

Challenging the Perpetrators' Narrative: A Critical Reading of the Photo Album 'Resettlement of the Jews from Hungary'

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Abstract: In the discourse on photographs taken by the SS or the Wehrmacht at concentration camps, ghettos, and during mass shootings, the 'perpetrators' gaze' or 'perpetrators' perspective' is referred to repeatedly. Notwithstanding the ubiquity of the term, theoretical or empirical approaches to the issue are largely missing from the discussion. Drawing on a well-known photo album produced by SS-photographers at the Auschwitz II (Birkenau) concentration camp in 1944, this article analyses the photographic mediation and narration of events preceding the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of Jewish deportees from Hungary. To this end, the paper explores the limited scope of the representation, the construction of an alleged rationale behind the murder and various dimensions of photography in the context of violence.

Keywords: photography, perpetrators' perspective, Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, photo album

Introduction

Our visual imagination of the murderous proceedings at the Auschwitz II (Birkenau) concentration camp is considerably shaped by a set of almost 200 photos taken in the summer of 1944, when 434,000 to 437,000 Jews were deported from Hungary, and the SS murdered 325,000 to 349,000 of them upon arrival.¹ Operating behind the cameras were two SS-photographers, Bernhard Walter and Ernst Hofmann, both working in the Identification Service

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¹ For details on the death rates and the administrative organisation of the murder of the Jews from Hungary see Stefan Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno: Das KZ-System im letzten Kriegsjahr* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), pp. 298–314.

of the camp.² Often exhibited and published separately, the photos stem from a photo album titled 'Resettlement of the Jews from Hungary'.³

In the past 25 years, caution has been voiced repeatedly against using visual records produced by perpetrators when teaching and exhibiting the history of the Holocaust today. Critics warn against 'a danger of viewing the past only through the eyes of the perpetrators' because 'we risk seeing the victims as the Nazis saw them'.⁴ While this issue remains relevant, it has gained yet another facet in more recent years due to the increasing number of exhibitions at German memorial sites which explicitly focus on National Socialist perpetrators.⁵ At these curatorially challenging exhibitions, records revealing the perpetrators' perspective may – if appropriately framed and countervailed – enable viewers to critically confront subject positions of those involved in mass murder.⁶ This approach is rooted in a larger discourse emphas-

- 2 For details on the two photographers see Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (London/New York: Tauris, 2004), pp. 102–119; Stefan Hördler, Christoph Kreuzmüller and Tal Bruttman, 'Auschwitz im Bild: Zur kritischen Analyse der Auschwitz-Alben', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 63.7/8 (2015), 609–33 (pp. 615–16).
- 3 The German title given to the album by the SS reads 'Umsiedlung der Juden aus Ungarn'. In the following, I refer to the photos by the numbers 1–190 according to the signatures FA268/1–FA268/190 in the Yad Vashem Online Photo Archive. My analysis is concerned with the album as an integrated whole and discusses a number of photos and sequences. Therefore, reproducing individual photos would run contrary to the approach. However, the album is available as an online exhibition: Yad Vashem, *The Auschwitz Album*, <https://www.yad-vashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/album_auschwitz/index.asp> [accessed 1 June 2019].
- 4 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 'How to teach about the Holocaust in Schools', <<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/educational-materials/how-teach-about-holocaust-in-schools>> [accessed 5 September 2019]. See also Struk, pp. 211–15; Susan A. Crane, 'Choosing not to look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography', *History and Theory*, 47.3 (2008), 309–30; Philipp Weigel, 'Schrecken erzieht nicht: Zum Einsatz von Fotografien in den Ausstellungen Polnischer Shoah-Gedenkstätten', in *Orte der Shoah in Polen: Gedenkstätten zwischen Mahnmal und Museum*, ed. by Jörg Ganzenmüller and Raphael Utz (Vienna: Böhlau, 2016), pp. 49–66; K. Hannah Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representation of Jews: History and Identity in the Museum* (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 62–78.
- 5 The Ravensbrück Memorial opened an exhibition on female guards in 2004, the Neuengamme Memorial opened an exhibition on the camp's SS-staff in 2005, and the Sachsenhausen Memorial opened two exhibitions on SS-perpetrators in 2015 and 2017. For case studies see Sarah Kleinmann, 'The Representation of Nazi Perpetrators in Exhibitions in Germany: An underexposed Part of Memory Politics', *The Journal of Social Policy Studies*, 13.3 (2015), 465–76; Christine Eckel, 'Fotografien in den "Täterausstellungen" der KZ-Gedenkstätten Ravensbrück und Neuengamme im Vergleich', in *Das KZ Neuengamme und seine Außenlager: Geschichte, Nachgeschichte, Erinnerung, Bildung*, ed. by Oliver von Wrochem (Berlin: Metropol, 2010), pp. 199–216.
- 6 Michaela Dixon, 'The unreliable Perpetrator: Negotiating narrative Perspective at Museums of the Third Reich and the GDR', *German Life and Letters*, 70.2 (2017), 241–61.

ing 'perspective' as an exhibition concept which grants visitors access to individual and diverging experiences of the past.⁷

Against this backdrop, the following case-study aims to provide an analysis of the album 'Resettlement of the Jews from Hungary' highlighting indications and characteristics of the 'perpetrators' perspective'. Focusing on the photographic and narrative construction of mass murder as a rational and seamless process,⁸ the close and critical reading of the album investigates three aspects.⁹ Firstly, I compare the representation in the album to the historical events of mass murder. While any photographic representation remains notoriously fragmentary, the selective and formalised narrative needs to be analysed meaningfully. Secondly, I unfold how the visual construction of the Jewish deportees suggests an alleged rationale and reasoning behind their murder and slave labour. While the first aspect is concerned with the selection and sequence of events presented in the album, this second aspect examines how coherence is constructed to link the events. Thirdly, I turn to the complex interrelations between photography and violence. With regard to the album, this issue has mainly been discussed in terms of its evidential value for the murder committed at Auschwitz II (Birkenau), and contradicting views characterise the discourse. Suspending the unresolved question of evidence temporarily, further nuances of the role of photography in collaboratively organised mass murder are explored.¹⁰

Taken together, all three layers concern *'the complex, formed by internal and external factors, of conditions for the comprehension and representation*

7 Among others: Dixon, p. 242; Martin Lücke and Irmgard Zündorf, *Einführung in die Public History* (Göttingen: Vadenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), pp. 42–45.

8 This peculiar focus of the album has been stressed repeatedly. See, among others, Habbo Knoch, *Die Tat als Bild: Fotografien des Holocaust in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), p. 99; Hördler, Kreuzmüller, and Bruttmann, pp. 616, 631; Yasmin Doosry, 'Vom Dokument zur Ikone: Zur Rezeption des Auschwitz-Albums', in *Representations of Auschwitz*, ed. by Yasmin Doosry (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 1995), pp. 95–103 (p. 98); Cornelia Brink, 'Das Auschwitz-Album vor Gericht', in *Auschwitz-Prozess 4 Ks 2/63 Frankfurt am Main*, ed. by Irmtrud Wojak (Cologne: Snoeck, 2004), pp. 148–59 (p. 149).

9 My analysis applies a post-structuralist definition of 'narrative' as a cognitive scheme: 'Narrative involves the construction of the mental image of a world populated with individuated agents [...]. This world must undergo not fully predictable changes of state [...]. In addition to being linked to physical states by causal relations, the physical events must be associated with mental states and events [...]. This network of connections gives events coherence, motivation, closure, and intelligibility and turns them into a plot.' Marie-Laure Ryan, 'On the Theoretical Foundations of Transmedial Narratology', in *Narratology beyond Criticism: Mediality, Disciplinarity*, ed. by Jan Christoph Meister (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 1–23 (p. 4).

