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(NOT ONLY) FAMILY ALBUMS

Abstract: Every photo album has its own unique character, and reflecting on family albums allows us to rediscover their significance for culture, for family members, and for the individual. Faded, fragmented, or blurred photographs reveal a simultaneous process of fusion (coincidences) and disintegration (de-coincidences), capturing the continuous “noiseless” transformations of human life.

These reflections do not aim to formulate yet another theory on the role of family albums or photographic memory. Rather, they invite us to consider the themes of transience and disappearance, resumption and recurrence – whether in a personal dimension (processing of grief, as discussed by R. Barthes in *Światło obrazu* [Camera Lucida] and by T. Różewicz in *Matka odchodzi* [Mother Departs]), in familial dimension (traces of existence preserved in photo albums, a motif explored in the TV series *Dom* [Home]), or in individual meditations on duration and impermanence (e.g., J. Janczewska’s photographs taken by S. I. Witkiewicz).

Photographs from family albums or private collections enable us to process grief and guide us from an internal “rupture” to what François Jullien calls a gradual “clearing of pain” after the loss of a loved one.

Keywords: aesthetics of photography, family album, processing grief, de-coincidence, transience of existence

The tradition of collecting family photographs combines sentimental value with the need to preserve a family’s history. Photo albums belong to family clans and are often passed down from generation to generation. They are not only keepsakes but also expressions of family unity and a conscious effort to cultivate tradition. At the turn of the 20th century, photography became

a means of documenting, archiving and capturing reality. As a result, even at the turn of the 21st century, it continued to serve as a powerful medium of remembrance.

Photographs create their own memory of images, both through the medium of photography itself and by evoking further images within our minds. The focus of this memory may also be – perhaps even by definition – the very function of photography as a vehicle of remembrance. The memory of images is most vividly revealed in images of memory. Photographs become carriers of memory, where one image calls forth another, endlessly referring back to other images¹.

Each photograph is like an image in the human mind: it retains the distinct shapes of figures and objects, a palette of colours and subtle shades. Yet, over time, it undergoes processes of decay – becoming distant and blurred. Photographs disintegrate, “crushing” reality into hundreds of scattered pieces. Many family portraits gradually fade, stain, or smudge as the years pass. The deterioration of a family album can become a metaphor for the disintegration of the family itself – caused by conflicts, physical distance, or the death of loved ones.

The concept of de-coincidence, understood as a breakdown that leads to a transformative phase from which something new, renewed, and integrated can emerge, is particularly useful when reflecting on photographs, family albums and interpersonal relationships. What was once a coherent family world gradually and imperceptibly falls apart – just like albums filled with old photographs. As François Jullien observed, all transformations occur almost imperceptibly, “silently,” and “we only notice them when an event suddenly triggers their revelation”².

Moments of separation or tragedy often allow us to look at photographs from a different perspective. Viewing an album after many years becomes an invitation to “contemplation – an encounter with silence and mindfulness”³. The accidental discovery of a photograph of his mother after her death takes on profound meaning for Roland Barthes (*Camera Lucida*) and for Tadeusz Różewicz (*Matka odchodzi* [Mother Departs]): contemplating photography as

¹ B. Stiegler, *Obrazy fotografii. Album metafor fotograficznych* [Bilder der Photographie. Ein Album photographischer Metaphern], transl. J. Czudec, Universitas, Krakow 2009, p. 163; here translated from Polish.

² From selected texts of F. Jullien, *Ponownie otworzyć możliwości: de-koincydencja i kolejne życie* [Rouvrir des possibles: dé-coïncidence, un art d'opérer], transl. E. Marynowicz-Hetka, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2024, pp. 38-39; heretranslated from Polish.

a means to process grief, moving from an internal “rupture” to – as Jullien describes it – a gradual phase of the “clearing of pain”⁴ after the loss of a loved one.

Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz’s act of destroying portraits of his fiancée Jadwiga Janczewska became an expression of his rebellion against death – an attempt to suppress and defy the pain of loss. In contrast, within the TV series *Dom* [Home]⁵, the gesture of removing a photograph from an album – as performed by Basia Lawina – represents an attempt to come to terms with fate, marking the character’s transition back to ordinary life, “from non-existence to existence, or from immobility to mobility”⁶.

A photograph preserved in an album is not merely a lifeless object; it remains in constant motion – intertwining memory and pain, revelation and liberation – continuously reopening the door to “new experiences”⁷. The process of de-coincidence, manifested in acts of “rupturing,” “destroying,” “disappearing,” or “losing,” enables one to gain distance from the past and to move forward, creating and shaping a new life.

A Decomposed Album

Tadeusz Różewicz’s poetic prose titled *Matka odchodzi* [Mother Departs] has posed numerous challenges for scholars; yet, precisely because of its generic and thematic heterogeneity, it offers a remarkably wide spectrum of interpretative possibilities⁸. By weaving together letters, diaries, poems and photographs, Różewicz created an innovative form for presenting both autobiography and traumatic experience. This kind of montage – using Georges Didi-Huberman’s concept from *Stratégies des images. Œil et pouvoir* [Strategies of Images: Eye and Power] in reference to Bertolt Brecht’s *Arbeitsjournal* and *Kriegsfibel* – presents an alternative to the conventional structure and narrative of biography.

³ Ibid., p. 208.

⁴ Ibid., p. 209.

⁵ *Dom* [Home]: Polish television series, premiere 16 January 1980, director Jan Łomnicki, screenplay Jerzy Janicki and Andrzej Mularczyk, music Waldemar Kazanecki and Piotr Hertel, cinematography Bogusław Lambach.

⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

⁷ Ibid., p. 208.

⁸ Many scholars have explored the relationship between Różewicz’s *Matka odchodzi* and various literary genres, drawing parallels to the threnody and the elegy (A. Spólna, *Nowe „Treny”? Polska poezja żałobna po II wojnie światowej a tradycja literacka*, Wydawnictwo UJ, Kraków 2007, p. 299; A. Legeżyńska, *Treny Różewicza*, “Polonistyka” 2000, no. 1, pp. 57–59), as well as to the poetictreatise (R. Cieślak, *Widzenie Różewicza*, Wydawnictwo UW, Warszawa 2013, p. 248). Other critics emphasize the unique structure of the text, describing it as a palimpsest (A. Spólna, *Nowe „Treny”?...*, p. 326), a collage (A. Spólna, *Nowe „Treny”?...*, pp. 326–327; R. Cieślak, *Widzenie Różewicza...*, p. 247), or a form of miscellany (A. Spólna, *Nowe „Treny”?...*, pp. 322–324 – “family chronicle”).

In Różewicz's case, this is not merely a matter of poetic composition, but also of a deliberate decomposition of collective works and photographic albums. Just as Brecht employed newspaper clippings, photographic cut-outs and diverse captions to convey the horrors of war, Różewicz sought an artistic form through which to express his despair after the loss of his mother. The poet "decomposes" collections of texts and family albums in order to "compose" the world anew. His past becomes a chest of memories, from which he retrieves texts as though they were objects, examining events from entirely new perspectives – artistic, philosophical, and literary – after many years.

Różewicz emphasizes "contrasts, cracks, dispersions. However, everything breaks so that it can properly reveal the space between things, their common ground, and the imperceptible relationships that bind them despite everything – even when those relationships are marked by distance, inversion, cruelty, or absurdity"⁹. In *Matka odchodzi*, he juxtaposed family photographs with texts, selecting from his home archive images of his parents, brothers and mother. In doing so, he introduced a parallel photographic narrative – a form of storytelling through images that complements the literary micro-narrative of the text.

