
On Photographic Violence

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of photographic violence in relation to a single defaced image found during the Bosnian War. The single example of pictorial violence opens a set of questions interrogating the nature of human aggression: What is the status of violence carried out in effigy? Can this particular example of defacement open understanding into the other forms of violence that took place during the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia? How does the image come to be marked by affect but also serve as the medium of its transmission? And finally, why does photography lend itself so easily to the expression of aggression? The wager of this paper is that thinking through such instances of photographic violence can shed new light on the nature of human violence writ large.

Keywords: trauma, memory, violence, genocide

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J-L Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

One of the most potent images collected during the Bosnian War was a found photograph (Figure 1). According to its finder, the photojournalist Ron Haviv, when the daughter of the Muslim family pictured in the image returned to Sarajevo after the war, she found her family home had been looted. Serbs who had occupied the house during the war finally left once the city was reunited

under the Muslim-led Bosnian government. But upon their departure, the occupiers stole almost everything—the furniture, appliances, cabinets, sinks, and even the windowpanes. The defaced photograph was the sole item left behind (Haviv 2000: 175).

On the one hand, the sheer endurance of this image is remarkable. Unlike all the other household items, the photograph



Fig 1 Blood and Honey: A defaced photograph that was found by a Bosnian family when they returned to their home in a suburb of Sarajevo, Bosnia, March 17, 1996. Photographer: Ron Haviv.

managed to survive as a melancholy relic of war. In this respect, photographs—and family photographs in particular—appear to hold little exchange value. Their worth is usually non-transferable. On the other hand, the narrative illustrates the way photography lends itself to a variety of uses in times of war. Specifically, the example shows how photographs can be pressed into service to actually wage war. The violence done to the surface of the image appears, on first glance, to echo the violence occurring throughout the region. The family members' identities have been scratched out, "cleansed" of the customary markers of ethnicity. In the hands of the occupiers, the photograph became an emissary of destructive affect, a canvas for the expression of sadistic desires.

This solitary example of pictorial violence opens a larger set of questions about the nature of human aggression. What is the status of violence carried out in effigy? Should the defacement be read as a fantasy that forestalls more direct forms of violence? Or is this a kind of "acting out" that inevitably leads to more profound forms of destruction, namely the annihilation of human beings? (Freud 2005 [1914]).¹ Can the particular violence done to the image be read for its "psychology of style"? That is, does the particular defacement open understanding into the other forms of violence that took place during the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia? And apart from these hermeneutical questions, why does photography—as opposed to the myriad of other material artifacts of a home—lend itself so easily to the expression of aggression? In other words, perhaps this example calls for a broader investigation into the ways photography is not only a

unique medium of visual reproduction, but also as a unique medium for the expression of violence. Hannah Arendt (1970) reminds us that violence—as distinct from power, force, or strength—requires implements.² The history of warfare is inextricably bound up with the history of technology. The frightening example from the Bosnian War suggests that by the close of the twentieth century, photography became one of the exemplary implements of genocide.

The violent effacement is, however, only one of the affective registers bound up in this example. The photograph's history of uses include: the family's initial circulation and preservation of the snapshot, the occupier's acquisition and sadistic defacement, and finally the spectator's melancholy contemplation of the relic in the time of afterwards, when one meets its reproduction in Ron Haviv's own collection of photographs of the war, *Blood and Honey: A Balkan War Journal*. This is to say, the contemporary spectator enters into, and indeed, becomes a participant in this narrative only at its conclusion. But this last site is itself unstable because the spectator is actually obliged to perform a dual task: to identify the subject of the image and to identify *with* it (Olin 2002). In order to comprehend this sequence of historical events, in order to know, one has to imagine for oneself the terrifying significance of this lonely relic. The spectator, in other words, becomes both the receiver of the object's enigmatic message *and* the carrier of its affective resonances. The wager of this paper is that attending these registers—thinking through this "acting out" of genocide in pictures—can shed new light on the nature of human violence writ large.

