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SHARE OF DEATH: CARE CROSSES CAMP

ABSTRACT

The essay thematises the question of care in conditions of total power – not merely *extra muros*, in the everyday life of the Third Reich, but in its most radical articulation, the concentration camp. Drawing inspiration from Todorov's work, the essay engages with Levinas, Agamben, Derrida and Nancy, to investigate Heidegger's determination of *Da-sein's* horizon through a solitary confrontation with death. Drawing extensively on primary testimonies, the essay shows that when the enclosure of the camp became the *Da* of existence, care assumed a radical significance as the link between the death of another and the death of oneself. In the face of an apparatus of total power and its attempt to individuate and isolate death, the sharing of death in the figure of care remained one's most inalienable act of resistance and the last means to hold on to death as something that could be truly one's own.

KEYWORDS

care, death, concentration camps, witness, totalitarianism, Todorov, Heidegger, Levinas, Agamben

*What was scandalous
was that the death of the other
could become indifferent.
(Kofman 1998: 87)*

*I am grateful to the friends who keep alive
our poetry and our love
and recognize our right to them.
(Borowski 1976: 138)*

It is not carefree; neither is it without care. *It*: the camp, annihilation more than labour or 'concentration'. *It*: a situation, a condition, more than a place. The way *it* rains, *it* is day or night. Here, where this discussion begins—or perhaps there, where it leads—*it* is certainly night, *Nacht und Nebel*.

The camp then, *KZ* or *Lager*, and care, *souci* or *Sorge*. And between them death. And life. Tzvetan Todorov's work on the camps was exceptional precisely because it raised this question, the question of care in the face of the extreme, at the threshold and limit, the limit of life, of humanity, the limit of the barbed wire that demarcates an inside against an outside. This question, decisive and measured, is at once an act of hope, transforming the opposition of power and

justice, survival and ethics, to the positive positing of an ethics at the heart of and therefore beyond mere survival. This ethics manifests itself as care.

In fidelity to this ethics, at the intersection of thought and testimony, this essay opens anew the question of care, of its relation to death, the originary relation of the death of an other and the death of oneself. It does not assume this question in order to seek a ready answer, but in order to share in Todorov's resistance to the unthinkable and unsayable under the sign of the Shoah. In the singular death of millions it does not seek long rotten corpses to scavenge, but the currency of the truth of life and the truth of thought, which ever since Plato the opacity of death promises to disclose.

Passing through a series of the question's integral loci the essay tests a double claim: i. the annihilation camp, this factory of death, attempted to make death, for those who died, impossible. Its main function was not to *give*, but to *extract* death. It never fully succeeded in this function. ii. In place of the share of death it extracted, the camp gave enough space for a solitary, individual demise. Care was the name of the refusal to relinquish the communion of death and thus the name of the inalienable claim to the singularity of one's own death.

1. Uncommon Humanity

The camps present the question of care in the first instance, as an inquest into the human. Levi's *If this is a Man* and Antelme's *The Human Race*, attest already in their title the urgency of the enquiry, from which Todorov's militant humanism proceeds.

The meaning of this humanism is manifold—always operative, yet liquid, nowhere arrested in a final definition. Humans are certainly the starting and end points of this humanism. (Gelson 1998: 48) But no more—and no less—than plural *humans* are on the one hand, the singular human, noun and adjective, and on the other humanity, in their indissoluble inter-signification part of this significant unity.

Humanity first. The essence of the human and care. The essence of the human *as* care. If one must evoke an essence, a primary trait, then care, care as humanity. Not as a descriptive constant but as responsibility—precarious possibility and potentiality. Humanism is accordingly the potentiality that exceeds any bio-anthropological normativity. It exposes in the words of Antelme “the limitations of the race [...] its distance from ‘nature’ and its relation to ‘nature’; that is, [...] a certain solitude that characterizes our race; and finally—above all—it brings us to a clear vision of its indivisible oneness.” (Antelme 1998: 6) The responsibility of this unity manifests itself in the unshakeable handshake between the privileged German political prisoner and the most dispossessed of inmates. A kindness and complicity against isolation that nothing will overcome: “neither the barking of thousands of SS troops nor the whole apparatus of ovens, dogs, and barbed wire, nor famine, nor lice.” (ibid 1998: 75)

And yet, this humanity, beyond or before nature persists also beyond or before the potentiality of care. It is certainly untrue that: “without moral universals, we do not have a way of affirming our common humanity in a non-biological sense,” (Goodheart 2004: 187) if by humanity is one designates the attainment of a moral universal. This is the sober teaching of Levi and Antelme, Todorov and Agamben: the inhuman belongs to the human. The human presupposes the collapse of the moral universal.

The tormentor and the tormented share in a humanity that is neither biological nor moral. They are sentenced to share a humanity without a predetermined, an exclusive community. They are of the same cloth (Todorov 2000: 136) and this constitutes a further source of shame for the survivor, compounded by lost dignity and the guilt of living at the expense of the death of an other (ibid: 263–265). And yet, the sharing of humanity, the participation in this *grey zone*, the infinite spectrum of evil, does not relinquish responsibility. (Todorov 1997: 3–8; 11–12) The crimes of Nazism against humanity presuppose the sharing of a singular humanity (Douglas 2001: 323)—for both parties, the unthinkable thought.

And yet “if, facing nature, or facing death, we can perceive no substantial difference between the SS and ourselves,” (Antelme 1998: 220) we must test history and this human desire for the investment of meaning (ibid: 74) neither in hope of deliverance, nor in fear of perdition (Todorov 2000: 139), but only because there is neither respite, nor reprieve in the face of the inquest of humanity. This search exacts those acts, acts of care and destruction, those uncommon acts that cut across unshared communities to expose the sharing of humanity.

2. More and Mores, Excess as Exit

Recognizing that neither biological description, nor moral prescription can account for the sharing of humanity, Todorov ties nonetheless morality to biology, to humanity as species. (ibid: 287)¹ If even those who exert the gravest violence against morality remain however not only within this strange species, but also within *humanity*, what is morality, how is the moral to be spoken of?

