is subjective and has no basis unless an official version exists that reinforces or refutes his testimony with historical reality — whether that version be film footage from liberation day, a movie version, or formal evidence in the form of written records by the Germans themselves concerning work procedures and their agenda for the “Final Solution.”

The third and most important conclusion is that the “liberation film,” in which the participants were directed to act one way or another in front of the camera, has retroactively become a piece of yardstick “evidence” that can undermine or corroborate the testimony of survivors who lived through the horrors but cannot prove it without “formal” supportive evidence, however contrived it may be. Apparently, at the time (immediately after liberation) there was no room in Holocaust memory for the subjective truth of individuals, except the truth of those who were there in a role other than that of survivor — those who were there as liberators! Accordingly, memory of the Holocaust appears to be divided into different kinds of truth:

- The subjective truth of a collective: the truth of a nation, or liberating power such as the United States, whose memory is that of a victorious people (usually based on collected and archived testimony by war criminals concerning their actions, the testimony of liberating soldiers, photographs, and written material collected from the liberated area).
- The subjective memory of absent bystanders, such as local inhabitants who knew — yet “did not know” — what was happening.
- Documentary memory filmed by people who were present — the Nazi soldiers and their collaborators, and the victims.
- The learned or acquired memory of those who were not there but learned about it from survivors at home, the education system, and the media.

I would like to say some words on the last-mentioned category. In using the phrase “acquired memory,” I seek to expand the concept of “shaped memory,” a term that has been used in modern historical research for some time. In my view, the concept of shaped memory is one-dimensional, since it deals with the learned and anticipated result of creating an image for a particular subject. Acquired memory, however, precedes the shaped memory. It might be called a sort of learning memory that collects all its information from various sources, including external factors such as the media and motion pictures, with which it has no direct connection; and other external but more personal factors that directly influence it, such as the education system, family, and environment. The link between the learner and these various factors is mainly characterized by dependence on an authority perceived as professional (teachers, education system, higher education), the receipt of high-level information, and its breakdown into common terms that are clear to the learner (lesson plans, books, other publications, etc.).

This is further augmented by critical reflexive learning that is triggered by internal factors in the learner’s consciousness and subconsciousness, together with personal, collective, and national experiences, and relations with the immediate and extended family that influence both all acquired and accumulated knowledge and the memory that it creates.

Let us now return to Alexandrowicz’s film. The conclusions and basic questions prompted by it are not new to film researchers who work with synchronic materials (which have been edited and reorganized without any real subordination to the concept of time). At the same time, however, the rather naïve weak point of all this is found somewhere at a deeper level, in the outlook that sets collective memory up against personal memory. It is not the survivors’ memory that is put to the test in Martin’s case, but the collective memory. To his chagrin, Alexandrowicz finds that the postwar collective memory does not develop on its own, certainly not in strong modern countries such as the U.S.
Collective memory is the work of a “mobilized Hollywood,” partisans and policymakers, political bodies or institutions that promote a specific agenda.

And indeed there is reason to believe that Nazi Concentration Camps, which Alexandrowicz viewed at the Dachau museum, was a staged production (this is not to say, of course — as Holocaust deniers would have it — that the concentration camps were an “invention” of the victors). The Americans invested a great deal in human capital, appropriate technology, and logistics in order to document visually the ambiguous evidence they found upon entering Europe — evidence the Allies would later use against the Nazi leadership at the Nuremberg trials in 1946. The intention was that the immediate conclusions of the Nuremberg judges and onlookers after watching the film would provide a basis for analyzing and categorizing the filmed segments as “special cases” that would immediately illuminate what was being shown. One possible conclusion after seeing the film was that the audience learned to “remember” how a camp survivor looked.

The second objective of the original cameraman, in cooperation with the Nuremberg prosecution team that put together the indictment, was to process the filmed testimonies into a long, reorganized, coherent text that was not in chronological order but rather told the story of the liberation of the camps as they had filmed it, in accordance with the testimony they had gathered — or, more accurately, the testimony they had selected, edited, and arranged. For example, the question as to whether prisoners were gassed at Dachau elicited the impossible response that makes historical truth conditional on a documentary post-historic judgment. That judgment asserts that without substantiating photographic or written evidence, it cannot be asserted that Dachau prisoners were gassed to death. In other words, without “authentic” evidence gathered retroactively during the liberation of the camps, the atrocity is difficult to confirm — even if the survivors insist that it happened.

To establish the exclusivity of the filmed evidence in the minds of the film’s audience, the final task — necessary in order to achieve the film’s first two objectives — was the mass distribution of the processed document (cut and edited material), innumerable times, to innumerable places, to audiences and destinations as near and as far away as possible. The assumption was that a spectator exposed to the flood of primary information that issued from the camps as soon as they were liberated, without being able to criticize or verify it, would conclude that the filmed evidence he saw on the screen was the ultimate proof of what had happened under the Nazi regime. While watching he internalized the photographic evidence before him as an absolute truth that shaped his entire understanding of everything he knew as “Holocaust.”

The example above illustrates my argument that the American footage of liberation strongly influenced audiences’ insights into everything connected with Holocaust memory. It also indicates the wonderful ability of the photographic medium to translate a thought or a transient incident from the past into an existential concept — to give it, in one swoop, a living form and significance. In the following pages I will examine the way that this filmed evidence became an archetype that has shaped consciousness of the Holocaust and its memories in film, television, documentaries, and the press.


13 Ibid., p. 1.
lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past — which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a citation à l’ordre du jour — and that day is Judgment Day.¹⁴

The U.S.’s preparations for the trials of the Nazi leaders at Nuremberg in 1946 were more indicative than anything else of the tenor of American policy on everything concerning the treatment of Nazi crimes in Europe. The task of drafting indictments involved innumerable obstacles. On one hand, the organizers of the trials had to collect large quantities of evidence and testimony from various places, and put together a list of charges for offenses that did not yet have any legal definition; on the other hand, they had to discourage the efforts of their allies to resolve “the problem” with a firing squad out in the yard.¹⁵ On the deepest level, this search for solutions was expressed first of all in legal language — that is, the way the prosecution charges were presented. Another way that the policy of the U.S. and its allies in Nuremberg manifested itself was in the conceptual thought reflected in that language. In other words, in order to explain horrors that were beyond human understanding to the judges and the world audience — whether they were sitting in the courtroom, listening to the radio, or reading the newspaper — the prosecutors had to be creative in explaining the trial’s purpose and objectives. They had to invent tools to explain the tortuous, tedious legalese that would sustain the language of the trial yet refine its complex concepts into a clear, coherent picture for the audience.

