

Thesis Title

The Lagermuseum

Creative Manuscript

and

'Encountering Auschwitz: Touring the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum'

Critical Thesis

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Abstract

The Lagermuseum

My creative manuscript – an extract of a longer novel – seeks to illuminate a little-known aspect of the history of the Auschwitz concentration and death camp complex, namely the trade and display of prisoner artworks. However, it is also concerned with exposing the governing paradigms inherent to contemporary encounters with the Holocaust, calling attention to the curatorial processes present in all interrogations of this most contentious historical subject. Questions relating to ownership, display and representational hierarchies permeate the text, characterised by a shape-shifting curator figure and artworks which refuse to adhere to the canon he creates for them. *The Lagermuseum* is thus in constant dialogue with my critical thesis, examining the fictional devices which often remain unacknowledged within established modes of historical discourse, specifically museums and tours. What emerges, I hope, is an ethically-sensitive work, which interrogates two key questions: Who is in charge of history? How do the ways in which history is curated affect our interpretations of it?

‘Encountering Auschwitz: Touring the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum’

In the mid-1990s, as the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum cemented its status as one of Europe’s most popular memorial destinations, critical conversation revolved around the potential implications and ramifications of Holocaust tourism. My thesis, however, aims to address an apparent gap within this still-evolving field of research. Thus I examine not visitor motivations for going to such sites, but the types of historical encounters available to those who seek them. Taking a personal, theoretical and strongly narrative approach, I critique the guided group tours provided by the museum, evaluating them in terms of both form and content. Particular emphasis is placed on representative tropes which can be connected to ethical concerns regarding the ‘museumification’ of Auschwitz, as well as wider issues within contemporary trauma theory and dark tourism research.

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The Lagermuseum

*'Seek and learn to recognize who and what,
in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno
then make them endure, give them space.'*

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Prologue

You knock – of course you knock. Curiosity is in your nature: the closed book must be opened; the twitching curtain looked behind; the sealed package calls for you to unwrap it; the letter carelessly left on a table demands to be read. And so a door marked '*Verboten*'? Of course you knock.

No answer. You try the handle but it does not want to give. Reluctantly, you walk away.

"Pssst... Pssssst."

Turning back, you find the door is now ajar though you did not see or hear it happen: the book has flown open. A voice emerges from inside the building, sputtering before it starts.

"Jubis, Posni, Doy-"

It collapses in a chorus of coughing, great grunts from the throat. You hear the strangled cry of liquid being brought up; a dollop of phlegm lands on the doorstep.

"Jubis-Polni-Doysh?" it tries again.

Your ears strain to pick out the words, which lurch uncontrollably between loud and soft, high and low. You try to pick out each syllable, test whether it can be connected to the next.

"Jüdisch? Polnisch? Deutsche?"

That's it, you realise. You step forward to get a look at the speaker but they remain just out of sight, concealed by the sliver of blackness between the door and the red brick building.

"Jüdisch? Polnisch? Deutsche?" it says again, *"oder Englisch?"*

You nod automatically.

"Okay, English." There is a pause; two hasty swallows. "I am German, for my sins, but please do not think badly of me for it – hah."

The 'hah' breaks into yet another series of coughs.

"So," the voice continues once recovered, "you knocked – what do you want?"

For a moment you forget – where you are, why you are here. It returns to you in stages: the site, the tour, this building and its number, 24a.

You ask the question.

“Ah yes, you are correct.” At last the voice crackles into life, the kindling finally taking flame. It belongs to someone older – very old – and male, you realise. It continues in a slow monotone, the drawn-out vowels punctuated by crisp consonants. “This is the gallery where the prisoners made art,” it confirms. “Or the *Lagermuseum*, as it was known. You have done some research, I think; most people do not recognise it.”

You venture a second question.

“No, no,” he says. “You are not allowed in. See the sign beside the door: ‘*Verboten*’? It means forbidden, off limits to the public. The *Lagermuseum* is not part of the tours.”

Another question.

“Why? Well you must ask staff why. No, I am not staff. I look after only this building – I am the curator, if you like – this is the word, yes?”

You hear him shift position – shuffling feet, the rustle of material – and finally you detect his outline: a hunched figure not more than five feet tall, though it would be more were he standing up straight. He is clothed in shadow and does not look at you when he speaks.

“It is not what you want to hear, is it? *Entschuldigung* – I am sorry for that. But tell me, why does it matter? You have not been shown enough of this place?”

A paper-white hand, caught in a net of black veins, appears from the darkness and gestures towards the rest of the camp.

“They took you to the gate, I assume, and around the barracks? You have seen the roll call yard, the punishment block, the uniforms, the prayer shawls? You have stood inside the gas chamber, observed the scratches on the walls? And you have seen, too, the piles of hair – and shoes and shaving brushes and prosthetic limbs and children's clothes and spectacles and so on and so on?”

Again, you nod.

“Well then,” he says, “what else can you want?”

You open your mouth but the hand flicks up, palm outwards.

“*Tsh-tsh*; I know the answer – I have met your kind before. It is not enough to take the same tour, to have the same experience as everyone else, is that correct? To only see what you have already seen in books, in photographs, in films? You want that there is something else, yes? You believe this.”

You do – although you did not realise it until now. All day you have carried the sense that there is something missing here; as though every artefact hides another just behind it, so that the more is seen, the more is lost.

“Well then,” he continues, “if you insist on viewing the artworks, perhaps it is possible that I show you. But not yet – I do not show them to the casual visitor. One hour, two hours, it will not be enough. You must come back later, when you have more time.”

The door begins to shut, only to be stopped by your words.

“Closed?” he responds. “Of course the museum will be closed; the site is always locked at night. But you look fit enough – the outer barrier is not so tall and they don't turn the fences on any more, hah. Few people want to break in here after all.”

A final question.

“When? I will let you decide when. Do not worry, I will be waiting. I am always waiting here. But now I must go inside, my eyes are not good in the sun. And you must re-join your group; they still take headcounts here, you know, hah. So, I see you later, but for now: goodbye-goodbye.”

Entrance

You return, of course you return. And once again you knock.

“Welcome!” he says, as the door swings open once more. “*Willkommen; accueil; bienvenidos; benvenuto, zapraszamy* – I can do them all, you see!”

Something has changed between this afternoon and this evening. His voice is stronger, more resonant, the tone now modulating smoothly up and down.

“You must come inside,” he says. “It is a wet night and you are shivering. We have a saying about Poland: she can be the warmest of mistresses on a summer's day but is always the coldest of wives at night. It translates well, I think?”

He stands back to let you enter, holding an arm out to wave you inside. His ease of movement tells you that he is much younger than you initially thought; he may not yet be out of his forties. Something else you did not realise: he smells. It is a noxious scent: turpentine, perhaps, or methylated spirits.

“Please watch your footing as you come in. The floor is not even and it is dark.”

You are surprised to feel your feet sink slightly as you step across the threshold; the other barracks had concrete floors. As you pass your host, it becomes apparent that you also misjudged his height before – he appears to have grown a good six or seven inches since your last encounter.

Inside the barrack all is inky blackness, save for a channel of silver coming through a window set further along the wall. The shaft of light slants downwards, the dust sifting through it like flour. It ends on the ground in a perfect square, cut through with a crucifix.

“Light bulbs are hard to source here,” he explains. “I save them for the exhibition.”

You cannot tell if the room is large or small, or how high the ceiling is. From outside, the building appeared to be two storeys high, but now you are not so sure. The air is cold but dry, like the interior of a church. It catches in your throat, as does a distinctive odour: something sweet yet fetid, animal excrement perhaps.

“I am afraid you will not find it warmer inside,” the curator is saying. “I do not heat the building: you can guess why, I expect?” He replies on your behalf: “Preservation, of course: keep a room cold as the grave and the objects in it will have the longest life. It is irony, yes?”

He places a hand on your shoulder from behind: "So, here we are."

The blood drains from your face, leaving only dizziness in its wake. You stretch an arm out to the wall to steady yourself but miss. You squat to your knees instead and bend your head low, but the smell down there is worse. Your stomach retches.

"You are not well?" the curator asks. "It is the shock, I think. It happens sometimes. I have even seen people faint here, drop straight down like corpses. You shall have a drink – some alcohol. It will warm you up."

He walks away. As he removes his hand, you feel a gust of icy wind. You gulp it down, grateful for the light relief.

The curator laughs somewhere ahead of you: "Always the same."

Slowly you stand up again, searching for him in the darkness. He reappears in the streak of moonlight falling through the window. You gasp; you cannot help it.

"What? What is that expression you are making? Ah, I see."

He turns his head towards the glass panes for a moment, allowing the light to reflect off his pale skin, picking out cavernous cheeks and eye sockets so deep they could be hollow.

"You are getting a good look at me," he says. "Certainly I do not look as healthy as I once did. But that is to be expected, no, when one works in a place such as this? For example, you have been here only five minutes and already you feel not so good!" He looks at you inquisitively: "But that is not it – what then?"

You point to his body: the striped smock and trousers; the cap and tattered boots.

"Ah, the uniform of course, I should have thought of this. The reaction is always the same. Do not be alarmed, I wear it for authenticity only: clothes are made to be worn, yes?"

He laughs – a rasp like radio static.

"You have the modern perspective, I see. But I have never understood such an approach. You want to know how the clothes looked: well then they must be on! What can they tell you in a display case: flat and empty; no arms in sleeves, no legs in trousers?"

You do not know what to say. Silence lingers, interrupted only by a heaving noise from your stomach. It spurs him into action.

"Enough of this; you must drink. I cannot watch you suffer. It is a shame we do not have the big ovens here like in the crematoria – that would warm you up!"

You stare at him, stunned.

“You do not like the joke?” he says. “It is only a little gallows humour – this is how you say it, yes? It was common here once, you know. So, you must forgive me: I am an old-timer and old habits are not easily forgotten.”

Your mind is a tangle of half-formed questions: can he be? Is it possible? No, he is too young. But the man you met earlier – or thought you met...

The curator has disappeared again. You can hear him beyond the window, rummaging around in some sort of container.

“Now, let me see what I have for you” – the clink of glass on glass – “Ah yes.”

He reappears in the light, his left arm raised. The object in his hand glitters obscenely, projecting thin needles of green, gold and pink into the room.

“It is a fine decanter, no? Austrian crystal, I believe, though that is not verified. But I have quite an eye – it is something I have developed over time. Your glass, however, will be less spectacular, I’m afraid.”

He flicks the wrist of his right hand and you realise that it, too, holds a vessel: an old jam jar. He looks at you apologetically.

“We have to make do with what we have here. Never mind. A quick blow to get the dust out – *phhhh* – and it is okay.”

He pours a cloudy liquid from the decanter into the jar.

“You will take a large measure, I think – I can see your lips are blue.”

His eyes, then, for all that they weaken in the light, have adapted to the darkness – certainly far better than yours. You clasp the jar as it is pushed into your hands. The bottom quarter where the liquid resides emits a gentle heat, making your fingers tingle. You pause.

“Why are you waiting?” the curator asks. “You are unsure of what I give you? But it is only vodka – you are in Poland, after all! But perhaps you have not seen this variety before? It is special to this region. ‘*Z Popiołów Przeklęta*’ it is called – a Polish name. I would tell you what it means in English, but it does not translate well.”

You raise the glass and sniff. Some combination of unknown herbs tickles your nasal passages. But there is something putrid beneath the overlying perfume, not unlike the smell of the building.

“So, will you drink?” your host asks. “Or are you one of those who believe it is not proper to drink in a place such as this? Will it make you feel better to say a toast to the dead first, perhaps – no? Well then-”

You drink.

“It goes down smoothly, I think, and the taste is not unbearable?”

The taste, in fact, is non-existent. But he is right about the liquid's passage: it slips down.

“Better?”

You nod, gasping as the alcohol kicks back into your gullet.

“Good. Then we can begin. So, what do you think of this room?”

You do not know what to say, given that you cannot see it.

“Not much?” he says. “It is a bit dark? Not the kind of entrance you might expect from a place of art, yes? But wait until you see what is through that door,” he gestures toward an unseen place behind him.

Something is happening inside you. The drink has not been cooled by your body. Instead it appears to be getting warmer, hot even.

“Now, of course,” the curator says, “you already know the *Lagermuseum* is not a normal gallery. Therefore we have special rules – some you will expect and others that are unique to this place. I ask that you respect them, whether you understand their purpose or not.”

You are finding it hard to focus on what he is saying with such heat now raging beneath your skin. You undo your jacket collar, hoping to let some air in.

“So, first the rules for preservation: you must finish your drink here, you must not eat and you must not smoke. How about pictures? Also no: forbidden. And you must remove your wet coat – I can see you are already, good. We are going to see original artefacts. They are not behind glass and not in frames; I do not believe in that. So we must be careful: water and paint – you can understand.”

He steps forward: “Please, your glass and coat, and your camera too if you have one.”

You are grateful for the excuse to take your jacket off. When you remove the garment you imagine (or do you see?) a cloud of steam rising. You await the cold air striking your body but it does not come.

“You have valuables in here?” the curator asks.

You shake your head.

"Fine," he replies. "I will put this on a peg to your left-hand side. Do not worry; it will be waiting for you when you come back."

You hear him move to the side, followed by what sounds like your coat pockets being rifled through before the jacket is dropped to the floor. You want to say something but are afraid to open your mouth: you are sure you would breathe fire.

"Now, the special rules," he says, suddenly in front of you again. "Most important, you must follow my instructions. Look only at what I tell you to; listen only to what I say. Anything else is *verboden*. *Ver-bo-ten*, you understand?"

You nod, though you are no longer sure that you understand anything.

"Secondly: no questions – you can ask questions at the end of the tour. These paintings, they have been waiting a long time. They have never been displayed to the public; they have never had the chance to tell their story. And so they are impatient, boisterous, and we have only so much time."

A noise like crashing waves inside your head is dwarfing all other sound. You can no longer be sure you are hearing your host correctly; what he appears to be saying makes no sense.

"You must trust me, your curator, to show you what is important. This is clear?"

You can manage only a small squeak. He takes it as agreement.

"So, we can start with the first room – follow me."

You try, stumbling forwards into the blackness, your hands outstretched, until a large rectangle of orange appears as if to guide the way. The curator's silhouette is framed in the centre of the doorway.

"Now, onwards: into the *Lagermuseum!*"

1941: Origins

The first thing you notice is the silence. As the door shuts soundlessly behind you, so, too, does the crashing in your ears cease. Your body is still warm but no longer burns. A calm feeling spreads under the surface of the skin, but is soon unsettled by the sight of the curator turning a key in the lock of the door you have just walked through.

“For security,” he explains. “We don’t want the paintings walking out with you, hah.” His voice is muffled, as though he is speaking to you from another place entirely.

“So, what do you think?” he asks.

You look around. In truth, the interior of the gallery is a disappointment – how can it be otherwise after such an introduction? Compared to the bright lights and fresh, clean walls you associate with such spaces, this room is small and dull. It is square in shape, about four metres by four. Three of the walls are mustard brown with patches of brickwork showing through where the plaster has crumbled. At the far end of the room – or perhaps halfway down – are two large off-white dust sheets, slung over a rope that runs the full width of the ceiling, concealing whatever is behind them from view. At least the floor is solid here, you think, stamping your foot. The impact makes no noise.

“You may find the acoustics in here unusual,” the curator says. But he offers no explanation for this phenomenon and puts a finger to his lips when you try to ask.

“Questions at the end,” he reminds you.

Only two pictures have been hung in the room, one each on the walls to your left and right. Not quite the expansive collection you imagined. Their contents are concealed by what look like thin woollen blankets, draped over ropes strung above the pictures. Beside them are the room’s only sources of light: two small lamps sitting on wooden stools, their crinkled pinkish-brown shades throwing out a sickly haze. There are windows here, you realise, but the panes have been painted black.

The curator shuffles to the centre of the room, into the dim strait between the two opposing pools of light.

“So, welcome to the *Lagermuseum*,” he says, tugging on the bottom of his striped shirt to straighten it and adopting a professional tone. “We will start here in the 1941 room, which I have called ‘Origins’. I begin, as you might expect, with the history of this

place. The *Lagermuseum* was established here in Auschwitz I in October 1941. This was not its original home; that was Block 6. But five months later, in March 1942, it was moved to Block 24 where it occupied this room and the one next door for the majority of its life. The *Lagermuseum* survived in some form until the camp was liberated – this is the word you use, yes? – on January 27th 1945.”

The speech is practiced, precise and without emotion. You wonder how many other people have stood where you are now.

“So, what was the *Lagermuseum*?” he continues. “Well, it was a place to display interesting memorabilia: collections of coins or stamps, for example. Also, it showed National Socialist military regalia, and some religious paraphernalia – prayer shawls, books etcetera. Also objects of value: antiques, rare documents and so on.”

You want to ask where these items were collected, and from whom, but you remember his warning about questions and hold your peace.

“The principle was to provide a place of culture – a sanctuary – for the men who had to work here. Auschwitz, as you can imagine, was a difficult job.”

Is he talking about the prisoners or the guards? Impossible to tell. What you can tell, however, is that the curator is wilting in the lamplight. The effect is surprisingly pronounced: his eyes have begun to narrow and his back is slowly hunching, as though shielding him from attack. He takes a deep breath before continuing, his voice now scratchy.

“But the *Lagermuseum* was also a place where prisoners with artistic leanings could practice. It was a gallery. But it was not a gallery for everyone, not the Jews and so on. It was for Polish inmates only. Those who were eligible could come here after their official assignments were finished in the evening or on the Sunday rest day.”

He beckons you over to the first exhibit. His step seems less sure. When he reaches the picture he grips the corner of the blanket, as if it might hold him up should he fall.

“So,” he says, “I want to show you two people central to the *Lagermuseum*’s creation. First I give you,” – he sweeps the cover away – “*Kommandant* Rudolf Höss.”

Unable to help yourself, you chuckle. After all the pomp and ceremony, you find the painting beneath the dust sheet emphatically substandard: a childish watercolour of a horse – only identifiable as a horse rather than, say, a cow because of the underlying pencil drawing visible beneath the paint. Astride this horse-cow sits a man or possibly a boy, grinning inanely at you through a red semi-circle mouth. The way the picture

has been exhibited only adds to its amateur feel: in the absence of a picture-hook and frame it has been pasted directly onto the wall, the angle squint, the glue still damp and glistening around the edges of the paper.

“You laugh?” The curator turns to you, his eyes blazing. “Why – the artist is no good?”

You try to attribute your reaction to shock but he will not be placated.

“You think it is easy to practice here,” he shouts, “with no professional materials, with only basic paint instead of oil, and with disease rife? You think you could do better?”

His face is centimetres from your own: what teeth he has are black, his breath emitting a sharp aroma. You apologise profusely; you are sorry, sorry, sorry.

The curator has exhausted himself. He stumbles backwards like a drunk until he catches the wall.

“Well,” he says, at last, “let us say no more about it.”

He readjusts his cloth cap, which came loose in the fracas. You apologise again but he ignores you and continues wheezing out his spiel.

“Here is a picture of Rudolf Höss, first and most famous *Kommandant* of KZ Auschwitz. It was done, we believe, by an unknown prisoner – a prisoner,” he emphasises, glaring at you. “We think this painting was commissioned by Höss himself, because it shows a scene from his youth. This,” he says, pointing at the black mass, “is his favourite childhood horse, as you can see in the title.”

He points to a small white information panel on the wall, to the bottom right hand side of the picture. The name is written there in German: ‘Rudolf and Hans, Riding’. You would like to ask how the title of the picture came to be known but will not risk angering the curator further.

“Höss had the foresight to see that the *Lagermuseum* could be of benefit to the Reich,” your host continues. “It became a tool in the rehabilitation of politically radical artists held in the camp. I tell you how later. But first: where did he get this idea? I show you – come.”

As you follow him to the opposite wall something at the far end of the room catches your eye – a movement? You peer at the shady corner where wall and sheet meet.

“*Achtung* – attention!” your host snaps. “Look only to me please.”

He has already exposed the second picture, the blanket now lying on the floor between you and him. The first thing you notice is the size of the image compared to that of its cover: it is tiny.

“Here,” he announces, “is the drawing which started it all.”

This second image is far superior to the first, despite being only a pencil sketch on a scrap of tracing paper. It is also of a horse – but one clearly identifiable as such this time. Only the head is depicted, the lines of the neck disappearing off the corner of the page. The muzzle sits low so that the full length of the creature’s nose and head are shown. The forelock has been swept aside to reveal a diamond in the centre of the forehead. But it is something about its position that makes the image truly arresting. The ears are pricked forward, the eyes downturned, the neck wrinkled, indicating that it is looking back at someone – at the viewer, perhaps, or a driver barking instructions as it hauls a heavy cargo. The shading supports the latter theory: the lighter touch employed just below the line of the mane suggests a slick of sweat.

“You like this one better, I think?” the curator asks, with an undertone of bitterness. You nod, a lump in your throat.

“This is a drawing by the Polish prisoner Fryderyk Tarłow,” he says. “Sometime early in 1941 – I don’t remember exactly when – *Kommandant* Höss came across a drawing by this inmate. Artistic activity was *verboten* in Auschwitz – punishable by death – but the picture was of a horse and, as you saw in the first picture, the *Kommandant* was a lover of horses.”

You look back at the first painting, at the grinning child. Your vision appears to skip for a moment; you could swear the horse-cow just tossed its head.

“Attention,” the curator says. “You will have more time to look in a moment.”

The image is now still anyway. You turn back to the drawing.

“The sight of the horse, drawn by a prisoner whom, I’ll concede, was a moderately talented artist, gave *Kommandant* Höss a marvellous idea. Therefore instead of beating or killing the inmate, as was his right, he instead made him Head Curator of the *Lagermuseum* – the project inspired by this picture.”

The information panel for the drawing identifies it as ‘The Feeding Horse’. You study the head again. Nothing about the animal’s position suggests that it is eating. The size listed on the panel is incorrect too: it claims the piece of paper to be thirty centimetres

by twenty, when clearly it is much smaller. Confused, you look from the description to the image and then back again.

“Sorry, sorry – this is incorrect.”

The curator barges past you and tears off the cardboard panel, leaving a strip of residue caught in the paste. He holds up the piece of card, pinched between two thin forefingers. As he does so, you can’t help but check for tattooed numbers on his forearm. There are none.

“You must excuse that it is somewhat haphazard. I have had little time to prepare.”

You reassure him that you do not mind, but he is already retreating back into the shade. Something appears to have unsettled him – he glances all around as though expecting a wild animal to leap out.

“I will leave you now,” he mutters. “I must make sure the next room is ready – we don’t want any more mistakes. I will fetch you when it is time to enter – do not come before that, understand?”

You stare at him – what are you meant to do here while he is gone? Meekly, you ask him if he will not stay, tell you more about the pictures.

“They will tell you themselves,” he shrugs. “But again I remind: do not look at anything I have not already shown you – most important.”

With that, and before you can ask what he means, he disappears behind the curtains.

You decide to re-examine the first picture. You stare at it, determined to find some redeeming quality. But it only worsens on second viewing: the over-blue sky; the lurid green field; what you assume to be forest in the background – straight vertical lines demarking trunks, round scribbles for foliage; and those clumsy central figures. The horse-cow snorts and steps to the side, as though offended by your thoughts. The boy, surprised by the movement, tangles his hands around the reins and digs his heels into the creature’s sides.

You stumble backwards. But the picture does not stop moving – more, the boy begins calling to the horse:

“*Stetig, Hans, stetig.*”

The voice – crisp, clear and at full volume – shatters the quiet of the room. You spin around, searching for an alternate speaker concealed behind a door or curtain. In the far corner, beside the long white sheets, you spot a dark figure crouching – perhaps

the curator has sneaked back in. You call out to him, but he does not respond or make a movement. You walk towards him, but as you draw closer you see it is not a man at all, but a wooden statue of a boy, seated. The head turns as you approach; the mouth – devoid of tongue or teeth - opens as if to speak.

Terrified, you back away. But from behind you now there is a rustling sound. Turning, you see the drawing of the horse's head has disappeared. In its place, a ball of paper is slowly unfurling on the wall. As it opens up, another pencil sketch of a horse emerges – the whole animal this time, with its head bowed. The information panel has reappeared too. You cannot read it from where you stand, but you can guess the image will have been re-christened 'The Feeding Horse'.

You consider running through the curtain to find the curator, but who knows what horrors lie through there? The entrance you came in by is locked, you know, but still you run to the door and try it. As it refuses to yield, an involuntary moan escapes your lips. You press your forehead against the wall beside the door, put your hands over your ears and squeeze your eyelids shut.

When you open your eyes you find another pair looking back. Or rather, not looking back, but off to your right hand side, as though unaware of your presence. Recoiling, you see that a full portrait is in the process of appearing. Colours – oils paints this time – swirl around an unframed canvas. As they collide with each other new tints and shades and shades are formed, which settle into place one by one. The woman's eyes are soon joined by pale skin, a headdress of some kind, a straight nose, and lips smiling benignly. She is clothed in silk robes, her left arm wrapped around her middle. In the crook of her elbow rests a white rat-like creature; her right hand caresses its neck.

Back in the centre of the room – the only apparent safe spot – you move in a slow circle, taking it all in: the animated *Kommandant*, still steadying his steed; the young lady with her unusual pet; 'The Feeding Horse', its nose to the grass; and the figure in the corner, sitting on his stump. As you turn and turn again you hear a low murmur, as though several people are talking all at once. It rises in volume as you spin – faster, faster, faster – until it becomes an assault of words and voices, all clamouring to be heard.

"Me, look at me!"

"Hi – here!"

"This way! This way!"

“Over here!”

What choice do you have but to oblige them – but where to begin? You stop and open your eyes – you did not realise you had closed them. You find you are staring at the *Kommandant* and the horse-cow. The other voices call out objections as you step towards the picture, but reduce to a simmering grumble then fall silent, resigned to waiting their turn. The boy’s mouth changes from a semi-circle to a U-shape as you approach. But he does not speak himself. Instead a whole new voice emerges, directing your view.

'Rudolf and Hans, Riding'

Unknown Artist / Watercolour on Paper / 60cm x 30cm / Circa January 1941 / Origin: Auschwitz I

The boy sits astride his horse. The day is crisp and cool – see the blue wash colouring the air and that light frost trimming the grass? Two funnels of steam pour from the animal's nostrils, one from the young man's mouth. These exhalations curl together in large white puffs that drift slowly skywards. It is quiet, so quiet that you can hear each hoof strike the ground with a dull *thwack* as the horse shifts its weight from foot to foot. The field is fringed on its farthest edge by dense forest, a tangle of brown and green and grey. But here in the sunshine all is colour. Wild flowers peer lazily through the grass, nodding yellow and purple heads to the breeze. Behind the young man and his oversize pet, a silver river cuts through the meadow, gurgling delightedly as it catches the sunlight in its ripples.

Rudolf looks rather grand straddling this fine animal, doesn't he? Observe how high he holds his chin – such a regal look for one not more than twelve or thirteen years old. The horse, too, has a noble gait, despite being only around fifteen hands tall. It helps, of course, that he is black and sleek, and his neck is held fully upright. This latter feature is the boy's doing – how tightly he holds the reins, not giving an inch no matter how hard the horse strains.

This scene appears simple, straightforward and serene – and yet if you look hard enough something does not seem quite right. There is a darkness creeping over. Is it that the sun has been caught out by a passing cloud, scattering careless shadows across an otherwise perfect vista; or that the image itself is dimming, as though someone is shading it in gently with a pencil? But perhaps it is that large thicket in the background: was it always that overbearing or is it, can it be, growing?

Whatever the cause, it is clear that the horse does not like it: he rears without warning. Rudolf reacts quickly, pushing his feet down on the stirrups so that for a single, still-frame moment he stands upright against the creature's back.

"Hans!" he cries. "*Stetig, Hans!*"

As the horse's front legs hit the ground, Rudolf is thrown forwards. His head crashes violently against the creature's neck, bursting his lip. Blood pours into the black mane, matting the wire strands together. The horse breaks into a gallop. With the actions of

an experienced rider, Rudolf presses his knees against the Hans' stomach and knots his fingers into the coarse, wet tresses. They streak across the landscape; the field, the thicket all racing the other way. Rudolf topples from side to side like a rowing boat on a rolling ocean, as they race towards – what is that? A black shape looming in the distance; the skeleton of a high gate, letters carved along the top.

Something else is happening: they are starting to alter. See how Rudolf's legs are stretching further down the animal's sides? His body is longer and his torso wider. His clothes are changing too: where once were shorts, socks wrinkled around the ankles, braces, a short-sleeved shirt, now there are dark trousers tucked into gleaming riding boots, a black jacket with silver buttons and a peaked cap. The horse is also growing: to sixteen, seventeen, eighteen hands. And gone is the black hide, replaced with a deep, shimmering chestnut.

Instead of hugging tightly to the horse's neck, Rudolf now grabs at the reins. He leans forwards, keeping his back straight as a yard stick. The animal froths at the mouth as Rudolf urges him on.

"Vorwärts! Vorwärts!"

The wind screams as it catches the trees between its fingers, shaking the branches. The forest takes on the appearance of a baying crowd, cheering as this strange couple approaches the enormous iron gate. There are fences either side of it, at least four metres high; line after line of barbed wire strung between concrete posts. There is fear in the horse's eyes; it tosses its head right, left, back – it bellows. But Rudolf won't let it stop. He thrashes its flank with his whip, steering it directly towards the entrance. He flattens himself against the horse's body as it leaps into the air-

What has happened? Where are they? The image has gone black. But wait – there in the top right-hand corner, can you see it, that prick of gold? It divides, bleeding into two horizontal strips, growing slowly thicker. Now they explode, so that all at once there is nothing but light. The picture goes black again.

When the eyelids reopen – for these are eyelids, don't you think; we are seeing what someone else sees? – we find that we are lying, face up, on a floor. The sun, which before seemed to be sitting on our chest, has shot up and out through the window of a wall positioned at a right angle to ourselves. The golden sphere shimmers mischievously, as though it has been there all along.

Now what is this? A tongue emerges to probe a thin crust at the edge of the lips – our lips. The dried snail’s trail cracks as the mouth stretches into a yawn. And we can feel fingers digging into palms as they ball into tight fists then tentatively unfurl. We look down, our hands patting all over the upper body, as though checking everything is still in place: the black jacket, the silver buttons, the waistband, the buckle. There can be no doubt about it, can there? We have entered the body of the Kommandant.

The sun is not done mocking Rudolf, is still fluttering its rays directly into his eyes. The head turns to the right, then left, giving us a view of his surroundings. On the other side of the room, through an open doorway, is what looks to be a washroom: a tiled off-white floor, an enamel sink and toilet, both with rusting pipes attached. And here where we are: the bottom drawer of a grey metal filing cabinet, the legs of a table – no, a desk, for it has side and back boards. Some sort of work space then. Right next to us is a wooden chair, turned on its side. Presumably this relates to the Kommandant ending up on the floor. Did he fall asleep in it and topple over? Or enter the room in a rush and crash straight into it? Not a suicide attempt, surely? No, there is no rope around our neck.

Rudolf is reaching up now, his arms flailing like a child begging to be taken out of its cot. He grabs the chair and raises himself into a sitting position – oh, how the head rages! A fresh surge sees him get to his feet, upturn the chair and sit on it in one fluid movement. This effort exhausts him: he puts his elbows on the table, allows his head to drift into his hands.

“Ouch.”

The source of this ‘ouch’ is obvious from this angle isn’t it? In front of us on the desk we can now see an empty bottle of vodka and a drained tumbler. The lid of the bottle has disappeared – we cannot see where – and the acrid stench of alcohol fills the air.

But wait, we are moving again. Rudolf’s eyes roam the room, while his hands begin a frantic dance, patting his chair, the desk, the piles of papers stacked upon it, then his chest and trouser pockets, unbuttoning the jacket to check inside. Whatever he is looking for is gone. He crosses his arms and slumps over again, releasing a low moan.

Yet abruptly the head shoots up again – don’t you wish he would stop jolting around like this? His right hand slides open the top right-hand drawer of the nut brown desk. The scrape of wood against the metal tracks makes him – us – wince. He peers inside hesitantly, as though expecting a monster to leap out. Then a smile: success! He

extracts a photograph. So this is what he has been searching for. He places it on the desk, giving us – himself – a better view of it.

Would it be fair to say that it's somewhat hard to see why the misplacement of this particular photograph caused such excitement? For the black-and-white image is only of a gap-toothed boy, around twelve years old, in a shirt and breeches, sitting astride a black horse, out riding on a sunny day – ah, but of course.

"Hans," the Kommandant says, just as we make the connection.

So it was a dream before, yes? Rudolf was dreaming.

Are those tears forming in his – our – eyes? Do you think we are still drunk? Certainly it seems a strange reaction. If we are where we think we are, and the time is when we think it is, then Rudolf must be, what, thirty-nine, forty at most? And consider: have we seen any evidence in this office of Rudolf having a familial life outside? We have not. The desk is empty, save for a black metal typewriter, and a small lamp with a papery brown shade. There are no framed photographs: no wife or children, girlfriend, mother or father, brothers and sisters; not even a holiday with friends by, say, Lake Constance or Baden-See. The walls, too, are bare; the drawers – what we have seen of them – devoid of trinkets. There is no drawing in a child's hand, no love letter or embroidered handkerchief. Instead we have only this full-grown man, cooing sweetly as he traces his finger down the nose of a two-dimensional horse.

But all at once, Rudolf is no longer looking at the picture. Instead his attention has been caught by the papers on his desk. Presumably they were once stacked, but they now lay fanned across the surface. Documents listing numbers and names, all arranged in neat, straight columns. Many of these names are repeated vertically down the page, separated by a comma from another, different one. But can they really be names? Have you ever seen such combinations of letters? If we try to say them, as Rudolf is trying now, don't they wriggle on our tongue like little fish? A 'z' beside a 'k', for example – what are we to do with such a combination? Is it 'zek', 'zik', 'zuck', or perhaps a less plosive 'tsuck'?

Rudolf shakes his head. He picks up the papers and shuffles them back into a neat tower. But now we feel the muscles in the face harden. The smile becomes a frown as he peers at the sealed envelope beneath the bottom sheet. He looks all around the room, taking in the washroom, the filing cabinet, and the door to his office. He walks over to check it and finds it unlocked – another groan. We can guess what he is

wondering: when was this letter delivered and what state did the deliverer find him in? His face heats up; he is embarrassed. He tears open the letter, sitting down on the chair again before he reads it. The message is typed on a neat rectangle of paper, the Death's Head badge at the top of the page:

Kommandant Höss,

24 January 1941

Confirmation that the inspection of Reichsführer Himmler will take place 1 March, 1941, at 0900 hours. During inspection, plans for future development of Auschwitz site will be discussed. The Reichsführer has expressed discontent with the progress made in the nine months since your appointment, particularly as regards the public face of the camp. Therefore I remind you of the importance of this visit, and the need to make full account of actions taken.

SS-Gruppenführer Glücks

Amt D: Konzentrationslagerwesen

Inspektion der Konzentrationslager (IKL)

Rudolf's elbows slip further apart on the desk as his head lowers once more to the wood surface. The forearms follow, toppling over the tower of paper as they drop. White sheets ghost to the floor and settle as we close our eyes again.

'Lady with an Ermine'

Szymon Zaczek / Oil on Paper / 100cm x 80cm / Circa February 1941 /
Origin: Kraków

The umbrellas are out in Kraków this evening. The streets of the Olsza region glisten, slippery, slick. The gutters have been caught unawares by the downpour, are choking up what they cannot swallow. And so the road has become a shallow river, the motorcars like boats with headlights seeking dry land. It reminds me of a Pissarro canvas: *'Boulevard Montmartre la nuit.'* Something about the angle I'm observing it from, or perhaps the haziness of the image – the way the fog appears carried by the water, the people slipping in and out of its folds like gleaming fish. Pissarro rendered his scene in deep blues, the pavement silver, the buildings olive green. But this is Olsza, poor Olsza, so there is only grey.

"I told him to put it up his own arsehole!"

A chorus of laughter returns me to the room. Turning from the window I see Esther throw back her head to shoot another glass of vodka, her crowd of bawdy admirers taking this as their cue to do the same. She is still in her shabby nightgown – she did not get dressed again today. She holds court, my forty year-old dirty Venus, with her knotted hair and over-sized breasts. Neither is she wearing a brassiere, I realise. The lamplight has made her gown quite see-through, the dark circles of her nipples clear through the once-white linen. I could go over there, pull the blanket on her lap up to her shoulders, but she'd only tear it off again. 'What – don't you like women, *kochanie?*' she'd say, jiggling her shoulders, her eyes aflame.

They are sitting in a circle, all of them. Gustav, our old professor from the Academy of Fine Arts, who no longer takes off his flat cap when he comes round – not since Esther told him that, since she was no lady, he'd be an idiot to catch his death of cold on her behalf. Then there's what remains of us, his former students: myself; Lisser with his sullen scowl – "fit only for sucking lemons!" Esther had declared when she first met him; Herschel, who can only smile like a lunatic in her presence; and Dietmar, who remains only and eternally interested in the drink.

Esther has them all bundled up as cosily as she can in the absence of a fire. Herschel, Lisser and Gustav are lined up awkwardly on the mattress of our small metal bed – she's turned it to the less stained side I notice, touched by the gesture. Dieter,

meanwhile, has been provided with our folded up towel to sit on, and the bed sheet to wrap around his shoulders. In her only concession to being the woman of the house, Esther sits on our one chair – its identical twin and the accompanying breakfast table long-since sold off.

“Now then gentlemen,” she announces, “it’s that time.”

The circle groans as she produces the old biscuit tin from beneath her seat and removes the lid.

“Hands nice and high when you drop it,” she says. “I don’t want anyone filching money like last week.”

Our eyes all flock to Dietmar, who keeps his trained on his knees.

“Szymon, don’t think I can’t see you hiding by the window,” she says. “Come join us.”

I obey, taking my usual place on the floor between her legs. I lean my head back into her warm crotch and look up.

“There, isn’t that better?” she says, winking.

She passes me the tin. I pull a coin out of my overcoat pocket and throw it in with an elaborate flourish, before handing it to Dietmar, who hesitates.

“Come on, Dete,” Esther chides. “Witek will not be denied.”

Sighing, he makes a point of holding his hand aloft, so we can all see his coin drop. Then Herschel obediently adds his coin to the little stash.

“Witek should try living as we do before demanding we fund more of his crazy resistance schemes,” Lisser grumbles as he adds his contribution.

“Vell vy don’t you complain to ‘*Chef der Sicherheitspolizei*’ Heydrich?” I joke, putting on my best German accent. “I’m sure our Good Friends ze Gestapo would love to hear all your grievances – *ja?*”

As the group laughs and Lisser continues to scowl, I stretch my legs out into the centre of the circle. My shoes carve two narrow pathways between the usual detritus: burned-out matches, newspapers, cigarette butts, a few leftover leaflets.

“Idiot,” Herschel hisses, as I take out his glass with my left foot.

Above us, pegged up on string, hang the drying portraits that I will take to town this week: ten copies of Cecelia, the ‘Lady with an Ermine,’ all in the same pose and holding the same pet to her chest. This uniform line of beauty is blacked out by the lunar eclipse of Esther’s head leaning in for a kiss. Her breath is full-flavoured, sharp and sweet like aniseed.

"That was a good night," Gustav says, as I arrive at the little plaza just along from the old Czartoryski Museum.

I set my load down; it hits the ground with a clang. Gustav begins disassembling the cargo as I stretch: the plastic cover, the metal frame, the cardboard tubes, the easel and the stool. The walk down Rakowicka felt longer than usual this morning. It always does on a Monday, after a Sunday spent replenishing my stocks, followed by an evening's drinking and plotting with these men. And then of course there was Esther to keep happy after that. I smile as I think of her, twisting and jerking beneath me like a rabbit in a net. She had not wanted me to leave this morning.

"Stay with me, kochanie," she had said, strands from her long braid fanning out on the pillow. "I'll cancel everyone today."

"Oh, you don't want to eat tonight?" I'd replied playfully, pinching her inner thigh. "Well then, alright--"

She had thrown the blanket at me. "Go on, get out!" she'd laughed. "And don't come back without my supper!"

"Yes, my lady," I'd said, bowing low.

She'd followed me to the door unclothed, her shanks swaying from side to side, her skin puckering with the cold.

"You must visit Witek today," she'd said. "He has more pamphlets for us."

"That man will be the death of us," I'd groaned. "We only just got away with distributing the last lot."

"He says he might give a talk next week."

"That would be well-timed. Morale is flagging."

As I'd opened the door she'd grabbed me, spun me round and kissed me hard, grabbing my backside with both hands as she did so. God knows what Pani Bobinski made of it as she trotted past our doorway and down the stairs.

Gustav has his nose in my lunch bag already, having somehow sniffed it out amongst the pile of baggage. I begin setting up my stand, propping my section of chain-link fence next to his against the wall. Once he has decided my lump of cheese and cut of bread are no better than his, he returns to helping me.

"You got here early today," I say, nodding at his already decorated stand.

"Still not early enough to beat Michał," he replies.

Michał has, indeed and as usual, secured himself prime position at the head of the line, nearest to St Florian's Gate. He does not come over to help but lifts a hand in greeting, lowering it quickly when it elicits no response.

"One day, old man," I tell Gustav. "That Jew luck of his can't last forever."

"But why is he not in the ghetto yet?" he gripes.

"He's probably feeding our Good Friends information," I say.

"Fuck!" Lisser declares, walking through the archway. "I was sure I would get here before you, at least, Szymon."

"Esther must be getting bored of him," Herschel adds, just behind. "She is letting him sleep at night."

We exchange handshakes as they take up the fourth and fifth spots in the courtyard.

"Good night, last night," Lisser says.

"That's what I told him," Gustav replies.

"A step ahead of me too, are you, Prof?"

"Don't call me that," Gustav says sharply.

Lisser shrugs an apology, but looks pleased to have unsettled our usually unflappable ex-teacher.

"So," Herschel says, keen as ever to defuse the tension. "What do we think: Eze last or Dietmar?"

We release collective snorts. Sure enough Eze, our thirty-two year-old man-child, waddles past a minute or two later. His equipment trundles after him, transported in a little wooden cart.

"*Whhhew*," Herschel whistles. "Where did you find that?"

"Made it," Eze says, proudly.

"Did your Mama help you?" Lisser asks, sarcastically.

"Yeah," Eze replies, oblivious.

"It looks good, Eze," I tell him, frowning at Lisser.

"Very impressive boy," Gustav agrees. He claps his nephew on the shoulder.

"Thanks, Uncle," he replies, grinning his thick-as-pig-shit grin.

Conversation stops as preparations take over. The fences are placed in position, the stools, easels, pencils and sketchpads set out in front of them, along with signs offering portraits and caricatures 'while you wait' (in German, of course: '*während Sie warten*').

The paintings are unsheathed from their cardboard tubes and rolled the other way to uncurl them before being pegged up on the stands.

My stall is comprised entirely of our faithful bestseller: five hand-painted reproductions of Leonardo da Vinci's 'Lady with an Ermine.' Lisser and Gustav have followed suit, though Herschel and Michał have been more adventurous, adding a copy Raphael's 'Portrait of a Young Man' and Rembrandt's 'Landscape with Good Samaritan,' respectively, to their displays. Once in place it will be as though the pages of a giant catalogue have been pasted onto the Old Town's protective wall, advertising the former highlights of the Czartoryski Museum, now closed and long-since plundered. The one exception will be Eze's stall, populated only with his gurning caricatures.

"Here he comes," Lisser announces.

Dietmar appears inside the gateway. He lumbers along the line, his face beet red, forehead glistening. His luggage is hooked over his elbows rather than his shoulders and hangs off his lower back. He bends forwards like a man four times older than his twenty years. I hear him panting as he passes.

"Good God, Dietmar," Gustav says.

"Quiet," he wheezes.

He hauls his pack into place at the end of the line with a grunt.

"Well that's my sales gone for the day," he says, searching his pocket for a cigarette. "And no need to remind me how much I drank last night."

"You can take the boy out of the Academy-" starts Lisser.

He is silenced by a four-fold: "*Shhhhhhh!*"

"Sorry," he says, looking around. "I don't think anyone heard."

All we can do now is watch, wait, and try to keep the cold out. Gustav sits on his stool, stamping his feet every so often, while the rest of us bob up and down or walk small circles, trying to stop the blood from freezing. We keep our caps low on our heads, our chins tucked into our upturned collars like roosting birds.

The people have started to arrive: first the Poles, who scuttle through St Florian's gate with their eyes to the ground, cutting the most direct route to their respective workplaces. They will spend the day keeping the economy afloat for their new German masters, before departing the way they came at the close of day. No use looking for a

customer among them. Instead we keep our eyes peeled for a military uniform, or off-duty garb – the Germans set apart from their Polish servants by neat tailoring, high-shine boots, and a more leisurely pace. If they are accompanied by a woman wearing a snatch of fur, lace, or even gloves then all the better.

“Come on. Come on,” Lisser growls.

“Patience,” Gustav counsels.

My thoughts turn to Esther. Did she return to her slumber after seeing me off? I imagine the wire frame of the bed squealing as she sits on the mattress and pushes her feet back under the blanket. Without my body heat to warm her, she’ll shiver beneath the thin wool cover, cursing the window I have instructed her to leave open so the remaining canvases can dry. Or did she slam it shut the second I closed the front door? Yes, that is more likely. She will have fallen asleep, smiling at her defiance, her nose twitching from the scent of paint, causing violent, colourful dreams.

But perhaps she has stayed up; who knows when her first customer will arrive, after all? I can see her now, sitting at the kitchen table, her wan face made yet more ghostly by the half-light stealing through the dusty windowpane. She will smoke a cigarette in the absence of breakfast, or perhaps help herself to another sip of vodka – ‘Just to warm the morning.’ She will be wearing my other pair of socks, curling her toes up inside them as she waits for a knock on the door.

“Look lively!” Hershel calls.

A group of off-duty German soldiers, Polish girls hanging off their arms, walk through the gate. The artists spring to attention.

Michał, being at the head of the queue, is the first of us to secure a commission – but only after the German officer who made the approach has taken a good look at his papers.

“What did I tell you?” I whisper to Gustav. “See that extra letter he gave him? I bet it’s got our Good Friends’ stamp on it – the rat.”

“Betraying his own – a *griever*,” Gustav snorts, “that’s what the Germans call them, don’t they?”

The girl sits on the stool and arranges her skirts around herself like a moorhen fussing with her nest. She giggles nervously as Michał begins to sketch. He draws a soft, vertical line down the centre of the page, followed by three parallel diagonal ones

cutting across it. He sets the eye in the centre of the vertical axis, the right further up the second diagonal. He marks out the extension of the nose then adds the crown of the skull, the hairline and the forehead. It is all good practice, but so familiar that it makes my fingers ache. The girl's picture will depict her *contrapposto*, looking just outside of the frame – a carbon copy of the position of the young Cecelia looking over Michał's shoulder.

"A caricature; how much?"

A second Polish girl is staring at Eze, who keeps his mouth clamped shut.

"He is mute, lady," Gustav interjects. "But I can assist you."

"*Er Kann nicht sprechen?*" the officer next to her says, eyeing Eze suspiciously. "*Ein Dummkopf?*"

"Please lady, tell him no," Gustav pleads once she translates. "Not an imbecile – as he can see from the pictures – just without words."

She repeats this to the officer, who says something I don't catch and then laughs. The girl laughs too, though rather more frantically.

"He says of course he is an imbecile; us Poles are all imbeciles."

Gustav laughs too, nodding at the officer.

"Tell him he is a piece of shit," he says to the girl.

She smiles, wryly: "How about I just give him your friend's price instead?"

"Alright."

"Gustav shouldn't help him," Lisser grumbles to me. "Eze's a dead man anyway – sooner or later they'll realise he's an idiot and ship him off."

"Don't ever let Gustav hear you say that," I warn.

Around lunchtime, I leave my stall in the professor's charge and head towards the heart of the Old Town. Świętego Jana used to bristle with people, veering from shop window to shop window or bar to bar, dodging the long rods of the pretzel vendors and the amber sellers' makeshift stalls. Now people walk only in a straight line, their heads down and their pace rapid. Rynek Główny, too, is but a pale imitation of a central square, its main populace a troop of German *Heer* soldiers performing drills by the town hall tower. Most of the restaurants that used to line the plaza have closed; the ones that remain only have officers as clients. But the most distressing sight remains the closed doors of Kościół Mariacki.

“Birds fall from the sky.”

Esther’s voice, thick with schnapps and awe, penetrates my memory as I walk past the old church. I took her there once in the early days, before the invasion, after she complained she only ever saw me in bed. She stood inside the entranceway, staring open-mouthed at the painted flowers covering the walls, the kaleidoscope windows.

“Some of Poland’s greatest artists worked on this place,” I’d informed her. “Many of them from the Academy I go to: Jan Matejko, Stanisław Wyspiański, Józef Mehoffer.”

She’d said nothing, instead tilting her head back slowly to take in the church’s vaulted ceiling: a rich ultramarine colour dotted with golden stars.

“They say it’s so convincing that when birds get trapped inside they become confused,” I’d said. “Some hit this sky at such speed that they drop down dead.”

“Birds fall from the sky.”

She had been impressed, too, by the altar: Wita Stwosch’s oak and lime wood tribute to the Mother Mary, smiling patiently through the Annunciation, the Pentecost, the Assumption, the Coronation and the Sorrow.

“Why does she always look like that?” Esther had asked.

“Like what?”

“Like she never saw a prick in her life.”

“She’s the Virgin, Esther.”

“Who says – she had a child, didn’t she?”

The long queue for the confessional booth had not deterred from dragging me in there before we left, loudly proclaiming her sins as I fumbled clumsily with her skirts:

“And then I – ooh – Let me tell you...”

I cross the square, skirting around the dark red stains that signify fallen countrymen. As I approach Witek’s block, I think again of those three great artists: Matejko, Wyspiański and Mehoffer. All of them mavericks in their own way; art and opposition, hand in hand. The former two never saw an un-partitioned, unconquered Poland in their lifetime. Mehoffer, meanwhile – like Gustav – grew up under occupation, but then saw twenty years of independence before it was snatched away again. Is the current invasion easier or harder for them, I wonder, than it is for my own generation, born into that sliver of freedom?

I ring the bell of the apartment block four times in quick succession then hold it down for a count of five. I see the curtain one floor up move as Witek's bald head appears at the window. He looks at me, then up and down the street to check it's clear. I hear his footsteps on the stairs and imagine him reaching down the back of his suit trousers as he approaches. I crouch, pretending to tie my shoe. My overcoat swings open, shielding the letterbox at the base of the door. As the pamphlets appear I shove them into the large inner pocket.

"Esther says you may give a talk," I say to the slot. "I think it is a good idea. The others are...nervous."

"I will let you know when. Go safely, brother," he replies, following it up a moment later with: "Tell Esther hello."

When I arrive back at the courtyard, I find my stand has been moved to second last in line, behind both Lisser and Herschel.

"Sorry – I got a commission," Gustav shrugs, pointing to his customer.

"I tried to stop them," Dietmar says, nodding at the two culprits as I take up my new place beside him.

"Good of you," I say.

"I didn't want you as competition," he sniffs.

I look at Herschel and Lisser and brandish my fist. The former avoids my gaze; Lisser only smirks. The stalls are busier now, at least. Two couples are wandering up and down in front of the pictures, while a third man watches from the opposite pavement.

"He's been there ten minutes now," Dieter says of the lone figure.

I nod, and try not to look.

One of the couples stops at the end of the line, the girl throwing her hands up as if in surrender. She says something in German, causing her officer friend to laugh.

"She is saying how can she tell which artist is best when they have all made the same picture," Herschel whispers.

I ignore him, still smarting from his betrayal.

"He says she should choose the cheapest then, and he can buy her dinner later," he persists, desperate to make peace.

"You, what is your price for a painting?" the girl asks me.

She is older than most, I realise – Polish too, naturally. Her hair is the alarming shade of copper that suggests onion dye. It has been smoothed with some sort of serum before being pinned to the head. She wears pink rouge, rose-coloured lipstick, and petroleum jelly on her eyebrows. Her face has been dusted over with ivory powder, which has settled into the lines around her mouth like little cracks. It looks as though she has been painted then left out in the sun to dry too long.

I give her a price.

“I will undercut him, Madam. Ten per cent,” chips in Dietmar.

The woman looks delighted to have two men competing for her attention – more so when Herschel joins the fold.

“I can give you a second picture for half the price, lady – one for your friend and one for you.”

“I will sell both for less,” says Lisser.

“*Beeile dich*,” the officer urges the girl.

She looks back at him and then at us: “Look, I do not have time to waste – who will give me the best price?”

“I will.”

“No me.”

“No, me.”

“Which painting are you interested in?” I ask her.

“This one.” She points to the ‘Lady with an Ermine.’

“A fine choice: they say the Führer has this same piece – the original, I mean.”

“Hitler has this?” she says.

“*Was?*” The officer’s eyes light up at the mention of the name.

She repeats what I have said to him and – success – he walks over to my stall. I watch the other artists beat a slow retreat. Lisser swears loudly; I smirk at him.

The officer studies each image at my stall carefully – rather too carefully, considering they are all one and the same. He asks the girl something.

“He wants to know if you studied?”

My blood freezes. Out of the corner of my eye I see Lisser, Herschel, Dietmar and Gustav become rigid too. Even Eze looks nervous – if only because everyone else does.

Holding my voice level, I reply: “Tell him no, I am self-taught.”

She repeats this to the officer.

“He says are you sure – they look professional?”

“Tell him I thank him for his compliment, but no.”

As the officer and the girl walk away down Świętego Jana, my painting tucked beneath his arm, Lisser turns on me.

“What are you trying to do – see us all sent to the Monte?”

“It is not my fault he appreciates talent.”

“It will be your fault if your vanity lands us all in prison!”

“Quiet,” I caution him. “Keep your voice down.”

“He does have a point Szymon,” Herschel says, timidly. “I mean, it was you who said we should not make the pictures look too professional, so they wouldn’t know we were from the Acad-”

“Don’t say it,” I snap.

“Or was that just a trick so you could steal all our sales?” Lisser interjects.

“Be quiet!”

Gustav is amongst us, a hand on mine and Lisser’s shoulders.

“If you want to continue this discussion,” he says, “you need to take it indoors – otherwise we’ll all be having it at Dom Śląski with our Good Friends.”

My eyes look to the spot across the street to where the single man has been standing. He is gone now.

“Gustav is right,” I say, my shoulders dropping. “I am sorry, Lisser.”

“You will be,” he replies, shaking free of Gustav’s grip.

He returns to his stall and begins packing up for the day: unpegging the paintings, rolling them and forcing them roughly back into their cardboard tubes.

“The life of the intellectual in modern Poland,” I quip to Gustav.

“Don’t make yourself a liability,” the old man cautions, his voice unusually gruff, his eyes still focused on Lisser. “You will find yourself short of friends if you do.”

“Witek misses you,” I call to Esther, once she lets me in the door.

I had to wait for her last customer to leave; she is wiping her legs with the towel as I enter.

“I’m sure he does,” she says, kissing me on the cheek. “How is the old, bald bastard?”

“Productive,” I respond, putting the leaflets down on the table. “How are we going to get rid of these?”

She comes over and takes a look.

“We’ll find a way. They look good, don’t they? Professional – Związek Walki Zbrojnej is a good name. ‘ZWZ’ has a nice sound.”

“I don’t think we should invite Lisser to the meetings anymore,” I tell her.

“Why?”

“We had another argument today – I beat him to a sale. I’m worried he’ll turn.”

“Commerce ruins good men, kochanie,” she says, wagging her finger. “But better to keep him close. Perhaps Witek can get some sense into him when he gives his talk.”

“Hmm.”

Tired of talking about Lisser, I grab her around the waist from behind and perch my chin on her shoulder.

“And how about you: did you pick up any good German secrets while you were being drilled?”

“Nothing – only a sore cunt and a few złoty to report.”

“Those shits.”

“Well at least their money’s good,” she says, pointing to the coins on the table.

I notice a small bunch of flowers lying there too. They have been handpicked, the soil still clinging to the ends of the stems.

“From a customer?” I say, raising my eyebrows.

“Herschel, if you can believe it. He brought them over on his way to work this morning. ‘Eta’,” she apes, ““thank you most sincerely for your hospitality yesterday evening.””

“That sneak, why didn’t he just give them to me to pass on?”

She laughs: “Where – in the plaza? You want to be shot as a pervert as well as an egghead?”

“It is fair point. Still, I should be the one bringing you flowers.”

“That’s what I told Herschel. So I said he’s to keep doing it until you start. In fact, I told him I’m going call him ‘Husband’ from now on too. Then you might finally marry me.”

“Always the same,” I joke, putting my pay down on the table next to hers. “You bring a woman money and she wants flowers; you bring her flowers and she wants a ring.”

“You don’t think I deserve a ring?” she says saucily, pressing her backside against my crotch.

“Oh you deserve many things,” I respond, slapping her behind.

She shrieks and turns to face me, her eyes full of mischief. I catch her wrist before she can slap me back and waltz her around the room.

“But who marries their Muse, after all?” I say.

“Some Muse,” she laughs. “When did you ever paint a single one of those ‘studies’ you used to do of me? I’m obviously no Cecily Gerundi, or whatever her name is.”

“And thank God for that,” I retort, pulling her in for a kiss.

Esther falls straight asleep after dinner, curled up like an old cat on the mattress, snoring. I pad to the chair by the window and the light of the streetlamps, and sit there with my old sketchbook on my lap. But I don’t open it; instead I imagine its contents, the pictures I used to draw.

I liked to sketch Esther lying back on the bed, reclining on an elbow. One leg would be draped carelessly over the other, her hand poised on her knee as though she might pull them open them at any moment. Or sometimes standing bolt upright, her arms stretched above her head as though mid-yawn. Her breasts would be lifted, her sex exposed, the round pot of her belly hanging down.

But however I drew her, I would always leave her outline somehow incomplete: a leg with no foot, an arm without a hand, a breast with no companion. And the face was always expressionless. The dashes of the eyes, mouth and nose begged me to elaborate, to place whatever countenance I wanted there. But each time I tried, I found it was only my own desire mirrored back at me in that face. This is the very essence of Esther, I have decided, the thing that keeps me coming back and back again: unknowable high seductress; unmanageable defeater of men.

I open the sketchbook. Cecelia Gallerani stares out of the page, smiling patiently, forever avoiding eye contact. I flick through the pages from back to front, each one the same, the same. But with my finger, over each I trace the outline of the woman that used to be there; before commerce took over and I was forced to erase her lines.

'The Feeding Horse'

Fryderyk Tarłow / Pencil on Paper / 30cm x 25cm / Circa March 1941 /
Origin: Auschwitz I

It is the Kommandant's office once more. But the view has changed. You are not Rudolf anymore; you cannot be, because instead you are looking up at him. You are positioned horizontally, as though lying on his lap – no, not his lap, his desk. It is not his most flattering angle: nostril hairs and a double chin.

Gone, too, is that other voice, dictating events as they happened. There is only you and Rudolf now. But this is not correct.

"You wanted to see me, Kommandant?"

Someone else is in the room: another male. Their voice is resonant, yet carries an undercurrent of ill health, something like bubbling in the lungs. You would guess the speaker to be around forty-five, fifty. German is obviously not his first language, though he appears confident enough with it.

"I ask the questions here, prisoner – understood?"

"Yes Kommandant, sorry."

"What is your number?"

"7626 – Fryderyk Tarłow."

Your ears prick forward; you know that name.

"I asked your number only."

"Yes, Kommandant."

"You are a Political prisoner – Polish, I presume?"

"Yes. Though I was not-"

"Silence," the Kommandant holds his hand up. "I wish only for you to tell me about this picture."

Rudolf's finger points at you, falling as if in slow motion. The tip of the digit grows bigger, fatter, pinker, until it lands – *thunk* – on your nose. This explains it, then: you are the picture. You are Tarłow's 'Feeding Horse'.

"Before you try to claim you are not the artist," Rudolf continues, "I will tell you that this drawing was discovered in the possession of your Blockführer, Unterscharführer Vogel, and he has identified you as its maker."

You can hear the other man – your creator – shuffling from foot to foot. What fear he must be feeling.

“It is as he says, Kommandant,” he mumbles at last.

“Did you study art, prisoner?”

Fryderyk was not expecting such a question; his voice betrays surprise.

“Yes, Kommandant, in Vienna.”

This explains his grasp of the German language, you think to yourself.

“It is not a bad depiction – for a Pole, I mean.”

“Thank you, Kommandant.”

“But tell me,” – the tone snaps from warm to cold – “where did you get the materials?”

A long pause.

“The camp Post Office. I work there.”

“So, you are a thief as well as a resister?”

“I apologi-“

“Of course, you understand that artistic activity is forbidden?” Rudolf barks. “As, of course, is theft.”

“Yes Kommandant.”

“And that these offences will see you punished with death if I to send you to Block 11?”

“Yes.”

The word barely constitutes a whisper.

“Tell me then, why I should not send you there?”

Rudolf is no longer looking at Fryderyk, you realise. Instead his chin has dipped, squeezing the roll of fat beneath it hard against his neck. His eyes – two rich brown pools – are looking down at you. His finger moves from your nose to the base of your neck, before stroking slowly, gently down your back. When he speaks again, the words are softer.

“Come on, prisoner: what can you say to persuade me not to have you killed?”

The question appears to be without trick; Rudolf is genuinely asking. You hear Fryderyk shuffling again. He coughs to clear his throat.

“Well, Kommandant,” he says slowly, obviously thinking on his feet. “You know, of course, that there are many artists imprisoned here.”

The Kommandant nods, though his eyes are still fixed on you: "Go on."

"For example, many students and professors from the great art schools of Vienna, Kraków etcetera."

"The degenerate artists, you mean, and those with ideas above their station as servants to the Master Race?"

"Precisely," Fryderyk says. "But what if these artists could be placed in service of the Master Race?"

The Kommandant shifts his gaze from you to the prisoner.

"What do you mean?"

"The purpose of the Konzentrationslager is re-education, yes?" The prisoner's voice is gathering momentum now. "So why not allow prisoners with artistic training to demonstrate their new subservience through their practice?"

"For what purpose – what use does Auschwitz have for pictures?"

"To demonstrate the success of its rehabilitation program; such pictures could be displayed."

"Displayed to whom?"

"To other prisoners, the press – or to the inspectors from the IKL."

"Like in a gallery?" Höss asks.

"Yes Kommandant, like a gallery – a Lagermuseum, if you will."

The view has changed again. You are no longer on the Kommandant's desk, staring up his nostrils. Instead you are behind it, opposite the main door to the office. The floor is between five and six feet below you; you have been hung on the wall.

A siren blares somewhere outside the window. You can hear barracks doors swinging open, the frantic charge of the prisoners towards the washrooms. There are shouts from the guards:

"Stetig! Stetig!"

Every so often these are followed by the sound of a baton striking skin, a strangled cry and a body falling. But these noises are suddenly subsumed by the shriek of water through pipes nearby. A few seconds later the sound ceases, and the Kommandant appears through the bathroom doorway. He has wiped his face too hard with the towel; his cheeks look red and sore.

He walks around the side of the bureau but does not sit down. Instead he fetches something from its top drawer, then turns and stands directly in front of you, staring. It is an uncomfortable feeling; you can feel your fur bristling. You want to stamp the cowardice out through your legs – *clop, clop* – but of course you cannot move.

The Kommandant raises his arm; his forefinger moves again towards your head. It comes closer, closer until you can see the fine imprint on its tip – a thousand tiny horseshoes all slotted into one another. He runs the digit down your forehead and muzzle. His other hand is holding something up, you realise. You can see only the back of the small, rectangular image as he compares it to you. The light picks out the outline of a young man on a horse.

“Uncanny,” Rudolf whispers, “just uncanny.”

A knock on the door sees him spin around, stuff the photograph back into the drawer and slam it shut. He sits in his chair before answering.

“Come.”

“You wanted to see me, Kommandant?”

The boy who enters is younger than his deep voice makes him sound – twenty at most. He does not enter the room but hovers in the open doorway.

“Yes. Come in.”

The boy enters and shuts the door behind him. He does not approach the desk, however, preferring to lean his back against the now-closed door for support. He is nervous, you realise He is expecting to be punished.

“Remind me of your name.”

“Vogel, Kommandant.”

“Bird, that’s right. Your name is Bird.”

The boy nods then tries to answer properly – ‘yes sir’ – but his tongue catches on the words, causing the sound to emerge as a small chirp.

“Alright, no need to prove it.”

The Kommandant’s tone is wry; he is enjoying this boy’s discomfort.

“I have spoken to the prisoner concerned in yesterday’s incident. He has been dealt with.”

“Yes Kommandant.”

“So now there is you to be dealt with, Little Bird.”

No response. Rudolf continues.

“I have a special mission for you.”

“Anything, Kommandant.”

“I want you to go over the lists of Politicals in the camps – the Polish ones only. Find those who trained as artists and bring me their information.”

“Yes, Kommandant, at once.” The boy pauses. “That is all?”

“That is all – fly away.”

The relief is evident in the young man’s manner. He straightens up and salutes Rudolf, clapping his heels together hard, his arm raised high. He turns on his heel a little too quickly, causing himself to wobble before regaining his balance. He strides out of the office, looking two feet taller than when he came in.