Community Building

The old Yugoslavia boasted one of the world's richest tapestries of language, religion, and culture before its people turned to violence in the 1990s. The chief architect of this breakdown was Slobodan Milošević, a member of the Yugoslav Communist Party, who rose to power in the country in the late 1980s. During his rise through the ranks, journalists sympathetic to the politician began spreading a fantasy about a grand conspiracy against the Serbian nation: the KGB together with the CIA, the Albanians, the separatists in Slovenia, and Islamic fundamentalists in Bosnia were purportedly working together to weaken Serbia. As a result of this inflammatory rhetoric, café life began to break down along "ethnic" lines (during this conflict the term "ethnicity" was often used as a euphemism for religious affiliation). Serbs began refusing to send their children to school with Muslims. Croats complained of being laid off by Serb managers, and vice versa. In June 1991, Croatia and Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia, which was quickly followed by an announcement from Macedonia. The next spring the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina announced its own secession. What began as local skirmishes in Croatia escalated until the fall of 1991, when the Yugoslav army launched an invasion into Croatia to "protect" the Serb minority who lived there. Within a few months, Serbs had seized a quarter of Croatia's territory and convinced the UN to send a force to guard the region. The Yugoslav army then redeployed their forces to Bosnia and war broke out there in 1992 when Serb paramilitary forces attacked Bijeljina and other towns, driving out the

Muslim populations. After three and a half years of bloodshed, including the nightmare of Srebrenica—Europe's worst massacre in more than five decades—NATO intervened with air strikes. The Dayton Peace Agreement, signed on December 14, 1995, bought a brief and tense ceasefire to the region. The peace only lasted a few months, whereupon Albanians, living in a virtual apartheid system in Kosovo, began attacking Serbian police units in 1996. Milošević used these attacks by the Kosovo Liberation Army to relaunch his plans for an "ethnically cleansed" Serbian nation. By the fall of 1998 the Serb police had driven tens of thousands of Albanians from their homes. NATO again demanded that Milošević withdraw his police units after Serb troops massacred a group of civilians in the village of Račak. The president's negotiators refused and NATO launched a limited air campaign. This only incited the Yugoslav army to expand their ethnic-cleansing operations. Thousands of Albanians were killed and some one million people were driven from their homes. Milošević finally withdrew his forces only once NATO threatened a ground campaign (Gutman 1993; Maas 1997; Sudetic 2000; Power 2002). The tragedies in this region offer one of the most potent examples in recent decades of just how difficult it is to love thy neighbor:

When the Bosnian War began in 1992, Western political leaders and even United Nations negotiators proposed that the fighting was the result of "ancient ethnic hatreds," animosities that had been smoldering for centuries in the blood of a people prone to violence. Such portrayals lean on a strange—one might say infantile—theorizing in which violence is believed to

break out because chance events inflame millennia-old blood tensions. Such a narrative appears to be easier to entertain than one in which a group of humans deliberately choose to reconstruct their world through mass extermination. Genocide, after all, is an exercise in community building (Gourevitch 1998: 95). In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud (Freud 2002 [1930]) offers a version of this thesis with what he calls the “narcissism of minor differences.” The term describes how peoples who share the same space of nation find means to distinguish themselves as members of a particular social group. In Freud’s words: “One should not belittle the advantage that is enjoyed by a fairly small cultural circle, which is that it allows the aggressive drive an outlet in the form of hostility to outsiders. It is always possible to bind quite large numbers of people together in love, provided that others are left out as targets for aggression” (Freud 2002 [1930]: 50). The thesis is counter-intuitive: rather than posit a biological or “ethnic” source for social violence, Freud proposes that community dynamics are structured by the vicissitudes of love and hate. The omnipotent desire for purity compels the members of a social group to expel their impurities onto nearby others. The group remakes their neighbors into strangers in order to cement their own attachments. Genocide, in other words, is a story about the treacheries of love.

Can the photograph tell us anything more about this drama of social violence? The defaced image from Bosnia is reproduced in Ron Haviv’s book, *Blood and Honey*, which provides an expansive visual documentation of the conflict. The album is a fitting home for the lonely relic. Haviv’s book offers a

pictorial catalogue of the violence that gripped the region: a crowd of Bosnians dodging sniper fire at a peace rally in the Spring of 1992; a Muslim captive pleading for his life from a paramilitary unit called the Tigers; the remains of a Kosovar Albanian reduced to ashes by Serbian forces in 1999; emaciated prisoners awaiting deportation at the Serb-run Trnopolje camp; Sarajevo’s new “warchitecture”;³ and most famously, one of Arkan’s Tigers kicking a murdered Muslim woman in the head in Bijeljina.⁴ Thousands of photographs emerged from the wars in the Balkans, but *Blood and Honey* bears witness to the primary target of the violence: civilians. Uncannily akin to the defaced photograph, this war’s ravages are visibly inscribed onto the very bodies of the people whose likeness Haviv captured with his camera.