One step taken to that end was to “translate” the indictment into cinematic and visual expressions that replaced language with pictures. The verbal legal explanation, which was clear in any case to a small group of lawyers and other legal experts, and the prosecution’s rather stumbling attempts to conceptualize

the unspeakable, were supplemented by photographic examples of Nazi atrocities, taking certain advantage of the fact that every picture, every sequence, was worth a thousand words. The work of Stevens’s film crews began as soon as American troops entered the concentration camps. Their photographs were unique and unprecedented, having been taken so soon after the Nazis’ departure that in some cases the corpses were still warm. The eye of the camera caught the liberated prisoners in all their emaciated, skeletal immediacy, tucked in their cells, lying twisted on the concrete floors, or slumped in death spasms against the barbed-wire fences.16

In the absence of any other photographic evidence, this on-the-spot visual material was perceived as a faithful, authentic, documentary representation. Moreover, the Allies, led by the U.S., attributed great weight to the documentary film because of its cinematic ability to bear witness, showing spectators a photographic truth that they experienced in much the same way that they did the testimony of the liberating soldiers themselves. For the Americans this was a rare and stable piece of evidence worth as much as the living human memory, which tends to change over time. It is thus no wonder that in the course of its preparations the Nuremberg prosecution team decided to use the film as supportive evidence in the trials, which took place about a year after liberation.17

Historically, there were many reasons for using film as evidence to bridge the chasm between life outside the camps and the reality inside them. On 8 December, 1942, Roosevelt met with a delegation of American Jews who gave him a detailed briefing on what was happening in Europe. In 1943 the U.S. Congress was given information on “the mass murder of Jews — men, women, and children.” The Congress forcefully demanded that the perpetrators of “the unforgivable massacre” be punished in a way commensurate with their offences. To this resolution was appended a report by the Department of State, which described the annihilation “in cold blood” of Europe’s Jewish inhabitants.18

However, U.S. policymakers chose to keep this information from the American public — which was already skeptical about what was happening in Europe after its previous experience with information of this kind in World War I9 — and anything that might create anxiety or demoralize the army and public opinion was hidden from the middle and lower ranks of the army and the diplomatic corps. This approach was promoted by a mobilized press that chose to highlight or downplay news items in accordance with the needs of the state war policy. The gap between the substance and importance of the information and a thorough understanding of these shocking reports was enormous, to the point that two years later, in 1945, the Nuremberg prosecutors had no close knowledge of the investigative material other than what they learned in the course of the trial itself.20

17 Contrary to what might be assumed, the troops and film crews who descended upon the camps and liberated them did not know what had been going on there. The U.S. government and the military command purposely chose not to tell them about the horrors in the camps, although clear, organized intelligence had been relayed to the president, the army commanders, and Congress back in 1942. The media, too, when reporting on the atrocities, kept descriptions of death to the minimum, so much so that no one could have imagined the extent and degree of the cruelty involved. Joseph W. Bendersky, The Jewish Threat: Anti-Semitic Politics of the US Army (New York: Basic Books, 2000), pp. 349–387. Bendersky wrote (p. 350): “Officers and enlisted men alike felt that nothing published to date begins to paint the picture in the horrible terms of the reality as it exists.” This circumstance sharpened the photographer-witness’s observation of the horrors he was coming upon for the first time, and in fact makes him more credible. See also Theresa Lynn, “Confronting the Holocaust: American Soldiers Who Liberated the Concentration Camps” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2000), pp. 48–96.
18 Ibid.
19 Shlomo Shafir, “Roosevelt, the Nazis — and the Jews” [Hebrew], offprint from Gesher 94–95 (Fall–Winter, 1978), pp. 51–60.
The legal advisor and chief prosecutor Telford Taylor wrote in his extraordinary memoirs: "like so many others, I remained ignorant of the mass extermination camps in Poland, and the full scope of the Holocaust did not dawn on me until several months later, at Nuremberg."21 Even then, however, in the interrogation rooms Taylor and his colleagues were forced to deal with Nazi officials who vehemently denied, despite internal and logical contradictions, the extermination of the Jews of Poland in particular and Europe in general.22

A more comprehensive historical examination confirms that this ignorance was apparently not confined to Taylor and his colleagues, but was orchestrated from above, with information intentionally being kept from the higher middle levels of the military. Moreover, since the Nazis’ rise to power, the outbreak of war, and the news of the murder of Jews in Europe, the State Department had shown a notably anti-Jewish obstinacy concerning the annihilation of the Jews of Europe and possible efforts to save them from the Nazis. This was augmented by the deep-rooted, indisputable anti-Semitism of the military institutions and of most American officers, including some in high command.23 The fear of not appearing credible before the international tribunal grew as the months passed between the day of liberation and the trial, and the army proved reluctant to deal with the problem of Jewish displaced persons (DPs).

Under these circumstances, important testimony such as that of Eisenhower clearly could not be considered ideal or very convincing. The decision not to put him or any of the soldiers-witnesses from the liberation forces in the witness stand was a reasoned one, and clearly had been considered from many aspects.24 The prosecution, headed by Robert Jackson, wanted the sort of evidence that would exude unquestionable credibility (and objectivity), yet still be sensational enough to satisfy public interest in the trial and its justification. In fact, they were seeking an effective and colorful means of engraving the events of the Holocaust in the collective memory. Accordingly, screening a film in which the pictures would be worth a thousand words — a half-silent film with subtitles consisting solely of the names of the liberated camps — seemed the perfect idea.25


22 "Nothing was denied more vehemently in the interrogation rooms at Nuremberg than the persecution of the Jews. The prosecution teams knew that an almost unimaginable crime had been perpetrated against the Jews of Europe somewhere in the thick undergrowth of the Nazi terror, but the exact origin and scale of what is now historically familiar as the Holocaust lay largely concealed," Overy, Interrogations, p. 178.


24 Norman Gordon Booth, Jr., “The Holocaust: General Jewish and Christian Media Perspectives” (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 2002 [Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 2002, facsimile]), pp. 107–155, 200–210. Booth’s research reveals a harsh picture of the daily struggle by dedicated Jewish and Christian organizations to bring the problems of the camps and the liberation to the public consciousness in the written media — without much success. Bendersky writes that in the first days of the liberation the American officers and soldiers were very empathetic towards the survivors. They were very shaken by what they saw, and some of them even gave the survivors food and clothing on their own initiative. With time their response and their view of the survivors changed — some saw them, as in the past, as a “problem.” Communists who were responsible for the Nazis’ rise to power; and many opposed the possibility of the Jews emigrating to the U.S. The possibility of using them as witnesses in the Nuremberg trials grew increasingly weak as the liberation became more distant in time. Bendersky, The Jewish Threat, pp. 340–350.

25 The U.S. government saw World War II as a just war in which only an unequivocal victory over Fascism and Nazism could restore order. One way to win the war was to win the propaganda war for the hearts and minds of the world. The best way to imbue the European and American consciousness in particular with a sense of the righteousness of the Americans and their Anglo-Saxon allies was through visual propaganda: motion pictures and newsreels were the tools for rapid and easily absorbed dissemination. Camera crews were dispatched to document every decisive military operation at sea, in the air, or on land, and to bring their testimony home to the audiences who had sent their sons overseas to deliver the message of democratic peace. See Donelson, “The Holocaust in American Film.” In this category we can include conscripted director John Ford’s 1942 propaganda film, December 7th/The Fleet That Came to Stay, about the attack on Pearl Harbor; Frank Capra’s Why We Fight: War Comes to America (1945), which documented the Normandy invasion; Billy Wilder’s Death Mills (1943);
It had already been acceptable for some time in the U.S. to show photographs as evidence in criminal trials. It was only natural that once the technology for “talkies” developed, motion pictures joined still photography as tools for substantiating the claims of the prosecution. Some maintain that the wide-ranging use of visual material undoubtedly ushered in a new age for criminal documentation methods.26

Lawrence Douglas argues that motion pictures were being presented as court evidence as early as 1915. However, there is no evidence that any court ever used a graphic documentary film as proof of criminal acts. At the Nuremberg trials in 1946, the prosecution was seeking a suitable vehicle for showing and judging the extermination of peoples and nations in Europe; and, as mentioned, a documentary film was eminently suitable for describing things that could not be described with the ambiguity of words. At the request of the prosecution the army prepared a documentary film of its own, since no documentary materials were available, time was short, and trial preparations were urgent. Before this film was screened at the trial, James Donovan, a counsel for the prosecution, appeared and explained the logic of showing the film as evidence: “[T]hese motion pictures speak for themselves in evidencing life and death in Nazi concentration camps.”27 As visual exhibits, films can offer incontrovertible proof of a reality that might appear invented or exaggerated if it were presented as written evidence — let alone as oral testimony, which could be attacked and undermined.

