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The Lacanian Review

STILL LIFE?

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**POLITICS: WE ARE
STILL ALIVE?**

Discourses, as Lacan has shown, can create social bonds, but they can also kill, as the ZADIG Forum in Brussels, Discourses That Kill, demonstrated. Furthermore, historical discourses that transmit knowledge about the “greatest crime” of the 20th century can be grayed through brouillage, an intentional distortion of discourse that makes the violence of the past seem banal, as Guy Briole explains. This subtle yet forceful banalization, this prolonged murder, supports Holocaust deniers and the Ur-fascism of today. As Briole illustrates, we need to remember the extreme manifestations of the hate and the murders of the past to recognize today’s manifestations. Though there are differences “between the populisms of the 1930s, vertical, centered on the unique leader, with a strong doctrine, and the new populisms supported by horizontal movements, connected by Facebook pages, polymorphic, atomized,” as Éric Laurent makes clear, they are both united by a hatred of the jouissance of the other.

Both of the papers in this section were written before Covid-19 changed the twenty-first century, but they offer insights into this changing sociopolitical landscape. In his text, the closing speech of the ZADIG Forum on Love and Hate for Europe, in Milan in 2019, Laurent further asserts that “populisms are united by the hatred of the ‘elite’ [...] or by the hatred of exchangeable objects such as the Jew or migrant.” Now, we have a common object to fight, to hate, which creates a surreal illusion of “universal love,” that also “infect[s]” us, as Gustavo Dessal points out in Lacanian Review Online, 29 March, and hatred is beginning to rear its head in terms of territorialization of medical supplies, and inequities in medical treatment. So although uniting to show our gratitude to frontline workers around the world is not a bad thing, it is also useful to remember Lacan’s hainamoration and the importance of realizing the “primacy of hatred,” because, as Laurent says, it “is above all a de-idealization of love as the primary affect.” And giving up on “the social bond under the disguised form of love is not the same as being fascinated by the power of hatred. It is to renounce the failure of love in order to rely on desire only.”

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— POLITICS: WE ARE STILL ALIVE? —

A GRAY DISCOURSE

Guy Briole

In his 1964 Seminar, Jacques Lacan underlined the fact that no meaning given to history whatsoever can justify the horror of the Holocaust or the “offering to obscure gods of an object of sacrifice.”¹ Who can possibly resist this “monstrous spell?” “Ignorance, indifference, an averting of the eyes may explain beneath what veil this mystery still remains hidden.” And Lacan adds that this is precisely the point toward which we must turn a courageous gaze.

Related to the greatest crime of all times, the Shoah, the duty of remembrance today has become an imperative, which includes a responsibility to continue to transmit this knowledge. Of paramount importance is the ability to hand down some knowledge about the inconceivable horror which left its mark on the middle of the twentieth century; the objective being to utterly reject any banalization of the concentration camps and to talk about what will forever be a topical issue: Auschwitz. The unjustifiable dimension of concentration camps is the absolute arbitrariness with which it was decided that a particular group of people was useless, on the basis of a discriminating feature—being born a Jew—and

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1. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. A. Sheridan (New York/London: Norton, 1978), 275.

was methodically exterminated. The signifier *concentration* will never cover that of *extermination*.

Brouillage and Gray Discourse²

On 22 April 2000, a seminar on Lacanian politics took place at the École de la Cause Freudienne in Paris. Organized by Jacques-Alain Miller, it was on the subject of "La destruction des juifs d'Europe: 1939-1945 (The Destruction of European Jews: 1939-1945)." I suggested a discursive term, which is perhaps even more perceptible today, in the discourses of the Holocaust deniers and collaborators: *brouillage*. The French word *brouillage* means obstruction of communications, distortion and interference and, at the same time, conveys the idea of a discourse that has been distorted with a distinct intention and objective, a discourse that has been hacked or jammed.³

With this jamming or hacking (*brouillage*), this scrambling of discourse, it is not a question of keeping quiet about what took place in the camps or about denying the Holocaust and all that went with it, nor is it a question of concealing those who took part in it, whether actively or passively. Quite the contrary, it is a question of talking, of writing about these issues, but all the while disrupting the signals: emitting a signal, while making a different signal resonate, one close to the original but different by the slightest degree. One then has to carry on tirelessly with this task and, gradually, make the distortion effective, while concealing the semantic sleight of hand.

