

Total Domination

From The Origins of Totalitarianism.

THE CONCENTRATION and extermination camps of totalitarian regimes serve as the laboratories in which the fundamental belief of totalitarianism that everything is possible is being verified.

a victory of the concentration-camp system would mean the same inexorable doom for human beings as the use of the hydrogen bomb would mean the doom of the human race.

What totalitarian ideologies aim at is not the transformation of the outside world or the revolutionizing transmutation of society, but the transformation of human nature itself.

It is the appearance of some radical evil, previously unknown

Hell in the most literal sense was embodied by those types of camp perfected by the Nazis, in which the whole of life was thoroughly and systematically organized with a view to the greatest possible torment.



Just as the victims in the death factories
or the holes of oblivion are no longer "human"
in the eyes of their executioners, so this
newest species of criminals is beyond the pale
even of solidarity in human sinfulness.

The concentration camps are the laboratories
where changes in human nature are tested,
and their shamefulness therefore
is not just the business of their inmates
and those who run them
bear in mind the necessary limitations
to an experiment which requires global control
in order to show conclusive results.

The camps are meant not only to
exterminate people and degrade
human beings, but also serve the
ghastly experiment of eliminating
spontaneity itself as an expression of
human behavior

murder of
the moral person
in man.

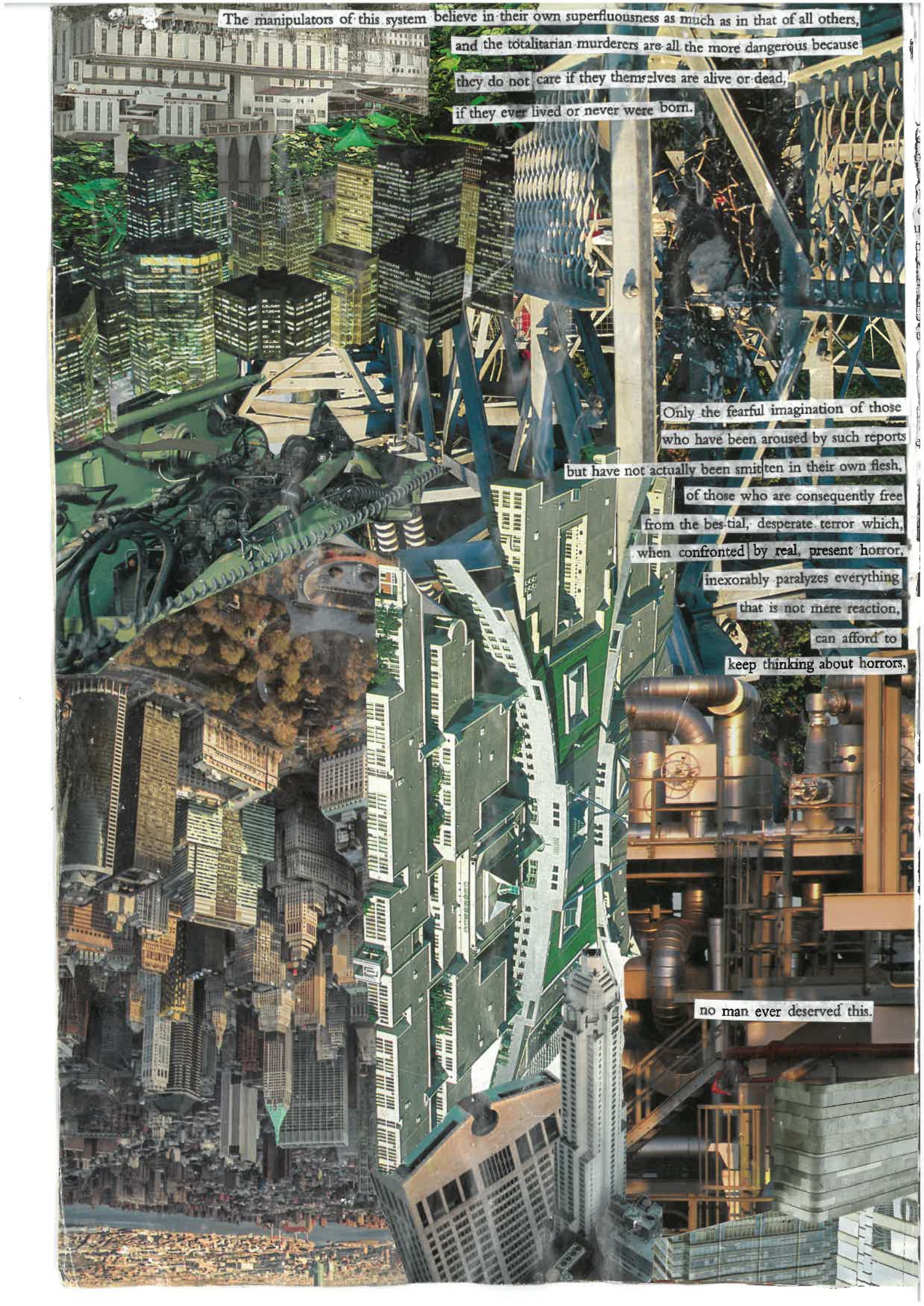


Under no circumstances
must the concentration camp
become a calculable punishment
for definite offenses.

If the
concentration camps
had been
dependent on
the existence of
political adversaries,
they would scarcely
have survived
the first years
of the totalitarian
regimes.

The Nazis can be sure that their factories of annihilation
which demonstrate the swiftest solution to the
problem of over-population, of economically superfluous and
socially rootless human masses, are as much
of an attraction as a warning.






The manipulators of this system believe in their own superfluosity as much as in that of all others, and the totalitarian murderers are all the more dangerous because they do not care if they themselves are alive or dead, if they ever lived or never were born.

