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FILMING AUSCHWITZ IN 1945: OSVENTSIM

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The film made by Soviet operators at Auschwitz following the discovery of the camp by the 1st Ukrainian front plays a central role in the construction of memory and representations of the site. Many of the scenes extracted from it have survived to the present day, and regularly feature in documentaries devoted to the subject in its broadest sense, far beyond Auschwitz alone: the

concentration camp universe, Nazism and the Second World War. To name but a few of the best-known, there are images of the vastness of Birkenau taken from the air, of a group of children in striped prisoner (*Häftling*) uniforms walking through a barbed-wire corridor, of tattooed forearms, and of women crammed into a barrack.

The conditions under which OSVENTSIM¹ (Oswiecim in Polish) was made have been the subject of several works designed to shed light on its history. The documentary DIE BEFREIUNG VON AUSCHWITZ / THE LIBERATION OF AUSCHWITZ by director Irmgard von zur Mühlen, released in 1986, has provided some insight, as have the works by Jeremy Hicks² and Annette Wieviorka.³ According to those, filming began in the days following the arrival of the Red Army, perhaps as early as January 28, according to Kenan Kutub-Zade.⁴ On February 8, the first shipment of 500 meters of film was sent to Moscow.⁵ Filming would have lasted at least six weeks, until mid-March, but the final footages, of a liberation enacted by prisoners and Soviet soldiers, would have been shot at the beginning of May, perhaps on the 7th.⁶

The film is nonetheless an important document, yet many aspects of it still need to be deciphered, whether in terms of dating, the staging of certain sequences or the filming choices made by the operators. The film not only combines sequences shot over a period of almost two months, but also a series of locations which, although part of the immense Auschwitz complex, are very diverse. What's more, the unused shots that have been found, at least in part,⁷ provide a broader view of what was filmed during those weeks.⁸ Although these are incomplete, the notes taken by the operators and sent to Moscow with the reels are an important source, providing an overview of the shooting.⁹ Last but not least, photograms that appear to have been taken from missing shots can be found in various collections,¹⁰ and seem to correspond to certain sequences shot but not yet found. The images are the work of five operators:

Mikhail Ochourkov, Nikolai Bykov, Kenan Kutub-Zade, Alexander Vorontsov and Anatoly Pavlov. As for the film itself, according to some sources, it was edited in Moscow at the TsSDF by director and editor Yelizaveta Svilova.¹¹

OSVENTSIM is one of the first testimonies to the discovery of the site by outsiders – as are the drawings by Zinovii Tolkachev, the photographs by Polish photographer Stanislaw Mucha¹² and the three Soviet photographers Rafail Mazelevn, Mark Redkin and Vladimir Yudin,¹³ or even the first articles by war correspondents and journalists dispatched to the site. It reflects the beginning of the construction of a memory of the place that continues to this day. The title of the film itself reminds us that, in the early years following the discovery of the site, it was named in Polish rather than German. The same applies to Majdanek. Like Oswiecim, Majdanek is not the name of the camp, but the Polish toponym of the site. During its existence, the camp's official name was KL Lublin (*Konzentrationslager*, concentration camp). Interestingly, however, the site went down in history under its Polish name. Auschwitz, on the other hand, is a different story, although for many years the Polish name prevailed. At Nuremberg, parts of OSVENTSIM were included in the Soviet film shown on the sixty-second day of the trial, February 19, 1946. The opening voice-over announces "lager Oswiecim."¹⁴ In 1948, the first monument erected in memory of Jewish victims, in Birkenau, referred to the camps of Oswiecim and Brzezinka,¹⁵ as did the successive laws and decrees, from 1947 to 1958, concerning the creation of the museum by the Polish state and its management.¹⁶ The only exception in these early years is the German version of the film, which opens with an insert announcing "Auschwitz (Oswiecim)."

The choice of the name *Oswiecim* (and its Russian counterpart, *Osventsim*) is understandable from the outset, as a reminder of the fact that this is Polish territory, occupied and annexed by the Germans, and as a claim to the Polish character of the area. It nevertheless reflects a perspective outside the place.

