

INTRODUCTION



The Environmental History of the Holocaust

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ABSTRACT

The introduction conceptualizes environmental history of the Holocaust as a subdiscipline of Holocaust studies. The authors approach this emerging field of research through the context of environmental humanities with its current interest in the Anthropocene, soil science, forensics, multispecies collectives, and explorations of relations between ecocides and genocides. Proposed approach considers post-Holocaust spaces and landscapes as specific ecosystems and examines relations between its actors (human and non-human) in order to show the Holocaust's spatial markers and long-term effects. The article outlines existing literature on the subject, identifies the central research problems and questions, and discusses sources and methods. The authors demonstrate that the environmental history of the Holocaust applies a hybrid methodology that uses methods from various disciplines with the aim of creating new theories and interpretive categories and thus should be considered complementary to existing approaches in Holocaust studies. The authors follow the methodological principles of grounded theory in generating new concepts and seeking multidisciplinary methods for explaining nature's role in the Holocaust and how Holocaust has changed nature. The authors claim that environmental history of the Holocaust broadens Holocaust studies as a field of research and opens up new questions concerning relations between nature and extermination in order to provide a more holistic perspective for exploring the relationship between culture and nature, genocide and ecocide. The approach proposed here shows Holocaust and post-Holocaust landscapes in terms of ecological/natural heritage, which might influence the way these spaces are commemorated, conserved and preserved, as well as used for tourist purposes.

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Introduction

The aim of this introduction is to conceptualize the subdiscipline of Holocaust studies that we, following Tim Cole, call the environmental history of the Holocaust.¹ Differentiating it

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¹ Tim Cole, "Nature Was Helping Us": Forests, Trees, and Environmental Histories of the Holocaust," *Environmental History* 19, no. 4 (2014): 665–86. Cole considers "what environmental history might contribute to the field of Holocaust and

from the broader field is crucial given the dynamic developments in the environmental humanities in its relation to violence, which emphasize the inalienable dependencies between humans and the environment, the growing debates on ecocide as a crime against humanity,² and the rise of comparative studies of genocide and ecocide that show the “totality of destruction.”³ It is particularly important for researching the crucial role of ecological (environmental) aspects of conflicts.⁴ This is not our intention to present ecological factors as the cause of Holocaust, but instead we will offer venues to examine the impact of nature on conduct during the Holocaust and its long lasting effects.

Opening the 2013 volume *Holocaust and Nature* with his article “The World Around Us: What Have We Learned From the Holocaust?,” John K. Roth examines the relationship between violence that humans commit against each other and their attitudes to nature.⁵ The volume’s editor Didier Pollefeyt offers the following commentary on Roth’s thoughts:

Indeed the Holocaust was beyond (in)human imagination, but the drama *did* happen. The impossible is possible. In confrontation with the dramatic perspectives on the future of the ecological system called ‘earth’, we also often think that the impossible is not possible. We often relativise the ecological challenges, comforting ourselves with the idea that the situation

genocide studies (and environmental histories of genocide might contribute to the field of environmental histories of war)” (665). He adds that he seeks

not only to contribute to Holocaust studies where forest hiding is relatively understudied, but also to the field of environmental history where the Holocaust and genocide remain largely unexplored despite more recent interest in environmental histories of war and environmental histories of Nazism [...]. I am interested in forests as both material sites and memorial landscapes, both as lived spaces and remembered spaces. (667)

His ideas were inspired by research on the role of nonhumans in the survival of those who hide in the forests. Cole’s explorations are, in turn, an important inspiration for us and provide the starting point for our own thoughts outlined here.

² In 2010, British lawyer Polly Higgins submitted to the United Nations an amendment to the Rome Statute, proposing that “ecocide” be legally recognized as the fifth (along with genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression) international crime against peace. On 18 April 2017, the so-called the Monsanto Tribunal at The Hague found that Monsanto had committed potential crimes against humanity and the environment, related to the distribution of herbicide (Roundup). The Ecocide Project “Ecocide is the Missing 5th Crime Against Peace.” A report by Anja Gauger, Mai Pouye Rabatel-Fernel, Louise Kulbicki, Damien Short and Polly Higgins (London: the Human Rights) (Updated June 2013), https://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4830/1/Ecocide_research_report_19_July_13.pdf (accessed 1 February 2018). Sailesh Mehta and Prisca Merz, “Ecocide – A New Crime Against Peace?” *Environmental Law Review* 17, no. 1 (2015): 3–7.

³ It is worth recalling here that the term *holocaust* means also large-scale destruction and in this sense is used to describe ecological disasters.

World ecology is at a crisis point. Within the next month sweeping emergency measures must be taken to reverse the fall in food consumption, the disruption of vital services and the exponential spread of disease or an irreversible ecological holocaust will be inevitable, a holocaust which will wipe out the human race.

See New Solidarity International Press Service report “The Ecological Holocaust,” *Executive Intelligence Review* 3, no. 16 (19 April 1976): 24; Paul Schullery, “Yellowstone’s Ecological Holocaust,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 47, no. 3 (1997): 16–33; Walter K. Dodds, “Weeds and Shrinking Violets. Pests on the Move and the Ecological Holocaust,” in his, *Humanity’s Footprint: Momentum, Impact, and Our Global Environment* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Kübra Kalkandelen and Darren O’Byrne, “On Ecocide: Toward a Conceptual Framework,” *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 18, no. 3 (2017): 333–49.

