

II Auschwitz and the Holocaust

Our turn came. My mother, my sons, and I stepped before the "selectors." Then I committed my second terrible error. The selector waved my mother and myself to the adult group. He classed my younger son Thomas with the children and the aged, which was to mean immediate extermination. He hesitated before Arvad, my older son.

My heart thumped violently. This officer, a large man who wore glasses, seemed to be trying to act fairly. Later I learned that he was Dr. Fritz Klein, the "Chief Selector." "This boy must be more than twelve," he remarked to me.

"No," I protested..

The truth that Arvad was twelve, and I could have said so. He was big for his age, but I wanted to spare him from labors that might prove too arduous for him.

"Very well," Klein agreed amiably.. "To the left!"

I had persuaded my mother that she should follow the children and take care of them. At her age she had the right to the treatment accorded to the elderly and there would be someone to look after Arvad and Thomas.

"My mother would like to remain with the children," I said.

"Very well," he again acquiesced.. "You 'll all be in the same camp."

"And in several weeks you 'll all be reunited," another officer added, with a smile.

"Next!"¹

Auschwitz is the central site of the Holocaust. This is attested by the fact that, at least since the year 1951 when Theodor Adorno stated that "to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric," the word Auschwitz has become a synecdoche for the Holocaust in general.²

There are various reasons why Auschwitz is legitimately seen as the center of the Holocaust. First of all, it is the site where the single largest group of Jews were murdered. According to Raul Hilberg's rather

conservative figures, which I hold to be the most reliable estimate of total Jewish deaths, the Holocaust claimed 5.1 million Jewish lives. Of this number, over 800,000 Jews died as the result of ghettoization and general privation, over 1.3 million were murdered in open-air shootings, and up to 3 million died in the camps. Of these, Auschwitz had the highest mortality with 1 million Jews, followed by Treblinka and Belzec with 750,000 and 550,000 Jews respectively.³

Second of all, Auschwitz is seen as the central site because the camp became the destination to a greater variety of Jews than any other. From at least twelve European countries Jews were deported to Auschwitz, and as such Auschwitz testifies to the pan-European character of the Holocaust.⁴ Then Auschwitz may be seen as a particularly pointed attempt to destroy not only Jews, but also the soul of Judaism. As the great Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig reminded the generation that was to succumb in Auschwitz, the Jews were the first to understand that the son is born so that he may bear witness to his father's father "The grandson renews the name of the forebear. The patriarchs of old call upon their last descendant by his name -which is theirs."⁵ Thus God planted eternal life in the midst of the Jewish people. Rosenzweig observed how the Jewish concept of a linked sequence of everlasting life which goes from grandparent to grandchild will know its eternity to be present in the child of its child. Because of this, Jews could forego to claim its eternity by means of the possession of land. In the grandchild, the Jewish nation knew itself to "begin again." As Elie Wiesel wrote in a commentary on the new beginning Adam and Eve made after they had been thrown out of Paradise, "it is not given to man to begin." This, so he argues, is God's privilege. "But it is given to man to begin again -and he does so every time he chooses to defy death and side with the living."⁶ This, in a nutshell, is the eternal foundation of a people which defines itself in the relationship between the old and the young. In Auschwitz the Germans annulled this link, and with that tried to destroy the very basis of Jewish existence: on arrival the old and the young, the grandparents and the grandchildren, were immediately sent to the gas chambers. And thus the linked sequence of the everlasting life which, for the Jews, goes from grandparent to grandchild, was to be destroyed from the very beginning. The generation in between was allowed to live for somewhat longer, in the barracks adjacent to the ramps where the selection took place, under the smoke of the crematoria. Auschwitz was, in the testimony of a survivor Yehiel Dinur given during the Eichmann Trial, a different planet.

Time there was not like time on earth. Every fraction of a minute there passed on a different scale of time. And the inhabitants of this planet had no names, they had no parents nor did they have children. There they did not dress in the way we dress here; they were not born there and they did not give birth; they breathed according to different laws of nature;

they did not live -nor did they die -according to the laws of this world.⁷

In this world,the old covenants between people were destroyed -not only at the moment of selection,but also for those ";lucky " enough to survive their initial confrontation with Auschwitz.. The whole camp system was designed to make fathers strangers to their sons,mothers strangers to their daughters,to set brother against brother and sister against sister.Primo Levi commented in his *The Drowned and the Saved* that in Auschwitz ";almost everybody feels guilty of having omitted to offer help."

The presence at your side of a weaker -or less cunning,or older,or too young -companion,hounding you with his demands for help or with his simple presence,in itself an entreaty,is a constant in the life of the Lager.The demand for solidarity,for a human word,advice,even just a listening ear,was permanent and universal but rarely satisfied.There was no time,space,privacy,patience,strength; most often,the person to whom the request was addressed found himself in his turn in a state of need,entitled to comfort.⁸

Those whose ancestors had given the world knowledge of a God who had created a good world from nothing were confronted with the truth of Auschwitz -the revelation that ";man,the human species -we,in short -had the potential to construct an infinite enormity of pain,and that pain is the only force created from nothing,without cost and without effort.It is enough not to see, not to listen, not to act.--"⁹ Therefore Auschwitz has remained such an enormous challenge to survival of Judaism,a religion that centers on a covenant of life between God and Abraham,a covenant that stipulates that the stronger will bear witness to the suffering of the weaker in a world that God acknowledged to be ";good."

Furthermore,and perhaps more importantly for those concerned with the general culturalhistorical impact of Auschwitz,the camp may be considered the center of the Holocaust because it was in its technology and organization thoroughly ";modern." For Henry Feingold,, Auschwitz marked the juncture where the European industrial system went awry."; [I]nstead of enhancing life,which was the original hope of the Enlightenment,it began to consume itself." Therefore Auschwitz was ";a mundane extension of the modern factory system."

Rather than producing goods,the raw material was human beings and the end product was death,so many units per day marked carefully on the manager's production charts.The chimneys,the very symbol of the modern factory system,poured forth acrid smoke produced by burning human flesh.The brilliantly organized railroad grid of modern Europe carried a new kind

of raw material to the factories. It did so in the same manner as with other cargo. In the gas chambers the victims inhaled noxious gases generated by prussic acid pellets, which were produced by the advanced chemical industry of Germany. Engineers designed the crematoria; managers designed the system of bureaucracy that worked with a zest and efficiency more backward nations would envy. Even the overall plan itself was a reflection of the modern scientific spirit gone awry.¹⁰

As the nexus of technological prowess, bureaucratic discipline and ideological determination, Auschwitz was not only thoroughly modern, but also "civilized." As Franklin H. Littell observed, the death camps were not planned, built and operated by illiterate, unschooled savages.¹¹ The killing centres were, like their inventors, products of what had been for generations one of the best university systems in the world. The architect who designed Birkenau was a Bauhaus graduate. Dr. Josef Mengele had a degree in philosophy from the University of Munich, and a degree in medicine from the University of Frankfurt am Main, and believed himself to be a herald of a new era. Inspired by Mengele, the German dramatist Rolf Hochhuth had the camp doctor state in his controversial play *The Deputy* that Auschwitz marked the end of the old and the beginning of a new age.

The truth is, Auschwitz refutes creator, creation, and the creature.

Life as an idea is dead.

This may well be the beginning of a great new era,

a redemption from suffering.

From this point of view only one crime remains: cursed be he who creates life.

I cremate life. That is modern humanitarianism - the sole salvation from the future.¹²

As Hochhuth's doctor declares, the modernity of Auschwitz was partly embodied in the crematoria, which offered in their logical arrangement of undressing rooms, gas chambers, and crematoria ovens a carefully thought-out production facility of death. Yet the modernity of this technology of mass destruction is not merely embodied in the statistics that state that the gas chambers could kill so many people in so many minutes, and the ovens could reduce to ashes so many corpses in so many hours. It is also embodied in the anonymity of the killing procedure itself. Ancient German law, going back to the pre-Christian era, stipulated that sentences of death should be pronounced in the midst of the community in the open air,

and the judges who had condemned a person to death should be present at the execution, which likewise had to take place in full view of the community, and the gods. All of this embodied a profound sense that when humans decide to take the life of another human being on behalf of society, they inflict a wound in the created world, and should accept public responsibility of this. In the modern world, issues of personal responsibility and accountability tend to become diffused. At no point has this become so clear as in the case of Auschwitz, where Jews were executed without having been subjected to a clearly established judicial procedure, and where the killing itself took place hidden from the world, in (mostly) underground gas chambers.

