The Camp
Narratives of Internment and Exclusion

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

COLMAN HOGAN
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As so often happens when you are primed for it, chance falls in your lap. In this case a water-cooler comment by a colleague, when learning about this volume and its title: "Is there really a need for another one of those?" Not wishing "to get into it," the subject got changed with a "that's a good question."

And, of course, a good question it is.

In formulating our answer to it we have paused to consider numerous *faits divers*: Médecins Sans Frontières' report that displaced persons worldwide now number 33 million; the ongoing outrage of the Guantánamo Bay detention camp where close to a thousand men have been held since 2002; the mystifying jurisprudence of "unlawful enemy combatants"; the slow and sporadic revelations about the extent and purpose of "CIA renditions" flights and "black camps" in Poland and elsewhere; recent accounts of private enterprise slave labour camps in Italy, Brazil, and China; increasingly frequent revelations that various agents of the West's so-called "war on terror" have routinely breached the Geneva convention on the treatment of prisoners, and casually embraced torture; the growing use of detention camps as the preferred means of policing immigration flows; the recent proposal by Switzerland's largest political party, the Swiss People's Party, of legislation "similar to the Nazi practice of "Sippenhaft"—or kin liability," in which "families of immigrants [would be] deported if their children are convicted of crimes involving violence, drugs or benefit fraud"; the recent arrest and detention of Humboldt University (Berlin) sociologist Andrej Holm, on the basis of terminological similarities in his research papers on urban gentrification and the communiqués of the urban activist *militante gruppe* (mg); revelations that the United States' NSA has routinely monitored domestic telephone calls without warrant; the "Foreign Intelligence Surveillance

Act" recently passed by the US Congress giving US security agencies unprecedented powers to spy on non-US citizens without a warrant; etc.[1]

As disturbing as these recent events are—and they are no less than that—no one of these items is the reason for this volume; nor do they together, in our minds, precisely answer the need articulated by our colleague. Perhaps we can put it more accurately by stating that these all too evident evidences of our present state of insecurity represent merely one tip of the iceberg at which this volume and its contributors have agreed to take aim: the camp. For the increasingly widespread employment in Western democracies of clauses of exception to the writ of *habeas corpus* have effectively made it all the easier to render each of us a detainee.

The figure of the iceberg is not gratuitous: it is, you will recall, nine-tenths invisible and images, moreover, a certain "petrified unrest" ("Das Bild der erstarrten Unruhe"[2]) that Walter Benjamin linked to the catastrophic history of states of emergency, states which have in this millennium increasingly come to define national states everywhere. Question: which nation-state hasn't made recourse to some form of a camp? To answer this admittedly rhetorical question it is probably easier to proceed negatively. First eliminate the various empires of the 20th century (British, French, American, Russian, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese); then, all those states involved in the two world wars, all those having undergone open or undeclared civil war, and all those states ruled by single party regimes; finally, those states without international air flights since, the airport immigration detention camp has become, like global viruses, a fixture of the trans-national movement of peoples. Further, as Chowra Makaremi points out in her chapter, legislative modifications to the border detention laws of Western democracies have added to this seeming "everywhere" of the camp the additional specificity of its non-locality: the "no-man's-land" of statelessness and consequent lack of legal protections characterizing the *sans-papiers* "literally sticks to their feet … [and] follows the detainee wherever he goes." By way of this rhetorical heuristic we arrive at the first salient characteristic of the camp, its ubiquity and its normalized invisibility,

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[1] We are abashed by the paucity of the references we give for the claims made in this paragraph. This embarrassment is germane to our point, to be addressed anon, about the "un-exceptional exceptionality" of our current state of insecurity. Given that the length of the list of references for the claims made in this paragraph is unwieldy, we have opted to place it in a note at the end of this introduction.

[2] Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, 410; *The Archades Project*, 326.

what Giorgio Agamben has called "the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living."[3]

And while we would concur with an imagined retort on the part of the aforementioned colleague—"State of emergency? What are you going on about? Yes there are those dirty deeds, and they really are dirty, don't get me wrong, but apart from that isn't life by and large still the same: weekends at the cottage, a glass of wine with friends, more work than we can handle, students impossible and exceptional ..."—we would concur with one proviso: namely, the fact that the states of exception in which Western democracies find themselves increasingly enmeshed takes place within a horizon of "normalcy," makes our crisis all the more exceptional. Exceptional, since as Hölderlin once remarked, "what is familiar must be learned as well as what is foreign."[4]

As we write here in Toronto (hardly anyone's definition of a terrorist hotspot), our attention is diverted by the sound of yet another after-dark police helicopter flight; and we must ask if you too, reader, have noticed in your town or city what we have noticed: that the frequency of these flights has trebled, if not quadrupled, since 2001. One wonders if the silence of protestation in response to this roar of surveillance, naturalizing it as "white noise," is the tip of a more widespread resignation in which "security" and "progress" have become synonymous. To answer in the affirmative would be to detail another annulation of petrified unrest—for like bones and trees, icebergs grow by concretion—and to recall that in Benjamin's definition "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule ... One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm."[5] And we would like to recall as well John Heartfield's seemingly all-too-familiar "Reservations" (first printed in *Reynold's News*, London, December 1939), with its double horizon and double interrogation: where is that round-up headed, towards what date for whom—and what are we to do about it?

