

Review Article

Psychological Survival in Banjica Concentration Camp due to Inmate Creativity. A Recommendation to Future Victims

Tomić I¹, Milić V², Lazić D³ and Marinković S^{4*}

¹Department of Art History, Academy of Fine Arts and Multimedia, Serbia

²Clinic of Children Neurology and Psychiatry, University of Belgrade, Serbia

³Psychiatric Clinic "Laza Lazarević", University of Belgrade, Serbia

⁴Department of Neuroanatomy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

***Corresponding author:** Slobodan Marinković, Department of Neuroanatomy, Institute of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, Dr. Subotić 4/2, 11000 Belgrade, Serbia

Received: September 09, 2019; **Accepted:** September 27, 2019; **Published:** October 04, 2019

Abstract

Artistic activity, as a psychological defensive mechanism, was not sufficiently analyzed in Banjica (Banyitsa) concentration camp. The aim of this study was to examine retrospectively the psychological state of the prisoners, and the influence of creativity to their survival in the camp. Banjica was the largest concentration camp in Serbia, through which passed about 25,000 prisoners, while 1,000 of them died, over 4,000 were executed, and several thousands were deported to other European labor and death camps. In order to survive psychologically, many prisoners used certain cognitive, emotional and social mechanisms, but also creativity. There were 351 drawings and watercolors, and 257 design products available for examination, created by 30 professional artists and 139 incarcerated amateurs, who were 24 to 47 years of age (31.3 on average). In addition to these 169 visual artists, many other prisoners were engaged in poetry, literature, music, and the theatre. The main subjects of artistic activity were the prisoners themselves and the situation in Banjica camp, which were most often depicted in realistic and expressionistic manner. Creativity was very important psychologically to both artists and their fellow-inmates. Of the mentioned 169 artists and amateurs, even 121 managed to survive (71%). Some of them were promoted to University professors or Academy members later on. In conclusion, artistic activity most likely influenced a better survival of the imprisoned artists and other creative inmates. Creativity could be a recommendation to future victims of long-lasting extreme social conditions.

Keywords: Concentration camp; Creativity; Fine art; Torture; Stress; Survival

Introduction

Nazi concentration camps were among the worst places in history for mass killings and torture of millions of innocent people, especially Jews, but also Slavs, Roma, and some others [1-11]. The genocide committed, particularly in gas chambers and crematoria, is known as the Holocaust (Greek *hólos* = whole, and *kaustós* = burned) and *Shoa* ("disaster" or "catastrophe" in Hebrew) [12].

We were mostly interested in the psychological state of the inmates, caused by extreme stressors, and the ideas used in their struggle for survival, but especially in the role of their cultural life, including fine art, music, theatrical, and literal activities, which helped many artists and some of their fellow-inmates to survive the horrendous conditions in the concentration camps [5,12-22]. At the same time, special attention was paid to the neuropsychological basis for such creativity in the light of recent achievement in this domain [16-18,23-32]. We also analyzed the psychological and social impact of inmate creativity and the fate of the camp artists during imprisonment and after liberation [2,5,13,33-35].

We chose for this study the largest concentration camp Banjica (Banyitsa) in Serbia, due to a lack of research about the beneficial effects of creative activity in this institution. Over 100 documents regarding this camp were examined in the collection of the Banjica

Camp Museum, the City Museum, and the National Museum, as well as those published in two specific books [2,13]. Special attention was paid to prisoner cultural and artistic creativity, which was reported in some documents, the mentioned publications, and a catalog regarding a 1945 post-war exhibition, and presented in collections of their artworks and design products in the mentioned Museums. The subject, technique, and art types were analyzed in all the artworks.

In order to compare our findings regarding Banjica camp to data published about similar places, many scientific articles and Internet presentations were examined vis-à-vis the cultural life and creativity in other European camps and ghettos [5,13,16,21,33,34,36-38]. In addition, a large body of literature was also examined in the field of fine arts, music, literature, psychology, psychiatry, and neuropsychology [18,27-29,32,39-51].

Banjica Concentration Camp

As soon as the troops of the German Army invaded and occupied Serbia [11], the Nazis organized a collaboration government in Belgrade, the capital, and started actions primarily against the Serbian resistance, the illegal Communist Party, and the intellectuals, as well as the Jews and Roma [2]. A list of all Jews in Serbia was compiled immediately, their human and other rights were repealed, and their property was confiscated. Jews and thousands of Serbian people were

soon arrested and sent to certain prisons or directly to four large concentration camps organized by the Nazi regime in Serbia [2].

Belgrade prisons were places for the investigation of some detained individuals mainly led by agents of the Gestapo. The investigation comprised of extreme physical torture and psychic abuse, due to which many of the victims died from the torture, e.g. composer Vojislav Vučković, a few of them committed suicide, and several were executed in the prisons themselves. Most of the surviving Jews were transferred to the Staro Sajmište camp near Belgrade for execution [20], including the writer Martin Hosier and the opera singer Irina Kurtega [2]. The remaining Jews, along with all the Serbian victims and some others, were transported to Banjica concentration camp in Belgrade which was established on July 9, 1941, long before the majority of the European camps [2].

