



TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT

F I L M
E D U C A T I O N

S T U D Y G U I D E

'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT' STUDY GUIDE

Before the war, Auschwitz, (in Polish "Oswiecim"), was a small and unimportant town in Polish Silesia some 400 miles from Warsaw. It has now entered the vocabulary and consciousness of the modern world and, some say, changed for ever the meaning of what it is to be human. In June 1940 a camp was established in which undesirable Poles, those from the regions of Poland which had been annexed by the German Reich, were to be used as conscript labour in a huge industrial facility. The camp and the linked industrial complex were later known as Auschwitz-Birkenau.

TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT, based on the experiences in Auschwitz-Birkenau of a young Jew from Salonika, comes in the tradition of holocaust testimonial, but is the first major film to have been made entirely on location at Auschwitz. This guide continues with the use of original sources to expand upon the film's historical basis and to discuss the presentation of the holocaust in art and literature.

Auschwitz and the Final Solution

SOURCE A

Rudolf Hoess, first commandant of Auschwitz.

Himmler received me without his adjutant being present and said to me in effect: 'The Führer has ordered that the Jewish question be solved once and for all and we, the SS are to implement that order...The existing extermination centres in the East are not in a position to carry out the large actions which are anticipated. I have therefore earmarked Auschwitz for this purpose.'

From the very beginning Auschwitz was no ordinary work camp; the deputy S.S. officer in charge, RapportFührer Palitzch, later admitted that 25,000 had died at his hands alone. In the summer of 1941 Auschwitz was earmarked to be greatly expanded for the mass extermination of Jews from the occupied territories. It had been selected for its easy rail access, its isolation from populated areas and the physical possibilities its location afforded for concealment and camouflage of its installations. The Auschwitz annihilation camp (Vernichtungslager) was extended on the personal orders of Himmler into the village of Birkenau, for the acceptance of a further 100,000 prisoners. Finally Fichmann selected a site for the construction of the first gas chambers at the camp, for the implementation of the Final Solution. On the 12 may, 1942 the gas chambers received their first victims, 1,500 Jews from Sesnowicz, Poland.

The Final Solution at Auschwitz was always veiled in euphemism, and superficially disguised as a normal Nazi work camp. Many knew what was going on, and many more chose to ignore their suspicions. Himmler described the SS involvement in the Final Solution as a "page of glory in our history, which has never been written and must never be written". Nevertheless, a mass of evidence has remained of what happened along with the testimony of those who survived. Here is a page from the lists of Greek Jewish women arriving in Auschwitz, signed by the commandant of the women's section, Marie Mandel.

- Are there any names you recognise from 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT.'?

SOURCE B

At first there was no need for innovation in the programme of mass killing at Auschwitz since the techniques had already been developed in Germany. Under Hitler's close personal supervision, to carry out what was euphemistically called the "Euthanasia Programme" to kill the mentally and physically handicapped. That programme, just like the Final Solution, evolved from National Socialist ideology and from Hitler's fanatical ideas about racial health and racial eugenics, which he first spelled out in *Mein Kampf*.

This is how one Holocaust survivor describes arriving at the camp. Read his story carefully, and those which follow. If you have already seen 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT', some of what he describes may sound familiar.

SOURCE C

Hugo Gryn was born in Czechoslovakia in 1930. Not long after his bar mitzvah he was sent with his family to Auschwitz.

When the train finally stopped it was still dark and for a long time there was only the sound of engines shunting, steam being released, and from time to time the crunch of footsteps on stones on one side of the train and the hollow echo of wooden boards on the other. For long intervals there was only silence and although the three days we had spent in the crowded cattle-wagon had exhausted us, most people were awake. But there was no conversation or movement. Only a waiting, an expectation and a sense of fear.

Although we did not yet know the name of our destination, we were, in fact, at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The stillness of the night was broken not only by light but also the arrival of people on the platform. We could hear doors sliding open, the sound of shouted German commands: '*Schnell, schnell*' and '*Austseigen!*' My brother and I stood on the case and saw low barracks in straight rows stretching as far as the eye could see, miles of barbed wire fences and curious high lookout towers. In the distance groups of people were standing and moving between the barracks. The distance was too great to make out their features but the place was big.

