

Excerpts from an interview with A

I was 13 or 14 years old, I think. We lived in Tel Aviv, in a rent-controlled apartment across from a neighbor who had a very large and very beautiful apartment. Our apartment was nice. We had a lot of furniture that was faux something: faux wood, et cetera. She had a huge apartment, full of furniture that I had never seen the likes of. apparently from Europe. Her living room was huge. For me, that apartment across the way was another country, more or less. And it was inhabited by a woman named Bronca (Polish, presumably) and her husband and son.

Her husband was a big, scary man who worked for ... I imagine ... escorting foreign guests of the government. ... And one day her husband died. I think I wasn't even 13 yet. She met someone abroad, remarried and moved to Paris.

She left the apartment empty and gave my mother the keys, charged her with watching the apartment. She didn't rent it out because she would come to Israel from time to time. And I, I loved sneaking into that apartment when my mother was away and being in a sort of palace. I suppose all sorts of stories took place there in my imagination.

And one day I found this box.

And I opened it and saw the collection of photos inside. And I was excited because I knew I had something very significant in my hands. I took it to my room and would look at the pictures once in a while, feeling I had a treasure in my hands. I didn't mean to take them for good but ... I borrowed them, in a manner of speaking. It was the only object that had a much wider context than this apartment, that is, I didn't know where it was from and how it had gotten there but I understood it was something special.

My experience then, my experience of the State of Israel and the Eichmann Trial for example, was an experience of something flying miles above my head. It was like ... a child who doesn't understand what's going on around him, there was something distant, something sublime, something I had no chance at all of touching, of comprehending or seeing. My parents would take care of it, or the government, or Ben Gurion or whoever would take care of it. (Not Ben Gurion any more ... but...)

And here I am, stumbling across these pictures and Eichmann himself appearing in front of my eyes, and other historic events... I felt a sort of direct, intimate contact with the Israeli essence of the period and it moved me greatly. It moved me greatly.

I felt it had a unique value, as if these pictures didn't exist anywhere else. But they are copies, and one might ask how they ended up where they did, I mean, here too there must be some collection, not a private one, which is not part ... it might even be state property, I don't know.

But I felt that I had found a great treasure, that this was unique, something only I had, and that must have been so appealing to me that I took it for myself. This thing.

That apartment was a no-man's-land. It didn't belong to anybody. The woman who lived there rarely came to Israel, her son lived in the US already, he was a doctor in America and the apartment was abandoned, nobody lived there.

I opened the closet and found the pictures and I must have spent a long time just trying to understand what it was I had found. I sat on the carpet and spread them out and was quite alarmed. Eichmann for me was something monstrous, I had no idea ... something larger than life in terms of my ability to understand what it was and it was something ... a little scary, foreign, unclear.

I thought someone had stolen them himself. Because he was a driver for foreign guests who came to Israel and who knows .

I remember his car, I'd like to talk about his car. In our street there were almost no cars because nobody had a private vehicle, and he had a huge white Cadillac with a decal on it of the Spies carrying a pole with grapes (you know this image) in red. And when he came by the children on the street were excited, because it was a Cadillac. It looked like those cars that you take to a wedding in the US and so on. And once in a while he would bring guests home, respectable people, it was like touching another world.

So my imagination led me to believe that because he accompanied guests and because he was close by, there were photographers and because he was close by and he gave them photos and all, he also took some home. Isak - that was his name - he was a driver who was

intoxicated by being a service provider on the sidelines of this historic move, and it was his way of taking something from it, and turning it into... there was an effort on his part to become part of the picture, and not just as a service provider, as a driver taking people from one place to another.

There's also something Israeli about taking things, stealing things like that. I mean, think of Dayan and the antiquities he stole. There's something Israeli also about the fact that the driver, and I'm not demeaning his job, that a driver for journalists takes these photos to have at home, so he can show them to the kids. That's very Israeli, I think.

I took it home. But I felt, sort of, *hagonev miganav patur*, something like that... that's how I felt.

There was a certain feeling of guilt about touching something but I thought no-one would ever touch it because the apartment was, except the furniture, empty of clothing and other personal effects. Her husband had died, she lived in Paris, her son was in the US... I didn't think that... there was a feeling of guilt but at the same time I was ... I had already developed an affinity with these photos, and I felt they were mine too.

The fear was that I had done something wrong. Because I had not asked anyone for permission, you see... It's not as if I had found a hundred shekels on the ... a hundred pounds which were then ... or half a pound, whatever, on the table, and had taken it to buy an ice cream... I felt that there was something different here, and that nevertheless it was wrong to take it. And I didn't have anyone to ask what to do with it, or anything... but I still felt that it was in a certain gray zone. See, I am even embarrassed now, telling you about it... Before talking to you, I rehearsed how I would like to present it. Now I feel that I am presenting it without any defenses ... but I had built a few layers of defenses to protect my good name.