The found photograph is one of the very last images reproduced in *Blood and Honey*. And while Haviv’s photographs ask us to dwell on photographic events, on the images’ pained and painful referents, the found photograph refuses this look. The damage done to the surface of the image makes it difficult for the spectator to drift into the photographic scene and so changes the functioning of the image. The destruction draws attention to the photograph as an artefact, as a two-dimensional picture that fails to represent that which is absent. The damage is specific in this regard: a combination of fine horizontal scratches which bite into the paper and four long vertical cuts that pierce the image.⁵ In his study of defacement, Valentin Groebner (Groebner 2004) calls upon a medieval German word to characterize the quality of such disfigurements: *Ungestalt*. Both a noun and an adjective, *Ungestalt* could

be translated into English as “hideous” or “hideousness,” but taken more literally, the term points to a particular quality of formlessness. That is, unlike “hideousness” which implies a gruesome disfigurement that may be all-too-visible, *Ungestalt* can signify that which has no appearance (Groebner 2004: 12). The distinction is important in the Bosnian example. The damage done to this photograph does not merely mar the family’s faces.⁶ This is not simple vandalism. Where there were once identifiable people in this photograph, only terrifying voids remain. The family has been rendered into faceless exemplars of horror.

The Mad Image

The grounds for assessing the significance of this violence are contested. The status of the photographic image—and especially the nature of the evidence the document can proffer—has been under debate virtually since the inception of the camera. On one side stands Roland Barthes’s famous dictum that all photographs proclaim “that-has-been,” that is, what one sees in the image once really existed (Barthes 1981: 77). This position argues that the photograph, as a material registration of light, provides unique phenomenological evidence of the prior existence of a thing. Yet Barthes cautions: there is madness in the medium’s proximity to reality. The image refers to something that is both *not* there and indeed *has been* and this particular quality renders the photograph “a mad image, chafed by reality” (Barthes 1981: 115).

On the other side of the debate, contemporary theorists argue that what photography shows is mere illusion. John Tagg claims that the “photograph is not a

magical ‘emanation,’ but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by force, for more or less defined purposes” (Tagg 1988: 3). This alternative position contends the significance of whatever “has-been” is not bound by the photographic frame, but shaped by who and how and why viewers look. Rather than reside in a unique proximity to the real, here photographic meaning is thought to depend upon the circulation and context in which the image is viewed (Burgin 1982; Tagg 1988; Apel and Smith 2007; Phu and Brower 2009).

The debate about photographic meaning is particularly resonant when it comes to images of violence. Susan Sontag underscored the problematic in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, her second and last book on photography, when she wrote: “all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions. During fighting between Serbs and Croats at the beginning of the recent Balkan wars, the same photographs of children killed in the shelling of a village were passed around at both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings. Alter the caption, and the children’s deaths could be used and reused” (Sontag 2003: 10). Ron Havis’s found photograph—and specifically the violence enacted upon its surface—seems to offer further evidence for the radical malleability of photographic meaning. Not only can meaning be shifted simply by changing the context of viewing, but by altering (or in this case, by defacing) the graphic properties of the image. The meaning of a photographic image is never fixed, never guaranteed, and never to be trusted. Like all implements of violence, this medium will lend its signifying powers to the highest bidder.

But this proven malleability of photographic meaning should not lead us to lose sight of the force of a photograph, or of the problematic point where, as Barthes puts it, the image is “chafed” by reality. It is significant, in other words, that the defacement of the family photograph in the hands of the Serb occupiers does not fully destroy the prior meaning of the photograph as a family keepsake. Indeed, the defacement actually *relies* on this prior meaning to lend the violence its force. The destructive gesture needs the significance of the family’s image to remain at least partially legible. The set of questions this example quickens, therefore, centers less on the source of photographic meaning than on the significance of its treatment, on the extraordinary vicissitudes of affect: How can the photograph act as both a source and emissary of the occupiers’ aggression? How does the image come to be marked by affect but also serve as the medium of its transmission?

In psychoanalytic terms, affect is the qualitative expression of the quantity of drive energy as well as its fluctuations (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 13). Freud uses the term “quota of affect” as a way to point to the particular amount of a drive’s charge. The affective representation of this charge can take a variety of forms, from bodily signs (physical sensations and parapraxis) to conscious, nameable feelings. Affect is, then, simply a medium for drive energy. The distinct fate of affect’s character—the extraordinary vicissitudes of emotional life—is not only subject to internal pressures but also to pressures from the outside world. Affect is the register through which we are susceptible to the

world as well as the means by which we affect it.

