

## The Mother of all Holocaust Films?

Wanda Jakubowska's Auschwitz trilogy

by Hanno Loewy

“We must first speak about the genre of this wonderful Polish film.”<sup>1</sup> With these words in 1948 Béla Balázs, one of the first and most influential film-theorists of all times, began his discussion of Wanda Jakubowska's *Ostatni Etap (The Last Stop / The Last Stage)*, the first feature film, that made the attempt to represent the horrors of Auschwitz, the experiences, made in midst of the universe of mass extermination. Filmed during summer 1947 on the site of the camp itself and its still existing structures, directed and written by two former prisoners of the women's camp in Birkenau, performed not only by actors but also by extras, who had suffered in the camp themselves, Jakubowska's film acquired soon the status of a document in itself. [illustration #1]

Béla Balázs did not only praise *The Last Stop* for its dramatic merits. He discussed the failure, the inadequacies of traditional genres to embody what happened in the camps. Himself a romantic Communist, but also a self-conscious Jew, he spent half of his life in exile, in Vienna, Berlin and Moscow. And in the end of 1948 he was about to leave Hungary for a second time, now deliberately, to become dramaturgic advisor of the DEFA in East Berlin. But that never happened. Just having settled his contract, he died in Budapest, in May 1949. In 1948 Béla Balázs is far away from any conceptualizing of the Shoah as a paradigm, but he senses something uneasy about the idea of having represented these events as a classical tragedy, or a comedy, or a novel. “The sizzlingly hot, vivid memories of the Auschwitz women's death camp and gas chamber did not fit into the well-rounded, well-formed shapes of previously known cinematic genres.”<sup>2</sup> Jakubowska's film for him seems to lay the grounds for a new genre in it self, the docu-drama.

“Its uniqueness is demonstrated by the fact that not only is it a new work of art, it also creates a new artistic genre.” A genre in that the events in a way begin to represent themselves, to speak through their metonymic traces. In Balázs' words: “the death camp at Auschwitz (...) functions as a set,” for “a series of miniature dramas,” but “it is not only a set but the very image [of hell] itself.” Balázs compares the film with Dante's *Inferno*, the hell, “that includes everything that existed as sin, radiating blood and horror, in the moral consciousness of his epoch.”<sup>3</sup>

The Polish director Wanda Jakubowska (1907-1998) returned to the site of this horror again in the sixties and in the eighties, in two films that never really found an audience in the west: *Koniec naszego świata* (*The End of Our World*, in 1964) and *Zaproszenie* (*Invitation*, in 1985)

In this essay I would like to address these films and their impact on the cinematic representation of the Holocaust from different sides.

First of all I would like to discuss the plots of Jakubowska's films of the 40s and 60s and their respective historical context.

Second I want to place Balázs' notion of docudrama back into the question of genre, addressing the question, whether the docudrama is in fact transcending the plot structures of traditional storytelling.

I then would like to show, how Jakubowska – especially in her first Auschwitz film – reinterprets cinematic visual traditions, and creates an iconography of the camps, using imagery already highly charged with meaning and popular myths, anxieties and desires. This leads to the question how *The Last Stop* became a reference for Holocaust films since then. In fourth place I would like to explore the cultural techniques of evoking authenticity, Jakubowska made use of. And I conclude with a remark on her last film, *Invitation* that represents in a way her resignation and her hope at a time.

## I.

Wanda Jakubowska was born in Warsaw in 1907. Already in 1929 she co-founded the leftist association of friends of film art – “START” – and in 1937 a cooperative of film authors.<sup>4</sup>

After experimenting with social reportage and documentary, in 1939 Jakubowska had finished her first feature length fiction film, when the war violently interrupted her career as a filmmaker. In 1942, active in the resistance, she was arrested, imprisoned in the infamous Pawiak and deported to Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. Already there she began to dream of a cinematic account of the camp, of torture, death and fight. In the camp she also became friends with Gerda Schneider, a German Communist, whose “career” in the camp reached from the top of the hierarchy among the women prisoners to the “Strafkommando”.

Jakubowska survived Auschwitz and Ravensbrück and in summer 1945 she met Gerda Schneider in Berlin. Together they started to write the screenplay for *The Last Stop*, before Jakubowska returned to Warsaw in September. Different versions of the exposé, the screenplay and the dialogue list, as well as protocols of the meeting of the artistic board of Film Polski, kept in the Filmoteka Narodowa in Warsaw, allow some insights in the

development of the project, that acquired half a dozen different titles from the beginning to its realisation, from the more martial “Front Auschwitz reports” over “Oświęcim” and “A letter from Oświęcim” to the final “Ostatni etap”.

Invited to Łódź by Aleksander Ford, then the first general director of Film Polski, already in december 1945 she passed the first version of the script to Jerzy Bossak, then Film Polski’s artistic program director. And in January 1946 she asked Ford officially to be commissioned for writing and directing a feature film about the Auschwitz women’s camp.<sup>5</sup> Bossak, she recounts later, liked the screenplay but told her, this would be “something for a Fritz Lang, Wilhelm Pabst or John Ford, but not for some Wanda Jakubowska”<sup>6</sup>. And the subject would be too much to take for an audience, a people, that had suffered so much, as the Poles did themselves. But Jakubowska was determined to overcome all these obstacles and arguments. In May 1946 Adam Ważik, the chief ideologist at Film Polski, demanded her to change the screenplay considerably. He found the documentary style, presenting endless images of atrocities against Jewish women and children, unbearable for the public. These facts could definitely not be portrayed on the screen and would cause psychic pain in the audience, without offering them the relief of something bright, contrasting the camps life.<sup>7</sup> Jakubowska added the elements of dramatic narration she was asked for and a month later Ważik was pleased, that now the “bestialities are better to take” and the narrative would now develop from “a martyrrium, that is imposed on the figures, to a conscious fight”.<sup>8</sup>

*The Last Stop* combined the “miniature dramas” of several female prisoners and their antagonists in Nazi uniform, with dramatic visions of the camp in carefully composed long and travelling shots, stark contrasts of light and an almost symbolic choreography of masses, which found the cameramen Boris Monastyrski (a student of Eisenstein)<sup>9</sup> well prepared for.

[illustration #2]

In the center of the plot however we find two women, to whom we are particularly attached by the fact, that we watch their arrival at Auschwitz. The first to come is Helena, a polish prisoner, who is giving birth to a baby in the camp, and becomes a leading figure of the resistance in the film, after her baby is killed by the SS.<sup>10</sup> The second is Martha, a Polish Jew, who arrives with a huge Jewish transport in the night. She is able to speak several languages and the camp commandant appoints her to be a translator in the camp. Thus she becomes the central character, as she is the only one, who understands everybody, and is addressed by everybody in the camps Babylonian reality. Everybody in the film speaks his native language:

Polish, German, French, Russian and Serbo-Croatian. Only Yiddish is hardly to hear throughout this film.

The film portrays characters from different nations, performing extraordinary solidarity. There is a Russian Doctor, Eugenia, who is tortured to death, because she tells the truth to a Red Cross delegation. There is Anna, a German nurse in the block. And there are Yugoslav prisoners of war, women who fought the Nazis and do not lose their dignity till the very end. There is even a Gypsy girl, interestingly enough the only prisoner without name (the credits mention her only as: the Gypsy). Martha, the Jewish character, on the other hand is subsumed under "Poles"<sup>11</sup>. The figure of the translator alludes to an almost "sacred" personality of the camps history. Mala Zimetbaum, who was deported to Auschwitz from Belgium, worked for the underground in the camp, used her position as translator to gather and distribute information and even succeeded, in June 1944, to escape from the camp, only to be caught and executed. But this execution became one of the legendary events in the history of the camps resistance itself. During the public reading of the sentence in front of the prisoners in the women's camp Mala Zimetbaum slit her wrists and pushed back an SS man. The rest of her story remains unclear. Following the prisoner's reports presented by Danuta Czech in her *Kalendarium*<sup>12</sup> Zimetbaum was brought to the camp's infirmary and then to the crematorium. She either died on her way or was shot to death.