In addition to the survivors from the Gestapo prisons in Banjica camp, a lot of citizens arrested in raids were sent there as well, especially the members of the Resistance and the mentioned Party, their supporters, intellectuals, artists, peasants, and hostages, as well as the captured partisans and a few American pilots later on. The intellectuals, including artists and many professors at the University of Belgrade and several academicians, were arrested for potential anti-Nazi activity. The Resistance members were imprisoned for creating various sabotages against the Nazis in Belgrade. As regards the hostages, they were intended to be part of a German revenge. Namely, 100 of them were to be executed for each single German soldier killed by the Resistance, and 50 for each wounded soldier [2]. Whilst some groups of prisoners were exterminated upon admission, the others were registered by their names, assigned rooms and locked up (Figure 1). If they were accommodated in the hostage room (Figure 2) or the "death room," they were very likely to be executed eventually.

The majority of the prisoners (73%) were Serbian by origin, whilst most of the remaining were Jews, Roma, and citizens of several Western European countries and the Soviet Union. Many of prisoners were males (87.5%), most of them aged between 20 and 35, although there were a few old people, as well as some children, including babies born in the camp. According to some Nazi reports and other historical documents, over 25,000 inmates passed through this camp from 1941 to 1944 [2].

Abuse, torture, and execution of the victims were disbursed habitually by the camp staff and soldiers, becoming a daily event. Extermination of Jewish women and children was done in a small gas chamber installed on a specially made track. Execution of others was performed by firing squad at several places, but most often close to the village of Jajinci (Yayintsy) near Belgrade. According to certain reports, over 4,000 of Banjica prisoners were executed, and about 1,000 died, whilst many thousands of others, including the painter Miloš Bajić, were deported to Auschwitz, Mauthausen, Osnabrück, Dachau, Buchenwald, and some camps in Norway [2,13]. Only a few hundred were released from the Banjica camp in October 1944.

The cultural inmate activity in Banjica camp

First, the imprisoned intellectuals, especially the university professors, used to give about 40 lectures yearly to the other inmates from various scientific fields and philosophy, as well as art history, music, and literature [2]. The discussions after the presentations



Figure 1: A partially reconstructed prisoner room in Banjica concentration camp. (Photo Marinković S).



Figure 2: The Hostage Room depicted in ink by Aleksandar Deroko. (Permission of the Banjica Museum and the City Museum).



Figure 3: A wooden model of a boy's head. (Permission of the Banjica Museum and the City Museum).

usually lasted for several hours. As regards the artistic activity, some prisoners were engaged in visual arts, and some others in music, literature, or the theatre.

Visual Arts

Almost 170 inmates, precisely 169, were involved in creative activity, ranging from 24 to 47 years of age (31.3 on average). Of all the works they created, 608 artworks and design products have been saved, i.e. 351 drawings and watercolors, and 257 design works [2]. Some of the creators were gifted amateurs (139), whilst others (30) were professional painters, e.g. Bora Baruh, Miloš Bajić and Dragoljub Vuksanović, or sculptors, such as Stevan Bodnarov and Risto Stijović. There was also Aleksandar Deroko, an architect, artist (Figure 2), and intellectual. Since sculpture modeling and architectural design were almost impossible in the camp, the artists mostly made drawings or watercolors occasionally. Only Bodnarov managed to create a bust of



Figure 4: Portrait of an inmate drawn in pencil by Miloš Baijić. (Permission of the Banjica Museum and the City Museum).



Figure 5: A study in pencil of prisoner heads, a hand, and a body by Dragoljub Vuksanović. (Permission of the Banjica Museum and the City Museum).

an inmate, and an unknown prisoner modeled a small wooden head of a child (Figure 3).

The material for making artworks was mainly provided from food parcels, occasionally sent to certain prisoners by their families, and some from a camp workshop or other sources. Of the mentioned 608 works, there were 351 drawings and watercolors. Drawings were made with black or color pencils, but rarely with ink (Figure 2). Watercolors were infrequently produced (13.7%), due to a lack of paints. Two main subjects were present in artworks, i.e. inmates' portraits (46.4%) and common camp scenes (53.6%). The emaciated faces of the prisoners (Figure 4) and their skin and bone bodies (Figure 5) dominated in the artworks. Certain room scenes (Figure 2) or outdoor events (Figure 6) were also presented, including some everyday camp activities.

Several amateurs, especially Mira Jovanović, were so talented that they virtually created true artworks, e.g. a Portrait of the Jewish Boy Kokan (Figure 7). Some other prisoners made 257 aesthetically designed items for everyday use, but also some decorative things by applying woodcut, etching, and relief. The female prisoners frequently made certain embroideries or needlepoints, but they most often created dolls of some linen patches and other materials. One of them cut her own hair and used it for her little daughter Tanya's doll just before being executed [2]. All the amateurs tried to do their best in creating arts or design products, and thus to be remembered by their fellow-prisoners or family members after execution.

Music

Music was very popular in the camp, in spite of singing or



Figure 6: An outdoor scene painted in watercolor by Miloš Baijić. (Permission of the Banjica Museum and the City Museum).



Figure 7: Portrait of the Jewish boy Kokan drawn in pencil by Mira Jovanović. (Permission of the Banjica Museum and the City Museum).

playing music being strictly forbidden. Vocal music was occasionally performed by individual singers, or by a small choir, in the corners of certain rooms. It comprised the popular folk songs, some "light listening," and certain patriotic songs, as well as a few melodies composed by Miloje Milojević, an imprisoned Music Academy professor. The inmates would occasionally dance in the rhythm of the music, but heartrending melodies were sung after the executions of fellow-inmates. Nevertheless, if the singing was heard by the camp staff, the guards would violently barge into the room, haul out a few prisoners, and beat them brutally in the camp lavatory [2].