It is at this point useful to quote the following consideration by Pierre Vidal-Naquet

In what way do the gas chambers have a specificity, not only in relation to the Gulag (which is obvious) or in relation to other methods of state sponsored terror, but also in relation to the Nazi concentration camp system as a whole, and even in relation to the collective murders carried out by the Einsatzgruppen in the USSR? Between death by gas and death by bullets, or even death by exhaustion or by the action of exanthematous typhoid, is there a difference in kind? My personal response is that there is a difference in kind. What, in the context of the SS State, do the gas chambers actually represent? Not only, not essentially, do they represent the industrialization of death - by which I mean the employment of industrial techniques for purposes of killing and not for production (which was still being carried out, moreover, just besides the slaughterhouses). While the "crematory ovens" of Auschwitz were highly refined tools, the techniques used to operate the gas chambers were of a very low level. The essential issue does not lie there. The key point is the negation of a crime within the crime itself. The problem has been posed very well by a German lawyer, Attorney Hans Laternser, during the course of the Auschwitz trial (1963-1965). Starting from the moment the order to kill was given, those who selected not - as is often said and as I myself once happened to say - in order to separate those fit for work from those unfit but in order to separate those who would be sent to replace the disappeared work force from those who would be killed right away, were in reality not killers of Jews but saviors of Jews. This lawyer was expressing in his own way something real: the reality of the diffusion of responsibility, the reality of the near disappearance of responsibility. Who, then, was the killer at Auschwitz? Was it the person who put the Zyklon B tablets under the lid that led into the gas chambers? All the operations from the directing of victims as they left the trains to the undressing and cleaning of bodies to their placement inside the crematoria were basically under SS control, of course. But all this was done through the intermediary of members of the Sonderkommandos who, in

the end,were the only ones placed in direct contact with death.¹³

In other words,the very modernity of Auschwitz -that is the anonymity of the killing -is embodied in the uniquely modern phenomenon that has arisen from it:the fact of Holocaust Denial.As Vidal Naquet noted,"[t]he crime can be denied today because it was anonymous."¹⁴

The American theologian Richard L.Rubenstein explored some other dimensions of the "modern humanitarianism" of Auschwitz..Rubenstein defined Auschwitz as the supreme example of absolute domination that, thanks to technology and bureaucracy,has become possible in the modern age.As a place which combined extermination with slave labour, Auschwitz constituted a new kind of society which allowed,so Rubenstein believes,a prophetic vision of a future increasingly confronted with the assumed problem of "surplus populations."

The death-camp system became a society of total domination only when healthy inmates were kept alive and forced to become slaves rather than killed outright.To repeat,as long as the camps [Treblinka,Sobibor,Belzec, Chelmno] served the single purpose of killing prisoners,one can speak of the camps as places of mass execution but not as a new type of human society.Most of the literature on the camps has tended to stress the role of the camps as places of execution.Regrettably,few ethical theorists or religious thinkers have paid attention to the highly significant political fact that the camps were in reality a new form of human society.

Only when the doomed inmates were kept alive for some time did the new society develop.It was at Auschwitz that the most effective system of extermination, mass gas chambers using Zyklon B coupled with on-the-spot crematoria,was first put to use.It was also at Auschwitz that the most thorough going society of total domination in human history was established.Much has been written about the infamous Dr.Joseph Mengele, the physician at Auschwitz,who used to meet the new arrivals and separate those who were to be killed immediately from those who were to be worked to death as slaves.Such a selection process did not take place at camps like Treblinka because they functioned only as killing centers.At Auschwitz,the camp served two seemingly contradictory purposes:Auschwitz was both a slave-labor and an execution center.Given the nature of slavery as practised by the Germans,only doomed slaves could successfully be dealt with as things rather than as human beings.¹⁵

Rubenstein believed that,as things are going,Western urban civilization is doomed to end in Necropolis,the new city of the dead.As the Holocaust was to him "an expression of some of the most significant political, religious and demographic tendencies of Western civilisation in

the twentieth century," so Auschwitz was the terminal expression of the chalice of modernization::the city.

At Auschwitz, the Germans revealed new potentialities in the human ability to dominate, enslave, and exterminate. They also revealed new areas in which capitalist enterprise might profitably and even respectably be employed. The camps were thus far more of a permanent threat to the human future than they could have been had they functioned solely as an exercise in mass killing. An extermination center can only manufacture corpses, a society of total domination creates a world of the living dead.¹⁶

As not all deportees were killed on arrival, many more survived Auschwitz than any other of the death camps. Of the 1.1 million Jews who were deported to Auschwitz, some 100,000 Jews left the camp alive. Many of those survivors were to succumb during the death march to the West, or during their stay during the Spring of 1945 in concentration camps like Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen. Yet tens of thousands saw liberation, and testified after the war about their ordeal. And some even did so during the war. The most important war-time report on the German genocide of the Jews, sponsored by the War Refugee Board, was written by two escapees from Auschwitz, and described the extermination installation in some detail. And of the 100,000 gentile survivors of Auschwitz, of whom the Poles, with 75,000, were the largest group, all who could did bear witness to the use of the camp as an extermination center for Jews.

The technology of mass destruction as it existed in Auschwitz also points at another important issue: the significance of the so-called Final Solution of the Jewish Problem as a state-initiated, state-sponsored, and state-controlled program of genocide. Like any major historical problem, there has been, is, and probably will remain legitimate disagreement between historians about various aspects of the history of the Holocaust. Yet there has been, is, and probably will remain a general consensus that the German destruction of at least five and possibly as many as six and half million European Jews was not the result of countless individual initiatives taken, as Irving phrased it in 1984, by "Nazi criminals, acting probably without direct orders from above."¹⁷ The evidence of the operations of the Einsatzgruppen in the German-occupied parts of the Soviet Union, of the ghetto-clearings in Poland with the subsequent mass-killings in the Operation Reinhard death camps, and of the deportations of Jews from many countries over long distances to the killing centres in Poland reveals a high level of organization involving many state officials. Furthermore Auschwitz was constructed in the middle of the war, in a time that there was a general building stop in Germany, with public funds. Many levels in the German bureaucracy were involved in the process, providing special construction permits and rationed building

materials. The German state railways cooperated when it gave after careful consideration permission for the construction of a railway spur connecting the existing railway tracks at Auschwitz to the crematoria in Birkenau. As Dwork and I have shown in our book *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* the concentration camp at Auschwitz was originally not intended as an extermination center for Jews. Yet its staged transformation from a prison camp for Poles to a death camp for Jews occurred on the initiative of, and under control of, the state - primarily as it was embodied in Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler in his capacity as Chief of the German Police.

Finally, Auschwitz is considered the center of the Holocaust because enough of at least the two most important parts, the Stammlager and Birkenau, still remain to give the visitor a sense of the nature and scale of the operation. Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor, which together hosted the murder of 1.5 million Jews, were small camps demolished by the Germans at the end of 1943. Very little to nothing of the original arrangement can be seen. Only recently in Belzec, with the uncovering of the enormous mass graves, has it become possible to acquire, at the location of the massacre, some visual sense of the atrocities that passed there.

In Auschwitz I, and more importantly in Auschwitz II, this is different. When the SS evacuated the camps, they had been able to dismantle the gas chambers and blow up the crematoria. But the Soviets found the rest of the Stammlager and Birkenau largely intact. In 1947 the Polish Parliament adopted a law "Commemorating the Martyrdom of the Polish Nation and other Nations in Oswiecim," and the Minister of Culture included both Auschwitz I and II in the new State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Given the many remains of the death camps - the guard towers, the barbed wire fences, the gatehouse, the tracks, the barracks, the ruins of the crematoria, and so on - it is not surprising that in a largely visual culture dominated by photography, film and television, the landscape of Auschwitz became an icon of the Holocaust. Alain Resnais' and Jean Cayrol's 1955 magnificent movie *Night and Fog* was largely shot in and around Birkenau. The opening scenes showed the banal, seemingly innocent fields around the camp. Filming the remains at Birkenau, Resnais allowed the horror to slowly emerge from the midst of banality. As the camera panned the empty barracks in Birkenau, the narrator immediately warned us not to take the image of the present for the reality of the past.

No description, no picture can restore their true dimension: endless, uninterrupted fear. We would need the very mattress where scraps of food were hidden, the blankets that was fought over, the shouts and curses, the orders repeated in every tongue, the sudden appearance of the S.S., seized with a desire for a spot check or for a practical joke. Of this brick

dormitory, of these threatened sleepers, we can only show you the shell, the shadow.¹⁸

Resnais tries to evoke an impression of the deportations by filming what remained of the deportees, in the showcases of the museum at Auschwitz I. As he filmed their contents, the narration which until then had so quietly recalled and probed, become halting, as the unimaginable and unspeakable is brought home. Finally it stops - as if there is nothing more to say about the world of the camp. Resnais constantly returned to the fields of Birkenau, and with every scene he confirmed the factuality of the events that happened there, and the centrality of Auschwitz for the modern understanding of the world.

