs of smoke.”[5] To Józef Hen, the yard of the tenement house at 53 Nowolipie Street was a stage of the “never-ending spectacle” performed between the poles of *sacrum* and *profanum:* sukkahs raised on the occasion of Sukkot, family fights, the smell of cabbage soup and fried onion, peddlers, junk dealers, beggars. “As children—Hen recollects—we were fascinated by the processes of brazing pots and grinding knives.”[6]

These are just crumbs. The bright history of things from Muranow still needs to be written.

The Dark History of Things

The times of stiffening gloom and thickening darkness, the time of Muranow’s decline and the decline of Muranow objects can be divided into several stages.

The first one is the siege of Warsaw in September 1939. The most extensive bombing raid focused on Nalewki and the Muranow district took place on September 14, on Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year). “Down the middle of the street, the chaotic, frantic crowd is flowing like a stream. Some are running one direction; others are rushing back. They are all struggling with their heavy bundles that contain their modest belongings: pillows, blankets, and some pots. They are seeking refuge, they want to escape the fire, but they don’t know where to run and how to save themselves.”[7]

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Processions of people carrying their belongings would regularly travel across the streets of the occupied city. Jewish refugees from the closer and more distant suburbs of Warsaw; displaced people from Praga district, from the city center, and other “Aryan” parts—all of them squeezed into the closed district; those who already lived within the ghetto walls and had to move when its borders shifted; and finally, crowds from various sections of the ghetto forcedly rushed towards the Umschlaghplatz. They all took things that they thought had a value—practical, material, sentimental, symbolic. In his poem “Things,” Władysław Szlengel describes the history of the Warsaw Ghetto from its beginning to the Great Deportation and Umschlagplatz as an endless procession of Jewish belongings transported on cars and carts, carried on people’s backs and in their hands. Every subsequent scene of this story, every subsequent removal, deprives people of objects. Along this way, there are also—at least to a certain point—pots. They set off towards the ghetto “from Hoża, Wspólna, and Marszałkowska Streets” / (…) “beddings, pots, rugs.” Then, already behind the walls, pots are carried “from Śliska to Niska Street,”[8] but during these transfers from Niska to Ostrowska and then to the barracks, where employees of shops have been congested—the pots get lost, they disappear, as they disappear from the poem. But there is another piece written by Szlengel—“The Monument,” in which the most ordinary kitchen pot becomes an item of great value, one of a kind, irreplaceable. Why? Because to those closest to it, it will be the last material trace of their wife and mother, taken from home while she was cooking dinner, and deported to Treblinka. The pot preserves her touch, her fingerprints, her papillary lines, the signature of her existence. It maintains—like an inscription on a tombstone—the memory of a woman who was burnt to ashes.

They took.
She went, as she stood. Off the fire.
The soup they missed… they took, she went — she’s gone,
they murdered.
The husband will come back from the shop,
heavily sit on the chair,

his hands would fall—dismayed
he'd look around and just stare.

(…)

Still on the shelf, her pot-silent, cold, and dead
He won't go to the shop.
The son will return from the city, starved
Still wearing muddy shoes, he'll dart
onto his unmade bed.
The sleep will never come.
He'll still remember and stare…
at his mother's cold pot
THE MONUMENT OF HERS…[9]

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Before the Germans literally and very physically destroyed Warsaw, they had dismembered the city with decrees: the Jewish quarter surrounded with walls, the Polish district, and then the separate German quarter (the latter would be created in its limited form as late as in spring of 1944). There emerged something that could be described as "decreed space." It was the manner in which space was organized in a totalitarian city. Arbitrarily, ignoring the setting and lived realities, it was brutally imposed and executed under threat of the most severe persecutions—a new urban order. It had to be accepted by those who still had the right to live. In a totalitarian city, space falls victim to flagitious decrees and at the same time, it becomes a source of misery for people locked away within it.[10] The space of everyday experience of the ghetto was subjected to consequent material degradation (omnipresent waste and dirt in the streets, yards, staircases, demolition of overpopulated apartments, houses falling to ruin, etc.).[11]

In this oppressive topography of the ghetto, life goes on. The everyday life of the ghetto constitutes normality in abnormality. What is unusual and extraordinary—imprisonment, hunger and diseases, terror and the threat of death—is covered or rather taken into brackets by the impossible to suppress current of common existence. Acquiring and preparing food, commuting from one place to another, work and even entertainment, the fulfillment of spiritual needs—all this went on, although often in an altered, crippled form. The effort put into leading a normal life—no matter what and against all odds, in opposition to everything which tormented it and put it at risk, constitutes the uncommon commonness of the ghetto.

And in this common life, a pot is a necessary item. It is used to prepare food or to store it. It is used as a dish to eat from. A pot is a useful, yet symbolic object. Its value cannot be limited to its utilitarian functions, its kingdom is not only a kitchen, but something far more important: a house, or rather a home—understood as the intimate space of the individual and unique identity. A pot is simply the metonymy of life that requires air and food.