Only the fearful imagination of those who have been aroused by such reports but have not actually been smitten in their own flesh, of those who are consequently free from the bestial, desperate terror which, when confronted by real, present horror, inexorably paralyzes everything that is not mere reaction, can afford to keep thinking about horrors,

no man ever deserved this.




The arbitrary arrest which
chooses among innocent people
destroys the validity of free consent,
just as torture—as distinguished from death—
destroys the possibility of opposition.

The aim of an arbitrary system is to destroy the
civil rights of the whole population.

Common sense reacted to the horrors of
Buchenwald and Auschwitz with the plausible argument:
"What crime must these people have committed
that such things were done to them!";
'For them to be thus reduced,
what power must be concealed
in the hands of the masters,'
and he turns away, full of bitterness but defeated.

Without concentration camps,
without the undefined fear they inspire,
and the very well-defined training they offer
in totalitarian domination, which can nowhere else be
fully tested with all of its most radical possibilities,
a totalitarian state can neither inspire its nuclear troops with fanaticism
nor maintain a whole people in complete apathy.



They begin with the monstrous conditions in the transports to the camps, when hundreds of human beings are packed into a cattle-car stark naked, glued to each other, and shunted back and forth over the countryside for days on end; they continue upon arrival at the camp, the well-organized shock of the first hours, the shaving of the head, the grotesque camp clothing; and they end in the utterly unimaginable tortures so gauged as not to kill the body, at any event not quickly. The aim of all these methods, in any case, is to manipulate the human body—with its infinite possibilities of suffering—in such a way as to make it destroy the human person

Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man.

Nothing perhaps distinguishes modern masses as radically from those of previous centuries as the loss of faith in a Last Judgment: the worst have lost their fear and the best have lost their hope.

Last Judgment, the idea of an absolute standard of justice combined with the infinite possibility of grace.



What meaning has the concept of murder when we are confronted with the mass production of corpses?

The murderer leaves a corpse behind and does not pretend that his victim has never existed; if he wipes out any traces, they are those of his own identity, and not the memory and grief of the persons who loved his victim; he destroys a life, but he does not destroy the fact of existence itself.