After a while the door of our wagon was opened. The four of us were last to get out and by then we found ourselves in a long column slowly moving towards the head of the platform. The S.S. guards, still with rifles drawn, faced us in a straight line on one side and on the other quick-moving men with brooms were darting in and out of the empty wagons we passed. They wore striped pyjama-like suits and flat caps made of the same material. As two officers walked towards the back of the train, the cleaners took off their caps and I was astonished to note that all had shaven heads. So grotesque did they look that I concluded they must be from the local lunatic asylum. I had heard or read that the Nazis had special programmes for the insane and these people had to be them.

An inmate whose armband proclaimed him to be a Kapo was ordering everyone to get undressed completely and to leave our clothes in neat piles as well as any hand luggage. It was frightening and embarrassing to see so many naked men. I knew many of them and tried not to look at their bodies.

Soon I was sitting on the stool and a man who whispered to me in broken German - "*Ich auch Jude - I too am a Jew*" - started to cut my hair. He tried to be gentle but the clippers he used must have been used too much. They pulled and I winced. The barber made soothing sounds, got me to my feet when my head was bald and continued to cut the sparse tufts of hair under my armpits and finally my pubic hairs. I looked and felt completely defenceless as did my father who was immediately behind me. Although I was bitterly cold I waited until he was hairless as well. He had thick, wavy and

prematurely grey hair and I could not help crying when I looked at him. He looked away from me and I was sure that he, too, had tears in his eyes.

I was not prepared for the next shock. As we entered the building in front, a man dipped a huge sponge-like thing into a bucket and smeared me in every place where I had just been shaved. The sting of the disinfectant was agonising. My resolve to be brave disintegrated and I yelled, as I had not done since I once fell out of a tree when I was about six years old. Once inside the building we waited until it was full, every man hugging himself and looking like plucked chickens. Overhead there were rows of pipes and when the hall was so full that our bodies practically touched each other, another KAPO gave orders to turn on the taps and a scalding hot shower of water descended on us. Now we were jumping and I wasn't the only one who yelled. But at least the dreadful sting was gone...

We were now inside the camp. As we went past piles of clothing I was handed a pair of striped trousers, a striped jacket, a pair of shoes that had thick wooden soles and canvas top and finally a flat cap. But no shirt or underwear or socks. My father and I leaned on each other as we got dressed. None of my things were the right size. I was glad to find a length of string near one of the piles and could at least make my trousers safe. I also realised now that the inmates we had seen since we got out of the train were not lunatics and that in the last two or three hours I myself had come to look and be like one of them.

Hugo Gryn is now a Rabbi and lives in London.

SOURCE D

Testimony of the French doctor Andre Lettich, assigned to work at Birkenau.

'(There were) two barracks, the men stood on one side the women on the other. They were addressed in a very polite and friendly way: "You have been on a journey, you are dirty. You will take a bath. Get undressed quickly". Towels and soap were handed out, and then suddenly the brutes woke up and showed their true faces: this horde of people, these men and women were driven outside both summer and winter to go the few hundred yards to the 'Shower Room.'

Above the entry door was the word "Shower" . One could even see shower heads on the ceiling which were cemented-in but never had water flowing through them.

These poor innocents were crammed together, pressed against each other. Then panic broke out, for at last they realised the fate in store for them. But blows with rifle butts and revolver shots soon restored order and finally they all entered the death chamber. The doors were shut and, ten minutes later, the temperature was high enough to facilitate the condensation of hydrogen cyanide, for the condemned were to be gassed with hydrogen cyanide. This was the so-called 'Zyklon B' , gravel pellets saturated with twenty per cent of hydrogen cyanide which was used by the German barbarians.

Then the SS Unterscharführer Mall threw the gas in through a little vent. One could hear fearful screams, but a few moments later there was complete silence. Twenty to twenty five minutes later, the doors and windows were opened to ventilate the rooms and the corpses were thrown at once onto pits to be burned.