Rudolf chuckles to himself. He could use a few more men like young Vogel, you are sure he is thinking. He opens the second drawer in his desk, takes the bottle and glass out and pours himself some vodka. It has the same cloudy consistency as the drink the curator plied you with earlier. It also appears to have a similar effect on the Kommandant: he leans his head back and closes his eyes; you note the thin film of sweat on his forehead.

He has built up a better resistance to the stuff than you though; within a couple of minutes Rudolf is sitting bolt upright again. He pulls the cover off his typewriter and feeds in a piece of paper. He winds the roller carefully, before locking his fingers together and turning them outwards to make the knuckles crack. The room is filled with imperfect rhythm: *tok-tok...tok-tok-tok...tok*; punctuated by a dull *ratta-ping* as the platen is returned its original position at the end of each line. Rudolf did not towel the back of his head with the same attention as he did his face, you notice. Red-brown streaks from the rust-tinged water decorate the nape of his neck like whip marks.

It is possible to read the top half of the letter over the Kommandant’s shoulder as it emerges from the black metal box:

SS-Gruppenführer Glücks,

12 March 1941

Following inspection of Reichsführer Himmler on 1 March, and req- [*ratta-ping*]
-uest by aforementioned for enhancing public face of camp, I here- [*ratta-ping*]
-by give notice of intent to establish a Lagermuseum complex, sug- [*ratta-ping*]
-gested location Block 6. I have devised aforementioned institute t- [*ratta-ping*]
-o serve and enhance rehabilitation program-

You snort; you cannot help it. It is the tone of the letter: the arrogance with which it helps itself to Fryderyk's idea. Rudolf's spine jolts from slouched to straight. He stops typing and looks all around. You do not dare breathe as he casts his eyes over the bathroom door, the file cabinet, the desk lamp – and then your image. His eyes narrow. He pushes his chair back so he can twist his upper body, get a better look; it scrapes against the wooden floor. He looks down, repeats the motion, smiles grimly and shakes his head: 'Horses on the brain,' he will be thinking, or something like it. He tucks his chair back into the desk and continues typing:

-for political prisoners, with the exhibitions and collections to focu- [ratta-ping]
-s on celebrating the Glorious Reich. Prisoners will earn visits to La- [ratta-ping]
-germuseum as privilege, and those with artistic leanings may prac- [ratta-ping]
-tice on condition works celebrate approved ideals. I have already i- [ratta-ping]
-dentified a Head Curator for this project. Sourcing of additional st- [ratta-ping]
-aff is ongoi-

With a flourish, Rudolf snatches the paper from the machine. Impossible to see the remainder of its contents as he signs it with an over-size 'H' then stuffs it into an envelope. He pulls on his overcoat and boots hurriedly before exiting the room. You take a final look around: the chair with no sitter, the typewriter with no scribe, the open drawer with no one to close it. Then you turn your attention back to your feeding, leaving the Kommandant to continue with his.

'Aleksandr, Seated'

Josef König / Sculpture in Oak Wood / 146cm x 58cm x 91cm / Circa April 1941 / Origin: Berlin

It began with "Aleksandr."

It is what you said – it was all you could say – the first time that we met. You pointed your finger to your heart and spoke; the Russian thick like syrup on your tongue.

"Aleksandr."

Certain details of that first encounter are no longer clear – the location, for example. Some dingy bar in a disreputable area of Berlin: Schöneburg, maybe Kreuzberg. A basement, no doubt, or perhaps an archway beneath the S-Bahn; somewhere that had mysteriously avoided being requisitioned as an air shelter. The owner, presumably, had connections.

What I do recall is that by the time I walked in (always preferring to arrive at the tail end of a party) the chairs were already piled up next to the entrance. The round wooden tables with their scratched surfaces had been pushed to the edge of the room to create a makeshift dance floor. It was a familiar tradition in certain venues, at a certain time of night.

What else can I see, when I think back? Lanterns – lanterns on exposed brick walls, failing to cast their soft orange glow more than a few inches into the room. Instead they illuminated only the damp surfaces they had been installed on, water trickling down the bricks as though the building itself were sweating. I remember a pink curtain on the far wall, stretching from floor to ceiling and backlit. And between this curtain and myself, a strange black beast, undulating gently to a soundtrack of raucous laughter and that Slavic-style of piano, where the fingers seem to stumble from key to key. Separating slowly, the dark mass revealed itself to be a tangle of human silhouettes, punctuated occasionally by the glimmer of a pair of spectacles, the lit end of a cheap cigar. Every so often a stray arm rose above the group, swaying in time to the music and stirring the dense fog of hovering cigarette smoke. The whole thing smelled rich, rich and over-ripe.

Even without seeing their faces, I knew it would be the usual crowd. Mirror images of myself: moneyed locals in dark suits, all not-so-young men – late thirties or forty-something. Their hair would be slicked back with grease or sweat, their best shoes

ruined by the falling liquor and the sticky wooden floorboards. And then there would be the boys who had drawn them here, without whom this squalid hole would fall to the debtors within a month: exotic accents, ungainly limbs, fluffy chins, dirty fingernails and no papers. And they would be young – young enough, at least, for men like me not to ask their ages.

It was 1940 then, and so the club was full. More full than usual, in fact. Defiance was in the air at that time – and not just among Berlin's Unterbauch class, who always felt its presence as they toured the city's illegal nightclubs. Instead it was out there on the streets, skipping amongst the general population like an overexcited child. This was back when the Tommy bombs had scarcely grazed us, and we remained determined to stick our fingers up, to flash our arses, at all opposing forces. The onset of winter had only made us braver – no more long summer days and clear nights leaving us a sitting target. We wore the mist like a shield and continued about our business. Fear only took hold later, as the year turned and winter gave way to spring. That was when the bombs began to drop more frequently, and when the sky – clear or cloudy – could crackle into life without warning, spitting fire onto the streets. But that night, with a drink in my hand, money in my pocket and a packed barroom before me, this was still an inconceivable future.

Yet when I recall first seeing you, Aleksandr, I am suddenly not in that barroom anymore. Physically I know this is where it happened. But my mind's eye refuses to see it that way. Instead, the moment is divorced of visual context – a portrait without a background. You come to me solo, your skin pristine against the darkness. That is not to say that you were perfect. Indeed, the more I stared at you, the more I realised you were not. Your chin was unmistakably that of a boy: small and round, running seamlessly off the curve of the jaw-line, a slight cleft in the middle like an inverted heart. And there was that tumble of blonde curls, of the kind that cause women to coo over toddlers. Yet the bulb of your nose was too large, your lips overly thick, as though both had been stolen from an older man. But it was your eyes: teardrops turned onto their sides, tail ends sweeping out towards the temples, and those brows: no arch, slanting downwards away from the furrow of the forehead. Their combined effect gave you an air of melancholy that I could not resist.

“Aleksandr,” you said, pointing at yourself.

It was only as you spoke that the rest of the room flared back into being, as though you had struck a single match. I found myself muted by your gaze. But you simply smiled and waited, as though this reaction were commonplace.

“Russian?” I forced out, at last.

You shook your head: “Aleksandr.”

“I mean, you are from Russia?” I said, louder this time, trying to lift my voice above the throng. “Like Aleksandr Pushkin – the great poet. Pushkin?”

“*Niet*, Pushkin,” you said, shaking your head, “AL-EK-SAN-DR.”

I gave up: “Do you want a drink, Aleksandr?” I made a cup gesture with my hand.

“Drink Aleksandr,” you mimicked, which I presumed meant ‘yes’.

How we made our way back to the apartment on Reichsstraße, I no longer know. Possibly the first train or a taxi or tram, or maybe we skipped the whole way, streaking across Adolf-Hitler-Platz arm-in-arm (of course not this, but that’s how I like to think of it). What I do remember is that as we entered the stairwell, beside the boarded up windows of what had once been Blumenthal’s Jewellers, the door slammed shut behind us.

“Josef!” was the cry that greeted us on the first floor landing. “What time is this to be making such noise?”

Peering out of his front door was Herr Holtzer, his chin dusted with morning stubble, his white hair sticking out wildly from underneath his nightcap.

He started when he saw you, Aleksandr – or to be more precise, when he saw your backside fleeing up the next staircase.

“And who was that?” he asked.

“A friend, Herr Holtzer,” I replied. “I apologise for the noise.”

“Your wife does not mind you having visitors so early?”

“Babette has been caring for her aunt this weekend,” I said, “but you are welcome to ask her when she gets back.”

He grunted and closed the door, pausing at the last moment to click it quietly, pointedly, shut.

The next image I have is of you, Aleksandr, safely ensconced in the third-floor apartment that Babette and I had made our home. You were in the room that served

as my studio for more years than I care to remember, your outline framed by the purple light coming through the window. You moved to the workbench just before I flicked the wall switch, so that it seemed you illuminated the whole room by the mere act of running your hand across the tools there. You took your time examining the chisel, the wood rasp, the mallet and files, yet you did not seem surprised by their presence – as though it were no new thing to find yourself in the lair of a sculptor at dawn. You lifted the cover of my sketchbook, allowing the pages to fall one by one. I felt a childish need to know if you approved of my rudimentary scribbles, but that half-smile of yours offered no relief. Once you were done with them, you stood in the corner of the room, studying the section of tree trunk that rested there. As you raised your right hand to touch the textured bark, I felt you caressed my own skin.

Your clothes had been unkind so far; like your smile, they had given little away. That over-size brown coat told me only that you had good shoulders – level, broad – and your lack of gloves that you had large, boat-paddle hands. I walked up behind you, reached my hands around your upper body as though to embrace you, and clasped the frayed lapels of the jacket.

“Take it off,” I said.

You could not have understood my words, but you read my actions: the coat dropped. When you turned around, I worked my fingers into the waistband of your trousers, gently hooking them under the hemline of your shirt. You looked at me calmly, and raised your arms above your head. Once you were naked, freed of all that rough, off-colour material, I stood back to consider your form. It was clear I had made an excellent choice. I walked towards you, ready to begin. But you put an arm out to stop me, locking it at a right angle from your body. Raising your other hand, you rubbed the fingers together. I understood, and paid.

What did you think, Aleksandr, when I would not let you kiss me? When I untangled your arms from my hair and guided you towards the stool instead? When I began rummaging in the old dressing-up box by the studio curtain, emerging with a white sheet a moment later? Or when I started arranging your body into different positions; wrapping the sheet around first one of your arms and then the other then whisking it off like a tablecloth to try again? Yet you did not resist any of it. Quietly you sat there as I fetched my book and began filling page after page with your image.

It did not take long for Babette to decide she did not like you.

“I do not like this boy,” she announced, the same evening she returned from Aunt Sara’s.

We three were sitting at the kitchen table having dinner. I had tried to put her in as favourable mood as possible by cooking her favourite meal: a chicken broth with speckknödel. Your eyes lit up at the sight of the food, Aleksandr. I remember how you ate – like a child who was starving. A trail of liquid dribbled down your chin and back into the bowl, only to be scooped up again with the next spoonful. Babette was less impressed, preferring to glare at you over the rim of her water glass.

“Dearest,” I scolded. “Be polite to my guest.”

“What? He cannot understand me, can he?” She sat forwards and looked you straight in the eyes: “I-do-not-like-you, Aleksandr.”

“Aleksandr,” you repeated, nodding uncertainly.

“An idiot too,” she declared. “For goodness sake, Josef, where do you find them? No, don’t tell me.”

I obliged, which only aggravated her further.

“He’s not Jewish, is he? I see that nose – I swear if you have brought a Jew into my house-”

“Don’t be stupid, look at that hair! He’s Russian. “

“Phhh – another foreigner.”

“I promise he will be gone soon,” I told her. “I just need to do some preliminary sketches and get the right measurements transposed onto the wood.”

“Hnumph.”

Putting down her glass – too hard – she picked up her spoon and split one of the speckknödel, sending a mushroom of steam up into her face. She submerged a piece of the dumpling in the broth and put it in her mouth, sucking the juice back out before swallowing.

“What I do not understand,” she said, “is why always boys? What’s wrong with female models? At least if you have girls coming here at all hours they only talk about how virile you are.”

“You – my wife – would prefer that?” I asked, incredulous.

“I would prefer it to what they say when you bring boys.”

“He’s a model, Babette – a professional,” I lied. “He’s good; wait and see the sculpture.”

“That’s not the point, Josef,” she said. “The point is people will talk.”

The fact that people might talk had always been of great concern to Babette. Yet when I look back on this incident now, I find renewed sympathy for her position. Both of us by then had heard rumours of the abductions. Not the celebrated Jewish removals, of course, but the parallel, occasional and far quieter disappearances of German citizens, summoned to ‘assist’ the Gestapo with their enquiries. But hindsight, as we now know, Aleksandr, is a marvellous yet hopelessly outdated teacher.

You were not ‘gone soon’, of course. Babette did not let me forget it.

“Herr Färber gave me a strange look as I passed him in the hall,” she said the following week, stirring a saucepan of milk on the stove. “I think he knows.”

“Knows what? What’s to know?”

She did not answer. I closed the curtain between the studio and the kitchen.

I picked up the handsaw and stared at the trunk, now screwed to the carving stand on my workbench. The top two-thirds had been planed into a box shape; the angles checked against the try square. Only the base remained in its original form: the circumference round; the bark still untouched, save for a small area facing me. This had been a tactical decision, Aleksandr. You were five foot six and the wooden block no more than four foot tall. Therefore I had decided to pose you seated, as though resting on the stump. The borders between this makeshift stool and your body would be deliberately rough and undefined, making it hard to tell where the tree ended and the human features – the calves, the backs of the thighs – began. The figure would thus be animated by a sense of metamorphosis: you had been imprisoned in a cocoon and were now emerging, freed by my own hand.

The next consideration had been how to make the structure strong. It was essential that as much of the carving as possible was set on the long grain, running from the top to the bottom of the trunk. Too many horizontal cuts would leave those sections carved on the short grain vulnerable – the thought of an arm or leg snapping was more than I could bear. Onto the surface, then, I had drawn the skeleton of the solution: you hunched forwards, your elbows on your knees and your chin resting on clasped hands.

The sheet draped over the right shoulder, sweeping across your torso and down between your legs, would provide additional support.

As I began cutting away the waste wood I asked myself what you must think of me, working a tree trunk instead of stone – some poor imitation of a sculptor, no doubt. But it was a decision made long before your time, at Babette’s insistence, naturally.

“Stone is too expensive,” she had declared, not six months before. “It will arouse suspicion. People will think we cannot be keeping up with our Winter Relief donations.”

“But I cannot sell wood carvings, Babette,” I’d argued. “Who will buy them?”

“Who has risked buying them for the last five years anyhow? They’re all degenerate. Make sculptures with clothes on – then we can talk about stone.”

Even back then I could see her point was good, yet I would not change my habits. And so one-by-one the pitcher, the claw chisel, the stone gouge were replaced by the coarse file, the mallet, the veiner. But as time passed I began to adapt to this new material, enjoy it even. The fundamental principle was the same, after all: that complex battle of measurement and recreation, where the hand is challenged to enact that which has been marked out on the material. And certainly oak was more giving, far easier to work. But there was something else too: I found wood retained warmth in a way that stone could not; as though it kept something of the subject’s essence inside itself even after they were gone.

“People are now talking,” Babette shouted as she arrived home one evening, no more than two weeks ago.

She had spent the day running errands – picking up packages of food and snippets of loose talk from the butcher, the grocer and whichever friends she had called on.

“Did you hear me, Josef?” she said.

“Yes Babette.”

I listened to her laying her spoils out on the kitchen table. She repeated herself for good measure, one word for each packet set down. I imagined them: chicken-flour-butter-potato.

“People-are-now-talking.”

Sighing, I put down the mallet and number-seven gouge that I was using for roughing out the wood; I knew my wife would not be placated until she had said her piece.

“Back soon,” I said to the real version of you, staring at me from the stool.

“Back – soon,” you aped.

You even seemed to understand, breaking your pose to raise your arms above your head to stretch. The sheet slipped from your shoulder to the floor, exposing you fully. For a moment I found myself rooted to the floor.

“Josef?” I heard again, followed by the clatter of a pan. “Shit!”

I went through to the kitchen.

“That witch,” Babette was muttering as she picked up the dropped pot.

“Which witch?”

“Frau Geiszler,” she replied.

I sat down at the table. “What’s the old hag done this time?”

It was as though I had lit a roman candle; the words fizzed from her.

“Well for one thing the rent is due – as if I could forget! She reminds me when the next rent is due from the same day that I pay the last month’s – and every day after that. I swear when that woman passes on, she will tell God Himself when the rent is due.”

“Tell her your father will provide a guarantee.”

“Don’t you think he does enough already to keep a roof over our heads? When’s the last time one of your degenerate statues paid our rent?”

I stayed silent, not wishing to fall into another, longer argument. She began putting the shopping away, her shoes crunching on the floorboards as she moved.

“But today, as well as telling me the rent is due,” she continued, “she asks, with a big smirk: ‘And just how many are living up there now?’ I tell her: ‘Two, of course, only two – always two!’”

“Frau Geiszler should mind her own business,” I said.

Babette came towards me, her arm outstretched. I thought she was going to slap me; instead she took my hand and dropped to her knees in front of my chair.

“People are scared Josef – I’m scared. I do not want to attract attention.”

“Why?” I said, instantly guilty. “We have done nothing. We are good Germans.”

“Tsh, you know as well as I do that does not always count for much.”

Gently, I pulled my wife up onto the seat opposite my own. Lifting her leg, I placed it in my lap and examined the sole of her shoe. A hundred tiny stars winked back.

“From the bombs last night.” she said. “There’s glass all over the shopping district.”

“Those Tommy wretches.”

“If it’s not our own side it’s the other.”

I pulled the shoe from my wife’s foot – it released from her ankle with a little pop. Taking a knife from the drawer tucked below the table top, I scraped at the sole, digging out the embedded fragments. Silver stars shot across the table.

Babette watched me with eyes suddenly full of affection. Before I could start on the other shoe, she grabbed my shoulders and pulled me into an embrace. Her lips pressed against mine, accusatory in their earnest. I made none of my usual protests.

She led me to the bedroom and pulled me – still stunned – onto the mattress. As she fumbled with the buckle of my belt, I heard you enter the kitchen.

“Josef?” you called out softly.

You had never said my name before. I felt a surge in my body – of what kind I could not say. But I needed none of the usual assistance to guide me into Babette’s wetness. She wriggled under me as though possessed, moaning louder than I have ever heard her, whether for my benefit or yours – or perhaps even Frau Geiszler’s – I could not tell. My erection lasted until I heard the front door close and your footsteps on the stairs.

Babette was kinder to you after that, Aleksandr. I wish I could say the same. But something changed for both of us that night, or in the following days. Around this time the outside world got louder too, refusing to be drowned out by a curtain across a studio entrance. The air-raid sirens screamed more often of impending attack; the Jewish removals – the stampeding footsteps, the breaking crockery, the shots, the wailing – became more frequent. And slowly, perhaps inevitably, your demeanour irreparably altered. Gone was the confident, aloof young man who had taken my thoughts, hands and tools hostage. In his place was a scared and anxious child, who shuddered whenever the thunder of trucks drew near. The noise of a suitcase exploding on the ground after being launched from a balcony caused you to jump from the stool. A shot ricocheting off a building saw you throw yourself under the workbench. Each time something happened, I would be forced to abandon whatever I was doing – checking the statue’s dimensions with the callipers, smoothing the finish with the flat gouge – to guide you back into position.

“Sorry,” you would say each time.

Yet I would say nothing as I pushed you, a little too roughly, back into place.

What I will admit to myself now, Aleksandr, is that I took some pleasure in these failures of yours, using them as a marker of my own success. As I worked you down, feature by feature, the statue became the preferred version: Aleksandr, corrected. Looking at the anxious creature the flesh-and-bone version had become made me more greatly admire the statue's supreme calm. I congratulated myself for having immortalised this aspect of your personality before it was lost. And as I began the sanding – noting with pleasure the way the sun shone off the oak's medullary rays – I enjoyed the thought that this surface, at least, would remain blemish-free: it would not break out in nervous rashes, or grow spotted or wrinkled. It was as though I had preserved the best parts of you inside the material, where I could keep them safe.

Does this mean I was cruel to you Aleksandr? Looking back, I hope I was not. For it was simply my way of ensuring that when the time came – as it always did – I would be able to say goodbye.

It was a cold day in April when I showed Babette the almost-finished sculpture. I had been practicing treating my wife more kindly; another attempt to soften the blow of your impending departure. Babette and I had been arguing less in recent days, and making love if not often then more. She had even taken to asking how my work was progressing, though she remained concerned about local gossip.

“Herr Müller,” she had said that morning, nuzzling her nose against my Cupid's bow.

“Forget Müller,” I had told her, drawing her head to my chest.

You were standing beside the workbench as we entered, fully clothed for a change, preparing the beeswax the way I had showed you. You ran your hand through the mixture, massaging it into liquid polish. I thought I saw something in your expression as we entered – a scowl? But perhaps it was my imagination.

“Oh Josef,” Babette said, looking at the statue. “It is beautiful.”

She slipped her hand into mine and I let her. She even smiled at you, Aleksandr. You smiled back nervously, and for a moment it was as though we were all connected in some fleeting, circular way. We three all stood there for a good few minutes.

“But why no clothes?” she said at last.

Yet 'Why no clothes?' is the very question I ask myself now, as the Gestapo officer taints the carved wooden figure with his stare. You are standing beside it, Aleksandr, completely still, holding the polishing cloth against the wood. It is the most disciplined I have seen you in weeks, as though you are hoping he might mistake you for part of the sculpture.

The curtain shielding the studio from the kitchen has been torn aside, the violence of this gesture betrayed by two broken curtain hooks hanging down like crescent moons. In the kitchen I can see Babette arguing with a second officer. She is pacing back and forth, her arms waving, her footsteps unsettling the stray sawdust that has crept over the borderline between the two rooms.

"Frau Geiszler? Or was it Holtzer?" she shouts at the squat man in a black coat.

"I can only tell you we are acting on information received by the Reich Special Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion," he tells her again.

"But from who?" Babette demands.

"That is not your concern."

In the studio, his colleague – thin, bespectacled – turns his attention to you.

"And you are from?" he asks.

"Russia," I answer, adding quickly, "but he is a cousin – Aryan stock."

"Well naturally – your kind goes mad for the young Aryan boys, does it not?"

"That's not what I mean-"

"Your name, child?" the Gestapo demands.

"Aleksandr," you manage to whisper.

"So, an Aleksandr from Russia – like Pushkin?" he says.

"Great poet," you reply, nodding eagerly.

My stomach flips. How much more have you understood than you ever let on?

The officer is not so impressed: "A political radical," he sniffs.

You realise – either from the man's expression or his answer – that you have said the wrong thing.

"But we are good people – good members," I hear Babette saying to the officer in the kitchen. "We have papers."

"Get them."

I hear her running to the bedroom, the slamming open and shut of drawers.

“This is typical of your ‘art’?” the Gestapo in the studio asks me. He points at the statue, a gesture that takes in you, Aleksandr, as well.

“No,” I say, as convincingly as I can muster. “This is a special commission. You must understand, officer. In these times I must take what work I can get.”

“And you have evidence of this special commission – documents, a name?”

I shake my head.

“We are up to date with our payments,” I hear Babette say as she re-enters the kitchen. “And I went to a rally only last week – tell him, Josef.”

“It’s true,” I call.

“And what about him?” I hear her Gestapo say.

“Well – he is an artist,” she answers, as if this explains everything.

“You two are married?” the officer asks.

“Of course; seventeen years,” she says proudly.

“But no children?”

I watch her shrivel.

“It’s not his fault,” she lies.

“What! What do you arrest him for – making sculptures?” my wife screams as I am led down the apartment stairs.

Herr Holtzer does not come to protest the noise; neither does Frau Geiszler stick her head over the bannister; Müller is nowhere to be seen.

It is not until I am outside that I realise how long it has been since I last left the apartment. The tree in the park opposite is no longer bare; the grass is green and fertile. Ahead of me, Aleksandr, you shriek and twist against the other officer like a crab in a boiling pot. I make no such struggle, allowing the hand on my elbow to guide me. I look up at the windows of the apartment block; a shiver runs through the building as curtains twitch back into place.

“Who made the report? I demand to know!” Babette cries. “If it was Müller then I can tell you a story about him. You want information? Well his cousin-”

The car door clunks shut, shielding us from whatever secrets she may be spilling. As we drive, she chases the vehicle down the street: her skirts flailing, her shawl stolen by the wind. I watch her through the back window, running, running, running. Until she falls, tumbling head over heels like the saddest of circus clowns.

1941: Origins

“You are ready?” the curator asks.

He is standing in the centre of a triangle framed by the wall, the floor and the curtain, the latter of which he is holding aside with his right shoulder. He appears renewed by his time in the darkness: his face looks fuller, his skin less sallow. You however, do not feel so healthy.

The curator cackles: “Always people look this way when the pictures first start to testify. One moment, I fetch something.”

He reaches behind the curtain.

“Here.”

This time when he holds out the jar you reach for it gratefully, desperate for something to relieve the fear that is pricking pins into your body, reducing your breath to sharp gasps. Throwing your head back, you swallow the fog-like mixture in a single gulp. Your body temperature rises almost instantly, but this time you embrace it. There is a deep-set shiver in your bones; you are determined to sweat it out.

“*Gut* – good,” the curator says. “So then, we can continue into the next room. I call this ‘1942: Expansion’.”

You stare at him – he means for this experience to continue? You open your mouth to protest but he cuts you off.

“Oh come. You must not let a little surprise scare you away. This is what you wanted, yes – something different, more authentic?”

You are no longer certain that you do. But if the curator sees your hesitation he ignores it. Instead he walks past you, back into the 1941 room.

“So, we will proceed,” he says. “But first I collect the lamps. Stay here.”

The drink continues doing its work as you wait. Your breath returns to a more regular rhythm. There is a light feeling inside your head, as though someone has opened up the top of your skull and is swirling a finger around inside, unsticking the troubled thoughts clinging to its interior. You untuck your shirt to let some air in and find the material is damp. Yet despite the hot flush running through you, the sweat is cold.

The lamps have not gone out yet. Turning, you find the curator has yet to reach the first one. His pace has slowed considerably, his shoulders hunching over as approaches the stand beside 'The Feeding Horse'.

But it is not 'The Feeding Horse' anymore. The image has been replaced by the original picture pasted there, its smaller brother. Your eyes look to the place beside the door where Cecelia should be hanging. But she is also gone. The lamp snaps off.

The curator reappears – eventually – in the centre of the room, his outline becoming clearer as walks towards the second lamp.

"Was – was ist das?"

His eye has caught on something down beside the curtain, the expression on his face now one of what – fear, disbelief?

Of all the intruder artworks, the statue alone has remained in position. And once again it has altered in appearance. The neck is now twisted so that the boy stares directly at the curator. The lips curve upwards.

"Nein," the curator whispers. His voice rises to a shout: "*Verboten, verboten!*"

He snatches for the blanket lying on the floor beneath the portrait of the *Kommandant*. He tries to run at the statue but can only manage a slow stagger, his upper body tilting forwards as though a gale blows against him. When he reaches the model he throws the cover over it and sinks to his knees.

"The light," he wheezes. "Turn it off."

You run to the second lampstand and yank the wire out of the wall. You catch a last glimpse of the *Kommandant* before all goes dark: his mouth is set into an 'O'.

Now there is only the sound of the curator's disrupted breathing: heaving coughs intercut with great, greedy gulps. But slowly these eruptions ease to a steady ebb and flow that synchronises with your own. You feel your way back to the meeting place between the curtain and the wall, and listen to his footsteps coming closer. A smell like steak left out too long lets you know he has arrived.

"You saw him?" he asks, his voice bristling. "Before, when you were in here alone?"

Something tells you not to aggravate him further: you reassure him you saw nothing but the exhibits he directed you to.

"Sure?"

You say you are sure. He shuffles back a few paces; the smell retreats with him.

"You follow me in here," he says.

1942: Expansion

As you enter the second room you hear the curator swish the curtain shut behind you. Then a sound like cotton being torn into strips – no, tape: he is taping it closed.

“What you must understand,” he says at last. “Is that not all the pieces here are official. Some are illegal – and they have no place in the *Lagermuseum*.”

You wonder what he means by ‘illegal’: forgeries, fakes? But he does not explain.

“Now, if you would be kind, the socket is on the wall to your left, about half way.”

It is only as he says this that you realise you are still holding the lamp. But you don’t want to move: you want to ask him questions. Yet within in the grip of the drink, you can’t remember what they are.

Hands on your shoulders catch you off-guard. They grab firmly, turn you and push forwards. The unexpected motion sends a wave of sickness through your body, which only subsides as you bump gently into the wall. You press against it; the coolness of the stone balm to your heat-ravaged skin.

“The socket – please.”

The voice is impatient.

Reluctantly, you stir yourself, tracing your fingers along the surface until they feel the scratch of a wool blanket. You run your hand towards the floor, sweeping it left and right, until you find a stool, and behind it a two-holed socket.

The lamp illuminates a semi-circle around you, mirrored by another on the wall. Its paper shade is made of several thin panels, stitched together like an umbrella. There is a different pattern printed on each section, badly faded, casting strange shadows. One may be an exotic plant, another some strange sea creature.

“Remove the blanket,” the curator instructs from somewhere behind you.

You look around, but he is out of the light’s reach.

As the blanket falls, all you can distinguish at first are the colours. Incidental splashes of white, carmine and ultramarine dot a canvas otherwise dominated by muted autumn tones: dusty pink, mustard yellow and fawn brown. Taking a step back, you catch your breath as you see the full portrait. Impressionistic brush strokes in oil paint pick out the back-view of an artist working at his easel. In front of him: a large flag, a table, some stools, a glass-fronted display cabinet. Most of the artist’s work-in-

progress can be seen over his left shoulder. But the image he is constructing is not clear yet: it could be two figures dancing, or fighting, or even an elaborate vase of flowers. The colour-scheme of his painting seems to be informed by the room around him. A mustard-coloured wall at the left side of his canvas matches that of the room he is working in – the same colour, you now notice, of the wall on which this painting has been hung.

“It is a fine work, yes?” you hear the curator say. “This is the only known picture of the inside of the *Lagermuseum*.”

You search for the information panel. All seems to be in order: the painting is listed as oil on canvas, fifty-one by forty-one centimetres, and titled ‘Interior of the Camp Museum’. Its creator is listed as Mateusz Kosnik.

“Kosnik trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków,” the curator continues. “He was already well respected as an artist by the time he came here.”

What could he have been arrested for, you wonder – surely not for producing works as exquisite as this? The curator seems to follow your train of thought.

“The artists working here were political radicals,” he continues. “Therefore, as you will have been told in the previous room, Höss decided to rehabilitate them through their natural practice.”

He does not mention that this was at Tarłow’s suggestion. In fact, save for crediting him as the artist of the horse’s head, the curator has failed to mention Tarłow at all. Only ‘The Feeding Horse’ has made the prisoner’s involvement clear.

“Soon you will see for yourself what types of pictures were considered acceptable for artists to paint here,” the curator says. “But I will tell you what was *verboten*: *Entartete Kunst* – artworks that were degenerate, yes?”

A low whistle emerges through the mist in your head: you have heard this phrase before.

“In Europe before the war there was a rash of so-called ‘modern art’. This was not loved by the good German people, who considered it subversive, elitist and morally suspect. Such works were often un-German, Jewish, or Communist in nature; they were also aesthetically inferior, and their subjects frequently perverted.”

He raises his voice for the final word, as though it is directed at somebody. Your mind wanders to the semi-nude statue behind the curtain.

“Therefore the *Lagermuseum* was purified of all this. Art was put once again in the service of morality, tradition, and most of all,” he pauses, “the Reich.”

The second lamp clicks on. You turn, and stumble back a couple of paces: the curator is not against the far wall as expected but rather in the centre of the room. You catch the stool behind you with your foot, causing the lampshade on it to wobble wildly.

“Careful!” the curator cries. “This is also an original artefact!”

You catch the lamp and steady it, apologising as you do. Then you shuffle over to join your host at the large table he is standing beside. His hands are resting against its surface. His eyes narrow as he watches you approach.

“Quickly, quickly,” he urges.

Looking down at the model, you find you are a bird hovering in the sky, with row after row of tiny red roofs below you, neatly aligned and cut through with snail trail pathways.

“Here we have model of one plan – one of many – for the expansion of Auschwitz I,” the curator says. “It was made by prisoners in the *Lagermuseum*, based on Himmler’s ideas and constructed at the *Kommandant*’s request.”

The land around the miniature buildings is painted green. Clusters of torn paper seem to represent forests, small pebbles quarries, and a straight dotted line a train track. A blue pipefish river bends its body along the south side of the landscape. On a wooden plaque in the north-east corner, the words ‘Camp Auschwitz I Development’ have been printed.

“It was not an easy job, to be *Kommandant* of Auschwitz at this time. When Höss arrived in 1940 it was meant only to be only a quarantine camp. But *Reichsführer* Himmler had other ideas.”

His voice sounds further away than it did a moment ago. You look up and find him backing away from the table – and the lamplight – towards a door at the bottom of the room.

“And so from his first inspection onwards it was plans, plans, plans: much for Rudolf to do, much to organise, much pressure from outside. Always they were thinking to expansion: how could the camp take more, more?”

The model makes that clear. In addition to the blocks you can identify – the prisoner barracks, the *Kommandant*’s villa, the guard’s quarters, the gate and so forth – there

are also buildings you are not familiar with, whole sub-sections branching off of the main camp.

“Höss, however, was not suited to the job. He was faithful to his duty, of course, but he was a man of simple tastes. Were you aware that he planned to be a farmer?”

The curator sounds sad as he says this, though it could be the cracking of his voice. You shake your head: no, you have not heard that before.

“So,” he says, abruptly, picking up what appear to be a couple of canvases stacked against the wall, “I leave you now. I will return when it is time to continue.”

Your head shoots up – you are to be left alone again? Before you can object, the curator has exited. You try to follow him, but this door has been locked too. You pull a few times – your palms slippery – but nothing. The pins are at your body again, your breath growing shorter. You wait, facing the door, straining your ears for any untoward noises.

You do not have to wait long: a light scratching like chalk on a blackboard becomes audible behind you and to your right; to your left, there is the *shhhhh* of grit being poured. You stay where you are, trying to decide which sounds the lesser of two evils.

A loud thud makes the decision for you. It comes from the centre of the room. As you approach the model village, you find the barracks tipped onto their sides, the pebbles scattered, and the knotted trees strewn across the board like tumbleweed. In the centre lies the cause of this disarray: a grey envelope with a broken red seal. You look up, but see no hole in the ceiling. Where, then, has it come from? Tentatively you pick it up, using your fingers as chopsticks. It is no use: another building tumbles as the corner of the envelope makes contact.

You feed the letter out of its sheath and examine it. The page is divided into sections: typed script set next to a handwritten scrawl, both in German. The handwriting is so cut through with the censor’s mark that very few complete lines remain. But, as you watch, the black bars start receding, revealing the words written underneath. And the letters too, begin to move: rearranging, altering shape, decoding before your eyes:

Concentration Camp Auschwitz

The following rules are to be observed when writing to prisoners:

1.) Each prisoner in protective custody may receive from and send to his relatives two letters or two cards per month. The letters to the prisoners must be legibly written in ink and may contain only 15 lines on a page. Only a letter sheet of normal size is allowed. Letter envelopes must be unlined. Only 5 stamps of 12 pfennig may be enclosed. Everything else is prohibited and is subject to seizure. Postal cards have 10 lines. Photos may not be used as postal cards.

2.) Shipments of money are permitted.

3.) It is to be noted that the precise address must be written on shipments of money or mail, thus: name, date of birth and prisoner number. If the address has mistakes, the mail will be returned to the sender or destroyed.

4.) Newspapers are permitted, but they may be delivered only through the Auschwitz concentration camp postal facility.

5.) Packages may not be sent, because the prisoners in the camp can purchase everything.

6.) Requests to the camp management for releases from protective custody are useless.

7.) Fundamentally, there is no permission to speak to and visit prisoners in the concentration camp.

T h e C a m p C o m m a n d e r

Ambitions. I hope all Arrangements to this end remain ongoing, despite our separation, and that you, Dear Husband, remain so committed.

I wonder, also, if you have news of Yourself and our Cousins. I hope that they remain as Active as Ever. I would be grateful to receive word of their adventures!

Write soon, Husband; I am anxious to hear of Our Family. I hope you, too, are well.

Your loving Wife

Prisoner Category: Protective Custody, Pole

Name: Serejski, Esther

Date of Birth: 3. V. 1900

Prisoner Number: 1726 Block 8

Auschwitz: 5. IIII. 1942

Dear Husband,

You have not heard from me in some time, since Our Little Szymon and I accompanied our Good Friends south in May 1941. I have been in Camp Auschwitz since March 26 of this year. I am healthy, I have sufficient food and the work is within my capabilities. I beg you to write to me. Follow the rules on this letter to ensure delivery.

I would be grateful for news – most urgently of Our Little Szymon, who I have not heard from. Is he in good health? Do our Good Friends keep him on Holiday or has he been returned to you? I pray that they were kind during his stay. If he is with you now, or if you have contact, I ask you to pass on a message from his Faithful Sister, Eta, who remains abroad at School. Reassure him that her heart stays dedicated to her Dear Brother, and her soul devoted to the fulfilment of our

Ambitions. I hope all Arrangements to this end remain ongoing, despite our separation, and that you, Dear Husband, remain so committed.

I wonder, also, if you have news of Yourself and our Cousins. I hope that they remain as Active as Ever. I would be grateful to receive word of their adventures!

Write soon, Husband; I am anxious to hear of Our Family. I hope you, too, are well.

Your loving Wife

You slip the letter back into the envelope and rub your eyes. You cannot make sense of it all. Your head is too full: of questions, of alcohol. And you are tired, so tired.

You look back to the model, but your vision is blurred: for a moment you think you see thousands of insects crawling all over its surface. They seem to respond to your gaze, skittering away, disappearing into the toy wooden barracks, or hiding themselves among the trees, underneath piles of tiny rocks.

You blink and wait for your eyes to clear. When you look back to the model you find all is in order once more. But of course it should not be in order – the letter meteor saw to that. Why then are the buildings all reset the right way up? How did the trees get knitted back together, the stones all neatly rearranged? As you stare at the model, bewildered, you hear the shriek of a siren. As the door to the *Kommandant's* villa springs open, the gallery around you starts to spin. You are in the centre of a whirlpool that, just as quickly as it appeared, sucks you in.

Camp Auschwitz I Development

Unknown Artists / Model in Plaster and Wood / 101cm x 172cm x 9.5cm /
Circa January 1942 / Origin: Auschwitz I

“You are Rudolf Höss. You are 41 years old. You are the Kommandant.”

This is what you told yourself this morning as you dressed in front of the bedroom mirror. Your lips had recited the mantra as you fixed the cap with the Totenkopf badge to your head and buttoned your jacket – was it getting tighter, or was it just your imagination? You had still been saying it when you walked down the hall to the front door. You were so focused on the words that you’d almost tripped over a young woman on her hands and knees in the hallway.

“Who are you?” you’d demanded.

“Hodys; Eleonore,” the young prisoner had said, clambering to her feet, her face flushing. “Your wife sent for me, to fix the carpet.”

Another of Mutz’s servant girls, you’d thought; a pretty one this time.

“Carry on,” you’d told her.

You’d made a detour past the bathroom before leaving. After using the toilet, you’d looked into the mirror as you washed your hands and permitted yourself a small smile. It has been a long time since a woman has blushed in my presence, you’d thought.

“You are the Kommandant,” you’d informed your reflection, approvingly.

But now that you are standing at the entrance of the villa you do not feel like the Kommandant. Instead you feel curiously light-headed – is it possible you are still drunk from last night? You straighten your posture, hold your chin up, and stand perfectly still. Far too still for a drunk man – so then, you are not drunk.

You stare at the view, trying to work out what is amiss. The high barbed wire fence surrounding the main camp encroaches on the right side of your vision. In front of you, as if hovering at the end of your nose is the iron trellis that surrounds the front garden – though in fact it is a good fifteen feet away. The grey gravel road, straight as a gun barrel, can be seen just beyond the garden’s border. And farther still, past this thoroughfare, the dense mass of trees and the grass verge that dips down towards the River Sola.

There is no perceivable end point to the left side of this picture. The road, the trees, all disappear into a great beyond – as do the prisoners, slowly marching from right to

left. One-by-one they pass through your eye-line and you struggle with the uncomfortable sensation that they are getting away – that something is getting away. But you will not turn your head. To do so would be to give in to a foolish notion and you are not a man to give in to foolish notions.

You have been fortunate to miss the first deluge this morning. All around you is wet, glistening with rain. You, however, are dry. You can feel your freshly-ironed shirt still warm beneath your over-jacket.

The orchestra is playing the prisoners out of the camp, to the tune of ‘The Triumph March’ from Verdi’s *Aida*. It is the same piece they played the morning of the Reichsführer's last inspection. Pride inflates your belly as you think of it, threatening to pop your jacket buttons right off. You will have to ask Mutz to get one of her servant girls to let it out. But the possibility of Eleonore being the one who snips the button, moves it an inch or so to accommodate the fat Kommandant, embarrasses you. Perhaps you will make do.

Certainly Himmler was better impressed this time than during his first inspection last year. The gallery he had found particularly interesting. He had even given a thin smile as he surveyed the building.

“This establishment will be useful,” he’d said, rubbing one side of his moustache. “This new stage of the programme may cause controversy; we will need all the good publicity we can get.”

With that he’d clapped his heels together and marched back to the door of Block 6. Himmler marches everywhere. In fact, you have never seen the man walk normally.

“It will need more prominent premises,” the Reichsführer had added over his shoulder at the exit, “something closer to the gate, nice and visible to those Red Cross busybodies.”

The last of the prisoners passes, leaving you staring at the landscape beyond the road. You recall the first time you saw this area, on a trip to assess its suitability for the proposed camp. Then, as now, the soil had been rich and fertile. A soft green mesh lay draped across it, spotted with patches of bluebells, puffs of wild clover. As you drove around – the vehicle carving two long brown scars in the earth – you crossed field after field of half-rolled bales of hay. They looked as though they had been shaken out by giant men, uncoiling as they bounced, creating golden pathways. You had imagined

establishing your own farm here someday: a stables; horses. But now is not the time for such thoughts. There is work to be done and you are the man to do it.

You decide to take the long way to your office. It won't do your belly any disservice, after all, to complete a circuit of the outside of the camp before you start work. You nod regally at the salutes you receive from the Wachbattalion in their watch towers on your way. Smoke from the administration buildings, the kitchen, the crematoria, is already hovering, leaking from various red-brick chimneys to paint the sky a doleful grey. Mutz will be pleased, you think, imagining your wife in her new greenhouse. Lots of fresh ash: 'The perfect fertiliser!' she always says.

As you walk, your mind drifts again to the bespectacled little man the Führer has chosen for his right hand. Despite his less-than-imposing presence, Himmler never fails to make you feel shot through with cold. You recall the Reichsführer bending over the latest set of expansion plans for Birkenau, nodding coolly as you pointed out the huts to be converted into gas bunkers.

"Good," he'd said. "The first contingent will arrive later this month: Upper Silesian."

This camp, too, will look very different very soon. You position the new buildings in your mind as you pass the sites earmarked for renovation. You see each one just as clearly as though they were already built. Here the new, bigger crematoria; here the reception building; over there the SS barracks; the additional workshops; the DAW equipment works. And here, you think to yourself, entering the prisoner compound through the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gate and turning left: the expanded roll call square; up to 30,000 prisoners, all being accounted for at one time.

There is a roll call still ongoing; someone must have gone astray. The prisoners are nervous – three in the front row have pissed themselves already, little puddles and puffs of warm steam visible around their clogs. A block Kapo you do not recognise is swaggering up and down the columns, counting. He is a large man, broad-shouldered, with orang-utan arms hanging down at his sides. His hands are clenched, eager to strike, to hit, to cuff. But his eyes betray him, darting around nervously – particularly when he notices you. He must have been recently promoted, you muse. He is concerned the lost prisoner may cost him his job.

This Kapo is also soaked through from the rain earlier this morning, but somehow it becomes him. The water sticks to his skin like sweat, in sharp contrast to the prisoners, whose shoulders stoop as if dragged down by the weight of their wet uniforms. You

become conscious that you have pressed your own shoulders back, sucked your stomach and rear end in.

Is this him? The thought comes out of nowhere, crisp as a gunshot: Is this the man who has been giving it to my wife?

You know of the rumours, though you have no reason to suspect this particular *Kapo* above any of the others. It is those dancing eyes, you decide. Perhaps it is not the unaccounted for prisoner that is making the *Kapo* nervous, but the presence of the fat, middle-aged, cuckolded *Kommandant*.

Your hands are in your pockets. You cannot remember having placed them there – indeed you frequently chastise the guards for such informal practice. But here they are, balled into fists, your nails digging into your palms. You imagine these fingers around the *Kapo's* neck, how they would feel pushing into the pale muscular flesh.

‘Did you think I would not find out?’ you would ask the man as he squirmed and gasped. ‘Do you think your *Kommandant* is so stupid?’

A strangled cry returns you to the roll call yard. Your body flinches as you watch a fallen prisoner's ribcage take the full force of the *Kapo's* boot.

“Up,” his torturer says.

The prisoner raises himself slowly, arms grappling at the air. Perhaps you should get your facts straight before tackling this particular *Kapo*.

The beaten prisoner will not last, that much is obvious; he can barely hobble back into line. Inmates jostle past him as the group is dismissed. Shoulders hit shoulders, feet trip feet, and soon enough the inmate is on the ground again. He disappears beneath a tide of trudging limbs. You watch the prisoners fall out, idly sorting them according to *Himmler's* new criteria:

“Him? No. Him? No. Him? Him? Him? No. No. No.”

“Sorry, *Kommandant*?”

The voice triggers a sensation akin to vertigo – as though a great hand has reached down, plucked you by the collar, and launched you up into the air. You look around for the speaker: Fryderyk Tarłow is standing to your right.

“What?”

“You said something, *Kommandant*?” he repeats, timidly. “The model, you like it?”

You look down: a microcosm of the proposed camp sits before you, made out of plaster and wood. You scan the room: you are in the Lagermuseum – but how? The prisoners gathered around the model are looking at each other, and at you. You can feel heat rising in your cheeks; you hope you are not blushing.

“We can change it, Kommandant,” Tarłow proffers, “if it does not match Reichsführer Himmler’s plans.”

He demonstrates, picking up the barrack representing Block 6 and moving it slightly to the right. You are sure you feel the floor beneath you shift as he does this, though the prisoners do not seem to notice it or react. They are in on it, you think.

“Kommandant?”

“Yes, it is fine,” you snap.

The tension leaves the room like air being let out of a valve. The prisoners clap each other on the back and relax their postures. Perhaps you have read the situation wrong. It would be unwise, after all, for men like these to mock you.

“And the new Lagermuseum,” Tarłow says. Have you decided where that will be?”

“Here,” you say, distractedly, pointing to a block beside the gate.

“24a – very good, Kommandant; it will make an excellent location.”

You nod: “Yes, it will.”

You look around for your cap and find it has somehow ended up on the floor. Tarłow snatches it up before you can bend down. The curator slaps it a few times to get the dust off, then hands it back to his Kommandant.

“Is there anything else we can do for you?” he asks, his eyes unblinking and far too innocent for your liking.

The Kommandant, Standing

Josef König / Model in Clay / 20cm x 8cm x 6cm / Circa May 1942 /
Origin: Birkenau, Men's Camp (BIb)

A few things of which I am sure:

I was born. And somewhere around the moment of production, the mother and father looked down at me and said: 'So, this is Josef!' Possibly it was a name they had discussed beforehand or perhaps it came to them then, as I squirmed in shit and afterbirth, the cord trailing from my navel. Or maybe it happened later, after a nurse, grandmother or other female relative had wiped a towel over my tiny body and presented me, swaddled, to my mother: 'We shall call him Josef.' Or later still, as the father snoozed in an armchair and I lay by Mama's side, sated from her milk. She could have looked from her deflated belly to the two men that were now her family: 'He is Josef; so he shall be Josef.' But whatever the truth of the matter, I was born and Josef is my name. And I am German – German Josef – for these are the words that feel most natural in my mouth.

Something else: I arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau forty-six days ago. Prior to this there was Sachsenhausen, in the region of Oranienburg. Both camps bear the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' legend on their gates, but there the similarities end. Sachsenhausen is already established, its brick barracks covered in grey stucco, the ground lined with grit to aid walking. It is considered a 'sissy camp' by the Birkenau inmates – both because of these perceived luxuries and the higher proportion of prisoners there with the Rosa Winkel badge stitched to their uniforms.

This brings me to the subject of my own pink triangle, and another certainty: I have been wrongly convicted. Of my life before the camps I remember nothing, but still I am quite sure I have never had sexual relations with another male. Of course, to be incorrectly branded is no uncommon thing here; categories cross categories the way radio waves split and intersect. Thus I have met political prisoners who are Jews, Jews who are criminals and criminals who are political resisters.

I have no evidence to support my claim of a miscarriage of justice, only the nausea I feel when considering the connotations of my badge. But while that may hold no weight in the courts, it is irrefutable to me. How particularly unlucky I am, then, to have been stamped with this mark.

Now, what I know of Auschwitz: I am a builder here; we are all builders. And building is a matter of some urgency in this section of the complex. For Birkenau, though far larger than its sister camp, is already overcrowded. My colleagues are mostly Russian prisoners of war – the hundred or so leftovers from a contingent of 10,000 sent to Auschwitz I in the latter half of last year. These survivors have been building Birkenau since the beginning. Thus they are the real brutes: the ones who will break a brick over your head for an extra potato.

Building can mean many things here: levelling the ground, laying foundations, digging drainage ditches, or installing the electric fences which will one day reach right around the camp. Or, as in my case, it can mean labouring in the brickworks. Each day, I help move carts filled with clay from the base of the pit to the machines at the top that produce the bricks. This requires a team of six: two in front with ropes pulled taut over their shoulders; and four behind, arms outstretched and bodies bent so far forwards that their faces almost touch the earth. Being behind the cart is the toughest job, and the rest of the team ensures I am always one who pushes. My mouth gapes open as I work, the air around me crackling with blows and breaking bones, so that sometimes it seems these noises come not from the exterior world but deep inside myself.

The earth is always wet and slippery, meaning the carts frequently derail and clatter back down into the pit. Those in front cry: 'Move, move!' when this happens, the rope shrieking through their palms. There are prisoners who get out of the way and prisoners who do not. Sometimes a frontrunner will go with the cart too, unable to react quickly enough. He will fly through the air still clasping the rope, like it belongs to a kite caught by a great gust of wind. His body will bounce off the ground at intervals all the way down.

One final, certain, thing: the other inmates do not like me. All those wearing the pink triangle – not that there are many of us – attract a special kind of hatred, one that transcends categories and nationalities. A typical insult often comes when I resume pushing the cart after a derailment: 'Next time it slips you hang on, pervert,' someone will say, their pig-German bastardising my mother tongue. Whenever I am addressed, it is always with that kind of tag on the end of the sentence: 'pervert' or 'Entartete' or 'Fee'.

A fine example of our unpopularity occurred the fifth day after my arrival. The target was an inmate who had arrived on the same transport as I. The cart had just made it over the crest of the pit, and my team had begun unloading the clay with shovels.

“Toilettenblock?” I heard a voice say.

All six of us cart-men turned in unison to see a surface worker hopping from foot to foot, clutching his backside through his trousers. A Kapo stood in front of him.

“Toilettenblock, bitte?” the inmate asked again.

The Kapo dropped his eyes from the prisoner’s face to his chest, and the pink triangle emblazoned there. He said something that caused the inmate’s body to flinch. A second later the prisoner spun around and fell face first to the ground, propelled by the momentum of the Kapo’s baton. An explosion of shit spread across the seat of his trousers. The Kapo remained where he was, his arm still extended. He watched as the prisoner crawled a few paces, before lifting his boot and bringing it down on his back. The snap of the spine was audible. The inmate’s face contorted and froze before the screaming started. The Kapo left him there and ordered us all back to work.

“Your turn next, Fee,” one of the rope-men told me as we walked the cart back down the pit.”

“I’ll hold the baton,” another joked.

It must have taken more than an hour for the screaming to stop.

That night, I stood in front of the barrel of water placed once a week at the end of the barracks. As usual, I had been shoved to the end of the queue, so the water was already brown. I opened my eyes as I raised my cupped palms to my forehead, felt the sting of sweat and soil as the liquid poured down my face. I pressed both of my hands to the back of my neck and drew them slowly over my shoulder-blades then down my chest. It was as I scrubbed at my arms that I realised the mud was stuck fast to my skin. It clung so tightly that it could be neither loosened by the water nor dislodged by my furious scraping.

So, those are the facts; now some things of which I am less sure.

As I have said, of my life before Sachsenhausen I remember nothing. But certainly there must have been a life: a childhood, some teenage angst, perhaps, the pursuit of a career. I would estimate my current age to be between forty and sixty years-old (a more accurate assessment is impossible – we all look at least a hundred years’ old here

– but I do not feel like a young man, and certainly the work we do could not be performed by anyone approaching old age). Therefore it is almost certain that there would have been a marriage and children, maybe even grandchildren. Despite this, I see only darkness where the past should be. Yet the fact that I do not recall such information does not trouble me greatly. For it is the men who are tormented by what once was that have the shortest life expectancy here.

There are, however, particular inferences that I can draw about my history. Chief amongst these is that I am an educated man; certainly more educated than is usual at Auschwitz, among both prisoners and guards. I have heard that several of the Polish inmates here are intellectuals (a contradiction in terms, if ever I heard one); students, professors and so forth. I would place myself among their ilk, though further distinguished, of course, by my Aryan heritage. This, coupled with the fact that I was initially interned in Sachsenhausen, makes it likely that I have either studied in or hail from Berlin.

Which brings me to perhaps the most significant thing: I believe I may have been an artist. It was when I began working in the brickworks that I realised I was drawn to the clay. It was everywhere, the rain saw to that. The earth seemed to ache with its weight, begging me to relieve it of a small part of this burden. I soon found myself scooping up a single lump each day, which I would place in my breast pocket. For the rest of the shift I would feel my heart beat against this heaviness, as though revived by my small act. I stored the clay back in the barracks, beneath my bunk. Throughout the week I would tend to the growing mass as though a houseplant, moistening it each night with rainwater.

Over time, I began adding to this stash. Paper I could purchase from certain other prisoners – those closest to Muselmänner status, eager to sacrifice a letter home for an extra piece of bread. Barbed wire could also be bought. Those inmates assigned to construct the electric fences cut pieces from great wire wreaths to smuggle back to the barracks. They did not like dealing with me, naturally, but commerce supersedes prejudice here.

I can still recall the very first model I made – on the thirteenth day, the second rest period since my transferral. And the sense of anticipation I felt that morning: a delicious taste in my mouth, both salty and sweet. I clambered out of the bunk – one of my bed-mates aiding my exit with a hard kick. As the other prisoners snoozed, made

trades or wrote letters, I sat cross-legged on the floor, my materials spread out in front of me.

I used the wire to create a frame for the model that I could build onto. I twisted it until I had a shape like a crucifix, a crumpled ball of paper attached to the top of the vertical axis. Thumb print covered thumb print as I began pressing mud onto this skeleton. The barbs pierced my skin, but rather than pain I experienced a feeling of release. I added more substance to the form, watching as the dull silver threads disappeared into the mud. A little human – female in form – started to emerge.

Yet the further I worked up the model, the less certain I became of what I was doing. I had a curious sensation of working against myself, as though building a person from internal to external were somehow the wrong way round. As my fingers continued to knead the material, drawing out a nose, indenting the eyes, defining a body, the expert I had felt so sure I was made way for a mere apprentice.

I have made several models since that first one, and each has only confirmed my novice status. They are an offence of flesh; grotesques with eyes, lips, cheekbones, and limbs all out of proportion. Their bosoms are worn pillows, their legs perfect triangles where the thighs rub together only to reduce to spindle calves. No matter how intensely I concentrate, the figures I create still repulse me. The only pleasure in completing this ritual, then, is in observing the drying process: watching tiny fissures spread across the skin, the figure crumbling between the hands that made it.

So perhaps I am not an artist after all – or only a very bad one. Yet still I cannot escape the compulsion to create, destroy and then rebuild.

This brings me to something I can find no explanation for: the last two weeks.

It was on day thirty-two that I first became aware of the illness. I remember pissing into the toilet bucket, staring down at hip bones thrust into a perfect U, a penis barely worthy of the name. I felt a flicker of surprise as the thin stream emerged: my body was still capable of producing warmth. Squatting to shit, my knees trembled under what weight I had left. As I stood up, I was pushed roughly aside, landing on the floor beside the bucket. The perpetrator squatted over the pail and released his bowels with unholy ceremony; faeces splashed over the sides and onto my hands, neck and face.

That night brought with it vomiting, fever and wave after wave of nausea.

The following day – thirty-three – I was ordered to join the surface workers, to help them shift the boulders now sitting too close to the widening quarry’s edge. Each time I pulled a stone up, and felt the lactic acid sweeping through my shoulders, I had to will my legs to straighten and stagger into line. Releasing each stone into the new pile, my torso would be hauled forwards, the stone slipping from my palms to the ground. Twice I had to jump out of the way as other prisoners dropped their rocks. Their expressions revealed disappointment at having missed their intended target.

It took only an hour or two for the dizziness to take over. It had been threatening since the start, my body exhausted from vomiting all night. After setting down yet another stone I stood beside the pile as long as I could, my hands on my knees and my head bent towards the ground.

A Kapo kicked my backside hard, sending me tumbling head over heels.

“No break, Entartete!” he screamed.

I felt the mud ooze through my clothes, up my sleeves and trouser legs. As I took a breath my mouth and nose filled with it too.

“Good work, Kapo,” I heard a second voice say.

“Thank you, Kommandant.”

I stumbled to my feet.

I had never seen the Kommandant at such close quarters. His health terrified me. Sitting astride his huge brown horse, I could imagine him to be ten, eleven feet tall despite his stumpy legs. His face was pink and freshly washed, pristine against the grey sky: a perfect rectangle emphasised by a wide jaw and straight hairline. His jacket gaped, the torso and belly straining against the buttons. He removed his peaked hat to run a hand over his dark brown hair, which was swept back from the forehead in neat lines. He had gentle eyes – nevertheless I trembled as his gaze took in the Kapo, the quarry and me.

The following day – thirty four – was a rest day, thanks be to God. I remained in my bunk as long as was permitted, my body overthrown with exhaustion. The previous night had brought stomach spasms so severe I had thought my insides might explode. I itched all over, as though a rash raged between the skin and my mud coating.

Despite my condition, still I felt the compulsion to attend to the pile of clay. I made my way to the floor. My head was light, yet my body felt heavy. Even my eyelids seemed weighted. But my weakened state was not reflected by my fingers. Quite the

reverse, in fact: they were agitated, keen to get to work. As I picked up the clay they took over, skipping nimbly over the wire frame with an energy all of their own. I, for my part, was content to let them do as they wanted. As they performed their tricks, I remember being conscious only of the mud that coated my arms beginning to crack. It flaked off in small chunks that fell to the floor.

After what may have been an hour or two or three, I found myself staring at a model of the Kommandant. It was different from all the others; not only in subject but execution. It was a perfect copy of the man himself: his thick-set torso and belly, his muscular arms, his short legs, the flare of his nostrils, the heavy brow, and his thin slit of a mouth. Even the etching on the surface was expertly rendered: the gape at the buttons of the jacket, the puckered seams down the legs of his trousers. His hair, too, had not escaped the attentions of my fingers. What nails I had left had been drawn back across the skull in fine straight lines to create the hair, leaving residual coils of clay in my lap.

I picked up a few of these curls and held them in my hand. They carried a charge like electricity, sparking in my palm. They jumped around, glowing brighter, becoming hotter and getting bigger. Their colour paled from brown to blonde, the texture from rough shavings to feathery threads, until it seemed I held not clay in my hand but human hair. But it was not done: the hair continued to get brighter. Suddenly, everything around me was bleached with light. This was accompanied by a searing pain in my skull, causing me to howl like a rabid animal. My body fell back. My shoulders slammed against the ground, and then my head.

When I came to, I found I could no longer open my eyes. A thick crust had formed between the upper and lower lids; they must have been closed for quite some time. I put my hands up to my face and pulled the skin around the sockets, until pricks of light bled through. This action seemed to stimulate an awareness of pain in the rest of me. It arrived all at once, a giant foot stomping my body. I closed my eyes again – perhaps I passed out.

When my eyelids at last reopened, I found the pain reduced to a muted throb all over. An unfamiliar sensation was prickling my skin: warmth. There was a wool blanket covering me, I realised, and thick straw underneath – so thick I could not feel the slats of the bed through it. I turned my head right and saw a brick wall. I turned it left and

saw fifty rowing boats bobbing upon an ocean. But no – I wiped my eyes – it was beds, other beds. But these were not the same as the usual barracks bunks. They were wooden, yes, but single-tiered, all lined up in neat rows with only one person per unit. Each prisoner had a blanket over them, a straw mattress beneath their back, and their own toilet bucket to one side. The floor, too, was covered in straw, matted together in clumps where vomit, blood, or other bodily emissions had landed and dried.

It was the appearance of a doctor that confirmed I had been moved to the hospital block. I watched him tour the rows of beds, moving from patient to patient. He was an odd, hunched-over fellow, with circular spectacles too small in size. He wore a dirty white apron over his prisoner uniform; a red triangle peeked out of one side of the smock. He announced his arrival at my bedside by flinging off my blanket.

It is hard to say what startled me more: the fact that I was naked, or that my skin was white, not brown. Someone had bathed me. Someone had got the mud off.

“What happened?” I croaked to the doctor.

“Typhoid,” he said.

He began digging around in my sores, scooping out maggots with his forefingers. He wiped the wriggling creatures down the front of his smock, adding to its mosaic of stains. When he was done he pulled the blanket back up, but made me keep my arms on top of it.

“They stay here, understand?” he said. “There will be no degeneracy in this hospital.”

At dinnertime, I was presented with a hunk of bread double the size of that handed out in the barracks, and a bowl of warm soup. I choked the first gulp up onto my chest, startled to find lumps amongst the liquid: potato – and sausage. Bending my head, I scooped each piece back into my mouth, squashing it carefully between my remaining teeth before swallowing.

Over the following days I monitored the return of my health through the changes in my body: my skin became pink; my fingernails started to grow. When I used the bucket to piss, the urine shot out of me hot and yellow. My testicles, long-since strangers, hung outside my body once more. The other patients let me be, preoccupied with their own recoveries or with staying just sick enough to remain in the hospital block. Once I saw a patient reopen a gash in his hand by rubbing it against the leg of his bed. Then he scratched his head hard, so that lice showered into the freshly bloodied wound.

I drifted in and out of sleep, unaware of the passage of time. So I cannot say when it was that someone else first got into my bed. But certainly it was night-time because the hospital was dark. I felt the straw shift from the extra weight placed upon it, breath against my neck. I was so surprised that I did not move as this second body – smaller than my own – pressed against my back. I could feel a large nose and thick lips nuzzling my skin; a flat chest against my shoulder blades. My backside fitted into the crook of the pelvis, their knees slotting neatly into the backs of mine. They placed a hand – surprisingly large – on my thigh and held it there for a moment, before spidering it down the saucer of my hipbone to my penis.

I spluttered back into waking, my nose and throat full of water, my body shivering. The doctor stood over me, a bucket in each of his hands.

“Next time it will be piss,” he said. “Your hands stay outside the blanket.”

I looked down: they were buried beneath the cover. But the other man was gone.

After the doctor left I looked around the ward, trying to work out which of the prisoners might be my anonymous bedfellow. But I could not pick out a single guilty face or nervous expression.

The second time it happened, I tried to fight him off. As his hand brushed past my pelvis, I grabbed his wrist and slammed his elbow hard into the wall. But I was still not at full strength. The man rolled on top of me, using his full weight – what there was of it – to pin me down. With my right arm locked beneath me, I grabbed wildly for his face with my left, hoping to land a punch or slap. When I made contact with hair, I tore it out: a fistful of blonde curls. But my attacker did not cry or scream. His fingernails scratched like claws towards my genitals, where he repeated his frantic gestures as I buried my face in the straw.

The doctor was as good as his word. I woke up with piss all over me. A taste like rust was in my mouth, my eyes wept from the musty perfume. I stayed where I was: face down, the evidence of my shame sealing my thighs together.

“Arms outside,” I heard the doctor say.

I placed them over the blanket.

“What have you done to your elbow?” he asked.

I did not answer.

“Next time I will have you selected,” he said.

After that, the only solution was not to sleep.

So, three days later – forty-six – and here I am. Redressed in my uniform, the Rosa Winkel reinstated to my chest, I and eleven other freshly patched-together inmates march back towards the barracks. The sharp edges of my bones now rest under a thin layer of fat, yet still I feel exposed, vulnerable in my clean, pink skin.

In the distance I can see the quarry and the cart-men, to whom I will be returned. The pit is like an open wound, a great scar on the landscape. I imagine how it once looked: green fields, the River Sola babbling across the horizon. Before these men – artists of destruction – arrived to un-paint the image.