10 This last aspect is greatly inspired by: Cornelia Brink and Jonas Wegerer, 'Wie kommt die Gewalt ins Bild? Über den Zusammenhang von Gewaltakt, fotografischer Aufnahme und Bildwirkung', *Fotogeschichte*, 125 (2012), 5–14.

of happenings', which is how Wolf Schmid defines 'perspective' in a narratological sense.¹¹ Thus we come to understand how the circumstances under which the photos were taken and their compilation as a narrative album determine not only their existence, but their motifs and composition. Moreover, characteristic details of the limited scope of the album favouring the SS' perception of mass murder are unmasked.¹²

Before turning to the album, we need to briefly look at its background and history. So far, no definite information is available regarding the photographers' assignment and the production of the album.¹³ Presumably, the album served as a form of internal self-praise and proof of performance addressed to superior SS-functionaries.¹⁴ Since such a large number of photos would not have been taken without an intended purpose, the album must have been planned beforehand.¹⁵ Considering the photographers' liberty to operate in spite of a general ban on photography in the camps, the pictures could not have been taken secretly.¹⁶ Thus, it is likely that Rudolf Höß, the first commandant of the Auschwitz Camp, who had been sent back to administer and oversee the murder of the Jews from Hungary, initiated the compilation of the album.¹⁷ After the war, Wilhelm Brasse, a Polish internee and professional photographer, testified that not only one, but 15 albums had been produced at the photo lab, and that he had processed the photos.¹⁸

- 11 Wolf Schmid, *Narratology. An Introduction* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), p. 99, emphasis in the original. Although the term 'perpetrator's gaze' is more commonly used in English, applying a narratological approach based on the analytical category 'perspective' allows me to address characteristic features of the album as a narrative medium which would not be within the scope of the concept of 'gaze'.
- 12 Hildegard Frübis recently proposed analysing the album as a pictorial narrative. She focuses on short picture series which depict aspects of the workflow and follow visual traditions of industrial photography. Hildegard Frübis, 'Evidenz der Fotografie und die fotografischen Erzählweisen des Judenmords', in *Darstellen, Vermitteln, Aneignen: Gegenwärtige Reflexionen des Holocaust*, ed. by Bettina Bannasch and Hans-Joachim Hahn (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2018), pp. 257–280 (pp. 272–78).
- 13 Tal Bruttman, Christoph Kreutzmüller, and Stefan Hördler, 'L' "album d'Auschwitz", entre objet et source d'histoire', *Vingtième Siècle*, 3 (2018), 22–44 (pp. 24–25).
- 14 Doosry, p. 102; Brink, 'Das Auschwitz-Album vor Gericht', p. 149.
- 15 Nina Springer-Aharoni, 'Photographs as Historical Documents', in *The Auschwitz Album: The Story of a Transport*, ed. by Israel Gutman and Bella Guterman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem/Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2002), pp. 87–97 (p. 94); Hördler, Kreutzmüller, and Bruttman, p. 616.
- 16 Struk, p. 111; Springer-Aharoni, p. 94.
- 17 Bruttman, Kreutzmüller, and Hördler, p. 26; Luca Crippa and Maurizio Onnis, *Wilhelm Brasse: Der Fotograf von Auschwitz* (Munich: Blessing, 2014), pp. 10–11.
- 18 Bruttman, Kreutzmüller, and Hördler, pp. 26–27; Reiner Engelmann, *Der Fotograf von Auschwitz: Das Leben des Wilhelm Brasse* (Munich: JBC, 2015), p. 60; Anna Dobrowolska, *The Auschwitz Photographer* (Warsaw: Rekontrplan, 2015), p. 164; MOCÁK/Museum für Gegenwartskunst Krakau, *Wilhelm Brasse, Fotograf, 3444: Auschwitz 1940–1945* (Krakow/Berlin: Revolver, 2012), p. 121.

Tadeusz Myszowski, another Polish inmate and graphic artist, wrote the calligraphic captions.¹⁹ However, we cannot attribute individual photos to the respective photographers, and it remains unknown who decided on the structure of the album and selected the photos.²⁰

In January 1945, when the staff of the SS headquarters, including Bernhard Walter, was relocated from Auschwitz to the Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp, the album traveled with them.²¹ Lili Jacob, a former prisoner, claimed to have found the album in a deserted SS-barrack after the US-Army had liberated the camp in April 1945. According to Jacob, who had been deported from the ghetto Beregszász on 26 May 1944 to Auschwitz II (Birkenau), she had recognised herself and several members of her family in the photographs.²² She kept the album as a memento before handing it over to Yad Vashem in 1980.²³ Hence, while some of the photos had been known and had been reproduced since the late 1940s, it was not until 1980 that Serge Klarsfeld published the first complete edition of the album.²⁴

Constructing a Linear and Selective Narrative of Mass Murder²⁵

Although it is impossible to know and reconstruct the course of events to the last detail, it is evident that those seven weeks during which Jews were deported from Hungary to Auschwitz II (Birkenau) are – at best – represented fragmentarily. The photos are divided into five chapters and additional subchapters with the following headings: ‘Arrival of a

19 Struk, p. 117.

20 Bruttmann, Kreuztmüller, and Hördler, p. 26–27.

21 Judith Cohen and Rebecca Erbelding, ‘Auschwitz durch die Kameralinse der SS: Die Entschlüsselung eines vielschichtigen Fotoalbums’, in *Das Höcker-Album: Auschwitz durch die Linse der SS*, ed. by Christophe Busch, Stefan Hördler, and Robert Jan van Pelt (Darmstadt: von Zabern, 2016), pp. 20–35 (p. 33).

22 However, two different women are identified as Lili Jacob in photo 166. For comparison see *The Auschwitz Album: Lili Jacob’s Album*, ed. by Serge Klarsfeld (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1980), [n. pag.]; Gutman and Guttermann, *The Auschwitz Album*, p. 208.

23 On the history of the album see among others, Gideon Greif, ‘The “Auschwitz Album”. The Story of Lili Jacob’, in *The Auschwitz Album*, ed. by Gutman and Guttermann, pp. 71–86; Klarsfeld.

24 Klarsfeld. Additional editions followed, e.g.: *The Auschwitz Album: A Book Based upon an Album Discovered by a Concentration Camp Survivor*, ed. by Peter Hellman (New York: Random House, 1981); *Gesichter der Juden in Auschwitz: Lili Meiers Album*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Hahn (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1995); *The Auschwitz Album*, ed. by Gutman and Guttermann.

