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Capturing Bolshevism: SS Photographs of Soviet POWs at Concentration Camps

A Case Study

Abstract

The article examines photographs taken by SS men at the Mauthausen concentration camp. The focus is on pictures of Soviet POWs from October 1941. A negative strip serves as a case study to highlight the importance of a critical method-driven approach for interpretations of visual sources, specifically perpetrator pictures. The images are analysed according to an adapted version of Ulrike Pilarczyk's and Ulrike Mietzner's serial-iconographic photo analysis to differentiate between description and interpretation. The aim is to contextualise the photos and link them to ideological meanings of the pictures for those who took or commissioned them.

Introduction

This article[1] follows the tradition of the "pictorial turn"[2] and is grounded in the field of visual history as a subdiscipline in historical research.[3] It focuses on a set of photographs from the Mauthausen concentration camp that was established in Austria after the so-called *Anschluss* to the German Reich in 1938. The article aims to raise questions beyond an interest in the visual content of images by dealing with the possible intentions behind the photographs by those who took them and those who commissioned them. Functions can be both practical as well as ideological. The interest lies on the connection of image and imagination in photographs by perpetrators for official purposes. Such commissioned pictures are interpreted as idealised images of reality that reflect the ambitions of those behind the cameras rather than the factual reality of the concentration camps, specifically for the inmates. This approach comprises major difficulties and challenges, particularly since only few written sources are preserved that document the scenes from different perspectives, including the individuals depicted in the pictures. In this sense, this article is an appeal

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2   W.J.T Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
3   Gerhard Paul, *Bilder einer Diktatur: Zur Visual History des „Dritten Reiches"* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020).

for a clear distinction between a reconstruction of the historical context of the emergence of the visual material, an analysis of what is visible in these sources, and interpretations and conclusions. A methodological dissection of description and interpretation allows us to reflect on contemporary knowledge and perspectives on historical photographs, as well as on preconceptions that shape how we look at visual historical sources. The historical meaning of images – or the inability to reconstruct such meanings due to the lack of available information and sources – can be described based on a standardised and comprehensible analysis. Consequently, photographs can be used as historical sources in a more differentiated and critical way by applying a clearly defined methodological approach. This article is designed as a case study to emphasise this argument.

In the centre of interest are photographs taken by SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Protection Squadron) photographers of Soviet deportees at the Mauthausen concentration camp in 1943. The Soviets were transferred by the Wehrmacht to the SS and incarcerated at Mauthausen. A photo negative strip of these men is used as a case study to reflect on the SS photographers' relations to the photographic conventions of the time. Due to the restricted length of this article and the lack of accompanying written documents, the article exclusively focuses on these photos. However, the case study's intent is to illustrate the need for a broader contextualisation of historical photographs and to search for possible counter-narratives to the perpetrator narratives inscribed in the images, in order to fully grasp the potential of pictures like these in historical research. The approach is to interpret the images and how they relate to specific photographic genres that highlight their intended function for those who took them.

Methodologically, this article uses an adapted version of Ulrike Pilarczyk's and Ulrike Mietzner's serial-iconographic photo analysis (*seriell-ikonografische Fotoanalyse*).[4] Pilarczyk and Mietzner modified Erwin Panofsky's classical iconographic-iconological method – which was originally intended to be used in the interpretation of artworks – to apply it to series of photographs.[5] This method enables a differentiated, step-by-step analysis and interpretation of photographic materials through a clear-cut step-by-step methodological model that resonates with my argument for a separation between description and interpretation. The first step of the approach is a description of the central pictorial elements of a photo series to define the iconographic elements of the pictures that then enable hypothesising for an analysis of the representative images. The analysis itself is separated into four steps: the pre-iconographic description, the iconographic description, the iconographic interpretation, and the iconological interpretation. The disengagement of the interpretation into clearly defined analytical steps enables a separation between, on the one hand, the descriptive extraction of information visible on the images and, on the other, an analysis with references to the cultural and historical context of the images. This second part specifically relies on interpretations that go beyond the photo itself.

4   Ulrike Pilarczyk and Ulrike Mietzner, *Das reflektierte Bild: Die seriell-ikonografische Fotoanalyse in den Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaften* (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2005).

5   Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Westview Press: Boulder, 1972).