Survivors speak of Auschwitz and Birkenau. Oswiecim is unknown to them. As for Brzezinka, in the mouths of the survivors it refers to the site beyond the Birkenau camp, where the killing process took place, as well as to the Kanada, the huge warehouses where the goods of the Jewish victims were sorted, which adjoined the KL. Birkenau, in the language of the camp, is strictly speaking the immense quadrilateral that is the detention area. The documents that mention Oswiecim during the war, or in the years that followed, are those from the outside. As for the operators' notes, they refer to Birkenau on the one hand, and Oswiecim (Osventsim) on the other¹⁷ – the name given to the site in Russian to this day.¹⁸

Among the Witnesses

One particular aspect of the filming must be emphasized. The film crews were present at the site for around three months, making it the longest film shoot of the war, more so than Majdanek,¹⁹ for example. And a fundamental difference from the latter, as with other sites, is that Auschwitz is far from being devoid of any human presence. While the immense mass of inmates had indeed been transferred out of the camp during its last months of operation, and over 60,000 were thrown onto the roads during the final evacuation on January 18, 1945, 7,000 men, women and children were still present in the three main camps – Auschwitz, Birkenau and Monowitz – when the Soviets arrived. Although Auschwitz was largely empty, unlike the concentration camps overflowing with inmates that would be discovered in the interior of Germany a few months later, providing striking images, it was not deserted.

While only a few hundred prisoners remained in the Majdanek camp at the time of the Red Army's arrival²⁰ – mainly Soviet POWs and very few inmates belonging to the categories making up the concentration camp population – giving only a partial picture of what the place was like, it's a different story with Auschwitz. The mass of survivors discovered at the end of January is a far more

accurate reflection of the reality of KL, with its mosaic of populations from all over Europe. As Jeremy Hicks points out, the operators initially focused their attention on the Soviet nationals among the survivors, but they soon became aware of the reality of the composition of the concentration camp population, as one of the filming notes shows: "The Red Army didn't just liberate Soviet people from the camps. There were prisoners of 20 European nationalities in the camp [...] (French, Dutch, Belgians, British, etc.)."²¹ It is also worth noting that the notes make no explicit mention of the fact that the vast majority of those discovered were Jews – a fact that becomes apparent when we look at the names of the prisoners mentioned in the filming documents, and which could not have escaped the operators' notice.

It's a site where thousands of prisoners are still held in the first few weeks, and hundreds more in the months that follow, and where Soviet operators find themselves. They were in daily contact with them. Among the testimonies of survivors present in the weeks following their liberation, there is no doubt an evocation of the presence of film crews – in addition to Soviet operators, Poles were also present.²² In *La Trêve (The Truce)*, Primo Levi mentions an episode that is probably related to this, when at the end of February 1945, after being bedridden for a month, he went out for the first time in the *Stammlager* (Auschwitz I): "Just behind the door there was a Soviet officer: he photographed me and gave me five cigarettes."²³ The presence of the operators is also reported by people who came to help the survivors at Auschwitz, such as Zdzislaw Bosek, a volunteer from Brzeszcze, who recalls that the mass burial on February 28, 1945 was filmed by Soviet operators, who also took a number of photographs.²⁴

The operators thus had access to direct information from the survivors, enabling them to understand the various facets that made up the "Auschwitz planet," a site without equal in German Europe, where countless Nazi policies were

intertwined, giving it an unparalleled complexity.²⁵ What's more, they were present at the same time as the extraordinary Soviet commission, which carried out its work at Auschwitz in February and March 1945 – succeeded on April 7 by the Polish commission for the investigation of Nazi war crimes²⁶ – and gathered a wealth of information. Like the work of the medical teams, that of the Extraordinary Commission is also partly filmed, with various sequences in the film directly linked to it: for example, doctors Henri Limousin, Berthold Epstein, Geza Mansfeld and Bruno Fischer testify in the courtyard of block 11,²⁷ or a brief sequence showing the deposition of one of the two members of the Sonderkommando – Shlomo Dragon and Henrik Tauber – before the commission.²⁸