SOURCE E

A French doctor, Sigismund Bendel, was for a time attached to the Jewish special commando in Birkenau, here is part of his testimony from after the war.

"One day, in June 1944 at six o'clock in the morning, I join the day shift (150 men) of crematorium IV... At eleven o'clock, a member of the political section appears on a motor cycle and reports that a transport is on its way. It is mid-day, when a long line of women, children, and old people enter the yard of the crematorium, people from the Lodz ghetto. One can see that they are exhausted and anxious. The senior official in charge of the crematorium, Herr HauptscharFührer Mohl climbs on a bench to tell them that they are going to have a bath and that afterwards they will get a drink of hot coffee. There is applause... they all undress in the yard. The doors of the crematorium open and they enter the large room which in winter serves as an undressing room. Pressed together like sardines, they realise they have fallen into a trap out of which there is no longer any escape. Nevertheless, they continue to hope since a normal brain is incapable of grasping the terrible death which awaits them. Finally, everything is ready. The doors are opened and an indescribable jostling begins. The first people to enter the gas chamber begin to draw back. They sense the death which awaits them. The SS men put an end to this pushing and shoving with blows from their rifle butts, beating the heads of the horrified women who are desperately hugging their children. The massive oak double doors are shut. For two endless minutes one can hear banging on the walls and screams which are no longer human. And then, not a sound... five minutes later the doors are opened. The corpses, squashed together and distorted, fall out like a waterfall... The bodies, which are still warm, pass through the hands of the hairdresser who cuts their hair and the dentist who pulls out their gold teeth... One more transport has just been processed through No. IV crematorium."

SOURCE F

Station commander, Sobibor

"The transports from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia arrived in luxury carriages with all their personal luggage and the people were convinced that they were coming to be resettled. Their naivety was such that some people from the transport turned to us workers of the so-called 'station commando' and offered us tips to help them carry their luggage. I assume that even when they were led naked into the gas chambers they were still convinced they were going to have a bath."

Now read what Himmler had to say about the treatment of the Jews.

SOURCE G

"We shall never be brutal and heartless where it is not necessary- obviously not. We Germans, the only people in the world who have a decent attitude towards animals, will also take a decent attitude towards these human animals. But it is a crime against our own blood to worry about them and to give them ideals that will make it still harder for our sons and grandsons to cope with them... We had the moral right, we had the duty toward our people, to kill this people which wanted to kill us. And in all, we can say that we have carried out this heaviest of our tasks in a spirit of love for our people, and our inward being, our soul, our character has not suffered injury from it".

DISCUSSION AND EXERCISES

- In groups, discuss your initial reactions to these documents.
- What do the sources tell us about the reactions of those entering?
- How do these responses help to explain how the camps fulfilled their function?
- Why do you think many of the survivors might have been so keen to explain the relative ease with which a death camp operated'?
- Discuss the relationship between sources F and C, and the assumptions in what the Sobibor commander writes.

ABOUT THE JEWS OF SALONIKA

SOURCE H

Primo Levi, Auschwitz survivor.

"These few survivors of the Jewish community of Solonika are the repositories of a concrete, mundane, conscious wisdom, in which the traditions of all the Mediterranean civilizations blend together. That this wisdom was transformed in the camp into the systematic and scientific practice of theft and seizure of positions and the monopoly of the bargaining market, should not let one forget that their aversion to gratuitous brutality, their amazing consciousness of the survival of at least a potential human dignity made of the Greeks the most coherent national nucleus in the Lager (camp), and in this respect, the most civilised".

In April 1941 Germany overran Greece, and immediately put into effect the anti-Semitic legislation which had been a part of German life since the early thirties. But in the captured and annexed territories, the German Reich moved much faster, and the Jews of Salonika, with their long and proud history, were soon restricted to ghettos, and debarred from all but the most menial enforced labour. The first convoy to be deported left on 15 March 1943 and arrived in Auschwitz five days later. Between then and 18 August 48,533 Jews from the ancient Salonika community were rounded up and deported. Here are the figures recorded at Auschwitz, the totals of the many convoys arriving from Salonika:

SOURCE I (compiled by the Weiner Institute from records in the Auschwitz museum)

No. men selected and tattooed	6,893
No. of women selected and tattooed	4,234
Total selected	11,147
Those not selected	37,386

Those not selected were sent straight to the gas chambers.