A potentiality is enunciated, the possibility that carries one beyond oneself. “To be moral is, above all, to be capable of preferring the other to oneself;” (Todorov 2002: 220) “the starting point for the moral act is the *you*, not the *I*.” (ibid: 223) This is morality in the first, exemplary (‘above all’) sense: the exit from the *I* towards the plenitude of the *you*.² This excess of the *other* is

1 The implications of this anthropology and the horizon of the animal, the plant and the mineral, of nature in general, remain open.

2 Todorov assumes Buber’s fundamental existential structure of the *I–Though* (ibid: 139–142), while appearing closer to Levinas’s infinite priority of the *you*, a *you* that unlike the *though* is always human. Although Todorov’s silence about the Jewish thinker who witnessed the camps cannot be explicated here, the themes that proceed from the

not abstract, it does not correspond to impersonal humanity, but to the always specific person who is the witness of my act (Gelston 1998: 50). This specificity of the other, a specificity without species, defines the particularity of the potentiality and of the act. Care, the name of this exemplary movement towards the *other*, is always specific (Todorov 2000: 287).

And yet it is because of the same potentiality that this movement can be impeded, interrupted, halted, reversed. Morality in the second, baser, sense means precisely the difficult freedom that governs the responsibility of this movement. Morality comprises of violence and failure. At best evil remains a possibility and indifference a common practice. Inside and outside the camps, we fail to suffer every suffering—we pity some and forget the most, in order to survive. (Todorov 1997: 18)³ Life commands a partiality that is both a negation and a condition of the moral. The second sense becomes first.

There is nothing new here. And the camps will teach us no more. We will find here neither the brutality, egoism and stupidity of an assumed “state of nature,” (Levi 2004: 93) nor a superior moral life. What we find is a rare clarity and eloquence of the question (Todorov 2000: 43). We see a man stealing another’s piece of bread, precipitating thus the latter’s death; we see an other man sharing his last piece of bread, defying his own demise. Certainly, “we didn’t need the camps to understand that man is a being capable of the most noble as well as the basest acts.” (Semprun 2005: 60) Rather, “here is where we’ll have known both the greatest esteem and the most definitive contempt, both love for mankind and loathing for it, with a more total certainty than anywhere else, ever.” (Antelme 1998: 88)

This certainty is absolutely significant. Here one dies in many ways: a holy man is killed and a smuggler is born in his place. (Wiesel 2008: 295) Here, however, “on the threshold of the house of the dead” one encounters also an unforgettable welcoming face, (Levi 2004: 37) receives a ‘thanks’ and an extended cigarette in the dark, from a faceless stranger (Antelme 1998: 292). One shares starvation with a sick inmate on the brink of death. (Kertész 2006: 192) Out of one’s absolute deficiency, an absolute gratuity emerges, a pure excess.

Here some succumb to those ordinary vices, those ‘banalities that produce monsters. (Todorov 2000: 138) Humanity is fragmented, conduct is disconnected from conscience, others are depersonalized and reduced to instrumentality, power is exploited and relished. (Todorov 2000: 139–140) Yet also here at the limit of an absurd and contradictory law, in the service of elemental—unjust and unjustified—force (Levi 2004: 92–95), some will remain unscathed. There will be those rare few who never break, never doubt, never discount

thought of Levinas, their genealogy and reception, constitute a trajectory that is not only *sine qua non*, but a *per quam* condition of the question that animates the question of death, the question of care.

3 La Rochefoucauld’s maxim “we are always strong enough to bear the suffering of others” (ibid: 7) can only be read in the most superficial sense. Ethics is the practice of finding this impossible strength; morality, is the corresponding potentiality.

their humanity (Antelme 1998: 89), those whom ‘the weapons of night’ never harm (Levi 2004: 63).

Here morality is open in the excess of its potentiality: from the everyday to the heroic, from atrocity to saintliness. This potentiality is manifest itself with all its force and one is compelled to recognize beyond all doubt that it is impossible to remain within oneself. The sole remaining decision is whether this exit will be *away from* or *towards the other*.

3. Another Death, the Death of the Other

In the vortex of disappearance that designates a camp, death appears bereft of all singularity. In an unprecedented “combination of technological ingenuity, fanaticism and cruelty,” (Levi 2004: 10) “thousands [of corpses] flow along like water from an open tap.” (Borowski 1976: 112) Those who survive the selections do not last either. Without asking for help, without ‘making trouble,’ (Wiesel 2008: 107) “like dry leaves, the dead detach themselves and fall from this enormous tree.” (Antelme 1998: 285)

“Auschwitz means death, total, absolute death—of man and of all people, of language and imagination, of time and of the spirit.” (Wiesel 1975: 314) Accordingly, literature, philosophy and music must be barred from death (Améry 1980: 16), death must be isolated from all expression, all access. It must be bared, denuded, disinvested, exposed. The exposition of death is the spectacle, the visual regime of the camps. The living flesh that enters the showers exits in the naked abandon of death, eloquent and mute.⁴ The sole expression of the camp is death without expression.

How to think, how to speak of this inarticulate flood of death? Heidegger, the Meister of Todtnauberg (Celan 2005: 282–283), in one of his rare utterances on the Shoah, presents the mass ‘fabrication of corpses’ in the 1949 lecture *The Danger* in Bremen, as mere perishing without death. These liquidated numbers do not die, because they are unable to “to carry out death in its essence,” because they remain unable to be “endeared to the essence of death.” (Heidegger 2012: 53) Earlier in the lecture, the infamous equation of mechanized food industry with the gas chambers set the dismal tone (ibid: 27). An accusation threatens to make our civilized meals repulsive; a suspicion reaches our table that one must dispel as simply unimaginable—like the rumours of the camps in Nazi Germany. One cannot accept this insinuation from an unrepentant Nazi, even if at the same time the Nobel prize laurels the work of the Jewish writer I. B. Singer, at the heart of which speaks the condemnation: “in relation to [animals], all people are Nazis; for the animals, it is an eternal Treblinka.” (Patterson 2002; 181–188)

4 This, the most overbearing of the visual figurations of death, was in principle witnessed only by the *Sonderkommando*, the group of inmates forced to operate the gas chambers and crematoria, and kept in strict isolation.