Sixty years ago, the terminus of that round-up must have been, for many people, imaginary; then, one could have legitimately imagined it issued in detention, forced labour, brutality perhaps. It bears recalling that, masquerading as a workers' party (the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*), the Nazis were consummate innovators in harnessing the power of the mass media to their agenda, both at home and abroad. In addition to the staged mass spectacles of the Nuremberg rallies and the 1936

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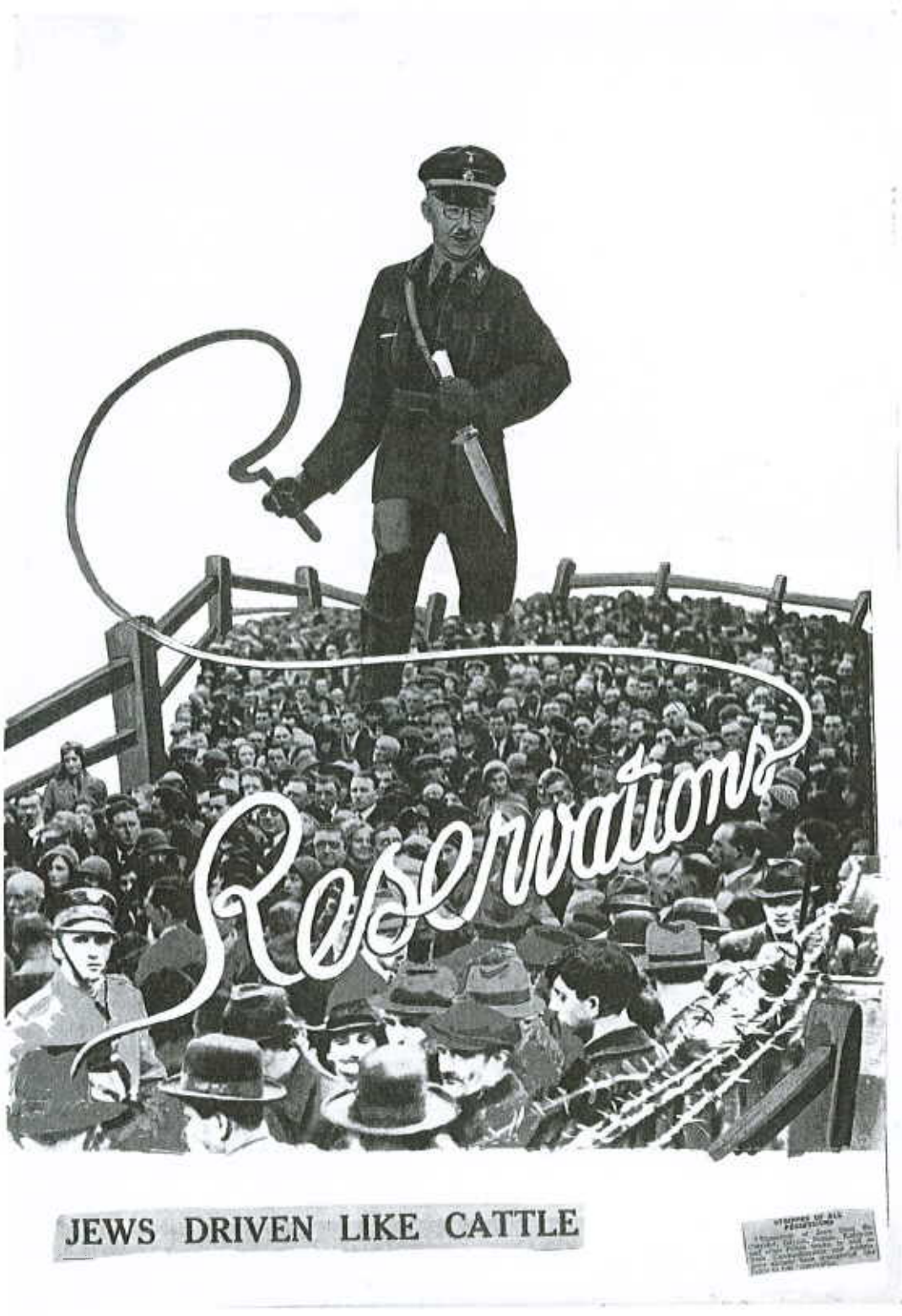
[3] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 166.
[4] Hölderlin, qtd. in Thomas Pfau, "Critical Introduction," 29.
[5] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257.