*The Last Stop* too ends with Martha's last heroic act under the gallows, but with a dramatically increased impact. With her wrists cut and her hands bleeding, she pushes back the camp's commandant himself and delivers a speech against fascism. Then she dies in the arms of Helena, with the words "never again", while allied planes appear in the air, and the SS runs in panic, connecting her self-sacrifice with the anticipation of liberation.

The members of the SS were portrayed rather stereotypical, even if Wanda Jakubowska remembered herself showing the perpetrators with more complex characters, attaching to them an own psychic life of contradictions<sup>13</sup>, something she in fact alluded to only in her later films.

The members of the artistic board, discussing the screenplay in 1946 and 1947, and the "expert opinions" they had invited<sup>14</sup>, asked for more political impact, and a clear message related to the cause of the resistance. And they also asked Jakubowska to collaborate with Georg C. Klaren, the chief scenario editor of DEFA in East-Berlin, in a perspicuous attempt to "facilitate" the writing skills of Jakubowska, on both a dramaturgical and ideological level.<sup>15</sup> Jakubowska changed the screenplay and cut out most of the story of Helena that

introduces her before her deportation to the camp. She put more emphasis on the activities of the resistance movement in – and their relation to the resistance outside of – the camp. She elevated the status of Eugenia, the Russian doctor, to a martyr, tortured to death by the SS (and by that took care, that the film after the reduction of the Helena character does not have “only” a Jewish martyr).<sup>16</sup> And she increased the dramatic temperature of the closure, by adding the panic of the SS, running away under the impact of allied planes. But she clearly refused any consultant forced on her like Klaren. And she also did not respond to Tadeusz Hołuj’s demand, not to portray the arriving deportees as “Jews”, but as “human beings” (in order not to “suggest, that what happened mainly concerned the Jews”).<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, in the dialogues of the film, the particular emphasis of the Nazis on the extermination of the Jews is referred to explicitly.

The film, that premiered in March 1948, became an international success, was shown on film festivals and in cinemas worldwide<sup>18</sup> and already in 1949 in New York. [illustration #3] Jakubowska became the director of one of the three production units of Film Polski, and, as Ewa Mazierska points out, “was one of the highest profile filmmakers to join the Polish communist party (...), representing the ‘party line’ among her fellow filmmakers, and lobbying the party on behalf of the cinema industry.”<sup>19</sup>

*Ostatni etap* in Poland was indeed not the most successful film about Polish suffering during the war. Leonard Buczkowski’s *Zakazane piosenki* (*Forbidden Songs*, 1947) about the life under occupation in Warsaw attracted a bigger audience in Poland. But *Ostatni etap* had a much bigger impact on the perception of Poland in the world, and on the cinematic tradition as a whole.

Only few films went beyond the “discreet” but still explicit portrayal of Jewish suffering, *Ostatni etap* presents, and by doing this already transcends the party line that never considered the extermination of the Jews as anything particular to be remembered in its own right. Aleksander Ford’s *Ulica graniczna* (*Border Street*, 1948), more traditional in its visual and narrative composition, culminates in the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto – and it ends with a heroic but doomed protagonist, David, heading back to the Ghetto with members of the Polish resistance, who come to aid the Ghetto. As we know, the relation between the Ghetto fighters and the Polish resistance was far from being romantic like that, a fact the film nevertheless pays tribute to by portraying at least some of the prejudices and anti-Jewish resentments among the Polish characters.

Working for Jewish organisations Nathan Gross finished his docudrama about Jewish child-survivors in an orphanage near Łódź, *Unzere Kinder (Our Children)*, in 1948.<sup>20</sup> The film did not have any notable impact on a Polish audience, even if Gross framed the film's narrative with a short propagandistic presentation of prospering Jewish Life in socialist Poland after the war – in a time, when anti-Semitic pogroms and incidents occurred not only in Kielce but throughout the country, and Zionist propaganda called the Polish Jews to leave and to gather in the DP camps in the American zone in Germany, to prepare – at that time still illegal – immigration to Palestine. Nathan Gross left Poland soon – while Aleksander Ford would follow him after the antisemitic purge of 1968.<sup>21</sup>

The first fictional film made in Poland after war, that portrayed the camps and the Holocaust, or more precisely the trauma, that it produced, was in fact not shown until 1957, but produced in 1946. Stanisław Wohl's *Dwie godziny (Two Hours)* deserves still proper attention (and research). Kept on the shelf for eleven years, this film with its late expressionist aesthetics and its harsh portrayal of a corrupt Polish post-war society, demoralized and deteriorated by war, occupation and *collaboration*, never had a chance. Its narrative, set in the two hours between the late night arrival of a train and the departure of the next and in the chiaroscuro of the dark streets, a train station and a nightclub, centers on a young couple, Marek and Weronika, who represent a higher morale and a better future<sup>22</sup> – and on two survivors from Majdanek: a former Kapo and his victim, a traumatized Jewish shoemaker, both caught by their past. The plot turns to the better only when the shoemaker, who had to search the shoes of thousands of victims, murdered in the gas chamber, for hidden valuable items, takes revenge and kills the Kapo in a dramatic climax, while at the same moment the shoemaker's wife gives birth to their child. [illustration #4] *Dwie godziny* clearly relies on Majdanek as the emblematic site of memory, representing the dark heritage of extermination, the place where Stanisław Wohl, Jerzy Bossak and Aleksander Ford themselves had encountered the fate of European Jewry, without recognizing this as such, when they came as the "Filmaktiv" of the 1. Polish division with the Russians to liberate Lublin in summer 1944 and produced their documentary film *Majdanek*.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly after the success of *The Last Stop* not only expressions of so called Jewish "cosmopolitanism", but also aesthetic liberties like Jakubowska's use of "formalist" devices, nonprofessional extras or the portrayal of an evil Polish Kapo probably would not have been possible any more. In 1949, the communist regime already in full power, the congress of filmmakers, monitored by the Ministry of Culture and Arts, criticized the early post war films,

including *The Last Stop*, and “Italian neorealism was condemned as a trend that ‘is not in the slightest in keeping with objective reality’”.<sup>24</sup> Jakubowska learned her lesson. In the fifties she successfully continued to produce film on both historical and contemporary subjects, favoring the construction of Socialism and to fight the evil representatives of the ‘old system’, who try to undermine the historical progress, causing the plots conflicts, which can be solved easily and ideologically correct.

In the beginning of the sixties Wanda Jakubowska returned to the experience of the camps. In a way she did so on a detour, which first led her to a coproduction with DEFA in 1960, a film that is not part of her Auschwitz trilogy, but also refers to the camps. *Spotkania w mroku* (*Meeting in the Twilight*) follows the Polish pianist Magdalena to a concert in West Germany and on a ride back into her memories. Eighteen years old she had been deported to a forced labour camp in Germany, where she fell in love with Steinlieb, the young owner of a shoe factory in a small town named Eltheim, where she had to work. Now she meets him again in a divided Germany, where he still is a decent man but committed to the wrong goals, loyal to the wrong people. And he is instrumental in the persecution of Wenk, a Communist who already helped Magdalena to escape from the Nazis and now fights against the preparation to war in the west, by the old elites and the US. Disillusioned in the end, Magdalena returns to Poland. [illustration #5] The film does not hesitate to refer to Auschwitz in several scenes. “Arbeit macht frei” is written on the gate of a concentration camp close to Eltheim, where the starving prisoners are supported by the resistance, namely Wenk and some of the slave workers in Steinliebs factory. And the german medical Doctor, who courageously helps one of the polish girls in the factory to give birth to her baby, turns out to be the husband of a jewish wife. When they are ordered to report for being taken to a distant Polish “village” called Auschwitz, they betray their ignorance of reality. The resistance’ attempt to save them from deportation fails and their fate is completed. Cursed by the people on the streets of Eltheim they are taken to their final destination.