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The visual history of Soviet prisoners-of-war (POWs) in Nazi concentration camps

Nazi concentration camps had been photographed since the establishment of the new regime in Germany in 1933. In a first phase, selected camps were photographed for the general public and published in illustrated news reports.[6] Early photo reports from the Dachau concentration camp in 1933 created an image of the camps as legitimate places of confinement for dangerous political enemies and with the purpose of re-education.[7] Reports from the following years and their photographic motifs illustrated the changing function of the concentration camps within the Nazi state. They further established the portrayal of camp inmates according to anthropological photographic standards with a clear antisemitic and racist iconography, such as an illustrated report from 1936 that aimed to show visual evidence of the inferiority of the prisoners ("Untermenschentum", sub-humanity).[8] These early illustrative reports set the visual tone for photographing concentration camp inmates according to established stereotypes and further influenced the Nazi visualisation of individuals seen as political or racial enemies.

In general, the photography of concentration camps and other Nazi institutions of incarceration was restricted and sanctioned by the official institutions in charge of the respective camp. Inmates were not allowed to take pictures by themselves, therefore there are only very few known photographs secretly taken by prisoners.[9] Photographs taken by "bystanders" – in reference to Raul Hilberg's categorisation of people involved in the Holocaust into victims, perpetrators, and bystanders – are under-represented in research, despite a new interest in daily photography in Nazi Germany.[10] During the liberation of Nazi-occupied territory, photographers – as part of Allied armies – documented crimes committed by Germans and their supporters through filming and photography. These early images were used in exhibitions and films which showed Nazi atrocities to a general public and acted as evidence for the committed crimes. In an immediate post-war context, they were also used for "re-education" purposes in occupied Germany and Austria.[11] Liberated

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6   Habbo Knoch, *Die Tat als Bild: Fotografien des Holocaust in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), 40.

7   The cover page of the *Münchner Illustrierte Presse* from 16 July 1933 showed a group of prisoners with the description "Disziplin erzieht zu gemeinschaftlicher aufbauender Arbeit" (Discipline educates to collective constructive work). *Münchner Illustrierte Presse* 28 (1933), cited in Knoch, *Tat als Bild*, 84. See also Jörg Osterloh, "„Es wurde ja auch darüber geschrieben, in der Zeitung…": Die Berichterstattung im Deutschen Reich über die Häftlinge der frühen Konzentrationslager," in „*…der schrankenlosesten Willkür ausgeliefert*": *Häftlinge der frühen Konzentrationslager 1933–1936/37*, eds. Jörg Osterloh and Kim Wünschmann (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2017), 324.

8   *Illustrierter Beobachter*, 49 (1936), 2016, cited in Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (London: Tauris, 2004), 19.

9   There are noteworthy exceptions from, for instance, the Ravensbrück and Auschwitz concentration camps: Andrea Genest, "Fotografien als Zeugen – Häftlingsfotografien aus dem Frauenkonzentrationslager Ravensbrück," in *Fotografien aus den Lagern des NS-Regime: Beweissicherung und ästhetische Praxis*, eds. Hildegard Frübis, Clara Oberle, and Agnieszka Pufelska (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar: Böhlau, 2018), 85–112; Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

10   See the following projects that deal with visual sources from daily life in Nazi Germany: "Ephemeral Films Projects: National Socialism in Austria," by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Austrian Film Museum, and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Digital History (https://efilms.at, 8 June 2021), and "Fotografie im Nationalsozialismus. Alltägliche Visualisierung von Vergemeinschaftungs- und Ausgrenzungspraktiken 1933–1945," by Michael Wildt, Ulrich Prehn, Linda Conze, and Julia Werner, conducted at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. See also the publication *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 4 (2018), "Special Issue: Photography and Dictatorships in the Twentieth Century."

11   Ulrike Weckel, *Beschämende Bilder: Deutsche Reaktionen auf alliierte Dokumentarfilme über befreite Konzentrationslager* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2012).

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camps were photographed by Allied soldiers, civilians, and consequently also visitors who came to the former camp sites for a variety of reasons, such as mourning family members and friends, as acts of political statements and demonstrations, for memorial events, or simply as tourists interested in the immediate past of a region.[12] In summary, there is a vast amount of visual material that has been – and still is – created at the sites of concentration camps. However, henceforth in this article, the focus is exclusively on a specific type of photographs: those taken by SS photographers during the time of the existence of the camps, and more specifically the existence of official photo studios in the concentration camps.

