

# Paul Antick

## SMITH AT AUSCHWITZ

### Research Product #5

*Smith at Auschwitz: Research Product #5 is part of an ongoing series of projects that use photography and writing to address, often tangentially, the phenomenon of “dark tourism”. Here the author uses the form of documentary-fiction to consider the production, distribution and consumption of a public art project, staged in Poland, that ostensibly focused on Holocaust tourism in Eastern Europe. The author produces a “cultural biography” of the project that provides an account of: the relationship between it and the promotional value of research in a new English university; the performative nature of a photographic event at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2005; and the project’s reception in the Polish city of Toruń in 2009. Smith at Auschwitz: Research Product #5 was originally performed, by four actors, at Belfast Exposed Gallery as part of the 2013 Belfast Photo Festival.*

### Technical notes

Dr. O. Willing is a ‘citizen anthropologist’ and is mainly interested in the ways in which Smith, a photographer and part-time university lecturer, behaves in what Willing calls “challenging environments and difficult situations”. So far, these have mainly involved events and places specifically associated with the phenomenon known as “dark tourism” (Skinner), as well as other events and places that might in future come to be associated with it. Acting in the guise of what Kennedy Saldanha and Lisa Klopfer (324) call “research tourists”, Smith and Willing have in recent years visited a number of “challenging” environments, including: favelas in Rio de Janeiro (Antick, “Flavia’s”); Bhopal, India, site of “the world’s worst industrial accident” (Judge John Keenan qtd in Baxi; also see Antick, “Bhopal”); Palestine (Antick, “Smith in Palestine”); and former Nazi extermination camps in Central and Eastern Europe (Antick, “iTourist”).

The essay that follows this introduction is chiefly organized around Willing’s “analysis” of *Research Product #4 (RP4)*, a public art project by Smith that makes explicit reference to Holocaust tourism in Poland, an especially popular form of “dark tourism”, and which was displayed on seven 10 x 8ft billboards at the “Art Moves Festival of International Billboard Art” in October 2009, in the Polish city of Toruń.<sup>1</sup>

At first sight, *RP4* arguably looks like a relatively conventional advertising campaign. The familiar dress, pose and body-type of the young woman in



Fig. 1 itourist? #4 (2006) Prague - Terezin Highway E55. © Paul Antick.



Fig. 2 itourist #3 Hotel Glob (2006). © Paul Antick.

Figure 3, for example, appears to mirror many other images of young women that one might routinely expect to find in the kinds of middle-brow fashion spreads that regularly appear in a welter of fashion and lifestyle-related catalogues, magazines, websites etc. that are readily available in most Western, and many non-Western countries, including, of course, Poland. In this instance, however, this perfectly banal, if not unappealing colour-saturated portrait of a young “fashion model” is augmented by the unsettling legend, “Auschwitz Birkenau November 2009”.

Advertising or promoting Holocaust tourism is not that unusual, in Poland and elsewhere. Excursions to Auschwitz, for example, are presently ranked “No. 1” on Trip Advisor’s list of “must do” day trips out of Krakow (Lyczewska). Although it probably comes as no surprise to learn that Trip Advisor’s advertising campaign, specifically its promotion of Auschwitz, as one of several ideal holiday “fillers”, bears no resemblance to *RP4*. Predictably Trip Advisor does not imply, through its mode of address (which doesn’t involve either the seductive use of colour, or appealing photographs of “attractive” young models, apparently posing at, or in the vicinity of former Nazi death camps) that the “pleasures” available to tourists at Auschwitz are in any way commensurate with the kinds of pleasures to be enjoyed on purchasing, for example, a new Mercedes Benz, the latest iPhone, or a luxury weekend break to Paris, London or Krakow — pleasures typically “promised” or “guaranteed” using the kind of seductive visual language referenced in Smith’s *RP4* billboard posters.

Of course the fact it might be considered inappropriate, obscene even, to actually advertise trips to former death camps like Auschwitz, Sobibór and Majdanek in this way — presumably one of the reasons Trip Advisor doesn’t do it — is, perhaps in the wake of, for example, Benetton’s use of “disturbing” documentary photographs in its notorious 1992 *Shock of Reality* campaign, no guarantee that trips to places like these would not be advertised like this. Whether or not anyone in Toruń was actually deceived into thinking *RP4* really was a “genuine” advertising campaign, deliberately promoting “cool” days out at former Nazi death camps in Poland, is difficult to know. Although it probably is fair to say that if there was any uncertainty on the part of those that engaged with Smith’s billboard posters, specifically regarding the class of object to which his images belonged — “*Are they adverts? Are they not adverts?*” — then the chances are this was induced by the project’s formal and thematic dissonance, its neurotic indeterminacy, something that was largely constituted through the collision (and contamination) of signifiers that appear to belong to several ideologically incongruent sign systems. Specifically, the juxtaposition of visual and linguistic signs constitutive of *middle-brow fashion advertising* and *the Holocaust* constituted a “disturbance” that was further compounded in Toruń by the additional juxtaposition of the posters themselves with the sedate civic space in which they were physically located.