I didn't tell anyone, I didn't tell my mother, I didn't tell anyone, I think I hid it somewhere in some out-of-the-way place, in a secret place in my dresser, and that's where it lurked. I may have touched it two or three more times but I never showed it to anyone, not to friends, no-one, I kept it ... as something that is only for me. I think that if I had been holding pornographic pictures at home, that would have been easier to hide than these photos. Because there is no explanation for

these. It became my secret place, through knowing about it and leaving it there.

But somehow I found it one day moving with me to the rented apartments that I lived in. And later I moved to London and it accompanied me. This box has come with me and I'm not sure I've opened it, I think it's just accompanied me. So I think I've kept a sort of distance from it. Which is not only characteristic of these photos, but definitely true of them. I've kept my distance, although there aren't many things I've kept for my whole life. I've kept this my whole life and still kept my distance from it.

I only re-discovered it years later, when I left home and took a box with souvenirs such as my report cards from first, second, third grade... as a part of my past. It blended into this box of documents that I ... took. And I took it everywhere, for the rest of my life. When I met you and heard about your work ... I thought: here's my opportunity to bring this into the light, to expose myself with ... this story ... and to give it to you. Maybe something valuable ... can be done with it. Because all in all, I believe there are photos here that are moving in many ways.

The photographs were beautiful. I don't know, if I looked now, what I would feel. But they were very beautiful to my eyes, aesthetically. Their sharpness, their glossiness. As a child I loved how they were glossy and remained ... there's something impressive about that, about how a photo retains its, its newness... they're well-kept, right? They're amazing quality photos, I don't think that at that time I had touched anything with such quality, there were no iPhone 6's at the time. I didn't know such quality was possible.

Moreover, I even imagined that they were somehow secret photos. Because I didn't know ... today I see the Government Press Office (ah, the Government Press Office, that's the name that slipped my memory before) and I understand that this, these photos are a copy of others ... I don't know where they are today with the mess the country is in. But they're a copy, they're not... at the time I felt that they were secret photos, something that could not be seen, or ... I don't know ... they had a sort of mysterious aura for a child who does not know what is going on.

I think the photos I remember best are those of Eichmann and the trial. That may have been in the press too. But there's something else,

there was no television, and newsprint was very bad quality. And these photos are high-quality, so there was a sort of high-definition contact with the experience that you couldn't get elsewhere. The photos of Eichmann made the greatest impression on me, but I couldn't point to a particular one.

These photos encapsulate a sort of relation to the state, to history, to what goes on, that is different from the relation I have to the place where I live today and my view of what is going on at present. In a way, they signify the dream that has been spoiled. I may be looking back at it differently today, you know, the disillusionment retroactively tints ... what I felt back then. But at least then, as a child, it was a box that represent the Zionist hope in some way.

Later there was also a feeling of guilt that perhaps I had robbed something from, that I was holding something public and keeping it to myself. Like someone who steals a Picasso and keeps it in his basement. There was the feeling that it was irresponsible towards the public.

It was my private secret, with the guilt and shame that come with that. It was even a kind of laziness. I've thought about it. It's that feeling, a feeling that it's wrong that I carry along, even now as we speak, okay? And I need to get over that, but that's it.

That's why I felt a certain relief in giving them to you. A big relief. Your eyes are the only other eyes that have entered into this experience. Sometimes you need another's eyes to give an experience meaning. Many times.

I think that it gave me a kind of power. That I had it, doesn't matter how I got it, it gave me some kind of secret, a power, feelings like that. When I gave it away, there was a feeling of parting ways, and a feeling that I don't know what will happen to it now. Just as I don't know what will happen to it right now, as we're speaking.

In this story, I want to say, you can find reasons, as I have during this conversation - but a lot of it is pointless too. Let's not pretend, I don't want to pretend here - that it has waited for this moment and now it has come to light and all that. It's an pointless story too. A story of a boy who takes something, is ashamed and stashes it away, until one day he grows up and meets someone and says here, take it, do something with it. And I can take the blame.

I don't need to do anything with it any longer. I'll give it to you and you deal with the headache of the little details, how to frame it and all that. Thank God I don't need to do that.

If the police comes looking for me, I'll call you to bail me out. If anyone asks, I'll probably say it was an artistic hoax, that I made a story up for art.

That's it, more or less, because really the artistic quest is not an artistic quest if it doesn't deal with the details, in my opinion, that is, that's what I think.