John Heartfield, "Reservations"

Berlin Olympic Games (refashioned in Riefenstahl's *Olympia* films), carefully fashioned photo-spreads and newsreel films of Dachau concentration camp appeared, with the party's blessings, in the major media of England, France and the US in the 1930s. In such a context, Dachau's "Arbeit Macht Frei" entry gate seemingly meant something almost benign. Heartfield, however, begged to differ. Committed communist, pioneer of photomontage, and "thorn in the side of the Nazis" (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed.), Heartfield viewed the inter-war political crisis in terms of a *Bildersteit*, or war of images. In response to the Nazi manufacture of consent by mass media, he developed an unique visual language to carry out a war of and for the conscience of the nation, producing over 200 anti-Nazi photomontages for *A-I-Z* (*Die Arbeiter-Illustrierte Zeitung*; a workers' illustrated weekly, with a circulation of 500,000 in the early 1930s), first in Berlin, and then from exile in Prague after 1933.

One of the last photomontages Heartfield created for *A-I-Z*, in June 1938 in the context of the Spanish Civil War, is entitled "This is the salvation that they bring!" (*Das ist das Heil, das sie bringen!*). The montage demonstrates how the acid of Heartfield's political satire is directed at not only atrocity, but cynicism. (Benjamin had praised Heartfield several years earlier for "the ability to give his picture a caption that wrenches it from modish commerce and gives it a revolutionary use value."[6]) The image of the montage depicts a colossal skeleton hand, whose five fingers issue in bombers, looming over the skyline of a ruined cityscape in which the corpses of dead children populate the foreground. In the margin of the image, a text from the current issue of the *Berlin Journal for Biology and Race Research*, informs us that:

> The densely populated sections of cities suffer most acutely in air raids. Since these areas are inhabited for the most part by the ragged proletariat, society will thus be rid of these elements. One-ton bombs not only cause death but also very frequently produce madness. People with weak nerves cannot stand such shocks. That makes it possible for us to find out who the neurotics are. Then the only thing that remains is to sterilize such people. Thereby the purity of the race is guaranteed.[7]

When Hitler demanded Heartfield's extradition to Germany in the fall of 1938, Heartfield fled Prague for London where, in December 1939, he mounted an exhibition entitled "One Man's War Against Hitler."

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[6] Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 775.

[7] Qtd. in Selz, "John Heartfield's Photomontages," 13.

Ironically, with war having broken out and all German nationals in the UK subject to internment, Heartfield spent the duration of the Phoney War in three different camps, before being released in mid 1940. In 1942, as a member of the Free League of German Culture, he contributed to an exhibition held in a Regent Street shop front, entitled "Allies Inside Germany," that sought to inform the British public about the atrocities that were taking place in Germany under fascism, and in particular the persecution of Jews, Gypsies, and anti-Nazis. In all these labours, Heartfield's photomontages sought to wrench the depiction of the real of contemporary events from out of the imaginary frame of consumption ("modish commerce"), and to thrust it into the symbolic, where as a tool, or weapon, it could effect change ("revolutionary use value"). Another champion of Heartfield's work, Bertolt Brecht, once described politics as "the art of thinking in other people's heads": like epic theatre, the principal demand of the photomontage is *to think*.[8] Its surplus-demand is that we confront the real.[9]

However, and to return the symbolic specificity of "Reservations," after April 1945 (or rather August 1944, as we will argue), with the Allied photo-documentation and universal dissemination of the actuality of the Nazi concentration camp regime, the twin termini of "Reservations" could no longer be deemed imaginary. In both the historical and Lacanian senses of the word, they are real. And, furthermore, as photographs from Abu Ghraib, documentation from Guantánamo Bay, and knowledge of CIA "renditions" have made evident, "reservations" are not only a blemish on the past, that is now (thankfully) past: they are evidence of the real in its contemporaneity. If "Reservations" disturbs—and we think it should—it is because it confronts us with the double horizon of the real: historical fact and present actuality; unconscionable atrocity and traumatic encounter.

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Each of the contributors to this volume addresses this double horizon of familiarity, this uncanny. Ice-picks in hand, they probe into the invisible nine-tenths of the iceberg of the camp, detailing, specifying, and analyzing

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[8] See Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," 773, 779.

[9] "[T]he Real … a traumatic encounter whose structuring role in the subject's psychic economy forever resists rewriting." Zizek, "Neighbours and Other Monsters," 136.

some portion of its structure, a labour which, we suggest, is also intent on "freeing the frozen sea within us."[10]

The camps upon which this volume's narratives of internment and exclusion take aim are nothing if not diverse: in kind, scope, particularity and situatedness; in sociological and juridical configuration; in texture, iconography, and import. Adjectives of camp specificity embrace a spectrum from extermination, concentration, and torture camps; to detention and internment camps; migration, deportation, and refugee camps; on to holding, disaster-relief, penal, and labour camps. While the geographic range covered here is hardly global—this is, after all, not an encyclopaedia—it is broad: Chile, Rwanda, Canada, the US, Central Europe, Morocco, Algeria, France and Spain, Guantánamo Bay, and international airports. The same may be said for the range of interpretive optics to which each contributor has subjected their "texts" (in themselves multifarious), which run a gamut of philosophic, political, sociological, literary-critical and literary-historical, psychoanalytic, historiographic, or commemorative approaches, oftentimes combining two or more optics, stereoscopically.