Revolutionary in its visual language, and brilliant in its counterpoint of image and sound, past atrocity and present landscape, *Night and Fog* simultaneously established and confirmed the central role of the landscape of Auschwitz in the modern imagination of atrocity. It is not surprising that, ever since, Auschwitz has become one of the world's most important places of pilgrimage. The recollections of the American Konnilyn Feig stand for the experience of many. When she first visited Auschwitz, she was not very impressed with the place, which turned out to be the Stammlager "; It is truly like visiting just another museum." Later that day, Feig discovered Birkenau - by accident..

We left Auschwitz when it was dark, but a full orange Polish moon stood in the sky. Wrong turn, and suddenly, silhouetted starkly against the sky, the strangest, eeriest sight I had ever seen. No one was around. It was silent. We got out, walked to the gates, and then peered through the fences. I did not know what I was looking at, but it frightened me to my depths - a young American girl standing with a friend in Poland in the deserted countryside, at Birkenau. I felt an overwhelming sense of evil - not horror, as in the Auschwitz warehouses, but evil. God, it was awful. I stood with my eyes wide and my mouth open, speechless. I had no idea what it was, but I felt evil, and that moment, that time, has never left me.¹⁹

This brings me to an autobiographical note. Seeing *Night and Fog* as a high school student in the early 1970s, and reading Feig's *Hitler's Death Camps* as a doctoral candidate in the early 1980s, I became interested in Auschwitz as a symbolic landscape. I travelled there in order to make a pilgrimage to the central site of the modern world. Yet walking around Auschwitz, and noting not only the camp grounds, but also the substantial German wartime civic construction in the town of Auschwitz, I had to revise my view of the camp. I realized that having grown up in a culture that had defined itself as one ";after Auschwitz," I had also ";mythified " Auschwitz, ignoring descriptions of historical contingency for the sake of assertions about some unchanging nature of the site, subsuming, in the

case of Auschwitz, my general understanding as a historian for the complexity of human acts in a belief in the simplicity of essences, and taking statements of fact as explanations.²⁰ Remembering Ronald Barthes dictum that the critique of a mythified object begins when we recall that it once was made ²¹ I began to investigate the archives in Poland, and found evidence that increased my confusion. The camp in Auschwitz had been not merely built right next to an existing town, but one that the same men who had ordered the construction of the camp had designated as a centre of growth. National Socialist Auschwitz was to become the German capital of a German district, and the site of massive German industrial activity. It became clear that the mythification of Auschwitz, in which I had participated unwittingly, had blinded me for a more complex reality in which seemingly opposing things such as the design for a utopia and the construction of a dystopia existed alongside each other. I became a truly "revisionist" historian when, with the help of my friend and colleague Deborah Dwork, I decided to strip away the myth, to lay bare the place, and reconstruct the where, how, when, and finally why of Auschwitz. In our work, it became clear that while Auschwitz did become the largest death camp for Jews, it was not pre-ordained to become the major site of the Holocaust. Reclaiming the many different and contrary intentions the Germans had for Auschwitz, we became able to square the way Auschwitz became the central site of the Holocaust with the ways of the world - a world in which the mysterious, mythifiable forces of malevolence seem often so ludicrously irrelevant compared to the profane, utterly intelligible and very effective tendencies of insufficiency and expediency. As a result, our book, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* recovers the ambiguous and often paradoxical realities that are at the bottom of the crisp, consistent and in many ways convenient scheme earlier historians accepted as the war-time history of Auschwitz.

The history of Auschwitz is not carved in stone, but like all accounts of the past it is subject to revision. Contrary to what Holocaust Deniers assert, serious historians who accept that Auschwitz was a central site of the Holocaust do not turn-off their critical faculties when they consider the topic. They do not consider the inherited history of the camp a religious dogma. At no point is this so clear as in the way the historical community has accepted and endorsed a major revision of the death count of Auschwitz from 4 million to 1.1 million. I would like to review here, in some detail, the way and manner in which the responsible revisionist scholarship of Dr. Franciszek Piper, chief historian of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, has established these numbers.

Before we begin, it is important to note that the Germans did not keep any records as to the number of people killed in the gas chambers. There are many German testimonies to that effect. One of them is from SS-Unterscharführer Percy Broad, who worked in the Political Department

at Auschwitz -the office that served among other things as a liason between Berlin and the camp for the purpose of the Final Solution. Immediately after the war,Broad gave some valuable information regarding record keeping.

When information was requested by the Reich Main Security Office concerning a past transport,as a rule nothing could be ascertained.Former transport lists were destroyed.Nobody could learn anything in Auschwitz about the fate of a given person.The person asked for ";is not and never has been detained in camp," or ";he is not in the files "-these were the usual formulas given in reply.At present,after the evacuation of Auschwitz and the burning of all papers and records,the fate of millions of people is completely obscure.No transport or arrival lists are in existence any more.²²

Broad's statement was confirmed by Commandant Rudolf Höss,who wrote after the war in a document that was submitted and accepted as evidence in the Eichmann Trial that he had not been allowed to keep records.Eichmann was ";the only SS officer who was allowed to keep records concerning these liquidation operations,according to the orders of the Reichsführer-SS.All other units which took part in any way had to destroy all records immediately."²³ And Oswald Pohl ,who ran the central administration of the SS,testified during his trial that while he received regular information about the mortality of registered prisoners,he was not informed about the number of deportees killed in the gas chambers upon their arrival in Auschwitz.²⁴

The first post-war attempt to establish within the context of a forensic investigation the total number of dead was undertaken by the "; Extraordinary State Committee For the Ascertaining and Investigation of Crimes Committed by the German-fascist Invaders and Their Associates On Crimes Committed by the German-fascist Invaders in the Oswiecim Death Camp."The committee came to the conclusion that four million people had been killed in Auschwitz.Their conclusion was based on an assessment of the capacity of the crematoria.The five crematoria would have been able to burn, at least in theory,5,121,000 bodies.²⁵ Added to that was the extra capacity provided by the pyres.

Making allowances for possible undercapacity operation of the crematoriums and stoppages,however,the Commission of technical experts established that during the existence of the Oswiecim camp the German executioners killed in it no less than four million citizens of the USSR., Poland,France,Yugoslavia,Czechoslovakia, Rumania,Hungary,Holland,Belgium, and other countries.²⁶

Apart from the engineering approach to the question how many people had

died in Auschwitz a second method emerged to establish the number of victims. It was based on an analysis of the number of deportations to the camp. As early as 1946, Nachman Blumenthal, using this method, came to an informed guess that the number of victims ought to have been somewhere between 1.3 and 1.5 million.²⁷ In the early 1950s, Gerald Reitlinger also tried to make a rough guess of the number of victims on the basis of the number of deportees.

As to the total number of Jews brought to the selection place at Auschwitz, it is possible to estimate fairly closely for the Western and Central European countries and the Balkans but not for Poland. There is no real guide to the percentage gassed. It was low before August, 1942, and generally low again after August, 1944, but in the meantime gassings might vary between fifty and nearly a hundred per cent. The following list makes allowances for a number of French and Greek transports sent to Majdanek and 34,000 Dutch Jews who went to Sobibor:

Belgium 22,600

Croatia 4,500

France 57,000

Greater Reich [....direct transports only] *25,000

Greater Reich [via Theresienstadt] 32,000

Greece 50,000

Holland 62,000

Hungary (wartime frontiers) 380,000

Italy 5,000

Luxembourg 2,000

Norway 700

Poland and Baltic States *180,000

Slovakia (1939 borders) 20,000

840,800

(*uncertain)

Of this total, 550,000 to 600,000 may have been gassed on arrival and to this must be added the unknown portion of the 300,000 or more, missing from the camp, who were selected.²⁸

It is important to note that Reitlinger systematically chose, if confronted with different estimates about the number of victims, the lowest one. The first reason was that exaggeration would serve those who wished to deny the Holocaust.²⁹ The second one must be located in his unusually cheerful disposition vis-a-vis the whole story, which was rooted in his very bleak assessment of human nature: as he wrote the book, he always reminded himself that it could have been worse - a sentiment few have shared.³⁰

Finally there were different assessment made by witnesses. The most important of these was, without doubt, Commandant Rudolf Höss. During his initial interrogations, Höss seems to have confirmed an initial assessment done by his interrogators that three million people had been killed in Auschwitz.³¹ In Nuremberg, he gave different numbers at different occasions. During his interrogations he gave detailed list of numbers for each nationality that came to over 1.1 million deportees.³² In his affidavit, however, he stated that ";at least 2,500,000 victims were executed and exterminated [in Auschwitz] by gassing and burning,, and at least another half million succumbed to starvation and disease, making a total dead of about 3,000,000."³³ He confirmed this number in a conversation with the prison psychologist Dr. Gilbert. ";He readily conformed that approximately 2 1 /2 million Jews has been exterminated under his direction."³⁴ In a short memorandum which he wrote for Gilbert later in April Höss returned to the lower number. He now stated that the number of 2.5 million referred to the technical potential. ";[T]o the best of my knowledge, this number appears to me much too high. If I calculate the total of the mass operations which I still remember, and still make allowance for a certain percentage of error, I arrive, in my calculation, at a total of 1.5 million at the most for the period from the beginning of 1941 to the end of 1944."³⁵ Finally, in Poland, Höss re-affirmed that the number of victims had been most likely less than 1.2 million persons, commenting that ";I regard the number of 2.5 million as far too high. Even Auschwitz had limits to its destructive capabilities."³⁶

Thus,by the beginning of the 1950s,there were basically three estimates of the number of victims,each based on different sources:a high one of 4 million based on the assumed capacity of the crematoria,a low one of around 1 million based on the number of transports and Höss's final assessment given to Dr.Gilbert in Nuremberg and Dr.Jan Sehn in Cracow,and a middle one of around 2.5 million,based on Eichmann's number as related by Höss,and as initially substantiated by Höss in his Nuremberg affidavit.