In this respect, however, it should be remembered that the use of films as supporting evidence in a trial is likely to be a double-edged sword owing to the unequivocal nature of the medium. Holocaust researchers who sought “the definitive historical view of the horror” in movies, found instead “one representative example” of what had gone on. For just as the film image succeeded in horrifying the judges as intended, so did American trendsetters and image producers manage to use audio-visual aids as an educational backup tool that filtered its messages to spectators according to their cinematic and juridical views.

By means of a “directed” — or more accurately, “sponsored” — film, however didactic, important messages were swallowed up within the existing cinematic and juridical entirety, to the point of being completely overlooked. Thus the Jews suffered the double fate of being first to be exterminated and last to be remembered on the day of liberation and payback. The Jewish victims were always an unseen presence in both the liberation films and later the post-occupation propaganda films of the Marshall Plan — absent from the legal text or the cinematic text, and from the narrative subtext of both.28

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26 Benderley, The Jewish Threat (Chapter 10), notes that the army was not equipped to deal with the liberated camps; initial sympathy for the survivors was soon replaced by disgust because of the sanitary problems and logistic difficulties: lack of food, fuel, and medicines that delayed the provision of good rescue services. The soldiers and officers showed little tolerance for the survivors, and the general situation was unbearable. In Austria, for example, the local police (up until then in the service of the Nazis) were authorized to shoot at will anyone who refused to cooperate with them, since that was the only language “they” (the survivors) understood. The decision not to specify the Jews as survivors in the liberation films was apparently very carefully thought out; in the past (World War I) and even more so in the present the army was not fond of the Jews as a race, seeing the prisoners before liberation as responsible for their own plight (“Because of them we had to go to war”) or, after liberation, as people who “think they’ve got everything coming to them.” Eisenhower’s efforts to explain to the soldiers what they were fighting against (atrocities and deliberate mass murder) were ignored. It was only “natural,” then, that Jews did not feature as camp survivors, given the enmity and expulsion of most of the liberating army. James Carroll mentions that 44% of Americans in 1944 saw Jews as the main threat of the war, 9% believed this of the Japanese, and 6% of the Germans. Newspaper coverage of Jews and their troubles did not look possible. Only in the first month of liberation was there daily coverage of the extermination camps, similar to the coverage of Kristallnacht. Pictures of atrocities from the camps were disseminated and it was reported that “everything that has been whispered to us [the readers] about mass

and Garson Kanin’s The True Glory (1946), which dealt with the liberation of Europe from the time of the Normandy invasion to the Allied entry into Paris. However, the existing film inventory did not contain anything suitable for the needs of the Nuremberg prosecution, whereas the brand-new material filmed in the camps appeared to be just what was required.


5. The Importance of Nazi Concentration Camps

The film Nazi Concentration Camps was directed by Lieutenant-Colonel George Stevens, a well-known Hollywood director before joining the Army Signal Corps, who became famous in the 1950s for such films as A Place in the Sun (1951), Giant (1956), Shane (1953), and The Diary of Anne Frank (1959). Nazi Concentration Camps was, as mentioned, the first visual evidence presented to the Nuremberg court of the liquidation of Jews and of “the other planet” of the concentration camps.

Innumerable studies have been written about the Nuremberg trials and the legal context for screening the films there. However, the vast majority analyze the films and their value in terms of the trials themselves and their contribution to the prosecution’s case. A very interesting aspect that appears to have been swallowed up in the enthusiasm for these legal studies involves precisely the question of the visual legacy of such films and their enormous influence on the Holocaust landscape portrayed in motion pictures today.

A. Lawrence Douglas’s Thesis

Lawrence Douglas sums up his arguments concerning Nazi Concentration Camps as follows: "the filmic landscape we inhabit is very much the visual legacy of films like Nazi Concentration Camps, a cultural universe defined by the production and circulation of graphic images of extreme violence." In his way, Douglas condemns the film and the American director George Stevens, who, before entering the army, had made several romantic comedies produced by Hollywood studios. It is inconceivable, in Douglas’s mind, that for such an important trial a Hollywood-style film would be used to present a narrative as strong as the liberation of the camps. (This argument was directed mainly at the spectators actually present at the trial. In his view, the shock of the film derived from the fact that this was the first time they were seeing the atrocities in the liberated camps.) He also argues that the director, like Frankenstein’s monster turning on his creator, exploited movie-making technique to over-power the plot and turn it into a horror story. (In other words, Stevens went against the Hollywood narrative structure in which technology is subordinated to the needs of the story rather than the opposite.)

Douglas goes on to attack the film and lists additional reasons for its failure both in court and in the public eye. Notable among them is the primary fact that the film in no way conformed to the technical rules of evidence as established in criminal law. In keeping with this failure, claims Douglas, instead of directing the audience towards a specific target, the film scatters responsibility and does not pinpoint the actual culprits. Despite Jackson’s claim at the beginning of the trial that “we have no purpose to incriminate the whole German people,” in Douglas’s view Stevens openly accuses the German volk, by attributing responsibility to the villagers living near the camps who were afraid to stand up to the Nazi regime or who chose not to know what was happening nearby.

In the cinematic context Douglas’s argument is more categorical. In his opinion motion pictures cannot transmit the real, significant narrative inherent in war stories the way that the
novels of World War I did, or the way that even a camera manages to capture death at its finest through a slowly clicking shutter (for example, Capa’s photographs of the Spanish Civil War). Worse, Stevens’s camera proved that it was not capable of giving a reliable, coherent picture of the situation. The consciousness of the camera and the subject of the photograph will always shape a momentary truth for us that is different from reality. The fiction that the film represents moves between real nightmare — close-ups of a burnt shack into which prisoners were shoved and burnt alive moments before the liberation — and a logic and absurdity that have no place in the dictionary definition of farce. A notable example of this appears in a sequence featuring an American formerly imprisoned in Mauthausen as he stands before the camera. In contrast to the walking corpses and bedridden sick seen in the rest of the movie, the American soldier, according to Douglas, looks robust, even bursting with health. He begins to tell his sad story, but presents himself in a way that distracts attention from his testimony, making it meaningless: “I am L.t. (senior grade) Jack H. Taylor, US Navy, from Hollywood, California. Believe me or not, this is the first time I have ever been in the movies.” The burden of credibility, claims Douglas, consequently falls not on the soldier’s enumeration of the different forms of execution at Mauthausen, but on his screen appearance. In Douglas’s opinion, the perverted logic behind this ironic celebration of a first appearance in movies is a flop. The translation of reality into terms of sound, light, voice, and movement failed because it turned that reality into a macabre and certainly irrelevant discussion of a subject that was so important in the trial.

Douglas’s categorical remarks seem to suggest that the showing of the film at the 1946 Nuremberg trials was a mockery of everything connected with our audio-visual memory of the Holocaust. Douglas’s harsh criticism concerning the film’s immediate failure (something that has not been wholly proven yet — on the contrary) would imply that, in the wake of that film, there has not been and should not be any narrative cinema that grasps the story of these horrors and translates it into cinematic terms that are accessible to everyone.

