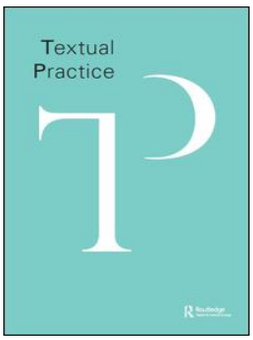

Textual Practice

ISSN: 0950-236X (Print) 1470-1308 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtpr20

Concentrationary art: Jean Cayrol, the Lazarean and the everyday in post-war film, literature, music and the visual arts

Emily-Rose Baker

To cite this article: Emily-Rose Baker (2019): Concentrationary art: Jean Cayrol, the Lazarean and the everyday in post-war film, literature, music and the visual arts, Textual Practice, DOI: 10.1080/0950236X.2019.1620478

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2019.1620478

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

BOOK REVIEW

Concentrationary art: Jean Cayrol, the Lazarean and the everyday in post-war film, literature, music and the visual arts, edited by Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books, 2019, 322 pp., £92.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-78533-970-7

The 'concentrationary universe',[1] as David Rousset first named it, is one which undetectably transcends the frontier between the camp and post-war reality, far from its exclusive and unprecedented containment within Hitler's concentration camp system across Germany and German-occupied Europe. This is the premise of Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman's intelligent and perceptive edited collection *Concentrationary Art*, which extends the political and aesthetic parameters of 'the concentrationary' to develop a new artistic model, as theorised by French poet and Mauthausen-Gusen survivor Jean Cayrol. The fourth and final book in a series on the concentrationary – the previous titles of which are *Concentrationary Cinema*,[2] *Concentrationary Memories*[3] and *Concentrationary Imaginaries*[4] – this volume defines, and situates within post-war modernity, what Cayrol called 'concentrationary art' or 'Lazarean art', opening-up the little-known (at least in the non-French speaking world) yet culturally resonant work of an important literary and artistic figure. It does so firstly by tracing the formulation of these concepts within Cayrol's own writing, and secondly by applying them to other cultural and artistic practices. Described not as testimony, but rather 'a certain type of literature' by Silverman in his introduction, concentrationary art is distinct from other artistic theories since it refers to a human condition or 'anthropological mutation' within which the eternally displaced and haunted figure of Lazarus – s/he who, in accordance with New Testament scripture, has passed through death – is inscribed (p.8). In the context of Cayrol's affective (if humanist) artistic theory, then, the Lazarean operates both as a warning against, and a means of recognising, the inhuman and dehumanised state of contemporary existence.

Crucially, the volume comprises the first English translations of Cayrol's two essays, 'Les Rêves lazaréens' and 'Pour un romanesque lazaréen', that were written in the immediate post-war period and republished in 1950 under the title *Lazare parmi nous* (*Lazarus Among Us)*. Derived from the personal experiences of Cayrol and his fellow deportees, these texts deal with Lazarean dreams and realities; that is to say, with the indelible psychological transformation of the concentrationary subject within the camp system and beyond it. It is with his commentary on dreams that Cayrol makes an especially novel contribution to existing knowledge of Holocaust experience and trauma, for his poetic invocation of the concentrationary dream illuminates 'one of the darkest aspects' of concentrationary life that remains overlooked (p.33). The insistence of the concentrationary or Lazarean dream, a phenomenon which was coincident with camp imprisonment, yet which contaminated the lives of survivors within post-war

'normality', gave rise to a 'dual reality [*dédoublement*]' that for the prisoner became a permanent state of consciousness (p.53). A central component of the Lazarean, this oneiric doubling could on the one hand offer somnambulant refuge from the brutal conditions of the concentrationary universe, and on the other, culminate in a confusion of the real, and mythologised camp, worlds. As Cayrol puts it:

> We ended up, as a result of this internal rupture between two universes, living equally *between* two universes, without ever completely joining them, and this left us even more, and perhaps evermore, feeling as though we were *wavering*, in a state of mental vagrancy and rootlessness. (p.37)

Cayrol claims neither to provide an exhaustive nor universal account of oneiric experience within the concentrationary universe (it must not be forgotten that Cayrol was a political prisoner, Pollock reminds us); rather, he offers interpretive theorisations of a host of 'waking dreams' which intervened in the lived experience of beatings, roll-calls, starvation and forced labour, and brought prisoners closer to their pre-war lives (p.36). With his notion of the 'post-concentrationary dream' that infiltrated the inmates' subconscious *outside* camp walls, Cayrol sheds light on the belated onset of traumatic dreams and flashbacks that haunt the concentrationary subject, as well as the continued afterlife of the concentrationary universe – the subject of his second essay (p.47). A fuller definition of the concentrationary or Lazarean aesthetic in these pages imagines, and determines the need for, a literature which bears many of the features characteristic of the Lazarean condition: duality, radical solitude, disembodiment, temporal stagnation and the personalisation of objects. Extremely timely over 70 years post-publication, Cayrol's work diagnoses the 'concentrationary influence' defiling modernity in Europe and beyond which, while not visible ('clandestine'), may be resisted via this artistic mode that deploys the dreamlike to communicate the otherwise incommunicable reality of neoliberalism (p.49, 128).

