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THE STRANGE TWENTIETH-CENTURY FAMILY ALBUM*

Cinema and television vs. Auschwitz photographs

For around forty years, photographs have been used to make films about concentration camps and the genocide of the Jews with little concern for their origins, the conditions in which they were taken or the point of view they depict.

After two decades, our perception of these pictures has changed: historical works are concerned with restoring their status as historical sources; part of the corpus of graphic depictions has been compiled, pictures have been labelled and put in context, and reflections have been made on picture-taking practices in the ghettos and camps[1]. This historiographic exigency has created a new configuration of memorial, social and symbolic demands imposed upon pictures by our iconomaniac societies.

At the same time, debates and discussions about the *images of the Shoah* have made their way into posterity thanks to Claude Lanzmann's film. They focus on the massacre of Jews in the gas chambers in Polish extermination camps, perpetrated in the utmost secrecy. In fact, there is no known photograph evidencing the killing of these victims inside the gas chambers. Thus, the heart of the process of annihilation appears to be a blind spot. This economy of the invisible and destruction of evidence, intended and organised by the Nazis, explain the importance and singular status given today to two series of photographs taken on the periphery of the event: the four photographs clandestinely taken in August 1944 by members of the *Sonderkommando* at Birkenau, and the series of photographs known as the *Auschwitz*

Album, taken by the Nazis after the arrival of a transport of Hungarian Jews at the end of May 1944.

With *Auschwitz, the Album, the Memory* (Auschwitz, l'album, la mémoire, 1984), Alain Jaubert became the first filmmaker to raise questions about this second set of pictures. His reflections on picture taking and the singularity of the *album* had a sequel four years later, with Harun Farocki's *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* [Images of the World and the Inscription of War]. These two works can be related to the recent BBC production *Auschwitz, the Nazis and the Final Solution* (2005), which explores the knowledge of the photographs and the camps in a radically different way in order to inscribe it in a new economy of the visible[2].

The history of the album

The Auschwitz Album is an illustrated report containing around two hundred negatives taken at Birkenau after the arrival from the Bilke region of a convoy of Jews[3]. Collected and labelled –for reasons still unclear– in an ordinary photo album[4], these pictures ended up in the hands of Lili Jacob (one of the survivors in that convoy[5]) due to a coincidence as miraculous as it is disturbing.

Since 1946, the year that the first copy was made for the Jewish museum in Prague, the photographs from the album have been used separately for works, exhibitions and films. In 1964, on the occasion of the Frankfurt trials of twenty-two Nazi criminals who had acted in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Lili Jacob testified and *her* album led to the identification and sentencing of the SS officer Stefan Baretzki, whose presence at the arrival of the convoy of Hungarians was evidenced by one of the photographs. It was at these same proceedings that the question of the identity of the photographers was raised; the names Bernhard Walter and Ernst Hofmann, two SS officers in the camp's identification service, were mentioned at the hearing.[6]