We can agree with this criticism on some points, and argue that there was reason to create a credible, coherent film that would faithfully present the reality of the “other galaxy” as it was revealed on the day of liberation. However, it is a mistake for researchers such as Douglas to use their own particular intellectual doctrine (law) as a basis for judging an artistic doctrine.

First, Douglas’s arguments can be refuted with history. The average American soldier serving in the units that liberated the camps, and a large proportion of the commanding officers, brought their own opinions of Jews from home. Military historians such as Bendersky and Lynn have proven that anti-Semitism was the daily bread of the white American soldier, just like his racist attitude to blacks and unpopular minorities in the US. His service in the refugee camps did not make him much more sympathetic to DPs. He saw them, especially displaced Jews, as a nuisance, scum, or simply filthy. Although in a multitude of respects the American army won kudos for its treatment of refugees in Europe, at the same time it was harshly criticized for the soldiers’ attitude towards the camp survivors — in most cases Jews left surrounded by barbed-wire fences and guards, with no idea of where to go. Testimony by army officers themselves spoke of a quite common derogatory attitude to the Jewish survivors, coupled with an exemplary, sympathetic attitude to the Germans, as though they were the salt of the earth. This was also apparently the attitude of the forces sent by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA).31

It can be assumed that by entering the camps immediately upon liberation, Stevens did in fact capture the “natural” immediacy of camp life without any external involvement that would tip the balance one way or another. On the other hand, Stevens’s camera crews arrived with their own personal, cultural,
and mental attitudes towards Jews, Judaism, the war and its goals, and the reasons that they were there. These views were probably reflected in the subjects the cameramen chose or were ordered to film. The claim that Stevens was flying in the face of Jackson's words and blaming the German people is contradicted by the friendly treatment accorded to the citizens of Germany and Austria by the liberators—a friendliness that, incidentally, was very apparent in the film. The liberators treated the locals didactically, as though they were teachers. The film does not address the question as to whether the local people knew what was happening in the camps, or what exactly they did know. Quite the opposite—the film indicates that ignorance was the common denominator for all.

Second, from a cinematic perspective, Douglas examines and discusses the narrative structure of the film only in the context of the latter's role as a court exhibit. His conclusion, as mentioned earlier, is that *Nazi Concentration Camps* created "a cultural universe defined by the production and circulation of graphic images of extreme violence." However, Douglas ignores and even contradicts the first part of his concluding sentence, where he writes: "the filmic landscape we inhabit is very much the visual legacy of films like *Nazi Concentration Camps*"; instead of developing and trying to advance this sentence, he treats the film as pure evidence, without understanding the essence of cinematic creation and the way it is manipulated, even for legal purposes.32

Douglas was misguided in his expectation that the body of evidence in the film would offer clear and logical answers concerning what was done in the camps. The idea of using a film as legal evidence was meant to explain a historical event that could not be logically interpreted and explained at the time. The film is a first step in the endless task of attempting to understand what humanity could not grasp, since, by its nature, it adds visual information that helps viewers understand what happened.

Contrary to Douglas, I argue that this is a very important film for creating awareness of the Holocaust and establishing it in the world memory of audiences of these films. Precisely because this was the first documentary film of its kind, it is interesting to see film esthetics used as a transferential means intended (a) to arouse feelings (latent and active) concerning traumatic social phenomena, and (b) to describe and explain "dry" historical facts by means of photographic creative thought and a figurative representation of death and human destruction. Other movies that were produced during that era in Europe, such as Billy Wilder's *Death Mills* and the Marshall Plan re-education films, were unable to transcend their propaganda and patronizing attitudes and vanished from public conscience.33

b. A Response to Douglas's Interpretation

The film's importance is expressed in different spheres and times. It is important in the present as the first of its kind, and in the future as a prototype. Postwar movie producers received *Nazi Concentration Camps*, filmed on the day the camps were liberated, and—comparing it with current information from the media, the military administration, and the DP camps that had popped up in major population centers—came to the conclusion that this was the most authentic film to present the human catastrophe that had taken place in the concentration camps. It was also believed to be the most accurate, because of the minimal interval between the Germans' abandonment of the place and the time of the filming. That this interval was brief is suggested by the fact that most of the male survivors who appear in the film show no more than one or two days' worth of beard growth, and later testimony by survivors indicates that their head and


body hair was shaved once every two or three days, to maintain hygiene in the camp. Photographs show that none of them was clean-shaven, thus eliminating any suspicion that the director had staged the scene before filming, or used actors and make-up. Thus, we can establish the time (estimated, of course, give or take two days) that the survivors were filmed by the appearance of their faces and the length of their hair (compared, for example, with the dead, who were all bald).

In addition, the content of the film conceptualized the early, vague news of the atrocities and expressed the magnitude of the disaster in unequivocal, concrete images. At this point, it was not the story that mattered, nor the essence of sacrifice and suffering, but the schematic form of terror and death — the way things looked. Accordingly, the shaping of this information into the historic-photographic iconography familiar to us today in the form of Holocaust films was probably to be expected. This recalls the stories about hell which we have all heard, without knowing how hell really looks. The first person to paint the existential image of hell established how it “really” looks. With that first standard, he implanted the image and topography of hell in the visual consciousness and imagined memory of the generations to come.

The film was also important in another way, connected to the circumstance of its being screened at the Nuremberg public trials of the Nazi leadership: the extensive press coverage and large international audience at the trials, in my view, fostered the later reproduction and imitation of this conscious model of both fictional motion pictures and documentary films. In other words, it can be argued, despite Douglas’s condemnation, that showing the film first at the Nuremberg trials shaped the visual image of the concentration camp survivor. In the process of shaping that image, two types of consciousness were created: a physical, figurative iconography that would provide the basis for many hundreds of photographs of survivors, and subsequently even models of concentration camps and ghettos; and obligatory factual details from the camps and symbols identified exclusively with them. Any serious director seeking historical validity for his or her film will use them: barbed-wire fences, piles of cadavers, prisoners in striped uniforms, death-squad soldiers in their uniforms and emblems, and so on.

6. The Visual Heritage of the Nazi Concentration Camps

A. The Iconography of the Survivor

I must repeat: we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses... those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the “Muslims,” the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception... their death had begun before that of their body.34

The physical appearance of the figure that the audience meets for the first time in Nazi Concentration Camps is alien and strange. The semi-human figures that are seen here do not seem to fit the normal conception that humans have of themselves and others. It dawns on the audience that these figures, who look as though they had just emerged from Dante’s Divine Comedy, are human beings who survived the concentration camp. In short, if that is hell we see, then those are its inhabitants.

The well-known photographer Robert Capa published a general blueprint of camps and prisoners during the Civil War in Spain, in the form of pictures that clearly show figures with shaven heads and striped uniforms who stand at attention with barbed-wire fences around them. However, these images were not studied, nor impressed on the human consciousness as pictures that tell us something about any kind of atrocity. In the

best case, the link between the icon of the prisoner in the Spanish Civil War and his geographical surroundings was associated in the viewer’s mind with “normal” or “acceptable” wickedness—that is, a type of harsh or perhaps even cruel behavior that can be expected to occur within reasonable limits in any internment camp or prison, but no more than that. This scene, which does not change (despite its subjects) takes on a different significance when it is applied to the period of Nazi rule and the “Final Solution” about five years later.

