

3 Looks

In this chapter, I turn our attention to photography which, for me, is one form in which limit experiences are recorded; it provides testimony of a particular type, a kind that demands close reading and interpretation. But photography speaks in a way that reverberates on entirely different levels than verbal text. The distinction between the photographic and textual record determines both the shape of the testimony itself and the possibility to closely “read” that testimony.

The sphere of my reflections here contains not only the relationships that occur between the photograph and the photographed object, but also – and perhaps above all – the relationship between the preserved photographic image and those who view that image. These issues, so defined, are tied to fundamental questions in the theory and aesthetics of photography.

The eye is a kind of pinhole camera. Even in ancient times, the phenomenon by which an image is thus created was known by the term *camera obscura*. The oldest illustration from a *camera obscura*, created by the Dutch physicist and mathematician Gemma Frisius (1508–1555), shows a view of a solar eclipse: we see a room with a small opening in a wall, through which light falls, which is projecting onto the opposite wall a miniaturized and reversed image. Clearly visible here is the fact that the continuity between the observed object and its image is maintained, despite the change in proportion and situation. It is still the same light ray, though captured and restrained, and yielding a “touch” of the real world. The novelty of photography, the powers of its invention, are thus not based on the ability to capture a light ray and use it to create an image of reality; the ancient Greeks, the Chinese, and Renaissance artists knew how to do that. Rather, photography was born out of chemistry, which made it possible to preserve an image, and from technology, which allowed for an image’s reproduction.

We commonly regard a photograph as a faithful reflection of reality, its objective copy, one that possesses a kind of authenticity and genuineness unattainable in any other way. We consider it to be irrefutable testimony to the fact that something really happened, that someone really existed and looked one way (and not another way); it plays the role of “material proof,” of a document, a *sui generis* historical source.⁴⁷⁵ It is not the place here to talk about the documentary function

475 On photography as material evidence and its application in trials and investigations, see Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Picador, 2001), 5. On photography as testimony to the Holocaust, see B. Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory*

of photography, about the tradition and contemporaneity of “documentary photography,” or about the relationship between the document, expression and art in photography.⁴⁷⁶ Nor is it the place to enter into a discussion of the complicated matter of the ontology of the photographic image. Nonetheless, it is important to state that the theory put forward in radical form by André Bazin in 1945 about photography’s realism (while the photographic image is identical to its object, a painting is only similar to its object)⁴⁷⁷ is unsustainable. One can gain a better grasp of photography’s particular status through an understanding of the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, who identified three kinds of signs: icons (which refer to their object through similarity); symbols (through the power of convention); and indices (through a factual connection, for example smoke as an indexical sign for fire). From the perspective of Peirce’s semiotics, there are three ways to understand a photograph. First – as a “reflection of reality” based on its iconic “similarity” to that which is presented. Second – as a “transformation of reality” in accordance with the mechanisms of symbolic interpretation of that which is real. Third and finally – as a “trace of reality.”⁴⁷⁸

The notion of a photograph as a trace, which we find in the works of Susan Sontag⁴⁷⁹ and Roland Barthes,⁴⁸⁰ is precisely what highlights its indexical character. A photograph would be a kind of index, one that manifests continuity between reality and the photographic image. The photograph is a trace of light ray that was, *then and there*, reflected off the object, passed through a lens, and then detained, preserved, and expressed in a photograph. Susan Sontag pointed to the photograph’s peculiar character as depiction. It usurps a position that is owing to reality, since the photograph is not just an image (a recreation of reality) but also a trace (reality’s imprint), which is precisely the basis for a photograph’s

Through the Camera’s Eyes (Chicago, 1998); Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (I. B. Tauris, 2004).

476 See S. Sikora, *Fotografia. Między dokumentem a symbolem* (Izabelin 2004); A. Rouillé, *Fotografia. Między dokumentem a sztuką współczesną*, trans. O. Hedemann (Kraków 2007).

477 André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” trans. Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly* 13, no.4 (Summer 1960), 4–9.

478 On the semiotic approach to photography, see François Soulages, *Estetyka fotografii. Strata i zysk*, trans. B. Mytych-Forajter, W. Forajter (Kraków 2007), 98–102. For the original French version, see Soulages, *Esthétique de la photographie* (Nathan Université, 1999).

479 See Sontag, *On Photography*.

480 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (Hill & Wang, 1980).

aura, its magic. As Roland Barthes wrote, a photograph is “an emanation of past reality,” and not its copy.⁴⁸¹ We do not construe, in some naïve way, the photograph to be a real version of that which it presents (after all, we cannot confuse a photo of the Eiffel Tower with the tower itself). Rather, the photograph offers us the possibility to see in a new way. A story or painting places between us and the world a filter of language, the distance of narrative strategy or of an artistic form. With a photograph, there is a kind of bridge between the subject and the perceived object. In a peculiar way, the photograph is transparent, a transparent medium, one that mediates between us and the world; it does not break contact with reality.⁴⁸² However, one must keep in mind that, with a photograph, the path from thing to image is never direct. The photograph is an “imprint” of the thing, but there is a physical separation between the thing and its photographed image. A photograph is also a “record” of a thing – that is, the effect of the next stages of the chemical process, which lead from the thing to its preserved image.⁴⁸³

Walking in the footsteps of the structuralists, who described not so much particular literary works as their characteristics, their “literariness,” we can ask: what is a photograph’s “photograph-ness” based on? The stuff of photography (the camera, photosensitive material, chemical solutions, light, photographic paper), without which photography would not be possible, does not help us define photography’s special nature. Because – as Francis Soulages stated⁴⁸⁴ – we find “photograph-ness” at the juncture of the irreversible and the uncompleted. Photography is at once humanistic and materialistic. It is a person who photographs, but through the act of taking a photograph that person is inevitably confronted with materiality. The press of the shutter button sets in motion physical and chemical processes that lead in effect to the achievement of a negative, which is a process that is both irreversible and a one-off event. One can subject photosensitive material to exposure one more time, but it will produce a different photo. One cannot retrieve a negative, once exposed (an irreversible process), and turn it into an unspoiled negative that can be exposed once again. But a photographer’s work on an exposed negative is something altogether different.

481 Ibid., 88; on the philosophical-semiotic way of defining the documentary nature of photography, see Sikora, op. cit., 21-40.

482 K. L. Walton, “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism,” *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (1984).

483 On record and imprint in the context of the truth of photography, see A. Rouillé, op. cit., 81-86.

484 In this paragraph, I follow the views of F. Soulages, op. cit. (particularly the chapter “Przedmiot fotograficzny: fotograficzność,” 137-171).

Such work is open and unlimited in character, and in this sense it is repeatable and potentially unending. As an effect of the act of taking a photograph, the negative is a single (and no other) moment, an object, shot, or constellation of worldly elements, one that is preserved “forever.” But the photographs derived from that negative can be infinite in number, one way or another regenerated and reprocessed by the photographer. Soulages wrote: “One of the characteristic features of photograph-ness is infinity. That is, that the photographer enjoys unlimited possibilities. Photography is thus the *art of possibilities* in the full sense of these words.”⁴⁸⁵

Tracking the characteristics of photography, Soulages identified three distinctive spheres: the conditions for existence, production, and reception. If, in relation to the negative, the photographer is both creator and receiver, and work on the negative “is merely the first link of an infinitely long chain of readings,”⁴⁸⁶ what role does the viewer play in the multi-layered process of reception? In the case of the photographs that will be the object of my analysis here, the viewer’s interpretative activity involves the relationship between the photographic image (as a “trace” or “impression” of that which is real) and one’s knowledge of the photographed reality and his emotional stance toward it. The viewer always possesses a “surplus of knowledge,” he always knows more than the photographed figures. The secret of the photographic record rests in the fact that time future-past is captured in the photo: *this will be* and *this already has been*. Looking at Alexander Gardner’s famous 1865 photo of assassin Lewis Payne in his death cell, we are aware that the young man will *soon* die, but also that he has *already* died.⁴⁸⁷ In the case of the photographs discussed in this chapter, this paradox involving future-past time and the viewer’s inexorable knowledge about the end is particularly dominant.

The countless illustrations of the appearance and functions of the human eye (*organum vivus*) scattered throughout anatomy atlases, encyclopedias and school textbooks are helpless in the face of the mystery of vision. A diagram of the eyeball (*bulbus oculi*), marked with a network of arrows and numbers, is perhaps a faithful rendition of a reconstruction of that part of our body, but it conveys a surrealist image, far removed from the truth of our everyday experience. Above all, it reveals that which is supposed to remain hidden – the insides of our corporal world. This laying bare, this breakdown of the natural border

485 See *ibid.*, 143; see also *ibid.*, 154-155.

486 *Ibid.*, 158.

487 For more on Payne, see Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

between that which is inside (us) and outside (us) can be read in the categories of the rational discourse of science as a cognitive value: we know more because we see more; our vision is more penetrating, it digs deeper. The spectacle of the autopsy, along with anatomical drawings, illustrations, and models mapping out the vast territory hidden under the surface of the skin, have long been the work of artists and scholars discovering the perfect order of a creation to which their powers of reason had access. The old and widely available anatomical tables do not make the same macabre impression on us as do naturalistic wax models, such as the one created by Clemente Susini in 1803 presenting the “organ of sight,” made up of a wax head (the back is “cut away” to reveal the interior) and a quarter of a face designed to highlight a profile of one eye socket, next to which lie a set of eyeballs (whole eyeballs, and others cut in half).⁴⁸⁸

The human eye works much like a camera. Light rays enter and they are captured. By way of chemical procedures, the latent image is “conjured up” and recorded. The pupil, located at the center of the iris, serves as an aperture, regulating the amount of light that passes through to the lens. The cornea, the chamber of transparent liquid behind it, the lens, and the so-called vitreous body together make up the eye’s optical system. It refracts the light rays and directs them toward the photosensitive surface of the retina, where an actual, miniaturized and inverted image of the viewed object emerges. Photochemical reactions stimulate nerve impulses, which reach the visual cortex in the occipital lobe of the cerebral cortex. Thus we have the encyclopedic description.

Diagrams, models and graphs fail to capture the mystery of vision – the phenomenon of embracing and absorbing unconcealed space; the seclusion within the small eyeball of the enormous surrounding reality; the miraculous mediation between the outer world and the inner world. The eye serves as the border between what is outside and inside of us. In the eye, light refracts and inverts, arriving there like a messenger with news about what is happening around us. But the elementary experience of vision is based on the conviction that, in a sense, we (by looking) step out into the external world, that we cross the border of our own body and move toward all that extends beyond us. The eye is thus a field of exchange and reciprocity, a secret aperture through which the world, in its visible form, relates with us, and we – by casting our glance toward it – relate with the world.

488 See the illustrations in *Spectacular Bodies. The Art and Science of the Human Body from Leonardo to Now*, eds. Martin Kemp, Marina Wallace (London 2000). Susini’s model is preserved at the University of Cagliari.

What interests me is the *look* that is preserved in a photograph, I could even say “written into” a photograph, given that photography, from the Greek, is “drawing with light.” If one would present the history of photography, as Roland Barthes proposed, as the “history of looking,”⁴⁸⁹ then photographs showing a person in a limit situation would occupy a special place in that history. One chapter could describe “looks” locked, as it were, within the confines of the photo’s world, detained within the framework of experienced suffering, cruelty, and fear; the *look* in the eyes of those photographed; the *look* of a terror not yet experienced but already a foregone conclusion, or of a terror already overwhelming but not yet annihilative. And finally, the *looks* that one can find in the faces of the dead, murdered, and tormented coming from the other side of the border between life and death. The network of these *looks* – those of the executioner (if he is visible), the victim, and gathered onlookers (if there were any) – is recorded on photosensitive paper. Their vectors cross, or they lead away from each other. The victims can be by themselves, or left to themselves. They might not yet know that they will be victims. We alone have such knowledge, as we look at the photo. Based on these *looks*, one can reconstruct the larger story and thus negate the commonly held belief that the photograph is, by nature, non-narrative. A separate chapter could contain an analysis of the relationship between reality, its photographic reproduction, and the viewer. The photo’s creator, along with the one who views the photo and anyone who finds himself in the photo, play out with one another a silent drama of *looks*. The photographer’s gaze is directed at the chosen object; it takes note of that object, isolates it in space, and locates it in the frame. That *look* through the lens is hardly “objective,” since it is a manifestation of an individual point of view, of a personal perspective, a concrete take on the matter. The *look* in the lens suits the photographer – conquering time and space, breaking away from the order of life and death, looking directly at us, the viewers. In the end, we accept this vision of those who were photographed, and – whether we like it or not – we look at them through the eyes of the photographer.

A photograph is a record of the experience of the person who created it; it is an expression of their experience, their mindset, their attitude. It is also a challenge to the viewers; it appeals to their emotions and sensitivities; it conveys images that transmit some kind of “objective” knowledge of the world, but more importantly indicate a way of perceiving the world. As such, we can include the photograph as evidence in those kinds of investigations that serve to not just document reality, but to understand reality.

489 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 12.

Photography is one of those manifestations of human activity that both derive meaning from the world and give it meaning. Taking a photo and looking at a photo can be placed under the category of communication: as ways of conveying and reading a certain message. Thus understood, photography is an element of culture, a medium between the human being and the rest of the world, among participants in the human community. Photography – as a cultural medium of a particular kind that enjoys a particular ontological status – has a deep anthropological dimension. Roland Barthes called photography “an anthropologically new object” that “must escape, it seems to me, usual discussions of the image.”⁴⁹⁰ Viewed from this perspective, the issue of photography belongs to the developing field in the humanities that is tied to visual anthropology⁴⁹¹ or the anthropology of images.⁴⁹²

The *look* is not just the subject of these current reflections, but rather something more – it is a path along which our thoughts will run. In other words: it is a way of conceiving that to which our thoughts are turned, around which they circle. I will attempt to follow the trope of *looks* given in the context of the experiences of people in limit situations. When considering the forms by which experiences are recorded, experiences that are situated at the border of possible expression (indeed, that belong to the sphere of the inexpressible and seem to be beyond discourse), I am confronted with the *look*.

Faces in Extremis

Eugène Delacroix, who like other great painters made use of photos as a kind of optical note, pointed to photography's imperfections when it came to capturing nature, even though photography relies on its ability to achieve the greatest possible resemblance to the external object. The fact that photographic technology allows for the most faithful image of reality can stand in the way of understanding and perception. The best photographs come about as a result of flaws or inadequacies in the reproduction process. Delacroix wrote:

490 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 88.

491 See S. Sikora, op. cit. Sikora referred to issues of *Konteksty* devoted to visual anthropology (1992, no. 3-4; 1997, no. 3-4); see also *Film i audiowizualność w kulturze. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*. Część I: *Audiowizualność w kulturze: wprowadzenie*. Część II: *Film w kulturze*, ed. S. Kuśmierczyk (Warszawa 2002).

492 See K. Olechnicki, *Antropologia obrazu. Fotografia jako metoda, przedmiot i medium nauk społecznych* (Warszawa 2003).

The photographs which strike you most are those in which the very imperfection of the process as a matter of absolute rendering leaves certain gaps, a certain repose for the eye [...]. If the eye had the perfection of a magnifying glass, photography would be unbearable.⁴⁹³

The imperfection of photography thus rests in its ability to produce a perfect replica of the photographed object showing only that which is on the outside. It cannot reach things and phenomena that are under the surface, to reflect their essence; it cannot synthesize; there is no room for the work of the imagination. In his journal, Delacroix wrote that “cold perfection is not art.”⁴⁹⁴ In another place, he cautioned:

One should not lose sight of the fact that the daguerreotype must be considered only a translator whose purpose is to further initiate us to the secrets of nature; for despite its astonishing reality in certain parts, it is only a reflection, a copy of the real that is false, in a way, because it is so exact. The monstrosities it presents are justifiably shocking, even though they are, literally, those of nature itself.⁴⁹⁵

These comments by the painter of “The Massacre at Chios” about the photography of monstrosities and the impressions they provoke in the eyes of those viewing such photographs, to which one could also attribute the particular virtue of “literalness” and “exactitude,” are leading us *in medias res*. The reflections in this book involve the matter of how we consort with the image of frightening and macabre things. I emphasize: with the image of the macabre, and not with the macabre itself; with reality’s likeness, not with reality itself in which we encounter something macabre. In a word, it is about *mimesis* of the macabre, about ways of presenting, about forms of representation. What is of interest to me in this section is, above all, certain photos from the First World War showing heavily injured soldiers – more specifically, their faces.

What photographs showing monstrosities could Delacroix have had in mind? Did he have access to Alexander Gardner’s famous photos from the American Civil War (1861–1865), which showed for the first time, on such a scale, the macabre of the battlefield? For example at Antietam, where on 17 September 1861 26,000 soldiers fell. Gardner took a series of photographs of fields strewn with corpses. Another famous photo by Gardner that had an enormous influence

493 Eugène Delacroix, *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. Walter Pach (New York: Crown Publishers, 1948), 645.