Academic interest in perpetrator photographs of the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities arose before the aforementioned postulated "pictorial turn". Sybil Milton wrote initial contributions that emphasised an integration of photographs as sources for the history of the Holocaust.[13] In German-speaking academia, the journal *Fotogeschichte* (Photo History) started debates about photography and Nazi crimes.[14] In the 1990s, the interest in the connection between image and memory grew and led to influential studies, among them monographs by Cornelia Brink and Habbo Knoch which dealt with the afterlife of photographs after 1945. Furthermore, debates about the so-called "Wehrmacht Exhibition" – a travelling exhibition by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research that confronted the German and Austrian public with crimes committed by German and Austrian soldiers during the Second World War – relied heavily on photographs.[15] Studies by Daniel Uziel and Petra Bopp further investigated German photography at the front.[16] Concerning photographs taken at concentration camps, Janina Struk touched upon these types of images in her work about photographs from the Holocaust.[17] More specific studies were conducted by Ute Wrocklage, who is a pioneer in the critical photo analysis of camp photographs with an emphasis on the context of origin.[18] Newly published edited volumes focus on specific photo albums or photographic holdings by individual perpetrators, attempting to integrate methods of photo analysis even more pronouncedly.[19] Recent studies have been critical of interpreting SS photographs and SS photo albums as representative of a "perpetrator perspective" alone since

12 For visual habits at the sites of former concentration camps, see Till Hilmar, „*Storyboards" der Erinnerung: Eine empirische Fallstudie zu Geschichtsbildern und ästhetischer Wahrnehmung beim Besuch der Gedenkstätte Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2014).

13 See, for instance, Sybil Milton, "The Camera as Weapon: Documentary, Photography and the Holocaust," *Simon Wiesenthal Annual* 1 (1984): 45–68.

14 See another article by Sybil Milton published in *Fotogeschichte*, "Argument oder Illustration: Die Bedeung von Fotodokumenten als Quelle," *Fotogeschichte: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Fotografie* 8, no. 28 (1988): 60–90.

15 Miriam Y. Arani, "'Und an den Fotos entzündete sich die Kritik': Die ,Wehrmachtsausstellung', deren Kritiker und die Neukonzeption. Ein Beitrag aus fotohistorisch-quellenkritischer Sicht," *Fotogeschichte: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Fotografie* 22, no. 85/86 (2002): 96–124.

16 Petra Bopp, *Fremde im Visier: Fotoalben aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2009); Daniel Uziel, *The Propaganda Warriors: The Wehrmacht and the Consolidation of the German Home Front* (Oxford, Vienna, and Bern: Lang, 2008).

17 Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust.*

18 Ute Wrocklage, "Das SS-Fotoalbum des Frauen-Konzentrationslagers Ravensbrück," in *Im Gefolge der SS: Aufseherinnen des Frauen-KZ Ravensbrück: Begleitband zur Ausstellung*, ed. Simone Erpel (Berlin: Metropol, 2011), 233–251; Ute Wrocklage, "Die Fotoalben des KZ-Kommandanten Karl Otto Koch – Private und öffentliche Gebrauchsweise," in *Fotografien Lagern NS-Regimes*, ed. Frübis and Pufelska, 179–206.

19 Christophe Busch, Robert Jan van Pelt, and Stefan Hördler, *Das Höcker-Album: Auschwitz durch die Linse der SS* (Darmstadt: wbg Academic, 2016); Tal Bruttmann, Stefan Hördler, and Christoph Kreutzmüller, *Die fotografische Inszenierung des Verbrechens: Ein Album aus Auschwitz* (Darmstadt: wbg Academic, 2019); Bildungswerk Stanisław Hantz e. V./Forschungsstelle Ludwigsburg der Universität Stuttgart, ed., *Fotos aus Sobibor: Die Niemann-Sammlung zu Holocaust und Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Metropol, 2020).

prisoners were also involved in their creation.[20] In my own research, I focus on what I call the "perpetrators' gaze" manifested in SS photographs and that included practical and ideological conceptions that the SS had of their concentration camps. My definition of the "perpetrators' gaze" refers not to individual photographers but rather to the institutionalised photography at concentration camps in the form of official photo studios, the so-called "identification departments" (*Erkennungsdienste*). SS men, who were usually not trained photographers, were responsible for taking photographs in the camps and prisoners were forced to assist them. Despite the involvement of camp inmates in the process of creating photographs, they were only allowed to act according to strict orders by the SS men in charge; however, possible acts of defiance and the prisoners' own agenda need to be reflected on as well whenever relevant sources are available. The photographs are interpreted as expressions of how the concentration camp administrations and those who commissioned the photographs wanted the camps to be seen, documented, and remembered, hence they represent an idealised version of reality from a specific perpetrator perspective – the "perpetrators' gaze".[21]