We are at the rear of the group; myself and the young man with the blonde hair. He is walking a pace behind me. No one else can see him or hear his footsteps. But I know he is present: it is something I am sure of. But he, too, must be undone. Slowly, I deconstruct my memory once more: that tumble of curls, the plump lips, and those boat-paddle hands. I package each part tightly before handing it back to him to carry.

So take them, Aleksandr, take them. They are no use to me here.

With each step I can feel you falling further behind. It won't be long before you're gone again, but I won't turn around or watch you leave. As I continue forward, I reach down, grab a handful of mud and rub it on my forearms. I press my palms together then run them down my face until I feel the mask harden. It is time for the rebuilding; those who cannot build perish here.

So: I was born. My name is Josef.

Portrait of S__ K__

Szymon Zaczek / Pencil on Letter Paper / 15cm X 25 cm / Circa June 1942 / Origin: Birkenau, Men's Camp (BIb)

The morning starts the way Sundays always do here: in the fugitive moment between sleep and waking. The images that come at this time are hazy. Half-drawn bodies surround me; spectres swim beneath my feet and circle overhead like birds. A female figure with rose-flushed skin dances into view, her borders half-formed, her movements slow as though she walks through water. She is wearing a dress of dirty white linen, which turns to gauze as a light behind her illuminates the outline of her naked form. She swings her hips teasingly, causing the material to sway from side to side. Her outstretched arms carve streaks of colour in the air: deep violet, burnt orange and volatile red.

I reach out, catch her around the waist and press her to me. Her body is soft like a pillow, the heat intense between her legs. Laughing – a ferocious, dirty laugh – she turns her head left then right then left again, so that I cannot get a fix on her features. We dance for a while this way, me trying to hold her still, to see her clearly, and she writhing within my grasp. Just as I think I have her – tangling the fingers of one hand in her hair while the other grapples for my pencil – she wriggles free with a shriek, the strands slipping like silk threads through my fingers. And this is how it ends; she drifts away, her hips still swinging, leaving only a vulgar cackle in her wake.

I open my eyes somewhere between 5 and 6am, judging from the pale light visible through the gap between the roof and the brick wall of the barrack. All around me is the sound of staggered breathing, the other prisoners eagerly drinking in their extra hours of rest-day slumber. I wipe my eyes, their salt irritating the line of red skin where my eyelashes used to be. I find my other hand inside the waistband of my trousers, wrapped around my erect penis. I stare at it as though a stranger. Without the dream it is a lost cause: the bodies next to me are ripe with dirt, faeces and urine, the splinters burrow into my back, and the only colour is the relentless grey and brown of the barracks. My ridiculous lonely soldier shrinks slowly out of view.

I make my bed as best I can, according to regulation, sweeping what straw there is together and smoothing the blanket over the top. But as I clamber out of the bunk, the

bodies either side of me shift, expanding into the space. One is awake enough to help himself to my blanket.

“I will have it back tonight,” I tell him. “Or you will see what happens.”

I descend from the top level, past prone bodies shelved as though after a bomb blast, awaiting a transport home. It is impossible to tell who has survived the night; only the morning siren will make that clear, the undead rising from their graves.

As I land on the concrete, a hand reaches out and grabs at my clothes. It digs into my pockets, searching for bread. I slap it away, hearing a yelp as I make contact, and the sound of its owner retreating to the back wall of the bottom bunk. The worst of them – the most desperate – reside down here, kicked to the lowest levels by stronger *Häftlinge*. I once found a man lying dead on this bottom tier, his mouth and nostrils stuffed with straw, his bed-mate snoring serenely beside him.

Before leaving the barracks I perform my rest-day rituals. I pinch the folds of flesh at my waist, my inner thigh, my upper arm and backside. I find a thin layer of fat which prevents my thumb and forefinger from meeting: a better week. Then I remove my shoes, unbutton my shirt and pull my trousers down so I can examine my sores. Using my fingers as tweezers, I tease maggots out of the worst ones, wincing as each larva releases its grip. I hold the tiny tubes up to the light to confirm they have not broken. Their yellow bodies turn translucent, revealing a fretwork of scarlet threads. Finally, I take out a small knife – traded for two evenings’ soup with a man that typhus killed off anyway – and work the nib of my pencil to a point, attacking the wood while scraping off only the minimum amount of lead. I put the pinch of shavings into my mouth and chew on them like tobacco.

The *Lager* at this time looks like a Tedeus Rychter watercolour. Morning mist has washed the scene, softening sharp edges, blurring mud and sky with wide brushstrokes. I wonder if it looks the same to the few prisoners already ghosting back and forth – their bodies thin smudges of blue and grey – or if I am the only one who sees it. The cardboard insoles of my shoes grow damper with each step as I cross the Men’s Camp. I’d like to buy myself some new ones but the going rate is too high – four rations. Several new transports of prisoners have arrived in the past few days, however. Once some of their possessions filter through to the black market the price should come down.

I meet a guard along my way. It is Heidrich, who has always struggled to take advantage of the camp's official rest day. While the other guards revel in the postponement of their usual morning supervision and roll call duties, Heidrich has a habit of using this spare time to perform exercises in the barracks' yard: stretches, squats and star jumps. He is wearing his boots, trousers, braces and a white vest, but not his jacket or hat with their polished badges. His honey-blond hair is unruly instead of swept back, the two side sections curling forward to trouble his brow. These changes make him appear even younger than his twenty-something years.

Heidrich bobs up and down, throwing a couple of punches in the air as I approach. His face is flushed from the heat generated by the exercise. His head is perfectly symmetrical: the nose aligned down the centre of the face; the neatly-tucked ears emphasising his square jaw. His skin is free of blemishes and glows, as though freshly painted. I find I am calculating the dimensions of this face, my fingers itching for my old sketchpad. But my desire is not to copy this face down verbatim. Rather, I want to carve it up. I imagine the features separating and violent colours – lime green, bright yellow, fuchsia – pouring from the gaps between.

"Konto für Ihre Bewegungen," he demands.

It is a phrase I know well by now: 'account for your movements'. I explain, in still-faltering but much-improved High German that I am searching for my cousin, having heard a rumour that he may have been on the transport that arrived two days ago. The boy is strong, I tell Heidrich, and could have been placed here to help with the expansion of the camp. I have invented a name for this cousin, an occupation and a home town. But Heidrich asks for none of this information. He merely grunts his permission for me to pass.

As I walk around him, I hear a *Wachbattalion* shout from one of the watchtowers.

"Alles gut, Heidrich?"

"Ja, ja," the young officer replies.

The guard shouts something else I do not catch, though I hear the familiar insult of *Dreckhund* aimed in my direction. Heidrich replies that it cannot benefit him to make anything of it today.

"Ich werde ihn morgen bestrafen, wenn der Herr Kommandant anwesend ist," he adds. 'I will get him tomorrow when the *Kommandant* is watching'.

I push open one of the wooden double doors to the toilet block. It does not matter how many times I enter this building or how often, the smell still hits like a woollen blanket thrown over the head. My throat closes; I retch but bring up nothing. I look inside, eyes squinting. Three concrete cuboids, pockmarked with holes along their upper surfaces, stretch the full length of the room, pointing towards a figure standing at the far end. I can tell he is waiting for me by the way he acts: like every other customer I have had in here. He looks all around before approaching, as though expecting to be accosted at any moment. His shuffle is that of an *Alte Nummer*: the toes dragged forwards for each next step.

“The great artist,” he says.

My ears delight at gentle words spoken in my Polish mother tongue.

“Brother,” I reply, offering him my hand.

He takes it in both of his shaking it slowly, as though pumping water.

“My name is S_ K_,” he says; some name I instantly forget.

“So, I am told you want a portrait?” I say.

“Yes.”

“And I will keep it, you understand?”

“Yes. You have a collection?”

“An archive,” I correct. “A record of faces, in case-”

“Yes,” he interrupts. “In case.”

I let the silence hang.

“Now, excuse me friend but I must ask: you have the payment?”

Looking around again, S_ K_ produces a ration of bread. My stomach lurches, but the prisoner holds the food just out of reach.

“How long will it take to finish the portrait?” he asks.

My eyes will remain on the food: “Not long, perhaps one hour.”

“But before the breakfast?”

“Of course.”

The crust moves closer.

“And you have done this before?”

“There are thirty-seven *Häftlinge* portraits now,” I say – a precise number always helping to secure the sale.

“So many?” S_ K_ breaks the bread in two: “Half now; half when complete?”

“As you wish, friend.”

I eat straightaway. The bread seems to expand in my throat as I swallow.

As I drop my trousers, I catch the confusion in S_ K_'s eyes as he looks – or tries not to look – at my shrunken genitals, fearful that he has mistakenly made another kind of arrangement. I stand there a second longer than necessary before sitting over one of the holes, removing the pencil from my breast pocket and uncurling a scrap of parchment from around my ankle. Understanding steals across the prisoner's face. It never fails to amuse me, their expectation that somehow I will whip out an easel and stool, and set up a little studio in the corner of the room.

S_ K_ takes down his trousers too. His arms shake as he lowers himself onto a toilet, and again as he moves a couple of places further away at my instruction.

“What if someone comes?” he asks.

I sweep the pencil and paper into the hole beneath me, grasp them beneath my backside and adopt a pained expression.

S_ K_ laughs; he cannot help himself.

“So, they will think you are giving yourself a helping hand?” he says.

“It works,” I shrug.

“Ok,” he says. “Ok – begin.”

But I have already begun. From the moment the bread passed into my hand I have been studying his face, estimating the distance from earlobe to earlobe, from cheek to cheek. Now, I reach forward to tilt S_ K_'s chin up. He stares cross-eyed down his nose.

“You must look here,” I say, using two fingers to point over my left shoulder.

S_ K_ turns his head obligingly.

“That's it. Don't move.”

I pick up my pencil. Each time I begin a portrait, I find there is moment just before I mark the paper where my hands do not seem quite my own. The pencil feels foreign: the stem scraping my callused fingers; they forming an awkward claw around the tool. It is only as I begin plotting out the face that they relent, surrendering to the familiarity of the routine.

I start as tradition dictates, with the central line. But as I do not have an eraser I cannot do a vertical stroke down the middle of the page with three diagonal lines cutting across it. Instead I use little dots, small enough not to trouble the eye on casual

viewing. This beginning brings with it a complicated emotion: I am an artist again, yes, but still and only a simple copy artist, not the one I should have been. Each movement resists my natural instinct, the markers slavishly recreating what I see in front of me.

I look up from the paper to find S_ K_ has changed position. One of several things may have caused this: that far-off shout, the passing shadow that made the light flicker, the scrabble of a rat.

“You must not move,” I tell him.

“Ok, sorry, I am trying.”

“It is hard at first,” I say, trying to temper my frustration. “Don’t worry, friend.”

Smiling gratefully, he recreates his stance.

I position the eyes: the left set in the centre of the page, the right further up the second diagonal axis. And now I become a child, connecting the dots in a puzzle in the local newspaper: here is the extension of the nose from bridge to tip, the crown of the skull, the hairline and the forehead, the semi-cylinder of the chin, the neck and shoulders sweeping down and outwards from the jowls, the V-shaped tendons between the collarbone and jaw. I finish the outline with the ears – helix, lobe and tragus – then rub my own head, crown to nape, the stubble scratching like dried grass.

“Finished?” S_ K_ asks, hopefully.

“Not yet, brother. I must take a break – a short break.”

I exercise my stiff fingers, making fists then claws then starfish. The movement aggravates the blisters at the joints; a couple pop back open. I push my palms outwards from my body then up over my head. The stretch is good.

“It is difficult, the picture?”

“No, everything is fine.”

Bringing my hands back to my body, I breathe on my fingers in an attempt to loosen the muscles. S_ K_ imitates the movement, and for a moment we blow steam into the air together, the clouds folding over each other like egg whites in a bowl.

“Did you study?” S_ K_ asks. “Art – is it something that you studied?”

“Yes of course, friend. I studied at the Academy of Fine Art in Kraków.”

“That is a good school, I have heard of it. When were you there?”

“From 1937 until they closed it.”

“So, you are *ein Eierkopf*?”

“Ha,” I laugh, recognising the SS term, “an egghead – yes, guilty.”

“It is a fine thing, to have a talent.”

“Not these days.”

“No.” He smiles ruefully, revealing black gums. “Not these days.”

I angle the pencil against the paper and press hard, creating dark shadows where S_ K_ 's lids rest on his eyeballs and in the hangdog sacks beneath them. I fill in the iris, varying the pressure to give a translucent effect, and add the catch-lights to the pupils. I graduate the tone from the crease of the lid to the brow bone and from the lower socket to the top of the cheek, until the eye area sits dark as a bandit's mask against the rest of the face.

A prisoner comes in. S_ K_ and I fly into position: me with my hand claspng the materials beneath my backside; he slouched over, a released marionette. I hold my breath as I wait to see what category they will be. At this time of the morning there are only a very few who will use the block for what it is intended for, the buckets in their barracks serving that purpose. A fellow Political will likely leave as soon as they see the toilet block is occupied, gesturing to their comrades that they must conduct their scheming elsewhere. The green triangle denoting a criminal, however, means we will be thrown out if we do not leave. The Jews are equally troublesome. Safe in the knowledge that their leaping Yiddish cannot be understood by others, they will continue their business even in our presence, leaving us stuck, not knowing whether to stay or go.

The man who enters startles when he sees us. His hands fly up to his chest, so that it is impossible to make out the colour of his identifying patch. He walks to the nearest toilet hole where he begins making ungodly noises.

I can see S_ K_ is panicking. The steam exits his nostrils in short bursts.

“I will run,” he whispers.

“No, hold,” I say.

Another man enters the block and begins walking towards the first. But he freezes when he notices S_ K_ and I at the far end of the room. Then his arms, too, fold across his torso. He betrays his companion as coolly as Peter denied Jesus, shuffling past him to the middle of the block. The two of them sit there, straining over their opposing holes; pointedly ignoring each other as they attempt to squeeze something – anything – out of their empty guts.

S_ K_ looks at me.

'Fairies,' I mouth.

My suspicion is confirmed a moment later. As the second man lowers his arms to lever himself off the concrete, I see the pink triangle of the homosexual on his coat. He exits the building. His friend follows a moment later.

The cigarette glows softly in the dim light.

"That was close," S_ K_ says.

"It happens," I tell him. "But we are safe now, friend."

I offer him the cigarette. His eyes tear up as he takes it.

"Thank you, brother. Thank you, thank you."

He reaches for it with thin fingers and inhales deeply, again and again.

"Not too much," I say.

"Sorry."

He takes a last drag then hands it over, a string of saliva shivering between his mouth and the filter. He tilts his head back, closes his eyes, and exhales a plume of smoke upwards. A great noise rips out of him as his bowels release. I hear the faeces drop into the slurry below.

"Sorry," he says again, looking at me sheepishly.

"It is what it is for," I reply.

He laughs, causing him to cough up phlegm black as charcoal. I give the cigarette to him to finish. As he takes it, I notice there is only raw skin where his fingernails should be.

"How do you get them out?" S_ K_ asks, suddenly.

"What?"

"The portraits, when they're finished. How do you get them out? Are there still ZWZ members on the outside that can help?"

"I cannot tell you that, brother."

"Or maybe they stay here until you can move them – do you store them somewhere?"

"I cannot tell you."

"But I am paying you. What is my guarantee?"

I pat my hand to my red triangle then point to the one on his chest.

“That is your guarantee. It was good enough for your brothers and it must be good enough for you. I cannot give out information. You know what this place is like – I cannot risk a traitor in the ranks.”

The blood rises in his cheeks.

“I had not thought of that. Forgive me.”

The cigarette has burned out but he stubs it on the concrete anyway before settling back into position.

It is the boredom that is my biggest adversary as I do the shading. My fingers throb each time I put pencil to paper, but the aching in my belly drowns out their objection. I add a thick line at the top of the neck to form a contrast with the jawline. The lips, cracked and shrivelled, are a patchwork of light and dark. But it is the nose that depends most on my ability to handle my tool: its few definite lines – the nostrils, the philtrum, the slope from bridge into cheekbone – require skilful shading to generate the necessary three-dimensionality.

Yet despite my careful attention, each feature I define – the bald head, the sunken cheeks, the sallow skin – seems to work against itself. S_ K_ is not rendered more distinct. Instead he disappears; just one more prisoner in the Men’s Camp, interchangeable with any other. It is all I can do not to strike the pencil right through the picture. If only I had colour, and brushes instead of a pencil. I could rescue this face from its nullifying palette of variants of grey. I would redo it in vermillion, cerise and turquoise, the background bright violet.

“It is a good portrait?” S_ K_ asks.

“Very good.”

“It looks like me?”

“Of course.”

My chest heavy, I shade gently around the left side of the face. I lick my finger then smudge this pencil-work, to raise the head from the page. Finally, I add the detail of his patch, number and pyjamas. S_ K_ sinks without a trace.

When the washroom bell rings, I look at the prisoner. He speaks before I can.

“It is finished, brother?”

“Finished.”

I hand the picture to him. He clasps it at the edges, setting it carefully on his lap as though it is a precious object. He stares at it for what seems like a long time.

He does not like what he sees; I know that already. His reaction is a theatre performance I have seen many times before: the hand flies to his face, but stops before making contact, afraid to confirm the truth of the image; the anger comes next, a red hue at the back of the neck, the top lip curling. And then the realisation: this is indeed how the world sees him now. The shoulders drop, the head hangs down.

“It is good,” he says, his voice cracking. “It is good.”

I reach out to reclaim the portrait but S_ K_ resists the movement.

“I must take it,” I remind him. “For the archive – so they know you were here.”

“My name though,” he says, pointing at the paper. “You have not put in my name.”

“Well for that you must give me the other half of the bread, brother.”

He cannot conceal his disappointment that I have remembered: he produces the food from his pocket but struggles to release it. I prise it from his fingers, his eyes betraying a desire to cave my skull in with a rock. But instead of eating the crust this time I place it in my trouser pocket.

“How do you spell your name?” I ask to cover the fact I have forgotten it.

He watches me make the appropriate marks on the page.

“So,” he says. “It is done.”

I nod, and watch as he raises himself up slowly from the block, his stiff limbs resisting. He looks at me expectantly, awaiting further words of reassurance or a meaningful goodbye.

“You leave first,” I tell him.

His brow furrows, then un-creases as he comprehends: our business is done. Shaking his head slowly, he turns to leave. He does not close the door behind him, and for a few seconds I watch him shuffle away across the dirt.

It cannot be long now until the breakfast bell. I seat myself over the toilet bowl again, and reach my arm beneath me. Thanks to the prisoner’s bread, it does not take much effort to release a fat shit into my hand. I pull it out, enjoying the warm feeling on my fingers. As I destroy his image, smearing it front and back with excrement, I feel a faint flicker of rebellion. When I first started this con, this final act used to cause me some discomfort – not guilt exactly, but an awareness that there should be guilt. Nowadays,

however, there is only scorn: who do these prisoners think they are that I would risk my life for them?

The picture coated, I screw it up and cast it into the hole beside me, watching as it disappears into the slurry below: goodbye S_ K_; and goodbye too P_ E_, G_ S_, Y_ T_ and all the others. I spit on my hands and wipe them on my trousers: goodbye and good riddance.

I walk back across the camp. The sun has done its work on the landscape: the dawn mist has been chased out; the sun is drying the canvas, exposing cracks and harsh edges. All on ground-level is brown or black or grey; a vicious contrast to the ultramarine sky.

Four guards are gathered around the soup barrels that are waiting to be transported to the barracks. All of them are holding cigarettes and emitting health in shimmering waves like heat. Heidrich is among them, all grown up now he is in full uniform.

“Konto für Ihre Bewegungen,” he demands.

“Keine Neuigkeiten.” No news, there was no news.

It takes Heidrich a moment to link my answer to the figure from earlier this morning, but he does make the connection for he is a reasonably intelligent man.

“Sie können weitergehen,” he says. ‘You may pass’.

The soup queue has already formed, but I am able to fight my way to a reasonable position. The man who stole my blanket earlier acts as my ally; I wonder what he will want in return. We wait – our bowls in our hands – for the barrel to appear.

“Herbert told me you need shoes,” he says to me as the door swings open.

“I might – how much?”

I finger the new crust of bread in my pocket. Meanwhile in my mind’s eye, the multi-coloured woman appears in the crack of the doorway. She shakes her rump at me and then nods sadly, before dancing slowly out of view.

Interior of the Camp Museum

Mateusz Kosnik / Oil on Canvas / 51cm x 41cm / Circa July 1942 /
Origin: Auschwitz I

The air is not just hot but humid, damp permeating everything. The camp is ripe with scent: sweat, the fetid earth and an unholy stench that has infested the air since the start of the year. It has its own taste. You can feel it rolling around your mouth: shit and mud and rotten flesh. These are the perfect conditions for flies. They assemble in little clusters that pockmark the landscape, their metallic green-blue backs glimmering in the sunlight like precious gems. As you walk, these strange pockets disperse with your footsteps, revealing black faeces beneath.

The summers are no good. Each person that passes – prisoner or guard – walks with a black cloud over his head. You look up: the Kommandant is not exempt; you too have your own swarm. The tiny insects dance in the breeze like flakes of dust. But these flakes have teeth: they bite, draw blood and leave red marks on the skin.

This bald heat is affecting you. You should be feeling good: the camp is keeping up with what is being demanded of it – if only just. Himmler even announced your promotion during his inspection yesterday. First SS-Sturmführer now SS-Obersturmführer: If these titles get any longer I'll have to write them down, you think. But something is still digging at you; a bite beneath the skin that can't be scratched.

It is not the gassings. They, by and large, have been less unsettling than you expected. As long as the prisoners enter quickly and one does not linger too long at the peephole they are surprisingly tolerable. It is the state of the bodies that makes the difference, you decide. Firing squads are messy affairs. Not that the chambers are clean, of course – your nose wrinkles as you think of the fluids that trickle down the mountains of corpses to the floor. But with guns there is blood, human matter flying everywhere. And there are the mishits: the wounded prisoners running for their lives or dropping, half dead, into pits that will soon be set alight. No wonder it causes the guards such disturbance. With the gassings one can close the door and be done with it.

No, it is the promotion itself, you realise. It does not feel earned. In all likelihood, it is only a demand for more.

"I will be sending details of further expansions through soon, for Birkenau," you recall Himmler saying, as he jumped up into his car.

The killing centres are not the only thing that have benefitted from relocation. The Lagermuseum, too, is much happier in its new home. You think so every time you step into Block 24a. It is a shame Himmler was not interested in seeing it this time. He gave it no more than a cursory nod when you pointed it out. Neither did he take you up on your offer of a tour.

“I am here to discuss the problems in the Woman’s Camp,” he had said. “Then I wish to see a gassing.”

You do not really need to be here either. It is Sunday, after all. You should be spending time with Mutz and the children: you have promised to take Klaus riding; only you can push Heidetraut high enough on her swing. But you came downstairs this morning to find your wife already departed.

“Mama has gone to town,” Ingebrigitt had informed you, grandly.

She had said it with the air of someone in on a secret – or perhaps only the pride of an eight year-old with news to impart. Still, you cannot shake the thought that your daughter may know something of Mutz’s dalliances.

You cough and the Häftlinge stand, startled by your unexpected presence. The Lagermuseum is busy – not surprising for a rest day. The prisoners, relieved of their usual duties, have flocked to this place of respite. I am not the only one then, you think. There are twenty of them at least; far more than the fifteen permitted. You see the problem at once: there, in the centre of the room, positioned behind an easel, stands Böhner. The stool behind the middle-aged Unterscharführer’s legs, the full set of medals at his chest, and his guilty expression, all whisper that the guard has been having his portrait done. Sure enough, a pencil version of Böhner’s fat face is staring at you from one of the easels. The image wears a self-consciously stern expression, made comical by his chubby cheeks. Poor Böhner, that baby-face of his will forever prevent him from rising further up the ranks.

“Wall,” you instruct, indicating the direction with your head.

The prisoners put down their paints, brushes and pencils, and arrange themselves in a line of the left-hand side of the room. You watch them, enjoying the fear your presence invokes. Böhner looks at you, unsure.

“You too.”

The soldier stomps over to join the prisoners, his face creased into a sulk just like Klaus when he is in one of his rages.

Kosnik is among the prisoners. This is not a surprise, of course. He is here every Sunday and many evenings too. But his presence excites you: perhaps the artist is working on the picture you have ordered him to make. Yes – there is Kosnik’s easel.

The artist has been painting the gallery interior in warm, loving shades: ruby red, topaz yellow and amber. The outline of the prisoner who was painting Böhner is situated to the right hand side of the frame. You note, with satisfaction, that Kosnik has left the soldier out, however. The artist knows there is no place for the depiction of bad practice in the Lagermuseum. If this picture is to be displayed in your villa, as you intend, all must be in order. It would never do for Himmler, on one of his visits, to see evidence of guards engaging with prisoners in this way.

You shake your head, musing again on the Reichsführer’s refusal to visit the gallery. Surely any man with even a rudimentary knowledge of art could have seen what a success this institution represents? There could even have been a promotion of a different kind had the Reichsführer viewed your work here – a swift sidestep to something more intellectually stimulating and culturally-oriented. It would be a welcome change: you are tired of being around disobedient ignoramuses, thugs and sub-humans. Mutz would not like it of course. She would have to leave her beautiful home, her garden, her lover. You smirk: all the more reason to snap it up.

But Himmler did not come and so that is that. And this was more disappointment than surprise. You have observed a change in the little man lately: he is no longer willing to discuss initiatives or side projects. He is interested only in those orders originating from above, which must be carried out to the letter and straight away. It was the same way when you tried to discuss the replacement of the Women’s Camp Commander with him:

“I will hear nothing of it,” he had said.

You turn your attention back to Kosnik’s picture. In place of Böhner, the artist has instead painted one of the museum’s glass-topped display tables, though he has omitted to show its contents: German medals in this case. Perhaps he will paint them in later. He has also added a window to the left wall: a clever move. The light streams in, bouncing off the glass, illuminating the large red flag in the corner of the picture. It is a Communist flag, you note with some discomfort. But the real version of it is indeed installed in the museum, having been placed here as an artefact of a soon-to-be-extinguished movement.

You turn to Kosnik.

“It is good,” you say.

Kosnik mumbles his thanks, but keeps his eyes trained on the floor.

“What will you put here?” you ask, pointing to the blank canvas Kosnik has painted his artist standing before.

“I am not sure yet, Kommandant.”

“You know,” you say, feeling your spirits rise. “It reminds me of one of those pictures-within-pictures.”

Kosnik stares at you, blankly.

“You see, the canvas is one picture, yes?” you tell him. “But inside it is another – the easel your artist is standing at, ready to paint.”

“Yes Kommandant,” Kosnik says.

“So,” you continue, momentum building, “what if he is painting this same scene also: the gallery and the easel and himself and so forth? Then the one inside that picture paints the same thing, and the one inside that. It goes on and on. I saw it done in a photograph once – it was a fine trick.”

“You want me to change the picture, Kommandant?”

His flat tone catches you off-guard.

“Well no, not necessarily. It was just an idea.”

You are embarrassed. You can see the prisoners looking at each other – did one just roll his eyes? ‘Who is he to be telling us about art?’ you can almost hear him ask. If they are not careful you will have them all sent to the standing cells. But this is an idle threat: you would not want to explain their transgression to the guards there.

“I will change the picture if you like, Kommandant,” Kosnik says again.

“No – never mind.”

Perhaps that promotion to the Ministry of Culture is not such a good idea after all.

You move on to study the rest of the artworks, your face still hot. Supplies are running low. A square tin on one of the tables contains only near-empty boot polish pots and squeezed out toothpaste tubes. This is what happens when too many men are allowed to practice.

The prisoners are watching you, wondering how much more of their assigned time slot you will take up. You keep your pace deliberately slow; that will teach them to roll their eyes. The paintings are all by and large within regulation, though some artistic

license has been taken. Your request for images of heroic battles has been accommodated by at least two painters, but both have opted for historical scenes. Did you specify present-day victories, or should you have made your instructions clearer?

The first painting features a cannon fight between two ships with great sails: one white with an eagle design, the other stripes of red, black and white. The latter ship is not faring well; it has a hole blasted in its side. The other image shows cavalymen on horseback. The animals have been well-rendered, straining at the reins as they lead the stampede. The central cavalry figure is less enticing, however. He is short and stumpy, with a square block head. And he looks afraid, his black cap sitting squint on his head, one hand clutching the saddle. Something about it makes you feel you are being mocked again.

The final picture you examine is the portrait of Böhner. You can see the guard fidgeting out of the corner of your eye. Böhner already has several strikes against his name for fraternising with the kitchen girls. You imagine the sweat gathering on the soldier's palms, the panic shooting around his body like a pinball. You look at the portrait for a long time, enjoying this renewed feeling of power.

"And this, Böhner, this is coming along nicely."

The soldier exhales with a great puff, as though all the air might leave his body.

"Thank you, Kommandant. It is a gift for my mother, for her birthday."

You nod, pleased with yourself: Böhner will tell the other guards tonight how generous the Kommandant is. But is this what I want, you think suddenly. Perhaps I should be harder, so the men know I am not to be messed with.

'What a sissy!' you imagine them saying, 'Afraid to even berate one of his own men!'

"But see it is completed outside of your supervisory duties," you tell Böhner, your tone severe. "Or there will be a reprimand."

The guard nods, his eyes wide: "Yes, *Kommandant*."

That's better.

Concentration Camp Auschwitz

The following rules are to be observed when writing to prisoners:

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4.) Newspapers are permitted, but they may be delivered only through the Auschwitz concentration camp postal facility.

5.) Packages may not be sent, because the prisoners in the camp can purchase everything.

6.) Requests to the camp management for releases from protective custody are useless.

7.) Fundamentally, there is no permission to speak to and visit prisoners in the concentration camp.

T h e C a m p C o m m a n d e r

Lessons. I wonder if there is anything you can do to help her, as she is not in the best situation? Perhaps Uncle Witek, for example, can help get her Withdrawn? I pray you will help your Faithful Family as much as circumstances will allow.

Write to me soon, Dear Husband. This is letter is my second and I grow ever more anxious.

Prisoner Category: Protective Custody, Pole

Name: Serejski, Esther

Date of Birth: 3. V. 1910

Prisoner Number: 1746, Block 8

Auschwitz: 3. XI. 1942

Dear Husband,

On April 5 of this year I sent you a letter. I hope that you received it? I am healthy and I feel well. I am in Camp Auschwitz, where the work is suited to my strength and the food is sufficient.

I am impatiently waiting for news. Can you tell me in particular of Our Son, Szymon? I am concerned for his health, as the Weather is so Cold now. Is he still on holiday with our Good Friends or has a place been found for him at a School somewhere? If at least I were to hear that he is well in School then that would be a comfort. What news, also, of Yourself and our Cousins? I hope that Uncle Witek is taking care of things and that all remain Active despite this Hostile Weather.

I have heard from Our Daughter, Eta, and I am afraid that she is full of complaint. She struggles at School with the toil of her Daily

Your Concerned Wife

P.S. Please send five postage stamps (German, 12 Penny)

1942: Expansion

The second letter arrived the same way the first one did: through some unseen hole in the ceiling. It missed the Auschwitz model this time, however. You are grateful for that at least.

There is a new smell in the room; your nose wrinkles as it gets stronger. Looking around, you see that the portrait of S_K_ is being coated in fresh brown smears. No hand is performing this task; the marks seem to appear all by themselves. The soft pencil lines of the prisoner-who-could-be-any-prisoner disappear beneath shit.

What of the clay figure of the *Kommandant*? It is still laying to the left of the door. You squat down to pick it up, just as you did earlier. But this time, tiny thread-like cracks appear on the surface where your fingertips make contact. You pull your hand away quickly. The figure repairs itself at once.

It is only when you stand back up that you realise the door is now open. But your host is nowhere to be seen. Tentatively, you stick your head out: a wall to your right; a dark corridor to your left; opposite, another door, locked of course.

From the other end of the hallway you can hear strange noises: thumps and bumps, perhaps a muffled cry? You are not sure you want to investigate – but then won't the exit be that way too? You try to remember, retracing your path through the *Lagermuseum* in your mind. Yes, it would make sense that you have now walked from one end of the building to the other. The effort of thinking is making your brain hurt. You are not used to drinking so much in a short space of time.

You cross the corridor and start walking up it, keeping your right palm pressed to the wall. The sounds get louder as you continue; your pace slows as you become less sure of your chosen course of action. But that shout – yes, that is the curator. So then, this is the only way to go.

You topple over as the wall gives way. But that is not correct: it doesn't give way, it disappears entirely. You cry out as you crash down heavily, your right ankle twisting beneath your body. You do not fall flat, however, but rather into a sitting position, your body tipped to the right. You feel a concrete step against your right arm – two, three, four. It is a staircase.

A door opens.

“Everything is okay?”

The curator’s voice pierces the darkness. It is clear now instead of muffled; he must be standing in the corridor too.

You try to stand up, but the dizziness overwhelms you. You sit instead on the bottom step, rubbing your bruised right arm. You can feel your shoe getting tighter, pain in your foot and calf: your ankle must be swelling.

“You are hurt?”

The voice is suddenly beside you, causing your body to shudder violently. All at once you are aware of how cold it is in here.

“Have this: for the shock.”

You identify it by the smell. You try to push the jam jar away, but each time you think you have succeeded, it somehow floats back into your hands.

“You must drink – it will help,” the curator tells you.

Before you know what is happening he has grabbed the hair at the nape of your neck, pulled your head backwards and tipped the drink into your surprised ‘O’ of a mouth.

You gasp and splutter, but to no avail. The mixture crawls into your sinuses, and trickles down your throat. The taste is more pronounced this time, something fungal, with an underlying sharpness, much like paracetamol. As the curator relinquishes his grip, the back of your head begins to itch furiously: he has torn hair out, you realise. You can feel tiny beads of blood forming in the empty follicles.

As you continue coughing, something small, like a plastic pellet hits the back of your incisors. He has put something in the drink. There it is: some sort of pill dancing inside your mouth. You try to trap it with your tongue as it fizzes and hops.

“Better?” the curator says. “So, you wait there, recover. I will get the lamps.”

You hear him scuttling down the corridor. A moment later, his silhouette flits across the orange rectangle denoting the doorway you came out of.

The first thing you do is slide your thumb and forefinger under your tongue and extract what remains of the tablet. It has reduced to about half of its original size; the rest disintegrates between your fingertips, leaving only a powdery residue. You can feel what you have ingested taking effect already. A tingling sensation patters across your skin like the lightest of pins and needles. You put your head between your knees and inhale great gulps of air.

You remain there for a long time. Perhaps you pass out; you cannot be sure. But eventually you sit back up slowly, feeling foggy but strangely weightless. The curator must have reached the lamps by now, for the light in the hallway has gone out.

Gingerly, you test your ankle. You are surprised to find it is not sore. Perhaps, you think, smiling dumbly, the tablet has been of benefit after all. You push yourself up from seated to standing, placing your weight on the left leg, then the right.

When you hear the noise, your first thought is that it is your anklebone crumbling. But no, you are still upright and it is holding steady: you rock your weight back and forth a few times to be sure. The sound breaks the silence again – and again, and again. A sharp rap followed by something like grit being crushed underfoot. It is not of your body at all. It is coming from the room the curator is in.

It is only on the fifth repetition that it dawns on you: the clay figure of the *Kommandant*; the curator is stamping it to pieces. Yet this knowledge does not trigger the alarm or outrage you expect. Instead you are calm, accepting, even: of course he is crushing it; why not?

You hear footsteps returning him to you. He stops what can only be centimetres from your face. He is panting heavily. When he speaks, there is a hard edge to his voice.

“What you must understand,” he says, “is that much of what you saw in that last room is not possible.”

You nod, feeling curiously acquiescent. Not possible? Okay then.

“Because if such works ever existed the way they claim to have existed,” he adds, “how could they be here?”

Your brain takes a while to work this one out. But there does seem to be some sense to what he is saying. The portrait of S_ K_, for instance – if that was really thrown into a latrine then it did not survive. And presumably a degenerate statue, like the one you saw in the first room...well that wouldn't have lasted long in Nazi Berlin. This man has a point, you think, hazily. This man definitely has a point. But what about-

“So, we can proceed?” he asks, interrupting the thought so abruptly it flies from your head like a startled sparrow.

You gesture with your arm: by all means, Sir, lead on. You follow him, padding softly, the floor beneath your feet now cotton wool.

1943: Selection

It is only as the curator switches on the lamp in the next room that you realise just how long you must have been stuck in the darkness. The light burns your eyes, causing them to tear up. Through this thick skin of water, you pick out the blurred figure of your host. He is standing beside a white canvas smudged with colour in each of its four corners. You close your eyes and rub them, opening them for the second time by degrees. This time they clear, though the flickering light still stings.

This side of the building has been partitioned by curtains too. But the room is smaller than the first two – about half the size.

“I can start?” the curator asks.

You can see now that he is standing not by a canvas, but a medium-sized piece of white paper. It has been cut into a square, the straight edges a refreshing contrast to some of the torn-off, yellowing scraps you have seen. And what you thought were smudges are in fact horses’ heads – one black, one grey, one brown, one piebald – each presented at a different angle. Something about the horse in the bottom right-hand corner is familiar; a bell sounds dully inside your mind.

“Ahem,” your host coughs.

He is impatient, you can tell. He is starting to wane already from being at such close quarters to the lamp. You apologise, and signal for him to please proceed.

“So,” he says, his voice wobbling, “here we have the final picture I wish to show you.”

Already? you think. But we are only in 1943 now, surely? You thought the *Lagermuseum* stayed open longer than that – until liberation, isn’t that what he said?

“This painting was a present to the *Kommandant*, from an unknown prisoner,” your host explains. “See here: no signature, no information panel.”

You lean forward to take a closer look, bending at the waist to a right angle. He is correct. The horses seem to twitch as you straighten up again.

“We can assume however, from the skill of the artist and the quality of the materials that this piece was most likely created someone allowed to practice in the *Lagermuseum*. Perhaps it is a ‘thank you’ gift then, yes?”

Yes, you suppose that follows.

“So although, as we have seen, the hours for the *Kommandant* were long and his job terribly demanding-”

You nod slowly, to demonstrate your sincere understanding: poor Rudolf, poor man.

“-still we can say that this scheme, at least, was a great success. For in fact,” he says, pausing theatrically, “seventy per cent of *Lagermuseum* artists survived Auschwitz.”

You applaud. Seventy per cent: bravo, bravo. What an angel the *Kommandant* was: Oskar Schindler; Irena Sendler; something else.

The curator seems pleased. He smiles: a large black slit. Has his mouth always been devoid of teeth? His body, too, looks older again and his face is slowly thinning. The skin sags beneath his eyes. Already he is backing away from the lamp.

“In truth,” he continues, his voice now barely a croak, “initiatives of this nature were likely a factor in the *Kommandant*’s promotion – to Deputy of the Inspector of Concentration Camps, in November of 1943.”

You shake your head as though in deep admiration: a promotion – marvellous.

“So, now I leave you,” he says, still smiling. “The painting can show you everything in more detail. Take as long as you need: I show you to the exit when you are finished.”

He holds onto the doorknob for a moment before turning it.

“And you will only look to this picture, yes?” he asks, his voice now barely a whisper.

You give him a thumbs-up, your grin as wide as a saucer: Yes, of course – got it.

The moment the door closes you drop to the floor and clutch your ankle. The throbbing started a while back – right around the point your host started spouting whatever rubbish that was about how hard the *Kommandant* had it. You shake your head: crazy old fool. You are not about to risk another attack though; best to get this over with and get out.

The horses in the picture are tossing their heads, as though laughing approvingly at your performance. So, friends, you think, looking around the room. What have you got to show me this time?

They do not take long to respond: another letter drops – no, two. And you can hear furious scribbling somewhere behind you. But it is a pencil sketch that catches your attention first, on the opposite wall the to *Kommandant*’s horses. Two figures are pictured, each pointing at the other. One is an old man, the other younger – or perhaps just healthier. Both resemble the curator.

'Autoportret'

Philipp Ebner / Pencil on Cardboard / 29.5cm x 20cm / Circa July 1943
/ Origin: Auschwitz I

You are in the roll call yard, listening to the daily reports of the SS guards. Now more than ever, they are full of complaint:

“We cannot keep on like this,” one says.

Another: “How can we fulfil targets when the labour force is incapable of work?”

A third: “Are we a concentration camp or a death camp? A decision has to be made.”

“We are suffering, Herr Kommandant.”

You hear their protests, and their thinly veiled insinuations that their Kommandant is not in control. But your eyes are not upon them. Instead you look over their shoulders to a prisoner marching out of the camp just as the rest march in.

As much as you would like to, you do not cry out or draw your gun – you are not a man to give into foolish notions, after all. Instead, you watch as the prisoner begins a tap dance outside the fence. He raps his feet against the ground so fast you cannot see them. He wiggles his backside, pirouettes then sinks into a low bow, pulling the cap off his head and swinging it in a wide circle towards the ground. It is Ebner, you are sure of it. So, he is still taunting me, you think.

It began two months ago, in the Lagermuseum. On one of your visits you discovered a drawing that had fallen to the floor beside one of the easels.

It was a pencil portrait of a prisoner. That in itself was an offence – one all the assembled prisoners knew to be punishable by death. You had felt a familiar creeping sensation through your body: embarrassment. I have been too indulgent, too lax – even the prisoners do not respect my authority anymore, you'd thought.

The drawn prisoner was dressed in striped pyjamas. He had grey lines sketched across his face, black shading at his cheeks and beneath his eyes. He was pointing to a second figure beside him, almost identical to himself. But this other man was dressed in civilian clothes, and was larger, healthier-looking. His features were drawn into a quizzical expression: the brows knitted together, the forehead wrinkled. A crude, child-like hand had scrawled something beneath the image. You had held the picture closer so that you could read the words:

'Who is this?' the healthy man was asking.

'You,' was the reply of his weaker friend.

'Me?' he responded.

'Yes!'

You had looked again at the figures. Both had high foreheads, low brows, wide noses, dark eyes and a square jaw. The second man, the civilian, had hair scraped back in neat lines from his forehead – and a receding hairline, you observed, self-consciously touching your own. His clothes, too, were uncomfortably familiar: a shirt tucked into riding breeches, boots that covered the whole calf. And down on the ground beside them, what was that – an upturned cap with a Totenkopf badge?

The drawing had been signed.

"Who is Philipp Ebner?" You had demanded.

Your voice had emerged louder than you expected, but was still greeted with silence.

"Böhner?"

The guard had stepped forward.

"I do not know, Kommandant. Why do you ask?"

You had not wanted to show him the picture – what if he told the other guards about it? You'd stuffed it in your pocket and looked at him sternly.

"Never mind why. He is in here – where?"

Böhner consulted his list.

"I'm sorry, Kommandant, I don't have him written down here."

"Of course you don't. Preoccupied with other matters again I assume? Whose birthday was it this time – your sister's?"

"No, Kommandant." He'd gestured to the room: "See, no portrait."

You'd glared at him: "Where were you then?"

Böhner had looked down at his feet before taking another step forward. Out of earshot of the prisoners, he'd whispered: "Upstairs."

"The brothel?" you'd barked.

"Perhaps, Kommandant, it could be raised at the next inspection?"

"What?"

The guard's question distracts you from the dancing prisoner.

“A fifth crematoria – to relieve the overcrowding. If we lean more heavily on Himmler, he might make the recommendation.”

“Lean more heavily on Himmler?” you reply, incredulous. “Does he strike you as a man that can be leant on – even lightly?”

The other guards are slouching. Two have their arms folded, another bites his nails. One even has his hat off and is scratching his backside, barely paying attention to the conversation. When did they start to stand so informally in your presence?

The prisoner, meanwhile, has recommenced his performance. Now he marches up and down the parameter fence, kicking his legs out straight, his arm extended in a salute. If only the Wachbattalion were able to see him as I do, you muse. They’d put an end to his mockery. You snort as you imagine his body, riddled with bullets, shuddering on the ground.

It was soon after discovering that picture in the Lagermuseum that you began seeing this prisoner everywhere. You can always tell it is him because, unlike all the other inmates, he has somehow eluded the barber’s razor. He is clean, too, and does not walk with a stoop nor drag his feet. He is well built, stocky if somewhat short, with strong legs. His stride is also distinctive, never a run but a swift forwards motion; he walks with purpose. But what really disturbs you is that in the month or so that has passed since you first saw him, this particular inmate appears to have grown stronger instead of weaker.

You have seen this prisoner eating slowly – not hunched over the plate, shovelling food into his mouth. Instead he takes small bites, chewing each morsel as though there is something to taste, even pausing between mouthfuls. You have noticed him in the barracks, snoring like a baby as all around him on the bunks groan. From the washrooms, too, you have watched him emerge pink and glistening, not the red-brown colour of the other Häftlinge.

This prisoner seems to know no boundaries, for you have seen him everywhere: in the munitions factory, head bent as he sorts the shells; laying railway sleepers; moving rocks in the quarry; labouring in the fields. You have observed him working the hardest of labour details, steadily and with a fluidity that seems to come from some higher power. He has emptied latrine buckets for barracks seven, eleven, nineteen – unaffected by the stench that chokes the other prisoners. He has carried turnips to the

kitchen, holding five or six in the crook of one arm while juggling two with his other hand. He has played second violin in the orchestra, one note behind the others, just to irritate you, you are sure. Worst of all, he seems to turn up at the ramp whenever you attend a selection. He stands amid the carnage, calmly pointing at you as the doctors send everyone else left or right.

You would love to get close enough to this prisoner to get just one clear shot. But he is too clever for that. Whenever he is close by he is part of a crowd, allowing him to slip in and out of your eye-line like a fish in water, never appearing long enough for you to get a proper look at his face. And when he appears solo, it is always as now: just far enough away to be out of range. Still, you think, it might be worth a go. You imagine drawing your Luger: the shriek of the bullet from the barrel, the crack as the prisoner's skull split open, the splash as blood hit the ground.

"Kommandant?"

Unterscharführer Glaßgen is looking at you, a nervous expression on his face. You realise you are holding your gun, your arm extended towards where the prisoner was dancing. But of course he has disappeared. Hastily, you re-sheath your weapon.

"Yes, yes, I am listening – continue."

They proceed with their litany of grievances as though nothing out of the ordinary has happened:

"This is hard work, Kommandant – too hard."

"I have not seen my wife in weeks – or my mistress."

Either they are used to thinking of their Kommandant as an eccentric, you think, or they are in on whatever is happening. Perhaps it is some sort of conspiracy to send you mad. After all, how many times have you had them check the prisoner lists for this Philipp Ebner, only for them to deny his existence?

"The person responsible for this drawing will be killed," you had informed the inmates the day you found the picture. "If he does not come forward now, I will kill every one of you and the Lagermuseum will be shut down."

The prisoners had looked at each other; Böhner at the floor. But still no one came forward.

"Get me the register, Unterscharführer."

But every man was accounted for, except that one.

“Very well, if no one is coming forward then we must do as we must.”

A long pause; you had enjoyed letting it linger, knowing full well the effect it would have.

“Klemens, it was Klemens!”

A prisoner stepped forward to point at the man next to him, as if on cue.

“It was Klemens, Kommandant, I saw him. Klemens made the picture.”

“It is a lie, Kommandant!”

But you had known right away that the accused inmate was telling the truth: Klemens was a carpenter, not an artist; Tarlow had come to you about his appointment personally.

“Böhner?” you had asked your junior, waiting for the Unterscharführer to let Klemens off the hook.

“It is hard to say, Kommandant,” he’d shrugged. “They all look the same to me.”

“Well if you find the job too hard, Böhner, I can see about a transferral. Perhaps you would prefer the front line?” you had snapped.

The officer had jolted as though electrified.

“Now that I think about it, Kommandant: yes, this is the man. It was him.”

“It is not true!” Klemens screamed again.

None of the other prisoners had come to the man’s defence, of course, unwilling to place themselves back in the line of fire. You were left with no choice.

“Block 11,” you had said, gesturing towards the prisoner.

You had felt your belly sink as Böhner dragged the man to the door, still screaming.

“And Böhner,” you had called, as the guard reached the door.

“Yes, Kommandant?”

“Rest assured I will be making a full report of your behaviour.”

“Rest assured I will be making a full report of your behaviour!” you shout after the guards as they stomp off, dissatisfied.

One – Glaßgen, you think – waves his Kommandant away. He knows as well as you do that the threat is an empty one. Glücks has made it quite clear that he has had enough of your complaints. If only he could see what I put up with, you think, taking a last look at the prisoners still not finished with roll call.

Concentration Camp Auschwitz

Prisoner Category: Protective Custody, Pole

Name: Serejski, Esther

Date of Birth: 3. V. 1910

Prisoner Number: 1746, Block 24

The following rules are to be observed when writing to prisoners:

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T h e C a m p C o m m a n d e r

Auschwitz: 2. VIII. 1943

Dear Husband,

I urge you to write to me. This is my third letter from Auschwitz, where I have been since March last year. I am healthy. The food here is sufficient. In July of this year I was assigned a new job, considered better suited to my capabilities.

I urge you to write to me, Husband. Of Our Daughter, Eta I can tell you that her situation at School has grown desperate. She is unhappy with a Change to the Curriculum; she desires to Leave Most Urgently. Will you not help her? Will Uncle Witek not help us? Perhaps you are finding the Weather too Hostile? But Conditions are Harsh for little Eta too. And so I beg you – please do whatever is within your power to help her. I ask you also: what has become of Szymon, Our Dear Son? Your silence makes me anxious: I would rather hear that he did not enjoy his Vacation with our Good Friends

than hear nothing at all, do you understand? And of You and our Cousins – assuming you are still altogether – is there no report you can make?

In my present employment I have found an Assistant; he assures me he will see to it that this letter will reach you if you are to be found.

Husband, you must remember, if it were you who were here, I would write.

Your Faithful Wife

Tata and Mama and Me

Jiřı Novak / Blue pencil on blotting paper / 22.2cm x 28.7cm / Circa September 1943 / Origin: Family Camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau (BIIB)

When I step out of the sleeping shed, the sunshine gets in my eyes and they go blind. I cannot rub them with a hand because then I would have to let go of one side of the paper and it might crease, and Mama says it is the last piece so I must not spoil it. I blink hard instead, and wipe my face against each shoulder. The material of my smock is dirty and scratchy, and it makes my eyes sting. But the black spots start to clear and I can see the *Familienlager* again and, beyond it, the Big Camp.

Most of the other children are in the yard already; it is better to be outside where it doesn't smell as bad. Some are doing trades: I spy a button, a photo, a cigarette, even a crust of bread changing hands. Others are setting up games, drawing 'Panak' grids in the dirt, or gathering sticks to throw at the wire for a round of Electric Fence.

One big group of children is playing '*Blockade: Aktion!*' I know this because the older ones have guns, which means they are the SS Guards. Their right hands curl under their armpits and their left ones hold the muzzles. They are not real guns of course, they are only made of air, but I can see them like they are real and I know the big kids can too. They keep them hoisted as they search the camp, taking long, slow steps through the mud. They look all around the sleeping shed, the toilet blocks, the kitchen units, the sick house, the school, and under the outside tables. But they point them at the ground when they pass each other so they do not shoot someone by mistake.

I want to join the game because it looks fun, but I have work to do. I carry the paper carefully, holding it out in front of me the way I used to carry Mama's tea tray for her. This must be a very old memory, because it is from the proper house in Prague. That makes it at least three years ago, when I was five or even younger. I see a plate of warm rugelachs in the centre of the tray, brown sugar shining on top of each one. Mama's best crockery is set out all around it: the cups with little gold leaves around the rim and a different animal on each saucer. I liked the fox best and the badger second. The blue pencil sitting in the pouch of my smock becomes the sugar spoon. Mama would always forget it until the very last moment then plop into the chest pocket of my smartest white shirt – *plop!*

“So Jiří, we are ready for them!” she would say, picking up the teapot which she would hold because hot water is dangerous.

We always walked into the Parlour Room together: Máma just behind me, one hand on my shoulder. And there, on the best sofa and armchairs (how soft they were – big clouds) would be the ladies from Máma’s prayer group, sewing parochets or Torah mantles for synagogue. They would look up all at once as we came in, like birds that had spotted falling crumbs.

“Such a big, strong boy you have, Eliška!” they'd say, as my arms wobbled under the weight of the tray.

The table in the Parlour Room had a smell like clean boots that tickled my nose. And it had a white coverlet that Máma had sewed herself, made of holes and strings with a pattern of orange flowers. As Máma poured the tea, the prayer group ladies would lean in, their long fingers pecking – slowly at first then faster and faster – at the rugelachs. I would stand by Táta’s armchair, picking at the loose threads where Pippi-Cat used to scratch, staring hopefully at the shrinking mound of rolled-up triangles.

But there will be no reward this afternoon for the big, strong boy: no *putt-putt* sound as the pastry breaks and turns to mush inside my mouth; no hot filling turning the top of my tongue to sand; and no syrup taste – sometimes nutty and gritty, sometimes apple-sharp, or best of all Máma’s special jam that tasted like perfume smells. Instead, I climb onto a bench next to one of the tables, and try to find a section of the wood that does not have bird shit or splinters on it. I put the paper down, tuck my legs under my bottom, take out my blue pencil and wonder what I should draw. But all I can think of now is rugelachs.

“Hi, you!” Pavel calls. He starts running towards me.

Pavel is a Czech Jew like me, but much older – twelve at least. This means he always gets to play a Guard in *'Blockade: Aktion!'* I am scared of him when I am not on his team for games, but in real life he is alright. Máma says me and Pavel went to the same schools, before first his family then mine were sent to Theresienstadt and then here. But I don't remember him. I do remember, though, that each new school I went to had fewer pupils than the last. Táta told me this was because only the cleverest got to stay on. Even though I know he was lying, I still like to think this was why Pavel was thrown out before me.

The older boy stops beside my table and stamps twice as he stands to attention.

“Have you seen ze vun zey call Hanuš?” he barks.

His German accent is very good.

“No,” I answer.

“*Nein*,” he corrects.

“Sorry – *nein*.”

“Vot about Hanna? Or Miroslav or Franta or any of the ozer leettle vuns?”

“*Nein – ich habt...nicht*.” I am proud of myself for having remembered so much German all at once. I must tell Táta later.

Pavel does not seem impressed though. He bends into a half-squat and points his pretend gun at my face.

“You are sure?” he says. “You are not on ze side of ze Leettle Jews, are you?”

I am getting nervous now; Pavel is taking the game very seriously.

“No – *nein*. I am not playing. I am drawing.”

The gun stays where it is: “Vot for?”

“Máma wants me to make a special picture.” The words sound stupid in my mouth. “Táta is sick and needs it to help make him feel better.”

“*Pisher*,” Pavel snorts, forgetting to be German for a second so he can insult me in Yiddish. He runs off to continue hunting, his feet making *pwuck-pwuck* sounds in the sludge.

I am embarrassed: I am not a *pisher*; I am a big, strong boy. And I don’t want to make a stupid picture; I want to play ‘*Blockade: Aktion!*’ and hunt the Little Jews and rob their things and eat. I want rugelachs and plum dumplings and poppy-seed pirishkes, all dripping in prune butter. I want to eat everything.

I was embarrassed like this the first time I met Pavel (again?) here. That was Máma’s fault too. We had just arrived in the *Familienlager*, and I was trailing her around as she asked after sisters and brothers and nieces and nephews. Suddenly, she saw Pavel’s Máma – who, she later told me, she hardly knew back in Prague at all. She threw herself into her arms, and they started crying and squawking, running their hands over each other’s faces. Me and Pavel stood behind them and tried not to make eye contact. We have not spoken of the incident since.

I wonder whether, if I chase after Pavel, he will let me join the game. But I am only eight, so it is not certain he would let me be a Guard even if he said yes. I look at the group: they are stalking in a star shape now, backs to each other, guns pointed

outwards. Gerta is one of the Guards and she is eight years-old. But no one says no to Gerta because she is built of bricks and likes to kick boys. Hanuš is also eight, and Pavel said he is hiding which means he is a Little Jew. But then Hanuš is a little Jew; his Mára used to say he did not grow properly because she hugged him too much when he was born (although I am not sure this can be true). But I am not nearly as big as Gerta even though I am taller than Hanuš. It is too risky, I decide; I don't want to be a Little Jew.

Probably it is best that I don't play anyway: Táta does seem very sick. That much was clear this morning when he did not even listen to the brand new joke I had for him, the one Vladimír told me he overheard from a real-life SS guard. Táta normally loves jokes, and this one must have been very funny because Vladimír said the SS laughed for ages after he told it – and it had a bad word, which Táta always likes.

“What do you call a thousand Jews on a train, Táta?” I said to the figure hunched up on the bunk and covered over with a blanket.

But he did not make a guess. He just carried on shivering like a big, dark pudding.

“Your father does not need this now, *nudnik*,” Mára said, swatting me towards the door as though I were an annoying fly.

I tried to explain to her that if he heard the punch line ('Fucked!') then maybe Táta would laugh like the SS man had and wouldn't shiver anymore. But Mára only nodded her head like she does when she is not really listening and handed me the paper.

“Go and draw something,” she said. “That will cheer Táta up.”

Sometimes it is a lot of responsibility, being excellent at art.

But all of this thinking has made an idea appear in my head: I will draw Táta. I am best at drawing people, after all. And if I draw Táta standing up and smiling perhaps it will encourage him to stop lying in bed being miserable.

I start with Táta's outline, the way that Slečna Marianne has taught us to during our lessons here. I do his legs first, nice and skinny, pressing gently because the paper is thin and the pencil can easily pop right through it. They come out wobblier than I would like but I decide it makes Táta look more ill, which is realistic. I do his shirt next and then his hands – up in the air, like he is cheering because he is getting better.

‘A fine idea,’ I imagine Slečna Marianne saying, the pretty brown curls that always peek out of her headscarf bobbing as she nods.

I do not understand why Mama won't take Tata to the sick house. He has not got up once in the past five days – except for when the SS come to the *Familienlager* each morning and night for 'Headcount'. When we first arrived Tata tried to trick me. He said 'Headcount' was just a big numbers game the guards liked to play that everyone must take part in. But I told him I was too old to believe nonsense.

Mama cannot be next to Tata during 'Headcount', because men and women must stand apart. So she has arranged for the two men that sleep either side of him on the bunk to hold him up in the line. She gives them some of our daily ration as payment. I have pointed out that if we take Tata to the sick house, then he will get better and we won't need the men and I can have my bread back. But Mama says Tata would rather stay here with us. Sometimes, when I am feeling really angry and really hungry, I think that this is selfish. But I wouldn't tell Mama or Tata that.

Alfred – who I don't like – mocked me when I asked some of the other children why Tata won't go to a doctor.

"Because no one wants to go to the sick house, Jiřı," he said, in a stupid sing-song voice. "No one comes back from there."

"That's not true," I told him.

"Well can you remember anyone coming back?" he asked. "No, because they put you in an oven and burn you up and crush your bones and stick you up the chimneys."

He had pointed to the tall turrets peeping out of the forest at the end of the Big Camp. This made Hanuř cry, of course, because his mother has been in the sick house a very long time now.

"Who says?" I asked him, swatting at Hanuř to shut him up.

"Gunter," he answered.

Gunter is Alfred's friend from the Men's Camp, who throws extra bread through the fence if Alfred shows him his bird and eggs.

"Well Tata says the chimneys are just for the bad prisoners in the rest of the Big Camp, not the *Familienlager*," I said. "And he wouldn't lie about that."

Alfred is an idiot.

I draw Tata's face second because Slečna Marianne says you should always draw it after the body. I am not sure why she says this but it does not matter because she always tells the truth. I leave a gap at the top of Tata's head so I can sketch his cap without a line going through it.

‘Good thinking, Jiří,’ I can hear her saying. ‘That is very clever art.’

I start to colour in the rectangle of Táta’s coat. Normally it is irritating only having a blue pencil and greyish paper, but today it is lucky because Táta’s clothes will be true-to-life. I concentrate very hard as I do the lines. I want them to be neat and tidy, in case Marianne sees the picture someday.

Slowly, very carefully, I colour a blue stripe up, then a blue stripe down, then a blue stripe up and a blue stripe down, then a blu-

-*Wheeeeeeeeh*, and here are the Little Jews! A group of younger children dart around the corner of the farthest-away shed; past a surprised Gerta, whose eyes are as wide as those of the bug-eyed prisoners from the Quarantine Camp. Pavel is in pursuit, his gun up and his face red.

“Suvvender you leettle sheets!” he screams.

Most of the Jews stay in a group because they are stupid, so it is easy for the Guards to surround them. They put their hands up and drop to their knees. But four or five break off and keep on running. They are even more stupid: the Guards put up their guns up and – *dugga-dugga-dugga* – the Little Jews fall. A couple stagger forwards a few steps before dropping – *splat* – into the mud. Another one crawls a short distance before releasing a final gurgle. The Guards cheer: they win again!

But wait – someone is still standing! It is The Idiot: scrawny, scabby, seven year-old Alfred. Somehow the bullets have missed him, or bounced off him, or gone through him because there he is, over by the fence. He does not flinch, even as Pavel walks towards him firing round after round. The Little Jew waits until he has everyone’s attention.

“I give myself to *Hashem!*” he shouts, throwing himself against the wire.

Alfred’s body shudders as electricity does a dance through his veins. He collapses to the ground, still shaking.

Everyone is silent. The Guards and the Little Jews stare, open-mouthed. Alfred remains where he is – still now.

Pavel begins to clap and whoop, and soon the others join in.

“Bravo!” they cry. “Bravo!”

Alfred stands up, wipes the bum of his trousers with his hands, and takes a big bow. His grin could not be wider if he stuck his fingers in each side of his mouth and pulled. I

applaud too, even though I do not like him, because it really was fine acting. For a moment I truly believed the fence had been turned on early.

Alfred struts over to re-join the group and I turn back to my drawing. But my heart thumps as I realise all of the excitement has made me puncture the paper: Táta looks like he has a bullet hole right through his chest. I am angry at first, but then I decide it is okay because Táta does have holes in his clothes. I push the pencil through the paper a few more times to show it is intentional.

‘A brilliant save, Jiří!’ my Marianne says, clapping her soft white hands together.

The guards – the real, German ones – never have holes in their clothes. Their coats and their trousers and their hats are always spotless and neat. I like the jackets best and the waist belts second. The jacket buttons sparkle when the sun hits them, and the black belts with their rectangular buckles make everything look tucked in and smart. I wish I had German clothes: mine are holey and dirty like Táta’s, and they smell of shit.

But this has given me another idea. I will draw a second person alongside Táta: me. Only in the picture I will have nice clothes and this will help make Táta feel better.

‘How clever,’ Marianne sighs.

Doing my outline is far more difficult than doing Táta’s, because I am not drawing from real life. It takes a lot of concentration to get my coat right, but I manage because of my talent.

“Hi Jiří.”

It is Alena, who is not to be trusted. That’s what everyone says.

“Her mother *stups* SS men for food,” Táta told me once.

I asked him what *stups* means; Mára said: “The Yiddish word for ‘Be quiet Táta’” and glared at him, but that doesn’t make sense.

Alena is thirteen and has lumps on her chest already, which means none of the girls like her but all the boys do. Hanuš brags to the other children that she showed them to him once, in exchange for the flowered headscarf that was all he had left of his Mára. Alena uses it as a handkerchief.

Some of the older boys whistle when they see Alena has stopped by my table, but she ignores them.

“Pavel said you are drawing a picture,” she says, tugging on the end of her long black plait. “What is it?”

“Just – something,” I mumble. I don’t want Alena to call me a *pisher* like Pavel did.

“Ah,” she nods. “And what are you drawing ‘something’ with?”

“Pencil.”

“I can see that, silly! But what colour?”

“Oh – blue.”

She pauses for a moment, as though thinking very hard. Then she bumps herself down onto the bench on the opposite side of the table. The jolt makes my pencil jump, sending my nice, straight belt all wiggly.

‘Careful, Jiří,’ Marianne scolds in my mind. ‘Don’t ruin it now!’

Alena leans over so that she is looking at the picture upside-down.

“Who is it for?” she asks.

“My Táta – he is sick.”

“What a good son you are,” she says. “Can I have a look?”

I turn the picture round.

She gasps: “It is very good, Jiří. Who is this, with his hands up?”

“Táta.”

“And this one here?”

“Me.”

She claps her hands: “Father and son, how lovely!”

Perhaps Alena is not so bad after all.

“You didn’t want to play ‘*Blockade*’?” she asks.

I shrug. “I had more important things to do.”

“Ah,” she nods, “of course. I didn’t play because it’s boring.”

I think ‘*Blockade*’ is the best game in the world but I don’t tell Alena this.

“It was much better in Theresienstadt,” she continues. “There were more places for the Jews to hide. But Auschwitz only has the barracks.”

“That’s true.” I have not thought about it that way before.

“All the games here are boring, boring, boring.” She points to the group of children playing ‘Electric Fence’, daring each other to run up and touch the wire. “Like that one: they know the fence isn’t even turned on until dinnertime. BORING!” she shouts at them.

“BORING!” I copy.

Alena smiles.

“Can I help with the drawing, Jiří?” she says suddenly. “I’d like a turn with a pencil.”

I don't think T

But – another idea! Why can I not be grown-up in the picture? That way I should be taller than Táta, and that will make it all okay.

‘Good, Jiří – the artist is back now!’ Marianne says, ruffling my hair.

