

Epilogue

I am aware that, having conducted research into limit experiences for so long, I have grown used to visions of horror and the macabre. But this does not mean that I have become indifferent and insensitive to them. I remain constantly in search of a language with which I can talk about this subject: without pathos, but also without analytical coldness; without an excess of emotion, but also without cynicism, perversity, or unhealthy fascination. I try not to succumb to such fascination, even though we know how attractive and alluring evil can be. I try not to succumb to the temptation to aestheticize evil, horror, and the macabre. Such, at least, have been my intentions. It is for the reader to decide the extent to which I have succeeded in resisting these temptations. I realize that I move between the poles of appropriateness and inappropriateness, but this is a risk I have taken upon myself consciously.

Writing this book has been a risky venture. Research into limit experiences, for the scholar himself, is a kind of limit experience. It runs up not only against cognitive boundaries, but also against barriers of expression and articulation. It also encounters a great ethical challenge.

Trauma is not the past; rather, it continuously “happens” here and now. It plays itself out again and again, which is why it does not entirely submit to the rigor of academic discourse. To some extent, the same holds true for the act of writing about trauma. It penetrates the scholar’s world, and he must defend himself against it. For me, writing this book has been an extremely important cognitive experience. It has served as a path to the acquisition of self-knowledge, just as it has been – simply put – a challenge: to take the risk of understanding human limit experiences, and the risk of understanding oneself.