Until the early 1980s no original scholarship was undertaken to come to a resolution of the unacceptably great range between the lowest and highest estimate.The Cold War was largely to blame:the figure of 4 million had been established by the Soviets,and the figure of 1 million had been first proposed in the West.As relations between the East and West deteriorated,with the largest part of Germany becoming part of NATO and with that country refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the post-war Polish annexation of the former German territories of East Prussia, Pomerania,and Silesia,the issue of the number of victims became an object of politics.The communist rulers of Poland were unwilling to give an inch on their claims against Germany as long as the Bonn government did not recognize the territorial integrity of the People's Republic of Poland, and therefore they continued to maintain,as a matter of policy,that 4 million people had been killed in Auschwitz.In the West,most historians of the Holocaust who,given the political climate,were unable to do original research in the matter tended to accept,with reservations,the middle figure of 2.5 million.Initially only Raul Hilberg,who did important statistical analysis into the number of victims of the Holocaust,supported the lower figure of 1 million.He reasoned -with justification - that given the total number of victims of the Holocaust (5.1 million in his conservative estimate), and given more or less reliable assessments about the number of Jews who died of general privation in the ghettos,who were executed in open-air shootings,and who died in other extermination and concentration camps,the total number of Auschwitz victims could not have been more than 1 million.³⁷

The advent of Solidarity and the election of the Pole Karol Wojtyla as Pope John-Paul II (1978)changed the intellectual climate in Poland.While the government was still committed to the official figure of 4 million victims,Dr.Piper of the Auschwitz Museum,who had been banned until then from researching the issue,began to focus his attention on the question of how many people had died in the camp.A catalyst for his research were new figures produced in France by Georges Wellers,who had come to the conclusion that 1,613,455 persons had been deported to Auschwitz (of whom 1,433,405 were Jews)and that 1,471,595 of them had died (of whom 1,352,980 were Jews).

Piper,brought his work to a first completion in 1986.Given the fact that he largely endorsed the figures that had been proposed in the West by Reitlinger and Hilberg,he decided to proceed carefully -a smart move considering that Poland was in the mid 1980s subjected to military rule. He first subjected his conclusions to a process of internal review within the museum,and then to a thorough external review by the leading Polish research institute on the Nazi era,the Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland.In 1990,after endorsement of his findings (and with the first post-communist government in power), Piper made his new estimate of 1.1 million victims known to the international community.This figure has been endorsed by all serious, professional historians who have studied the complex history of Auschwitz in some detail, and by the Holocaust research institutes at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C.38

When he began work,Piper realized that the remaining papers of the camp administration, which the SS had largely destroyed before they abandoned the camp,would provide little help in establishing the total number of people deported to and killed in the camp.All the deportees who had been selected for the gas chambers on arrival had never been registered as inmates,and so about them no administrative record within the camp had ever existed except for reports made by the head of the labour allocation of the inmates to his superiors in Berlin,stating that of such-and such transport that contained so many deportees a certain number had been selected as ";fit for work," while the rest,judged to be ";unfit for work," had been subjected to ";Special Treatment " ("; wurden sonderbehandelt--")or had been ";specially lodged " (";gesondert untergebracht--")-an obvious euphemism for killing as firstly there was no accomodation in the camp to provide ";special lodging " for those declared ";unfit for work," and secondly these people subsequently disappeared without a trace..39 Three of such reports survive.40 According to the SS man Pery Broad,who worked in the Political Department of Auschwitz,similar reports were sent by his department to Eichmann at the nerve center of the whole operation to kill the Jews:the Reich Security Main Office.None of these survive. As we have seen above,Broad declared that,immediately after the numbers had been dispatched to Berlin, the Political Department was under instruction to destroy all records.41

Piper also decided not to make use of the estimates of the number of people murdered made by eyewitnesses.With one exception -Kommandant Rudolf Höss -none of the German personnel who confessed after the war,and none of the survivors of the camp,belonging either to the resistance organization within the camp,or who had worked in administrative offices,or as Sonderkommando in the crematoria,had been in a position to gather sufficient aggregate data over the whole period

of the camp's history to establish a credible figure.

Piper also discarded the early attempts, made by Soviet and Polish forensic investigators in 1945, to establish the total number of victims on the basis of the incineration capacity of the crematoria. As we have seen, the experts had decided that, over the period of their existence, the crematoria could have incinerated up to 5,121,000 corpses. To be on the safe side, they had assumed that the crematoria had operated on four-fifths of capacity, and therefore they finally assumed a number of four million. Given the fact that the investigators probably over-estimated the incineration capacity of the crematoria (on the basis of a multiplication of the official German figures for each crematorium and the time they were in operation, one would come to a figure of 2.6 million corpses⁴²) and underestimated the sometimes considerable time that the crematoria had been idle, Piper also concluded that it would be difficult to reach conclusions on that basis alone.

The best approach, so he argued, was to follow Nachman Blumenthal's method and proceed on the basis of research on the numbers of people who had been deported from the various countries to Auschwitz. Analysis of the transports had been the basis for Reitlinger's estimate that some 900,000 people had died in the camp, and Wellers's conclusion that 1,471,595 people had died in Auschwitz. Yet Piper was sceptical of Wellers's figures. Wellers, so he argued, had used some arbitrary premises, not considered data of great importance, and combined approximate figures with precise numbers. Failing to take into account transfers of inmates to other camps, inmates who had been released and who had escaped, he had underestimated the number of survivors by 80,000. Added to that, Wellers had overestimated the number of deportees to Auschwitz by around 320,000 people, chiefly by overcalculating the number of Polish Jews brought to the camp (622,935 instead of 300,000).⁴³

On the basis of archival research done by scholars in various countries, and especially the three-decade long project known in the Auschwitz archive as the "Kalendarium," and undertaken by the Polish scholar Danuta Czech, Piper was able to come to an estimate of the number of Jews deported to Auschwitz. The Kalendarium - a day-by-day, fully annotated chronicle of the history of the camp - is a massive reference work which has been since 1956 the core of the long-term research policy of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Early instalments of the Kalendarium were published in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Work continued, however, throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, with constant refinements as more source material became available. Finally, in 1989, the German publishing house Rowohlt published the massive German edition of the Kalendarium, followed a year later by the English-language edition entitled *Auschwitz Chronicle: 1939-1945*.⁴⁴ This work includes, after twelve pages of

introductory remarks,805 pages chronicling the pre-history of the camp from the outbreak of the war to the establishment of the camp in the Spring of 1940,and almost every day of the camp's operation until its liberation on January 27, 1945.Added to that are 19 pages with short biographies of the major perpetrators,a four-page glossary,and an eight-page bibliography that includes 152 individual entries.

A typical entry,randomly chosen,reads as follows:

November 14 [1942]

Prisoner No.69656 is shot at 5:40 A.M.By the SS sentry on duty at Watchtower B of the main camp ";while escaping."

The standby squad is ordered to the unloading ramp at 1:45 A.M.to take charge of a transport.

2,500 Jewish men,women and children arrive with an RSHA transport from the ghetto of the Zichenau District.After the selection,633 men and 135 women are admitted to the camp and receive Nos.74745 -75377 and 24524 - 24658.The remaining 1,732 are killed in the gas chambers.

1,500 Jewish men,women and children arrive with an RSHA transport from the ghetto in the Bialystok District.After the selection,282 men and 379 women are admitted to the camp and receive Nos.75378 -75659 and 24659 - 25037.The remaining 839 deportees are killed in the gas chambers.

71 male and two female prisoners sent to the camp by the Sipo and SD for the Krakow District receive Nos.75660 -75730,25038,and 25039.