Barthes offers us an opening for thinking through how the photograph serves as both a container and agent of affect: “The Photograph,” he insists, is “a bizarre *medium*, a new form of hallucination” (Barthes 1981: 115, original emphasis). In contrast to an illusion (which is a strictly visual perception), a hallucination can include an array of sensory and somatic sensations: smells, feelings, tastes, and sounds. What Barthes proposes is that photography’s peculiar effects—its madness—far exceed the realm of vision. Photography is a medium that can encompass a broad affective terrain. In the dense last chapter of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes dwells on the various ways society has attempted to tame this madness which keeps threatening to explode in the face of whoever looks at a photograph. There he calls photography “*ecmnesic*,” which is to say this medium produces something more than just a vision of the past. Looking upon an image can induce a state of delirium in which the past actually *feels* present. Photography is a form of hallucination in which one can feel oneself *to be* in a prior time.

This sounds like madness to be sure. Given Barthes’s admission that he is writing while deep in grief over his mother’s death, one might wonder if his evaluation of photography’s functioning is distorted by melancholia. Even Freud admitted he had difficulty evaluating whether mourning is ever successful (Freud 2005 [1917]). As a means to measure its success, Freud contrasted mourning with melancholia, the latter being a distinct position a subject takes in relation to the loss of the beloved object. Normally, a respect for the reality of the loss carries

the day, which is to say one's attachments and investments in the beloved are slowly withdrawn in a painful, piecemeal fashion. But the melancholic turns away from the reality of the loss and holds onto the beloved in a hallucinatory manner—in effigy, in the truest sense of the word. In normal mourning, there is a painful recognition that the lost other is no longer, nothing but a memory, an image in the mind of the viewer (Derrida 1996). The melancholic functions as if the other still exists. Listen to Barthes on the photograph: “it bears the effigy to that crazy point where affect (love, compassion, grief, enthusiasm, desire) is the guarantee of Being. It then approaches, to all intents, madness; it joins what Kristeva calls ‘*la vérité folle*’” (Barthes 1981: 113). For Barthes, photography can open a hallucinatory passageway to the other's being. Through the photograph one can actually *enter* the crazy spectacle, take into one's arms what is dead, what is going to die.

One may be tempted to dismiss Barthes's thesis about photography as the madness of a man deep in grief, a man gripped by a hallucinatory wish-psychosis. But this mode of mental functioning finds a curious parallel in the delusions of war. Like mourning, war can provoke a psychological distress that is expressed most clearly in an altered relation to the other. In fact, in much of the psychoanalytic writing on the subject, the problem of war is placed in the context of mourning. For Franco Fornari, war is a “paranoid elaboration of mourning” (Fornari 1975: xviii). For Jacqueline Rose (1993), war parallels the ambivalence of love relationships evident in melancholia. In times of war, aggression is projected onto the enemy-other. In melancholia, the human tendency

toward hatred is satisfied by turning the aggression back against the self. In *On War*, one of the most famous texts ever written on the subject, Carl von Clausewitz defines war in the following quasi-psychoanalytic way: as “an act of violence [that] is intended to compel the enemy to fulfill our will” (Clausewitz 1982: 101). In grief and in war, it is difficult to let the other go.

The parallel between these two psychological positions is underscored by the treatment of the found photograph. This example from war-torn Sarajevo cements Barthes's theory. According to Ron Haviv's account, the occupiers successfully took up residence in the house of their enemy, making a home for themselves in the place of the (hated) other. Even when forced to abandon the house, they took the enemy-other's possessions with them. In psychoanalytic terms, the Serbs identified with the Muslim family so thoroughly they managed to incorporate their most intimate household objects. Identification is a way to modify self-representation, a complex process where the subject assimilates some aspect or property of the other and is thereby transformed. Put simply, the occupiers were able to take the family's objects as their own. Only the photograph stubbornly refused this inscription. Where the occupier's own image ought to have appeared, the Muslim family's faces looked back. Put differently, the photograph registered as a refusal, as a lack, as *negative ocular proof* of the occupiers' existence in the place of the other. Akin to Barthes's vision of the photograph as ecmnesic, for the Serbs, the Muslim family snapshot appeared to function like a negative hallucination.⁷ In the face of the photograph, the fact of

the family's existence could not be denied. The photograph registers the stakes of this struggle with plastic clarity. The cruel, deliberate scratches testify to a violent surge of affect. The image became a medium, a site of the transference through which the occupiers could express their hatred: an embodied location where unconscious wishes could be actualized. In short, the photograph provided a hallucinatory venue for the Serbs to realize the annihilation of their neighbors.