In addition to academic publications, exhibitions are an important intermediary for historical knowledge about photographs, and they are initiators for research projects. An updated virtual exhibition at the memorial site of Buchenwald is a recent example of this approach.[22] Concerning the historiography of the Mauthausen concentration camp, an exhibition also served as an initiator for an increased interest in the visual history of the camp.[23] Stephan Matyus, then in charge of the Mauthausen Memorial's photo archive, wrote significant studies that followed on this initial research.[24] Benito Bermejo further contributed with his study about Francisco Boix, a Spanish photographer and prisoner at Mauthausen.[25] My own studies on photography at Mauthausen were intended to also complement the investigation of photo production at the Mauthausen concentration camp and serve as a base for my current research project at the University of Haifa about SS photography in concentration camps in a larger scope.[26]

Concerning Soviet POWs at concentration camps, a newly published study by Reinhard Ott and Rolf Keller has immensely expanded our knowledge about this relatively under-researched topic, specifically concerning the cooperation between the Wehrmacht and the SS with regards to captured Soviet POWs.[27] Matthias Kaltenbrunner wrote an in-depth monograph about the escape of Soviet officers from the

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20 See Ulrike Koppermann, "Challenging the Perpetrators' Narrative: A Critical Reading of the Photo Album 'Resettlement of the Jews from Hungary,'" *Journal of Perpetrator Research* 2, no. 2 (2019): 104, 124.

21 See, for instance, Lukas Meissel, "The Visual Memory of Mauthausen," in *Contemporary Austrian Studies: A Visual History of Austria* 30 (2021), 161–181.

22 "In Black and White: Photographs from the Buchenwald Concentration Camp 1937–1945," accessed 19 August 2021, https://schwarzaufweiss.buchenwald.de/en/index.html.

23 Ilsen About and Gabriele Pflug, eds. *Das sichtbare unfassbare: Fotografien vom Konzentrationslager Mauthausen. Katalog zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2005).

24 Stephan Matyus, "Auszeit vom KZ-Alltag: Das Bretstein-Album," in Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, ed., *Täter: Österreichische Akteure im Nationalsozialismus* (Vienna: Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, 2014), 107–133; Stephan Matyus, "Die Befreiung von Mauthausen, die fotografische Perspektive eines Häftlings: Francisco Boix," *Fotografien Lagern NS-Regimes*, eds. Frübis and Pufelska, 159–178.

25 Benito Bermejo, *Francisco Boix: Der Fotograf von Mauthausen* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2007).

26 Lukas Meissel, *Mauthausen im Bild: Fotografien der Lager-SS. Entstehung – Motive – Deutungen* (Vienna: Mauthausen Komitee Österreich, 2019); Lukas Meissel, "Perpetrator Photography: The Pictures of the Erkennungsdienst at Mauthausen Concentration Camp," *Fotografien Lagern NS-Regimes*, eds. Frübis and Pufelska, 25–48; Meissel, *Visual Memory Mauthausen*.

27 Reinhard Otto and Rolf Keller, *Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene im System der Konzentrationslager* (Vienna, Hamburg: New Academic Press, 2019).

Mauthausen concentration camp, who were systematically murdered by SS men. However, he focuses on a specific group among Soviet deportees, the so-called *K-Häftlinge* (K-prisoners) who were not formally registered at the camp because they were selected for execution.[28] Mareike Otters contributed an important article about photographs taken by SS men at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp of Soviet POWs, which is a significant fundamental study for the approach of this article.[29] Current projects by Axel Bangert and Jörg Osterloh at the Fritz Bauer Institute in Frankfurt am Main deal with photographs taken at Soviet POW camps and of Soviet POWs in Nazi Germany respectively.[30] Paul Hanebrink's monograph about the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism has further contributed to our understanding of the German treatment of Soviet POWs by emphasising the antisemitic perception and conceptualisation of the Soviet Union in Nazi Germany and beyond.[31]

This article aims to contribute to this field of research by investigating a specific set of photographs taken at Mauthausen. They serve as a case study for interpretations of pictures that are preserved with very few additional (written and visual) sources, which makes their analysis a challenging – and from a historian's perspective – often unsatisfactory endeavour. The approach is to analyse historical photographs very carefully and as transparently as possible with an adequate methodology that highlights both the potential of photographs as historical sources as well as their limited value in the absence of proper contextualisation or additional documents. As a case study of a specific photo series, I have chosen a relatively unknown subject in the historiography of the concentration camp system, the mass murder of Soviet POWs. The aim is to highlight the potential of visual sources for researching hitherto under-researched topics in the history of Nazi atrocities.