Turning to the family album is, for Różewicz, an attempt to revisit the spaces of what has been repressed. Linear time dissolves, and photographs bring the dead back from nonexistence into the world of the living. The assembled texts and photographs, accompanied by commentary, are profoundly reflective. They evoke not a sense of detachment but rather a state of poetic calm that leads to the acceptance of life, death, and the laws that govern both. Individual photographic images "refer to images" of both sentimental and traumatic memories preserved in the poet's mind. A particularly significant aspect – given the title *Matka odchodzi* – is:

The placement of the mother's photograph on the cover (...) immediately introduces us to the central figure of the volume. It creates the impression that the texts which follow are not fictional but authentic, carrying a deeply "sentimental" value, as if they were part of a collection of personal mementos. This impression is further reinforced by additional photographs, each accompanied by brief captions¹⁰.

⁹ G. Didi-Huberman, *Strategie obrazów. Oko historii* [Stratégies des images. Œil et pouvoir], transl. J. Margański, Korporacja HA!ART, Warszawa-Kraków 2011, p. 82; here translated from Polish.

¹⁰ A. Skrendo, *Tadeusz Różewicz i granice literatury*, Universitas, Kraków 2002, p. 121.

The photographic portrait on the cover creates the illusion that the figure of the mother can exist in an eternal present, in which the past, present and future become one. The mother is the embodiment of love, which is a kind of covenant between the past and the present: it connects the present with the past. Although she has been dead for many years, the mother is still visible as a living figure, "(...) and yet the deceitful photograph convinces me that what I see exists, and that the rest can be deduced from the image"¹¹. The photographic portrait and the literary work can therefore be treated as Różewicz's attempt to evoke the physical, tangible presence of his mother.

Różewicz creates not only a family album, but above all an album about his mother; one could even say that the effect of an "album within an album" has been created. He constantly searches for her photographs, digging them out of various nooks and crannies, and constantly adding to his collection in order to fill the void left by his mother's death with these photographs and to constantly mark the traces of her presence. For him, photography is "prosthesis of memory, so it is supposed to last longer than the world it depicts (...) The image therefore lasts longer than the reality it reflects; longer than the people depicted in it"¹². In a poem entitled *Fotografia* [Photography], Różewicz recalls:

(...) yesterday I received
the saved photograph of my mother
from 1944

mother in the photograph
is still young beautiful
smiles lightly (...) ¹³.

Finding another photograph brings the son both joy – through the visual encounter with his beautiful mother – and a deep sense of sorrow and despair over her loss. In moments of profound life experience, matter and time, emotions and memories merge into a single dimension, becoming a tangible substance of existence that permeates consciousness. Photography links the poet with his deceased mother, momentarily liberating him from the linear order of time. Yet, the mother rediscovered through a photograph can be lost again.

Roland Barthes, in his reflections in *Camera Lucida*, also emphasizes how profoundly significant finding a photograph of his mother was for him:

¹¹ W. Nowicki, *Odbicie*, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2015, p. 82.

¹² W. Nowicki, *Dno oka. Eseje o fotografii*, Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2010, p. 175.

¹³ T. Różewicz, *Matka odchodzi*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław, p. 67; translation of the poem from *Sobbing Superpower. Selected Poems of Tadeusz Różewicz*, translated by Joanna Trzeciak, published by W. W. Norton & Company in 2007.

And so, alone in the apartment where she had recently died, I looked at my mother's photographs one by one in the light of the lamp, going back in time with her, searching for the truth of the face I loved. And finally, I found it. The photograph was very old. (...) my pain craved a faithful image, an image that would be both right and accurate: just an image, but a faithful image¹⁴.

For both Różewicz and Barthes, the mother has “passed away” but remains present within the portrait. Discovering a photograph of the deceased, in both cases, becomes part of the “processing of grief”. The “living” presence of the departed captured in the image is both a source of pain and a testament that she has not been forgotten. It is the silent, enduring lament of sons for their lost mothers.