Interestingly enough there was no Wenk and there were no US-Americans in the script, when Jakubowska had offered the project a year earlier to DEFA. Her scenario, based on the novel of Stanisława Fleszarowa-Muskat *Pozwólcie nam krzycheć* (“Allow us to shout”)<sup>25</sup> provoked a polite but firm reaction from the side of Kurt Maetzig, the director of antifascist DEFA films like *Ehe im Schatten* (*Marriage in the Shadows*, 1947) or *Der Rat der Götter* (*The Council of Gods*, 1950). Maetzig was particularly critical about what he called the danger of opening old wounds between Poles and Germans, to disturb the growing friendship between Poland and

the GDR, and to harm the process of successful reeducation (“Umerziehung”) of the people of the GDR. He missed a clear distinction between those Germans (i.e. the GDR), who now work for peace and socialism and those in the West, who prepare the rise of fascism again. And he asked her urgently not to continue with such a project or to discuss this as long as necessary to either convince him or to be convinced by *his* arguments.<sup>26</sup>

Like *The Last Stop, Meeting in the Twilight* pays not only tribute to the prospect of Polish-German friendship but also to the myth of the Polish mother, giving birth to new life even in the reality of a camp. But while references to the death camps in this film still remained at the periphery of the plot, in 1963 Jakubowska turned back to Auschwitz in her film *Koniec naszego świata* (*The End of Our World*, 1964), based on Tadeusz Hołuj's book. [illustration #6] She presents the narrative as a series of flashbacks, framed by a confrontation in the present. Henryk, a Polish Auschwitz survivor and Communist, is asked by two American tourists, a young couple, to give them a lift to the Museum on the site of Auschwitz. First reluctantly, then caught by his own memories, he offers them a guided tour. Julia, the young lady turns out to be the daughter of Jews who died in the camp. Her companion instead lacks any personal attachment (or commitment) to this history, asks the most ignorant questions, regards the museum as something not exciting enough, compares Nazis to Communists, and persistently urges the others to film him with his camera. His “unflattering portrayal,” as Ewa Mazierska points out, “serves to expose western consumerism, selfishness and moral vacuity and contrast it with the more serious and ascetic attitudes of Poles.”<sup>27</sup>

Most of the time in fact we follow Henryk back to the past. Different from *The Last Stop* *The End of Our World* does not present heroes who already settled in their beliefs, contrasted by plainly evil antagonist (Nazis and Kapos), but tries to explore a greater variety of characters. Henryk is arrested and deported to Auschwitz for a simple act of civil courage, criticizing a German police man in the street for his cruel behaviour against a Polish mother. In the camp Henryk soon becomes a Muselman, already doomed to die. But fellow prisoners help him and exchange his identity with that of somebody who is already dead. While his wife Marijka in Kraków is informed of his death, Henryk becomes a guinea pig for SS-Doctor Wirth, and miraculously survives, as a grotesque figure, that only in the course of time regain its human integrity. Where in *The Last Stop* a more graphic expression of the human devastation – the destruction of the human body and spirit – was almost completely avoided, *The End of Our world* began to approach this dimension of the camp. [illustration #7]

Months later: Marijka has married Henryk's friend Smolek, an activist in the resistance. Both are also deported to Auschwitz, and when Henryk finally learns to know about their fateful

triangle, Smolek is already about to die himself. Henryk und Marijka, who are allowed to meet and make love in a Kapos room (it also could be the camps brothel), will not find back to each other completely. Henryk becomes more and more a heroic figure, while Marijka wants to survive. Henryk, assigned to by the resistance movement in the camp, becomes Block eldest in Birkenau, and reluctantly learns to use his new power against criminal Kapos, traitors and others, who do not follow him. Somewhat similar to *Naked among the wolves*, the DEFA film about the resistance in Buchenwald, Henryks morality is never seriously questioned, even if Jakubowska goes further than Frank Beyer, and shows the political prisoners even killing a fellow prisoner, who blackmails Henryk.<sup>28</sup> Marijka does not want to participate in the resistance, by smuggling explosives out of a camp. She instead takes care of the children in the gypsy camp and when the gypsies are finally brought to the gas chambers, she follows them, passionately staring at Henryk when they see each other through the fence for the last time.

It's indeed Henryk, not her, who survives in the end. Before that, *The End of Our World* shows almost everything, *The Last Stop* spared its audience of, sixteen years before. Not only the border between criminal and political Kapos, even the distinction between the Nazis and their victims seem to be not as clear anymore as it was. And the arriving deportations are now portrayed in a less visionary, but even more disturbing, almost grotesque matter of fact style, which sometimes reminds of Tadeusz Borowski's novellas in *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentleman*.<sup>29</sup> While Henryk is establishing contact with the Jewish Sonderkommando in the crematoria, we follow the process of mass killing in every detail (except what happens inside of the gas chamber), as some kind of a daily routine. Tadeusz Borowski, himself like Jakubowska imprisoned in Auschwitz for political reasons, had explored after the war the most radical perspective on the camps reality, telling his stories about everyday life and death in the camps from the perspective of the Kapo. Doing that he is able to transcend the classical scheme of tragedy, which, as the polish scholar of literature Andrzej Wirth claims, seems to be utterly inadequate to the horror of mass extermination. In the perspective of the "third" party, that intermediate "between the henchman and the victim,"<sup>30</sup> Andrzej Wirth identifies a new concept of tragedy, which presents its hero no choice, only doom. Such a tragic, that in fact leans heavily on the side of the absurd, of dark satire, leaves no space for catharsis anymore.

Strikingly different from that, the end of Jakubowska's film again presents a dramatic closure. The Polish leaders of the resistance, including Henryks friend Samek, the Jewish Communist

who fought in Spain and lived in France before the war, they teach the Jews in the Sonderkommando how to fight. To do so Jakubowska is turning the history of the camps resistance upside down. Throughout the summer of 1944 it had been the Jewish Sonderkommandos who urged for the uprising, to destroy the killing capacity of the gas chambers, while the resistance in the camp, lead by political prisoners, slowed down the preparations in order to organize a mass escape as soon (or as late) as the Russian front gets closer, something that indeed never happened.

This historical narrative from a Polish perspective, Henryk's personal story in Auschwitz, and the plot of the film culminate with the beginning of the liquidation of the camp (and the departure of the two Americans in the framing story).

And it is Henryk himself, who in the film leads the uprising of the Sonderkommando, which ends in a heroic but uneven battle, and in quite conventional war movie images. Samek dies in the fight, and Henryk is confronted by SS-doctor Wirth. Already before that Wirth has been exposed as an ambivalent and fragile character, desperately believing in anti-Semitism and racism, in order not to lose control over his mind in midst the reality of the camp. Giving the film a note of classical, even pathetic tragedy, Wirth does not kill Henryk in the end, but himself.

In the closing images of the film we see Henryk in Auschwitz in the presence. He walks to his car and leaves the site. And we know, who indeed Julia's father was, the father she talked about persistently during the walk through the museum.