And yet these characterizations of the camp run the risk of diffusing what in its origin is a *concentration* into a paratactical series of "identity particularism[s],"[11] and thereby evading both the intent and the motive animating this collection. As Mark Currie and others have stressed, such particularisms, while necessary and responsible articulations of difference, are politically vitiated: "there is no politics of pure particularity."[12] This is not to say that we whole-heartedly and antithetically seek to promulgate a universalist vision of the phenomenon and import of the camp. Rather, it is to explore the imbrication of the particular and the universal as it pertains to the camps, the ways in which, for example, the various utopic fantasies animating the creation and justification for the necessity of camps can be seen to stand in a non-antithetical, dialectical relation to particular and "always local" "enemies."[13] Moreover, to detail, specify, and analyze some portion of the structure of a camp or camps is to engage the very concept of structure—however imperfectly, however provisional—, the

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[10] Franz Kafka, letter to Oskar Pollak, January 27, 1904, *Briefe 1902—1924*, Max Brod, ed. (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1958) 28: " ... ein Buch muß die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns." Our, free translation.

[11] Mark Currie, "Universals," *glossalalia*, 297.

[12] Currie, "Universals," 297.

[13] We have quoted from and adapted Yannis Stavrakakis' phrasing. *Lacan & the Political*, 108.

sine qua non of political action, since to force change is to apply a lever to the human construct of political structures.

Let us further consider this, perhaps utopic, universal question, this question of the universal. It cannot have escaped the attention of the reader that in our present political climate these two adjectives pass for an accusation. Given that our so-called political "leaders" generally *follow* the doxa of democratic liberal capitalism, which they know full well is economically, representationally, and increasingly inegalitarian, it would hardly behoove them to advance this politics as an ideal; and in fact, they generally don't. Instead, they limit themselves to a version of the Candidean "best possible world."[14] As Alain Badiou has argued, politics must reclaim the universal from those who would use its deprecation as a justification for inequality. However, the issue is more complex than it might at first appear. What Badiou unabashedly calls truth or a truth must be distinguished by its capacity to interrupt knowledge (which is a repetition), by its novelty and potential universality, by its open and infinite character, its non-predicability:

> ... there is no law of physical laws ... no unique political formula ... The being of a truth is a generic subset of knowledge, practice, art and so on, but we can't have a unique formula for the subset because it's generic, there is no predicate for it, but you can *anticipate* the subset's totalization not as a *real* totalization but as a *fiction* ... The subject can make the hypothesis of the situation where the truth of which the subject is a local point will have completed its generic totalization. It's always a possibility for the subject to anticipate the totalization of a generic being of that truth. I call the anticipating hypothesis a forcing. The forcing is the powerful fiction of a completed truth.[15]

When Badiou articulates as "a forcing" ("*forçage*") the imaginative anticipation of a completed truth he has in mind a series of paradigmatic examples: Aeschylus (vis-à-vis tragedy), Galileo (vis-à-vis the mathematization of nature), the French Revolution (vis-à-vis the politics of emancipation) and love ("'I will always love you' ... the anticipating hypothesis of the truth of infinite love").[16] Since, as the nomination

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[14] See Alain Badiou, "On Evil." On the question of our current "leadership," see Benjamin's Xth thesis, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 258.

[15] Badiou, "On the Truth-Process."

[16] Badiou, "On the Truth-Process." Lisa Peschel in her chapter in this volume describing a series of cabaret performances in the Terezín ghetto, notes that one cabaret sketch envisages a kind of science-fiction scenario of the future anterior, set so far in the distant future that no one recognizes the meaning of the yellow

implies, forcing entails a kind of power, "the ethic of truth resides entirely in a sort of caution, as far as its powers are concerned"; specifically, how far should the forcing of truth extend; would it include, for example, political totalitarianism?[17] The ethic of truth Badiou articulates envisages modern art, thought and politics as a study of the limits to forcing, and specifically an engagement with what he calls "the unamable," the Real point of resistance to *forçage*, the nothing which cannot be said and which authorizes all that can be said. It is a study of the always finite, always local construction of truth (in imaginative anticipation of its completion) and a reflection on the catastrophe of the non-limited, infinite forcing of truth. In articulating this ethic, Badiou situates himself in a current of thought adopting and extrapolating upon the notion that, in Agamben's parsing of the Lacanian formula, "what could not cease from writing itself was the image of what never ceased from not writing itself."[18]