This irreducible asymmetry between Singer and Heidegger, this injustice, is just. Yet beyond and before the accusation, death calls for thought; and in these lines of Heidegger death is contrasted to mere perishing (*Verenden*). Men here become animals, animals which have no death, which unable to endear themselves to its essence. Men are loaded onto cattle tracks for a journey into the unknown, a journey with no destination, no return. They are exterminated like vermin. If we find unthinkable that equating men to animals means equating animals to men, if we cannot read the equation in both directions, it is because death, in its inexhaustible singular plurality is still to be thought.

For the thought that can here only begin, one must ask of the ‘proper’ of death, the death one *can* die as one’s own. In *Being and Time* this death is the horizon of existence, the originary possibility of *Da-sein*, of being-there, there, with a view to this horizon, which one can assume or bar. In the face of this death says Heidegger “everyday impropriety—made up of chatter, ambiguities, and diversions and in which man finds himself always already thrown—is transformed into propriety; and anonymous death, which always concerns others and is never truly present, becomes the most proper and insuperable possibility.” (Agamben 2002: 74–5) This proper death is the sole certain possibility of *Da-sein*, which calls and collects all of its possibilities to itself. Death is the termination of possibilities, which have not been exhausted or fulfilled (Levinas 2000: 40) and thus the horizon of their excess. Death is a way of being, being-unto-death, which provides life’s “undisguised meaning” and “augments life’s intensity” against everydayness (Blumenberg 2010: 145–146).

Todorov locates the origin of many survivors’ suicides in precisely this withdrawal of the horizon of death. Returning from the absolute, where everything is a matter of life and death, everydayness feels unbearable (Todorov 2000: 267). The survivors have witnessed more than perishing, what they bring with them is the testimony of death. Is it however *their* death, this testimony that they haul back to the world of peace?

For Heidegger there is no possible substitution. One can go to death for another, but cannot take away the other’s death. Death manifests the mine-ness (*Jemeinigkeit*) that structures *Da-sein*. It is not merely the case that death presupposes a self; rather, a self presupposes death. The there (*Da*) of being (*Sein*), life and self, open only from a death that gives the *me* that receives it. I receive thus the certitude of my death as the only ineluctable possibility. Accordingly, death is not merely certain, but the origin of certitude (*Gewissheit*) and thus also of conscience (*Gewissen*). From death, my self, being-in-the-world and being-with-one-another proceed (Heidegger 1996: 274).

The death of *Da-sein* as its ownmost possibility, this first and proper death does not valorize the *I*. Not only because the *I* is never mentioned, passed over as an insufficient category of analysis, but because the *I* is not there before death, while once *Da-sein* has witnessed and assumed the horizon of its death, what emerges is a self, which understands its mineness as given, rather than as a substantive, founding prerogative. And yet, the eclipse of the *I* does not amount to deference to a *you*. The certitude and conscience of death do

not come from, but rather include the other to which they open (Levinas 2000: 10, 13; Heidegger 1996: 236 ff.).⁵

Levinas's thought proceeds from a revision of this exclusion. Here sympathy and compassion, 'dying a thousand deaths for the other', has its origin in a more radical substitution for the singular other. Not only am I able to witness the death of the other, but this death ruptures my ownmost *self* (Levinas 2000: 13). It forces me to respond and assume the responsibility of the other's death *as if I were guilty of causing it*. This 'ultimate nearness' of *surviving as a guilty one*, without being the cause of the other's death, this impossible responsibility, so familiar to the survivors of the camps, is the response to the necessity of death that is first and always *the death of the other*. "My death is my *part* in the death of the other, and in my death I die the death that is my fault," says Levinas (ibid: 39). The other's death is not a part of mine, it is the totality and origin of my death, the event to which my death will be offered back in a gesture of absolution.

This is the testament of the unconquerable dead, who keep eternal watch over the living. (Wiesel 2008; 283) From assuming a share in their graves, (Duras 1986: 47) to being reduced to "a living graveyard," (Wiesel 2008: 169, 271) the survivor is exposed to the dead, the dead who are hungry and gather to eat in the synagogue, who laugh and never forget, who *are* silence, a silence judging the living. (Wiesel 2008: 189, 190, 193, 200) At times, spectres of corpses return turning reality into nightmare (Borowski 1976: 41), from which suicide appears as the only exit (ibid: 18). The survivor hears the dead and sees their blood, descending to madness and through this madness to his own death. Spectres lead him to death. For years the voice of one such madman will haunt Semprun: "that echo of ancestral terror, that voice which speaks of the blood of the butchered, that viscous blood itself, which sings dully in the night." (Semprun 2005: 132)

And yet the dead do not always exact death. At times they merely ask for a fraternal look, commanding the living to live on (ibid: 75). The living vow to bear their death through life, as a condition of this life. It is a condition as impossible as the responsibility one assumes for the death of the other. For when the other dies one is not merely left *with* the memory, but left alone *in* the memory. The past is "slated to disappear" (ibid: 217) and suddenly it seems as though one was always alone, as though the atrocious event never occurred, even as it devours interminably the one who survived (ibid: 139). Thus one cannot live on, yet neither can one die; without the other, the possibility of death, of death's reality has been vacated, and all one can do is efface oneself and vanish (ibid: 197). Thus one must bear the testimony of the other's death in order to be able to live, in order to be able to die. The true death is not my own, but the death of the other, from which I receive the truth of my life and death (ibid: 199).

5 The fragmentation of oneself that was commonly attested in the case of Nazi and other agents of death and often welcomed by inmates appears as a pre-emptive gesture against this rupture. Accordingly, the death of the other encounters no singularity, nothing to call into question, nothing to rupture, except for a network of functions.