⁴ Harald Welzer, *Climate Wars: What People Will Be Killed For in the 21st Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge, Malden: Polity, 2012); Jürgen Zimmerer, ed., *Climate Change and Genocide: Environmental Violence in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2015); Carl-Friedrich Schleussner, Jonathan F. Donges, Reik V. Donner, and Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, “Armed-Conflict Risks Enhanced by Climate-Related Disasters in Ethnically Fractionalized Countries,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 33 (2016): 9216–21; Devin C. Bowles, Colin D. Butler, and Neil Morisset, “Climate Change, Conflict and Health,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 108, no. 10 (2015).

⁵ John K. Roth, “The World Around Us: What Have We Learned from the Holocaust?” in *Holocaust and Nature*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2013), 14–22.

is not as bad as we think, that we do not see or experience ourselves the decline of nature, that things are exaggerated, etc. Nature is as vulnerable for evil and destruction as our interhuman relations.⁶

In his article, “Nature’s Healing Power, the Holocaust and the Environmental Crisis,” Eric Katz has argued similarly that there were connections between the Shoah and environmental destruction:

genocide and ecocide may be linked together by an analysis of the concept of domination. A comparative study of these two evils may point us in the direction of developing a harmonious relationship with both the natural world and our fellow human beings.⁷

Adopting an environmental history perspective can open the way to further studies, enabling closer analysis of relations between the environment and the Holocaust, thus in turn revealing more dimensions and previously unnoticed results of the latter. Such an approach can reorient and enrich the research field by transcending dominant modes in Holocaust research, namely memory studies and trauma studies where the “representation paradigm” prevails and discussions focus on the ability to represent the Shoah.

Current debates on anthropogenic climate change, including the conflicts and migration it causes, on the Anthropocene, sustainable development, the extinction of species, ecological catastrophes, and the relationship between genocide and ecocide, particularly in the context of the extermination of indigenous populations,⁸ all suggest feasible alternative research approaches. They enable, for example, rethinking both the causes and the long-term effects of the Holocaust by exploring sites of mass murder and extermination camps as “sacrificial zones” of extermination that are marked as sites of the “legacies of atocity” and institutionalized cruelty against humans, non-humans and the environment. What emerges is a stratigraphy of the Holocaust, showing its multiple layers.

Opening up Holocaust studies to environmental history entails not only epistemic and critical dimensions, but also has ontological and ethical consequences as it places the issue of human subjectivity, the status of human remains, nature’s agency and non-human actors in a new context. Understanding the complex relationship between the Holocaust and the environment can enable us to rethink in a new light the consequences of the instrumentalization not only of other human beings but also of nature, thus contributing to the cultivation of environmental virtues⁹ and the promotion of ecologically-sound behaviour. The environmental history of the Holocaust demonstrates concern for the future of humanity and other species inhabiting Earth, as well as for the planet itself, meaning that it could contribute to the transformation of consciousness and the construction of an ecological democracy.¹⁰

⁶ Didier Pollefeyt, “In Response to John K. Roth,” in *Holocaust and Nature*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt, 23.

⁷ Eric Katz, “Nature’s Healing Power, the Holocaust, and the Environmental Crisis,” in *Judaism and Environmental Ethics. A Reader*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 80. These ideas were already evident in an earlier article by Eric Katz, “Nature’s Presence and the Technology of Death: Reflections on Healing and Domination,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 17, no. 1 (1997): 5. Such diagnoses become significant when we consider the fact that the current geopolitical situation, as Timothy Snyder has argued, resembles that of the period preceding the Second World War. “Climate change as a local problem can produce local conflicts; climate change as a global crisis might generate the demand for global victims.” Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015), 328.

⁸ See Donald A. Grinde and Bruce S. Johansen, *Ecocide of Native America: Environmental Destruction of Indian Lands and Peoples* (Sante Fe, NM: Clear Light, 1995).

⁹ Dominika Dzwonkowska, “Virtue and Vice in Environmental Discourse,” *Studia Ecologiae et Bioethicae* 11, no. 4 (2013): 61–76.

¹⁰ Franz J. Broswimmer, *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 97–102.

Issues associated with a broad conception of nature (the landscape, soil, air, water, fire, flora, fauna, insects, viruses, fungi, etc.) are evident in various historical sources, including testimonies, documents and photographs, and thus constitute an essential element of research on the Holocaust. What has been central to existing studies is the human being as victim, perpetrator or witness. Taking into account the role of non-human (f)actors in the Shoah not only queries Hilberg's triad (perpetrators-victims-bystanders) but could ultimately expand it. Favouring "symmetrical history"¹¹ and complementary approaches that entangle natural and cultural processes, we suggest paying more attention to the "natural history of the Shoah." Rather than treating it merely as the background to events, this approach considers nature to be an important participant in events as a witness (and not only in the metaphorical sense), a shelter for victims and perpetrators, and as something that often masks crimes. The environmental history of the Holocaust makes it possible to transcend the anthropocentric perspectives that dominate discourse on the Shoah. Until now, the history of the Holocaust has been a human history. It has been based on a fragmentary model of knowledge that does not consider the agency of non-human (f)actors.¹² Our project, however, furthers efforts to construct a holistic, integrated knowledge of the Shoah. Our premise is that the Holocaust is not only an event but also a process¹³ with lasting effects that remain present both in the lives of humans as well as nature. Thus, to paraphrase Claude Lanzmann, we propose "an investigation into the Holocaust's present."¹⁴

While experimenting with modes of thinking, what interests us first and foremost in this context is the issue of environmental justice, which is fundamentally connected to the issue of social justice. In the course of our research, we explore whether the environmental history of the Shoah can contribute to the construction of what Naomi Scheman has termed "sustainable epistemology." Scheman suggests that

in looking for a concept of knowledge and of epistemic norms that "work," we think in terms of *sustainability*, meaning norms that underwrite practices of inquiry that make it more rather than less likely that others, especially those (whoever they may be) who are marginalized or subordinated (however that might be), will be able to acquire knowledge in the future. There is no need – as there is no possibility – of identifying in advance or in general the nature and

¹¹ We apply the term "symmetrical history" as an analogy to "symmetrical archaeology." This approach is influenced by Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and primarily concerns relations between people and things. As defined by Christopher L. Witmore, symmetrical archaeology is based on the premise that

humans and non-humans should not be regarded as ontologically distinct, as detached and separated entities a priori. [...] Any radical separation, opposition and contradiction between people and the material world within which they live is regarded as the outcome of a specifically modern way of distributing entities and segmenting the world.