Here we take cognizance of the fact that the violence of infinite *forçage*—and of the camp as one of its principal instantiations—confronts us with the profoundly intractable, intransigent and refractory, the non-imaginary *Vernichtung* of the *Vernichtungslager*. Looking through the editors' spectacles of overview we cannot but notice a multitude of figures of the Real punctuating, like the ellipses of a stutterer, the very diverse analyses and accounts that chapter this volume. They may take an imaginary form as figures of horror—evoking *jouissance* and our propensity to presentify and eternalize, and thus potentially addressing our "perverse desire to hear tales of suffering" (Neuman). As such they may also act as *aides imaginaries*, for is not our fear of the camp a fear of that place where literally anything could, or does occur. They may take a symbolic form, as signifiers of pure consistency or pure absence or both, as is the case when we become cognizant that in the contemporary biopolitcal order "proliferation of borders" and "patchwork of exceptions" have become isomorphic terms (Little); or, that at the time of the genocide in Rwanda veridical photo-reportage of the events was available but never published (Hron). Or, they may take a properly Real form, "the Real of the illusion ... a pure semblance" as Zizek calls it,[19] in which the sublime blossoms from the banal, as we "outsiders" may say it did for the survivor of the Nazi genocide who, having traveled from Toronto to Belarus to revisit and photograph the homemade bunker cum hole in the ground that

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star; she comments: "If experience is a construct, by restaging Terezín they are re-constructing their experiences and enabling them to mean something different."

[17] Badiou, "On the Truth-Process."

[18] Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 34 ("Threshold").

[19] Zizek, "Trauma," 226.

was his refuge, left "in his eagerness ... his camera in the earth" (Lipszyc). In whatever form they surface (and they are often multiply imbricated), these figures of the Real both bring us into confrontation with a categorical ellipsis whose "originary"[20] locus is the Holocaust, and limn the portrait and the potential of "our (in)capacity for action" (Norridge).

And what of this (in)capacity?

Interestingly, a pamphlet bearing the title *Das Vernichtungslager* was published in Moscow 1944, in German, Hebrew, and English editions.[21] Konstantin Simonow, a Russian journalist of some repute, had followed Soviet troops into Eastern Poland in the summer of 1944, and interviewed survivors of the Majdanek extermination camp on site.[22] In the opening sentence of one of the first mass-published accounts of the Nazi genocidal enterprise, Simonow gestures towards the enormity and sheer impossibility of the particular with which he had come, albeit at second hand, face to face: "The subject I now intend to write about is *too big and terrible* to be grasped in its entirety" (3; emphasis added). Faced with the incomprehensible in fact and in essence, one can only, Simonow suggests, apprehend this or that "tiny detail" (13), or alternately, and "probably the most frightful evidence of what took place there" (11), the various, *almost infinite* figures of absence:

> ... The floor of this hut, twenty or thirty metres wide and long, is completely covered to a height of over two metres with the footwear of those who have been done to death during the past three years. It is hard to

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[20] Our use of "originary" is in the sense given the term by Michel de Certeau, for whom "historians never apprehend origins, but only the successive stages of their loss." *The Writing of History*, 22.

[21] Constantine Simonov, *The Lublin Extermination Camp*. Hereafter parenthetical page numbers refer to this work. Loewy in his article, "The Mother of All Holocaust Films?" refers to "Konstantin Simonow's *Das Vernichtungslager* (Moscow, 1944)," in a footnote on page 202, calling it "The first brochure about Nazi extermination in the camps distributed worldwide in a mass scale (regarding the number of copies)."

[22] Due to the Soviet Army's rapid advance in the summer of 1944, the Majdanek camp was liberated almost "intact," and several thousand, of the over tens of thousands of prisoners, remained on site following the hasty retreat by the SS. In the same year the camp was turned into a NKVD concentration camp for, mostly, Polish non-communist partisans. See the State Museum at Majdanek web site (<http://majdanek.pl/?lng=1>), and the Wikipedia entry on "Majdanek" for these and other details, as well as a photograph published in the London press, October 1944, of a Soviet soldier on the roof of the Majdanek gas chamber, captioned: "The opening of the roof of the gas chamber through which 'Cyclone' crystals were poured": <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Majdanek>.

> say how many pairs of boots and shoes there are here. Perhaps a million, perhaps more. The building seems bursting with its contents, for they bulge and drop out of windows and through the door. In one place the wall gave way under their weight, and part of it fell out together with heaps of boots and shoes.
> Here is every kind of footwear: torn Russian army topboots, Polish army boots, men's shoes, women's shoes, rubber overshoes, and, what is more frightful, tens of thousands of children's footwear: sandals, slippers and tiny shoes of ten-year-old, eight-year-old and even one-year-old children. It is hard to imagine anything more frightful than this scene. Terrible silent witnesses to the death of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children. (11-12)

Here, in this "probably the most frightful," this "what is more frightful," this nothing "more frightful," Simonow confronts the Real and its impossibility, the condition in which, as Lacan formulates it, "nothing exists except against a supposed background of absence."[23] That words fail, and superlatives founder—"Terrible silent witnesses"—is an (in)capacity of the first order.