SOURCE J

Helina Birenbaum, from Hope is the Last to Die

"It became a regular custom in the factory, bearing witness to increased solidarity- that a jug of warm liquid or bread slops passed from hand to hand, among all those at the same work table. Each woman took a sip, first the sick, then the healthy by turn. If anyone managed to flavour the water with a pinch of salt acquired somewhere, a scrap of margarine, or clove of garlic, all her comrades without exception enjoyed it. This was a good custom, a humane custom, even though the conditions of our lives were becoming increasingly bestial".

SOURCE K

F B. Unsorfer, from 'The Yellow Star'

"I was a rich man that night: the proud owner of a whole loaf of bread- not the black camp bread, but bread prepared and baked for the elite of the German army. I was glad to share it with my friends on the night shift, but particularly to offer a fair share to Benzi, my friend, who had so often given me part of his bread and soup when my hunger was unappeased by my own meagre rations".

SOURCE L

Primo Levi, about Auschwitz:

"We now invite the reader to contemplate the possible meaning in the lager (camp) of the words "good" and 'evil', 'just' and 'unjust' - let everybody judge, on the basis of the picture we have outlined and of the examples given above, how much of our ordinary moral world could have survived on this side of the barbed wire.

There is no way that we, as an audience, can appreciate the degradation suffered by an Auschwitz prisoner. The situations that Salamo and his family find themselves in are almost beyond imagination. They are certainly beyond our usual moral structures; Salamo, Avram, Allegra and Elena all face impossible moral decisions in their daily fight to survive.

- Is anything left of their dignity?
- What spirit, if any, triumphs?

DISCUSSION AND EXERCISES

To begin to discuss these difficult questions, here is a chart which should help to clarify what the film expresses through its characters. Choose one of the main characters represented in TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT, (Salamo, his brother Avram, Allegra or Elena) and either fill in the chart below or use it as a basis for an essay.

What is he or she forced to do or asked to do in order to survive?	How does he/she try to make life more bearable?	What are the moral questions raised by these actions?
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- How do the written sources seem to contradict Salama Arouch's story of life in Auschwitz?
- Why might these differences occur?
- Do we see any of 'our ordinary moral world' surviving in 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT'?
- Why do you think the film has this title?

SOURCE M

Samuel Beckett, playwright

There is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express. No power to express...together with the obligation to express.

SOURCE N

Reinhard Wyschogod, theologian

"I firmly believe that art is not appropriate to the holocaust. Art takes the sting out of suffering...It is therefore forbidden to make fiction of the holocaust...any attempt to transform the holocaust into art demeans the holocaust and must result in poor art".

SOURCE O

Elie Weisel, writer and Auschwitz survivor

"At Auschwitz. Not only man died but the idea of man. A novel about Auschwitz is not a novel, or else it is not about Auschwitz".

SOURCE P

Siegfried Kracauer, film theorist

"When Athena instigated Perseus to slay the Gorgon Medusa. She warned him never to look in the face itself but only at a mirror reflection in the polished shield she had given him. The moral of the myth is, of course, that we do not, and cannot, see actual horrors because they paralyze us with blinding fear; and that we shall know what they look like only by watching images of them which reproduce their true appearance... .the reflection of the happenings which would petrify us were we to encounter them in real life. The film is Athena's polished shield".

- Is the human imagination the same after Auschwitz?
- Is it able to express what happened or properly assimilate the reality and the idea?

Samuel Beckett clearly thinks not, but states the artist's confused obligation. What really is involved in the representation of the holocaust is often the deep frustration and anguish of the 'artist' (writer, filmmaker, painter) who confronts a subject that belittles and even overwhelms the resources of his or her medium.