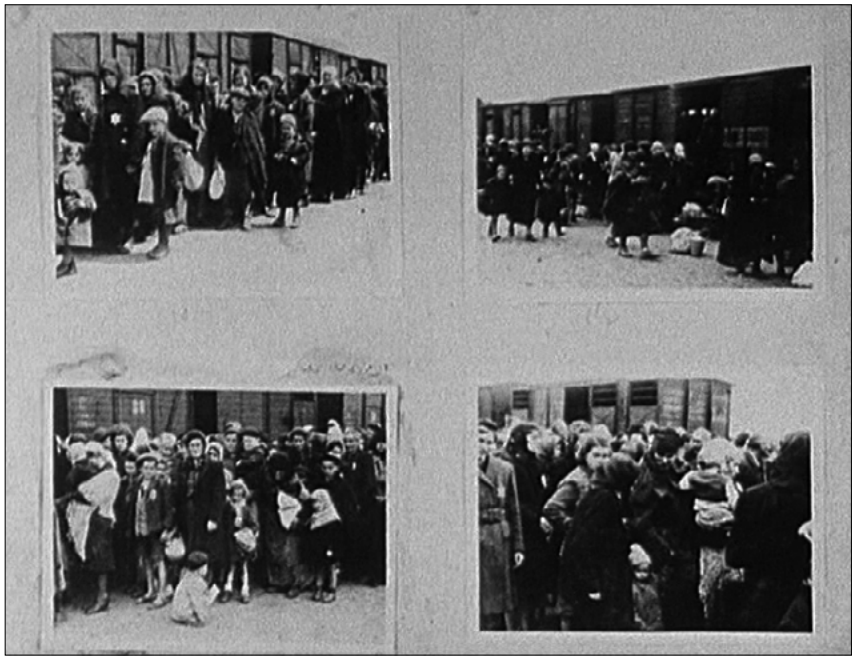
In 1979, Serge Klarsfeld found out about the plates that were being kept at the Prague museum, and "with the intuition of a historian" (WIEVIORKA, 2005: 94) he immediately began working on recovering the original album, which he considered as precious as the Dead Sea Scrolls. In fact, as Annette Wieviorka points out, the importance of these photos does not lie so much in each picture taken individually, allowing us to «illustrate that phase of the genocide» or to "prove the guilt of such-and-such SS officer", but in the effect that the whole set of pictures has as a report that constructs a narrative and allows us to «view a story» (WIEVIORKA, 2005: 94). In 1980 in Miami, Serge Klarsfeld found Lili Jacob (now Lili Meier) and managed to convince her to lend the museum at Yad Vashem her "family album"; that same year, the Beate Klarsfled Foundation published the first reproduction, whose existence became known to Alain Jaubert thanks to psychoanalyst and Auschwitz survivor Anne-Lise Stern. The appearance of this photographic report –as well as the mysterious story and fate of the album– was perfect material for a film.

This series of snapshots is cut into sequences (WIEVIORKA, 2005: 94) which depict the different stages of the arrival of Hungarian Jews: the transport arriving at the platform, the wait at the ramp, the *selection*, the entry of the *fit* ones into the camp to be taken to work, the selection of personal effects, the inspections of the other line –those declared *not fit*– grouped for a final stop in the forest of Birkenau.

These pictures have a dual quality. Unlike other photographs taken by the Nazis (especially those taken in the Polish ghettos), they do not reveal an anti-Semitic gaze. In this regard, Alain Jaubert points out that the photographer "does not use his camera as if it were a rifle; his view of his subjects is not monstrous" (LINDEPERG, 2000: 188)[7].These pictures do not depict any act of violence or coercion; they show not so much the actions as the conditions and stages (the arrival of a train; a boxcar with its doors open; the rows of people; the head-shearing, its effects illustrated by a row of women with their heads shaven...).

It is therefore our knowledge of these facts that gives these pictures their concealed violence, permitting us to imagine the gas chamber off-camera, understanding that the old people, women and children we see are about to face their death. In this sense, the photographs from the Auschwitz album give life to a different type of

Picture from the *Auschwitz Album*. Courtesy of the Yad Vashem Museum, Jerusalem



propaganda from the pictures of the ghettos, as they allow for a strategy of literal, decontextualised reading that supports the argument that nothing was really happening on the platform or in Birkenau itself, nothing out of the ordinary in the material and hygienic organisation of the admission to the camps; an interpretative strategy that entails the denial of the genocide.

At the same time, a different interpretation can shed light on the terrible logic of the extermination. Thus, the row of people chosen for the gas chamber, which can be seen in many of the photographs, allows us to get closer to the massacre, since "not entering the camp meant going to the end, to the death"[8].

Signs and margins

This second reading is the one proposed in Alain Jaubert's film, whose set of images is made up of photographs from the album, while its soundtrack is a tapestry of voices: the director's, proposing a reflection on the act of picture taking; Anne Wiazemsky's, reading a montage of quotations from Charlotte Delbo, Elie Wisel, Miklós Nyiszli, Viktor Frankl, Peter Hellmann, Jean Cayrol and Adelaïde Hautval; the voices of four deported old Jewish women, intimately linked, reacting to the photographs, and anonymous voices who are identified only by their first name and the tattooed numbers presented on a piece of cardboard at the beginning of the film. The four women are not filmed during their reading of the images, which ultimately result in the film creating a «testimony without witnesses», as suggested by Anne-Lise Stern, one of the four protagonists of this polyphonic choir[9].