The process of grief can be compared to the treatment and slow healing of wounds – psychological rather than physical injuries – that may fade over the years but are never fully forgotten or unfelt. A striking illustration of this can be found in a scene from the TV series *Noce i dni* [Nights and Days], based on the novel by Maria Dąbrowska. While moving from Serbinów to the Pamiętów estate, Barbara Niechcic sifts through boxes and trunks, laying out various family heirlooms on the table. In one of the boxes, she finds a portrait of her deceased son, Piotr Niechcic. Enclosed in an oval frame, the boy's face looks back at her. She gazes at it tenderly, then notices that the portrait is cracked. Instinctively, she places her finger on the crack, trying to smooth and join the curled edges.

The image of the small child is fractured, and the crack mirrors the mother's pain. A sharp gap has opened between Barbara's longing and her tragic experience, a gap that seems to widen endlessly. Yet Barbara, almost in defiance of fate, continues her attempt to unite two worlds: the living and the dead.

Perhaps simply entering the gap, simply existing in it, is the most appropriate response to the call directed at us. When we slip into a hidden reality that welcomes and shields us, perhaps we do not need to know any thing – perhaps it is enough simply to exist in a place where we belong, which seems to allow us to remain there for a certain time¹⁵.

Stefania Różewiczowa's photograph is not physically damaged, yet the metaphor of a “crack,” evoked by the scene from the film *Nights and Days*,

¹⁴ R. Barthes, *Światło obrazu. Uwagi o fotografii* [La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie], transl. J. Trznadel, Aletheia, Warszawa 2008, pp. 122-124; here translated from Polish.

¹⁵ J. Brach-Czajna, *Szczeliny istnienia*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1992, p. 178.

aply illustrates the emotional rupture that occurs at the death of a loved one. Although his mother's portrait remains intact, it can be perceived – like Piotr Niechcic's painting – as an “open wound,” a constant reminder of painful loss. A symbolic crack has formed between Różewicz and the image of his mother, a space into which the poet places his poems, letters and diaries. Over time, this “wound” begins to heal, and Różewicz writes, “The healed hole has been filled. This year I was at the cemetery on your grave”¹⁶. He comes to terms with this state of being, yet the grief over his mother's death may never fully subside.

Literature and photography play a therapeutic role in Różewicz's process of grief. The poet deliberately selected “photographs from the family album, photocopies of manuscripts, and, by arranging them in a certain order, transferred them from private to public circulation, interpreting them within a new narrative framework”¹⁷. Through self-therapy expressed in creative work, Różewicz was able to reorganize his inner world and maintain a unique, posthumous bond with his mother through memory and reflection¹⁸.

A Blurred Album

Reflections on memory and photography invite deeper contemplation of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's photographic collection. In her album *Witkacy. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz: Życie i twórczość*, Anna Micińska titled the third chapter *From the Family Album*. In the introduction, she explains her choice of photographs and the concept behind compiling a visual chronicle of the artist's life:

The third chapter, which opens the main part of the album, once again recounts the story of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, but attempts to bring him closer to the reader by other means. (...) The photographs, arranged chronologically, form a kind of ‘biographical film’ – moving in itself, even if the uninitiated viewer does not know whose fate it portrays. To clarify this, the photographs are accompanied by a collage of excerpts from authentic sources: Witkiewicz's private correspondence and that of his family, the memories of friends and relatives, and Witkiewicz himself, who speaks about his life and work¹⁹.

¹⁶ T. Różewicz, *Matka odchodzi*, p. 111.

¹⁷ R. Cieślak, *Widzenie Różewicza...*, p. 241.

¹⁸ There are two types of use of photographs in therapeutic practice: ready-made and self-made. A creative activity is therapeutic only when it is conscious – as a form of self-narration. See: Ł. Lange, *Praca żałoby i praca z żałobą*, “Studia de Cultura” 2019, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 119-133.

¹⁹ A. Micińska, *Witkacy. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz życie i twórczość*, Wydawnictwo Interpress, Warszawa 1985, p. 7.