The function of the camps is to dissociate the two. To extract the death of the other from one's own death, and thus deny one both life and death. But for Semprun and the crowd of inmates forced to the spectacle, the hanging of a fellow inmate arrives as no threat or warning. It is rather welcomed, assumed as a shared declaration of hope: "We are busy dying this pal's death, and by doing so we negate it, we cancel it, from his death we are deriving meaning and purpose for our own lives." (ibid: 52)

The camp is the conclusion of the Nurnberg Laws of 1935, which ostracize the unwanted, turning each one separately into a *homo sacer*, "a quarry of Death [...], someone to be murdered" (Améry 1980: 85–86)—indeed not even murdered, but merely killed, killed with impunity, a wolf's head in a royal forest. The camp attempts to dissociate the living and the dead, the living from the dead. It attempts to turn everyone into a lone, emaciated wolf, a wolf to perish without a trace. And yet people will not merely *end*. If not their life, their death offers the last resistance. It emerges stronger than the Nazi law, which cannot subject the dead. (ibid: 93–94) In their imminent death, the living and the dying, discover that the death of the other cannot be completely taken from them. 'Welded together' (Semprun 2005: 214) in this shared death, they discover the absolute singularity of the departed (Duras 1986: 67–68), of themselves, of the world.

4. A World of Responsibility

Death opens the world. Its horizon is the sharing of a place and time of meaning from which the dimensions of the world unfold. Thus the violence of the camp, forcing the dispossession of death, pronounces a non-place as much as the end of time, "the end of the world." (Améry 1980: 29)

Already the first blow shatters the victim's "trust in the world," knowing that no help is to be expected (ibid: 28). The world incessantly dissolves. *One* is no longer part of it, as the *other* is reduced to merely yet *another one*. In Antelme's words: "The catastrophe isn't just that *this* particular friend may have died; it's that *one* of us has died. [...] His friends will be especially aware of it, but will soon forget it. It causes no stir at all, nothing stops. He dies, it's roll call; he dies, it's soup; he dies, we receive a beating. He dies alone." (Antelme 1998: 95)

In this death, solitary for those dying and those surviving it, there is no world. *Angst* does not disclose here an existential "solipsism" that collects *Dasein* to itself, opening the world to it. (Heidegger 1996: 176) It is an *Angst* that proceeds from the denial of a world, a trembling that expresses the ultimate coming to be of "the worldlessness of the Jewish civilization." (Krell 2015: 134) The animal perishing given to the inmates is tied to their lack of a world. Thus Heidegger's distinction of a stone without world (*weltlos*), an animal poor in world (*weltarm*) and the human who creates the world (*weltbildend*) (Heidegger 1995: 176ff.), leaves the inmates suspended somewhere between minerality and vegetation: "We are as insensitive as trees [says Borowski], as stones. And we

remain as numb as trees when they are being cut down, or stones when they are being crushed.” (Borowski 1998: 138)

These less-than-animal beings are forced to forget how the death of the other, a friend or a beloved, announces each time the expiration of the world. Not a mere segment, or a constitutive dimension of the world, but the whole world, a world shared, comes to an end. Each time the whole world sinks into an abyss, a loss that even the most faithful memory cannot redeem (Derrida 2001: 95, 107, 115). It goes deeper: those who survive, like those who die here, are denied memory; the camp prohibits any experience of the ‘without-response’ (ibid: 203) of death that entrusts the survivor with infinite responsibility. (ibid 2001: 204; Levinas 2000: 17) Unable to declare: “I mourn therefore I am, I am—dead from the death of the other,” (Derrida 1995: 321) the living are deprived at once of death and of world, their life reduced to the passive awaiting of their demise.

And yet the camps will not always succeed in arresting this “movement beyond anxiety and stronger than death,” (Levinas 1990: 48) the movement that leads to the other. A shared goodbye and a true communion are at times salvaged. Parting with strangers, one looks the other for the first time in the eye, one says adieu, and “an impossible love” is felt, the “potential for goodness” emerges for a moment (Antelme 1998: 18), a world is born, a world of response and responsibility. “Now [Levi reminisces], in the hour of decision, we said to each other things that are never said among the living. We said farewell and it was short; everybody said farewell to life through his neighbour. We had no more fear.” (Levi 2004: 25)

5. Muslims beyond Faith and Life

There is, however, a counter-point to the overcoming of fear. There is a point beyond which fear is not felt, because one has lost all life and all death. Beyond this point one becomes a living trope of horror, a figure which goes by names such as *Gamel*, the rotting one, or *Krypel*, the cripple. Mainly, this figure is known with the obscure epithet *Muselmann*, or Muslim.

It is the figure of a breathing corpse and in his foundering the limit of the camps is to be found. Whatever clarity might be gained with regard to this limit, the limit of humanity and morality no less than the limit of life and death (Agamben 2002: 47, 55, 63), it must proceed from an engagement with the ground of this limit, with a *who* and *why* next to the *how* or *when*, of becoming a *Muselmann*.

The *Muselmann* is the one who is deprived of death. For him Heidegger’s imputation is true, the camp *has succeeded*: “One hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand.” (Levi 2004: 96) Already dead, the *Muselmann* cannot even perish. As Levi will say for himself: “I am not even alive enough to know how to kill myself.” (ibid: 150) The task is thus taken over by

the camp. For the *Muselmann*, the caring recall to life from a fellow inmate becomes bothersome noise (Kertész 2006: 173), as the will for survival is hardly more enticing than the invitation of a painless death (ibid: 188).

This resignation is invested in an absolute corporeal deprivation. The living corpse is at times too weak to even try to find food, try to eat. Most of the time however, it hovers at a limit where its whole being is consumed by the drive for something edible. “I was transformed into a hole, a void of some kind, and my every endeavor, every effort, was bent to stopping, filling, and silencing this bottomless, evermore clamorous void.” (Kertész 2006: 162) And when this effort fails, as it always does, the abyss opens. “There was nothing left to chew. Nothing. The lack of no other thing so powerfully evokes the word: *Nothing*.” (Antelme 1998: 83)

In the face of the void, the *Muselmann* will do anything. “A ‘Muslimized’ Jew from Estonia who was helping me haul street bars [says Borowski] tried to convince me that human brains are, in fact, so tender you can eat them absolutely raw.” (Borowski 1998: 156) A son will attack a dying father for a piece of bread, being in turn beaten to death by other inmates for the same piece of bread (Wiesel 2008: 119–120). Wiesel himself, relieved upon the death of his emaciated, sick father, whom he could no longer save and to whose aid he did not come in the final hour, becomes a *Muselmann*. He, the son, survives the father’s death—but nothing matters anymore (ibid: 131). Nothing but a single imperative: to eat. A struggle of survival ensues waged against the dead and the living, often indiscernible from each other (ibid: 112), a struggle of survival where life is already lost. Despite not having perished, the *Muselmann* is already dead.