This knowledge and understanding of the site can be seen in the note accompanying the shipment of 2,500 meters of film on March 19, signed by Mikhail Ochourkov, which gives a two-page description of Auschwitz. It reads:

*A colossal territory – several tens of kilometers, a double row of barbed wire through which current was passed, furnaces for incineration, gas chambers, an endless number of barracks, the Farbenindustrie factory, which the prisoners worked on and built. This is what Auschwitz was like. Echelons of people condemned to death drove here from all over Europe, here the Germans wanted to burn the freedom and conscience of Europe, the furnaces worked twenty-four hours a day. The black smoke covered everything, the barracks, the factory. It was hard to breathe. The furnaces could not cope with the work, then some people were poisoned in the gas chambers, and in the forests they dug ditches where they laid the wood poured with gasoline and on top of it men, women and children were put in rows.*²⁹

The contribution of eyewitness accounts is evident in these lines, as is their explicit mention in the various shooting notes. The only gap, to which we will return, is the absence of any mention of the specific fate of the Jews.

A Mosaic of Sequences

The film is made up of scenes filmed not only over a long period of time, but also at different locations within the Auschwitz complex. The alternation of shots showing snow-covered Auschwitz sites and others untouched by snow has already been pointed out, and is indeed obvious. But it should also be added that the film mixes images from several sites, not just Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. The most obvious is the gigantic Buna factory, stretching over three kilometers. Like Birkenau, it is the subject of both ground and aerial shots – the latter taken from the very first days, as shown in the snow and confirmed by the notes of operator Anatoli Pavlov, who reports on February 8, 1945:

I filmed:

Birkenau internment camp (near Auschwitz) – aerial shots.

The chemical factory built by the internees (aerial shots).³⁰

OSVENTSIM also briefly shows a few seconds of footage taken during the first days at Auschwitz III-Monowitz, still snow-covered.³¹ They come from the only filming carried out in this camp. From February onwards, the operators focused their attention solely on the huge Birkenau camp and Auschwitz I, the heart of the system and the place where rescue and investigation activities were concentrated. It should be added that none of the other camps in the complex were filmed, even though several sequences, apart from the Buna, were shot outside the two main camps. This was the case in the town of Oswiecim, where several scenes were filmed, the most important being the burial of 470 victims found when the Soviets arrived or who subsequently died.³²

Although the notes mention the production of general views of Birkenau, neither the film nor the available unused shots show the railway station (the “ramp”) stretching from the central watchtower to the two large gas chambers (KII and KIII), nor are there any plans of BI (Women’s Camp) or BIII (“Mexiko”). As for the latter, it was completely untouched by construction at the time, the barracks having been dismantled at the end of 1944 on SS orders and shipped to KL Gross-Rosen, which certainly explains the lack of interest in filming it. On the other hand, sequences were shot from the central watchtower: a shot showing the immensity of the BII and its succession of six camps stretching as far as the eye can see appears in the film.³³ There are several shots, attributed to Vladimir Yudin, showing the operators breaking the windows of the watchtower in order to position themselves on the roof of the right wing (stretching towards the BII) of the building so as to be able to film.³⁴

The choices made in the editing process have left out many sequences in their entirety. Some are among the unused footages that have been found, while others are known only through shooting notes. It appears that on at least one occasion, the operators themselves decided to leave out some of the sequences shot: those devoted to filming prisoners of war, mainly British and from the Commonwealth, held in a stalag at Auschwitz. A note in the document states: “The column of British POWs removed – were not in the Auschwitz camp. They were in other camps and were clothed with Red Cross funds.”³⁵

The dating of certain footages, and the order of shots, can be partly reconstructed on the basis of certain elements. First of all, the presence of snow characterizes the first shots. Then the snow disappears, giving way to soggy ground. Primo Levi reports that the thaw came quickly, a few days after the arrival of the Soviets, transforming Monowitz’s landscape: “as the snow melted, the camp became an ugly swamp. Corpses and filth made the foggy, soft air unbreathable”³⁶ – an observation that can also be made for Birkenau, as can

be seen repeatedly in the images.³⁷ Whether, as Kenan Kutub-Zade claims, the Soviets were filming as early as January 28, is difficult to ascertain. Others seem to have also been present in the first few days after the site was discovered.

