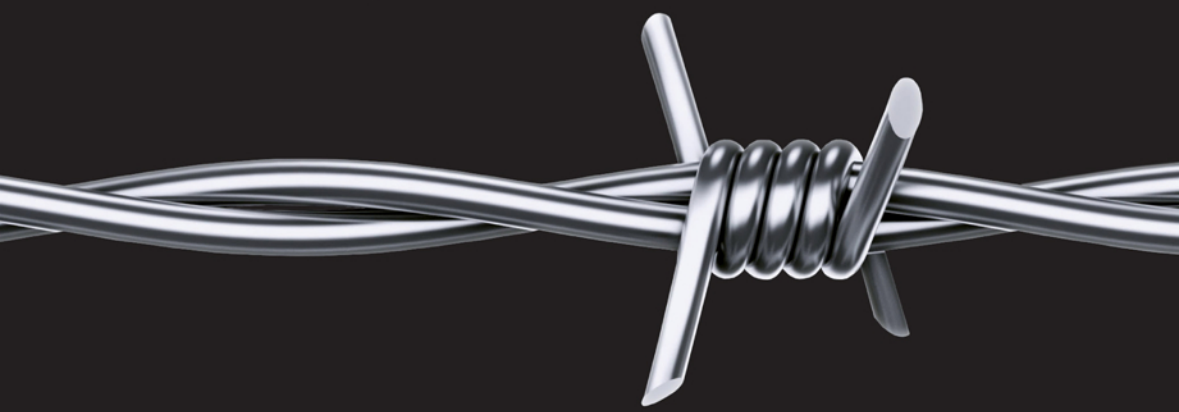
Edited by **Griselda Pollock** and **Max Silverman**

CONCENTRATIONARY IMAGINARIES

tracing totalitarian terror in popular culture



I.B. TAURIS

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Tracing Totalitarian Violence in Popular Culture

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I.B. TAURIS
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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter 6: Seep and Creep

Chapter 7: Haneke and the Camps

Chapter 8: Spec(tac)ularizing 'Campness': *Nikita* and *La Femme Nikita* the Series

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SERIES PREFACE

CONCENTRATIONARY MEMORIES
The Politics of Representation

This mini-series is part of the series *New Encounters: Arts, Cultures and Concepts*. It is the product of a collaborative research project in cultural analysis, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of England, entitled *Concentrationary Memories and the Politics of Representation*. The series consists of the following titles: *Concentrationary Memories, Concentrationary Imaginaries* and *Concentrationary Art*. *Concentrationary Memories* and *Concentrationary Imaginaries* are collections which we have edited and introduced. *Concentrationary Art* presents the first translation into English of two essays by French writer and concentration camp survivor Jean Cayrol, who proposed a new form of art that he named concentrationary art, and two new essays that we have written to accompany them.

The aim of the series is to re-engage with the relations between aesthetics and politics in the aftermath of World War II when the images of the opened concentration camps of Germany and the testimony of their (for the most part) political prisoners/survivors dominated the world's horrified responses. This was a time when the political deportee rather than the racial deportee was the major symbol of victimhood and Buchenwald was more infamous than Auschwitz. The term 'concentrationary' was coined by David Rousset, a returning French political deportee from Buchenwald who wrote an analysis of the system of what he called 'the concentrationary universe'. In 1951 political theorist Hannah Arendt published her substantial analysis of 'evil' in the aftermath of the concentrationary universe, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt showed how the search for total domination has its roots in imperialism,

racism and the development of the nation-state and is then realized in its most egregious form in Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union. Arendt saw this novel form of totalitarianism as a turning point in history as it unleashed the new reality of total domination, not merely of a territory or its resources, but of 'men', and ushered in the epoch in which, in Rousset's words subsequently adopted by Arendt, 'everything is possible'.[1]

Since that time, the growing recognition of the racially-targeted genocide at the heart of Nazism's atrocities and the engagement with the Jewish (and to a lesser extent Romani) experience of attempted annihilation have focused attention on the horror now known by the name 'Holocaust', whose historiography and commemoration raise a number of challenging philosophical and aesthetic questions. Without wishing to displace Holocaust memory and the terrifying issues it raises about the novel but repeated crime of genocide, we aimed in our project to reintroduce the parallel but eclipsed domain of the concentrationary as a prism through which to examine the relations between the politics of total domination with its systematic destruction of the human, and the self-conscious aesthetic practices which identify and resist that persistent threat.