The complexity of the manifold spectrum of the *Muselmann*’s resignation in these descriptions is compounded by Levi’s disavowal: “we, the survivors are not the true witnesses.” (Levi 2003b: 63) For Levi who returns to confront the spectres one last time, it is clear: “At a distance of years one can today definitely affirm that the history of the Lagers has been written almost exclusively of by those who, like myself, never fathomed them to the bottom. Those who did so did not return, or their capacity for observation was paralyzed by suffering and incomprehension.” (ibid: 6)

“Those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the ‘Muslims,’ the submerged, the complete witness, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance.” But they cannot testify and could not testify. “Even if they had paper and pen, the submerged would not have testified because their death had begun before that of their body. Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to compare and express themselves.” (ibid: 64) Therefore, “we [says Levi – yet who is this “we,” we must always ask] speak in their stead, by proxy.” (ibid: 64)

In this, as much as in the question of resentment, Levi seems to oppose Améry, who at the very outset of *At the Mind’s Limits* excludes the *Muselmann* from his considerations, precisely because of the spell of incomprehension

through which the *Muselmann* drags his living remains (Améry 1980: 9). Instead, *the survivor* is for Améry the true, complete, the proper, witness: “only we, the sacrificed, are able to spiritually relive the catastrophic event as it was or *fully* picture it as it could be again. Let others not be prevented from empathizing [...] go ahead, good people, trouble your heads as much as you want; you still sound like a blind man talking about color.” (ibid: 93; my emphasis) The survivor is for Améry, not only the *only*, but also a *sufficient* witness, a witness who can reconstruct the event.

Wiesel assumes a median position. “Those who have not lived through the experience will never know; those who have will never tell; not really, not completely.” (Wiesel 1975: 314) The true witness survived and yet must remain silent, since a new language should have to be invented, to say what has never been said and never will. Therefore the camp is no more than a mute cipher, “its mystery [...] doomed to remain intact. The survivor knows. He and no one else. And so he is obsessed by guilt and helplessness.” (ibid: 314)⁶

The testimonies offer us three, at least three, possibilities; which in an order of seemingly diminishing access they profess: i. The survivor possesses the truth of the camps and is able to reconstruct it in its totality. This truth however cannot be *received* by those who have not lived through the experience. Moreover, the *Muselmann* is a false witness, an irrelevant figure (so Améry). ii. The survivor possesses the truth, but he cannot impart it; he is silenced by shame and the apophatic limit of language, which is incommensurate to the event (so Wiesel). iii. The survivor does not possess the complete truth. *Yet he is able to offer an account by proxy*. The complete witness is the *Muselmann*, but the *Muselmann* is mute, effectively dead, despite having survived (so Levi).

The three positions are much closer than they appear at first. Albeit for different reasons, they attest that the overwhelming truth of the total event cannot be shared; it can only *at most* be experienced. A few lines cannot decide the absolute significance of the possibility of testimony. What is critical here, is what might be said *of* this experience, which cannot be said *simpliciter*. Indeed the question is complicated since *contra* Levi, many of the testimonies are written by survivors who either identified themselves as *Muselmänner*, or should be identified as such according to any likely description. Antelme, Gawalewicz, Kertész and Wiesel are among them. They try to share the unshareable; their efforts manifest some of the most forceful acts of language.

An excess of meaning animates the testimonies. It is a remainder that language cannot assume, it is a truth that we can only approach, it is Levi's Gorgon. To look into this truth is to exit the community of the living. Kertész is warned that even the sight of a *Muselmann*, a glance at those who have seen the Gorgon, will cost his life. Yet he survives their sight (Kertész 2006: 138). In turn, the *Muselmann* survives the abysmal truth. Agamben calls this survival “Levi's paradox.” The human survives humanity, everything that constitutes it as human. When one destroys the human what remains is the witness,

6 On language and violence cf. Levi 2003b: 76 and Levi 2004: 129.

a witness of the inhumanity, which the human survives, (Agamben 2002: 77, 82, 134) precisely as non-human. Being human means thus to bear witness to the inhuman, to say what cannot be said (ibid: 121). The limit of this limit, the limit of Levi's paradox, is the first person enunciation: "I was a *Muselmann*." (ibid: 165)

Yet this enunciation can only be offered in the past tense. When one testifies, even only for oneself, at present, one testifies for another, by proxy. The essential horizon of every testimony, its reference to a past that only the testimony can account for, is here at the same time an essential condition of the experience. One can never say, at present: "I am a *Muselmann*." One can survive one's humanity, one's death, thereby fracturing the *I* of the pronouncement, but a singular *I* cannot testify its death. The *I* is already a plurality, already shattered and shared.

The Gorgon reveals in its blinding radiance the impossibility of seeing, of knowing (ibid: 54). It does not do so abstractly, but in every fiber of the *Muselmann's* starving body—in every gesture, articulation. In this eclipse of meaning, the lack of foundation emerges as the sole justification of the exercise of power. An absolute negation of meaning invites the harshest theodicies. Jewish or Christian, the Muslim has lost all faith. In contrast to the Arabic origin of his name, his resignation does not offer itself as an unconditional submission to the will of God (ibid: 45), but as prey to the "law of life." (Kertész 2006: 154)

This law, in the service of survival, commands a complete detachment. The death of a friend in the camp does not constitute for the *Muselmann*, as it did for Augustine, a reminder of the wordly attachment that the one who approaches God must abandon (Todorov 2002: 124; cf. 88–89, 129). It is rather the abandonment of the world altogether, of every *other*, for the sake of *one more day*. In this process, one becomes the human that survives the human, in this detachment one becomes the witness. One has not perished, but one has already died. Beyond this limit of detachment, no tie, no *with*, can any longer collect the *I* to itself. Beyond this limit, parents and children, lovers and friends, communities, as much as one's own self, are dissolved, liquidated. The only plurality that remains is of the human victim and the inhuman witness, that bears him in the shell of a single body.