Images taken by Henryk Makarewicz, an operator with the 1st Polish army, also show the area covered in snow, while a burnt-out barrack in the BI is nearing completion,³⁸ suggesting that it was the very end of January. Photographs taken by Vladimir Yudin also show barracks on fire, but it is not possible to locate them,³⁹ and are undoubtedly among the first images of the area. On February 15 or 16, the sick prisoners were transferred from Birkenau, where they had initially been cared for in the BIlf by the emergency services, to Auschwitz I.⁴⁰ This transfer can be seen in OSVENTSIM. This means that all the images showing prisoners walking through the mud-covered Birkenau camps date from the first fortnight of February 1945. Another chronological marker is February 28, 1945, the day of the burial of the victims, particularly those who died in the days following liberation. It thus sets a *terminus ante quem* for scenes showing corpses.

Staging the KL

A large number of shots are staged by the operators, particularly those showing survivors. The best-known of these is the filming of women inside a typical Birkenau barrack, carried out more than a month after the discovery of the site.⁴¹ But many other shots have also been reconstructed to varying degrees of detail. Such is the case of the footage of children marching along the barbed-wire fence at Auschwitz I. Some of the children in this scene have been identified.⁴² They are Jewish children. Some were deported from Slovakia in November 1944. They arrived after the gassing of the “Sondertransports” had stopped, like Shmuel Schelach (born Robert Schlesinger), escaped murder and were registered as prisoners. Others were Jewish children selected as “medical material” for Joseph Mengele’s experiments. Such was the case of Eva Mozes

Kor and her sister Miriam. Deported from Hungary, they were “selected” because they were twins. Tomy Shacham (Schwarz), then aged 11 and one of the oldest children, reports that his group was transferred by the SS from Birkenau to Auschwitz on January 22,⁴³ as was Eva Mozes Kor.⁴⁴ But not all of them were. Other children were still present in Birkenau when the Soviets arrived, as can be seen in several shots of OSVENTSIM but also in OBÓZ KONCENTRACYJNY W OŚWIĘCIMIU. Such is the case of Gábor Hirsch. At the age of 15, deported from Hungary, he passed the “selection” when he arrived in June 1944. In January 1945, when the camp was evacuated, he was hospitalized at the BIlf and hid there, before being transferred to Auschwitz I in the weeks following liberation. In his memoirs, he considers it possible that he was one of the emaciated young men filmed in February in the BIlf by the Soviets.⁴⁵ And according to research carried out by the UCS Shoah Foundation, he was also present in the footage filmed in Auschwitz I, which would suggest that it was only filmed in the last days of February or early March.

For the shot, the Soviets gathered the children together, and distributed prisoner stripped-uniforms to them.⁴⁶ Some, like Tomy Shacham (née Schwarz), can be seen wearing them over their clothes, while others wear uniforms that are far too large, in which they literally float, as Gabriel Neumann mentions: “You can see that they dressed us in prisoner uniforms that were a few sizes too big for us. Underneath the prisoner uniforms we wore the rags that we had.”⁴⁷ In her testimony, Eva Mozes Kor describes in detail the organization of the filming:

The following afternoon many Soviet people gathered around us. They asked Miriam and me and all the surviving children, most of them twins, to put on striped prison uniforms over our clothes. Because we were Mengele’s twins, we had never worn those Auschwitz uniforms before. I was already wearing two coats because it was so cold. Underneath our coats and dresses, Miriam and I carried everything we owned: food, bowls, blankets – things

we regarded as treasures.

We stood at the very head of the line and held hands as Soviet soldiers marched us out of the barracks between the high, barbed-wire fences. A nurse holding a small child in her arms walked beside us. Huge cameras kept filming, filming. I looked at the cameraman and wondered why he was taking our picture.