*Smith at Auschwitz*, the short essay that follows, is a piece of “experimental” writing that, like *RP4*, also involves collisions and contaminations. In fact, one of the reasons one might at first suspect *Smith at Auschwitz* is an ‘experimental’ piece is because, like

*RP4*, it appears to be, on the face of it, neither one thing nor the other; the very thing, in fact, that could, ironically, lead some readers to identify or classify it as “experimental”; as an object, in other words, that reproduces, like *RP4*, however imperfectly, the codes and conventions — the formulas — of, in this case, a particular kind of literary experiment.

*Smith at Auschwitz* uses — or at least implicitly refers to — the language or rhetoric of theory, broadly speaking, as well as its methods: the scientific evaluation of empirical phenomena, or, more precisely in this case, their pseudo-scientific evaluation. It also refers to actually existing places (Auschwitz and Toruń), and purports to bear witness to real events that actually apparently occurred in these places — a “fashion shoot” at Auschwitz, Smith’s public art exhibition in Toruń, the actuality of which is, in part, legitimated in the essay (or story) through the use of “credible photographic evidence”. At the same time though, *Smith at Auschwitz* reads perhaps as much like a work of absurdist fiction, a made-up work containing at least two emphatically made-up characters — Smith and Willing, the implausibility or unlikeliness of whom arguably occupies a place far away from the “plausibility”, “rationality” and aesthetic “sobriety” that many readers perhaps associate with the idea of both theory and documentary.

(The Holocaust *wasn’t* an “implausible” or “unthinkable” event (Schwartz 38)! Its plausibility was obvious to the Nazi Party officials and apparatchiks who met in the salubrious Berlin suburb of Wannsee in Berlin in 1942 to discuss, thrash out, think about, the implementation of the so-called “final solution of the Jewish question”. It wasn’t an “irrational” event either (Wiesel), not according to the precepts of Nazi anthropology’s meticulously substantiated theory of racial eugenics, the persuasiveness of which was precisely achieved through its “plausibility”, in part secured through the production and reproduction of photographs, illustrations, diagrams, charts, surveys, and, most of all, writings by professional theoreticians (Mosse), that consisted of “scientific” formulations, “expert” argument that soberly facilitated the transformation of a grotesque ideology, an abstract belief system, into concrete “knowledge”, into pure and incontrovertible systems of “information”: Professor Hans F.K. Gunther of the University of Freiburg (“The Nordic Race as Ideal Type”), Doctor Ludwig Claus of the University of Berlin (“Racial Soul, Landscape and World Domination”)...)

As most readers here will appreciate, the style of writing in *Smith at Auschwitz*, involving the amalgamation of several seemingly immiscible genres, isn’t, in itself, all that unusual (or, in the wake of so many compelling visual and literary modernisms and postmodernisms, all that experimental either). Jacques Roubaud’s *Mathematics: (a novel)*, for instance, is a story about memory that “tells itself” through an amalgamation of “fiction”, “theory” and “history”, in this case the history of mathematics. But Roubaud’s book is called a “novel”, or “(a novel)”; and in Foyles’ bookshop in London *Mathematics* is located in the section containing novels written by writers of fiction whose surnames begin with “R”. It isn’t found in the section where one generally goes to find books on algebra, calculus and so on. In this way, any confusion that might result from mixing up fiction and science in *Mathematics* is ostensibly deferred, at least until, I suppose,

one actually begins reading it. This is not quite the case here, however, in this journal, where *Smith at Auschwitz* is immediately preceded and followed by discrete examples of academic writing, academic essays that articulate “theory”, and which are almost exclusively articulated through theory’s often exceedingly flexible linguistic and conceptual repertoires. In this context, then, the following piece of writing, although, as I say, not unusual in itself, nominally represents, I think, a relatively novel, albeit not entirely unfamiliar kind of interruption. In the same way that *RP4* represented a similar kind of not entirely unfamiliar interruption in a small park in Toruń, in 2009.

Perhaps I should add that the author is not necessarily experimenting for the sake of it - tempting as it is. Instead, the purpose of using this rhetorical strategy, involving the knitting together, the montaging, of different literary and photographic forms, is intended to represent, in itself, I think, both an echo of, and a fantasy about, the often paradoxical, inconsistent and polyvocal nature of some of the events under discussion in *Smith at Auschwitz*. For example, the often unpredictable nature of the relationship between photography, identification and affect (in the section titled “The Photograph”); the vexed status of the exhibition project *Research Product #4* itself — specifically, the ambivalent, uncertain nature of its intellectual, artistic and promotional value in the increasingly commodified and instrumentalized world of contemporary higher education in the UK (something explicitly referred to in the opening and closing sections, “Production(s) of Smith” (1) and (2)); the moment and manner of *RP4*’s reception in Toruń (dealt with in the fourth section, “Advertising Smith”); and, finally, the performance or theatricalization of photography itself, which in this instance occurred during a day-trip to Auschwitz-Birkenau, undertaken by Smith and Willing, in the summer of 2006 (see section three, “The Performance”).