It is important to note however, that – as Latour stresses:

ANT is not, I repeat is not, the establishment of some absurd 'symmetry between humans and non-humans'. To be symmetric, for us, simply means not to impose a priori some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations.

Christopher L. Witmore, "Symmetrical Archaeology: Excerpts of a Manifesto," *World Archaeology* 39, no. 4 (2007): 546; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 76. See also: Bjørnar Olsen, "Symmetrical Archaeology," in *Archaeological Theory Today*, ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 208–28.

¹² Richard C. Foltz, "Does Nature Have Historical Agency? World History, Environmental History, and How Historians Can Help Save the Planet," *The History Teacher* 37, no. 1 (2003): 11–12.

¹³ Sheri P. Rosenberg, "Genocide Is a Process, Not an Event," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, no. 1 (2012): 16–23.

¹⁴ Claude Lanzmann, "Shoah as Counter-Myth," trans. Jonathan Davis, *The Jewish Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1986): 12.

sources of marginalization and subordination; rather, what is called for is attentiveness to perspectives on the world associated, in particular situations, with marginalized and subordinated social locations (however multiple, intersecting, and unstable). It is a matter of asking such questions as: Whose ways of thinking about things are likely to be unheard or misinterpreted? Whose interests are likely to be ignored or dismissed?¹⁵

While adopting her main idea, we would like to take our project in slightly different – non-anthropocentric – direction, treating symmetrical history governed by a sustainable epistemology as an approach that reveals the underrepresentation of nature and underestimation of non-human actors in Holocaust studies. We would also like to stress that adopting an environmental perspective is an attempt at *supplementing* knowledge on the Holocaust. There is no intention whatsoever to underplay human suffering and guilt, or to defer human responsibility for the tragedy of the Shoah by transferring it to non-human actors, nor does it involve adopting the perspective of non-human subjects (trees, animals, etc.). We are interested, first and foremost, in demonstrating their (often unintentional) agency while highlighting the interdependence of humans and the environment, thus showing the connections between the extermination of human beings and the extermination of nature.

We are conscious of the ambivalent legacy of ecological thought, including Nazi ecology, which has already been studied extensively.¹⁶ We also remain aware, as Boaz Neumann has written, that ecological ideas can be found at the foundations of the Holocaust, which can indeed be considered an ecological project *per se*, if we trace the concept of ecology back to its nineteenth-century origins.¹⁷ It was Ernst Haeckel who in 1869 first used the concept in scientific research as he followed Darwin in drawing attention to the close connections between organisms and the environment. He wrote that “ecology is the study of all those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence.”¹⁸ Our project is not interested in tracing such interrelations as part of a struggle for existence, but instead sees ecology as the study of ecosystems that exist on the basis of interdependence and the necessity of mutual adaptation in a form of symbiosis, which should not be considered as a mode of ideal coexistence but rather as a mutually beneficial order that is often associated with parasitism.

We are sceptical of those attractive yet deceptive tendencies of romanticizing and aestheticizing nature, which becomes evident in ascribing nature and its elements a therapeutic, healing role.¹⁹ We also perceive the inadequacy of the critical perspective and thus follow Fredric Jameson who encouraged future-oriented thinking.²⁰ We also consider how an environmental history of the Holocaust can assist us in conceiving of alternative forms

¹⁵ Naomi Scheman, “Toward a Sustainable Epistemology,” *Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy* 26, nos. 3–4 (2012): 473.

¹⁶ Luc Ferry, *The New Ecological Order*, trans. Carol Volk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 91–107; Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, eds., *How Green Were the Nazis?: Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ Boaz Neumann, “National Socialism, Holocaust and Ecology,” in *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed. Dan Stone (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 106–7.

¹⁸ This is the fragment most commonly cited in the literature from Ernst Haeckel’s definition of ecology. Cited in Robert C. Stauffer, “Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology,” *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 32, no. 2 (1957): 141.

¹⁹ Katz, “Nature’s Presence and the Technology of Death,” 6 and Katz, “Nature’s Healing Power,” 317.

²⁰ Fredric Jameson, “Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future,” in *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, eds. Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley, and Gyan Prakash (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 42–3.

of co-existence and more-than-human communities, while also assisting in constructing a realistic and responsible ethics of inclusion and reciprocity.