Photography and portraiture were, in fact, part of the Witkiewicz family tradition and that of their close circle. Fragments of memory preserved in old photographs – yellowed, faded, torn, cracked, dated, or inscribed – capture the charm of “what was”, offering a glimpse into the artist’s life and surroundings. Selected episodes from Witkacy’s life unfold in a distinctive rhythm, resembling a “theatre of images”. One can trace the successive stages of his intellectual biography by reconstructing images from memory or following a chain of personal associations shaped by the materiality of remembrance.

This process relies on the psychological mechanisms of memory, which select certain elements, people and events. Memory, through its constant movement and associative power, determines the direction of this biographical game. Particularly intriguing is the interplay between word (commentary, title) and image (colour, form). The fluidity of this dialogue with images of memory opens the space for multiple interpretations, shifting with time and context. In this sense, memory itself becomes a kind of “photo album”, filled with portraits, objects, fleeting phenomena and selected moments – each preserved like a photograph. Photography thus approaches the realm of archiving and documentation, but above all, it plays a vital role in commemorating the very fact of “being in the world.”

As an artist, Witkacy created his own “photo album” – a chronicle of memory and selfdocumentation of his creative pursuits. Within this context, two types of photography can be distinguished: the first preserves memory and draws on thematic material (e.g., photographs of the Witkiewicz family in the family album), while the second reflects on the very phenomenon of memory itself (Witkacy’s experimental photographs that evoke illusions of memory). Witkacy deliberately manipulated photographic material in various ways so that, once developed, the images would appear aged. Cracks, stains and other marks reveal the artist’s dialogue with the world and his attempt to reshape both the past and present. These photographs seek to convey something universal about human experience – about remembering and forgetting one’s past, the memory of which remains a fundamental element of personal identity.

The 1910 *Autoportret* [Self-Portrait] photograph is described by researchers Stefan Okołowicz and Wojciech Sztaba as a “cracked portrait.” The image depicts a face composed of several fragments:

The photographic print was prepared by the artist after shattering the negative with a precise blow of a sharp tool to the middle of the forehead. (...) The print, composed of fragments of the broken negative, depicts the artist’s cracked face, suspended as if in cosmic space²⁰.

²⁰ S. Okołowicz, *Witkacy fotografuje. Witkacy na fotografii*, in: *Światło obrazu. Wykłady otwarte*, ed. M. Dziewulska, Aletheia, Warszawa 2007, p. 100.

The memory embedded in this photograph is closely tied to the idea of breaking and shattering, expressing the impossibility of reconciling this world into a unified whole. What the viewer perceives is the wound of the image – a fracture of its integrity. The face itself becomes wounded, symbolizing transience and the hope that light may emerge from the site of the wound. Repair, if possible, comes through illumination.

Similarly, the photographs *Helena. Ja photo* [Helena. A Photo of Me] (1912) and *Portrety Jadwigi Janczewskiej* [Portraits of Jadwiga Janczewska] (1913-1914) reflect Witkacy's deliberate attempts to blur, fade and stain images. These manipulations "are not accidental and indicate attempts to make the photograph unreal and to search for a different, more painterly space within the photographic image"²¹.

Every relationship with another person carries certain limits – not only because of misunderstandings, conflicts, or the fading of feelings, but also due to the brevity of life and the inevitability of death, the ultimate and insurmountable separation.

The aesthetic emotion, evident in the framing, perspective and interplay of black and white, enables a nuanced expression of the feelings transformed by the artist in the photographs of Jadwiga Janczewska. Witkacy failed to perceive what was unfolding in the inner world of the young woman; it was only her suicide that led him to reevaluate and reinterpret their relationship. As Jullien rightly observes, many events in life take place "silently" and "imperceptibly"²².

Through his photographic experiments with his fiancée's photographs, Witkacy explores the transitions between darkness and light, between memory and the sensation of "the lightness of non-existence". Is the artist not, in a sense, a guardian of memory – one who oscillates between preserving and attempting to forget? Photography becomes a medium for an extraordinary, posthumous dialogue. Memory takes on the form of a shadow, holding within it the mystery of presence and absence, as the artist alternately reveals and erases those he portrays. Painful memory acquires a metaphysical dimension.