This jamming (*brouillage*) consists in conveying the intended signal in the message, but in a way that goes unnoticed. In its turn, this signal can be hacked by another signal that is close to it. Yet, this signal can sometimes arrive with a stream of other signals that overload the receiver or that blend with other background noises, making it hard to distinguish. This jamming (*brouillage*) makes the discourse dull gray.⁴

2. TN: The French term *brouillage*, like the English term "jamming," refers to the use of interference to block or otherwise distort a radio signal. The French term evokes the word *brouillard*, "fog," hence the link to a gray discourse.
3. TN: Although the English term *jamming* most often refers to the blocking of a signal, like its French equivalent, it can also be used in both these senses, as in the following extract from a Wikipedia entry on "Radar jamming and deception" [*Brouillage et deception radar* in French] shows: "Radar jamming and deception is a form of electronic countermeasures that intentionally sends out radio frequency signals to interfere with the operation of radar by saturating its receiver with noise or false information. Concepts [*sic*] that blanket the radar with signals so its display cannot be read are normally known as jamming, while systems that produce confusing or contradictory signals are known as deception, but it is also common for all such systems to be referred to as jamming."
4. Cf. Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Voyage to the End of the Night* (New York: New Directions, 1934).

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The question of responsibility is often a theme in this type of discourse. It is presented in terms of dilution and dispersion, leaving it to history to re-establish the truth! Thus, denial marks the testimony that is pronounced with a professed desire for knowledge. It then turns out to be nothing but a justification of the unjustifiable. The facts are acknowledged but are always made a matter of perspective with respect to what they imply. To this end are evoked, pell-mell, the time in which they occurred, the fading of memory, the unsoundness of human testimony, the universality of cowardice. And, for the sake of a show of truth, they insist on running through the infinite twists and turns of the narration in which the proliferation of details comes to supplant the actuality of events.

The outcome is a watering down of the discourse and bland, gray statements. It is a question of producing a gray discourse. Gray is the color of uniformity: gray are the garments worn in the camps, gray are the lackluster faces, gray the words printed in newspapers, gray the letters which accuse, gray the photographs. Gray is the goal to reach. After this ghastly night everything and everyone is gray. Who will be able to distinguish any difference? Gray is the color in which one must disappear, in order to live beyond, unnoticed.

The distortion (*brouillage*) of discourse started from the moment the camps were liberated because the horror which was discovered there and which became known to the world could not find its place in any discourse. As a consequence the world concentrated on reference points that were familiar as well as signifiers which were valid for all; priority was given to the prisoners of war or to political prisoners and every party or state could send its emissaries to look for their own people and retrieve them. But there was no one to come for the Jews! They belonged to no one!

What came to light in the camps, of the project to exterminate the Jews, could not be looked at, no one could bear to look, with an unflinching gaze, upon what they had not wanted to hear from all those who had, nevertheless, sounded the alarm. Before as well as after the troops entered the camps, the abjection of what had been happening and methodically carried out was not taken up into any discourse. The banalization started from this instant of refusing to see; it persisted after the war in the perpetuation of the time of not understanding, and it continues still in the most insidious forms towards a moment to conclude that draws ever closer to negation and as always with a complicity which "from small acts of cowardice to small acts of capitulation makes it possible for brutality, injustice, then tyranny and murder to become widespread."⁵ Human beings forget the

5. Charlotte Delbo, *Ceux qui avaient choisi* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017), 41.

lessons of history and in their search for truth they most often choose gray discourse.

