

INTERVIEW ERIC TOLEDANO & OLIVIER NAKACHE

What motivated you to get involved in the project for the series *Les Immortels*, and who is it aimed at?

Our primary motivation stems from a long-standing sense of concern that overwhelms us every time we hear about the gradual disappearance of the last survivors of the Holocaust.

Each passing marks an ever greater, more painful distance from their stories, like the extinguishing of their voices. And yet, their memory is essential and indispensable.

Our inspiration also came from the idea of a “relay” with young people aged 14, 15, or 16, who have no immediate or direct connection to this history. This concept was brought to us by the Mémorial de la Shoah and the Madame Bovary agency. They approached us with this idea, and we wanted to follow these young people, see them open up, take an interest, learn, and ultimately witness their meeting with the survivors of this dark period and the madness surrounding it.

It’s this encounter, this dialogue—seemingly improbable yet ultimately so natural—that we sought to capture. It reflects what we aim to achieve in our work, not only with our films but also with the unique journalists of *Le Papotin* (France 2): creating connections, building bridges, and fostering exchanges between generations, paths, and worlds that initially appear vastly different.

The richness of this approach lies in the attempt to bring these stories back to life—not simply as a reading from a history book, but as a living heritage, a memory that we continue to share. A story that remains relevant.

Les Immortels is about that meeting, both intimate and collective—a way to ensure these invaluable memories don’t fade into mere dates or insignificant facts locked away in a textbook or a history book.

How do you approach filming with a Holocaust survivor? What precautions do you take—or choose not to take—to capture the authenticity of their story while respecting their history and experiences?

The first step is the meeting. The goal is to avoid neutrality or lukewarmness. We strive to create the most intimate setting possible, ideally at the interviewee’s home—a familiar, personal, human environment. Building a relationship is crucial to fostering trust. One of the keys to this process is that the young participants don’t know beforehand who they are going to interview. So, when the door opens, the encounter truly happens for the first time.

We have an essential need for the authenticity of this exchange. Without spontaneity, the testimony doesn't have the same power or depth. It's a gamble we take because, when the chemistry works, the sincerity of the connection is visible, and that's where our approach takes on its full meaning.

Another precaution we take to ensure authenticity while respecting the survivor's history and experiences is a preparatory meeting, which is just between us and the survivor. This meeting allows us to define the framework and expectations. In parallel, we also meet with the young person who will conduct the interview. We prepare them for the themes to be discussed and have an open conversation about what may arise during such an exchange, which will be filmed. This discussion inevitably provides insight into the period.

With all the young participants, we had the honor of being welcomed at the Mémorial de la Shoah by its director, Jacques Fredj, who delivered a highly valuable presentation. This preparatory work was essential for fostering a respectful and enriching encounter.

How has the meeting of such distant generations—Holocaust survivors and today's youth—influenced your approach to filming?

We haven't fundamentally changed our approach. A shoot remains a shoot. The mission remains the same: to capture.

However, we paid particular attention to certain aspects: the unspoken, the silences, the glances, and the emotions.

We drew inspiration from a phrase by Emmanuel Levinas, often cited when we worked on *En Thérapie*: "The face speaks."

A silence, a glance—these can sometimes express much more than words. The unspoken can manifest in a gesture, an expression, or even silence.

Technically, we also focused on lighting. Natural and unembellished, it always reflects the spontaneity and authenticity of the meeting. We owe much to the subtle work of Augustin Barbaroux, who excelled in framing and lighting. Thanks to his choices, the image itself became a witness to these unique exchanges.

What can cinema bring to the transmission of history and the memory of the Holocaust?

Cinema and documentary filmmaking are versatile media. Transmission is one of their virtues. They allow voices and faces to endure. The magic lies in the fact that witnesses do not age—they never disappear. The past remains alive because it continues to concern us.

Of course, Spielberg's initiative and his Shoah memory project paved the way. His vision ensured that testimony lives on. The past is no longer buried or erased. That would be the worst outcome.

The risk we also fight is distortion. Negationism is a violent poison, an abominable crime. Eighty years later, we must preserve these lived experiences. Survivors are like lifelines; their testimonies are safeguards against fake news and the dangers of disinformation. Capturing these stories serves that purpose too: to keep the flame alive.

Are you concerned about how this history is perceived and its future with younger generations?

Absolutely. Young people are drifting away. The Holocaust, like all 20th-century genocides, represents an absolute failure. What we appreciated about the work of the Mémorial de la Shoah is that it also highlights other genocides, such as those of the Armenians or the Tutsi in Rwanda. Every tragedy is part of our shared history. We must keep them alive in our consciousness.

The enemy is ignorance—or worse, indifference. To progress, educate, and prepare for the future, it's imperative to study these tragedies, their contexts, and their mechanisms.

The danger lies in the unhealthy blending of truth and falsehood, amplified by social media, AI, and deepfakes.

As creators, we bear a responsibility: to honor these men, women, and children, preserve their lived experiences, and relay their stories to prevent oblivion, which leads to repetition. That's why we were so proud to create these modules: to transmit and maintain vigilance.