And yet, despite this failed confrontation Simonow forces the question. In the third and second last paragraphs of his 18 page (photographically illustrated) pamphlet, Simonow tells the tales of two Germans, two "employees" of the camp: Theodor Schollen, aged 41, former butcher in a Berlin meat packing plant, who joined the Nazi party in 1937 and came to Majdanek as an SS *Rottenführer* in July 1942; and Edith Schosteck, aged 21, who came to the camp in the capacity of her one-year obligation to work for the state at age 19, but stayed two years. Upon recounting these stories, in his final paragraph Simonow summarizes:

> And so the last link is fitted into the chain that includes the whole of Germany. At one end of this chain is the butcher Theodor Schollen who tore the teeth out of people's jaws and then pushed the people into the murder chamber, and at the other end is Edith Schosteck who only received the belongings of the victims in payment for her work. These two are at different ends of the chain, but the chain constitutes one whole. (18)

In July 1944, Simonow could hardly have known—was *incapable* of knowing—that the *Sonderkommando* (responsible for the disposal of corpses in the extermination camps, regularly exterminated by the SS to prevent knowledge of the extermination reaching the outside world, and composed in the majority of Jews), were tasked by their overseers with,

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[23] Lacan, *Écrits*, 327.

amongst other horrors, of removing gold teeth from the mouths of freshly gased victims. And yet by virtue of this "tiny detail" and "half-truth" that is the vignette of Theodore Schollen the butcher-dentist, Simonow imaginatively anticipates the "full chain," the totalization of the truth of the Nazi *Vernichtungsregime*. For by naming what cannot be said, Simonow articulates the inner *Spaltung* of language that Agamben has defined as the extimate locus of testimony: "to bear witness is to place oneself in one's own language in the position of those who have lost it, to establish oneself in a living language as if it were dead, or in a dead language as if it were living."[24]

As do each of the chapters in this volume, Simonow's text demonstrates that to engage the dialectic that is (in)capacity is to be animated by potential that always has something outside of it. For writing the camp is both potentially infinite flight from infinite absence, a defense of and against that other, and potentially infinite concatenation—of resistance. This transfinite, double articulation constitutes the fovea centralis of the dialectic that is (in)capacity, the point in which the blind spot of incapacity may become capacity to act. When, in his testimonial *If This Is a Man*, Primo Levi describes his initiation into the order of the *Lager* at Auschwitz with the phrase "here is no why," he articulates a chain of reasoning in which the violent overthrow of the norms of reason was inscribed as the *primum mobile*: "to he that has, will be given; from he that has not, will be taken away":[25]

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[24] Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 161. We thank Jaume Peris Blanes, in this volume, for drawing our attention to this feature of testimonial language. On the inner *Spaltung* of language, the distinction between *onoma* and *logos*, see Agamben, *Idea of Prose*, 105 ("The Idea of the Name"): "According to this idea, the unsayable is not that which is in no way attested to in language, but that which, in language, can only be named. Whereas the sayable is that about which one can speak in defining discourse, even should it finally lack a name of its own. The distinction between the spoken and the unspoken passes, therefore, through the interior of language, dividing it like a sheer-cliffed watershed."

[25] Economists have described this moral inversion in relation to the dynamics of monopolies as the "Matthew principle." Cf. Matthew 25: 29, the parable of the ten talents: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (1947)—the title originally and accurately rendered in English as *If This is a Man*—is in the American edition, which we use, scandalously mistitled *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, 88. Hereafter parenthetical page numbers refer to this work.

> Many people—many nations—can find themselves holding, more or less wittingly, that "every stranger is an enemy." For the most part this conviction lies deep down like some latent infection; it betrays itself only in random, disconnected acts, and does not lie at the base of a system of reason. But when this does come about, when the unspoken dogma becomes the major premise in a syllogism, then at the end of the chain, there is the Lager. Here is a product of a conception of the world carried rigorously to its logical conclusion; so long as the conception subsists, the conclusion remains to threaten us. (9)

In reflection, *in capacity*, the experience of the camp demonstrates that while violence, reasoning, and *forçage* may forge a chain of monstrous conclusion, "invention and creation remain incalculable"[26]—since (in)capacity is always premise.

§

The *Mémorial des martyrs de la déportation* in Paris forces the visitor to reach a vantage point from which the gaze is captured by rather than capturing the river Seine through an opening cancelled by bars. Further into the space there is a crisscrossing of corridors continually intersected by pointed corners without exits. On the walls, engraved, these verses stand out:

> Le jour / Où les peuples / Auront compris qui vous étiez /
> Ils mordront la terre / De chagrin et de remords /
> Ils l'arroseront / De leurs larmes / Et ils vous élèveront / Des temples.

These were the words that Jean Bruller, better known as Vercors (French writer and Résistance fighter, founder of the once clandestine Les Éditions de Minuit), virtually addressed to those deported to the Nazi Camps, appealing, in an apparently paradoxical gesture, to the role of "the peoples" in the construction of testimony.

Vercors's stanzas could not have been more appropriate to a memorial site that—provided the visitor acquiesces—constructs a scenario where the tensions between past and present are mediated through the corporeal reactions of the visitor.

With the *Mémorial des martyrs* we are far from the mimetic attempt to recreate a camp that is the case with the Holocaust Memorial in Washington DC which, the visitor guided through a staged space, attempts to recreate the experience of the past horror. Horror, however, cannot be

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[26] Badiou, "On the Truth-Process."