Photographs serve as vessels of memory, bridging past and present. In the case of his fiancée's portrait, Witkacy's pain becomes palpable – an unhealed wound, a longing for the impossible presence of Jadwiga Janczewska. Yet, beyond time and space, he uses the photographic image to forge a metaphysical bond, a place of indestructible closeness preserved in memory. These photographs exist at the threshold between light and darkness. The photographic concept of "photosensitivity" is not merely a technical term with

²¹ E. Franczak, S. Okołowicz, *Przeciw nicości*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Warszawa 1986, p. 78.

²² F. Jullien, *Ponownie otworzyć możliwości...*, pp. 38-39.

physical potential, but an unexpected metaphor drawn from the very essence of things, from the nature of the world. Janczewska's posthumous photographic portraits are Witkacy's tender touch upon the "delicate past," enabling us to experience reality anew.

The subtle nuances in the photographs of his fiancée blend reality and materiality with a realm of postmodern and timeless existence. The present moment is excluded from tangible presence; everything appears to coexist in perfect harmony, drawing nearer and interpenetrating one another. Though Janczewska has died, she remains alive; she does not exist in the physical sense, yet she is undeniably present. For Witkacy, the experience of photography takes on an almost mythical quality, enabling him to summon the figure of his beloved.

A Discovered Album

Personal photography emerged at the turn of the 20th century and gradually became a widespread social practice among families seeking to preserve their shared experiences through portraits. This practice was underpinned by a belief in safeguarding family history for future generations, passing it down visually. From its earliest days, photography also served broader functions – as a form of communication and a means of exchanging experiences. Family photographs are a recurring theme in the television series *Dom* [Home].

Beyond its exploration of political, social and historical issues, early episodes of the series emphasize the theme of photography and its impact on the mental and physical states of three characters in particular: Barbara (Basia) Lawina, Łukasz Zbożny and Andrzej Talar. In a basement strewn with rubble, Ryszard Popiołek, the house's caretaker, discovers the Lawina family album. It contains photographs of Basia's parents, as well as images of her and her fiancé Łukasz from their school days. Photographs serve as a crucial medium for preserving family memories. Encountering these images encourages reflection and inquiry, sparking attempts to interpret the meaning of the past.

Susan Sontag noted that photographs function as a tool for documenting family life: "Through photographs, each family creates its own chronicle written in portraits – a portable set of images that testify to their shared life"²³. Taking and collecting photographs expresses an intergenerational dialogue, bridging age and time. Popiołek, the house's caretaker, recounts the history of his pre-war family and asks the young Talar to return the album to its rightful owners. His micro-narratives about the people captured in the photographs act as an

²³ S. Sontag, *O fotografii* [On Photography], transl. S. Magala, Karakter, Kraków 2009, p. 15; quotation from the original published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in New York in 1977.

external memory and affirm the enduring bonds that unite the community living in the tenement house. The past matters not only in the context of major historical events but also through the lens of intimate family histories. French film critic André Bazin observed that in family albums:

In shades of gray or sepia, like phantoms, and almost impossible to identify, are no longer the traditional family portraits but rather the presence of lives arrested in their duration... For photography does not create eternity, as art does; it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper decay²⁴.

The photo album reflects the fate of the Lawina family, surviving the conflagration of the 1944 Warsaw uprising with only minor damage and cracks on its cover – just as the family itself endured, despite material losses and lasting harm to their health.