There was some instrumental music as well. For example, one of the prisoners used a knife to make a piccolo flute from a wooden broom handle and play folk and dance music. Toward the end of the war, due to corrupt guards, the prisoners managed to smuggle in a guitar and accordion. Finally, music was often an important part of some theatrical performances of a satirical or parodying nature. In that case, the famous German melody Lili Marlene was commonly sung, first broadcast on Soldiers Radio Belgrade in 1941 [2], which was sung later on by the well known actress Marlene Dietrich, and by a singer in the 1981 film of the same name directed by Fassbinder.

Literature and Poetry

Several incarcerated writers wrote certain literary texts, e.g. Božidar Kovačević and Veljko Petrović. Poetry also had an important spiritual role, and recitals occurred often. In addition to well-established poetry, many poems were created by the prisoners themselves, especially by the poets and writers in the camp. Most

of the poems were about the appalling camp life, but some of them were written in a satirical form to make jokes of the Nazis or certain prisoners. Some lines, related to certain occasions, were created in just a few hours. For instance, when there was news of a prisoner becoming a father, the mentioned writer Kovačević wrote a poem, and the music professor Milojević composed an appropriate melody for the infant [2].

The mentioned types of creativity were performed permanently in Banjica camp, and they were continued by all artists-inmates deported to other European camps [2,13].

Performative arts

Theatrical activity was as popular as music among the prisoners [2]. An improvised stage was set up occasionally in one of the rooms by using some cardboard boxes and blankets. The performances were segments of plays by well-known theatrical writers, with the participation of incarcerated professional actors. In addition, some performances, as already mentioned, were of a satiric and parodying nature which made fun of the Nazis. Since the applause after a performance could be heard by the guards, only excitement and sporadic crying would be seen on prisoners' faces [2].

The Other Camps' Cultural and Artistic Activity

The life conditions and fates of prisoners in other European concentration camps were similar to those in Banjica camp, especially regarding starvation, torture, humiliation, and slave labor, including everyday executions, with grave physical and psychological consequences [1,5-7,9,10,13,16,52].

In spite of the horrible situation, virtually all types of creativity were performed in European labor camps, death camps, and ghettos [5,13,33,34,38,53,54]. Artistic activity was strongly forbidden in some concentration camps. Due to that, many prisoner artists risked punishment, and even their lives, if caught in the artistic pursuit [34]. In spite of this, certain prisoners simply had to express their creativity.

Visual arts

According to their art education, some inmates were amateurs who started drawing after their imprisonment, e.g. Dora Schaul and Hanna Schramm in a French camp, and Alice Lok Cahana in Bergen-Belsen camp [34]. The majority, however, belonged to the class of professional artists in many camps. Some others were professional designers, e.g. Esther Lurie, Jeanne Lévy, Sylta Busse-Reismann, and Friedl Dicker-Brandeis [34,53].

Due to the mentioned prohibition in some camps, artists faced two main technical problems: how to provide the necessary material, and where to hide their artworks when completed. Amalie Seckbach from the Terezin camp used the paper and cardboard she found in garbage cans, some artists in a French camp at St. Cyprien used the canvas walls of tents, and some others provided materials from a camp workshop. The artists also managed from time to time to get pencils, pens, ink and watercolor, and very rarely several pastels, tempera or oil paints. Some of them used charcoal, rust, or food and vegetable dyes for drawing and painting [33].

After finishing their artworks, some artists, like Halina Olomucki from the Warsaw ghetto and Miloš Bajić from Mauthausen, buried

them at several sites throughout the camp [13,34]. Malva Schaleck and Leo Haas placed them into the barracks' walls in Terezin camp. Esther Lurie concealed her sketches in several jars she made in a ghetto workshop. Finally, the works of a few artists were somehow smuggled from certain ghettos or camps with the intention "to reveal to the world the true face of the Nazi regime" [34], as well as to assure their families that they were still alive and well.

As regards the art subject, the camp scenes and inmate portraits were the predominant motifs [13,33,34,38,53]. The camp scenes were present in about 20% of artworks [33]. The artists depicted the interior of the barracks, and the outdoor scenes in the camp (e.g. by Leo Breuer, Moritz Müller, Miloš Bajić, and Edith Birkin), a camp entrance (by Bedrih Fritta), and a barbed-wire fence (by Karl Bodek and Kurt Löw). In another 20%, certain everyday activities were depicted, e.g. washing, laundry, hair-washing, and sleeping, including certain types of humiliation, i.e. standing in a long line for food, or going to the toilet with no privacy (by Lou Albert-Lazard, Lili Rilik-Andrieux, and others).

Starvation was depicted as well, e.g. skeletal inmates from Buchenwald (e.g. by Boris Taslitzky), and Hunger (by Leo Haas) presenting several inmates searching for potato peelings in the garbage [34]. The consequences of torture were also presented, e.g. a watercolor by Jacob Lipschitz entitled *Beaten*, and a drawing of Miloš Bajić *Hundführers Unleashed the Dogs* [13,34,53]. Walking to the gas chamber (by Leo Haas), and transport arrivals or deportation scenes (also by Leo Haas and some others) were depicted as well [21,34]. The camp scenes showed "a misery of the living space, a sense of being trapped, emptiness, isolation and loneliness, torture consequences, and death" [34]. These artworks can be compared only with a presentation of some war crimes in history: Goya's "caprichos" regarding the Napoleonic invasions of Spain, Picasso's *Guernica* related to German bombing during the Spanish Civil War, and Otto Dix's paintings of decomposed, mutilated, and disemboweled corpses of soldiers in battle fields [33,41].