The SS Camp Doctor makes a selection in the prisoners ' infirmary..He selects 110 prisoners,who are taken to Birkenau and killed in the gas chambers.45

The Kalendarium must be regarded as the basis of any research into the history of deportations to Auschwitz,but it must be pointed out that it is not perfect.Especially with regards to the final liquidation of the Lodz ghetto,and the subsequent deportation of its remaining population to Auschwitz,the absence of a clear indication of the size of 11 of the 12 listed transports is troublesome.The transport of September 18,1944 had a size of 2,500 deportees.If this was a typical transport,this would mean that the ten listed transports account for a total of 25,000 deportees.However,the Statistical Office of Lodz shows that in August and September 73,563 Jews were deported from Lodz,most of them were sent to Auschwitz. This means that all record of a maximum of 20 transports (some 50,000

people)are lost,at least in the account of the Kalendarium. This "; disappearance " of up to 20 transports seems,,in my opinion,to be the single greatest anomaly in the Kalendarium.

Using both the Kalendarium and the research done by historians in various countries on the precise number of Jews of each national group deported - in the case of France the total number of victims was established by Jacob Letschinsky in early 1947,46 in the case of the Netherlands all deportation lists were found intact and included in the Parliamentary Report on the German occupation,and so on -Piper was able to come to precise estimates of deportations to Auschwitz of Jews from the following national groups (rounded up or down to the next thousand for all numbers larger than 10,000):

(i) France:71 transports between March 27,1944 and August 22,1944; transport lists total to a number of some 69,000 deportees.

(ii) The Netherlands:68 transports between July 15,1942 and September 3, 1944; transport lists total to a number of 60,000 deportees.

(iii) Greece:22 transports between March 20,1943 and August 16,1944; railway tickets show the deportation of some 49,000 Jews from Saloniki to Auschwitz,and transport lists show the deportation of another 6,000 Jews from Athens and Corfu to Auschwitz.

(iv) Bohemia and Moravia:24 transports between October 26,1942 and October 1944;transport lists total a number of some 46,000 deportees.

(v) Slovakia:19 transports between March 26,1942 and October 20,1942; various other transports in the fall of 1944;transport lists total a number of some 27,000 deportees;

(vi) Belgium:27 transports between August 4,1942 and July 31,1944; transport lists total a number of some 25,000 deportees;

(vii) Italy:13 transports between October 18,1943 and October 24,1944; transport lists total a number of some 7,500 deportees;

(viii) Norway:2 transports between December 1,1942 and February 2,1943; transport lists total a number of 700 deportees.

This brings a sub-total of some 290,000 deportees based on relatively straightforward archival information.All the deportees were either killed on arrival,and therefore not registered,or admitted to the camp,and

registered.

The figures concerning the Jews from various other countries demanded more involved analysis. In one case there are precise figures for the number of deportees, but a significant number of those not killed on arrival were not admitted or registered in the camp. These so-called Durchgangs-Juden (transit Jews) were kept temporarily in transit, to be dispatched to concentration camps in the Reich.

(ix) Hungary: according to a telegram dated July 11, 1944, sent by the German ambassador in Budapest to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, a total of 437,402 (438,000) Jews were deported to Auschwitz. The total number of transports was 148. Of the 438,000 Jews, as much as 25,000 could have been qualified as Durchgangs-Juden

This brings a revised sub-total of 728,000 deportees -all Jews 47 -from nine countries. In all the foregoing cases, Piper's numbers came close to those of Wellers.

Finally there are the countries for which the data, for various reasons, proved less straightforward, or for which, at one point or another, there has been substantial disagreement between scholars.

(x) Poland: there is relatively reliable information, based on records kept by the camp resistance movement, about the number of regular transports with Polish Jews (except those from Lodz) that arrived in Auschwitz between May 5, 1942 and August 18, 1944 (142). These transports averaged some 1,500 people each, with three going as high as 5,000 people (June 1942 from Bielsko-Biala, August 1942 from Bendzin, September 1943 from Tarnow), three exceeding 4,000 people (June 1942, January 1943 from Lomza, November 1943, from Szebnie), and thirteen transports of between 3,000 and 4,000 people. The usual size of Polish transports was either 1,000 or 2,000 people. Thirty-six transports counted less than 1,000 people. The total number of deportees from these transports were some 221,000 people. Added to this number should be the transports that liquidated the Lodz ghetto in August and September 1944. Of these ten transports are listed. In July 1944 the ghetto counted a little below 74,000 people. By the end of September there were none. Most of the transports went to Auschwitz. Hence the total number of Polish Jews deported to Auschwitz was between 280,000 and 290,000. Piper rounded this up to 300,000 people to accommodate possible discrepancies.

This round figure of 300,000 Polish Jewish deportees to Auschwitz seems also confirmed by a consideration of the fate of all the Jews of prewar Poland. Before the war, some 3.1 million Jews lived in Poland. After

the Polish Campaign of 1939, the Germans gained control of some 1.8 million Polish Jews. With Operation Barbarossa, another million Polish Jews came under German control, which brings a total of 2.8 million Jews. Of these 100,000 survived. The Polish historian Czeslaw Madajczyk determined that of these some 200,000 were executed through shooting by Einsatzgruppen or police units, and 500,000 died in the ghettos. Some two million Polish Jews were killed in the German camps. Madajczyk estimated that between 1.6 million and 1.95 million Jews were killed in Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor and Chelmno; Hilberg estimated the number at 1.7 million. Of these 1.7 million, 100,000 victims came from Germany, the Netherlands, and Czechoslovakia, and the rest (1.6 million) from Poland. Which leaves (2 million - 1.6 million =) 400,000 Polish Jews unaccounted for at this point in our calculation. Between 50,000 and 95,000 Polish Jews were killed in Maidanek, from which one may conclude that at least 300,000 and possibly as much as 350,000 Polish Jews died in Auschwitz.

This figure is roughly half the figure of 622,935 Polish Jews assumed by Wellers.

(xi) Germany and Austria: according to research done by the German Federal Archive in Koblenz, 38,574 German Jews were killed in Auschwitz. Of these, a number had, before the war, found refuge in France, Belgium and Holland, and were included in transports from those countries to Auschwitz. Others were first deported to Poland, or Bohemia and Moravia (Theresienstadt), and were included in transports from those places. In order not to count these people twice, their number (some 15,000) must be deducted from the 38,574. As a result some 23,000 German Jews were deported directly from Germany to Auschwitz.

(xii) Yugoslavia: the data for Yugoslav Jews is confusing. Between 60,000 and 65,000 Yugoslav Jews were killed during the war. Most of them were killed in Yugoslavia, either through public executions, pogroms, or in camps organized by Croats or Serb fascists. From some of these camps Germans deported groups of Jews to Auschwitz - some 5,000 in total. After the Italian capitulation in 1943 the 4,000 remaining Jews in Croatia were deported to Auschwitz in May 1943. Adding in some smaller transports in 1944, Piper estimates the total number at around 10,000.

This brings a revised sub-total of 1,061,000 Jews deported to Auschwitz.

Finally, a number of Jews, some 34,000 in total, arrived in Auschwitz from other concentration camps (not including Theresienstadt, or the transit camps in the various countries mentioned above). This brings a final total of 1,095,000 (1.1 million) Jews deported to Auschwitz. 48

How many of these deportees were killed on arrival? There are precise data for the number of registered inmates. The registration numbers ran consecutively, and once a number had been issued, it was never re-issued again. In total 400,207 numbers were issued for six categories of prisoners:

a. General number system, given to gentiles and Jews (May 1940 and later): 202,499 men and 89,325 women. Total: 291,824 inmates.

b. Jews, A series (May 1944 and later): 20,000 men and 29,354 women.

Total: 49,354 inmates.

c. Jews, B series (May 1944 and later): 14,897 men.

d. Re-education prisoners: 9,193 men and 1,993 women. Total 11,186 inmates

e. Soviet prisoners of war: 11,964. Total 11,964 inmates.

f. Romani: 10,094 men and 10,888 women. Total 20,982 inmates.

Total: 400,000 registered inmates.

Groups b and c total 64,251 Jewish inmates. On the basis of calculations taking into account the fact that virtually no Jews were registered in the camp before March 1942, and that after that date all the transports sent by the Reich Security Main Office contained exclusively Jews, Piper came to the conclusion that slightly less than half of the 291,824 inmates registered under the general number system were Jews. This brings a total of some 205,000 (64,000 + 141,000) registered Jews.

Given the fact that 1,095,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz, and 205,000 were registered as inmates in the camp, it follows that 890,000 Jews who arrived were not registered. Of these some 25,000 would have been Durchgangs-Juden, which leads to the conclusion that 865,000 Jews were killed on arrival.

