

Sofsky, Wolfgang, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997. ix +356 pp. table, figures, acknowledgements, epilogue selected glossary and abbreviations, notes, and bibliography.

**Thesis:** Unlike many other authors working on the Holocaust in general and the concentration camps in particular, Sofsky does not come out and say what his thesis is. He rather lets it develop over many, oft repeated, instances. After completing the Epilogue the reader will finally get a feel that his thesis is to explore the one-way flow of power in the Nazi concentration camp. Or, perhaps he is saying that the modern world was the genesis of the concentration camp, that they were just as likely to spring up anywhere, not just in Germany under German efficiency. I really do not know.

**Themes:** Absolute power is the most evident theme throughout the entire book. I stopped counting paragraphs that began with "Absolute power is..." after sixteen. He uses it to explain the German hierarchy, and then the hierarchy within the camps themselves, among prisoners, is "organized power," (p. 18) "the power to label," and "graduated power." (p.19) This "graduated power" seems to be the most obscure. Sofsky says that it "sets up a cleverly devised system of collaboration by turning some victims into accomplices, outfitting the functionary elite with substantial authority." (p. 19)

Sofsky also takes great pains in the methodical organization of the camps. He explains in painful detail the layout and use for everything from barracks and latrines, to the open spaces, the "roll-call squares" which were also used for other power-confirming spectacles, including, but not limited to "public executions". His work also picks apart everything from "camp time" in which "the prisoners were awakened at 4:00 or 4:30 a.m." (p. 74) to the SS personnel and how they were "to be both a model and a mentor." (p. 105) According to the notes for this chapter, they were supposed to be models and mentors to subordinates in the camp, not necessarily the prisoners.

Working as a sociologist, Sofsky allows many pages to examine the self-management and power within the camps. He says, "Prisoner personnel were threatened by attacks from rivals...the relationship between reds and greens often assumed the character of mortal enmity." (p. 143)

The systematic nature and near universality of the camps seems to fascinate Sofsky. He writes of the camps detachment from the functional "special purposes" of existing institutions. "The prison is meant to rehabilitate criminals, the military to train and drill obedient soldiers, the insane asylum to banish insanity from society. But in the concentration camp, no one was supposed to be healed, educated or trained to obedience." (p.277) I suppose annihilation of a race is not considered a "special purpose."

Sofsky's main point I believe is the negative nature of the camps and their power hierarchy. He says, "Absolute terror creates nothing...it realizes its freedom in the complete and total annihilation of the human being." (p. 281)

**Style:** Sofsky's work is organized very similar to a dissertation, and I believe that this was one. The entire work reads that way. There are 5 parts ranging from the beginning of the camps through their social structures to the violence and death. Each part consists of three to five chapters each adding an explanation to the greater part. This work, although scholarly, is very dry and methodical.

**Evidentiary Base:** The original work was completed in German. Most of the sources are in German and it is hard to distinguish primary and secondary sources, even though English works are included "in brackets" (p. 343) within the bibliography. Sofsky's work was published in 1997 and the newest source he used was from 1990. Most of the works were from the sixties and early eighties.

**Strengths:** The research was very meticulous. The scholarly merit appears to be unquestionable. The material is presented in a straightforward manner and is only sparsely confusing, as any translated work is apt to be.

**Weaknesses:** Sofsky is a sociologist. This book is written from the sociologist standpoint of the concentration camp. The research is presented for other sociologists to peruse and use. The work is written like a dissertation, mostly for a small group of people that understand the standpoint that Sofsky is using. The organizational detail of the camps and the schedules are times akin to reading blueprints and an elementary school day schedule. The information was also presented with all the exacting manners as a phonebook. I would have rather read a phonebook. This book will never find a popular audience. Even the tables that Sofsky uses are these obscure quadrant-based hierarchical styled sociologist tables.

**Note:** I looked for reviews to see if I was the only person to have this opinion of Sofsky's work. I only found one four-page review online from a man named Alan Wolfe who teaches political science and sociology at Boston University.

"The camps, he [Sofsky] writes in the epilogue, contradicting, it seems to me, the argument which comes before it, relied on modern techniques of discipline and surveillance to carry out their objectives. One is left with the disturbing impression that modernity brought the camps into being and not specific people who happened to be German.

Sofsky's epilogue inadvertently makes it apparent why Goldhagen's book is so important. Sociology is not only about power; it is also about people; indeed the one cannot exist without the other. But concentrating so much on the former and so little on the latter, Sofsky's sociological account of the camps, one of the most important books about the Holocaust yet written, is nonetheless incomplete. From his book, we now know how power in the camps was exercised. We await more accounts like Goldhagen's before we know who exercised it."

Full review can be found at:

[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1252/is\\_n10\\_v124/ai\\_19962927/pg\\_3/?tag=content;col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1252/is_n10_v124/ai_19962927/pg_3/?tag=content;col1)