"Are we movie stars or something?" I wondered. I was very impressed with it all. The only real movies Miriam and I had seen were the ones starring Shirley Temple that our mama had taken us to in the city.

To my surprise, after we had all walked through the fences, the cameraman sent all of us back inside and directed us to march out again. With nuns, nurses, and Soviet soldiers accompanying us, rows and rows of twins filed back into the barracks, then right back out again. We repeated the action several times until the cameraman was satisfied.⁴⁸

Barbed Wire, the Film's Central Character

A large number of scenes were organized specifically to show the barbed wire at both Auschwitz and Birkenau. The organization of the filming of the children is a case in point: the Soviets march the group, reinforced by nurses and nuns, between the two rows of barbed wire surrounding Auschwitz I. No prisoner ever walked in this area, which for them was a safe zone. None of the prisoners ever moved into this space, which was for them a death zone, and one that was difficult to reach. But the images obtained in this way are striking: children, some of them barely able to stand, moving through a constrained space that, with the barbed wire supported by the sinister pylons, is far more threatening than the

camp aisles running alongside the Auschwitz blocks.

One of the most important staging choices made by the operators is the constant presence of barbed wire, omnipresent in the images, to the point of being a character in the film in its own right. This search is almost systematic, revealing the highly advanced staging of certain scenes, such as those showing the children. The omnipresence of barbed wire begins in the very first images of the film, which show a long column of civilians, presumably leaving Auschwitz, along a stretch of barbed wire that stretches out of sight. It's not the least paradoxical that the first images of the film do not show survivors leaving one of the camps. Instead, they are civilian workers, Ostarbeiter, walking along the fence of IG Farben's imposing Buna factory, located to the east of the city, far from the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps. In fact, this fence, with its characteristic pillars, is of the same design as those surrounding Auschwitz and Birkenau, helping to maintain the illusion of what can be seen.⁴⁹

This type of scene – detainees walking along barbed wire – was replayed several times before Soviet cameras, and punctuates the film. Here, the word “played” is essential, as the movements made by the survivors in no way correspond to the reality of movement in the camp during detention. The aisles of the camps that make up Birkenau are at their center, between the rows of barracks, while the barbed wire marks their limits. In the scenes filmed, the survivors move individually or en masse along the barbed wire as if this path were leading them to the camp exit, which is not the case, as the access gates face the aisles around which the barracks are built. The only scenes that correspond to this reality are those showing the evacuation of patients from the BIIc in mid-February 1945, where we can see them passing through the gate leading to the Lagerstrasse. Others, such as those showing male and female prisoners walking towards the camera along barbed wire (filmed in BIIc or BIIId), are staged to show the prisoners with the fence that marked the limits of their

space. Another effect achieved is that the survivors, moving outside the usual aisles, find it difficult to get around because of the mud that has invaded the area, as can be seen in the footage showing three survivors in Blle, Oleg Mandic, his mother Nevenka and his grandmother Olga,⁵⁰ the latter having to be helped to move by her daughter and a Soviet soldier.

The positioning of the former prisoners shown in this way makes no sense. This is the case of one of the most iconic sequences, showing children walking between the two rows of barbed wire at Auschwitz I: they are walking in a place restricted to SS-men during the camp's operation. The same applies to the scene filmed much later, showing prisoners lined up behind the barbed wire, again at Auschwitz I. They are again standing inside the double perimeter of barbed wire, as the operators film them from inside the camp. This shot is reminiscent of the one filmed with prisoners in Majdanek in the summer of 1944, and featured in both the Soviet and Polish films.⁵¹ Paradoxically, the most problematic shot filmed by the operators⁵² – a fictitious liberation showing Soviet soldiers cheered on by inmates massed behind the gate marked *Arbeit Macht Frei* – is the only one to position the survivors in a coherent way: inside the camp. The barbed-wire fence and its pylons, which have since become an iconic feature of Auschwitz, are the film's main protagonists. Almost constantly present in the foreground or background of the film, they are even the subject of several still shots.⁵³