When Julia and her friend, immediately before the uprising sequence of the film begins, left the site, she hurried back to Henryk to tell him, that her father was in France before the war and was reportedly killed fighting in Auschwitz. Henryk looks after her, when a cut connects Julia immediately with Samek, who comes to tell Henryk that the Sonderkommando is going to be killed, and that the uprising must start now.

When Jakubowska directed *The End of Our World*, Auschwitz had already become a focus of international interest again. Since December 1963 the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt had attracted worldwide attention. Films like Konrad Wolf's *Sterne* (1958) and Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapo* (1960) had developed cinematic strategies to transform the history of camps and deportations into romantic and melodramatic stories that already defied the radical standard of docudrama, exploring dehumanization and trauma, slightly blurring the distinction between perpetrator and victim as a means to discuss moral ambiguity and political discontent.

Throughout Eastern Europe the censors grip on the arts had somewhat loosened its efficiency,

at least during certain periods. Particularly in Czechoslovakia and Hungary (as Antonín and Mira Liehm have shown)<sup>31</sup> in the 1960s the subject of war, resistance and collaboration, but also the deportation and murder of the Jews had become (not only for artists with a Jewish background) a vehicle to express criticism or even discontent about totalitarianism, from a dissident socialist perspective as well as from a more independent one. And to present, in a way that was not immediately threatened by censorship, issues like the compliance to an authoritarian regime or the conflict between individuals and ideology, introducing anti-heroes as main characters. Those films frequently used satirical devices, which turned their critical potential toward their protagonists, and not only, not even mainly to the portrayal of evil, as it was the case with most of the antifascist satire before. Jakubowska's film wasn't anymore a particular radical cinematic vision.

## II.

Returning to the question of genre: Balázs' early insights into the problems of genre and representation (never published before 1996), however unsystematically expressed and never brought to a conclusion, anticipated almost fifty years of thinking about Holocaust and film. Claude Lanzmann's verdict about any representation beyond the metonymical trace of memory in the auratic presence of the survivor and the physical site is only the most prominent example of this. The few, mostly American, book length studies of Holocaust and film, by Ilan Avisar, Judith Doneson or Annette Insdorf for instance, agree on interpreting feature films in comparison to standards set by documentaries like Lanzmann's *Shoah* or Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*, which place fiction and genre films against a horizon of authenticity, truthfulness to the facts, and seriousness of purpose.

The same is true for literature, which tries to present the holocaust or its impact on human experience, during or after the events. Sue Vice<sup>32</sup> has identified three main fields of discourse in which holocaust fiction responds to the claims of authenticity, factuality and seriousness. First stands out the "intertextuality" of holocaust fiction, its reliance on documents and memoirs in particular, which seem to be recognized as a source of authenticity, no matter how biased these sources themselves might be.

Second the "treatment of time," which pays tribute to the fact, that history seems to defy story, or on another level: story defies plot. As much as the outcome of the events seems to be defined by catastrophe, the plot structure works against such unified irreversible destruction. Or to put it the other way around: the plots subject works against the neat and easy closure of

genre, and informs holocaust-narrative with a certain uneasiness with and self-consciousness of generic tradition.

Third there is the scrutinized “relation between author and narrator,” favoring artistic creation if it emerges from first hand experience, rather than from imagination, thus in a way turning traditional aesthetic hierarchies upside down.

The most poignant results of these considerations Sue Vice locates not particularly in the literary genre of memoirs but in holocaust fiction which presents itself as the “documentary novel”, “documentary fiction” or simply as “faction”, as several critics labeled Thomas Keneally’s book *Schindler’s List*.

What even in the realms of literature, of novel, turns out to be not so much a genre in its own right but a paradigm affecting all kind of genres, in the world of cinema fully appears first of all as a set of stylistic devices which create a certain “authentic touch”, using freely visual sources like newsreels and photographs, metonymical traces like original locations and memoirs of survivors.

But fiction film is a modern medium of storytelling that follows its own rules, more close to the world of fairy tales, than to a reproduction of “reality”. And the basic agreement between those who produce such films and their audience, materialized in the very form of the medium itself, cannot be completely undone by any purpose outside of the realm of cinema.

“The nature of film as a medium,” writes Carlo Celli, following Jean-Louis Baudry, “allows an audience to feel a sense of control of the images being projected. The spectators, because of their privileged position in the screening room, feel that they dominate the world the film portrays.”<sup>33</sup> In other words: film (and I am speaking of feature films of course, but also of popular television drama) is a medium for an illusionistic wish fulfillment, which can be performed in all kinds of classical film genres, but is clearly rooted in the experience and tradition of fairy tales.

Wish fulfilment does not only mean that the events on the screen and the closure of the narrative in particular tend to equate our wishes, that is tend to present us a happy ending. That would be a quite trivial interpretation of the medium. And it does not only mean that we experience a kind of reality effect in the cinema that makes us believe we witness a real event. Wish fulfilment in the cinema is a much more complex experience that draws us into the subconscious illusion that what happens on the screen – like a day dream as Christian Metz puts it – is indeed controlled by our wishes. Confronted with the Holocaust this can create a

puzzling effect. The illusion of a magical power the medium lends to us is a power we experience as our own.

No other than Béla Balázs pioneered this understanding, when as early as 1930 he wrote that the identification of the spectator is not with the characters of the films but with the camera as an agent of a capacity to be inside of the event itself and to see it from all sides, that is, to control it completely. And he was among those who compared it to the power of dream, which is utterly our own creation, lending us the illusion of superpower while in fact as movie spectators we are giving up our mobility and our conscious control of perception. The use of magical power is what makes the romantic hero. The hero's quick draw in the classic Western, as well as Indiana Jones' use of his whip, is first of all a metaphor for the capacity to manipulate something from a distance, to rule objects and enemies by the force of will.

Watching film leads us to believe that what we see is what we really want. And cinematic pleasure derives from the fact that we have the impression that what happens on the screen happens there *because* we want it. This is by no means always a "happy ending". But it is an ending that does make sense – sense in a manner in which, at least in western culture our classical genres (the plot structures of tragedy and comedy, of satire and romance) offer us as closure. Even if this closure only leads back to the road open to the next adventure – or to an expression, a projection of our own doubts about closure.

Inspired by what Balázs said, the Holocaust did not only become the subject of docu-dramas, but particularly of films which follow the plot structure of romance: The plot structure of adventure, survival and martyrdom, in that the power of good triumphs over evil, physically or spiritually. And this was true already for Jakubowska's film and true even for the essay Balázs wrote about it.

"We see people being shattered and slowly burned to death, but they can never be broken. The film," and with these words, Balázs concludes his remarks on *The Last Stop*, "is not only the most terrible indictment in mankind's history, it is also the most inspiring testament to mankind's moral stature."<sup>34</sup>

Jakubowska's film *The Last Stop* ends indeed with the female hero's triumph. Martha's self-sacrifice under the gallows, told according to the legend of Mala Zimetbaum, who cut her wrists in September 1944.

"At the film's climax," Stuart Liebman observes, "the heroics become excessive."<sup>35</sup> "Martha is viewed through much of this scene in low angle, medium close-up, her strong, handsome

face tilted skyward, enveloped in an almost divine light. It lends a hysterical note to the film's conclusion". [illustration #8, #9]

Even this dramatic closure was for Balázs not enough. He asked Jakubowska for a final cut, at least for the foreign market, and asked her (in a letter of April 9, 1948) to change the closure to a still more upbeat ending, having the translator saved in the last minute by the Russian liberators, greeted by the prisoners orchestra, now playing their music to celebrate victory. "The optimistic, victorious feeling that reality itself brought as a conclusion to this tragedy can not be absent from the film, and certainly not from the export version."<sup>36</sup>

When Stuart Liebman asked Wanda Jakubowska 50 years later, in 1997, what she thought about Balázs' advise, she dryly answered: "Americans like happy endings."<sup>37</sup>

Balázs was neither American, nor did he confine his remarks on the version that was shown in New York in 1949 with remarkable success. And that was probably pretty much the same like the original version.