Our purpose, then, was to consider cultural responses, not to the specific event we now know as the Holocaust but to the larger context within which the genocide occurred, namely totalitarian terror, and also to track the initial forms of response to that system of terror of which, as Arendt said, 'the concentration camps are the most consequential institution'.[2] In the first part of our project, we devoted 18 months to the study of one film, *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et brouillard*), made in France in 1955 by Alain Resnais in collaboration with Mauthausen survivor Jean Cayrol and the German socialist composer Hanns Eisler (1898–1962). It was made as a commemorative study of the experience of political deportation. In the process of research for the making of the film, however, the racialized genocide was apparent alongside the system of political terror, yet was not given the prominence that it later acquired. Hence, the film was criticized for insufficiently exposing the genocide of the Jewish and Romani peoples. Our argument resisted this simplification to read its aesthetic structure as the production of a different kind of memory, one which agitates the present to warn us of the continuing threat, not only of genocide but of the experimental elaboration of a system of total domination and systemic dehumanization.

We argued that the film delineated a politics of aesthetic resistance to this system of total domination. In our study of the film, now published as *Concentrationary Cinema* (2011), we adopted the term 'the concentrationary' to frame our research and speculatively established four aspects of the concentrationary.[3] The first is the concentrationary universe itself, that is Rousset's term for the political/industrial/military complex which underpins totalitarian rule; the second, concentrationary art, is the term used by Cayrol to define a new art which will register the novelty of the world and the menaced human in the wake of the camps and, consequently, be equipped to challenge its continued presence and reappearance in the future; the third term, concentrationary memory, extends Resnais and Cayrol's understanding of the persistence of the concentrationary universe in post-war everyday life and registers cultural resistance to and vigilant anxiety around its continued threat in different contexts; the fourth term, concentrationary imaginary, examines the unprocessed and unacknowledged seepage of a totalitarian mentality into the deepest recesses of everyday popular culture.

The first book in this new series, *Concentrationary Memories*, extends the inquiry into art's response to the concentrationary universe. It assumes that what Cayrol termed 'the concentrationary disease' (*la peste concentrationnaire*) which is mentioned at the end of *Night and Fog*, was not simply confined to Nazi Germany and destroyed along with the fall of the Third Reich, but embraces other sites and times, colonialism and Stalinism being perhaps the two most obvious examples. It also assumed that, like Resnais and Cayrol in *Night and Fog*, other artists have created forms of concentrationary art by identifying and resisting radical terror. In contrast to the ethical imperative of testimonial works on the Holocaust and related questions of the representability of such an event, we believe that concentrationary art and concentrationary memory are more concerned with a political aesthetic of representing and resisting the radical presence of the concentrationary universe and its system of total domination. *Concentrationary Memories* thus has as its premise the proposition that the concentrationary plague is not simply confined to one place and one time but, now unleashed on the world, is a permanent presence shadowing modern life, and that memory (and art in general) must be invoked to show this permanent presence of the past haunting the present so that we can read its signs and counter its deformation of the human. *Concentrationary Memories* applies these ideas to different cultural

responses to concentrationary terror in different sites in the post-war period.

In seeking to conjugate the diagnosis of the 'evil' of totalitarianism with modes of critical-aesthetic resistance, *Concentrationary Memories* has to negotiate Theodor Adorno's paradoxical proposition that, although it is barbarity to offer the solace of any aesthetic artefacts to the cultures that 'beat people until the bones break in their bodies' (here Adorno is quoting Sartre), it is nevertheless only in art that the enormity of such suffering can find any voice.[4] Our book seeks to supplement Adorno's perspective with a specific focus on the politics of representational/aesthetic practices. Straddling art, cinema, literature, political theory and philosophy, this focus places the aesthetic in an ethical relation to the political: it is the duty of art to monitor totalitarianism which, first realized in the laboratories of terror of the concentration camps and the gulag, has changed the conditions of all human life. The book includes chapters which, firstly, re-examine the responses by writers, poets, filmmakers, and others involved in the cultural production of memories of the horror of totalitarianism, and, secondly, analyse the works of those who sought to find forms/languages/image systems through which to make sense of and resist this new state which, as Hannah Arendt argued, made 'human beings as human beings superfluous'.[5]