25 By analysing the selected scenes in contrast to the historical context and the order in which they are arranged, I follow the theoretical framework introduced by Schmid, pp. 190–93.

transport', 'Sorting' ('Men upon arrival', 'Women upon arrival'), 'After the sorting' ('Men still fit for labour', 'Women still fit for labour', 'Men no longer fit for labour', 'Women and children no longer fit for labour'), 'After delousing' ('Assignment to the work camp'), 'Effects'. Within these very brief headings some aspects are repeated. In this way, they introduce and develop certain subjects. They express as well as structure a biased interpretation of the events – one focusing on the functional and processual aspects of mass murder.²⁶ Regarding our working definition of 'perspective' it is important to note that the order in which the few chosen moments appear coincides neither with the personal experience of one or more deportees, nor with the experience of one or several SS-men and the SS-photographers. The assembled sequence creates a super-personal viewpoint and constructs a plot of a finite, chronologically progressing process of a transport arriving at Auschwitz II (Birkenau), a subsequent sorting of the deportees and their assignment to forced labour. The pages of the album lend a material basis to the successive chapters, while its front and back covers frame the beginning and ending. Therefore, the material structure of the album shapes its content in such a way that it succeeds in making the represented process appear sequenced and coherent.²⁷

At second glance, the exemplified pattern proves to be a mere construction as it includes photos of several transports, merging them in an undifferentiated manner.²⁸ Due to their similar motifs and composition, it is not immediately apparent that the pictures were not always taken in the order in which they appear in the album. As a result, an entirely constructed version of an arriving deportation transport achieves a universal representative function for all 137 transports from Hungary.²⁹ Likewise, the title claims a representative value for the album itself by referring to the 'Resettlement of *the* Jews', as in *all* Jews from Hungary. Since the title alludes to the entire Jewish population of Hungary, whereas the album presents only one thoroughly constructed

26 Erich Kulka, 'Photographs as Evidence in the Frankfurt Court', *Yad Vashem Bulletin*, 17 (1965), 56–58 (p. 56); Springer-Aharoni, p. 96.

27 On how the material basis of an album gives shape to the content see, Matthias Bickenbach, 'Das Dispositiv des Fotoalbums. Mutation kultureller Erinnerung. Nadar und das Pantheon', in *Medien der Präsenz: Museum, Bildung und Wissenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Jürgen Fohrmann, Andrea Schütte, and Wilhelm Voßkamp (Cologne: DuMont, 2001), pp. 87–128 (pp. 88, 100–101).

28 At least seven transports have been distinguished, but most photos relate to four transports: Bruttman, Kreuztmüller, and Hördler, p. 34.

29 For a list of the deportation transports see, Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), ii, Appendix 6, pp. 1403–05.

deportation transport, an invariable repetition and standardisation of mass murder is suggested. Hence, the referential relationship between the album and its historical point of reference is itself highly significant – not to mention the euphemistic use of ‘resettlement’ to refer to the subjection to forced labour and mass murder of the deportees.

Due to the chosen headings, some aspects are depicted in more detail than others. For example, the selection process is conceptualised in terms of the act itself (‘sorting’) as well as the groups of deportees (men, women and children) and their alleged condition (‘upon arrival’, ‘still fit’ or ‘no longer fit’ for labour). In comparison, few headlines and photos serve to depict the deportees’ assignment to forced labour. Within three chapters, captions referring to men and women follow one after another, thereby creating a linear structure. On the one hand, indicating the separation of the sexes repeatedly suggests an orderly and systematic procedure according to clear-cut categories. On the other hand, the successive chapters on men and women contribute to the construction of a chronological process, and it appears as if the selection was evolving gradually. By contrast, a division of men and women during the ‘de-lousing’ is not mentioned in the caption, although the photos depict the sexes separately and indicate that the deportees were in fact split up when being showered and dressed in the so-called ‘sauna’. Therefore, it seems that the captions’ primary purpose was to conceptualise the selection. Scenes such as those shown on the last pages – namely, prisoner functionaries working in the ‘Canada-Commando’ – took place simultaneously to the selection. More specifically, while the selection was taking place, prisoner functionaries gathered luggage left behind alongside the train (81). Moreover, they worked continuously in day and night shifts sorting looted personal belongings in the warehouses.³⁰ Captions could have indicated which tasks were carried out simultaneously, but instead, a constructed chronology is suggested, which renders the entire process more easily discernible. Since the sequences in the album seem to follow the natural flow of time, its *ex post facto* construction is barely noticeable, and the chronology serves to characterise the event as an evolving process – change happening over time.³¹

30 Verena Walter, ‘Raub’, in *Der Ort des Terrors: Geschichte der Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, 9 vols., ed. by Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (Munich: Beck, 2007), V: *Hinzert, Auschwitz, Neuengamme*, pp. 128–30.

31 On the construction of chronology as a temporal order in narrative see Schmid, pp. 205–07; Werner Wolf, ‘Das Problem der Narrativität in der Literatur, bildender Kunst und Musik: Ein Beitrag zu einer intermedialen Erzähltheorie’, in *Erzähltheorie: Transgenerisch, Intermedial, Interdisziplinär*, ed. by Ansgar Nünning and Vera Nünning (Trier: WVT, 2002), pp. 23–104 (pp. 47–48).

The deportees' assignment to the work camp is represented in relatively few photos and is blatantly fragmentary. Firstly, what the SS euphemistically called 'delousing', namely shaving the deportees' heads and body hair, is mentioned in a caption and therefore marked as integral to the procedure. However, the shaving itself is not depicted visually, men were rather photographed 'after delousing'. It thus seems that only the result – the total loss of all individual features when entering the camp – was considered worth a picture (146–168).³² In one of the private albums of Karl Otto Koch, the first commandant of the Buchenwald concentration camp, the missing scene is included.³³ The image was taken in October 1939 and shows Polish deportees sitting on stools, stark naked, within a fenced area outdoors, being shaved and bathed by prisoner functionaries. The photographer must have been relatively close to the scene and was a direct witness to the humiliation of the Poles. By excluding similar pictures from the album, the SS withheld such degrading and destructive aspects from the official visual record of their work at Auschwitz II (Birkenau). Thus, in how far viewers are able to reconstruct the painful procedures on the basis of the photos depends on their background knowledge and inclination.³⁴

Moreover, the caption makes readers believe that deportees selected for forced labour were assigned to the work camp immediately 'after delousing'. In fact, however, after arriving at Auschwitz II (Birkenau), deportees were led to the so-called 'sauna' and – often without registration – were temporarily detained in a provisional transit camp in the camp sections BIIC, BIIB, BIIE and the yet unfinished sector BIII.³⁵ Organisational difficulties delayed their transfer to other camps, and the deportees were stranded for weeks in the overcrowded transit camp.³⁶ For example, Lili Jacob arrived at the camp on 26 May 1944, but she was

32 Doosry, p. 98.

33 Photo taken by an unknown photographer, October 1939, *Buchenwald Memorial Photo Archive*, photo no. 006.006, <<http://fotoarchiv.buchenwald.de/detail/2848>> [accessed 1 June 2019].

34 Brink and Wegerer, p. 5.

35 In the summer of 1944 an average number of 30,000–50,000 men and women were detained in the transit camp. Danuta Czech, *Kalendarium der Ereignisse im Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau 1939–1945* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1989), pp. 699–700; Irena Strzelecka and Piotr Setkiewicz, 'Bau, Ausbau und Entwicklung des KL Auschwitz und seiner Nebenlager', in *Auschwitz 1940–1945: Studien zur Geschichte des Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager Auschwitz*, 5 vols., ed. by Aleksander Lasik and others (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 1999), i, pp. 81–155 (pp. 115–17).