At the same time, there are no images showing the interior of the camp. There are no views of the aisles lined with barracks in Birkenau, any more than in Auschwitz. The inside of the camp is virtually absent, whether in the film or in the unused shots. The same applies to the inside of the prisoners' barracks or blocks, which are never filmed as such. The only exceptions are a sequence shot in the first fortnight of February, when the Extraordinary Commission visits the inside of a barrack at Birkenau; the hearings of the same Commission, held

in a block at Auschwitz I; and the re-enactment with Polish survivors. The initial lack of lighting equipment to film the interiors is not enough to explain this – the Commission's visit to a barrack was carried out even though this equipment was deficient.⁵⁴ Rather, it's a choice made by the operators: it's not so much the camp as a structure that is filmed, but its victims, shown above all with that which symbolizes detention, barbed wire.

Auschwitz Concentration Camp

Nevertheless, it's the concentration camp dimension that's filmed first and foremost. It is the camp as a space that is the subject of the film, not the killing center. It is the horrors of the concentration camp – the conditions of detention, the medical experiments, the torture – that are evoked. The mass murder that engulfed 90% of Auschwitz-Birkenau's victims, who were never detained there, is absent. However, the operators do not ignore the reality of the site. The fate of the Jews is explicitly mentioned from the outset: "a group of Jews from Minsk is marching. They were destined to be burned in the ovens, but the Red Army freed them."⁵⁵ Numerous shots show Jewish survivors. The identities recorded in the notes are also revealing. But the fact remains that mass murder is buried beneath the elements of the concentration camp (barbed wire, barracks...). This is undoubtedly part of the difficulty of understanding this dimension of the site on the spot, in contrast to the way in which Vassili Grossman became aware of the full extent of the Shoah on discovering Treblinka. Despite the presence of two survivors of the *Sonderkommando*, despite the thousands of survivors able to explain the horror of concentration to which they were torn and the mass murder carried out at the same time, the operators were unable to grasp its specificity – and the film all the more only touches on it in passing, in an almost incidental manner. If the ruins of the four crematoria were filmed at all, it was in a rather limited way. What's more, there are no images (either from the Soviet and Polish operators or from the various photographers present) of the perimeter around the Bunker II, the gas chamber away from Birkenau.⁵⁶ Yet

one of the dimensions that runs through the film is its focus on the technical dimensions of modernity: machines, electrical devices, plans, barbed wire, etc. It is not so much the gas chambers as the crematoria (i.e. ovens) that are the subject of the film, cremation more than gassing, in a way.

Incomprehension and lack of understanding are undoubtedly the keys to explaining these absences. This is in addition to the political dimension, which the Soviet authorities took to erase the specificity of the fate of the Jews. One event filmed by the operators is highly revealing of this desire: the burial of the victims on February 28, 1945. Here, the staging is not the work of the operators, but of the politicians. The ceremony was organized with great pomp. The chosen site is a mass grave dug not far from the Auschwitz I camp. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people gathered for the occasion. In addition to local residents, there were a large number of officials, members of the *Milicja Obywatelska* (Citizens' Militia), Soviet soldiers lining the route and Catholic clergy. However, no rabbis or Jews identifiable as such were to be seen. It is indeed a Catholic ceremony that is organized and shown, even though many of the dead are Jewish victims.⁵⁷ But these are not mentioned, not even symbolically.

1 There are multiple versions of this film, in several languages, available on several websites. We refer here to the Russian version, collected as part of the Visual History of the Holocaust project, RGAKFD UND-05203-R01 P OFMID-1643190054927 and UND-05203-R02 P OFMID-1643190054929.

2. Jeremy Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2012).

3. Annette Wieviorka, *Auschwitz, 60 ans après* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2005).

4. Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*.

5. Ibid.

6. Wieviorka, *Auschwitz*, 33.

7. RGAKFD, UND-10915-R01 P OFMID-1653379470154; 10915-R02 P OFMID-1653379470156; 10915-R03 P OFMID-1653379470158; RGAKFD_UND-10915-R04_P_OFMID-1653379470160.

