On Holocaust Photography:
Or when the memory practice of the victims is empty

Sofija Grandakovska

Let us speak, then, of the world from which human beings have disappeared.

J. Baudrillard

I.

Holocaust, perhaps, belongs to the rare historical theophanic experiences for which neither science nor art, nor history or the poets could agree on the conclusion that we possess awareness for a precise or true acknowledgement of the event.[1] Consequently, we are faced with the lack of power over knowledge that constantly eludes us, spins and elapses. The inability to anticipate the Holocaust as a rational cognizance, not merely as a political project, but also as an established truth of the greatest of all evils of man and humanity, the event itself becomes apophatic[2] within our understanding. The problematic aspect of the Holocaust confronts us with the inability to discuss the event in terms of the generally established, acceptable terms and discourses, which are rejected by the nature of Holocaust itself, hence, the possibility to elucidate, adopt and interpret this event on a comprehensible discursive level becomes rejected as well. The decision to speak of the Holocaust through the prism of comparative-contrastive

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[1] The text "On Holocaust Photography Or when the memory practice of the victims is empty" by Sofija Grandakovska, was primarily published in the chrestomatia: The Jews From Macedonia and the Holocaust: History, Theory, Culture, edited with a foreword by Sofija Grandakovska (Skopje: Euro Balkan Press, 2011, pp. 646-671).

[2] When using the term apophatic [ἀπόφαστις] the reference is at its secondary level in order to signify the distinctness of the Holocaust event in terms of its understanding as such.

analysis, and by employing derived signifying systems and terms becomes requisite for our theoretical, inevitably human, need and finds justification in the problem of expressing ourselves on the event by way of the existing, but not satisfactory terminology. This only proves that the event itself is ineffable and inconceivable in all its ghastly, painful and eschatological dimensions, i.e. it is a denial. On the other hand, the Holocaust is a paradigmatic example of an utterance striving to reach the omnipresence of evil. Hence, there exists the necessity to speak of the Holocaust and its horrifying metaphors by deconstructing already familiar terms, while by disseminating them to achieve a possible cognizance of the Holocaust reality as the most hostile face for mankind. By introducing the term `face`, I extend this research on Holocaust to the *ethics of viewing*, thus attaining knowledge on the event by means of photography and its visual statements, which present to us and accumulate the world of death and pain, a world that associates the significance of these occurrences and their presence to a real event rooted and finalized in our historical, yet modern time.

By means of aesthetics of viewing and by secondary, typologically derived levels and disseminated meanings of Holocaust terminology and the Holocaust event, I give priority to Holocaust photography and the cognizance it contains and produces. Photography is a narrative, both disguising and revealing, disclosing in a way that enables the narration to be understood in a unique mimetic manner, a narrative not illusive even from afar, nor a reflection of Holocaust reality, nor one that alters the value of its content or signifying quality. Photography is constituted on the iconic principle and from semiotic aspect, its understanding is related to the manner in which we read and interpret its visual presentations, i.e. signs. The semiotic expressiveness of photography refers to its understanding as a *text* that helps us to "read" the image, to understand what it presents and finally to interpret what the text of the image signifies in instances when the linear scripture is replaced by a visual one. The visual language fills in the gaps and offers information on the Holocaust event. Photography refers to the historic terror that has occurred, as a negative epiphany that had befallen the Jewish people in World War Two, as well as the entire humankind. Therefore, the

photography text represents the *metacode*[3] of the visual medium itself. The subject of research of Holocaust photography refers to the question of what governs the visual statements and the way in which they govern each other so as to constitute a "set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable, and hence capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures".[4]

Holocaust photography, examined from the aspect of the text and the semiotic parameters in reading the text, infers that the image is connotative, i.e. it is polysemous and hence it would be wrong indeed to think of the image as a space where only visually perceived and fixed occurrences, gestures or forms can be seen. Accordingly, the text of the photography is in dialogical relation with cognizance and the message these occurrences and gestures carry, as well as the represented motives they refer to or signify. Photography is much more than the passive observation of what it represents. Of crucial significance to this discussion is attainment of cognizance regarding what Holocaust photography narrates as a text, the type of messages it reflects, its composition, structure, the rules that constitute the text of Holocaust photography regarding the close thematic horizon of the Jews from Macedonia and their deportation to Treblinka II in 1943,[5] and finally, discover if the discourse of the text of Holocaust photography belongs to a certain order of rules that distinguishes and sets apart Holocaust photography as an exceptional subject of research.

II.

Although modernism should have been perceived as a "lyric dream" for liberation of human thought and meticulous humanistic

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[3] For this question, please see: Vilem Flusser, *Filozofija fotografije* [*Für eine Philosophie der Fot*ografie], Zagreb: Scarabeus-naklada, 2007.

[4] The author quotes in the original text in Macedonian: M. Fuko, „Istina i moć", *Spisi i razgovori* [M. Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*], Beograd: Fedon, 2010, 144, while the English quotations are taken from: M.Foucault, "Truth and Power", *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. by Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, p. 112. (trans. note)

[5] Treblinka I was a labor camp. The text refers specifically to the question of Jews from Macedonia and their deportation to Treblinka II.

development, nonetheless, mass graves, gas chambers and collective death stipulated by the Nazi program marked this historical time as a modern archetype of universal pain related to the Jewish question and its serious historical, cultural, ontological and civilized implications. Modernism launched the decision to transform the world by the implementation of technology and definitely to transform the world by the alienation of the man with the Holocaust project on "Master-ing". The Post-Holocaust is marked by a strong epistemological dilemma regarding the human capacity concerning good and evil, on standing in front of death and the suffering of Jews, as well as by the question of the ontological value of human life as a non-repetitive category. Although the history of humanity is characterized by many wars, each of them distinct and irrational, fatal and extremely humiliating in its nature, World War Two remains the only branded war and one exclusively labeled with the term Holocaust as an event without an "archetypical instance". Bearing in mind that the Nazi agenda was carried out under secrecy (in terms of the execution of the crime), I would like to emphasize the so-called *isotopic*[6] inability which refers to the meticulous sublimation of the details of the Holocaust event. Here indisputably must be considered the deportation and extermination of around 7,200 Jews from Macedonia in Treblinka II in 1943.