The uncommon commonness of the ghetto put people to the ultimate test. One of the key experiences of such a situation is the selling—out of necessity—of everything that can be sold. Starvation deprives human beings of objects that have existed in the common space of the house for years and sometimes even "for ages." "It started with Jews selling their clothes, furniture, then their personal undergarments, bed linens, then pillows, and now it's the turn of the pot and the washtub. A poor Jewish man or woman will not have anything to cook a meal in or to wash their last shirt. Signs of the most extreme poverty which lots of people fell into. At present, it shall be said that this or that person has sold the pot from their kitchen, and not—as it has been so far—that they have sold their 'last shirt'"—Abraham Lewin wrote in his journal.[12]

The three Kobryner sisters who "brought from their house, from this misery of theirs, a beautiful, bourgeois, aluminum pot" would come to the soup kitchen managed by Rachela Auerbach at 40 Leszno Street. This pot was witness to the extermination of the Kobryner's family. At first, one of the sisters came to the kitchen with the pot, she poured some soup in and carried it home. Then she stopped coming and instead of her, there appeared another, explaining that her sister was ill. Soon, this one also disappeared from the kitchen, and the youngest girl who was the strongest started coming with the pot. Rachela Auerbach observed how the sisters got weaker and weaker, how they were defeated by hunger. "Only the pot remained the same. Always as clean as a new pin. The pot that told an elaborate story about habits and customs, about the neat apartment, and the proud decline of yet another Jewish family."[13]

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During the Great Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in July, August, and September of 1942, objects together with people set off in the last procession along the streets of the ghetto towards the Umschlagplatz. And the poem "Things" by Szlengel also leads us towards this very last—final—march. However, only a handful of things reach the designated loading square. The vast majority of them stay: on tables set for ghetto dinners; in drawers, cupboards, whatnots, and closets; in secret cubby-holes—because they could not be taken in a hurry—on stairs and in the yards of tenement houses; on the pavements, and on cobblestone streets. It is precisely at this moment, that Jewish things became post-Jewish.

The cityscape of the ghetto alters. It involves fewer and fewer people and more and more things. In abandoned houses and in the empty streets, objects occupy the foreground, they become visible. And they gain a specific agency. Their presence stimulates movement, hustle, spurs to action, it ignites the desire to possess them. Looting expeditions of individual seekers float from the "Aryan side." Visits of Poles to the residual ghetto were as dangerous as they were profitable. One of the main tasks of the Jewish Police was securing the empty apartments full of valuables as well as repositories systematically filled in with those objects. Behind the residual ghetto walls, the most important and the most extensive "shop"— Werterfassungsstelle—was created. Jews supervised by the Germans worked "cleaning" the apartments after the deported—they gathered, assorted, and delivered the abandoned possessions to the warehouse, where they are supposed to be packed and sent to the Reich. The enterprise operated as part of the SS Command Office and the Police. For a short period, the head of the Werterfassung was Paul Otto Geibel, until he was replaced by Franz Konrad.

Post-Jewish objects attracted Germans, Poles, and Jews. Everybody was stealing, starting with the head of the Werterfassung, through to German officials and guards, Jewish workers, and lastly with Polish looters. Rachela Auerbach calls this system of corruption the "graveyard idyll." And everybody was happy: Germans, Jews, and Poles. All of them profiting from these dealings—one way or another.[14] In his journal, clandestinely written on the "Aryan side," Samuel Puterman, who was employed there, describes one of the regular days in the Werterfrassung. "Most of us worked carrying things from apartments to carts, some worked at huge sorting stations and sewing rooms, where clothes and underwear left after the deported Jews were washed and fixed, and other employees every morning were brought to work at repositories that stored particular kind of things. Collecting objects from apartments was kept in line with a strict system—by houses, streets, quarters. There were separate groups that collected glass and porcelain, separate that dealt with chandeliers, clothes and undergarments, separate for paintings and light furniture, and finally, those for heavy furniture."[15]

The post-Jewish objects became not only subject to looting, but also sabotage of various kinds. Trophies were sometimes destroyed before they could get into perpetrators' hands. Such practices were recollected by Janina Bauman, who as a young woman worked at the Werterfassung. "I took a break in the room with porcelain. I sat on the floor to take a closer look at particular dishes. There were sophisticated dishware sets made of thin, hand-decorated porcelain, sets of intricate crystal wine glasses, valuable vases, and figures—some of them very old, some of them exceptionally beautiful. (…) I thought of those who used to be owners of those cups and vases, how they enjoyed them, and now they were dead. (…) Feeling almost physical pain and trying not to make noise, I started crushing the most valuable cups, plates, and figurines, banging one item

against another. This was my first act of active resistance. And the last one."[16]