Fig. 3 Research Product #4a (2009). © Smith.

## Production(s) of Smith (1)

The core business of the industry that Smith works in is the production and consumption of knowledge. By way of recompense, the new university that employs Smith transfers money each month, from one of its many bank accounts, into an account that Smith keeps. If the contract of employment that exists between Smith and the university becomes severed then the university will cease to transfer any funds into Smith's account.

The contract that exists between Smith and his employer obliges him to perform certain duties and if he refuses to perform these duties, or if the university deems that Smith is performing them badly, then his value in the university's own internal marketplace, as well as the wider market within which organizations of knowledge production and consumption are situated, will be reduced. The decline in the value of a commodity like Smith – who is frequently animated, like a clock or a toy robot — can take several forms, including the degradation of its symbolic value. If Smith's productive capacity becomes so impoverished that the cost of the university's investment in him is determined to be in excess of the return that the university expects to make on its investment, then the possibility of Smith's foreclosure will arise.

When Smith addresses a room full of people he is generally engaged in a promotional exercise that involves the transfer of knowledge. Patterns of knowledge consumption during Smith's performances are uneven. Sometimes the distinction between the production of knowledge and its transfer is unclear. Note that Smith's distribution of knowledge involves the expelling of words. The university's customers will exchange money for words, and it is often the case that payment is deferred on the understanding that it will eventually be made. In principle, the pecuniary value of each word that Smith expels during a performance is quantifiable. There surely exists a formula for calculating the price of words like these, but neither Smith nor I know what that is.

Sometimes Smith talks about interesting things. He uses his right index finger to point at pictures that are projected onto a screen that glows. Sometimes these will include pictures of things that Smith has made, including: (a) the photograph of a young woman posing outside Block 15 at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2005, and (b) the photograph of a male catering assistant posing in the grounds of a new university in North London in 2007. In exchange for words expelled, and other gestures, Smith will receive more money than many in the university, but not nearly as much as others. Remuneration most obviously takes the form of money, but is not limited to that.

At work, Smith stages all kinds of performances — in classrooms, corridors, stairwells, canteens and offices. Be assured that in spite of appearances, they are only ever staged by Smith to maximize his own financial, professional and emotional well-being. The maximization of Smith is potentially equal to the maximization of the university. When the university's and Smith's interests coincide then there may be a period of relative growth. When they diverge then, for the university, the productive capacity of Smith's performances will be negligible. However, the deterioration of Smith will not necessarily be consistent with the deterioration of the university. While Smith's decline will generally have a negative impact on Smith's value as a commodity in the university's internal marketplace, the impact it will have on the value of the university itself will usually be slight. Because it employs a lot of people, quantities of production at the university are relatively high. And, because it is in a state of permanent technical and

administrative revolution, quantities of production will, during periods of relative economic stability, invariably increase. Increases in production usually result in the reduction of the average cost of each unit of production. This is one reason why, during periods of stability, the university is prepared to exonerate Smith's failure. Like the catering assistant in Smith's photograph, Smith is a unit of production — albeit, of course, an entirely different class of unit.

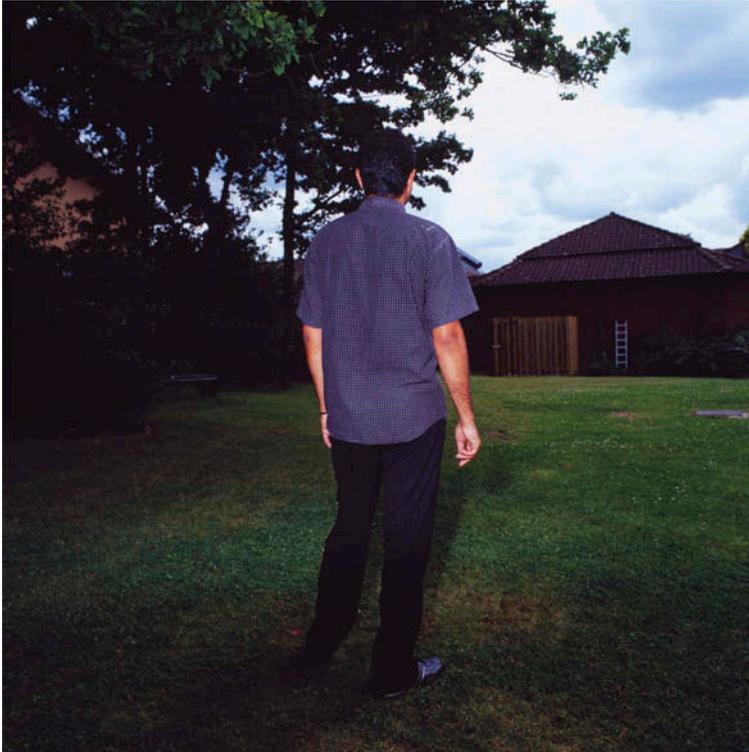


Fig. 4 Catering Assistant 2007. © Smith.