On the basis of our research, guided by the ideas and hypotheses outlined above that serve as both founding principles and the outcome of research, we have developed a definition of the environmental history of the Shoah: it is a field that is interested in how spaces of the Shoah (and post-Holocaust spaces) function as ecosystems while also exploring relations between and the mutual impact of human and non-human agents (for example animals, insects, flora, fungi, organic remains, the air, soil, water, weather – rain, etc.) within the environment. As such, the environmental history of the Holocaust engages first and foremost with the influence of the environment on how the Holocaust as a process (for example, the significance of natural conditions in shaping the location and working of camps, the influence of the climate and weather on the lives of prisoners in camps and ghettos, and how nature was instrumentalized in the crimes). Secondly, it investigates the influence of the Shoah on the environment (for example, the effects of the camps and ghettos on the environment, environmental change resulting from human remains being amassed, and the influence of commemorative practices, the management of memorial sites and conservation practices on the environment). Thirdly, it is also interested in the various imaginaries, meanings and values associated with nature in the context of the Shoah (for example, the ways nature is represented in survivor testimonies, the role of landscape in the Third Reich's imperial politics, and representations of landscapes in contemporary art dealing with the Holocaust).²¹

Existing Research

The first indicators pointing towards the emergence of a new field of research within Holocaust studies appeared after 2000 along with the rise of the eco-humanities and growing interest in environmental history.²² Researchers working on the Shoah started paying attention to ecological issues, initially focusing on the role of the landscape and environment. However, it was only in 2014 that the term “environmental histories of the Holocaust” first appeared, in the above-mentioned article by Tim Cole.²³ Until now, there has been no attempt at integrating these studies or conceiving a new subdiscipline bearing the name. In light of this, Boaz Neumann's 2012 article “National Socialism, Holocaust, and Ecology” is particularly significant, since it not only treats the Holocaust as “an ecological event” but also suggests treating ecology as “a methodology in and for Holocaust studies.”²⁴ Studies in this field go significantly further than Neumann's understanding of

²¹ In formulating this definition, we found J. Donald Hooghes' differentiation of research fields within environmental history particularly useful. J. Donald Hooghes, *What is Environmental History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 3.

²² This process has also become evident as interest has developed in the “environmental history of war”. See Edmund P. Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of Warfare*, eds. Edmund P. Russell and Richard P. Tucker (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), Edmund P. Russell and Richard P. Tucker, eds., *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of Warfare* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), Chris Pearson, *Mobilizing Nature: The Environmental History of War and Militarization in Modern France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

²³ Cole, “Nature Was Helping Us.” See also Tim Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

²⁴ Neumann declares:

In this chapter I will discuss the issue of a possible link between the Nazi and ecological movements (Part 1), focusing on the historical, historiographical, and methodological implications for Holocaust studies. I will

ecologism as a conservative and nationalist ideology of the Third Reich connected to a mysticism focused on the earth, nature and “Heimat” that served the renewal of the nation, meaning that the Holocaust is conceived of as an ecological project.²⁵ As time has passed, research – particularly studies conducted by the younger generation of scholars – has started drawing inspiration from theories and approaches stemming from non-anthropocentric humanities, on the one hand, while also increasingly engaging with explorations in the legal humanities and forensic humanities, as well as dead body studies, on the other.²⁶ The limitations imposed on new research themes by the dominant approaches in Holocaust studies (particularly memory studies and trauma studies) made developing a new metalanguage, new methods and theories a necessity.²⁷ This article’s attempt to outline an environmental history of the Holocaust is an upshot of these turns.

One of the first indications of an environmental turn in Holocaust studies was the 2002 article “Memorialization and the ecological landscapes of Holocaust sites: The cases of Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau” by Andrew Charlesworth and Michael Addis.²⁸ The authors noticed that researchers interested in Holocaust memorial sites had focused primarily on issues related to their aesthetics while avoiding ecological matters. They were also critical of the plan for managing vegetation adopted by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum as it would lead to limiting the site’s biodiversity.²⁹ Jessica Rapson’s work has also addressed similar issues. She has explored memorialization and experiences of the landscape at Holocaust sites, treating the environment as a “medium for remembrance.”³⁰

However, as Neumann argued, the emergence of “a new and surprising research field establishing a link between the Nazi and ecological movements” became evident in the 1990s already.³¹ Among the numerous works on this subject, it is worth mentioning

consider whether the Holocaust can indeed be considered not only as an ideological, political socioeconomic, ethnic and racial project, but also as an ecological project (Part 2), and even as an ecological event (Part 3). Moreover, I will argue that with regard to the issue of the Holocaust and ecology, “ecologism” can function for historians not only as a historical characteristic of the Holocaust, but also as a methodology in and for Holocaust studies.

²⁵ Compare: Thomas M. Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity 1885–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Of particular interest is the volume *Mapping the ‘Forensic Turn’: Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, ed. Zuzanna Dziuban (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2017). Such research is conducted by humanities scholars and social scientists inspired by, and often collaborating with, forensic archaeologists and anthropologists. Forensic archaeologists themselves are now increasingly often aware of the need to conduct complementary research. See: Caroline Sturdy Colls, *Holocaust Archaeologies: Approaches and Future Directions* (Cham: Springer, 2015).

²⁷ See Stef Craps et al., “Memory Studies and the Anthropocene: A Roundtable,” *Memory Studies* 11, no. 4 (2017): 498–515.

²⁸ Andrew Charlesworth and Michael Addis, “Memorialization and the Ecological Landscapes of Holocaust Sites: The Cases of Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau,” *Landscape Research* 27, no. 3 (2002): 229–51. Other texts by Charlesworth worthy of attention include: “The Topography of Genocide,” in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (Houndmills etc: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 216–52; “A Corner of a Foreign Field that is Forever, Spielberg’s: Understanding the Moral Landscapes of the Site of the Former KL Plaszow, Kraków, Poland,” *Cultural Geographies* 11, no. 3 (2004): 291–312; “<<Out of Place>>” in Auschwitz? Contested Development in Post-War and Post-Socialist Oświęcim,” *Ethics, Place and Environment* 9, no. 2 (2006): 149–72.

²⁹ Barbara Zajac discusses this plan in: “Grey or Green? Problems with the Maintenance of the Vegetation on the Museum Grounds,” in *Preserving for the Future: Material from an International Preservation Conference, Oświęcim, June 23–25, 2003*, ed. Krystyna Marszałek (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2004), 57–62.