But there indeed exists a version with an alternative closure. A copy I obtained by the Archives of the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau turns out to finish in fact with Russian tanks instead of American planes, and the sequence under the gallows ends not with Martha dying. One even does not realise that she is cutting her wrists, but only see her pushing back the SS and starting to deliver her speech, when triumphant music rises to newsreel imagery of victorious Russian battalions.

I have no information so far, where this version was actually shown. Balázs' advice at least was heard somehow, and the different versions of the screenplay and the dialogue list show clearly, that Jakubowska did already before that experiment with different, more upbeat closures. One version offers an epilogue with Helena again in the center, telling the story of the death marches and their liberation.<sup>38</sup>

### III.

If we look closer at how Wanda Jakubowska interpreted her own experience in Auschwitz – and the legends she heard of – we realize, how much she relied on images and visual tropes already loaded with meaning in the cinematic and pictorial tradition. But she did so not just to use them as a symbolic vocabulary – as the closeness of Monastyrski, her cameraman, to Eisenstein might suggest. By reinterpreting these images and imaginations she turned the world upside down, and introduced almost all the cinematic expressions that form the visual tradition of Holocaust films and not only film since then.

Showing the arrival of the deportation train in the night, not only adds to the real horror of Auschwitz a more cinematic, dramatically haunting appearance with the contrast of darkness, aggressive searchlights and white steam. It also plays on one of the oldest cinematic experiences of shock and repression. From the Lumières' film *The Arrival of the Train at the Station*, cinema is obsessed with trains. Leo Braudy referred to this obsession as one of the major elements of what he calls "closed films", films that present a world which is basically not free, but enclosed, controlled and claustrophobic. "Since the closed film is so concerned with the atrophy and weakness of the will faced by constraints and limits, it is attracted to the train, a vehicle that subordinates its passengers, whisking them along into adventures that may be unwilled and undreamed of."<sup>39</sup>

The climax of all these sentiments in Jakubowska's arrival sequence in the night became a standard of almost every film portraying the camp, from Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapo* (1960) to Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), from Alan J. Pakula's *Sophie's Choice* (1982) to the recent TV production on Anne Frank (*Anne Frank – The Whole Story*, 2001). And as in many of these films the arrival of the train (and its white steam) is immediately connected with the dark smoke, coming from the crematoria.

The same can be said for the mud, which occupies the "Appellplatz", the "second mute hero"<sup>40</sup> of the film, as Danuta Karcz writes. [illustration #10] It makes us feeling stuck to the ground and to a world of suffering and bondage. And this introduces a detail of particularly strong impact to our cinematic experience, against our expectation, given the preoccupation of cinematic neorealism and filming on location with open spaces and the regular cinematic tendency to weightless movement (not only in the prairie or in outer space, but almost in general). The muddy ground in Jakubowska's film is presented with increasing effect throughout her film. It begins with the roll call after the arrival of Helena, the pregnant Polish woman, and it ends with a roll call short before the SS wants to evacuate the camp, now also effecting the movement of the camps commandant who can hardly walk in the mud, terrorizing and killing female prisoners, clearly in state of increasing fear for his own safety. The Chief of the Gestapo already accused him of having the situation not under control any more.

The mud becomes a stock image for Holocaust films. In *Sophie's Choice* Sophie's way to the camp's commandant Höss is a literal fight with the mud, that nearly not allow her to move. And when Bryan Singer directed his comic-book adaptation *X-Men* in 2000, feet in the mud had become already a synecdoche of the camp as a whole, introducing the camera into the opening scene, situated in Auschwitz.

A whole tradition of narrative climax began similarly with Jakubowska's use of the barbed wire of the fence in her film. Helena, after giving birth to her child, protected by the camp doctor Eugenia and the nurse Anna (played by Tatiana Górecka and her daughter Antonina Górecka), has to experience the worst. The cynical SS doctor is taking away her child, and kills it with poison. Short after that she is seen close to wire, which is loaded with high voltage. While the barbed wire after world war one had become synonymous with violent death in the trenches, an image widely proliferated by photographs and films alike, it now obtains a certain energy of magnetic attraction – both by the electrical power and by the wish to die an easy death, at least easier as many alternatives the reality of the camp offered. When Helena approaches the fence everybody expects her to kill herself, but she resists the temptation, and turns herself into a hero of the resistance.

The magnetic deadly attraction of the fence has been indeed one of the real experiences of turning the world upside down, often reported in diaries and other personal accounts, in the ghettos and camps. But given the spatial experience of cinema connected to the expression of wish and its power to manipulate from a distance, the reciprocal negative attraction, the fence offers to us, the attraction of death, felt as a magnetic, electrical field, has a strong cinematic effect. And it is reinterpreted again and again in films like Pontecorvo's *Kapo* (the hero has to stand half naked close to the fence for a whole day and is not allowed to move), or Pakula's *Pawnbroker*, from Daniel Mann's *Playing for time* (where the fence and the fatal use, prisoners make of it, are presented mostly on the sound track – contrasting the self protective acoustic bulb of the prisoners orchestra) to Tim Nelson's *The Greyzone*, where the female prisoners who belong to the resistance and smuggle explosives into the camp are tortured and questioned by the SS in a particularly vicious way. There the SS during a roll call starts to shoot women at random, repeatedly asking the suspects, who are forced to watch, to give up and to inform about others involved in their actions. Two of the girls manage to make an end to this by running into the deadly fence, while the third is agonizingly fighting with herself in order to do so, being caught between her wish to die and to live.

The same expression of ambiguity emanates from the ritual of shaving women's heads, known as a dramatic climax in the world of cinema already since films like *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (Carl Theodor Dreyer, 1928). Shaving the hair addresses to a multivalent field of connotations spanning from female martyrdom and self-sacrifice to the ritual tradition of disempowerment of the female body, from the liminal purification to victimization. In a way it is an initiation ritual connected to death performed as a complete loss of identity, and

rebirth, the introduction into a kind of spiritual community, existing apart from our “normal” lives.

What can be an act of spiritual initiation, an act of will and perfected self-control in the traditional ritual is now bound to the extreme of the most violent act of dehumanization, the signature of extermination, which first kills human dignity and then the human being. And still, the old spiritual meaning of the ritual is not entirely eradicated in the cinematic representation, but still vivid as a layer of meaning in its narrative.

Jakubowska introduced this trope into the cinematic tradition almost in passing. Martha, appointed as the translator in the camp, is allowed to keep her hair, while the other Jewish prisoners lose it. “Come over and keep your hair”, the Kapo tells her, when she is going through the humiliating ritual. So she stands out of the mass, clearly acquiring a special status from the very beginning, keeping her hair and her power to act as a subject. Later in the course of film history, when the Jewish identity of the victims will be brought to the fore in Holocaust narratives, the loss of the hair will acquire another meaning, a signifier for belonging to those who are “others”.

Imagined again and again as a part of this ritual is the tattoo, the application of the number, which exchanges the name and individuality. Jakubowska portrays this as a particular violent routine. Her own memory of the day she herself entered the camps universe, is somewhat different, telling more about the grotesque simultaneity of everyday life routines and extermination in the camps. “You can see my tattoo, Number 43311,” she told Stuart Liebman in 1997. “The reason the numbers become smaller is because I was telling jokes to the person tattooing me!”<sup>41</sup>

Jakubowska’s film did not only introduce the iconography of the Holocaust in film, but became more: a document, treated like an image of a certain authentic quality.