The next title in the series, *Concentrationary Imaginaries*, is based on the second strand of our project. The concentrationary imaginary is the possible realization of Resnais and Cayrol's worst fear, namely that instead of being able to recognize and challenge the continued threat of the concentrationary universe in our midst, our culture has become saturated with its devices and strategies to such an extent that we are largely unaware and ignorant of its presence. In this book we are, therefore, asking whether a failure of concentrationary memory to agitate the present (which it achieved by making us aware of a past that has never passed) could produce an installation of aspects of the totalitarian in the realm of the cultural imaginary. Thus, our major research question, which is the core theme of this book, is as follows: can a concentrationary legacy be located in post-war and contemporary popular culture in the form of an unconscious and politically unprocessed concentrationary imaginary? This book, informed by but extending the work of Giorgio Agamben and Paul Virilio, who suggest that the camp and war are now the matrices of post-war society, considers the cultural forms and

subjectivities that are symptomatic of a concentrationary imaginary. What would be its indices, locations, tropes and affects? The use of the term 'imaginary' in the cultural field refers to two elements. The first is a repertoire of images, tropes and formulae that are, often unconsciously or spontaneously, drawn upon in representation. The second is the manner in which a cultural apparatus, relying on processes of identification and misrecognition to lure us as participant spectators and ideologically-interpellated readers, structures subjectivity through the operation of fantasy.

Our question could thus be reformulated as follows: has anything of the historical and political event of the concentrationary universe seeped into the cultural imaginary, the repertoire of images, self-understandings and cultural representations that we encounter through cultural forms? Does anything of the totalitarian mind-set inform elements of contemporary culture, without being fully acknowledged as such? Has the totalitarian mind-set been normalized by narratives, styles, images, attitudes and tropes so that, without the active work of warning performed by an agitating, ever-anxious and haunting memory of a past (one that was simply the beginning of a new terror that could and has been repeated), it has become an integrated part of our cultural repertoire? Refashioned by changing times, is this mind-set now an unmarked presence of an egregious historical event that we should remember to condemn, not use to entertain? Has the concentrationary passed from the political real into culture? Unhinged from its specific historical origins in Nazi camps and Stalinist gulags, does the concentrationary shape the contemporary cultural imaginary like a political unconscious, normalizing narratives of military superpowers enslaving and annihilating its subjected and dispensable others, and accustoming us to unspeakable violence and suffering where arbitrary extinction is no longer murder but wasting, or, worse, just business? Are its once singular images and objects now iconic tropes that glamorize what Susan Sontag called 'fascinating fascism'? Is our cinematic culture of spectacular violence – as opposed to cultural forms which present violence politically – the iterating imprint on our cultural unconscious of what we were once shown in order to shock and warn us that this must never happen again? Is there a 'concentrationary imaginary' in popular cultural forms that exhibits an unconscious assimilation of totalitarian modes of violence through which, as Arendt argues, human beings qua human beings are

rendered superfluous? Does this imaginary operate through fantasies of total domination via our specular identification as consumers of films, games and other cultural practices?

These are difficult questions that we wish to raise as a way of plotting a speculative field of enquiry that in turn has no clear signposts. As an imaginary, the concentrationary does not announce itself as such but, nevertheless, may inhabit other spaces. Is it, however, too labile and non-specific? Does the concept merely colonize other existing sites? How is it different from, yet related to, the colonial imaginary, the imaginaries of current urban cultures, of crime and the city, or political wars on terror, and so forth? What are the signs of 'concentrationariness' that may piggyback on other formations? The book addresses these questions by exploring the *concentrationary imaginary* within the wider representation of violence, terror, and criminality. It asks whether a cultural politics of resistance to this imaginary is possible. Is the very act of identifying such a possibility as the *concentrationary imaginary* already a resistance that may reveal contradictions within it? The book investigates the legacies of the concentrationary in diverse forms of contemporary culture, from literature to cinema and video games, and explores the notion of cultural resistance to the threat they present.