Intractable Reality

The example from Bosnia is certainly not the most extreme incident of photographic violence in the history of war. The destruction of the European Jewry during World War II was designed not only to eradicate an entire people, but also to consume all memory itself. During the course of their methodical extermination project, the Nazis went to great lengths to expunge all traces of their victims. It is well known, for instance, that prisoners arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau had their personal belongings confiscated upon arrival. These items were sent to the Kanada storehouse to be meticulously sorted and catalogued: clothing, toys, shoes, eyeglasses, prosthetic devices, gold teeth, wristwatches, jewelry, suitcases, books, hair—*anything* that could be reappropriated by the German people. Contemporary visitors to the museum at Auschwitz can still ruefully gaze upon huge bins of these artifacts. Less well remembered is what happened to the personal effects that were deemed unusable, those things that resisted German reappropriation and were therefore deliberately destroyed: letters, drawings, family photographs. According

to one Auschwitz survivor, Yehuda Bacom, there was a separate crematorium in the gas chamber complex where such items were incinerated (cited in Young 2001: 16).

The full significance of this deliberate destruction—and in particular its transferential relationship to the burning of people—has perhaps yet to be realized. Throughout his oeuvre, Freud never tired of emphasizing the strangeness of encountering signs of the transference. He came to regard it as both necessary and dangerous to the project of analysis. Transference is both the condition for analysis *and* the most powerful obstacle to its success. In his own way, Roland Barthes proposes that the photograph functions similarly. These peculiar images are the site of our most ambivalent attachments, locations through which we pass “beyond the unreality of the thing represented” (Barthes 1981: 117). The photograph opens a paradoxical relationship in which one encounters the very letter of time, a backward movement in which the past dominates our view of the present.

Focusing on the affective treatment of the image—attending photographic violence rather than depictions of violence—opens a “sideways” view of the functioning of social violence (Žižek 2008). What the Nazis and the Serbs find intolerable and rage-provoking about the ferociously normal family photographs is not the immediate reality of Jews or Muslims. It is the figure, the image of the “Jew” and the “Muslim,” that is the true target of violence. Instances of photographic violence underscore the primacy of this fantasmatic dimension. Such instances of “acting out” should not, in the end, be regarded as a mere secondary effect, as a distortion of “real” social violence. Indeed,

the symbolic realm is the ultimate resort of all human violence (Žižek 2008: 66). And this is the “mad” point of all photography, the place where the image is “chafed by reality.” To rephrase Barthes’s enigmatic thesis, the photograph offers an uncomfortable proximity, a kind of suture between the social and psychical realms. When the identity of this family was attacked through the ravaging of the photograph, it was not merely a statement about what the family represents. Rather, the attack determined their social existence, the very *being* of these subjects. In a mad, hallucinatory way, one only has to look at the photograph to *feel* the force of this vicious inscription.

Is there something to be gained from attending this violence? Judith Butler (2004) proposes that thinking through our exposure to violence and the task of mourning that follows constitutes an important dimension of political life. The work of mourning is set in contradistinction to the violence of war: Grief, Butler contends, provides as an alternative ground for imagining community. One can gather a sense this perilous task by looking through *The Last Album*, a rare collection of the personal photographs that survived Auschwitz’s crematoria (Weiss 2001). The pictures in this album are quotidian scenes from the first decades of the last century: a group of teenagers playfully thumbing their noses at the camera, a proud family posing in front of a store, a smartly dressed couple on a promenade through town, children modeling their costumes for a school play, a wedding, a picnic. Similar to the family snapshot from Sarajevo, the pictures in *The Last Album* do not represent the violence of the genocide in any direct fashion.⁸ Yet the history of their

violent treatment still manages to convey the qualitative force of war’s affects. The fact the Nazis took such pains to destroy these objects in the same manner as they did their owners underscores Barthes’ thesis about the ecmnesic quality of photography. Yet the images in *The Last Album*, like the Sarajevo snapshot, nevertheless offer a uniquely moving testimony of the catastrophe’s reach. For here spectators meet the painful, piecemeal work of mourning head-on. This is what I think Barthes meant with his last words on the photograph: in each of these images one confronts “the wakening of intractable reality” (Barthes 1981: 119). Everything pictured in these photographs is lost and yet everything must be let go. Negotiating such losses reconfigures the very ties that bind.