"recreated," at best it can be vaguely grasped and only through abstraction—an abstraction of time and space. Thus, the pretence of experiencing a surrogate horror backfires, for by filling up the necessary void with "sensations" the import of the original event is dissipated and the memorial intention gives way to the narcissistic fascination of the "here and now."

Conversely, the Paris memorial does not entail the displacement of the former suffering but rather a focus on the unremitting tension between victim and external world. Inviting the visitor to place his body in such angles, allows him to perceive—rather than recreate—the tension between his inner world and what seems to be an imperturbable exterior represented by the incessant flow of the Seine. Undoubtedly this tension implies a questioning of the role of the listener, or the reader for that matter, and the much needed ethical dimension of acknowledging the other's experience. An other that, as this is the case, had been once part of the landscape in which we find ourselves, an environment that points to both the horror and our blindness (for the day will come, "full of remorse we will bite the soil and water it with our tears").

The verses by Vercors, in spite of their premonitory tone, stand as a damnation, and underline the unrelenting difficulty—almost to a point of impossibility—of incarnating the horror lived by others, of making the horror our own. Vercors' stanzas, therefore, acknowledge a dialectical movement between the subject who has suffered the event, and the subject who stands outside the horror. Having to be prepared to understand—in whatever shape this understanding takes; by seeing, listening—, is an element fundamental to the transmission of the event. It is, therefore, the task of the subject who has not experienced the horror to construct narratives that, as temples, provide a place for the word, allowing the testimony to exist.

Testimonial narratives, as suggested by this dynamic, are sites of agency that make present a voice which in its turns demands—as a fundamental condition for its existence—the recognition of a symbolic place freed from the Real; that is, to re-find a place in the social fabric.

In keeping with this, oblivion should be understood not only as a subjective process within the structure of memory but also as a result of an active rejection on the part of the one who has been spared the experience to listen. Memory in tandem with voluntary oblivion conform to a movement that gives structure to the past and constructs the present.

Memory in the case of testimonial literature—and hence of any literary attempt to speak from and about the horror—is permeated with the taste of bitter seeds; remembrance in this case does not lead to daydreams but calls

the listener to action. Vercors' hopeful premonition signals, indeed, the gap between these two subjects, a potential narrator and a volatile listener. A gap already referred to by Walter Benjamin and Sigmund Freud when analyzing the silences of the soldiers returning from the front in WWI.[27] For the first time in Modern Europe, perhaps, something had been lived through that was not possible to inscribe and thus remained unwritten in a potential collective narrative; an event without experience.

Nevertheless, the status of the testimony since then seems to have made an interesting detour, from the impossibility to narrate to what has been perceived as a testimonial excess. One should question, however, whether what it is in circulation are in fact narratives or the visual manipulation of the testimony: images of survivors, images of the sites of horrors digitally reduplicated by the media to the point of indifference.

We argue that is it precisely this detour that has fashioned a trajectory substituting "testimony" in favour of the "victim" and thus perpetuating a confusion by equating what is political with what is personal. This confusion has been exploited by a certain politics of the "recuperation of memory" that promotes a reconstruction of history divested of the political, presented as a mere concatenation of events, inexorable in nature, and whose origin is an impulse toward radical evil.

In resisting this trend it is worth mentioning the existence of the *Kataru Kai,* an association born in Japan during the 1980s and created by survivors of Hiroshima. The very name, which means "association for narrating," indicates the will of its members not only to pass on their experiences orally, but to distance themselves from the concept the *hibakusha*, a term equivalent to "victim." The members of *Kataru Kai* identify themselves under the signifier *ikinokotta mono*, which means "those still alive," and points to their active role as transmitters. In this case, the will to narrate by means of the spoken word entails as well the search for an active listener, in contradistinction to the passive viewer.[28]

The *ikinokotta mono* have actualized as it were both the need and the tension expressed already by Primo Levi and Robert Antelme and which in most cases takes the shape of a recurrent nightmare: the "haemorrhage of expression" felt by the survivor, as Antelme called it, colliding with the negative audition of those who had not been part of the event.[29] The

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[27] Benjamin, *Illuminations*; Freud [1915]; "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death."

[28] Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory.*

[29] Robert Antelme, *The Human Race.* [*L'espèce humaine*. Paris: Gallimard, 1957]; Primo Levi, *Survival In Auschwitz.* [*Si questo è un uomo*, 1947].

question is still of actuality: is there testimony when the ears of the other are clogged?

The trajectory of the testimony is then a complex one, for it implies both the capability of elaborating something that has been captured in the Real on the side of the testimony, and the psychological capacity of a community to receive it, and in doing so to willingly face responsibility as a potential transmitter of narratives. That is, the capacity of the listener to become, in turn, a testimony.