Things left behind by the Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto ended their journey in dumpsters. Heaps of rotting, rusting, and decaying objects piled up there, thrown away and abandoned, mixed and piled up, filling up yards and streets. An epic poem about ghetto dumpsters can be found in two masterpieces by Rachela Auerbach: "Lament of Dead Things"[17] (associated with the period just after the Great Deportation in the summer of 1942), and "Lacrimae rerum"[18] (from after the January Operation of 1943). Rachela wrote these pieces once already on the "Aryan side," where she stayed in hiding from March 1943. From behind the wall she observes how the ghetto is devoured by fire and turned into ashes. Then she realizes the totality of the Holocaust which destroys both individuals and objects. "In the imagery of the Holocaust of Jews, the Holocaust of things takes an outstanding place. The catastrophe and adversity of things was as valid as the catastrophe and adversity of people, and at the same time, it was a perfect reflection and a metaphor of those experiences. The phenomenon was so diverse and so rich in the always tragically strident colors of decay, so abounding with meaningful symbols, and so directly striking the soul of the viewer, that it deserves a separate monograph. Volumes should be written about it. Separate ones entirely dedicated to the yards and streets, to interiors, and to the ghetto dumpsters."[19]

In Rachela Auerbach's texts, the dumpster represents the ultimate form of existence—degraded and tormented, pushed to regions of hideousness that evoke disgust and repulsiveness.[20] These overwhelming piles of rubbish left after the extinguished world, this universe of neglected things—contains everything. It also contains kitchen utensils. These are the dumpsters after the Great Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, in the autumn of 1942: "Iron, aluminum, and enamel pans of various sizes and equally numerous representations of kettles of the mentioned kinds in different sizes and shapes. Some still unbroken cake domes and the youngest representative of the kitchenware and dishware family (home is also about eating)—the red and white porcelain milk cup decorated with images of small fly agaric mushrooms."[21] And here are the dumpsters after the January Operation in 1943: "Again piles of various dishes and utensils languished in all the yards. Bowls, buckets, kettles, pans, porcelain, and delftware…."[22]

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During the Ghetto Uprising, Marian Berland, together with his family and a big group of Jewish people, was hiding in the tenement house at 38 Muranowska Street, in the basement turned shelter. Between them and the Umschlagplatz, there was only Niska Street, not much more than one hundred meters. Meals were cooked in the clandestine kitchen upstairs, in one of the abandoned apartments. "Cooking here is a real ordeal (…) My father has come back and he is

replacing me again. (…) You would have to see the tenderness he treats the pot with and the attentiveness when he feeds the fire."[23] Then the food, a real treasure, was brought to the basement. "The tunnel is dark. I am holding the pot with food and moving slowly ahead. (…) Dozens of wild eyes dart to the pot I am carrying (…) Many people, noticing that I am holding the pot, shove just behind me with saucepans in their hands (…) I give the pot with the groats to a mother."[24]

Stella Fidelseid was hiding with others at 6 Wołyńska Street, at first in a hide-out on the second floor of the tenement house, and then in the bunker below the yard. In their underground existence, a pot was a crucial thing, thanks to which meals could be cooked and eaten. Thanks to which one could survive. Cooking took place in the basement. "It was about 3 a.m. It was time to think about cooking some soup. The only place that was anyhow useable was the kitchen of the basement canteen. (…) The kitchen was quite spacious. In the corner, just below the window, there was quite a lot of wood. After a bit of poking about, we found a hatchet, some pots, bowls, a couple of dishes, some flatware, and even a small supply of salt. (…) In the meantime, the soup was ready. I helped to carry the pot to the bunker. Dad was cleaning the kitchen to cover all the traces of our night visit. We left the pots and bowls randomly in the corners—as we had found them before. In the bunker, I served cups of soup to those who had no food provisions at all."[25] The found utensils were also used to store supplies, especially water. "In the semi-burnt houses, there are some abandoned pots and kettles with water. We pour it into one dish, some of it is used for cooking, and the rest is put to the stove in the canteen kitchen."[26]

The final destruction of the streets and houses was caused by fire during the uprising. It was then that the space of the ghetto lost the last traces of any, even if insane, order. It was turned into a chaos of debris and ashes. This was the time things started going down, underground.

The Underground History of Things

The ghetto walls remained, although the ghetto ceased to exist. Now, they surrounded the extensive territory of death, a limitless cemetery, under which life hidden in the bunkers still smoldered for quite a long time. It went on at night: cooking, expanding and camouflaging the bunkers, social life and entertainments, expeditions for food and water. During the day, it withdrew into a latent state: bunker dwellers hunkered down, kept absolute silence, some stayed awake, others fell asleep. From the overworld, life moved to the underworld. There, people co-existed with decaying or charred corpses, with rats as massive as cats, with lice. And with the objects they had brought with thems or dug out from the debris—and they were sometimes as precious as food. They helped their owners survive. And to survive, one had to disappear from the face of Earth, to stop being visible and audible.