Notes

- 1 One thinks of Heinrich Heine’s oft-cited line from *Almansor*: “That was only play. Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings.”
- 2 Hannah Arendt, who wrote *On Violence* in the wake of the 1968 student uprisings and in the context of the rising violence in the US Civil Rights movement, argued that violence is related to power and strength, but distinct in its instrumentality: “Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purposes of multiplying natural strength until, in the last stage of their development, they can substitute for it” (Arendt 1970: 46). Can one imagine the Bosnian example as a signal of this transformation, as a quotidian example of this “last stage of development” when the implement of violence substitutes for the violence itself?
- 3 The term “warchitecture” emerged in Sarajevo as a name for the catastrophic destruction of

architecture during the 1992–1996 siege of the city (cf. Herscher 2008).

- 4 These and many more of Haviv's photographs can be viewed in an online photo essay: <http://photoarts.com/haviv/BloodandHoney/>, accessed February 13, 2009.
- 5 Ron Haviv confirms: "the scratches actually pierce the image. It appears the vertical lines were done using some sort of implement and the horizontal possibly with a razor blade" (personal correspondence, January 14, 2009).
- 6 Attacks upon the face carry a special symbolic significance. Groebner's study (Groebner 2004) draws attention to the link between facial disfigurement, racism, and policing of the sexual order. In 1938, for instance, he reports that the Swiss physician and racial anthropologist George Montandon published an article in France calling for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine as the solution to the "Jewish Question." The article called upon Jews to divest themselves of their other citizenships and further proposed a "protective policy" that prevented mixing with other races. Sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews were outlawed. Montandon proposed that men violating this law should be castrated and women under the age of forty should have their noses cut off (Groebner 2004: 67). Groebner finds precedent for this particular punishment in fifteenth-century Nuremberg where the cut-off nose appeared as the symbol *par excellence* of losing face, that is, of lost honor (Groebner 2004: 80). The face thus disfigured—rendered *Ungestalt*—was a visible mark of an invisible sexual disgrace that could range from adultery to (passive) homosexual activity. Montandon's proposal from 1938 features an additional phantasm in its tacit reference to the allegedly "Jewish" nose that so fascinated nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial anthropologists (Groebner 2004: 86). A symbolic link is implied between the (Jewish) nose and circumcised penis, between the policing of illicit sexual activity and its punishment in facial disfigurement.

Groebner's study bears a surprising significance to the found photograph from Bosnia. In the

Balkans, the most common way to identify "ethnicity" was by family name. Most family names are easily identifiable as Orthodox Christian Serbian, Bosnian Muslim, or Catholic Croatian. But in Bosnia in particular, some names are common among all three groups and many families have long genealogies of mixed marriages. There are no immediately apparent physical differences between the three peoples. Throughout the region, however, only Muslims practice circumcision. During the war it became common practice for Bosnian Serb (or Bosnian Croat) soldiers to order men to drop their pants for identification. The widespread rape of Muslim women during the conflict was often "justified" through a reference to circumcision (Olujic 1998). In light of Groebner's study, the fine scratches and long, vicious cuts done to the Muslim family photograph perhaps can be seen to bear a deeper symbolic significance about the sexualization of aggression. The damage perhaps points to the Serbian occupiers' fantasies about circumcision and the invisible sexual act. But such expressions of aggression are not easy to interpret. Freud famously remarked that Thanatos—the destructive drive—purposely eludes perception (Freud 2002 [1930]: 57). It works silently, so to speak, discerned only as a residue left behind by Eros. The found photograph bears the marks of this struggle. The artifact provides a kind of mute testimony about the work of sadism—Eros yoked out of shape, perverted by the destructive force of Thanatos.

- 7 My discussion draws heavily here from André Green's notion of "negative hallucination" (Green 1999 [1973]).
- 8 There is a large and growing body of literature that questions photography's capacity to represent the events of the Holocaust (or indeed any traumatic event) faithfully. Engaging the complexities of this debate is far beyond, and indeed aside from, the scope of the present paper. I would, however, point the reader to Georges Didi-Huberman's recent book *Images in Spite of All* as one of the most lucid sites of the debate. Speaking of four photographs made by the *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz in 1944, Didi-

Huberman contends that the photographic image appears in the fold between two impossibilities: the imminent obliteration of the witness and a certain unrepresentability of testimony. Moreover, because the *Sonderkommando* felt the perilous need “to snatch an image from the real,” we are perhaps obliged to contemplate, to *imagine* the hell that was Auschwitz in the summer of 1944 (Didi-Huberman 2008: 7).

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