Hitler circulated millions of copies of his book in which he stated that to be successful, a lie must be enormous—which did not prevent people from believing him.

Total domination, which strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual.

No ideology which aims at the explanation of all historical events of the past and at mapping out the course of all events of the future can bear the unpredictability which springs from the fact that men are creative, that they can bring forward something so new that nobody ever foresaw it.

This principle was most fully realized in the gas chambers which, if only because of their enormous capacity, could not be intended for individual cases but only for people in general.

people who had done nothing whatsoever that, either in their own consciousness or the consciousness of their tormenters, had any rational connection with their arrest.



Totalitarianism strives not toward despotic rule over men, but toward a system in which men are superfluous. It is necessary for totalitarianism to destroy every trace of what we commonly call human dignity.

horrors are recorded in detail in the trials against the physicians of the Third Reich

For respect for human dignity implies the recognition of my fellow-men or our fellow-nations as subjects, as builders of worlds or cobuilders of a common world.



The road to totalitarian domination leads through many intermediate stages for which we can find numerous analogies and precedents. The extraordinarily bloody terror during the initial stage of totalitarian rule serves indeed the exclusive purpose of defeating the opponent and rendering all further opposition impossible; but total terror is launched only after this initial stage has been overcome and the regime no longer has anything to fear from the opposition.



Those who aspire to total domination must liquidate all spontaneity, such as the mere existence of individuality will always engender, and track it down in its most private forms, regardless of how unpolitical and harmless these may seem.


Free consent is as much an obstacle to total domination
as free opposition.

Grief and remembrance
are forbidden.

totalitarian hell proves only that the power of man
is greater than they ever dared to think,
and that man can realize hellish fantasies
without making the sky fall or the earth open.

Suddenly it becomes evident that things which
for thousands of years the human imagination had
banished to a realm beyond human competence
can be manufactured right here on earth.





The insane mass manufacture of corpses is preceded by the historically and politically intelligible preparation of living corpses as if there were a possibility to give permanence to the process of dying itself and to enforce a condition in which both death and life are obstructed equally effectively.

The camps were no longer amusement parks for beasts in human form, that is, for men who really belonged in mental institutions and prisons; the reverse became true: they were turned into "drill grounds," on which perfectly normal men were trained to be full-fledged members of the SS.

The old spontaneous bestiality gave way to an absolutely cold and systematic destruction of human bodies, calculated to destroy human dignity; death was avoided or postponed indefinitely.

the very immensity of the crimes guarantees that the murderers who proclaim their innocence with all manner of lies will be more readily believed than the victims who tell the truth.

The world of the dying, in which men are taught they are superfluous through a way of life in which punishment is meted out without connection with crime, in which exploitation is practiced without profit, and where work is performed without product, is a place where senselessness is daily produced anew.

This atmosphere of madness and unreality, created by an apparent lack of purpose, is the real iron curtain which hides all forms of concentration camps from the eyes of the world.



Just as the stability of the totalitarian regime depends on the isolation of the fictitious world of the movement from the outside world, so the experiment of total domination in the concentration camps depends on sealing off the latter against the world of all others, the world of the living in general, even against the outside world of a country under totalitarian rule. This isolation explains the peculiar unreality and lack of credibility that characterize all reports from the concentration camps and constitute one of the main difficulties for the true understanding of totalitarian domination, which stands or falls with the existence of these concentration and extermination camps; for, unlikely as it may sound, these camps are the true central institution of totalitarian organizational power.

Someone may die
as the result of
systematic torture or
starvation,
or because the camp is
overcrowded and
superfluous human material
must be liquidated.



When the impossible
was made possible
it became the
unpunishable,
unforgivable
absolute evil which
could no longer be
understood and explained
by the evil motives of
self-interest,
greed,
covetousness,
resentment,
lust for power,
and cowardice;
and which therefore
anger could not revenge,
love could not endure,
friendship could not forgive.
For in the human estimation
there is no crime
and no sin
commensurable with
the everlasting torments
of Hell.