Initially, apart from civilians, there were armed groups hiding in the rubble, so-called “ruin dwellers,” who resisted the formations plundering the destroyed ghetto. From the very first days of the uprising, Leon Najberg was hiding in various shelters in the area of Świętojerska, Wałowa, and Nalewki. They hunkered down in burnt apartments, in attics and basements. Basements turned into shelters were the safest. But from the basements, one had to go out at night and penetrate the demolished tenement houses. Among the debris, one could find some food and an entire variety of objects. One week before the Great Synagogue in Tłomackie was blown up, which became the symbolic end of the uprising, Najberg went out of the hide-out with his companions to search the ruins. They reached a kitchen and find some kitchen utensils. “Interiors of the burnt houses were not peaceful, either. On the vaults, there were burnt corpses, skeletons of baby prams, ice-skates covered with dust, and other half-burnt toys. Burnt chandeliers were dangling from ceilings, white tiles showed through almost completely charred kitchens. And what remained were the little hangers over the cooker with half-burnt pots and pans hanging on them.”[27]

Some of the ruin dwellers managed to make their way through the ghetto walls before the outbreak of the uprising. Some of them stayed and after the collapse of the uprising, were joined by others. Some managed to survive there till January 17, 1945. At that time, a few hundred people lived in the area of the former ghetto, as well as in the ruins of the entire capital. Dawid Fogelman, together with some other companions, was staying in the bunker at 5 Szczęśliwicka Street, nearby the former Umschlagplatz. They had hidden there during the Warsaw Uprising and they managed to survive till the day of liberation. Fogelman started writing a journal in the bunker, he wrote poems and busied himself with the issues of everyday existence. First and foremost, acquiring food and water. Utensils to collect and store water were necessary. And those utensils had to be found. September 1944: “At night (it is dark), we take all the dishes and we go out (…). We look around, enter the yard of the building no. 6, and we enter interiors. (…) Carefully we slide in and look for a tap in the darkness. We find it after a longer search, we run it… and water starts to pour. (…) We fill all the utensils with it.”[28] On the cusp of October and November 1944: “There’s no water again, we have to go out to get it, we are preparing all the utensils.”[29] After the Warsaw Uprising collapsed, seven Jews, among them Chaim Icel Goldstein, went underground and started hiding in the bunker at 8 Franciszkańska Street. They got food and water during their “hunting expeditions” into the ruins. After which they would all sit around a steaming pot and eat. As they used to eat at home. “They would sit around the fire, on which the meal was getting ready. Steam was puffing from the pot, and the smell of cooked pearl barley teased their senses. (…) For each person, Chana (…) made a cake of a bit of flour mixed with water, baked on the red-hot brick. Then, onto the table, she put a pot of soup—hot water, in which there were floating some noodles made of the same dough.”[30]

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To Germans, rubble represented great value. Thus it was decided to make use of the debris first, and then wipe everything out and establish an extensive park in its place. In his decree, issued on June 11, 1943, Himmler ordered the bulldozing of the post-ghetto area, bringing in lots of soil and creating a huge park that would cover about 180 ha—more or less half of the area of the Central Park in New York. To complete the task, on July 19, 1943, Germans established a special concentration camp, to which only Jews from abroad were transferred from Auschwitz. The area of the Konzentrationslager Warschau camp, also called Gęsiówka, the same as the prison for Jews which had operated in the ghetto, spread along Gęsia Street—from Zamenhofa Street to Okopowa Street. The topography of the ghetto once again was about to go through metamorphosis, and the process of spacial destruction entered yet another stage.

Based on the accessible documents, orders, decrees, reports, and invoices, Jerzy Giebułtowski has shown, step by step, what happened to the area of the ghetto destroyed during the uprising, and also what was planned to be done in future, but never completed.[31] The entire scope of works was supervised by the general of the Waffen-SS, Dr. Engr. Hans Kammler from the SS Main Economic and Administrative Office. He developed a plan and calculated a budget for the whole project which involved: constructing buildings in the camp, works associated with bulldozing the remaining buildings in the ghetto, recovering useful materials, disposing of parts of the debris, backfilling the basements and tunnels with the rest of it, and then planting the area. Among the ruins of the ghetto there started demolition works that also included recovering materials and valuables. Not only did the labor commandos blow up the ruins of the houses, remove the rubble, and recover all types of recyclables, but also scouted apartments, attics, basements, storages, and bunkers in search for useful items, commodities, and valuables. It also happened that among the debris, they found Jews who had been hiding there since the uprising; they were shot dead on the spot. Over 30 million bricks, 6 tons of iron scrap, and over 800 tons of non-ferrous metals were recovered. The works ceased in June 1944. Kammler informed Himmler that “works in the Warsaw Ghetto had to be terminated. The demolishing part was completed in time, but the bulldozing works could not be finished.”[32] In the end, Himmler’s order was not executed. The park in the “post-ghetto area” was never created.