In the six critical essays that follow, five contributors (including the two editors) investigate the cultural manifestations of latent concentrationary reality within contemporary life, applying to post-war art, literature, film and music elements of the Lazarean postulate. Collectively, these essays uncover the extent to which present-day humanity has succumbed to the death-in-life existence encompassed by the Lazarean, conjuring the political aesthetic of Lazarean art as a means of rousing the reader from its grip. Patrick ffrench's and (the first of) Griselda Pollock's contributions to the volume contextualise the Lazarean as well as the ambivalent symbolic currency Cayrol affords to it, the former in relation to literary theory in post-war France; the latter in relation to representations of the biblical entombment of Lazarus in the visual arts. The dynamics of presence and Barthesian erasure central to ffrench's discussion of Lazarean writing and concentrationary logic, which affects the world before as well as after the camps, connects the concentrationary regime with an absent presence or temporal displacement that echoes Cathy Caruth's work on the self-effacing catastrophic event. Particularly well placed are questions ffrench and Pollock respectively raise concerning the ethical implications of the concentrationary

returnee as spectre or revenant, and of presenting this spectralised existence as a universalisation of the concentrationary experience. ffrench outlines the tension between the materiality of death for those who did not survive the concentrationary universe, and the notion of Lazarus as one capable of 'supernaturally' transcending it, while Pollock draws an important distinction between the Lazarean and the Jewish concentrationee, bringing Cayrol's writing on the Lazarean into dialogue with Elie Wiesel's *Night* as an example of a specifically Jewish as well as Lazarean text.

The modern city and domestic home become spaces within which the absent presence of the concentrationary is rife in Silverman's essay, which traces the concentrationary reality of the everyday in Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) – a monotonous yet complex representation of the banality of post-war life under commodity capitalism in France. Silverman considers the commercialisation of these spaces that regulate the human in Akerman's concentrationary work via an interrogation of hyper-realist filmic motifs, Lazarean doubling, and, most significantly, the 'de-objectified' everyday object that functions both as a site of commerce and a surrogate for affectivity (p.136). Imbued with 'ontological presence' yet unable to transcend its 'thingness' in cinematic representation, Silverman's navigation of this paradox is particularly compelling (p.138). Matthew John also explores capitalist anxieties in his contribution which, through the lens of concentrationary realism, analyses the Lazarean representation of labour and the workplace in Laurent Cantet's 1999 film *Ressources humaines*. Drawing attention to the fundamental differences between the commonly conflated concentration camp system and modern labour, John exposes the operation of concentrationary logic within the mental and physical enslavement of the subject in the workplace – a re-emergent theme among contemporary French filmmakers – often concealed by corporate structures like HR departments. Cayrol's theory of the concentrationary and its 'implicit' assessment of the dangers as well as the potential of technology thus becomes a tool with which to redress the insidious ideology of capitalist modernity (p.152).

Benjamin Hannavy Cousen addresses the biopolitical roots of the Lazarean, who is neither ghost (separate from the spectre) nor zombie nor *Muselmann* – the term Giorgio Agamben uses to designate those reduced to living corpses by the concentration camp regime. The Lazarean encounters death but is not death materially or immaterially reanimated, though s/he haunts contemporary life and culture, as is convincingly shown throughout this anthology. The concentrationary and the Lazarean are not interchangeable; the latter refers to a quality or impression for Cousen involving the appearance and reception of an image ('a particular way that an image can appear') (p.175). Pollock's conceptualisation of a Lazarean sound in the final contribution of the volume draws together two musical performances entitled *Night and Fog*: Hanns Eisler's score to Alain Resnais' concentrationary film *Nuit et brouillard* (1956), the commentary of which was scripted by Cayrol, and Susan Philipsz' installation at the Kunsthaus Bregenz exhibition in 2016. The creation of Lazarean sound by Eisler and its re-creation in Philipsz's experimental work entails the staging of an interaction

of art and isolated sonic (rather than musical) motifs that reproduce the unsettling proximity of death to life.

This is a politically urgent volume and an excellent resource for anyone studying the cultural or representational legacies of the concentration camp 'as both *event* and *form*', its (post)traumatic manifestations or memory in the contemporary world (p.236). While the volume offers no resolutions to the saturation of everyday life by the concentrationary (nor does it propose to), its mix of rigorous political with artistic analysis offers a critical framework with which to identify and analyse its guises, of which democracy is perhaps the most pervasive: has the Lazarean become a cipher for democracy itself, Pollock asks in her conclusion? By means of the present volume, Cayrol's reconfiguration of art, literature and theory in the wake of the camps is comprehensively and compellingly put to English-speaking readers for the first time. Recalibrating our understanding of cultural texts in the post-concentrationary era, the French thinker's contribution to debates on 'art and the Holocaust' grants him a deserving place among canonical post-war philosophers such as Jean Amery and even Primo Levi.

Notes

1. David Rousset, *L'Univers Concentrationnaire* (Paris: Éditions de Pavois, 1946).
2. Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (eds.), *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's Night and Fog* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).
3. Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (eds.), *Concentrationary Memories: Totalitarian Terror and Cultural Resistance* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).
4. Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (eds.), *Concentrationary Imaginaries: Tracing Totalitarian Violence in Popular Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

Emily-Rose Baker
University of Sheffield, South Yorkshire, UK
erbaker1@sheffield.ac.uk

https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2019.1620478