494 E. Delacroix, *Dziennik, część pierwsza (1822-1853)* (Wrocław 1968), 243.

495 Quote from M. H. Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass; London 1993), 188.

on the American consciousness, and that became for Americans a synonym for the brutal truth of war, was “Home of the Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg” (1863), which shows a soldier’s body in a trench. After Delacroix’s death in 1863, America was shaken by photos of Yankee prisoners held in Confederate camps in the South, including the most infamous camp at Andersonville, where 100 prisoners had died every day. The camp was built in the spring of 1864. What is most striking about these photos is the connection between the conventions of a medical study, exhibiting with laboratorial exactitude emaciated bodies of starved humans – images of the “living skeletons” we know so well from our own times – with the conventions of a portrait. Each photo presents one naked (or almost naked) figure, holding himself in the sitting position with great effort, posed against a dark background, like an anatomical specimen. These photos became an object of Congressional proceedings; a special investigating committee attached them to its report; drawings based on these photos were distributed widely in the press; and they were used as evidence in the trial of Captain Henry Wirz, the camp commander at Andersonville, who was sentenced to death and hanged.⁴⁹⁶

During the Civil War, but much more so during the First World War, photographs of injuries sustained by soldiers were taken for medical documentation. But these photos were meant for internal use only and not for publication. Terrible stories circulating among Union soldiers about the situation of prisoners of war at Andersonville, along with growing public pressure regarding this matter, led to the photos being publicized. They thus became a key propaganda argument in mobilizing public opinion. The shock that these photos caused was tied to their medical aspect, which had – I would argue – a fundamental influence on how they were received. It was thus not just the subject matter itself (that is, the emaciated human body) that made the photographs – to once again refer to Delacroix’s term – “unbearable,” but above all the way that the body was presented – with cold exactitude, medical dispassion, reducing the human to an anatomical specimen.

496 On Gardner’s photographs from the Civil War and photographs of prisoners of war, see V. Goldberg, *The Power of Photography. How Photographs Changed Our Lives* (New York 1991), 20–28 (reproductions of some photos). It is worth adding that the picture of the corpse in the trench had been arranged by Gardner. The photographer moved the soldier’s body and his rifle to a place that was more suitable for a photograph, and he used the same body for two differently arranged photographs. See J. Ruby, *Secure the Shadow. Death and Photography in America* (London 1995), 13 (a photo reproduction).

The anatomical dimension of the presentation of the human body has a long tradition in European art; we need only mention the sketches of Leonardo da Vinci, the illustrations of Andreas Vesalius in his monumental *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), or the full series of “anatomy lessons” of Rembrandt, Adriaen Backer, Albert van Neck, and Cornelis Troost. From the Renaissance to the middle of the nineteenth century, anatomical imagination emanated from works of art, and the creators of anatomical illustrations were artists guided by the Greek maxim “know thyself.” They harbored the conviction that visible nature, through which the divine order manifested itself, was accessible to reason. In their artwork, they thus tried to explore the internal mechanisms of the human organism – muscle functions and skeletal movement, but also internal signs of character, types of emotional expression. After all, they argued, the body was home to the spirit, to the external manifestation of that which was internal. And the human face, according to physiognomists, was the area that most perfectly revealed a person’s soul, his essence, his identity. Hence, physiognomic studies of the face *in extremis* – portraits (for example, Rembrandt’s “Self-portrait with Open Mouth” and Gustave Courbet’s “The Desperate Man”), illustrations (for example, Le Brun’s “Despair”) and sculptures (for example, Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s marble bust “Damned Soul”) – represent an attempt to fathom the deepest secrets of humanity, to find an artistic form of expression for human limit experiences. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, the situation changed radically: standardization of anatomical illustrations, the use of photography for medical reasons, and finally the use of x-rays (let us recall the characters of *The Magic Mountain* and their fascination with their own internal portraits), led to increasing accuracy in the mapping of the human body, at the expense of a devaluation of the human’s spiritual dimension. That process of mapping was transformed from a great artistic endeavor into an object of technical reproduction.⁴⁹⁷

The photos of the Andersonville prisoners contain within themselves something that is artistic, which turns photographs into a kind of hybrid: photographic exactitude combined with a painter’s sense of composition, with ways of positioning the object in front of the lens. The photos included in Sir Harold D. Gillies’ powerful book (bound in red leather) entitled *Plastic Surgery of the Face. Based on selected cases of war injuries of the face, including burns, with original illustrations* (London 1920) are essentially only medical documentation of particular cases described in this thick volume. Sir Gillies (1882–1960) was the

497 See Kemp & Wallace, op. cit., 11-19, 94-107.

founder of modern plastic surgery in England, and his work turned plastic surgery into a recognized branch of medicine. He practiced on injured soldiers from the First World War who had been transported from the Western Front to the Cambridge Military Hospital, where he developed his own methods for treating extensive wounds and facial burns by replacing missing tissue and transplanting natural skin from undamaged places on the head or other parts of the body. The photos, or rather entire sequences of photos, illustrate the various stages of treatment, beginning with the patient's condition just after being wounded, through subsequent phases, to the final result. Cases are ordered according to the area of operation, and we thus see chapters on methods for treating wounded cheeks, upper and lower lips, chins, noses, eye regions, foreheads – that is, so to speak, a full survey of the most essential areas covered in Johann Kaspar Lavater's physiognomy, the most important physiognomic signs.⁴⁹⁸ But these signs are terribly deformed, they have succumbed to far-reaching destruction, some of them hardly recognizable.

Plastic Surgery of the Face is Sir Gillies' great album of images of people stigmatized by war, though it is one that cannot be read according to the physiognomic tradition by which the texts of human faces were read. At the heart of Lavater's approach was the belief that there are a finite number of features of appearance that reflect a finite combination of features of character. The goal was to unveil and describe a certain code; hence, physiognomy was situated – as it were – in the field of semiotics, and it posed questions tied to reading and interpretation. The face became a kind to text, a statement, formulated in a readable language. But the faces of Sir Gillies' patients were written in the modern script of war; they had been torn apart by shell fragments, blown through by bullets, burned by fire and gas. They do not suit the traditional physiognomic approach. Their appearance had undergone a fundamental disturbance. Their features, recognized theretofore in conventional terms and consisting of a recognizable system of physiognomic signs, succumbed to decomposition, deformation, even complete destruction. The semiotics of the face had been annihilated.

498 “The eye, eyesight, the mouth, the forehead, cheeks, in a word: the human face [...] is that which science calls physiognomy” – we read in *Zasady fizyognomiki i frenologii. Wykład popularny o poznawaniu charakteru z rysów twarzy i kształtu głowy. Przez A. Ysabeau, profesor nauk przyrodniczych*, trans. W. Noskowski (Warszawa 1883), 13. For more on Lavater's basic physiognomic signs, see J. Bachórz, “Karta z dziejów zdrowego rozsądku, czyli o fizjonomie w literaturze,” *Teksty 2* (1976), 90–91. See also comments on eyes, ears, and the forehead as basic elements of facial expression, see A. Kępiński, “Twarz i ręka,” *Teksty 2* (1977), 11–28.

The texts used to describe the individuals presented in Gillies' photos were, for obvious reasons, reduced to the kinds of wounds they had sustained and the operations they had endured. The images themselves are limited to various shots of massacred faces, and they are accompanied by rudimentary information about the person appearing in the photo, boiling down (though not always) to name, rank, branch of service, date of injury, date on which aid was first provided, and date on which surgical therapy started. There are occasional one-sentence instances when a soldier's suffering, his courage, or his strength of spirit are mentioned, but even such instances are subordinate to the medical discourse. A certain private (no name given, case 139), during the Battle of the Somme, on 4 July 1916, had taken a gunshot to the face which tore apart his jaw, chin, and part of his cheeks.

It is an interesting point to note that this gallant fellow walked several miles to the dressing station on July 4th, 1916, during the battle of the Somme, and this very feat of endurance, maintaining, as it did, the upright position, may have prevented an emergency tracheotomy or even a worse fate.⁴⁹⁹

This description of case 139 is accompanied by six photos. In "Early condition" we see a person whose lower face around the mouth had been turned into a mass of tissue. The upper part of the face is untouched – the nose, eyes, forehead – and the hair is neatly combed. "Healed condition" – shows the effects of several months of healing: reduction in the cheeks and jaw area, shapeless lips, but a face without chin. "After first plastic" – condition dramatically better than after the "Second plastic," in part because skin from the top of the head had been brought down to fill the cavity caused by the gunshot and now covered the area around the patient's lower lip, cheeks, and chin. The two final photos document the surgical treatment's next stages. In each of them the face is different, though equally frightening and equally unlike the human face.

The requirement to document the different stages of therapy comes with a kind of narrative element. We are witnesses to a story, illustrated by photos, about horrifying transformations of the face. And though the intention behind repeating, with brutal monotony, these sequences of photos was to show the amazing achievements of plastic surgery, the inescapable impression on "non-professional" viewers of these photos is that they are participating in a spectacle, a theater of horrors. Above all these are stories of transformation. In a sense, such extensive and destructive injuries set the face in motion. The changes in

499 Sir Harold D. Gillies, *Plastic Surgery of the Face, based on selected cases of war injuries of the face, including burns, with original illustrations* (London 1920), 168.

appearance are so deep that they blur not just individual similarities (subjects stop resembling themselves), but also broader similarities (it is unclear if that is still a face, or something else). The face thus stops being a face, it turns into ruins, in which it is difficult to spot that which was. Becoming something else, something strange, and yet remaining the same (the terribly distorted face of a concrete person), the face defies description; it does not submit to categorization; it crosses borders. It turns into a monster; it radiates a threat that is unpronounceable and unspeakable.⁵⁰⁰

In Sir Gillies' book we see photos of things we do not want to look at, from which we would prefer to shy away. The horribly transformed faces of injured soldiers, subjected to plastic surgery, are not faces. They are monsters that resemble nothing. And at the same time, they are concrete people who suffered greatly, about whom we know nothing beyond what we read about the treatment process, which is delivered in an expert's cold language. The striking contrast between the person's anonymity and the surgical precision with which his monstrous appearance is shown is one of the sources of shock that we feel when looking through *Plastic Surgery*. What is most shocking is the collision of various disproportionalities: the expressiveness of the presentation, purged of any situational context, unceremoniously reveals what should be hidden; a reality that cannot be grasped, because it is amorphous and thus incredible, is recreated with laboratory-like exactitude; and finally, the soulless analytic nature of the image, the fact that it is broken down into its elemental parts, into more or less broken parts of some mechanism, collides – in the viewer's consciousness – with the symbol of the face (deeply rooted in culture) as a reflection of the soul, a sign of a person's unique identity.

It seems that it is not so much the brutal nature of these images as their medical coldness and passionless expressiveness that lend them their quality of peculiar eeriness. We are reminded of Delacroix's comments on the shock that can be caused by photos containing repugnant content. Photographic perfection has rarely been more intolerable than it is in this case. We see the detailed anatomy of injuries and nothing more. The owner of that which was once a face is now the specimen of an anatomical monster. Anatomical, because it is bereft

500 The Aristotelian definition of monstrosity is related not so much to the deformation of appearance, but to a lack of tangible relationships between the parent and descendant. Monstrosity is deceptive, its bizarre appearance disturbs the natural relations of resemblance (it is not known what exactly it is similar to), it violates the boundaries between categories and breaks Nature's order. See Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, 4. The monstrous is thus "between"; it is something yet not something. Hence, the horror.

of metaphysics, of mystery, of unsettling ambiguity. In a sense, the photos of soldiers treated by Sir Gillies injured them once again. Shrapnel and bullets had savaged their faces, robbing them of their natural appearance. In order to restore them, at least partly, their faces are taken away once again, by turning them into an object in the documentation of surgical proceedings. In this sense, the photos in *Plastic Surgery* are empty and flat, one-dimensional – which is precisely what is intolerable about them. They strip down the wounded soldier, depriving him of the terrible mystery of his wounds. We are told to look at flesh; we are thus blocked from the possibility of finding sense in what we see. With their mechanistic exactness – as Delacroix would put it – they falsify reality. Skin, tissue, flesh and bone reduce the experience of having lost a face, the destruction of that physiognomic text that serves as a record of identity, the morbid transformation of the face into a non-face, a monstrous mask, into photographic documentation, into an inventory of broken and repaired facial material. These photos also do away with one of the great phantasms of culture involving the effacement of the border between mask and face, the desire to gaze “at the inside” of the face, in order to check if something exists “between,” if something exists that is simultaneously under the mask and in front of the face.⁵⁰¹ The response we receive is a shapeless mixture of tissue and bone.

The main character in Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* goes directly from the trenches on a short leave of absence at home. His mother asks him about nothing. His father is constantly demanding that he talk about the war. “I realize he does not know that a man cannot talk of such things.”⁵⁰² “Dear mother, how shall I ever speak of the unspeakable things I have had to see?”⁵⁰³ Egon Erwin Kisch, an experienced journalist who served in the Austrian army and who maintained a journal during the Serbia campaign, wrote desperately at the beginning of the war: “[...] but now I don’t know what to write. Where should I begin, if I want to speak of this unprecedented horror?”⁵⁰⁴ Invocations of the topos of inexpressibility are usually followed by descriptions

501 See the anthropological commentary of S. Rosiek on the relationship between the mask and face in the fourth part of the series “Transgresje” under the title *Maski*, ed. M. Janion and S. Rosiek (Gdańsk 1986), vol. II, 157–188.

502 Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. A W. Wheen (Ballantine Books 1987), 165.

503 Quote from John Laffin, ed., *Letters from the Front 1914 -1918* (London 1973), 25.

504 Egon Erwin Kisch, “Schreib das auf, Kisch!”: *Das Tagebuch von Egon Erwin Kisch* (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1930), 96. Translator’s note: The texts above and below drawn from Kisch are my translation from the original German.

of that which cannot be described. The reader is prepared for the use of exceptional language: a special assortment of words, metaphors, and stylistic tones; a suitable manner of speech, all in an effort to build the textual equivalent of “this unprecedented horror,” which does not submit to textualization. None of the authors quoted here shied away from descriptions of drastic scenes, but this letter, written by a young French soldier, would seem to be particularly shocking, in large part because of the collision between the letter’s macabre content and the fact that the letter was addressed to the soldier’s mother: “For five days my shoes have been slippery with human brains. I have walked among lungs, among entrails. The men eat, what little they have to eat, at the side of the dead.”⁵⁰⁵

The above passage from the letter from son to mother is photographic in its literality. Photographic in that its account is cold, bereft of adjectives, objective, as if the author was trying to convey reality through a camera’s lens. The macabre appears in this text as if unshielded, as if not passed through the filter of linguistic expression. Neutral images of the macabre are set alongside various forms of the macabre’s verbal occlusion, making it more tolerable and ingestible. As if in a report, Kisch writes: “Countless injured were carried by us, [...] Bandaged or unbandaged, people whose cheeks or nose had been ripped off.”⁵⁰⁶ Remarque reports dispassionately: “We see men living with their skulls blown open; [...] we see men without mouths, without jaws, without faces.”⁵⁰⁷ In this context, a story told by Robert Graves can serve as an example of how an author can distance himself from the macabre, how to obscure the macabre through the use of sarcasm, through the brutalization of language:

[poor bastard] Sergeant Gallagher [...] thought he saw a Fritz in No Man’s Land near our wire, so the silly booger takes one of them new issue percussion bombs and shoots it at ‘im. Silly booger aims too low, it hits the top of the parapet and bursts back. Deoul! man, it breaks off his silly f-ing jaw and blows a great lump from his silly f-ing face, whatever. Poor silly booger. Not worth sweating to get him back! He’s put paid to, whatever.”⁵⁰⁸

The facial injuries described here remind us of Sir Gillies’ patients. While in those photographs we see everything with excessive exactness, here the visualization is much more complicated, determined by the meaning of words and sentences. Sometimes an author avoids descriptions of injuries altogether, by

505 Laffin, *Letters from the Front 1914 -1918*, 25

506 Kisch, “Schreib das auf, Kisch!”, 47.

507 Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, 134.

508 Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That: An Autobiography* (Vintage, 1958), 98.

invoking the topos of inexpressibility, or by approaching the subject situationally, as Stefan Żeromski did in his portrayal of the injured character Śnica: “The head was wrapped in bandages, with only the eyes and mouth exposed. The eyes were unconscious, full of hellish fire.”⁵⁰⁹ The injured face wrapped in bandages, a kind of merciful disguise in front of seeing eyes, also has a quality of photographic documentation.⁵¹⁰ The dressing hides what we are afraid to look at, but the hidden monstrosity will soon be laid bare during the surgical operation, and then preserved on film.