Alain Jaubert's commentary and his montage work with the snapshots he explores through tracking shots and zooms privilege the search for signs and the reflection on the margins of the photograph. In a style similar to that of the photographer in *Blow Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966), Jaubert uses frames and enlargements of the photographs in order to construct a narrative, to propose an intriguing mise-en-scène of the event; except that, unlike the search undertaken by Antonioni's character, his observation of the photographs does not reveal the crime scene at all, but the double discourse of absence in the image and the close presence of what is off camera. For Alain Jaubert, the idea was precisely "to understand how those photographs, which do not reflect the most brutal reality of the camps at all, nevertheless open a door to decoding the photograph in its margins. [...] Because it is in the margins where the horror takes place, it is before and after that verbal and physical violence occurs, and it is after that the extermination inferred from the separation in rows takes place. Certain details allow us to glimpse the reality of the extermination: for instance, when looking at these pictures, train carriages are often visible side by side, bearing the letters SNCF [the French National Railways] and DB [Deutschbahn], Hungarian carriages and Czech carriages. And suddenly we are struck by a dizzying thought: if an SNCF train is arriving at Auschwitz transporting deported Hungarians, this means that trains were circulating all over the Greater Reich and across the whole of Europe. The small letters on the train carriage, sometimes written in chalk, bear witness to the existence of a formidable stationmaster, a formidable chief logistics officer called Eichmann. This is how Auschwitz appears, in the signs and in the margins of the photograph, as the biggest station in Europe" (LINDEPERG, 2000).

The voice of the narrator who questions the status of photography and the context the pictures were taken in meets the choir of deported women who comment on the images, interpret them, and uncover subtle signs (the frayed clothes of the deported, their unpaired shoes, the washing line that identifies the gypsy camp...). Sometimes they reject the pictures, and they often complete them as they too acknowledge the invisibility of the dead and what is off camera. This fugue in four voices is also organised around the central motif of extermination, the *crematorium*, a nearby building containing the gas chambers and crematory ovens, an inaccessible place in the mise-en-scène of death, brought closer by the story of a deported *Sonderkommando*, by the sight and smell of the chimneys, because they recall the disappearance of the near ones and the not so near (the whole gypsy colony exterminated in one morning). Gauguin confirms that if something is not in the frame it does not mean it is not there; it is just off canvas (HUPPERT, 1990: 151).



Thus, the image changes status: rather than a piece of evidence, it appears as a trigger for the gaze, a crystalliser of recollections, a memory operator. In return, the mismatch between memories and photographs produces an implicit reflection on the status of the evidence. Lucidly, the former deportees question the differences between their own experience and the photographs they are looking at, but also on the fragility of memories, on their migration and interference with the passage of time. Again, as Alain Jaubert points out: "After so many years, these deported women had read many books, they had recomposed their past for themselves, they had seen films [...]. It is the moment when even the strongest certainties –some deportees were very close to the black spot of the camp, that is, the gas chamber and the crematory ovens– start to crumble in their memories under the weight of denial. So the idea was to bring these former deportees face to face with their own memories, with this background of denial, and show not only that their memories might not match up with the photographs, but also that photographs cannot translate reality" (LINDEPERG, 2000).

By interrogating the instantaneity of the act of picture taking and its relationship with destruction, Alain Jaubert's film once again calls into question the idea of the time of the event. The essential force of the images of Auschwitz have is the way they capture the gazes and faces of those who are about to vanish, and offer the "last moment in these people's lives, right before their deaths. [...] In a photograph, an instant is frozen in which there are people, when we know they are looking at something, often at the photographer. Rather like those Renaissance paintings in which the reflection of the workshop window can be seen in the brightest corner of the canvas, we imagine we could enter the eyes of the character and see what he was seeing at that very moment, the historical event or the non-event; in short, the instant. And obviously we are disappointed because the photograph does not have that power to record the moment; it merely captures the most superficial layers, but does not penetrate into the mind, and when we enter the gaze of the people, we enter the heart of the photograph. But these hearts are interesting, and that is why I have filmed highly detailed shots that are blurred, because we find ourselves in the heart of the image. These points of light, these photons imprinted on the film, offer us a message that is undecipherable, that might make no sense, but that is nothing more than the faces of women, men and children that have been frozen this way, for the last time before being disintegrated, either immediately afterwards or a little later" (LINDEPERG, 2000).