An attempt to draw a diachronic line of suffering will prove impossible in a general context, still, by limiting the present thematic horizon we can locate the beginning of the collective suffering of the Jewish people pointing with certainty to the Old Testament, namely the second book of the Old Testament, *Exodus*. The Book of Exodus emphasizes the interest for repressing the mythological dimensions and affirming the historical context of the event and time with regards to sacred history.[7] Furthermore, there is truth in the statement that the

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[6] In order to stress the analytic impossibility for speaking of microscopic significance of the singularities related to the implementation of the deportation plan and killing the Jews from Macedonia in the gas chambers of Treblinka II in 1943, I borrowed Jacques Derrida's terminology and the binary structure of: *dissemination* (referring to complex and multiple meanings of a text) and *isotopy* (referring to sublation of meanings).

[7] С. Грандаковска, „Молитвата во еврејската книжевност", in: *Говорот на молитвата* [S. Grandakovska, *Discourse of the prayer*], Скопје: Премин, 2008, p. 49.

confrontation of the Jewish people with evil historically can be focalized in the term *exile*. While crossing the "Sea of Reeds"[8] and the escape from slavery in Egypt certainly speaks of exile of the Jewish people, until then the exile was marked and related to a *focalization of the future* [for the Jewish people].[9] The event from the Old Testament depicted in the *Second Book of Moses* is etymologically related to the term *exodus* [eksodus], which signifies a way to exit,[10] more precisely it refers to a binary dynamics related to departing [exiting Egypt] and arriving (an exit [*Exodus*]) to salvation. Examined through the biblical narrative, this stand certainly implies the question of reuniting or restoration of Jewish life, a new hope and purpose in view of continuing the Jewish tradition, culture and history after the episode of *Exodus*, practicing them in a new space. Therefore, the past can be *memorized*.

Post-Holocaust thought faces an extraordinary problem for being marked with the impossibility to use the same terminology and speak of the exodus of 1943, after which the treatment of the Jewish catastrophe resulting from the period of the Holocaust would imply nurturing, restoration or valorization of Jewish life. It is from the simple reason that those who are to constitute the historic consciousness of its existence - of life - are dead.[11] Historic truth stays repetitive and therefore consistent: none of the Jewish victims from Macedonia returned from Treblinka. Therefore, when applying the term exodus in the Holocaust context, indisputably, the only possible use would be its derived

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[8] In the Jewish text, the syntagm "The Sea of Reeds" in all probability is the name of the Red Sea. See: Џ. Дрејн, *Увођење у Стари завет* [J. Drane, Introducing the Old Testament], Београд: Clio, p. 57.

[9] Of course, the banishment of the Jews from Spain in 1492 is also paradigmatic in relation to the exodus as an example for a view to the future.

[10] H. Leon- Dufour, *Rječnik biblijske teologije* [*Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique*], Zagreb: Nadbiskupski duhovni stolb, 1969, 375-9.

[11] The text refers to the event related to the annihilation of the Macedonian Jews in Treblinka II in 1943. Only those who joined the Partisan movement and the Jewish foreign citizens managed to save themselves from being deported. Two Jewish communities were renewed after the war: in Skopje (around 328 members) and in Bitola (around 57 members). After the creation of the State of Israel only the Jewish community in Skopje remained active with approximately fifty members. Before World War Two there were three large Jewish communities in Bitola (around 3,100 members), Skopje (over 2,800 members) and in Shtip (around 600 members). Of course, Jews lived in other Macedonian towns (Strumica, Veles among others), but no Jewish communities were established there.

meaning "exodus to death" or more precisely: deportation straight to death. It defines the historical, semantic and ontological reality of genocide, yet also the firm cognizance that: *the memory practice of the victims is empty*.

By indicating to the semiotic value of the iconic (meaning), photography captures the cognizance of what is not always explicitly visible, though still tangible, susceptible of perception and apprehension. This is because the semiotic reality of the visual interacts with secret, hidden codes seeking to be understood and interpreted accordingly to signification or pursuant to the rule of *signifying*: what does the sign refer to in a visual text. By demonstrating the victims' absence of memory practice, the text of Holocaust photography allows it to be stated and accessible as cognizance, to reach the "the absent syndrome of survivor"[12] due to the image of the photography text. Therefore, it would be safer to state that Holocaust photography acquires *memorial* character by way of semiotic dialogism in absence of the living memory practice of the victims.

Taking into consideration all these observed distinctions of the provisional term *exodus* [in death] of the Jewish people from Macedonia during World War Two, which in respect of the event can be understood as *genocide* as well,[13] the post-Holocaust period is left with a limited number of objective analytic instruments employed to identify, evaluate and precisely synthesize the destroyed Jewish history in its (post-) Holocaust thematic horizon. These analytical instruments would be: a limited field which would constitute the historic awareness for Jewish life in Macedonia (since no one returned alive), i.e. the syndrome of the absent witness; the topos of silence caused by the absence of the Treblinka witnesses, whose testimony would render the trace, the

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[12] Z. Bauman, "The Holocaust Life as a Ghost", *Social Theory after the Holocaust*, ed. by R. Fine and C. Turner, Liverpool University Press, 2000, 8.