In autobiographical records from the First World War, faces of corpses appear significantly more often than faces of the living. In many descriptions we read of people being in constant touch with death, unable in the trenches to avoid the companionship of corpses; of close contact with bodies lying for weeks or months in “no man’s land” or buried in earth constructions fortified by decaying corpses. Even if one got used to the macabre, its vision remained difficult to tolerate and ways were sought to – literally – cover it up. Ernst Jünger took note of a typical scene:

Arms and legs and heads stuck out of the slopes; in front of our holes were severed limbs and bodies, some of which had had coats or tarpaulins thrown over them, to save us the sight of the disfigured faces.⁵¹¹

It thus turned out that it was the monstrous deformation of the face that particularly needed to be covered. Whether it was the face of a living person torn to pieces by a bullet or the decaying countenance of a corpse, *looking* avoided the sight of macabre transformation. It is so difficult to look at the medicinal photographic documentation showing the subsequent stages of metamorphosis undergone by the faces of Sir Gillies’ patients because what is most horrifying about such a face is that, though it has retained some of the outlines of its old shape, it is no longer something that resembles itself, or something that resembles anything. In his journal, a British general on the Western Front, Frank Percy Crozier, used precisely this term – “something”:

509 S. Żeromski, *Charitas* (Warszawa 1974), 254.

510 Among many such photos, one that is particularly characteristic and serves practically as an illustration of the quote from Żeromski, is Lievin, 18 July 1917 - two injured Canadians are sitting in a military ambulance, both of whose heads are completely wrapped in bandages, which create a kind of white mask with holes for the eyes and mouth. In the Photograph Archive, Imperial War Museum, London, sygn. C. 0.1636.

511 Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hofmann (Penguin, 2004), 98.

In the main communication trench we passed a man carrying a sandbag full of *something*. Thefts of rations and minor stores from the line are increasing. I therefore asked, “what have you in the bag?” “Rifleman Grundy, sir,” came the unexpected reply.⁵¹²

In Kazimierz Wierzyński’s verse, poetic frenzy serves to depict the battlefield: “No, those shapeless lumps, torn apart corpses / Lie sticking, bloated and *unrecognizable*.”⁵¹³ But in Henri Barbusse we read: “It is befouled faces and tattered flesh, it is the corpses that are *no longer like corpses even*, floating on the ravenous earth.”⁵¹⁴

The laws of human perception, the elementary mechanism of understanding, dictate that we relate that which is new, different or inconceivable to that which is known and understood. Which is why, in order to express that aphoristic “something,” that which remains after a person, we reach for various comparisons for assistance. If corpses are no longer even like corpses, to what can we compare them? Maybe they were like “washing” hung on the barbed wire in “no man’s land,” like “scarecrows who scared no crows since they were edible,” as a result of which “the bodies had the consistency of Camembert cheese.”⁵¹⁵ What does the skyward face of a dead soldier in a flooded trench resemble? “The eyes are two white holes; the mouth is a black hole. The mask’s yellow and puffed-up skin appears soft and creased, like dough gone cold.”⁵¹⁶ With what does one associate the massacred heads of dead soldiers?

I remember two of our fellows in a shell hole. They were crouching unnaturally. One had evidently been saying to the other, ‘Keep your head down.’ Now in both men’s heads there was a dent, the sort of dent that appears in the side of a rubber ball when not fully expanded by air.⁵¹⁷

In the photographs in *Plastic Surgery* we observe – if I may put it this way – the face in movement. The dynamics of this transformation did not lead, clearly, to the complete reconstruction of the face; it did not bring about a return of its original appearance. The patient and doctors could be satisfied with the sculptural effect of the operation; after all, given the horrible nature of the inflicted wounds,

512 Denis Winter, *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (Penguin, 2014), 205.

513 The poem “Popkowice” in “*Rozkwitaly pąki białych róż...*” *Wiersze i pieśni z lat 1908-1918 o Polsce, o wojnie i o żołnierzach*, ed. and intro. A. Romanowski (Warszawa 1990), 379 [author’s emphasis – J. L.].

514 Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire: The Story of a Squad* (BBBZ Books, 2010), 209.

515 These words are taken from an account by S. Cloete. See Winter, *Death’s Men*, 208.

516 Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, 206.

517 The recollection of S. Graham. See Winter, *Death’s Men*, 207.

the victim – after the surgical procedure – seemed to have recovered a human countenance. But from an anthropological perspective, the “repaired” face was not the same face. It was an artificial construction, a mask built with different pieces of the body joined together. In this case, can one still talk about a face as a “spiritual mirror,” as a sign of a person’s unique identity? Such a surgically fabricated face is rather a deceptive monster – pretending to be what it is not. Some descriptions of corpses’ faces, drawn from literature from the First World War, contain another kind of duality. The dynamics of change are characterized by an intense process of transmutation that begins right after death: decay, bloating, decomposition, and mummification – the corpse’s “life after life,” so to speak.

In a novel by Zofia Nałkowska, we read:

He was changing, although it was really completely superfluous, in a certain way he was still alive. He was swelling up. He was changing color. It was almost like he was moving. He was shifting around in his own clothing.⁵¹⁸

Robert Graves described a scene in which the dead were being collected from “no man’s land”:

After the first day or two the corpses swelled and stank. [...] Those we could not get in from the German wire continued to swell until the wall of the stomach collapsed, either naturally or when punctured by a bullet. [...] The colour of the dead faces changed from white to yellow-grey, to red, to purple, to green, to black, to slimy.⁵¹⁹ Ernst Jünger, struggling alone through a wood churned up by shelling, heard:
[...] a quiet hissing and burbling sound. I stepped closer and encountered two bodies, which the heat had awakened to a ghostly type of life. The night was silent and humid; I stopped a long time before the eerie scene.⁵²⁰

This moment is characteristic, when one’s gaze – as noted by Jünger – is caught by the sight of something that, even in a front-line situation that is saturated with brutality, represents an “eerie scene,” one that mesmerizes the viewer. In his description, the author of *Storm of Steel* avoids describing how the corpses looked in full detail; he points only to the sounds that attracted his attention. What he saw and called a “quiet hissing and burbling sound” was not named directly. The contents of the “eerie scene” are indicated metaphorically. The visualization of that “awakening to a ghostly type of life” is a task left for the reader. What we thus have from Jünger is a metaphor that mediates between (a macabre) reality

518 Z. Nałkowska, *Hrabia Emil* (Warszawa 1977), 229.

519 Graves, *Good-Bye to All That*, 163.

520 Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, 152.

and its representation. It is a kind of *mimesis*, one that conveys the macabre, not along the path of a veristic description, but by setting in motion the imagination. We also have an attitude that allows us to contemplate the macabre vision. The author frames – so to speak – a part of reality and extracts it from the background, and though his *look* – directed and intentional – he composes from that reality an image.

Language is capable in many ways of circling around that which is inexpressible. The indefinite pronoun “something” used by General Crozier when he was speaking of a bag filled with human remains, along with Jünger’s use of metaphor, stimulate the work of the imagination. But the photographic image cannot evade literality. “Something” must be filled with a concrete thing. Exactitude and absolute clarity seem to close off the field of imagination. The question remains, in the case of photos presenting the macabre: do initial shock and rejection always precede later indifference and dulled sensitivities? In other words: is it possible to have hermeneutic contact with such images?

In the Museum of the History of Photography in Florence one can view two juxtaposed photos creating a dual portrait of a soldier named Brunier. Both photos look like a standard identification photo. In one, we see a young person in his buttoned-up uniform. The shape of the head, close cut hair, a thin mustache under his nose, the outlines of the eyes and ears lightly retouched. In the other, the same person in an unbuttoned uniform, head on a pillow, his entire face, forehead and neck burned and covered in incrustation, in which the crevices of the eyes and ears are barely visible. In the bottom right corner we see the name: “Brunier” and the date: “21-6-16.” But in the upper left corner, the date: “23-6-16.” Does the first date indicate the day he was burned, and the second date the day he was admitted to hospital? Was Brunier the victim of a flamethrower, or was his burned face – and this seems more likely – the effect of a gas attack? After chlorine and phosgene gasses, mustard gas was the third generation of poison gases used in combat on the fronts during the First World War. Perversely, it was called the “most humanitarian” gas because it killed only 2 percent of its victims. It terribly maimed the rest. Sister Millard, who worked at a dressing station, remembered: “Gas cases are terrible. [...] Some have their eyes and faces entirely eaten away by gas and their bodies covered with first-degree burns.”⁵²¹

This dual portrait of Brunier shares the kind of exactitude and literality that we see in the photos in *Plastic Surgery*, and yet it does not give the same repulsive

521 Winter, *Death's Men*, 123.

impression of laboratory-like sterility as does the photographic documentation of Sir Gillies' work. The photos of Brunier show the macabre metamorphosis of his appearance, but they do not undermine the integrity of the individual, they do not try to dig deeper, under the mask of incrustation into which his face had changed. They present only two images to the viewer: one "before" and another "after." The history of this terrible transformation is something we have to figure out for ourselves.

In addition to the photos, Sir Gillies' books included pastel drawings by Henry Tonks (1862–1937), an English physician and painter who gave up medicine for art. In 1916 he joined the military and served as a lieutenant in the Royal Army Medical Corps. He was transferred to the Cambridge Military Hospital, where he did a wide range of sketches, diagrams and portraits of injured patients. Sir Gillies valued the painter's work, particularly for its documentary value. Tonks himself saw something more in his work. In a letter to a friend he wrote: "I am doing a number of heads of wounded soldiers who had their faces knocked about. [...] It is a *chamber of horrors*, but I am quite confident to draw them, as it is excellent practice."⁵²² But Tonks, one of the closest friends of the great American painter John Singer Sargent (one of whose famous paintings was *Gassed*, which takes up Bruegel's theme of the blind leading the blind), was not indifferent to the horrors of war and did not treat it as just an opportunity to carry out a technical exercise. Just after the war, in France, he painted his most famous work, *An Advanced Dressing Station* – a panoramic scene from the front containing a crowd of injured and medical personnel in a feverish commotion. His *Studies of Facial Wounds* (these pastel drawings, done at hospital bedsides, go well beyond the framework of surgical documentation) hang in Tate Britain and the Imperial War Museum in London.

Tonks' pastel drawings faithfully depict facial deformation and do nothing to hide their monstrous appearance. And yet their exactitude is not the exactitude of a photograph, because it is not – to use Delacroix's word – "cold." Far from standard examples of realism, they contrast sharply with the battle-scarred faces of the living and dead that emerge from a portfolio of fifty etchings by the outstanding German painter and graphic artist Otto Dix (1891–1969). Published in 1924 under the title *Der Krieg*, the collection became Dix's most famous work. With expressionistic lines, full of passion and unrestrained violence, these etchings exhibit Dix's own front line experiences (he took part in the Battle of the Somme, served briefly on the Russian Front, and then fought at Verdun and

522 L. Morris, ed., *Henry Tonks and the Art of Pure Drawing* (Norwich [1985]), 42.

Ypres). Between the macabre reality of the trenches and that reality's image there is a screen of forms. The observed world persists in the artist's memory, it is processed through his consciousness; the images are created by his hand, having been filtered through his individual sensitivities, his heart, and his mind. They are not mechanistic replicas of reality, but rather its interpretation.

One of Dix's etchings shows the heads of two corpses in an advanced stage of decay⁵²³ – a sight that often accompanied soldiers on the front, and one that often made its way into journals and memoirs. In Barbusse's work, we find a passage that would provide an excellent caption for Dix's etching:

This plain [...] is an amazing charnel-house. It swarms with corpses, and might be a cemetery of which the top has been taken away. Groups of men are moving about it, identifying the dead [...], turning the remains over, recognizing them by some detail in spite of their faces. [...] It is some months now since death hollowed their eyes and consumed their cheeks [...]. By the side of heads black and waxen as Egyptian mummies, clotted with grubs and the wreckage of insects, where white teeth still gleam in some cavities, by the side of poor darkening stumps that abound like a field of old roots laid bare, one discovers naked yellow skulls wearing the red cloth fez, whose gray cover has crumbled like paper.⁵²⁴

In Dix's work, the two heads disgorge themselves from their former shapes, afflicted as they are by this macabre metamorphosis; they still resemble a human face, with the bared teeth and eye sockets, but they are already leaning out toward strange, monstrous forms. In the front, between the two heads, there is a soldier's "dog tag." One can even read the soldier's name and his date of birth: Miller, 3 V [18]94. Between the appearance (as suggested by the presence of the dog tags and as evoked in our imagination) of the twenty-year-old private Miller and that which remained of him, there is a story about this terrible transformation. The image of the living Miller, not revealed directly but existing as subtext, connects this etching with the tradition of the *danse macabre*, processed expressionistically. That meeting between the living and the dead also speaks to a transformation, which depicts contact between a living face and the decaying countenance of a *transi*. The contrast that Dix achieved by matching the immutable piece of metal (as an indicator of a soldier's identity) up against human heads falling into

523 I am referring here to the last of the fifty etchings, entitled *Tote vor der Stellung bei Tahure*. See *Disasters of War: Callot, Goya, Dix*, published on the occasion of "Disaster of War: Callot, Goya, Dix, a National Touring Exhibition" organized by the Hayward Gallery (London 1998). Almost half of the items in *Der Krieg* were reproduced in this catalog, which also includes an essay on Dix's etchings written by J. Willett.

524 Barbusse, *Under Fire*, 169-170.

decay, builds a type of expression that – capturing the horror of the macabre – does not confine itself to “cold literality,” but obscures it with form.

The experience of the macabre has an ambivalent character. It repels and attracts at the same time; it frightens and, in a sense, fascinates. It is also a mixture of metaphysical horror and trivial materiality. The collision of these two orders triggers the shock we feel when we have this type of experience. When strangeness (which cannot be reconciled or expressed, which defies description and depiction, which arouses horror) is confronted with the literality of the photographic record (without the distance of form, without a screen, without metaphor), the shock intensifies. We see a flat image, in which everything is exactly what it is: a corpse, decaying flesh, torn tissue, festering wounds, a tangle of boiling material. If such a photo faithfully represents reality, does it faithfully represent experience?

Delacroix cautioned against photography’s exactitude and literality. The literality of the photos in *Plastic Surgery* is anatomical. There is no depth. It offers no opportunity to take a hermeneutic stance. It is to serve other purposes. To give expression to limit experiences (one kind of which, no doubt, is the macabre), a language must be developed and consciously shaped by which we can attempt to conquer this literality, master the horror, overcome the shock, and come closer to understanding.

Before Marching off to the Front

After the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was killed in Sarajevo, war fever struck politicians, military leaders and people on the streets of Europe. While German diplomats pressed for war, German intellectual and artistic elites were exuberant; in war, they saw Faustian forces destroying old forms, radically changing and renewing the world, a unique opportunity for spiritual liberation and rebirth. British, French and American opinion-makers treated war as an order to protect legacy, that which was inherited from the past, to preserve the highest values developed over the course of generations, to defend Honor, Motherland, Family. War caused excitement among everyone, even antiwar pacifists and reluctant socialists. The British contrasted the Germans’ apocalyptic fantasy of “a new heaven and a new earth” with their own kind of social-political millennialism, expressed in the famous slogans: “The war to end all wars” and “the war to make the world safe for democracy.”⁵²⁵ However it

525 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 90-94, 142-154.

might sound today – after the experiences of the twentieth-century wars – news that war had broken out was welcomed with joyous elation by certain poets and writers on both sides of the conflict, since – as it seemed to them – it offered cleansing, purification. The English poet Rupert Chawner Brooke, an officer in the British Navy, fatally wounded during an expedition in the Dardanelles in 1915, wrote in his poem *1914*:

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour, [...]
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary, [...]
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth, [...].

And for Thomas Mann, future Nobel Prize in Literature laureate, war was to be:

[...] a purification, a liberation, an enormous hope. [...] The German soul is opposed to the pacifist ideal of civilization for is not peace an element of civil corruption?⁵²⁶

News about the war was welcomed with spectacular explosions of joy. Scenes of cheering crowds were immortalized in a wide range of photos which, though they were taken in various European capitals on opposing sides of the front, are amazingly similar to one another. On 28 July 1914, the day Austro-Hungary declared war on Serbia, enthusiastic Viennese carried portraits of Franz Joseph through the streets, lifting their hands, waving their hats in the air, smiling and screaming. In the back, above the heads of the crowd, we see black umbrellas opened to protect people from the sun. The hats quavering in the air stand in contrast to the calm and static umbrellas.⁵²⁷ The Germans declared war on Russia on 1 August. A crowd of many thousands of people poured into the street, and in front of the royal palace enthusiastic Berliners greeted the Kaiser. And when the mobilization proclamation was posted on the palace gates, the gathering sang the national anthem, “And now let us all thank the Lord.”⁵²⁸ On 4 August, after German troops crossed into neutral Belgium, Great Britain declared war on Germany. From the balcony of Buckingham Palace King George V, surrounded by the royal family, greeted the crowd, which sang in joyous excitement “God Save the King.” Again a forest of raised hands waving hats. It was night, and the bright lamps highlighted the palace façade against the dark backdrop and

526 For both quotes (Brooke and Mann), see Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (Presidio Press, 1962), 369.