8. It is also possible that shots not included in the film or in the unused footages can be found in other films. See, for example, "27 janvier 1945 : la libération d'Auschwitz Birkenau par l'Armée rouge," l'INA, published 20.01.2015, edited 22.01.2020, <https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/27-janvier-1945-la-liberation-d-auschwitz-birkenau-par-l-armee-rouge>.

9. We would like to thank Irina Tcherneva for sending us these documents, which she unearthed at the Russian State Archive of Film and Photographic Documents (RGAKFD) in Krasnogorsk and in the private collection of Fomin.

10. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum has some of these in its collection, some of which are featured in Jacek Lachendro, *Auschwitz after Liberation* (Oswiecim: Auschwitz-Birkenau-State Museum, 2015).

11. Yuri Scherbakov, "Operator Kenan Kutub-Zade from Rostov Film Studio [Frontovoi Kinooperator Kenan Kutub-Zade Rostovskoi Kinostudii]," *ascinemadoc*, accessed 15.03.2024, <http://ascinemadoc.ru/frontovoy-kinooperator-kenan-kutub-zade-rostovskoy-kinostudii/>.

12. A Polish photographer, he accompanied the work of the Extraordinary Commission. He is the author of a book featuring photos of Auschwitz from various sources, published under the title *Oświęcim-Brzezinka KL Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Krakow: Stowarzyszenie "Opieka nad Oświęcimiem," 1948).

13. David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes. Photography, War and the Holocaust*

(New Brunswick/New Jersey/London: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 175.

14. The film can be viewed at <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn616417>.

15. See photo of the monument at <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/gallery/historical-pictures-and-documents/liberation-and-foundation-of-the-museum,13.html> (accessed May 24th, 2024).

16. The texts can be read at <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19470520265> (accessed on May 27th, 2024).

17. See for example RGAKFD, UN-10915 BC-174 2-II.

18. As illustrated by the Wikipedia page in Russian dedicated to Auschwitz, titled **Освенцим** and not **Аушвиц**.

19. On two films shot at Majdanek, Ania Szczepanska, "Filmer l'usine de mort : stratégies cinématographiques des opérateurs polonais et soviétiques à Maïdanek," in *Filmer la guerre : les Soviétiques face à la Shoah (1941–1946)*, ed. Valérie Pozner, Alexandre Sumpf, Vanessa Voisin (Paris : Mémorial de la Shoah, 2015), 104–108, as well as Hicks, *First Films of the Holocaust*.

20. Estimates vary from 500 to 1,000 survivors. See in particular Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps. The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Haven/London: Yale University, 2015), 37.

21. RGAKFD, UN-10915 4.

22. The film *OBÓZ KONCENTRACYJNY W OŚWIĘCIMIU* (Wytwórnia Filmowa Wojska Polskiego – Polish Army Film Studio) can be viewed at <http://repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/4468> (accessed June 3, 2024).

23. Primo Levi, *La Trêve* (Paris: Grasset, 1966), 37.

24. In Andrzej Strzelecki, *The Evacuation, Liquidation and Liberation of Auschwitz* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2001), 38.
25. Tal Bruttman, *Auschwitz* (Paris: La découverte, 2015).
26. Lachendro, *Auschwitz after Liberation*, 160–183.
27. UND-05203-R02 P OFMID-1643190054929 at 02:11.
28. Both are mentioned by name in the shooting notes (RGAKFD, UN-10915 BC-0333-0171-0172-0173-0174-0177 27-II, sequence 23). Tauber can be seen in OSVENTSIM (RGAKFD, UND-05203-R02 P OFMID-1643190054929 at 01:36).
29. RGAKFD UN-10915 BC-333-171-172-173-174-177 27 (all quoted extracts are translations by Irina Tcherneva).
30. RGAKFD, UN-10915 BC-174 2-II. Images of the Buna flyover can be found in RGAKFD, UND-10915-R01 P OFMID-1653379470154.
31. Several other sequences (close-ups of survivors) appear among the unused footages (RGAKFD, UND-10915-R01 P OFMID-1653379470154, 05:38 to 05:55).
32. Wieviorka, *Auschwitz*, 30.
33. RGAKFD UND-05203-R01 P OFMID-1643190054927, at 2:30.
34. See the sequence in RGAKFD UND-05203-R01 P OFMID-1643190054927 at 02:32.
35. RGAKFD, 10915 4 II.
36. Levi, *La Trêve*, 19.