The third book in the series, *Concentrationary Art*, presents the ideas of Jean Cayrol on 'concentrationary art' to an English-speaking audience for the first time and is accompanied by two new essays by the authors. Cayrol was a surrealist poet and political deportee to Mauthausen concentration camp. He wrote the narrated script for Resnais's *Night and Fog*, and also collaborated with Resnais on his 1963 film *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour*. In 1950 he published a book called *Lazare parmi nous*. It is divided into two parts, 'Les Rêves lazaréens' and 'Pour un romanesque lazaréen' (which had themselves previously been published separately). 'Pour un romanesque lazaréen' was then reprinted as 'De la vie à la mort' to accompany the publication of Cayrol's commentary for *Night and Fog* in 1997. In 2007 a complete collection of Cayrol's writings on the Lazarean was published by Editions du Seuil under the title *Jean Cayrol: Œuvre lazaréenne*. None of Cayrol's work on the Lazarean has ever been translated into English. Given the importance of Cayrol's thinking on the development of post-war culture in France, and the centrality of his ideas on concentrationary art to our own thinking about a political aesthetic relating to art and horror in the post-war period, we believe that this book

will be essential reading for an English-speaking public with an interest in these areas.

Cayrol uses the Christian figure of a man resurrected miraculously from the dead, Lazarus, as the symbol of the new art after the camps. This art, that he termed both 'concentrationary art' and 'Lazarean art', will show human life shocked out of its familiar contours through revealing the 'invisible thread' that ties it to the presence of death, humanity haunted by its inhuman double, the known always shadowed by the unknowable. Lazarean art, for Cayrol, is therefore founded on a 'doubling' (and troubling) effect to cast us into a state of the 'in-between'. Its duty is to alert us (the unbelieving, those who want to re-establish the comfort of 'ordinary life') to a radically altered reality in which the concentrationary cannot be confined to the past but is still present today in different forms and under different guises. Concentrationary art must be able to read the signs of the normalization of the concentrationary universe in everyday life in order to make us constantly vigilant of its ruses. This is a political aesthetic employing the techniques of defamiliarization to allow us to read the terror in our midst.

Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman
Leeds

INTRODUCTION

A CONCENTRATIONARY IMAGINARY?

Griselda Pollock

At the Fourteenth International Congress of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA), held on 2–8 August 1936 in the Bohemian spa town of Marienbad, a young French analyst gave a paper. The only trace is its title – 'The Looking-Glass Phase' – and its author – J. Lacan (Paris) – appearing in the conference proceedings summarized in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*.[1] Overstepping his allocated time, J. Lacan was rudely interrupted by his session's chair, Ernest Jones. Lacan promptly left the conference, taking the opportunity to visit the infamous Berlin Olympic Games (1–16 August), held under the auspices of the Third Reich and turned into one of the most notorious works of fascist cinema by Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympiad* (1936).

On 17 July 1949, the Sixteenth International Congress of the IPA assembled in Zurich. Now better-known, Lacan delivered another 'version' of the earlier paper. Published in the *Revue française de psychanalyse* 4 (1949), it has become the classic articulation of the Lacanian notion of the Imaginary: 'Le Stade du miroir'. Despite its aim to posit a Kleinian *position* (that remains operative throughout psychological life) rather than a Freudian *phase* (through which the subject should pass successively), the French *stade* (stage) has been translated as 'The Mirror Phase'.[2]

Towards the end of the 1949 text – and I am quoting the 1977 English translation – Lacan writes:

> At the culmination of the historical effort of a society to refuse to recognize that it has any function other than the utilitarian one, and in the anxiety of the individual confronting the '*concentrational*' form of the social bond that seems to arise to crown this effort, existentialism must be judged by the explanations it gives of the subjective impasses that have indeed resulted from it: a freedom that is never more authentic than when it is within the walls of a prison; a demand for commitment, expressing the impotence of a pure consciousness to master any situation; a voyeuristic sadistic idealization of the sexual relation; a personality that realizes itself only in suicide; a consciousness of the other that can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder.[3] (my emphasis)

In the French original, the key adjective is *concentrationnaire*: 'Au bout de l'entreprise historique d'une société pour ne plus se reconnaître d'autre fonction qu'utilitaire, et dans l'angoisse de l'individu devant la forme *concentrationnaire* du lien. . . '[4] In translating this passage for the English publication of Lacan's selected writings in 1977, Alan Sheridan knew of no English equivalent for the French adjective *concentrationnaire*. He created 'concentrational', leaving it uneasily in quotation marks. Sheridan does acknowledge, however, in a translator's footnote: '"*Concentrationnaire*", an adjective coined after World War II. . . to describe the life of the concentration camp [sic]. In the hands of certain writers it became, by extension, applicable to many aspects of "modern" life.'[5]

There it was, all the time, a thesis about the concentrationary and the Imaginary. This book takes up such a thesis to offer some preliminary explorations of a concentrationary imaginary.