Some of Smith's performances give rise to feelings of pleasure in him. He is aware that his body pumps out large quantities of adrenaline when it becomes agitated — which is often the case when Smith addresses a class. And when this occurs he believes he is saying interesting and insightful things. Smith thrives on beliefs like this and is grateful to belong to an organization that enables him to generate them. It remains the case, however, that without the guarantee of monetary exchange Smith would never stand up in front of anyone. Paradoxically, although Smith doesn't stage performances like these for money, he does do so for this reason alone.

### The photograph

In May 2002, after class one day, Smith returned to his office and found a book there containing 51 black and white photographs, allegedly taken by a man called Wily

Georg. According to information that Smith found on the book's dust jacket, in the summer of 1941 Georg entered the Warsaw Ghetto and produced an illicit photographic record of some of the things he found there (Georg 110). Compiled in 1992 by Rafael F. Scharf, Georg's book is entitled *In the Warsaw Ghetto: Summer 1941*. According to Scharf, Wily Georg was an ordinary radio operator in the Wehrmacht, one of several German repressive state apparatuses (Althusser 148) that should never on any account be confused with either of the following other German repressive state apparatuses that were also operating in Poland at the time: the SS (including Einsatzgruppen) and the Gestapo (Althusser 110).



Fig. 5 Smith's doppelganger. © Dr Rafael Scharf.

Smith's attention was arrested by the image of a young man who was looking straight into Georg's camera, and therefore I suppose, into Smith as well (Georg 79) (Figure 5) Smith noticed that the young man was holding a metal cup in his left hand and that the enamelling on the outside of the cup was chipped in three or four different places. The young man appeared to be standing quite still and his body's comportment suggested to Smith that standing still was habitual. Smith thought it was strange that, under the circumstances, no one else in Georg's photograph appeared to look as desolate — or despired — as him.

The young man's left hand was bandaged and whilst the bandages on his hand appeared to be doing exactly what one would expect, those that were loosely wrapped around his feet looked so desperately limp that it occurred to Smith that they were a kind of sandal, and not really bandages at all. In addition, the young man appeared to be wearing a sack cloth undergarment, on top of which was something that might once have been a smart blue sleeveless cotton shirt, or even a child's dress, but which was now in such a state of distress that in order to remain attached to his body, it appeared to require the support of a piece of twisted grey cloth that was probably once, wrote Smith, "as white as the rest of his body might have been" (17). Although his style of dress was different to that of all the other people in Georg's photograph, there was, for Smith, something about the young man that seemed to profoundly compromise his state of abjection. His legs were obviously damaged — the skin was torn in several places — but the young man's face looked, according to Smith, "remarkably well" — physically at least, if not temperamentally. Unlike the "musselmann" in Margaret Bourke-White's famously iconic photographs (Callaghan), taken immediately after the liberation of Buchenwald in 1945, this young man's dereliction, said Smith, "is clearly less than convincing".<sup>2</sup>

In fact, had the young man dressed and posed like the other people in the same photograph — most of whom also appeared to be looking into Georg's camera, and therefore I suppose, into Smith as well — then, according to Smith, the state of his physical frame alone would definitely not have been enough to distinguish him, socially, from: the "smart" woman in the black dress, the "sprightly" young boy in the cap, the "pretty" girl in the floral chemise, the "sturdy" man in the rain coat, the "somber" man in the dark suit, and another girl in a dress which, had the photograph been in colour, would in my opinion have most likely been either red or blue. In fact, whilst the young man's clothes looked like they had been worn repeatedly and never washed or repaired, the condition of his face suggested to Smith that, incredibly, these garments might not actually have always been worn by him at all. In short, it seemed to Smith that the disconnection between the young man's face in particular — which was full of youth — and the rest of his person, hinted at what Smith refers to in his notes as "the kind of performance one might associate with an enthusiastic amateur in fancy dress" (17). Indeed, if some reasonably well-to-do young Polish, or even German gentleman, on the other side of the ghetto wall, had one day decided to cross over into the ghetto itself, and then whilst there, impersonated one of its inhabitants, then this young man, according to Smith, is precisely what they might have looked like.

Perhaps what Smith calls his ‘pantomimic aspect’ is one of the reasons why the young man continues to remind Smith of himself, such as he was, aged somewhere between 17 and 22 years? Which is to say that although Smith’s identification with the young fellow in the photograph might at first have been physiognomically motivated, the uncanny nature of the relationship that persists between Smith and the young man in Georg’s picture was, and most probably still is, about something rather more than bone structure, pigmentation and...

## The performance

...On 12 August 2005 Smith arrived at Auschwitz for the second time. On this occasion he travelled there by train. On the way to Auschwitz Smith visited several other places in Poland, each of which served a similar purpose: Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór and Majdanek.

En route to Oświęcim (אֶשְׁכַּנְיָא) from Kraków, Smith wrote: “I admit I was quite surprised, more than a little disturbed in fact, to see so many stars on the trees outside ... dangling — just like men, I thought — from bright yellow aerosol nooses” (13).