The Visual Construction of "Bolshevism" at Mauthausen

Official camp photography at the Mauthausen concentration camp can be traced back to 1940, and its photographs have been documented systematically since 1941.[32] The camp was established on 8 August 1938 at a time when the concentration camp system had already, in 1936, been standardised according to the so-called "Dachau Model". This means that each camp under the control of the SS was structured according to a standardised plan that included the main departments of each camp, the structure behind the topography, the registration procedure, administration, and responsibilities. One of the standardised departments of the concentration camps was the so-called "political department" (*Politische Abteilung*) that represent-

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28 Matthias Kaltenbrunner, *Flucht aus dem Todesblock: Das Massenausbruch sowjetischer Offiziere aus dem Block 20 des KZ Mauthausen und die „Mühlviertler Hasenjagd": Hintergründe, Folgen, Aufarbeitung*, (Innsbruck, Vienna, and Bolzano: Studienverlag 2012).

29 Mareike Otters, "Photographing Soviet Prisoners of War in the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp: A Study of Anti-Soviet Propaganda Photos," in Frédéric Bonnesoeur, Philipp Dinkelaker, Sarah Kleinmann, Jens Kolata, and Anja Reuss, eds., *Occupation – Annihilation – Forced Labour - Papers from the 20th Workshop on the History and Memory of National Socialist Concentration Camps* (Berlin: Metropol 2017), 102–133; Mareike Otters, "Fotografien sowjetischer Kriegsgefangener: Eine Studie zur Konstruktion antisowjetischer Feindbilder in der NS-Propaganda 1942/43" (MA thesis, TU Berlin, 2013).

30 "Axel Bangert," accessed 22 September 2021, https://www.fritz-bauer-institut.de/mitarbeiterinnen-und-mitarbeiter/axel-bangert; "Jörg Osterloh", accessed 22 September 2021, https://www.fritz-bauer-institut.de/mitarbeiterinnen-und-mitarbeiter/joerg-osterloh.

31 Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2018).

32 Bermejo, *Francisco Boix*, 103.

ed the Secret State Police (*Geheime Staatspolizei* or *Gestapo*).[33] These departments were responsible for administering the inmates' individual files, the registration of them upon arrival and their transfer to other camps, and bureaucratic procedures concerning death cases, among other tasks. Part of this *Abteilung* was an identification department (*Erkennungsdienst*) that resembled police institutions with the same name. This sub-section of the political department functioned as the official photo studio in the camps. The SS personnel working there were responsible for taking pictures of deportees upon arrival, photographing corpses of prisoners who had died of "unnatural causes" (often camouflaging murders committed by SS men), and conducting photographic assignments handed down to them by superior departments or institutions.[34] Habbo Knoch and Benito Bermejo have defined types of photographs that were created within the concentration camp system by official photographers. Based on these categories and my own research, I have established five broad groups of motifs that summarise photographs taken at the Mauthausen concentration camp: prisoners, concentration camp, violence and death, SS events, and private motifs.[35] In my previous studies, I focused on describing these visual sources rather than on producing an analytical interpretation. However, this initial descriptive approach has become a springboard for a further in-depth examination of the pictures.

At Mauthausen, three SS photographers are known to have worked in the identification department. To be precise, none of these men were actually trained photographers before their time in the concentration camp: it is not documented whether they received any photographic training prior to their transfer to the identification

Figure 1. Archive Mauthausen Memorial/Collection Museu d'Història de Catalunya, fons de Amical de Mauthausen y otros campos.

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33 Stefan Hördler, "Die Politische Abteilung im KZ-System: Polizei und SS ,in gutem Einvernehmen,'" in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung in Norddeutschland* 15 (2013): 90–104.