[13] 12 For an anthropological aspect of the genocide see: A. L. Hinton (ed. by), *Annihilating Difference, The Anthropology of Genocide*, University of California Press, 2002; for social aspect of genocide see: L. S. Newman and R. Erber (eds), *Understanding Genocide, The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

authentic explicit fragment and potential orientation in the discussion of what has truly occurred there. What remains is the empty space of the authentic memory, the physical space of 7,200 Jews from/in Macedonia being the life force of transformation, of continuation of history, culture and ontology of Jewish life after the Holocaust. Treblinka remains the topos of an *exodus with no return*. Holocaust photography is a visual representative, a testimony of the world and event, of the people gone and never to be born again. In the absence of the living memory practice of the victims, Holocaust photography is *historic reality, a documented testimony*.

Post-Holocaust thought is by far most limited by the language impotency to express the inexpressible, the endured experience in Treblinka with a life testimony. Clearly, we can distinguish between an intellectual and emotional problem with respect to the Holocaust. The Holocaust exposes something which remains as invisible, for we cannot constitute the *subject* within the language, in other words the subject can neither be a linguistic construction, nor constitute it. There is no natural relationship between the signifier and the signified, just as there is a broken, severed relationship between life and death. Hence, the semiotic relation between the sign and the signifier is *terrorized*, it is forcefully discontinued. Therefore, the discursive (theoretic) level employed to examine the Holocaust over the Macedonian Jews indicates a certain re-writing, as a possibility to bring back to life the world in Treblinka. (This is a world we know so little about, a world discussed only after abandoning the conventional schema (authentic testimony, survivors), a world constructed and kept in secrecy by the Nazis, a discursive maneuver[14] to hide the crimes from the eyes and the face of the world. This world disturbs once again with the question: how is it possible that such an enormous human capacity created such an inexpressible crime and such inexpressible pain, when at the same time it is impossible to understand in detail what actually happened in Treblinka. In the absence of living witnesses and their linear testimonies, it is precisely Holocaust

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[14] Wolfgang Sofsky, *The order of terror: The concentration camp*, Princeton University Press, 1997, 62.

photography that revives the dark world via the opportunity for semiotic reading of the text of its visual writing and the signification of the separate details depicted in the image. Holocaust photography is a *language*, speech in the absence of the living memory practice of the victims.

III.

The question of the secret exodus to death of the Macedonian Jews is not one of a merely political nature. Of course, it mustn't remain exclusively legal[15] either, although at the time an entire legal system was established withthe purpose of legalizing Hitler's Nazi invention, i.e. the crime. This question could also be of a profoundly religious nature, referring to the inexpressible human suffering (closely related to the memory of senses, emotional / intuitive/cognitive/inexpressible memory). Still, it cannot remain simply religious for it expands beyond this singular sphere, entering the domain of interpretation and the possibility of analytic approach. I would like to refer to the *Book of Job*, in order to draw a contrastive parallel between suffering and the Holocaust's pain and loss. Job's motive for rebellion and his suffering seems to be actualized once more in the post-Holocaust thought in respect to the question of Jewish suffering, which on the other hand generates the thematic subject of a privileged anti-theodic object.[16]

    Job, the righteous, suffering man, in his rebellion asks two crucial questions. One question has an ontological character and refers to the rebellion of human conscience against disharmony in the world, as well

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[15] I do not refer only to the laws introduced by Hitler, or the laws enforced by the Bulgarian forces in Macedonia beginning from 1941, which were deadly for the Macedonian Jews, rather to the Nurnberg Trials as well.

[16] Namely, this view problematizes the theodician question on the arguments about "The justification of the Jewish God" (after the Holocaust event) and his righteousness. The antitheodic concept refers to the relationship between God and evil. See: Zachary Braiterman, *God after Auschwitz, Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, 163. I would like to indicate particularly these chapters: "Theodicy and Its Others: Forms of Religious Response to the Problem of Evil" (p. 19-34), "Hitler's Accomplice, Revisioning Richard Rubenstein" (p. 88-111); "Do I Belong to the Race of Worlds, Anti/Theodic Faith and Textual Revision in the Thought of Eliezer Berkovits" (p. 112-160). Also see: R. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (John Hopkins University, 1966); E. Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973) and *With God in Hell: Judaism in the Ghettos and Death Camps* (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1979).

as to the attempt to resolve this disharmony in the world as a phenomenon constituted on a binary principle: good and evil (dark and light, etc.). Thereto, Job never renounces his faith in Yahweh during his suffering, but questions God's righteousness. The semiotic value of his passionate rebellion still signifies rebellion against the presence of a negative principle in the world. On the other hand, Yahweh is an uncontested authority providing for a harmonic and ideal world order. The foundations of Job's world (the righteous, suffering man) are shaken and are in an absurd position with respect to what Yahweh announces as his will (provided his laws are respected and obeyed). Therefore, righteousness and loyalty contradict the suffering of Job, the righteous. Obeying Yahweh's laws is the promised justice, which constitutes faith itself.

Job's second question has profound philosophic-ethical character and refers to the question: what is the point of a world established upon a binary principle, and the justice of the structure of the world? Essentially, by asking this question Job manifests his faith in the positive principle, which is humanistic (related to happiness and the welfare of human beings). Although his suffering is the strongest proof of the paradox of the world, Job remains a fervent believer.[17] By employing this parable from the Old Testament, the post-Holocaust thinkers developed the tragedy of the Jews during World War Two into a question of the morally absent God or, on a derived, metaphoric level, into a question of the "missing Father" (the one unifying a single family).[18]

Further on, without pondering over the details of the numerous aspects offered by the anti-theodic thematic argument, as a pretext, I would like to take into consideration the semantic load of the syntagm

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[17] Perhaps the most interesting detail of his ardent faith is his wife's advice: Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. (King James Bible, Job, 2, 9-10). The syntagm: Curse Him, presents the euphemism: Bless Him. (underlined by the author)

