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Surfaces of Auschwitz

Although numbers are uncertain, recent research estimates that 1.1 million lost their lives at Auschwitz between 1940 and 1945. The camp has been continuously open to the public since 1946; in the year 2011 alone, 1.4 million visited Auschwitz. Its impact on visitors is undeniable. But what about the impact of visitors on the camp? This exhibit is the result of a research trip to Poland in summer 2011; it seeks to show the behavior of visitors in four key Auschwitz buildings to understand how light level, signage, the presence or absence of guides, and contact with original surfaces all influence visitors in a historic place, leading to -or preventing- attention, excessive noise, and vandalism. The research and exhibit are one student's attempt to understand how historic places of suffering may be opened to influence the public, while still protecting and leaving space for ghosts.