The historical brackets of Lacan's interventions – 1936 and 1949 – are significant as they straddle the emergence and the defeat of the Third Reich after a devastating world war and industrial genocide. They also confirm the post-war literary and political dissemination of the term *concentrationnaire* in France.

In his critique of Existentialism's failing to grasp the 'subjective impasses' created by the totalitarian legacy in modern society, Lacan identifies as a *concentrationary* social nexus the effects of an entire society dominated by only utilitarian purposes. He is not recalling the actual experiences the prisoners reported, but rather pointing to what is happening outside or beyond the camp at the level of the social system.

Lacan thus designates a contemporary bond(age) in which people live in anguish, feeling themselves reduced to being mere cogs in an economic machine or mere functions in a political regime, there only to be used, and used up, by the indifferent calculus of both capitalist or socialist systems. It is this widespread, atomizing, de-socializing nexus that Lacan chooses to characterize as *concentrationary*.[6] Occurring in a psychoanalytical text, Lacan asserts that this plays out in psychological – imaginary – dispositions that structure potential narratives mirroring these 'subjective impasses':

> A freedom that is never more authentic than when it is within the walls of a prison; a demand for commitment, expressing the impotence of a pure consciousness to master any situation; a voyeuristic sadistic idealization of the sexual relation; a personality that realizes itself only in suicide; a consciousness of the other that can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder.

Coined by French political prisoners who returned to France from their ordeal in such German concentration camps as Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen and Ravensbrück, whither they had been sent for their *political* resistance to the Nazi occupation of France after 1940, the adjective *concentrationnaire* was introduced by Trotskyist writer and political deportee to Buchenwald David Rousset (1912–97) in the title of his book *L'Univers concentrationnaire* (1946) – 'the concentrationary universe'. Using his own blend of surrealism and bitter political irony, Rousset uncovered the *logic* of the concentration camps by producing a political anatomy of the camps as a system that not only operated inside the barbed wire but also eviscerated the political culture of the surrounding society that used the camps as their instrument. Rousset thus identified the system as the novel and terrifying *anti-political* political experiment in the total destruction of humanity in which the unimaginable became the fact that 'everything is possible'.[7] Obviously the inmates of such camps were defenceless; but Rousset is also arguing that their existence is part of a wider effect before which all become defenceless against the system.

In the research project *Concentrationary Memory: The Politics of Representation*, of which this book is the third publication, Max Silverman and I are translating *concentrationnaire* as 'concentrationary', following the

rule by which Lacan's *l'Imaginaire* becomes 'the Imaginary'.[8] Benjamin Hannavy Cousen, one of the authors writing in this book (see Chapter 6), first drew my attention to the term *concentrationary* in Lacan's text on the mirror phase that I had formerly read only for its psychoanalytical theory of the Imaginary. In the most speculative strand of this project, Benjamin Hannavy Cousen and I set out into uncharted waters to test a hypothesis that recovers the implied connection in Lacan's text by posing this question: Is there a *concentrationary imaginary* in contemporary culture? I shall return to Lacan and the Imaginary (capitalized) at the end of this introduction. Initially, I need to unpack the concept of the *concentrationary*.[9]

Chance beginnings at the movies

The original question arose while I was watching a movie of which I did not know the title or the plot. There was a scene of prisoners of some kind, living in some extra-legal space outside normal society, who were controlled and manipulated by a group clearly acting outside the law or beyond it while officially endorsed to do so. It was a world apart, yet embedded in a system. The lead character was a former drug addict sentenced to death for killing a police officer. She was to die by lethal injection. Her death was, however, faked. When she awoke, appalled at having been tricked, she was offered a deal. She could die for real or agree to train as a secret assassin. For this she would learn to be able to kill without feeling. She would be refashioned to be able to pass as a sophisticated and attractive professional woman keeping secret her real job.

The film turned out to be *Point of No Return* (1993, John Badham), also known as *The Assassin*, an American remake of Luc Besson's action thriller *Nikita*, also known as *La Femme Nikita* (1990). In the final chapter of this book Brenda Hollweg develops a 'concentrationary' reading of the films and their various TV spinoffs, elaborating a critical apparatus for this genre of political thriller and its gender politics.