The Lawina family's story takes an unexpected turn when Andrzej, who is in love with Basia, removes her photograph – an image of a girl with braids – from the album. The fate of the family's youngest member no longer follows the course she had envisioned before the war, when she dreamed of earning a medical degree and marrying the poet Łukasz Zbożny. Andrzej's act of taking her photograph becomes a symbolic gesture, redirecting her destiny into his hands. The young student appropriates the image for two reasons: first, to keep the likeness of his beloved as a talisman of love and, second, to sever Basia's fragile hope of finding Łukasz. Having gathered information from various witnesses, Andrzej becomes convinced that the young poet perished along with the entire Miotła unit during the uprising. At one of the exhumation sites, where personal mementos of the dead – books, medals, belts, combs, mirrors and buttons – were stored for identification, Andrzej places Basia's photograph, identical to the one she had once given Łukasz.

This photograph, like a theatrical prop, becomes part of a complex intrigue. These two identical images entwine the girl's fate between two men, dividing her life and memory between love and loss.

From a psychological perspective, photography as a narrative prop in the series *Dom* captures two fundamental states of human experience: a reaction to the death of a loved one and an attempt to process grief²⁵. The photograph,

²⁴ A. Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1967, p. 14.

²⁵ Contemporary research on reactions to the death of a loved one and the process of bereavement distinguishes three stages. The first is a moment of shock, marked by a state of *numbness* and disbelief at the loss. The second stage involves *withdrawal into oneself*, accompanied by an intensifying and painful sense of loss, feelings of injustice, anger and remorse. The third stage is one of adaptation, during which the bereaved person gradually adjusts to the new reality, accepting the emotions associated with the loss, which slowly diminish over time

presented as evidence of Łukasz's death, provokes an intense emotional response in Basia – an outburst of anger intertwined with helplessness, alternating between screams and tears. The black-and-white image creates such a powerful illusion of death that even when Andrzej confesses his deceit, Basia, engulfed by mourning, is unable to accept the truth.

What matters here is that “a photograph has the power of confirmation, and that the confirmation of photography refers not to the object but to time”²⁶. The feeling of irreversible loss, like a thorn, becomes embedded in the photograph, intensifying her longing for what is gone. Her mourning does not fade; it does not remain confined to graves with their flickering candles.

Mourning is a complex process, one still not fully understood by psychology. In his 1917 essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, Sigmund Freud observed:

Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person... Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of interest in the outside world – in so far as it does not recall him – the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with the memory of the lost object²⁷.

The *mourning process* can be divided into two stages: the first involves a gradual detachment and fading of the emotional bond between the mourner and the deceased, while the second is an adaptation to life in which the loved one is no longer present. In the final stage of *processing grief*, the individual forms new relationships and develops a transformed attitude toward the deceased.

The observations of the Viennese psychologist apply well to Basia Lawina's behaviour in the series. After the phase of mourning her beloved, she attempts to suppress her grief by seeking distractions – flirting with other men, dancing in nightclubs, drinking to the point of unconsciousness and even attempting

(see <https://www.mp.pl/pacjent/psychiatria/choroby/91656,zaloba-i-depresja-w-przebiegu-za-loby>, accessed: 18.06.2025). However, these reactions can vary significantly, influenced by factors such as age, the depth of attachment to the deceased, religious beliefs and cultural traditions. A grieving person may display behaviours that are inconsistent or even contradictory compared to their previous patterns, surprising those around them.

²⁶ R. Barthes, *Światło obrazu...*, p. 158.

²⁷ S. Freud, *Żaloba i melancholia* [Mourning and Melancholia], transl. J. Jabłońska-Dzierża, in: *Depresja. Ujęcie psychoanalityczne*, eds. K. Walewska, J. Pawlik, PWN, Warszawa 1992, pp. 20-30; here quoted after *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated and edited by James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud, and assisted by Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson, originally published by The Hogarth Press in London over a period from 1953 to 1974.

suicide. Gradually, however, with the support, patience and understanding of Talar, a young student in love with her, she regains her emotional balance: she overcomes her breakdown, passes her exams, marries and celebrates the reconstruction of Warsaw.