34 Concerning the identification departments at the concentration camps, see my other publications, such as Meissel, *Perpetrator Photography.*

35 Meissel, *Mauthausen im Bild*, 55–56.

department.[36] In any case, professional photographers among the camp inmates were selected to assist in the photo studio by developing photographs and storing them in the department's barracks. Amidst these photographers, a group of Spanish prisoners were responsible for hiding photographs in the camp and even smuggling some images outside of the camp to an Austrian resistance fighter in the town of Mauthausen. Due to their heroic acts, photographs of the SS identification department were preserved. Among these saved pictures from the Spanish prisoners are negative strips that are at the centre of interest of this article.

This picture (figure 1) shows a selection of negative strips that were developed by the identification department of the Mauthausen concentration camp and saved by the Spaniards. SS photographers took the pictures and prisoners were forced to assist in developing them. Three Spanish deportees who were assigned to the identification department were most likely the ones responsible for hiding these strips among other materials and for therefore saving the strips from destruction: these persons were Francisco Boix, José Cereceda, and Antonio García. The exact reasons behind the choices for which images were saved are not entirely clear. After his liberation, Boix stated in a postwar trial that he chose pictures which had meaning and which he could put in his pocket due to the small size of Leica negatives.[37] As a result, the focus of this article is on eleven photos of these strips that are shown in enlarged forms of figure 1, and which were supposedly taken on the same day.
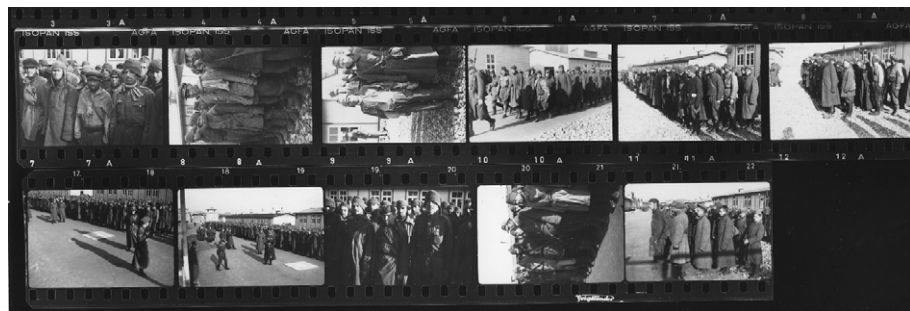

Figure 2. Archive Mauthausen Memorial/Collection Museu d'Història de Catalunya, fons de Amical de Mauthausen y otros campos.

According to serial-iconographic photo analysis, it is advisable to first deal with the elements visible on an image without interpretation as part of the pre-icono-graphic description. The photos show two distinct groups of uniformed men in a central square between buildings. A comparison with the topography of the Maut-hausen concentration camp proves that they were taken at the central roll call square of the camp, identifiable via the buildings, barracks, and the main gate. The angle of the shadows, coming from the south-east, indicates that they must have been taken in the morning or before noon. The focal point of the photographer, and therefore the main interest, lies on a group of men that are depicted either marching in the square or waiting in line. Their clothing seems torn: some elements of the fabric give the impression that they were fixed or improvised. Their uniforms indicate that they are Soviet soldiers. The men guarding and observing the group are recognisable as camp personnel, whether as guards – like on the photo that shows men in Soviet

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36 Ibid, 38–42, and Bermejo, *Boix*.
37 Archive Mauthausen Memorial, copy, original: NARA, RG 549, US Army Europe, Cases tried, Case 000-50-5 (Mauthausen), US vs. Altfuldisch et al., Trial Transcripts, 3444.

uniforms being led by a man in an SS uniform with a rifle on his shoulder – or as officers; wearing their respective uniforms, they are inspecting the waiting crowd. The sequence of the images on the strip implies that the Soviet soldiers were led to the roll call square in groups, accompanied by SS guards and watched by higher ranking officers. The photographer or photographers seem to have been part of the group of camp personnel, taking pictures of the Soviets walking onto the square, taking closer pictures of waiting men among the group, and documenting the whole scenery by moving away to get a wider angle. No women are visible in the photos. The amount of people photographed is difficult to measure; however, the number of Soviet soldiers must have been in the hundreds, while the SS personnel presumably only numbered a few dozen.