Discrimination Through Negligence

Liberation brings to mind a return to human values and to respect for the other; *liberation* sounds like something joyful. The terrible paradox is that this time of so-called liberation was not a period that stopped the horror. It prolonged it, albeit in a different form, that of discrimination through negligence. Treatment of the victims was ill-adapted. We know that many died because, after wanting food so badly, they were given far too much of it. In some camps the liberating troops set fire to the buildings, justifying this as a fight against the risk of epidemics. Except that this perceived risk concerned their own men and not the victims who had survived there.⁶ Here they were dragged out in a perfunctory manner for the sake of hygiene, thrown outside in the cold, with no backup plan, and thus dying in numbers. Simone Veil showed very well how saving them (the Jews) was not a priority.⁷ Liberators must also ponder this negligent attitude which is another name for discrimination against the Jews.

While prisoners of war went straight back to their home countries which were mobilized to retrieve them, one must bear in mind that this was not the case for the Jews. They had still to suffer the reprehensible shillyshallying of the nations who were uncertain whether to accept or refuse them, followed by endless journeys in lorries or trains.⁸

Primo Levi described these paths to freedom, strewn with people dead from exhaustion, lack of medical treatment or because they had lost all hope of reaching the end of the horror, which they had glimpsed for a moment. Thus, as soon as the Allied troops arrived in the camps, a distinction was made between deported resistance fighters—Jewish or not—and the Jews who were there only because they were Jewish.

Marceline Loridan-Ivens mentions these death marches to which the Jews who had survived the camps were subjected.⁹ Primo Levi recounts in detail the nine months between his liberation from Auschwitz by Soviet troops and his arrival in Italy. Months of displacements and wanderings from one Eastern country to another, by train, on foot, in carts... Blows, humiliations, hunger, sickness, and death punctuated this inhuman path,

6. Simone Veil, *Une vie* (Paris: Stock, 2007), 90.

7. *Ibid.*, 91.

8. *Ibid.*, 91.

9. Marceline Loridan-Ivens, *Et tu n'es pas revenu* (Paris: Grasset, 2015), 52.

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11. Simone Veil, "On ne 2005): 26–27.

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even beyond the camp. For the Jews, 'outside' the camp was still 'in the camp.' True, it was a different camp but there was still no return to one's family, as though their lives had no reality for other people. And, Primo Levi adds, there was this "penetrating nostalgia" eating at you, "a limpid, but nagging pain."¹⁰ This feeling of utter strangeness with close relatives persisted beyond the failed reunion: "My house was still standing, my family was alive, no one was waiting for me," owing to the fact that "we could feel running through our veins the poison of Auschwitz."

In an interview published by *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Simone Veil bore witness to this with her own family:

we arrived in France. What Jews had undergone, the extermination of most of them, did not arouse any interest. My other sister's return, however, was celebrated; she had been deported to Ravensbrück as a resistance fighter. She was a heroine, she was questioned about the French Resistance movement, about what had happened in the camp. [...] As for us, it was no use trying to speak, we were interrupted. The topic of conversation was changed. [...] It was too painful for our relatives to talk about all this. We told appalling stories, [...] for those who loved us it was unbearable.¹¹

The Resistance—regardless of each one's patriotism and heroism—must not become another name for banalization by eclipsing the Shoah. Why the camps? The expression remains impersonal. It says nothing of the fundamental reason for the existence of the concentration camps and their objective, the extermination of the Jews. Banalization began with the so-called *liberation* of the camps. How was this liberation possible? Liberation from what?

A Few Examples, Forms, and Styles of Gray Discourse

A Fault in Transmission

In a previous work, *L'Héritage de la faute*,¹² I tried to identify what could have been transmitted to the children whose parents had taken part in the shame of the middle of the 20th century. Dan Bar-On, an Israeli psychologist, investigated "what message of hope those parents had been able to transmit to

10. Primo Levi, *The Truce* (London: Bodley Head, 1965).

11. Simone Veil, "On ne voulait pas nous entendre," *Le Nouvel Observateur*, no. 2097 (13-19 January 2005): 26-27.

12. Guy Briole, "L'Héritage de la Faute". *Quelle transmission pour la faute?* (unpublished brochure, International Military Symposium, Paris, June 26-27, 1992).

their children?"¹³ His book, *L'Héritage infernal*, in which he interviewed the sons and daughters of Nazis in Germany, was invaluable to me. Other books and texts¹⁴ written by the children of collaborators and Nazis were also useful.¹⁵ It took its toll on all of them and although their reactions were different, solitude is a feature they shared. Many of them lived cut off from all social life, withdrawn into themselves. Several wrote about Nazism, about their families and their oppressive secrets, without finding an answer to the still wide-open question of what prompted their parents to be active accomplices in the horror. Elsewhere the writing is more uncertain, with confusion, allusions, and contradictions. Others have managed to find posts at universities where they wrote theses in history. Others still have found a solution in religious conversion. And lastly, a small number continued on their paths in fascist groups.