The photograph Basia finds among the mementos of the dead becomes a kind of Platonic *pharmakon*. On one hand, it is a poison, awakening in her the pain of irreversible loss and deepening her depression. On the other, it acts as a medicine, freeing her from the obsessive search for her fiancé and the torment of lingering memories. To close this painful chapter, she looks at the family album and removes Łukasz's photograph. In her view, "the dead should not remain among the living". By removing the image, she attempts to make him extinct from her memory as well.

This scene resonates with the reflections of Thomas Bernhard. In his novel *Auslöschung. Ein Zerfall* [Extinction], he argued that photography is a powerful means of erasing reality and replacing it with images²⁸. In the film, the act of photograph removal functions therapeutically – it purges painful memories and the emotions tied to them.

Years later, Łukasz finds Basia in Warsaw and makes her realise that he never gave up hope – nor did he ever lose her photograph, the portrait of the *girl with braids*. The pre-war Lawina family album, once marked by empty spaces where Basia's and Łukasz's images had been, is complete once again. In this way, a new story of the youngest couple in the family is inscribed in the album, shaped by both love and war. Perhaps the filmmakers had a similar intention to that of poet Tomasz Jastrun, who wrote in the introduction to his poetry collection *Album rodzinny* [Family Album]:

I wanted these poems and photographs to be a testimony to history – both the great and the small, the family history. And I wanted them to speak not only to each other, but also to the reader²⁹.

Each photo album has its own unique character, and reflecting on family albums allows us to rediscover their significance for culture, family members and individuals alike. An album is not merely a static archive of images arranged according to a set pattern. The phenomenon of de-coincidence reveals, within the ever-changing "movement of life", various "cracks and fissures,"

²⁸ Reference to the Polish edition of T. Bernhard's *Auslöschung. Ein Zerfall*, Wydawnictwo Od Do, Warszawa 2005 under the title *Wymazywanie*, transl. S. Lisiecka, p. 25.

²⁹ M. Jastrun, *Album rodzinny. Wiersze i fotografie*, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warszawa 2022, p. 9.

showing how a fragmented or incomplete album – as presented in the poetry collection *Matka odchodzi* or the TV series *Dom* – or even an attempt to destroy it, as in the case of Jadwiga Janczewska's photographs, can ultimately lead to a reintegration, or coincidence, of human existence. Faded, cracked, or blurred photographs simultaneously embody processes of merging (*coincidence*) and decay (*de-coincidence*), allowing us to witness the ongoing “silent” transformations of human life.

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ALBUMY (NIE TYLKO) RODZINNE (streszczenie)

Każdy album fotograficzny ma swoją specyfikę, a rozważania wokół rodzinnych albumów pozwalają na nowo odkryć ich znaczenie dla kultury, członków rodzin i jednostki. Fotografie wyblakłe, pęknięte czy też zamazane pokazują symultaniczny proces scalania (koincydencja) i rozpadu (de-koincydencja), dzięki czemu można zaobserwować nieustanny proces „bezszelestnych” transformacji ludzkiego życia.

Niniejsze rozważania nie pretendują do eksplikacji kolejnej teorii dotyczącej roli rodzinnych albumów czy też pamięci fotografii, jednak pozwolą przyjrzeć się problemowi przemijalności/znikania, wznawiania/ uobecniania zarówno w wymiarze osobistym (praca żałoby – R. Bartes, *Światło obrazu*, T. Różewicz, *Matka odchodzi*), rodzinnym (ślady istnienia w fotograficznych albumach – motyw w serialu *Dom*) czy też indywidualnej refleksji trwania/przemijania – fotografie J. Janczewskiej wykonane przez S. I. Witkiewicza).

Fotografie z rodzinnych albumów czy też prywatnej kolekcji pozwalają na przepracowanie żałoby, czyli od wewnętrznego „pęknięcia” do – jak określa Jullien – stopniowej fazy „rozchmurzenia” bólu po stracie bliskiej osoby.

Słowa kluczowe: estetyka fotografii, rodzinny album, praca żałoby, de-koincydencja, przemijalność istnienia

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