Today, the “landscape” of prisoners and their lives, manifested in ways unique to the prison camp — standing in formation in the camp yard, the striped clothing, the appearance of the prisoners with their shaven heads, and the atmosphere of the camp paths, unprotected from the weather, snaking between lines of barracks, and no color or nuance except the black and white of the striped garments — is exclusively associated with and attached to the description of the Nazi concentration camps and the inmates there, both Jews and other ethnic groups. There are probably varied reasons for this mental adoption and sweeping incorporation of the prisoner experience as such (both before the Nazi concentration camps and after them) into the image of concentration camp inmates.

First, the Civil War in Spain did not end with a war crimes trial as World War II did, with the trial of the Nazi leadership. Thus, technically there was no formal arena (as opposed to popular forums — the press for example) in which to raise and discuss the story of the prisoners. Second, these pictures probably did not become representative iconography of prison camps because those prisoners were considered a small, “marginal” group with specific political characteristics (Communists); their pictures were aimed in advance at a particular audience who supported their political struggle, while conversely they held no interest at all for a wider public who did not politically support the prisoners and their struggle, and who was not interested in the reasons for and circumstances of their imprisonment. Third, in January 1947 the moving pictures, considered in their silence to speak for themselves, were seen over and over again in every place to which the American army had access.

During the trials and the discussions around them, films were shown that had been shot during the liberation of Europe from the Nazis and of the Allies’ liberation of the concentration camps — notably Die Todesmühlen/Death Mills (Hanus Burger, 1945), which had been personally edited by Billy Wilder. At the same time descriptions of the liberation battles and the victory over the Nazis were presented. These films were the work of the American army’s camera and editing crews.

The commercial motion picture industry did not remain idle either, and feature films produced in Hollywood at the end of the war, such as The Stranger (Orson Welles, 1946), used selected footage from Nazi Concentration Camps to illustrate the role of agent Edward G. Robinson, of the special commission for investigation of war crimes. In The Stranger, the agent is sent to locate a senior Nazi, played by Orson Welles, who has fled to the United States, married, and is living in a typical American town. In the course of the movie, the war crimes commissioner shows the Nazi’s new wife footage from Nazi Concentration Camps. The 1940s film audience shared the shock and disgust apparent on the face of the new bride as she saw for the first time the human evil disclosed at the Nuremberg trials projected on the screen — a shock and disgust that deeply influenced her character and responses. After seeing “the reality” outside the movie, within a movie (The Stranger) that examines the reality of another movie, Nazi Concentration Camps, the wife is forced to

35 Weckel, “The Influence of the Film Die Todesmühlen.”

36 German Experience, Munich [No.] 56, War Crimes Trials (Borkum Island), Ludwigsburg, Germany; Munich [No.] 59, War Crimes Trials, Nuremberg, Germany; No. 58, War Crimes Trials, Nuremberg, Germany, 12 March, 1946, Munich, Department of Defense, Department of the Army, Office of the Chief Signal Officer (9/18/1947–1964). Department of Defense, European Command, Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.), Office of the Chief Counsel for War Crimes and Department of Defense, Department of the Army, Office of the Chief Signal Officer (09/18/1947-02/28/1964).

make a fateful decision about continuing relations with her new husband. The judges and spectators at Nuremberg underwent a similar experience while watching Nazi Concentration Camps: they were watching the film from an external perspective—that is, as judges after the fact—yet were moved and deeply shocked by what they saw, as though living through it themselves. This film-viewing was not only the point of no return for the audience at the Nuremberg trials—the loss of their innocence—and the turning point in the fictional life of the actress in *The Stranger*, it was also a watershed for the Nuremberg defendants. They, too, realized that from this moment the course of their trial would change, and every effort to undermine the prosecution’s arguments would end with an accusatory fingernail pointing at the filmed evidence on the screen.38

The concentration-camp footage also clearly influenced the “neutral observers”: the press and other members of the media, and public emissaries from around the world who came to cover the trial and were thrown into a difficult viewing experience. Edward R. Murrow, a senior correspondent for CBS radio who watched the trial, summed up his own visit to Buchenwald in these words: “I pray for you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald. I reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it. For most of it, I have not words.”39 The filmed evidence created a turning point in the learning process undergone by the spectators in both the courtroom and the movie theater: from the acquisition and internalization of the filmed evidence as a subjective model by the director and his crew who bore photographic testimony (their observation) of the horrors of the camps, to the shaping of the “filmed information” and objective memory of the atrocities as “everyone” remembers them.

In short, the internalization of the meta-narrative in the figure of the liberated prisoner in Nazi Concentration Camps—who serves as a visual icon representing the film’s main subject—is essentially the process undergone by the viewer upon experiencing the shock of seeing the film: a strong emotional stimulation. Viewing the film, the spectator accepts absolutely that what he sees is what actually happened “there,” and that portrayal encapsulates for him his “understanding” of what happened in the camps.40

Since no other portrayals of the camps and what happened in them were available—certainly none as strong as those displayed on the screen for the first time before Western eyes—should be noted here that Murrow’s conclusion was preceded by a great deal of field work. In General Eisenhower’s report to Congress in 1945, “Atrocities and Other Conditions in Concentration Camps in Germany,” he wrote: “We are constantly finding German camps in which they have politicized prisoners where unspeakable conditions exist. From my own personal observations I can state unequivocally that all written statements up to now do not paint the full horrors. In view of these facts you may think it advisable to invite about twelve congressional leaders and twelve leading editors to see these camps. If so, I shall be glad to take these groups to one of these camps. Such a visit will show them without any trace of doubt the full evidence of the cruelty practised by the Nazis in such places as normal procedure. A similar invitation is being sent to similar representative British groups. General Marshall requested these representatives to contact both Houses, in the manner above-mentioned, for the purpose of arranging the delegations of their respective members to make this investigation with all promptness possible.” Document No. 47 of the 79th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Report (May 15, 1945) of the Committee Requested by Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower through the Chief of Staff, Gen. George C. Marshall, to the Congress of the U.S. relative to Atrocities and other Conditions in Concentration Camps in Germany.

38 G.M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (New York: Du Capo Press, 1995), pp. 45–49. Unlike my fellow Holocaust and film researchers, I do not include the films *Crossfire* (1947) and *Gentlemen’s Agreement* (1947) in the same category with Welles’s *The Stranger*. Even though they are all based on the theme of the American Jew’s dealings with U.S. culture and its attitude to anti-Semitism, I believe that these two films were a response to what was happening in the army throughout the war and the attitude to both the Jews who served in it and the Jews of liberated Europe. In my view, these two films do not offer any insights into what was happening in Europe, but merely war, perhaps, against what might happen to American society if it continues its negative attitude to Jews. *The Stranger*, in contrast, which does not deal at all with the specific issue of the extermination of Jews, sends the audience a sharper message about events in Europe and the lessons to be learned from them. Its central theme is clear, the examples specific and biting, although brief; this film should be seen as a rather halting attempt to bring the horrors of the Nazi regime to national attention.

audiences naturally internalized the image of the *Muselman* (a camp inmate who had lost the will to live) and projected it on any Holocaust survivors they might subsequently see: emaciated and on the verge of collapse, never a normal, ordinary person. With some caution it can be said that spectators may have been predisposed to this image. Ideas concerning the appearance of Holocaust survivors may well reflect the triumph of the Nazi doctrine that for a decade used propaganda to dehumanize the Jews: both in their lifetimes, as prisoners, and in death, as human shadows. Thus the simplistic iconography of an effaced, lifeless figure, twisted and crushed on the floor of the camp, or a tottering bundle of bones in a pile of corpses, was preserved in the spectator's memory as an abnormal sight — not as victims, but as abnormal subhumans who did not deserve to live.