[18] I borrowed the syntagm from J. Derrida. See: Ž. Derida, *Odmetničke države (Dva ogleda o umu)*[J. Derrida: *Voyous (Deux essays sur la raisson)*], Beograd: Beogradski krug, 2007, 76-7.

on the *righteous*, *suffering man* and develop the discussion through the prism of hermeneutical innovation and derived, secondary level, in the context of the present subject on Holocaust and the Jewish people. Suffering is a semiotic sign precisely positioned in two different centers, two different worlds, burdened from entirely two different aspects: theological and historic. It is precisely why, by introducing the parable from the Old Testament, I wish to suggest a slightly different question (from the anti-theodic). Insofar as the first human question on suffering was directed to God (being an archetypical value), wouldn't the following be more logical: Is Holocaust a question intended for man and to man, or should the question on suffering in the greatest of all human tragedies be directed to God? This is supported by the fact that Holocaust is derivative, an invention, a creation of man. Therefore, would the question on suffering refer to the faith in God, or in more humble words, to the doubt in his righteousness or, perhaps the question refers to re-examination of the faith in man, not merely as a being, rather as a civilization category? In the first case, the dramatic dialogue unfolds between man and God, whereupon the individual suffers, yet remains faithful to God, he understands the paradox of the world, leaning towards the positive principle (towards God) and finding peace in the cognizance in God - i.e. in the principle of the good, which is always related to the term God (theological principle). The antitheodic prism in its attempts to offer a theological answer to the problem of how evil and suffering emancipates a meaning of skepticism towards the Jewish God and affirms a secular approach towards God, relating it to the political praxis. Still, as J. Liotard stressed, "political emancipation becomes synonymous with the exclusion of Jews within anti-Semitism as a negative principle."[19] Consequently, we can draw a clear critical distinction between the theological and political discourse.[20] What

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[19] D. Seymour, "Lyotard: Emancipation, Anti-Semitism and 'the Jews'", in: *Social Theory after the Holocaust*, ed. by R. Fine and C. Turner, Liverpool University Press, 2000, 127.

[20] For this distinction see: G. Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy*, Stanford University Press, 2003 [G. Anidžar, *Jevrejin, Arapin: istorija neprijatelja*, Beograd: Beogradski krug & CZKD, 2006)].

connects them is the principle of mutual exclusion by way of the term: *reduction*, equal to the contrasted terms: divine and human. In the second case, the research, inspired by Job's story and the post-Holocaust thought, is mostly concerned with the semiotic importance of the relation: suffering-Holocaust in historic-political context.

The Holocaust – and the suffering the Jewish people endured as a result of the Holocaust - implies congregation, collectiveness, togetherness. Hence, this *congregation* in the suffering of the Jewish people during World War Two, along with death as its final instance, brings these people closer to the attribute- congregational. Suffering, on a secondary, semiotic level, acquires liturgical character and refers to mutual suffering. Therefore, Holocaust photography is a *liturgical testimony of collective suffering* in the absence of the living memory practice of the victims.

The semiotic character of the text in Holocaust photography is an epiphany of something else, not of divine, but of human origin. The liturgical concept of Holocaust photography refers to the idea of a specific event in Jewish history. The liturgical implies cyclicity, iteration, *repetition*. Here, I do not mean iteration of the Holocaust as an event, rather the actions that constitute the event, by all means equal, applicable and iterative on every individual-victim [read: Jew] in the event. I shall mention only some of these segments: marking, registration, gathering, deportation and murder. The iteration of the actions, created by the Nazi-program, is interpreted, created and with no exceptions applied to the victims. Thus, the Holocaust event as a whole constituted its commemorative function, which developed into memory by repeating one and the same, the previous, the first: gathering (grouping, separation, exclusion), deportation and murder, while by repeating the actions within the event, it realizes its ritual or performative agenda, thus valorizing the monstrous reality which unities the people in common suffering (suffering together). Consequently, the congregation of suffering acquires the derived, implicated, negative, deconstructed notion of the "liturgical concept"[21] - of Hitlerism. The de-

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[21] M. Foucault speaks of torture as a technique, part of a ritual, an impressive act and the ceremonial administration of justice, employing the term punitive liturgy. He stresses: "... Hence, no doubt those tortures that take place even after death: corpses burnt, ashes thrown to the winds,

sacral act multiplies "the liturgical" by disseminating it and driving it to its negative, punitive variant which is of typological character; the new unity becomes a new form of congregation, unknown for humanity up to then, new semiotics, new performance, new liturgy, *new knowledge*. Repetition is maintained with every new killing, while every next one would be a commemorative act of the previous. Therefore, we cannot even follow the line of an archetypical constant, it is not a matter of archi-trace with prehistoric anthropological root, rather a trace with its source in modernism, a trace without its own pre-paradigm. Pursuant to the critical discourse of the Holocaust concept, it should not be possible to include the category of absolute (eternal) knowledge (in theological sense), because the Holocaust is connected to a concrete historic context implying linearity in time (not infinity), therefore with an historical knowledge of an event which has a beginning and end.[22] And so, this deconstructed liturgical concept, already an integral part of modern history, constitutes its memory in the future as an archi-trace coming from modern history. Therefore, in the absence of living memory practice of the victims, Holocaust photography becomes the signifier of the liturgical testimony of the suffering of the Jewish people and in the absence of living memory practice of the victims, it becomes a testimony of a deconstructed liturgical concept of killing and of its performativeness, cyclicity and commemoration of killing.

Distinguishing the semiotics of the "negative archetypical value", erected to a level of real Holocaust event, might pose an interesting question on who controls the right and understanding of the authority. This question has always held a definite position in theology and in religious life. The question of who controls the right and the authority

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bodies dragged on hurdles and exhibited at the roadside. Justice pursues the body beyond all possible pain."(The author quotes: М. Фуко, *Надзирати и кажњавати* [M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*], Нови Сад: ИКЗС, 1997, 35. (English quotations are from: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Vintage Books 1995, 34, trans. note). Foucault speaks of public torture, alterations in torturing in the course of history and law.

