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Portfolio

PERPETRATORS

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Perpetrators. Etymology: < post-classical Latin *perpetrator* person who perpetrates something, especially a crime or evil deed (4th cent.) < classical Latin *perpetrat-*, past participial stem of *perpetrare* + *-or*. Compare Middle French *perpetrateur* (c1450).

◆ Court room where the trial of Adolf Eichmann took place in 1961. Originally, it was Jerusalem's Beit Ha'am (People's House) theatre.

Could it be that victims are overly exposed in our society? That they are too present? Endorsing their struggle for recognition, their demands and their hopes, should we be wary of the danger of saturating our collective memory? Of submerging or tainting it? Perhaps victims in general occupy a prominent position – an all too prominent one, according to some – in today's discourse on and representations of violence. Maybe so. But then again, what are we to make of the visibility of notorious criminals in our culture? They are no less visible than the victims, but strangely enough, they are not targeted by the critics. Their visibility is “natural” to us, so it seems. Their portraits, their smiles, their replications, their presence, their topicality, have been stirring our imagination for centuries, to the extent that we have now become accustomed to a certain level of darkness. For writers, they are a source of inspiration, leading to the publication of a brilliant best-seller every now and

then. Criminals also populate the blockbusters of our time. In sum, our culture and everyday-life is permeated by the figure of the perpetrator.

Some readers might feel uncomfortable with our decision to juxtapose their images, creating some kind of family photo album, as it were. Especially because the album shows them in different situations and postures, making them look more or less flattering or arrogant. Moreover, what is left from them is often not even their portrait but their attributes – SS, swastika, moustache –, which goes to show just how omnipresent Nazi references are in our society. It is through their attributes that these infamous men continue to metonymically impose their presence and keep circulating, from one poster to another. After 70 years of “Never again”, the least we can do is to devote a portfolio to them. ■

Philippe Mesnard

(Translation: Anneleen Spiessens)

❖ “If they have not forgotten, that’s their business.”
Klaus Barbie in May 1987, on the opening of his trial in the courthouse of Lyon.

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❖ “You can see whatever you want here.”
1994. *The Troubles We’ve Seen: A History of Journalism in War Time* by Marcel Ophuls. On the screen: Slobodan Milosevic, President of Serbia.

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◆ 2006. *Nessuno tocchi Caino* (Hands Off Cain), an Italian NGO, published a poster of Saddam Hussein at the time of his trial, asking whether “it is murder to kill a murderer”.

❖ Poznan, Poland.
Billboard for Dani
Levy's burlesque film
*Mon Führer: La Vraie
Véritable Histoire d'Adolf
Hitler* (My Führer: The
Real Authentic Story of
Adolf Hitler, 2007).

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❖ Poznan, Poland.
Parliamentary elections
of 2007. Graffiti on the
candidates of the Civic
Platform (the party
is still in power today
and holds a majority in
Parliament).

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◆ 2007. Berlin. Bus shelter indicating the nearby location of the building where Adolf Eichmann held his office, not far from the zoo.

◆ 2008. Berlin.
Topography of Terror,
permanent exhibition.

◆ 2003. Garda, Italy.
Kitchen apron with
a print of Mussolini,
among a vast choice
of designs.

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◆ In the 1970s, numerous pornographic films came out that were inspired by the sadistic practices the SS or the Nazis performed on the deported. This film genre is known as *Gestaporn* or *pornonazi*. In the photo, we see the DVD of a renowned series based on the legend of Ilse Koch (1974, director Don Edmonds).

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♦♦ 2008. Paris Metro. I have always been a little taken aback by the famous double S of the even more famous American rock band, even though there doesn't seem to be any neo-Nazi reference.

♦ Paris. You are not mistaken: Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong) is actually wearing a red nose on the cover of *Télérama*.

◆ 2013. Moscow. Bust of Stalin. Today it is not unusual to find busts, calendars and other decorative objects with Stalin's portrait, indicative of a discreet but undeniable process of rehabilitation.

◆ Before 1989. Monopoly game called "Stalinalee" (GDR).