36 Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Das letzte Kapitel: Der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944–1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2004), pp. 375–79.

only registered and given a prisoner's number on 25 July 1944.³⁷ Thus, it is most likely that she was detained in the provisional transit camp for eight weeks.³⁸ Ultimately, the heading 'Assignment to the Work Camp' does not reveal the provisional, at times lengthy detention in the transit camp and the fact that these circumstances worsened the living conditions of the deportees immensely.³⁹

Finally, the depiction in the album does not allow conclusions about deportees engaging in acts of resistance. And yet, at least twice (on 25 May and 28 May 1944), deportees attempted to escape right outside the gas chambers, and the SS shot all fugitives on both occasions.⁴⁰ Such violent scenes resulted from the SS' momentary loss of control and briefly challenged their dominance. Notwithstanding the recurrence of these incidents, the album omits the shooting of innocent people as well as their initiative to escape. Therefore, the pictures taken and selected for the album – like so many other pictures taken by perpetrators – 'perpetuate a narrative in which Jews who were persecuted only ever appear as passive, nameless victims.'⁴¹

Taking the aforementioned into account, it becomes clear that '[i]t is only against the background of the non-selected that the selected gains its identity and meaning. Experiencing a story as a meaningful whole entails inferring the *logic* of its *selectivity*.'⁴² A critical analysis of the album's narrative enriches Schmid's theoretical argument with precise data by investigating the specific context and contrasting it with the document. The selection was determined by the SS' internal discourse and negotiation on what is 'relevant', 'showable' and 'tellable'.⁴³ Where-

37 'Testimony of Lili Zelmanovic', 3 December 1964, Frankfurt on the Main (Germany), <<http://www.auschwitz-prozess.de/download.php?file=Zelmanovic-Lili.pdf>> [accessed 1 June 2019]; Czech, p. 829; Peter Moses-Krause, 'Bericht über das Auschwitz-Album der Lili Jacob Meier', in *Gesichter der Juden in Auschwitz*, ed. by Hahn, pp. 7–27 (p. 22).

38 Hördler, Kreutzmüller, and Bruttmann, pp. 619–20.

39 Gerlach and Aly, p. 376; Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka, *The Death Factory: Document on Auschwitz* (Oxford/London: Pergamon Press, 1966), p. 195; Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz* (Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 48.

40 Czech, pp. 785, 787.

41 Michaela Christ, 'Photographs of Violence: Exhibiting and viewing Images of Brutality and Suffering', in *Mass Shootings: The Holocaust from the Baltic to the Black Sea 1941–1944*, ed. by Topography of Terror Documentation Center and Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (Berlin: Topography of Terror Documentation Center/Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2016), pp. 303–315 (p. 315).

42 Schmid, p. 204, emphasis in the original.

43 On the social standardisation of the 'showable' in photography and the 'tellable' in narrative see, Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 8, 19, 24; Jerome Bruner, 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1991), 1–21 (p. 15).

as the album highlights extensively how deportees are forcedly integrated in the camp, the rampant overcrowding in the camp and the sporadic challenges to SS domination are not communicated to viewers of the album. From the deportees' perspective, this means that their unbearable living conditions and resistance are absent from the visual record. Regarding the shaving, bathing and changing of clothes, viewers may only decode visual traces of the humiliation if they are acquainted with the implications of 'delousing' from other sources.

Alleged Rationality and Narrative Coherence

Of the over 400.000 deportees, relatively few were photographed and even fewer are featured in the album.⁴⁴ It seems that motifs were chosen to construct causality and give coherence to the process, thereby legitimising and rationalising the atrocity of subjecting the deportees to selection, murder and forced labour. The cover page is significant, as it serves to establish an image of those being 'resettled' – that is, deported, exploited and murdered. The first two photos (1 and 2) – showing elderly, orthodox men in semi profile and portrait format – were taken in the style of eugenic photography in order to emphasise alleged 'racial traits'.⁴⁵ Interestingly, photo 1 was taken in the studio of the Identification Service in Block 26 at the main camp.⁴⁶ Using professional equipment, the portrait was taken in front of a monochrome background and with carefully arranged lighting. The spotlight outlines the men's noses and foreheads, considered to be 'racial traits' by the National Socialists. As the spotlight accentuates the two faces in a similar fashion, they look very much alike, almost like duplicates or mirror images. Since their identities remain unknown, it is impossible to determine whether the photo was taken in the context of the 'Hungarian Action' or whether the two men had been deported to Auschwitz at some other point. According to Bernhard Walter's testimony, the first picture is not a rarity, since 'typically looking' Jews, e.g. Rabbis in their traditional costume, were brought to the studio on several occasions.⁴⁷

Moreover, the studio photograph raises major questions concerning the notion of the 'perpetrators' perspective', since it may have been

44 Bruttman, Kreutzmüller, and Hördler, p. 34.

45 Doosry, p. 94; Springer-Aharoni, p. 92; Frübis, p. 278.

46 Gutman and Gutterman, *The Auschwitz Album*, 139.

47 Bernhard Walter's testimony is reprinted in: Klarsfeld, [n. pag.].

taken by the aforementioned prisoner Wilhelm Brasse.⁴⁸ Indeed, if an inmate took this frankly stereotyping picture as part of his work requirements as a prisoner functionary, the visual coding of the picture, which follows the SS' instructions, and its production, which again was embedded in hierarchic power relations, must be described and analysed separately. Conceptualising the 'perpetrators' perspective' solely based on the photographer fails to grasp the complexities behind this – and ultimately all – mug shot pictures taken routinely of and by concentration camp inmates.⁴⁹ Hence, if one wants to adhere to the concept, they will need to account for the ways in which prisoners were instrumentalised and forcedly subjected fellow prisoners to standardising mug shots. A more nuanced understanding of the term has to go beyond the photographer and consider the intentions and circumstances surrounding the photos' production, which may lead to certain motifs and visual codes as required by the SS.⁵⁰

Restoring the pictures' original order reveals that photo 2 was taken together with photos 101–103, which are part of the chapter 'Men no longer fit for labour'.⁵¹ Therefore, the cover page also brands the deportees as typically 'unfit for labour'. Taken together, the cover photos encode anti-Semitic attributions and apply them to all 'Jews from Hungary'. Similarly to Christoph Hamann's observations regarding photos of Soviet POWs taken by German Propaganda Troops, an entire collective is thus allegedly represented through a single face.⁵²

Following the cover page, the captions 'Arrival of a transport', 'Sorting' as well as men and women 'upon arrival' do not imply an evaluation of the deportees. However, the people in the pictures display precisely the sort of characteristics which marked them as 'unfit for labour' in the eyes of the SS. Among the 'Men upon arrival' series, either elderly men are presented in the foreground (37, 41, 43, 45, 46, 50, 52) or others whose physical weakness is evident at first glance: men

48 Hördler, Kreutzmüller, and Bruttman, p. 616.

49 For Brasse's account of his task see, Dobrowolska, pp. 78–91.

50 In his analysis of the permanent exhibition in Block 16 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Philipp Weigel refers to the display of these mug shots as an unintended but unfortunate reproduction of the 'perpetrators' gaze'. He argues persuasively that the attempt to personalise the children based on these photos fails because the children had already been robbed of their individual features, e.g. clothes and hair. Weigel, pp. 53–55.

51 Hellman, p. 88.

52 Christoph Hamann, 'Feindbilder und Bilder vom Feind', in *Beutestücke: Kriegsgefangene in der Deutschen und Sowjetischen Fotografie 1941–1945*, ed. by Margot Blank and Museum Berlin-Karlshorst (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2003), pp. 16–31 (p. 17).

carrying walking sticks (40, 41, 42), a man with a wooden leg and an amputated arm (41), men wearing glasses (37, 38, 42, 51) and a man with a hunchback (52). Additionally, a high percentage of children is claimed as characteristic of the group by featuring several photos of children (5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 48, 53–56, 58, 59). Ultimately, the depiction of the arriving deportees marks a majority as 'unfit for labour' right from the outset by displaying features that were part of the SS' internal sign system.