- Does the holocaust overwhelm the resources of film?

Some claim that it is not possible to lead the camera or the pen to penetrate this history and create art, that both can at best merely record events. The conception of film, like the novel, insists on recognising a whole set of antecedents and accepted forms, and as such suggests that film grows as much from within a tradition as from within an individual. It is a collaborative art form and it is also an

industry. It has a tradition of avoiding complex moral problems and depressing realism. It cannot sustain the cost of its own production without a guarantee of a recognizably commercial product. Not only then does film share with language an apparent inadequacy in dealing with the holocaust, but also the tradition it does come from, of the big budget film, is famously trivial with dilemma and dishonest with history.

- How does 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT' overcome this?

SOURCE Q

Elie Weisel

"If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation has invented a new literature; that of the testimony".

'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT' is inspired by the actual experiences of Salamo Arouch in Auschwitz--Birkenau. Because it is a reconstruction or a dramatisation, 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT' denies accusations of exploiting atrocity; it purports to be a sort of historical document and a testament to those who suffered and died.

Kracauer's analogy (Source P) is particularly appropriate to films, which reconstruct scenes from the holocaust. However, his argument includes the idea that these images have nothing in common with the artist's creative development of an unseen dread "but are in the nature of mirror reflections". Yet merely to show the surface savageries of camp life might not lead too much beyond a numbing of response. The question for Kracauer, and for the audience of 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT', is how filmmakers can apply their art in shaping history into a heightened form of communication. Kracauer believed "that the images on the shield or the screen are a means to an end; they enable the spectator to behold the horror they mirror".

But do holocaust films always serve this purpose? Knowledge of the holocaust may increasingly be filtered through fictionalised renderings such as 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT'. This places a special burden on the filmmaker like Arnold Kopelson who is trying to illuminate rather than exploit the holocaust and on the viewer with a stake in historical truth.

As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. once advised; "fiction films live as much by cumulative dramatic convention as they do by fidelity to fact, and addiction to stereotypes dilute their value as historical evidence". For this reason alone it is important to record as many first person accounts as possible (as was the mandate of Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah') whilst acknowledging that even survivors' accounts can only provide a segment of the truth; many of the most courageous and most extraordinary certainly perished.

The filmmaker has a further responsibility however, only partly to do with fidelity to historical reality. Alain Resnais said about his film Night and Fog; "The constant idea was not to make a monument to the dead turned to the past. If it existed, it could happen again; it exists now in another form." Film may be at its best encouraging an identification with characters in history. And in recognising our ability to identify (when this can be coupled with a proper understanding of some of the dynamics of history), we move a little nearer to guarding against that which allowed the holocaust to develop; indifference.

DISCUSSION AND EXERCISES

The American mini-series Holocaust increased awareness of this period and has opened up the subject of the Jewish experience in World War Two to many subsequent media projects as well as much discussion.

- Does this justify any accusations that it trivialised and sensationalised the subject matter?
- Take one of the quotations from the beginning of this section and use it as the basis for an essay.

TESTIMONY AND REMEMBERING

SOURCE R

When all the survivors, all of us, have long since disappeared, when there will no longer be any real memory of this, only the memory of memories related by those who will never know (as one knows the acidity of a lemon, or the softness of a shoulder) what all this reality was,

Jorge Semprun 'The Long Voyage'

The drama and literature of the holocaust is at its best a reflex to this potential loss of memory. 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT' is part of the post war tradition which justifies itself, unlike any other art form, simply as testimony. In the presence of extraordinary actuality, consciousness takes the place of imagination.

Survivors have recorded that paper and typewriters were stolen when Auschwitz was liberated such was the desire to record what had happened, not least lest it was not believed. In the absence of understanding, all the participant or the reader/viewer can do is testify and listen. This in itself has been the historical and aesthetic lesson of the holocaust.

Yet even as we recall the past, our memory reshapes it until it is hard to tell if we remember original experiences or only a memory of them. When an event, such as the holocaust, enters the collective memory of a culture, especially through the pervasive medium of film, it is all the harder for those who experienced it to retain a true memory or for us to maintain a fresh response. Is it the event we remember, or the representation of the event?