I draw some wrinkles on Táta, to show how very old he is. Then I start colouring in my clothes: jacket, trousers, hat and boots. I pay special attention because if my clothes are to look perfect then I must stay inside the lines. But only having blue means it is hard to tell where the trousers end and the boots begin.

It is getting hard to draw now, because smoke is in my eyes. Not just in my eyes but in my mouth and nose too. My whole head must be filled with it – I bet it’s even coming out of my ears. I gulp down as much as I can even though it makes me cough, because at least it tastes of something.

It looks like the smoke is getting to the Guards too. The eating is getting faster, more frantic. Some are chewing on little sticks like they are chicken bones. Others coo over little mud cakes they have made – Idiot Alfred even stuffs one in his mouth. Rudi is on his hands and knees, jerking his head as though he is a wild animal tearing flesh off a corpse. Pavel circles them all, jumping up and down.

“More! More!” he shouts.

The Little Jews are fed up. They start to break away from their line – one at a time at first, then in twos and threes when they realise the Guards no longer care. Some of them join the group playing ‘Electric Fence’ at the border with the Men’s Camp. They will have to finish soon though; it can’t be long until the fence is switched on.

I imagine one of the children putting their hand on the fence and getting zapped. Sometimes it happens – Vladimír has told me – though I have never seen it. I wonder what the other children would do: would they scream or would they run over and tear the body to bits? I imagine tucking into a warm shin bone and my stomach wails.

If our parents saw us eating the child, would they would tell us off or join in too? Probably there would be a rule about not eating humans, like there is for pigs. I once asked Máma:

“If a pig walked through the camp right now, would you kill it and feed it to me and Táta?”

She said no.

I am getting angry again: our adults are so stupid. They say ridiculous things about hugging babies so much they do not grow, about ‘Headcount’ being a game, and about

having to be Jewish just because our mothers are. But they would not eat a piece of meat if it walked right past them or fell off the fence. German adults are smart and that is why they are the bosses. They are clean, they wear nice clothes, they have guns and they eat all the time – any meat they like, Eva says. I bet they wouldn't even blink at eating a cooked child if they were hungry.

I have another idea: Máma should be in the picture too. But I will give her a pig nose, even though it is not nice, because I am angry at her for being stupid.

'Careful, Jiří,' Marianne warns.

But this time I ignore her.

"How is the picture, Jiří? Are you finished yet?"

Alena has wandered back over.

"Nearly," I tell her.

"Good," she says, "because I have decided what your next one should be."

She uses her hands to push herself up to sit on the table-top then leans back.

"I think you should draw me."

"Why?" I ask.

"Why not – don't you think I would make a good subject?" She turns onto her stomach and props herself up on her elbows, so that the neck of her smock hangs down. "Come on Jiří, don't you want to draw me? We can go behind the barracks."

"But there are no tables behind the barracks."

"But it's private," she says.

I don't know why that matters and I don't like how Alena is being strange.

"I'm not sure, Alena" I say. "I don't think I'll feel like drawing again straight away."

"Well why don't we do something else?" she suggests.

"Like what?"

Her voice goes all low and breathy: "Use your imagination."

I think hard: "'Hats Off'?"

"What?"

"'Hats Off' – they're playing it over there, look."

In the Men's Camp a line of prisoners are kneeling on the ground, their hats by their sides. Three SS are marching up and down the row, shouting, and spitting on the

ground. One of the guards has badges on his chest: a black cross and two big coins. I wonder if he will use the coins to buy his dinner later. My stomach does another growl.

“Sure Jiří, we could play ‘Hats Off’,” Alena says.

She doesn't sound keen though.

“We don't have to.”

“No, I want to. Let's go.”

“Go where?”

“Behind the barracks.”

“Why not here?”

“Because I want to play it there. Come on. Bring your pencil – it can be the gun.”

“It's ok if you don't want to play, Alena. I don't like ‘Hats Off’ that much anyway.”

“Oh for goodness sake!”

She looks annoyed now, like Mára does when I tell Táta jokes with bad words. I think she is about to stomp off, but instead she slaps her forehead.

“What a *nebbish* I am, Jiří. I forgot to tell you: I have a pencil for you. It is red! You only have blue; think what you could do with red too.”

I do think of it: red mouths for Táta and Mára and me; and, if I press lightly, pink faces too; and my uniform – I could have a red band around the sleeve, and a red badge on my chest. I hold out my hand, but Alena shakes her head.

“Uh-uh. You have to come behind the barracks if you want it.”

“Why?”

“Oh Jiří,” she says. “You know if the other boys see me giving you a present they will get jealous. Follow me and you'll get your red pencil – and bring your blue one too.”

Something in my brain goes *ping*: Alena is not to be trusted. After all, only I know the real story of her and Hanuš – the one he made me promise not to tell anyone. When Alena led him around the corner of one of the big sheds, Gerta was waiting there to beat him up. Alena took his Mára's headscarf – and now she is after my blue pencil.

“Let me see the red pencil, Alena,” I say.

She shakes her head, digging circles in the dirt with her shoe.

“Only if you come behind the barracks – come play with me Jiří. Wouldn't you like that?”

Another big gust of smoke sweeps through the *Familienlager*. I hear coughing all around me. But I swallow it all up until the burning makes me feel like a dragon inside.

“No, I wouldn’t like that, Alena,” I say, clenching my fist around my precious pencil. “I wouldn’t like that at all because you’re a *pisher*.”

Alena jumps back like flames are coming out of my mouth: “What did you say?”

Power surges through my body like I am the one who has been zapped by the fence.

“I said you’re a *pisher*, Alena – just like that mother of yours who *stups* SS men for food.”

“*Nebbish!*” Alena cries back, swiping at her nose and eyes with her sleeve.

She sprints all the way back to the barracks.

I am flushed with feeling: I am the Guard and I am victorious! Smoke pours from my nose as I let out a big breath. I pick up my blue pencil again, and draw myself a peaked hat and some shining buttons. I add a rectangular buckle to my belt and three coins to the badges on my chest so I can buy myself a big dinner later. Then I add a cross-shaped medal, because I am the best ever at art. Finally, I sketch my gun – pointing at Mάma and Tάta to show them that I am the boss now.

Only the faces are left to do: I decide Mάma will look scared – O mouth – because she knows I am angry with her. But Tάta will be smiling – U mouth – because he is proud of his big, strong, German son.

And, at last, it is finished.

‘It is your finest ever picture, Jiří!’ Slečna Marianne cheers, planting a wet kiss on my cheek.

Saddle Horses

Philipp Ebner / Pencil on Cardboard / 29.5cm x 20cm / Circa October 1943 / Origin: Auschwitz I

“You are Rudolf Höss. You are 43 years old. You are the Kommandant.”

This is what you say as you examine your reflection in the bathroom of your office. Your lips mechanically recite the mantra as you replace the black cap on your head.

Walking back into the main room, your eyes catch on the picture. It is pinned to the wall, next to Tarłow’s ‘Feeding Horse’. Four horses’ heads, this time: one from the front; two in profile; another turning, as though looking back at you. It arrived only yesterday, delivered by Vogel.

“What is this?” you’d said, as the young Unterscharführer handed it over.

“One of the prisoners asked me to give it to you,” he’d said, shrugging.

Even Vogel has become insolent these days.

The picture was titled ‘Saddle Horses’. The skill with which the animals had been rendered left only two candidates in your mind.

“Tarłow,” you’d said, “or Kosnik?”

“Sure-sure. One of them.”

“I will remind you to address me properly, Little Bird.”

“My apologies, Kommandant.”

Had that been sarcasm in his tone? You shake your head; it makes little difference now. You move over to the desk to switch off the lamp before you leave – you cannot take the glare of exposed bulbs these days, you’ve found.

The letter is still laying there, the words all upside down. You do not turn it round – you know well enough what it says. You snap off the light: the knotted figures cast on the wall by the lampshade disappear.

You pause before you leave, your hand hovering somewhere over the door handle.

“You are Rudolf Höss. You are 43 years old. And you are still the Kommandant.”

It doesn’t do any good.

Autumn has given way to winter. The first snows will come soon; you can feel the threat of it in the air. Your children love the snow, as all children do: that moment of wonder when the word is quilted. For you, however, changes of season only bring

fresh troubles, and throwing a blanket over everything won't change that. Nevertheless, there is work to be done, and you are still the one responsible for doing it – for the time being, at least.

You walk to the entrance of the SS quarters, overlooking the gate leading into the prisoner barracks. With each step, the strains of 'The Triumph March' get louder. It is as though the music is mocking you – so, too that legend above the gate. Work makes you free, you think with a grimace; can't say I've noticed.

The inmates are marching into the camp, their day's labour over. The Kapos nod as they pass to let you know all are accounted for. Despite this, you cannot escape the feeling – now more than ever – that something has got away. Ebner, you think suddenly. Certainly you have not seen him in a while. Perhaps he has finally succumbed, become just another bald skeleton marching. Maybe selected, transferred or – who knows – he could have just marched out of the camp one day, unhindered. You would not put it past him. Well, good riddance, you think – one less thing to torment me.

The prisoners are in a bad way; most will not get through the winter. Their mouths hang open; to close them is too much effort. Their heads are all bent forwards, the weight of their skulls pulling them on. You can see their shoulder blades protruding beneath their smocks, as though they conceal wings beneath the sackcloth. Maybe that's what happened, you think: Ebner simply took off his jacket and flew away.

You would like to straighten these men's backs, lift their chins up, and inject some determination into their trudging. You imagine ordering the guards to select five inmates. You would have them insert steel rods into their mouths, pass them down through their throats and stomachs, and out their rear ends. They would be staked into the ground, gagging and squirming, wriggling like up-ended beetles. The rest would have to march past them; then they'd stand up straight.

The clouds are sitting low, blocking all trace of sun, adding to your sense that the world is closing in on itself. As the orchestra finishes playing, you look around at the landscape. The grass has been stripped like a tablecloth, yanked so swiftly that all cutlery has been left in place. The marshland here can no longer take the rain. It does not drain into the River Sola, and nor can it be absorbed by the fetid earth.

This was farmland once, you think – it could have been again in the future. But now it is ridden with bodies, infested with maggots and disease. You recall driving through

this area, just over three years ago – is it really such a short time that’s passed? But the tracks of hay are all gone now, as though the harvest never happened.

The first thing you see when you re-enter your office is your new picture. ‘Saddle Horses’ – likely the closest you’ll ever come to owning your own stables. You walk around your desk, grab the bottle of vodka and a glass from the top drawer. You down a shot before dragging your chair round to the other side. You sit, put your feet up on the desk and raise the second drink to the picture.

“Prost,” you say to your horse companions, tipping both your head and your chair back as you swig the mixture.

As you return to an upright position it seems the horses nod at you – but perhaps it is just the motion of the chair legs landing back on the floor.

The letter is still on the desk. You had been hoping it might have disappeared – a figment of your imagination, like so many other things seem to be here. Again you don’t turn it around. It was barely two lines, after all, not hard to memorise.

Kommandant Höss,

22 October 1943

Confirmation that Reichsführer Himmler will arrive 01 November to discuss all matters relating to future service.

SS-Gruppenführer Glücks

Amt D: Konzentrationslagerwesen

Inspektion der Konzentrationslager (IKL)

I bet Glücks loved writing that one, you think. You can imagine him sitting at his typewriter, cackling as his fingers drum away.

“You stupid arsehole,” he’d be muttering. “They’ve got you now.”

The letter means one of three things: you are being promoted, discharged or shuffled out. And given that your idiot team – the one that has been hampering you right from the beginning – can now add ‘Thieving from Prisoners’ to their resumes, along with ‘Singularly Missing all Targets’, you highly doubt their Kommandant will be moving anywhere but down.

You shake your head as you pour your next drink, thinking of the Inspectorate’s report. You sit upright and slash the air with an outstretched finger as you ape the line:

“Unannounced on-site checks revealed evidence of corruption; theft of Reich property; degeneracy.”

Mutz will be furious to leave her paradise – that may be the one upside. It will be hard to maintain contact with her lover from whatever back of beyond place they are about to be sent to. Please God not the frontline, you think to yourself suddenly. You are not equipped for Russia, or for fighting.

You down the vodka: you should not be thinking such things. No use torturing yourself until you’ve heard what Himmler has to say. You stare at ‘Saddle Horses’, hoping it will take your mind off the subject. It really is very good: that one at the top left looks just like Hans. And that bottom right one is Reinhard – the one that you have now. Yes, it is the same chestnut colouring, the same diamond on the forehead.

And they’re ever so lifelike, you think, your eyelids growing heavy. Look how they seem to nod at me. They toss their heads impatiently – come on Rudolf, come riding!

-you land. The landscape has gone quiet. There is no baying crowd, no great wind sweeping past your ears. The horse slows to a trot, a walk, a stagger. It is shrinking, you realise. It is no longer a chestnut giant, instead only a half-the-size black pony – Hans. You look around, embarrassed, hoping no one can see you. But there are only horses inside this enclosure, no people. Hans struggles on, his hooves sinking in the mud. Not just his hooves, you realise, but his ankles too, and now his knees. Your feet make contact with the earth. It seems to open up around them, closing in again just as quickly. You pull on the reins but Hans pays no heed. As you stick fast, he walks right out from under you. He wades off into the distance, ploughing deeper and deeper, until, with a last swish of his tail, he disappears into the earth.

You are in some huge compound. Barbed wire wreaths, stacked one on top of the other, obscure any view of the outside. But this strange prison is not empty – no, there are the horses. They trot over to greet you now, but these are not horses of any kind that you have seen before. They are skeletal, with long stick legs; they totter as though on stilts. Each carries a large brown leather saddle on its back, and yet they do not sink as Hans did – as you are now are. They walk instead as if the ground is firm, impenetrable, despite the great weight upon them.

As you watch, the horses begin to multiply. As one moves, another appears behind him – as though they are splitting and dividing, sprouting directly from each other. The cage is filling up with horses but you are powerless to stop this slowest of stampedes.

The animals do not react the way you would expect to what is happening. Instead of becoming scared, rearing, whinnying, they simply nudge their way as best they can between the hundreds – thousands – of other bodies, of necks and flanks and legs. As they continue to reproduce, those at the outer edge of the group are pushed against the wire. Barbs pierce skin, but there is no panic. No noise comes from them at all.

In the centre of the circle, where you are, the air is thick with horses. You can smell the sweet, wet scent of their shit; the flies that hover around these brown-green piles biting you, breaking skin. The horses' bodies press against yours – your face, your mouth, are smothered by fur. And now the crushing starts. One by one your ribs give way, each one popping as it breaks. Your legs snap next, your arms shatter. But the onslaught does not stop. It continues until every bone of your body has been ground into a fine grey powder. What's left of the Kommandant trickles to the ground and is stamped into the mud.

Concentration Camp Auschwitz

The following rules are to be observed when writing to prisoners:

1.) Each prisoner in protective custody may receive from and send to his relatives two letters or two cards per month. The letters to the prisoners must be legibly written in ink and may contain only 15 lines on a page. Only a letter sheet of normal size is allowed. Letter envelopes must be unlined. Only 5 stamps of 12 pfennig may be enclosed. Everything else is prohibited and is subject to seizure. Postal cards have 10 lines. Photos may not be used as postal cards.

2.) Shipments of money are permitted.

3.) It is to be noted that the precise address must be written on shipments of money or mail, thus: name, date of birth and prisoner number. If the address has mistakes, the mail will be returned to the sender or destroyed.

4.) Newspapers are permitted, but they may be delivered only through the Auschwitz concentration camp postal facility.

5.) Packages may not be sent, because the prisoners in the camp can purchase everything.

6.) Requests to the camp management for releases from protective custody are useless.

7.) Fundamentally, there is no permission to speak to and visit prisoners in the concentration camp.

T h e C a m p C o m m a n d e r

I ask, what have I – what has your Kraków Family – done to deserve this? But perhaps this is unfair; I cannot pretend to know what has befallen you – perhaps you have gone on Vacation too? But please, Husband, if you are reading this do not deny Poor Eta your voice. My only wish now is for a sign you have not forgotten Your Daughter. Until my end, I will take it as an affirmation of our deep and lasting Friendship.

Your Loyal Wife

Prisoner Category: Protective Custody, Pole

Name: Serejski, Esther

Date of Birth: 3. V. 1910

Prisoner Number: 1746, Block 24

Auschwitz: 27. XII. 1943

Dear Husband,

I write to you from Auschwitz, where I have been since March 1942. This is my fourth letter. I am healthy and I feel fine. The food here is sufficient.

However, I have sad news: Eta has become Unwell. In fact, I am sorry to tell you that it is impossible she will Survive; others in her Class have been struck with the same Affliction, and None so far has Lived. It would soothe her if only she could hear a word from you, her Dear Father, before she Passes. If you have news of her Brother Szymon, then so much the better. Her hopes that he is Well, after all this time, are very much diminished.

My Assistant here tells me he checked on the status of my last letter, and that it was delivered to your address. And so I wonder whether perhaps you have chosen not to write back to your Wife. Is this possible? If so,

I ask, what have I – what has your Kraków Family – done to deserve this? But perhaps this is unfair; I cannot pretend to know what has befallen you – perhaps you have gone on Vacation too? But please, Husband, if you are reading this do not deny Poor Eta your voice. My only wish now is for a sign you have not forgotten Your Daughter. Until my end, I will take it as an affirmation of our deep and lasting Friendship.

Your Loyal Wife

1943: Selection

The curator has not returned for you yet. You step away from the final picture – ‘Saddle Horses’ – and sit on the ground again so you can massage your ankle. But the pictures do not like it.

“Get up!” they hiss. “Get up! Get up!”

They don’t want the curator to hear, you realise. You can imagine him standing in the hallway, his ear pressed to the door, checking all is in order. But what can these pictures want from you now? You have visited each one in turn, and read both letters.

They are giving you the answer; as ever, you only have to look. The twin figures of the curator – or is it the *Kommandant*? – are now pointing not at each other but the curtain. So, too, has the blue SS child-guard swung around to aim his gun at the swathe of hanging material instead of his hostages. And the horses are all now facing that way, their noses up, nodding gently.

You have your orders then. You stand up, hobble to the curtain and sweep it aside. Another room – and possibly another, behind a second curtain further down. Here, you realise, are the missing rooms: 1944 and 1945.

1944: Resistance

Sturm and the Dybbuk

Michał Behrman / Mixed Media on Paper / 60cm x 40cm / Circa July 1944
/ Origin: Crematoria II, Auschwitz-Birkenau

Sturm is as anxious as I, the night of our first sitting. He cannot decide how to sit. He hangs his hands straight down by his sides, perches them on the edge of the stool, places them on his knees then clasps them in his lap. He folds his arms across his chest, but no, this will not do either, he mutters to himself. It will cover the medals that will surely come – the ones that I, or someone else, will add to the portrait later as required. The arms return to his sides. Then the legs start.

For all his posturing, his face maintains the same expression throughout, one which he presumably considers suitably military. His lips are pursed, pushed into crinkles; his chin positioned at an almost seventy-five degree angle to his neck. He stares straight down the bridge of his nose at me; his eyes, the peak of his cap, appearing almost level with his nostrils. The effect is comical. Were it anyone else, I would laugh.

Instead, I wait – what can I do? To initiate conversation with an SS is prohibited, and I am not about to take the risk that my being commissioned for this special task somehow dissolves that rule. Yet this puts me in a difficult situation, for the young *Unterscharführer's* pose is untenable; I cannot draw him as he is. Even the outline – beyond the rough arc of his shoulders, the thickness of his neck – cannot be marked out until the head is lowered. The pencil he has given me becomes slippery in my hand as the palm sweats.

I wait.

He exhales loudly – he has been holding his breath, I realise.

“Will you not begin?”

“Yes, *Unterscharführer* – though could I ask you to look here, if you don't mind?” I hold my finger out to the side.

He obliges, dipping his chin and looking slightly to my left.

The outline is not so difficult, and is completed well within the assigned hour of our session. But it is when Sturm comes to assess my progress that the problems begin.

Moving from his stool to stand behind mine, he peers over my shoulder at the square of canvas, which is pinned at each corner to the wooden board propped on a chair that is serving as my easel.

“It does not look like me,” he says.

In fact it is an excellent likeness, but I play along.

“It is not unusual at this stage, *Unterscharführer*. Once the paint is applied-“

A sharp backhand to my temple lets me know my opinion is uncalled for. I hit the concrete floor before I have time to put my arms out to break my fall.

“It is not right,” he says.

“What would you have me change?” I reply, hoisting myself back up, trying to ignore the blood trickling from my brow where his wedding ring has split the skin.

“My nose,” he says, after considering a while. “It is too big.”

His nose is perfectly proportioned, but I make it smaller.

“And the eyes; put them further apart.”

On and on the corrections come – the hairline, the ear, the lips – each new version taking the image further from his true face. Yet he seems convinced that at any moment the picture he desires will appear, the one that I cannot see.

“Perhaps if I hold my gun,” he says, returning to the stool.

“Your gun?”

“Yes,” he says, drawing his Luger from a leather sheath at his waist. He aims it at me.

“It will make me look more authoritative, don’t you think?”

All I can see is the little black hole of the muzzle pointing between my eyes.

“I am sure it will.”

“See that it does,” he says, bringing it back to his chest where he holds it, cocked up and outwards.

At last I understand what he wants. I raise my shaking hand to the picture, steadying it against the board before continuing. This time when I re-sketch, I add not only the gun but broader shoulders, a squarer jawline and a furrow between the eyebrows. The baby fat beneath his chin is erased, as is the soft flesh beneath his lower lash line. I narrow the eyes too, so that he scowls out of the frame.

“Better,” he says, as I hold the canvas up for his approval. He stands and looks at his watch. “That is enough for tonight; return to your unit.”

“Yes, *Unterscharführer*.”

“You would do well to make it a good picture,” he tells me as I leave. “I am going to be a great hero someday. They might hang your painting in a gallery – think of that.”
I think of that.

“Zink of Zat!” I ape to Adir and Eliezer.

I march to the door, keeping my legs straight, kicking them up to a right angle with my body.

“That *amoretz*,” Adir exclaims, doubled over with laughter.

“A perfect idiot,” Eliezer agrees, tears rolling down his cheeks.

“A useful idiot,” I say.

I produce a sausage Sturm gave me from the breast pocket of my coat. They applaud as I divide it up and distribute it amongst the three of us.

“Quiet, down there!” Selig calls from the bunk above. “We have work tomorrow.”

“And for some of us it is pay day!” I retort.

We eat, sitting side-by-side on my bed, our bodies still ripe with the smell of the chlorine disinfectant we use for washing down the crematoria.

“How many days do you think you can stiff him for?” Eliezer whispers.

“Three,” I reply, “four, at most.”

“We had better make a start then.”

“I said silence!” shouts Selig.

We reconvene in the washroom. Adir brings three bowls and a smooth rock, Eliezer a small penknife and a pocketful of ashes, and I some oil and a few onion skins that I managed to buy from the kitchen workers who brought us our dinner. We say little, aware of the time; the days here are long enough without cutting into our sleep.

Eliezer hands me the knife. I crouch beneath the washroom troughs and begin scraping the rust from the faucet pipes into one of the bowls. Adir sits cross-legged on the floor, where he grinds the onion skins to pale brown powder with the rock. Eliezer, meanwhile, uses his hands to mix the ashes and a little of the oil into a grey paste.

“We’re going to need white too,” I tell them, “for the gorget patches.”

We line up on the new ramp in the centre of Birkenau. The morning is blisteringly cold, keeping our chins tucked to our chests and our shoulders up. I desperately want to stamp my feet, to walk a few steps to bring the feeling back. I am sure the rest must

too, but not one of the *Sonderkommando* breaks formation. In front of us, an SS walks up and down the line, issuing instructions. I try to concentrate on what he is saying, but it is hard with his back turned towards me half the time and the wind whistling by my ears. What I do hear is only what we have been told fifty times before anyway: almost six-hundred to be processed; luggage here, here and here; separate quickly into two groups, men, then women, children and the infirm; first group to registration, the others straight to the forest; get them undressed, move the clothes; check the ovens are prepared; one woman and two children on a pallet, or one man and one child; every fifteen minutes and do not forget the fans.

“Verstanden?” the guard shouts.

“Ja!” the group replies.

As the officer stomps back into place, I become aware of a slowly building noise, like rocks being poured from the quarry trucks: another train is coming. I lift my head as the great black beast roars into the camp, charges up to the platform and lurches to a halt. Steam gushes from beneath its belly. I close my eyes as the fog hits, trying not to stumble out of line as I splutter.

From somewhere outside this hot, hissing cloud, I hear the order given:

“Vorwärts! Vorwärts!”

The wagon doors open and people fall out, tumbling over each other like bones. All I can hear are the shouts of the guards – *“Raus! Raus!”* – echoing in my ears. My sinuses and throat are invaded by the stench of urine, excrement, menstrual blood, vomit and sweat. I begin grabbing at the space around me, yanking at an arm whenever I make contact until a face appears in front of me.

“What is your age?” I yell, again and again. *“Where are your bags?”*

As the air begins to clear, two distinct groups are formed: those who will be taken directly into the forest and those who will face selection. At the end of the ramp I observe an SS doctor who will run the latter operation. He by turns scours the group and mumbles instructions to an officer beside him holding a clipboard. Two small children – twins – stand shivering to one side of him; another guard shoves their mother back into the forest group.

Myself, Adir, Eliezer, Selig, and all the rest, stride through the confused crowds, confiscating suitcases, boxes and handbags. We bark instructions at them in Yiddish, both the official ones and those we have added in ourselves over time:

“No, join this group – you will be reunited after the disinfection.”

“Tell them you are eighteen at least.”

“Leave that here.”

“You have a trade? Make one up if not.”

“You will be fed after the shower.”

“Stand up straighter – puff your chest out.”

The prisoners look at us, bewildered and half-demented after the transport. Some won't release their grip on suitcase handles and have to be kicked down. Others refuse to let go of their children or partners; the guards deal with them.

Amidst this commotion it is easy for Adir, Eliezer and I to engage in a further act of subterfuge. As we move the prisoners between groups we scan them for snatches of colour, keeping a running tally among ourselves.

“Green,” Adir calls, as he informs a woman he must confiscate her felt hat.

“Purple,” Eliezer says, stuffing a pair of gloves into his trouser waistband.

“Those feathers are against regulation,” I tell a man, pointing to the band around his trilby. “Brush,” I say to the others as the man joins the selection crowd.

Adir is one of those assigned to escort the crematoria group into the forest. Eliezer and I are ordered to guard the prisoners' luggage until the *Kanada Kommando* arrives to claim them. We watch as the remaining prisoners are ordered to strip then are pushed into a long line. The SS doctor stands at the head of it, brandishing a conductor's baton. He listens intently as his assistant asks the men their ages and occupations, and tells them to run a few paces. A flick of his wrist indicates whether the prisoners should go to the left or right.

“Orange,” Eliezer whispers to me.

His eyes are focused on a silk scarf, trailing from the side of a suitcase.

Sturm has changed his mind by the time of our second session.

“No gun,” he tells me.

“As you wish, *Unterscharführer*.”

I continue sketching the detail of his uniform, completing the buttons and the belt buckle. I will tackle the eagle-and-swastika and *Totenkopf* skull badges of his cap next, I decide. Then the collar and those gorget patches – SS lightning bolts on one side, a

single diamond-shaped pin on the other – and the shoulder boards with their silver trim. After that I will see about adjusting the arms to omit the gun.

“Don’t you want to know why?” the soldier asks.

I am so surprised by the informal tone of his question that I cannot remember what he is referring to.

“The threat should be implied,” he says, unfazed by my lack of response. “It should be in my expression, my demeanour. Symbolism – this is what good art is about, yes?”

I nod, still blindsided by this break from functional speech. We are almost having a conversation – though admittedly I have not said anything yet.

“I thought so,” he says, gleefully. “You see, it is not just your people who read books.”

“You have read a book – on art?” I venture, hunching over in case he goes for me.

“Well, Kurschuss has. I showed him the picture. It was he who said I should not hold my gun. He also said that if you do a good job he may commission you himself.”

Suddenly I am picturing a whole exhibition of officers, all done by my hand: *Unterscharführers, Scharführers, Oberscharführers*, members of the Hygiene Division. The thought makes my head swim. I imagine my signature in the bottom corner of each of the paintings: the only trace of a Jew left in this bold new empire.

“Besides, there are much better ways to kill than with a gun – as we know,” the young soldier adds. I could swear he winks at me before saying: “I don’t want to be out-of-date, after all.”

“No. We wouldn’t want that.”

When the session is over, I put the pencil down and push the chair-easel back.

“How are you getting on with the colours?” he enquires.

“Quite well, *Unterscharführer*. But some will be difficult. White is a challenge, for example.”

“You said you were equipped to do this job,” he snaps. “If the work is substandard you will be punished.”

“Punished?” Eliezer mocks. “What will he do, beat you – again?”

He takes the extra bar of soap that was today’s payment and rubs it vigorously up and down his forearms, like a surgeon preparing for an operation.

“Give you a tougher work detail, perhaps?” snorts Adir.

He takes the soap from Eliezer and bends his head under the washroom tap, scrubbing his hair with his fingertips. The water in the trough below turns grey from the dislodged ash.

Once we are all redressed, we sit in the corner of the washroom in a triangle formation. Between us, the colours we have collected sit like an offering: scarves, hats, gloves, handkerchiefs and other human accessories.

“Not a bad load,” I tell them. “We should be able to get most of the rest of the palette from these.”

“I can get them to Lisa tomorrow via the kitchen workers,” Adir says. “She will see that they make it to the pot.”

“And when can she get the dyes back to us?” I ask him.

“Hopefully the next day.”

“White,” Eliezer says suddenly. “We still don’t have white.”

It is in the furnace room of Crematoria II that we return to the subject of where to source white.

“Maggots?” Adir suggests, grunting as he yanks a gold tooth from one of the bodies before we haul it up onto the tray.

“They come out yellow,” I reply, grabbing the wrists of another.

Adir and I swing the man up and onto the tray beside the first corpse. I start to push it into the oven, but Adir stops me.

“They want a woman with each two men today, remember? Or two *Muselmänner* and two children”

We find a female, cut the hair and lob her on top of the stack. We have to push the bodies down hard to get them through the small archway of the furnace, causing the woman to expel lumpen grey fluid through the mouth.

“I know how she feels,” Adir jokes, leaping out of the way.

“SS morons,” I complain. “Overstocking the ovens will only block the channels.”

“That’s why we’re emptying the ashes after every two loadings,” Eliezer responds, dragging the next body over to us.

“And they want the coke stoked every twelve minutes,” I say. “Why the big rush?”

“Something’s afoot,” agrees Adir.

“Fingernails?” Eliezer interjects, waving the hand of a young woman at us.

“Also yellow,” I say, reaching down to grab her ankles.

Once we have finished the cremations, we rake the ashes from the ovens and begin the cleaning process. Eliezer grinds the bones that did not burn fully in a large pestle, while Adir and I set to hosing the walls and floors down ahead of the chlorine disinfection.

“Bo- a-bide!” Eliezer yells.

“What?” shouts Adir, switching off the hose.

“Bones will be white,” he repeats, looking at the contents of the pestle. “Before they’re burnt, I mean.”

“Only when first stripped from the skin,” I say. “Give them a few minutes and they turn-“

“Yellow?” Adir guesses.

“Yellow.”

Eliezer looks at me quizzically: “I don’t want to know how you kno-“

“Enough talking!” *Blockführer* Kurschuss shouts. “We have to do a deep clean tonight.”

“See?” Adir whispers. “They’re preparing for something.”

Kurschuss turns to me.

“Sturm wants you,” he says. “You other two – stay.”

“Think of us while you’re sitting on your arse,” Eliezer grumbles as I exit.

This time when I enter the little room, I have new tools with me. Three brushes: one of straw, a second of feather, and another of human hair. I have a palette too: a sheet of cardboard, the blobs of raw paint set out on it. Adir’s three bowls are my mixing basins, while two half-filled jam jars will wash off the brushes. I also have two small rags, for blotting and correcting errors. All of these sit on the floor, forming a circle around my feet.

Yet when Sturm appears, he does not comment on my new set-up. Not a ‘Good’, not a criticism, not a blow to the side of the head. Instead he seats himself on the stool and assumes his pose. There is something different about his face tonight: the furrow I added to my original sketch has now taken root between his eyebrows; and so, too, fine creases beneath the eyes.

“Well then, begin,” he says at last.

I oblige, mixing a little of the onion paste with water. With my straw brush, I sweep the orange-brown colour across the canvas to create the rich backdrop that I hope will offset the dull tones of Sturm's uniform. The loose stitching of the canvas is highlighted by the wet paint; raised like Braille, it catches the light and shines. Every so often I pick up a rag and blot it over the surface, to seal the colour and soak up the excess water.

I work the grey ash mixture meant for the uniform with my fingers, to loosen it without compromising the thick texture that imitates real oil paint. It is the same colour as the fluid that erupted from the female corpse's mouth earlier; a thought that makes my stomach lurch. I apply the colour to the picture, pressing it into the canvas with the hair paintbrush. The outline of the *Unterscharführer's* field uniform slowly fills, from shoulder to shoulder then neckline to hem. Occasionally a hair works its way loose from the brush and becomes caught under the colour. I allow these rogues to remain, forever trapped beneath the skin.

It is as the jacket nears completion that I become aware of motion in my belly, something akin to dancing. But rather than a rhythmic, flowing movement, it is distinguished by sharp, aggressive jolts; flicks and kicks deliberately out of time. I continue painting, trying not to let these strange summersaults throw my hand off. Eventually they seem to settle, becoming only an insistent pressing on my bladder.

Sturm ends the session early and rather abruptly.

"That is enough for today."

He walks past me silently, drops the payment and exits without even looking at the painting. I listen as his footsteps retreat down the corridor.

"Dybbuk," Adir says, when I tell my friends about the strange sensation I had while painting.

"Indigestion," says Eliezer, ever the pragmatist. "You've been eating too well."

He takes a large bite of his portion of the sausage to emphasise his point. Both of their uniforms are flecked with tiny white spots, and they smell of turpentine.

"We got you a present," Eliezer says, once he has finished eating.

He pulls a jam jar from beneath the bed, a quarter full with white paint. I stare at it, my mouth agape.

"They had us lime-wash the undressing chamber while you were gone," he says. "I managed to smuggle this out."

“We managed to smuggle it,” Adir corrects. “Now close your mouth, I can see your food.”

“Oh – that you find offensive?” Eliezer laughs, slapping him on the shoulder. “That, of all the things we see here!”

“Lime-wash,” I say. “What are they up to?”

It is 8am. I stand with the other *Sonderkommando* in the opening to the corridor leading from the undressing room to the ovens. The large chamber is whiter than I have ever seen it. The walls gleam, sticky and potent with the scent of fresh paint. The floor has been scrubbed, the benches propped neatly under rows of numbered coat hooks. The legends have been reinstalled on the underground bunker’s supporting columns. ‘Clean is good,’ ‘A louse: your death,’ ‘To the disinfection room,’ listed in multiple languages: German, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Dutch.

Sturm has been positioned next to the open gas chamber door. Inside I can see the fake shower heads, and the ventilation slots high up the wall through which the pellets will be dropped. The young *Unterscharführer* is agitated; his fingers tap against his thighs. They drum faster as the sounds outside draw close: barking dogs, and beneath that screams, shouts and wailing, accompanied by the *thunk* of batons striking skin.

The door flies open and people burst in like water breaking a dam. All becomes loud, loud, loud. They seem to scream with a single, hysterical banshee shriek. Driving them on are the SS officers, hitting indiscriminately. Large dogs snarl and snap at heels, ankles, calves. As the last child enters and the door is slammed shut, I catch a glimpse of the outside world: more SS men lined up around the entrance stairway, machine guns trained on the door.

It is apparent from the moment the prisoners enter that this processing will be tougher than any of the others. For a start, the Family Camp inmates look different to the ones we usually see. These men, women and children are relatively well-nourished. There are no haggard skeletons that we can tell ourselves will be relieved to meet their end. Instead, as I look from one end of the room to the other, I find myself haunted by images of plump flesh that only multiply as the guards force people to undress: small pot bellies, thick thighs, wobbling upper arms, full breasts.

And they fight. These people will not go quietly:

“Heidenbeck; Schwarzhuber said we would go to Heidenbeck!”

“We want to be taken there!”

“Take us there!”

They throw themselves at the guards over and over, despite the blows that rain down. Faces become bloodier and bloodier; the begging only more frantic:

“We want to live!”

“We want to work!”

The children cling to each other, their faces pale, howling as their parents fight.

We *Sonderkommando* are not immune. The prisoners hurl themselves against us, hoping the passageway we shield might be some secret path to freedom.

“Let us pass!” they scream.

“Damn you, collaborator!”

I cannot hear myself speak, but I must speak, for my mouth makes shapes and people respond. They swear and curse and cry as we push them back into the room.

“You are lying!”

“Liars!”

On the opposite side of the chamber, Sturm is my mirror, shouting the same words:

“Prepare for the disinfection shower! Come on – undress, undress! Put your clothes on the pegs – they will be waiting for you when you get back!”

They do not believe him either. They grab at his clothes, pleading, wailing. I want to make it stop. I want a baton too. I want to beat and beat and beat, until there is no more screaming.

The guards abandon all hopes of having everyone undress before the gassing. They drive the prisoners into the chamber half-clothed, surging forwards in a great wave, dogs at the front. They smash fingers that cling to the doorway, kick the faces of those trying to crawl between their legs.

Inside the gas room the prisoners’ mantra changes. Instead of begging for their lives they start crying out for loved ones they have lost in the melee:

“Hana!”

“Izrael!”

“Max!”

“Arnošt!”

“Alena!”

“Ota!”

“Yoshua!”

“Hanuš!”

I clamp my hands over my ears so that I cannot hear the names. I do not want to know them. But another noise bleeds through. Not the frantic staccato of shouted names but a slowly rising hum. As I remove my hands from the side of my head, I recognise strains of the *Hatikvah*, and its relentless call for hope:

...yehudi homiyah,

Ul(e)fa'atei mizrach kadimah,

'Ayin letziyon-

The door closes and the pounding starts, I turn from the small window in the chamber door. I and the other *Sonderkommando* start picking up the belongings of the Family Camp prisoners, sweeping them towards the outside exit to be taken to the trucks.

We load the clothes, our bodies shivering in the cold morning air as the gas does its work on the ones inside. I count the minutes until the inner door will be reopened. I imagine the corpses piled up at the chamber mouth, the way they always are: children at the bottom, the strongest men at the top. They will tumble out the way they tumbled into the camp from the cattle cars – only this time they will not stir once they hit the ground. There will be only the pyramid of bodies, the peach-pit scent of gas residue, and the chamber walls, still gleaming white.

When Sturm appears for our final session he is a revitalised man. He strides into the room and claps me on the shoulder.

“I have something for you,” he says, “for the collar and cap.”

A small round tin lands in my lap. I unscrew the lid slowly, half-expecting it to explode in my hand or some other trick. But it is indeed boot polish, pitch black. I pick up the brush of hair and run it around the rim. It leaves a swirl pattern on the surface that is accompanied by a twisting in my intestines.

“You will use it?” he asks me, his face eager and ten years younger than yesterday.

I nod.

“Excellent – only the best for the portrait of the great hero, yes?”

He smiles, baring his teeth. I think of the snarling dogs.

“So, now you will have to say the picture is by me too,” he jokes, “a self-portrait!”

The knot in my stomach pulls tighter. My eyes fall to the baton at his side.

“Now begin,” he says. “Begin – I want the picture finished today so I can have it sent to my wife in time for her birthday.”

“You have a wife?” I ask, unable to help myself.

“Of course.”

I recall the wedding ring that split my temple.

“And children?”

“Two,” he answers proudly: “Heydrich and Adolf.”

I see tiny arms and legs, blue and purple, sticking out of the bottom of a pyramid.

I pick up the feather brush, dip it in the jar of lime-wash and move it towards the image. The moment the colour touches the canvas, something inside me swells. It happens swiftly, this rising: another chest pushes my own out; new legs stretch into mine, their feet stamping against my soles; Arms grow inside my arms, fingers sprouting at their ends. A second body is encased beneath my skin.

“What is the matter? Why have you stopped?” Sturm asks.

“Nothing, all is well,” a voice says, using my tongue, my lips to form the words.

I paint – or rather, it paints – copying over everything I have previously done. The colours blur, escaping their lines as shade is layered over shade. It doesn’t stop until the whole canvas is wet, the young *Unterscharführer’s* face smeared and shining.

The creature pauses. I stare at the bleeding colours and think of the gas chamber floor after the bodies were cleared: the urine, excrement and blood swirling together.

“Is it finished?” Sturm enquires, his voice betraying a nervousness that reinvigorates my tingling fingers.

“Almost,” the other voice says.

Nails scratch the insides of my fingertips until they pop right through the skin. They reach for the canvas and spread out along the top of the picture.

“What are you doing?” he demands.

“Texture,” it replies.

The Dybbuk pulls its claws slowly down the painting. Vertical lines race each other over the fabric – the background, the face and neck, the uniform – the stripes rendering the whole painting a prison. Finally, it dips my thumbnail into the boot polish and draws a black stitch across the officer’s lips.

“It is finished,” it tells Sturm.

Exhilaration courses through me as the *Unterscharführer* approaches. I am finished with this life: I want the beating; I want the foot in my stomach; I want to feel my head being crushed, the breath empty from my body.

He stands behind me, leaning over my shoulder. Minutes pass, or perhaps just one.

"It is different," he says.

"Yes."

"Symbolic?"

"Oh yes."

There is another long silence.

"It is better, I think."

The Dybbuk bursts, reducing to a sack of shrivelled skin inside my belly. It knocks the wind out of me, leaving me faint, my limbs like lead.

"You like it, *Unterscharführer*?" is all I can force out. It is my own voice once more: thin, reedy and defeated.

"Yes," he says. "It looks like a real painting."

1945 Onwards: Liberation

My Dear Friend Szymon

Herschel Bartoszek / Blank Canvas / 150cm x 110cm / Circa. 1938-1970 /
Origin: Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp and Paris

My dear friend Szymon is not a comfortable man. All day he fusses and frets about things.

“Herschel,” he tells me, “the light in here is too strange.”

He is referring to the studio room he rents on the Boulevard Montmartre. He has been here two months now, after deciding he would prefer it to the one bedroom apartment he used to rent on the outskirts of the Nineteenth Arrondissement. Given his miserly nature I, and no doubt his financial adviser too, were surprised by Szymon’s decision to move to this most expensive part of town.

Once – a few drinks down – Szymon confessed to me that the Boulevard reminds him of our Polish hometown, Olsza. However, I cannot see any connection between those dull grey streets and the gleaming white brickwork of Montmartre, with its black-tiled domes and trellis balconies. Nor can I compare the drab shop fronts of our old Krakówian suburb with the assault of the Boulevard at street level: the cloth-covered tables of the cafés, enmeshed in coffee and chocolate scent; the florists’ stalls spilling buckets of tiger-lilies onto the pavement; and the department store windows, their white backdrops setting off paisley-pattern shirts and skirts with hemlines closer to the sex than the knee.

Many (myself, his cleaner Madam Roberge, Szymon’s financial adviser – the latter with the assistance of pie charts and graphs) have tried to persuade my stubborn friend to at least buy this apartment rather than rent it.

“You have the money,” I tell him. “If I had such security I would buy.”

“But who does it go to if I am taken? I will not put my money into enemy hands.”

“Szymon,” I say. “It is 1970 – you have to stop thinking this way.”

My friend has yet to unpack a single thing in his new apartment save for a few pieces of kitchenware – a mug or two, some cutlery – and his art supplies, of course. Not that one would think an artist actually lives here; the room looks more like a museum. His tubes of paint are lined up in rows on a table, all colour coded and rolled up neatly

from the ends. His brushes fan out from a jar on the windowsill, their sepia hairs freshly washed. His trousers, too, are never paint-splattered. The lengths Madam Roberge goes to in order to get those stains out, under threat of being fired.

The rest of Simon's possessions comprise only a few boxes, yet they remain stacked in the corner. The only exception is an old sofa-bed set against the wall opposite the window; a gift from a female admirer downstairs. For, despite his many eccentricities, my friend does not struggle for admirers. I gesture to these boxes now.

"Well do you not have a lamp in one of those, you old curmudgeon? If you want different lighting you only have to flick a switch or two."

Of course, I know already that he does not possess a lamp and nor will he buy one.

He does not reply, but continues staring at the blank canvas he has had propped between the floor and window sill since he moved in.

"Perhaps it is not the light," he says. "Perhaps it is the size of the canvas."

It is not typical for my friend to struggle so with getting going. Usually he works fast, with the clinical precision that has become synonymous with his name – as though each brushstroke has been mapped out already and he is merely transferring it to the page. This can, it has been argued, lead to a curious coldness in his work; a lack of engagement or dialogue between artist, subject and viewer. Others praise his unrelenting eye for its fierce objectivity, claiming that it mimics the perspective of the perpetrators, implicating the viewer in the crimes depicted.

"Well I think the piece is coming along nicely," I joke. "How long have you been at it now?"

"Since 1938," he says, at which I make my excuses and leave.

The reason for Szymon's discontent may be a show he has upcoming; a retrospective of the twenty-five years since he found his way to Paris, titled 'Liberation: Paris 1945-1970'. This show marks a landmark in our friendship too – not that this will have occurred to Szymon. It is now twenty years since he and I first met again, by chance, outside the Louvre in 1950. I, as in our Kraków years, was the street vendor offering copies of the gallery's most famous works and portraits of tourists. He, meanwhile, had graduated from salesman to critic.

“What is this shit, Herschel?” he’d asked, by way of reintroduction, casting his disapproving eye over my catalogue: Titian’s ‘The Entombment of Christ’, Caravaggio’s ‘The Fortune Teller’, and of course da Vinci’s ‘Mona Lisa’ (my friend hates da Vinci).

He could not possibly have foreseen that I, too, would have made my way to Paris – though in 1947 in my case, having spent six years in Switzerland after negotiating passage out of Poland. Yet his manner betrayed no surprise at finding me there. Instead it was I who was dumbstruck at seeing him again – and alive.

“Is this the sum total of what people want from art today?” he had continued, seemingly oblivious to my shock. “The same turgid focus on the past?”

Recalling these words now, I am caught by their irony given the work my dear friend has since become famous for producing.

A few days later I visit Szymon again, but find him in no better humour. Nor has he made any progress: the canvas remains blank. I sit on the sofa-bed while he broods over it, until the glass of water that is all he ever offers me during these visits is dry.

It is Anka, Szymon’s chief benefactor and organiser of his retrospective, who has commissioned this new work. It is to serve as the centrepiece to the exhibition. Yet despite this she has given him no budget and no brief: ‘Anything you paint will sell,’ she apparently told him.

The source of Szymon’s trouble, then, is that rather than sticking to the subject he is known for, he – as defiant as ever – has decided to attempt something new.

“I want to paint a woman, H,” he announces, after we have sat there for a good hour.

“Well that’s a start,” I say. “What sort of woman?”

“A real one,” he replies. “Not like those ghastly creatures we used to paint back in Kraków – the da Vinci’s and so forth.”

This kind of thoughtless comment is typical of my friend.

“You have painted plenty of real women in the work you have done already,” I say, trying to keep my tone light. “All too real, some might say.” I think of their skeletal forms and shudder.

“Not like them either,” he mumbles.

We sit a while longer.

“Well, I have my own work to do,” I tell him. “My ghastly creatures won’t paint themselves any more than that one there will.”

He keeps his eyes trained on the canvas as I get up.

“Maybe it is the material,” he muses. “Perhaps a finer stitch would work.”

“Well whatever the problem, friend, I am not sure resolving it will help – it strikes me that you are losing that famous Midas touch of yours.”

The comment is meant in jest, but I know it will not be taken that way. He does not speak as I put on my coat, though he rises to open the front door.

“Oh, H?” he says as I start down the stairwell – the elevator having remained broken for as long as he has been refusing to pay his share to have it fixed. “I forgot to tell you: I saw Anka yesterday. She expressed interest in your work.”

“Oh yes?” My ears prick up.

“She wants to know when you will next be working at the Louvre. She thinks her brother in Montbouy would love a shit copy of the ‘Mona Lisa’ for his birthday.”

The door slams shut.

Szymon is a petty child with his insults, always ensuring they hit harder than any perceived slight levelled at him. But, like a child, he will have forgotten his anger tomorrow and we will continue as we have for the last twenty years – twenty-four if you count the period before the Interruption.

I have been asked many times now if I begrudge Szymon his success, given our similar backgrounds and training. But the truth is I do not. Although certainly on cold mornings, sitting in the line of street artists outside the Louvre, I often find my thoughts straying to that neat little apartment. But it is likely we are warmer out here than he ever is in there; we at least have the benefit of flasks of soup and our tin-drum fires, Simon being too cheap to ever use the electric hob or turn on a heater.

“I cannot tolerate warmth anymore,” he claims. “It makes my skin itch. I get a rash.”

But it would also be true to say that I do not believe Szymon to be a better artist than I or that, given the same set of circumstances I could not have achieved the success he has had. Stylistically he may be more advanced, perhaps – I, out of necessity, being a follower of others’ fashions. But I could claim, without ego, to be his technical superior. ‘Art is a thing that finds you,’ I have heard said many times. But to be a successful artist you also need a subject that can sell and a receptive audience. A repentant audience is even better – then there is serious money to be made, as my clever friend has found.

A couple of days later I escort Szymon to inspect the proposed venue for his show; a moderately-sized place in the Fourth Arrondissement. Before he will give permission for any gallery to host an exhibition of his work, however, my friend insists on inspecting the property first. His main concern is that it is immaculate.

“I cannot have dirt,” he says. “My paintings are not to do with that.”

(There are many who would disagree, of course.)

When we arrive at the location, Szymon gets on his hands and knees. He crawls the entire length of the room, examining the right angle where floor meets wall. Then he runs his finger across the display stands and over the tops of the frames that hang where his soon may. The security guard steps forward but is waved back by the curator, anxious not to lose the commissions Szymon’s work will surely bring in.

Once my friend is finished, he gets up again, wiping the imaginary dust from his knees. He gives no sign of approval or disapproval.

“Must the light be so bright?” is all he says.

After the inspection, we stroll along the north side of the Seine, towards the Louvre and the Jardin les Tuileries. We do not speak; instead I listen as our feet tap out a soft rhythm, barely audible beneath the fury of the passing cars.

When we reach the park, we wander haphazardly along paths lined with beech trees, amongst manicured lawns and flowerbeds planted with bluebells and cornflowers. I see my friend start to relax: his shoulders drop, his pace seems to become lighter – less like he is dragging each foot on and on.

“Anka has selected a good spot,” he says, eventually.

The statement sounds more like a question, Szymon’s voice rising at the end – rarely does my good friend seek my opinion directly.

“It is an excellent choice,” I reassure him. “Your show will be a great success.”

There is something endearing about observing him in this state: uncertain, nervous even. When we come to a bench, we sit there side-by-side.

“How goes your painting of the woman?” I ask.

His neck disappears again.

“It is no good, H,” he mutters. “I don’t even know where to start.”

The gruffness of his response makes it clear no further comment is desired of me. I turn my attention towards the sunset, watching as it washes the horizon pink, making shadow puppets of trees on the opposite side of the river.

“I mean, I used to know, but I forgot.”

“Sorry?”

I look at Szymon but he does not repeat the sentence. He only slouches lower in his seat, and draws his collar up around his chin.

Anka is thrilled when she hears Szymon’s next piece will be a woman.

“Anyone I know?” she asks.

The wattle beneath her chin shivers as she strikes a pose, putting her hands on her hips and tilting her head to side.

“No,” he answers.

We have met Anka at the press night she has harried Szymon into attending. It is for her latest discovery – and no doubt her latest conquest. He is a young artist of thirty-something with a bald head, heavy ginger moustache and burgundy-coloured corduroys. The young stud pumps Szymon’s hand enthusiastically when Anka introduces them.

“You have been such an influence, sir,” he says.

He puts his arm around the older man’s shoulders and grins as the PR manager for the event points a photographer in their direction.

“Then I’m sorry for you,” my friend answers, shrugging him off.

Anka laughs, somewhat too loudly: “I warned you he’s a character, Bertol!”

Szymon scowls and shuffles off to find the canapés.

My friend always manages to embarrass himself at these openings. It is not so much the drink, for everyone takes advantage of the free alcohol on such nights. But when the waiters appear with their trays of nibbles, Szymon swiftly works his way around them. The staff members freeze as he seizes salmon blinis and prawn vol-au-vents, stuffing them one after another into his mouth until the tray is empty. His adoring public watches tolerantly, happy to indulge the artist-eccentric. I, on the other hand, am embarrassed by this gluttony; Szymon has always taken more than his fair share.

I insist that he joins me for an obligatory turn of the room before we depart.

“It is the least you can do,” I tell him, “after eating the party dead.”

The young buck's work, unsurprisingly, belongs to the so-called 'next generation'. From what I can tell, this means gaudy colours designed to hurt the viewer's head. The figures in his portraits are smeared, their borders undefined. Their bodies twist in strange shapes: they could be dying or they could be dancing. Does he mean them to be comic? Or is this some crass suggestion of redemption? Whatever the answer, certainly his work is the very antithesis of Szymon's.

My friend barely looks at the pieces. Instead he tugs at his scarf.

"Herschel, can we go? It is too hot in here."

"Well why haven't you checked your things into the cloakroom?"

"Someone might take them," he replies.

"I'm not sure that would be a bad thing," I joke. "How old are those relics? I mean, that looks like the old cap I had three years ago."

"Well it isn't," he snaps, although we both know it is.

Before we leave, I insist on finding Anka so we can say goodbye. She is not hard to locate, taking special pride in always being the most overdressed woman in any room. Tonight it is a black velvet dress, floor-length, cut too low for a sixty year-old. A large necklace, comprised of squares of purple sapphire, shimmers against the crêpe paper of her décolletage.

"Perhaps I will see you later?" she says to Szymon, noting the glass in his hand.

(My friend has a terrible habit of fucking Anka when he is drunk).

"I'm going to his tonight," he says, pointing his thumb at me.

(It's the first I have heard of it.)

"And where have you been hiding this one?" she says, looking at me.

"We have met before," I say. "Herschel."

"Oh – are you an artist too?"

My friend snorts: "Hardly."

Szymon does come back to my flat in La Courneuve, following me on and off the Metro – I paying for his ticket, naturally. At the other end I stride ahead, smarting from our conversation with Anka. Szymon carves a drunken zig-zag along the pavement.

"Where is the drink?" he demands as we reach the ninth-floor box in the tower of grey boxes that is my home.

I pour him some bourbon and he seats himself in the chair beside my table. The glass is empty by the time I give up fiddling with the temperamental heater.

“I like your apartment, Hersch,” he slurs. “It’s like the one I used to have. That shithole in Olsza, you know, with-“

“I remember,” I interrupt. “And if you ever want to swap apartments, friend, you just let me know.”

“What did you think of the show tonight?”

“What did you think?” I reply – knowing he has only asked so he might proffer his opinion.

“I think he was full of it!” he shouts, slamming the base of the glass against the table.

The bitch downstairs bashes a broom against her ceiling. Szymon stares at the floor where it hit before stamping back twice. When she raps again he leaps up and performs an inelegant tap dance across the floor. He finishes with a spin and a stagger then looks down expectantly. The bitch gives up.

“He was full of it,” he repeats, “just like I used to be.”

I top his glass up as he sits back down. He props his elbow on the table and rests his chin in his hand.

“Cecelia,” he says suddenly.

He is staring at the portraits I have lined up against the wall, ready to take to the Louvre in the morning. The colour has disappeared from his face.

“No, friend – you’re thinking of ‘Lady with an Ermine’. That is the ‘Mona Lisa’.”

“I know that,” he says, wagging a finger at me. “I know that.”

But he looks back at the picture, as if to make sure.

“Did you know, H,” he says after a pause, “that da Vinci painted only three women in his lifetime?”

“You hate da Vinci,” I say.

“Yes,” he replies. “So what does it say of me that I cannot even paint one?”

“I expect it says that you are a shit artist, Szymon,” I sigh, tiredly.

I kneel on the floor and begin untying his bootlaces – it is apparent my friend will be staying here tonight.

“Do you know what else is shit, H?” he says, dangling his drink in front of my face.

“What?”

“This bourbon.”

“Well perhaps if you introduced me to your rich friends in more flattering terms, I could afford better liquor.”

He holds the tumbler up to his eye and looks at me through it: “I doubt it, H – but wait! This glass – this glass is not shit. Where is this glass from?”

He has noticed the Polish crest on it, I realise: the engraved eagle, wings spread wide.

“Where do you think?” I say.

“I thought so,” he says, smiling dreamily. “I thought so.”

He falls asleep in the chair, his hand still gripping the tumbler. I try to take it from him, but his grip is vice-like, even when unconscious.

In the morning, when I emerge from my bedroom, I find Szymon and the glass are gone. It is no surprise to me that he has taken it, of course. My friend is a terrible thief.

“Herschel, isn’t it?”

I can tell it is Anka before I look up. She is wearing knee-high brown suede boots with a stiletto heel, a red wool coat, and she has a fox’s head peering over her right shoulder. The tail of the stole trails down her left breast, the body twisted around her neck and pinned with a big quartz broach. She holds out a gloved hand.

“We met the other day – again, I believe – at the opening.”

“Yes, hello.”

“I was just at the Louvre for a meeting – you work here?”

I gesture at my stall: “For all my sins.”

“They’re not bad, you know,” she says, smiling benignly at the portraits.

“Thanks – I’d be happier doing my own paintings though.”

“Do you think so?” she teases. “It doesn’t seem to work for Szymon.”

Later, after I have offered her a stool and handed her a mug of soup, she again raises the subject of our mutual friend.

“He’s not very nice to you, is he?” she says, blowing on the surface of the liquid but not sipping.

“He’s not nice to anyone,” I shrug.

I pull up a second stool and sit opposite her, ignoring the raised eyebrows of my neighbour, Emile.

“So, what’s your excuse?” she asks.

“Sorry?”

“Well, he makes me money – why do you put up with him?”

I can feel the back of my neck getting hot: “We knew each other back in Kraków.”

“Ah,” she says, “before-”

“Before the Interruption, yes.”

I take a swig from my flask, gasping as the hot soup bites my lips.

“Is that what you talk about then,” she asks, “the good old days in Kraków?”

I wonder what she is imagining: myself and Szymon, young and brooding; working studiously at the Academy – or perhaps laughing and swapping tales at our quaint little stalls outside the Czartoryski Museum. Fine old chums in either version, no doubt – not rivals. Does it occur to her that we only worked those stalls – that I still work this one – because the invaders slung us out of our school and shut it down? That we had to prostitute our art to trade, or perish? It depends just how rose-tinted Anka’s spectacles are. Wherever she spent her war, I think to myself bitterly, certainly it was not in Kraków.

“He tries to bring it up sometimes,” I say, trying to keep my voice even. “But I don’t think he remembers it correctly. The truth is that the old days weren’t really so good.”

She nods her head knowingly – she, who has never worked a day in her life, save to open her purse and legs for a succession of hungry artists.

“Well, I bet there were women, at least,” she says, winking. “A couple of fine young men like yourselves.”

My mind instantly goes to Esther, to all of us sitting on her dirty old bed. Of the way she held us all in thrall, warming the cold nights with her filthy stories. But, as ever, the memory is superseded by a sick feeling and a shiver that crawls down the spine.

“I forget now,” I reply.

It is Madam Roberge who calls me back to Szymon’s apartment, around a week before his show. She uses the phone belonging to the neighbour to issue her summons. When I arrive, I find the 70-something year-old harried and upset, her smocks wet and crumpled, her hands rubbed raw. Szymon is sitting on the sofa, his arms folded, staring at the canvas. There is a glass – my glass? – shattered into a thousand pieces on the floor beside him. The jar of brushes has been tipped out on the window sill.

“You take him out,” Madam Roberge says. “Take him out right now. I can’t stand it.”

I walk my friend to the Jardin les Tuileries. On the subject of his dispute with Madam Roberge he says very little.

“She does not work to my satisfaction,” is all I can get.

“Is it the painting?” I ask.

He does not answer, but buries his chin in his coat. We walk on for a while, the light receding all around us. Figures slip by, grey ghosts with shoulders hunched.

“It is the show,” my friend says eventually. “It has made me think.”

“Think what?”

He looks at me: “That I have not – that I have never – painted what I was meant to paint.”

“Well what do you call all the work you have done up to now?”

“What they left me with.”

The air seems to grow colder. I pull my coat tight around myself and walk on. I assume Szymon to be following, until I hear him call.

“Oh look, H – look!”

A man at the west entrance of the park is packing away a little stall, unpegging caricatures of famous figures: Édith Piaf, Serge Gainsbourg, Brigitte Bardot. He rolls them up, one by one, slotting them into toilet roll tubes before placing them in a cardboard box at his feet.

Szymon is a child again: “H – remember how Eze used to do caricatures? Oh, let us get our picture done.”

“What? No, Szymon, he’s finish-”

But too late; my friend is already next to the caricaturist, righting his upturned stool.

“I’m sorry,” I mouth to the man as I stand behind Szymon, my hands on his shoulders.

He shakes his head: “It is an honour to draw the great artist.”

Back at the apartment – Madam Roberge now gone – Szymon admires the finished sketch.

“He has got you just right, H – look at those ears, so big! And your nose – ridiculous!”

“You approve of the picture?”

“It is excellent, excellent,” he chuckles.

“But why, if you like it so much, did you make all that fuss in the park?”

He waves his hand dismissively.

“It is not my fault if a man does not know the value of what he produces, Hersch. The fool should have stuck to his price.”

“Szymon – you told him he was a rotten artist and should be ashamed to charge for shit.”

He looks up, eyes sparkling: “Yes, that got him, didn’t it? He did not expect that.”

“But you weren’t even the one who paid for the picture – I was.”

“So I have got you a bargain and you are ungrateful,” he grumbles. “What logic is this?”

“You are impossible,” I tell him, adding silently: ever since you came back.

I slam the door as I leave, but guilt still chases me all the way down the stairwell.

Szymon does not finish the painting in time for his retrospective, and nor does he turn up for the opening. This raises some questions, of course, but nothing the public relations manager Anka hires for such occasions can’t handle.

“I think what we have to remember,” he tells the assembled press, gathered around the empty frame intended for Szymon’s new picture, “is what this show represents to a survivor. The title – ‘Liberation’ – is ironic, after all.”

I watch as heads nod and pencils copy down the words: *‘Liberation’ – Ironic*.

“After all, what better testament to the brutal honesty of these works – their power,” he continues, “than the fact their own creator cannot face them all together like this?”

The end of his speech garners a small round of applause. As the journalists step back, the PR man straightens the handkerchief in the pocket of his fitted tweed jacket, and tightens his polka dot tie. Anka joins him and they pose sombrely beside the frame for the photographers.

It does not take long for me to realise that I am enjoying the exhibition far more without the company of my friend. I can drink as much as I want (I do), mingle if I like (I do not), even eat a few canapés (don’t mind if I do). It is a fine show. Not the artworks, so much – I prefer not to look at those – but the set-up, the organisation. I find myself admiring the mechanics of it all: the young waitress who appears with a napkin for my cocktail stick the moment I finish a morsel; another who refills my empty champagne glass without my even having to wave; and the salesmen discreetly installed around

the room, ready to sidle up to any potential collector pausing beside a piece too long. What a wonderful thing to have one's own exhibition, I think, drunkenly, jealously. Szymon should thank me, really.

It is interesting to observe the reactions of those in attendance. There is a distinct difference between the responses of the older generation and the newer brand of art aficionados – the latter kind appearing to have attended primarily for the promise of free drink. The older ones tend to stare at Szymon's pictures in respectful silence: their eyes clouding over, their hands rising to their mouths. But it is the younger ones who feel the need to say something – perhaps to compensate for their all too obvious boredom.

"Such bravery," they say, meaning: 'Are people really still talking about this?'

"Such defiance of insurmountable odds," meaning: 'This has nothing to do with me.'

Back at the bar I encounter the PR man again. He is off the clock now – the press having left – and is ordering martinis like the well might run dry.

"What I've never understood is why he has to dress like he is still there?" he is telling his companion, loudly. "He'd get more press coverage if he looked less – well, less ill."

Anka sashays over, looking all of fifty until she comes closer. She has on a gown of fuchsia satin with tassels from mid-calf to the floor, so that she sweeps it as she walks. Szymon's perfect dress, I muse, thinking of my friend's aversion to dust. She orders a whiskey and ginger, swallowing it in one before turning to me.

"That bastard friend of yours, leaving us here like this" she says, meaning: 'Take me home tonight.'

The following day, I arrive at Szymon's apartment with a selection of newspapers and a box of Turkish Delight. It is a tradition we established long ago: studying the reviews together the morning after one of his openings. But my friend does not answer the door when I knock. I push against it and find it unlatched.

"There you are, didn't you hear me?"

Szymon is sitting on the sofa. He has not shaved for a week at least. His clothes are creased and smell strongly of his own body odour, as though he has been sitting here for as long as his facial hair has been growing. On the floor are the remains of a lunch, God knows how many days old: a crust of rye bread, a chunk of hard cheese. The canvas, however, has disappeared.

“Where’s Madam Roberge?” I ask, eyeing the mess suspiciously.

“I fired her.”