Inmate portraits, comprising between 25% and 40% of works, commonly presented the prisoners' skin-and-bone faces with big eyes and ears, and with a deeply poignant horror of physical and emotional suffering and deterioration [13,33,34]. The artists made self-portraits occasionally, e.g. Josef Kowner in Lodz ghetto, Miloš Bajić in Mauthausen, Zoran Mušič in Dachau, and Felix Nussbaum in several camps [13,21]. Some artists created child images occasionally, e.g. Fritta Bedrich who depicted the work *To Tommy* dedicated to his son Thomás on his third birthday in Terezin camp [53]. In addition to adult artists, some children were also engaged in drawing in this camp [37].

It happened rarely that some painters depicted other motifs. For instance, a few of them made some humorous, ironic, and satirical artworks, e.g. Hanna Schramm, Pavel Fantl and Eli Leskley, which were actually their personal rebellion and protest against the horror they lived in [21,34]. On the other hand, the Serbian artist Dušan Vlajić in Osnabrück painted, among others, animals and imaginary nude figures, his compatriot Petar Lubarda created almost abstract artworks, and Charlotte Buresova depicted several beautiful dancers. Some artists painted landscapes showing the countryside outside the camps, which connected them emotionally with the outside world.

Hans Reichel in Dachau created watercolor abstracts of flora and fauna, and Eva Gabanyi in Auschwitz presented the subjects in a surrealist manner [34,55]. The latter was able “to paint beauty in a world of suffering and death - flowers, imaginary landscapes, and surrealist portraits” [34].

The artistic styles used were related to realism, naturalism and expressionism, and rarely to symbolism, e.g. *The Refugee* by Felix Nussbaum [21,34,41,53]. Other styles, e.g. impressionism, surrealism and abstract art, usually could not present the horror in an effective manner. As regards the artistic techniques, drawing and watercolor were most frequently applied, and rarely painting, graphics, or collages. Drawings were usually made with pencil, and infrequently with ink or pastel, e.g. those created by Esther Lurie in Kovno ghetto, and Ervin Abadi in Bergen-Belsen camp. As for sculptures, they were modeled very infrequently, e.g. those by Albin Maria Boniecki and Azriel Awret. Several Spanish artist at St. Cyprien camp in France used squares of woods polished with sand for woodcuts [33].

Some camp authorities allowed creative activity in organized workshops for several reasons: to produce some objects for the needs of the camp, to use the design products or artworks for themselves, or as propaganda for the Nazi regime [34]. Thus, Charlotte Buresova painted copies of the famous classical masters' artworks for the camp authorities. Eva Gabanyi was ordered to draw fauna for some decorations, whilst the mentioned Esther Lurie produced jugs in the camp pottery workshop. Halina Olomucki, Leo Haas, and Hirsch Szylis were requested to paint official portraits of SS officers. Dina Gottliebowa was ordered to depict Roma portraits to be used by Dr. Josef Mengele to study racial differences, and as potential illustrations for a book about his medical experiments in Auschwitz [33]. In any case, such artistic services were of benefit to the artists themselves, as they received better foodstuffs and, in addition, they had access to the art material which they used then for their personal creativity.

From the neuroaesthetic aspect, visual arts under normal circumstances activate different brain regions depending on the subject and type of art [23,49]. Aesthetic perception and judgment activate, among others, the emotional brain regions responsible for feeling beauty, fascination, awe, poignancy, and empathy [28,32,47]. Emotions induced the activation of some of the regions engaged in pleasure and reward, which produce well-being, as well as the regions which facilitate mental processes and behavior [23,40]. This helped the prisoners to adopt and survive in a harsh environment.

Music activities

Music was allowed in some concentration camps, but not in others [5,33,54,56,57]. The opera singers Fania Fénelon and Magda Spiegel were active in Auschwitz, as well as composer James Simon and conductor Alfred Kropf [33]. Many prisoners in Dachau used to sing predominantly folk and patriotic songs. The Jewish musicians in Westerbork camp, including the pianist Martin Roman, were members of the camp cabaret. The street singers were very popular in some ghettos, as well as inmates choirs. The musician Wladyslaw Szpilman was active in the Warsaw ghetto, which was presented in the 2002 film *The Pianist* by Roman Polanski. There was even a symphony orchestra in the Terezin and Auschwitz camps, and the Vilna and Lodz ghettos, the members of which enjoyed some privileges [54]. Abraham Brodno and Misha Veksler in Vilna ghetto created several

melodies, whilst the musician Victor Ullmann in Terezin composed a few music pieces, including his opera *The Emperor of Atlantis*. He was gassed later in Auschwitz [33].

The authorities of some camps used music to abuse and humiliate prisoners [33,54]. Thus, in Dachau and Buchenwald camps, music was often played over loudspeakers during the night to deprive the inmates of sleep, and sometimes Wagner's music was played in order to “re-educate” the political opponents. The Auschwitz authorities forced the prisoners to sing certain Nazi patriotic and military songs. In addition, they ordered the inmate musicians to form several orchestras and to play for hours “for their fellow-prisoners on their way to the gas chambers” [54]. Finally, the intention of the German authorities in Terezin was to convince outsiders that the Jewish inmates were treated well. To prove that, they once organized an opera show in a nearby theatre performed by inmates for the International Red Cross, whose staff was impressed. Soon after, however, the entire cast and crew were exterminated in the gas chamber.