The question of instantaneity is explored further in the commentary of one of the deportees: when recalling the law of the camp, she underlines the obliteration of the duration and perspective of time, the total power of the instant, the relentless twists of fate that literally mock/play from one second to the next. This time crisis also has its origin in the black hole of death, where both narration and duration are absent; as Michel Deguy wrote, for the Jews thrown into the gas chambers «when they thought there were entering a work camp, there was no time for the unbelievable to happen» (HUPPERT, 1990: 41).

"A thought in images"[10]

Alain Jaubert's reflection on the photographs from the Auschwitz album finds its echo and sequel in Harun Farocki's *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges (Images of the World and the Inscription of War)*. In its manner of repeating and shooting, frame and misframe, the central motif of this work consists of interrogating and reopening the boundaries of interpretation of the aerial photographs of Auschwitz taken in April 1944 by American bomber pilots flying over Silesia with the aim of locating the IG Farben factories in Monowitz. The worrying proximity between the acts of preservation and destruction, the relationship between the violence of war and the technological recording and reconnaissance devices and the instability of the meaning ascribed to an image according to the context of interpretation constitute the main themes in Farocki's film. From this perspective, the filmmaker refers to numerous snapshots from the Auschwitz album. He also points out the singular nature of photographic reporting and the materiality of the album whose pages he leafs through. While describing the implacable process of *selection* (*Aussortierung*), Farocki points to the effects of the euphe-

Pictures from the *Auschwitz Album*, from left to right, photographs 189, 183, 185, 113, 7, and 65 of the album. Courtesy of the Yad Vashem Museum, Jerusalem



mism of the labels on the photographs. He clarifies the hidden meaning of the images by relating them to other sources: the drawings made by the deportee Alfred Kantor; the report by Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, two inmates who escaped from Auschwitz, whose testimony provided the allies with precise knowledge of the extermination process in this death camp. Farocki's film thus strongly emphasises the necessary "interplay between image and text in the writing of history" (FAROCKI, 2002: 37), and proposes a new articulation between photography and testimony. The knowledge constituted by the witnesses is treated as a means of reinterpreting and deciphering the elements captured in the image. While Jaubert privileges the aspect of counterpoint, the Berlin filmmaker instead underlines the journey of the visible; the experience of the eyewitnesses allows us to recognise and therefore see what is in the photograph but could not be read or interpreted. The placement of one image in relation with the others, but especially the combination of seeing and knowing, allows us to capture the unconsidered elements of the photograph at the moment it was taken. The multiplication of views and perspectives on the event (pictures taken automatically from bomber planes at 23,000 feet, reports on escapes from Auschwitz, photographs taken by the victims just outside the gas chambers) allows us to access this tragic observation: everything was there, "written as if in the book of God" and visible to the eye; everything remained, waiting for interpretation and for a willing interpreter. This new reading appears as the result of a reunion between historical knowledge, the domain of the memory, the social imaginary and popular culture (the success of the serial *Holocaust*), which condition the exhumation of the photographs, the questions raised about them and the way of deciphering them. But it also assumes a demand for instantaneity and a political will, as Farocki suggests by positioning his film in the tradition of Günther Anders, calling for "reality to begin". In 1983, supporting the ban on nuclear arms sites in West Germany, Anders reminds us of the Allies' decision not to bomb Auschwitz. In this sense, *Images of the World* appears as a work shaped by the political urgency of the present.