Both Besson's and Badham's films are thrillers about turning a violent miscreant and condemned murderer into a secret, trained, extra-legal government killer who will in turn be liquidated once any signs of resistance or any feelings emerge. Nothing overtly links this plot to the historical site of SS-run concentration camps. Yet it was from watching this film that I began to wonder how many elements, or rather the logics of possibilities beyond normal limits, which had originated in that

historical experiment and its terror, wander and return, disguised through a variety of genres and narratives. What would be the implications of such recyclings? How many movies, having no intention to invoke a historical reference or to make a representation of the historical actuality, have as their premise an echo or trace of the logic of 'the concentrationary universe' where, as Rousset remarked, 'everything is possible' and, as Hannah Arendt would argue (see below), the human *qua* human is superfluous? What is happening to us if a specific and abhorrent historical event has generated its own place in the cultural imaginary as an unmarked resource for cinema or video games that 'imaginatively' play out as thrillers, science fiction or futuristic scenarios what was once a dire political reality?

The possibility of a *concentrationary imaginary* – the 'concentrationary social nexus' and its subjective impasses finding expression in cultural modes, images, narratives as a logic at work in contemporary cultural forms reshaping if not deforming our subjectivities as social and political beings – thus generates a raft of questions. Are we to understand that 'the concentrationary universe' has seeped beyond its historical confines into the cultural imaginary, shaping the repertory of images, self-understanding and cultural representations that we encounter through cinema or video games? Does a totalitarian mindset inform contemporary cultural forms without being acknowledged as such, thus not warning us, but entertaining and enthralling us? Have aspects of a political experiment in absolute domination been normalized into narratives, plots, styles, iconographies, attitudes or tropes and assimilated into conventional repertoires so that we no longer revolt against their representation of the world? Can aspects of the increasing obsessions with and spectacular representations of violence and killing, with war as the norm, in media culture be related to an unacknowledged concentrationary legacy that redefines core issues such as death and dying, human value and valuelessness?

A once political reality has morphed into imaginative scenarios, generating newly compelling, or recycling borrowed iconographies. It may be, as Hannavy Cousen argues in this volume, that a concentrationary imaginary is identifiable primarily *in the negative*. That is to say, the lack of conscious memory combined with borrowed signs that might continuously warn of its menace mark the danger. In its imaginary form, Hannavy Cousen finds the *concentrationary* inhabiting, unannounced, many spaces appearing in several guises. In the theorization of the

concentrationary imaginary across a range of films – here the example he studies is Martin Scorsese's film *Shutter Island* (2010) – he has produced a taxonomy of differing images – indexical, citational, amnesiac – and different modalities – seep and creep – by which traces of a concentrationary archive are mobilized, surface or inform, each with distinctive narrative and ideological effects as well as affects. Hannavy Cousen's work is the most systematic and insightful work on the concentrationary imaginary in post-war cinema to date.[10]

In addition to acknowledging that there are still instances of the concentrationary in changing political realizations, it is now crucial to recognize its virtual work in imagination and in imaginary forms that anaesthetize us to its presence while shaping our subjectivities in its image. Unhinged from the space and time of its historical origins in Hitler's camps and Stalin's Gulags, the concentrationary may have infiltrated its logics into cultural fantasy, becoming a sort of *apolitical* unconscious – the reference here is to Fredric Jameson's notion of a political unconscious – normalizing narratives of militarized superpowers enslaving or 'erasing' subjected peoples and dispensable others, accustoming us to unspeakable violence towards and the suffering of any given underclass, race or gender, where arbitrary disposal is no longer murder, but erasing, wasting, business.[11] At times, as we shall also show, the concentrationary imaginary may dress itself up in kitsch glamour distorting our responses to death and dying, borrowed from the unexpected return and fetishized recasting of icons and styles of what Susan Sontag denounced in 1975 as 'fascinating fascism'.[12]

The concentrationary universe

Three key points can be identified in the political, philosophical and sociological literature on the concentrationary: the destruction of the political community, the logic of dehumanization, and the creation of an order of terror that functions as a space-time of a new kind of power.