³⁰ Jessica Rapson, “Fencing in and Weeding Out: Curating Nature at Former Concentration Camps in Europe,” in *Emerging Landscapes. Between Production and Representation*, eds. Davide Deriu, Krystallia Kamvasinou, and Eugénie Shinkle (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 161–71; see also her chapter, “Emotional Memory Formation at Former Nazi Concentration Camp Sites,” in *Emotion in Motion. Tourism, Affect and Transformation*, eds. David Picard and Mike Robinson (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 161–78; and her, *Topographies of Suffering: Buchenwald, Babi Yar, Lidice* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

³¹ Neumann, “National Socialism, Holocaust, and Ecology,” 101.

publications by Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (1997, 2002),³² the book *Imagining the Nation in Nature: Landscape Preservation and German Identity 1885–1945* by Thomas M. Lekan (2004),³³ and *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment and Nation in the Third Reich* edited by Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller (2009).³⁴ Other notable contributions in this context are Hartmut Ziesing's 2004 study on the garden of the commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau Rudolf Höss³⁵ and Boria Sax's monograph on animals in the Third Reich published in 2000.³⁶ Other works relevant to an environmental history of the Holocaust address the Third Reich's biopolitics and geopolitics, including *Geographies of the Holocaust*, edited by Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole and Alberto Giordano (2014) and *Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich* edited by Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca (2016).³⁷

The first large-scale study of the relations between nature and the Shoah was the 2013 volume *Holocaust and Nature* edited by Didier Pollefeyt.³⁸ The contributors explored subjects including the influence of the Holocaust on the perception of nature in Judaism, Nazi visions of nature, and the relationship between the Holocaust and the current ecological crisis. Another attempt to connect the Holocaust to environmental issues was Timothy Snyder's 2015 book *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*. He argues that the Holocaust was an "ecological" undertaking and compares the situation preceding the Second World War to our current ecological crisis.³⁹

In Poland, a pioneering study using environmental approaches to the Holocaust was Jacek Małczyński's 2009 article "Drzewa 'żywe pomniki' w Muzeum-Miejscu Pamięci w Bełżcu" (Trees as "living memorials" at the Bełżec Memorial Museum),⁴⁰ while the edited volume *Sztutowo czy Stutthof? Oswajanie krajobrazu kulturowego* (Sztutowo or Stutthof? Taming the Cultural Landscape) appeared in 2011.⁴¹ It includes findings from archaeological and anthropological studies conducted on the site of the former concentration camp

³² Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn and Gert Gröning, "The National Socialist Garden and Landscape Ideal. *Bodenständigkeit* (Rootedness in the Soil)," in *Art, Culture and Media under the Third Reich*, ed. Richard A. Etlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 73–97; Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, "The Nationalization of Nature and the Naturalization of the German Nation: 'Teutonic' Trends in Early Twentieth Century Landscape Design," in *Nature and Ideology: Natural Garden Design in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997), 187–219.

³³ Lekan, *Imagining the Nation in Nature*.

³⁴ Brüggemeier, Cioc, and Zeller, eds., *How Green Were the Nazis?*

³⁵ Hartmut Ziesing, "A Flowery Paradise in Auschwitz: The Garden of the Kommandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höß," *Centropa: A Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts* 4, no. 2 (2004): 141–8.

³⁶ Boria Sax, *Animals in the Third Reich: Pets, Scapegoats, and the Holocaust* (New York: Continuum, 2000). Piotr Krupiński has written a pioneering work on animal themes and metaphors in Holocaust literature: *Dlaczego geśi krzyczały? Zwierzęta i Zagłada w literaturze polskiej XX i XXI wieku* [Why Did the Geese Shout? Animals and the Holocaust in Twentieth and Twenty-First-Century Polish Literature] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2016) and his, "'Birdless Sky'. On One of the Topoi in Lager Literature (and Its Fringes)," *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis. Folia Litteraria Polonica* 8, no. 46 (2017): 167–85.

³⁷ Anne Kelly Knowles, Tim Cole, and Alberto Giordano, eds., *Geographies of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca, eds., *Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

³⁸ Pollefeyt, ed., *Holocaust and Nature*.

³⁹ Snyder, *Black Earth*. See also: Jürgen Zimmerer, "Climate Change, Environmental Violence and Genocide," *International Journal of Human Rights* 18, no. 3 (2014): 265–80.

⁴⁰ Jacek Małczyński, "Drzewa 'żywe pomniki' w Muzeum-Miejscu Pamięci w Bełżcu," *Teksty Drugie*, nos. 1–2 (2009): 208–14 [published in English as: "Trees as 'Living Monuments' at the Museum-Memorial Site at Bełżec," trans. Aleksandra Wnuk, in *Memory of the Shoah. Cultural Representations and Commemorative Practices*, eds. Tomasz Majewski, Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, and Maja Wójcik (Łódź: Officyna, 2010), 35–41. See also: J. Małczyński, "Polityka natury w Auschwitz-Birkenau" [The Politics of Nature in Auschwitz-Birkenau], *Teksty Drugie*, no. 5 (2014): 141–58.