The issue of the shameful involvement of the fathers is of paramount importance. What could possibly prompt men and women to be actors in the horror, aiming at the systematic destruction of others who were the "target of a deliberate selection"?¹⁶ There are conflicting theories: chance, saving the honor of the nation, treason, the other started first, etc. All these explanations and a good many others aim, to the very end, at justifying the father and restoring him as a possible father. For those who, on the contrary, acknowledged the crime and brought this admission to the forefront, denial reveals the truth of the unconscious: "One might think that I am trying to clear my father's name, but that is not my intention, I have no right to do so," said one son of a Nazi.¹⁷

The children of these leaders kept a certain distance from, and an apparent control over, the events. Their painful memories refer to the disastrous period when they went from being the children of feared and honored heroes to being the children of criminals. It is striking to notice that the victims are only mentioned as a reflection of their inner wounds¹⁸ or even, in some accounts, only indirectly alluded to.¹⁹

For the children of those in subordinate positions, the invariable argument is that their fathers were obeying orders and their identification with the victims is predominant. For them there is no mediation of the function of power or ideology. In a way, they have been appointed to take the blame. They are the ones whom the group wants to remain silent even when they

13. Dan Bar-On, *L'Héritage Infernal* (Paris: Eshel, 1991), 13.

14. Dominique Fernandez, *Porfirio et Constance* (Paris: Grasset, 1991).

15. Marie Chaix, *Les Lauriers du lac de Constance* (Paris: Seuil, 1974).

16. Dan Bar-On, *L'Héritage Infernal*, *op. cit.*, 256–259.

17. *Ibid.*, 61.

18. Marie Chaix, *Les Lauriers du lac de Constance*, *op. cit.*, 53–58.

19. Dominique Fernandez, *Porfirio et Constance*, *op. cit.*, 53–58.

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20. Hans-Josef Ortheil,
21. *Ibid.*, 24.

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try to get psychological or psychoanalytical treatment. For those who, in Germany, expressed their desire to undergo such treatment in relation to this issue, the response of the therapists wavered between a falsely sympathetic attitude of reassurance and a prohibition on talking about this point, regarded as a symptom hindering the cure. To the unbearable secret the answer was: don't try to find out.

The mother's position in relation to the different figures of the father, whether they represent transgression, treason or dishonor, should be examined through the repercussions it could have had on the children. Some of them, it has been claimed, were kept in the dark. They are described as innocent, as "women of duty" who devoted themselves first and foremost to their children. Like their children, they are identified as victims and formed a group that was destined to be sacrificed. Others went on living as though they did not know, protecting the father with a screen that aimed to conceal his involvement. These women were particularly good at handling discourse and producing gray discourse. This is what happened with the endless discussion between a mother and her son, Hans-Josef Ortheil, to which he bore witness in his book, *La Haie*:

We talk a great deal with each other and she makes sure there is no quiet moment. Sometimes I would rather she kept silent for a while but this idea would never cross her mind [...] A pause would definitely break the continuity of the conversation. My mother does not want to hear of pauses, this is the problem [...] When she tells a story, she will invariably tell this story in the same way, as often as she is asked to. She will use the same words, mention the same details, maintain the same assessments [...] There is not the slightest diversion and very often one gets the impression that she tells these stories as though she were only quoting them, as though she were reading these stories, come from so far away, written on parchment rolls that the listener unwinds roll after roll with his questions.²⁰

As he continues, "[t]his is the way my mother speaks".²¹ This mother illustrates how a narration can be made that leaves no mark. In the end the narrator becomes the prominent figure to the detriment of the content of the discourse, which gets tangled up in details. This is one of the tricks used to gray the discourse.