527 See photo in I. Westwell, *World War I Day by Day* (Osceola 2001), 11.

528 See photo in Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, no. 6, 208.

reflected off the raised white hats.⁵²⁹ At the same time, people in Trafalgar Square were singing, screaming, rejoicing, and waving their hats in the air.⁵³⁰

In a photo showing a patriotic demonstration on 2 August 1914 in front of the Feldherrnhalle at Odeonsplatz in Munich, hats are mostly sitting on their owners' heads, only few are lifted into the air.⁵³¹ The signs of joy are raised hands with clenched fists, smiles on faces. In the crowd packed into the square in front of this monumental Field Marshals' Hall there was a certain young man, without a hat, gazing out toward some point in space. Many years later, looking at this photo, Adolf Hitler remembered that he was in this heaving crowd at Odeonsplatz, hoarse from singing "Die Wacht am Rhein" and "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles." Heinrich Hoffmann, the man who had taken the photo and who would later become Hitler's court photographer, enlarged the photo several times and, as Ian Kershaw wrote:

[...] discovered the face of the twenty-five-year-old Hitler in the centre of the photograph, gripped and enraptured by the war hysteria. The subsequent mass reproduction of the photograph helped contribute to the establishment of the Führer myth - and to Hoffman's immense profits.⁵³²

War fever was felt especially by young people. On the wave of patriotic enthusiasm, they followed their hearts; they wanted to participate in a knight's battle over the noblest ideals, though they also wanted to experience a true and manly adventure. Rallies and demonstrations, celebrating the coming war in the huge theater of open urban spaces, led to other scenes of public spectacle, namely mobilization campaigns, which were also widely photographed. The same actors appear in new roles, though they remain in the same costumes. The emotion-filled crowd, the vibrating mass of people, transform themselves into a group of volunteers, crowded tightly, motionless, staring at the camera lens, and waiting in civilian clothes in front of the recruiting center. Hats and caps are no longer waving in the air; they had long come down and, without exception, are resting nicely on the heads of those who had decided to join the army. In response to the appeal by Sir Horatio Herbert Kitchener, the British War Secretary, who on 8 August 1914 requested 100,000 volunteers, 175,000 came forward within a week. By 5 September, that number had climbed to 250,000. On that day, for the first time, the famous poster appeared with a huge image of Kitchener

529 See photographs in J. Terraine, *The Great War* (London 1999), 10.

530 See photo in Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, no. 9, 208.

531 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889-1936 Hubris* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), after p. 162.

532 *Ibid.*, 89.

pointing toward the viewer with the words: Lord Kitchener “wants YOU.” Thus were the origins of the British Expeditionary Force, an army made up of mostly volunteers, about which Ian Hay, several months later, would write the following in a popular hymn dedicated to the so-called Kitchener’s Army:

Within their hearts be writ
This single-line memorial: -
He did his duty – and his bit.⁵³³

I am looking at a photo taken in August 1914 at the Central London Recruiting Depot.⁵³⁴ Volunteers are crowded in front of the gate. Visible behind them is a brick wall with grim, probably barred windows. The men are standing in a strikingly ordered way. The photo, taken from slightly above, gives the impression of people arranged in an amphitheater. In the foreground, a few characters are fully visible, but behind them, the middle of the photo is filled with heads. Almost parallel layers build themselves one upon the other, and their linearity is highlighted by the sharp lines of the cap and hat brims. Horizontal lines are dominant: the arrangement of the heads, faces, eyes, the clear outline of the wall bricks, the window grilles. The iron gate’s horizontal beam makes up an upper border of the composition, above which the lines of the radiant grating flow up and outward, toward a space beyond the frame’s limits. Everyone is looking at the camera, and a counterpoint for these centered *looks* consists of two figures at the photo’s foreground: a man standing with arms akimbo, his back to the photographer, looking at the group of volunteers; and a police officer – the only person in uniform – who is also facing the men gathered in the courtyard.

One would like to say that all of the above indicated some kind of military order, as if the volunteers waiting to be called into the army had already unconsciously fallen into formation. The dynamic movement of crowds of people, joyous over the knowledge that war was coming, had changed into some kind of wait-and-see motionless. The smiles visible on some of the volunteers’ faces seem to be more restrained, and the expression on other faces is a mixture of gravity, interest, excitement, fear; all eyes are set in one direction – that is, at the photographer, and thus toward us, as we look at the photograph. But we look at these men from a distance of 100 years; between the time this photo was taken and time we give our *looks*, there was not just the history of the Great War, in which these volunteers were about to participate, but the entire twentieth century.

533 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 178.

534 See photo in Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 20.

The photograph of volunteers standing in front of the recruiting depot tells a story about waiting for something that would transform everything, which no one at the time was able to comprehend. The Great Change – sensed, longed for – eludes the view from August 1914. Anticipating that change, the volunteers look us in the eye, joyous and boisterous, excited while they wait for their adventure to begin, intoxicated by their patriotic mission. They do not know yet, because they cannot know, what will happen to them, what will befall Europe and the entire world. They have no idea what the object of their anticipation will turn out to be. War had not yet managed to reveal to them its monstrous face. Still healthy and whole, they stand before us as the Great Change approaches: civilian caps will be exchanged for helmets; they will take off their civilian clothes and put on uniforms; bodies vibrating with life are changing into bodies that are exhausted, tormented, injured, torn apart by bullets, dead and decaying; youthful enthusiasm transforms itself into disappointment, horror, shock, and torpor.

Then and there – in front of the Central London Recruiting Depot in August 1914 – nothing had happened yet. Like those faces looking into the camera lens, preserved in time, the entire photo leans toward the future, as if, together with the London volunteers, it had caught sight of what was about to happen. The narrative potential of this photograph is contained in our knowledge of what was about to happen, and of what they did not know at the time. This surplus of knowledge transforms itself into a story drawn (or rather extrapolated) from the photo. It would be a story about how their faces were frozen in a mask of horror, about how they had been massacred or choked by gas, about how – with noses ripped off, jaws crushed, and cheeks torn open – they found themselves lying in a field hospital. It could also be a story about crippled men without legs or arms populating postwar Europe; about those who had drowned in mud in the trenches or had been buried under the ruins of destroyed shelters or in artillery shell craters; about unburied corpses decaying for months in “no man’s land”; or about soldiers suffering from shell shock and hidden from the world in psychiatric hospitals. All of them, dead or alive, could have had the faces of the volunteers in the photo.

Our *look* puts them today in a situation marked by tragic irony; it reveals the gap between the perception shaped by the first salvos in August 1914 and the war reality that was waiting for the volunteers behind the gate of the Central London Recruiting Depot. They are about to set off on a trip whose end only we know. We know that what the volunteers wanted and what they were doing would not stop the catastrophe toward which they were all inevitably headed. We look at them as an audience looks at Oedipus, the noble king of Thebes, on whom the knowledge that he had killed his father and married his mother

would, in the end, fall. Would knowledge gained in the trenches also take from them those eyes (as in the case of Oedipus) that were now looking with excitement toward future events, focused on a photographer who was eternalizing the moment when they had started down the path toward war, eyes that were directed toward us?

Nineteen-year-old Roland Leighton enlisted in the army as a volunteer in August 1914, but he was accepted only in October, in Norwich. He thus could not have been one of the London volunteers, and was certainly not one of the volunteers in that photo. He fought first in the 4 Norwich Regiment and then the 7 Worcestershire Regiment. He died on 22 December 1915, two days before his holiday furlough, shot to death at night in “no man’s land” while repairing barbed wire fencing. On 11 September 1915, he had written to a friend, Vera Brittain, from the trenches of France:

The dug-outs have been nearly all blown in, the wire entanglements are a wreck, and in among this chaos of twisted iron and splintered timber and shapeless earth are the fleshless, blackened bones of simple men who poured out their red sweet wine of youth unknowing, for nothing more tangible than Honour or their Country’s Glory or another’s Lust [for] Power. Let him who thinks that War is a glorious thing, who loves to roll forth stirring words of exhortation, invoking Honour and Praise and Valour and Love of Country with as thoughtless and fervid a faith as inspired the priests of Baal to call on their own slumbering deity, let him but look at a little pile of sodden grey rags that cover half a skull and a shin bone and what might have been its ribs, or at this skeleton lying on its side, resting half crouching as it fell, supported by one arm, perfect but that it is headless and with the tattered clothing still draped around it; and let him realise how grand & glorious a thing it is to have distilled all Youth and Joy and Life into a foetid heap of hideous putrescence. Who is there who has known & seen who can say that Victory is worth the death of even one of these?⁵³⁵

This same kind of rapacious, ironic disillusionment was employed by the English poet Wilfred Owen, who enlisted and was sworn into the military almost exactly a year after Roland Leighton – on 21 September 1915 – and who died on 4 November 1918 under artillery fire during the crossing of the Sambre–Oise Canal. In his poem “Dulce et Decorum Est,” Owen described a gas attack and the death of a soldier who had not managed to put his mask on:

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,

535 *Letters from a Lost Generation. First World War Letters of Vera Brittain and Four Friends: Roland Leighton, Edward Brittain, Victor Richardson, Geoffrey Thurlow*, eds. A. Bishop, M. Bostridge (Abacus 1999), 165.

And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
 Pro patria mori.⁵³⁶

Damaged Photographs of (from) the Holocaust

I will now focus on those instances in which the transparency of the photographic medium is disrupted, and when what Barthes called “reference worship” is questioned or seriously restricted.⁵³⁷

In this context I would like to consider the situation in which external circumstances – independent of the subject, the material, and the very mechanisms by which a photographic image is produced – interfere with the photograph's materiality. What interests me here is the photograph that was “destroyed” by events or circumstances beyond the knowledge, will and intentions of the photographer handling the negative or photographic print, and to what extent such destruction enriches photography as the “art of the possible.”

The photographs I have chosen to examine here have a particularly significant feature: they are, in various ways, damaged, and they thus lose the virtue of transparency for the viewer; they cannot be reduced to the reference itself; they unveil the materiality of the photographic medium, its texture. Such damage exposes the photograph's “fiction of transparency”⁵³⁸ and the principle of the

536 Wilfred Owen, *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. C. Day Lewis (New Directions Book, 1965), 55.

537 For more on the “reference worship” in Barthes' reflections on photography (what we have here are “photographs without an image,” because – as Barthes stated - it is not the photo we see, but “that-which-was”), see A. Rouillé, op. cit., 74-79. It is worth noting that Soulages is invoked here, and that Rouillé also questions the transparency of a photograph.

538 On the fiction of the photographic image's transparency, see A. Rouillé, op. cit., s. 71-73.

“invisibility of the negative,”⁵³⁹ which reveals in turn the paradoxical nature of the relationship between the object and its photographic image. Damage impedes perception, establishing distance between the object and its image, highlighting discontinuity between the object seen in the photos and the object itself. A damaged negative or defective photographic emulsion become visible on the print, “screening” the photograph’s object. And yet, damage would appear to lend (at least in certain receptive situations) the photographed object an exceptional aura, one that – in a sense – brings the viewer closer to the reality preserved in the photo. I would like to reflect on this paradoxical phenomenon.

Let Us Pause for a Moment on the Matter of Damage

In one way or another, all of us have seen works of ancient art (in museums, in published reproductions, or in their original locations). A fundamental quality of these works is their “being in ruins,” and they include surviving fragments of temples, columns broken into pieces, statues without heads, without hands, without faces. Our relationship with a work of art that is damaged, defective, or destroyed – despite the fact that it is in this condition, or perhaps precisely because of this fact – has for us a particular aesthetic value. After all, we could not imagine “repaired” Greek statues. Reconstructed arms on the Venus de Milo or a head on the Nike of Samothrace would no doubt be treated not as a supplement to its aesthetic value; on the contrary, it would represent impoverishment, deformation, destruction. In the colloquial view of Greek statues, their white stone, washed out by thousands of years of water and wind, have a natural severity, but we in fact are not aware of their original appearance. In Greek art, Acrolith are statues made with various materials: the head of the sculpture was of marble, the feet and hands of stone, and the body of wood. These figures were clothed in the kind of ornate fabric robes that one can see today in Catholic churches. What followed from this was chryselephantine works made of ivory and gold; the body was sculpted from ivory, the robes were made from sheets of gold leaf, all of which was built around a wooden frame.⁵⁴⁰

From antiquity we have inherited not only broken columns and headless statues, but also pieces of papyrus. At the beginning of the twentieth century, during an excavation at ancient Oxyrhynchus, 160 kilometers southwest of

539 “The negative in itself is invisible, because I only look at it through the already-created photo, inasmuch as looking at a negative is seeing in it a picture [...]” F. Soulages, op. cit., 156.

540 See K. Estreicher, *Historia sztuki w zarysie* (Warszawa; Kraków 1977), 132-133.

Cairo, the English archeologists Hunt and Grenfell found on an ancient trash heap papyrus scraps with the poetry of Sappho (as well as fragments of Pindar, Sophocles, and Euripides). How are we to reconstruct them today? We stand before an impassable barrier: the element of destruction is invincible, destruction is omnipresent, only scattered phrases and single words have been preserved on scraps of papyrus. But when one reads these remnants of Sappho's poetry, do they not sound – precisely because of their fragmentary nature – like excellent modern poetry which requires nothing more, which is already whole, despite – or because of – defects.

For Cyprian Norwid, ruins themselves were a work of art – that is, not only something left over from past beauty, an evocative thought of time inevitably gone by, but a lasting and current source of aesthetic experience. In *Rzecz o wolności słowa*, the poet drew an image of the ruins of Palmyra in Syria:

Patrzyłem i wydziwić się nie mogłem onej
 Całości rzeczy w całość ruiny zmienionej,
 Pięknej ogółem, który powstał ze zniszczenia,
 Z potrącenia, zdeptania i zlekce
 ważenia,
 [...]
 chciałem kamień drobny
 Podjąć, lecz nie jak fragment wydał się osobny
 Palcom moim; zadrząłem i ramię cofnąłem,
 Czując, że za część jedną rzeczy pełnej wziąłem,
 I natychmiast szepnęła do mnie myśl ostrożna:
 “Patrz!... oto i Ruinę nawet popsuć można!”
 A jam jej odpowiedział:
 “...Zaprawdę: Ruina
 Jest całością!...
 ... I nową twórczość odpoczywa
 I looked and could not stop wondering
 Things in their entirety changed into complete ruin,
 A beautiful whole that arose from destruction,
 from being knocked down, trampled and disregarded,
 [...]
 I wanted to pick up a small stone
 But to my fingers it did not seem like
 a separate fragment; I shivered and withdrew my arm,
 Feeling that I took a part of a larger whole,
 And at once a cautious thought whispered to me:
 “Look! ... *here one can even ruin Ruins!*”
 And I responded to that thought:

“... Verily: *Ruins*
They are a *whole!* ...
... A new creative work.⁵⁴¹

Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert was more skeptical:

We have learned to look at works of Greek art as fragments and scraps. We believed too easily that they owe their perfection and beauty to being fragments and scraps. We cannot, nor do we even want to imagine the Venus of Milo or any Greek temple as they really were. We derive a strange aesthetic satisfaction (which has probably never been fully analyzed) from the fact that the capital of a column holds up nothing, that the marble cheek of a goddess suddenly loses its fleshly smoothness and turns into raw uneven stone. This constant neighboring of art and nature, the clear border between what was carved by the artist's chisel and nature's chisel, does not prompt the imagination to fill out the whole but on the contrary, silences it.⁵⁴²

It has happened to all of us, or it could happen – a photograph gets dirty or becomes bent or torn. “Tattered” private photographs are a part of any “domestic history,” of a family's story, of everyday private life. John Berger drew a distinction between “private” and “public” photography. Private photography demonstrates a sense of continuity; such a photograph is surrounded by meaning and received within the context of private life, guaranteeing continuity with regard to the life from which it is severed. Public photography demonstrates a lack of continuity between the viewer and the event presented in the photograph (and its original meaning). Information is severed from *all* lived experience; it preserves the memory of a stranger.⁵⁴³ The kinds of damage of interest to me here are not “innocent”; they have come about not as a result of inattention or neglect. These instances of damage are not trivial, the kind that mark the everyday life of objects and are inevitably tied to them. They are an effect of such an event as the Holocaust, and they are thus manifestly “not-everyday.” They are exceptional.

This initial treatment of the matters at hand leads us to the following assertions:

First – the subject of these considerations will be the damage that marks the object of our *looking* (in the broadest possible sense, it involves an artifact, but more strictly speaking: in the text below, we are talking about a photograph).
Second – this damage is the result of the interaction of a wide variety of factors, which certainly were not part of the creator's intentions; they were separate

541 C. Norwid, *Pisma wszystkie*, ed. J. W. Gomulicki, vol. III, 616-617.

542 Zbigniew Herbert, “Labyrinth on the Sea/Acropolis,” in *The Collected Prose, 1948-1998*, ed. and intro. Alissa Valles, preface Charles Simic (Ecco, 2010), 478.

543 John Berger, *About Looking* (Vintage, 1992), 55-56, 60-61.

and independent of the creative process; they are not part of the world of art, but of nature and/or history.