Physically, “Music is a sequence of tones arranged into certain patterns, and organized through time” [31]. Gradually unfolding patterns of tones result in the generation of expectation, anticipation, tension, and resolution [17,27,29,48]. Musical mood induction always activates the brain regions involved in emotion, social and cognitive domains, as well as in reward processing [17,29,40,48]. The power of music engages the cortical motor regions as well, which can move people to dance, as happened occasionally in Banjica and some other camps [2,24].

Ancient Greek philosophers realized that “proper music was harmonizing the human psyche” [17]. Music always induces emotions, e.g. tenderness, peacefulness, joy, power, nostalgia or sadness, but also complex emotions, including transcendence [27]. Some of the emotional effects are related to mood repair. Music is also very important for “communicating emotions, forming bonds, social cohesion, and conflict reduction” [17].

Literary activity

This activity was not allowed in many camps, especially possessing and reading books, and writing and reading poems, or prose pieces [5,34]. However, activities in this domain could not be hindered. For instance, a few inmates in Auschwitz, and the Vilna and Kovno ghetto, wrote poetry and recited verses to their fellow-inmates, e.g. Yitzhak Katzenelson and Krystyna Żywuńska. Under normal circumstances, poetry, like music, produces “the exploration of emotions, and feelings of close personal attachment, such as romantic love and deep friendship” [51].

Also a few writers were active in some camps. Thus, the famous Serbian writers and translators Stanislav Vinaver and Ivan Ivanji, as the inmates of the Osnabrück and Buchenwald camp, respectively, wrote several literary texts. Some writers from other countries were inmates of Auschwitz and other camps, e.g. Charlotte Delbo, Jean Amery, Jerzy Kosinsky, Arthus Koestler, and Simon Wiesenthal, including the young Anne Frank as a diarist [35]. Listening to or reading literary texts in normal conditions provoke an experience of suspense and uncertainty, as well as prediction and anticipation [28,32,38]. Literary art also contributes to enhancing social bonds and “the exploration of emotions, and enables the transformation of selfhood” [25].

Performative arts

Dance, cabaret, and theatre were allowed in some concentration camps, at least intermittently [5,36]. As regards dance, it was occasionally performed in some camps, for instance, in Auschwitz. Normally, dance has several behavioral functions, e.g. “attentional focus, basic emotional experiences, imagery, communication, self-intimacy, and social cohesion” [24]. It was practically impossible to perform ballet in any camp. However, there was a young ballerina in Auschwitz, Edith Eger, who was forced to dance for Josef Mengele [33]. An inmate there, René Blum, was a ballet impresario who was murdered in 1942.

As for plays, there was an official inmate theatre in Buchenwald camp with both prisoners and SS officers present in the audience, but also certain underground theatrical activities. One of the members was József Szajna, a famous Polish play writer, designer and painter. However, it was dangerous to organize theatrical performances in Dachau and some other camps. In spite of this, certain plays were performed in the huts with the participation of some inmate professional actors.

Theatre performances are complex cultural events, which involve speech, facial expression, and body movement, as well as dance and music now and then. Some of the activated brain regions are associated with the spectators’ emotional reaction, including sadness or enjoyment and satisfaction, but also with social interactions, e.g. social engagement and belonging [26,30,43,58]. For those reasons, theatrical performances were very popular among the camp prisoners.

Photography and film

The imprisoned professional and art photographers, e.g. Erich Salomon, Mendel Grossman, Rudolf Breslauer, Claire Beck Loos, and Imre Kinszki, were not allowed to take and make photographs. However, some of them, e.g. Rudolf Breslauer in Westerbork camp, were forced to make certain documentaries, or to participate in the creating of Nazi propaganda films for the International Red Cross toward the end of the war [34]. As regards the post-war movies, the 1997 film *Life is beautiful* directed by and starring Roberto Benigni, as well as the *Schindler’s list* by Spielberg, represent some of the most touching films about the Holocaust.

Creativity as a Psychological Defensive Mechanism

Many prisoners spontaneously and intuitively used certain cognitive, emotional, social, and religious mechanism for their psychological protection and, directly or indirectly, for their survival in terrible conditions [5,22,38,45,58,59]. In this context, Dostoyevsky noticed in his *The Brothers Karamazov*: “In sorrow seek happiness” [42], and a former camp artist Roman Halter said: “Just as there’s no limit to suffering, there’s no limit for happiness” [34]. The positive attitudes and mindfulness of such prisoners promoted their relative well-being and reduced stress and the distress [5].

In addition, some of the inmates also used creativity as a defensive mechanism. Creativity helped artists to disregard, at least to some extent, the repulsive reality and to escape to another world [5,13,33,34,38]. This enabled them to live in an imaginary surrounding, as well as confirm their creative and intellectual

capabilities, and thus to restore or enhance their self-esteem and self-confidence, and to provide emotional reward and intellectual satisfaction [5]. One of the essentials for the camp artists was to regain their lost identity and, in this way, to make them feel human again [5,8]. Due to that, many artists, like Halina Olomucki in the Warsaw ghetto, had an urge to draw and paint, whilst the imprisoned artist Zoran Mušič commented: “Art gave me the force to survive” [33].

As already mentioned, depicting prisoners’ portraits was one of the main subjects of the camp artists. Beneficial effects were produced not only in artists, but in portrayed inmates as well: “Portraiture had almost magical powers, for it granted the subjects a feeling of permanency, in contrast to the extreme fragility of their actual existence” [34]. Some female inmates begged certain artists to depict portraits of them and their daughters, “in the belief that this might be their last chance to be commemorated” [34]. In addition, the artworks spread a positive feeling to the majority of other prisoners, so that they could bear their suffering more easily [5,13,34,53].