20. Hans-Josef Ortheil, *La Haie* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1991), 22-23.

21. *Ibid.*, 24.

Other mothers demanded the breakup of their couple and went as far as erasing the existence of their husbands for the sake of their children: "She never said a word to them [...] against the collaborator, against the adulterer [...] No word of condemnation could have been as oppressive as the cold silence in her eyes."²² Finally, a few of them opposed their husbands' commitments. It is their children who made the most progress regarding the questions about their fathers, devoting themselves more to the search for truth.

Alexithimia

Alexithimia is a neologism constructed by Peter E. Sifneos using Greek terms—a (which is privative), *lexis* (word) and *thymos* (breath of life)—to refer to a characteristic feature of speech, i.e. the lack or even the absence of words to express emotions and feelings.²³ This concept was particularly developed by an American psychoanalyst, Henry Krystal, himself a survivor of the Holocaust, to describe how difficult it was for the survivors to speak about what they had experienced—a trauma whose significance no words seemed adequate enough to express. Thus, he remarked that the fact that deportees were silent or sometimes very secretive about their experiences gave no indication of the extent of their sufferings, each person reacting to "extreme situations" in a unique manner.²⁴

Psychiatrists at the New York Mount Sinai School of Medicine pursued research along this initial idea, but this notion, which is used for somatic disorders, today undergoes the same excesses and distortions as modern psychiatry. We shall not focus on this aspect. In alexithimia, an analysis of the contents of the stories reveals a few characteristics: the prevalence of "one" over "I"; the large number of passive verb forms (which present the subject as undergoing the action); the more frequent use of the present rather than the past tense and of dynamic verbs (describing actions) rather than stative ones (describing states of being); the repetition of short, interrupted sentences. Lastly there are more occurrences of questions than of answers—*Warum* being a haunting echo of the "*Hier ist kein Warum*" ["Here there is no why"] heard in concentration camps. This difficulty in speaking causes the self-effacement of the victim, often leading others to speak in his place: an association, a state, writers, ourselves.

22. Dominique Fernandez, *Porfirio et Constance*, *op. cit.*, 447.

23. Peter Emanuel Sifneos, "Anhedonia and alexithimia, a potential correlation," in *Anhedonia and Affect Deficit States*, eds. D.C. Clark, J. Fawcett (New York: PMA Publishing, 1987): 119–127.

24. Henry Krystal, *Integration and Self-Healing: Affect, Trauma, Alexithimia* (Hillsdale: Analytic Press, 1989).

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25. Rachel Ertel, *Dans l*

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In the camps, cruelty reached such a degree of atrocity that the survivors themselves feared arousing incredulity: "My listeners do not follow me." Other expressions are used: "Indifference was perhaps even more formidable" and alongside the relative silence of the survivors, one must take into account the "deafness of the world which refused to listen." It is this difficulty experienced by the victims in making themselves heard that is taken as a model and worked through, point by point, in the modern form of the discourse of deniers.

The Torn-out Tongue

Peter E. Sifneos using Greek and *thymos* (breath of life)—to the lack or even the absence of this concept was particularly for Krystal, himself a survivor was for the survivors to speak whose significance no words e remarked that the fact that etive about their experiences ings, each person reacting to

As we have underscored, one of the discursive strategies consists in taking up the same words and lexical expressions in order to de-subjectivize the discourse by emphasizing the facts that are banalized. This is what discourse jamming (*brouillage*) achieves, as it creates a confusion between the transmitters (either victim or persecutor) thanks to a signal that is superimposed and which can no longer be distinguished by the person receiving it. Thus, step by step, the message is distorted by an onslaught of language which leads to the negation of the subject, torn away from his own utterances. Rachel Ertel stressed this when she wrote: "Extermination endowed language itself with the marks of destruction."²⁵ She calls this language "*langue arrachée*" (the torn-out, or ripped-out, tongue).²⁶ The onslaught of language dismantles the most intimate structures and alters chronological time, where death is the natural limit of life. But as far as the camp is concerned, "destruction is not death. It is a rip in time."²⁷

School of Medicine pursued n, which is used for somatic s and distortions as modern In alexithimia, an analysis of racteristics: the prevalence of erb forms (which present the e frequent use of the present bs (describing actions) rather the repetition of short, inter- rrences of questions than of f the "*Hier ist kein Warum*" tion camps. This difficulty in ctim, often leading others to iters, ourselves.