The mortality of the registered Jews is more difficult to determine. It is clear that, of the registered inmates, 190,000 were transferred to other concentration camps - most of them after the death marches of January 1945. A total of 8,000 inmates were liberated by the Red Army on January 27, 1945, some 1,500 inmates were released, and some 500 escaped. This means that some 199,500 inmates, or roughly half of all the registered inmates, are accounted for. The rest, or 200,000, must have died

in the camp. According to Piper, the mortality rate for the general camp population (mainly Poles and Jews), was around 50 per cent over the life of the camp -for the Soviet prisoners-of-war and the Romani it was much higher. As a result Piper came to a rough estimate of 100,000 registered Jews that died in the camp. The result is that the total mortality of Jews in Auschwitz was 960,000.

Added to this number are a number of other victim groups, such as unregistered Poles sent for execution to Auschwitz by the Gestapo Summary Court, registered Polish inmates, unregistered Romani, registered Romani, unregistered Soviet prisoners-of-war sent for execution, registered Soviet Prisoners-of-war, and others (Czechs, Russians, Belorussians, Ukrainians, Yugoslavs, Frenchmen, Germans, Austrians and so on):

1. Jews: 860,000 unregistered and 100,000 registered inmates. Total 960,000 victims.

2. Poles: 10,000 unregistered and 64,000 registered inmates. Total 74,000 victims.

3. Romani: 2,000 unregistered and 19,000 registered inmates. Total 21,000 victims.

4. Soviet prisoners-of-war: 3,000 unregistered and 12,000 registered. Total 15,000 victims.

5. Others: 12,000 registered inmates. Total 12,000 victims.

Total: 1,082,000 victims.

Since its publication, Piper's assessment that some 1.1 million people died in Auschwitz has found only one substantial challenge. In 1993 the French researcher Jean-Claude Pressac came to the substantially lower figure of around 800,000 dead in a five page appendix to his *Les Crématoires d'Auschwitz*. The major reason for Pressac's disagreement with Piper is in the former's belief that both the number of Hungarian and Polish Jews killed in the camp were substantially lower than Piper assumed. Pressac agreed with Piper that 438,000 Hungarian Jews had been deported to Auschwitz, yet assumed that 118,000 of these had been *Durchgangsjuden* who had been transferred to other camps immediately after selection. Piper had assumed that only 25,000 of these Hungarian Jews had been *Durchgangsjuden* which meant that Pressac felt justified to reduce, on the basis of this assumption alone, the mortality of Auschwitz with $(118,000 - 25,000 =) 93,000$ people. Pressac also assumed, on the basis of a very quick and rough calculation that instead of 300,000

only 150,000 Polish Jews had been deported to Auschwitz.⁵¹ As a result, Pressac came to a total number of 945,200 Jews deported to Auschwitz, of whom 118,000 were Durchgangsjuden (Piper's number is 1.1 million, of whom 25,000 were Durchgangsjuden, and subtracting from that number 200,000 registered Jews, Pressac assumed that 630,000 Jews were gassed on arrival (Piper's number is 860,000). Because Pressac also assumed a lower mortality for registered inmates (130,000 instead of 200,000) whilst assuming the same numbers for the Soviet prisoners-of-war (whilst "forgetting" the Romani!), he arrives at a total mortality of (630,000 + 130,000 + 15,000 =) 775,000 dead (or roughly 75 % of Piper's numbers.⁵²

In the German translation of *Les Crématoires d'Auschwitz* which appeared in 1994 under the title *Die Krematorien von Auschwitz: Die Technik des Massenmordes* Pressac had changed his mind. Now he presented in an eleven-page appendix a substantially lower figure of at least between 631,000 and 711,000 dead. This new range of figures was the result of a new assumption that the number of Hungarian Jews deported to Auschwitz was substantially lower than both Piper and Pressac himself had assumed. Instead of 438,000 Hungarian Jews, Pressac now used a number of between 160,000 and 240,000.⁵³ As a result, Pressac came to a total number of between 667,200 and 747,200 Jews deported to Auschwitz (Piper's number is 1.1 million), and subtracting from that number 200,000 registered Jews, Pressac assumed that between 470,000 and 550,000 Jews were gassed on arrival (Piper's number is 860,000). Because Pressac also assumed a lower mortality for registered inmates (126,000 instead of 200,000) whilst assuming the same numbers for the Soviet prisoners-of-war and the Romani, he arrives at a total mortality of between 630,000 and 710,000 - or roughly between 57% and 65% of Piper's number.

Are Pressac's challenges to Piper's numbers to be taken seriously? Let us first consider the general credibility of his research. There is no doubt that Pressac has rendered important service to the historiography of Auschwitz through his research on the development of the gas chambers and the crematoria. Yet it is also true that, having achieved a deserved recognition through the study of one aspect of the history of Auschwitz, Pressac did not hesitate to pronounce himself, at least in my own presence, not only the ultimate expert in all matters relating to the history of Auschwitz, but even to claim expertise in all matters relating to the Holocaust. As a result, Pressac did not hesitate to make far-reaching claims on issues he had not studied, and which were beyond his judgement. His desire to "escape" the narrow perspective of his study of the gas chambers by offering his contribution to the question of the number of victims is a case in point. His lack of true expertise becomes clear when one considers how he radically changed his assessment of the number of people murdered in Auschwitz from one edition to the next.

Reviewing his arguments, it seems to me that Pressac could have a point, which he however fails to prove, when he claims that Piper was too low in his assessment of the number of Hungarian Jews who were qualified as Durchgangsjuden on arrival in Auschwitz. Given the German policy during the Hungarian Action to use Auschwitz as a selection station, I have always had some problem with Piper's number -but would have no data to prove him wrong. If Pressac were to be right, or somewhat right on this issue, then it could be that the total number of Jewish people murdered in Auschwitz would be lower than 960,000, and that the total number of victims would be closer to 1 million than the 1.1 million people which Piper calculated. Pressac's argument that 150,000 and not 300,000 Polish Jews were deported to Auschwitz is, however, based on some very arbitrary observations regarding the liquidation of the ghetto of Bendin and Sosnowitz in early 1943. It is clear that, in the first week of August, more than 30,000 Jews from these ghettos arrived with convoys of either 2,000 or 3,000 people in the camp, and that more than 22,000 of them were killed in the gas chambers. Pressac reasons that the average killing and incineration rate should have been close to 4,000 per day during this period. Theoretically, this should have been possible, given the fact that the official daily incineration capacity of the crematoria was 4,756 corpses.⁵⁴ Pressac reasons, however, that in the first week of August the total incineration capacity of the camp had been less than halved because of problems with crematoria 2 and 5, and that as a result the camp incinerators could not have "accommodated" within the given period the ((close to) 22,000 victims. Hence, Pressac assumes that because the incineration capacity of the crematoria was half during this period, the number of victims was half, and that therefore the number of Bendin and Sosnowitz Jews deported to Auschwitz was half -ignoring the fact that there was independent confirmation from the chief of police of Sosnowitz of the number of 30,000 deported Jews. Undeterred by this, Pressac reasons that because the number of deportees was half, the size of each of the transports was half (that is 1,000 or 1,500 people per transport and not 2,000 or 3,000 people per transport) and, committing the fallacy of composition, he now assumes that all transport of Polish Jews were half of what they were supposed to have been, and that therefore the total number of Polish Jews had been half of the 300,000 people Piper assumed.⁵⁵ Thus a potentially legitimate observation that during the first week of August 1943 half of the ovens were out of order led Pressac to conclude that, over the whole history of the camp, only 150,000 and not 300,000 Polish Jews had been deported to the camp. And he "saves" these 150,000 Polish Jews in an argument that takes a little over a page..

It will be clear that Pressac's methodology, and hence his revision of the number of Polish Jews deported to Auschwitz, is not to be taken seriously. As a result, Piper's numbers remain the only ones that are supported by substantial investigation into the matter. As a scholar working on the history of Auschwitz, I reviewed Dr. Piper's methodology and his

conclusions both in conversation, through study of his writings, and by considering the evidence he has presented, and I fully join the scholarly consensus that he has put the matter to rest. And while it is not impossible that at some future date they could be revised if, for example, more information becomes available about the number of Hungarian Durchgangsjuden I do not expect such a revision to be beyond a range of about 10 per cent. Even if the total number of Jewish victims of Auschwitz were to be closer to 900,000 than 1,000,000, Auschwitz was to remain the center of the Holocaust, and as such the likely focus of Holocaust denial.

1 Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz* transl. Paul P. Weiss and Clifford Coch (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1947), 15f.