At first sight, it is surprising that the main motifs of drawings and paintings were the camp inmates and scenes, i.e. exactly those subjects which produced distress, unhappiness, or death threatening. There are two explanations for the situation. First, this was the only surrounding where the artists lived, and hence their inspiration by fellow-prisoners and the camp scenes. Second, this could be actually another defensive mechanism, i.e. facing and analyzing reality in order to overcome it as much as possible, and a better adapting to the horrible situation. This is also the basis for the modern psychotherapy of stress [18,39]. Such a cognitive-behavioral (reappraisal) therapy is based on cognitive effort in coping with harmful events. It mainly comprises a repeated exposure to feared situations and their re-interpretation, which gradually exerts an inhibition of the negative aspect of stressful events [18].

As mentioned several times, all types of art (visual, performative, music, poetry, and literature) activate the emotional, reward, social, and cognitive regions of the brain [14,27,46,48]. In this way, they had a beneficial effect on the emotional and mental state of prisoners, and, due to enhanced empathy and altruism, on their social relationships. Such a state of affairs could suppress negative feelings and provoke positive internal emotions in their minds, which helped them to better regulate reactions to environmental events and to improve their psychological resilience [5,14,16,38,60]. Other cognitive abilities could be improved as well, especially right decision-making, which enabled better chances for their survival. This is one of the reasons why art and creativity engagement were a universal phenomenon in concentration camps and ghettos all over Europe [2,5,13,33,34,36,53,54].

The Artists’ Fate and the Documentary Significance of Camp Art

The artists had different fates. For example, the Serbian composer Vojislav Vučković died in a Gestapo prison, Miloš Bajić was deported to Mauthausen, whilst some artists-amateurs, e.g. the mentioned Mira Jovanović, were executed in Banjica camp [2]. The painter Malva Schaleck in Terezin was murdered after refusing to depict a portrait of a local collaborator, and painters Felix Nussbaum and Moritz Müller, composer Victor Ullmann, and poet Yitzhak Katzenelson

were killed in Auschwitz [34,55]. Some artists died in the camp or during deportation, for instance, the painter Amalie Seckbach and the photographer Imre Kinszki.

In general, however, many artists managed to survive. According to David Sim [61] from the *International Business Times*, 26 of the 50 artists (52.2%) from several camps he had mentioned had survived, which is a much higher percentage than with prisoners of other professions. It was an even better situation in Banjica camp, where 121 of 169 (71%) professional artists and amateurs survived [2].

Some artists who managed to escape from certain camps or ghettos joined the Resistance to fight against the Nazis, as in the case of Leo Haas, Dora Schaul, Jan Komski, and Alexander Bogen [34]. Certain artists, especially writers, expressed a posttraumatic stress syndrome associated with depression, and committed suicide after liberation [12,15,19,35,56,62]. On the other hand, the majority of the surviving artists, particularly painters and sculptors, managed to cope and adjust in a normal environment [2,13,33,34], and to continue their creative work after their release, e.g. Samuel Bak, Yehuda Bacon, Jonasz Stern, Miloš Bajić, Petar Lubarda, Stevan Bodnarov, and Risto Stijović [2,5,33,53]. Some of them, and a few others, became famous artists worldwide, for instance, Max Ernst, Samuel Bak, and Zoran Mušič, whilst some others were promoted to University professors or Academy members, e.g. Miloš Bajić, Petar Lubarda, Stevan Bodnarov, Risto Stijović, Aleksandar Deroko, and Alexander Bogen [2,13,34]. Many of the Holocaust artists, however, continued to draw and paint the camp scenes until the end of their life spans [13,21]. The horror which they survived was “imprinted” in their minds forever. On the other hand, Alice Lok Cahana, a Holocaust survivor, believed that her art “had to be about the transcendence of the human spirit, the triumph of human spirituality over inhuman evil” [55].

Finally, the camp art also had a significant documentary impact. Thus, in the Kovno ghetto community, painter Esther Lurie was asked to make drawings of all the events and of many inmates, and thus to document the situation for the outer world and the future generations [33,34]. Avraham Tory designed many architectural drawings there for the same purpose [34,53]. Norbert Traller, an architect, made many documentary drawings and paintings, including portraits of children, as well as a lot of patients in Terezin hospital [33]. Many artists in other ghettos and camps also wanted to document the cruelty, horror, and suffering of innocent and helpless victims. Finally, scenes from the concentration camps were drawn or painted by some war artists immediately after liberation, such as Eric Taylor, Morris Kestelman, George Mayer, Jan Hartman, Doris Zinkeisen, Leslie Cole, and Zinovii Tolkatchev. Their documentary artworks definitely convinced the world about the horrible genocide committed by the Nazi regime in concentration camps.

Moreover, the artworks created in camps served as a testimony at court on several occasions. For example, some drawings and watercolors by Esther Lurie and Yehuda Bacon were used during the Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961 [33,34]. Similarly, the mentioned Jewish boy portrait (Figure 7), created by Mira Jovanović in Banjica camp, as well as several drawings of Miloš Bajić, were enclosed as material evidence against the camp commander after the war [2,13]. Camp artist Dora Schaul was a witness at the Klaus Barbie trial in Lyon in 1987. All this was a non-planned revenge of the tortured or

executed camp artists against the Nazi war criminals.

Conclusion

In order to avoid the psychological deterioration caused by starvation, torture, humiliation, and permanent death risk, professional artists and some other inmates engaged themselves in various forms of creativity. This creativity helped the majority of artists and amateurs to psychologically survive in harsh conditions, as well as physically in many cases. Moreover, most of them managed to cope and adjust in a normal environment after liberation, and to continue their artistic work. In any case, creativity could be a recommendation to future victims of long-lasting extreme social conditions.