Unlike most visitors to Auschwitz, the camera that Smith used that afternoon was a medium format Bronica SQ-B. Also unlike most visitors, Smith used a Metz flashgun to illuminate his photographs, almost all of which he took during the day. Like most, but not all visitors, Smith took photographs inside the old extermination camp, but then, unlike most visitors, Smith boldly approached other visitors — people he’d never knowingly met before — and asked them to pose for him. Mostly they agreed. Unlike most “serious” photographs that make reference to the Holocaust, the photographs Smith took that day were colour-saturated photographs that, according to Smith, invoke what he calls, “the iconography of middle-brow fashion advertising” (24).

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“‘Jews were genocided. Now they’re doing Palestinians. Stop them.’ There were other things written on the walls of the women’s barracks”, wrote Smith, “most of it was scatological, but some of it was scatological *and* sexual. Like, for example, ‘We fuck your Jew mother up the shitter’.” (13)

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The svelte young woman who emerged that day from Block 15 was wearing a blue, white, red and grey striped sleeveless shirt, a white cotton skirt, a pair of blue sandals and black toenail polish that was almost exactly the same colour as her hair. The exposed parts of her body — her arms, legs, neck and face — were tanned, and it was obvious to me that she was probably the most beautiful woman that Smith had ever seen that day.

Smith explained to the young woman — who was nothing if not agreeably assertive — that he would be grateful if she could allow herself to be photographed by him.

“I would like to photograph you now ... for a project”, he said, and then I noticed that she very nearly didn’t smile, almost as soon as he’d finished speaking.

Of course, I realize that had either Smith or the young woman refused to suspend their disbelief in Smith's performance — the legitimacy of which was, in part, secured by the severity of the various metal, ground glass and plastic props that he wore over his left shoulder — then it's unlikely that either of them would have said anything at all to each other, that afternoon in Silesia.

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“Perhaps there were as many as ten people sat in a circle in the attic room at the party I attended in Ladbroke Grove 23 years ago”, said Smith, later that evening at the Hotel Glob in Oświęcim. “In the centre of the circle was the same young man who invited us to go upstairs with him. Of course, not everyone had wanted to go, but I never thought twice about it. The young man – who earlier presented me with a small gift called *(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais* (The Clash) — shuffled from the centre of the circle to its outer edge where each of us was sat cross-legged, and although I am unable to remember every logistical detail of the operation that followed — whether, for instance, our host had prepared separate shots or whether instead we were each dispensed part of a single pre-prepared dose — I do clearly remember the feeling I experienced then, after being injected with the drug, and how that feeling was not dissimilar to the feeling I experienced this afternoon, when I looked through my Bronica SQ-B at the body of a young woman standing in front of Block 15 at Auschwitz-Birkenau.”



Fig. 6 Block 15 #1 (2005). © Smith.



Fig. 7 Block 15 #2 (2005). © Smith.

Smith photographed her 12 times and the act itself lasted for approximately five minutes. That she didn't look directly at Smith is immaterial. That she never did this does not I think mean she wasn't looking *for* him. Perhaps her performance was staged *for* him, *and* in spite of him? In fact I have no idea what Smith may or may not have represented to her, either before, during or after their performance. Likewise, although she may have derived a certain kind of pleasure from knowing, or at least imagining, that there was something in her performance that amused Smith, it would probably be a mistake to conclude that she was only performing in order to please him. Although this is possible. Actually, just as I believe his relationship with her was, in part, parasitic, so I suspect her relationship with him was of an entirely similar order.

Smith didn't ask for her name and nor did he instruct her to pose in any particular way. But had she done something inappropriate — smiled, for instance — then I believe he would almost certainly have instructed her not to do it. If Smith does ever say anything at all to his subjects during what he calls “photographic intercourse”, which is extremely rare, then in my experience his speech almost always contains some kind of prohibition. It is certainly interesting to note, however, that in situations like these Smith is generally successful in persuading his subjects that they are almost always responsible for the making of their own decisions.

It wasn't the pose she assumed — the performance she chose to re-enact — that startled him, but the fluid, flawless way in which she articulated it. The way she

turned her left foot four inches in front of her right, and then rotated her right foot 15 degrees further to the right, whilst bending her right leg slightly at the knee, all in one slight, uncomplicated movement. Still, despite all that, Smith knew very well that however seductive its iteration, the pose she struck that afternoon in Silesia was in fact no more or less than the accomplished reproduction of precisely the kind of pose one might find every day in glossy magazine pages, and on billboard posters, in most Western and many non-Western countries. It was a brilliant facsimile, but no less seductive for it. Much like Smith's own brilliantly "attentive" attitude and studiously crackerjack physical disposition, each of which also embodied a set of conventions appertaining to the performance of a type of photography. Despite their obvious lack of originality, Smith and the girl delighted in their performances which, lest we forget, were acted out only metres away from the spot — now derelict — where the industrialized and highly original reproduction of death once included gassing and ...