At the same time, the process of remembering is interpretive and selective, and creates a new understanding of what happened. Any quest after objective 'truth' using memory alone as its tool must necessarily be frustrated by:

- a) The initial selectivity of perception which later made up memories,
- b) The gradual alteration of memory through repetition and interpretation,
- c) By the witness's state of mind at the time of telling.

Memories, therefore, are themselves a sort of fiction, always shaping the reader's response. Obviously, in the process of film making this selectivity is all the more refined and limited. The process could be presented like this:

EVENT - INITIAL MEMORY - RECALL - SCRIPTING - FILM MAKING

Where the memories of an individual may be expanded and explained in a written testament, a film can only portray a restricted series of events, and in doing so must constantly engage the audience's interest and sympathy. It must also fulfil all sorts of expectations in terms of plot and character development, adventure and romance.

For these reasons, the makers of 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT' have changed elements of Salamo Arouch's story, and introduced a love affair, which in fact began after the war. Yet films which purport to depict a character's memory of an horrific past and the characters degradation by it, can have more integrity than a film which purports to deliver an objective historical account. An entirely fictional account of Auschwitz is not quite as 'truthful' as one person's subjective memory of it, for the latter so clearly acknowledges the partiality of recollection.

Here are some more sources from Auschwitz. Read them carefully. I in doing so, ask yourself two questions:

- a) In what frame of mind were they written?
- h) Do they form fresh images in your mind?

SOURCE S (from 'The Holocaust and the Halakhah' by Irving J. Rosenbaum)

"One day I was lying down on my bunk in the children's block at Auschwitz, and I saw one of the officials of the block coming with a thick truncheon to beat someone. I jumped off my bunk to see whom he was going to beat. Beatings were given for every 'sin', and the number of blows was according to the severity of the crime. This was the first time the rubber truncheon was used. Generally they would use a stick, which often would break in the middle of beating...I wanted to see how the rubber truncheon worked, perhaps some day I would meet up with it myself. The official approached one of the bunks. The boy who was there already knew what was in store for him... He bent over and the beating began. The rest of us watched and counted. The boy neither cried nor screamed, he did not even sigh. We wondered, we did not understand what this meant. The count passed twenty-five, this was usually the maximum number of blows. When the count reached forty, he began to beat the boy on the head and feet. The boy neither sobbed nor cried out- a fourteen-year-old boy- and he didn't cry.

The official finished fifty blows and left wrathfully. I remember a tremendous red welt on the boy's forehead made by the rubber truncheon. We asked him what he had done to incur the beating. He replied, "It was worth it. I brought some siddurim to some of my friends so they could pray. It was worth it." He said not another word. He got up, returned to his bunk and sat down".

Hugo Gryn, continuing his account of Auschwitz.

(extract from Churban, The Murder of the Jews in Europe by Anthony Bayfield).

"The barrack was long, filled with bunks that had three tiers running the whole length of the wall and on both sides. It already had some inhabitants - all of them males - and when the leader of the block announced that we would be staying there for some time, it was clear to me that our family would not be united. We were told to find a place on one of the bunks. Our arrival was expected because people were sifting or lying on the top bunks to show that they were occupied and our group had to take lower ones.

I was tired and wanted to sleep. But I was curious as well. After the man above my bunk found out a little about us, I began to ask him about the routine of the camp and especially how I had to go about seeing my mother and brother. "How old is your brother?" he asked. "Eleven," I said. "Did he go with your mother or with the old people?" "With the old," I answered. He came down from his bunk and stood in front of me. "You will not see your brother again." He spoke quickly: "Your brother is dead by now and so are all the people he was with. He was poisoned and burnt and has gone up in smoke" I wished my father wasn't at the far end of the block talking to some other people. "We had a terrible journey," I said to my new neighbour, "and it is very cruel of you to scare me with such dreadful jokes." He said nothing and as he climbed up again I thought he laughed.