References

1. Abalán F, Martínez-Gallardo R, Bourgeois M. Neuropsychological sequelae of deportation to the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War. *Actas Luso Esp Neurol Psiquiatr Cienc Afines*. 1989; 17: 36-43.
2. Begović S. *Banjica Camp 1941-1944*. Volume 1 and 2. Belgrade: Institute of Modern History. 1989.
3. Bramsen I, Deeg DJ, van der Ploeg E, Fransman S. Wartime stressors and mental health symptoms as predictors of late-life mortality in World War II survivors. *J Affect Disord*. 2007; 103: 121-129.
4. Connelly J. Nazis and Slavs: from racial theory to racist practice. *Cent Eur History*. 1999; 32: 1-33.
5. Frankl VE. *Man is searching for meaning*. 4th edition. Boston: Beacon Press. 1992.
6. Jablonski RK, Leszek J, Rosińczuk J, Uchmanowicz I, Panaszek B. Impact of incarceration in Nazi concentration camps on multimorbidity of former prisoners. *Neuropsychiatr Dis and Treat*. 2015; 11: 669-674.
7. Peters UH. Psychological sequelae of persecution. The survivor syndrome. *Fortschr Neurol Psychiatr*. 1989; 57: 169-191.
8. Pingel F. The destruction of human identity in concentration camps: the contribution of the social sciences to an analysis of behavior under extreme conditions. *Holocaust Genocide Stud*. 1991; 6: 167-184.
9. Ryn Z. Between life and death: experiences of concentration camp mussulmen during the holocaust. *Genet Soc Gen Psychol Monogr*. 1990; 116: 5-19.
10. Schmolling P. Human reactions to the Nazi concentration camps: a summing up. *J Human Stress*. 1984; 10: 108-120.
11. Wright E. *An illustrated history of the world*. Volume 4. London: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited. 1979.
12. Shemesh AA, Kohn R, Radomislensky I, Brodsky J, Levav I. Emotional distress and other health-related dimensions among elderly survivors of the Shoa living in the community. *Isr J Psychiatry Relat Sci*. 2008; 45: 230-238.
13. Bajić M. Mauthausen 106621. Belgrade: Media Center Defense. 2017.
14. Davies C, Knuiman M, Rosenberg M. The art of being mentally healthy: a study to quantify the relationship between recreational arts engagement and mental well-being in the general population. *BMC Public Health*. 2016; 16: 15.
15. Kuch K, Cox BJ. Symptoms of PTSD in 124 survivors of the Holocaust. *Am J Psychiatry*. 1992; 149: 337-340.
16. Ofer D, Greenwood N. Everyday life of Jews under Nazi occupation: methodological issues. *Holocaust Genocide Stud*. 1995; 9: 42-69.
17. Perlovsky L. Musical emotions: functions, origins, evolution. *Phys Life Rev*. 2010; 7: 2-27.
18. Ross DA, Arbuckle MR, Travis MJ, Dwyer JB, van Schalkwyk GI, Ressler KJ. An integrated neuroscience perspective on formulation and treatment planning for posttraumatic stress disorder: An educational review. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2017; 74: 407-415.