[22] On absoluteness of knowledge, the critical discourse, institutions of power and the dissident narrative in the comparative-contrastive analysis with recognizable archetypical forms by way of examples in the old Hebrew literature, see: S. Grandakovska, "Lightness of the Dissident, Brightness of the Critical Mind", in: *Playing by the Rules: Alternative Thinking / Alternative Spaces*, ed. by S. Rand and H. Couris, New York: Apexart, 2010, 154-171.

becomes a definite position of the absolute or totalitarian power in modernism. The semiotic signifier of the religious principle is *transponed* and concentrated directly in the autocratic program of Hitler's-Nazi regime. The difference might be the following: in Judaism, although Yahweh holds the central position, he does not deprive Job of the right to ask questions, while Job passes through an inner individual transformation by way of the permitted suffering in order to achieve a higher cognizance of consciousness. In absolute power, Hitler holds the central position and not only does he deprive man from the right to ask questions, rather he exterminates and kills Jews without their knowing where they are being taken to, or furthermore that the only thing waiting for them is death. In the case of Treblinka II, it is impossible to discern any sort of inner process that the victim had experienced, there is no dynamics leading to cognizance, enlightenment, and theophanic proclamation of a new knowledge. The central position of God as the absolute idea (in a theological context) encounters its deconstructed negative equal in the political authority (in an historic context). Thus, the central positions are held by a man who decides and elucidates over the question of the meaning of the world and the destiny of life (of the Jews), without any possibility for them to be considered in a rational dilemma, a choice, struggle, rebellion, question, possibility for rescue, possibility for exodus as an escape to the future [*Exodus*]. I would like to specify that the mass Jewish execution was not triggered by their Judaist religious persuasion, which they were to abandon,[23] rather because they simply were Jewish (an unworthy, unnecessary race). Still, the distorted form of the associative designation - Jew, indicates that the Holocaust on a derived level could have a profound theological importance, by binary designation: first as a Jew, second as a present *Stranger*.[24] In such a distorted semantic continuum it remains questionable whether we could

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[23] In this context, we set aside the question of converting many Jews in Christians, because this implies a different position of discussion.

[24] "...the Jew was virtually the only `stranger`. This was particularly true of Germany. In principle, the German racists of the early 20th century hated and despised Blacks just as much as Jews; but there were no Blacks in Germany then. Hate is of course more easily focused on the present than on the absent..." In: I. Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years*, Pluto Press, 1994, 57. The author quotes the edition: I. Shahak, *Židovska povijest, židovska religija, Tri bremena tisućljeća*, Zagreb: Naklada Jesenski i Turk, 2006, 106. (trans. note)

speak of a morally absent God in a religious context, while proposing yet again the anti-theodic post-Holocaust thought that positions God in the close historic frames of the Holocaust, for the Holocaust event primarily indicates to a moral absence, more precisely, to take M. Foucault's syntagm, to the apparent *localization of* evil[25] (which does not decrease the power of the crime), the central position in the autocratic Nazi program, rather than to a position of discussion on the religious discourse of the victims, i.e., that they are abandoned by God.[26] Such a claim is not reliable, bearing in mind that religious thought has been constituted since its earliest beginning as the human aspiration toward the vertical, hence towards reaching closer to the transcendent reality and union with the sacral nature [God]. In reference to the Jews-victims of the Holocaust, we could not say that the Holocaust affirms a morally absent (Jewish) God, rather that the congregational suffering of the victims affirms, in the least, an immorally present autocratic program that creates, rules and establishes the world - Treblinka, applicable only under the term - factory for evil and death. More precisely, it affirms the desire of a man for its verticalization by means of the gruesome concept of "Master-ing". Consequently, if the Holocaust crime is examined and applied under the prism of the anti-Theodic discourse, does it signify an introduction, or in more moderate words, affirmation of *religious imagination*, which would be abstract and refers to the awakening of the archetypical conscience by prompting desire. Desire has no history. Just as the good, just as God. Holocaust is embedded in history. Lamentation over the anti-Theodic imagination could not be permitted on account of marginalizing the truth of the Holocaust speech and its institutional foundations in the most catastrophic act for humanity.

As Job individually conciliated in the good [God] after having faced the existence of the negative principle in the world and its bizarre foundation, the Jewish people collectively "conciliated" in the criminal

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[25] M. Foucault, "Religious deviations and medical knowledge", *Religion and Culture*, selected and edited by J. R. Carrete, New York: Routledge, 1999, 52.

[26] The following inversion would also be appealing: God disappears, but he exists behind his judgment. (stressed by the author)

act with poisonous gas once and for all, so not one would survive to recount what he had seen and experienced, so the world wouldn't learn of the suffering that cannot be outlived, that is without a hope. "The survivor knows. He and no one else".[27] The survivor is dead, so he will never speak of how it felt to face and experience the darkest side of man. Therefore, in the absence of the living memory practice of the victims, the Holocaust photography is a liturgical testimony on the suffering of the Jewish people and in the absence of the living memory practice of the victims, it is a testimony to the negative liturgical concept on killing and its performativness, cyclicity and commemoration.

IV.

Traces of the event survive by way of photography. Photography transforms memory into a form of the past burned into ashes.

"All photographs are memento mori [reminders of death]. To take a photograph is to participate in another's person (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt."[28]

Photography text has an explicit narrative form, providing, by applying a so-called `archeological approach', that our time not be deprived of the possibility for retrospection of contemporary Jewish eschatology and of the catastrophic event, an expression of death and insufferable pain. The textual approach to Holocaust photography allows memories to become communicative, and history marked with blood - a trace, document, testimony, memory, biography and autobiography, a political fact, presence and absence of the past. Photography is an eye.