Drawing on Rousset's literary political text in her magisterial study *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951, Hannah Arendt outlines her classic argument that the camp is a key instrument in the practice of total domination:

> The concentration and extermination camps of totalitarian regimes serve as the laboratories in which the fundamental belief that

> everything is possible is being verified. Total domination which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all humanity were just one individual is only possible if each and every person is reduced to a never changing identity of reactions so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other. The problem is to fabricate something that does not exist, namely as a kind of human species resembling other animal species whose only 'freedom' would consist in 'preserving the species'. Totalitarian domination attempts to achieve this through . . . absolute terror in the camps.[13]

The concentrationary universe is thus an experimental, if ultimately defeated but never erased, locus for an anti-political project to destroy the political, of which genocide is but one of its extreme faces. The political is linked for Arendt to the quality of action: agency and choice: 'The camps are meant not only to exterminate people and degrade human beings, but they also serve the ghastly experiment of eliminating under scientifically controlled conditions, spontaneity itself as an expression of human behaviour and transforming human personality into a mere thing, something that even animals are not.'[14] If we are to seek signs of the concentrationary in our cultural imaginary, it will be at this level of any normalization of this depoliticized, dehumanizing vision of a de-socialized world.

Writing in the 1990s, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben identified the juridical-political structure that made the concentrationary universe possible. He argues that the historical camps were symptoms and a realization of a *logic* that is to be understood as a *nomos* – model – of all modernity, which also involves an assault on the human condition:

> The camp is merely the place in which the most absolute *conditio inhumana* [inhuman/nonhuman condition] that has ever existed on earth was realized: this is what counts in the last analysis, for the victims as for those who come after. Here we will deliberately follow an inverse line of enquiry. Instead of deducing the definition of the camp from the events that took place, we will ask: What is a camp, what is its juridico-political structure, that such events could take place there? This will lead us to regard the camp not as an historical fact and an anomaly belonging to the past (even if still verifiable)

> but in some way as the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living.[15]

From another angle, that of the political sociologist, the key issue is that of the camp *qua* camp as 'universe of power'. In his aptly named book, *The Order of Terror*, however, Wolfgang Sofsky reminds us that:

> [A]bsolute power should not be confused with either asymmetrical relations of exchange or with punitive power. Nor should it be confused with modern disciplinary power or with relations founded on obedience. It is not based on exploitation, sanction or legitimacy but on terror, organization and excessive violence.[16]

Understanding the camp structurally as a system of terror, Sofsky argues, furthermore, that the concentrationary operates as both a separated *space* of boundaries, zones, hierarchies and as 'a structuring of *time* and a reconfiguration of sociality *in the negative* all structured through the power to kill'.[17] (my emphasis)

Then Sofsky adds three key factors. The concentrationary order of terror cannot be explained by the motivations or rationales of the perpetrators and thus explained away with their demise or defeat. It is also a closed system: a colony of terror at the far end of the social world. Finally, organized terror takes place in situations of action and suffering:

> It targets social situations in which human beings live and function. Here, it breaks their resistance, herds them together and shreds social ties; it dissolves action; it devastates life. Any investigation of the camps is short-sighted and flawed if it fails to include the power *that micrologically invades the structures of space and time, sociality and identity*.[18] (my emphasis)

Thus Sofsky concludes his 'thick description' of the order of terror:

> The destruction of sociality entails the negation of the human relation to the self. In the concentration camp, the social process of individuation is reversed. The regime of violence and misery obliterates individual space, ravages the sense of time and casts

> the human being into a permanent condition of dying. Organized terror reduces social life, the foundation of any self humanhood, below the animal minimum . . . It seizes hold of bodies – not to turn gesture and movement into a blind automaton, but gradually to extinguish all manifestations of life.[19]

From his analysis of the architecture of totalitarian militarism – the bunker in particular – cultural philosopher and film theorist Paul Virilio has suggested that totalitarianism extends beyond the camp. The form it inhabits is war, which is now one of the other matrices of contemporary society.[20] In Chapter 3 in this volume, Ian James explains this supplementary logic in the post-war thinking of Paul Virilio as part of the extended exploration of the effects of the militarization of culture and reminds us, therefore, of the wide range of post-war thinkers alert to the signs of new logics of social and political life in the wake of the totalitarian experiments.

Such theorizations of the concentrationary as experiment in absolute domination, as matrix of our present social order, and as a spatialization/temporalization of an order of terror, all aimed at the destruction of the social, political, moral and embodied subject, identify signposts for an analysis of the concentrationary as it becomes an imaginary informing and shaping narratives, images, cultural horizons. It is to systems and logics on the one hand, and to subjective effects on the other, that we look in order to discern the tracing of the concentrationary universe into images, narratives, scenarios, situations and genres that performatively install a concentrationary imaginary without the outward and visible signs of a once-historical realization.