## Advertising Smith

...Toruń is a large medieval town in the north of Poland (pop. 206,000), and is often referred to in promotional materials, including tourist brochures, as the birthplace of Nicolaus Copernicus.<sup>3</sup>

According to Copernicus: "Whatever motion appears in the firmament arises not from any motion of the firmament, but from the earth's motion. The earth together with its circumjacent elements performs a complete rotation on its fixed poles in a daily motion, while the firmament and highest heaven abide unchanged" (Rosen 174).

Watching Smith forage about the corner of the small park on the outskirts of Toruń where his seven *Research Product #4 (RP4)* billboards are displayed, I realize that he is the only element in motion. Like the sun in Copernican theory, each billboard is perfectly still.

Smith is holding a video camera in his right hand. From time to time he raises the video camera to his face. Occasionally he mounts the video camera on a tripod and points it at something. Sometimes he points it at one of the *RP4* billboards, or at a person, or group of persons, in the corner of the park where the billboards are. On one occasion he places the video camera — which is made by Sony — onto a clump of green and yellow grass, tilts the camera 15 degrees in an upward direction, then inserts a damp matchbox, which he discovered earlier today in Rynek Staromiejski, near the famous Church of the Holy Spirit, underneath the lens.

Smith's video camera is pointing at a square photograph of the young woman he met four years earlier outside Block 15 at Auschwitz-Birkenau (see [Figure 3](#)). In Toruń the young woman's image is juxtaposed with a bright pink rhombus that reminds me of Mr Blobby by Noel Edmonds, and which contains two horizontal lines of black text, one above the other.<sup>4</sup> The upper line says: "Oświęcim-Brzezinka Październik 2009" and the bottom line says: "Auschwitz-Birkenau October 2009". The photograph of the young woman is framed by another rhomboid, the colour of which corresponds directly with the colours in the

photograph. The two objects — the second rhomboid and the photograph of the young woman — whilst conceptually distinct, are somehow perceptually indistinguishable.

On the left hand side of the photograph of the young woman is a vertical strip containing seven rectangles, each of which contains a colour which is different to the colours contained in the other adjoining rectangles. The colours in the strip are: red, purple, blue, brown, green, black and yellow. Note that the colour scheme used in *RP4* reproduces aspects of the highly nuanced colour coding system that was used to classify inmates at the various Nazi concentration and extermination camps: Yellow = Jew; Red = “Political enemy” (including communists); Brown = Roma; Green = “Professionally criminals”; Blue = Forced foreign labourers; Pink = “Sexual offenders” (including homosexuals); Black = “Asocials” (including alcoholics); and Purple = Jehova’s Witnesses.<sup>5</sup> Note also that the diegetic elements that constitute *RP4* — photographic images, colours, shapes etc. — are complemented by innumerable non-diegetic elements. Examples of some non-diegetic elements that exist in the vicinity of the *RP4* billboards include: cobblestones, leaves, flowers, trees, a hamburger stand, two bus shelters and passers-by.

Unlike Barcelona, Toruń is not a colourful city. In fact Smith’s impression of Toruń — an impression I share — is of a city that’s invariably beige. In this context, then, one might go so far as to say that Smith’s billboards are, chromatically speaking at least, quite outstanding, which may account, in part, for the nature of most people’s initial reaction to them — something which, in general, persistently realizes itself through the enactment of sudden and highly irregular locomotive procedures.



Fig. 8 Research Product #4 (2009) Art Moves Bydgoskim Przedmieściu Park Toruń. © Smith.



Fig. 9 Research Product #4 (2009) Art Moves Bydgoskim Przedmieściu Park Toruń. © Smith.

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*Couple A* is composed of a man (*B*) and a woman (*C*) in their late twenties or early thirties. Smith and I believe an intimate connection probably exists between them, but as a result of the limited amount of information available to us it's impossible for either of us to be absolutely sure about this. *Couple A* descend the steep decline that connects Bydgoskie suburb to Toruń's town centre via Bydgoskie Przedmieście Park, and, on reaching level ground, they immediately enter the vicinity of Smith's billboards. Unlike many other couples in the park, I notice *B* and *C* remain physically unattached throughout their encounter. *B* is wearing a dimpled grey plastic bag on her right shoulder, and I notice the bottom of the bag is adjacent to the lower part of her right thigh, which is insulated by a material that looks like corduroy. "More likely corduroy than linen", I think, "because linen would offer little resistance to the wind, which, although not strong, is extremely cold today in Bydgoskie Przedmieście Park." *C* is wearing a black rucksack, a small one, exactly the kind I believe people take away with them on leisurely day trips to places like Poznań or Wrocław, or Gdynia. But almost certainly not Lublin.