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[27] "...those who have not lived through the experience will never know; those who have will never tell..." Eli Wiesel in: Wolfgang Sofsky, *The order of terror: The concentration camp*, Princeton University Press, 1997, 10.

[28] The author quotes: S. Sontag, *O fotografiji* [S. Sontag, *On Photography*], Beograd: Kulturni Centar Beograda, 2009, 23. The English quotations are from: Sontag, S., *On Photography*, London: Penguin Books, 2002, 23. (trans. note)

The text of photography immortalizes the individuals-victims (and the individuals-executors as well) with its visual units. Therefore, I consider quite justified the question on the *ethics of memory*, posed by the narrative of suffering and the images invalidated by the gas chambers doors in Treblinka.

Any positive ethic dimension would be impossible to formulate on the Holocaust as an event.[29] Deconstruction of the ethic discourse of Holocaust leads towards the concept of trauma and crisis in memory. Memory is related to the question of self-image. Still, memory also contains the attribute of congregation, since it concerns the collective, which as an historical factor is concerned with history and the attempt to preserve and interpret what happened then. Therefore, the crisis of memory[30] regarding the Holocaust of the Jews in Macedonia indicates the etymologic value of parting, of discriminating against the possibility that memory could deliver the event in all its details, thus forever revoking the role of life experience on authenticity of the past event. In this respect, textual approach to Holocaust photography provides hermeneutic innovation that "demonstrates/surpasses" anomalies in memory as a method in research on discontinuity and abruptions in intellectual and emotional history[31] of the historical event, a coded language to death. So, the photography text on the annihilation of the Jews from Macedonia acquires an *iconographic status* of the horror and the human drama, invoking the disappeared, the banished and the killed from a position of an iconic semio-awareness and making present the silent speech of suffering and death. Holocaust photography becomes a *culture of memory*, developing into a visual history of the event. The absence of the written and life testimony on the unspeakable endured

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[29] On the question of the so-called negative moral and theoretic discussion regarding this issue, see: R. Clifton Spargo, *Vigilant Memory, Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust and the Unjust Death*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006.

[30] See: S. Rubin Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.

[31] On the distinction between intellectual memory, related to thought, and the memory of the senses, which is in fact the deep memory related to emotions, see: C. Bigsby, *Remembering and Imagining the Holocaust, The Chain of Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge, 2006, in particular the chapter: "The past remembered" (p. I-25). The author's contemplation on history of senses is interesting, whereupon he indicates that when memory is missing, we enter the world of aesthetics, i.e. of writing.

and infernal experience from the ecstatic Holocaust event testifies to the magnitude of the great deforming influence Nazism had on language and the inability of acquiring its own linguistic entity by depriving it of the key subject - the witness. Holocaust photography provides hermeneutic innovation in `surpassing` the anomalies of memory in the absence of living memory practice of the victims. The event per se disappears, yet its meaning resurrects anew in the invoking images.[32]

The Holocaust *exodus to death* and the subject of suffering is surely merely one of the semiotic signs in the text of Holocaust photography. On the other hand, the action of *excluding* all living witnesses, possibly the main goal in Hitler's conception for victims as an example of a successfully enforced deportation and liquidation, not a single person to narrate, is not in fact a nameless response on the events in Treblinka that occurred behind closed doors and in the domain of concealed reality. The echo can be found on another, secondary, derived level- contained in Holocaust photography. Namely, the visual signifier for the concealed reality signifies our will for knowledge and cognizance for the Holocaust drama of the Macedonian Jews in a symbolic, practical and discursive manner, allowing us to pursue silence with words by way of simulacrum reflected by photography itself. The text of Holocaust photography indeed appears to be one of the central positions in my attempt to interpret the unclassified, non-cognitive Holocaust tragedy in Treblinka and correct our skeptic relationship towards the reality of what and how it actually happened on a discursive level. It follows that Holocaust photography bears *emancipation values* for our thirst for real knowledge on the Holocaust exodus in Treblinka, in the absence of the living memory practice of the victims.

V.

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[32] M. Bernard-Donals, "Memory and the Image in Visual Representations of the Holocaust", *Forgetful Memory, Representation and Remembrance in the Wake of Holocaust*, State University of New York Press, 2009, 56.

The visual language of the Holocaust photography establishes itself as an articulation of inhumanity, a speech directed against the body and soul, against life, man and mankind. Holocaust photography in Macedonia is associated with the term Treblinka II. Which is the text of Holocaust photography and what is its composition? What are the questions and the responses it offers when the life vigor is gone from the dead eyes, and man is deprived of power, of theophany of the authentic speech?

Holocaust photography is grey, with a black tarnish. It signifies and displays death, hence it is horrid, touching, yet is profound and terrible. Holocaust photography is wrongful and offensive. It is tragic. The manner in which death arrived for the annihilated Jews in Treblinka II is the extensive narrative, revealed by the text of Holocaust photography. Its apprehension is narrowly related to absolute power, totalitarianism. The absolute Nazi power constituted a separate universe established upon its own rules, concentrated around deadly politics and merciless Holocaust inquisition over Jews. Gas chambers define the territory of genocide over the Macedonian Jews, marking the true existence of a real world and space where the perfect execution was committed in 1943. It is a world uninhabited by people, a mere transit place[33] where crime is finalized. Consequently, Treblinka II is not a concentration camp, rather a death camp (a camp for immediate dying), where nothing but death awaits the arrival of the `chosen`. Such a world exists as a *territorial simulacrum* in order to disguise its existence in reality.