Third – we will treat the damaged Venus de Milo statue, the damaged poems by Sappho, or a damaged photo as an aesthetic object. Aesthetic objects can be created intentionally (like all works of art) or not. What is decisive in determining whether something achieves the rank of an aesthetic object is the adoption of an aesthetic stance by the viewer. It is the viewer who causes something to potentially become an aesthetic object. For me, phenomenological aesthetics is only an inspiration, a point of reference, one that carries no obligation to follow philosophical orthodoxy. Roman Ingarden's concept of the aesthetic object – which has an intentional character and is the concretization of the work-scheme based on the supplementing or complementing of “indeterminable places” – seems to me to be closest to what I want to achieve in these reflections; it best reflects the features of my view of damaged photographs, which is why I refer to this concept at this point.

Types of Damaged Photographs

Photographic documentation of the Holocaust is dominated by photographs that were taken by the perpetrators. The Holocaust was photographed both by common soldiers (“amateurs”) who would fill up hundreds of albums with thousands of prints,⁵⁴⁴ and by professionals from specialized propaganda units in the Wehrmacht or the Waffen-SS, within which distinct propaganda companies were active.⁵⁴⁵ I want to emphasize most strongly that all of the damaged photos analyzed below were taken by victims.

We have at our disposal both scattered, individual photos and collections of photos taken by Jews themselves. Two albums of photos taken by the Foto-Forbert portrait studio emerged from occupied Warsaw: one was put together in April 1940 for Joint (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) and exhibited the activities of various self-help institutions, and another one was put together in the autumn of 1941 illustrating work done in the *szopy* (German-run

544 See J. Levin and D. Uziel, “Ordinary Men, Extraordinary Photos,” *Yad Vashem Studies* XXVI (1998); J. Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust* (see chapter “Armed with a Camera” and part of the chapter “Cameras in the Ghettos”)

545 See D. Uziel, “Wehrmacht Propaganda Troops and the Jews,” *Yad Vashem Studies* XXIX (2001).

workshops in the ghetto).⁵⁴⁶ The photograph archive of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw contains many private Jewish photos along with those that survived together with other materials in the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto (the Emanuel Ringelblum Archive). But this clandestine photographic documentation is rather meager – 76 photos showing life in the ghetto and its officials in 1941 and 1942 and documenting smuggling operations (passing bags of food over and through the ghetto walls). Also saved from the Holocaust was a book manuscript under the title *Choroba głodowa. Badania kliniczne nad głodem wykonane w getcie warszawskim z roku 1942* along with ten photographs. This work was published by Joint in Warsaw in 1946. Two Jewish photographers were active in the Łódź Ghetto: Mendel Grossman⁵⁴⁷ and Henryk Ross,⁵⁴⁸ who were able, under the conditions of occupation, to assemble extensive photographic documentation of various aspects of life in the closed quarter of Łódź. Under the auspices of the Łódź Council of Elders, official albums appeared that had a certain propaganda quality (they contain photos taken by Grossman and Ross). Arie Ben-Menachem (who, after the war, went by the name Artur Printz) compiled his own album made up of montages of photographs both clandestine and official, and attached with new captions that changed their meaning.⁵⁴⁹ The ghetto in Kaunas was photographed by Zvi Kadushin (later George Kadish), who secretly took more than a thousand photographs of everyday life. He managed to escape the ghetto and, after the war, to return and retrieve the hidden negatives. He died in the United States in 1997.⁵⁵⁰ Photos taken by Naftali Zaleszczyz (Naftali Saleschutz) of the ghetto in Kolbuszowa also survived.⁵⁵¹

546 Both albums are preserved in the photograph archive of Yad Vashem. For more, see http://www1.yadvashem.org.il/search/index_search.html (accessed 25 May 2008) and http://www1.yadvashem.org.il/search/index_search.html (accessed 25 May 2008). See also Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust*, 120-122.

547 Grossman, *With the Camera in the Ghetto*, ed. Z. Szner and A. Sened (New York 1977); Grossman, *My Secret Camera. Life in the Lodz Ghetto. Photographs by Mendel Grossman* (San Diego 2000).

548 Ross, *Łódź Ghetto Album. Photographs by Henryk Ross* [London] 2004.

549 Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust*, 89-92.

550 See the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum online photo archive, go to <https://www.ushmm.org/search/results?q=Zvi+Kadushin> (USHMM search results for “Zvi Kadushin”). M. Gilbert, *Holocaust. Ludzie-dokumenty-pamięć*, trans. Z. Dalewski (Warszawa 2002), 96, 99, 174.

551 See <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/idcard.php?ModuleId=10006202> (USHMM search results for “Naftali Saleschutz”).

Kinds of Damage

Damage – involving both paper prints and negatives – can be divided into two basic types: chemical damage and mechanical damage.⁵⁵²

Chemical damage is caused above all by the effects of the photographic fixer sodium thiosulfate. The chemical treatment process must take place in suitable conditions (temperature, humidity) which, in the ghetto and particularly in the creation of clandestine photos, were difficult to ensure. Sodium thiosulfate should be very carefully rinsed, otherwise it reacts with the silver present in the photographic material, thus creating silver sulfide. The effect of this reaction on a poorly rinsed print is discoloration: brown stains and rusty shades turning into sepia tones (old photos, over time, take on such tones); and on poorly rinsed negatives, a yellow-brown coat is visible (mainly at the perforations).

Beyond scratches on the negative or paper, external smudging, and tears of various kinds – mechanical damage involves above all the effect of humidity and water. Henryk Ross's negatives, having been recovered from their hiding place under ground, carry traces of both chemical and mechanical damage, though the greatest destructive role was played by mechanical factors, namely the conditions under which the negatives had been stored – that is, buried in a damp space under the ground. Humidity softens the emulsion; moisture sometimes washes out large areas of the negative surface. Black deposits visible on Ross's photographic prints are empty spaces on the negative, spaces lacking exposure but corroded by dampness of the photographic emulsion.

The Private Photograph

Here, private photographs (as Berger understood it) would seem to be a typical attribute of “normal times.” They provide documentation of the life of family and friends, family celebrations, trips, excursions, fun, everyday activity. They are photographs taken as if ignoring the war and the Holocaust; they are taken, as it were, despite the Holocaust, or on the margins of the Holocaust, in at least a dual sense. First – thematically, they are “alongside”; they show not what we know about those times: individual and collective portraits, family groups, faces, common amusement, meetings, and smiles. Second – they are the effect of purely private activities, which manifestly ignore public obligations and

552 I want to thank Agata Pietroń, a graduate of the University of Warsaw's Europejska Akademia of Fotografii and Instytut Kultury Polskiej, for her advice on photography's technical matters.

the moral duty to bear witness to the fate of the exterminated collective. They seem not at all to document the times of the Holocaust, but rather to focus on recording expressions of privacy which were not touched by the Holocaust, from which the Holocaust was distilled. The Holocaust creeps into these photos only through the context of their reception, because of our knowledge of when, and in what circumstances, these photos were taken.

In front of us is an identification photo taken in Vilnius between the time when the ghetto was established in September 1941 and its liquidation in September 1943. Blended into the dark background, the face of a woman – dressed in a dark jacket and with hair pulled back – is the only bright spot against the gloomy backdrop. The face has black eyes with clear rings around them. The official nature of the identification photo is, in a sense, broken from the inside – a usable photo, which satisfies the standard and customary visual schema, is transformed into a psychological portrait. The facial features, the lighting, the shadows under the eyes, the background, the *look* – all of this carries within itself an individual truth. What's more, it seems to not speak directly about the situation in which the photo was taken. The photo contains a note of sadness, of hidden suffering. But the photograph is also marked "from the outside." A single distinct scratch runs across the entire photo, marking the woman's right cheek and dividing her nose from her upper lip, and two other scratches, less visible, cut through the photo vertically and horizontally, crossing at the forehead. The woman's name is Henrietta Zeldowicz, the mother of Emilia, born in 1922, who married Aleksander Sedlis in the Vilnius ghetto. Both Emilia and Aleksander were doctors working in the ghetto hospital. Aleksander's parents, Elian and Anna Sedlis, were also doctors at the ghetto hospital. Anna died. Elian survived. Aleksander and Emilia also survived, and they are the ones who saved the family photos, among which is the identification photo of Henrietta Zeldowicz – the only vestige of her existence. Henrietta died during the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto.⁵⁵³

Another photo, carefully cropped and lightly sepia-toned, is creased. These creases bypass the figure of a smiling girl in the foreground and just barely touch her feet. From behind the girl, a boy leans forward with his hands in his suit coat

553 See [https://www.ushmm.org/search/results/?q = Henrietta+Zeldowicz](https://www.ushmm.org/search/results/?q=Henrietta+Zeldowicz) (USHMM search results for "Henrietta Zeldowicz"). To go directly to the photo described above, see <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1156977>. There are three other photos of the Zeldowicz family in the USHMM photo archive showing Henrietta, daughter, husband, and relatives.

pocket, looking toward the photographer, interested and amused. The eyes of both the girl and the boy are aimed directly at the camera lens. They are giving a look of curiosity and good cheer. In the background, a tree and a brick wall. In the photograph is Dorka Lewin. The scene takes place in Kłodawa. In December 1940 Dorka sent this photo to a friend, Gina Tabaczyńska, who was living in the Warsaw Ghetto. Dorka died in the Chełmno extermination camp. Gina went into hiding in a bunker during the ghetto uprising, after which she crossed over to the Aryan side. She was then sent to Germany to work as a Pole. After the war, she returned to Poland, and in 1947 she left for the United States through France.⁵⁵⁴

The brother-sister photo of Jadzia and Szlamek Mącznik is almost completely undamaged. Only the bottom left corner is torn off, and at the top and middle we see a small scratch. Such portraits of children have adorned the windows of hundreds of photo studios. The one we are looking at here was taken in one of those studios in 1942, in this case in the Sosnowiec ghetto. This conventional shot features the heads close together of brother and sister, dressed up for the photo. They are looking at the camera lens with a serious expression on their faces, well aware of the role that has been handed to them – to pose for a family portrait in a photo studio. From their look one cannot read what is about to happen to them. Between May and August 1942, in three successive waves, the Jews of Sosnowiec were deported to Auschwitz. One of these waves carried away Jadzia and Szlamek along with their parents. Their brother Berl and sister Dorka survived. In 1948, Berl left Europe for Israel. He was the one who gave the photo of Jadzia and Szlamek to the Holocaust Museum archive in Washington, a photo taken just before their annihilation.⁵⁵⁵

Two other portrait photos originated from studios: one of Berek Putersznyt, a cobbler from Dąbrowa Górnicza, and another of his wife, Natalia Netka Putersznyt. These photos are significantly damaged: creased, with a thick network of cracks, rust-colored stains covering the sepia-tone surface like chick-enpox spots. As parents, Berek and Natalia took these photos themselves in 1942 and sent them from the ghetto in Dąbrowa Górnicza to their daughter, Zosia, who had been transported to the concentration camp at Oberlstadt. Miraculously, Zosia was able to hide the portraits in a shoe. In May 1945 the nineteen-year-old

554 See <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1087278> (USHMM photo archive).

555 For biographical information, see Photo Archives online USHMM http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia_doc/query/2?uf=uia_zFlcPn (accessed 25 May 2008).

Zosia was liberated by the Red Army. Her parents died in Auschwitz in August 1943. The photos, hidden in her shoe, survived.⁵⁵⁶

Let us now move on to private photos taken by Henryk Ross in the Łódź Ghetto, among which there are many damaged photos, though the damage in these items is different than what we see in the ones discussed above. Those above were mostly scratched, creased or torn. Ross's photos exhibit black and white stains creeping across significant portions of the surface, discoloration that takes on strange shapes, washing away, in a sense, the photographic image. The world presented in the photos is thus eclipsed. What's more, it enters into a relationship with another visual order, with an abstract form that not so much disrupts the image as originally recorded as it, in a sense, broadens the present perspective. This collision of orders was not a product of the photographer's intentions, but was rather imposed from the outside as an effect of material disturbances of the image's original whole.

From this rich collection I have chosen three photos, in one of which the photographer's wife, Stefania, is lying on the grass with her hands up behind her head. The scene is idyllic. Stefania, dressed in a summer dress with short sleeves, is illuminated by warm sunlight. Her eyes are shut. She is resting, napping, dreaming. From the top of the frame, two black stains flow toward her face, in the shape of tongues, with bright white edges. The larger one touches her forehead, the smaller one is approaching her chin. Stefania is calm, unconcerned, as if she did not see the threat. The damage gave Ross's photo an unexpected and new dimension, one which can be perceived and interpreted only from the other side of the Holocaust. Stefania survived. In another photo a child is laughing, standing probably in a crib set up in a room. It is no more than a year old. The face is quite visible, its polka-dot outfit, but the rest has been devoured – like a translucent ameba – by a stain running from the bottom, top and side. Ross took this photo in 1940. We do not know what happened to the child. In the third photo, a mother, kissing a child (perhaps the same child) that she is holding in her arms, is photographed in front of a house. Some fencing is visible, behind which there are plants. The edges of the photo are marked by black serrated stains, from below – like black smoke – a stain climbing upward and eclipsing the figure of the mother. The child, dressed in a sleeveless overshirt covering a checkered short-sleeve shirt, is fully visible. The mother is able to save only her face and neck from the black, her dark and wavy hair blends with the tumbling

556 For biographical information, see Photo Archives online USHMM http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia_doc/query/3?uf=uia_npTeMa (accessed 25 May 2008).

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texture of the stain. There is no way to say what happened to the characters in this photo.

Clandestine Photographs

Clandestine photographs document conditions in the ghetto, deportations, terror and crimes. They constitute material evidence, often prepared within the framework of a wider secret campaign to depict the Holocaust and its processes.

Three examples come from the Henryk Ross collection. First, Execution on Łódź's Bałucki Rynek. At the center is a gallows. A person hangs from a rope. It is a gray winter day. Snow has fallen on the cobblestones and roofs. The public execution had been carried out earlier. The crowd on the square has dispersed. Visible next to the gallows are the dark silhouettes of a few passers-by. The photo is unclear, unfocused, because it is poorly lighted. A mistake that is difficult to avoid when one is photographing in secret. But it is not that technical mistake that dominates the photo. From the top and bottom edges of the photo, two black stains flow toward one another, hemmed in by white bands, like the outlines of non-existent continents. They tend toward the gallows, but they do not cover it. Next photo. One of the deportations to the extermination camp in Chełmno. In the forefront, two Jewish policemen are escorting the deportees as they walk toward the Radogoszcz train station, which is where these deportees will board the train. Right now they are walking, carrying their belongings in bags, bundles thrown over their shoulders, milk cans. More or less a quarter of the photo is consumed by blackness, over which eerie white ripples are visible. Another scene. During the September 1942 "*szpera*" (from the German word "*Gehsperre*" referring to a total blockade of movement in the ghetto), the sick locked up in the hospital on Łagiewnicka Street are attempting to escape through a window. The Jewish police have caught them. The left side of the photo is reduced in size by a margin a few centimeters wide with ragged edges. And it is toward this blackness that an old woman, bent almost to the ground, is apparently fleeing, trying to avoid the grasp of one of the policemen.

Several photographs taken in the autumn of 1944 by members of the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz-Birkenau are absolutely exceptional. They emerged from a situation marked by extreme threat, from strict clandestine conditions. They show the macabre "everyday events" of a crew at Crematorium V: the burning of bodies that do not fit in the crematorium furnaces, naked women moving toward the gas chamber. The frame is extremely tilted, the silhouettes of the women disappear into the background, among the trees. In another photo the field of vision is, to a large extent, obscured by the door

frame of the gas chamber, from which the photographer snaps the photo. These photos show no visible traces of damage. They are blurred and shaky. They are marked by the very act of photographing: time and place. They carry the image of what was the Holocaust's culmination – the technological process of mass murder. They were smuggled out of the camp to Kraków, accompanied by a note dated 4 September 1944 and signed with the pseudonym “Stakło” (Stanisław Kłodziński).⁵⁵⁷

Interpretive Tropes

Photographic damage directs the viewer toward the medium of the photographic image; it forces the viewer to shift attention from the “represented world” to the material substrate, that which determines the appearance of that world in front the viewer's eyes. Damage reveals what is usually hidden, overlooked, unnoticed: the material surface of the photographic paper that is susceptible to mechanical influences, the chemical metamorphoses of the negative.

The layer of a photograph's damage appears as a result of external actions with respect to the act of photographing, external with respect to the object (subject) of the photograph, and independent of that act. Damage is the effect of a tangle of incidental circumstances (in the sense that they are planned by no one, that they are random) and the influences of mechanical factors and chemical processes. But this external affliction is an integral part of photography and makes up – so to speak – one of its aesthetic dimensions. Chance turns out to be an essential part of presentation; happenstance seems to cross over into the sphere of intentions in meaning-creation; the destruction of forms of representation endows the photo with additional meaning.