“Right,” I sigh. “Well – here’s a gift for you.”

I place the hexagonal box in his lap. The action seems to revive him: he snatches up the box of jellies, and tears off both lid and bow in one action. He pops the treats into his mouth two at a time, his arm curled protectively around the cardboard case.

“Not going to offer them around?”

“Well, did you bring them for me or didn’t you?” he says, his cheeks puffed out like a gerbil’s.

He does not speak again until the box is empty, and he has removed all trace of icing sugar with a licked finger.

“You are not needed at the Louvre today, Hersch?”

“Zach said he’d mind my stall until lunchtime.”

“You trust your money to a Jew?”

“Times have changed, Szymon.”

“Times never change.”

“I brought the reviews,” I tell him, grateful for an excuse to change the subject.

My friend is seldom happy with the reaction to his shows. Those who fawn over him he finds embarrassing. He thinks them ill-informed.

“If they could see what I have been trying to do,” he says as he reads a full-page spread with pictures, “they would know what a failure this represents.”

“You would rather have a thousand words about your failure?” I joke.

“Yes,” he says, stubborn as a teenager.

But this time he gets his wish: there is not universal praise. There are critics in whom this retrospective has inspired a less favourable reaction – albeit tempered with sympathy for all the artist-martyr has endured. But nevertheless there are arguments – eloquent, well-reasoned – that this show betrays a lack of evolution over the course of the artist’s career. Simply put, Szymon has not moved with the times.

“Well, what do you say to that, friend?” I can’t help but ask.

“I say I would like to shake them by the hand.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“I do.”

I get up to make the coffee, retrieving the granules and the saucepan from my bag.

“Well I know what kind of review I would prefer,” I call back to him.

“But no one’s writing about you, H.”

“No, Szymon. No one’s writing about me.”

“Don’t put it on too long,” he warns as I move to the hob.

I obey, heating the water only as long as it takes for tiny bubbles to form a ring around the base of the pan. Then I stir the lukewarm liquid into the granules, picking out the ones that don’t dissolve.

“Anka’s furious you missed the show,” I say, handing him a mug.

“Fuck Anka.”

I drink my tepid coffee.

I leave my friend just before noon. He seems in better spirits than when I arrived – so much so that I dare to ask him about the missing canvas.

“Oh that? I gave up,” he says.

I chuckle; trust Szymon to be so glib after months of playing the dramatist.

“Well friend,” I say, clapping him on the shoulder, “you are not the first to fall short of the Muse. You will be back for another go, don’t worry.”

“Oh no, it’s done,” he replies, amiably. “I forgot her, you see, H. I forgot her.”

“Who, Szymon?”

He looks at me strangely: “Esther.”

It happens instantly: the ringing in my ears, the constriction in my chest.

“That is who you have been trying to paint?”

“Of course,” he replies. “I have been trying for weeks now – well, decades, really.”

And so it all makes sense: his move to the Boulevard, his reaction to the da Vinci’s, the caricature, his pilfering of my trinkets – the Poland glass, my old hat.

“But she’s gone,” he says, matter-of-factly. “And so that is that.”

I shrug into my coat as he opens the front door. He holds out his hand to shake mine but I ignore it. My head is spinning: I need fresh air.

And so somehow it is not a surprise to me when, a little over a week later, I read in the newspaper that they have recovered the body of my dear friend Szymon. The last confirmed sighting, it says, was in the Jardin les Tuileries. The theory is that he put rocks in his pockets and stepped into the Seine.

My friend has no family, of course. And it soon turns out he has no assets either, his financial adviser informing me that Szymon donated all of his money to some political organisation or other just before his death. Anka is too overcome with grief to be of much assistance; or too preoccupied – I suspect in my more ungracious moments – with the now skyrocketing value of Szymon’s remaining paintings. And so, after a few calls, it is agreed that I should arrange the funeral.

It is thus a small affair, though I do the best I can. And I feel no shame at dispensing with fripperies like flowers – my friend would have snorted at such waste anyway. One thing I do regret, however, is that I have his body cremated. It occurs to me only after the deed is done that Szymon would not have liked that.

There is not a big crowd on the day for I do not invite many: just Madam Roberge, myself, a few faithful fans. A few photographers and journalists linger outside the church – the death of a renowned artist (however out-of-sync with the times) is still news, after all. Anka is there too, of course, resplendent in her black velvet dress. She brings the ginger buck with her. They pose for pictures before heading in for the service, looking suitably grief-stricken. Inside she keeps up the performance, weeping all down the front of his paisley shirt.

After the funeral, I say my goodbyes and walk to the Jardin. I sit on the bench I once sat on with my dear friend and watch the riverboats pass. I am struck by how stately they seem, like great white whales nosing their way towards the sea.

I can hear the letters rustling in the inside pocket of my tweed overcoat. But I do not take them out, I do not need to: there was so little there to memorise, after all. Four envelopes, each address struck through with red, until finally they caught up with me at La Courneuve, many years the first one was posted. Four pages of pleading, most of it blacked out by the German censor’s mark. Just a few fragments of speech, then – half-lines destined to torment me each day since their arrival.

‘Dear Husband-’

‘If it were you who-’

‘What have I – what has your Kraków Family – done to deserve this?’

Did Esther know? Impossible to say, but certainly I do. And now Szymon is gone, who do I pay penance to, for them taking her as well, instead of just him?

Exit

"It was a fine trick," the curator says, as you push back the final curtain.

He is sitting in the centre of the room on a tall wooden stool. His back is to you; in front of him is an easel. To his right is a second stool. Small jam jars, half-filled with watercolour paints, are clustered together on its surface. Each one has a brush sticking out: are they made of straw, hair or feather? You can't tell.

It is the dimness of the light that is the problem. Hard to see properly with only a thin streak of palest silver coming through a crack between two blankets, hung above the window of the far wall. This does not seem to trouble the curator, however. He continues working as though he is painting outside, on the brightest of sunny days.

Beyond his silhouette and the outline of the easel, you can just make out a door to the left of the window: the exit.

You take a step forwards. The curator does not turn around. He does not even break his brushstroke; you can hear it swishing softly across the surface of the paper.

"I came to find you," he says calmly, "in the 1943 room. You were not there."

Another step closer: to both the door and your host. Over his left shoulder you can now make out the painting he is working on. It is a landscape – or at least, the bottom half is green, the top half blue. A house like a child might paint has been set on a hillock to the right side of the image: a square yellow box, pencilled-in windows and a red triangle roof.

"I should have been cleverer than to show you that final picture," he says, his voice still even. "I should have known it would be by Ebner. Too much a fool for horses; it has always been my problem."

In the centre of the curator's painting, the sky drops down suddenly. It is a valley, you realise, the green ground forming a low bowl. In the centre of this dip are a series of other buildings, grey rectangles, haphazardly arranged.

"No matter; I will know better next time."

Next time?

You take another step towards freedom, bringing you level with the curator and the picture. You can now make out dark shapes, dotting the foreground of the vista. You

squint at the dark smudges; they look somehow familiar. Animals, certainly – but are they meant to be horses or cows?

“You like it?” the curator asks, as you gasp in recognition. “It is for the 1943 room, to replace ‘Saddle Horses’, now it has revealed itself to be illegal.”

You cannot answer; the questions are spinning too fast inside your head for you to catch one. So from the beginning? How many of the paintings? Why would he?

“No?” he says, shrugging. “Oh well, *es spielt keine Rolle*. You do not have to like it; it is my job to make the selections, after all.”

He chuckles loudly, his mouth a great black hole.

“I will call it ‘*Zur Freiheit*’. It means ‘To Freedom’ in English. It translates well, yes?”

You do an about-face as your next step takes you past both the curator and the easel. You back away slowly, your hands grappling behind you for the door.

“Ah-so, you are leaving?”

You nod.

He sighs: “I should know better by now than to show these paintings to the casual visitor. They cannot take instruction; always they let the *verboten* artworks interfere.”

Why have you not reached the door yet, you wonder. But you do not look behind you; you don’t dare take your eyes off him.

He stops painting and sets his brush down.

“Well, what do you wait for? You want one more drink before you go, perhaps?”

You shake your head.

“Well then-,” the curator sucks in a great breath: “*RAUS! RAUS!*”

Zur Freiheit

It is not what Rudolf thought it would be. And yet everything is here. Standing at the top of a small hillock he surveys the landscape: the horses grazing peacefully in front of the grey stone stables, and behind him the red-roofed, stucco-covered farmhouse he always longed for, even as a young boy. It should bring him pleasure, he thinks: here he is, in charge of all this. Yet still remains the feeling that something is out of place. But this is not correct. Instead it is that everything is in place, yet still something does not feel quite right.

The birthing will begin soon. There is a shiver running right through the farm – not only among the workers, but the animals too. The horses are restless in their stalls, snorting and stamping, kicking their doors. The air itself seems to carry the promise of new life, sweeping through the little orchard that borders the stable yard, causing the leaves to rustle excitedly.

Rudolf observes this anticipation building and is jealous. It is an excitement he should be able to feel too. He wonders what it is like – a sort of simmering in the stomach, perhaps. He focuses on that area now, trying to stir some feeling there. But there is only a residual fullness, a little gas building in the left side of his gut – the result of one of Mutz's breakfasts. Sighing, he walks down the little slope towards the yard.

The men line up to greet their boss as Rudolf approaches the stable block. They tip their flat-caps to him, murmur their regards, and those of their wives and children. Rudolf always enjoys observing the change that comes over the men when he enters the yard on a workday. Backs are straightened; hands are removed from pockets; beards are smoothed down. Even the horses poke their noses over the tops of their stable doors when they hear him approach. Rudolf has had metal heel caps put on his boots specially, so that his step is always distinct.

The mare has already been separated from the rest, to a single stall where she will reside until nature has taken its course. Short blasts of steam can be seen mushrooming above the closed bottom half of the stable door. Rudolf comes to a halt outside her pen, and the men gather around him in a horseshoe shape. He can hear her heavy breathing as he begins instructing them on how the birthing should proceed.

As Rudolf barks his orders – what role each worker is to play; the new equipment he has bought in for this occasion – the men listen attentively, nodding along.

Their admiration propels Rudolf's speech to greater heights. A fire roars through him as he speaks of the miracle of new life, the profundity of the task they are about to perform: here, now, together. His oration seems to fall into a rhythm which synchronises itself with the horse's snorting. As he comes to the crescendo she whinnies loudly, a contraction squeezing its fist around her insides.

But the flames are extinguished as soon as the men are dismissed. They go about their business as if they have not heard a word Rudolf has said. They have paid him the courtesy of respectful audience, but now it is time for the real farmers to take over. They fall back into patterns designated long before the new owner's arrival, singularly ignoring the shining new clamps and hemostats laid out for them, in favour of buckets, towels, a great tub of petroleum jelly. Rudolf finds himself outside of this machine, standing in front of the stable door as the men buzz around, making preparations.

"Excuse me, sir?"

A groom – a young boy – is standing behind Rudolf, his arms folded. He cannot be more than twelve; he reminds Rudolf of his son Klaus.

"Yes, young man?" he says, patting the lad's head. "What can I do for you?"

"No – excuse me," he repeats, rolling his eyes.

He pushes past Rudolf into the stall, followed shortly by Gunther and Heidrich. The three of them stand over the mare and begin conversing in low tones about the best course of action. Rudolf stays where he is, his cheeks blazing.

The horse is gearing up now. The thunder from her nostrils comes faster and faster. Rudolf does not like to see her this way. She looks awkward, cumbersome, like a cow that has been tipped. Her legs stick straight out in front of her, the upper ones a good two feet off the ground. Her belly – huge anyway – has been pushed up into a mountain.

The men ignore his suggestion that she might find standing up more comfortable. Instead they hold her in place, Heidrich at her head. But instead of cradling it tenderly like a baby, whispering soothing words – as Rudolf would – the farmhand pushes down hard, pinning the horse in place. Rudolf can see the horse's terror, in the whites of her eyes. Her body has betrayed her and now these men won't let her go. The whinnying

becomes a shriek, a noise a horse should not be able to make. Rudolf wants to shout at the man to stop, to jump into the stall and help her, but he does not dare –

-End-

Encountering Auschwitz: Touring the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

Introduction

In 2014, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim, Poland, officially became Europe's most-visited memorial site.¹ Approximately 1,534,000 people travelled to the preserved grounds of the former concentration and death camps of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau, representing the highest annual figure since the institution first opened to the public in 1947.² While full-year figures for 2015 have yet to be published, a new record of one million tourists was received between the start of January and the end of July.³ Commenting on the tally, the institution's Deputy Director, Andrzej Kacorzyk, stated: 'All indications are that the year 2015 will be marked by the increase in attendance of up to a dozen per cent.'⁴

The growing popularity of the museum among tourists has not gone unnoticed by mainstream media outlets in the United Kingdom. For example, in April 2015 the institution reported a 40 per cent rise in first-quarter visitors compared to the same period in 2014, attributed to the 70th anniversary of the camp's liberation.⁵ This prompted the *Daily Mail* newspaper to brand the site 'the world's most unlikely tourist hot spot'.⁶ The article was accompanied by the results of a survey conducted by the online travel company sunshine.co.uk, which listed the internet's 'Most Common Dark Tourism Searches': Auschwitz placed second, after New York's Ground Zero.⁷ In late 2013, *The Telegraph* carried a feature entitled 'Dark Tourism: Why are we Attracted to Tragedy and Death?' which referenced the high tourist turnover at the Auschwitz site,⁸ while an article in *The Guardian* noted an apparent trend among travel companies operating in Poland to include Auschwitz tours in stag party packages.⁹

In each of the aforementioned examples, the act of visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is connected, either explicitly or implicitly, to the phenomenon of 'dark tourism'. Anthony Carrigan defines this as 'a practice that can be traced historically

¹ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, '1,5 Million People Visited'.

² Ibid.

³ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, '1 Million People have Visited'.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'Growing Attendance and Security'.

⁶ Emily Payne, 'So Popular They're Turning People Away'.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Natalie Paris, 'Why are we Attracted to Tragedy and Death?'

⁹ Catherine Bennett, 'First it's a Visit to Auschwitz'.

through many different modes of human travel which involve encounters with, and memorialization of, death.’¹⁰ While dark tourism’s origins are arguably ancient, with roots stretching back to ‘the gladiatorial games of the Roman era, pilgrimages and attendance at medieval public executions’¹¹ in the view of Richard Sharpley, the term itself only entered modern parlance twenty years ago, as a result of growing interest in the subject from the academic sector.

The phrase ‘dark tourism’ was coined by Malcolm Foley and John Lennon in 1996, specifically to refer to ‘the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites’.¹² However, it has since become an umbrella term for a series of contemporaneous related phrases, each with their own distinct characteristics. These include: ‘thanatourism’, which Anthony Seaton defines as being determined by visitor motivation, denoting ‘travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death’;¹³ ‘morbid tourism’, which Thomas Blom claims as a specifically postmodern conceit;¹⁴ and ‘black-spot tourism’, which Chris Rojek links to the notoriety of atrocity victims, encompassing ‘sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent deaths’.¹⁵ Other sub-categories noted by Sharpley include ‘grief tourism’, ‘fright tourism’ and ‘dissonant heritage’.¹⁶ In 2006, Philip Stone further proposed a ‘Dark Tourism Spectrum’, placing disaster sites on a scale ranging from ‘darkest’ to ‘lightest’ based on criteria including educational impetus, tourism infrastructure and authenticity of location.¹⁷ Within Stone’s framework, concentration and death camp sites – considered ‘the ‘canon’ of dark tourism destinations’¹⁸ according to Carrigan – sit at the very darkest end of the spectrum, while entertainment-focused ‘dark fun factories’ such as The London Dungeon inhabit the lightest region.¹⁹

¹⁰ Carrigan, ‘Dark Tourism and Postcolonial Studies’, 237.

¹¹ Sharpley and Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel*, Loc 157.

¹² Foley and Lennon, ‘JFK and Dark Tourism’, 198.

¹³ Seaton, ‘Guided by the Dark’, 240.

¹⁴ Blom, ‘Morbid Tourism’, 29.

¹⁵ Rojek, *Ways of Seeing*, 136.

¹⁶ Sharpley and Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel*, Loc 280.

¹⁷ Stone, ‘A Dark Tourism Spectrum’, 151.

¹⁸ Carrigan, ‘Dark Tourism and Postcolonial Studies’, 241.

¹⁹ Stone, ‘A Dark Tourism Spectrum’, 152.

The journey of the dark tourism moniker into popular usage correlated with a new influx of western travellers visiting perhaps the world's best-known former concentration camp memorial institution: the Auschwitz Birkenau-State Museum. This was a direct result of Poland's 1989 rejection of Communist rule, which opened up both the country and the institution to a previously untapped sector of the international tourist market. In turn, this provoked renewed scholarly discussions regarding the ethical implications of locating a museum on a site of genocide. In her 1992 memoir, *Still Alive: a Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, Ruth Klüger problematised the 'museum culture of the Shoah',²⁰ asking what the 'carefully tended, unlovely remains'²¹ of former concentration camps could possibly communicate of the actual experience of being incarcerated there. Meanwhile, in the early- to mid-1990s, James Young, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, Robert Jan van Pelt and Debórah Dwork offered targeted critiques of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, questioning the methods of historical representation it employed and branding several aspects of its exhibitions ethically insensitive or even deceptive in nature.²² Such concerns spoke to wider debates within Holocaust scholarship, namely the limitations of representation and the transmission of what Marianne Hirsch has christened 'affiliative postmemory'²³ – in this case from the second to third post-Holocaust generations onwards.

The concurrent emergence of these two distinct-yet-overlapping fields of research may explain the sense of suspicion that often permeates both critical and creative texts dealing with Holocaust tourism. For example, Ana Carden-Coyne asks: 'How can the Holocaust be represented both accurately and ethically, without sensationalizing, trading in 'edutainment' or encouraging macabre fascination with atrocity imagery?'²⁴ In *Holocaust Journey: Travelling in Search of the Past*, Martin Gilbert twice refers to the number of visitors to the Auschwitz I site as 'disturbing' – though interestingly, he

²⁰ Klüger, *Still Alive*, 63.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² For examples see Young, *Texture of Memory*, 132–133, and van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 359–369.

²³ Hirsch defines 'postmemory' as: 'The relationship of the second generation [of Holocaust survivors] to powerful, often traumatic experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.' ('The Generation of Postmemory', Abstract). This is sub-divided into 'familial' and 'affiliative' postmemory, indicative of those with ancestral links to the Holocaust, and of those without direct ancestral heritage seeking a connection to the events (in a broader, cultural sense), respectively. (*Ibid.*, 114–115).

²⁴ Carden-Coyne, 'The Ethics of Representation in Holocaust Museums', in Dreyfus and Langton [eds], *Writing the Holocaust*, 167.

seems to distinguish his own research group from the general throng of tourists.²⁵

Meanwhile, in the memoir *The Lost: a Search for Six of Six Million*, Daniel Mendelsohn equates the commercialisation of the Auschwitz site with historical misappropriation. Calling it ‘the gross generalization, the shorthand, for what happened to Europe’s Jews’,²⁶ he continues: what of ‘Jews who were lined up and shot at the edges of open pits’, or those sent to ‘camps that are less well-known to the public mind precisely because they [...] produced no survivors, no memoirs, no stories’?²⁷

Many such works are rich with implied judgements regarding the motivations of those who visit Holocaust sites: in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra warns of ‘vicarious victimhood’ and of ‘fetishising trauma narratives’;²⁸ in ‘Sightseeing in the Mansions of the Dead’, Chris Keil quotes an Auschwitz guide commenting on the behaviour of tourists at the site: ‘it’s not yet a park and picnic place, but it’s approaching that atmosphere’;²⁹ and in the novel *Hope: a Tragedy*, Shalom Auslander parodies guided group tours of the former Sachsenhausen concentration camp – ‘Mother said, Are there ovens at least? The trip shouldn’t be a total waste?’³⁰ Thus the ‘Holocaust tourist’, as conceived by its associated literature, tends to carry overwhelmingly negative connotations.

It is arguably this preoccupation with visitor motivation which brings Holocaust tourism scholarship most directly into dialogue with what Carrigan has called the ‘new wave of dark tourism research’.³¹ He traces this to the 2009 publication of *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, co-edited by Stone and Sharpley. Central to this collection of essays is Sharpley’s notion that dark tourism research has thus far ‘lacked theoretical foundations’, revealing ‘little about the nature of the demand for and supply of dark tourism experiences’.³² This influential volume thus brings together various theorisations of dark tourism, interrogating their philosophical intersections and examining their sociological implications. However,

²⁵ Gilbert, *Holocaust Journey*, 174 and 175.

²⁶ Mendelsohn, *The Lost*, 112.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 47.

²⁹ Ibid, 484–485.

³⁰ Auslander, *Hope: a Tragedy*, 208.

³¹ Carrigan ‘Dark Tourism and Postcolonial Studies’, 238.

³² Sharpley and Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel*, Loc 300.

Sharpley notes that 'limited attention has been paid to exploring why tourists might be drawn towards sites or experiences associated with death and suffering'.³³

This concern is starting to be addressed by contemporary academics, as evidenced by a 2013 special edition of the *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* dedicated to dark tourism.³⁴ In one article, Rachael Raine proposes a 'Dark Tourist Spectrum' as an expansion of Stone's original scale. This sister-spectrum identifies nine distinct 'types of dark tourists, presented in a darkest to lightest framework'.³⁵ These comprise: mourners, pilgrims, the morbidly curious, thrill seekers, information seekers, hobbyists, sightseers, retreaters and passive recreationists.³⁶ Meanwhile, Anna Farmaki examines visitor motivation alongside 'supply-side drivers'³⁷ in 'Dark Tourism Revisited: a Supply/Demand Conceptualisation'.

However, while visitor motivation is quite rightly becoming a more developed strand of dark tourism research, I would argue that in the field of Holocaust tourism its relative historical dominance has led to another, equally important area of study being comparatively overlooked. I am referring to the experiential aspect of visiting Holocaust sites – from a dark tourist's perspective. It is my contention that the form a visitor's encounter takes will impact directly on their experience and understanding of a Holocaust site. This must therefore be taken into consideration when interrogating the supply-demand relationship that characterises both Holocaust tourism and the wider dark tourism field.

There is a noticeable lack of access-type analysis within the critical literature of Holocaust tourism – although tentative steps are starting to be taken within the Holocaust education sector, with Victoria Nesfield's recent analysis of the impact of guided experiences on groups of school students taken to view the Auschwitz site.³⁸ This seems a particularly striking omission given that many concentration camp museums, including the Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen, Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, the State Museum at Majdanek, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum now actively promote participation in guided tours

³³ Sharpley and Stone, *The Darker Side of Travel*, Loc 300.

³⁴ A. Birna and K. Hyde [eds], Vol 7:3 (2013).

³⁵ Raine, 'A Dark Tourist Spectrum', 242.

³⁶ Ibid, 248.

³⁷ Farmaki, 'Dark Tourism Revisited', 281.

³⁸ 'Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant in a Changing Landscape: Seventy Years On' (2015).

to visitors.³⁹ In the case of the Auschwitz museum, several varieties of guided experience are now available, including group tours, private tours, school trips, and two-day study sessions.⁴⁰ Perhaps as a result of the museum's promotional efforts, tours have also become the means by which the majority of people view Auschwitz: 84 per cent (1,124,262) of visitors employed the services of a guide in 2013, while a further 77 per cent (1,180,975) followed suit in 2014.⁴¹

It further appears that a desire exists among many previous visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum for access-type research to be conducted. For while a cursory glance at online reviews of the group tours reveals strongly positive visitor responses, when monitored over a period of time a pervasive undercurrent of discomfort emerges. Participants refer to a perceived commercialisation of the site ('Auschwitz has become a money-making machine!'; 'It may seem like Disneyland'), inadequate tour management ('The speed [...] [of] the organized tour left little time for reflection'), and an apparent emotional disconnection generated by the overall experience ('There is somehow something missing'; 'Everything had been [...] sanitised to the extent of losing its impact'). Reactions like this are often linked to a genuine wish by tour participants to develop their knowledge of the site's history, but to do so in an ethically appropriate way (though of course opinions vary as to what constitutes 'ethically appropriate' in this context). One visitor ultimately concludes: 'I had a dismal feeling about the fact that I also was a tourist'.⁴²

This thesis therefore attempts to expand the scope of Holocaust tourism scholarship by analysing one of the most popular forms of guided experience offered by the Auschwitz museum: the 3.5 hour group tour of Auschwitz I and Birkenau. Its primary aim is to evaluate this tour in terms of both its form and content, focusing on elements which speak to ethical concerns previously raised – or yet to be raised – about the site's reconfiguration as a visitor destination. This interrogation is framed by my own first experience of a guided group tour of the Auschwitz site, although in the interests of being representative it incorporates material relating to a total of ten group tours, taken between August 2009 and April 2014.

³⁹ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'Visiting'.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, *Report 2014*, 19.

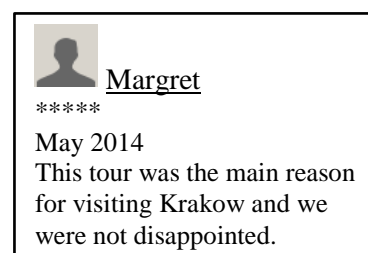
⁴² User reviews taken from tripadvisor.com, viator.com and yelp.co.uk between January 2011 and January 2016.

There is a specific reason why I have elected to take a personal-theoretical and strongly narrative approach within this thesis: it enables me to address the broader question of whether a dark tourist's experience is 'borne' of their own expectations and motivations in attending a particular black spot, or 'made' by the form of the encounter they have once there. In posing it, I wish to (respectfully) suggest that constructions such as Raine's 'Dark Tourist Spectrum' prove unhelpful in the face of such a query, being limited in their ability to reflect the complexities of human nature. Not only would I argue that a person's motivation for attending a location considered 'dark' is seldom singular (for example, a 'thrill seeker' can equally be an 'information seeker'), but the determinative presentation of such scales contains no facility for fluctuation or change as a result of the dark tourist's experience (a 'passive recreationist' may consider themselves a 'pilgrim' by the end of their encounter, for instance). In this way, I feel Raine's spectrum speaks more to a specific, arguably fear-based mind-set, predominant in Holocaust tourism: that only particular 'types' of tourist are desirable at such sites.

What I hope to show via the filter of my own first-person responses to the Auschwitz museum – and through the often-divergent views of others, expressed in the online reviews dotted throughout my analysis – is that a visitor's relationship to a black spot is at all times inconsistent, pluralistic, and affected by a range of factors. However, while an institution cannot account for many of these variables (a person's political persuasion, for example), they do control one primary source of influence: the form of the tourist's encounter. This, of course, is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, desirable responses can be, if not elicited, then facilitated or encouraged by close analysis and adaptation of the types of visitor experiences on offer. But without due attention, these framings can also generate negative effects – as this thesis demonstrates.

Old Town / New Town

It begins in Kraków, a city that is two cities. Browsing a guidebook map ahead of my trip, this division appears precise: the Old Town (Stare Miasto) sits right in the centre, as though someone has dropped an aged



postcard of days gone by there, torn into a rough teardrop shape. In this UNESCO World Heritage Site, I – the tourist – am promised, I will find a complete and bookended history, starting in the medieval period and halting sometime in the late 1800s. Renaissance, Baroque and Gothic buildings pockmark an epicentre containing approximately six thousand historic sites and over two million works of art.⁴³ The Old Town is encircled by a former moat, now Planty Park. Outside this grass-and-tarmac border lays the vast expanse of new Kraków, comprised of the many boroughs it has created or absorbed over the years: Grzegórzki, Krowodrza and Podgórze, to name but a few. They fan out across the landscape, covering an area of 327 square kilometres. The Old Town, meanwhile, occupies a little over one square kilometre. Thus it appears a tiny island, threatened by a relentless modern tide.⁴⁴

Arriving into the main train station of Kraków Główny in late August, I find this modern/historic aesthetic divide further enhanced. Emerging from a basement-level, concrete structure, flooded with white light and dotted with Day-Glo plastic furniture, I encounter a plaza where my eyes cannot rest on an older building without a steel-and-glass neighbour screaming for attention. Thus, despite having been spared the World War II bombings that obliterated large swathes of European contemporaries such as Berlin, my immediate impression of new Kraków is that it is a resolute product of the twenty-first century. As if to emphasise a sudden, seismic shift in time, the station's old, nineteenth century ticket hall sits abandoned to one side of the square. Closed down and boarded up, its carved wooden doorways and cathedral domes are overwhelmed by the glittering glass cube of the *Galeria* shopping mall next door.

From this plaza I am funnelled, via a gleaming subway, directly into the Old Town and its pre-1900 timescape. This slight-of-hand manoeuvre ensures that I bypass the rest of new Kraków which, I discover later, stubbornly contradicts the station square's most progressive image. It is a move which, once noticed, appears somehow anxious, over-wrought; as though both factions of the city – Old and New – have somehow conspired to render the twentieth century obsolete.


As I zig-zag my way through the Old Town crowds, in search of my apartment, I find that I am haunted by strange figures. On the main thoroughfare streets of Floriańska and Grodzka, and as I skirt the main market square of Rynek Główny, young men and

⁴³ Rubnikowicz, *Essential Krakow*, 72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

women in their early twenties approach me. They wear distinctive red jackets, or carry laminated A4 signs. All are carrying leaflets advertising: 'Auschwitz: Walking Tours, Driving Tours, Day Trips'. Small motorised buggies lurk nearby, their canvas roofs trimmed with scalloped banners and blocky font, reading: 'Kraków: Old Town-Wawel-Jewish Quarter'. Signs at the front of the cars denote 'English Driver' or, on colder days, 'Heating'. It is from these sellers, or from the many pocket-sized souvenir stalls and tourist information booths stuffed into the archways of old buildings, that one can purchase a ticket for a return coach trip to and guided group tour of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, situated 60 kilometres to the west in Oświęcim. Customers can choose between full- and half-day options, while some agents also offer a 'double-deal', taking in the camp and the Wieliczka Salt Mines, to the south-east of the city, on the same day.⁴⁵

These coach trips represent the easiest and most convenient, if by no means the cheapest way to access the site from the city. The train from Kraków to Oświęcim – built for neither comfort nor speed – takes more than two hours and drops visitors approximately two kilometres from Auschwitz I, where the museum's main exhibitions are situated. The tour sellers capitalise on this fact, emphasising the practicality of their option: here is a map with the bus stop marked; be there at this time and we will do the rest. Some even offer a pick-up service from selected local hotels. Thus, come 9am the next morning, I find the pavements of Świętego Idziego swelling with fellow travellers, each one searching for their particular tour company's bus stop.

| |
|--|
|  David B ***** February 2013 An excellent way to see both Auschwitz and Birkenau. Much easier than on public transport. |
|--|


*See for yourself where the atrocities of the Nazi's 'Final Solution' were carried out with a tour to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. [...] Inclusions: English speaking guide, [...] guided walk through Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, documentary screening. Duration: 9:30am till 3:30pm. Frequency: daily. From January headphones included.*⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Such agents include 'Krakow-Auschwitz' (krakow-auschwitz.com), 'Krakow Shuttle' (krakowshuttle.com) and Krakow Direct (krakowdirect.com).

⁴⁶ 'Old City Tours' leaflet, April 2014.

Transport (I)

As the tour bus exits the Old Town, it passes Wawel Hill and the gold-capped turrets of the city's Royal Castle and Cathedral. Then it's out into new Kraków, and on through the fringes of the city. Finally, the roads begin to narrow and I realise we have entered the

DeAnn N


March 2014
The transportation was well planned [...]. The documentary on the way really set you up for a sobering day.

countryside: rolling green fields, and the distinctive red- or green-tiled pavilion roofs of Polish homes, that appear less frequently as the journey progresses. Despite the pleasing farmland scenery, the drive to Oświęcim is an awkward one. People do not make small talk with those sitting next to them; there is a sense of not knowing how to behave. Thus it comes as a relief when, around the halfway point of the voyage, small television monitors pinned to the ceiling of the bus begin to hum and flicker, and a video starts to play.

A haunting violin soundtrack announces a set of opening credits, giving way to a series of familiar images accompanied by stern, male-voiced narration. There are present-day shots, taken in appropriately dull weather, of things I – and presumably the other tourists – recognise as belonging to Auschwitz: barbed wire fences; watchtowers; the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate. There are period photographs: the cattle trucks split open, Jews and suitcases spilling onto the selection ramp; male prisoners in striped pyjamas crammed into barracks' bunks; close-up shots of bodies, dead and alive, with protruding hipbones and spines that threaten to break through the skin. There is film footage: black-and-white videos of children shuffling through a corridor of barbed wire; victims being stretchered out of the camp at liberation. And finally, in full colour, the survivors testify, affirming the necessity of remembering this history so as not to repeat it, and reciting a maxim as much beloved as subsequently disproved: 'Never Again'.

This brief video, barely twenty minutes long, performs two important functions. Firstly, the survivors' words legitimise our group as tourists: we will be witnesses, not voyeurs, at Auschwitz. Secondly, we are reassured that our destination, ghastly as it may be is, at least, a known quantity. For although Auschwitz was one of many hundreds of concentration camps, death camps and sub-camps, established by the National Socialist regime, it has been rendered unique by the sheer variety and volume

of ways that its image has been propagated in the public consciousness. From Claude Lanzmann's seminal documentary *Shoah*,⁴⁷ to Uwe Boll's critically-derided film *Auschwitz*;⁴⁸ from Tadeusz Borowski's realist short story collection *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*,⁴⁹ to John Boyne's fairy tale-esque novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*;⁵⁰ from school history lessons on World War II to university seminars on Primo Levi, Auschwitz has become an icon of Holocaust suffering and, consequently, a thing we think we know about. Indeed, such is the grip of the site on


 Ryan D

 June 2015
 The bus ride to Auschwitz was comfortable. The video presentation shown during the drive was informative. The driver was professional, as was the tour co-ordinator.

our cultural imagination that – in an echo of Mendelsohn's 'shorthand' theorisation – it becomes possible to argue that, for today's generation, all Holocaust victims to some extent pass through Auschwitz: our vision of the period inevitably being comprised, at least in part, of images of the camp.

Reception

Yet the Auschwitz of the tour bus video is not the one that we tourists arrive at. As Nesfield notes, 'the most frequently encountered narratives of the Holocaust do not prepare the visitor for the dual function to the site as it is presented now'.⁵¹ Thus, as the bus pulls into the visitor entrance of today's Auschwitz I, what greets us is not a death camp but a car park lined with picnic

 Tracey J

 May 2014
 We had originally planned to go to Auschwitz independently, but were really glad we changed our minds [...] we avoided a very lengthy queue to obtain tickets, as we were met by our guide and swept straight through to begin the tour!

benches, a bookshop and a black-and-yellow stall marked 'Snack Bar'. This latter construction appears a particular cause of consternation for Gilbert in his memoir: he juxtaposes its image with an account of the first gassing to take place inside the camp.⁵² Further embodying the apparent disconnect between the site's past and present functions is a large, red-brick, L-shaped building which sits at the far end of the car park. Formerly a delousing station for prisoners, it now serves as the main reception for the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, complete with cashier's desks,

⁴⁷ Les Films Aleph, Eureka Entertainment Ltd, 1985.

⁴⁸ Uwe Boll, Event Film Distribution, 2010.

⁴⁹ New York: Penguin, 1976.

⁵⁰ London: David Fickling Books, 2006.

⁵¹ Nesfield, 'Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant', 47–48.

⁵² Gilbert, *Holocaust Journey*, 173.

post office, café, toilets, left luggage deposit and documentary screening room. But perhaps most striking about arriving at this time of year – August, peak season – are the swathes of fellow tourists descending from near-identical vehicles. It is a stark reminder that Auschwitz, in the modern era, has become big business. And its popularity among travellers has not only proved enduring but continually-evolving: in the last five years the museum has seen visitor numbers rise by almost 250,000, from 1,300,000 in 2009 to 2014's aforementioned record high.⁵³

This widespread interest in the site is inevitably reflected in the commercial sphere, to the extent that the 'Auschwitz' name has become a marketing tool. Countless films, novels and non-fiction books have benefitted from their associations with the concentration and death camp. A few popular examples from just the last ten years include: Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006), now established on the UK's Secondary National Curriculum;⁵⁴ Martin Amis' acclaimed novel *The Zone of Interest* (2015),⁵⁵ featuring a protagonist based on the Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss; the *Sunday Times* bestseller *Hanns and Rudolf: the German Jew and the Hunt for the Kommandant of Auschwitz* (2014), a dual biography of Höss and Hanns Alexander by Thomas Harding;⁵⁶ the Oscar-nominated film adaptation of Bernhard Schlink's novel *The Reader* (2008), directed by Stephen Daldry;⁵⁷ and *Saul fia* (Son of Saul),⁵⁸ a film following a day in the life of a Sonderkommando at Auschwitz, which became Hungary's first 'Best Foreign Language Film' winner at the 2016 Golden Globes. Indeed, in some cases publishers have even been known to push survivor memoirs into Auschwitz. The cover blurb of the 2004 edition of Viktor E. Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, for instance, describes this nine million-selling memoir as the 'story of his struggle for survival in Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps'.⁵⁹ Yet Frankl spent less than a week in Auschwitz, having been held in the Theresienstadt Ghetto for two years prior to his transferral there, then being swiftly moved on to the Dachau-affiliated Kaufering and Türkheim work camps.⁶⁰

⁵³ Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, *Report 2014*, 19.

⁵⁴ www.theboyinthestripedpyjamas.com/downloads/JP-STAY-BITSP-Teaching-resource-2014.pdf

⁵⁵ London: Vintage, 2015.

⁵⁶ London: Windmill Books, 2014.

⁵⁷ Film: Mirage Enterprises, The Weinstein Company, 2008. Novel: London: Phoenix, 1998.


⁵⁸ L. Nemes (dir), Hungarian National Film Fund, Mozinet, 2015.

⁵⁹ London: Rider, 2004.

⁶⁰ Referenced in Klingberg, *When Life Calls Out to Us* and Redsand, *Viktor Frankl: A Life worth Living*.

Given the public appetite for representations of Auschwitz, and the ever-increasing numbers of visitors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, it is not surprising that the institution has committed to providing guided tours of the site ‘for as many people as possible’, as has been stated by Kacorzyk.⁶¹ To this end, a 300-strong contingent of specially trained in-house guides (or ‘licensed educators’⁶² as they are referred to in official material) is employed by the museum. They offer group tours in nineteen different languages which set off at half-hour increments throughout the day. Each commercial busload originating from Kraków is linked up with one of these staff members, who will lead their tour. Meanwhile, a sign at reception strongly recommends that solo visitors employ a guide – be that as a member of a group tour or for an individual guided experience. Between the hours of 10am and 3pm during the peak season of April to October, there is no alternative: entry is only permitted with a guide.⁶³

Thus the majority of visitors encounter a similar experience upon arrival at the Auschwitz museum. Having been assigned radio packs and headphones, they pass through turnstiles at the far end of the reception building, emerging onto a gravel plaza just outside of the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate and the main block of prisoner barracks. There is a mild furore as participants in the museum-managed experience

 Nobody M.
**
July 2015
They don't let individuals in prior to 3pm. Why not? [...]
The only thing that makes sense is that group-only entrance allows them to collect revenue from tour guides, since the museum is free.

are arranged into rough groups, numbering up to sixty people. Members of the pre-designated groups from Kraków, meanwhile, try not to lose their particular crowd amidst the many others. Guides shout above the confusion: ‘My group – Channel One/Two/Three/Four/Five/Six!’ as people attempt to get their audio receivers working and tune in to the right voice.

⁶¹ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, ‘Auschwitz Memorial Visited by 1.33 Million’.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, ‘Visiting’.

Auschwitz I

*Ladies and gentlemen [...] I will be your guide today in this place. We all know that this place is a very important place. It is not typical museum site for visitors. It is a place of unbelievable human suffering. [...] Today I'm going to tell you the story of those who were imprisoned and who were killed.*⁶⁴



Lamby15

July 2011

This may sound awful [...] but the camp looked beautiful when we went. It was an insanely hot day, the birds were chirping [...]. It left us with strange feelings.

As our guide makes their introduction, I look around – and feel suddenly unsure of where I am or what I'm doing here. My fellow tourist look similarly confused, as though the same thought ricochets amongst us: 'This cannot be Auschwitz'.

It is the size of the camp that is the initial problem: it is smaller than I expected. A circuit of the remaining barracks could be performed in under half an hour. This is partly due to what Robert Jan van Pelt and Debórah Dwork identify as a 'misconstruction of history [that] begins right in the parking lot,'⁶⁵ whereby the preserved Auschwitz I, as presented to visitors, reflects only the 1940–1942 version of the camp. Expansions made during the period of the Shoah were sold off in the post-war era or re-appropriated by the Polish government, while other buildings, such as the Höss family villa, were reclaimed as private residences by the descendants of families expelled to make way for the camp.⁶⁶ Another factor may be the status of some of the site's best-known landmarks in popular thought: few, after all, would expect to be able to jump up and touch an archway as notoriously imposing as the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate.

The colours are also troublesome: red brick buildings, light brown gravel pathways, green grass, tall poplar trees, blue skies and a golden sun. Today's Auschwitz I is bright and vivid – and thus refuses to correlate with the dark grey- and brown-washed images we are used to seeing, both in period images and more modern representations, such as Tim Blake Nelson's *The Grey Zone*⁶⁷ or Milan Cieslar's *Prisoners of Auschwitz*.⁶⁸

Andrew Charlesworth and Michael Addis suggest that non-period works often employ dull colour schemes to 'bring continuity to images taken at the time of the camps'

⁶⁴ Appendix III, 0:45.

⁶⁵ van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 359–60.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Millennium Films, Lionsgate Films, 2001.

⁶⁸ High Fliers Films, Bioscop, 2013. Originally released as *Colette*.

operation'.⁶⁹ Yet this traditionally sombre palette, when contrasted with what Young refers to as the present-day camp's 'unexpected, even unseemly beauty',⁷⁰ creates a dual rupture for the tourist: between both the imaginary and the real, and the past and present.

In coming to the site, we tourists learn that the Auschwitz we previously envisioned was but a montage of subjective images: black-and-white photographs; brown-washed films, the dull weather of the tour bus video scenes. However, this epiphany is not accompanied by new knowledge of what Auschwitz I was 'really like'. Instead, we are presented with this surreal version: too small, too colourful and too neat. It is what Jean Baudrillard would term a 'hyperreal' Auschwitz I, reflecting 'a real without origin in reality'.⁷¹ Thus it seems grimly ironic when our guide continues with an assertion of authenticity:

*The exterior is pretty much the same as it was [...] during the war [...]. The buildings that we can see in front of us, those are the same buildings in which prisoners were kept. They were not reconstructed; they were not rebuilt after the war. Only the interior in some buildings has been changed.*⁷²

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is organised around these structures, formerly concentration camp prison blocks and before that army barracks. Sixteen of the twenty-eight preserved brick buildings now serve as permanent exhibitions, while the rebuilt former camp laundry houses a temporary exhibition space. The remainder are either closed or hold the archives and administration offices of the museum.

Blocks 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11 – titled 'Extermination', 'Material Proofs of Crimes', 'Prisoners Life', 'Living and Sanitary Conditions' and 'Block of Death', respectively – are the main public exhibitions, providing differently-focused accounts of the site's concentration and death camp history. Blocks 13 through 18, and Blocks 20 and 21, constitute the 'national pavilions', dedicated to Auschwitz victims from the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Russia and the Czech lands, as well as European Sinti and Roma. Block 27, the former Jewish pavilion, reopened in 2013 with the title 'Shoah',

⁶⁹ Charlesworth and Addis, 'Memorial Landscapes', 231.


⁷⁰ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 120.

⁷¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

⁷² Appendix I, 0:45.

following a refurbishment overseen by Israel's Yad Vashem.⁷³ Blocks 2 and 3 opened in November 2014 as additional displays reserved for 'study visit' participants.⁷⁴

The Auschwitz I leg of the group tours take in Blocks 4 and 5, then one or two of Blocks 6, 7 and 11, as time and visitor numbers permit. Participants also view the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, the roll call yard, the execution wall, the SS quarters (where the exteriors of the hospital block, the camp's administrative offices and Höss' villa can be seen), and a reconstructed gallows in the place where Höss was hung in April 1947. The tour concludes with a walk through the gas chamber of Crematoria I.




badmintontim

January 2016
The site has been well preserved and well laid out [...]. The only thing that is lacking is a place to have coffee, although there is a small place across the car park which is reasonable.

Of the original twenty-eight brick buildings [...] in most of them prisoners slept. Some were used as a kitchen, warehouse, commander's office, political department. And how many people could be held at once in here? Usually the number of prisoners at once was like thirteen, even fifteen thousand prisoners. [...] And now we are going to enter block number four: 'Extermination.'⁷⁵

Block 4: Extermination

The interior of Block 4 looks more like an old school hall than a prison: two-tone blue walls and a floor of mottled concrete. The ground level of the building is divided into four equal-size rectangular rooms. A long corridor cuts down the centre, from the front door to the rear entrance. A wide staircase halfway along this hall leads up to the first floor, where two more long rooms are situated. Room One – to our immediate right – is dominated by a large map, detailing the many transit camps and ghettos which supplied prisoners to Konzentrationslager Auschwitz:



Traveller1999

May 2013
Everything had been, perhaps unavoidably, sanitised to the extent of losing its impact [...] It is impossible to replicate the terrible conditions that existed at the time and nor would anyone with any sensitivity want to. [...] But there is somehow something missing.

Ladies and gentlemen, there were many concentration camps in [...] countries during the war: Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, Bergen-Belsen, Mauthausen; these are the names of former concentration camps. And there were also [...] death camps that the Nazis put in occupied Poland.⁷⁶

⁷³ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'New Agreement Reached'.

⁷⁴ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, "Reserve' Blocks 2 and 3'.

⁷⁵ Appendix III, 12:15.

⁷⁶ Appendix I, 5:00.

Further information boards describe the persecution of Jews and other nationality groups, both before and during World War II, supported by photographs of ghetto round-ups.

As we proceed through the five additional rooms, a pattern emerges: we are shown item after item, artefact after artefact. There is the Urn of Human Ashes, containing the remains of numerous unknown Auschwitz victims, reproduced arrivals lists and prisoner identification papers in table-style showcases. There is a scale model of Crematoria II, sliced open so we can see its inner workings, a showcase stacked with Zyklon B canisters, a giant bin of human hair. And there are more enlarged photographs: an aerial view of Birkenau; Commandant Höss with fellow SS officers; two grainy images of a gas chamber, thought to have been taken illicitly by a member of the Sonderkommando; and a picture of the selection ramps, teeming with Hungarian Jews:

Here we can see, in this photograph, what happened when those trains arrived in Birkenau. We can see that people had to step out of these cars and then they had to stand in two lines. [...] And once people were standing in two lines SS doctors, that we can see here in the photographs, then they decided who is fit, who is unfit for work.⁷⁷

What we implicitly understand is this: the history of Auschwitz can be told through its remains.

Since its conception in 1947 by the Polish parliament (Sejm), the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has relied on artefacts, witness testimonies and reconstructed objects to communicate the history of the site to visitors. In fact, with a mandate defined as 'to collect, preserve and conserve the collections and buildings of the museum, to conduct research upon them and to make them accessible to visitors',⁷⁸ the institution considers itself to have a 'statutory obligation'⁷⁹ to collect, safeguard and, where possible, display all surviving remnants of Auschwitz. Bohdan Rymaszewski, a member of the International Auschwitz Council between 2000 and 2006, states that this position enables the museum to provide visitors with 'material proofs supplementing

⁷⁷ Appendix I, 15:45.

⁷⁸ Olesky, 'The Education Centre at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum', in Davies [ed], *Teaching the Holocaust*, 86.

⁷⁹ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'Museum's Position on Issue of Portraits'.

and authenticating the accounts and reconstructions of past events'.⁸⁰ And while many critics find the museum's policy of object display problematic, most do concede its value as an archive. One example is Mendelsohn who, while scathing in his critique of the site as a tourist destination, also acknowledges:

One reason to go to Auschwitz is that the entire site is a gigantic piece of evidence, and in this respect seeing the piles of eyeglasses or shoes themselves, as opposed to merely knowing about them or seeing photographs or videos [...] is more useful in conveying what happened.⁸¹

It is also largely because of how much of the former concentration camp remains that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum has been able to establish itself as an epicentre of Holocaust education. Although access to the museum is free, visitors must pay to take a guided tour. The revenue this generates accounts for a sizeable proportion of the institution's annual income: 6.7 million euros in 2014, according to the latest *Museum Report*, equating to 55 per cent of its 2015 budget.⁸² And while it would be unfair to suggest that profit is a motivating factor for the museum, certainly the numbers of visitors it attracts – paying not only for the tours, but for books and educational DVDs – help fund its ongoing preservation efforts, as well as scholarship initiatives such as the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, founded in 2005.⁸³

It can further be argued that the display of primary artefacts to the public can allow new insights into the site's history to be gained – both by the museum and by visitors. On one tour, for example, a guide informed us that a member of a previous group had identified his own father in one of the photographs of the Auschwitz guards on display, having previously been unaware of his connection to the SS and the site.⁸⁴ Whether such knowledge was desired by this gentleman or not, certainly such an incident serves to remind us that archival objects do not hold meaning in and of themselves. It is only in their display that they become activated by interpretation.

Given the museum's artefact-centric approach, it does not seem surprising that the tour guides base their narratives on these displayed remnants, utilising them as

⁸⁰ Rymaszewski, *Generations Should Remember*, 70.

⁸¹ Mendelsohn, *The Lost*, 113.

⁸² Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, *Report 2014*, 57.

⁸³ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'ICEAH – General Information'.

⁸⁴ Appendix I, 18:45.

mnemonic devices. As we are led from room to room our guide pauses by particular objects, which then appear to trigger the relation of information. Thus the selling-off of human detritus for profit is untangled from a giant bin of women's hair, while canisters which once held Zyklon B contain the story of an attempt by SS guards to conceal the existence of the gas chambers:

*Now we're going to see how gas looked like. Poison crystals stored in cans like this [...]. In 1945 Russians entered. They found a lot of empty cans left. Can you believe that to deceive world [...], Nazis stole cars from Red Cross organisation, humanitarian organisation, and this gas were delivered in Red Cross trucks?*⁸⁵

By appearing to extract a series of neat, interconnected anecdotes from these available remnants, the guides give the impression that they not only authenticate the history of Auschwitz but help to 'flesh it out', filling in the gaps: seeing these objects is aligned with knowing what happened here. This is a position supported by Rymaszewski, who claims that while the original camp is lost, visual stimuli can enable visitors to 'recognise it, aided by the conscience of the past events'.⁸⁶ Nesfield further points out that this practice may also help visitors resituate themselves within the site, as a place of suffering: 'The physical exhibits [...] support and bolster the imagery which fills most testimonies: the selection process, [...] the violent loss of possessions, the ruthless dehumanisation process the deportees endure.'⁸⁷ It is in front of these display cases that tourists encounter evidence of the Auschwitz they understand to be authentic – and therefore these objects arguably serve as a counter to the shock of Auschwitz I's 'museumified' appearance.

However, I would argue that while these artefacts undeniably serve an educational purpose and perhaps an orientational one too, they are incapable of providing visitors with a sense of what Auschwitz was 'really like'. The historical interaction is incomplete: even Rymaszewski concedes that 'smell and hearing cannot currently recognise the original nature of the camp's reality'.⁸⁸ Yet while the museum's official guidebook also acknowledges that 'it is difficult for us to imagine the tragic scenes which took place daily in the camp,'⁸⁹ the tour guides appear to suggest that these

⁸⁵ Appendix III, 35:15.

⁸⁶ Rymaszewski, *Generations Should Remember*, 92.

⁸⁷ Nesfield, 'Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant', 49.

⁸⁸ Rymaszewski, *Generations Should Remember*, 92.

⁸⁹ *Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oświęcim Guide-Book*, 15.

objects facilitate just that type of understanding, with assertions such as ‘so now you can imagine’,⁹⁰ which pepper their monologues. What is not acknowledged, however, is that the tourist is encountering only a partial, fragmented visual image – one divorced of the vast majority of its cultural and contextual signifiers. I would argue that, among tour participants, this often results in a response that E. Ann Kaplan calls ‘empty empathy [...], fleeting [in] nature’, as opposed to legitimate ‘witnessing’, which Kaplan defines as ‘a response that transforms the viewer in a positive pro-social manner, and that [...] involves ethics along with empathy.’⁹¹

It also becomes possible to argue that, in the context of the group tour, what these artefacts are actually being placed in service of is not historical knowledge but rather the chosen method of historical representation: narrative. Through being aligned with aspects of the site’s history, these artefacts cement the guides’ designation as ‘licensed experts’ by allowing them to present a seemingly comprehensive history of Auschwitz. But this in turn generates an illusory impression of historical and archival completeness for tour participants. In *The Texture of Memory*, Young expresses concern about original artefacts being reconfigured as vessels of meaning in this way, warning that by the ‘fetishization of artifacts [...] we risk mistaking [...] the implied whole for the unmediated history’.⁹² In essence, he suggests that if material presence is privileged over that which is absent, any historical representation derived from such a hierarchy will constitute a biased image skewed towards that which remains. And in the case of Auschwitz, the presentation of knowledge as being derived from, limited to and dictated by surviving objects has serious ethical ramifications.

I would argue that any historical archive necessarily comprises three parts: the ‘physical archive’, made up of surviving remnants of the period; the ‘testimonial archive’, encompassing events or objects whose existence can be attested to by witness or documentary evidence; and the ‘lost archive’, which refers to events and artefacts of which no trace remains. This latter category is crucial to Holocaust history, which is characterised by a deliberate act of erasure and fragmentation: genocide. Yet the lost archive is also the category which appears most neglected by both the Auschwitz museum and its guided tours.

⁹⁰ Appendix II, 15:45.

⁹¹ Kaplan, ‘Empathy and Trauma: Imagining Catastrophe’, in Coplan and Goldie [eds] *Empathy*, 255.

⁹² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 127.

One demonstrable example of this is the Auschwitz brothel. Located in Block 24 of Auschwitz I from 1943, yet (unsurprisingly) little testified to, this aspect of concentration camp life has only begun to be researched relatively recently, by scholars including Robert Sommer and Laurence Rees.⁹³ This comparative lack of testimony, combined with Block 24's re-appropriation as an archive for the museum (thus making public access impossible), appears to correlate with a lack of acknowledgement of the brothel's existence at Auschwitz I: it is not marked in the main directory, there is no information panel outside Block 24, and neither is it mentioned by the tour guides. Thus, in focusing their narration on that which is both materially present and available to view, the guides arguably disenfranchise an entire sub-section of the site's history.

It can therefore be demonstrated that the narrative structure of the tours reinforces a hierarchy of representation which begins with the museum displays. A demand is made that a physical trace be left – and for viewing of it to be possible – in order for an object, event or person to be spoken about. Tangible artefacts fulfil this criterion, as do reproductions, substitute objects and recorded testimonies. But if an item cannot be displayed, it is apparently not considered 'narratable' and is at risk of being treated as though it has never existed. This is particularly disturbing when one considers that it was the SS who ultimately had responsibility for what remained and what was destroyed at Auschwitz – meaning that those most at risk of narrative disenfranchisement are their victims.

It's difficult to estimate the exact number of people who were brought here during the war. Many documents were destroyed by SS before the liberation, and we have to remember that most of the people [...] were never registered. They never became prisoners; they never received camp uniforms because they were killed immediately.⁹⁴

However, a distinction between form and content may be required when applying this critique to the guided group tours. For while the form of the tour may exclude large amounts of Auschwitz history, in terms of content most guides are vigilant in pointing out that what visitors see represents only a fraction of what would have

⁹³ In *Das KZ-Bordell: Sexuelle Zwangsarbeit in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern* and *Auschwitz, the Nazis and 'The Final Solution'*, respectively.

⁹⁴ Appendix I, 13:00.

remained had there not been a concentrated attempt by SS officials to cover up the crimes committed at the site.

Yet, as our guided experience continues, I find that where archival incompleteness is acknowledged, a physical stand-in is offered: we are told that ‘ashes symbolise every innocent victim of this place, lost victims,’⁹⁵ in front of the Urn of Human Ashes in Block 4; later, in Block 5, we are informed that a huge showcase of victims’ shoes represents ‘all the shoes’⁹⁶ of those who died; similar sentiments are echoed at the International Monument to the Victims of Fascism in Birkenau, where we are also told that wooden barracks destroyed at the war’s end looked ‘exactly the same as the [reconstructed] wooden barracks in the Quarantine Camp’.⁹⁷ The tourist is thus reassured that what has not survived is still represented, substituted by material presence. What is not referred to by the tours, meanwhile, slips further from our collective consideration.

We emerge from the dim hallway of Block 4 into sunlight now more ferocious than before. It is approaching midday, and there is still the rest of Auschwitz I to cover before we proceed to Birkenau. I feel conflicting emotions: shock and horror at what I have encountered so far, concern that we will not be able to complete the full tour in the designated time and – though I am loathe to admit it – a strong sense of fatigue. Nesfield notes: ‘The reality of any one-day visit to the camps is that visitors are walked round the traumatic and graphic array of exhibits, herded along crowded corridors, huddled in together to hear their guide over other guides, [and] moved on quickly so as not to get left behind.’⁹⁸ Yet this weariness is not only a result of the physical demands of touring: it is a mental fatigue, borne of the consistent failure to reconcile my former impressions of Auschwitz with this site, and also to take in the vast quantities of new information that we are being provided with. Nesfield acknowledges that this is a particular challenge that both tour guides and educators (such as herself) face when accompanying groups of visitors:

⁹⁵ Appendix III, 17:30.

⁹⁶ Appendix III, 49:45.

⁹⁷ Appendix II, 9:00.

⁹⁸ Nesfield, ‘Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant’, 49.



Ricky Thompson

July 2014

Our guide [...] left little time to pause and contemplate. There were too many big groups around, crowding the place. It was noisy and, inside the museum buildings, cramped. The guide moved us through too quickly.

In an environment which can be totally overwhelming and that is from the beginning often antithetical to expectations, continually disrupting individual orientation, engagement and thoughts can be counter productive to the rationale for delivering Holocaust education on site in the first place.⁹⁹

If our guide is feeling this pressure, however, it is superseded by their awareness of the time constraint. They urge us on to the next block.

Block 5: Material Proofs of Crimes

Now we're going to see very, very touching, touching exhibitions in here. We are going to see original, personal Jewish items, found by Russian soldiers at the end of war. So every item is original and every item here belonged to Jew who was killed in camp.¹⁰⁰



Nick G

January 2016

It's hard to get your head around the numbers and figures [...], you find it hard to comprehend that atrocities that took place.

There are several artefacts in the museum which have lives outside of Auschwitz. They have been elevated beyond simple archival materials to internationally-recognised symbols of suffering. They include the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, the execution wall in the Block 11 courtyard and the next item on our itinerary: the stolen property of Jews incarcerated in and killed at Auschwitz. These are the objects which have been reproduced on screen, formed the basis of many critical conversations, or referred to by other visitors in online reviews. Thus it is with an uncomfortable yet undeniable sense of anticipation that we enter Block 5: Material Proofs of Crimes, to view giant bins of shoes, spectacles, shaving brushes, prosthetic limbs, suitcases, kitchen utensils, Torah shawls and children's clothes.

Standing in front of these artefacts is a powerful experience for not only, as Young notes, do they 'compel the visitor to accept the horrible fact that what they show is 'real'',¹⁰¹ they also illustrate (albeit fractionally) the vast scale of the crimes committed at Auschwitz. However, the display of 'original, personal Jewish items', both at Auschwitz and other Holocaust museums, has historically been considered

⁹⁹ Nesfield, 'Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant', 49.

¹⁰⁰ Appendix III, 43:00.

¹⁰¹ Young, *Writing and Re-writing the Holocaust*, 174.

controversial. Young, for example, asks: 'What does our knowledge of these objects – a bent spoon, children's shoes, crusty old striped uniforms – have to do with our knowledge of historical events?'¹⁰² while Oren Baruch Stier argues that the 'classic object-driven museum [...] remains flawed'¹⁰³ when tasked with representing the victims of the Holocaust.

The debate around the display of 'material proofs' at Auschwitz can be linked to a wider discussion within trauma theory regarding the ethics of Holocaust representation. This gained traction in the 1990s, amid the proliferation of Shoah Studies within the Humanities schools of western universities. Many such conversations took as their starting point Theodor Adorno's famous assertion 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.¹⁰⁴ In his seminal work, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, Saul Freidländer further defines the ethical dilemma facing scholars, curators, historians and artists, interpreting Adorno's statement as: 'a need for 'truth'' versus 'the problems raised by the opaqueness of language'.¹⁰⁵ He continues to assert that in attempting to establish such 'truths', those engaged in representing the Holocaust run the risk of developing ill-conceived, inadequate 'master narratives'¹⁰⁶ of this history.

Such debates intersect with the practices of the Auschwitz museum, as an institution responsible both for the preservation of Holocaust history via its archives, and for the public dissemination of it through its displays and tours. In effect, this means it is engaged in the production of two distinct types of memory, as Susan Crane observes: 'Being collected means being remembered institutionally, being displayed means being incorporated into the extra-institutional memory of the museum visitors.'¹⁰⁷ Through its decisions regarding how artefacts will be displayed, and how guides will interact with them, the Auschwitz museum is thus the originator of a 'master narrative' consumed by over one million visitors each year.

¹⁰² Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 132.

¹⁰³ Steir, *Committed to Memory*, 129.

¹⁰⁴ Adorno, *Can one Live after Auschwitz?* 34.

¹⁰⁵ Freidländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Crane, *Museums and Memory*, 2.

*Of these deported Jews one million were killed – most of them. Poles: of those deported, seventy-five thousand were killed – half. Roma, gypsies: of those deported, twenty-one thousand were killed – most. Soviet soldiers: twelve thousand of those died – most. And from Czechoslovakia, France, Yugoslavia, also Germany [...], about fifteen thousand were killed.*¹⁰⁸

If the tours and exhibits can be said to focus on one dominant theme, it is the scale of the crimes committed at Auschwitz. To this end, statistics recur throughout the museum – both on information boards detailing the numbers of prisoners who passed through the camp, and in the monologues of the tour guides. As previously demonstrated, artefacts are invariably linked to these verbal statements, and thus the giant piles of human accessories effectively also function as statistics: physical representations of how many people were killed. Yet, while arguments can be made about the need to impress the magnitude of the genocide onto visitors, Klüger points out that ‘statistics falls a little short of human interest and is not exactly prodigal with the details of individual lives’.¹⁰⁹ This is a concern taken up by Young: ‘armless sleeves, eyeless lenses, headless caps, footless shoes: victims are known only by their absence, by the moment of their destruction’.¹¹⁰ For him, this form of representation affirms only that what was once living is no longer.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, dehumanisation starts ‘at the point when [...] the objects at which the bureaucratic operation is aimed can, and are, reduced to a set of quantitative measures.’¹¹¹ He further states that, in the case of concentration camp victims, dehumanisation was achieved ‘by reducing their action to the most basic level of primitive survival, by preventing them from deploying cultural (both bodily and behavioural) symbols of human dignity, by depriving them even of recognisable human likeness.’¹¹² Once such individuals were sufficiently dehumanised, he suggests, it became possible for operatives working under the banner of National Socialism to commit various tortures and atrocities upon them. This chimes with Hannah Arendt’s conception of the ‘banality of evil’, through which ostensibly ‘ordinary’ men could be persuaded to commit acts contributing both directly and indirectly to genocide.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Appendix III, 16:45.

¹⁰⁹ Klüger, *Still Alive*, 91.

¹¹⁰ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 132.

¹¹¹ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 102.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

However, Bauman further claims that all 'bureaucracy is intrinsically *capable* of genocidal action'.¹¹⁴ And if this theory is tested with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum as the bureaucratic organisation in question, an uncomfortable political association emerges. For it can be argued that by representing people in collectivised form, through piles of property ostensibly 'the same', the institution's tour guides and exhibits deny the Jews of Auschwitz autonomy as individuals, and thus themselves visit their own form of dehumanisation upon them. 'Jews were described by Nazis as 'no humans',¹¹⁵ our tour guide tells us – and then, as if to prove it, we are presented with artefacts which can only testify to the absence of their lives. It is a disturbing effect, one which prompts Young to go so far as to claim that the primary victims of Auschwitz are remembered 'as the Germans have remembered them to us'.¹¹⁶

However, an important point of distinction should be acknowledged between the tour guides and the governing bureaucratic institution here. As previously established, the guides appear to have been trained to base their 'master narratives' only on that which is displayed. And, as Nesfield notes, the Auschwitz exhibits depict 'a very specific trajectory of victimisation and suffering throughout'.¹¹⁷ Yet within the museum's archives, Nesfield claims, are many artefacts which speak to the disparate personalities and belief systems of the prisoners of Auschwitz: 'The collections of works of art, caricature and craft, of incredible skill and effort [...] are hidden away from the standard tour,' she states. Thus 'many visitors will leave the site with [...] little sense of the defiance, the humour and energy of these prisoners, their identity subsumed beneath [...] this singular Jewish identity as that of the victim.'¹¹⁸ The museum, then, *chooses* to focus on scale, which generates a problematic form of collectivised representation. The guides, meanwhile, as museum employees are *obliged* to reflect this pre-established, de-individualised portrait within their orations.