2 Theodor Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I: Prismen. Ohne Leitbild* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 33. Adorno's "after Auschwitz" became a popular figure of speech to denote the great historical rupture wrought by the Holocaust. See, for example, Ignaz Maybaum, *The Face of God after Auschwitz* (Amsterdam: Polak and Van Genneep, 1965); Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966); André Neher, *L'exil de la Parole: du silence biblique au silence d'Auschwitz* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970); Hans Jansen, *Christelijke theologie na Auschwitz: Theologische en kerkelijke wortels van het antisemitisme* (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1982); Peter Mosler, ed., *Schreiben nach Auschwitz* (Cologne: Bund Verlag, 1989); David H. Hirsch, *The Deconstruction of Literature: Criticism after Auschwitz* (Hanover and London: Brown University Press, 1991). It is important to note here that at least one prominent Jewish philosopher, the late Arthur A. Cohen, protested against the use of "after Auschwitz" as a synecdoche of the Holocaust, which he denoted with the term *tremendum* a word that denotes a vast terror." Note that I have not referred to Auschwitz as the name by which to concretize and transmit the reality of the *tremendum* "Cohen wrote.."; Auschwitz was only one among many sites of death. It was not even the largest death camp, although it may well have claimed the largest number of victims. Auschwitz is a particularity, a name, a specific. Auschwitz is the German name for a Polish name. It is a name which belongs to them. It is not a name which commemorates. It is both specific and other." Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: a Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroads, 1981), 11.

3 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* revised and definitive edition, 3 vols. (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1985), vol. 3, 1219. For the mortality in Auschwitz, see the extended discussion at the end of this section.

4 Hungary (438,000);Poland (300,000);France (69,000);The Netherlands (60,000);Greece (55,000); Bohemia and Moravia,Theresienstadt (46,000); Slovakia (27,000);Belgium (25,000);Germany and Austria (23,000); Yugoslavia (10,000);Italy (7,500);Norway (69,000).See Franciszek Piper, Die Zahl der Opfer von Auschwitz Aufgrund der Quellen und der Erträge der Forschung 1945 bis 1990 (Oswiecim:The Auschwitz- Birkenau State Museum in Oswiecim,1993),Table D (between pp.1445)..

5 Franz Rosenzweig,The Star of Redemption, trans.William H.Hallo (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,1971),298.

6 Elie Wiesel,Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends transl. Marion Wiesel (New York: Summit Books,1976),32.

7 State of Israel,Ministry of Justice,The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Record of Proceedings in the District Curt of Jerusalem 5 vols.(Jerusalem: The Trust for the Publication of the Eichmann Trial,1992),vol.3,1237.

8 Levi,The Drowned and the Saved 78.

9 Ibid.,86.

10 Henry L.Feingold,";How Unique is the Holocaust?,"Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust Alex Goodman and Daniel Landes eds.(Los Angeles: The Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1983),398.

11 Franklin H.Littell,";The Credibility Crisis of the Modern University," in Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton,The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Genocide (Millwood:Kraus, 1980),274.

12 Rolf Hochhuth,The Deputy transl.Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Grove Press,1964), 248.

13 Pierre Vidal-Naquet,The Jews: History, Memory, and the Present transl. David Ames Curtis (New York:Columbia University Press,1996),148f.

14 Ibid.

15 Richard L.Rubenstein,The Cunning of History: The Holocaust and the American Future (New York: Harper Colophon Books,1978),46f.

16 Ibid.,6;79.

17 David Irving,";On Contemporary History and Historiography,"Journal of

18 Cayrol,";Night and Fog," in Hughes ed.,Film: Book 2-Films of Peace and War 240f.

19 Konnilyn G.Feig,Hitler's Death Camps: The Sanity of Madness (New York and London:Holmes & Meier,1981),337.

20 Roland Barthes,Mythologies transl.Annette Lavers (New York:Hill and Wang,1972),143.

21 Ibid.

22 Pery Broad,";Reminiscences," in Auschwitz--Birkenau State Museum in Oswiecim, KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS: Rudolf Höss, Pery Broad, Johann Paul Kremer transl.Constantine FitzGibbon and Krystyna Michalik (Warsaw: Interpress,1991),142.

23 State of Israel,Ministry of Justice,The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Record of Proceedings in the District Curt of Jerusalem 5 vols.(Jerusalem: The Trust for the Publication of the Eichmann Trial,1992),vol.3,1005f.

24 United States,Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals Under Control Council Law No. 10 10 vols.(Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office,1950),vol.5,433.

25 Crematorium 1,so it was estimated,had had a monthly incineration capacity of 9,000 corpses. Having been in operation for 24 months,it was assumed that it had had a burning capacity of 216,000 bodies.Crematoria 2 and 3 were estimated to each have had a monthly capacity of 90,000 corpses.As they had been in operation for 19 and 18 months, they would have been able to incinerate together a total of 3,330,000 corpses. Crematoria 4 and 5 were estimated at 45,000 bodies per month,and as they had been in function for 17 and 18 months,they had together over that time a cremation capacity of 1,575,000 bodies.See ";Statement of the Extraordinary State Committee For the Ascertaining and Investigation of Crimes Committed by the German-fascist Invaders and Their Associates On Crimes Committed by the German-fascist Invaders in the Oswiecim Death Camp," Information Bulletin, Embassy of the Soviet Socialist Republics (Washington D.C.)vol.5,no.54 (May 29,1945),8. Ibid.

27 Expert Opinion Nachman Blumental,Höss Trial,volume 29,153ff; vol.31,47ff.,Archive AuschwitzBirkenau State Museum in Oswiecim.

28 Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939-1945* (London:Valentine,Mitchell &Co.,1953),460f.

29 Reitlinger explained this reason for this extremely cautious approach in the pre-ambule to his calculation of the total number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust, which he set at between 4,194,200 and 4,581,200 people." ; Since the reading of the Nuremberg indictment in November, 1945, naming the figure of 5,700,000 Jewish victims of Germany, the round number of six millions has become a generally accepted assumption in most circles that are interested in the matter. But in the course of writing this book I have been forced to the conclusion that, while it cannot be determined even within a half-million degree of accuracy, the true figure may be considerably smaller. In submitting my following estimates I realise that I may be accused of belittling the sufferings of the persecuted communities, but I believe that the nature of the book is a guarantee of my good faith in that respect. The figure used in Nuremberg was supplied by the World Jewish Congress at a moment when little reputable data were available. Constant repetition of that figure has already given anti-semitic circles on the Continent and in Germany in particular the opportunity to discredit the whole ghastly story and its lessons. I believe that it does not make the guilt of the living German any less, if the figure of six million turns out to be an over-estimate and that the accurate assessment, if it can be ever obtained will not weaken the Jewish case for sanctions against recurrences of these symptoms. Whether six million died, or five millions, or less, it will still be the most systematic extermination of a race in world history. Moreover, once the principle of the murders is proved, there is no particular magic in additional millions. As a German, Walter Dirks, has written: 'It is shameful that there should be Germans who see a mitigating circumstance in reducing the sum from six millions to two millions!' " Reitlinger,, *The Final Solution* 489.

30 Reitlinger concluded the main narrative with the following remarkable observation: "; I have spent close to four years among these documents and I found their company neither gloomy nor depressing. For on many pages darts and gleams that thing which prevents all government becoming a living hell -human fallibility. Eichmann fails to fill his death trains, the satellite-government Ministers refuse to answer letters, someone gets the figures wrong, and someone else gives the show away too soon. And so the immense disaster was partly whittled down. How much worse it would have been if the French had not been inconsistent, if the Italians had not been easygoing, the Hungarians jealous, the Rumanians corrupt, and the Germans wedded to protocol. It is possible that murderous racialism is something ineradicable in the nature of ants and men, but the Robot State which will give it full effect cannot exist and never will. Reitlinger, *The Final Solution* 488.

31 As quoted in State of Israel, Ministry of Justice, The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Record of Proceedings in the District Court of Jerusalem 5 vols. (Jerusalem: The Trust for the Publication of the Eichmann Trial, 1992), vol. 3, 1310.

32 ";Testimony of Rudolf Hoess Taken at Nurnberg, on 1 April 1946, 1430 to 1730," in The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes eds. John Mendelsohn and Donald S. Detwiler, 18 vols. (New York and London: Garland, 1982), vol. 12, 72.

33 Document 3868-PS, ";Affidavit of Rudolf Franz Ferdinand Hoess," in International Military Tribunal, Trial of the Major War Criminals 41 vols. (Nuremberg: Secretariat of the Tribunal, 1947-49), vol. 33, 275f.

34 Gustave M. Gilbert, Nuremberg Diary (New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1947), 249.

35 State of Israel, Ministry of Justice, The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Record of Proceedings in the District Court of Jerusalem 5 vols. (Jerusalem: The Trust for the Publication of the Eichmann Trial, 1992), vol. 3, 1005f.

36 Rudolf Höss, ";The Final Solution to the Jewish Question," in Rudolf Höss, Death dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz ed. Steven Paskuly, transl. Andrew Pollinger (Buffalo NY: Prometheus Books, 1992), 38f.

37 Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews revised and definitive edition, 3 vols. (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1985), vol. 3, 1219.

38 Yad Vashem published his findings in 1991: Franciszek Piper, ";Estimating the Number of Deportees to and Victims of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp," Yad Vashem Studies vol. 21 (1991), 49-103. The United States Holocaust Research Institute published Piper's findings in 1994: Franciszek Piper, ";The Number of Victims," Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds., Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp (Washington D. C., Bloomington and Indianapolis: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Indiana University Press, 1994), 61-76.