Harun Farocki lingers on certain photographs from the album, wondering about the context in they were taken in, the chance for the person in the photograph to "face the camera", his fragility before the photographer's armed eye. Under the sign of the exchange of gazes, the camera lingers on the picture shown on this page.

The composition of this snapshot (which also appears in Jaubert's film) highlights the contiguity of two scenes from two universes that are clearly distinguished and separated in time: the background where the fate of a deportee is decided in the *selection* process; the gaze directed at the photographer by the young woman in the foreground and the movement of her body that keeps her in the world of *before* for a second, far from the implacable machine of destruction.

Enlarging and framing the image, Farocki offers the following commentary on it: "A woman has arrived in Auschwitz, and the camera captures her in motion. The photographer has set up his camera and when this woman passed in front of him, he shoots – the same way he would look at her on a street, because she is attractive. [...] The woman assents to turn her head, just enough to capture this photographic gaze and look into the eyes of the man looking at her. If this had happened on a boulevard, her eyes would evade a man watching and fall on a shop window, and with this furtive look, she seeks to transport herself to a world of boulevards, women and shop windows, far from here. The camp, run by the SS, will destroy her, and the photographer who immortalises her beauty is part of that same SS. Preservation and destruction – how can the two things be combined?"

The idea of a combination and contiguity of opposites is found again in Farocki's comment on the ambivalence of the concept of *Aufklärung* considered «in the sense of (intellectual) *Lights*, but also in the military and policing sense of *reconnaissance*» (BLÜMLINGER, 2002: 14), a reconnaissance that carries the seeds of

Pictures from Harun Farocki's film *Bilder der Welt uns Inschrift des Krieges*, in which the photograph "Birkenau, Poland, Geza Lajtos from Budapest during a selection on the ramp in front of an SS physician" from the *Auschwitz Album* is framed, Yad Vashem Photo Archive

destruction inside it. Again, this reflection is connected with Alain Jaubert's, when he evokes in his film the polysemy of the "light of Auschwitz": impressed upon the film in order to reach us, like stars that have already died, messages from the persecuted; more metaphorically, the "revelation" confirming that the philosophy of the Enlightenment had in no way eliminated Evil in the heart of Humanity[11].

In *Images of the World*, the time of the film also serves as a dark room for the development of History, thanks to the deployment of a montage which is infinitely complex and subtle. Beginning with the constant of an invisibility of the event, the filmmaker concludes by revealing the imprint as if on a photographic plate; he thus it makes visible, thanks to the collection of signs and of scattered traces which come to declare the film before the final resolution. The enigmatic reprise of the "Canada" photographs is a milestone in the journey of Vrba, an inmate in the section of the camp who was in charge of sorting the deportees' personal effects; the numbers and the registers return to Wetzler, who worked in records; the coded messages prepare the revolt for members of the *Sonderkommando* which succeeded in October 1944 in partially destroying the Birkenau crematorium. This movement to action made by the victims for whom "reality began" was photographed from the air, producing "an image out of these numbers".

In Farocki's and Jaubert's films, the slow discovery of the pictures, the path they have taken to reach us and the long history of their readability are all invitations to meditate on the complex status of photography, the strength and the fragility, the absence at the heart of the visible, and the political motivation of the gaze, the dimension that exists off-camera or the absence at the heart of the visible.

This is quite a different approach from the one proposed by the series *Auschwitz, the Nazis and the Final Solution*[12], which places historical knowledge at the service of an omniscient discourse that fills in the gaps and reduces the time intervals.

Although the reconstruction strategy serves to support archive images, at the same time it denies their intrinsic force and value

The tyranny of the visible

This programme by Laurence Rees, written in close collaboration with historian Ian Kershaw, combines filmed testimonies, archive still shots and photographs, fictional scenes performed by comedians, views of Auschwitz-Birkenau shot in colour: a mixture of images that allow us to reconstruct certain facilities in the camp.