The *Muselmann* can only testify when he recovers the inner plurality, the community *within* and *without* himself, the community that assumes and welcomes the witness that has become of him. What it testifies is that even a *Muselmann* can find comfort in the thought that others, *at least others*, are eating. (Kertész 2006: 163) That peace is made even with the swarming vermin feeding on his festering wounds, not only in resignation, but also in reconciliation, in acquiescence to the unity of nature (ibid: 183). At a breath's distance from death, the *Muselmann* will testify that squeezed against other dying bodies he is freed from irritability, enveloped in a shy affection. From these bodies "alongside the general groaning, the hisses from between clenched teeth, the quiet plaints—a word of solace and reassurance—so hushed and yet, at the same time, so intimate" arrives (ibid: 185).

6. The Grammar of Community

The premise of an elemental human community grounds Todorov's work. The state of nature, a state of a generalised enmity that the camps were supposed to have revealed, did not emerge then any more than at any other time in the historical or immemorial past (Todorov 2001: 144; 2002: 100). Man is rather always already social, the social being the condition of the individual, as much as of virtue and vice, selfishness and altruism (Todorov 2001: 147; 2002: 85). The social is the condition and breath of life, without which one suffocates (Todorov 2001: 57). Thus, "the first distance the infant focuses on is not the two centimeters to the breast he wants to suck, but the twenty centimeters to the face of his mother." (Todorov 2002: 61) Later, human desire does not seek "pleasure, but the relation between men." (Todorov 2001: 145) The self emerges not in the bareness of an austere need, but cloaked in the gratuitous plenitude of the other.

Todorov proposes a threefold taxonomy of the spheres of the social with its respective positive articulations. The most general he calls *humanitarian*: here is found charity, the descendant of *caritas* or *agapē*, the highest of Christian virtues, as well as pagan philanthropy (Todorov 2002: 118–119). Its universality constitutes its limitation, which posits an essential asymmetry, wishing to know nothing *of* and expecting nothing *from* its recipient, who is reduced to interchangeable anonymity. As a religious calling, it commands sacrifice and glorifies death, tainted either with vain pity (Todorov 2000: 136), or with the futility that Todorov recognizes in Elly Hillesum's martyrdom in Auschwitz (ibid: 200–208).

A more restricted sphere is the *political*. Its expression is solidarity, which demarcates a partial interchangeability. This interchangeability is decided by a 'here and now,' determined as region, association, or a people (Nancy 2000: 65). As Levi observes, it is a "selfishness extended to the one who is closest to you, which in distant times a friend of mine appropriately called us-ism." (Levi 2003b: 61; Todorov 1997: 14, 17) Levi will choose this selfishness of the *we*, as will Semprun and Antelme. In the camp such selfishness is for the most part the greatest generosity to be hoped for: "we have reached the point where it is unthinkable to share food with anyone except a guy from the car." (Antelme 1998: 277)⁷

Finally, there is the *personal* sphere, where no substitution is possible. For Todorov's the *Imperfect Garden* its *telos* is found in *love*, not in the sense of *caritas*, but as the singular love of a father, a friend or a child. In *Facing the Extreme* its name is care, the cardinal act of humanity.

Upon these three dimensions Todorov's work superimposes another threefold, summarized in the declaration of the French Revolution. Liberty expresses the autonomy of the *I*, fraternity the finality of the *you*, equality the universality of the *they* (Gelson 1998: 49; Goodheart 2004: 183). To these three persons-ideals correspond three virtues: dignity, in which the *I* relates to itself, care,

⁷ The 'guy from Semur' does not and cannot even share his apples with the whole car, but only with Semprun. But he does so without a moment's hesitation. (Semprun 2005: 59)

in which the *I* relates to a *you*, and what Todorov calls ‘the life of the mind’, where the *I* relates to the *they*. Significantly, this triad is necessary and sufficient: “there can be only three virtues, just as there are three grammatical persons in the conjugation of a verb.” (Todorov 2000: 103)

Still, the juxtaposition of the two triads presents the possibility of a much more complex taxonomy, the analysis of which would soon need to move beyond occidental grammar.⁸ This analysis is fundamental for an understanding of the possibilities of being-with, of dying-with, of communities and communion. What must be preserved at present is *care* as the relation of an *I* to a *you* that becomes a *we*, which in no way sublates or cancels the difference of the *I* and the *you*.

At the heart of this care, Todorov uncovers a *you* beyond the Kantian categorical imperative, exceeding the finality that refuses to instrumentalize the other (Todorov 2002: 131–132). This *you* comes first, before the *I*: “the first individual is *you*, not *me*, for every *you* presupposes a *me*, and the individual exists only in relationship. Every *you* is unique, every *I* is common.” (ibid: 158) The *I* becomes unique from the singular *you*, “ipseity is itself constituted by and as sharing,” (Nancy 1993: 70) and this sharing is no more and no less than the condition and production of meaning, which exists only as shared.