Furthermore, pictures of deportees who had been declared as 'unfit for labour' can be found in preceding chapters. For example, two photos (38 and 51) were taken after the selection and not 'upon arrival'. On both pictures, the background indicates that the men were walking along the middle path between camp section BIIC and BIID leading towards the gas chambers IV and V. Additional pictures of the same series showing the same group of men are placed in the chapter 'Men no longer fit for labour' (106, 98, 111, 110).⁵³ Similarly, the age composition of the women and children depicted on the photos 54, 56–60 suggests that they had already been considered 'unfit for labour', but the pictures are used to depict their arrival. Thus, there are two distinct moments of classifying the deportees and assigning them to the binary categories: during the actual selection and when compiling the album – herein lies a fundamental interrelation between the historic event and the document. I do not mean to suggest that these pictures were deliberately used in the 'wrong' chapter, since there is no evidence to support such a claim. However, the example demonstrates that the captions do not necessarily correspond to the situation depicted, and the context information provided in the captions needs to be questioned and revised.

The following four chapters 'After the sorting', express a clear evaluation of the deportees as 'still' or 'no longer fit for labour' [*noch* or *nicht mehr einsatzfähig*]. For one thing, the adverb 'still' [*noch*] leaves no doubt as to the fact that the deportees *will* lose their ability to work conceivably whilst being detained in the camp. On the other hand, by using 'no longer' the *topos* of man power remains the dominant argument, whereas alternative descriptions such as 'old', 'weak', 'ill', or even 'mother' and 'child' would not explicitly refer to the apparently rational criterion of labour force.⁵⁴ The pictures taken and selected for these

53 Consequently, in the regrouped picture appendix of their edition Gutman and Gutterman place photos 38 and 51 in a chapter labelled 'Doomed to Death: "No longer able-bodied Men, Women and Children"'. Gutman and Gutterman, *The Auschwitz Album*, pp. 189, 191.

54 According to Habbo Knoch, the album's focus on labour and efficiency mirrors the risen demand in manpower in wartime economy in the summer of 1944. Knoch, pp. 99–100.

chapters seem to employ visual codes that would allegedly explain the allocation and define the category visually. In this way, the photos chosen for each chapter vouch for the SS' decision-making regarding the selection of the deportees. Taken by itself and without a caption, an old person's stooping may be read as a sign of many years of manual labour, life experience, vulnerability, dignity or sorrow.⁵⁵ The signifier itself does not determine its significant interpretation. Roland Barthes' argument that text tends to have 'a repressive value'⁵⁶ on photos applies to the album in two ways. Captions define photographic meaning, and the interpretation manifest in the captions mirrors the very real and ultimately deadly ascriptions forced on the deportees. Definite and unequivocal linguistic meaning rules over visual polysemy and echoes the SS' power to decide on the deportees' fate within the framework of the binary selection categories. While a single quality is marked as relevant, the verbal ascription denies all other individual traits of the deportees. However, beyond the SS' utilitarian vocabulary, they enjoyed a wide margin of discretion regarding the reasons behind their decision making.⁵⁷ Situational factors, e.g. accommodation capacities, the SS' demand for forced labourers and their ability to deport them to other concentration camps remain invisible although they affected the number of people to be murdered.⁵⁸ Instead, the alleged inferiority and uselessness of the deportees is claimed to be the only decisive factor. Consequently, the category's title and visual representation do not mirror the complex and variable reasoning behind the decision-making process.

In contrast to those labelled 'no longer fit for labour', close-ups and single shots of healthy, young, energetic men and women, which would indicate their 'fitness' through physical characteristics, are largely missing from the album. Rather than visually signalling labour force, their photos presumably serve a demonstrative purpose beyond the people themselves: they seem to prove the SS' ability, as described by Hannah Arendt, 'to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation

55 The following analysis is based on Roland Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the Image', in Roland Barthes *Image, Music, Text*, selected and translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 32–51 (pp. 37–41).

56 *Ibid.*, p. 40, emphasis in the original.

57 Jan Erik Schulte, 'Die Wannsee-Konferenz und Auschwitz. Rhetorik und Praxis der jüdischen Zwangsarbeit als Voraussetzung des Genozids', in *Die Wannsee-Konferenz am 20. Januar 1942: Dokumente, Forschungsstand, Kontroversen*, ed. by Norbert Kampe and Peter Klein (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013), pp. 216–38 (pp. 234–37).

58 Gerlach and Aly, pp. 291–96.

of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual [...]'.⁵⁹ The way this impression is created predominantly by the image and page composition is most evident on two pages, each showing four pictures of men and women previously selected for forced labour.

The photos of men are composed very similarly in that they were taken from the same angle. Therefore, these men seem to be walking from left to right past the photographer; the lower picture's edge cuts through the men's legs just below their waist and the upper edge includes a narrow strip of sky. However, the photos do not belong together as one, but as two series (72, 75 and 73, 74). In photo 158, depicting women with bald heads wearing working dresses, the guards' barracks located right at the entry of camp section BI can be seen in the upper left corner.⁶⁰ In the other three pictures (155–157) similarly dressed women are passing prisoners' barracks or warehouses in camp section B II. On both pages, photos taken on different occasions, but similar in their motif and composition, were put together to construct a uniform picture of forced labourers in the unit of a page.

Three close-ups (149–151) do indeed show men with their heads shaven, wearing striped prisoners' clothes – apparently after 'delousing'. Due to the view from below, the undersized clothes and their shaved heads, the men in the front row appear clumsy and stocky, with bloated faces. The picture frame includes the men's heads, chests and shoulders but, strangely enough, it cuts off their hands and legs – those body parts most essential to physical labour.⁶¹ The prisoners' clothes, on the other hand, seem to be in good condition – no buttons are missing, and there are no noticeable stains or patches. Considering the verbal and visual stigmatisation, it seems as if their 'new' clothes are really their only qualification to perform forced labour – which they had just received *at the camp and through the SS*.⁶² Overall, it seems that these photographs are subjected to conflicting interests: namely the SS' eagerness to demonstrate their significance and impact by providing the war economy with forced labourers, and, at the same time, to degrade the deportees.⁶³

59 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, 1976), p. 438.

60 Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, *Auschwitz-Birkenau: The Place Where You Are Standing* (Oświęcim, 2012), [n. pag.]; Hellman, p. 120.

61 Peter Hellman suggests that these men are physicians chosen to provide medical care for the prisoners. The caption's emphasis on manual labour (mis-)leads readers to perceive them as slave labourers. Hellman, p. 112.