We need, however, to be clear: it is not the media qua evil that has turned the testimony into the victim, for the potential is already there lurking in every testimony that those left "outside" events will be carried away by a phantasmic construction. Whereas narratives make possible a resituating of the testimony in the symbolic order, the massive presence of the image, on the contrary, collapses this very possibility by virtue of turning the experience into spectacle. And spectacles do not call for responsibility. Philippe Mesnard dates this incipient turn from 1968, with the publication of a widely disseminated photograph of a small boy in Biafra whose belly is swolled by hunger. From that point forward, argues Mesnard, the contextualization of limit situations has given way to the universal representation of the victim, what the author calls the construction of the "screen victim" (*La victime écran*), fashioned to evoke compassion rather than to promote political action.[30]

This current situation has made it possible for some authors to speak of the "Time of the victim," in open contrast to the "The Era of the Witness" conceptualized in 1998 by Annette Wieviorka to refer to the explosion of testimonial narratives inaugurated by the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961.[31]

The idea of the present volume was conceived against this background with the aim of inserting itself into the broad but incipient reflection that calls attention to the analysis of the role of the listener in the construction of the testimony.

From this vantage point the question of why yet another volume on concentration camps misses the point, for the question should be why concentrationary narratives are so poorly known. Furthermore, we are of the opinion that the testimonies of liminal situations such as concentration camps—understood, following Agamben's conceptualisation, as primarily juridical constructs—offer the clearest example of narratives resisting official history.

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[30] Mesnard, *La victime écran*.

[31] Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*. [*L'ere du temoin*. Paris: Plon, 1998]; Eliacheff and Soulez Larivière, *Le Temps des victims*.

Moreover, and in as much as they are central to our *Zeitgeist*, reception of the testimonies has become increasingly uncomfortable, perhaps because these narratives do not construct collective identities, but point rather to their weaknesses, to imaginary constructions, and perverse reactions. We believe the introjection of this discomfort to be a necessary element in the analysis of our *unheimlich* and of what has become already "our house," a piece of jouissance that does not cease to be written.

The studies that compose the present volume all share the intent of rescuing the concentrationary literature—most of it produced in recent times—from the avatars of a reception saturated with voices, too many undifferentiated voices, an unbearable noise.

Some of the chapters in this volume refer to the testimonies of the *Shoah* (Baxter, Ionescu, Peschel), focusing mainly on the role of audiences in making the testimony possible. While other chapters focus on lesser known concentrationary experiences (Beggar, Ferandes Dias, Solar, Veggian, Zhou), they do so by detailing the economy of cancelling the testimony and its impact in the present. Another group of chapters manifests a directly political stance by specifying the formation of contemporary concentration camps (Hron, Rivera and Silveira, Makaremi, Sweedler), and the conflicting role of the testimony—or the role of the testimony mediated by literature written either by witnesses themselves or by what Agamben would call "testimonies" (Michonneau, Neuman, Norridge, Peris, Zaza)—in an attempt to respond to the need expressed by Enzo Traverso of building a "historical consciousness" opposed to an "historical memory."[32]

We have also found it important to call attention to the effects of the past, not only on what in history is constructed as present but also through the inscription of this past in the body, directly affecting our senses (Lipszyc, Rubinstein).

It is Claudio Martyniuk, however, who interrogates this presence in its most disturbing voice: by showing the painful intersection of the dead with our bodies, by raising an accusatory finger to blindness and muteness, by allowing us to glimpse, to perceive, to touch and taste a present engraved in the past. Here the voice of Vercors resonates even stronger.

The conception of this volume has generated many dialogues: among the authors themselves, between ourselves as editors, with friends and colleagues, within the members of the Research Group for the Study of the Literature of Concentration Camps (RGSLCC) at Wilfrid Laurier University, out of which forum the original idea took root. These

[32] Enzo Traverso, *A feu et à sang*.

dialogues, as is often the case, have surpassed the limits of this volume and are now a background at work in our need to question the interrelation between testimony and listener and the need to surrender, individuals and society alike, to the—inevitably corporeal—work of mourning.

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Note

On the figures for displaced persons world wide: Médecins Sans Frontières cites this statistic from the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. See their World Refugee Survery, 2005, Table 1. <http://www.refugees.org/uploadedFiles/Investigate/Publications_&_Archives/WRS_Archives/2005/key_statistics.pdf>.

On the private-enterprise slave labour camps see: *The Guardian*, "Scandal of missing Poles shocks Italy," by Barbara McMahon, Sunday September 24, 2006, at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/italy/story/0,,1879762,00.html>; *The Guardian*, "Brazil raid frees ethanol plant slaves," by Vivian Sequera, Wednesday July 4, 2007, at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/worldlatest/story/0,,-6756094,00.html>; *The Guardian*, "Man sentenced to death in Chinese slave scandal," by Mark Tran, July 17, 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/china/story/0,,2128313,00.html>.

On the proposed Swiss legislation see *The Guardian*, "Swiss nationalist deportation plan condemned," by Fred Atwell, Friday August 31, 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/farright/story/0,,2160047,00.html>.

On the arrest of Andrej Holm see *The Guardian*, "Protests over terror arrest of German academic," by Kate Connolly, Tuesday August 21, 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/germany/article/0,,2152984,00.html>.

On the "Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act" see *The Guardian*, "Terror law puts Britons at risk of surveillance by US agents," by Jamie Doward, Sunday August 19, 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/humanrights/story/0,,2151941,00.html>.

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