Similarly, the audio-visual impression of the “human landscape,” as filmed on the day the camps were liberated and shown over and over in different forums, was deeply etched in the world consciousness and quickly inducted into the permanent album of images with which world cinema sought to describe the Holocaust and its horrors. All of us, young and old, “know,” after seeing *Nazi Concentration Camps* and the films that followed it, what happened in the Holocaust and how things looked. The special nature of the pictures, the warped human forms, the dimensions of the concentration camp and all its characteristics are engraved in our consciousness of the Holocaust and lodged in drawers of memory that were previously completely empty — just as in infancy the round shape of a ball, the image of mother, and the like are imprinted upon us. The concentration-camp landscape was so strongly impressed on the world consciousness that when pictures of the prison camps in Serbia were published, a Bosnian prisoner — physically similar to the *Muselman* and seen against a camp background of barbed wire and crowds of emaciated figures huddled together in fear — was compared to prisoners in World War II concentration camps.

The archetypal icon of the prisoner, with the striped uniform, round cap, and hunger-ravaged body, is a staple in every motion picture that tells the story of the camps. But we have also learned about camp life from scenes in the film that could not escape notice. In the Buchenwald concentration camp the survivors meet the cameraman. The audience sees a strange scene: The survivors huddle together before the camera lens, and, as though preparing for inspection, they stand up straight and gaze at the camera; at their feet lies a half-dead, disfigured body, but no one looks at it or pays it any attention at all. The group awaits the instructions of the cameraman, and then, without a word, as though obeying some internal command, they all take off their caps. Was this for the benefit of an important person passing behind the cameraman, or for the cameraman himself? We will probably never know. However, two important things can be understood from this scene. First, the group’s behavior was derived from and conditioned by some habit that they had acquired during their stay in the camp. Second, it was patently clear that removing their caps, no matter who the gesture was intended for, was more important than taking care of a prisoner lying dead or alive at their feet. This picture tells us more clearly than any written law that removing one’s cap before a higher authority in the camp — a kapo, a block senior, a Nazi guard — was a necessary condition for staying alive. Every “educated” prisoner realized that in his or her first hours in the camp.

The scene of the inspection line-up in Stevens’s documentary film is mimicked by identical scenes in many other films, but the most notable of them all, looking like a visual conceptualization of Primo Levi’s descriptions, actually appeared at a relatively late date in a 1989 film by Robert Young, *Triumph of the Spirit* — a challenge to the narrative of Leni Riefenstahl’s film *Triumph of the Will* (Germany, 1934), as indicated by the twist on the title. The movie tells the story of the Jews of Saloniki for whom the “Lager” (camp) language was alien and who had to communicate either by imitating or “learning” from the blows

of the kapos. This adds an important informative level to the
film, which provides a photographic explanation of camp life
similar to what was documented in the 1945 Stevens film. Even
the casting choices, however random they may have been, are
amazingly well matched to the characters of the survivors. Their
appearance when standing at attention, their faces with caps and
without, their height and range of ages, were all remarkably
congruent with those of their real-life counterparts.

We well remember the moving character of Pasqualeino, the
criminal offender from Lina Wertmuller’s Seven Beauties, who
served his sentence in a concentration camp. For those of us who
were never there (probably the vast majority of the audience),
the iconography of the concentration camp appears real and
includes most of the details that we expect to see in a movie
about concentration camps: a vast parade ground, uniformed
guards with dogs, emaciated prisoners in striped uniforms,
kapos, latrines, gallows, and punishment implements. Does this
mean that Wertmuller lived the experience of a prisoner in a
death camp? Of course not; yet we can point with some certainty
to Wertmuller’s sources (the same sources that her audiences
have): they are exactly reproduced from Stevens’s original film.
And indeed, apart from the director’s personal interpretation
of the primary cinematic source and her decision to use color,
sound, and language (Italian and German), the second half of
her film is full of the existential camp iconography seen in the
documentary source.

Diachronically, the development in film of the cinematic
iconography of the survivor and the existential landscape of the
concentration camp inmate can be charted only from the mid-
1950s on. Notable first of all is the choice of the actor’s physical
body type: fragile, thin or emaciated and tall, with sunken cheeks.
Such was the appearance of the young girl in Gillo Pontecorvo’s
film Kapo (1959). However, that girl’s pale face and slight
dimensions were not etched in the consciousness of the audience
in the same way as the anorexic character of Charlotte Rampling
in Liliana Cavani’s famous movie The Night Porter (1974). The
narrative aspect and the cinematic aspect are well integrated
as a film within a film in the scene in which the female prisoner
is selected to serve the photographic needs of the camp doctor.
The doctor goes around with a camera and gives the lined-up
prisoners a “screen test.” Like a director choosing actors from a
pool of candidates, the doctor selects the object of his perversion.
The criteria will accordingly be sex (female), age (young), body
type (slender and fragile). Rampling’s physical appearance makes
her a perfect candidate for two main roles: one in the
reality of Cavani’s casting call, and the other in the “reality” of
the filmed story of the camp. On one hand, she is an actress who
is invited to act the part of the quintessential camp inmate on the
set; on the other she serves the perverse needs of a camp doctor
who is shooting a film within Cavani’s film.

The specifically focused choice of certain actor types some
three decades after the war and up to the present, such as, for
example, in Polanski’s film The Pianist, reflects an effort
by moviemakers to achieve a “historical-visual truth” as they
understand it, and to try to approach the horrors of the camps by
means of an iconographic-figurative (not necessarily narrative)
reproduction that is faithful to the original.

One film that does not fit this pattern is Tim Blake Nelson’s
The Gray Zone (1998), which describes the work of the

47 In the 21st century, the Hollywood obsession for being faithful to the original by
using actors who drop dozens of pounds to fit a desired movie role has become
the subject of a theoretical debate as to whether this trend contributes to or detracts
from the film’s authenticity. Well-regarded actors such as Adrien Brody, Charlize
Theron, and Renée Zellweger have proved that their diets added to the virtuosity
of their acting and to the credibility of the characters they played. Undeniably
they earned the admiration of the Academy, receiving Oscars and Emmys. Caryn
James, “Gaultier to Gargantuan and Back: The Atkins Method of Acting,” New
B. The Experience of Pain and the Sight of Brutality

The cameras taken into the death camps filmed 18,000 feet of film, 6,000 of which was taken to Nuremberg and shown for some 50 minutes. Undoubtedly the director and his crew, dubbed "the Stevens irregulars," tried to capture the moment before liberation, the horror of the day before as it was seen by the survivors. Obviously, however, the liberators only arrived after the Nazis had fled the camp. Consequently, no actual brutality could be captured by the eye of the camera, or described in words. Displayed instead were the tools of that cruelty and the wounds they had inflicted: a twisted leg, a broken nose, an empty eye socket, a split skull. We see the liberated inmates' great cry of pain and relief on the screen, but there is no sound. As a result, the pain observed by the film audience changes from an accessible pain to an imaginative guess at the pain experienced by the survivor. The experience of pain and humiliation is directly associated with the sight of the atrocity, since there is no atrocity without pain. The physical anomaly of the survivors evokes the spectator's own memories of pain (illness, thinness, poor health), which he projects onto the survivor. But the survivor's personal pain is silenced — there is no language to identify him as the member of a particular nation, there is no sound to his story.