The image elements lead to the conclusion that the photos show the arrival of a big group of Soviet prisoners of war at the Mauthausen concentration camp, accompanied and observed by SS guards and officers. According to Ralf Lechner, the head of collections at the archives of the Mauthausen Memorial, the pictures stem from the day of the arrival of the first big group of Soviets at Mauthausen: 20 October 1941. A comparison with other files indicates that at that time two SS photographers worked at the identification department and therefore must have been the men behind the cameras: Friedrich (Fritz) Kornacz (or Kornatz) and Paul Ricken. Kornacz is the least documented of the known SS photographers at Mauthausen since he was drafted in 1943 and killed in combat. Antonio García, who was forced to assist him at the camp's identification department, described him as violent towards camp inmates.[38] Paul Ricken's background is comparatively better documented in available sources since he served as deputy commandant of a sub-camp of Mauthausen at a later stage and faced legal action after the war. According to survivors, he seemed to have been an enthusiastic amateur photographer.[39]

Following the methodology, the next step in a critical photo analysis of the pictures is the iconographic description – the investigation of the photo's meaning based on its content by reflecting similar and recurring themes and motifs in its cultural context. In reference to my previous descriptive studies of photographs from Mauthausen, the images on the negative strips can be summarised as sharing the "prisoners" motif as the Soviet POWs were the main focus of interest of the SS photographers. This motif resonates with earlier photographs taken at other concentra-

Figure 3. Archive Mauthausen Memorial/Collection Museu d'Història de Catalunya, fons de Amical de Mauthausen y otros campos.

38 David Wingeate Pike, *Spaniards in the Holocaust: Mauthausen, the Horror on the Danube* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), 136.

39 Ibid.

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tion camps since their establishment.[40] However, there are two different types of photographs present on the strip: pictures that show the Soviets as a group and images that emphasise a few individuals among the broader mass of people.

Figure 3 contains two examples of the first type, showing two pictures that emphasise the size of the group of deportees. The contrast in the composition of the two pictures – which seem to have been taken within a very short timespan – is striking. Whereas the first photo appears to have been taken without consideration for its photographic composition, the second one was clearly taken according to established photographic conventions for the composition of pictures. That is, the Soviets form a viewing axis and visual line of sight towards the gate to the camp in the background and are placed opposite to the SS personnel in front of them. The photo resembles pictures of Soviet soldiers captured by the Wehrmacht at the frontlines in Eastern Europe.[41] Visually, they are presented in similar ways as in Wehrmacht and SS war photography, as spoils of war, and it appears as if the SS men – with their military style uniforms and visible weapons – had captured the Soviet soldiers themselves.

In accordance with an iconographic interpretation of the pictures – examining the "deeper meaning" of the image and its elements by focusing on the intention(s) of the photographer behind a picture and its actual usage – it is worth reflecting on the message the photographer aimed to convey with his picture, if there was indeed a clear intention beyond documentation. Intriguingly, the SS at concentration camps seem to specifically have had the urge to legitimise their absence from actual combat: their performance visually constructed on the photos reflect this need to compensate their lack of involvement in fighting at the front. The concentration camps are shown as a space where the Bolshevist enemy arrives, factually entering the German Reich. The SS is in charge of controlling this assumed hazard and does so professionally and with military order. In conclusion, and with reference to the final step of the methodology – the iconological interpretation that integrates an analysis of unintended photographic elements in order to grasp the eventual meaning of a photo between the photographer's intention and the actual content – the pictures can be placed within a specific type of photographic genre of the time: war photography. They reflect the self-presentation of the SS in concentration camps as a military formation with aims connected to the general war effort, highlighting the significance of the SS's tasks, both militarily as well as ideologically. Additional photo analysis of other photographs or series of photos could further investigate if this reflects a general self-presentation of the SS within the concentration camps and if these findings are also true for the SS's visualisation of themselves with regards to other prisoner groups.

Figure 4. Archive Mauthausen Memorial/Collection Museu d'Història de Catalunya, fons de Amical de Mauthausen y otros campos.

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40 See, for instance, those photographs referred to in footnotes 7 and 8.
41 Bopp, *Fremde im Visier.*