62 I gratefully owe this interpretation to Ulrich Prehn (Berlin).

63 With regard to slides taken by Walter Genewein, a member of the administration of the Ghetto Lodz, a similar analysis has been suggested by Gertrud Koch, *Die Einstellung ist die*

Regarding the two subchapters depicting men and women categorised as 'no longer fit for labour', the first pages are dispositive in that they show close-ups of individuals (88–89, 115–117). In the light of the caption 'no longer fit for labour', these men and women are declared as prototypes of the groups established during the selection. On the first page of the chapter on 'Men no longer fit for labour', photos 88 and 89 exaggerate two criteria degrading men racially and anti-Semiticly and thereby allegedly proving their inability to perform forced labour. Photo 88 is a portrait of a man apparently suffering from *osteogenesis imperfecta* and sitting on a broken wicker chair. In the picture's background, the feet of a crowd of people gathered a few yards away from him can be seen, indicating that the portrait was arranged while the selection was going on nearby. Photo 89, for its part, shows an elderly orthodox Jew, the semi profile take highlighting the outline of his forehead, beard and nose similarly to the two photos on the cover page. The individual shots of women focus on three deportees, all of whom are at an advanced age, wear torn clothes and have a stooped posture.⁶⁴ Only because the pictures are composed similarly – in portrait format with a single individual placed in the centre – and then arranged in a sequence, do these aspects stand out as shared characteristics. In the light of the caption, furthermore, they become criteria. The anonymous depiction has the effect of degrading the individuals to case examples.⁶⁵ On both pages, photos belonging to separate series were chosen and put together to provide a set of individuals that would serve as an alleged visual definition of those 'no longer fit for labour'.

Pictures of men declared 'no longer fit for labour' encode and correlate the ascribed attributes 'Jewish' and 'unable to work'. Photos showing individual men (89, 93) and small groups (94–97, 101–103, 111) – which resonate with common stereotypes of the 'Eastern Jews' due to their traditional hats, black coats and long beards – were chosen to construct this category.⁶⁶ Within it, the diverse group of men is reduced to stereotypes based on a limited set of signs.⁶⁷ Additionally, the photos foreground the men's physical weakness, as they carry walking sticks

Einstellung: Visuelle Konstruktion des Judentums (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 177.

64 Frübis, p. 278.

65 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 70.

66 Doosry, pp. 97–98; Kulka, p. 57.

67 See Hans Henning Hahn, '12 Thesen zur historischen Stereotypenforschung', in *Nationale Wahrnehmungen und ihre Stereotypisierung: Beiträge zur historischen Stereotypenforschung*, ed. by Hans Henning Hahn and Elena Mannová (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 15–24.

(90, 91, 93–95, 97, 98, 109, 111) and sit on the ground, exhausted (90, 91, 93, 94–97, 107, 113). These signs are deemed characteristic, significant, and evident by remaining distinctly visible throughout the chapter. In this sense, it seems reasonable to suggest that the photos were carefully chosen to provide a repetition of these traits and to naturalise stereotypes.⁶⁸

Taking Pictures in a Violent Setting

The discourse surrounding the album is pervaded by its contested evidential value regarding the murder committed in Auschwitz. Some view the album as a 'weapon' against revisionists and a testimony to the terror of the camp.⁶⁹ Others stress the absence of pictures showing physical violence and refer to the album as an 'alibi' or 'Nazi camouflage' which deliberately covers up the mass murder.⁷⁰ During the Auschwitz-Trial in the 1960s, the court in Frankfurt eventually dismissed the album as evidence, because it seemed to provide no unambiguous, easily decodable information on the perpetrators or the crime scene.⁷¹ Instead of assessing the link between photography and violence solely based on what is (or isn't) visible in the pictures, Cornelia Brink and Jonas Wegerer bring into consideration additional facets of this complex relationship such as the production, presentation, distribution and use of photographs.⁷² Since the available sources do not allow me to investigate all of these aspects equally, I focus on the first, excavating details on the photographers' operation on-site and attending to how they shape the visual information conveyed to viewers. Moreover, I draw attention to the aesthetic dimensions of photography, which constitute a visual prerogative of interpretation of the depicted events. Both aspects reflect the role of the photographers as mediating agents, who determine what will be conveyed to the future audience.⁷³

68 On the concept of 'prototype' in picture theory see, Klaus Sachs-Hombach, *Das Bild als kommunikatives Medium: Elemente einer allgemeinen Bildwissenschaft* (Cologne: Halem, 2003), pp. 292–96.

69 Among others: Hellman, p. XXVIII; Israel Gutman and Bella Gutterman, 'Preface', in *The Auschwitz Album*, ed. by Israel Gutman and Bella Gutterman, pp. 11–13; Bill Peschel, 'Album proves the Reality of Holocaust Horrors', *The Daily Tar Heel*, 18 February 1982, p. 11.

70 Quotes: Kulka, p. 56; Springer-Aharoni, p. 97. See also: Telford Taylor, 'Picturing the Holocaust', *The New York Times*, 24 January 1982, p. BR8.

71 Brink, 'Das Auschwitz-Album vor Gericht', pp. 151–55.

72 Brink and Wegerer, p. 6.

73 Brink and Wegerer, p. 9; Dixon, p. 250.

There are two ways in which the photographers' operation on-site interacts meaningfully with the photos' spatial perspective and their visual encoding. Firstly, more than half of the pictures were taken from a high vantage point: the photographers climbed on top of boxcars, took pictures standing on the threshold of an empty wagon or walking on a ridge lining either side of the middle path in camp section BII.⁷⁴ In some cases, the photographers took pictures of people sitting on the ground or – in the case of women and children – they were simply taller than the people they photographed. Due to their elevated position, the photographers not only seem removed and separate from the events, but above all, these were locations that were inaccessible to the deportees. Their vantage point provided the two photographers – and later the viewers – with information about the camp-site to which the deportees were not entitled. As for pictures taken of people resting on the ground or of those shorter than the photographers, the view from above accentuates significant differences in their physical condition and constitution. It also implies the photographers' privileges to move freely across the site without keeping a respectful distance to people they photographed.⁷⁵

Secondly, the camera is often directed straight at the faces of the Jewish deportees, diametrically opposite to their viewing direction. Not once does the camera capture what the deportees saw when waiting in line, namely the backs of the heads and the necks of the people in front of them and the SS-physician at the very front of the line. Viewing directions constitute a powerful means to give insight into someone's visual perceptions and shape the scope of information conveyed to the audience.⁷⁶ Hence, the camera's orientation favours the SS' visual perception, whereas the inverse view – the Jews' perception of the SS – remains unknown to viewers of the album.⁷⁷

Some pictures reveal how the photographers intervened in the course of the events for the purpose of carrying out their task. It has been presumed that the picture of a man on a wicker chair (88) was arranged to shoot a distinctive portrait. Furthermore, some deportees walking in the direction of the crematoria IV and V were stopped along the way to take their picture, as can be deduced from their feet, stand-

⁷⁴ Springer-Aharoni, p. 94; Struk, pp. 110–11.

⁷⁵ Springer-Aharoni, p. 94; Hördler, Kreutzmüller, and Bruttman, p. 631.

⁷⁶ Schmid, pp. 100–101.