19. Sharon A, Levav I, Brodsky J, Shemesh AA, Kohn R. Psychiatric disorders and other health dimensions among Holocaust survivors 6 decades later. *Br J Psychiatry*. 2009; 195: 331-335.
20. Shelach M. Sajmiste—an extermination camp in Serbia. *Holocaust Genocide Stud*. 1987; 2: 243-260.
21. Vashem Y. *Art from the Holocaust - 100 works from the Yad Vashem collection*, German Historical Museum, Berlin. 2016.
22. Zukerman G, Korn L. Post-traumatic stress and world assumptions: the effects of religious coping. *J Relig Health*. 2014; 53: 1676-1690.
23. Boccia M, Barbetti S, Piccardi L, Guariglia C, Ferlazzo F, Giannini AM, et al. Where does brain neural activation in aesthetic responses to visual art occur? Meta-analytic evidence from neuroimaging studies. *Neurosci Biobehav Rev*. 2016; 60: 65-71.
24. Christensen JF, Gaigg SB, Gomila A, Oke P, Calvo-Merino B. Enhancing emotional experiences to dance through music: the role of valence and arousal in the cross-modal bias. *Front Hum Neurosci*. 2014; 8: 757.
25. Lehne M, Engel P, Rohrmeier M, Menninghaus W, Jacobs AM, Koelsch S. Reading a suspenseful literary text activates brain areas related to social cognition and predictive inference. *PLoS One*. 2015; 10: e0124550.
26. Meeks S, Shryock SK, Vandembroucke RJ. Theatre involvement and well-being, age differences, and lessons from long-time subscribers. *Gerontologist*. 2018; 58: 278-289.
27. Miu AC, Pitur S, Szentágotai-Táatar A. Aesthetic emotions across arts: a comparison between painting and music. *Front Psychol*. 2016; 6: 1951.
28. Oatley K. Art as emotional exploration. *Behav Brain Sci*. 2017; 40: e372.
29. Oetken S, Pauly KD, Gur RC, Schneider F, Habel U, Pohl A. Don't worry, be happy - Neural correlates of the influence of musically induced mood on self-evaluation. *Neuropsychologia*. 2017; 100: 26-34.
30. Proverbio AM, Calbi M, Manfredi M, Zani A. Comprehending body language and mimics: an ERP and neuroimaging study of Italian actors and viewers. *PLoS One*. 2014; 9: e91294.
31. Salimpoor VN, Zald DH, Zatorre RJ, Dagher A, McIntosh AR. Predictions and the brain: how musical sounds become rewarding. *Trends Cogn Sci*. 2015; 19: 86-91.
32. Schindler I, Hosoya G, Menninghaus W, Beermann U, Wagner V, Eid M, et al. Measuring aesthetic emotions: A review of the literature and a new assessment tool. *PLoS One*. 2017; 12: e0178899.
33. DeCoste CF, Schwartz B. *The Holocaust ghost. Writings on art, politics, law and education*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press. 2000.
34. Rosenberg P. "Art during the Holocaust. Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. Jewish Women's Archive". 2009.
35. Weisz GM. Secondary guilt syndrome may have led Nazi-persecuted Jewish writers to suicide. *Rambam Maimonides Med J*. 2015; 6: e0040.
36. Curt D. *Theatre in the Nazi concentration camps*. 1968.
37. Gaezer Grossman F. The art of the children of Terezin. A psychological study. *Holocaust Genocide Stud*. 1989; 4: 213-229.
38. Karay F. The social and cultural life of the prisoners in the Jewish forced labor camp at Skarzysko-Kamienna. *Holocaust Genocide Stud*. 1994; 8: 1-27.
39. Åhs F, Gingnell M, Furmark T, Fredrikson M. Within-session effect of repeated stress exposure on extinction circuitry function in social anxiety disorder. *Psychiatry Res Neuroimaging*. 2017; 261: 85-90.
40. Berridge KC, Kringelbach ML. Pleasure system in the brain. *Neuron*. 2015; 86: 646-664.
41. Davies PJE, Denny WB, Hofrichter FF, Jacobs JF, Roberts AS, Simon DL. *Janson's history of art. The Western tradition*. 7th edition. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall. 2007.
42. Dostoyevsky F. *The Brothers Karamazov*. London: Penguin Books. 2003.
43. Etzel JA, Valchev N, Gazzola V, Keysers C. Is brain activity during action observation modulated by the perceived fairness of the actor? *PLoS One*. 2016; 11: e0145350.
44. Friedman HS, Schustack MW. *Personality. Classic theories and modern research*. 2nd edition. Boston: Pearson. 2006.
45. Miller L, Balodis IM, McClintock CH, Xu J, Lacadie CM, Sinha R, et al. Neural correlates of personalized spiritual experiences. *Cereb Cortex*. 2019; 29: 2331-2338.
46. Sherman A, Morrissey C. What is art good for? The socio-epistemic value of art. *Front Hum Neurosci*. 2017; 11: 411.
47. Stamatoopoulou D. Empathy and the aesthetic: Why does art still move us? *Cogn Process*. 2018; 19: 169-186.
48. Tiihonen M, Brattico E, Maksimainen J, Wikgren J, Saarikallio S. Constituents of music and visual-art related pleasure - A critical integrative literature review. *Front Psychol*. 2017; 8: 1218.
49. Vartanian O, Skov M. Neural correlates of viewing paintings: evidence from a quantitative meta-analysis of functional magnetic resonance imaging data. *Brain Cogn*. 2014; 87: 52-56.
50. Wang X, Zheng L, Cheng X, Li L, Sun L, Wang Q, et al. Actor-recipient role affects neural responses to self in emotional situations. *Front Behav Neurosci*. 2015; 9: 83.
51. Wassiliwizky E, Koelsch S, Wagner V, Jacobsen T, Menninghaus W. The emotional power of poetry: neural circuitry, psychophysiology and compositional principles. *Soc Cogn Affect Neurosci*. 2017; 12: 1229-1240.
52. Pollanen MS. The pathology of torture. *Forensic Sci Int*. 2018; 284: 85-96.
53. Feinstein SC. *Holocaust. Art and the Holocaust*. 2010.
54. Flam G. *Holocaust. Music and the Holocaust*. 2010.
55. Cahana AL. *Internet*. 2018.
56. Robinson S, Rapaport J, Durst R, Rapaport M, Rosca P, Metzger S, et al. The late effects of Nazi persecution among elderly Holocaust survivors. *Acta Psychiatr Scand*. 1990; 82: 311-315.
57. Fackler G. Cultural behaviour and the invention of traditions: music and musical practices in the early concentration camps, 1933-6/7. *J Contemp Hist*. 2010; 45: 601-627.
58. Kosslyn SM, Rosenberg RS. *Psychology. The brain, the person, the world*. 2nd edition. Boston: Pearson. 2004.
59. Morina N, Bryant RA, Doolan EL, Martin-Sölich C, Plichta MM, Pfaltz MC, et al. The impact of enhancing perceived self-efficacy in torture survivors. *Depress Anxiety*. 2018; 35: 58-64.
60. Engen HG, Kanske P, Singer T. The neural component-process architecture of endogenously generated emotions. *Soc Cogn Affect Neurosci*. 2017; 12: 197-211.
61. Sim D. *Holocaust Memorial Day 2016: Poignant paintings by Jewish concentration camp prisoners go on show in Berlin*. *International Business Times*. 2016.
62. Bath KG, Russo SJ, Pleil KE, Wohleb ES, Duman RS, Radley JJ. Circuit and synaptic mechanisms of repeated stress: Perspectives from differing contexts, duration, and development. *Neurobiol Stress*. 2017; 7: 137-151.