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The great recycling of post-Jewish objects was nothing new. Already before the Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, Poles had been going behind its walls to buy for next to nothing the possessions of those who had been starving. After the Great Deportation, Polish smugglers entered the residual ghetto. Objects were still resting underground. In spite of subsequent looting waves, and

despite the systematic work of recovering supervised by Germans, there were still plenty of them.

After January 1945, the ruins of the whole of Warsaw became a territory of intensive looting. Time and again, such cases were reported by the press, publicists, and literary people. In her novel *Stolica* [The Capital] written in late 1945, Pola Gojawiczyńska described looters as wolves and vultures preying on the corpse of Warsaw.[33] The first issue of the monthly magazine "Twórczość" from 1945 published a reportage "Gesty i symbole" [Gestures and Symbols] written by Mieczysław Wionczek. It was dedicated to Warsaw in the first months after liberation. The author paid attention to the unprecedented scale of a phenomenon that he called "necrophilia." "I do not know if anywhere in the so-called civilized countries, people looted and destroyed the remaining belongings of co-citizens to such an extent as took place in Warsaw in winter of that year (…). Five years of occupation appeared to be educationally fruitful. (…) Furs and furniture from the ghettos across Poland caused what they caused—blindfolded eyes and gagged consciences. (…) These were not only dregs that looted, but also "respectable citizens" who stroll along the promenades of ruined Warsaw with their families on Sunday afternoons, wearing looted shoes and bowler hats."[34]

Looting in the ghetto ruins took an especially hideous form. The post-ghetto-space became the target of expeditions organized by pillagers equipped with buckets, spades, and sieves used to sift through the ashes of murdered people. In "Robotnik" from September 1946, we read about "grave robbers who cart away the ashes of martyrs." Exhumation teams working for the Polish Red Cross were still confronted with traces of their activity. "(…) using buckets, robbers carry the ashes away to some other, distant place and there they start looking for valuables among them."[35]

The construction of the Southern Muranow district which started in 1949 fueled the still smoldering gold fever. Another wave of "diggers" rushed towards the ghetto ruins as if they were the legendary Klondike River in Canada. "As soon as the cleaning works started"—we can read in "Słowo o Muranowie" [A Word about Muranow]—"the popular legend of the alleged gold and treasure hidden in the ruins of basements and walls was brought back to life. The information about the beginning of works once again attracted hordes of loafers and all kinds of treasure hunters."[36]

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Not only looters searched for post-Jewish objects, but also those scarce castaways who survived and were now are coming back to the ghetto dead sea of debris.

Władka and Benjamin Meed left Warsaw after the collapse of the Warsaw Uprising together with other residents of the capital. They returned on January 23, 1945. "Battling through the gloomy,

abandoned ruins, we were cutting a swath through bomb craters, debris and heaps of rubble, piles of bricks, stones, and rust-eaten crates. (…) Every stone, every hill of debris reminded us of life we once used to be part of. Here—a bit of pipe that sticks out, there—a bent rod and a charred tree—these were the only things that remained after our desolated world. My eyes stopped on a scrap of a tattered prayer book covered with dust, and on a rusty, jagged pot… And all of a sudden, I saw again my family home, my Dad and my Mum….”[37]

Izrael Goldhar, from 33 Miła Street, left Warsaw on September 6, 1939, in response to the call of Colonel Umiastowski. He came back in the autumn of 1945. Years later he described his return to the ghetto ruins. “Among the debris, I found Miła Street. I found the house no. 33. I entered the first and second yard. (…) I felt like sieving the rubble to find at least one tiny keepsake after my beloved ones. (…) The images of our house, district, and apartment keep haunting me. I still mourn the lost “treasures” that I used to store in my drawer: my photograph taken by a street photographer when I was four years old, letters, school reports, and other sundries. When I visited the ruins of our house just after the war, there was a moment when I felt an urgent need to sieve through the debris to find my drawer. I realized that that would have been a Sisyphean task. I walked away resigned and depressed.”[38]

Underground Muranow as a Challenge

Let’s travel under the surface of the modern-day city which was raised on the 19th- and 20th-century Jewish district and the ghetto. How to describe this palimpsest that the post-ghetto-space represents? The dendrologic metaphor (roots of the ghetto still residing under the ground) might be accompanied by an anatomic metaphor (if we assume that everything which remains under the skin of the contemporary city lives with its own, very inherent and specific life) or a metaphor inspired by the practices of autopsy (if we assume that the post-ghetto-space is a corpse that—opened with the scalpel of an archeologist or a historian—reveals its cadaverous interior).