In photography there is an artistic phenomenon known as the aesthetics of error. The work of Jerzy Lewczyński falls into this category, by virtue of his use of the so-called “found negatives.” One work – presented at the exhibition entitled “Archeologia fotografii” (the archeology of photography), from the cycle *Znalezione fotografie* (1985) – presents the highly creased identification photos of a young woman, which are remarkably like the portraits of Berek Puterszynt and his wife taken in 1942 in Dąbrowa Górnicza. Critics call Lewczyński's method an aesthetics of error “in light of the generally destructive nature of the author's use of negatives, which – through their scratches and damage – further strengthen

557 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

the medium with regard to the passage of time.”⁵⁵⁸ But it is the photographic work of Wojciech Prażmowski that would seem to be closest to the photos discussed above, even though Prażmowski never made the Holocaust a focus of his work. A breakthrough in his approach to photography was the “Pierwsza światowa wystawa zdjęć zepsutych” (The first world exhibition of defective photos, at the Mała Galeria ZPAF-CSW, Warsaw 1989). Prażmowski intentionally applied all kinds of defects to negatives and double exposed them to reflect the qualities that come with the passage of time. His *Album rodzinny* (family album) is one of his most interesting works, in which he imposed two images of reality upon one another: one – a reproduction of a historical photograph, and another – a contemporary photograph, often stylized as an old photo.⁵⁵⁹

But there is a fundamental difference between the above-mentioned works and the damaged photos that I am analyzing here. Lewczyński and Prażmowski’s photographs came about as the effect of conscious artistic actions; they are the product of concrete creative methods applied by their authors. But the damaged photos from the time of the Holocaust become an aesthetic object during the process of reception, when they are viewed; they are perceived as an object; they are a correlate of an intentional act – an aesthetic experience. It is not the creator who lends his work a patina of agedness by arranging its features, by producing damage, cuts, scratches or stains. This damage is caused by the “chisel of history,” and as such becomes (or can become), when viewed, an integral part of the photographic image. In addition, in photos taken by artists practicing the aesthetics of error, their scratches, tears and discolorations are supposed (according to interpreters) to mimic the effect of the passage of time, of time gone by, giving them an aura of melancholy. It seems, in the case of the damaged photos from the Holocaust, the situation is the complete opposite. Thanks to the layer of damage, which “disturbs” a photograph’s reception, the image is – in a sense – updated; the patina of agedness, the aura of time gone by is put into question. The viewer is moved from the safe “here and now” to the disturbing “there and then.” The disturbed reception is a confirmation of the

558 Z. Tomaszczuk, *Świadomość kadru. Szkice z estetyki fotografii* (Wrzesień 2003), 126–127.

559 Ibid., 132–133 and http://www.galeriaaff.infocentrum.com/2000/prazmo/prazmo_p.html (accessed 16 February 2018). See also Christian Boltanski, *Gymnasium chases* (1991), which makes use of photos of Jewish school children in a Vienna gymnasium in 1931. Magnification, grain, images deformed, blurring, “collapsing” of the image, etc. – all suggest the terror of the Holocaust.

authenticity and the up-to-date nature of the medium. The “calm” and “normality” presented in private photos are a matter of appearances; their defective form confirms our knowledge about what would happen later, our knowledge of the end. The terror presented in the clandestine photos breaks up form, it decomposes form.

Let me propose three interpretative tropes:

Damage as a Stigma of the Holocaust

Involved here are photographs originating from that place and that time – that is, photos *from* the Holocaust and photos *of* the Holocaust. Material damage visible in the photographs under discussion here emerged from that time and that place. The Holocaust mutilated them.

A damaged photographic image was – so to speak – “stripped of its skin,” revealing its internal tissue, which became the photo’s additional texture, a mark on the image, its stigma.

I am aware how risky it is, when talking about the Holocaust, to refer to Christian tradition, but it is precisely from this tradition that I want to borrow a certain interpretive formula. In Christianity, a stigma is not a flaw, not a defect, but a mark of a specific bond with the sacred. If we treat damaged photos of (from) the Holocaust as “stigmatized,” then we must ask: what meaning does this stigma reveal?

Is this not “negative stigmatization”? Damage and destruction is the stigma of the fate of the victim: hounded – pursued – tormented – killed, but also hiding in various places and in various ways. Photos share the fate of the people whom they are presenting, whom they make present, whom they “hold” in an infinite moment of eternal duration. They burn along with them, or – if destined for survival – carry within themselves uneffaced trauma. Because we remember that stigmata are wounds that are tied to suffering, and a stigma is the language of trauma.

Damaged photographs from the ghetto – they lay bare the trauma of the material, and through that, the trauma of memory.⁵⁶⁰

560 Texts on (from) the Holocaust are similarly damaged: texts are wounded, they bleed. For more on this understanding of damaged texts (deteriorated, soiled, distorted) see my chapter “Losy tekstów” in *Tekst wobec zagłady*; see also P. Rodak, “Wojna i zapis (o dziennikach wojennych),” *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2005), 33–45; Rodak, “Dziennik osobisty: praktyka, materialność, tekst,” *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 1 (2006).

Damage as a Vestige of the Holocaust

A photograph is not just an image, a representation. A photograph is also a vestige, an attestation of presence. A vestige – that is, something directly reflected in the world, like a footprint on the sand or a death mask. In this sense, photographs of (from) the Holocaust are a vestige.

On the basis of these vestiges, we are able to reconstruct the fate of a photograph itself as an object, as a thing; to reconstruct the history of its materiality (its preservation, the fact that it was hidden, the influence of the conditions in which it was hidden).

Damaged photographs of (from) the Holocaust join with an entire legion of other things left behind by Jews; they fit nicely into the history of those things, snatched up by looters or rotting in trash heaps.

In hiding on Warsaw's Aryan side, Rachel Auerbach wrote:

There are tears of things - *sunt lacrimae rerum*. And there is a cry of things. [...] The death, extermination, demolition of the individual, and then there is the extermination and demolition of things. In the image of the annihilation of the Jews, the annihilation of things occupies a prominent position. The tragedy and mistreatment of things is equal to the tragedy and mistreatment of people. [...] And then there is this: the trash heap of the ghetto in August 1942. [...] Photographs. A terrible number of photographs. [...] photographs in trash heaps were not put on display, and none of them had captions attached. They demonstrated themselves what they had to say. It was the dot over the “i” in the fantastic phraseology of the trash heap in the wake of the Jews. [...] Oh, those wedding photos, family portraits. Vacation photos in happy times against the backdrop of nightmarish reality.⁵⁶¹

Damage as a Metonym for the Holocaust

Let us refer to an article by Frank Ankersmit, “Remembering the Holocaust: Mourning and Melancholia.”⁵⁶² The fundamental question is: what kind of discourse is proper for research into the Holocaust? The answer can be found within the tension between “historical discourse,” whose “goal is to describe and explain the past,” and a “memory discourse.” While a “historical discourse” makes use of metaphors, a “memory discourse” is metonymic, and not metaphorical⁵⁶³ – that is, its element is closeness, contiguity, a desire and search for contact. In a sense,

561 R. Auerbach, “Lament rzeczy martwych,” *Przełom 2* (1946).

562 F. R. Ankersmit, “Remembering the Holocaust: Mourning and Melancholia,” in *Historical Representation*, 176–194.

563 Ankersmit uses the opposing concepts of metaphor and metonymy within the understanding originated by R. Jakobson, which has become most common in modern

metaphor is the intellectual appropriation of, taking possession of, the object of knowledge. Metonymy is different. Memory, governed by the rules of metonymy, first tends toward something, much like *looking*, which we direct in front of ourselves in order to be able to see something at all. As we look, we – so to speak – “touch” with our *look* that which we come across in our line of sight, which appears within our field of vision. We “touch” but we do not “appropriate.” In this sense, the “memory discourse” does not destroy the aura of ineffability, and it respects that unnamable reality that we usually associate with the Holocaust. Ankersmit put it this way:

Metonymy favors mere contiguity, respects all the unpredictable contingencies of our memories, and is, as such, the very opposite of the proud metaphorical appropriation of reality. Metaphor has the pretension to go right to the heart of the matter, metonymy makes us simply move on to what happens to lie next to it – and so on, ad infinitum. Metonymy ties together a web of associations depending upon our personal experiences and a host of contingent factors, instead of forcing (past) reality within the matrices of a metaphorical appropriation of reality.⁵⁶⁴

Damaged photographs of (from) the Holocaust set forth a metonymic reading: they invite the viewer into intimate contact with the material of an image, which talks with a voice that is muted, faded, and tormented, one that is often difficult to hear and recognize; which talks in a way that is intermittent and fragmented, but which talks entirely through itself; it forces us to look at the whole (precisely – paradoxically – because it presents itself as a whole that is broken, maimed). Because we *look*, the image achieves integrity of a different order. It not only represents that reality (over there), it not only conveys its image; that reality being broken and deformed, it manifests the impossibility of its representation (within the classic framework of *mimesis*).

Nothing resembles that which was then and there. Thus, deformation turns out to be the only possible form of representation. Deformation which breaks apart and damages (impossible) *mimesis*. Deformation which, by its own self, reveals the affliction of that reality, over there.

humanities. It is a concept based on the “fundamental distinctiveness of metaphor and metonymy, understood broadly as two cooperating but opposing ways of developing and composing every lingual expression: *the metonymic way is based on relationships of contiguity, the metaphorical - on relationships of similarity* [author’s emphasis – J. L.]. See M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. J. Sławiński (Wrocław 1998), entry “Metonimia,” 308.

564 Ankersmit, “Remembering the Holocaust,” in *Historical Representation*, 178.

Children of the Holocaust: Obverse and Reverse

The Boy from the Warsaw Ghetto

He is standing with his hands up. His palms are visible held up to the level of his head, on which he is wearing a flat hat. His carefully buttoned overcoat comes to an end around the bottom of his short pants, revealing his thin bare legs in socks that are pulled up almost to the knees. On his feet, leather shoes covering his ankles. All of which, in the ghetto, represented exceptional luxury. His clothing shows not the slightest sign of ghetto poverty. His face – delicate, sensitive, subtle – is not marked by the torture of horror, is not branded by the stigma of hunger or suffering. He is expressing no violent emotion, but rather restrained amazement mixed with fear. He is looking out in front of himself under dark eyelashes. Behind him, a group of Jews with hands up – men, women and children – are emerging through a building gate. Standing a few steps behind the boy, on the gray cobblestone sidewalk on other side of the street gutter, is an SS-man aiming the barrel of his machine gun toward the boy's back.

This is one of the most famous photographs from the Holocaust. It has been reproduced countless times in albums, on book covers, and on posters, and it has been enlarged into gigantic dimensions for museums in Warsaw, Jerusalem, Washington and London. It has been published for television reports, as an illustration in anniversary press articles, as an emblem invoked almost automatically. This image of the “ghetto boy” has assumed a permanent place in the inventory of mass imagery; it has become an icon of mass culture preying on the Holocaust.

The anonymous boy from the ghetto, with his hands up, is looking out toward the inevitable final solution. We look at this photo of him with greater knowledge of what is about to happen than that which is just beginning to flicker in his eyes. We see him just before the finale. His hands still raised, his eyes still looking forward, his legs still carrying a boy's body and still filled with warm blood. But the boy, thrown into the cogs of mass imagination, cannot hang in suspension; his story, fulfilled and pushed shut, built into the universal project to reconcile the Holocaust, must emerge from the photo. Ultimately, from the core of darkness, he exerts a ray of hope; among those who survived the Holocaust, there were children who, though they have a terrible story to tell, fill our hearts with calm. They are an archetypal figure of the infernal Odyssey, a trek through the land of horror, suffering and torture toward the home port. Great narratives in the global village cannot remain open, cannot be fragmentary, and cannot burn up in ashes. We know how the story continues, but we want to listen to it once again. What's more, we want the nightmarish story, in the case of the boy in the photo,

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to represent an exception. We want the Holocaust to release him from its claws, at least him, the one who stands before us, so innocent and fragile, so very definite and tangible. We want this story to proceed differently, so that (as in Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*) life-giving water flows from the showers in Auschwitz and not deadly gas. In a word, we want the boy to survive, to be saved.

The photograph of the boy from the ghetto is overgrown with stories. Let us attempt to separate fact from fiction. The photo belongs to a so-called "Bildbericht," which contains 59 carefully cropped photos attached with handwritten Gothic script captions. These photos are an integral part of the Report put together for Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler by the man who led the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Jürgen Stroop. The report carries a title that has itself become one of the textual icons of the Holocaust: *Es gibt keinen jüdischen Wohnbezirk in Warschau mehr!* The thick volume, elegantly bound in leather, lay on a bookshelf in Stroop's Bavarian villa until the American Seventh Army took control of the area. The Report was added to evidence presented at the Nuremberg Trials and Stroop's trial in Warsaw.⁵⁶⁵ The photo under discussion here carries the title "Mit Gewalt aus Bunkern hervorgeholt." The scene recorded in this photo thus took place during the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, between 19 April and 16 May 1943. These are irrefutable facts.

We know when and under what circumstances the photo was taken. But the question remains: who are the people in the photo? Recently, Edward Kossoy carried out what is probably the only attempt in the Polish secondary literature to deconstruct the legend surrounding the photo of the "ghetto boy."⁵⁶⁶ He pointed out that the first stage of identifying the people in the photo came during Stroop's trial (he was sentenced to death and hanged in Warsaw on 8 September 1951), when research into the matter was led by Professor Paweł Horoszowski, director of the Laboratorium Kryminologiczne in Warsaw. At this time, only one person could be identified: The German aiming his machine gun at the boy. He turned out to be SS-Rottenführer Josef Blösche, who was tracked down in 1967, put on trial in Erfurt and sentenced to death in 1969. Investigators at the time were able to discover the names of none of the Jews seen in the photograph. But indirect testimony began to emerge. Two women claimed, independently of one another,

565 See B. Mark, Introduction to Stroop, *The Report of Jürgen Stroop Concerning the Uprising in the Ghetto of Warsaw and the Liquidation of the Jewish Residential Area* (Warsaw 1958).

566 E. Kossoy, "Chybiona parada. Dzieje pewnej fotografii," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 149. I want to thank J. Petelewicz for pointing this article out to me.

that the boy with his hands up had the last name Siemiontek and was a child of affluent parents from Łowicz. His family had been deported to the Warsaw Ghetto in the summer of 1941. But the women's testimony was not enough to officially identify the boy, and he remained an anonymous child of the ghetto. Thus ended the first stage of identification.

In the Photo Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington there is information about people who can be recognized in the photograph. In addition to the above-mentioned Blösche, four of the people in the group of Jews have been identified: the little girl on the left edge of the photo looking directly at the camera lens is Hanka Lamet. She is positioned right next to her mother, Matylda Lamet Goldfinger (second from the left), who has her hands stretched above her head and is also looking toward the camera lens. Deeper in the photo, not far from the gate, the boy with a white bag over his shoulder is Leo Kartuziński. The woman at the forefront with the bag hanging from her elbow, her head turned toward the central figure of the boy, is Chana Zeilinwarger. The identity of the photograph's main character is still an open question. The archivists cite five hypotheses, none of which – they emphasize – can be sufficiently confirmed. The boy's name could be Siemiontek, Artur Domb, Izrael Rondel, Levi Zeilinwarger (the son of the woman positioned next to him and looking at him), or Tsvi Nussbaum.⁵⁶⁷

The careful hypotheses put forward by archivists do not satisfy our need for a great narrative. The second stage of identification begins, one that is myth-creating. As Kossoy stated, in 1978 the *Jewish Chronicle* found the “ghetto boy.” Of course he was alive, and of course he was a successful man, a wealthy forty-three-year-old entrepreneur living in London. But the newspaper had to quickly retract its story because that story had a brutal confrontation with the facts. The alleged “ghetto boy,” who spent the war in Turkestan, and not the Warsaw Ghetto, dated the photograph as having been taken in 1941. The fiasco of this story led to another, when a New York doctor (again, a successful man!) Tsvi Nussbaum came forward claiming that he was most likely the boy in the photograph. Even though Nussbaum's claim was not categorical, he nonetheless became a media sensation. He put together a tableau: a framed portrait of the ghetto boy and a photo of himself at the age of ten, which was supposed to show a striking resemblance between the two faces. He allowed himself to be photographed with this tableau

567 See <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1088110> (USHMM photo archive).

and his commentary: "An event from my past, which haunts me until today."⁵⁶⁸ In 1982, the *New York Times* promoted the Nussbaum revelations, and in 1990 a French-Finnish team produced a 50-minute film entitled *Tsvi Nussbaum. A Boy from Warsaw*. Finally, and sadly, the idea that Nussbaum was the ghetto boy was further propagated by the authors of an excellent, pioneering handbook on the Holocaust published for the Polish market.⁵⁶⁹

In light of his own story, the doctor from New York cannot be the ghetto boy. And in order to confirm this fact, no especially deep knowledge is required. It is thus no real wonder at the irritation felt by Edward Kossoy, who called Nussbaum's story "rubbish," "fantasy," and "obvious nonsense."⁵⁷⁰ The alleged boy in the photo claimed that it had been taken on 13 July 1943 as a group of Jews was being removed from the Hotel Polski at 29 Długa Street.⁵⁷¹ Advocates of the New York doctor story do not want to notice the obvious problem here, since July is not May, and since the Hotel Polski was not within the moribund Warsaw Ghetto, and Długa Street – though it was not far from the ghetto – was always outside its boundaries.