The uninhabited world/space is in associative relation to the desert. However, the semiotic affirmation of the desert as a space in reference to Holocaust innovation cannot be conceived as a paradigmatic pattern of comparison, or as a semantically satisfactory term. The associative relationship can find justification only in contrastive analysis. The desert is a syntagm of a notably profound term - asceticism, a process of

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[33] In the extensive discussion on Treblinka and the typological distinctions of the camp, we suggest: C. Mattogno & J. Graf, *Treblinka, extermination camp or transit camp?* (Chicago, 2004), in particular the chapter "Transit camp Treblinka" (p. 290-300), which considers greatly the understanding of Treblinka as a transit camp.

dialectic opposition where the thing constantly evolves in another impressive dialogue, a conflict, conversation or, perhaps communication, reaching a new truth, cognizance of one self and the paradox of the world. The deserted space allows for the metaphor on the desert, an anthropologic relation between man and the world that acknowledges the structure of disharmony, eschatology, the paradox and the binary. However, precisely in this dialogical process the subject is able to discover the polyphonic structure of its being and his/her relation to the outside world, and thus build individual ideological standing regarding the existing reality. Therefore, the desert is a metaphorical passage [*Exodus*] to a new cognizance, perception from another standpoint. The difference between the desert and Treblinka is an essential one. In Treblinka II an individual is deprived of the possibility for inner asceticism and transformation of the being, deprived of the process of inner suffering, of the awareness and sanctity experienced during the process. Treblinka is only associatively related to the desert as a metaphor for the passage. In the first instance, the passage refers to a higher cognizance, to evolving, while in the second instance it refers to a transit place leading to death. Consequently, the desert maintains its sanctity, and remains an insufficient term in its capacity to encompass Treblinka II as well.

The characteristic of the totalitarian in power in the execution of the Holocaust genocide over the Macedonian Jews is the excellent organization of the Nazi regime. Reconstruction of the practice reveals a new form of murder executed by the bureaucratic administration and the garnered experience (lists, rounding up people, marking, deportation and killing in the gas chambers): "it represented a climatic high point in the negative history of social power and modern organization"[34]

Contrary to concentration camps, gas chambers were held in strict secrecy so those who were deported could be killed instantly. Treblinka II wasn't the sort of place where the deported where given a job, or possibility of hope, a place where certain so-called social activities of a

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[34] Wolfgang Sofsky, *The order of terror: The concentration camp*, Princeton University Press, 1997, 12.

closed type would occur.[35] In its essence, this camp was concerned with immediate genocide; quick death, hence such power of organized and implemented terror is unique and consequently distinctive. Treblinka is *non-space* and *non-time*. Therefore, details, testimony of the new form of murder cannot be provided either by historiography or history, for things happened quickly, silently, without a word, leading solely to one direction - death. Entering this last moment of life is marked simply by the introduction of an enclosed universe, execution of discipline of power that creates mechanical beings from the deported that have disappeared without even traces of ashes, because their bodies have been burned and scattered over the fertile fields of Treblinka.[36] The process of killing speaks of a unique murder, contributing to a siu generis structure of absolute power, and a *non-chronotop* of Treblinka.

Deprivation of any "camp social activities" implies that the concept of absolute power can prevent, or possibly, cause any kind of action on the part of the victims. Absolute superiority is achieved in the act of death, whereupon each person is merely one of many shoved into a single aggregate. The secret of Treblinka is the perfect example for the skill of rapid killing. The camp is not a place for educational-correctional influence over individuals, nor is the body here subjected to torture, rather the camp's main goal is that of immediate execution. Treblinka is a space where criminals are not punished, there is no public torture, the act of death is not postponed here, death is equal for all "convicts", and crime had to be `faceless'.

Treblinka II is neither an in-between world, rather, in typological frameworks, it is a transit place or more precisely: space-limb where the central position is indisputably occupied by killing. The Nazi regime legitimatized its Holocaust politics by way of laws. The ideology

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[35] For instance, Auschwitz or Theresienstadt.

[36] The possible reconstruction of the number of victims when there is no physical evidence and the phantom of "mass graves" is particularly interesting for the later forensic research regarding Treblinka (as well as: Belzec, Sobibor, Chelmno). We suggest: M. Shermer & A. Grobman, Denying History: *Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?*, (London: University of California Press, 2000); C. Mattogno & J. Graf, *Treblinka, extermination camp or transit camp?* (Chicago, 2004).

became legitimate. Power doesn't tend to be legitimatized, rather to implement itself, for it is alpha and omega, absolute and superior. Therefore, Treblinka II is a distinct type of power, arrogant, not informing, but witnessing the excessive violence, the

uniqueness (of the event of) industrial mass killing, practice that provided a functional death protocol, solid organization which excluded any kind of action on the part of the victims. Reasons and developments have no place here - only the goal for executing the genocide methodology and methodic precision in the victim selection, whereupon the act of killing is the final runway.

If distinctively considered from a position of post-Holocaust theory, the victims in Treblinka II cannot be equated, or related to the Auschwitz jargon of the Muselmann metaphor.[37] The rapid tempo while executing death in Treblinka II does not indicate to an anthropological and ontological transformation of the being towards death. The victims of Treblinka II do not gradually pass through a process of social alienation, mental, spiritual or corporal collapse; social experience of death (an asocial act itself!) is absent here. The victims have not been prepared for death. There is no non-corporal punishment "that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations…".[38] According to M. Foucault, this type of punitive politics over the body develops a strategy, while the power itself produces knowledge of mastery over the body that can be called political technology of the body.[39] The developments here are rapid, divided functionally and methodologically in few segments, while death is just the final act of events, strictly kept in secret, as is the venue of the 'act' itself.