The de-personifying aspect of these displays of human leftovers is further exacerbated by their status in popular culture. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the site's best-known artefacts are considered to be an unmissable part of the 'Auschwitz Experience'. Mendelsohn states:

¹¹⁴ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 106. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁵ Appendix III, 21:15.

¹¹⁶ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 132.

¹¹⁷ Nesfield, 'Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant', 50.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

[They have] been reproduced, photographed, filmed, broadcast, and published so often that by the time you go [...] [to Auschwitz], you find yourself looking for what it is difficult not to think of as the 'attractions' [...] more or less as you'd look for the newly reconstructed apatosaurus at the Natural History Museum.¹¹⁹

This statement carries echoes of an argument which emerged in the late 1990s, as critics started to question the global proliferation of Holocaust imagery. These concerns centred on the fact that certain photographs – of the piles of hair/shoes/glasses, of the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, of starving prisoners – seemed to be reproduced more often than others, and in doing so became symbols rather than historical evidence of the Holocaust. Carden-Coyne states: 'Repetition without historical context was seen as producing a Holocaust 'aesthetic' [...]. Voyeurism and dehumanization were seen as the result of such photographs becoming signifiers of reduced meaning.'¹²⁰

When analysing the group tours of Auschwitz I through such a filter, certainly it could be argued that they support the re-designation of artefacts as 'attractions', by encouraging a particular form of objectified viewing: 'look at *this*; now look at *this*'. This is supported by official sanction, with the tours being endorsed by the museum. John Urry believes this treatment, combined with the type of prior conditioning identified by Mendelsohn, results in a 'tourist gaze' that 'is as socially organized and systemized as the gaze of the medic'.¹²¹ This analogy is particularly apt as the man of medicine retains a level of emotional removal from their patient or subject, and an apparent side-effect of the tourist gaze, observable in some (though by no means all) group tour participants, is emotional estrangement from these artefacts as evidence of genocide. Bauman identifies this as a by-product of dehumanisation: 'Once [...] cancelled as potential subjects of moral demands, human objects of bureaucratic task-performance are viewed with ethical indifference.'¹²²

Thus, as we walk through these long rooms piled high with remains, people crane their necks, point, 'ooh' and 'aaah', and ignore the repeated requests of guides for silence and not to take photographs. Such behaviours are noticeable at other well-known Auschwitz landmarks – by tourists and, on occasion, by tour staff too. In

¹¹⁹ Mendelsohn, *The Lost*, 113.

¹²⁰ Carden-Coyne, 'The Ethics of Representation', in Dreyfus and Langton [eds], *Writing the Holocaust*, 172.

¹²¹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 1.

¹²² Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 103.

Auschwitz I, a teenage boy poses for a friend's picture beneath the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, his left arm extended in a Nazi salute; 'This way, this way to the Wall of Death!' is our tour guide's repeated cry as we approach Block 11. While these incidences do not reflect the behaviour of the majority of visitors or guides, they do speak to how easily artefacts reaching this level of notoriety can exceed their historical referent. And when this happens, the risk of dark tourism in its most voyeuristic form appears to exponentially increase.

One case which gained international notoriety in 2014 was that of the American teenager Breanna Mitchell, who took a smiling 'selfie' at the Auschwitz site, which she subsequently posted on Twitter. However, while her actions attracted widespread condemnation, Nesfield takes more sympathetic standpoint, drawing attention to the unrealistic demands the site makes of its young visitors:

Auschwitz is a stage. [...] Young students are presented with the tourist version of the Holocaust in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and necessarily participate in this industry as visitors to the site. At the same time, they are expected to elicit the historical, and possibly moral, lessons from the site, a difficult balance for any visitor.¹²³


Expanding on this argument, if it is possible to claim that if Auschwitz in the modern era has been rendered no more than a stage, then do the tours of the site constitute a (theatrical) performance, driven more by the twin demands of narrative storytelling and audience than the accurate communication of past events? Certainly the use of artefacts as mnemonic devices – without acknowledgement of the inherently fractured nature of the history of Auschwitz – speaks to the first of these two public-facing demands. The second, meanwhile, is arguably evidenced by the format of the tours.

One seemingly obvious measure which could discourage the viewing of Auschwitz artefacts as 'attractions' would be the de-standardisation the group tour route and thus of the exhibits and artefacts that tourists see. Yet the tight 3.5 hour timeframe for covering both Auschwitz I and Birkenau requires the guides to be highly selective about which artefacts tourists will view – and, of course, they are obliged to respond to (or perform according to) the demands of a paying public. So while it is true that no guide would consider bypassing the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate, the execution wall, or the piles of human accessories, this format is not established by the guides themselves.

¹²³ Nesfield, 'Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant', 51–52.

Rather, it is their job to produce for inspection a set of Auschwitz remnants adherent to those visitors have seen, read and heard about throughout their lives. The result can thus only be a standardised tour route, focusing on the camp's best-known artefacts.

Urry argues that this supply-demand relationship ensures that 'over time, via advertising and the media, the images generated of different tourist gazes come to constitute a closed self-perpetuating system of illusions'¹²⁴ – in other words, a performance, repeated *ad infinitum*. Through word-of-mouth or online reviews, the visitors of today determine what the visitors of tomorrow will demand of their

| |
|---|
|  salopwanderer *** January 2016 I expected a highly emotional remembrance and homage to those who suffered, and actually got a [...] 'fun day out' visiting a murder theme park. |
|---|

Auschwitz encounter. But this means the tours – and thus the 'material proofs' that they show to visitors – speak only to a speculative Auschwitz, one established long before the next group of tourists ever sets foot in the camp.

Moments of Reprieve (I)

On my last visit to the Auschwitz museum, as a solo, unguided tourist, I had the opportunity to experience the new 'Shoah' exhibition recently installed in Block 27. What I found most striking was the fact that not a single original primary evidentiary source was on display. Instead, its long white rooms featured wall projections of survivor testimony and period photographs. There was also video footage of a speech by Adolf Hitler, and an artist's reproductions of artwork by children held in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, many of whom were later transferred to and perished at Birkenau. The ground floor, meanwhile, hosted a Reflection Centre and an enormous 'Book of Names', containing the details of all known Holocaust victims. I found myself wondering if this intrinsically different approach perhaps constituted a deliberate counter to the artefact-reliant main exhibition displays. The only comment I could find on this issue was decidedly ambiguous, possibly diplomatic: 'We decided that we are not going to compete with the artifacts,'¹²⁵ Avner Shalev, director of the Yad Vashem Institute for Holocaust Research and curator of the exhibition, told the *New York Times*.

The group tour route does not take in the Jewish pavilion.

¹²⁴ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 7.

¹²⁵ Melissa Eddy, 'Auschwitz-Birkenau Honours Children'.

Roll Call Yard

We file out of Block 5 and weave our way between other tour groups and the red brick buildings towards the Roll Call Yard. Our route takes us past Block 11: 'Block of Death'. This building served as a punishment block for the Auschwitz I camp, we are told. Prisoners could be held in 'standing cells', where four people would be crushed into a space of not much over a square metre and left for days; they could be starved; they could be shot at the execution wall in the block's courtyard; or their wrists could be bound behind their back before they were suspended from a hook, their bodies bent into an S-shape.

The main story our guide wants to tell us, however, is one I will hear recited on every tour I subsequently take. It regards an act of mercy by a Polish Catholic priest:

SS guard Karl Fritzsch, he chose ten prisoners in the camp. [...] They were supposed to die in the cell by starvation. [...] Man who was not chosen – in fact he was a Polish priest, Maximilian Kolbe – he ask the guard: 'Man, can I replace Franc? I am a priest. I don't have children. I can die. Let me replace Franc'. SS guard agreed and Polish priest [...] saved the life of a man with family.¹²⁶

This is one of several tales featuring a named prisoner or perpetrator that we will encounter during the course of the tour. And across the tours in general, it appears that certain names frequently reoccur. Among the former prisoners: Lili Jacob Meier, who found the 'Auschwitz Album'; Alberto 'Alex' Errera, the *Sonderkommando* member thought to have taken illicit photographs of a Birkenau gas chamber; Primo Levi, who wrote perhaps the most famous Auschwitz memoir, *If This Is a Man*;¹²⁷ Rudi Vrba and Alfréd Wetzler, who successfully escaped the camp in April 1944 and tried to tell the world what was happening there; and most particularly Saint Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish priest who martyred himself for a fellow prisoner. Among the SS, there are also repeat references: doctors Heinz Thilo and Josef Mengele, who carried out selections and participated in human experimentation; Bernhard Walter, the SS



JD

January 2016

Barrack 11 [...] made the most sombre impression. We were shown the cell of Father Maximilian Kolbe, a priest who compromised his life for another. He is now a saint. We were shown the courtyard [...] where prisoner where tortured and executed.

¹²⁶ Appendix III, 76:15.

¹²⁷ First published in Italy in 1958.

member thought to have photographed the camp; and Rudolf Höss, the camp's longest-serving commandant.

These former inmates and Nazis are each granted something akin to 'celebrity status' within the tour. Participants expect to hear their stories – many nod when a name they recognise is mentioned. Yet these Auschwitz icons, already well-known outside the camp, are the only ones granted any form of individualised identification within the tours. By contrast, when we reach the roll call yard, this is what we are told:

On the right is a huge square in this street. It was a place of daily roll calls. Twice a day, every morning and every evening, prisoners have to stand here because guards want to count them, checking nobody escaped the registration. The longest [...] roll call ever took place on July 1940. [...] They had to stand here for all together twenty hours.¹²⁸

No prisoner is singled out; no names are given. The inmates of the roll call yard remain a faceless, de-individualised mass. It is a stark, sobering reminder that one history is always recounted at the expense of numerous others; an act of remembrance is always equally an act of forgetting.

As previously established, the hierarchy of representation the museum imposes demands that a person or artefact survives, be testified about or leaves some physical trace in order to be remembered. It can further be argued, however, that the tour guides create a hierarchy-within-a-hierarchy, relating only the most extraordinary and thus most narratable aspects of the camp's history to visitors. But this means that individual representation can only be secured by an act of exceptionalism: a heroic undertaking; a connection to an artefact considered particularly important; a record of unprecedented brutality; or a story that somehow escaped Auschwitz, either because the person involved survived to recount it (as Levi did), or because it entered popular legend (as with Kolbe).

Thus there is a criterion, set by the tour guides, which one must meet if they are to be individually acknowledged. That is not to say that individual representation is or should be the sole aim of any prisoner (the cases of Klüger and Dina Babbitt in the following chapter demonstrate that it often is not); it is only to note that a demand is made. And it is a demand which places people who were present during this event in


¹²⁸ Appendix III, 92:15.

the service of modern day tourists. In effect we ask that they perform for us – but, as Klüger notes:

[It is] impertinent of the living to ask of the dead that they should have acted or behaved in a certain manner (...) either offering the heroic gestures of a senseless fight or displaying the equilibrium of martyrs. They didn't die for us, and we, God knows, don't live for them.¹²⁹

It is also the case that if representation is 'earned' by exceptionalism, there is then clear potential to further skew the historical picture. When asked his opinion of Steven Spielberg's Holocaust film *Schindler's List*,¹³⁰ his fellow director Stanley Kubrick reportedly replied: 'Think that's about the Holocaust? [...] The Holocaust is about six million people who get killed. *Schindler's List* is about six hundred who don't'.¹³¹ His point, of course, is that by selecting an ostensibly heroic narrative through which to depict the Holocaust – presumably in part to satisfy the demands of a cinema audience – Spielberg created a Holocaust film which presented a story atypical of the Holocaust.

It can be argued that the tours similarly prioritise narrative concerns and audience demands over historical accuracy: seeking out heroes and villains, death-defying stunts, acts of bravery, and tales of survival against all odds. These tropes of literary or cinematic fiction are spoon-fed to tourists as representative fact, resulting in a history of Auschwitz peppered with stories atypical of Auschwitz. For example, the tale our guide now recounts might suggest to visitors that daring escape attempts were (a) more common than they were, or (b) more successful than most proved:



Peter H

June 2013
Until you actually visit the camps you cannot grasp the horror that those poor souls went through and against all odds survived.

*One of the most famous escapes took place in 1942. Four Polish political prisoners employed at the warehouse they stole cars of guards, uniforms of guards and also guns. And because one of them spoke [...] German language very well they pretended to be like guards, and everybody in the camp thought they were SS men. They escaped and they were never caught later.*¹³²

¹²⁹ Klüger, *Still Alive*, 82.

¹³⁰ Amblin Entertainment, Universal Studios, 1993.

¹³¹ Goldman, 'Staley Kubrick's Unrealized Vision', *Jewish Journal*.

¹³² Appendix III, 93:30.

Block 6: Prisoners Life

*We have [...] heard what happened to most arrivals: eighty per cent of Jews were described as unfit for work, killed straight away. And now we're going to hear what happened to twenty per cent of these who could work: Prisoners Life. We're going to see now block number six.*¹³³



VensoHowlie

December 2015

Everything inside is shocking, appalling, disgusting, but so important. [...] It can be pretty intense so I won't recommend or dissuade going.

As we enter our last exhibition block, the issue of prisoner representation arises yet again. In a room entitled 'Starvation', we are confronted by a series of enlarged photographs of Auschwitz survivors, post-liberation, being treated in hospital for a host of conditions related to their incarceration and torture, including extreme malnourishment.

An underlying question regarding consent instantly problematises this display of photographs. The prisoners are shown entirely naked, in a state of physical deterioration. And yet there is nothing to suggest that the subjects of these photographs ever gave their permission to be publicly displayed. There is thus an element of voyeurism inherent to being a tourist viewing such images – derived from not knowing if one is permitted to look, but looking anyway. Such images become, to use Susan Sontag's description of atrocity photography, 'tacitly pornographic'.¹³⁴ The acknowledgement of whether consent has been given is thus as important to the viewing of these artefacts as the status of the consent itself, yet no reference at all is made to this issue within the exhibit.

Enquiries I later make to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum regarding these photographic displays go unanswered, but certainly what can be demonstrated is precedent within the institution for what I would call 'imposed representation' – overriding the wishes of former inmates regarding the display of personal items. In the early 1970s, for instance, an argument erupted between the museum and former Auschwitz inmate Dina Babbitt. Babbitt was requesting the return of seven paintings she completed during her imprisonment, under the orders of Dr Mengele. The museum repeatedly refused numerous requests made by Babbitt over the next thirty-five years, on the basis that 'everything that remained from Auschwitz Concentration

¹³³ Appendix III, 52:30.

¹³⁴ Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn*, 139.

Camp [...] is the evidence of crimes committed here.¹³⁵ Teresa Swiebocka, one of the museum's then-deputy directors, further informed Babbitt by email in 2006 that her portraits served 'important documentary and educational functions as a part of the permanent exhibition',¹³⁶ and even went so far as to suggest that because the works were commissioned by Mengele, they could not be considered 'personal artistic creations'.¹³⁷ Upon Babbitt's death in 2009, her daughter told the *Telegraph* newspaper: 'the museum's refusal to release the paintings to Dina began her re-incarceration as a spiritual hostage of the Auschwitz Death Camp,'¹³⁸

A similar case concerns the artistic output of Klüger. In her memoir, *Still Alive*, she states: 'I have been told that they exhibit my Auschwitz poems in their museum, against my express wishes.'¹³⁹ Her basis for objecting to this display centres on her assertion that 'the place which I saw, smelled, and feared, and which has now been turned into a museum, has nothing to do with the woman I am.'¹⁴⁰

What these examples show is that the question of whether a former prisoner will be represented is, in all cases, decided on and enforced by the museum. And just as there is no opportunity for individualised representation for the prisoner who has left no physical, distinctive and narratable trace, so too is there no option for a former prisoner not to be represented if the institution has decided they should be.

Interestingly, Babbitt's paintings are the only original prisoner artworks currently on display within the museum's permanent exhibitions. Yet the institution holds more than 2,000 such pieces within its archive, funds for the permanent display of which have apparently yet to be found. This highlights the fact that the curation of artefacts inevitably reflects the political agenda of the host institution – over and above the interests of those for whom such objects supposedly 'speak'. What such cases may also suggest, however, is the impossibility of one institution fulfilling both museum and memorial functions. This paradox was alluded to in a letter written in support of Babbitt by the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies in Philadelphia:

¹³⁵ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'Museum's Position on Issue of Portraits'.

¹³⁶ Steve Friess, 'History Claims her Artwork,' *New York Times*.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ 'Obituaries: Dinah Babbitt', *The Telegraph*.

¹³⁹ Klüger, *Still Alive*, 111.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

'Reuniting Mrs. Babbitt with her paintings would be a sign of the museum's dedication not only to history but also to humanity', it said.¹⁴¹

*Can you believe that at the time they were under intensive medical care, how they look like [...] skeletons? Polish lady: twenty-five kilos; Belgian Jew: thirty-five kilos; and this Dutch Jew: scary twenty-three kilos. Former prisoners.*¹⁴²

As our guide continues to talk they point to each photographed subject, picking out areas of interest: a U-shaped pelvis; a jagged elbow; a bird-like leg, the outlines of both tibia and fibular clearly visible beneath the skin. And yet no information is provided as to who these prisoners are, or about their lives before, during or after Auschwitz. John Mack states that 'the greatest risk of being forgotten [...] occurs when a person is no longer in charge of the mechanisms of their own remembrance'.¹⁴³ And staring at these haunted bodies propped up on hospital beds, it is hard to claim that they are truly 'remembered'. For they are presented as 'objects of study',¹⁴⁴ to use Sara Horowitz's phrase: illustrative only of the effects of starvation on 'prisoners', as a collective noun.

*So all the time prisoners were called here as 'bloody criminals', 'bloody, stupid criminals'. Despite of fact many of prisoners were very well educated, police officers and the church, [...] they were called in here as the 'stupid bloody criminals'. And if you look, the prisoners were given new clothes: striped pyjamas.*¹⁴⁵

De-humanisation, as aforementioned, was a key weapon of the Nazis. Jews were regularly portrayed in National Socialist propaganda posters, public speeches and literature as everything from poisonous mushrooms to rats.¹⁴⁶ This de-personification could be further enhanced by representing the Jews as a unified group, rather than individuals. Giving the example of soldiers told to shoot 'targets' rather than people, who 'fall' rather than die as a result,¹⁴⁷ Bauman states that this type of reductive language releases its subjects from normative codes of moral consideration: 'The

¹⁴¹ Steve Friess, 'History Claims her Artwork'.

¹⁴² Appendix III, 61:00.

¹⁴³ Mack, *Museum of the Mind*, 13.

¹⁴⁴ Horowitz, 'Literature' in Hayes and Roth [eds], *Oxford Handbook*, 439.

¹⁴⁵ Appendix III, 56:00.

¹⁴⁶ For examples see Spiegelman, *Meta Maus*, 115.

¹⁴⁷ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 103.

language in which things that happen to them (or are done to them) are narrated, safeguards its referents from ethical evaluation.’¹⁴⁸

Primo Levi demonstrates this effect in his memoir *Moments of Reprieve*. He, too, uses the example of a tour of Auschwitz. But his version features a 200-strong contingent of Hitler Youth being taken to see Monowitz during World War II:

[They] lectured [...] ‘These that you see are the enemies of the Reich, *your enemies*. Take a good look at them: would you call them men? They are Untermenschen, sub-men! [...] They are subversives, bandits, street thieves from the four corners of Europe, but we have rendered them harmless.’¹⁴⁹

Levi's example shows the kind of ‘otherness’ collectivised language can potentially project onto its subject. And while of course contemporary tours of Auschwitz have no use for such derisive terminology, there are critics who have raised concerns about the language of mass representation that is often used when discussing those impacted by the Holocaust, specifically: ‘prisoners’; ‘victims’; ‘survivors’.

In her novella, *The Shawl*, Cynthia Ozick uses her protagonist Rosa to raise the question of whether the term ‘survivor’ has become a modern day tool by which to project ‘otherness’:

Consider also the special word they used: *survivor* [...]. As long as they didn't have to say *human being*. [...] A name like a number – counted apart from the ordinary swarm. Blue digits on the arm, what difference? They don't call you a woman anyhow. [...] Who made up these words, parasites on the throat of suffering!¹⁵⁰

Klüger, meanwhile, expresses discomfort about what she appears to view as the negligible distinction between ‘prisoner’ and ‘survivor’:

Still, now that the Holocaust archives are doing the counting for us, I won't register with them as a survivor. [...] I can't overcome my resentful reluctance to fill it out, as if it were one more morning roll call.¹⁵¹


In each of these cases, the collective form serves not only to de-individualise, but further ensures that the person concerned is designated as belonging to a victim/prisoner/survivor group. They are thus detained by language in Auschwitz; held

¹⁴⁸ Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, 103.

¹⁴⁹ Levi, *Moments of Reprieve*, 87–88. Underlined emphasis added; italics in original.

¹⁵⁰ Ozick, *The Shawl*, Loc 435. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵¹ Klüger, *Still Alive*, 19.

 rfromthecastle

August 2013
It was impossible to enter the place with any respect for the people who died [...]. I had a dismal feeling about the fact that I also was a tourist.

a 'spiritual hostage,' as Babbitt's daughter so eloquently put it. It is therefore possible to argue that the tour guides, with their perpetual references to 'victims,' 'prisoners' and 'survivors' for anyone other than those meeting the specific criteria for individual acknowledgement, perpetuate another variant of imposed representation.

Moments of Reprieve (II)

On another Auschwitz I tour, my group is escorted to Block 7: Living and Sanitary Conditions, instead of Block 6.¹⁵² Here, we encounter the Corridor of Photographs: images of prisoners taken upon their registration at the concentration camp. The people in these photographs have suffered two kinds of de-personalisation: one historical; one modern. Firstly, they have all had their heads shaved and have been assigned the nullifying striped pyjamas of the camp. Secondly, their images – now mounted and framed – have been arranged uniformly on the walls in straight lines, evenly spaced. And yet, whilst it appears that every effort has been made to render the subjects of these photographs indistinct from each other, as one walks down this long corridor occasionally they will notice a single flower atop a frame, its stem tucked into the space between the picture and the wall.

'When you see a flower attached,' our guide tells us, 'it means the relatives. These visitors have been here and they attached a flower.'¹⁵³

It is a truly touching sight – perhaps the only genuinely untempered emotion I felt across any of the tours. Such gestures reflect an act of love, of deep, enduring affection, and maybe, just maybe, an attempt to reclaim these individuals *as* individuals – to say: 'This one was mine'.

¹⁵² See Appendix I, 45:30 onwards.

¹⁵³ Appendix I, 50:00.

Crematoria I

The first leg of the tour concludes with a walk through the SS quarters of Auschwitz I. This includes external views of a hospital building and the camp's administration offices, a glimpse over a high wall at the stucco-covered villa that once housed the Höss family, and a pause beside a reconstructed gallows in the place where Rudolf Höss was hung in 1947. Finally, we come to a halt beside Crematoria I.



HutteriteMile

January 2016

Walking into the intact earth-mounded crematoria with its soot-black ceilings and open-blast furnaces makes for a visceral and terribly sad experience.

This building has been a site of contention among critics since its reconstruction. The work was undertaken with the tours in mind, according to van Pelt and Dwork: 'The [museum] committee felt that a crematorium was required at the end of the memorial journey, and crematoria I was reconstructed to speak for the history of the incinerators at Birkenau'.¹⁵⁴ At the time of writing, these critics claimed no signage had been installed to indicate that this particular crematorium was in fact a reconstruction. And the tour guides apparently stayed silent on this issue, resulting in the building being 'presumed by the tourist to be the place where *it happened*'.¹⁵⁵

If van Pelt and Dwork are correct in their assertion, then the Auschwitz museum of today can be said to have attempted to address this misrepresentation. An information panel to the side of the chamber now details the restorative work that took place. The guides, by and large, also appear to refer to the chamber as a reconstruction (though it should be noted that occasional online reviews suggest this demarcation is still sometimes overlooked):

*The gas chamber that you will see in a moment was much smaller than the ones in Birkenau. About six hundred people could be locked in that gas chamber at one time so we consider this gas chamber was a prototype. [...] Crematorium I was shut down in 1943 and the Nazis converted the whole building into a bomb shelter.*¹⁵⁶

Of more pressing concern, however, is the fact that, without exception, every guide on the tours I participate in during my research will request that visitors observe a reverential silence while walking through this building. Meanwhile, their monologues about its purpose are conducted either in the 'undressing room' just inside the

¹⁵⁴ van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 363–364.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 364. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵⁶ Appendix I, 78:00.

entrance, or outside of the chamber entirely – one with the comment: ‘I don’t want to say anything inside’.¹⁵⁷ And I find that similar observances are often made in front of another reconstructed artefact in the Auschwitz I complex: the execution wall in the courtyard of Block 11.

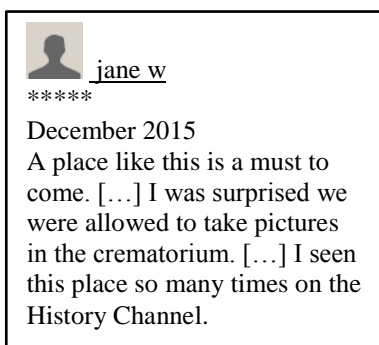
In addition to this blurring of the distinction between primary and secondary articles of evidence, Nesfield further claims that many ‘real’ Auschwitz artefacts do not actually originate from the site:

Efforts to destroy evidence of Nazism at these sites have left little [to] frame a site educational visit around. [...] [Thus] many of the exhibits on display at Auschwitz I have been brought in from other camps. These physical pieces of ‘evidence’ are in fact evidence of atrocities that took place elsewhere.¹⁵⁸

While I cannot attest to the veracity of Nesfield’s claim, if a practice of ‘artefact sharing’ is common among concentration camp memorial museums then certainly it is not acknowledged by the Auschwitz museum’s tour guides. One can only speculate as to the potential reasons, but perhaps a fear of opening the door to Holocaust deniers may play a part? And yet, if this is a significant factor, why use outside artefacts at all?

It can thus be argued that the elevation of these reconstructed and substitute objects to the status of ‘Auschwitz artefacts’ serves a primarily narrative purpose. However,

while this may contribute to a more comprehensive-seeming historical encounter for tourists, it also serves to collapse the distinction between such artefacts and ‘what they evoke’,¹⁵⁹ to borrow Young’s phrase. And yet this uncomfortable blending of fact and fiction somehow seems an appropriate note on which to end the first leg of the tour.



¹⁵⁷ Appendix I, 78:45.

¹⁵⁸ Nesfield, ‘Keeping Holocaust Education Relevant’, 48.

¹⁵⁹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 120.

Auschwitz II-Birkenau

The bus journey to Auschwitz II-Birkenau is perhaps five minutes long. We follow a road beside which fragments of railway track are occasionally visible. As we pull up to the entrance tower at Birkenau, we can see that these broken, rusted tracks once connected to a much better-preserved section of the route. This begins just through the archway of the tower and runs – in an efficient, gun barrel-straight line – up to the former selection ramp.

The second leg of the tour begins beside this famous entrance tower and track. Here we are told that we may recognise both relics not from period photographs, but from Spielberg's 1993 film:¹⁶⁰

*If you've seen Schindler's List, this was filmed here in Birkenau. There's a scene in Schindler's List when the train is coming through the main gate, the train with women from the Schindler's factory. [...] So they actually put a train on these original train-tracks. So that's the same watchtower we can see in Schindler's List.*¹⁶¹

As we walk towards the first landmark on our Birkenau itinerary – the reconstructed barracks of the Quarantine Camp – our guide explains to us that, due to the first part of the tour overrunning, the time we spend at this site will be reduced from ninety minutes to forty five. 'It is not ideal, but it is enough, I think,'¹⁶² they tell us. Thus, rather than doing the full tour which takes in the Quarantine Camp, the selection ramp, the International Monument to the Victims of Fascism, the crematoria ruins, the Men's Camp, and finally some 'free time' during which the visitor is advised to climb the entrance tower for a panoramic view of the site, our experience will instead be limited to the Quarantine Camp and the viewing platform.

van Pelt and Dwork have previously suggested that the structure of the group tours at the Auschwitz museum relegates Birkenau to 'a position of secondary importance'¹⁶³ within the complex. However, at the time of writing (the mid-nineties), these tours apparently only covered Auschwitz I. 'One can enter Birkenau,' van Pelt



Kristina Schwarz

January 2016

It was really great experience to walk through one of the biggest death factories all over the world. [...] But I think, if you see some movies or documentaries about Auschwitz, there would be nothing new for you.

¹⁶⁰ Amblin Entertainment, Universal Studios.

¹⁶¹ Appendix II, 2:30.

¹⁶² Group tour, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, March 2012.

¹⁶³ van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 365.

and Dwork noted, 'but on one's own'.¹⁶⁴ Whilst they acknowledged that factors such as funding made it necessary for the museum to concentrate resources, still they found it inconceivable that 'the standard guided tour does not include a visit to the principal site of the Judeocide'.¹⁶⁵ They further observed that the length of the Auschwitz I tours of the 1990s made it difficult for parties originating from Kraków to continue on to Birkenau: 'Visitors from [...] the somewhat distant city of Cracow have little time left after their late arrival in Auschwitz, their lunch, and their guided tour to undertake more than a cursory trip to the enormous site at Birkenau.'¹⁶⁶

The Auschwitz museum of today appears to have taken such criticisms on board. The first page of the 'Visiting' section of its website tells potential tourists: 'It is essential to visit both parts of the camp, Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau',¹⁶⁷ while the guided group tours do continue to the larger site. Thus, as Geneviève Zubrzycki notes, 'the museum and its guides now place more emphasis than before on Birkenau'.¹⁶⁸ However, the two sites are still treated differently by the tour guides – an assertion supported by Zubrzycki who claims that, despite the museum's efforts, 'Birkenau is presented as an 'option' rather than as an integral part of the visit'¹⁶⁹ to tourists.

The Auschwitz museum website further advises: 'In order to take in the grounds and exhibitions in a suitable way, visitors should set aside a minimum of about 90 minutes for the Auschwitz site and the same amount of time for Auschwitz II-Birkenau'.¹⁷⁰ The tour guides, however, appear to routinely disregard this official advice. In every guided experience I participated in during the course of my research, the duration of the Birkenau visit depended solely on the time in which the Auschwitz I section was completed. Thus, on eight out of ten occasions my party was diverted to the reduced route. In peak season the problem appears particularly pronounced, due to the high volume of tourists attempting to squeeze in and out of the same five exhibition buildings at Auschwitz I. But never does it seem to be an option to cut the Auschwitz I leg of the tour short, to ensure the full Birkenau itinerary can be completed. It is also noticeable that while parties on coach tours originating from Kraków are escorted to

¹⁶⁴ van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 364.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 366–367.

¹⁶⁷ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'Visiting'.

¹⁶⁸ Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, 115.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 116 (footnote).

¹⁷⁰ Auschwitz Memorial and Museum website, 'Plan Your Visit'.

both sites as part of their package, the guides responsible for groups originating from the museum tend to portray Birkenau as a discretionary add-on. A typical example:

In here [Auschwitz I] we are going to spend two hours, in Birkenau one hour and a half, so altogether three hours and a half. Of course [...] if you need a bus to Kraków you can leave much sooner.¹⁷¹

It can further be argued that the guided group tours effectively remove the onus on visitors to view both sites, by offering a deceptively 'complete' narrative historical experience within the reconfigured borders of Auschwitz I. The tours begin beside the *Arbeit Macht Frei* gate – erroneously perceived by many visitors to be the entrance to the camp – and finish beside Crematoria I which, of course, was not the main crematoria for the Auschwitz complex. Thus the traditional narrative arc of beginning to ending – incarceration to death – is fulfilled. This may feed into an attitude apparently prevalent among tour party members that to see only Auschwitz I is enough. Evidence of this can be found in participation drop-off rates between the first and second legs of tours originating from the museum. Typically, I found that of a party numbering approximately fifty, just five to ten people would continue to Birkenau. 'This is usual,'¹⁷² one guide confirmed when questioned.

There are, of course, several possible reasons for the decline in numbers between phases one and two of the tour. One may indeed be the sense of narrative completeness that the tour of Auschwitz I generates. But the Auschwitz I tour is also highly intensive, with lots to take in both emotionally and intellectually within a very concentrated format. Fatigue may therefore be a factor, especially when visitors are then faced with the prospect of advancing to a camp seventeen times larger than the first. Another reason may be people's frustration with the tours themselves. Particularly in peak season, after all, tourists are shuffled in and out of buildings too quickly to properly consider what they are being shown. Thus some may give up on the tour entirely, preferring to venture to Birkenau alone at another time. Others may elect to stay in Auschwitz I so they can see exhibits they have missed – the national pavilions, for example – or return to those they have not had adequate time in front

¹⁷¹ Appendix III, 2:30.

¹⁷² Group tour, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, April 2014.

of. However, none of these possible alternatives resolves the group tours' implication that Birkenau is the more dispensable part of the 'Auschwitz Experience'.

Here on the right side we can see nineteen wooden barracks. This used to be a Quarantine Camp for new arrivals. [...] The vast majority of the wooden barracks on the right side are missing because they were dismantled after the liberation. So before there were three hundred barracks.¹⁷³

The interiors of two of the reconstructed barracks have been refurbished to take on the appearance of sleeping quarters and a toilet block. Dutifully, we produce sleek digital cameras to take artistically-composed photographs of empty bunks, stacked four-high, and three long blocks of concrete pockmarked with holes. In doing so, we unwittingly perpetuate the 'Holocaust aesthetic' of the modern era – reproducing Auschwitz images that we understand to be 'Auschwitz images' because they acquiesce with ones we have seen before. These may later be shared with family and friends – or even online, where they will join the vast repository of repeat photographs that one will find when they Google 'Auschwitz'. This process is set against another soundtrack of numbers and collective references to the camp's occupants, courtesy of our tour guide: the Quarantine Camp now consists of nineteen barracks; it used to be three hundred; it held five thousand prisoners; there were only these three toilet blocks; prisoners had two minutes to use the facilities.¹⁷⁴ Then it's out into the open air to hear yet another tale of exceptionalism:

The prisoners who were assigned to burn the bodies in crematorium number four, [...] in October 1944 they attacked the guards [...] with hammers and axes. They killed three guards, more than twenty were wounded. They destroyed four buildings and the crematoria was completely destroyed during the revolt.¹⁷⁵

As we trail our guide back towards the entrance tower, I scan the surrounding landscape and am struck by how less well-kept Birkenau seems compared to Auschwitz I. To my right is a forest of chimneys that stretches as far as the eye can see: former wooden barracks, left as bequeathed by the Nazis and the camp's Russian liberators – burnt or dismantled. Ahead are a series of red brick barracks, some still standing independently, but many propped up with makeshift wooden scaffolding. The barbed

¹⁷³ Appendix II, 3:15.

¹⁷⁴ Appendix II, 3:15 onwards.

¹⁷⁵ Appendix II, 9:30.

wire fences and watchtowers look similarly dilapidated; weeds and wild flowers poke through long stretches of grass.

The contrasting presentations of the present-day Auschwitz I and Birkenau sites are a deliberate feature of their design, dating back to the earliest days of the institution's reconfiguration as a site of record and remembrance. It was not long after the liberation of Auschwitz that the idea to preserve some sections of it as a museum and memorial arose. In April 1946, Poland's Ministry of Culture and Art (Ministerstwo Kultury i Sztuki or MKiS), despatched a delegation of former Auschwitz inmates to the site, headed by Tadeusz Wąsowicz, to consider how best to implement such an operation. In an organisational plan presented at the beginning of 1947 by Ludwik Rajewski, head of the MKiS' Department of Museums and Monuments, it was proposed that the new institution should function as a 'historical document',¹⁷⁶ serving two primary roles: education and commemoration. The former administrative headquarters and prisoner barracks of Auschwitz I would fulfil the educational role, its blocks converted into exhibitions. The larger space of Birkenau would serve as a memorial ground and cemetery, with a mausoleum monument erected on the former site of Crematorium III. Meanwhile the Lagererweiterung, a warehouse extension erected near the main camp between 1943 and 1944, would be turned into a vocational school for the orphaned children of former Polish political prisoners. Three of the site's forty-two sub-camps – Rajsko, Harmęże and Pławy – would be converted into farms, their profits used to support the museum.¹⁷⁷

While the original plans for the Auschwitz site were never fully realised and political attitudes towards it have shifted over the years, the institute's dual ethos of commemoration and education has remained unchanged. Auschwitz I remains the complex's educational centre, and the focus of its exhibitions and tours. It also houses the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, which offers an annual program of lectures, seminars and study groups, aimed at scholars of all ages. The Birkenau site, meanwhile, is responsible for fulfilling the commemorative aspect: its surviving brick barracks remain largely untouched save for conservation efforts, while the few reconstructed wooden barracks speak by proxy (to paraphrase

¹⁷⁶ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'The First Years of the Memorial'.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

Primo Levi)¹⁷⁸ for the skeletal ruins of other blocks. Its centrepiece is the International Monument to the Victims of Fascism, unveiled in 1967 and erected between the remnants of crematoria II and III.

However in 1989, amid the backdrop of the shift in Polish governance, the Ministry of Culture established a new Auschwitz Council and charged it with overhauling the museum. The organisation of the institution thus became a renewed subject of critical debate among survivors, historians and scholars. Of particular note was a discussion regarding a perceived Polish bias in Auschwitz I's exhibitions: it was an argument inextricably linked with place.

Both Young's *The Texture of Memory*, and van Pelt and Dwork's *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* make reference to the Polish parliament's original 1947 declaration that the Auschwitz museum would serve as a memorial to 'the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other peoples [translated as 'nations' in van Pelt and Dwork]'.¹⁷⁹ They claim this statement clearly identified Polish persecution as the institution's focus, reflecting a specific 'ideology of remembrance,' to use van Pelt and Dwork's phrase.¹⁸⁰ According to these critics, this ideology was still in evidence in contemporaneous incarnations of the Auschwitz museum, with the result that Jewish experiences were subsumed into those of Polish prisoners.

For Young, the internationalist focus of the museum exhibitions in Auschwitz I, epitomised by the national pavilions, serves the purpose of preserving 'the essential diversity of memory here'.¹⁸¹ But he also cautions that this unilaterally results in the 'splintering of Jewish suffering into so many national martyrdoms'.¹⁸² Of course there was, and remains, a dedicated Jewish pavilion in Block 27 of Auschwitz I. But aesthetically, at least, the fact that Block 27 was and still is only one of many equally sized 'nationality' blocks, could arguably perpetuate the impression that Jews were no more disproportionately targeted than any other victim group under the Nazi regime.

van Pelt and Dwork, meanwhile, point to the fact that locating the main museum in Auschwitz I appears to reinforce a fallacy of shared experience between Poles and Jews. After all, for much of its operational lifetime the smaller Auschwitz I complex

¹⁷⁸ Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 84.

¹⁷⁹ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 130; van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 364.

¹⁸⁰ van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 365.

¹⁸¹ Young, *Texture of Memory*, 130.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

served as a site of incarceration primarily for Polish political inmates. Meanwhile the majority of Jewish victims – over 90 per cent – were either incarcerated or executed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. The transposition of Jewish accessories – hair, spectacles, shoes, prayer shawls, etcetera – from Birkenau to the Auschwitz I exhibitions, can thus be viewed as a fusion of disparate experiences into one generalised persecution narrative. Iwona Irwin-Zarecka is also vocal on this subject, claiming:

Auschwitz [...] is *not*, for Poles, a symbol of Jewish suffering. Rather, it is a general symbol of 'man's inhumanity to man' and a symbol of the Polish tragedy at the hands of the Nazis. It is a powerful reminder of the evil of *racism*, and not a singular reminder of the deadliness of anti-Semitism.¹⁸³

This, she argues, far from being a well-intentioned but misjudged expression of kinship, instead reflects a politically motivated desire to rewrite the past: 'The sharing in suffering, together with assigning all the blame to the Nazis, helps eliminate questions about the Poles' actions and inaction towards the Jews'.¹⁸⁴ She is referring to the anti-Semitism rife in Poland throughout the early and mid- twentieth century, and to the participation of Polish citizens in anti-Jewish pogroms both during and after the German occupation.

Certainly this illusory notion of shared victimhood is observable in other museums in Poland. For example, in Kraków's Dom Śląski Museum – formerly the Gestapo's wartime headquarters – the experiences of Polish Jews during World War II are presented as one facet of a larger overall struggle for Polish independence, a movement which outlived the war itself, extending into the period of Soviet rule. Even the exhibition's title – 'People of Kraków in Times of Terror 1939-1945-1956' – reflects this revised cultural portrait: a united Kraków rallying against all opposing forces.

And perhaps this revised Jewish-Polish cultural portrait is evident now, as we accompany our guide back to the Auschwitz II entrance tower. For our narrative journey will end with a description of the camp's liberation which, while providing chronological resolution, has little actual historical relevance to the primary inmates of Birkenau:

¹⁸³ Irwin-Zarecka in van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 365. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*



TimeaRose

June 2014
All throughout the tour, it was
`Polish political prisoners,
Polish Jews, Polish people`.
There was very little mention
of other nations.

I'm using the word 'liberation' and I shouldn't be using that word because Poland was, in fact, occupied by the Soviet Union for the next fifty years after the war. So Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the Nazis were here for six years and when the war was over the Russians came in for the next fifty years. The communist regime in Poland was over in 1989, but the last Russian soldiers and the last Russian tanks left Poland in 1993, sixteen years ago.¹⁸⁵

Moments of Reprieve (III)

So ladies and gentlemen I'd like to show you now the entrance to the main watchtower. You will find also in that building bathrooms and a book store. Your driver [...] is waiting for you in the parking lot behind that building. And this is the end of our tour. I'd like to say goodbye and thank you very much.¹⁸⁶

At the top of a winding staircase, I find a small room with windows on all sides, offering a panoramic view of Birkenau and the surrounding landscape. If the initial shock of Auschwitz I is how small it is, then the primary visual rupture caused by Auschwitz II is that photographs and film footage turn out to be incapable of giving a sense of its true size. Facing the camp now, my view is cut neatly in two by the train tracks: to the left of them are the red brick barracks; to the right, those skeletal chimneys that denote where the Family Camp, Women's Camp and Gypsy Camp once were. Both sides stretch as far as the eye can see. An information board beneath the window informs me that beyond the visible horizon – christened 'a vanishing point that was indeed a vanishing point'¹⁸⁷ by Mendelsohn – are the Field of Ashes, the 'Canada' warehouse foundations, the Sauna building and the ruins of four crematoria.

There is another element of the presentation of Birkenau that sets it apart from Auschwitz I: there are fewer information boards, fewer crowds of tourists, and only one exhibition block (the refurbished Sauna). Birkenau is thus the lesser narrated of the two sites. While van Pelt and Dwork express concerns about the main exhibitions being located in Auschwitz I, they nonetheless appreciate the less object-reliant approach evident at Birkenau, stating: 'The site has not been appropriated or falsified by transposed objects.'¹⁸⁸ As such, Birkenau – in what may be a deliberate choice on the part of the museum – offers a counterbalance (rather than resolution) to many of

¹⁸⁵ Appendix II, 19:00.

¹⁸⁶ Appendix II, 20:15.

¹⁸⁷ Mendelsohn, *The Lost*, 114.

¹⁸⁸ van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 367.

the ethical problems arising from the Auschwitz I displays. For example, the main camp's hierarchies of representation are neutralised by Birkenau's unpopulated barracks, which do not rely on human accessories or artefacts to communicate the fact that people were kept there.

van Pelt and Dwork also contend that by dint of not being 'museumified', Birkenau retains its identity as a particularly Jewish space: 'the bleakness of Birkenau fits the Jewish memory of the genocide as Shoah: total devastation and ruin'.¹⁸⁹ This site with its empty barracks, ruined buildings and landscape strewn with human ashes, confirms that what occurred here was an erasure. So while its preservation gestures towards our desire to remember and to learn, it simultaneously reminds the visitor of the impossibility of retrieving what has been destroyed. This is something lost in Auschwitz I, where the slew of information and constant diversion of one's attention to what remains, generates precisely the opposite impression.

Finally, from a tourist's perspective, it can be argued that the alternative aesthetic of Birkenau offers certain representational advantages. Mendelsohn states:

When you [...] wander the enormous, vertiginously broad plain where the barracks once stood, and trudge over the great distance to the place where the crematoria were [...] it begins to be possible to understand how many people could have passed through there.¹⁹⁰

This stands in sharp contrast to Auschwitz I, where one of the most immediate challenges for the visitor is to accept that such a relatively small space could have been connected to genocide of such catastrophic proportions. The vastness of Birkenau also makes it possible for visitors to be more easily absorbed. Confronted with miles of relative emptiness, the solo traveller finds the space necessary to reflect on the events that took place here.

A shame, then, that as group tour participants we do not have more time.

¹⁸⁹ van Pelt and Dwork, *Auschwitz: 1270*, 367.

¹⁹⁰ Mendelsohn, *The Lost*, 112.

Transport (II)

The return journey from Auschwitz to Kraków feels shorter than the one from there to here, as though by willpower alone we are causing the bus to flee from this place. On board, people are silent as they struggle to reconcile their previous imaginings of the Auschwitz concentration and death camp with what they have seen today – and what they have not seen.



Chris F

June 2010

The speed at which we tried to move around (school trips permitting) on the organized tour left little time for reflection [...] Some of it sunk in only on the quiet bus journey back to Krakow (I don't think anyone spoke on the bus during the whole journey!).

It has been posited many times that silence is the best response to the Holocaust. And certainly there is a sense among the group now that we do not know how to speak; that this attempt to know a history better has instead drawn us further from it. It is a feeling I will find replicated on every subsequent group tour I take of Auschwitz.

Esther Sánchez-Pardo states: 'Anyone confronted with Nazi Germany and the Holocaust is bound to have a strong emotional and intellectual reaction [...]. This confrontation produces crisis and breaks with existing frames of reference.'¹⁹¹ What she is describing is a traumatic response – an experience which exceeds understanding and thus cannot be assimilated into a person's world view. What is not clear, however, is whether Sánchez-Pardo intends this statement to apply to people who have literally 'confronted the Holocaust' – survivors – or have 'encountered' it in a more figurative, second-hand sense: through scholarship, historical research or, as in our case, Holocaust tourism. Given that she later maintains that if one can work through such trauma, it will be 'precisely this crisis that enables a dialogue and the possibility of living with our past',¹⁹² the latter appears more likely; the former being too complex an issue for the suggestion of singular solutions with determinate outcomes. Perhaps, then, it can be claimed that my experience of visiting the Auschwitz site has produced a form of trauma, one which will take time to work through, but will ultimately produce greater knowledge?

However, while this traumatic framework may initially appear a neat fit, it cannot be said to accurately describe my present situation. For what I have 'confronted' today is not the Holocaust-as-it-happened, but a strange, surreal representation of it, that has left me feeling not overwhelmed but oddly cold, emotionally disconnected and only a

¹⁹¹ Sánchez-Pardo, 'Who will Carry the Word?', 37.

¹⁹² Ibid, 37–38.

little better informed. And, if online reviews and my subsequent experiences of these tours can serve as evidence, neither is this reaction uncommon. One could argue, of course, that such a response is itself a symptom of trauma, but I would suggest that it may equally speak to the type of encounter that I have just had.

I have already outlined the standardised route of the guided group tours of the Auschwitz I and Birkenau sites, thus showing their narrative scope to be severely limited. Their further reliance on both physical objects and well-known artefacts results in a representation which effectively constitutes a singular narrative, being delivered to over one million visitors per year. This is evidenced by the Appendices to this thesis: across the three tours presented, the same names, facts, figures, even the same anecdotes, are repeated. But is it possible to argue that this replicated narrative might in fact constitute a *traumatic* repetition? Such a question means that to properly interrogate my reaction to the tours, it becomes necessary to decide in what ways trauma theory may have bearing on the Holocaust tourist's experience of Auschwitz.

While Sigmund Freud is often cited as the originator of trauma theory, the first person to investigate the relationship between trauma and mental illness was the French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot, in the late nineteenth century. He pioneered studies into hysteria while his student, Pierre Janet, extended Charcot's teachings into the area of traumatic experience and personality development. Both influenced Freud's development of psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline, particularly his early works regarding hysteria and the internalization of childhood trauma (1893-1895).

Further significant developments came in response to three of the major wars of the twentieth century. During World War I, against the background of high numbers of soldiers returning from combat displaying signs of 'shell-shock', Abram Kardiner observed that re-enactment of the traumatic event appeared to be a key element of this affliction, which subsequently became 'a central construct in modern trauma theory',¹⁹³ according to Shoshana Ringell and Jerrol Brandell. Meanwhile, the return of concentration camp survivors post-World War II prompted studies by the psychoanalyst Henry Krystal, which determined that 'traumatized patients come to experience emotional reactions purely as somatic states, without being able to

¹⁹³ Ringell and Brandell [eds], *Trauma: Contemporary Directions*, 3.

interpret the meaning of what they are feeling'.¹⁹⁴ Finally, through working with veterans of the Vietnam War, Robert Jay Lifton and Chaim Shatan were able to identify 27 different symptoms of 'traumatic neurosis'.¹⁹⁵ These, and other developments within the psychiatric field, gave name to and subsequently shaped contemporaneous incarnations of traumatic afflictions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Complex Traumatic Stress Disorder and Developmental Trauma Disorder.

Yet it wasn't until the mid-1990s that widespread attention began to be paid to trauma studies in literary criticism. A seminal work in this field was Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*¹⁹⁶ which, according to Michelle Balaev, 'pioneered a psychoanalytic poststructural approach that suggests trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language'.¹⁹⁷ This expanded on previous interrogations into the relationship between language and pain, undertaken by the likes of Slavoj Žižek, Geoffrey Hartman and Elaine Scarry. Essentially, Caruth's approach posits trauma as an unrepresentable event which causes irreparable damage to the psyche, resulting in disassociation. The traumatised individual at once repetitively relives their experience/encounter with death, but is unable to assimilate/live with it, resulting in an 'oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*'.¹⁹⁸ Caruth further contends within this repetitive reliving of past events a new perspective of history can be conceived. Efraim Sicher explains:

History is understood not as the conventional chronicling of events in their diachronic happening, in the delusion of an objectivity free of interpretation and rhetoricity, but in the interpretive shaping of memory through the imagination. In other words, the memory of the past is the story of the relation of the present to the past; we cannot see the past as it really was.¹⁹⁹

This person-centred approach, in which history is effectively inextricable from both the individual and the moment of relation, became the 'classic model of trauma' according to Balaev. Many critics were responsive to its acknowledgement of human

¹⁹⁴ van der Kolk, Weisaeth and van der Hart 'History of Trauma in Psychiatry' in van der Kolk, McFarlane and Weisaeth [eds], *Traumatic Stress*, 60.

¹⁹⁵ Lifton, *Home from the War*, 1973.

¹⁹⁶ Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

¹⁹⁷ Balaev, 'Literary Trauma Reconsidered', in Balaev [ed], *Contemporary Approaches*, 1.

¹⁹⁸ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 7. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹⁹ Sicher, "Taced's Wound": From Repression to Symbolization', 197.

suffering, its Adornian associations of a linguistic impasse, and to its revised conception of what constitutes history. And certainly, such ideas speak to contemporaneous configurations of Holocaust history as a traumatised narrative. In his influential 1992 essay, 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening',²⁰⁰ for example, the psychiatrist Dori Laub discusses the challenges of encountering the 'record yet to be made'²⁰¹ when interacting with Holocaust survivors. In such situations, he contends, the traumatised individual attempts to testify to an event which 'has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of'.²⁰² He argues that the skilled listener to trauma can be the (decidedly not-blank) canvas onto which history is inscribed. The listener is thus part of the process of knowledge production, with the resultant inscription occupying a position both past and present.

Based on this classic model, it may be possible to suggest that the Auschwitz museum is not only responsible for collecting and holding historical artefacts and testimony within its archive; it also adopts the position of the 'listener' – or at least the listener by-proxy – as conceived by Laub. As the mediating institution between Holocaust tourist and traumatic event, it speaks 'to the human voice that cries out from the wound',²⁰³ as Caruth terms it. Yet by subsequently training its guides to recite a singular, standardised narrative, which is then disseminated to each new group of tour participants, it effectively nullifies rather than facilitates the type of knowledge production Caruth claims such a conversation can elicit. From this point of view the tour narrative can thus only mimic the effects of traumatic repetition, rather than engaging the modern tourist in any meaningful kind of dialogue.

However another significant work in the field, LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*,²⁰⁴ took issue with Caruth's vision of knowledge production borne of the working through of trauma. This, he claimed, constitutes a 'redemptive, fetishistic narrative that excludes or marginalizes trauma through a teleological story that projectively presents values and wishes as viably realized'.²⁰⁵ And certainly such a perspective serves to remind the Holocaust tourist of their place, in a sense; for while Laub suggests that the listener may serve a role in the production of useful historical

²⁰⁰ In Felman and Laub [eds], *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing* (1992).

²⁰¹ Laub, 'Bearing Witness', in Felman and Laub [eds], *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing*, 57.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3.

²⁰⁴ Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001.

²⁰⁵ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 192.

knowledge, he is also emphatic in his assertion that this requires substantial training. It is thus not enough to simply claim that tourists will become better witnesses by expanding the narrative scope of the tours at Auschwitz, or allowing them greater archival access. What Caruth's configuration may thus inadvertently play into is our desire to feel 'important' as Holocaust tourists, to offset the feeling that we may 'only' be Holocaust tourists – i.e. voyeurs.

What LaCapra does acknowledge, however, is the return of historical trauma as discourse. He identifies a key phenomenon, relevant to the discussion of the Auschwitz tour, as inherent to such a return: 'positionality'. This, according to Sicher:

suggests that acting out [trauma] must take into account language, ideological discourse, agenda, cultural constructs, and subjectivity at the time of narration through which the historical experience is invariably filtered. There is no unadulterated 'event' devoid of interpretive perspectives 'after'. [...] Narratives do shape memory as well as being mediated through popular culture.²⁰⁶

Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated several different impacts of the application of narrative discourse to the history of Auschwitz (for example, its illusory impression of comprehensive historical knowledge), and thrown light on some of its unacknowledged subjectivities (its adherence to audience demands, or demotion of the lost archive, for instance). Yet nowhere are these effects noted within the tour narrative itself. This speaks to a Barthesian conception of narrative as an inherently deceptive form. In *Mythologies*,²⁰⁷ Roland Barthes discusses the 'second-order meanings' present in all narrative encounters: from discussions of the weather wherein light is presumed to be 'beautiful', to automobile advertising where the car is elevated to the status of a 'purely magical object'.²⁰⁸ He argues that we often overlook the impact of such unacknowledged, imposed ideologies or cultural mechanisms – the 'what-goes-without-saying',²⁰⁹ to use his phrase.

LaCapra thus suggests that canonical texts (such as tour narratives at sites of genocide) should not impose definitive interpretations, but rather help to 'foreground ideological problems and to work through them critically'.²¹⁰ This approach recognises each text as itself being a site of trauma, 'with which the reader would have to

²⁰⁶ New York: Hill and Wang, 1973.

²⁰⁷ E. Sicher, "Taced's Wound": From Repression to Symbolization', 198.


²⁰⁸ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 150.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 25.

engage',²¹¹ as part of their historical encounter, according to Jonathan Berger. Thus, rather than 'permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not',²¹² as in Caruth's configuration, the traumatic nature of the narrative itself is acknowledged and interrogated.

LaCapra asserts that the Holocaust 'has often been in the position of the repressed in the post-World War II West',²¹³ resulting in the types of compulsive narrative repetition that I would argue are evidenced in the guided group tours of Auschwitz – and further in the proliferation of the visual 'Holocaust aesthetic' that Carden-Coyne identifies. Indeed, Hirsch arguably expands LaCapra's argument, suggesting that society may use repeat Holocaust images quite deliberately, as tools of desensitisation: 'Do they become 'like clichés,' she asked, 'empty signifiers that distance and protect us


 AL

December 2015
Has to be done, but only the once. Not as emotive as you would expect.

from the event?'²¹⁴ If Hirsch is correct, then perhaps the emotional disassociation I and many other tourists feel after visiting the site may be understood as a consequence of an encounter not with history, but with a pervasive expression of trauma.

Invisible Cities

When the bus comes to a halt beside the sidewalk of Świętego Idziego, I head straight into the Old Town, drawn by its promise of a pre-Auschwitz timescape. Yet despite its oxidised copper domes and the 'Olde Worlde' stylings of its 'traditional' restaurants, I find

 meia

July 2013
Pure history. Unfortunately there are thousands of people going there on a daily basis, what makes it [...] seem like Disneyland.

it swamped with the filler of any other city-centre travel destination: currency exchanges, kebab stands, drinking holes, gelato stalls, gift shops – and thousands upon thousands of tourist, just like myself. In Rynek Główny, visitors ride in horse-drawn carriages past St Mary's Basilica, the Old Cloth Hall, *Diesel* and *Coffee Heaven*. Old Kraków is a theme park too, I realise – albeit an extraordinarily beautiful one.

²¹¹ Berger, 'Trauma and Literary Theory', 576.

²¹² Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 11. Emphasis in original.

²¹³ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 188.

²¹⁴ Hirsch, 'Surviving Imagery', quoted in Carden-Coyne, 'The Ethics of Representation in Holocaust Museums', in Dreyfus and Langton [eds], *Writing the Holocaust*, 173'.

During the next few days, I wander the streets of this divided old-new city, looking for signs of the Second World War: I go to the innocuous-looking Silesian House (Dom Śląski), to see its one-room 'People of Kraków in Times of Terror' exhibition, where Poles and Jews battle 'side by side' for their respective freedoms; I visit the Katyn Memorial, set at a crossroads by Wawel Hill; I view a large painting of Saint Maximilian Kolbe in the Old Town's Franciscan Church; in the Czartoryski Museum I stand in front of an empty frame opposite Leonardo da Vinci's *Lady with an Ermine*, which awaits the return of Raphael's *Portrait of a Young Man*, plundered by the Nazis during the war. Thus what I uncover does indeed cohere to an overriding narrative of Polish persecution.

Finally, I venture into Kazimierz. Located in new Kraków, this former Jewish Quarter boasted a population of approximately 70,000 Jews pre-World War II. But the German invasion of 1939 saw the vast majority of them deported and the area's ninety-plus synagogues sequestered to be used as storage facilities. Only a few hundred Jews live in Kazimierz today, while many of its former synagogues have been turned into city centre apartments. Here, then, one could reasonably expect to find evidence of what happened to Kraków's Jewish community during World War II?

In Berlin, between 1991 and 1993, in a series of installations entitled 'The Writing on the Wall', the artist Shimon Attie projected photographs of Jewish people onto their pre-World War Two residences or places of work. Explaining his motivation in a book accompanying the series, Attie said:

I came to Berlin in the summer of 1991 [...] Walking the streets of the city that summer, I felt myself asking over and over again, Where are all the missing people? What has become of the Jewish culture and community which had once been at home here? I felt the presence of this lost community very strongly, even though so few visible traces of it remained.²¹⁵

Attie's projections thus represented an attempt not to return the Jews to Berlin, but rather to enforce a sense of both presence and absence – a literal haunting. In Kazimierz, however, this haunting is of a very different form.

Industry, it appears, has filled the void left by an eradicated heritage – for while Judaism is emphatically celebrated in Kazimierz, it is only for the benefit of tourists. Restaurants advertise 'genuine kosher food', and offer 'traditional Jewish

²¹⁵ Attie in Young, *At Memory's Edge*, 67.

entertainment': usually non-Jewish musicians dressed in Hasidic-style party costumes (complete with side-locked wigs), rehashing traditional folk songs. In the Izaak Synagogue, visitors can purchase wooden figurines of 'The Jew', featuring black robes, Torah shawls, violins, big noses and long beards. It all constitutes a cruel mimic: a performance of history in which no blood is shed and everyone dances. Less contentious histories of Kraków's Jews, meanwhile, are confined to a few small exhibitions within a handful of still-operational synagogues.

Young states:

To some extent, the relative absence in Poland of specific iconographic reference to its murdered Jews [...] becomes emblematic in itself, recalling the way in which two holes in a doorjamb might signify the *mezuzah* that is no longer there.²¹⁶


My assessment of Kraków is less generous, however. I cannot help but think of the tour sellers and of the motorised buggies that are always found skulking nearby: the former assist tourists in leaving the city, ostensibly to encounter the dual historical abominations that are Auschwitz and European anti-Semitism; the latter, by contrast, trundle around Kraków oblivious to both. Here is the beautiful Old Town, their drivers tell tourists. Let me tell you the myth of the Wawel Dragon and then let's go to the Jewish Quarter to watch the musicians play.

But perhaps this is what both Old and New Kraków have been concealing all along. Auschwitz being 'over there', allows the city to rewrite its entire twentieth century, conveniently ignoring its fiercely anti-Semitic past (and arguably its present too). Therefore possibly the most ethically problematic aspect of the Auschwitz bus tours is that they provide the means by which vast swathes of history are transported out of Kraków.

In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Marco Polo tells Kublai Khan: 'Sometimes different cities follow one another on the same site and under the same name, born and dying without knowing one another, without communication among themselves.'²¹⁷ In Kraków, however, these two cities seem to sit alongside each other in silent alliance. The visitor is meant to appreciate their differences, but not interrogate the obvious gap that is one's future and the other's past. Thus elder and modern Kraków share the

²¹⁶ Young, *Writing and Re-writing the Holocaust*, 178.

²¹⁷ Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 26.

 Lila A

November 2015
Lots to see and absorb on this information loaded tour [...]. Pick up from hotel and drop off with a Viator guide is also highly recommended.

same invisible city; Planty Park serving as the meeting place where they nod their heads sagely at each other, before facing in opposite directions to continue their separate parodies of the past. Meanwhile, just sixty kilometres away, another busload of tourists arrives at Auschwitz I.

Conclusion (I)

This thesis has constituted an attempt to identify and analyse several ethically problematic aspects of the guided group tours of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau offered by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. This discussion has been situated within the wider fields of Holocaust tourism, dark tourism scholarship and literary trauma theory, in particular: the ethics of representation as relates to guided group tours at concentration camp museum sites; visitor experiences as participants in guided group tours at black-spot sites; and an analysis of the Auschwitz group tour monologues as traumatic narratives.

At the heart of these issues appear to be series of binary paradoxes, namely: the tours assert presence through artefacts which diminishes a history characterised by absence; they present themselves as vehicles of fact when they rely on traditional fictive mechanisms within their narratives; they employ singular narratives which ignore the inherently fragmented nature Auschwitz's history; they claim to represent victims yet employ problematic models of both collective and individual representation; and they assert the significance of the Judeocide while simultaneously downplaying the importance of the Birkenau site.

However, while I wish to draw attention to these problems, I believe it is important to note that the current leadership of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum does appear willing to engage with critiques of its practices. This is noticeable even where it defers from popular opinion, such as in the Babbitt case.²¹⁸ Perhaps the most significant recent example of this was the institution's March 2015 announcement that it is to completely overhaul the main exhibitions in Auschwitz I – a project which will take eleven years to complete. In an official press release announcing the

²¹⁸ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'Museum's Position on Issue of Portraits'.

redevelopment plan, the museum pledged that ‘the new narration will [...] illustrate more the fate of an individual and the personal aspect of crime’.²¹⁹ While it remains to be seen how or whether the reconfigured exhibitions will resolve or engage with some of the specific ethical issues identified within this thesis, certainly it is a welcome and long overdue step.

I would also like to state clearly that it is not my contention that the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum ceases to use the tour form as a means of educating travellers. It is, after all, only doing its best to cope with the increasing numbers of visitors it attracts each year, while also attempting to navigate endless contrasting, shifting – and often irresolvable – representational and political demands. Instead, what I hope this analysis points to is the need to examine the guided group tours as part of this proposed redevelopment programme, and to make both major and minor modifications to such visitor experiences where necessary.

It should further be pointed out that while the group tours have long been a problematic part of the museum’s operational programme, there have also been several positive recent developments in this area. For example, on January 1, 2015, the museum introduced an online booking system for all visitors to the complex in a bid to ease congestion.²²⁰ Another welcome addition was the unveiling of QR codes at locations in Auschwitz I and Birkenau in April 2015, allowing users with compatible devices to access audio recordings of survivor testimony, thus creating a more pluralistic narrative experience for visitors.²²¹

Ultimately then, what I hope I have demonstrated is the type of contribution Holocaust tourism scholarship can make to the ongoing reshaping of visitor experiences at the Auschwitz museum. This includes helping to identify and analyse ethical issues connected to the use of guided experiences at black-spot sites, and assisting in devising less problematic representational models, where such exist. For example, while I can claim no knowledge of the practicalities involved in the organisation of large-scale group tours, I do wonder if the possibility of starting half of the tours at Birkenau rather than Auschwitz I has ever been discussed. If implementable, such action would surely help alleviate concerns about perceived

²¹⁹ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, ‘Long-term Ministerial Program’.

²²⁰ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, ‘New System of Online Booking’.

²²¹ Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, ‘Testimonies of Auschwitz Survivors Available’.

Polish bias or the subsuming of Jewish experiences within the institution, and help ease overcrowding at the Auschwitz I site?