The need for myth is stronger than humility in the face of facts. Rooted in historical experience, in concrete events, and individual fates, this need moves beyond the facts and soars toward the universal horizon, which is what a great Holocaust narrative requires, one that reconciles the story about a child's hecatomb. The boy captured by the Nazi photographer is marked off from the group of other Jews. In the photograph's compositional structure, he is positioned at the photo's focal point, at the intersection of the lines of the golden ratio. He stands next to those exiting the gate, next to the group of Germans, as the only autonomous, separate, individual figure in the photograph. His face, eyes, and

568 See "Child of the Ghetto," in M.-M. Robin, *100 Historic Photos of the 20th Century* (Köln, 1999), no. 24. Robin identifies the boy in the photo as Tsvi Nussbaum, though she also cites the expert opinion of Professor Izrael Gutman of Yad Vashem, who claims that though several dozen people have aspired to be the ghetto boy, the boy's identity is in fact not important, given that his image has become a "symbol of victory."

569 See R. Szuchta, P. Trojański, *Holocaust, Zrozumieć dlaczego* (Warszawa 2003), 219.

570 E. Kossoy, op. cit., 87-88.

571 Jews still hiding in Warsaw who could afford to purchase, from Jewish agents of the Gestapo, South American citizenship or Palestine certificates gathered at the Hotel Polski. From there, they were to participate in an exchange for German citizens. Some of them were in fact interned and exchanged, but most were shipped off to Bergen-Belsen or Auschwitz, or were shot in the ghetto rubble. For more on the Hotel Polski, see A. Haska, "Jestem Żydem, chcę wejść". *Hotel Polski w Warszawie, 1943* (Warszawa 2006).

silhouette immediately catch the viewer's attention, and are etched in memory. They embody everything tied to the fate of a child of the Holocaust: a defenseless and innocent victim of unimaginable violence. The sight of these victims, symbolized by the boy in the photo, pierces our hearts, but it also releases in us a more or less conventional reaction. This type of victim, a child victim, is – so to speak – culturally reconciled and emotionally accepted. It is easier to identify with a victim whose appearance is like our own than it is to identify with a child's body that is monstrously deformed by hunger. In a word – it is easier to open oneself up to such a victim, because it is immaculate, clean; the sight of such a victim is easier to internalize, and it is easier to identify with the victim himself, because he is heroic.

The story about the photograph from the Strop Report, tied to a great narrative about the Holocaust, not only establishes the axiom of the rescued child, but also engineers a legion of hero-storytellers. Here we have the triumph of hope over hopelessness, the triumph of insatiable life over the Nazi death sentence. The ghetto boy living a good life across the ocean or along the Thames complies with our thirst for justice, perhaps even a “happy ending.”

A Boy from the Łódź Ghetto

A boy with a chubby face is turning his head toward the camera and giving a delightful smile. The sunlight is shining on his full cheeks. The brim of his police cap with a flat top, modeled on the French kepi, casts a shadow over his right eye, while the left eye is looking – through the camera lens – directly at us. The cap is a policeman's cap, because the boy is wearing a play uniform of a Jewish policeman – that is a member of the Ghetto Police (*Ordnungsdienst*). At various times in the Łódź Ghetto, between 850 and 1,200 Jewish police officers were mobilized to maintain order and cooperate with the Germans in the deportations.⁵⁷²

572 The structure of the Jewish police in the Łódź Ghetto was extremely complicated. The Ghetto Police (*Ordnungsdienst*, OD) had one headquarters and 5 stations. A separate section of the OD was called the *Überfallkommando*, used for the suppression of demonstrations and strikes. The OD Reserve Section guarded ghetto institutions, the OD Isolation Service organized the quarantine of flats and buildings during epidemics. The *Hilfsordnungsdienst* - that is, the Auxiliary Order Service - guarded wooden objects, protecting them from being dismantled for firewood by ghetto residents. There was also the so-called *Policja Gospodarcza* (Economic Police), *Policja Żeńska* (Women's Police), which dealt with minors, and *Policja Obyczajowa* (Morality Police). Within the OD, there was also the so-called *Sonderkommando*, renamed over time to *Sonderabteilung*, or the Special Branch, which tracked illegal trade in goods and

The boy is dressed in a uniform coat. On his sleeve there is a regulation police armband, and on his head a regulation cap. He holds in his left hand a police baton, or rather a toy baton suitable for a child's small hand. The little policeman is not alone. He is standing behind another boy, who is a bit taller and thinner, dressed in a gray jacket and wearing a flat hat. The little policeman is holding the other boy tightly by the collar with his right hand, and – with the baton in his left hand – he is striking the other boy on the arm. No doubt we are witnessing children playing. The boys are playing a version of the old game of cops and robbers. The chubby one is the policeman and he has just caught the thief, which gives him the genuine satisfaction that we see painted on his happy face.

The photograph I have just described is not an icon of the Holocaust. Until 2004, only a few people knew about the photo. It was put into public circulation through the publication of a collection of photographs taken in the Łódź Ghetto by Henryk Ross.⁵⁷³ Does it have a chance of becoming as famous as the image of the boy with raised hands in the Warsaw Ghetto?

Henryk Ross (1910–1991) was born in Warsaw. Until the Second World War he worked in Łódź as a photo reporter for one of the Warsaw newspapers. Drafted into the army, he fought in the September campaign against the invading Germans. After the defeat, he returned to Łódź. In January 1940, along with the other Jews of Łódź, he moved into the area of the future ghetto. In the ghetto, together with his friend Mendel Grossman, he worked for the Judenrat Department of Statistics as one its two official photographers. His job was to take propaganda photos and personal identity photos. Like Grossman, he had access to photographic equipment and a darkroom, and like Grossman, alongside his official duties, he took clandestine photos of the ghetto and its inhabitants. These items make up an exceptional archive of photographs documenting life in the Łódź Ghetto: back-breaking work, hunger, and deportations, but also family life, celebrations, and wedding ceremonies. What attracts our attention in particular are photographs that draw a collective portrait of privileged ghetto residents, namely the family members of the Judenrat and Jewish police. As the Germans were liquidating the ghetto, Ross managed to hide three thousand negatives, which he retrieved after the war. He lived with his wife, Stefania, in Łódź until 1950, when he left for Israel. Ross's photos were used as evidence in the trial of Adolf Eichmann, during which Ross himself gave testimony. The conditions

valuables among the ghetto inhabitants. See D. Dąbrowska, "Struktura i funkcje administracji żydowskiej w getcie łódzkim," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 51 (1966): 46–50.

573 See Ross, *Łódź Ghetto Album*.

(under ground) in which the photos had been preserved caused damage to parts of the negatives, but they did not efface the poignant images that those negatives contained.⁵⁷⁴

According to experts at the Ghetto Fighters' House in Galilee, the photo showing the children playing cops and robbers was taken on 22 October 1943,⁵⁷⁵ which means around a year after the notorious “*szpera*” in September 1942, when around 20,000 children (10 years old or under) and old people (65 years old or older) were deported from the ghetto to the Chełmno death camp. It was at this time that Chaim Rumkowski called on desperate parents to gather at Łódź's Bałucki Rynek:

They [the Germans] demand what is most dear to it [the ghetto] – children and old people. [...] I never imagined that my own hands would be forced to make this sacrifice on the altar. In my old age I am forced to stretch out my hands and to beg: 'Brothers and sisters, give them to me! – Fathers and mothers, give me your children...’⁵⁷⁶

In another one of Ross's photos the same chubby boy in a police uniform is chasing a bunch of fleeing children. One of the children has stopped to look around, and – as if stepping out of the game – he looks with interest at the person taking the photo.⁵⁷⁷ Yes, all of this is pretend; the children at play are posing for a photograph. No one is really fleeing, and no one is really chasing anyone. But this game, like probably every children's game, is an imitation of the adult world, and in the world of the Łódź Ghetto the scene played out by the children was not something rare. Perhaps the father of the boy playing the policeman took part in such scenes, with an adult policeman's cap on his head and a police baton with proper dimensions. Let us remember that the scene with the playing children was set in the ghetto after it had been emptied of children. During the September action “Jewish police had to pull children away from their Jewish mothers, take Jewish children from their parents,” wrote Oskar Singer, one of the main creators of the *Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto*, who was murdered in August 1944 in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Singer added: “The Chairman [*Prezes*] demoralized the Jewish police. He assured the safety of their children so that they

574 See *ibid.*, 11-12.

575 See *ibid.*, 117.

576 For the text of this famous speech by Rumkowski on 4 September 1942, see *Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, ed. Y. Arad, I. Gutman, A. Margolit (London; Jerusalem 1999), 283–284.

577 See H. Ross, *op. cit.*, 118-119.

would, with full strength, wrestle other children from their mothers' grasp."⁵⁷⁸ On the subject of the fate of children of the Łódź Ghetto, a certain Goldman testified in December 1945:

The head of the ghetto Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski did everything to indulge the ghetto inhabitants. He assured everyone that he loved little children above life. Until the point when the Gestapo demanded that he deport children from the ghetto and he immediately signed over all of them from 1 to 10 years old. But did he hand over all of them? No. It was clear whose children were taken away. Not the children of the Rajnholces, Sienicickis, Fuchses, Farbers, Praszkers and other directors of departments and businesses. Rather, the children of workers were taken, the children of the mass of people who worked hard and starved so that directors could wallow in all possible goods. It always worked this way, with every liquidation action that ever took place in the ghetto.⁵⁷⁹

The boys at play were children of the ghetto's prominent people, who had evaded being gassed at Chełmno. We get to know their parents through Ross's photographs. We can easily see the joyous and proud faces of the mother and father of the boy in the police uniform, who is a character in a series of at least 41 photos: portraits of their dear only child, photos of the boy playing, at a birthday party. One of the photos shows a group of children at a long table filled with food. At the end of the table, next to the mother dressed in white, stands the party boy in a white short-sleeve blouse. Everyone – children and several adults – is holding glasses in their hands: they are offering a toast, after which they will sit down to eat.⁵⁸⁰ This scene reminds me of the birthday of a certain child from the Warsaw Ghetto celebrated in the spring of 1942, around four months before the start of the *Grossaktion*. We can quote from the journal of Rachel Auerbach, for whom the fundamental stylistic and conceptual figure is the grotesque. To give a full sense of the strength of this entry, an extended quote is necessary:

Life, especially the kind of life as ripe for death as ours in this closed city, sometimes offers up bizarrely vivid symbolic abstracts, like melodramatic ideas for a banal film. Once I saw with my own eyes, near the gate to a building containing a soup kitchen and Jewish police station, at the entrance to a candy store, a child's corpse covered with a "Month of the Child" poster with the text: "Save the children! Our children must live!" But two facts which I heard about this week are very original in their thinking. One of them involves a police report that a policeman I know told me about. As the corpse of a

578 O. Singer, *Przemierzając szybkim krokiem getto... Reportaze i eseje z getta łódzkiego*, trans. K. Radziszewska (Łódź 2002), 72.

579 Archiwum ŻIH, Relacje 301/1419, k. 1.

580 See H. Ross, op. cit., 121.

child was being collected from an apartment on Krochmalna Street it was noted that the corpse was missing a piece of its haunch. An investigation indicated that that part of its “flesh” had been sliced off by a family member – I don’t know if it was his mother – to make a meal... tenderloin. But the second fact I heard about involves maternal affection. The young son of the “director of directors” of the “*szop*” working for the Germans was celebrating his birthday. A “*fajf*” [afternoon party] was planned for the child. His most recent passion was little pigs. He is raising a few piglets at home, apparently given to the family by the Germans. Not only was a piglet killed for the birthday feast, whose head probably garnished the serving platter - the mother, infatuated with her son, also made a decorative motif out of a piglet’s head under whose sign all the birthday celebrations were held. A painter called in especially for the party painted a trail of piglet heads on the wall of the child’s room, and a tinsmith prepared a special mold to create a cream pig’s head placed on top of the cake. But the greatest feat of the maternal heart was the fact that this woman “ran through the entire ghetto” to achieve a truly amazing miracle. She managed to find a mask in the form of a pig’s head and, having put on the mask, she personally served the children at the *fajf*... The pig illusion was thus complete. Imagine this [little scene]: “Once upon a time there were three little pigs ...” As would have been written back when columns in newspapers could be devoted to facts like this: “Further comment not necessary.”⁵⁸¹

There were various children’s games behind the walls. Little Michał played chess or spent hours looking through an “enormous German atlas. [...] I would spread it out on the floor,” he remembered, “and look at the world.”⁵⁸² Ernest:

[...] puffs his cheeks, carefully blows and lets soap bubbles float through the street. [...] The rainbow bubble grows, flies, floats freely in the air. It floats carelessly over the beautiful and terrible, impossible world [...].⁵⁸³

Three boys are playing horse on the street. Next to them on the sidewalk is:

[...] a youngster either alive or already dead. [Their] ropes (reins) get tangled up. They discuss it, they try several things, and they grow impatient – with their feet they poke at the youngster lying on the sidewalk. Finally one of them says: - let’s move aside, he’s just in our way. They move a couple steps away, and they continue to struggle with the reins.⁵⁸⁴

Ringelblum noted in May 1941: “The children are no longer afraid of death. In one courtyard, the children played a game of tickling a corpse.”⁵⁸⁵

581 R. Auerbach, *Dziennik z getta*, Archiwum ŻIH, Ring I, 641, k. 2.

582 Michał Glowinski, *The Black Seasons*, trans. Marci Shore (Northwestern University Press, 2005), 162.

583 B. Wojdowski, *Chleb rzucony umarłym* (Warszawa 1981), 95.

584 J. Korczak, *Pamiętnik*, in *Pisma wybrane*, vol. 4, [wybór A. Lewin, oprac. i przepisy M. Falkowska, M. Kopczyńska-Ciesielska, I. Olecka] (Warszawa 1986), 355–356.

585 Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, 174.

Playing soldier and playing with toy soldiers have always been popular among children. Wooden sabers, pistols, rifles are natural props for boyhood games. Children dressed in a police uniform or playing cop was nothing exceptional, either in the Łódź Ghetto or the Warsaw Ghetto. The powerful pressure of reality was in operation here – the ludic rule of *mimesis*. In March 1941, Ringelblum wrote: “Children’s badges reading ‘Law and Order Service’ are being sold on the street – in a word, the police are now in fashion.”⁵⁸⁶ Krystyna Żywulska provided a particularly striking example of this “mimetic” kind of playing. Szymuś and Anulka are playing in the staircase of an apartment building in the Warsaw Ghetto. Szymuś is building a forest out of blocks, and Anulka “knocks the blocks down, saying that there aren’t any trees at all in the world.” Szymuś complains that Anulka:

[...] only wants to play wall and gendarme. She always wants to build a wall. Then she screams at me: “stop smuggling!” or “I am the gendarme and now I’m going to shoot you.” And I don’t want to play that game.⁵⁸⁷

The boy in the police uniform in Henryk Ross’s photograph and the boy with his hands up in the photograph from Jürgen Stroop’s Report. Two images of children of the Holocaust. Two figures representing the child-victims of the Holocaust. Obverse and Reverse. The “ghetto boy,” famous throughout the world, with whom so many people want to identify, and the chubby boy with the police baton in his hand, who is known to no one.

Can we measure the level of suffering inflicted on children condemned to the Holocaust by Hitler’s Germany? The boy from Warsaw and the boy from Łódź were deeply wounded before death. And after all – I have no reason to doubt – they both died. We are already used to the suffering that emanates from German photography. Looking at the photograph taken by Henryk Ross makes us feel the kind of pain that is caused by a thorn that we cannot remove. Indeed, Ross’s photograph conveys one of the most terrible images of the Holocaust that I have ever seen. Not a pile of corpses, and not walking skeletons with glowing eyes, but a smiling boy who, in play, unconsciously exchanges the role of victim for the role of perpetrator. This is the “gray zone,” about which Primo Levi wrote⁵⁸⁸; the blurred line between executioner and victim; the insertion of victims into the executioners’ trade as an act of the greatest depravity. Games played by these children from prominent

586 Ibid., 140.

587 K. Żywulska, *Pusta Woda* (Warszawa 1963), 9–10.

588 See P. Levi, “The Gray Zone,” in Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York 1986), 36–39.

families in the Łódź Ghetto exhibit precisely such an inversion, a reversal; their participants thus represent the kind of victim that does not fit nicely into the category of the heroic-martyrological.

Who would want to identify with that Łódź boy in the *Ordnungsdienst* cap? Who will come forward with a story of miraculous survival? Who will put their childhood photo alongside that ghetto photo and state: “Look how I resemble that boy? That’s me.”?