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[37] The author quotes: [G. Agamben, *Ono što ostaje od Auschwitza, arhiv i svjedok (Homo sacer III)*, prev. M. Kopić, Zagreb, 2008, chapter "Musliman", (pp. 29-60)] The English quotations are from: G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz, The Witness and the Archive*, the chapter "The Muselmann" (New York, 1999), (p. 41-86) (trans. note). See also: Wolfgang Sofsky, *The order of terror: The concentration camp*, Princeton University Press, 1997, 25.

[38] The author quotes: М. Фуко, *Надзирати и кажњавати* [M. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison*], Нови Сад: ИКЗС, 1997, 19. The English quotations are from: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York: Vintage Books 1995, 19. (trans. note) See the first chapter addressing public torture, as well as the distinction between corporal and non-corporal punitive politics.

[39] Ibid., 28-9.

Natural death is the indisputable right of every human being. Absolute power demarks the line between life and death. Treblinka II is a paradigmatic example of deprivation of the right to natural death, an intimate desire of every human being. The intimate act of death is replaced with the not demanded `right' to violent death. Undressed, shaved, naked and powerless, the victims are forced under showers lashing deadly gas instead of water. Deception pertains not only to their life, rather equally to their death.

The Nazi totalitarian power rejects individual death as the natural limit. Totalitarian power conceives death as bureaucratic. Individual death is collective death. Individual death in Treblinka II is political. It is real. Death becomes a bio-political act created by means of technology and technological instruments.[40] In this instance of making death bureaucratic and its political execution, the victims remain passive. Not even in their imagination were they able to see that they were going to be killed immediately upon their arrival in Treblinka II, in order to turn to the possibility of rebellion, escape and resistance, reaction and action. In Treblinka II the punitive semiotics asserts itself as an efficient principle of politics over body, and its immediate elimination from life. The victim is an obedient body, transported to a certain place, a body completing controlled activities by following orders that create `harmony' between the body and its movements (stop here, undress, enter the bath, etc.). Thus, totalitarian power only temporarily conceals the censorship in order to raise the victim's hopes of a working place that will provide a more comfortable life for the entire family. In fact, deportation is nothing but an act to mystify the killing that followed. Therefore, the passive victim is not only an instrument to mystify death, but rather to accomplish *exploitation of death*. This embodies the bourgeois attitude towards life and death by the Aryan, whereupon each dead Jew is nothing but a dead body among other dead Jews. The superior bourgeois relation of Nazism regarding death of Jews is, in fact,

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[40] B. Groys, "Immortal bodies" in: *Going public*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011, 154-160.

the key moment of punitive semiotics as executive in the transformation of: the Jewish man in mechanic death and the Jewish body in ashes:

"A body effaced, reduced to dust and thrown to the winds, a body destroyed piece by piece by the infinite power of the sovereign constituted not only the ideal, but the real limit of punishment."[41]

Death is *institutionalized*. Therefore, Holocaust photography, in absence of the living memory practice of the victims, is an archive of the deadly Hitler- Nazi politics.

VI.

In the Jewish deportation in Treblinka one can recognize even better an archival project on a derived level and constituted upon archival principles. It renders the relationship between totalitarianism and the archive.[42] The archive reflects an historical narration as a possibility to revaluate and protect the thing from oblivion and ruin. The fundamental archival principles of recording data are achieved in the process of registering facts and familiarization with them, in creating categories, selection of data, indexing etc. Archival principles are identical with the ones pertaining to deportation: compiling lists to register the Jews in Macedonia,[43] closely related to registering the subjects in indexes, numbers, subjects; rather interesting is also the stigmatization of the Star of David, a mandatory emblem of every Jew with a central position in typology of the archival approach in deportation. This sign clearly signifies the creation of a manipulative world, without a subject, where the Jew is the object. The Star of David implies the existence of an empty world. Non-chronotope.

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[41] M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, p. 50.

[42] Ernst van Alphen: "Archival Obsessions and Obsessive archives", in: *What is research in the visual arts, Obsession, archive, encounter*, Michael Ann Holly and Marqard Smith (eds.), Massachusets: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008, 65-84.

[43] The numbers inscribed on their bodies are typical, for instance, for the Jews taken to Auschwitz.

In the absence of living memory practice of the victims, photography evolves into a type of archive that documents the absent rhetoric by invoking psychological mentality, or the so-called text-mirror. Photography itself is a text-mirror. The mirror is empty, no face is reflected and yet we see the face and events that we cannot contact. Photography text evolves in a mirror of the absence of living beings, of traces of former human presence; in the reflection of the image we see evil, the performative death (I mark you, I register you, I transport you, I kill you, I turn you into ashes). Therefore, the semiotic value of photography provides the possibility for the visual text to make present the living, individual narration that will never become live, yet is present in the reflection of the image. In this derived narration of the absent, life speech in the photography text-mirror, speech becomes repetitive power, it is recurring, documented, original, present. Thus, the text of Holocaust photography becomes an archive and narrates of the past that has occurred out of sight and in secrecy and photography as such, has a privileged historical place being an illumination of the past. Consequently, photography obliterates the difference between illusion and reality[44] and, being true to the world it displays, a world taking place in 1943, photography seizes sequences true to reality, unplanned, unprovoked things – reflections of the real world and remembers them as such.

VII.

The driving force throughout this text was the question: can photography visualize death? Can pain, suffering and thought in the absence of living memory practice of the victims be digitalized? Of course, the answer reveals as affirmative one and involves the semiotic possibility of reading the world through visual language. Photography demonstrates in detail what the world gone by looked like. It conveys

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[44] J. Baudrillard, *Why hasn't everything already disappeared?* New York: Seagull books, 2009, 40.

the experience of speech of the absent world by way of a world revealed behind the world that is gone, behind the sight of disappearance; the image-text-mirror transforms everything and by way of aesthetics of viewing, when living words and speech are missing and the memory practice of the victims is empty, the silence becomes a coded and present narrator on everything that cannot be narrated for the world from which human beings have disappeared forever.