Another, more radical suggestion would be for the institution to explore the possibility of using an automated tour system rather than licensed educators. This measure does seem to go against the museum's ethos, however, Kacorzyk having stated: 'It is very important to learn about the history of this unique place [...] through the contact with a specially qualified educator and not by means of automatic guide systems.'²²² But given the number of guides required to conduct the tours, and the apparently standardised training they receive, I would suggest that an automated system might, in fact, prove a more advantageous model. Mack suggests that from the latter half of the twentieth century onwards 'museums have become allied to the functioning of collective memory in new and significantly enhanced ways.'²²³ One of these ways, at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, is through the employment of guided tours. But collective memory in this context is a troubling concept – ensuring that acts of erasure are perpetuated time and again via the delivery of a singular 'Auschwitz history'.

Edward Linenthal, an original member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum advisory board has cited a postmodern turn in museum representation in the contemporary era. The museum, he claims, can be reconfigured as a space where the 'pluralistic ownership of memory' can be explored.'²²⁴ This movement was foreshadowed by Young, who in *The Texture of Memory* concluded his chapter on the Auschwitz and Majdanek memorials with the words:

The wisest course [...] might be to build into the memorial at Auschwitz a capacity for change in new times and circumstances, to make explicit the meanings the site holds for us now, even as we make room for the new meanings it will surely engender in the next generation.²²⁵

With advances in modern technology, an automated tour service could offer a means by which to present numerous alternative histories of the camp: differently focused, generalised or personalised, and related by multiple sources. Such a device could also be used to initiate a visitor-led model of engagement, whereby the tourist picks and

²²² Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum website, 'Auschwitz Memorial Visited by 1.33 Million'.

²²³ Mack, *Museum of the Mind*, 13.

²²⁴ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 5.

²²⁵ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 154.

chooses – and is thus responsible for – the narratives they listen to and the artefacts (or non-artefacts) they engage with. This may help diversify the narratives encountered at Auschwitz, encouraging more visitors to seek out and explore lesser-known exhibits and exhibitions – for example, the national pavilions in Auschwitz I.

Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all solution; nothing can address every ethical concern raised about the Auschwitz museum or resolve every representational issue. But contemporary scholarship can continue to expand the scope of this discussion, revise thinking around different aspects of ongoing debates, and attempt to find new models of representation, taking advantage of the latest scholarly developments, site management techniques and emerging technologies. In short it can, as Young suggests, help build movement into these most important memorial museums, allowing for flux and change.

Conclusion (II)

I would like to conclude my doctoral thesis – and indeed conclude my PhD, for I am writing this ‘second conclusion’ post-Viva, at the tail-end of my corrections – by reflecting on the ways in which my critical and creative work have intersected over the course of the last five years. In doing so I hope to demonstrate less how my historical research has informed my creative manuscript, *The Lagermuseum* (though of course it has, in countless ways), but more on how the diversions and discoveries I made while attempting to develop a meaningful engagement with a history as fragmented, shape-shifting, ethically complex and resistant to definitive interpretation as that of the Auschwitz death camp came not only to shape my creative manuscript, but to overhaul it in terms of both content and form. It was an exhaustive, demanding, and at times incredibly frustrating process – and one which, as a writer, I am infinitely grateful for.

The subject of my critical thesis was never meant to be the Auschwitz tours – and neither were they, or the Lagermuseum once located in Block 24, intended to provide the framework for my novel. My original source materials, and the focus of my PhD proposal, were a handful of artworks made by Auschwitz prisoners that I had stumbled across online while studying for a Masters in 2008. My novel was supposed to focus directly on these artworks and the artists who produced them, giving voice to a little known aspect of the camp’s history – a ‘straight’ work of historical fiction, then

(admittedly a naïvely undertaking). My critical thesis, meanwhile, would examine the status of these artworks as evidence, taking into account their stylised renderings of camp life. It would also look into the wider issue of why such pieces were not displayed within the Auschwitz museum's main exhibitions and examine whether this might be connected to their problematic status as historical artefacts.²²⁶

On my first research trip to Poland, I elected to stay in Kraków. The bus tour packages thus seemed the best option for my initial Auschwitz encounter: they would take me there and back, I would get a detailed history of the site, a visual sense of the place, and the following day I could return to examine the artworks held in the museum's archives. Thus I found myself being herded in and out of barracks buildings at a frighteningly fast pace, ushered swiftly in and out of rooms piled high with artefacts of genocide, and thoroughly bewildered by not only the unexpected appearance of the site, but the huge crowds of people, the loud chatter, the bottles of water, the photographs, the bookshop, the car park, the snack bar.

However, on my return to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, two days later – entirely ignorant of the formal processes of historical research – I found that getting to view actual archival artefacts would be more than simply a matter of walking up to a cashier's desk, flashing my postgraduate student card and asking to see the Head of Collections. I would have to apply in writing, I was told, and justify both my research and the reasons why it necessitated a physical encounter with the artworks. And I would not receive a response within the week-long duration of my trip. I was welcome to take a guided group tour of the site, however. There was no alternative available: it was peak season, around 10am. And so: a second encounter, every bit as frenetic as the first, with much information repeated and the same vague sense of discomfort about how artefacts were being treated or displayed. I was fascinated: I returned two days later for another tour.

Over the course of the next few years, as I returned again and again to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (on one occasion actually getting to see some artworks, though only after a kindly staff member smuggled me into a room where they were being temporarily held), I participated in a total of ten tours. Some I

²²⁶ In fact, this latter issue had a disappointingly straightforward answer: paintings require special display cases and conditions (heating, air, and so on); the museum has yet to be able to raise sufficient funds to modify one of the barracks accordingly.

recorded on a pocket Dictaphone – ostensibly, at first, for my own reference. But as I slowly came to understand the disciplinary situation of my own creative work within the vast and diverse canon of Holocaust literature, so too did I come to view the tour narratives as a crucial part of that canon. From there, natural dialogues emerged between my creative and critical interrogations, which I cannot now imagine either aspect of my PhD without. It is impossible to provide a comprehensive list of crossover points here, as that would constitute another thesis-length work. But I do wish to touch on one key conversation, and to relate it back to contemporary trends in Holocaust literature, to demonstrate and acknowledge the value of my critical research when it came to attempting my own piece of creative work within this field.

Historical Faction

In *Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics*, Berel Lang claims that Holocaust literature is characterised by the ‘blurring of traditional genres’.²²⁷ Using as one of her key examples Benjamin Wilkomirski/Bruno Dössekker’s controversial faux-memoir *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*,²²⁸ she claims that the ultimate ‘test’ of Holocaust literature is whether its subject or referent would be better served (in the ethical sense) by not being represented at all. This, of course, reflects one of the primary dilemmas any writer must to some extent confront when working within the broad spectrum of Holocaust literature: Should I be writing this?

For Lang, the dual causes of this generic ‘blurring’ can be defined as ‘the character of the Holocaust as a subject for literary representation and the role of historical and ethical causality in shaping the genres, and thus the forms, of literary discourse.’²²⁹ This perhaps suggests that another question is more appropriate: not ‘Should I write this?’ but ‘How can I write this?’ The way in which the narrative of the group tours was presented gave me a clear idea of what I did not want to do: the presentation of historical ‘fact’ through the filter of devices typical of fiction (hero narratives, anecdotes, etcetera) resulted in ethical quagmires that I did not feel either qualified or inspired to navigate within my creative work. Thus straightforward historical-fiction, as

²²⁷ Lang, *Holocaust Representation*, 10.

²²⁸ Berlin: Schocken Books, 1997.

²²⁹ Lang, *Holocaust Representation*, 35.

I originally conceived my novel to be, would not suffice. I did not want to simply insert false words into the mouths of prisoners and perpetrators whom had once actually lived – or, at least, not without a considered reason for doing so.

This appeared to leave me with two options. I could take an approach similar to that of Laurent Binet in his novel *HHhH*.²³⁰

All the characters in *HHhH* are real. All the events depicted are true. But alongside the nerve-shredding preparations for the attack runs another story: when you are a novelist writing about real people, how do you resist the temptation to make things up?²³¹

This direct splitting of the narrative into ‘fictive’ and ‘real’ held little appeal, however – primarily because Binet has already rather cornered the market in this regard, and thus it was difficult to conceive of an approach that would at once provide a historical narrative and comment directly on the creation of that narrative without descending into mimicry. The secondary reason is that while I find Binet’s technique initially quite involving and impressive, his ‘commentary’ narrative seemed, to me, to suffer by comparison to the historical story. Put perhaps a little bluntly: Binet is less interesting as a character than Jozef Gabčík, Jan Kubiš or Reinhard Heydrich. And, put even more bluntly, I suspect I would be even less interesting as a character than Binet.

My second option, as I saw it, would be to attempt a ‘light’ historical retelling: employing historical events and backdrops, and perhaps even recognisable Auschwitz figures, but changing names, chronologies and situations so that such references were clearly demarked as being within the realm of ‘fiction’. This is a familiar trope of the genre, recent examples including *The Zone of Interest* by Martin Amis and *The Undertaking* by Audrey Magee.²³² Yet again, however, this did not feel like the right fit. I did not want to only tell a story: I wanted to in some way reflect the problematics of Holocaust representation in prose, particularly as my investigation into the tours of Auschwitz developed. This decision was further influenced by Lang’s assertion that Holocaust representation which fails to acknowledge or observe ethical or historical constraints often falls into the category of melodrama, sentimentality or cliché. While I would not necessarily view Amis’ work in this way, certainly I found *The Undertaking’s*

²³⁰ London: Harvill Secker, 2012.

²³¹ Binet, *HHhH*, ‘About This Book’ (preface).

²³² London: Atlantic books, 2014.

wartime-romance plot disappointingly predictable when set next to its more radical employment of the perpetrator perspective.

What I required for my work, then, was a fictive narrative which inhabited the concentrationary universe without claiming it as a realist space, and which could also interrogate issues relating to Holocaust representation without breaking into overt critical discourse. It was a combination of my original critical thesis subject – the Lagermuseum of Block 24 – with the group tours which usurped it that provided the resolution. Setting my story in a space which appeared to be Auschwitz but which took on elements of the supernatural (the talking pictures and the ghostly curator being two examples) resolved the first issue, while staging this encounter as a tour would allow me, through my researcher-protagonist, to constantly question the veracity of the events that took place – and thus interrogate the various incarnations and limitations of Holocaust encounters available to contemporary generations.

Using artworks in this way, I felt, also destabilised any ‘claims to truth’ made by the short stories/paintings that comprise the bulk of *The Lagermuseum*. These stories may appear realist in terms of setting, but each is underpinned by a fundamentally surreal event: the ‘appearance’ of the anarchist painting/story. This simultaneously points to the impossibility of their historical veracity – further emphasised by the occasional intrusion of supernatural forces into the stories themselves (the Dybbuk of ‘Sturm and the Dybbuk’, for example).

Several other key elements of my fictive Lagermuseum were suggested by my participation in the guided group tours. For example, championing the form of the audio-guide as an alternative to the tours’ singular narrative reinforced the importance of reflecting the multiplicity of histories that comprised Auschwitz. Put simply: there were as many versions of Auschwitz as there were victims of it and perpetrators within it. This realisation prompted the idea to display many different paintings and stories in *The Lagermuseum* rather than ‘the oeuvre’ of one or two key artists. By doing so, I was also able to represent a broad spectrum of Auschwitz prisoners – something which became important to me also as a direct result of my tour experiences. In being bound up primarily with Polish history and the scale of the Jewish massacre, I found the tours made only fleeting reference to other Auschwitz victim groups, including different nationalities, female prisoners, child inmates, and most particularly homosexuals. I can only hope my novel in some way addresses this deficit.

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Appendices

Please see Appendices section, starting on page 250.

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Research Trips

Both the creative and critical writing elements of my PhD were informed by my participation in approximately ten different guided tours of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum between 2009 and 2015. Transcripts of two representative examples of these tours can be found in the Appendices section overleaf.

Appendices

Appendix I

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Programme | Audio file supplied by Claire Griffiths |
| Date and Time | Monday 12th January 2015 |
| Subject | Transcript, Group Tour, Auschwitz I, August 2009 |
| Prepared by: | Wordsworth Transcripts Ltd: Paul Ellis and Claire Griffiths |
| Time Markers: | Bold script, minutes/seconds, format: [0:30] , [1:00] etc. |

Tour Guide: [...] They were trained in Germany before the war, even before Germany invaded Poland in 1939. And we can see in front **[0:30]** [...] in translation 'Work will set you free' [...] everything in the museum (...) I mean, the exterior is pretty much the same as it was [...] during the war [...] The buildings that we can see in front of us, those are the same buildings in which prisoners were kept. They were not reconstructed, they were not rebuilt after the war. Only the interior **[1:00]** in some of the buildings has been changed after the war. Some of the buildings are also empty, and some of the buildings here have the main exhibition that I would like to show you in a moment. Now, the building that you can see here on the right side, the building with many chimneys, used to be the camp kitchen, the main camp kitchen. And next to the camp kitchen, the camp orchestra were situated. Camp orchestra consisted of professional musicians. They were also prisoners **[1:30]**. And they were playing next to the camp kitchen twice a day: in the morning, while the prisoners were going to work, through that gate, outside the camp; and also when they came back in the evening, the camp orchestra was playing here. And the columns of prisoners that were going to work had to march in ranks of five, neatly in each pack. And the camp orchestra provided music for this, to make it easier for the Nazis to count the prisoners. And sometimes they were playing for the SS officials **[2:00]**.

So, I mentioned that the prisoners were going to work. So what kind of work did they do? The prisoners were all the time building the barracks, the watch towers, the gas chambers and the crematoria were built by the prisoners. I mentioned a minute ago the camp kitchen, because there were prisoners preparing food for others. There were groups of prisoners responsible for, um, sorting the luggage that the Jews brought with

themselves here during the war. There was a special unit of prisoners responsible for burning corpses. And between 1942 and 1945 **[2:30]**, the prisoners used to work in private companies which cooperated with the Nazis, so in coal mines, oil refineries, ammunition factories, farms which traded outside the camp. So most of the prisoners were not here in the main camp, they were going to work in the mornings, then being outside camp, then they were coming back in the evening. Regardless of the time of the year, prisoners had to work eleven hours a day.

I mentioned before that Germany invaded Poland **[3:00]** in 1939, and many people don't realise that Soviet Union did the same thing seventeen days later. Hitler and Stalin made a pact one week before Germany invaded Poland. So Poland was attacked from both sides. One part of Poland was incorporated into Germany, and the other part into the Soviet Union. So Hitler and Stalin were allies for the first few years during the war. And Nazi Germany invaded Soviet Union 1941, and in violation of international law, Soviet prisoners of war were also held at Auschwitz **[3:30]** [...] it was isolated from the main camp, and it was called 'War Camp' for Soviet POWs [...] It will be easier for us to walk out this way [...] **[4:00]** **[4:30]** ground level of the upper [...] we will also see later how living in unsanitary conditions [...] the main camp [...] so, let's go inside. **[5:00]** Ladies and gentlemen, there were many concentration camps in [...] countries during the war: Sachsenhausen, Ravensbrück, Bergen-Belsen, Mauthausen; these are the names of former concentration camps. And there were also [...] death camps that the Nazis put in occupied Poland. Nazi concentration camps were different than **[5:30]** extermination camps, although the goal of annihilating the victims remained the same. In concentration camps hunger, coupled with hard work, was the basic method of extermination. The prisoners in concentration camps spent shorter or longer periods of time. In extermination camps, however, Jews were murdered immediately upon arrival. Ten or fifteen minutes after they arrived, they were sent straight to the gas chambers, where they were killed, so that was the difference. And Auschwitz was **[6:00]** a concentration camp for five years, between 1940 and 1945. And for three years it was also an extermination centre for European Jews. The decision to murder European Jews was made by the Nazis probably in the summer of 1941. And in January 1942, during the Berlin Wannsee Conference, head of the security of the Nazi Germany, Reinhard Heydrich, he presented the problem a 'Final Solution'. The Final Solution of the Jewish Question, and that plan included murdering

over [6:30] eleven million Jews living at the time in Europe, eleven million Jews, living in occupied countries by Nazi Germany, neutral countries, and in countries to be occupied by Germany in future, for instance Great Britain. So the plan was to murder eleven million European Jews, and the Nazis managed to murder six million. If you turn around for a second you can see all the trains to the camps and ghettos from which Jews were deported to Auschwitz during the war. We can see that people were deported to Auschwitz from almost every European country [7:00]: from Greece, from Italy, from France, from Norway, even from Channel Islands.

Unidentified Speaker: [...]

Tour Guide: What, right now?

Unidentified Speaker: Yes

Tour Guide: Yes, yes, ok. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to show you now what the Red Army soldiers found after the liberation. Auschwitz was liberated by the Russian soldiers in January 1945. And when the Russians came in here, they found human ashes [7:30] next to the ruins of four gas chambers and four crematoria. There were four gas chambers and four crematoria that the Nazis built at the site Birkenau – so not here, none in the main camp. And when the Germans realised that they are losing the war, that the Red Army is approaching, they decided to blow up those buildings. They tried to hide the evidence of the crimes that they committed here. So they used dynamite to destroy those buildings, and the Red Army soldiers found human ashes next to the ruins of those crematoria. Human ashes were [8:00] thrown by the Nazis into the rivers, ponds. They were also using human ashes as a fertiliser. So we can see here, symbolic grave, and you can also see photographs on the wall, and in the photographs we can see Hungarian Jews. The Nazis managed to deport to Auschwitz almost half a million Hungarian Jews during two months of summer, 1944. So when the war was coming to the end, that decision was made, to transport here as many people as possible. Almost half a million [8:30] Hungarian Jews were brought to Auschwitz in sixty-three days, so it means that approximately eight thousand Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz every day in 1944. The photograph that we can see here was taken by one of the Nazis who served here. His name was Bernhard Walter. He was a professional photographer. We will see more photographs of his in the exhibition. Follow me please. [9:00] [9:30] [10:00] So ladies and gentlemen, you will remember when I said that the majority of the prisoners who were

deported to Auschwitz for the first two years, I mean between 1940 and 1942, the most of these prisoners were Polish political prisoners. Auschwitz was not designed as an extermination camp for the European Jews, I mean in the beginning. In 1940, Auschwitz was supposed to be a concentration for, just another concentration camp for political prisoners. So most of the people that were sent here for the first two years [10:30] were people known from their patriotism or social standings before the war, but mostly people considered by the Nazis as any part of the leadership class: teachers, lawyers, priests, politicians, doctors; just because they were intellectuals they were sent to concentration camps, including Auschwitz. People arrested in revenge for participation in resistance were also sent, so at least seventy-five thousand Polish prisoners were killed here during the war, seventy-five thousand. Most of them were political prisoners. So if we look over here, in [11:00] the first photograph we can see seven hundred and twenty-eight Polish officers and students. They were all arrested in June 1940, and it was the first known transport to Auschwitz. So here in these four photographs we can see Polish prisoners. Please come a little closer to the next photograph. The German invasion of Poland was very brutal. It was different than the German occupation of western European countries, France or Greece. There were six million Poles who were killed during the war, six million. Three million were Jewish and three million were not Jewish [11:30]. Here we can see gypsies, who were regarded by the Nazis as 'anti-socials'. At least twenty-three thousand of them were sent here during the war; twenty-one thousand were killed. They were kept together at the site of Birkenau. Here we can see the prisoners that I mentioned before, Soviet prisoners of war. I mentioned that only ninety-six of them survived Auschwitz. Now let's come a little bit closer to the next photographs. And here we can see in the next photographs Jews being deported from occupied countries in Europe, Jews being deported to Auschwitz. The Nazis believed [12:00] that the German nation is fated to dominate the world, and that the Jews, Poles, Gypsies, Russians are sub-humans, and they have no right to live. They wanted to create a master race, and in order to create a master race they decided to get rid of the people that they considered inferior. The Jews were first in line, eleven million European Jews, and then Slavic people were second, second in line: Poles, Czechs, Russians. So here you can see in the photographs once again from which European countries [12:30] Jews were deported to Auschwitz during the war: It is Polish Jews, French Jews, Dutch Jews, Greek Jews, German Jews,

Hungarian Jews. We'll stop over here for a few seconds so you can see that the Jews were deported to Auschwitz during the war from almost every European country: also from Norway, from Yugoslavia, from Italy, from Channel Islands. The total number of Jews who were deported here during the war is at least 1.1 million **[13:00]**. It's difficult to estimate the exact number of the people who were brought here during the war. Many documents were destroyed by SS before the liberation, and we have to remember that most of the people that we can see here in the photographs were never registered. They never became prisoners, they never received camp uniforms because they were killed immediately upon arrival. That's why it's difficult to say for sure how many of them were sent, but at least 1.1 million, and ninety per cent of them were murdered, ninety per cent. So, almost one million Jews were killed here during the war. **[13:30]**

I would like to show you now more photographs of Bernhard Walter, the professional photographer that I mentioned before. The purpose of taking these photographs is still unknown. The Nazis tried to do everything in secret. Guards, the German officers were not allowed to take photographs at all, they were not allowed to record anything. And album with the photographs of Bernhard Walter was found by one of the survivors of Auschwitz, who we can actually see in one of these pictures. Her name was Lili Jacob Meier; she was Jewish **[14:00]**. She arrived here on the same day when the photographs were taken. And Lili was also a prisoner of Dora, which was a concentration camp situated two hundred kilometres from here. That camp was liberated by the Allies in 1945. And after the liberation, Lili was searching for some warm clothes in [...] building, and when she was searching for some warm clothes in Nazi headquarters, she found that album with almost two hundred photographs. So here we can see some of the photographs **[14:30]** that she found and she even recognised herself in one of the photographs, she also recognised members of her family. She was the only one of her family to actually survive the war. Please remember that the photographs were taken at the site of Birkenau, they were not taken here: none in the main camp. But we are going to Birkenau you will see the railway lines in Birkenau, you will see unloading platform. But you will not see, in Birkenau, two buildings that are visible here in this photograph. Here we can see gas chamber and crematoria number two, gas chamber and crematoria number three **[15:00]**. Those buildings looked pretty much the same, and they were destroyed one

week before the Russians came in, in 1945. So European Jews that we can see here in the photographs. We all know that those people were deported to death camps in those crowded cattle cars that we can see here in the photographs. People in these very difficult conditions were transported to Auschwitz sometimes with no food at all, only with one bucket of water. And those transports lasted many hours, many days [15:30], sometimes more than one week. One transport from island Corfu in Greece – once again, you can see on the map from which European countries Jews were deported to Auschwitz – so that transport from island Corfu in Greece lasted nine days. So people who got to Auschwitz from Greece, from France or from Norway, they did two thousand kilometres. Some of these people died on the way. And here we can see, in this photograph, what happened when those trains arrived in Birkenau. We can see that people had to step out [16:00] of these cattle cars and then they had to stand in two lines. Women and children were separated from men. And once people were standing in two lines SS doctors, that we can see here in the photograph, then they decided who is fit, who is unfit for work; who is able, who is unable to work, just by looking at each person. Those selected as unfit for work were killed immediately upon arrival, approximately seventy per cent of each transport upon arrival, seventy per cent. So who is selected by [16:30] the Nazis as unfit for work? First of all, children, handicapped people, elderly people, people who looked physically weak, pregnant women. Only young, healthy men and women were selected as fit for work. And then they were registered. They received camp uniforms, their number was tattooed on their forearm, and then these people became prisoners, workers. They were sent to the camp. Please remember that the selections were conducted only among Jewish prisoners. So those who were deported [17:00] to Auschwitz and were not Jewish, they were all forced to work, even children or elderly people. So Auschwitz served two functions: concentration camp and an extermination centre. Some of the people who were sent here were put to work, they were used as slaves in the Nazi war machine and others were killed immediately upon arrival. And why Poland? I've mentioned that there were six death camps and they were all built here in occupied Poland. The first reason was the railway connections. Poland is situated in the centre of Europe [17:30] so people could be easily deported here from every European country. And the second reason was that when Germany invaded Poland there were three and a half million Jews who lived here in Poland, three and a half million, so the largest

Jewish European community. And also the Nazis tried to keep everything a secret so they thought they could easily isolate those camps in Poland from the outside world. And I would like to show you now the moment of selection, let's come a little bit closer to the next photograph. Here you can see in this photograph another SS doctor **[18:00]** who served here during the war, his name was Heinz Thilo. He committed suicide after the war, he committed suicide in 1946 and you can see that there were doctors who conducted the selections. So they were saving people's lives before the war and during the war they were killing people, they were the masters of life and death, they decided who'd be sent to the gas chamber, who would be sent to the camp. And you can see here the moment of selection, you can see by the movement of his hand he sends some people right, sends some people left. This man that we can see here in this photograph **[18:30]** he was selected by Thilo as unfit for work. You can also see a group of people herded along that road. They were also selected by Thilo as unfit for work, so they were all going to the gas chambers, gas chambers number two, three, four and five. A few months ago we, we got a visitor from Germany who was sixty five years old when he came here and when he saw that photograph he recognised his father in this photograph. He recognised his father and he never knew that his father was a member of SS **[19:00]**. He never knew that his father was a guard here. And it turned out a few hours later that he was right, that it's actually his father that we can see in that photograph. You can also see here mothers with their children already selected as unfit for work. European Jews that we can see here in the photographs, those people were told that they would be resettled, that they would be transported to east. Many European Jews believed that they would be transported to family camps. Polish Jews heard rumours about Auschwitz; they heard rumours **[19:30]** about other death camps because they were built here in occupied Poland. So Polish Jews suspected' they knew that sooner or later they would be sent to those camps just because they were Jewish, so they tried to fight, they tried to defend themselves. I think that most of us heard about the uprising that took place in Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, so they tried to fight but if somebody was brought here from Hungary or Greece or Italy they'd never heard about Auschwitz and they were transported here for so many days that when they arrived here they were exhausted, very weak. And when they arrived here they were told that they were going for disinfection **[20:00]**, that they would take a shower. Undressing rooms that the Germans built in Birkenau had

misleading inscriptions on the walls, written down in different languages: Polish, German, Italian and French. Those inscriptions were saying 'undressing room' and 'bathroom'. And gas chambers, four chambers [...] in Birkenau had fake shower heads and water pipes attached to the ceiling. So many believed, many people thought even if they were already inside a gas chamber they thought that they would take a shower. In order to avoid mass panic **[20:30]**, people were told they would take a shower. Here we can see in the next photograph some of the luggage that people brought with them [...] during the war. People who were deported to death camps they brought with themselves their most valuable things [...] Birkenau [...] conditions [...] money, jewellery, gold, clothes [...]. And we can see here that Auschwitz was a complex of three camps. Here we can see the name of the town that was incorporated in to Germany in 1939: Oświęcim. When the Nazis invaded Poland **[21:00]** they were changing Polish names to German names so Auschwitz was the name of the town during the war, this town's more than eight hundred years old, and when the Nazis decided to build a concentration camp here they also named it Auschwitz. So here we can see the main camp, twenty eight buildings, we are now inside building number four. Auschwitz III, Monowitz, was situated seven kilometres from here. About ten thousand prisoners were kept at the site of Monowitz and all these prisoners used to work in a factory that were called Buna-Werke and in that factory prisoners **[21:30]** used to produce synthetic rubber and liquid fuel. And that factory was bombed by the Allies several times in 1944. The railway lines, gas chambers and the crematoria were never bombed by the Allies, only that factory. And here we can see Birkenau, and we can see that Birkenau was much bigger than the main camp. In August 1944 there were one hundred thousand prisoners kept only at the site of Birkenau, one hundred thousand prisoners. So we can compare the camp to a small town. There were four gas chambers and four crematoria that the Nazi's built in Birkenau **[22:00]**. I would like to show you now the model of gas chamber and crematorium number two. So we have to go upstairs. **[22:30]** Keep to your right hand side please, try to go one by one. **[23:00]** And so, ladies and gentlemen, in a moment we will have a better view of the model of the gas chamber and crematorium number two. So people who were selected by those German doctors as unfit for work: children, disabled people, elderly people, they all had to go, at first they had to go downstairs because undressing room **[23:30]** was situated underground, so people had to go downstairs. In the undressing

room they were once again told they would take a shower, people were even told that they had to remember the place where they left their clothes. Once they were naked they had to turn right, they were forced to turn right to the gas chamber that was also situated underground. And in that gas chamber even one thousand and five hundred people could be locked at one time, one thousand and five hundred people, let's take a closer look. **[24:00]** So there you can see a group of people guarded by SS men. We can see those selected as unfit for work. You can see that they all had to go downstairs to the undressing room. Once they were naked they had to turn right. Once people were in a, once people were inside a gas chamber doors were locked and people were trapped inside. The doctors, SS doctors, the same doctors who conducted the selections, the same doctors stood on the roof of the gas chamber and, and through four openings **[24:30]** in the ceiling they were dropping down the gas that was called Zyklon B. It took fifteen minutes to murder one thousand and five hundred people, within fifteen minutes nobody was alive. So we can say that the Nazis were killing here one thousand and five hundred people in fifteen minutes in only one gas chamber, and they built five of them. So you can see that Auschwitz was a death factory, that people were murdered here on an industrial scale. Those who were standing very close to the place where the **[25:00]** gas was dropped down they were dying instantly, in just a few seconds, but the majority of these people were dying in ten minutes, sometimes in fifteen minutes so it was a very long and painful death. After half an hour a gas chamber was ventilated, gas chamber was dispersed from the side and then those prisoners who were assigned to burn the bodies they were called in German Sonderkommando, it means Special Unit. There were only Jewish prisoners in these units so they had to enter the gas chamber and then they were transporting those hundreds of corpses by a special elevator to the crematorium **[25:30]**. We can see the crematorium was situated on the ground level, it was not situated underground. And we can see members of Sonderkommando burning corpses in five, five furnaces. But before the bodies were cremated they were shaving heads of the corpses, they were taking out golden teeth, all the jewellery and then they were burning the bodies. I would like to show you now those prisoners, we can see them in one of the photographs that was taken by a prisoner, not by the Nazis but by a prisoner. When the Nazis made their decision to murder **[26:00]** European Jews they tried to find out the most efficient way. Excuse me. They tried to find out the most efficient way of

murdering people, mass executions were carried out by shooting in Soviet Union. The mass executions by shooting were not efficient enough. Himmler, Head of the SS, he fainted during those executions and he said these words: 'We have to find a better way of killing'. But not for the victims but for the soldiers **[26:30]**, because the German soldiers were killing women and children at close range, some of them were going insane. That's why the Nazis decided to test Zyklon B on people. Those tests were successful so the problem for the Germans was not the kill those thousands of people who were deported here every month during the war, the problem for the Nazis was to get rid of the bodies, to burn the corpses. The crematoria that the Nazis constructed were too small, especially in 1944 when so many Hungarian Jews were brought to Auschwitz every month. So you can see that those prisoners who were responsible for burning corpses they also **[27:00]** had to burn the bodies in open air cremation pits. That photograph was taken by one of the prisoners his name was Alex he was a Greek Jewish prisoner. He took that photograph in secret at a great risk in 1944 and only a few of these prisoners that we can see in the photograph survived the war because they were eye witnesses to mass extermination, they knew too much. And in a moment we will see how Zyklon B looks like, the gas that was used in gas chambers **27:30**. Zyklon B was produced by German company named [...], you will see in a moment crystals saturated with hydrogen cyanide. Those crystals exposed to air were changing to lethal gas. Here we can see those crystals. According to the first commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, the Nazis needed from five to seven kilos of Zyklon B to kill at one time, one thousand and five hundred people, from five to seven kilos **[28:00]**. So the Nazis needed six, sometimes seven canisters that we can see here to kill at one time one thousand five hundred people; only six canisters. When the Russians came in here in 1945 when the camp was liberated the Red Army soldiers found hundreds of empty canisters which contained Zyklon B, they found many empty canisters but they also found canisters still full of Zyklon B, still full of those crystals. So here you can see **[28:30]** canisters that were actually used to murder people in gas chambers. **[29:00]** Ladies and gentlemen you remember when I said that those prisoners who were assigned to burn bodies, that they were shaving heads before the bodies were cremated? Here you can see two tons of real human hair. Human hair was used in a German **[29:30]** textile industry, the Nazis were producing carpets from human hair, uniforms for soldiers with this. So they were selling human hair from

Auschwitz to factories in Germany, they were selling human hair. And hair that we can see here right now these were the remains that the Nazis had not yet managed to sell and send to factories. In 1945 the Red Army was approaching, the Nazis knew that, so they decided to evacuate all these prisoners who were kept here to concentration camps in Germany and they left. They just left human hair packed [30:00] tightly in to bags as you can see in the photograph behind you. That photograph was taken by one of the Russian soldiers after the liberation. We can see that human hair was packed in to bags. So the Nazis just didn't have enough time to sell and send human hair to Germany. When the Russians came in here – yes?

Unidentified Speaker: When you put those pellets down-

Tour Guide: Yes.

Unidentified Speaker: -it turned in to gas?

Tour Guide: Yes, this exposed to air. They were open, they had to open those canisters and then connection with the oxygen [30:30], with the air, crystals were just activated and would change in to gas, lethal gas yes. So the Russians- so they had to wear a gas mask, I mean those Nazis who were dropping down those crystals they had to wear gas masks and also the prisoners who were carrying the bodies to the crematorium they also had to wear gas masks because I guess the Zyklon was activated in just a few seconds. So the Russians found over seven tons of human hair after the liberation, seven. So here we can also see proof that hair was used in the [31:00] textile industry. The hair cloth that we can see here was found after the war, it was found in a Polish town called [...] and then it was analysed and I can tell you that twenty per cent was made of human hair, twenty per cent. [...] human hair probably women's and also the nets that you can see on top of the [...] was made from human hair. So you can see here that the Nazis were using everything, I mean literally everything. The human ashes were used as a fertilizer, golden teeth were melted and sent to Germany and human hair was used in the textile industry. [31:30] So now we'll be coming downstairs. [32:00] So ladies and gentlemen here we can see an aerial photograph taken by American aircraft in July 1944. So we can see that the allies knew exactly [32:30] what was going on here in 1944. This is some of the prisoners managed to escape. They made reports about Auschwitz. Those reports were sent to governments in London and Washington, so the Allies knew about the death facilities which were installed very early in 1943. The first report about was sent to London in 1941. So it

raises the question why Auschwitz was never bombed by the Allies. Some historians were saying that it was a question of priorities, that Auschwitz was not a military target that's why it was never bombed by the Allies. And we have to remember that it was sixty years ago. I mean now **[33:00]** in 2009 it would be very easy to bomb those gas chambers and crematoria without killing people living nearby. And it, but it was sixty five years ago so if the Allies tried to bomb those gas chambers and those crematoria all these prisoners would have been killed, those barracks were situated very close to those gas chambers and to those crematoria. I mention about the factory that was bombed by the Allies in 1944 but the factory's huge so it's a big target. But what about the railway lines? If you bomb the railways lines nobody gets hurt and may be it would slow down the whole process? **[33:30]** The problem is that the Allies didn't do anything at all it's a very controversial, it's a big [...]. Here you can see in this photograph how huge Birkenau was. Building of that camp was never completed, there was a plan to build another crematorium, more barracks for the prisoners. And on the other side of this photograph we can see warehouses in which the property of Jews was sorted and stored. I mentioned before that people brought with themselves here their most valuable things. So **[34:00]** we can see that everything the people brought with them, so here was sorted in those warehouses and then the things were shipped to Germany. And this is where trying to recycling these things in factories and also German civilians and German soldiers they even receiving the property of people who were deported to Auschwitz. And you can see that the Germans set on fire those warehouses, they set on fire those warehouses because they tried to hide the evidence. If they had enough time probably everything would have been destroyed so we can see that when the Russians came in here those bags were still burning **[34:30]**, they were still burning but not everything was destroyed. In a moment we will go another exhibition where I would like to show you all the things that the Red Army soldiers found in those barracks after the liberation. We will see the property of people who were deported to Auschwitz during the war but please remember that everything that you will see in a moment is just a very small part of the things that people brought with themselves here during, during the war, it's just a tiny fraction. There were 1.3 million people who were deported to Auschwitz during the war, 1.3 million. And the trains **[35:00]** full of belongings from Jewish victims were leaving every day from Auschwitz. And the prisoners that we can see here in photographs, prisoners were

assigned to sort the luggage. They considered themselves as the lucky ones, why? All these prisoners who were kept as workers they were suffering from starvation and they tried on every possible occasion to get some additional food and additional water. And European Jews were deported to death camps, they were hiding in their suitcases and in their bags money, jewellery, gold but also food and water **[35:30]**. So when they were sorting the luggage they had a chance to find additional food. Let's go outside. **[36:00] [36:30]** So here in the first room we can see thousands of glasses that the Russians found after the liberation. Please remember that everything that you're about to see here is just a, a very small part of the things that people brought with them so through during these five years of the camp's existence, a very, very small part. And you can see how many glasses the Russians **[37:00]** found after the liberation. You can also see here Jewish prayer shawls and in this exhibition you will notice a few photographs taken by Russian soldiers after the liberation and in the photographs you will see piles of shoes and piles of clothes. We will see in the photograph and in, and in this exhibition that people brought with them [...] their most necessary, everything that they felt they would need to survive. So let's walk around, keep to your left hand side please. **[37:30] [38:00] [38:30] [39:00] [39:30]** So, ladies and gentlemen, now we'll be coming upstairs. **[40:00]** So here in the upper floor you can see hundreds of suitcases found after the liberation **[40:30]** and you can see that each suitcase was carefully signed with each person's first name, last name, address, number of transport, date of birth. People marked their suitcases because they believed that everything that they brought with them would be given back to them so they could easily identify their suitcases afterwards. And you can see that some of these cases belong to the children, here we can see date of birth December 1941, February 1943. So you can see that when these children arrived here **[41:00]** they were two years old, three years old, four years old. At least two hundred and thirty thousand children were deported to Auschwitz. Most of them were Jewish children. The fate of Jewish children was tragic because most of them were killed upon arrival and there were also doctors, SS doctors, who conducted medical experiments also on children. Infamous SS doctor who served here during the war: Mengele. He was called by the prisoners Angel of Death because he was responsible for conducting medical experiments on handicapped people but also on children, especially on twins **[41:30]**. And Mengele was one of the Nazis who was never arrested, he was never put on trial.

He fled to South America after the war. He was hiding in Paraguay also in Argentina. He died in Brazil in 1979. Many other Nazis did the same thing after the war they fled to South America and they were never brought to justice, some of them are still alive. And children who were not Jewish and if they had blue eyes and blonde hair they were taken from their families and they were transported to Germanisation Centres **[42:00]** where they had to learn German history and German language. Over sixty thousand Polish children who were not Jewish and had blue eyes and blonde hair were taken to these Germanisation Centres. Others were treated as adults and were sent to concentration and death camps. When the war was over ten per cent of these children came back to Poland and others were adopted by German families. So when the Russians came in here in 1945, when the camp was liberated, the Red Army soldiers found only seven thousand prisoners who were still alive, only seven thousand prisoners, and everything that you can see here **[42:30]** in this exhibition. So clothes, suitcases, shoes, here we can see shoes that belonged to the children and in the next room you will see even more shoes that the Russians found after the liberation. There you can see forty thousand pairs of shoes. Please walk around, keep to your left hand side please, you can see the next room eighty thousand shoes found after the liberation, eighty thousand. **[43:00] [43:30]** So slowly we'll be coming downstairs. **[44:00]** Please go this way now turn left to room six and then please wait for me outside, I'll meet you in front of the building, I'll be there in a moment. **[44:30] [45:00] [45:30]** Ladies and gentlemen follow me please **[46:00]**. We will go now to building number seven. I would like to show you how living and sanitary conditions looked like in the main camp during the war. And you will have noted from that exhibition a few hundred photographs taken during the registration procedure. You will see in the photographs mostly Polish prisoners, on your left side you will see women and on your right side you would see men. And you remember when I said that those selections which were conducted among the new arrivals **[46:30]** well they were conducted only among Jewish prisoners. So the prisoners that we will see in a moment in the photographs mostly they were not Jewish so when they arrived here they were all registered, they were all put to work. So when they arrived here at first they had to undress. Once people were naked barber went to work. The barber shaved the whole body of the prisoner. Then prisoners had to take a shower, very often the water was too cold or too hot. Orders and instructions given to the prisoners were given in

[47:00] German. When there was only a small group of German prisoners most of them were German criminals they understood German but others didn't understand at all so they were all the time beaten, all the time humiliated by guards who served here. And then the camp number was tattooed on left forearm. Auschwitz was the only concentration camp in which prisoners were tattooed the cause was the high death rate. So many prisoners were dying every day that the Germans had problems with identification of the corpses and also prisoners could be easily tracked down if they managed to escape **[47:30]**. Then prisoners received camp uniforms, camp uniforms had blue and grey stripes and depending on the reasons why people were arrested they were marked with different types of triangles. Those triangles were attached to the camp uniforms. Political prisoners were marked with red triangles, criminals green triangles anti-socials and gypsies black triangles, homosexuals pink triangles, Jehovah Witnesses purple triangles. And the Jews were marked in a different way, they were marked **[48:00]** with a star made of two triangles red and yellow. And then prisoners were photographed. So now let's take a closer look at these photographs. And you can see in this exhibition how living and sanitary conditions looked [...] and here in first room on the left side we can see how living conditions looked like for the first few weeks of the camps existence. We can see that prisoners slept only on straw, then as you can see here on the right side, on straw mattresses and between 1941 and 1945 prisoners slept on three level **[48:30]** wooden bunks that you will also see in a moment. So here we can see those photographs. On your left side you can see women on your right side men. Please remember that the photographs were taken at the same day when these prisoners arrived here. So a few months later the same people looked completely different because they were suffering from starvation. And please remember that those people were not killed in gas rooms, those who were killed in gas rooms were never photographed, they were never registered. Here you can see prisoners who are dying **[49:00]** from hunger, diseases or hard work, beaten to death by guards or shot at the execution wall. So let's stop for a second and please pick one photograph and please pay attention to the numbers and dates that you can see underneath that photograph. And the first line we can see camp number and the second line we can see last name and a first name and the third line you can see date of birth and in the very last line underneath each photograph you can see date of arrival and a date of death underneath each photograph, the very last

line **[49:30]**, you can see date of arrival and a date of death. You can see that none of these prisoners survived Auschwitz. If you compare those dates you will see that given such extremely difficult conditions, hard work, punishment, diseases, lack of water you can see that these prisoners lasted usually from three to five months, from three to five months. So let's walk around. Everything that you can see inside these rooms is original. We can see how sanitary conditions look like at the main camp during the war, we can see the interior of a washroom **[50:00]** and you can see original paintings on the walls, paintings made by the prisoners sixty years ago. When you see a flower attached to the photograph it means the relatives. These visitors have been here and they attached a flower. And when you see women on your left side please pay attention to the month of death. You can see it's very often December or January, February you can see that these women were dying in winter because the winter in Poland is usually freezing, minus ten, minus fifteen. We can see that these prisoners were dressed only in camp uniforms **[50:30]**, regardless of the time of the year they had to work eleven hours a day so it was crucial to work indoors. Only these prisoners had a chance to survive. We can find in this exhibition a room unlike the others, a room in which prisoners put in charge of other prisoners were kept. It was a privileged category of the prisoner, most of those supervisors were German criminals they were called *Kapos*. They were criminals so they were sometimes more brutal, more cruel than the SS guards themselves. Some of the male prisoners that you can see on your right side **[51:00]** were Polish intellectuals arrested just because they were considered as a part of leadership class. So we can see that this prisoner [...] was a lawyer, [...] was a doctor, [...] was a teacher. So you can see that many of them were teachers, lawyers, architects, engineers. Sometimes the whole families were arrested and sent to Auschwitz together. We can see sisters, they were twins, when you see the same last name you can see the members of the same family. They were sisters, you can see the same date of arrival **[51:30]** they died at the same day two months apart. She was considered as a political prisoner because we can see red triangle attached to the uniform and she was only sixteen when she was sent here, sixteen years of age. We can see also prisoners who are Jewish, we can see star attached to the uniform [...] Jude, you can see his face probably beaten by guards or by *Kapos* and managed to survive only sixteen days. Jewish prisoners were treated even worse than for example political prisoners. Here we can see another Jewish prisoner, star attached **[52:00]** to

uniform, [...]. You can see date of arrival and a date of death, one day. He managed to survive only one day. And here on the right side you can see another family. We can see prisoner who's reported to Auschwitz with his two sons. We can see the same, same last names [...], they were Polish Jews. [...] was only seventeen years old when he was sent to Auschwitz and he managed to survive only two months. And when you see that word, long word, [...], it means that the prisoner was shot at the execution walls. You can see the same date of death **[52:30]** here in these photographs, so these prisoners were shot on the same day. We will see the execution wall in a moment. So please go this way now, walk around, please take your time, and I'll meet you in front of the building, I'll be there in a moment. **[53:00] [53:30] [54:00] [54:30] [55:00] [55:30]** Ladies and gentlemen let's go outside, I'd like to show you now the execution wall **[56:00]**. We will go at the courtyard between buildings ten and eleven. And building eleven was quite different than others because in the basement of building eleven there used to be a camp prison, camp prison for civilians and also for the prisoners. So we can say that it was a prison within a prison. It was the most feared place in the camp, the place where prisoners were sent to be punished, interrogated, tortured and even executed. There were different types of cells in the camp prison, for example cell number eighteen **[56:30]**. That cell was called 'starvation cell', and in that cell prisoners condemned to death by starvation were locked. They didn't receive any food at all only water. And why prisoners were left in [...]? One of the prisoners managed to escape in revenge for that the Nazis used to select ten prisoners from his barrack and they were left in the starvation cell, they were condemned to death by starvation so that the prisoners would be aware of this policy. So this was one of the reasons why not so many prisoners **[57:00]** attempted to escape because they knew that if they managed to escape others would suffer. And it was September 1941 one of the Polish prisoners managed to escape and in revenge for that the Nazis once again decided to select ten prisoners. But before they were locked in the starvation cell one of these prisoners started to cry, he was begging the guards. He said he has wife, he has children and that he doesn't want to die. And there was a prisoner who was standing nearby who was well known before the war **[57:30]** Polish priest, his name was Maximilian Kolbe. And when he saw that photograph, when he, when he saw, he saw the prisoner crying, when he saw the prisoner crying and begging the guard, he said to the Nazis: 'I'll take his place'. And the guards agreed so they switched the

places. So that priest, Father Maximilian Kolbe, was locked in the starvation cell instead of the prisoner who was crying. So he was locked in that cell with nine other [58:00] prisoners. According to the survivors, that priest after two weeks was still alive. But then the guards said that that's enough, they said that it's impossible that he survived so many days and after two weeks they killed him with a phenol injection in to his heart. So the prisoner was killed, the, the priest was killed after two weeks and the prisoner who was crying and begging the guards, he survived Auschwitz, he survived the war, he died only fourteen years ago. And his family also survived war. Let's go this way [58:30]. So that's cell number eighteen, starvation cell. There was also suffocation cell in the camp prison, cell number twenty and it was called the suffocation cell because prisoners were dying there due to lack of oxygen, there was no window in that cell and even thirty, sometimes even forty prisoners were locked in that cell at one time. And there were also punishment cells in the camp prison. Punishment cells so-called 'standing cells'. When the prisoner violated camp regulations, just for [59:00] stealing a piece of bread or using the toilet without permission, just for that the prisoner was locked in the standing cell with three other prisoners. Four prisoners had to stand in one cell and I can compare the size of the standing cell to a phone booth. Just imagine four prisoners standing in a phone booth sometimes for a dozen of nights. Prisoners had to stand in those standing cells during the night so during the day they had to work, very hard work, eleven hours a day and then during the night they had to stand in a standing cell with three [59:30] other prisoners. We are now in a courtyard between buildings ten and eleven, you can see in front of us the execution wall, also known as wall of death. Thousands of prisoners were shot at the execution wall, most of them were Polish prisoners but there were also prisoners who attempted to escape from Auschwitz and were caught, members of resistance, prisoners who were suspected of maintaining contact with outside world, the local people as well. [...] On May 27th 1942 one hundred and sixty eight Polish actors [60:00] and performers were shot at the execution wall, they were killed here in revenge for attack against high officer of SS. One of the Nazis was assassinated and in revenge for that, one hundred and sixty eight Polish actors were killed here and they had nothing to do with this attack. Regardless of the time of the year prisoners who were shot at the execution wall were shot naked: first women, then men, at close range with a bullet to the back of the head. So these prisoners were facing north. Let's

take a closer look **[60:30]**. You can see that windows in the building number ten, the building that you can see on your left hand side, that the windows were blacked out so that the prisoners couldn't see what was happening here, couldn't see the executions. But, of course, they could hear the shots and what was worse: seeing those executions being carried out here every day or just hearing shots? And on the upper floor of building number ten, one of the doctors who served here, his name was [...] **[61:00]**, he used to conduct medical sterilisation experiments on Jewish women. Most of these women died during these experiments and also some of them were killed so that autopsies could be performed on them. And there are still a lot of German companies that exist, I mean German companies which were involved in conducting medical experiments on the prisoners. For example Bayer, a company that makes aspirin or Siemens. So there are still a lot of German companies, more than twenty, more than twenty German companies that **[61:30]** were involved in conducting medical, medical experiments on the prisoners. And you remember when I said that the Nazis decided to test Zyklon B on people because they tried to find the most efficient way of murdering people? For the first time they test the Zyklon B on people in the basement of building eleven. On 3rd September 1941 they locked in the basement six hundred Soviet prisoners of war and two hundred and fifty Polish prisoners selected from the camp hospital who were locked in the basement and Zyklon B was poured inside. And at the time the Nazis didn't know how much **[62:00]** Zyklon B they need to kill all these prisoners. So one day later it turned out that some of these prisoners were still alive. So they had to throw inside Zyklon B once again, some of these people were dying for two days and that test was successful that's why Zyklon B was later used in gas chamber one here in the main camp but also in the four gas chambers in Birkenau was used to murder European Jews. And I mentioned about the standing cells that prisoners had to stand if they **[62:30]** violated camp regulations. Here you can see another place where prisoners were punished, let's take a closer look. So just for stealing a piece of bread, smoking a cigarette, grabbing an apple from a tree prisoners were punished here. So the prisoner was hanged from his hands tied behind his back so the feet couldn't touch the ground, feet were not touching the ground: so in this position. According **[63:00]** to the survivors people who were hanged here often lost consciousness from pain and shoulders were sometimes dislocated because the prisoners hanged for so many hours. **[63:30]** Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to

show you now the place where the roll calls were held [64:00], and we will also see the house where the first commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss used to live with his family while he was a commandant. Please remember that it's not Rudolf Hess, the deputy of Adolph Hitler who flew to Scotland in 1941, Rudolf Hess. And the first commandant of Auschwitz: Rudolf Höss, H-O-S-S, two different persons. So we will see the house where Rudolf Höss, the first commandant of Auschwitz, we will see that he used to live, in the shadow of gas chamber and crematorium number one. [64:30]

[65:00] This was [...] Polish Army base. This was the reason why this place was chosen because some of the buildings already existed.

Unidentified Speaker: The wooden barracks on Birkenau?

Tour Guide: Yes that's right, that's right. So this place was chosen because some of the buildings were already here. There were twenty buildings standing here when Germany invaded Poland so those buildings were just converted in to the accommodation barracks for the prisoners. I mentioned that there were seven hundred prisoners kept in each building and then when this camp became over populated the Nazis decided to build Birkenau and [65:30] the vast majority of the barracks that the Nazis constructed in Birkenau were made of wood. There were brick barracks also situated, constructed in Birkenau but the vast majority of them were made of wood. We will go to Birkenau and we will see one sanitary barrack, wooden barrack which you can see the toilets and washrooms and that's one, one accommodation barrack which consisted of three level wooden bunks. And the guards who served [66:00] here during the war, they stayed outside of camp, they were afraid of diseases. We will see in moment, like I said we will see the house where the first commandant of Auschwitz used to live with his family during the camp's existence. And here we can see the place where the roll calls were held, the roll calls were held here twice a day before prisoners went to work in the morning and after when they came back in the evenings so the Nazis were counting the prisoners here. And the roll call was also used by the Germans as punishment [66:30]. [...] was a Polish prisoner who managed to escape in July 1940 and in revenge for that the Germans held a roll call here which lasted nineteen hours. So prisoners had to stand here for nineteen hours without food, without water and it was July so it was very hot. So regardless of the time of the year if somebody was missing prisoners had to stand here dressed only in camp uniforms and they had to stand here also in winter [67:00] and sometimes for

five hours, ten hours even fifteen hours. The same number of prisoners that went out to work, I mean those prisoners who were going to work outside the camp, the same number of prisoners had to be back in the evening. So if somebody died at work outside of camp the corpses had to be brought back because the same number of prisoners had to be back here in the camp. And like I said if somebody was missing, if somebody died or somebody managed to escape prisoners had to stand here for just ten hours, fifteen hours, twenty hours **[67:30]**. And in front of us once again you can see the camp kitchen, the main camp kitchen, and prisoners who were kept as workers, they'd been receiving food three times a day; in the morning before they went to work, half litre of so-called black coffee [...] sweetened, always cold. In the afternoon soup, the soup was watery with rotten turnips, rotten potatoes. The new prisoners ate that soup with disgust and in **[68:00]** the evening a very small piece of bread and bread very often was spoiled and old. So the prisoners were suffering from starvation and those prisoners who used to work in the camp kitchen they also considered themselves as the lucky ones because in the winter they used to work indoors and they had a possibility to get additional food and additional water. So now we will turn right and we will see the house of Rudolf Höss. **[68:30] [69:00] [69:30] [70:00] [70:30] [71:00] [71:30]** So ladies and gentlemen you can see that we are now outside the camp. The building that we can see right here it used to be a camp hospital for the Nazis who served here. There were also hospitals for the prisoners, but they were hospitals only in theory. Prisoners used to call camp hospitals 'waiting rooms for crematoria' because the doctors **[72:00]** also conducted selections in camp hospitals. So prisoners were all the time pretending that they were healthy enough, that they were strong enough to work. So it was a hospital for the Nazis. So how many Nazis served here during the war? The total number is eight thousand, at least eight thousand guards served here during the war in three camps: Auschwitz I, Birkenau and Monowitz. Most of them were German and Austrian guards but in the end of 1944 also Ukrainian and Yugoslavian guards served here for a short period of time. At one time, for example in 1944 **[72:30]**, there were only four thousand and four hundred guards here. So four thousand guards and at the same time there were one hundred and thirty thousand prisoners kept here. You can see SS headquarters here in this building, and in the last one on the right side we can see the office, the main office for the first commandant of Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss. He was the commandant for three years. He

came back here once again in 1944. He came back here to oversee the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. And we can also see a house [73:00] with a red roof behind those trees. The house on your left hand side. That's the house where Rudolf Höss used to live with his wife and with his five children so you can see how close he used to live with his family to the gas chamber and crematorium one. You can see building with a big chimney, gas chamber and crematorium one. And that's the house of Rudolf Höss' family. Wife of Rudolf Höss described in one of the letters that she sent to her family during the war she describes this place [73:30] as 'paradise,' she actually used that term paradise. And why? First of all many of those Nazis that were here with their families, with their wives with their kids but the most important thing for the Germans was the fact that they were not risking their lives during the war, they were not fighting on the Eastern Front or Western Front they were safe here and they had everything they wanted, everything they needed because they were stealing the most valuable things from the transports which arrived here: money, alcohol, cigarettes, clothes, food. Wife of Rudolf Höss had a garden [74:00] just right over here between her home and the crematorium. There's a river nearby, just across the street there's a river where her children used to play with their father when his work was done, so for her it was paradise. And Rudolf Höss changed his name in 1945, he escaped to Germany but he was arrested. He was brought back here and when he was in prison in Poland he said these words: 'The only thing that I regret is that I didn't spend more time with my family' [74:30]. And he was found guilty of committing crimes against humanity and he was sentenced to death by Supreme National Tribunal in Warsaw and there you can see place where he was executed in April of 1947, you can see gallows in front of us built especially for him. It was a public execution. Only Rudolf Höss was hung here. So you can see it was his last view: Auschwitz the place where he used to work, the place where he had murdered over one million people. According to the new research, there were at least one hundred thousand Germans [75:00] and Austrians who were involved in Holocaust, one hundred thousand people, and only five thousand were put on trial after the war, only five thousand, as we can see a very small percentage. And very often they were put in prison for three years, for five years, for seven years and then they were released.

Unidentified Speaker: [...].

Tour Guide: No, no, no I've never been there. This is, well, that house belonged to a Polish family [75:30] before the war. Those German officers, I mean the regular guards used to live in barracks constructed for those regular guards, but officers used to live in those houses that belonged to Polish families before the war. So those, those Polish families had been expelled from here, they had to move out and they came back here after the war they wanted their house back, so they got it back. They decided to live there. They sold [76:00] it to another family, so there's still a Polish family living in that house but I've never been there, it's a private-

Unidentified Speaker: A private house.

Tour Guide: Private, private house yes, yes. If I, if I were in their position I mean I would choose another place to live but-

Unidentified Speaker: Does the road that goes past it, does that lead straight in to the camp?

Tour Guide: No, no, no you mean that, that road?

Unidentified Speaker: The road that goes past the house, the front of the house.

Tour Guide: You mean if it leads to the camp?

Unidentified Speaker: Yes.

Tour Guide: No, no it just, it's around the camp.

Unidentified Speaker: Okay.

Tour Guide: It goes around the camp yes. So you can see [76:30] those cars driving here, so just across the street, there's a river where those children. The children are still alive, they were here when they were five years old, seven years old so they're in their sixties yes so they're still alive. I guess they came back to Germany, they changed their names and yes. A few months ago we hosted, we got a visitor from Germany and he hired the German speaking guide and he admitted that he's the son of Edward [...] the main doctor of Birkenau. He also conducted medical experiments [77:00] on the prisoners. And he even showed the guide the house where they used to live because he was here during the war, he was like seven years old or eight years old during the war and he even remembered the house where they used to live, yes here during the war yes? Okay so I would like to show you now gas chamber and crematoria one. Inside the gas chamber please pay attention to four openings in the ceiling. So the doctors, the SS doctors, [77:30] stood on the roof and through those openings in the ceiling they were dropping down those crystals that we've seen before, Zyklon B.

Sometimes the Germans were placing around the buildings, while they were here, a few trucks, four or five trucks, their engines were turned on so that the prisoners in the main camp couldn't hear screaming coming from the gas chamber. That's why later the Germans built those gas chambers underground. And the gas chamber that you will see in a moment was much smaller than the ones in Birkenau, about six hundred **[78:00]** people could be locked in that gas chamber at one time so we consider this gas chamber was a prototype that the Nazis were testing Zyklon B here, they needed bigger gas chambers and also they needed bigger crematoria because in the same building you will see crematorium one and because of the small capacity that crematorium was shut down in 1943, only three hundred and forty bodies could be cremated in that building in one day. So the Germans could kill six hundred people in gas chamber one and then they had to burn the bodies for two days. So Crematorium I was shut down in 1943 and the Nazis converted the whole building in to a bomb shelter for themselves. So they converted **[78:30]** gas chamber and the crematorium in to a bomb shelter. And also the same year in 1943 they built bigger, more efficient crematoria at the site of Birkenau. There was no undressing room in this building so prisoners had to undress in front of the building right over here, they had to go inside. I don't want to say anything inside so when you see those openings in the ceiling you will notice at least two openings in the ceiling, it would mean that you're inside the actual gas chamber. So first we will see gas chamber one **[79:00]** and then you will see crematorium, and then we'll meet outside right here in front of the building. **[79:30]** **[80:00]** **[80:30]** **[81:00]** **[81:30]** **[82:00]** Let's go this way. Come on, please. **[82:30]** **[83:30]** **[84:00]** **[84:30]** Okay you can see in front of us the main building, that's the same building where we started. This is the end of our tour here in the main camp Auschwitz I. Let's make a short break. You will find in the building bathrooms and bookshops. Your tour leader will tell you how long the break is going to last. I'll see you in Birkenau, I'll be waiting for you there, **[85:00]** I'll be waiting next to the main gate and we're going to Birkenau without the headsets so we have to give back the headsets right now. So please unplug the headphones please, disconnect the headphones. **[85:30]**

-End-

Appendix II

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| Programme | Audio file supplied by Claire Griffiths |
| Date and Time | Saturday 10th January 2015 |
| Subject | Transcript, Group Tour, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, August 2009 |
| Prepared by: | Wordsworth Transcripts Ltd: Paul Ellis and Claire Griffiths |
| Time Markers: | Bold script, minutes/seconds, format: [0:30] , [1:00] etc. |

Tour Guide: [0:30] [1:00] [1:30] [...] in February 1941 at full speed, because the main camp Auschwitz I was overpopulated. And you can see that the camp was huge and in order to control all these prisoners easier Birkenau was divided in to two sections. So on your left zone you can see brick barracks. That part of the camp was built at first. I mentioned that there was a village, houses were dismantled and the bricks were re-used to build a brick barracks **[2:00]** and only women were kept in that part of the camp. You can see original train tracks in front of us, between the railway lines you can see the selection area, that was the place where the selections were conducted by SS doctors and that was the sort of place where that professional photographer that I mentioned before, Bernard Walter, that was the place where he took those two hundred photographs during the arrival of Hungarian Jews. Now if you've seen *Schindler's List*, this was filmed here in Birkenau **[2:30]**, there's a scene in *Schindler's List* when the train is coming through the main gate, the train with women from the Schindler's factory, so they were filming it here in Birkenau, the museum was closed for three days, so they actually put a train on these original train tracks. So that's the same watchtower that we can see in *Schindler's List*. So during the war the trains from all over Europe were coming in through the main gate and then the selections were conducted among the new arrivals, you remember how it looked like that women and children were separated from men and then doctors decided who was unfit for work. So those unfit for work **[3:00]** were herded along that road straight to the gas room. The gas rooms and crematoria were situated on the other side of the camp. We cannot see those buildings anymore because they were completely destroyed because of liberation. Here on the right side we can see nineteen wooden barracks, this used to be a quarantine camp for new arrivals. And we can also see on the right side this forest

of chimneys hundreds of chimneys. The vast majority of the wooden barracks on the right side are missing because they were dismantled after the liberation. So before there were three hundred [3:30] barracks. On the left side there was brick and wooden barracks, on the right side only wooden ones. We're here so I can show you [...] barracks which consists of toilets [...] accommodation barracks, and then if you wish to see a view from the main watchtower you would find the entrance on the other side of the building, you just have to climb up, you will have better view of whole camp. So at first let's see two of the barracks, this way. [4:00] [4:30] [5:30]

Unidentified Speaker: Is it okay to take pictures in here?

Tour Guide: Yes. [6:00] So here we are in the sanitary barrack which consists of three rows of toilets, and they would be facing to the entrance where prisoners would walk from their cells. Sanitary barracks was constructed here in 1943 but before prisoners were not allowed to use the water, water was only in the kitchen and only guards were allowed to use that water. So given such conditions – not enough water, not good sanitary facilities, overcrowded in barracks – it wasn't surprising that epidemics, contained diseases, were transferred at the time, for instance typhus [6:30]. And with barracks like this one were constructed here in 1943 prisoners were allowed to use them only twice a day, before they went to work in the morning and after when they came back in the evening. And it was only two minutes to use the toilet [...].

Mentioned in the main camp was that instructions were given to the prisoners in German. We are now in the part of the camp where only new arrivals were kept. Most of these prisoners didn't understand German so they were all the time beaten, all the time humiliated, especially when using toilets prisoners were humiliated by *Kapos*. I mentioned in the [7:00] main camp that they were mostly German criminals, they were prisoners put in charge over these prisoners who were kept here. And you will see in a moment the whole camp is divided in to these sections. There was a part of the camp where only women were housed, part of the camp for men, family camp, gypsies, camp hospital and many other sections. Each section was surrounded by an electrified fence and in each section there were only three barracks to supply this. We are now in the Quarantine Camp for approximately five thousand prisoners. This meant five thousand prisoners using only three [...] [7:30]. So it was impossible for all these people who were kept here to use the toilets or to use the wash. There were just too many prisoners kept here. And you can see there was no sewage system built here,

so there was a group of prisoners responsible for emptying the latrines manually. Let's go outside. **[8:00]** **[8:30]** So ladies and gentlemen, all the buildings that you can see in front of us, I mentioned that you can see only the remains of the wooden barracks. The barracks that are missing they look exactly the same as the wooden barracks **[9:00]** in the Quarantine Camp. Most of the wooden barracks here in Birkenau were dismantled by Red Army soldiers after the liberation because when the camp was liberated it was January 1945 the war was still not over, the Russians needed wood for fuel so they dismantled the barracks, which is why we can only see today, we can only see the remains. And behind all those hundreds of chimneys the Nazis constructed four gas chambers and four crematoria, and I would like to tell you the story about the prisoners who were assigned to burn the bodies in crematorium number four. Thanks to the cooperation with women from a munition factory they were able to get **[9:30]** some explosives. And they decided to fight because they knew that sooner or later they would be killed because they were eyewitnesses to mass killing. So in October 1944 they attacked the guards at crematoria. They attacked them with hammers and axes. They killed three guards more than twenty were wounded. They destroyed four buildings and the crematoria was completely destroyed during the revolt. Then they cut the fence surrounding the camp and they tried to run away. Some of these prisoners barricaded themselves in the, in a building **[10:00]** just two kilometres from here, but the reinforcements of SS came very quickly and unfortunately all prisoners who attempted to escape that they were killed. Four hundred and fifty one prisoners were killed that day, nobody survived. At least eight hundred prisoners attempted to escape from Auschwitz during the war, only eight hundred. If we compare this number to the number of people who were deported here during the war, 1.3 three million, so you can see it's a very small percentage. But we have to remember that most of the people who were deported to Auschwitz were killed immediately upon arrival **[10:30]** and all these people who were kept here as workers they were suffering from starvation, they couldn't even think straight. The only thing on their minds is, is food, water, and some clothes, I mean the basic needs. The fences were electrified, but we can see that it was easier to escape from Birkenau because Birkenau was surrounded by one electrified fence but if you remember the main camp: two rows. There was a forest on the other side of the fence, a place to hide. And I mentioned of the policy that if somebody escaped successfully, in revenge for that, ten prisoners were killed.