⁴¹ Łukasz Banaszek and Małgorzata Wosińska, eds., *Sztutowo czy Stutthof? Oswajanie krajobrazu kulturowego* [Sztutowo or Stutthof? Taming the Cultural Landscape] (Poznań-Sztutowo: EIAK UAM, IP UAM, Muzeum Stutthof w Sztutowie, 2011).

in Sztutowo (Stutthof). The contributors explore themes relating to the geographical and environmental contexts of the camp location while also investigating the influence of these factors on the local population's perception of sites related to camp. In recent years, more articles furthering ecocritical approaches to the Holocaust have been published by Aleksandra Ubertowska,⁴² while Agnieszka Kłos has explored the issue of the vitality of "dead spaces" in Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁴³ Roma Sendyka has also published on the relationships between non-sites of memory/amnesia, the landscape and nature.⁴⁴ In the last ten years, Ewa Domańska has stimulated further research by teaching courses on "ecocides and genocides," presenting lectures on environmental aspects of the human dead body and remains, and encouraging PhD researchers and early career scholars to explore relations between ecology, ecowitnessing and post-genocidal spaces.⁴⁵ In 2017, the peer-reviewed journal *Teksty Drugie* (Second Texts) published a special thematic issue titled "Historia środowiskowa Zagłady" (Environmental history of the Holocaust). It included a programmatic article by Małczyński, "Środowiskowa historia Holokaustu" (Environmental history of the Holocaust), as well as contributions from the above-mentioned Polish researchers work on such questions.⁴⁶

Sources, Methods and Theoretical Frameworks

Our research employs a variety of sources, including classical secondary sources (legal testimonies, interrogation protocols, local land surveys), as well as testimonies, press reports,

⁴² Aleksandra Ubertowska, *Holokaust. Auto(tanato)grafie* [The Holocaust. Auto(thanato)graphies] (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2014); A. Ubertowska, "Nature at Its Limits (Ecocide). Subjectivity after the Catastrophe," trans. Jan Pytalski, *Teksty Drugie*, english edition, no. 1 (2015): 173–85; "<<Kamienie niepokoją się i stają się agresywne>>. Holocaust w świetle ekokrytyki" ["The Stones are Troubled and are Becoming Aggressive". The Holocaust and Ecocriticism], *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka* 25 (2015): 93–111; A. Ubertowska, "Nature as an Archive of (Post)memory: Ecocriticism and Polish Holocaust Art," in *Entangled Memories: Remembering the Holocaust in a Global Age*, eds. Marius Henderson and Julia Lange (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017), 293–314; A. Ubertowska, "Nature as a Counter-Historical Narrative in Holocaust Poetry (Miłosz, Celan and Pagis)," trans. Paweł Wojtas, in *Ecopoetics and the Global Landscape. Critical Essays*, ed. Isabel Sobral Campos (London: Lexington Book, 2018), 105–28; A. Ubertowska, "Scratch, Groove, the Imprint of (Non)Presence: On the Spectrologies of the Holocaust," in *The "Spectral Turn": Jewish Ghosts in the Polish Post-Holocaust Imaginaire*, ed. Zuzanna Dziuban (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2019), 65–84.

⁴³ Agnieszka Kłos, "The Disappearing Memory of Birkenau. A Story of the Power of Nature," in *Politics of Erasure. From "damnatio memoriae" to Alluring Void*, ed. Anna Markowska (Warsaw-Toruń: Polish Institute of World Art Studies & Tako Publishing House, Polish Institute of World Art Studies, 2014), 59–72.

⁴⁴ Roma Sendyka, "Prism: Understanding Non-Sites of Memory," *Teksty Drugie*, english edition, no. 2 (2015): 323–44; Roma Sendyka, "Landscapes of Fear – Cultural and Societal Responses to Vegetation on Contested and Abandoned Killing Sites," in *20th Century Mass Graves. Proceedings of the International Conference Tbilisi, Georgia, 15–17 October 2015*, eds. Matthias Klingenberg and Arne Segelke (Bonn: DVV International, 2016), 113–20; Roma Sendyka, "Sites That Haunt: Affects and Non-Sites of Memory," *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 30, no. 4 (2016): 687–702; "The Difficult Heritage of Non-Sites of Memory. Contested Places, Contaminated Landscapes," *Traces Journal*, no. 3 (2017): 4–15.

⁴⁵ See Ewa Domańska, *Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała* [Necros: An Ontology of Human Remains] (Warszawa: PWN, 2017).

⁴⁶ The issue included the following contributions: Przemysław Czaplinski, "Poszerzanie pola Zagłady" [Broadening the Field of the Holocaust]; Jacek Małczyński, "Historia środowiskowa Zagłady" [An Environmental History of the Holocaust]; Ewa Domańska, "Przestrzenie Zagłady w perspektywie ekologiczno-nekrologicznej" [Post-Holocaust Spaces in an Ecological-Nekrological Perspective]; Mikołaj Smykowski, "Eksterminacja przyrody w Lesie Rzuchowskim" [Exterminating Nature in Rzuchów Forest]; Roma Sendyka, "Nie-miejsca pamięci i ich nie-ludzkie pomniki" [Non-Sites of Memory and their Non-Human Monuments]; Jacek Leociak, "Góry śmieci otulały wata śmrodu wszystko, co żyło. Śmieci w getcie warszawskim w perspektywie środowiskowej historii Zagłady" [Piles of Rubbish Wrapped Everything that Was Alive in a Cotton Ball of Stench: Rubbish in the Warsaw Ghetto as an Environmental History of the Holocaust]; Aleksandra Ubertowska, "Krajobraz po Zagładzie. Pastoralne dystopie i wizje <<terracydu>>" [Landscape After the Holocaust. Pastoral Dystopias and Visions of "Terricide"]; Marta Tomczok, "Klimat Zagłady (w perspektywie powieści Pawła Huellego, Tadeusza Konwickiego, Andrzeja Kuśniewicza i Piotra Szewca)" [A Climate of Annihilation (in Novels by Paweł Huelle, Tadeusz Konwicki, Andrzej Kuśniewicz and Piotr Szewc)]; Agnieszka Kłos, "Zielona Macewa" [A Green Matzevah].

photographs and aerial photography, films and witness testimonies), while also drawing on primary sources (interviews and photographic documentation). We also turn to material sources, including camp buildings and objects.⁴⁷ We draw on the ideas of William J. Turkel who has written that “every place is an archive that accumulates material traces of its past, and the continuity of that unwritten archive makes it possible to write very long-term histories of any place.”⁴⁸ During the course of our research we often found that the objects being investigated served as ecowitnesses and ecotestimonies.⁴⁹ Furthermore, we noticed that the environmental history of the Shoah encourages rethinking of the status of historical sources, creates new sources and stimulates new ways of reading them, which seems to be very important as the human witnesses are dying off.