Survivors bear witness to this rip in time. They no longer believe in history. It is the very historicity of their sense of belonging which is affected, even when they are with their relatives. They are not guilty of having survived, as is impudently claimed by Americans and many others who invented the nosological category of "survivor guilt." They are much more inhabited by the dead than language can allow them to talk of. With them it is not a question of death partaking of life, death aroused by the imaginary and causing guilt to emerge. They say so; we must listen to them and be able to hear what little they can say with what is left to them of language. The feeling of shame is built in this rip in history where they met this other, like them and at the same time ruthless.

7. "potential correlation," in *Anhedonia and* ark: PMA Publishing, 1987): 119-127.

25. Rachel Ertel, *Dans la langue de personne* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 139.

26. *Ibid.*, 139.

27. *Ibid.*, 75.

A former deportee explained that for many years she had wrestled with a nagging question: "Why me?" This question can be construed in two ways: "Why was I deported to the camps?" and "Why was it me who came out alive?" The change to a "Why not me?" during her analysis was made possible because she had distanced herself from the guilt imposed on her by the others, enabling her to live differently after Auschwitz.

The Refusal to Know!

"We did not know" or, more precisely, "At that time we did not know" is a very common expression used as a justification for not pleading guilty; it was simply a lack of knowledge! It is not a fixed expression: it is now changing into an "I do not know any longer, I have forgotten." It highlights an ethical wrongdoing regarding the duty to remember. It is an obscuration, a jamming (*brouillage*) of memory, which can be expressed by the succeeding generations through this common sentence: "I knew there was something to know but people would not talk about it." "Nobody knows what they would have done in their place" is another phrase which is doubly ambiguous: it compels the person who questions to ask themselves the question. While the person questioned, the one who dodges, is thereby exempt from answering. It also implies a confusion between those to whom this question is addressed: victim or persecutor? It is the key phrase for those who play, simultaneously, on all levels.

When the Accused Becomes the Accuser: Obscene Discourse

One of the ways used to distort (*brouillage*) the discourse is to misappropriate the thought of a major author, a thinker, a person whose reputation would be unquestionable for a group. It consists in quoting them at length while placing oneself under their authority and, little by little, introducing questions which ultimately leave some ambiguity about their stance on the issue.

For those who proceed in such a way and find themselves caught out, the defensive move is immediate: nobody has a monopoly on the truth of the interpretation. Now this is genuinely deceitful reasoning. And there will always be people who agree, and who, given the situation, will argue that the uniqueness of the Shoah cannot be questioned. How could one have doubts about their position? You only need to ask them the question!

More generally speaking, an even more common complaint endures: "Why on earth does it have to be me?" "Why is this interest focused on us, on me? There are so many others." The aim is to lead us to believe that

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28. Jacques Lacan, *The L
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29. *Ibid.*, 235.

30. Primo Levi, *If This Is*

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they—the collaborators and their accomplices—are much more numerous than has been said. A very united and secret circle protects them. Resistance was simply last-minute opportunism. Claiming that they were all collaborators would be the next step, the step one does not take in order to maintain the force of indignation and allusion. "What do you still want from us?"

What kind of truth is this? It is simply the name given to the obstinacy that persists beyond the deaths and imprisonments. It is the name of an impossible settlement of accounts. Consequently, the victims must be blamed for an insatiable desire to settle the score. Come on, it is protested, it would be too easy and so unfair to pick one and put the blame on him. So, if we can't take them all, let us take none. Implacable irony.