And most **[11:00]** of the people who were captured they didn't speak Polish, so the problem with escaping: where would you go, where would you hide? Polish prisoners could communicate with the local people so it was easier for Polish prisoners to, to escape. Eight hundred prisoners attempted to escape, one hundred and forty four succeeded. How did they manage to escape? For example, in 1941 four Polish prisoners attempt to escape. One of them knew German, the other prisoner was able to get the keys for the storage where SS uniforms were kept and the third prisoner had keys of the **[11:30]** car that belonged to one of the Nazi officers here. So four Polish prisoners disguised as SS guards in that car drove out. That's how they managed to escape, they all survived. The prisoner who knew German is still alive his name is [...], he's ninety-one years old. **[12:00]** **[12:30]** **[13:00]** [...] over here for a second **[13:30]** [...] and according to the German documents each barrack was designed for four hundred **[14:00]** prisoners. According to the survivors and also according to the Nazis who served here over seven hundred, even eight hundred prisoners were kept in the barracks. They were extremely overcrowded. The living and sanitary conditions here in Birkenau were extremely difficult, are considered to be even worse here than in the main camp. Remember in the main camp it was twenty-eight solid brick buildings in which the prisoners were housed. Here in Birkenau most, the vast majority of the barracks were made of wood. So in the winter it was warmer in the main camp **[14:30]** than here in the wooden barracks in Birkenau. We can see grass outside the barracks and according to the survivors there was no grass here at all during the war only swamp, mud, dirt. Rats were attacking the prisoners and the buildings were filled with insects and lice. Prisoners were suffering from starvation and they were also suffering from starvation diarrhoea. In 1942 they were not allowed to use water at all so they couldn't wash themselves, they couldn't wash their hands and clothes. So conditions were horrible. In the middle of the barrack you can see **[15:00]** primitive heating, the heating is very [...] imagine over seven hundred or eight hundred prisoners kept here at one time in summer. At night those vents were closed, the prisoners were not allowed to go outside [...]. How many prisoners slept on each level? Let's get a closer look. According to the survivors **[15:30]**, according to the Nazis who served here, on each level, on each square that you can see here, even ten prisoners had to sleep. So there were ten prisoners on the first level, ten on the second level and ten prisoners slept on the third level. So now you can imagine who those barracks were extremely

overcrowded. And in the corner you can see the photographs taken by Russian soldiers after the liberation. You can see how those wooden barracks looked like shortly after liberation. So you can take a closer look and I will meet you after. [16:00]

[16:30] [17:00]

Unidentified Speaker: [...]?

Tour Guide: No, no, no it was *Life is Beautiful*. It was not, it was not filmed here, only Schindler, *Schindler's List* if filmed here I think that's the most famous film that is made here. *Life is Beautiful* was filmed in Italy, [17:30] in Italy. It was in Italy.

Unidentified Female Speaker: [...]?

Tour Guide: Yes.

Unidentified Speaker: How long did it take them to build Birkenau, I mean?

Tour Guide: Well, prisoners started building this camp in October 1941. And the first prisoners were sent here in 1942, five months later. But of course we have to remember it didn't look like this.

Unidentified Speaker: Right.

Tour Guide: It was all the time a construction site. Part of the camp where you can see the brick barracks was built at first and then prisoners started building [18:00] wooden ones. And they were all the time, all the time building new barracks, all the time building new watchtowers. Like I said in the main camp, the building of this camp was just never completed because the Russians were approaching, the priority for the Nazis was to evacuate prisoners back to Germany so they just left those barracks behind and they evacuated the prisoners to, to Germany. So when the Russians came in here those three hundred barracks were still standing, so it proves that the barracks were destroyed by the Russians not by the Germans [18:30]. And I mentioned that when the Russians came in here they found only seven thousand prisoners who were still alive. The Germans decided to leave behind prisoners who couldn't walk: sick prisoners, the children, elderly people, and others were transferred to concentration camps in Germany. Most of these prisoners had to walk and it was January 1945, it's the middle of winter, so these many of these people who started marching from Auschwitz died or were killed during this death march to Germany. The camp was evacuated on January 27th, 1945 and two years later Polish Government established a museum here [19:00] to commemorate the victims. So the museum was established in 1947 and I'm using the word 'liberation' and I shouldn't be using that word because

Poland was, in fact, occupied by the Soviet Union for the next fifty years after the war. So Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the Nazis were here for six years and when the war was over the Russians came in for the next fifty years. The communist regime in Poland was over in 1989, but the last Russian soldiers and the last Russian tanks left Poland in 1993, sixteen years ago. So I can say that Poland is an independent country [19:30] since 1993. And many survivors of Auschwitz, people who were members of resistance during the war, they were often considered by the communists as a threat to the communist regime because of their experience. There were cases of people who actually survived this horror and were put in prison after the war or were sent to Siberia. And I think it's important to remember that what happened here that this genocide took place only sixty years ago. It's not long ago, some of the Nazis are still alive, many survivors are still alive [20:00], and you can see that it's still happening. Of course it's not the same thing, it's not, not that organised, but what about Darfur, Rwanda.

Unidentified Speaker: Sudan yes.

Tour Guide: Cambodia, where two million people were killed, and what about Europe? In Bosnia there were mass executions carried out by shooting just fifteen years ago. It's unfortunate that history repeats itself. So ladies and gentlemen I'd like to show you now the entrance to the main watchtower. You will find also in that building bathrooms and a book store. Your driver, your tour leader is waiting for you in a parking lot [20:30] behind that building. And this is the end of our tour. I'd like to say goodbye and thank you very much for your attention.

Several Unidentified Speakers: Thank you.

Tour Guide: So I would like to show you now the entrance to the tower.

Claire Griffiths: Excuse me can I ask a question?

Tour Guide: Yes sure.

Claire Griffiths: In Auschwitz I-

Tour Guide: Yes.

Claire Griffiths: -I read that Rudolf Höss set up a museum and an art gallery, was that correct – to display [21:00] Nazi propaganda? And that there were, there was prisoner art displays there.

Tour Guide: Where?

Claire Griffiths: In Auschwitz I.

Tour Guide: And that Rudolf Höss made that?

Claire Griffiths: The commandant, yes.

Tour Guide: Where, where, where, where exactly was that, you remember the place where you read that?

Claire Griffiths: It was in, it was in a book about Rudolf Höss by Ian Baxter.

Tour Guide: In a book, in a book about Rudolf Höss, I mean that he, he established a museum, I mean during the war, during the-

Claire Griffiths: During his time, yes, when he was commandant in Auschwitz.

Tour Guide: Well I guess that might be true [21:30]. I've never heard about it but that might be true because there were prisoners who were assigned to, to make paintings to, to-

Claire Griffiths: Yes.

Tour Guide: -to, to draw paintings, to take photographs as well, so I would guess-

Claire Griffiths: Do you know if any of this work is displayed anywhere in the, in the museum?

Tour Guide: No, no, no.

Claire Griffiths: Okay.

Tour Guide: I know that there are some paintings made by the prisoners in the, that they're being kept by the museum authorities in, in the archives.

Claire Griffiths: Okay.

Tour Guide: But it's not, it's not shown to, to the public.

Claire Griffiths: Okay.

Tour Guide: So I know that there are, [22:00] I, I'm aware of the fact that there is some paintings made by the prisoners, I know that the, the people who run the museum they have plans to establish a new exhibition. It was supposed to be open in 2014 so I'm pretty sure that it would also be displayed, I mean those paintings made by the prisoners. It's very interesting. I think that if you, if you, well I think the only possibility to see those paintings I think just to Google 'Auschwitz paintings'.

Claire Griffiths: Yes.

Tour Guide: I think that's the only way because I don't know or, [22:30] or you can – I don't know if you're staying here for long – but if you're really interested you can always write an email to the museum and ask, ask them if they would allow you to-

Claire Griffiths: Okay.

Tour Guide: -to enter that building where they keep-

Claire Griffiths: Do you know who the right person would be to email? Sorry.

Tour Guide: Just, I think it's just, it's the best way just to visit the official website of the museum-

Claire Griffiths: Okay.

Tour Guide: -and may be search for the person that is responsible for the, for the archives-

Claire Griffiths: Okay.

Tour Guide: -because there are a lot of departments and there is a [23:00] [...] email to the person that is running the archives and just to, I think the best way is to write an email to that person and tell them you're really interested in seeing those paintings. And maybe they will, I, I'm pretty sure they will write you back. But I don't know if they will agree, maybe they will agree, and then you can come here again and just go to the archives and you can see those paintings. I've seen those paintings.

Claire Griffiths: Have you?

Tour Guide: They're interesting.

Claire Griffiths: Thank you that's really useful.

Tour Guide: Thanks for the interest in the tour.

Claire Griffiths: Thank you, thank you very much for your time [23:00].

Tour Guide: Thank you.

-End-

Appendix III

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|---------------|--|
| Programme | Audio file supplied by Claire Griffiths |
| Date and Time | Monday 12th January 2015 |
| Subject | Transcript, Group Tour, Auschwitz I, April 2014 |
| Prepared by: | Wordsworth Transcripts Ltd: Paul Ellis and Claire Griffiths |
| Time Markers: | Bold script, minutes/seconds, format: [0:30] , [1:00] etc. |

Tour Guide: [...] And after more or less two hours we're going to continue, we're going to see the second section, Birkenau, much more bigger than this one, three kilometres away. Excuse me, English speaking tour, yes, English? Number one, numero uno. What? **[0:30]** Number one and number one. Number one, channel number one. So, ladies and gentlemen, please do not eat and do not smoke. How about pictures? So we can take pictures, but in two places it's forbidden. Don't worry; I will remind you in these two places. And please take pictures inside buildings – indoors – without flash **[1:00]**. This is very important. My name is Anna and I will be your guide today in this place. We all know that this place is a very important place. It is not typical museum site for visitors. It is a place of unbelievable human suffering. Nazis killed over one-, over seventy years ago, about one million human beings. It was a hell on Earth. And today I'm going to tell you the story of those who were imprisoned and who were killed, who had **[1:30]** suffering in unbelievable ways in five long years. Do you have any questions now? And we will go to Birkenau in more or less two hours, by special museum bus – shuttle bus. This bus to Birkenau and also returns to the same place afterwards. Excuse me, can you hear me? Number one, that's it. Number three. It's just a different channel, so you need to replace it and please tell the staff members **[2:00]** there that you have to have here number one, that you have three and I've got number one in here, on the dock, okay?

Unidentified Speaker: Okay.

Tour Guide: So can we start? Thank you very much, please follow me.

Unidentified Speaker: Excuse me.

Tour Guide: Yes?

Unidentified Speaker: There is the same price from here in, in Birkenau? It is the same price?

Tour Guide: The same price of a ticket? Yes, it is included in your ticket price, that's right. Also shuttle bus is included. In here we are going to spend two hours [2:30]; in Birkenau one hour and a half; so altogether three hours and a half. Of course if you, for example, if you want to go to Kraków earlier you can, if you for example, if you need a bus to Kraków, you can leave much sooner.

Unidentified Speaker: [...]

Tour Guide: Okay, no problem, so about three hours and a half. [3:00] [3:30] Ladies and gentlemen if you wish to come a bit closer. In front of us famous gate with the sign: *Arbeit Macht Frei*, now the symbol of this place. The Second War, it was one of the biggest wars in world history. The Second War began when Nazi Germany [4:00] invaded Poland in September 1st, 1939. Two weeks later, Poland was attacked also by Russians, the Soviet Union, and Poland disappeared. Both occupying countries – so Nazi Germany and Soviet Union – were of course enemies to Polish country. Both regimes divided Poland into two smaller zones. And both regimes wanted to kill Polish educated people: lawyers, politicians, teachers, doctors – why? [4:30] Because Poland was supposed to be a stupid country, a country of slaves. In Nazi plans, Poland was described by Nazis as a country of slaves, sub-humans. Nazis described themselves as a nation of the super-humans, the best people in the world to create rule of the world. They wanted to create in the future a so-called 'Living Space' on Polish-Russian territory. So Polish people were supposed to work very hard for Germany, and in disciplines [5:00] Polish intellectuals educated – lawyers, politicians, soldiers – they were supposed to die. Why? Because Nazis wanted to prevent them from organising resistance movement. Ladies and gentlemen, when Poland was occupied by the Germans Polish schools were closed, universities were closed, and Polish who were accused of illegal activity against Hitler were held in prisons and killed. So how many Polish people could be killed because of the Nazi occupation? About three millions [5:30] Polish people were killed. On April-

Unidentified Speaker: Three million?

Tour Guide: Three millions. In fact six millions of this lived in Poland: three million Poles, and three millions Polish-Jews who lived in Poland. So six millions of this who lived in Poland. Ladies and gentlemen, on April, 1940 SS, one of the biggest Nazi organisations –of course criminal organisation – had given order; order to set up new concentration camp next to small Polish town Oświęcim, on the suburbs [6:00] of this

town, so just right here. You are going to hear today many times today about SS men, SS organisation, one of the most cruel organisations of the Nazi movement. And the members of SS, most Germans who were in the regime, were employed at Nazi death and concentration camps as the guards. So in fact SS was responsible for most of the crimes committed by Nazis during the war. They set up all the death and concentration camps, and they set up new one [6:30], Auschwitz, in 1940 in here. I have just said the word 'new' concentration camp – why 'new'? Ladies and gentlemen, Auschwitz was not the first one. First Nazi concentration camp was in Dachau in Germany, before the war, in 1933. It was the time when Hitler became the head of Germany. So what Nazi concentration camps were: at the very beginning, special places for political, ideological enemies of Hitler, who were isolated in them [7:00]; and later concentration camps were set up by Nazi authorities also in occupied countries. It is a very good example: first one set up by Nazis in occupied Polish territory. At the very beginning it was supposed to be a concentration camp for Polish political prisoners, to isolate dangerous [...] Poles in it. Two years afterwards, the second section of the camp was set up: Birkenau, three kilometres away. And most of these who were killed there, in gas chambers [7:30], these were Jewish people, who I will be talking about today, many times. How about first transport? It arrived from Tarnów; it is still small town on south, more or less 70 kilometres from Kraków city to Tarnów. And this section of the camp is called Auschwitz I site, and this section was all the time main department headquarters. The commander was employed in here, camps departments in here. And every new prisoner was supposed to pass [8:00], at the very beginning, this gate with the sign above: *Arbeit Macht Frei*. The meaning in English is 'Work Makes you Free'. It was of course lie, Nazi propaganda. Nobody was given freedom. This point of fact: people were supposed to work very, very hard in here, even to do eleven hours a day. A very hard existence and many of the prisoners died because of this hard, slavish labour. Now we're going to enter gate [8:30] [9:00]. Ladies and gentlemen, one of the main aims of the Nazi concentration camps was of hard, slavish labour. From Nazi's point of view, prisoners were great, ideal, cheap labour force. So people were exploited and used as the tools of war. Prisoners of Auschwitz also were supposed to work for all [...]. They were employed as carpenters, shoemakers [9:30] and tailors. And most of the workshops were located outside the main fence. So that's why prisoners were supposed to pass this gate with the sign twice a day. Every morning

they went out to work, and also in the evening they returned to the camp. And every time when they would pass through this gate, they were supposed to hear the sound of this band: camp orchestra. This band played in here, in the same place **[10:00]**. And this band played marches. Why? The sound of marches was supposed to make this [...] easier and to help the prisoners keep in time. Why? [...] main gate, and left and right, that all the time the SS men, Nazi guards, they were supposed to count the prisoners [...], and so the marches played by this band were supposed to make this counting process easier for the guards **[10:30]**: one-two, one-two. There's a picture of prisoners, the members of band were prisoners of the camp, were professional musicians. Of course from prisoners' point of view, this band was very ironic. Many who survived this, they told us after war: 'You know what? We hated this band. We were dirty in here [...], hungry people, beaten by guards. And we had to pretend every day that Auschwitz was normal place **[11:00]** to be working full time.' I want you to look to the right at the brick buildings, so-called 'blocks'. Why Nazi headquarters decided to set up new concentration camp in here? So first of all it was these buildings. Most of buildings that you see in here were here before the war. Why? Because before the war it was Polish army base. So Nazi headquarters **[11:30]** decided to use them. The second reason why had they chosen this site: because of the very good location, train connections. We are going to see in a moment map, which shows that Auschwitz was located in the centre point [...]. So when Nazis entered in 1940, eight buildings in this row in front of you – like thirteen, fourteen, fifteen – these eight in front of you were built by prisoner slaves from scratch **[12:00]**. So new buildings by prisoners were [...] and prisoners were supposed to build buildings, dig ditches, level the ground. It was very, very hard labour, so many of them died. Today of the original twenty-eight brick buildings [...] in most of them prisoners slept. Some were used as a kitchen, warehouse, commander's office, political department **[12:30]**. And how many people could be held at once in here? Usually the number of prisoners at once was like thirteen, even fifteen thousand prisoners. So there was a great many. Sometimes in one building even seven hundred, eight hundred, even one thousand people sleep at once. And very important is that every building is of course original **[13:00]**. And now we are going to enter block number four: 'Extermination.' **[13:30]** Ladies and gentlemen, I have just told you that for two years it was small concentration camp, like a prison for Polish political prisoners. But after 1942 the role of this camp had changed,

why? So let's enter **[14:00]**, now that's everyone. In January, 1942, in Berlin, in Berlin took place special Nazi conference. This conference is known, today in history **[14:30]**, as the Wannsee Conference. At that time Nazis decided to carry out plan. They called this plan as The Final Solution to the Jewish Question. Every European Jew was supposed to die since that time. And since 1942, Nazis started to deport Jews in occupied countries, almost all European countries to so-called 'death camps'. Death camps, as the name says, were the names of places for genocide **[15:00]**. Jews who arrived there, they were killed in gas chambers by gas straight away, never registered as prisoners. So no original names from victims, no traces left. These kinds of death camps were set up by Nazis in occupied Poland. It was easier to hide on the east. So here located on the east: Belzec right here; Majdanek next to Lublin; Sobibor on the east; Treblinka, next to Warsaw city; Chelmno death camp next to Warsaw **[15:30]**. And since 1942 the sixth one, the biggest Nazi death camp, became this place, Auschwitz-Birkenau. In fact, it had all the time to function: it was still concentration camp, like a prison for political prisoners. But after 1942 the second function, at the same time, was a Death camp for Jews. And you can see map which shows main places which people were deported from, political and Jews. And **[16:00]**, as remember I have told you, why the Nazis had chosen this site: in the centre of Europe, good train connections. It is very, very difficult to tell how many people could be deported from Auschwitz, how many of them could be killed, why? Nazis had never written names of Jews who had died in gas chambers. The second reason: they destroyed most of the documents at the end of the war. They wanted to erase crimes. And here you can see estimation **[16:30]** which shows that in five long years, Nazis could deport to Auschwitz even one million and three, and most [...]. One million point one were killed. The most numerous of victims, it is the Jewish population. Of these deported Jews, one million were killed, most of them. Poles: of these deported, seventy-five thousand were killed, half. Roma, gypsies: of these deported, twenty-one thousand were killed, most. Soviet soldiers **[17:00]**: twelve thousand of these died, most. And from Czechoslovakia, France, Yugoslavia, also Germany of the political: about fifteen thousand were killed. So we see that most of rivals were killed in this hell. Now we are now going to see place of the human ashes. Ashes of the victims of Auschwitz, found in the second section of the camp complex, in Birkenau, by Russians at the liberation. They were found in place of dumping, next to **[17:30]** crematorium which they were burnt in.

Ashes symbolise every innocent victim of this place, lost victims is the point of view. Innocent Jewish families, who had no idea at the time what is going on in the world with politics. May their souls rest in peace forever **[18:00]**. Ladies and gentlemen, I have just told you that definitely most of documents were destroyed by Nazis, but some were saved, for example by prisoners, for the end of war, illegally. In the second showcase on the right, we see now personal files of Polish political prisoners. You can check why Poles could arrive at Auschwitz. And in front of you, also personal files, so more details **[18:30]**. You will see that Nazis wrote information on these cards: name of prisoner, surname. But even, even we've got here: mouth, shape of nose, *haar* – hair, *augen* – eyes, brown. So they wanted to control every prisoner. It was very, very difficult to escape from Auschwitz. Ladies and gentlemen, first victims **[19:00]** of Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, these were Polish people: Polish lawyers, politicians, teachers, doctors, educators – but not only. Sometimes Poles could be deported because they were caught by Nazi guards in streets of big cities, like Warsaw city, Kraków city, for nothing. They were walking in the streets. And also because they helped the Jews. In occupied Poland, every man who helped the Jews in the ghetto, who wanted to save Jewish lives **[19:30]**, was supposed to die. And there is a photograph which shows first transport ever; arrived from Tarnów on June 1940. Seven hundred and twenty-eight Polish political arrived on the train. Below you can see Polish monks. Ladies and gentlemen, Polish clergy was extremely victimised during the war. Many of Polish priests, nuns, monks died in concentration camps. Why? From Nazis' point of view, they are like our educated leaders. In the middle **[20:00]**, you can see Poles from Zamosc. Zamosc is a city on the east, and these Polish families, can you believe that they had only five minutes to leave homes. Why? They were expelled by Nazis [...] because the Germans were supposed to live in future in their houses: 'Living Space' plan. Innocent families, for nothing, expelled, evacuated and deported to Auschwitz. Many of them, even children, were killed in here. And then Warsaw families. At the end of war **[20:30]**, in 1944, in Warsaw city, uprising had broken out. Thirteen thousand not fighters but civilians, families, lived there. Expelled, evacuated and transferred to Auschwitz. Many of them were killed. Soviet soldiers arrived at Auschwitz since 1941, when the war between Germany and Russia had broken out. Ladies and gentlemen, their fate was dreadful. Persecuted by Nazis, and beaten by them, humiliated **[21:00]**, they were too exhausted, after arrival [...], they were too

exhausted. And now gypsies: two gypsy families arrived: the Roma and Sinti. And they were described by Nazis as 'anti-social' and 'useless', because they were moving between places all the time. And ladies and gentlemen, Jews were described by Nazis as 'no humans'. Gypsies shared the same fate. And at the end of the war they were killed in gas chambers **[21:30]** like Jews, the same fate. The biggest overall victims of this place, it is the European population of Jews. This estimation how many European countries: even from Norway. We can see pictures over there. So, before deportation, Jews were supposed to wait in special places. They were separated from society there. Jews from the west were supposed to wait in so-called 'transit camps', like Drancy next to Paris; Jews from the east, Polish, Ukrainian **[22:00]**, in so-called 'ghettos', like Lodz Ghetto, Warsaw Ghetto. Ladies and gentlemen, fate of Polish Jews held in ghettos was dreadful; epidemics of typhus, diarrhoea. Many of Polish Jews, of Warsaw Ghetto for example, they were dying in ghetto streets. They were too starving, too thirsty. So we can say for sure many of Polish Jews have never seen Nazi death camps. They died in ghettos before arriving at these places **[22:30]**, the death camps. Ladies and gentlemen, west European Jews, Dutch, French, Italian, they had never heard about Auschwitz before. That's why it was much more easier to deceive them. West European Jews were told **[23:00]**, Nazi guards told them: 'Jews, you are resettled. You are going to start new life in the East. Don't worry, you will be working for us'. It was a lie, but many of Jews to the end of their life believed that. And if we enter, on the right you can see transport conditions. Jews were supposed to get on trains in occupied countries, and they were deported to Auschwitz like animals, in cattle cars. Usually eighty people in each wagon at once, usually **[23:30]**. They were not given during the journey any food, any water, they had no chance to get off to use, for example, toilet. They were thirsty, tired; they could be pregnant, disabled. So many of them died on the trains, of course. After arrival, Jews were supposed to put away their bags, to put bags on the railway. And you can see middle of the picture truck. This truck was supposed to wait for the bags. Bags were stolen by Nazis. You can also see **[24:00]** two buildings in background: chimneys. These were two biggest gas chambers and crematoriums. Jews were hurried up by Nazis. They had no time to think what is going on in the camp [...] and divided straight away, quickly, into two smaller groups. In the first line men. In the second line, as you can see, women and children. And anybody who was still alive was supposed to wait for selection. Ladies and gentlemen,

selections **[24:30]** were carried out by Nazi doctors, criminals. It was, of course, scary moment for Jews, not to mention wartime. Jewish fate was totally uncertain. They were persecuted in ghettos, killed, humiliated, beaten. Many of them lost in ghettos family members: wives, children. That's why they didn't want to leave these who were still alive in the ramp. They began to cry, scream, but Nazis guards, these guards, told them **[25:00]**: 'This is a war camp. Now you are tired, you are exhausted, now you are going to take a bath. Showers are waiting for you. After baths you will meet again your fathers, brothers, wives.' Of course, it was lie. Most of them had never met again each other, never. You can see pictures on the wall, taken in the second section of the camp, in Birkenau, in 1944. It is a paradox of history. The last one and the biggest group of Jews was killed in here at the end of war **[25:30]**, Hungarian Jews, in the photographs. At that time, Americans were in Normandy, in France, D-Day operation. Russians were on the east, liberating eastern part of Europe. Couple of months later war was over, and these Jews were being killed at the same time. We don't know still, after seventy years, why Nazis wanted to kill them at the end of the war, despite the fact they knew that war was going to be over. At that time one of the guards **[26:00]**, his name was Walter, was given the task to take propaganda pictures over there, in Birkenau. And now very important photograph which shows selection. And I want you to look over there, there is a man in the middle, one of the most important figures in Nazi [...], he middle. Doctor-criminal, we know for sure his name was Heinz Thilo. He committed suicide; he was never caught **[26:30]** after the war. With one movement of his hand, this man, this man, would decide about Jewish fate: life and death. He would look at them. He had just a few seconds to decide who is able to work and who is not able to work, like: 'This man is young, he can work; this man too old, he can't work'. But everybody who was pregnant, sick, disabled, older, children, they said no, she has to leave. From this man's point of view they were totally useless, they could not work **[27:00]**. They were killed in gas chambers straight away, never registered as prisoners. Twenty per cent of arrivals, ten, twenty per cent, those who could work, young and in good health, were saved. And they shared the fate of Polish political prisoners. They were registered and forced to work in concentration camp, Auschwitz. But only twenty per cent. Most of them shared this fate. This Hungarian Jewish family was, at that time, on their way to die. Tired faces **[27:30]** – at that time they had no idea what their fate was. Nazis told them: 'You are going to take a bath'. But it proved, twenty minutes

later, they were killed in gas chamber in Birkenau. At the very beginning of 1942, Nazis killed Jews at Auschwitz I site. We are now in this site, main section of the camp. We are now somewhere here. They killed the Jews in gas chamber number one, the smallest one [...]. But they realised [28:00]: transports arrived bigger and bigger. Greek arrived, Dutch Jews, Italian Jews arrived. They wanted to keep secret. That's why they transport, they decide, to the second section of the camp complex, Birkenau, much bigger and located in the wood. So this site it was Polish village, Brezinka. Polish farmers lived there. When war had broken out Polish men expelled, Polish houses were pulled down. But two Polish houses in the forest were saved [28:30], because in this place houses were converted by Nazi guards into two small temporary gas chambers. In 1943, two small gas chambers in Polish houses were closed. Why? Nazis built four much bigger gas chambers, remodelled: two, three, four, five. On the right there is also plan: Monowitz, a third part of the Auschwitz camp. Prisoners were saved; they were supposed to work for this firm: IG Farben [29:00]. This firm produced petrol. Moreover, in 1942 Nazis built about forty smaller camps, so-called sub-camps, on these farms [...]. Most of smaller we don't see on the map today. They were located, as you can guess, far away, so they were next to Polish mines, Polish stations, factories. So this was saved. They were supposed to work there like slaves, for Germany, of course. And you can see grey area, which embraced [29:30] forty kilometres of land. To compare, it is [...] Polish town [...]. Can you believe that at the end of war, campsite was bigger than whole Polish town?

Claire Griffiths: Can I ask a question?

Tour Guide: Of course.

Claire Griffiths: Where did, did selections happen at Auschwitz I as well?

Tour Guide: At the very beginning yes. But later, definitely most of the Jews left straight for Birkenau. And selections as you can see in pictures were taken at Birkenau.

Claire Griffiths: And selections were only for the Jewish?

Tour Guide: Only Jews were selected [30:00]. Everybody who was Pole, even if he was very old, too old to work, he was registered here and forced to work. Only Jews were selected.

Claire Griffiths: So where did the selections happen in, when they were in here?

Tour Guide: So, in Birkenau?

Claire Griffiths: It was only in Birkenau that they had them?

Tour Guide: At the very beginning, because we have to remember that in Auschwitz also there was selections, but later, when Birkenau gas chambers, very big, were built most of Jews went straight there, straight to Birkenau. The selections were carried out there [30:30]. I will show this place in Birkenau, because there were two ramps: Old Ramp and New Ramp. Two ramps in Birkenau.

Claire Griffiths: Okay, thank you.

Tour Guide: You will see it in Birkenau. And now we are going upstairs, and please keep to our right [31:00]. Ladies and gentlemen, we have just seen pictures taken by one of the guards of Hungarian Jews. But Nazis had never taken photographs of Jews who were being killed in gas chambers. Too dangerous, of course, they want to keep secret. But some prisoners had done it illegally. And now, we are going to see very important, illegal photographs taken by Jews at the end of the war. During [31:30] selections events, Nazi doctors-criminals had chosen the strongest Jews who arrived, tall, strong Jews, and forced them to burn the bodies of victims. Can you believe that Jews were supposed to burn bodies of family members killed? They were called as the *Sonderkommando*: special secret work team. And these photographs which you see on the wall were taken by them, by Jews who was forced to burn bodies [...] [32:00]. And these shows women, led to the gas chamber naked in Birkenau, five minutes before they were killed. The second picture behind you, in the background: burning bodies in the wood. They were taken most likely by Alex. He was a Jew. He was supposed to burn bodies like these guys were, but he was also member of the camp's illegal, secret resistance movement. When they gave him a camera he took a risk, he took them. They were smuggled out of the camp site and sent to [32:30] Kraków city. They were supposed to be sent to the West on another transport. Why? To tell the world what was happening here. Ladies and gentlemen, at that time, nobody on the West was to believe that something like this could happen in centre of European civilisation, nobody was to believe them, believing him. And now we're going to see model of gas chamber and crematorium number two in Birkenau. I want you to come a little bit closer. Alright [33:00], in model we can see huge undressing room. In undressing room there were benches, propaganda inscriptions on the wall, like, for example inscription: 'To take a shower, enter this section', to mislead Jews to the end of their life. Even, can you believe that, numbered handles to put clothes there. So when Jews were naked, they went to next room, on right in front of you: gas chamber, also underground. Gas

chamber looked like, we know for sure, like a typical, innocent **[33:30]** shower room: water pipes, fake showers, also white plasterwork and special lamps, doors. Over two thousand people could die at once there. So when gas chamber was filled up, SS guards closed the door, and then a special guard, he has a mask on his face, he stood on the roof of gas chamber and he dropped poison, Zyklon B gas crystals, through the openings. Openings were in the roof and below **[34:00]** openings, indoors, we see in model special piles. Above piles there were openings in the roof. Guard stood on the roof and he dropped poison crystals through these openings on the roof. Ladies and gentlemen, Jews were indoors. They had been suffering, not suffered, had been suffering long action for about half an hour – unbelievable human suffering. They were crying, screaming, scratching the walls, gasping for the air, and begging for mercy **[34:30]**. But that time there was no, there was nothing more they could do, in fact. The door closed very tightly. After about more or less half an hour everybody was killed. They died because of lack of oxygen, suffocation. And afterwards, when everybody was killed, doors opened and Jews who were supposed to burn bodies went to work. They were supposed to put the bodies into the special lift, elevator, in the middle, and transport the bodies to the higher level **[35:00]**, the ground floor level. You can see crematorium, five ovens. Bodies were put into the oven and burnt, with coal, wood-coal, to make it faster. It took about twenty minutes time to burn the bodies at once. And now we're going to see how gas looked like. Poison crystals stored in cans, like this can in showcase. And Höss, he was the commander of the camp. After the war **[35:30]** he was caught. During trial, he said: 'Well, to kill about one thousand people we needed usually about five, even seven kilos of these poison crystals', produced by firm [...], we can document. This German firm earned big money. Profits were huge at the factory – death factory. In 1945 Russians entered. They found a lot of empty cans left **[36:00]**. Many were full. Can you believe that to deceive world, propaganda [...], Nazis stole cars from Red Cross organisation, humanitarian organisation, and this gas were delivered in Red Cross trucks. It is irony. Now in next room please do not take photographs, very touching exhibition **[36:30]**. I have just told you that the strongest Jews were supposed to burn bodies. But before they burned bodies they were supposed to remove gold teeth from mouths of victims. The second task: cut the hair of dead women. In 1945 Russians liberated Auschwitz. They found seven tonnes of hair left in the grounds, seven tonnes. What you see now is original

human hair [37:00]. We know for sure this hair contains gas, so it belongs to Jews who were killed in gas chambers. What hair was used for? Ladies and gentlemen new, modern, scary kind of crime: industrial crimes. So everything was used like in factory, even parts of the body. So hair was cut, it was dried in attic of crematorium and later packed into bags. And bags of hair were sent to Germany [37:30] and sold to firms that produced textiles. And these firms produced, for example, socks for [...] for soldiers, blankets, mattresses, even [...]. And this, for example: hair-cloth. Found after war in one of the factories. And we know for sure, it was proved that this hair-cloth was made of women's hair. Most likely these were killed in Birkenau gas chambers [38:00]. So we can see everything was used: hair; gold teeth removed, melted down, turned to gold and sold; even human ashes. Human ashes were used, for example, to fertilise the fields of the SS guards. And now we're going downstairs and please keep to the right [38:30]. And now we're going to hear [39:00] what happened to bags of the Jews. They were also used. Ladies and gentlemen, Jews who arrived, they could take themselves bags [39:30], one each, weighing no more than fifty kilos, even less. If I knew about this kind of limit I would take myself, for sure: my best clothes, my money, my boots, this stuff. Why? They were told they were to be resettled. They took the most important items. It was of course Nazi plan: let's plunder them. From behind you: when Jews were being killed, at the same time huge piles of bags were put into the trucks and transport on trucks [40:00] to special warehouse. And behind you, so next to me, there is the photograph taken by Americans. American government knew about the camp. Polish people told them, illegally, during the war. So Americans took photographs when Hungarians arrived at the end of the war. First warehouse, smaller, next to Auschwitz I site, and the second warehouse, much bigger, [...] in Birkenau. The warehouse was called by prisoners as being *Kanada*. Why *Kanada*? [40:30] It was rich country at that time, so for prisoners warehouse was very rich place, like Canada is: symbol of wealth. Why Americans had never bombed gas chambers? They bombed only chemical factory eight kilometres away, because population of Birkenau prisoners held in barracks was around, at the end of war, one hundred thousand people, and they didn't want to kill them [41:00]. It has been a discussion for seventy years, if American army was able to bomb or not to bomb, the question is. We don't know still for seventy years. So, what happened to that warehouse? There's a photograph, also taken by, by guard. And special prisoners chosen by guards for this [...] were supposed

to sort items. They would be doing that for all day and night long **[41:30]**, under the supervision of guards. Gold, money, jewellery, this was sent to bank in Germany, and item, items like clothes, shoes, utensils, glasses, suitcases, all of good quality were sent to German ministries and government departments, German soldiers, [...] members, air force members, guards employed in death **[42:00]** and concentration camps, and their wives, to Germans employed by firms and factories. These possessions were sold to Germany. At the end of war, when Hungarian Jews arrived, biggest of killed. About two thousand people were supposed to sort items all the time. That's the [...]. Let's look behind you. In 1945, just a couple of days before liberation, Nazis destroyed warehouse on the Birkenau site **[42:30]**. They wanted to erase crimes. Now we're going to see very, very touching **[43:00]**, touching exhibitions in here. We are going to see original, personal Jewish items, found by Russian soldiers at the end of war. So every item is original and every item here belonged to Jew who was killed in camp. **[43:30]** So, we can see glasses, and in front of you also Jewish prayer shawls. Jewish men used to put these shawls onto the head, onto the shoulders, during prayers. **[44:00]** Even prayer shawls were stolen and used as rags. I have just told you that definitely most of items were shipped to Germany. But at the end of the war Nazis realise that Russians were very close to the camp site. They were approaching very fast. So Nazis had no illusions they could win the war. That's why they decided to escape, and that's why small part of items was left **[44:30]** by them in warehouse and found by the Russians after liberation. This place teaches every day about human dignity. The weakest: people who were disabled, sick, older, weak, disabled. They had no chance to survive. Described as useless. **[45:00]** And now a very chilling, one of, definitely the most touching showcase in here. [...] When Jews were killed, items like these were sent to Germany and they were given to German soldiers, army, who lost hands, legs [...]. So new hand, new leg, giving them to soldier **[45:30]**. I think **[46:00]** to myself every day that I have similar tools today in my kitchen. They look very similar to each other [...]. So now we're going upstairs and please keep to the left **[46:30]**. We can say that Nazis were masters of propaganda: so Red Cross trucks to deliver gas in; they were **[47:00]** 'resettled'. And, before deportation, Jews in the west were also told 'Jews, write your names on the suitcases, so that you can find them in camp.' Why? To keep them calm, which is [...]. They wrote names, surnames, number of transport, even date of birth. There's a very touching suitcase in the middle of this pile, if you

come closer. It belonged to Peter Eisler **[47:30]**, and you can see that he was born on March 1942, during war. Too young to work. Peter Eisler suitcase in the middle, he was born on March 1942. **[48:00]** Ladies and gentlemen, it was forbidden that Nazi guards employed in this place. They had been stealing items all the time, even toys, dolls, of Jewish children killed. As you can guess, they gave them later to their wives **[48:30]**, family members. About two hundred thousand children arrived. Most were Jewish, and they were killed straight away. I want to ask now: what had they done? Nothing. From Nazis point of view **[49:00]** they were dangerous animals, for Germans. State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau **[49:30]**, Oświęcim, has got today restoration department, and have got today about eighty thousand shoes. I know that's a lot of shoes but it is only small part of all the shoes [...]. Shoes were given to members of German organisations, like resettled Germans, and [...] members, and a [...] were given even to prisoners of Nazi concentration camps **[50:00]**, so everything was used. **[50:30]** Please, turn left. I'll wait everyone here. **[51:00]** Now in last one room, you're going to see brushes. Brushes were given to Nazi staff like guards in death and concentration camps, soldiers. And in last one showcase next to window there's some [...] original packages **[51:30]** of shoe polish, shoe polish in how many European languages, how many names? **[52:00]** Some brushes. In the left one showcase next to window, shoe polish. **[52:30]** We have just now heard what happened to most arrivals, eighty per cent of Jews were described as unfit for work, killed straight away. And now we're going to hear what happened to twenty per cent of these who could work, Prisoners Life **[53:00]**. We're going to see now block number six. So who could be a prisoner of Nazi concentration camps? All political prisoners, most Polish political, also these Jews [...] in prisons [...]. They were shaven, they were given new clothes, striped pyjamas, and they were supposed to work in **[53:30]** here for all days long. And now we're going to see how like, like a concentration camp. Ladies and gentlemen, how many prisoners **[54:00]** could be [...] in Auschwitz-Birkenau camp? So all together about four hundred thousand people. How many of them survived? Half; two hundred thousand survived war. We can say they were saved, they were the lucky ones. But ladies and gentlemen in this place nobody was the lucky one [...], nobody. People who were held in Nazi concentration camps they were all the time beaten by guards **[54:30]**, cursed by guards, humiliated by guards. They could be shot by guards anytime, any camp street, without reason for it. And if you look over there, there's a painting by a man who

survived. Sometimes new prisoners, they [...], and Nazi guards and prison guards told them: 'Prisoners of Auschwitz, you are bloody criminals. Remember that. This is not a holiday. You are now in Nazi **[55:00]** concentration camp, place of death. The only one exit for you is exit through crematorium chimneys'. Metaphor – they were supposed to die, of course, not in gas chambers, but a slow, slow death for all of that, a very hard camp life. If you can bear to your right [...] and make the price of everything [...] for shower room. In shower room you see **[55:30]** barbers at work and barbers shaved all hair from the body for [...] with blunt razors. This is [...] at a moment [...] in the background, showerheads would spray scalding hot and ice water on new, scared prisoners and everyone who ran away from the water he was beaten by guards, harassed all the time. So all the time prisoners were called here as 'bloody criminals', 'bloody, stupid criminals' **[56:00]**, despite of fact many of prisoners were very well educated, police officers and the church, and they were called in here as the 'stupid bloody criminals'. And if you look the prisoners were given new clothes, striped pyjamas. In fact striped pyjamas were not new, they were dirty with dirt, dirty with excrement and dirty with lice. Why? Taken from the dead prisoners. There's also registration, now photographs taken **[56:30]** by Nazis to make identification here and the second part, registration, and you see pictures which show survivors after war. Ladies and gentlemen Auschwitz-Birkenau was the only one Nazi concentration camp which people were tattooed in. If you have ever met survivor with a number tattooed, he was for sure held this place. So tattoo it was a holding camp number, tattooed usually in here, on to left forearm **[57:00]** with a needle and special black ink. And since that time prisoners became only numbers, just numbers, they were deprived of names, surnames. The worst, of course, humiliation, personal identity. If somebody died they're replaced by next number and so on and so on: death factory. And [...] that prisoners were supposed to wear also special marks, triangles, and there were many colours and each colour marked category **[57:30]** of prisoners. Red colour, political prisoners, most Polish political prisoners, which you can see there. Green triangle, criminals like gypsies, anti-socials, a few Soviet soldiers. Pink: homosexuals also imprisoned. Most homosexuals of Auschwitz, German homosexuals, they were described by Nazis as 'anti-social'. And violet **[58:00]**: Jehovah Witnesses. Why they were imprisoned? They were described, so in fact Jehovah Witnesses refused to be soldiers in German Army, that's why they were held in concentration camps. And the

Jews, well they were supposed to wear yellow David star. In front of you original camp clothes, striped pyjamas. On left see male clothes, in front of your male. Men received one pants, shirt, trousers and coat. There were very few coats **[58:30]**. Ladies and gentlemen in winter they of course suffered because of the cold, unbelievable suffering. They had only one clothes, they were supposed to sleep at night in the wet, cold clothes. Two days of rainy, snowy weather they get pneumonia and died. We can see also shoes, Dutch type wooden clogs, very heavy clogs, unsuited. Not to mention ten hours of very hard physical job in this kind of a shoes **[59:00]**. They get very sore, once they died straight away. In the summer, of course, overheating. So this clothes, shoes could kill, could kill them any time of the year in fact. Excuse me, what happens here is we go right. Ladies and gentlemen we are going to see **[59:30]** these photographs in corridor in moment. First of all room number two: Starvation. So now you are going to see how prisoners looked like after a one month of being held in this place. **[60:00]** Ladies and gentlemen, one of the survivors, Polish writer Tadeusz Borowski, he committed suicide five years after liberation, but before he died he wrote, 'People **[60:30]**: you in free, independent world who have never been held in any Nazi concentration camp, do you know what real hunger is, our hunger? When one man looks at another man as if he wanted to eat this man, it was our hunger. We were so poor, so hungry, we wanted to each other in this hell'. And you can see the pictures from our prisons, they were taken by Russians at the liberation of the camp in 1945. Can you believe **[61:00]** that at that time they were under intensive medical care, how they look like, like a skeletons. Polish lady: twenty-five kilos; Belgian Jew: thirty-five kilos; and this Dutch Jew: scary twenty-three kilos; former prisoners. Ladies and gentlemen it was very, very difficult to survive Auschwitz, because usually people could receive daily in Auschwitz one thousand and half calories daily **[61:30]**. They were supposed to work very, very hard physical job. They were weak, [...] exhausted, they died straight away. And there is a model that shows daily portion of food, what prisoners were given to eat daily. So three meals per day. In morning, breakfast: black coffee, only cold the coffee, unappetizing, watery liquid. New arrivals as you can guess didn't want to eat it. The second meal, during the break **[62:00]** in the afternoon: soup vegetable or meat soup, water, sausage, potatoes, everything spoilt, rotten, undelicious, stinking. And third meal in, in evening: bread and slice of margarine. Ladies and gentlemen, as I've told, everything was dirty, stinking, spoilt rotten. New

prisoners after two days, therefore two days after arrival, they didn't want to eat it but afterwards they realised **[62:30]** they had been spending all days long in here working and thinking all the time about food, obsession of people. At the end of life they look like those captive shots. They were lying on the ground and doing with their heads, look at me now please, just like that. They were moving their heads this way, that's why they were called by prisoners as Muslims, because they look like Muslims during prayers. They had only one thought in mind **[63:00]**: 'I want to eat something before I die'. And now were' going to see paintings by paper artist, Polish man who suffered here. We're going to see how looked daily life in Auschwitz. Ladies and gentlemen **[63:30]**, 4am o'clock, 4am they started. No mercy. Fell to the ground, cold wake up. You were beaten by guards, hurried up all the time. Just a few seconds to use toilet in morning, and in front of you a very important picture shows distribution of meals. And ladies and gentlemen, those men on the right with the armbands, description [...] **[64:00]**. He was a special prisoner supervisor, so-called *Kapo*. *Kapo* was the name of security guards, prisoner, because he was supposed to how, help, he was supposed to help guards how to control prisoners in barracks. So a *Kapo* was a privileged man, he performed duties. For example, the *Kapo* was supposed to distribute meals and count people. At very beginning most of special prisoners, these were German criminals like thief **[64:30]**, very brutal men. They even killed people like guards did. And after breakfast people were counted by guards and led out to work. And where they worked? In the very beginning they were supposed to extend Auschwitz I site. They were building buildings for new arrivals. Later they built Birkenau camp, barracks in Birkenau. They were employed in mines or stations in this area. Also in warehouse, even gas chambers in Birkenau **[65:00]** were built by them. Of course money was sent to Germany, to German companies. Many times people were supposed to work even to ten or eleven hours per day, without any [...], and heavy objects like wood, which they carried, crush them and they died. SS guards would shoot at any men that working here. At about 5pm o'clock they returned to the camp. Many of them had never returned **[65:30]**, they were shot or too exhausted to go on. And in this one small room, about 9pm o'clock how many slept? Ladies and gentlemen, in this one room altogether about two hundred prisoners slept, can you believe that, this small room? They were supposed to sleep on the floor, in three rows of mattresses and usually they were able to sleep only on their side, one side of this mat because the

room was overcrowded **[66:00]** all the time. Can you believe that in this one building even more than one thousand people could sleep at once? And now pictures in corridor. They were taken by Germans to make identification easier during registration. On the right Jewish, of course these Jews who could work, those registered. And on the left Polish political prisoners. I want you to compare **[66:30]** their professions. Doctor, paramedic, painter, artist, teacher, lawyer, clergyman, clergyman, engineer, teacher, teacher, doctor: so educated Poles. Poland was supposed to be a stupid country, easy to control, a country of less educated slaves. I want you to compare now two dates from **[67:00]** picture: first date of arrival the second date of the death. Let's look how long people lived. Typical prisoner after arrival who lived one, two may be three months only, that's all. These were employed outdoors. They died because of the weather, very, very bad. In 1942 first train **[67:30]** had [...] arrived. So male prisoners, and these were Jews who could work, who were took of Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, Yugoslavia, also gypsies. Women died in Auschwitz straight away, very fast. You can see fear in those eyes: Women were crying [...] they missed **[68:00]** husbands very much, family members. I'd like to compare dates: this lady lived two months; this two months; one month; and this, who is older, she lived only two weeks. Women were held in Birkenau we're going to see their barracks in Birkenau. **[68:30]** Ladies and gentlemen, in a moment you're going to hear what happened to children, definitely really one of the darkest parts of our human European history. **[69:00]** I want you to move closer. The museum estimated that even more than two hundred thousand children and youths could be deported. Most of them, these were Jewish children. They had no opportunity for life. They were killed in those chambers straightaway, too young to work. There were also gypsy children **[69:30]**, eleven thousand; Polish children, two thousand, around; and Ukrainian; and also Russian. All the children who arrived were like political prisoners, and they were registered as this. And they were supposed to work in the camp. Also refugees who were older, teenagers, if they could work they were saved. But they shared the same fate as adults, they worked them very hard, they could be shot by guards, they were starving, they died straightaway. I want you **[70:00]** to enter. There is a girl in the middle, Polish political girl, fourteen years old [...]. Let's look up there. She had blood on her mouth. She was beaten by guard during registration. She was killed by phenol injection, poison, to the heart later. Her, her mother was killed in Auschwitz a couple

of months later. If you look up there, that is so. In camp worked doctor in Joseph Mengele he was called the 'Angel **[70:30]** of Death'. This doctor had one insane mission. He wanted to prove insane theory that Germans was the best nation in the world, super humans. To prove it he had chosen during selections in ramp in Birkenau, Jewish twins, gypsy kids by [...] girls, dwarves, these who were disabled. They were taken away from mothers and standing for hours in Birkenau in barracks, in cold barracks naked **[71:00]**. They were crying, screaming, didn't want to be touched by doctor. Very painful experiments. Mengele drugged their eyes, he wanted to test their blood, and afterwards killed most of the kids. 1945 Russians entered. They found seven thousand prisoners. In that group there were about six hundred children liberated. These are children, can you believe that? There was girls may be fifteen year old like old lady **[71:30]**. Most of them had no place to return to, their parents were killed in gas chambers. In first row, in here, you can see two Jewish twins: Miriam and Eva Moses. They recognise themselves after war. One of them this, she's still alive [...]. Why they survived? Because many of liberated children, these were twins. Mengele worked in here till the end of war. He escaped only just **[72:00]** a couple of days before liberation, he took all the documents. He escaped to South America. He died in Brazil in 1979 because of a stroke. Never caught after the war. And now we're going to see block number eleven, last one at the end of this street, called as the 'Block of Death'. **[72:30] [73:00]** Ladies and gentlemen, block number eleven is called by the name **[73:30]** 'Block of Death' because it was a prison. In this camp prisoners were held, prisoners who were described by Nazis as especially dangerous, for example, prisoners who were members of the camp's illegal, of course, resistance movements. So Polish lawyers, politicians, soldiers, they organised uprisings and prisoners' escape. And also these prisoners who broke the rules: sometimes escaped, somebody who stole bread **[74:00]**. So these prisoners were locked in basements, in special punishment cells. And later definitely most of these were held in block eleven [...], and shot in this quarter and left next to so-called 'Execution Wall. Next to the execution wall there were also shot a selection of Polish people from the south. Why? There were accused of illegal activity against Hitler. There was no place in prisons **[74:30]** at the time, overcrowded. They were transferred to Auschwitz and they were supposed to wait in this block number eleven, on the ground floor, for special Nazi police court. This Nazi court [...] investigation, trial, put to death by shooting most of them. And whole Polish families

could be shot there, next to wall, because from Nazi's point of view they're like dangerous enemies of the Germans. We're going to see wall in a moment [75:00]; first of all block eleven. There is a plan. In block eleven, on the ground floor, there were held Polish people that were supposed to wait for investigation. In the basement were twenty eight cells, most [...] to prisons like Polish lawyers, soldiers, who were supposed to wait for executions in those. Three of the cells in basement, these were so-called 'punishment cells'. Number eighteen: starvation. People were held without [75:30] any food, any water there. They were too thirsty, too hungry. They died after a couple of days. The second punishment cell, number twenty: dark room. No light, people could die because of lack of oxygen, too many at once in a small, overcrowded space. The third one, punishment, number twenty-two: so-called 'standing cells' or bunkers. In each cell four prisoners had to stand for all night long [76:00]. Ladies and gentlemen in the summer 1941 one of the prisoners escaped. He was not caught by guards so that why this kind of a punishment for everybody, like warning. SS guard Karl Fritzsch, he chose ten prisoners from the camp, by chance, it was like: you, you, you and you. And they were supposed to die in this cell by starvation. What happened was that man who was chosen to be killed was Polish man, Franck. He cried out: 'Man [76:30], I've got a wife, I've got children. I don't want to die because one of us escaped. I want to survive Auschwitz, come back to my wife'. What happened was that man who was not chosen, in fact he was a Polish priest, Maximilian Kolbe, he asked the guard man can he replace Franck: 'I'm a priest, I don't have children, I can die. Let me replace Franck'. SS guard agreed, and Polish priest, can you believe that, volunteered [77:00]. He saved the life of a man who had family. Man who was saved by priest he survived war and he died 1995. So many years after the war, in a free, independent Poland. We are going to see priest's cell also. So if we enter. Block eleven was saved, is original. Also inside you're going to see [...] original floor. And please ensure all the time to the left side of this, go one by one. First room on the left, [77:30] so-called 'investigation room': Poles who were accused of illegal activity were investigated there, in very much [...]. Nazi court arrived usually twice a month, very brutal investigation. There was not a judge, witnesses were supposed to prove that men was guilty even if he was not guilty. Here on the ground floor, Poles who were accused of illegal activity were supposed to wait for trial [78:00], you see the box: on left, on right. And after Nazi court said: 'You are guilty, you are going to be shot', Poles were supposed to get undressed. Why? They

were shot naked; clothes were used, given to new prisoners. In first washroom, women were supposed to put away striped pyjamas. In the second washroom at the end of the corridor, we see it, men were supposed **[78:30]** to put away clothes. And there's the gate on the left at the end of corridor. They went out through that gate, driven to the wall and shot naked in front, through this gate. So, at the end of corridor on the left, gate. They went out through that, through this gate, and they were shot **[79:00]** outside. In a moment we're going to see basement. In basement please keep all the time to the left side, and please do not take pictures. In this basement took place first death of Zyklon gas **[79:30]**, you know, experimental death. We know that Nazis built four big gas chambers in Birkenau, but at the very beginning they had no idea how to use poison gas for that. To check it out they used, in autumn 1941, sick prisoners that could not work and also exhausted Soviet soldiers. They held them in cells in this basement and dropped gas crystals for the first time. After one day **[80:00]** they opened the door they realised some were still alive. They had no idea how much of the gas should be used. They dropped more crystals and after two days everybody was killed. So two days of suffocation in here. On right, on left in background you can see cells allocated to prisoners like Polish lawyers, politicians. They were supposed to wait for executions inside. But now three so-called 'punishment cells' that I'm **[80:30]** talking about: first one, number eighteen, of Polish priest who saved life of Franck, with a special Pope's candle. John Paul the Second, Pope was in here in 1979. Priest [...], he became after war a saint of Catholic Church. Number eighteen, starvation of priest, with a special Pope's candle **[81:00]**. At the end of the corridor, room number twenty: so-called 'dark room', no light. Opening in the wall, for the air, could be frozen. In winter people could die because of lack of oxygen. So number eighteen, starvation of Polish priest and Pope's candle. And at the end of corridor, twenty: dark room, **[81:30]** people could die because of lack of oxygen in the winter. Why people could be locked in punishment cells? For everything, in fact. If somebody had stolen bread; if somebody wanted to move – if they wanted to use toilets, at work for example; even if somebody wanted to help to another prisoner, this also punished. And so one time: eighteen, starvation; twenty **[82:00]**, dark room; and last one punishment cell, one of the hardest, just a few survived afterward, so-called 'standing cells'. Little bunkers and in each bunker four men had to stand for all night long. These four gates in the wall, four men passed the gate. They were supposed to crawl like animals in through the

gate. The gate was closed and they had, they had to stand in each cell at once [82:30], each bricked cell. Four prisoners at once stood for all night long. And only this first one is original, this first cell had the white brick walls, walls. So each cell was bricked like this first one. So one more time for you, there is a gate below. Four men passed the gate here, crawl like animals. They entered, the gate was closed and they had to stand in each bricked [83:00] cell, four prisoners, for all night long. And you're going to see that only this first one is original, this first one had white brick walls. So it was bricked. Sometimes they have to stand for next five, even ten nights, one by one. Usually in day they were supposed to work with everybody. So at night they had been standing, at day working [83:30]. [...] completely exhausted, they died. And now we're going out please. Just keep to the left because [...]. I will wait for you on the ground floor to show you the rest. [84:00] If you go straight ahead and wait outside, I will meet everyone here. [84:30] [85:00] [85:30] [86:00] And now we're going to see execution wall. In the middle there is a reconstructed execution wall, it is not original one [86:30]. Original look very similar, it was black during the war, made of sand mulch, in same place in the middle. Original one was pulled down by Nazis. They wanted to erase crimes. On right there is a gate, the same gate you have just seen before indoors. There went out from this gate, driven to wall and shot in the back of the head, naked and barefoot. First women, later men. It is estimated that there took place about more or less [87:00] four thousand executions, and most were shot in here, most were Polish: Polish lawyers, politicians, teachers, doctors, a lot of soldiers. So very important members of our pre-war society. On the left that is block number ten, so there are windows which are boarded up [...] bricked windows. So secret executions. Bodies [87:30] that were shot, dirty and bloody, were put in to special trucks, and transferred to crematorium and burnt. May their souls rest in peace forever. [88:00]

Claire Griffiths: Could I ask a question about the gypsies that were in here? [88:30]

Tour Guide: Yes, but these were in Birkenau.

Claire Griffiths: They were all in Birkenau were they?

Tour Guide: I'm sure they were.

Claire Griffiths: And when he did the experiments, Mengele, did he go there, or did he have them brought here?

Tour Guide: Yes, Mengele, yes that's right. Mengele had, he had his own workshop on Birkenau.

Claire Griffiths: In Birkenau?

Tour Guide: I will show you where. In the gypsy section of the camp, but he was also employed at the ramp.

Claire Griffiths: Yes.

Tour Guide: Because he was supposed to kill the Jews, and kill, carry out selections. But during selections, he had a chance [89:00] to see who was there [...] employed there. I will show you where [...]. Gypsy section is in Birkenau [...]. [89:30] Ladies and gentlemen, in front of you there's a block number twenty-eight, and also three blocks on right were used as a camp [90:00] hospital for sick prisoners. I know that [...] beaten, killed in camp hospital, so of course very ironic name. In these blocks, Nazi doctors-criminals, they'd chosen sick prisoners that could not work, and they put them to death in gas chambers, also later by poison injections to the heart, phenol. And there's block number twenty, the second one on the right, and in this block [90:30] on the left on the ground floor there is a window of so-called 'treatment room', which is ironic name. So one more time, block number twenty on left, on the ground floor prisoners, and were secretly killed if they could not work, they were killed there by phenol injections, poison. A lot of Polish children were killed this way. In the camp hospitals [91:00] there was a lack of medicines all the time. That's why prisoners would prefer to die at work, in the camp's streets, than in the camp hospital. Moreover, you have heard about Doctor Joseph Mengele. He worked in the hospital so it was a very, very dangerous place to be. [91:30] We have just heard that executions by shooting were secret, but in here by the end they were public. Next to the food kitchens, this red building on left is camp kitchen, there is a reconstructed [...] gallows. If somebody escaped, he was caught by guards, driven back to the camp. He would be hanged here [92:00] and everybody, all the prisoners standing in the streets in a row were supposed to see it as a warning. In the biggest execution by hanging ever, twelve Polish political prisoners were hanged over here, one next to another, because they escaped and everybody was supposed to see it that day. Moreover, on the right is a huge square in this street. It was a place of daily roll calls. Twice a day every morning and every evening [92:30] prisoners have to stand here because guards want to count them, checking nobody escaped the registration. The longest so roll call ever took place on July 1940, in the very beginning of the camp's existence, in fact. First men escaped from the camp, who was not caught up by guards. So everybody, as a kind of a

punishment, they had to stand here for all together twenty hours at a time, without any chance to sit of course **[93:00]**. So huge square on the right, this is the place of roll calls. How about escapes? So I think that's really interesting, so museum has estimated that there were about eight hundred escapes, eight hundred, and only one hundred and forty successful. So this means the most people escaped, they were caught, driven back to the **[93:30]** camp and killed. One of the most famous escapes took place in 1942. Four Polish political prisoners employed at warehouse they stole cars of guards, uniforms of guards and also guns. And because one of them spoke language, German language, very well they pretended to be like guards, and everybody in the camp thought they were SS men. They escaped and they were never caught **[94:00]** later. But definitely most of prisoners they were captured, because of the [...] you see on the outside and the barbed wire. During the war it was all the time under pressure, so electrified. In fact it was very, very difficult to escape Auschwitz. Of course there was also watchtower. So SS guards worked up them, and they were allowed **[94:30]** to shoot at any men walking here without permission. We have just seen a fraction of the camp allocated to prisoners, mostly buildings, important sites [...]. But behind this wire, behind watchtower, special section **[95:00]** of camp allocated to guards. On the left, the green building was used as a camp hospital for sick SS men. On right, two buildings: the red one administration, so guards' offices; the second one in background, the green one on right, commander Höss' headquarters. Also secret gas chamber and crematorium **[95:30]**. I know that it can be quite haunting that most of guards they had also children, many of them. They had wives, children, family members, they lived very close to the campsite. And there is an example of that, if you want to come a bit closer. There is a house in background outside **[96:00]** the camp fence. I want to ask you now: do you see this house behind the trees, on the left, grey house, white windows, red roof? In this house on the left lived commander of camp, his name was Rudolph Höss. Höss lived there in the house with family members. Wife Hedwig, and five children. Fifth child, daughter of commander, she was born **[96:30]** in that house. Can you believe that? She was born next to crematorium chimney. At the end of the war Höss escaped and he was hiding in Germany. He called himself as a France man, and was not caught for about one year. But recognised by British man [...] in Germany. And after a very famous trial, Nuremburg Trial, he was only as a witness investigated there, transferred to Poland. In Warsaw city he was

[97:00] sentenced to death by Polish authorities. But he was hanged in here, in these gallows, in 1947, two years after the liberation of the camp. So in a symbolic death, he was killed next to those chimney sites. So one more time: house on left, grey house on left, commander's house. Scary message is that most of guards escaped, they were never captured, can you believe that? It is estimated that there could work even eight thousand [97:30] guards altogether. And only ten per cent, seven, maybe eight hundred of these were judged caught. Many of them took a chance, because of the Cold War cooperation between the West and Russia was very difficult at that time, Iron Curtain. They escaped to South America: Brazil, Argentina, like Mengele did. Many of them in fact never, were never even recognised, by no one, in fact. So now we're going to see very, very impressive [98:00] place. Over there Gas Chamber and Crematorium Number One. The smallest gas chamber; the only one to survive the war. And I have just told you it was Polish army base. So before the war, all these soldiers using this gas chamber as ammunition bunker. It was converted by Nazis into the smallest gas chamber later, and used by them only to 1943 [98:30]. They built later much more bigger gas chambers in Birkenau site. And we're now going to see in those two rooms. First one marked as a 'C' in plan: gas chamber. Even eight hundred Jews died at once there. The second room, 'D': crematorium. There were two ovens that the bodies from victims were burned in. Produced [...], German firm earned big money for that, like in factory. In this [99:00] crematorium could be burned daily about three hundred and forty bodies. And to compare it, just in the model and just in gas chamber – remember that this model shows gas chamber number two in Birkenau, not this building. In the second one in Birkenau, the biggest one, at the end of the war when Hungarians Jews arrived, it went to five thousand bodies being burnt. After the war chimney and also parts of [99:30] ovens were reconstructed by museum staff members. Iron elements of ovens, original, which reconstructed. Why? At the end of war in 1944, Americans bombed chemical factory. It closed [...]. So that's why at the time Nazis decided to use this gas chamber as a small, bomb shelter for guards. It was bomb shelter, that's why it survived war. All gas chambers, chambers in Birkenau were all at once blown up [100:00] by Nazis. So let's enter. On the roof stood guards with mask on face, crystals, and they dropped crystals through an opening in roof. Ladies and gentlemen [100:30]: gas chamber. And in front of you, these are openings in the roof [...]. They stood over and dropped poison crystals through these openings.

Forward and right **[101:00]**. And the second room: crematorium. Bodies were put into the special carts, transferred over to be burnt. Two or three bodies at once usually. **[101:30]** Estimated number of bodies burnt in this building is around seventy thousand bodies. **[102:00]** **[102:30]** Ladies and gentlemen, we have seen place of unbelievable human suffering: many mothers, children, men who were put to death there because they were born as **[103:00]** Jews. And now we're going to see the second section of the camp, Birkenau, and I believe you are going to see the scale of that during the second part, because [...] is seventeen times bigger than [...]. In Auschwitz most of the victims, ninety per cent Jews, were killed in [...]. And we will go to Birkenau in a moment, by special museum bus. Our bus will leave **[103:30]** half past three. So now please stick together because then I will show this bus. And please be there in bus [...] it leaves half past three. And now the break. So you can use toilet, you could also buy books in book store, and afterwards please be in the coach. So now we have to return back equipment. We're not using it in Birkenau **[104:00]**. So please turn off receivers and put them in the green tents in a moment on right. And please stick together, I will show you to our special bus now. Thank you.

-End-