Our take on the environmental history of the Shoah applies a hybrid methodology that uses methods from various disciplines with the aim of creating new theories and interpretive categories and tools derived from the source material in accordance with the principles of grounded theory.⁵⁰ This can be useful for the construction of a metalanguage relevant to such research. In particular we have applied methods drawn from anthropology, history and literary studies (field studies, participant observation, interviews, textual analysis, discourse analysis, semiotics, case studies, comparative analysis and deep reading) in our research. We have also drawn on creative methodologies, such as walking and/or performing as a method and poetical writing,⁵¹ which have been applied in ethnographic studies, for example, in order to sensitize researchers to sensory aspects of knowledge and stimulate their imaginations.

Our proposed environmental history of the Holocaust is based on the notion of “radical interdisciplinarity” that combines elements of anthropology, archaeology, biology, ecology, geography, geology, history, literary studies, cultural studies, sociology and other fields of knowledge. When he used this term in 1989, Stanley Fish was referring to deconstruction, Marxism, feminism, a radical version of neopragmatism, and the new historicism that managed to unify interdisciplinarity and critique. Now “radical interdisciplinarity” means connecting the humanities, social sciences, and the life and earth sciences. It has come to be considered a necessary condition of innovative research.⁵² Within the framework of what is known as Global Change Research (GCR), which supports “radical interdisciplinarity,” the humanities are seen as an ally of the natural sciences in working towards an integrated conception of human agency and the planetary environment combining knowledge and practice while also paying greater attention to the bio-

⁴⁷ On the subject of things, see: Bożena Shallcross, *The Holocaust Object in Polish and Polish-Jewish Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Gilly Carr, “The Small Things of Life and Death: An Exploration of Value and Meaning of Nazi Camps,” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, special issue, *The Material Culture of Nazi Camps*, published online: 27 July 2017; Tim Cole, “The Place of Things in Contemporary History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, eds. Paul Graves-Brown and Rodney Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ William J. Turkel, “Every Place Is an Archive. Environmental History and the Interpretation of Physical Evidence,” *Rethinking History* 10, no. 2 (2006): 268.

⁴⁹ See, for example: Smykowski, “Ekologiczne świadectwo Zagłady. Repatriacja mirabelki na Muranów” [Ecological Evidence of the Holocaust. Repatriation of Mirabelle on Muranów], in *Świadek: jak się staje, czym jest?* [Witness: How Does It Become, What Is It?], eds. Agnieszka Dauksza and Karolina Koprowska (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2019), 278–91.

⁵⁰ Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed. (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014).

⁵¹ Denielle Elliott and Dara Culhane, eds., *A Different Kind of Ethnography: Imaginative Practices and Creative Methodologies* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2016). See also Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy, eds., *Emergent Methods in Social Research* (London, New Delhi: Sage, 2006).

⁵² Stanley Fish, “Being Interdisciplinary Is so Very Hard to Do,” *Profession* 89 (1989): 15–22.

geophysical dimensions of the social sciences, to ecological approaches in the humanities, and to the development of concepts, theories and research aims that would form fields enabling transnational studies.⁵³ Since we are humanities scholars by training, our research was profoundly influenced by drawing on scientific expertise and consultations with other researchers based in fields such as archaeology (including forensic archaeology), physical anthropology, earth and life sciences and forensic sciences.

The theoretical frameworks of our investigations are drawn from a broadly conceived environmental humanities, as well as their various subdisciplines (ecocriticism, environmental history and environmental anthropology), new material culture studies and thing studies, landscape studies, dead body studies, animal studies, plant studies, and integrated heritage studies. We also draw on related theoretical approaches, such as multispecies ethnography, relational ontologies and epistemologies (Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, for example), multispecies theories, new materialism and new vitalism (Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti), notions of natureculture (Donna Haraway, Latour), affirmative politics/ethics (Braidotti), posthumanism (Cary Wolfe), forensics (Caroline Sturdy Colls), ecocriticism/ecopoetics and geocriticism/poetics, and, finally, biosemiotics, geosemiotics and zoosemiotics.

Conclusion

Applying an environmental/ecological approach to Holocaust studies opens up several fields of research:

1. The ecological connectivity of genocidal and ecocidal processes opens up questions relating to far-reaching transformations of both social systems and ecosystems. Explorations of humanity's influence as a geological force on natural environments that draw on the concept of the Anthropocene encourage us to think in *longue-durée* categories and planetary terms. As Aleksandra Ubertowska shows, concepts such as omnicide,⁵⁴ planetocide,⁵⁵ terracide⁵⁶ and ecological holocaust⁵⁷

function retrospectively [...] casting a shadow over natural history from the perspective contemporary humankind, which is submerged in a posttraumatic culture focused around its central category of complete destruction while also exploring related ideas that dominate the postmodern humanities, namely the discourses of biopolitics and thanatopolitics.⁵⁸

holistic and integrated approach to research on such processes in the past and present might reveal ways of neutralizing anthropopressure in future.