Muranow’s underground territory of the Holocaust is inaccessible, invisible, hidden away from our sight, remaining beneath the sphere of the every-day experience of the city residents of here and now, as well as beyond the sphere of conventional forms of commemorating (museums, monuments, boards, on-the-ground art installations). Therefore, it is a place that is not memorialized as it remains extremely difficult or even impossible to memorialize. During investments invading the structure of the land, there are often discoveries of various artifacts from the period when the ghetto existed. The underground legacy of the ghetto is not treated as a monument.[39] In the area of the former ghetto, there are only two sites listed in the National Register of Historical Places, both directly related to its history: Anielewicz’s bunker at 18 Miła Street, and the Umschlagplatz.

Underground Muranow constitutes a singular underground escrow of the Holocaust. It consists of various types of artifacts; fragmented material remainders, destruction, debris (bits of bricks, remnants of components used to build houses, and other construction elements); material remainders that comprise bigger structures (fragments of foundation, basements, vaultings, etc.).

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Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich POLIN [The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews] preserves various types of objects excavated from the building site of the Museum edifice and its nearest surrounding. These findings originate from three different sources.[40] The first constitutes excavation works conducted within the period between September 15, 1998 and October 31, 1998. The second source is archeological research carried out between August 12, 2009 and October 9, 2009. The third source of the items gathered in the POLIN Museum inventory are the things donated by the Mazowieckie Stowarzyszenie Historyczne “Exploratorzy.pl” [the Mazovian Historic Association—“Explorers”]—objects found in Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Nasielsk, Wyszków, Warsaw, and its suburbs.

The excavated objects from the POLIN collection belong to two categories. Firstly, there are so-called “mass artifacts.” A specific artifact that has been destroyed so extensively that its remnants are so amorphous that re-creating its original shape is impossible. Secondly, so-called “discrete artifacts,” complete objects or objects with insignificant damage, including parts and fragments, on which it is possible to quantitatively and qualitatively identify the preciously complete objects. These are mostly associated with pottery (vessels, tiles, and items), glass objects (utensils and items), objects made of stone, synthetic materials, wood, non-ferrous metals, and iron. This group includes kitchen utensils: pots, saucepans, mugs, and roasting pans, etc. Are there among these any of the pots that accompanied the authors of the testimonies quoted above?

From April 17, 2020 to November 30, 2020, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews will showcase a temporary exhibition called „Tu Muranów” [Here is Muranow] I was its initiator and co-author, together with Beata Chomątowska, Kamila Radecka-Mikulicz, and an entire team. The exhibition has been presented in two spaces: the indoor space of the museum and outdoors—on the square next to the Monument to the Ghetto Heroes. A showcase installation has been authored by Artur Żmijewski, Zofia Waślicka-Żmijewska, and Marcin Kwietowicz. The objects obtained during the archeological excavations carried out on the construction site of the POLIN Museum play a vital role in the concept of this exhibition.

Translated by Aleksandra Szymczyk

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- Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, Goldhar, Izrael (Jurek). *Miła 33. Wspomnienia z domu rodzinnego*, file no. 302/307

- Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, Puterman, Samuel. *Wysiedlenie z warszawskiego getta*, file no. 302/27.

1. On objects understood as special kind of witnesses of the Holocaust, with the methodological and theoretical background evoked in this article, I wrote in the paper "Redefinicja kategorii świadka i świadectwa. Wokół rzeczy wykopanych na terenie miejsca-po-getcie w Warszawie" [Redefining the Witness and the Testimony: Reflections on Objects Excavated in the Warsaw Ghetto Area], in *Świadek: jak się staje, czym jest?* [Witness: How does one become one? What is it?], eds. Agnieszka Dauksza and Karolina Koprowska (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2019), 231-244. ↩
2. *Ilustrowany Przewodnik po Warszawie wraz z treściwym opisem okolic miasta* [The Illustrated Guide to Warsaw and a Brief Description of Its Suburbs] (Warsaw: Nakład Redakcyi „Wędrowca", 1893), 151. ↩
3. See: Gabriela Zalewska, *Ludność żydowska w Warszawie w okresie międzywojennym* [The Jewish Population of Warsaw in the Interwar Period] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996), 48-67. ↩
4. See: Daniela Kosacka, "Nalewki do schyłku XVIII wieku" [Nalewki till the Late Eighteenth Century], *Rocznik Warszawski*, Year 1 (1960): 93. ↩
5. Pola Gojawiczyńska, "Po strajku" [After the Strike], in *Szybko zapomniane. Utwory z lat 1945–1963 drukowane w czasopismach* [Soon Forgotten. Writings Published in Magazines from 1945–1963], ed. Wanda Nadzinowa (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1974), 167–168. ↩
6. Józef Hen, *Nowolipie* (Warsaw: Iskry, 1991), 29. ↩
7. "NN. Wspomnienia z września 1939 r. Obrona Warszawy" [Anon. Recollections from the September 1939 Warsaw Defense], in *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, vol. 15*: Wrzesien 1939. Listy kaliskie. Listy płockie* [The Ringelblum Archive. The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, vol. 15: September 1939. Letters from Kalish and Płock], eds. Tadeusz Epsztein, Justyna Majewska and Aleksandra