Cruelty in its various forms is dramatized for the camera by prisoners/survivors: one playing himself and another in the role of a Nazi guard. Nothing in the background or the camera's range evokes the guard who had stood there a few hours earlier and attacked his victim. The scene, already difficult and patently incomprehensible, leads the audience to draw conclusions about the abuse that took place earlier; to that end, torture implements are demonstrated: a finger crusher, a truncheon, a club covered in barbed wire, a pillory, stocks. From the director's perspective, the survivor is a medium for conveying the concepts of suffering and cruelty. The professional narrator describes to the audience, in fluent English, what it is seeing. In these circumstances, the
neural” narration (a topic to which I shall return) contributes first to the universalization of both the pain and the survivor, without regard to the latter’s ethnic or national origin; in the same measure it separates the cruelty from the German soldier as the national source of evil (since he is not in the picture at all) and universalizes him, too, together with his cruelty and punishment methods in the camp. An example of this can be seen in the portrayal of the non-German kapos in the film as virtually equivalent to the German camp guards; they cannot be told apart.

The film also emphasizes the theme of hunger and the sight of hunger gnawing at tortured bodies. This strong image, recurring throughout the film, has become an integral part of the portrayal of concentration camps, and any description of the Holocaust would be incomplete without it.

C. Color

In the opening scene of the film D-Day to Berlin, a documentary that George Stevens, Jr., produced and directed about his father’s work, the narrator says, against a background of black and white photographs of the war: “This is World War II and this is how we remember it in a black-and-white film.” The scene changes dramatically as colorful pictures from the war appear before our eyes: red blood, green uniforms, camp survivors with their cheeks burned by the cold. Against this background, the narrator goes on to say, “And this is how it really looked to those who were here.”

Stevens Sr. joined the army in 1942 to serve in the US Army Signal Corps. He was appointed by General Eisenhower to “organize the filmed documentation of the war in Europe” from liberation day, from Normandy to Berlin. It was decided at the outset to film this journey in black and white, although not because there was no color film or Kodachrome negatives in use at the time. The real reason was technical. Stevens’s commanders assumed there might not be facilities for screening color footage in every place that his films would be shown, whereas they were completely confident that black-and-white 35-mm cameras could be found everywhere, so Nazi Concentration Camps was filmed in black and white: the anti-modern, monolithic “colors” used by photographers in the distant past. (Nevertheless, Stevens took his own camera and filmed color footage parallel to the black-and-white frames filmed by his camera crew.)

The instructions to photograph in black and white did not take into account that this made the testimony the Americans wanted to bring before the audience/judge more remote. The human brain associatively identifies objects according to their location, color, shape, or the early memory of a previous encounter. To a spectator in the age of color, black-and-white photography clearly evokes photographs from the past. Moreover, the expressiveness of the human horror just revealed and the film coordinates of the camp are terra incognita for the spectators, who were never there; for them the supposedly routine documentation in fact discloses a vision from another planet. The disadvantages of filming in black and white can be considered to create a mental gap between the past and the present. Of course, we must examine the “truths” of the past with the actual tools of the past. If the spectator believes that the past was filmed in black and white because those were the technological options available at the time (as was the case for many Hollywood films from the 1930s and 1940s — film noir, dramas, etc.), then it follows that a film of the end of the war will also derive authoritativeness, credibility, and authenticity from using the black-and-white photography that was part of the cinematic formula in the past that it depicts.

Given that this is a film that received a great deal of publicity, together with other liberation films made in the same mold, the integration between black-and-white photography and a place that is not a place had a very significant impact on the way we

51 Shlomo Sand, Film As History — Imagining and Screening the Twentieth Century (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved and Open University Press, 2002), chaps. 5-6.
evaluate the credibility of photos of the past and remember the Holocaust, as well as on patterns of production and direction that would shape Holocaust fictional and even documentary films in the future.

D. Language and Sound

The voiceover in Stevens’s film is in English, delivered by a professional narrator. In the silent parts of the footage the voices of the filmed subjects are, of course, not heard. The use of sound, as I mentioned earlier, is meant to serve, first of all, the film’s creators and their purpose. The use of a professional narrator’s voice answered the question of “who” (who made the film) and the question of “what” (what was the film’s objective). The question of “why” remained open to interpretation. Only two survivors speak, in two major languages: English (the language of the liberators) in the testimony of the captured soldier from Mauthausen, and German in the testimony of the doctor from the women’s camp who talks about torture and medical experiments there. Why are the voices of the other survivors not heard? Because the survivors cannot speak for themselves? What language would they speak, in a camp where the languages spoken nearly equaled the number of countries occupied by the Nazis. And why could not survivors/victims and guards/soldiers be labeled according to language and dialect?

The film’s audience can only draw conclusions from what it sees on the screen and hears directly from the narrator. For the audience, the absence of the Germans’ “barking” discourse—the commands, instructions, and orders—obscures the Germans’ central responsibility for what was done. In addition, the language of the collaborators, the kapos and their helpers, is completely erased, as is the survivors’ “language of the Lager/camp,” as Levi carefully reminds us in his book. It has disappeared as though it had never been. On the “set” everyone looks the same. In one scene the camera recorded some of the guards at Dachau slipping into the ranks of the survivors to escape punishment.

The narrator tells us this, while in the background we see a group of survivors among whom the camp guards are allegedly hiding. With no language to distinguish between survivor and camp guard, between one accent and another, there is no way of telling the “good guys” from the “bad guys”—since they both in fact look the same, dressed in the same camp uniform, with cropped hair and shocked, anxious expressions on their faces.

It can be argued, of course, that the film’s lack of sound is also a relative advantage. The film is supposed to express its unique truth however it sees fit, and to offer formal evidence of the horrors to which it was unofficially a witness; it must tell the pan-European audience, in a language familiar to everyone, what the liberators saw, and what happened in the camps. The neutrality of the testimony in this case is in fact achieved by the choice of silence, which avoids pointing an accusing finger directly at all Germans, as Douglas argued in his book. On the contrary, the local Germans who were invited to the camps to see what had been happening in their own backyard served as witnesses-spectators of events like the audience in the Nuremberg courtroom. Like that audience, this was the first time they had seen the awful scene up close; they, too, were instructed by the director as to what to look at and from what point of view, and their shocked reaction was similar to that of the film audience. The voices and verbal responses of the “ordinary Germans” were silenced, together with their hostility, so that the Nuremberg judge would not be biased because of anything he saw in common between the innocent German “civilian” and the brutal soldier who worked for the Nazi party machine.