⁷⁷ Others have pointed to the glaring void of a reciprocal depiction within the photographic documentation of the Holocaust. Crane, p. 318; Gerhard Schoenberger, *The Yellow Star: The Persecution of the Jews in Europe 1933–1945* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. XIII.

ing still, and their bodies, turned slightly sideways towards the camera (118, 122, 123). Two further details suggest that others were also ordered to stop and turn to face the photographer behind them (111, 120). Firstly, there is a rail track visible in some pictures, which – looking at it from a northbound direction – went along the right side of the middle path in camp section BII (118, 119, 122).⁷⁸ Secondly, in the background of photo 120, a group of people walking ahead of those depicted in the foreground can be seen *from behind*. Continuing the passage in the direction of the crematoria, they were out of earshot of the photographer and not targeted by his intrusion. Even though these are minor interventions, they indicate how the photographers gave directions that would facilitate their task – the scenes captured in the pictures, in this way, reflect the photographers' involvement.⁷⁹

What is more, the photographers held the privilege of composing the pictures and assigning a visual structure to the events. Pictures 21 und 22 were taken from the roof of a boxcar and portray the moment after the separation of the deportees according to sexes, as they were lining up beside the deportation train. Due to the chosen shooting location and angle as well as picture frame, the two lines of men and women as well as the train tracks form straight lines leading towards the vanishing point in the picture's background: the main entrance gate. On the right side of the picture, the men's heads form a straight line parallel to the train tracks, while on the left side the deportation train flanks the line of the women. At a visual level, the lines of the deportees are thus incorporated into the camp's architectural structures, merging with them. Since the picture was taken twice and two almost identical prints are brought together on the same page, the aesthetically evoked impression of 'order' is strengthened even further. Due to the elevated viewpoint and the great distance from which the pictures were taken, only a group of SS-men is clearly contoured and defines the picture's centre. The deportees, by contrast, are slightly blurred and out of focus. What lies behind the impression of 'order' is nothing else than a forcefully achieved scene of heteronomy and collectivisation: split up in lines, families, couples und friends were separated and a new

78 Photo 64 shows the beginning to the rail tracks right by the entrance gate to camp section BII.

79 Urs Stahel, 'Körper, Bilder, Macht und Gewalt', in *Darkside II: Fotografische Macht und Fotografierte Gewalt, Krankheit und Tod*, ed. by Urs Stahel (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), pp. 8–11 (p. 11).

arrangement of the group was enforced according to the SS' objectives and organisational procedures in the concentration camp.⁸⁰

Similarly, prisoners near the camp entrance or lines of deportees waiting along the deportation trains become little more than variations of the same theme when photographed repeatedly according to the same picture composition. On an aesthetic level, composing the pictures re-enacts the moment when the deportees were actually allocated and herded across the site – only this time according to visually-formalistic criteria: instead of instructing people to form lines, the photographers fixated them as diagonals or horizontals within the picture frame. Eventually, the photos were symmetrically arranged – two, three, or four at a time – and pasted onto the album's pages. Therefore, the outward appearance of the deportees is repeatedly subjected to the geometric layout of the pictures and the album. Visually, the orderly organisation of the events is achieved by compositional means which do not necessarily correspond to the actual situation on-site. However, aesthetic layers of meaning are superimposed on the photographic subject and work their way into the viewer's perception of the historical events.

With strictly limited leeway for self-determined actions left to the deportees, their facial expressions would appear to be a personal, nonverbal means of expression.⁸¹ However, very few pictures display noticeable expressions. It remains unknown whether more photos existed which were not selected for the album – maybe even *because* the deportees' expressions were conspicuous. Reviews of the editions of the album illustrate how readers have tried relentlessly to read the deportees' emotions: they perceive their faces as 'dignified and brave, but utterly exhausted, and unsuspecting of the savagery awaiting them',⁸² make out 'confusion, but a basic calm, belief that each would see his family after the 'processing',⁸³ or silent sorrow and an awaiting of the unknown but inevitable.⁸⁴

Undermining the viewer's empathetic impulses, photography constitutes an exterior view limited to the outer surface of the depicted people, and facial expressions fixated on paper are unable to communicate subtle nuances of self-representation unambiguously as the following ex-

80 It has been argued, that the SS-men even waited for the photographer to take the pictures before beginning the selection. Bruttmann, Kreuzmüller, and Hördler, p. 38.

81 Cornelia Brink, 'Vor aller Augen: Fotografien-wider-Willen in der Geschichtsschreibung', *WerkstattGeschichte*, 47 (2008), 61-74 (p. 61).

82 Todd Crespi, 'The Auschwitz Album', *The Jackson Sun*, 14 February 1982, p. 58.

83 Beth Harris, 'Beth Looks at Books', *The Desert Sun*, 15 January 1982, p. A16.

84 Michael Schäfer, 'Wenn das Grauen zu sprechen beginnt', *Göttinger Tageblatt*, 26 January 2005, p. 15, translation from the German original.

ample illustrates.⁸⁵ Photo 156 shows a column of women, frontally photographed. All five female prisoners in the front row look down at the ground; the second to the right lowers her head and her hand is in front of her face. Maybe she is ashamed of the way she looks as a prisoner; maybe refusing eye contact with the camera is the only attempt to exercise agency left to her; or maybe she is simply adjusting her headscarf. In the picture, her movement is frozen into an undecodable pose.⁸⁶ Thus, the reviewers' and my own interpretations are rather unspecific guesses or mere projections informed by retrospective knowledge, while the deportees' personal feelings, experience and anticipation remain unknown and are not accounted for in our readings of their body language.⁸⁷ As Prager has argued, 'we cannot know the horizon of expectation in the minds of those depicted, and we also cannot attribute one to them.'⁸⁸ Since photography does not allow for a nuanced introspection, the photographic record does not – and cannot possibly – convey the diverse and individual emotions of the Jewish deportees.

A final aspect reveals strikingly how the photographic documentation of the crimes was interwoven with organisational aspects of the collaborative murder. Several photos were taken in a clearing near the crematorium V – in immediate spatio-temporal vicinity of the subsequent murder: men, women and children are gathered, waiting underneath the trees, some standing up, some sitting on the ground.⁸⁹ Due to the camera orientation, the crematoria and the burning pits were not included in the picture frames (except for photo 112); only the nearby warehouses of 'Canada II' are visible in the background (104, 108, 114, 133, 139, 140).⁹⁰ Therefore, only viewers familiar with the site and killing procedure will associate these photos with the imminent murder. What appears to be a crowded but mostly calm setting only crystallizes as deserving of particular attention by considering the deportees' un-

85 Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Narration in Various Media', in *Handbook of Narratology*, 2 vols., ed. by Peter Hühn and others (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), i, pp. 468–88 (p. 478); Wolf, p. 54; Hans-Jürgen Pandel, 'Interpretieren als Selbsterzählen: Das Problem der narrativen Empathie', in *Inszenierung des Fremden: Fotografische Darstellung von Sinti und Roma im Kontext der historischen Bildforschung*, ed. by Silvio Peritore and Frank Reuter (Heidelberg: Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum deutscher Sinti und Roma, 2011), pp. 19–37 (pp. 34–36).

86 Pandel, pp. 21, 33.

87 Ibid., pp. 34–35.

88 Brad Prager, 'On the Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs', in *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. by David Bathrick, Brad Prager, and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2008), pp. 19–37 (p. 27).

89 Gutman and Gutterman, *The Auschwitz Album*, pp. 237–48; Knoch, p. 99; Hellman, p. 149.

90 Gutman and Gutterman, *The Auschwitz Album*, p. 243; Hellman, p. 158.

awareness and misinformation in face of the imminent atrocity.⁹¹ Filip Müller, a survivor of the 'Sonderkommando', wrote in excruciating detail about this scenario on 'one hot June day in 1944':

That morning they were made to wait their turn for the gas chamber since the victims of the previous night had not yet been cleared away. Every now and then Hauptscharführer Moll⁹² put in an appearance, asking people to be patient and promising that soon they would be given something to drink. [...] Some time later a crowd dragged itself along, wearily surging to and fro on the camp road. [...] The procession stopped in front of section B2f and waited there until their predecessors, who were waiting in the little wood, had been herded into the gas chambers of crematorium 5.⁹³

Unlike the deportees, the photographer did anticipate the murder, and, due to his foresight, the deportees are photographed as living dead.⁹⁴ The pictures mirror and result from a discrepancy of knowledge between the photographer and the photographed, which was also essential to the SS' organisation of mass murder. Disentangling the circumstances of these pictures demonstrates most poignantly why we must move beyond the notion of visible, physical violence in order to address the brutality condensed in these pictures.