Here is the worst transmuted into innocence, the cowardly person's honor besmirched, the collaborator or his representative persecuted by his victim. It is his turn to demand compensation: justice is for everyone! He is the one who has been offended no matter how shameful the anachronism is. Let us take legal action; the attorney will plead our case. And then, relying on a new science, victimology, we will be able to stigmatize the victim. No matter how despicable, the attorney will plead our case.

Death Died in Auschwitz

In his seminar *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan underlined a recurring tendency to "reason about men as if they were moons,²⁸ calculating their masses and gravitation." He added that *Mein Kampf* "dealt with relations between humans as if they were relations between moons."²⁹ Excluding a part of humanity from a possible relationship to otherness is tantamount to regarding it as a mass. It remains to define the criteria of what constitutes that mass in order to split them away as a group, and carry on relentlessly with the program. There are no more limits.

Primo Levi emphasizes the fact that the only camps he ever talks of are the Nazi camps which stand out from the others on account of the monstrous aims pursued: "to wipe entire populations and their cultures off the face of the earth."³⁰ As well as the means, the "huge death machines: the gas chambers and their cremation ovens deliberately designed to destroy lives and human bodies by the million." Furthermore it must be added that

28. Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York/London: Norton, 1991), 235.

29. *Ibid.*, 235.

30. Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man* (London: Orion, 1959).

the aim was to remove every trace of these lives and bodies, to send them into these flames and smoke which burst out of the chimneys and spread ashes across the sky. To a woman who had just arrived in the camp and asked what it was, somebody answered: "We are the ones who are burning."³¹

It is this outlandish perspective that prevails in the specious argument that indicates, in spite of the denials, a will to counterbalance horror by assessing the numbers and percentages involved—which means emphasizing the number of survivors compared to those who died, grouping this horror together with other dark moments in the history of humankind, and making everything equivalent through the use of statistics. Care is taken to use the same words but here in mathematical abstraction in such a way that, in this ratio of the masses, what inspired the ideology that led to the Holocaust re-emerges in this retrospective assessment as the step taken toward negation. So for those who survived, there is only shame left. There is no life without death, any more than there is war without death. Death partakes of life; it is in everyone's destiny. For Freud, it gave a particular appeal to the ephemeral, and for Lacan it made life bearable.³² For François Cheng, it is a precious good and this particular good, "this very death died in Auschwitz."³³

"Why still talk about all this?" is a question one occasionally hears. To some it seems endless. "There are still Jews left, would you believe it," wrote Anne-Lise Stern,³⁴ and besides, fascism could always return. Such is the ethical position grasped by Umberto Eco in his essay "Ur-Fascism." In it he describes what he calls Ur-fascism, "primitive and eternal" fascism³⁵ based on key points such as "the cult of tradition," the absence of "progress in knowledge," truth being told once and for all, "irrationalism," mistrust of culture, "the fear of the other," "obsession with conspiracies usually targeting the Jews and their secret networks," "popular elitism and contempt for the poor" and "the cult of death" where it is often urgent to have others die, to name but a few. But here is the point that Eco emphasizes and which we must absolutely remember: "Ur-fascism is still around us and sometimes in plain ordinary clothes. [...] It can come back under the most innocent of disguises. Our duty is to uncover it and to point our finger at any of its new instances—every day, in every part of the world."

31. *Ibid.*, 201.

32. Jacques Lacan, "Conférences de Louvain," *La Cause Freudienne*, no. 96 (June 2017): 11.

33. François Cheng, *Cinq méditations sur la Mort* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2013), 97.

34. Anne-Lise Stern, *Le savoir-déporté* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 106.

35. Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," in *Five Moral Pieces* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2001): 65-88.

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Author's note: As I am about to finish this article, the date that stands out is the anniversary of the Vel d'Hiv Roundup in Paris on 16 and 17 July 1942, when 13,152 people were arrested because they were Jewish. What is more, two major events, with France paying national tribute, marked the beginning of the month of July 2018: the burial in the Panthéon of Holocaust survivor Simone Veil and the death of Claude Lanzmann, the French filmmaker who made the Holocaust documentary film *Shoah*.

Translated by Domitille Krupka and revised by Philip Dravers

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