This combination of different levels of the visible responds to a didactic approach: in the eyes of the production team, it should bring an awareness of the latest historiographic advances to the general public. This awareness is extended to the history of the images; unlike the *misuse* of archives that was so frequent in documentaries made in the first decades after the war (LIDEPERG, 2007), the photographs and shots are in this case perfectly dated, *labelled* and sometimes clarified by the shooting conditions themselves. The image of the cremation of bodies in Birkenau thus became the object of the following comment: "This photo, taken by a *Sonderkommando* risking his life, shows dead bodies lying near the crematory pits that started to be used in 1944". The pictures in the Auschwitz album, magnified in many parts of the film, are restored to their context too: "As a general rule, it is forbidden to take photographs in Auschwitz. But an SS photographed the arrival of this convoy coming from Hungary. No one knows why he took these photos, but they constitute a valuable visual testimony of what happened there". And since the director, when recalling *Doctor* Mengele's sinister experiments, chose to include some shots of the Auschwitz twins advancing behind a tangle of barbed wires, the narrator specifies that these are shots filmed by Soviet troops after the liberation of the camp.

This concern for scientific rigour goes hand in hand with the concern for the debates and controversies over the question of the unimaginable and *the unrepresentable*. The conception of the fictional sequences subtly reveals the boundaries that the team has imposed on itself. The main purpose of the fictional scenes is to give life to the texts from the period: hearings, letters, administrative processes... because the reconstruction results in some dramatic scenes (executions by firing squad, the *Sonderkommando* uprising at the Sobibor, the raping of German women by Soviet soldiers), the filmmaker imposed the *ethical* boundary of not depicting the victims or the corpses; he chose what he considered the *right distance*, sometimes misframing the actors at the height of their legs, placing the camera on the ground, using shadows and tricks of light in order to make certain details obscure.

Although the reconstruction strategy serves to support archive images, at the same time it denies their intrinsic force and value. In the episode devoted to the killings in the summer of 1941 on Soviet territory, the director presents the filmed sequence of an execution of *Einsatzgruppen* and decides to burden this scene with a fictitious reverse shot showing the actor who plays Himmler witnessing the show. For the production team, the dual concern for visibility and historical accuracy –the *SS Reichsführer* attended an execution near Minsk on the 15th of August 1941–authorises this reverse shot, which results in a flattening of the different layers of images and a loss of historicity of the filmed document[13].

The lack of reliance on archive images, which have to be *completed*, repeats itself in the use of filmed tes-

timonies. While an old political deportee at Auschwitz, Jerzy Bielecki, tells of having seen "a junior SS officer walking around the pit with a pistol in his hand", his image vanishes from the screen to give way to a fictional scene produced to illustrate his words. Likewise, a shot *licked* by the flames of a fire covers the testimony of a member of the *Sonderkommando* at Birkenau while he recalls the exhumation of bodies in Auschwitz and the open-air cremations. The testimony, cut down mercilessly, is incapable of igniting the imagination of the spectator, whose vision is being saturated by a combination of redundant images.

The incessant shifting from one level of the visible to the other is evident in the use of the pictures from the Auschwitz album. In the fifth episode of the series, several dozen photographs of the convoy, with musical accompaniment, are put in motion through rapid tracking shots and zooms that close up on the faces of the women and children. These shots overlap, always at high speed, with colour shots of Birkenau, and the testimony of an escaping convoy of Hungarian Jews and of two former members of the *Sonderkommando*.

In *Auschwitz, the Nazis...*, the articulation of testimony and photography does not emphasise so much the collusion or counterpoint than an economy of exchange whereby word and image are supposed to mutually validate, bear witness to and justify each other. The constant shifting between the archive document and the image in the present does not inspire a debate, much less a crisis; it functions as an accumulation of evidence that validates the historical discourse.

Pictures from the film *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985)

As for the colour shots, their debt to *Shoah* (1985) is obvious; however, they reduce this cinematic technique to the dimension of a cliché, like the postcards in the Auschwitz museum sold to tourists as a souvenir with the sunset over the barbed wires of Birkenau. Taking note of the destruction of remains, Claude Lanzmann constructed his film on the basis of emptiness, of disappearance, and redefined the relationship between place and word, between land surveying and testimony. In the TV film *Auschwitz, the Nazis and the Final Solution* colour shots of the landscape offer the design of the places on which the scenery is to be placed; if they outline the emptiness it is only to better fill it when recreating the buildings and death facilities by means of digital techniques. From this perspective, off-camera shot of the gas chamber becomes a *full shot*, a recreated space where the spectator-visitor walks through as if it were a video game. And with this *mise-en-scéne* of death that will not be their own death, they see how the door closes, leaving a tiny ray of light in the corner of the eye as the only bright spot...