Care is the sharing of meaning beyond language that arrives from the other and makes possible the self. In the night of the camps this care shone clearer than ever: “in fact, it was not necessary to speak the French language, or even to speak, for a true exchange, a relation without relation to be established. It was enough to be offered a back on which to lean, an arm to support you when your legs could no longer walk, or a helping hand when you couldn’t climb up to your own mattress, when you could no longer be yourself and needed a fraternal other to supplement your own ‘I’ that could no longer be an ‘I’” (Kofman 1998: 53–54)

The *I* is no longer an absolute foundation; moreover, it cannot be given in its totality. Todorov, reading Montaigne, recognizes the essential partiality of the *I* as well as its inner plurality (Todorov 2002: 140–141). The *I*, extending beyond itself in space and time, (Todorov 1997: 5) emerges as an *other*, not only the other inside, but the other outside, *within* and *without*. This is why Levi needs no mirror to see his own sordid misery reflected in every face around him (Levi 2004: 32). Yet this is also why the inmates will queue as Antelme attests for a glimpse into that ‘brilliant solitude’ of the mirror which they “entered only in

8 A provisional survey of the irreducible distinctions of relations discovers: i. Two possible self-relations of the first person (I–I, I–we). ii. Four possible relations of the first person to the second (I–though, I–you, we–though, we–you). iii. Six possible relations of the first person to the third (I–(s)he, I–it, I–they, we–(s)he, we–it, we–they). Moreover, if the *direction* of the relation is important, as in some cases clearly is (i.e. one might call one of the positive relations of the *we* to the *I*, of a community to the individual, welfare), then the twelve modes of relating are doubled. The distinctions are further multiplied, should gender, race, species, etc become constitutive, should for example every I be always already gendered, and so on.

order to drown.” (Antelme 1998: 53) Here at last they can collect their inner plurality, their broken self, their defaced face, which they must constantly obliterate, in order not to attract attention, in order to be a nothing in the eyes of the SS. Here they are called to witness the other within, the one that has become inhuman. Thus when Kertész, returns home, filled with hatred and looks himself in the mirror for the first time in months he discovers a less ‘reassuring look’ in his eyes (Kertész 2006: 238). Wiesel discovers a corpse (Wiesel 2008: 133).

One is already dead without the other, the other towards which the *I* exceeds itself. Since the inner plurality of the self not only makes possible an instantaneous move between fraternity and enmity (Antelme 1998: 285), but, “despite all logic,” it accommodates compassion and brutality in the same person, at the same time (Levi 2003b: 39), our *self* is in greater danger than our life (ibid: 61). The other is the power that averts this danger, the *katechon* that withholds us from turning against ourselves, from relinquishing our death in order to survive. This power is care.

7. Crossing Care

In *Being and Time* Heidegger relates an arcane fable of Hyginus.⁹ It is the only time in the work when myth speaks *for* philosophy, perhaps by proxy, *before* but also already *after*, the strict phenomenological exposition. It commands a close reading:

“Once when ‘care’ was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took a piece and began to shape it. While she was thinking about what she had made, Jupiter came by. ‘Care’ asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, Jupiter forbade this and demanded that it be given his name instead. While ‘Care’ and Jupiter were arguing, Earth (Tellus) arose, and desired that her name be conferred upon the creature, since she had offered it part of her body. They asked Saturn [or in the Greek Kronos, time] to be the judge. And Saturn gave them the following decision, which seemed to be just: “Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you should receive that spirit at death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since ‘Care’ first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called ‘homo,’ for it is made out of humus (earth).” (Heidegger 1996: 184)

Care crosses the river.¹⁰ On the other side she fashions man and possesses him through and through for life. Heidegger contrasts this life of humanity, with the life of God, who in Seneca’s last letter, finds fulfillment in his own

9 Blumenberg gives an incisive account of the transmission of this fable through Herder, Goethe and Burdback (Blumenberg 2010: 139).

10 In the Latin *cura* is semantically closer to *care*, to which is thought to be etymologically unrelated, than to its cognate *cure*. The semantic spectrum of care, trouble, attention, pains, industry, diligence and exertion is preserved in the German *Sorge* and the French *souci*.

divine nature (ibid: 185). Care is clearly human, and is tied to life. Whereas death collects *Dasein* to its ownmost possibility facing the originary limit of itself, in care *Dasein* exits itself into the space of things. Thus, “as paradoxical as it sounds, care unburdens one from busying oneself with oneself,” (Blumenberg 2010: 154)¹¹ it directs the origin of meaning from death to the world, a world of idle chatter, of the everyday.

The structure of care designates thus an area (*Da*) of thought and action for Da-sein, the horizon of which is things, in all their worldly, quotidian banality. (Levinas 2000: 31) This area (*Da*) is the very foundation of one’s existence (*Dasein*), a foundation without a ground, (Levinas 2000: 29) which does not presuppose but is presupposed for selfhood. (Heidegger 1996: 297) And yet this presupposition is bound to remain inauthentic as long as care is not in turn oriented towards death (ibid: 277). Only insofar as *Dasein* is unto death, is care true, only insofar as one is able to die, ‘having endeared himself to the essence of death’, is essential care possible.

This essay, following the most radiant moments of the camps and the incision of Todorov’s work, does not simply reverse the condition, making originary care the ground of possibility of death, but sees the two in their radical interweaving, their constitutive co-emergence. Where the *Da* of *Dasein* is the camp, where death is the everyday, only this interweaving does prevent relentless atrocity from degenerating into banality. And where death is in danger of being reduced to mere perishing, the circumspection of care has not a trace of the everyday; a piece of string is survival, the theft of a spoon murder.

In the camp, death and care go hand in hand. On the way to the gas, holding a little package does not betray an attachment to the paltry remains of one’s possessions, but supplements a last touch, the holding of another’s hand and thus a holding onto hope. (Borowski 1976: 150) Carrying a little package I bear the other who bears me, (Levinas 2000: 11) the other who is not merely ‘there’ (*Da*) too, at my death, (Heidegger 1996: 222) but who gives ground to this death. I thus repeat to myself as I repeat to the other the words of Celan: “*Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen.*” (Derrida 2005)¹² The world is over and I must carry you; it is “a responsibility from which there is no flight,” (Levinas

11 Blumenberg’s reading remains tenaciously unconvincing on both historical and hermeneutical grounds. Most eloquently summarized in the title chapter: “the narcissism of care: the creature of a fleeting reflection,” what Blumenberg tries to trace in care is a Gnostic origin in which *Cura* stands for *Sophia* and does not fashion the human as a craftsman but through her reflection on the river she crosses. Blumenberg’s reading emerges thus as an exegesis rather than a critique of the Heideggerian gesture. Unlike death, which evokes the true, the proper self, care is merely selfish, narcissistic. It busies itself with things and people, in order to help herself forget her own death.