Imaginary conflation

At this point, we need to make some distinctions and clarify several confusions. The concentrationary defines the particularity of the system of concentration camps. It is not a synonym for what is now conflated under the overly broad understanding of the term 'the Holocaust'. Emerging as a necessary linguistic label that would make visible the specificity of racialized genocide – initially obscured by being overlaid by the many persecutions and atrocities performed by the Third Reich – the term Holocaust now falls into the opposite abyss of covering every terror

and horror of that regime, including the persecution of the mentally and physically disabled, the religiously dissident, the socially undesirable, and the sexually diverse.[21]

The Holocaust thus becomes identified with images of what was actually the *concentrationary* universe. This is a result of the fluke of history, namely which armies liberated which sites. In 1945, the Allies discovered and liberated German concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Ravensbrück, Mauthausen and thousands of others. They made films that aimed to shock and circulated horrific photographs to indict the SS and Nazism. These images, these place names, became notorious in the Anglo-American and Western European world. They were far better known than the actual sites of racialized mass murder of European Jewry that took place at specially designed and short-lived death factories, such as Treblinka, Sobibor, Chełmno, Bełżec, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and briefly Majdanek – all in Poland. The first four sites were built in 1941–2 as dedicated extermination camps under *Operation Reinhard* following the Wannsee Conference (20 January 1942) that minuted the Final Solution, namely the proposed mass destruction of 11 million Jewish people throughout Europe. These Reinhard death camps were, however, destroyed in 1943 as the tide of the war turned against Germany after the defeat at Stalingrad (2 February 1943) and the Red Army began its advance into Poland and Germany from the East.[22] Until Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985) cinematically retraced the journey to these now forested, farmed over, almost obliterated sites, and tracked down the handful of survivors of the death camps, and interviewed the bystanders, the understanding of the Holocaust was often projected onto the images made by the Allies in 1945 from a different set of places that at least has a visible record: the concentration camps of Germany.[23]

In contrast to the four dedicated and two other death factories, hidden in Poland, there were by 1945 over 10,000 concentration camps in Germany alone. Initiated at the very beginning of the Third Reich in 1933 – Dachau was the first to be built – these camps were the foundational instrument of the system of dominative domestic and imperializing terror although their death toll was only 1.2 million (out of the 1.8 million sent to concentration camps between 1933 and 1945) compared to 3 million killed in the death camps, while 3 to 4 million Jews and Romanies (Roma) died by direct killing by shooting during the

invasion of the Soviet territories in June 1941 or in the ghettoes of disease and starvation.

At the level of the cultural imaginary – what we remember and carry in our heads – there is thus a conflation of the genocidal Final Solution targeting Jewish and Romany populations in Europe enacted in a few, short-lived and largely obliterated sites of mass murder in Poland, with this vast network of concentration camps across Germany. This is in part the result of the powerful effect of the photographic and cinematic documentation by the liberating Allies through which 'the concentration camp' (fences, barbed wire, watch towers, shaven prisoners in striped uniforms, unburied and emaciated corpses) has, therefore, become the iconic signifier of both general Nazi atrocity and its racialized genocide despite the fact that the sites of the two are distinct. Named the *Holocaust* (translating from the Greek as 'burnt whole'), or, in the Jewish world, as *Ha'Shoah* (the destruction), the historical event of an industrialized and racialized genocide has been increasingly misrepresented through images of concentration camps from all across Germany and its occupied zones. This conflation is so widespread that it has produced a distorting identification of the concentration camp and Jewish experience under Nazism. Two anecdotes will underline this tendency in the cultural imaginary that effectively makes it less likely for us to discern the specificity of the concentrationary *per se* that we need to recognize in order to analyse its potential dissemination into popular culture.[24]

In an article about Peter Weiss (1916–82), the German-born Swedish painter, filmmaker and playwright known for his monumental novel *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* (*The Aesthetics of Resistance*, 1975–81) and his play *Die Ermittlung* (*The Investigation*, 1965) about the Auschwitz Trials in Frankfurt in 1964, I read that in his autobiographical novel *Der Fluchtpunkt* (*The Vanishing Point*, 1961), Weiss writes of the epiphanic moment at the cinema for him as a German-born Jewish artist who escaped the destiny he suddenly confronts in images on the screen. Weiss records that he watched a screening of the infamous footage made by the British army of the liberation of the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen in April 1945. The footage horrifically shows bulldozers driving piles of already disintegrating corpses into mass graves.

What have scenes of this concentration camp in Germany, filmed by the Allies in the aftermath of liberation to shock the German people