Bańkowska (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2014), 25–26. ↩

8. Władysław Szlengel, *Co czytałem umarłym. Wiersze z getta warszawskiego* [What I Read to the Dead. Poems from the Warsaw Ghetto], coll. and ed. Irena Maciejewska (Warsaw: PIW, 1977), 125. ↩
9. Szlengel, 82–83. The fact that the pot in this poem "plays the role of a material trace," that it constitutes both a substitute of the death and the life of a woman, and is "a portrayal of the nurturer, mother, and wife who cooked dinners in it, touched it, moved, cleaned, performed thousands of tiny movements around it, movements that build closeness and unity"—was noted by Bożena Shallcross, *Rzeczy i Zagłada* [Objects and the Holocaust] (Cracow: Universitas, 2010), 58. ↩
10. I have written more about various forms of the totalitarian city, as well as the "decreed space," in the sub-chapter „Topography and Existence", in Jacek Leociak, *Limit Experiences. A Study of Twentieth-century Forms of Representation,* trans. Alex Shannon (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 79-91. ↩
11. I have written on the sanitary conditions in the ghetto, as well as financial and administrative problems with getting rid of waste here: "Góry śmieci otulały watą smrodu wszystko, co żyło. (Śmieci w getcie warszawskim w perspektywie środowiskowej historii Zagłady)" [Piles of Rubbish Wrapped Everything That Was Alive. (Rubbish in the Warsaw Ghetto as an Environmental History of the Holocaust)], in *Teksty Drugie*, no. 2 (2017): 120–129. ↩
12. Abraham Lewin, "Dziennik" [Journal], in *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, vol. 23, Part I [The Ringelblum Archive. The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, vol. 23, Part I], eds. Katarzyna Person, Zofia Trębacz and Michał Trębacz (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015), 32–33. (Note from May 18, 1942, translated from Yiddish into Polish by Adam Rutkowski and Magdalena Siek). ↩
13. Rachela Auerbach recollects the Kobryner sisters and their pot in: *Warszewer cawoes. Bagegeniszn, aktiwitetn, gojroles 1933–1943* (Tel Aviv: Jisroel-Buch). Fragments of this recollection were quoted and translated by Karolina Szymaniak in a footnote to: Rachela Auerbach, "Brulion monografii kuchni ludowej" [The Brullion Monograph of People's Kitchen], in *Pisma z getta warszawskiego* [Writings from the Warsaw Ghetto], ed. Karolina Szymaniak (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015), 236–237. ↩
14. See: Rachela Auerbach, "Werterfassung," *Nasze Słowo*, no. 3/4, 1949, 11, 14. ↩
15. Samuel Puterman's journal "Wysiedlenie z warszawskiego getta" [Displacement from the Warsaw Ghetto], The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute Archive, file no. 302/27, 254–255. ↩
16. Janina Bauman, *Zima o poranku. Opowieść dziewczynki z warszawskiego getta* [Winter in the Morning. A Story of a Girl from the Warsaw Ghetto] (Poznan: Znak, 1989), 109–110. ↩