From George Stevens’ *The Diary of Anne Frank* to films like the German/Yugoslavian 1966 co-production *Witness From Hell* some directors even used clips from *The Last Stop* to authenticate their own visions, as others did with newsreel material or photographs. Stevens’ introduced the roll call sequence of *The Last Stop* as a dream of Anne Frank in hiding, showing the female prisoners swaying to and fro, turning what in Jakubowska’s film is a moment of solidarity of the prisoners’ community with the pregnant woman, into a surreal dream vision. Zika Mitrovic, in *Witness From Hell* uses Jakubowska’s film instead as an illustration of the memories of the female protagonist, who refuses to give testimony in a trial – a trial modeled somewhat after the great Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. Tortured by her

memories and threatened by German supporters of the defendant, a former SS medical doctor named Berger, Lea Weiss kills herself in the end of this film. The investigation did not only open her wounds, but revealed her secret. In the camp Dr. Berger had not only sterilized but also abused her, and she became a prostitute in order to save her life.

#### IV.

But Jakubowska's film was not only *treated* as a document. Its claim to be a docudrama resided heavily on a series of deliberate decisions to make use of the devices of authenticity. At the same time, the Polish State decided to turn the original site of the camp into a museum, and to protect it forever – and while Polish peasants had started to remove the wooden barracks illegally to use them for construction or heating – Jakubowska managed to get the permission to film as much as possible on location. Six wooden blocks had to be reconstructed for the film, as the camp's structure had already suffered seriously.<sup>42</sup>

A lot of directors followed her example, using this site itself as an auratic presence on the screen. (When Steven Spielberg was not allowed to film inside of Birkenau he at least acquired the right to reconstruct parts of the camp in front of the gate, on the parking lot – so in *Schindler's List* we in fact see the train coming out of the real gate and camp site, entering the film set, where the selection takes place.)

Jakubowska hired inhabitants of Oświęcim (the town of Auschwitz) for the numerous extras. And she asked former prisoners, to join. How many of them participated in the end, in the masses on the screen, is hard to figure.<sup>43</sup> Inspired by Italian neorealism, she even tried to engage survivors for the major roles, but that did not work.

In contemporary reviews, as well as in Jerzy Toeplitz history of film, the notion, that most of the extras, the masses you see on the screen, in fact had been survivors, added significantly to the impact of the film.<sup>44</sup> In the papers there was even mention of a kind of initiation ritual, these extras would have gone through. "A month before the production started, they were brought to the camp site. They changed their clothes and took on prisoner's uniforms. (...) One month they did prisoners work, clearing the site"<sup>45</sup> and preparing it as a set for the production. Interviewed by Stuart Liebman Jakubowska speaks about the impact the film had on the inhabitants of Auschwitz, who still would keep their prisoners uniform costume in mothballs.<sup>46</sup> The film, produced throughout the course of at least three months on location, obviously contributed to the identification of the town with the museum. And actually it anticipated the installation of the museum's displays, showing the "warehouses" in the camp.

In a particular graphic sequence, albeit without any depicted violence, we see a transport arriving, women and children, and a child playing with a ball. In an obvious allusion to Fritz Lang's *M* an SS-officer asks the child to pass over the ball. [illustration #11, #12] (In *M* it's the shadow of the murderer, visible on a police announcement on a billboard, that asks for the ball...). We see the SS-men taking the deportees away to their execution, and then the SS returning alone, a fire visible in the background of the image. Like in *M* we see the ball again, without the kid, but now on a heap of children's toys. The camera travels along shelves with clothes and prayer shawls, prosthesis, toothbrushes and shoes, hats and antiques. (Even that alludes to a travelling shot in *M* following closely after, where exhibits are examined in a police station.) In a superimposition Jakubowska then takes us with one of the vases on display into an elegant parlour, decorated with this reminder of the dead, where the SS and their families meet for a joyful reception.

In *The End of Our World* Jakubowska not only integrates the image of the relics, but also well known documents. She explicitly included the photographs made by the SS at the ramp and the birch wood close to the crematoria in Birkenau, and also the few photographs made by a Jewish member of the resistance cell in Birkenau. In a long sequence showing the arrival of Hungarian Jews, we see an SS-guard on a tower photographing the scene – and we see Samek with a hidden camera. Samek's portrayal in the film indeed follows in one respect the legendary figure of David Szmulewski, who had fought in Spain and was a professional roofer, a profession which gave him access to different parts of the camp. In the 1960's Szmulewski was considered to be the one, who had taken the photographs that have remained from those attempts to document the crimes in Auschwitz.<sup>47</sup>

We see, what the SS photographed: orthodox Jews, mothers and children at the ramp – but also an image of Sonderkommando prisoners burning corpses and a blurred photograph of naked women on the way to the gas chamber, two of the three pictures taken by the Sonderkommando. Without being explicit about that, Jakubowska's dramatization and editing of the scene, attributes most of the photographs, taken by the SS on the ramp, also to Samek, making, even unintentionally, the difference between the gaze of the perpetrators and the victims completely invisible.

The sequence ends with the guide in the Museum showing photographs to the tourists. A well-dressed lady grabs at one of the photographs with her hand, wearing elegant gloves, and making us feeling uneasy.

Wanda Jakubowska herself used a camera, when she was a prisoner of Auschwitz, too.<sup>48</sup> She was assigned by the SS to photograph leaves of rubber plants that were cultivated in an

experimental plantation near Auschwitz, maybe the one in Harmence, Tadeusz Borowski described in one of his vicious novellas. Realizing the discrepancy between the disturbing photographs taken by the Sonderkommando, and her own photographic work for the SS may have been a sour experience for Wanda Jakubowska.

V.

Twenty years later, in 1985, Wanda Jakubowska returned to the site of Auschwitz for the last time. *Zaproszenie (Invitation)*, starts with a flashback, showing us a young couple, celebrating their engagement. But the war disrupts their love. He becomes a soldier, she finally finds herself in Auschwitz. The following flashbacks, the memories of Anna, the main character are triggered, when her old flame Piotr, who now lives in the US, comes to visit Poland in the 1980s. Similar to *The End of Our World* the plot on the personal level is informed by the wrong notice of his death, Anna had received during the war, leading to another marriage. And leads Piotr to leave Poland discreetly and to become a scientist in the new world. 40 years later Anna now is a widow, a mother of daughter who works as a photographer, and herself a highly respected paediatric surgeon. She is played by Antonina Górecka who already performed as the young German nurse in *The Last Stop*, 40 years before. Anna, surprised and moved by this reunion, takes Piotr on a tour to the camps.

Her daughter Natalia does not follow her altruistic moral, her strength of belief and commitment to the lessons of the past. Her dreams are worldly, materialistic and, as Ewa Mazierska points out, the “ultimate indication of the gulf between their attitudes is Natalia’s decision to visit the USA at the invitation of Piotr and not to return to Poland.”<sup>49</sup> But the preliminary dialogue between Anna and Natalia about her journey expresses in a paradoxical way Jakubowska’s own ambivalence toward the US. Anna asks Natalia: “Do you know, what that is: America?” And Natalia replies, quite relaxed: “America – is America.” Even if Jakubowska’s Auschwitz trilogy ends on a somewhat resigned note, there is also the character of Antoninas son, born on the death march in a barn, delivered by Anna, thus triumphing over the destruction. He is a young man, who traveled the world only to bring the knowledge of New Zealand to Poland, how to grow up sheep, a somewhat ambivalent metaphor for a healthy soul in a still healthy Poland – whatever Anna experiences in terms of materialism, corruption and abuse of power in her contemporary socialist world, a world that is about to collapse soon.