When my father returned I told him what was said. He sat down beside me and said, "That man was not trying to scare you. It is true. We are in the most terrible place in the world and we are abandoned people. I don't know what is to become of us." And for the first time since we got on the train my father cried and his sobs were the saddest sounds I had ever heard.

In the next two or three days I discovered how Auschwitz-Birkenau worked. How the young and the old, to the sound of music were marched to the low buildings that looked like our shower-block, how they too had to strip and make neat piles and how instead of hot water they were engulfed by the vapours of Zyklon B gas and how they were taken to ovens and cremated. How the members of the SonderKommando, themselves prisoners, took their valuables, even the gold teeth from the mouths of the dead and how they cut the long hair of the women. People whom I grew to trust spoke about the way the SonderKommando themselves had 'selections' and were periodically killed and replaced. And about the way in which human fat and ashes were turned into soap. Perhaps the small grey bars of soap we were given.

The routine, too, became clear in those days. To rise soon after dawn and stand outside in rows of five for Appel when we were counted. Then breakfast, which was lukewarm brownish water with ersatz or artificial coffee flavour. Aimless work or just marching about until mid-day and a bowl of thin soup with an occasional slice of potato or turnip in it. More work and Appel again. Then the final meal of the day: a slice of bread that was seldom properly baked and never tasted like proper bread. And sleep... but almost every morning at the latrines the sight of some fellow-prisoners who hanged themselves on the rafters. Daily we became thinner and weaker and got to know the danger signs of becoming what the S.S. called a Musulman - so emaciated that you were taken to the gas chambers".

DISCUSSION AND EXERCISES

- Of the sources you have read in this guide, are there any which give a different picture of Auschwitz to the one you have after seeing 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT'?
- When you read them, do images of the film come to mind?
- Does a film necessarily give a fuller picture of an historical period or incident?
- Why have the testimonies surrounding the holocaust held such fascination for the generations following the Second World War?

- Do you think there might be ways in which the holocaust and its reflection in art and literature, fiction and testimony, could have changed ideas about the media and art?

REALISM AND EMOTIONAL MEMORY

Willem Dafoe, who plays Salamo Arouch, has said that “physically being there (filming in Auschwitz) rooted everything we did. It allowed us to feel a step closer to those who came before”.

Willem Dafoe has been compared in his acting style to some of the great screen actors of America such as Marlon Brando, Peter Fonda and Montgomery Clift. Like them, his work is inspired by 'The Method'; an approach to acting which grounds everything that happens in performance upon “emotional reality” rather than just upon effect.

'The Method' was pioneered in the 30's by an acting teacher called Lee Strasberg in New York, but soon came to influence Hollywood acting, especially in the realistic social dramas of the 50's. Based upon the exercises devised by the Russian director Stanislavski, The Method stresses the importance for the actor of coming as near as possible to actually experiencing whatever his character is experiencing, and if the actor has no equivalent emotional memory, then it is suggested that some analogous emotional experience is recreated.

In filming at the actual site of Auschwitz concentration camp, director Robert M. Young and producers Arnold Kopelson and Shimon Arama have placed 'TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT' firmly in the tradition of 'Method' movies, where the psychological backup for the actors - and the awareness of this for the audience- is put above considerations of finance or ease of production. The setting of the film in the true site of its events lends a truthfulness to the project that many filmmakers are willing to jettison in favour of cheaper studio shoots or locations the art director prefers.

DISCUSSION AND EXERCISES

- How aware were you of this being the real Auschwitz?
- How did this affect your appreciation of the film?
- Were you ever conscious that this was Auschwitz in 1990 and not in 1944 (the condition of the buildings, the look of the actors)?
- Why do you think the makers of TRIUMPH OF THE SPIRIT have been so keen to stress that it was filmed in Auschwitz-Birkenau?
- In what ways might an actor find it more difficult to act the part of a holocaust victim in a studio reconstruction of Auschwitz?
- In what ways is 'Method Realism' a difficult approach to this subject?

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80 East End Road, Finchley, London N3 2SY

J. Noakes and G. Pridham

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