Perhaps however, in the crossing of the river a crossing of time is to be found. Time, as what flows, as river, is only one of the possibilities. Care, crosses, traverses this possibility, extending itself beyond the time of duration. She possesses man unto the judgment of *Kronos*, the figure of a time beyond the flux of a river, the condition of every temporality.

12 The line of Celan forms the leitmotif of the whole of Derrida’s exploration.

2000: 20) I can only “carry out the categorical imperative” of care (Todorov 2000: 118), carrying you and your death, which signals the end of the world, bearing thus a world unto the last moment and giving myself the possibility, the hope, the gift of death.

8. The Unsharable Share

Often, what the survivor carries is an unbearable guilt. The statistical knowledge that: “the privileged prisoners were a minority within the Lager population, but they represent a potent majority among survivors,” (Levi 2003b: 26) distills into the conviction that: “the worst survived—that is the fittest; the best all died.” (ibid: 63) The survivor wonders thus: *was I one of the worst?* Did I survive, because someone else, perhaps someone more worthy of living than me, died? (ibid: 58, 62–63) Having survived on the soup made with the bones of the dead, having exchanged the gold of their teeth for bread, (Antelme 1998: 16; Borowski 1976: 175) having simply been there, behind the same fence, how much of the crime do I carry, how much should I, can I, bear?

Levi tries to dispel the spectres: “Go away. I haven’t dispossessed anyone, haven’t usurped anyone’s bread. No one died in my place. No one.” (Levi 2003a: 13) For it must be true: “one is never in the place of another.” (Levi 2003b: 13) Why then do the spectres return, why the voices, the unfathomable angst? Wisel has no reserve: “I am still here, because a friend, a comrade, an unknown died in my place.” (Bettelheim 1980: 298) The law pronounces an abysmal interchangeability, a devastating economy: “everyone dies and lives in the place of another, without reason or meaning: the camp is the place in which no one can truly die or survive in his own place.” (Agamben 2002: 104) Where life is meaninglessly interchangeable, my demise is not the life of a singular other, my survival is not the life of a singular self. I survive only by surviving my self as much as my humanity; I survive in fragments.

The revenants revoke the shattering experience of the disconnection of survival and life, of demise and death. They accuse those who merely survived of having done so at the expense of everyone’s life, at the expense of everyone’s death, reduced now to a mere demise. The spectres cannot rest because they were unable to die; they return. They carry fear and silence.

Angst is for Heidegger the transparency of death’s solitude. In the face of death, one realizes that: “no one can take the other’s dying away from him. Someone can go ‘to his death for an other.’ However, that always means to sacrifice oneself for the other ‘in a definite matter.’ Such dying for ... can never, however, mean that the other has thus had his death in the least taken away.” (Heidegger 1996: 223) One must die one’s own death, follow through the imperative of the unsharable event. Thus death collects the self to itself, collects the excess of its own possibilities and the responsibility of authentic care.

However, it is by now clear that the angst of the survivor emerges rather from the loss, the generalised dispossession of death. This does not mean that those who were led to the gas chambers perished without dying. It means that

those who survived can no longer die, die their own death, because they did not share the death of those who merely perished. In turn, those who merely perished did so because the world forbade their death, forbade the sharing of this death. So they return. They designate in the *Da* of *Dasein*, a space of existence in which the survivor is prisoner of the dead (Levinas 2000: 21).

After the event, one is called to share the death of those who merely perished, return them their death in order to receive in return one's own share of death. It is the *common share* of the unsharable that cannot be disavowed—it is the survivor's act of care towards the dead who always care.

Afterword: “this is the after-life which is beginning today” (Semprun 2005: 118)

The preceding words are traces along a path of thought signposted with the inexhaustible uniqueness of a series of testimonies. These untimely words, arriving at once too late with regard to the irrevocable event and too early in the face of the incalculable future, are no more than provisional forays into the promise of care.

Todorov sought in the countless expressions of care in the camp the sharing of life in order to dispel the myth of a solitary antagonism of survival; in the wake of the recovered significance of care this essay seeks the potentiality of a sharing of death, eroding a glorious ideology of terror, the ideology of solitary death.

Death is here witnessed in its inextricable relation to the other (Levinas 2000: 8). It offers the realization that the failure to share death leaves one a stranger to the other and a stranger to oneself (Améry 1980: 95). This stranger, unable to die the unique death of the other, has already proscribed his own death: to shun the unsharable share means to forsake one's own death in exchange for a solitary demise. This solitude, the product of the dissolution of care, was the undertaking of the factories of death, a totalitarian dream that was never concluded. Sharing death was the infinitely weak and infinitely difficult resistance that kept the infinite potentiality of a future open. These words that arrive today, carry its testimony.

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Georgios Cagdis

UDEO SMRTI: BRIGA PRELAZI LOGOR

Apstrakt

Esej tematizuje pitanje brige u uslovima totalne moći – ne samo *extra muros*, u svakodnevnom životu Trećeg Rajha, već u njenoj najradikalnijoj artikulaciji, koncentracionom logoru. Crpeći inspiraciju iz Todorovljevog dela, esej se bavi Levinasom, Agambenom, Deridom i Nansijem, kako bi propitao Hajdegorovo određenje Da-sein-ovog horizonta kroz samotno suočavanje sa smrću. Opsežno se oslanjajući na primarna svedočanstva, esej pokazuje da je, kada je *Da* egzistencije postalo ograda logora, briga poprimila radikalni značaj kao veza između smrti drugog i smrti samog sebe. Suočeni s aparatom totalne moći i njegovim pokušajem da individualizuje i izoluje smrt, deljenje smrti u liku brige ostalo je neotuđivi čin otpora i poslednje sredstvo za zadržavanje smrti kao nečega što bi uistinu moglo biti nečije vlastito.

Ključne reči: briga, smrt, koncentracioni logor, svedok, totalitarizam, Todorov, Hajdeger, Levinas, Agamben