Herself Jakubowska remained a faithful believer in the ideas of communism and the merits of Stalin till she died in 1998. “I am fierce and unrelenting Communist. (...) For my whole life,

whatever was going on, I had to get involved with it,” she told Stuart Liebman in 1997. “I was always in the epicenter of whatever was going on.”<sup>50</sup> Already in the sixties, but definitely in the eighties and nineties this had become a somewhat euphemistic expression of her unbroken self-esteem.

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<sup>1</sup> Béla Balázs, *Ostatni Etap* (transl. into English by Stuart Liebman), *slavic and east european performance. drama, theatre, film*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Fall 1996), p. 66.

[Typoscript in the Hungarian Academy of Science, manuscript collection (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára), MS 5014/198.]

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Members of START had been, among others, Stanisław Wohl (1912-?), Jerzy Bossak (1910-1989), Jerzy Toeplitz (1909-1995), Jerzy Zarzycki (1911-1971), Eugeniusz Cękalski (1905-1952) and Aleksander Ford (1908-1980). They all met again when Film Polski and the Film School in Łódź were founded after the war. See Frank Bren, *World Cinema. 1: Poland* (London, 1986), p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Her letter from January 5, 1946, is quoted in Alina Madej's interview with Jakubowska from 1994, published in 1998. (Alina Madej, *Jak powstawał *Ostatni etap**, *Kino*, 5/98, p. 14). She tells Ford about her collaboration with Schneider and asks for permission to travel to Berlin, Czechoslovakia, Paris, Kraków, Tarnów, Nowy Targ and Oświęcim.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “Opinion” of Adam Ważik about the screenplay “Oświęcim-Birkenau”, May 15, 1946 (in: Filmoteka Narodowa, files of “Ostatni etap”, S 364, 144/78). Tadeusz Hołuj in his respective expert opinion made similar points again, arguing for a clear distinction between this film and any documentarism.

<sup>8</sup> “Opinion” of Adam Ważik about the screenplay “Oświęcim”, June 20, 1946 (in: Filmoteka Narodowa, files of “Ostatni etap”, S 364, 144/78).

<sup>9</sup> Monastyrski had been the cameramen in Gustav von Wangenheim's anti-nazi film *Borzi* (Fighters) in 1936.

<sup>10</sup> The first version of the screenplay put Helena even more in the center of the narrative by presenting her and her husband in a more elaborated exposition before she enters the camp. In the discussions of the artistic board of Film Polski this was reduced to a short introductory sequence followed by the titles of the film. See the protocols of the board meetings of February 2, 1947 and April 24, 1947. (Both at Filmoteka Narodowa, Warsaw, files of “Ostatni etap”, S 364, 144/78.) Adam Ważik, in a memorandum of January 21, 1947 had already consulted her, to have Helena being reunited with Andrzej in the end, by letting the liberated women meet Polish soldiers, who come with the Russians, as the closure of the film. (Filmoteka Narodowa, Warsaw, files of “Ostatni etap”, S 364, 144/78.)

<sup>11</sup> An early version of the screenplay identifies her as a Slovakian Jew.

<sup>12</sup> Danuta Czech, *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau 1939-1945* (Reinbek, 1989), p. 879.

<sup>13</sup> In her interview by Madej she told, that together with Schneider in Berlin, she had spoken to several SS men in summer 1945 in order to learn about their motivations and inner conflicts. Even with “Lagerführerin Mandel” they would have tried to make an “interview”, but she refused. In the film, Mandel is played by Aleksandra Ślaska who got her chance to elaborate a much more differentiated character of a female SS guard only 15 years later, in Andrzej Munk's film *Pasażerka*, a casting clearly motivated by her emblematic figure in *Ostatni etap*.

<sup>14</sup> The board included Aleksander Ford, Jerzy Bossak, Stanisław Wohl and Eugeniusz Cękalski. They had asked Tadeusz Hołuj, a communist writer and survivor of Auschwitz and an important figure in the process that led to the founding of the museum, Zofia Nałkowska, who helped to build up the “Główna Komisja”, the Main

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Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes after the war, and for the questions of ideology and politics in particular a certain comrad Żółkiewski.

<sup>15</sup> Gerda Schneider, who – when the film was released – got the credit for consulting on the screenplay only, is not mentioned anymore throughout these protocols. In her interview by Madej, Jakubowska remembered with disgust that Ford in particular was trying to force Klaren (“a hitlerite screenwriter”) on her. (Alina Madej, *Jak powstawał Ostatni etap*, *Kino*, 5/98, p. 16) Klaren (1900-1962) had worked for the filmindustry throughout the Third Reich and, after writing and directing a few films for DEFA (among that an adaption of *Wozzeck*), left East-Berlin in 1950 for Vienna, the town, where he was born.

<sup>16</sup> This was obviously a delicate subject. In her interview by Madej she recounts criticism by her fellow prisoners, that the main heroine had been a Jew and not a “Polish woman”. (Alina Madej, *Jak powstawał Ostatni etap*, *Kino*, 5/98, p. 17) Here she explained the change in the emphasis with her mistake of casting a weak actress (Wanda Bartówna) for the role of Helena, that had forced her to put Martha in the center.

And she told about more problems with the casting. For the role of the French heroine Daniele/Michele (who sings the Marseillaise on her way into the gas chamber with her fellows) she had already engaged Juliette Greco. But her “beloved French communists” did not allow that and forced Huguette Faget on her, obviously backed by the Sowjets who did not always accommodate Jakubowska’s favorites with the required passports. Traveling around in post war Europe was not that easy.

<sup>17</sup> Expert opinion of Tadeusz Hołuj. (Filmoteka Narodowa, files on “Ostatni etap”, S 364, 144/78)

<sup>18</sup> The film won the Grand Prize at the International Film Festival in Marianske Lazne 1948 and was shown shortly after in Germany, France, Italy, Norway, and many other countries.

<sup>19</sup> Ewa Mazierska, Wanda Jakubowska’s Cinema of Commitment, *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1.5.2001), p. 221. In 1955, in the course of the reorganization of the Polish filmindustry, she became head of “Start”, one of the six film production units, now endowed with an increased artistic autonomy.

<sup>20</sup> On *Unzere Kinder* see Ira Konigsberg, “Our Children and the Limits of Cinema”, *Film Quarterly*, Fall 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Ford worked in Denmark, Israel and West-Germany and then lived in the United States, where he committed suicide in 1980. Jerzy Toeplitz lost his position as the rector of the Łódź Film School and went to Australia, where he died in 1995.

<sup>22</sup> In order to do so Marek, who is probably returning from Russia like Stanisław Wohl himself, has to say farewell to his hometown, his old love and his own bourgeois past. The somewhat explicit moral vantage point, from where the authors of the film (in addition to Wohl also Józef Wyszomirski got a credit for directing) portrayed post war Poland, was unlikely to attract the audience and the film was not released in 1946.

Unfortunately in the Filmoteka I could not find any sources related to this case, besides a short note to the review “Film” from 1946, that Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, who wrote the first idea for the film, refrained from any participation in the film and that the title of the film would be changed into “Od 9-ej do 11-ej” (From 9 to 11), already indicating a conflict about the film. (Files of “Dwie godziny”, S-113, in Filmoteka Narodowa, Warsaw. The existing version of the film (from 1957) has only 1917 meter (about 70 minutes). One might wonder what happened to the other 20 minutes.

<sup>23</sup> Stuart Liebman’s extensive research in that subject will soon be published in an essay. Majdanek, as the first death camp, liberated by the Allied, in this case the Russian forces, was to be – in the Western hemisphere – overshadowed by Buchenwald, Dachau or Belsen and only later by Auschwitz, as a world wide symbol for the Holocaust. The first brochure about Nazi extermination in the camps distributed worldwide in a mass scale (regarding the number of copies), was Konstantin Simonow’s *Das Vernichtungslager* (Moscow 1944). And the “shoes of Lublin” (up to this day installed as a huge museum showcase in Majdanek) became the first iconographic emblem of the Holocaust and remained a pertinent one in East Germany, codified by Johannes R. Becher’s famous poem “Kinderschuhe von Lublin”.