39 The so-called ";family camp," created in subsection BI Ib of Birkenau in September 1943 for 5,000 Jews brought from Theresienstadt, and enlarged with another 5,000 Theresienstadt Jews in December 1943, cannot be considered an example of the so-called ";special lodging " for those declared ";unfit for work " at the selection at arrival. While the inmates

of the family camp included old people and children -that is those usually declared "unfit for work " at selection -none of them had been subjected to selection at their arrival in Birkenau.Men and women,young and old,healthy and sick,were all interned in the family camp.The name of each prisoner was designated with the code SB6,i.e."Special Treatment (Sonderbehandlung after six months." Indeed,,in March 1944,six months after their arrival,the first transport was gassed,after having been asked to write postcards to relatives who had stayed behind in Theresienstadt. The purpose of the family camp was to produce first of all a paper trail to refute reports that those taken to Auschwitz were killed.During Red Cross visits to Theresienstadt,the postmarked messages of people who had been sent six months earlier to Auschwitz were given to the delegation to counter rumors that Auschwitz was an extermination camp. Furthermore these inmates were kept alive as some Red Cross delegates to Theresienstadt had mentioned their wish to visit these people in Auschwitz.When during the June 23,1944 Red Cross visit to Theresienstadt the SS proved able to convince the delegates that no transports had left the ghetto,and that the "Hitler's gift to the Jews " was indeed a permanent abode and not a transit point to Auschwitz,the delegation decided that there was no need to visit Auschwitz. Subsequently the SS decided there was no need to preserve the family camp in Birkenau,and liquidated it.The circumstances that led to the creation and destruction of the family camp -the only place in Auschwitz where inmates who could have been considered unfit for work (if they had been selected)were lodged - were unique,and cannot be used to explain the references to "special lodging " for those declared "unfit for work " after the selection at arrival in Auschwitz.See Nili Kern,"The Family Camp," Gutman and Berenbaum,,eds.,Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp 428ff.

40 One is a telegram of February 20,1943,and concerns three transports from Theresienstadt which arrived on January 21,24 and 27,1943.These transports counted a total of 5,022 Jewish men,women,and children.Of these,930 (614 men and 316 women)had been selected for labour allocation; the rest (4,092 people),had been determined to be "unfit for work " and were "lodged separately " ("gesondert untergebracht--")The second is a telegram of March 8,1943,and concerns three transports from Berlin and Breslau which had arrived on March 5 and 7.They counted a total of 3,223 Jews.Of these 1,324 (973 men and 351 women)were selected for work, the rest (306 men and 1,593 women and children)were "treated specially " ("wurden sonderbehandelt--").A final telegram of March 15,1943, concerns a transport from Berlin.Counting 964 Jews.Of these 365 were selected for work,and the remaining 126 men and 473 children were "specially lodged " ("gesondert untergebracht--").There is no record in the Auschwitz archives about any special accomodation for those who were to be "specially lodged " after having been determined to be "unfit for work " at a selection.See Piper,Die Zahl der Opfer von Auschwitz 65ff.

41 In his 1945 deposition made to the British, Broad stated that "when information was requested by the Reich Main Security Office concerning a past transport, as a rule nothing could be ascertained. Former transport lists were destroyed. Nobody could learn anything in Auschwitz about the fate of a given person. The person asked for 'is not and never has been detained in camp,' or 'he is not in the files '-these were the usual formulas given in reply. At present, after the evacuation of Auschwitz and the burning of all papers and records, the fate of millions of people is completely obscure. No transport or arrival lists are in existence any more. Pery Broad "Reminiscences," in Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oswiecim, KL Auschwitz Seen by the SS: Rudolf Höss, Pery Broad, Johann Paul Kremer transl. Constantine FitzGibbon and Krystyna Michalik (Warsaw: Interpress, 1991), 142.

42 Crematorium 1 had an official cremation capacity of 340 corpses per day, or 10,200 corpses per month; crematoria 2 and 3 had an official cremation capacity of 1,440 each, or 43,200 per month each; crematoria 4 and 5 had an official cremation capacity of 768 each, or 23,040 each. Letter Bischoff to Kammler, 28 June 1943, Osobyi Moscow, ms. 502/1 -314; USHRI Washington, microfilm RG 11.001M.03 - 41..

43 See Piper, "Die Zahl der Opfer von Auschwitz," 100..

44 Danuta Czech, Auschwitz Chronicle: 1939-1945, transl. Barbara Harshav, Martha Humphreys, and Stephen Shearier (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990).

45 Ibid., 268f. The annotation of this day refers to various documents in the archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. A typical reference is, for example, the source for the order to assemble the standby squad at the unloading ramp: APMO, D-AuI-1/3, FvD, p. 138, which reads as Archiwum Panstwowego Muzeum w Oswiecimiu (Archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Oswiecim), Document-Auschwitz I-file 1, item 3, Führer vom Dienst (Duty Officer Log), p. 138. The entries to the two transports are not annotated following Czech's practice to provide, in cases where she obtained information about various transports from a common point of origin from a single body of material, only the reference to the first time such a transport appears in the Kalendarium. For example, the first transport from Zichenau arrived on November 7, 1942, and the source of this information is the archive of the Höss Trial (1947) which is preserved in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

46 Jacon Lestschinsky, "Bilan d 'extermination," Le Monde Juif (March 1947), 19f.

47 There were only three substantial groups of gentile prisoners deported to Auschwitz:Poles (140,000 to 150,000),Romani (23,000)and Soviet prisoners of war (15,000).None of these groups came from the nine countries mentioned above.There were also a total of 25,000 gentile inmates of various nationalities (including Czechs and French citizens). They were,however,not brought to Auschwitz with the Jewish transports referred to in the list given above,but in small transfers from other concentration camps.

48 Remarkably enough,this figure comes very close to the number of 1,130,000 deported Jews given at three different occasions by Kommandant Rudolf Höss.During his interrogation in Nuremberg,Höss admitted to a total number of 1,125,000 deported Jews to Auschwitz..";Testimony of Rudolf Hoess Taken at Nurnberg,on 1 April 1946,1430 to 1730," in The Holocaust: Selected Documents in Eighteen Volumes ,eds.John Mendelsohn and Donald S.Detwiler,18 vols.(New York and London:Garland, 982), vol.12,72.In a private memorandum which he wrote for Dr.Gustave Gilbert, and which the latter submitted as evidence in the Eichmann Trial, Höss claimed that 1,125,000 Jews had been deported to Auschwitz.State of Israel,Ministry of Justice, The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Record of Proceedings in the District Curt of Jerusalem 5 vols.(Jerusalem:The Trust for the Publication of the Eichmann Trial,1992),vol.3, 1005f..Finally, during Polish captivity,he confirmed once more the figure of 1,130,00 Jews.Rudolf Höss,";The Final Solution to the Jewish Question," in Rudolf Höss,Death dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auchwitz ed. Steven Paskuly,transl.Andrew Pollinger (Buffalo NY:Prometheus Books,1992),38f;

49 The introduction of the A and B numbers in the Spring of 1944 occurred amidst the administrative chaos created by the Hungarian Action. According to Helen Tichauer,a Slovak- Jewish inmate who helped manage the administration in the women's camp in Birkenau,the new A and B series were introduced because (1)the existing numbering system created in 1940 when the camp only had gentile Polish inmates did not make distinctions between Jews and non-Jews and (2)in the regular numbers had become too high (in the women's camp in had reached almost 90,000,in the men's camp it had passed 185,000),and the five and six digit numbers created confusion.In introducing a combination of letters and numerals, simplicity was to be restored.Arriving gentile inmates were to be given numbers following the old system, while arriving Jewish inmates were to be registered in the A and B series.Yet the opposite happened:confusion increased.For example:while Jews who arrived with transports dispatched by the Reich Security Main Office were given A and B numbers,those who were transferred from other camps or prisons were given numbers following the old system.Therefore the SS returned in August 1944 to a numbering system without letters,closing the A and B series.Helen Tichauer

in conversation with author, May 22 and 23, 1999.

50 Jean-Claude Pressac, *Les crématoires d'Auschwitz: la machinerie du meurtre de masse* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1993), 147.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 148.

53 Jean-Claude Pressac, *Die Krematorien von Auschwitz: Die Technik des Massenmordes* transl. Eliana Hagedorn and Barbare Reitz (München and Zürich: Piper, 1994), 197ff.

54 Letter Bischoff to Kammler, 28 June 1943, Osobyi Moscow, ms. 502/1 -314; USHRI Washington, microfilm RG 11.001M.03 - 41..

55 Pressac, *Die Krematorien von Auschwitz* 196f.

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