

# Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence (New Directions in Critical Theory)

By Adriana Cavarero

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## Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence (New Directions in Critical Theory) By Adriana Cavarero

Words like "terrorism" and "war" no longer encompass the scope of contemporary violence. With this explosive book, Adriana Cavarero, one of the world's most provocative feminist theorists and political philosophers, effectively renders such terms obsolete. She introduces a new word—"horrorism"—to capture the experience of violence.

Unlike terror, horrorism is a form of violation grounded in the offense of disfiguration and massacre. Numerous outbursts of violence fall within Cavarero's category of horrorism, especially when the phenomenology of violence is considered from the perspective of the victim rather than that of the warrior. Cavarero locates horrorism in the philosophical, political, literary, and artistic representations of defenseless and vulnerable victims. She considers both terror and horror on the battlefields of the *Iliad*, in the decapitation of Medusa, and in the murder of Medea's children. In the modern arena, she forges a link between horror, extermination, and massacre, especially the Nazi death camps, and revisits the work of Primo Levi, Hannah Arendt's thesis on totalitarianism, and Arendt's debate with Georges Bataille on the estheticization of violence and cruelty.

In applying the horroristic paradigm to the current phenomena of suicide bombers, torturers, and hypertechnological warfare, Cavarero integrates Susan Sontag's views on photography and the eroticization of horror, as well as ideas on violence and the state advanced by Thomas Hobbes and Carl Schmitt. Through her searing analysis, Cavarero proves that violence against the helpless claims a specific vocabulary, one that has been known for millennia, and not just to the Western tradition. Where common language fails to form a picture of atrocity, horrorism paints a brilliant portrait of its vivid reality.

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### Editorial Review

Review

Essential.

(*Choice*)

Her book is indispensable for anyone keen to understand violence in our society today.

(Joanna Bourke *Environment and Planning D*)

Review

A highly welcome and intelligent philosophical reflection on contemporary forms of violence and our attempts to name them—and thereby unflinchingly come to grips with them.

(Paul Kottman, New School University)

This moving and humane book never stops delivering, from small details such as Adriana Cavarero's insightful dissection of the term 'casualty' and her analysis of the leers on the faces of the photographed women torturers at Abu Ghraib, to large claims—that horror is the real aim of terrorism and that its worst offense is an ontological crime: that of erasing the singularity of persons and transforming all humans into mere insignificant body matter. By contrast, even Medea, Cavarero notes in one of this book's many breathtaking moments, knew the sons she killed by name and 'loved them in their unrepeatable singularity.'

(Bonnie Honig, author of *Democracy and the Foreigner*)

Adriana Cavarero has the courage and intellectual force to compel us to place horror and terror back within the ambit of humanist inquiry and philological scrutiny. In shying away from theories of speechlessness or the speechlessness of theory, she insists on the autonomy of the experience of horror—for our growing global archive of victims—from the intentionalities of terror. In so doing, Cavarero makes us think again about war, force, victimization, politics, and innocence. A remarkable meditation on the macabre world of modern political violence that will appeal to a wide range of readers.

(Arjun Appadurai, Godard Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication, New York University)

About the Author

Adriana Cavarero is professor of political philosophy at the University of Verona. Her books in English include *In Spite of Plato: A Feminist Rewriting of Ancient Philosophy*; *Stately Bodies: Literature, Philosophy, and the Question of Gender*; *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*; and *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*.

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