The trend of silencing the Germans and presenting them as guilty (active or passive) would continue in Hollywood movies until the end of the 1990s. This trend has changed since the beginning of the new millennium, mainly in German movies that focus the audience’s attention on the Germans’ sufferings in the war. These movies—for example, Stalingrad, Der Untergang, and Hitler’s Parade—tend to ignore their victims. Another subsidiary trend is exemplified by the comparison of Jewish
and German sufferings in *Aimee & Jaguar*, or, conversely, the portrayal of the Germans as saviors and anti-Nazis in Von Trotta's *Rosenstrasse*.52

The weak point of the film that would be the prototype for later films lay in the fact that it allowed free rein for the audience to imagine both the words of the Nazi soldier and the testimony of the survivor who is supposed to tell what happened. In this context, audience interpretation may be, first of all, a historical-semantic interpretation: It happened or did not happen, since, after all, we have not heard the witnesses and/or survivors speak for themselves about themselves. Otherwise, interpretation could be based on identifying the characters by their accents, a very prominent motif in later Holocaust films, which sought to preserve national-historic authenticity by making actors who were playing Nazis adopt a heavy German accent. The purpose of imitating accents in these films (both the German accent and the survivors' accent) was to create some kind of separation between the victim and the executioner, not only in dress and appearance, but also in sound. At the same time, most of the films dealing with the Holocaust use one international language: English, and English alone, even when the target audience is not American.53

In filming and editing the footage that was to be shown in the Nuremberg trials, this was taken into account, and as a result the survivor had no real identity; the only identifiers were big letters appearing in every sequence to explain where the survivor was photographed and to what camp he or she belonged, and the marks on camp uniforms by which the Germans labeled their prisoners (for example, the letter “P” on the lapel for political prisoners, and so on). By the same token, the audience watching *Nazi Concentration Camps* sees the survivor as part of a persecuted mass with no real identity — a somewhat repellent, destitute, pitiful figure with no explanation for his poor physical state. The solution was immediate and close at hand: In this anomalous and unfathomable image the body of the survivor himself becomes "the body of the evidence" — that is, the confirmed and most substantial proof of what has happened to him. It is the essence of testimony, required to explain itself "in its own words." From the cinematic point of view, the power of the survivor's visual appearance is neutralized by the director's decision not to use the survivor's voice. As a result the survivor's image is a silent, perfect icon that serves his new, compassionate benefactors, the liberating troops; the photographer who commemorates his wretchedness forever; and the mercy of a world that does not want to see such images ever again.

Nevertheless, both the image of the liberating nation and the icon of the *Muselman* disappeared from movie screens with the end of the Nuremberg trials.54 Other researchers have explained why the iconic figures of survivor and benefactor did not appear in either American or European movies for the two decades following the war. For one thing, everyone agrees that the U.S. took an anxious view of the Nuremberg trials, their influence, and their implications for the future rehabilitation of Europe; it wanted to let the dust settle and focus on rehabilitation and

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52 Stalingrad (Vilsmaier, 1992); *Aimee & Jaguar* (Farberbock, 1999); *Hitler's Hit Parade* (Ayer and Benze, 2003); *Rosenstrasse* (Von Trotta, 2003); *Der Untergang* (Hirschbiegel, 2004).

53 For example, the Italian film *The Night Porter* (Cavani, 1974) is mostly in English, as are *The Damned* (Visconti, Italy/West Germany/Switzerland, 1969), *The 25th Hour* (Verneuil, Italy/Yugoslavia/France, 1967), *The Truce* (Francesco, Italy, 1997) which describes Primo Levi's return to his homeland — and the Hungarian *Sunshine* (Szabo, 1999). Although in his first film, *Mephisto* (1981), Szabo carefully preserved a minimal authenticity and put the Austrian actor Klaus Maria Brandauer in the role of the actor who sells his soul to the devil, here the actors who play the generations of the Hungarian family not only speak English, but their origin is demonstrably Anglo-Saxon. The *Plantist* (Polanski, Poland/France) falls in the same category, as does *Amen* (Costa-Gavras, France) — both of them produced in Europe in 2002; yet another example is *The Architecture of Doom* (Sweden, 1989), Peter Cohen's English-language documentary.

renewal. Once the fighting was over and the trials at an end, the U.S. had no special interest in allowing the past to overshadow the future, and certainly not in offering any close support for fictional or semi-documentary film productions. Moreover, the liberation of Europe from Nazi dominance, as captured on film, appeared both frightening and commercially unappealing; in addition, the Americans thought that loud boasting about their role might be considered patronizing and condescending by the liberated Europeans, impairing efforts to rebuild Europe and reassemble it into the family of nations. Even the film magnates who were invited to Europe by the military administration to see the liberated camps with their own eyes did not come up to scratch.\textsuperscript{55} The vision of death and cruelty seemed intolerable, and quite impossible to conceptualize in trivial cinematic terms. After World War II the world wanted emotional relief; it wanted to overcome the economic crisis, and it wanted to smile. The concentration camps were a story that left a bad taste and that Hollywood saw no need to deal with for the time being.\textsuperscript{56} The regrettable decision by the liberation forces not to tell what they had seen also helped expand the circle of silence.\textsuperscript{57} And, in the background, cold winds were already blowing from Moscow.

\textsuperscript{55} Bendersky, The Jewish Threat, p. 350.
\textsuperscript{57} The Lucky Ones: Alfred Airmen and Buchenwald, Dir. Michael Alldor, Canada, 1994. In this film a group of liberated soldiers are taken back to the Buchenwald concentration camp to tell the story of the liberation from the perspective of 40 years later. The veterans were accompanied by their wives. In the course of the film, the horrible truth emerges: All of them kept the horrors they had seen and experienced to themselves. Not one of them told anyone at home of his experiences in the camp. The most crushing response to the question “why?” asked by one of the wives, who had just been told of this sealed chapter in her husband’s past, was given by one of the soldiers: He said he had feared to tell what he saw to those at home because they might not believe him, and that he was crazy.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the visual legacy of post-1945 Hollywood movies that focused on the Holocaust as their primary narrative. These films also dealt with the personal, subjective memories of the survivors, which were swallowed up in the collective memory of the camps’ liberators.

A direct visual link can be seen between such Hollywood works and the film screened at the Nuremberg trials, Nazi Concentration Camps. This link between the footage shot during the liberation of the camps and movies made later confirmed Holocaust movies as a unique genre. The first pictures taken in the liberated camps — the 

\textit{Muselman}, the concentration camp images — became the iconographic prototypes of the camp survivor. These images also conceptualized the reality of “evil” in such a way that everyone could understand what had happened “there.”

The visual images were almost always devoid of sound and color. Few survivors had the opportunity to give evidence about their own experiences of terror and horror. The survivors’ silent testimony was expressed through their emaciated bodies, and narrated in English. This use of an international language made the events universal as well, stripping them of emotion — a conceptual and historical achievement for the liberators, who did not want one particular group (such as the Jews) to stand out more than others (political prisoners, for example). The lack of color was the result of technical reasons; most camp liberations were actually filmed in color, but the footage was distributed in black and white. The resulting black-and-white patterns, however, created a dichotomy of “here” and “there,” turning the camps into another world whose rules, customs, and inhabitants seemed bizarrely extraterrestrial.

From the 1960s onward, once the U.S. had recovered from its fear of revelation and no longer had any need to avoid discussion of or apologize for its massive involvement in the war, American filmmakers continued to use the Stevens 1946
movie interpretations of all the behaviors and norms that had prevailed in the camps — marches, parades, the removal of one’s hat in the presence of authority, shaved heads, the kapo at the head of the procession, striped uniforms, and the like. Thus, the private memories of the survivors were appropriated and turned into the collective memory of first the liberators and then the entire free world. Jorge Semprin, having viewed the Buchenwald liberation film a year after the war had ended, wrote: “These images from the bottom of my soul became strange to me as they were objectified on screen... On one hand I undoubtedly saw myself as dispossessed of those images; on the other, I saw it as confirmation of their reality: I had not dreamed Buchenwald. My life was not a dream.”