It's 375 kms from Toruń to Lublin. (Majdanek is there.)<sup>6</sup>

The first billboard in the left-hand corner of Smith's personal exhibition space in Bydgoskie Przedmieście Park, just off Rapackiego Square, contains the image of a pre-pubescent girl in smart, but casual, red trousers, and a matching red t-shirt, emblazoned across the front of which is a concentric pattern of small pink bubbles, and in the middle of which are the letters: "R", "F" and "G" (Figure 10). I can see Smith standing several metres behind the billboard, discreetly pointing his video camera at *Couple A*; he's wearing a brown fleece by Folk, a pair of blue Levis from American Classics on Endell Street, a blue t-shirt by American Apparel, the collar of which is barely visible, and a pair of brown, open-toed Birkenstock sandals.<sup>6</sup> The girl in the photograph, who, like Smith, is also pointing a camera at *Couple A*, is posing in front of an elongated spherical monument — composed of human ashes — that was built on the site of an extermination camp, located on the edge of the small village of Sobibór, not far from

Poland's border with Ukraine. According to historian Raul Hilberg (338), between April 1942 and October 1943, approximately 200,000 people passed through Sobibór.



Fig. 10 Research Product #4b (2009). © Smith.

Writing in 2011, about the contents of a glass case in the small museum building that may be found there today, Holocaust tourist Jennifer Rosenberg blogged, “There were so many in (there) that I actually counted them. There were eleven visible dead flies.”

After gazing briefly at the photograph of the young girl, *B* continues to move briskly forward in the direction of an exit gate, directly opposite the place where I’m standing now. Suddenly *B* looks left again, in the direction of the first *RP4* billboard, then looks away. She stops moving, and turns to the left once again. (Note that *B* isn’t “loitering”, which would be “aimless”, she’s “lingering”, which is “purposeful”). Then I notice that for two or three seconds the leather heel of *B*’s left foot is disconnected from the concrete path to which her other foot remains firmly attached, and I think she resembles a ballet dancer I saw once, performing gracefully, on tip-toes, years ago, in a street near Covent Garden.

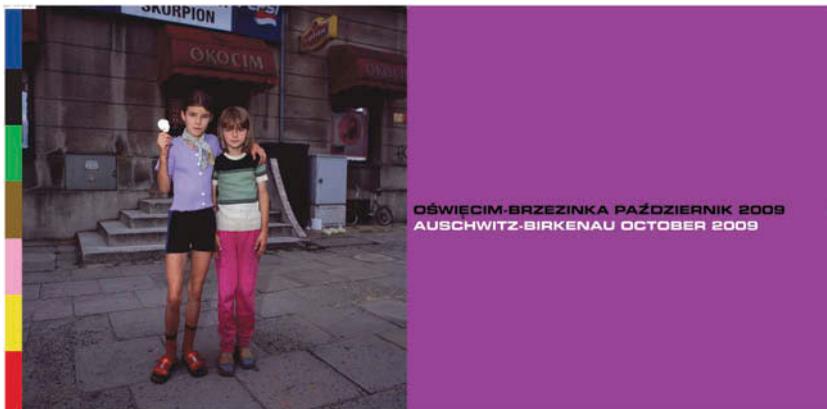


Fig. 11 Research Product #4c (2009). © Smith.

C is standing next to B. And now, for some reason, I'm convinced they're no longer looking at the picture of the girl with the silver compact camera, but are gazing intently instead at one of Smith's other posters — the second billboard, to the right of the first, that contains a photograph of two young girls, perhaps a year or so older, I think, than the other girl, the one in the red outfit, posing for Smith in front of the monument at Sobibor. These girls, who are both almost as thin as the waiters and waitresses at Oświęcim's (ויצ'ישא) Hotel Glob, are standing in front of Restauracja Skorpion, which is opposite Oświęcim's (ויצ'ישא) main railway station (Figure 11). And like the legend in the box next to the image of the young woman standing outside Block 15, the legend in the box next to the photograph of the two girls standing outside Restauracja Skorpion reads: "Oświęcim-Brzezinka Październik 2009", and below that, "Auschwitz-Birkenau October 2009".

For what must have been almost exactly four seconds *Couple A* was standing perfectly still, almost directly opposite the poster of the two girls. Then, perhaps no more than two or three seconds after walking away, B and C suddenly turn their heads to the left again and gaze once more at the poster containing the photograph of the two girls, standing outside the restaurant in Oświęcim. Maybe they're looking at other posters too? But from where I'm standing it's impossible to tell. Finally *Couple A* exit Bydgoskie Przedmieście Park, and then disappear, probably forever.

This performance, or one just like it, is enacted by four other couples, and three individuals — two women and a man — in Bydgoskie Przedmieście Park between 1.45pm and 2.20pm on 17 October 2009. And in all of these cases Smith and I believe the following things occurred:

- 1 On encountering the *RP4* billboards the spectators' attention was arrested by the relatively startling visual material they found on display there. In particular, most spectators were engaged by, (a) models, in whom the majority identified morphological characteristics that the models appeared to share, either with themselves — the spectators — or other people with whom the spectators may have been acquainted, (b) the familiar nature of Smith's photographs, as well as the reassuring manner of their display. (Smith and I believe the idea of the billboard itself is inextricably tied in most people's minds to the idea of consumer capitalism, and that there are few things as reassuring as the aestheticization of a commodity.)
- 2 While visually striking, we believe Smith's images are not, in themselves, compelling enough to arrest locomotion for more than, at most, three or four seconds each. Evidence for this was provided on each of the above occasions. However, it was generally the case that after having resumed locomotive activity for on average no more than four seconds, the attention of all of the above spectators was arrested again by something else they detected in *Research Product #4*.
- 3 We are convinced there's a straightforward explanation for the "double-take". Although spectators in Bydgoskie Przedmieście Park were perhaps at first seduced by the visual audacity of Smith's billboards — itself a consequence of Toruń's architectural monochromism — it was their computation of the words that accompanied the photographs — the names of the camps — that so dramatically arrested their attention, for at least the second time that day.