This tyranny of the visible and this aesthetics of the overfilled appear to be a symptom of the new industries of programmes. In *Auschwitz, The Nazis and the Final Solution,* the intention to educate and the knowledge about the image do not go hand in hand with the desire to construct the spectator's gaze. The visual saturation and the rapidity of the edition –which becomes a kind of channel-hopping within the programme– prevent the images from existing and happening, flattening the time perspectives that distinguish each category of the visible.

This confirms Marie-José Mondzain's diagnosis (2007: 91) that "in the violence of visual flows, time is what suffers the greatest damage..." the time of an image, the time of a gaze, the time of the thought.

Notes

* The title of this article was inspired by a comment made by Alain Jaubert for his film *Auschwitz, the Album, the Memory*.

** Editor's note: this essay was published in July 2011 in *L'Atalante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos*, n. 12, under the Spanish title "El extraño album de familia del siglo XX". The English version has been translated from the French by Lucía Nieto Carbonell, and revised by Martin Boyd in 2013. *L'Atalante* is grateful to the Yad Vashem museum to allow us the use of *The Auschwitz Album* images that accompany the text, available at <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/intro.asp>.

1 See Clément Chéroux (2001); Marie-Anna Matard Bonucci and Edouard Lynch (1995); Janina Struk (2004); Teresa Swiebocka (1993); Barbie Zelizer (1998).

2 In these three films we find sequences and commentaries on the photographs taken clandestinely by the members of the *Sonderkommando* in Birkenau.

3 The deported Jews came from the Bilke region in the Carpathians (an area that had belonged to Czechoslovakia between the two World Wars before Hungary annexed it in 1939).

4 A 33x25 cm hard cover album, with corners reinforced with metal rivets, consisting of 56 pages. See Serge Klarsfled (2005) in the new French edition published on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the camps, and Annette Wieviorka (2005: 89-96).

5 Jacob might have found the album in Dora-Nordhausen, to which she was transferred in May 1945. See S. Klarsfeld and A. Wieviorka, *ibid*.

6 The matter has not been completely closed; see Klarsfled (2005).

7 Alain Jaubert also explains his film in Phillippe Mesnard (2000: 307-313).

8 Taken from the film.

9 The other three were Violette Jacquet, Louise Alcan and Janine Joffé.

10 The expression is by Christa Blümlinger (2002).

11 "Light in the metaphorical sense of revelation. The final solution constituted a major trauma that made humanity aware of the fact that Kant, Hegel and all the philosophy of the Enlightenment had not freed us from evil, from the beast, and that culture did not protect us from the most atrocious savagery. I think of Steiner's paradox when he said that once his hard day of extermination was over, the camp director at Auschwitz would return home and listen to a Schubert quintet. This is the revelation of Auschwitz, its blinding light. In fact, I am playing with the polysemy of the word *light*: it refers to the revelation and also to the light that is printed on these negatives which, having been kept in the Auschwitz album and then suddenly made public, come to us after the fact, just as the light of the stars takes a long time to reach us. This is the complex message these people sent right before they died" (LINDEPERG, 2000: 190).

12 This TV film was broadcast in January 2005: in its unabridged version on the Histoire channel under the title *Auschwitz, les nazis, la "Solution finale"* and in its abridged version (two parts) on TF1 under the title *Auschwitz, la "Solution finale"*.

13 The exhibited document is the short sequence filmed by Reinhard Wiener, a member of the *Einsatzgruppen*, which depicts the execution of a group of Jews in a pit in Liepaja. In the interests of accuracy, the comment specifies the purpose of the execution Himmler attended: "The sight must have been similar to this execution, filmed around the same time on the sand-dunes of Liepaja".

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