The second set of pictures within the motif of "prisoners" is vastly different and focuses on groups of individuals within the otherwise anonymous mass. The photographer comes closer and takes shots that emphasise the facial structures. The first example shown in figure 4 puts a contrast on the faces of the photographed men with the shadow coming from the right. It resembles depictions of "human types" according to racist stereotypes that also stress prominent bodily features, such as the nose or shape of the head, that are emphasised by shadows and contrasts. The photos are typical of racist and antisemitic imagery, relating to a tradition that goes beyond the Nazi period but was heavily used in Nazi propaganda. Within the concentration camp system, the photos echo a well-established set of images that were produced in the early concentration camps, but they are also reminiscent of similar pictures of Soviet POWs taken by SS photographers in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, as described and analysed by Mareike Otters. In her studies, Otters proved that three pictures taken at Sachsenhausen were later used in anti-Soviet and antisemitic propaganda, in which they served as visual proof of the danger of Judeo-Bolshevism. Otters argued that they represented the Nazi concept of the "Untermensch", which "served as belated grounds of legitimization for the Nazi war of extermination against the Soviet Union, which was propagated as a necessary war of liberation and defence of allegedly free 'European peoples' against the 'Jewish-bolshevist oppressors' and their stooges".[42] The intended usage of the Mauthausen pictures is not documented, but a similar usage could have been possible.

It is especially telling that the three pictures were taken according to well-established photographic conventions that the SS photographers from the identification departments were very familiar with: the first group photograph is a frontal picture, the second was taken in semi-profile, whereas the third and last image shows the Soviets in profile. They resemble the core tasks of the SS photographers, namely the photographing of prisoners in frontal, semi-profile, and profile upon arrival, according to police standards of the time (and which are still applied today). The vast amount of such identification pictures from Mauthausen are not preserved since they were destroyed in the last stage of the camp's existence.[43] Following the establishment of identification departments of police in the nineteenth century, such pictures shaped common visual imaginations of criminals and were frequently linked to racist and antisemitic visual tropes.[44] The connection between identification and the visual construction of the racial "other" becomes especially obvious in the photographs of the Soviet POWs in the roll call square. Be it in accordance with an official order or subconsciously, the SS photographers apply their pseudo-police gaze to the visual constructions of their pictures, creating images that refer to and validate the ideological imagining of Soviets as being criminal and dangerous.

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42 Otters, *Photographing Soviet Prisoners of War*, 132.

43 A vast amount of identification photographs is preserved from the Auschwitz concentration camp, and they were mainly saved by the Polish prisoner Wilhelm Brasse. Maria Anna Potocka, ed., *Wilhelm Brasse, Fotograf 3444: Auschwitz 1940–1945* (Cracow and Berlin: Revolver Publishing, 2011).

44 For the connection between photography and racist constructions, see Amos Morris-Reich, *Race and Photography: Racial Photography as Scientific Evidence, 1876–1980* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Conclusions

Photographs – specifically when taken for official purposes or by official photographers – reflect images that those who commissioned them or took them wanted to create. Therefore, they refer to ideological conventions or aims. In concentration camps, photography was regulated and only very few selected SS men were allowed to use cameras within the camp vicinity. Consequently, their pictures can be used as sources for the "perpetrators' gaze" of their respective camp, especially since they were part of institutionalised photography departments. However, a lack of additional sources makes interpretations difficult and easily problematic. Transparent methodological approaches serve to differentiate between description and interpretation, making the visual material accessible for the extraction of previously invisible information.

Researchers should be careful with overinterpretations and projections, since other sources emphasise the high level of deception inscribed in SS photographs. Concerning the photos from Mauthausen, Spanish survivor Francisco Boix elaborated on the staging of many pictures that he was involved in developing.[45] This article, as a limited case study about one series of photos, therefore concludes with an appeal for a consideration of counter-images and counter-narratives to the power of interpretation inscribed into the photos by perpetrators, for further in-depth analysis of concentration camp photographs. This approach would highlight the significance of – as I would call it – an "integrated visual history" of the concentration camps, meaning an inclusion of multiple perspectives on preserved images and their contexts of origin. The term references Saul Friedländer's concept of an "integrated history" of the Holocaust that complements the study of the Holocaust that had been mainly based on perpetrator sources with equally important sources from the victims.[46] Historically, an integration of counter-narratives and counter-images – such as post-war testimonies, art works created by camp inmates, or the rare cases of secret photography in camps – contribute to our understanding of the often scarcely documented pictures. Analytically, they highlight aspects of pictures otherwise overlooked. Ethically, they represent the narratives of those who were silenced by the perpetrators' cameras. Conclusively, the often ideologically motivated photographs taken by perpetrators could be further contextualised via the narratives of survivors, eventually contributing to uncovering the reasons behind and the functions of perpetrator pictures.

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45 Meissel, *Mauthausen im Bild*, 107–108.
46 This concept is a core element of my current PhD project. See also Saul Friedländer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden: Verfolgung und Vernichtung 1933–1945* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2006).

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