Farewell

The Łódź Ghetto. Closed off on 30 April 1940. In many ways exceptional, and – despite a basic similarity shared by all ghettos (they were all an intermediate step on the path to absolute extermination) – distinct and dissimilar to other ghettos. It was the only ghetto that found itself on territory that had been joined with the Third Reich. Two-hundred-thousand of its residents were hermetically isolated from the rest of the world. They found themselves behind a heavily guarded border made of barbed wire and in German surroundings, unlike the Warsaw Ghetto. The Łódź Ghetto became a German state institution, managed by the *Gettoverwaltung*, whose head was Hans Biebow. It was a huge production enterprise in support of the German war economy. Indeed, it was one of the most profitable enterprises in the Reich, and it was tied to the fates and interests of hundreds of German officials, party members, and SS officers. The Łódź Ghetto was the longest lasting of all the ghettos; the final transport to Auschwitz departed on 30 August 1944, with the Warsaw Uprising already a month old and the Red Army waiting at the Vistula River. On 19 January 1945 the Soviet army entered Łódź, where around 800 Jews remained.

In 1987 around 400 color slides turned up in a Vienna bookstore. To everyone’s surprise, they showed images of the Łódź Ghetto! Noone had had any idea of their existence. They had been in a state of latency, to finally see the light of day after 42 years. A former nurse and probably the lover of the slides’ author – Walter Genewein, the head accountant of the Łódź *Gettoverwaltung*, who had died 13 years before the slides surfaced – tried to sell them quietly and anonymously. The plan failed. The matter became public. The Jewish Museum in Frankfurt bought the slides, which represent some of the very earliest color exposures. IG Farbenindustrie (today’s AGFA) first put color photo technology on the market in 1936. The ghetto in color – it runs against our expectations; it challenges our imagination; it shocks us. Images of the Holocaust had come to us only in macabre black-and-white. As Michał Głowiński wrote in *The Black Seasons*: The only color in the ghetto was black, or various shades of gray.

We are able to view the Łódź Ghetto through the lens of Walter Genewein thanks in part to an excellent film by Dariusz Jabłoński entitled *Fotoamator* (released internationally as *Photographer*). Genewein, one of the main ghetto overseers, is not an executioner, at least not in the traditional understanding of the word. He is an official. His ghetto is seen through the eyes of an Austrian bookkeeper, a bureaucrat climbing tirelessly up the career ladder, proud of his achievements. Genewein also reveals his private ambitions. He is an amateur photographer, someone who loves taking photos; he is passionate about this activity, is delighted by the new possibilities offered by color photography, though he expresses concern about technical deficiencies and problems caused by the poor quality of photosensitive materials. He takes photos not just out of professional obligation, but also out of an entirely private passion.

Jabłoński conducted a kind of hermeneutics of the image, preserved in photos. His camera carefully tracks every detail of particular photographs; with reverence, he scrutinizes fragments, as if he is searching for something that is not visible on the surface of the color slides. As if he wanted to reach into the depths, to touch the people Genewein had caught on film. The *looks* of the people photographed by Genewein seem to say more than what is in the photograph, more than the camera lens is able to capture, more than the photographer would like. As a rule, those being photographed are looking at the lens: momentarily interrupted from their work in the ghetto workshop, stopped in the street, waiting in line, selling their old things spread out on the sidewalk – they lift their heads and look. Their *looks* follow us the entire time; they look into Genewein's camera lens – as an obligation, as a punishment; maybe they fear being accused of insubordination; maybe they want to please; maybe they think it is expected of them, or that it is simply something interesting. In any case, they always look at us, at us watching them not in the “then and there,” but in the “here and now.” Here, a barber at work – he stands next to a colleague cutting a client's hair, standing unnaturally straight, his back to a mirror, and – with an amazing *look* on his face, a *look* from beyond the grave – he stares straight into our eyes. Here, in a cobbler's workshop, a boy – sitting at the end of a table and holding a hammer in his hand – lifts his gaze from the sole of a shoe. Here, the *looks* of women in a weaver's workshop, foggy and unreal with their faces obscured by the looms. Here, in the background, an apartment building with an open window, and in the open window is a blurry silhouette looking out. And here, the face of a boy peeking out from behind ties hanging on a fence, ties being inspected by Biebow.

The reality captured in a photographic negative can overwhelm its “objectivity,” can escape the photographer's grasp, can evade his intentions. And, in the end, it is precisely on this strength that the extraordinary and amazing nature

of Genewein's photographs rests. Ghetto residents managed to escape the cool eye of the head accountant. Genewein was unable to capture their *looks* in any statistics, he was unable to rule over them. Looking into the lens of his camera, they were – in a certain sense – liberated, though they were still in captivity, still full of fear, trembling. With one click of the camera shutter, they were freed, as free as their last *look*, as it escaped the tormented body and crossed the border between life and death. And now, conquering time and space, that *look* reaches us, since they are looking right at us, directly into our eyes, and there is no way to avoid their gaze.

The Austrian bookkeeper was not the only photographer in the Łódź Ghetto. Mendel Grossman and his friend, Henryk Ross – great photographers who are absent in Dariusz Jabłoński's film – took thousands of clandestine photos, putting their lives at risk every day. Some of Genewein's color slides (for example, of boys standing in line for soup) have practically identical duplicates in black-and-white photos taken a moment before (or after) Genewein – the boys have their heads turned away, they are looking in another direction. This is evidence that a clandestine photographer often moved along with Genewein, step by step, photographing the same objects. But were they really the same?

Mendel Grossman was born either in 1917 or, as other sources indicate, 1913. His family was Hasidic, but he decided to pursue the study of the fine arts: literature, theater, painting, sculpture, and photography. He recognized photography as an art, and that the camera was a magnificent tool in the hands of an artist, one that opened up new possibilities for artistic expression. He photographed flowers, still lifes, landscapes, and portraits, and at the same time he painted, with a focus on the same objects that he preserved in photographs. Before the war, when the theater group Habima from Tel Aviv visited Łódź, Grossman photographed the actors on stage in rehearsal, and from that point on – fascinated by the possibility of capturing action and movement on film – the focus of his work was the human being in movement. He started to photograph street traffic, pedestrians, suburbs, children playing. Still a young man, he earned himself a high position in Łódź circles as an artist-photographer, one expression of which was the fact that, at the beginning of 1939, Grossman got an offer from the Jewish Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia (the Health Protection Society) to create an album of photos depicting Jewish children, in particular poor children and street children. He finished this work in the summer of 1939, but the album was never published. Grossman's photographs and the children he had photographed vanished during the war.

After moving into the ghetto, Grossman began working at the photo lab of the Wydział Statystyczny (Statistics Department) of the Judenrat (which in Łódź

was called the Ältestenrat, led by Chaim Rumkowski as Head of the Council of Elders). It was this department's task to collect and process data documenting the activities of workshops in the ghetto and the products produced there; such documentation included photographs. Work permit photos were also taken at the department's lab, where there was a large supply of film and photographic paper. Work at this lab provided the perfect cover for Grossman's work as a clandestine ghetto documentarist. He no longer photographed flowers, clouds and still lifes. The main object of his photographs were humans in movement, though it was movement of a specific kind – movement toward death. Grossman was able to look at the reality around him; he was able to penetrate the depths of that which was happening around him; but above all he was able to see into people, to see their suffering, the pain emanating from their eyes, the battles and defeats, the struggles with hunger, illness, and fear, with the death that would overwhelm them. He set aside his artistic ambitions; his mission was now clear: to provide the world – if that world was to survive – tangible evidence of the crime, preserved in a universally understandable language, in photographs.

Grossman was inseparable from his camera, which he hid under his clothes. He took photographs in secret, pulling back his coat flap. He spent most of his time on the streets, in the alleyways, in soup kitchens, in bread lines, in flats, at the cemetery. He photographed workers in the workshops, children at work, families pulling carts of faeces, bread being delivered, rationed soup being eaten. He climbed poles in order to photograph deportees walking to the train. He took photos from roofs, he walked up church towers, in order to photograph the changing of guards at the barbed wire. From a great distance, he photographed the first public execution. He was not satisfied with the quality of the photo. For the next execution, he moved closer. In the silence that fell over the square, the sound of his shutter was so loud that it almost gave him away. He photographed the unburied corpses of the murdered, attached numbers to them, and later – with these numbers – marked the mass graves into which they were thrown so that families – recognizing their relatives in the photos – could later find where they had been buried. He did a photo report from the liquidated gypsy camp in the Łódź Ghetto. He also photographed the activities of youth organizations. At the end of the day, he returned to the lab and developed pictures until late in the night. In the morning, he handed out prints to friends and acquaintances, keeping the negatives for himself, which he hid in metal containers. His collection of negatives grew day by day, until it numbered more than ten thousand.

Just before the final deportation in August 1944, Grossman hid the negatives in a window-sill in his apartment. He later found himself in a labor camp in Germany, at Königs Wusterhausen, where he continued to take photos in secret,

but he was no longer able to develop the pictures. He died during the evacuation of the camp, a few days before Germany capitulated, having suffered a heart attack at the age of thirty-two. His photographer friend, Henryk Ross, survived. Ross moved to Tel Aviv and died in 1991. Just after the war, Grossman's sister retrieved the negatives that Mendel had hidden. She immediately left for Palestine, where she handed them over to the kibbutz Nitzanim in the Negev desert. During the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, the kibbutz fell into the hands of the Egyptians and everything was destroyed, including Grossman's ten thousand negatives from the Łódź Ghetto. Only those prints that the photographer had handed out to friends, and that they managed to hide, survived.⁵⁸⁹

Between 5 and 12 September 1942, during the so-called “*szpera*,” the Germans cleansed the Łódź Ghetto of children 10 years old or younger and old people 65 years old or older, all of whom were deported to the Chelmno death camp. In his famous speech, Chaim Rumkowski stated that the Germans had demanded a “resettlement,” and he turned to ghetto residents with his appeal: “give me your children.” Jewish police delivered these young and old Jews to collection points, where they waited to be transported further. Grossman went to these collection points. Some of the photos he took at the time survived. Their leitmotif is the wire fencing dividing families: on one side, adults and youngsters, and on the other side, the younger children. Within the closed ghetto, one more enclosure had emerged that contained the very youngest. Those who were more than ten years old are standing on the outside. Both groups are very close to the fencing, both are touching it, bringing their faces close to it, entwining their fingers in it, piercing it with their *looks*.

In one of these photos, a boy in shorts is sitting cross-legged on the ground, with his back to the camera lens.⁵⁹⁰ On the back of his jacket, near his right shoulder, a sewn-on Star of David. On his head, a flat cap. Right in front of him is the wire fencing, which covers almost the entire surface of the photograph. Just behind the fence, on some kind of blanket or bags, a group of people: a woman of middle age, a girl, a boy, another girl – all of them gathered in front of the boy sitting on the other side, bent in his direction. No doubt this is family – mother and brothers and sisters. They have come to say goodbye to the boy. In

589 One can view these photos in Grossman's *With a Camera in the Ghetto* (New York 1977); in Grossman, *My Secret Camera: Life in the Lodz Ghetto* (London 2000); in an anthology published by Adelson and Lapidés entitled *Lodz Ghetto. Inside a Community under Siege* (1989); and in the updated version of Dawid Sierakowiak's diary, translated into English and published by Oxford University Press in 1996.

590 For this photo, see *My Secret Camera. Life in the Lodz Ghetto* (no pagination).

the background there is a woman in a white blouse, clearly separate from the rest, sitting with her back toward the camera and looking off to one side. We do not know who this woman in the white blouse is. Is she a member of the boy's family, is she a stranger? What is she doing there, seeing off one of her own relatives? Unlike many other photographs, no one is looking into the camera lens. And they are not looking at each other, as if they are avoiding each other's gaze, as if they cannot look each other in the eye.

We see only the eyes of the older brother of the boy designated for deportation. On his head he is wearing the very same flat cap, and – instead of a jacket – he is wearing an overcoat (we should recall that it is early September). He has protruding ears, half-open mouth. He is looking over his brother's head, somewhere into the distance. Perhaps he is observing other children closed off in the collection point, perhaps he has noticed some younger friends. But it seems that his gaze is reaching significantly farther, beyond the limits of space and time. So what does he see? Maybe he is looking without seeing anything in particular, and maybe his look extends beyond the visible shapes and objects on the other side. Or perhaps it was precisely about this older brother – this boy from the Łódź Ghetto immortalized in Grossman's photo – that Roland Barthes wrote: "In fact, he is looking at nothing; he *retains* within himself his love and his fear: that is the Look."⁵⁹¹

The mother is on her knees, leaning toward her son, closed behind the fence. She is saying something to him, but her gaze is directed downward. What is most important are her hands; they are folded, one on top of the other, resting near the ground in front of the fence. With the fingers of her right hand she is gripping the fence from the bottom (it does not quite reach the ground) and from the side occupied by the closed-in boy. Four of the mother's fingers have crossed the border of the enclosure, but they are not reaching toward her son, they do not try to touch him. They remain on the border, resigned, hopeless; in a sense, they are holding up the fence, confirming – in a way – the state of separation. The mother's hand under the fence is the only distinct gesture recorded by the photograph. A gesture – so to speak – forsaken.

The figure of the boy with his back turned to us is the focus of the drama contained in this photographic tale. We see the shaved nape of his neck, his ears sticking out, his bare legs, on which he has propped his elbows. We even see the belt he is wearing, pulled through a loop, and a small piece of his shirt through a gap between his shorts and the belt. We see from behind a slightly opened suit

591 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 113.

pocket, a patterned cap – delicate white stripes. We do not see his face. We do not know how he looks, or whether he is saying anything. The position of his head suggests that he is not looking at his family on the other side of the fence, but rather down toward the ground or at something he is holding in his hands. We do not know that, and we will never know that. We never look him in the face, just as – at the moment when this photo was taken – the family members around him were not looking at him. I know of no photograph that depicts, in a more poignant way, the pain of terrible loneliness and abandonment, of resignation and hopelessness.

The people captured in Grossman and Genewein's photographs already knew (not completely, unclearly, approximately, though this is the only way we know it here on earth) what a ghetto is. In this sense they were already on the other side; they were experienced, as opposed to the World War I volunteers, who had no idea what was awaiting them. This time, those in the photo had greater knowledge than we, the viewers, have. In the case of the volunteers, it was the opposite: only we know their fate. Residents of the Łódź Ghetto experienced what has not been given to us to experience. Relative to us (the viewers), they find themselves "inside" in multiple senses: inside the photograph and inside the ghetto, and inside an experience that is inaccessible to us. Which is why their *look* also runs from the inside – through the camera lens – outward, toward us. We cannot share their experience, but their gaze rests upon us.

Every photograph has a connection with death. It revitalizes that which died long ago; it preserves that which fell into ashes. It talks about a death that happened in the past. Every photo is a "return of the dead."⁵⁹² But Grossman and Genewein's photographs are marked by death in a particular way. They show living corpses. Dawid Sierakowiak, closed off in the Łódź Ghetto, noted on Wednesday, 20 August 1941: "The cadavers walking along our streets have given the entire ghetto a pale, musty, tubercular look." Less than a year later, on Friday 10 July 1942, he wrote: "Most people are just cadavers, walking shadows of their former selves."⁵⁹³ We know that the people visible in these photographs would soon be exterminated, they would no longer exist. We know all of that and we see that they are still looking at us. It is not essential that, at the moment the photo was taken, they are still alive; knowledge about death has been provided

592 Ibid., 9.

593 Dawid Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Lodz Ghetto*, ed. Alan Adelson, trans. Kamil Turowski (Oxford University Press; Reprint edition, 1998), 121, 195.

them, and they are being taken over by their own death. They are doomed, and they are starting to realize this very fact. A limit situation of being *in between* was captured on film: simultaneously “here” – on the streets of the ghetto, in the hectic bustle of life – and “there” – toward the horizon, on the narrowing railway tracks, in the hectic bustle of death.

I have referred to several photographs in which we can detect traces of events that the twentieth century inflicted on us. With only one exception, they are not photos that show, in any drastic way, anything particularly brutal or macabre. On the contrary, one could say that what is most important in these photos is what was eclipsed in them, and perhaps it is precisely for this reason that they attract our gaze. Their meaning reveals itself only when I turn toward the *look* that was detained then and there in the camera frame. The hermeneutics of a *look* are based on tracing what appears between us. I look at them (captured in the photo) and they (from the photo) look at me. In looking, we lean out beyond our own selves, we exceed ourselves, we move toward something else, we seek something in the world that is external to us in order to invite it to us, to comprehend it.

In some of the photographs discussed here we see the deformed faces of injured soldiers, crowds welcoming the outbreak of the First World War, English volunteers in August 1914 standing in front of the London Recruiting Depot, Jews in damaged family photographs from the Holocaust, boys from the Łódź and Warsaw Ghettos. I follow the *looks* that come toward me from these photographs, and I try to capture what they reveal to me: the landscape of the limit experience, that area where we cross from life to death.