<sup>24</sup> Mira Liehm, Antonin J. Liehm, *The most important art: Eastern European Film after 1945* (Berkeley, 1977), p. 116.

<sup>25</sup> An early version of the screenplay with this title exists in the files of “Spotkania w mroku”, S 1900, D 1395/63, in Filmoteka Narodowa, Warsaw.

<sup>26</sup> See Kurt Maetzig’s letter from May 28, 1959, to Wanda Jakubowska in the Archive of Akademie der Künste Berlin, Kurt Maetzig-Archiv, file 1606. “Now films are needed that foster the friendship between our two states and our people, expressing the atmosphere we find for instance during the long distance cycle race for peace (Radfernfahrt für den Frieden).” Maetzig, who mentioned his own losses of family members in the the camps in his letter to Jakubowska, was probably touched by one very personal aspect of the story too. His own Jewish mother committed suicide in Nazi Germany. A fact he had tried to come to terms with in his own film *Ehe im Schatten* (*Marriage in the Shadow*, 1947)

<sup>27</sup> Mazierska, Wanda Jakubowska’s Cinema of Commitment, op. cit., p. 226. This portrayal of American arrogance and ignorance was heavily debated in the “kolaudacja”, the artistic board discussion of the film. Aleksander Ford, Jerzy Toeplitz and Stanisław Wohl found the cliché of the American unconvincing and even tasteless. “We don’t need to make an asshole of him, it’s enough to show him as a young, flippant person”,

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somebody who is moved, by what he sees in Auschwitz, Bossak argued. It was Kawalerowicz who took Jakubowskas side: "That's the way, these Americans are", while Aleksander Ford told about discussions he had about Auschwitz with John Steinbeck, who was not taking serious enough what happened there. For him Auschwitz had been an "accident" of history. But the problem, Aleksander Ford wanted to present, nobody in the board was willing to discuss: even a most decent man, a leftist, critical thinker like Steinbeck, had a different view, had still to be "convonced". For Ford this clearly showed, that the film should not be at all the last one on that subject, as others argued. And it was Kawalerowicz who confirmed, how much Jakubowska had to fight already, to be allowed to make this film, even in Poland. (Protocols of the "kolaudacja", January 6, 1964, FilMOTEKA Narodowa, Warsaw, A-216, 13)

<sup>28</sup> Jan Rybkowski emphasized this difference to *Naked among the Wolves* explicitly in the "kolaudacja". (Protocols of the "kolaudacja", January 6, 1964 in: FilMOTEKA Narodowa, Warsaw, files on "Koniec naszego świata", A-216, 13, p. 19)

<sup>29</sup> Tadeusz Borowski, *Die steinerne Welt. Erzählungen* (München, 1963).

<sup>30</sup> Wirth, Andrzej, Die unvollständige Rechnung des Tadeusz Borowski. Nachwort. In: Tadeusz Borowski, *Die steinerne Welt. Erzählungen* (München, 1963), p. 273.

<sup>31</sup> See Antonín J. Liehm, *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience* (White Plains, New York, 1974) and Mira Liehm, Antonín J. Liehm, *The most important art: Eastern European Film after 1945* (Berkeley, 1977).

<sup>32</sup> Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London, 2000), pp. 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Carlo Celli, The Representation of Evil in Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful*, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Summer 2000), p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> Balázs, Ostatni Etap, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> Stuart Liebman, Lost and Found. Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stop*, *Cineaste*, vol. 22, no. 4 (March 1997), p. 43.

<sup>36</sup> Béla Balázs, Letter to Wanda Jakubowska, 9.4.1948. (transl. into English by Stuart Liebman), *slavic and east european performance. drama, theatre, film*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Fall 1996), p. 65. [Original: typoscript in the Balázs files, Hungarian Academy of Science, Manuscript collection (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtára), Budapest, MS 5021/102.]

<sup>37</sup> Stuart Liebman, "I Was Always in the Epicenter of Whatever Was Going On..." An Interview With Wanda Jakubowska, *east european performance. drama, theatre, film*, vol. 17, no. 3 (Fall 1997), p. 25.

<sup>38</sup> Scenario (not dated) in FilMOTEKA Narodowa, Warsaw, files on Ostatni Etap, S 364, 144/78. A russian tank meets the women, coming out of a barn, and the soldier asks Marusya: "From where?" "From Moscow!" she replies. And turning to Aniella he asks again: "And you?" "From Warsaw!" "And you?" "From Berlin!" "And we go to Berlin!". Other scenarios and dialogue list either include or ommit the last dialogue between the dying Martha and Helena, who consoles her with the oath: "there won't be any Auschwitz never again!". Jerzy Kawalerowicz, the Polish director who functioned as the assistant director in the making of *Ostatni Etap*, in an interview with the author on December 9, 2003, confirmed that they had discussed several versions with a more optimistic or more "tragic" closure.

<sup>39</sup> Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame. What We See in Films* (Chicago/London, 2002 [1976]), pp. 55-56.

<sup>40</sup> Danuta Karcz, *Wanda Jakubowska* (Berlin, 1967), p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Liebman, „I Was Always in the Epicenter of Whatever Was Going On...“, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> In March 1946 Jakubowska still planned to shoot abroad, as the original camp site was obviously not available. See the quotes of her letter to Bossak of March 3, 1946, in Madej, *Jak powstawał Ostatni etap*, p. 15.

<sup>43</sup> Jerzy Kawalerowicz speaks of about 300 camp survivors, that had responded to the ads, Jakubowska had placed in the newspapers in Kraków. And he also confirms another "story" about realism and authenticity, that is told about the making of the film. Lacking enough costumes for well dressed hungarian Jews, arriving in the camp, they had profited from actually arriving visitors of the camp, that had been shocked by what they saw: a functioning camp, as the film set appeared to them. A few spontaneous shots of their reactions were taken to be used for the arrival scene. (Interview Kawalerowicz with the author, December 9, 2004.)

<sup>44</sup> Jerzy Toeplitz, *Geschichte des Films. Band 5. 1945-1954* (Berlin, 1984), p. 298.

<sup>45</sup> *Berliner Zeitung*, 29.8.1949.

<sup>46</sup> Liebman, „I Was Always in the Epicenter of Whatever Was Going On...“, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> Up to this day the puzzle who actually took the photographs could not be solved completely. Most probably the photographs had been taken by a greek member of the jewish Sonderkommando. Eric Friedler, Barbara Siebert and Andreas Kilian, following the testimony of the Stanislaw Jankowski, a member of the Sonderkommando, attribute the photographs to Alberto Errera (Eric Friedler, Barbara Siebert, Andreas Kilian, *Zeugen aus der Todeszone. Das jüdische Sonderkommando in Auschwitz* (Lüneburg, 2002), p. 214). See also Clément Chéroux, *Photographies de la résistance polonaise à Auschwitz*. In: *Mémoire des camps. Photographies des camps de concentration et d'extermination nazis (1933-1999)*. Edited bei Clément Chéroux (Paris, 2002), p. 86.

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<sup>48</sup> See Liebman, „I Was Always in the Epicenter of Whatever Was Going On...“, op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> Mazierska, Wanda Jakubowska's Cinema of Commitment, op. cit., p. 228.

<sup>50</sup> Liebman, „I Was Always in the Epicenter of Whatever Was Going On...“, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

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