⁵³ Poul Holm et al., "Collaboration between the Natural, Social and Human Sciences in Global Change Research," *Environmental Science & Policy* 28 (2013): 26. See also Andrew Barry and Georgina Born, eds., *Interdisciplinarity: Reconfigurations of the Social and Natural Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁵⁴ Lee Ann Hoff and Lisl Marburg Goodman, *Omnicide: The Nuclear Dilemma* (New York: Praeger, 1991) and Daniel Landes, ed., *Confronting Omnicide: Jewish Reflections on Weapon of Mass Destruction* (Northvale, NJ: J. Aronson, 1991).

⁵⁵ Anton Weiss-Wendt, "Problems of Comparative Genocide Scholarship," in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 47.

⁵⁶ Ubertowska, *Krajobraz po Zagładzie*.

⁵⁷ This concept is used in the context of threats posed by bacteria and epidemics in the above-mentioned report by the New Solidarity International Press Service, "Ecological Holocaust," *Executive Intelligence Review* 3, no. 16 (1976): 24–9; the term is also used in relation to the destruction of nature in Yellowstone National Park during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: Schullery, "Yellowstone's Ecological Holocaust."

⁵⁸ Ubertowska, *Krajobraz po Zagładzie*, 133.

2. The post-Holocaust ecosystem can also be considered in terms of ecological heritage.⁵⁹ Disturbances to ecosystems possess transformative potential,⁶⁰ as environmental changes stemming from activities related to the Shoah continue to influence the development of local fauna and flora, trophic networks, conditions for vegetation and the directions taken by the subsequent successful evolution of biological niches. Noticing such disturbances enables, for example, identification of fauna that serves as a bioindicator that can often assist, for example, in locating mass graves because plants serve as burial indicators.
3. The post-Holocaust landscape can also be seen in terms of non-human/environmental memorialization. As Jessica Rapson writes, the sites where the Holocaust was carried out memorialize not only the death of a person but also mark the extermination of a local ecosystem.

The way we treat nature has consequences for human beings, and the way we treat human beings has consequences for the natural world; nature, culture, and destruction are implicated in an intense mutuality, a relation which may find unique expression in the dialogical space of the memorial environment.⁶¹

Environmental memorials⁶² are at the same time both a form of atonement in respect of ecosystems that have been degraded or subject to total destruction, as well as a form of memorializing and commemorating traumatic human experiences. They show how managing the memory of genocide must not necessarily entail reproduction of ecocidal attitudes: managing nature at memorial sites can be founded upon a sustainable approach.

The environmental history of the Holocaust creates risks as well as opportunities. We have already mentioned, above, the disturbing legacy of Nazi ecological thought. Other dangers include the “scienticization” of the humanities, including the excessive saturation of the language of the humanities with scientific terminology, as well as the danger of distributing agency and responsibility between human and non-human subjects. Another threat is the loss of identity entailed in posthumanist ideas of “becoming earth” and the concomitant danger of revisionism, which is often supported by research in forensics. It is also difficult to conceive of events that took place just several decades ago in the “*longue-durée*,” since some of the environmental consequences of the Shoah might only emerge after several hundred or even several thousand years have passed.

Our findings suggest that opening up Holocaust studies to environmental history and, more broadly, the environmental humanities can inspire new research questions as well as

⁵⁹ For more on ecological/environmental heritage, see: Kristina Baines, *Embodying Ecological Heritage in a Maya Community: Health, Happiness, and Identity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016); Kim D. Coder, “Live Oak: Southern Ecological Heritage,” *Dendrology Series* (March 2015); Israel Olivier King, Chitra Viji, and D. Narasimhan, “Sacred Groves: Traditional Ecological Heritage,” *International Journal of Ecology and Environmental Studies* 23 (1997): 463–470; Smykowski, “Hibakujumoku – drzewa, które przeżyły. Ekologiczne dziedzictwo bombardowań atomowych w Hiroshimie i Nagasaki” [Hibakujumoku – Trees That Survived: The Ecological Heritage of the Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki], *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2018): 386–98.

⁶⁰ Anna L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 163.

⁶¹ Rapson, “Fencing In and Weeding Out,” 163.

⁶² See Małgorzata Praczyk, ed., *Pomniki w epoce antropocenu* [Memorials in the Anthropocene Epoch] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2017), and Whitney A. Bauman, “Facing the Death of Nature. Environmental Memorials to Counter Despair,” *Tikkun* 30, no. 2 (2015): 20–21.

readings of familiar sources. It also enables the creation of new analytical categories which in turn generates space for the emergence of a different metalanguage for speaking about the Holocaust. The opportunities created by an environmental history of the Shoah include not only the chance to reorientate the field but also the chance for scholars in Holocaust studies to participate in current debates on climate change, species extinction, the Anthropocene, ecocide, and climate wars and their consequences. Turning our attention towards ecological dimensions enables us to see the role of non-human (f)actors in the transmission of information about the past (known as ecotestimonies), which is particularly crucial in light of the passing of the human witnesses to the Shoah. An ecological perspective might also contribute to changes in the way Holocaust museums and memorial sites are managed, in turn changing attitudes towards nature. This could take the form of adopting non-destructive methods of tending to it and creating exhibitions or alternative maps proposing visits to these sites showcasing the environmental aspects of history.⁶³ The findings of research conducted in the field of the environmental history of the Shoah could then also be compared with research on other genocides, thus substantially enriching comparative studies of genocides and mass murders, while also encouraging comparative approaches to genocide and ecocide. The environmental history of the Shoah makes it possible to fundamentally rethink what the legacy of the Holocaust is today and what it could be in future.

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⁶³ Verity Morgan, "Can we Teach the Environmental History of the Holocaust?," *Teaching History*, no. 169 (2017): 48–55.

Nekros. Wprowadzenie do ontologii martwego ciała [Necros: An Ontology of Human Remains] (2017, in Polish).

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