37. See, for example, the shot at 05:56 in the unused sequences.

38. <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1144233> (accessed May 24, 2024). The photo is captioned "Kanada burns. Before fleeing, the Germans set fire to the warehouses and piles of prisoners' clothing," but the location of the image corresponds to a barrack in the Women's Camp, which is confirmed by an aerial photo of February 19, 1945, on which the location of this barrack can be seen (NARA, 306 059).

39. Yad Vashem, 4212/85 and 93.

40. Memoirs of Ursuline sister Tacjana (Helena) Pozarowszczyk, who came from Krakow to help the survivors, in Strzelecki, *The Evacuation, Liquidation and Liberation of Auschwitz*, 39.

41. DIE BEFREIUNG VON AUSCHWITZ (Irmgard von zur Mühlen, 1986) from 11:20.

42. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/through-the-lens/auschwitz-...> and <https://sfi.usc.edu/news/2015/01/8451-finding-children-behind-barbed-wire> (accessed January 25, 2024).

43. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/through-the-lens/auschwitz-child-survivors.asp> (accessed March 12, 2024).

44. Eva Mozes Kor, Lisa Rojany Buccieri, *Surviving the Angel of Death: The True Story of a Mengele Twin in Auschwitz* (Indiana: Tanglewood Publishing, 2011).

45. Gábor Hirsch, *From Bekescsaba to Auschwitz and back, Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors*, vol. 6 (Zürich: Kontaktstelle für Überlebende des Holocaust, 2017), 34–35. This is a sequence visible in OSVENTSIM (RGAKFD UND-05203-R01 P OFMID-1643190054927) at 05:54.

46. Paula Lebovics (née Pessa Balter): "they dressed us up in those stripped uniforms which we never had before" (<https://sfi.usc.edu/content/paula-lebovics> 2:20:55-2:21:15;

accessed March 15, 2024). See also the testimony of Tomy Shaham (née Schwarz), <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/through-the-lens/auschwitz-child-survivors.asp> (accessed March 12, 2024).

47. <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/through-the-lens/auschwitz-child-survivors.asp> (accessed March 12, 2024).

48. Mozes Kor, Rojany Buccieri, *Surviving the Angel of Death*.

49. The description of this scene, filmed in the early days, appears in the notes (RGAKFD, 10915 4 II) as follows: "The survivors, freed by the Red Army, leave the camps in a steady stream along the roads and head for the rear and their homeland."

50. They are identified by name in the shooting notes (RGAKFD UN-10915 BC-0333-0171-0172-0173-0174-0177 27-II). See also Lachendro, *Auschwitz after Liberation*, 122.

51. Szczepanska, "Filmer l'usine de mort," 106.

52. Wieviorka, *Auschwitz*, 33.

53. OSVENTSIM (RGAKFD UND-05203-R01 P OFMID-1643190054927) features a fixed shot from 03:14 to 03:24, followed by two others from 03:38 to 03:44. Other shots of the same type also appear among the unused footages.

54. The other sequences, filmed inside barracks or blocks, come later and are devoted to the looted objects stored there. It's not the prisoners' conditions of detention that are the focus. This late filming of the objects also indicates that it took several weeks for the importance of these looted goods to be grasped. The fact that some of these images were taken outdoors, with neither snow nor soggy ground visible, indicates a relatively late date.

55. RGAKFD, 10915 4 II.

56. We can also add the absence of any images showing the KL, located at Auschwitz I. In 1945, however, this building no longer housed a gas chamber and crematorium, and was converted for other uses.

57. As can be seen from the list of deaths following the liberation of the site:
https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/archive/1-1-2-1_1465000 (accessed January 15, 2024).

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