Conclusion

Creating a photo album implies imposing a set of medial and socio-cultural characteristics on the events represented in it – in this case, the killing and enslaving of hundreds of thousands of people. Photo albums generally serve to conserve memorable and personally meaningful moments, but at the same time, the choice of topics included in the album is subjected to a standardising social consensus.⁹⁵ Moreover, albums are

91 For details on the level of knowledge and unawareness among the deportees see Gerlach and Aly, pp. 289–90.

92 Otto Moll was in charge of all crematoria and gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau during the deportations from Hungary. Hördler, pp. 313–14.

93 Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers* (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1979), pp. 134–36. Excerpts from Müller's account are also cited in Hellman, pp. 152, 156, 166.

94 Several reviewers of Hellman's edition referred to the photographers' knowledge: Susan Bolutin, 'Odd Book of Horror', *The New York Times*, 26 December 1981, p. 21; Lesley Hazleton, 'The Esthetic View of Death', *The Nation*, 21 November 1981, pp. 529–31; Danny Lyon, 'The Auschwitz Album', *Aperture*, 89 (1982), 6–9.

95 Bourdieu, pp. 8, 19, 24; Paul Hugger, 'Die Bedeutung der Photographie als Dokument des privaten Erinnerens', in *Erinnern und Vergessen: Vorträge des 27. Deutschen Volkskundekongresses*, pp. 11–12.

of immense emotive value to their creators or to people they are bestowed upon.⁹⁶ Representing the killing of Jews from Hungary in an album makes this episode stand out from the mass murder committed at Auschwitz II (Birkenau) over a period of years. The album transforms the event into a memory, supports and shapes how it will be remembered in the future and marks it as a positive and valuable recollection among the creators.⁹⁷ To conclude, I will now summarise the findings on the construction of an idealising and rationalising narrative by assessing them with regard to the role of photography in a setting of excessive violence and unequal power relations. Considering these aspects carefully might be a further step towards a thoughtful and ethical engagement with the photos.

Firstly, the dichotomy between the photographers and those photographed largely mirrors the unequal power balance between the SS and the deportees. Therefore, the act of taking pictures reproduces and augments this asymmetric relationship. The two photographers were members of the SS, and photography was their specific assignment in the process of collaborative murder. When taking pictures, they were involved in interactions with the deportees – even though, clearly, the pictures were taken without their consent.⁹⁸ Therefore, photography can count as one of the many coercive measures the SS imposed on the deportees. Moreover, the role of the photographers can be analysed as that of a third party, as conceptualised by Reemtsma: who observes on-going acts of violence which therefore ‘assume social significance’.⁹⁹ Notwithstanding the first argument, the album includes a picture most likely taken by an inmate. Thus, the ‘authorship’ of a photo is an insufficient criterion for the ‘perpetrators’ perspective’, and further circumstances must be considered.

Secondly, the degree to which viewers detect violence in the pictures depends heavily on their knowledge of the historic context.¹⁰⁰ Detailed information on organisational aspects of the murder were familiar to

gresses Göttingen 1989, ed. by Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich, Rolf W. Brednich, and Helge Gerndt (Göttingen: Schmerse Media, 1991), pp. 235–42.

96 Verna Posever Curtis, *Photographic Memory: The Album in the Age of Photography* (New York: aperture, 2011), p. 7.

97 It has been suggested that Rudolph Höb had the album made to claim his status as proficient commandant: Hördler, Kreuzmüller, and Bruttmann, p. 622.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 631.

99 Jan Philipp Reemtsma, *Trust and Violence: An Essay on a Modern Relationship* (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 268; Brink and Wegerer, p. 8.

100 Brink and Wegerer, p. 5.

the initially intended audience.¹⁰¹ To them, certain scenes, buildings, and locations would serve as unambiguous indicators of the procedures gradually leading up to the mass murder.¹⁰² Similarly, the photographers' knowledge proved to be a characteristic trait specific to the album. Today, when viewers are less acquainted with background information, describing the conditions under which the pictures were taken, and contextualising when and where the depicted scenes took place is essential to reveal specific features of the SS' regime and logistics.

Thirdly, due to the way photography was employed in the context of mass murder and its close relation to power privileges, it had, as Susan Sontag has argued so powerfully, the effect of objectifying the people in front of the lens.¹⁰³ The photographers' privilege to choose and compose pictures echoes the SS' command over the deportees. Compositional decisions and metaphorically charged angles constitute genuine photographic prerogatives of interpretation. However, bearing in mind that the photographer is a privileged agent who freely moved about the camp-site helps to deconstruct the compositions as resulting from his voluntarily chosen view point.

Fourthly, a photo album offers even more complex means for privileging or precluding particular interpretations of an event, because it opens up a space for a selective, and hence exclusive, narration. The sequenced and successive structure of the pages can impose a rigid form on the representation, and captions assign a single linguistic meaning to the photographs, which are inherently ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations. Thus, the relationship between imagery and language, two innately different sign systems, constitutes another medial level on which meaning is produced. Ultimately, the album's dominant narrative obscures the countless individual stories of the deportees, replacing them with a single master narrative.

With the fifth and last point on the relationship between photography and violence we have come full circle in regard to the debate outlined at the beginning: it concerns aspects of showing and viewing images of violence.¹⁰⁴ Viewers of the album, again, constitute a third party witnessing the crimes once committed at the camp site and therefore

101 Bruttmann, Kreuzmüller, and Hördler, p. 29.

102 Ibid., p. 29.

103 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 72; Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), pp. 14–15.

104 Brink and Wegerer, pp. 6, 8–9, 12.

turning them into a communicative and socially meaningful act.¹⁰⁵ Having said this, we are impelled to analyse how pictures were chosen and purposefully encoded, while negotiating new meanings when displaying the pictures today.

Regarding the concept of the 'perpetrators' perspective', I suggest that we can only begin to grasp this opaque phenomenon within a specific visual record if we analytically interlace its features as a medium and its embeddedness in a particular historical context. In order to determine and differentiate constitutive layers of meaning specific to the medium, I disentangled the various steps in which the album was produced – e.g. choosing the scenes, composing the pictures, arranging and captioning them in the album. Locating the photos within the topography of the camp and placing the photos in the order in which they were taken was yet another way of interrelating medium and context. This means that the preceding analysis may provide methodological impulses for future case-studies on similar sources, but its findings are inevitably specific to the album I focussed on.

Lastly, the case-study also demonstrated that the partly unexplained circumstances of the album's production restrain the degree to which we can determine the 'perpetrators' perspective'. Since we do not know exactly who of the two photographers in question took which photo, or who decided on the structure of the album, I refrained from deducing personal dispositions of certain individuals from the medium. What is more, as Michaela Christ has argued persuasively, even if we do know the photographer, it is impossible to reconstruct his thoughts and emotions based on the pictures.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, since several people were involved in the production of the album, the concept of 'perspective' cannot be limited to the personal prism of an individual. Rather, the entire album and the narrative it constructs served as pivotal objects of investigation. Thus, the ambiguity of photography and uncertainties about a record's provenance and context of production may limit our abilities to define the 'perpetrators' perspective' in a visual record.

¹⁰⁵ Reemtsma, p. 268.

¹⁰⁶ Christ, p. 313.

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