

Simulacra and Simulations - III. Holocaust

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Forgetting extermination is part of extermination, because it is also the extermination of memory, of history, of the social, etc. This forgetting is as essential as the event, in any case unlocatable by us, inaccessible to us in its truth. This forgetting is still too dangerous, it must be effaced by an artificial memory (today, everywhere, it is artificial memories that efface the memory of man, that efface man in his own memory). This artificial memory will be the restaging of extermination - but late, much too late for it to be able to make real waves and profoundly disturb something, and especially, especially through a medium that is itself cold, radiating forgetfulness, deterrence, and extermination in a still more systematic way, if that is possible, than the camps themselves. One no longer makes the Jews pass through the crematorium or the gas chamber; but through the sound track and image track, through the universal screen and the microprocessor. Forgetting, annihilation, finally achieves its aesthetic dimension in this way - it is achieved in retro, finally elevated here to a mass level.

Even the type of sociohistorical dimension that still remained forgotten in the form of guilt, of shameful latency, of the not-said, no longer exists, because now "everyone knows," everybody has trembled and bawled in the face of extermination - a sure sign that "that" will never again occur. But what one exorcises in this way at little cost, and for the price of a few tears, will never in effect be reproduced, because it has always been in the midst of currently reproducing itself, and precisely in the very form in which one pretends to denounce it, in the medium itself of this supposed exorcism: television. Same process of forgetting, of liquidation, of extermination, same annihilation of memories and of history, same inverse, implosive radiation, same absorption without an echo, same black hole as Auschwitz. And one would like to have us believe that TV will lift the weight of Auschwitz by making a collective awareness radiate, whereas television is its perpetuation in another guise, this time no longer under the auspices of a site of annihilation, but of a medium of deterrence.

What no one wants to understand is that Holocaust is primarily (and exclusively) an event, or, rather, a televised object (fundamental rule of McLuhan's, which must not be forgotten), that is to say, that one attempts to rekindle a cold historical event, tragic but cold, the first major event of cold systems, of cooling systems, of systems of deterrence and extermination that will then be deployed in other forms (including the cold war, etc.) and in regard to cold masses (the Jews no longer even concerned with their own death, and the eventually self-managed masses no longer even in revolt: deterred until death, deterred from their very own death) to rekindle this cold event through a cold medium, television, and for the masses who are themselves cold, who will only have the opportunity for a tactile thrill and a posthumous emotion, a deterrent thrill as well, which "will make them spill into forgetting with a kind of good aesthetic conscience of the catastrophe.

In order to rekindle all that, the whole political and pedagogical orchestration that came from every direction to attempt to give meaning to the event (the televised event this time) was not at all excessive. Panicked blackmailing around the possible consequence of this broadcast on the imagination of children and others. All the pedagogues and social workers mobilized to filter the thing, as if there were some danger of infection in this artificial resurrection! The danger was really rather the opposite: from the cold to the cold, the social inertia of cold systems, of TV in particular. It was thus necessary that the whole world mobilize itself to remake the social, a hot social, heated discussion, hence communication, from the cold monster of extermination. One lacks stakes, investment, history, speech. That is the fundamental problem. The objective is thus to produce them at all cost, and this broadcast served this purpose: to capture the artificial heat of a dead event to warm the dead body of the social. Whence the addition of the supplementary medium to expand on the effect through feedback: immediate polls sanctioning the massive effect of the broadcast, the collective impact of the message - whereas it is well understood that the polls only verify the televisual success of the medium itself. But this confusion will never be lifted. From there, it is necessary to speak of the cold light of television, why it is harmless to the imagination (including that of children) because it no longer carries any imaginary and this for the simple reason that it is no longer an image. By contrast with the cinema, which is still blessed (but less and less so because more and more contaminated by TV) with an intense imaginary - because the cinema is an image. That is to say not only a screen and a visual form, but a myth, something that still retains something of the double, of the phantasm, of the mirror, of the dream, etc. Nothing of any of this in the "TV" image, which suggests nothing, which mesmerizes, which itself is nothing but a screen, not even that: a miniaturized terminal that, in fact, is immediately located in your head - you are the screen, and the TV watches you - it transistorizes all the neurons and passes through like a magnetic tape - a tape, not an image.