17. Rachela Auerbach, “Lament rzeczy martwych”, *Przełom,* no. 2, 1946, 6-8. ↩
18. Rachela Auerbach, “Lacrimae rerum”, *Przełom*, no. 20, 1949, 12-13. ↩
19. Auerbach, “Lament rzeczy martwych”, 6. ↩
20. For an extensive interpretation of the figures of a dumpster and a cemetery, linked by the category of exclusion, see the sub-chapter „Methaphors of the Ghetto” in my book: *Limit Experiences. A Study of Twentieth-century Forms of Representation,* 91-100. Objects in Rachela Auerbach’s texts were interestingly written about by Aleksandra Ubertowska in the chapter “Rachela opłakuje ślady, resztki, widma, wyrwy w ziemi” [Rachela Laments the Traces, Remnants, Phantoms, Voids in the Ground] in her book *Holokaust. Auto(tanato)grafie* [The Holocaust. Auto(tanato)graphies] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN 2014). Bożena Shallcross, in her very interesting and inspiring, and undoubtedly pioneering book *Rzeczy i Zagłada* does not mention the texts written by Rachela Auerbach, without which it is impossible to get close to the phenomenon studied by the author. ↩
21. Auerbach, “Lament rzeczy martwych”, 7. ↩
22. Auerbach, “Lacrimae rerum”, 12. ↩
23. Marian Berland, *Dni długie jak wieki* [Days as Long as Centuries] (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992), 60. ↩
24. Berland, 74–75. ↩
25. Stella Fidelseid, *Pozostałam w gruzach… (moje przeżycia po likwidacji getta warszawskiego – kwiecień–grudzień 1943)* [I Stayed in the Rubble… (My Memoir After the Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto—April–December 1943)], The Jewish Historical Institute Archive, file no. 301/4873 [in the title card, text signed as “Author unknown”], 12–13. ↩
26. Fidelseid, 28. ↩
27. Leon Najberg, *Ostatni powstańcy getta* [The Last Ghetto Uprisers] (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1993), 78. ↩
28. Dawid Fogelman, “Pamiętnik pisany w bunkrze” [A Diary Written in the Bunker], *Biuletyn ŻIH*, no. 52 (1964): 132–133. ↩
29. Fogelman, 134. ↩
30. Chaim Icel Goldstein, *Bunkier* [Bunker], trans. Yiddish to Polish by Sara Arm (Warsaw: Ośrodek Karta, 2006), 40, 56. ↩
31. See: Jerzy Giebułtowski, “Dzieje jednej faktury. Glosa do przypisu, czyli Central Park Heinricha Himmlera” [The History of an Invoice. A Comment on a Footnote or Heinrich Himmler’s Central Park], *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały*, vol. 12 (2016): 12. For basic studies of the KL Warschau see: Tatiana Berenstein and Adam Rutkowski, “Obóz koncentracyjny dla Żydów w Warszawie (1943–1944)” [The Warsaw Concentration Camp for Jews], *Biuletyn ŻIH*, no. 62 (1967), 3-22; Bogusław Kopka, *Konzentrationslager Warschau.*

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32. Quoted after: Giebułtowski, 340. ↩
33. Pola Gojawiczyńska, *Stolica* [The Capital], Part I (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1948), 18. ↩
34. Mieczysław Wionczek, „Gesty i symbole" [Gestures and Symbols], *Twórczość*, no. 1 (1945), reproduced in *Pamięć warszawskiej odbudowy 1945–1949. Antologia* [The Memory of Warsaw's Reconstruction 1945–1949. Anthology], ed. Jan Górski (Warsaw: PIW, 1972), 127. ↩
35. "Hieny cmentarne wywożą prochy męczenników," *Robotnik,* September 5, 1946, 7. ↩
36. Feliks Weber, "Słowo o Muranowie" [A Word about Muranow], *Stolica*, October 16, 1949, 4. ↩
37. Władka Meed**,** *Po obu stronach muru* [On Both Sides of the Wall] (Warsaw: Jaworski, 2003), 303–304. ↩
38. Izrael (Jurek) Goldhar, *Miła 33. Wspomnienia z domu rodzinnego* [33 Miła Street. Recollections from the Family Home], The Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute Archive, file no. 302/307, 4, 64. ↩
39. So far, there has not been established any legal or restoration regulations that would care for or secure the underground areas of Muranow District. In January 2018, the Warsaw City Historic Preservation Officer took measures to add the area of the former ghetto (or part of it) to the register of historical monuments. ↩
40. Here, I have used a special note, prepared by Katarzyna Reszka who works as a registrar and a manager in the Collection Department of the POLIN Museum and to whom I am especially grateful for help and extensive information. See also: Joanna Borowska and Ryszard Cędrowski, "Ślady nieobecnej obecności mieszkańców dawnej dzielnicy żydowskiej w Warszawie" [Traces of the Absent Presence of the Residents of the Former Jewish District in Warsaw], in *Archeologia współczesności* [The Archeology of Contemporaneity]*,* vol. 1, ed. Anna Zalewska (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Naukowe Archeologów Polskich, 2016), 225-232. ↩

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University Press 2009; extended and improved Polish edition 2013), *Doświadczenia graniczne. Studia o dwudziestowiecznych formach reprezentacji* (2009) / *Limit Experiences: A Study of Twentieth-Century Forms of Representation* (2019); *Ratowanie. Opowieści Polaków i Żydów* [Life Saving. Stories of Poles and Jews] (2010); *Spojrzenia na Warszawskie getto* [Views to the Warsaw Ghetto] (2011); *Biografie ulic. O żydowskich ulicach Warszawy: od narodzin po Zagładę* [Streets' Biographies. On Jewish Streets of Warsaw: from the beginning to the Holocaust] (2017). *Młyny boże. Zapiski o Kościele i Zagładzie* [God's Mills. Notes on the Church and the Holocaust] (2018). He selected, edited, and commented (together with Marta Janczewska) and wrote a foreword to *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Antologia* [The Ringelblum Archive. Anthology of Testimonies and Accounts] for the "Biblioteka Narodowa" series, Wrocław 2019.

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