To conclude, we believe the spectators' first "act of looking" represented a "moment of intense interest", precisely because despite regularly allowing oneself the opportunity to look at a billboard poster, it seems one rarely ever exercises one's capacity to actually *stop* and look, in Toruń or anywhere else for that matter, which is of course exactly what happened that afternoon on many occasions in Bydgoskie Przedmieście Park, where the spectators' "intensity of interest" was specifically signalled through the brief, but dramatic, curtailing of their locomotion. As for the second act of looking, this occurred when the information we believe most spectators initially registered in Bydgoskie Przedmieście Park — 'Auschwitz-Birkenau', 'Majdanek', 'Sobibor' — but then for some reason repressed, was suddenly returned to them.

### **Conclusion: Production(s) of Smith (2)**

Clearly, the value of Smith is not only contingent on his ability to conduct a class efficiently. In the university, the impact that one's capacity to effectively transfer knowledge has on one's own value as a commodity is remarkably limited. In fact, the value of Smith is principally motivated by his capacity to *produce* knowledge which is intended for dissemination beyond the university, by legitimate knowledge distributors like, for example, the Polish street art organization, Galeria Ruzs.

Earlier we suggested that during times of relative market stability, Smith's failure to perform diligently and efficiently will rarely be fatal. A dip in the value of his own personal "stock" — triggered, in particular, by his failure to produce legitimated knowledge — may provoke a raft of unwanted responses on Smith's part, including paranoiac fantasies, feelings of shame, worthlessness and frustration. However, in certain circumstances it very often appears to be the case that such failures will rarely, as I say, provoke a punitive response from the university. To reiterate, during times of economic growth in particular, the university is often prepared to overlook failures of this kind (which is not to say they go unnoticed). However, in times of crisis, when the provision of funds for knowledge organizations like Smith's is dramatically reduced — for whatever reason — then it is interesting to note how the promotional nature of knowledge production (including photography), which in this instance is predicated mainly on the exploitation of events at sites associated with the Holocaust, as well as the principle of competition between employees, both of which are always at least underlying, invariably becomes violently apparent.<sup>8</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 See Górska and Góral ski. *Research Product #4* is based on Paul Antick's public art project *itourist?* In December 2006 ten *itourist?* billboard posters appeared on the streets of North-East London and Southampton in the UK. At the same time five *itourist?* billboard posters were exhibited on the main highway between Prague and Terezin (formerly known as Theresienstadt) in the Czech Republic. Paul Antick's posters were designed by Syd Shelton and contained photographs taken by Antick at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Sobibór, Bełżec and Majdanek in the summer of 2005. *itourist?* was supported by Stephen Foster at John Hansard Gallery, Joanna Górska and Rafał Góral ski at Galeria Ruzs and Professor Adrian Rifkin at Middlesex University. See Tynan.
- 2 According to Primo Levi (64) the term "musselmanner" (moslems) was a slang word used at Auschwitz to describe what he calls "the submerged"; those physically and emotionally emaciated inmates whose "deaths had begun before that of their body".
- 3 See <http://www.visittorun.pl/>
- 4 See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1220390/Pictured-The-abandoned-ruins-Mr-Blobby-theme-park-ravers-trash-site.html>
- 5 See <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/markings.html>
- 6 See <http://www.majdanek.eu/>
- 7 See <http://www.folkclothing.com/men>; <http://www.americanclassicslondon.com/>; <http://www.americanapparel.net/intl/uk.html>; <http://www.birkenstock.co.uk/>
- 8 Note that, as well as increasing the university's symbolic value, the production of legitimate knowledge, by the employees of universities like Smith's, presently attracts discrete income parcels that are delivered to the university by the state, and that the size of each income parcel is contingent on the quantity and quality of legitimated knowledge(s) produced by select members of the university. Legitimated knowledge is evaluated by the state according to criteria that generally remains unclear to many of those whose work is measured against it. Currently most English universities receive monies based on judgements made about the legitimacy — or otherwise — of knowledge produced by their employees. See <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/>. According to the Higher Education Funding Council for England: "The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the ... system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The REF will be undertaken by the four UK higher education funding bodies. The exercise will be managed by the REF team based at HEFCE and overseen by the REF Steering Group, consisting of representatives of the four funding bodies. The primary purpose of the REF is to produce assessment outcomes for each submission made by institutions: The funding bodies intend to use the assessment outcomes to inform the selective allocation of their research funding to HEIs, with effect from 2015–16. The assessment provides accountability for public investment in research and produces evidence of the benefits of this investment. The assessment outcomes provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks."

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