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ON MURDEROUS SILENCE

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on violence, claiming that it is not action, but silence and inaction that become "murderous", given that we are forced into a permanent and impossible process of choosing between responsibility for the other and the possibility of responding to a call for help. Still, this position is not final and the author offers certain alternative strategies, such as rebellion, goodness, critique and shame.

KEYWORDS

violence, consent, responsibility, rebellion, goodness, critique, shame

*For Zona,
with gratitude,*

I Translation

There is nothing more political than to shift, (one would almost rather say to clear the way for) or rather to force, a book from one language into another. The pages that were written in the context of a language and that are consequently historically and culturally specific, find a place in a different space, one that is impacted differently. The pages then seek readers that they could neither have found nor have met without the help of translation and translators. One of the later, as it happens, is my friend Zona and I would like to start by paying my respects to her. Translators act as ferrymen who, with each translation, cross a river of absence and forgetting; a river that always precedes them. But things are rarely as simple as that. It often happens that a kind of 'somewhere else' inhabits and haunts one's thoughts in a more or less secretive or confessional kind of way. This is so even when these thoughts occur and are written in a specific language with all its uniqueness, most notably its particular historicity. Once we consider the question of violence, of our indifference, our resignation or, in more active terms, our encouragement of and participation in violent death, thought can no longer escape the noise of the world. This is all the truer when the said noise is sanguine. We cannot develop or form thought by closing our eyes and ears. We are constantly confronted from all

sides with images and emblematic talk of passivity, or rather of the activity of the murderous consent – which both are forms of. Neither can we remain ignorant of the testimonies that tell of the painful trace left on murdered bodies and consciousnesses.

All translations are important. All languages and cultures are able to offer their hospitality to a new book. But there are countries whose recent histories have been impacted more so than others by consents of this kind; there are peoples who carry the trace of them like a tumor in their memories. One would have to be exceedingly deaf and blind to manage to ignore the unique resonance that the thoughts we have introduced here take on within a political space that was divided and unthinkably devastated by a terrible war just a quarter of a century ago.

First off, and this is fundamental, no peoples, no communities, regardless of their nature, have the right to allege that the dimension of belonging to the world – because it is precisely a matter of belonging to the world – and which we endeavor here to describe as ‘murderous consent’, is foreign to their history and culture; to their literature and the ideologies they have adopted. Who could deny that such consent is at work when all throughout Europe and the United States, in Turkey and Brazil and many other countries, leaders are brought to power through democracy, by the will of their people; peoples who are fully aware and have full knowledge of the brutal measures these rulers advocate, the threats they proffer, the segregation they seek, and their prejudice against this or that part of the population? Moreover, who knows what history has in store when a people let itself be seduced by the fervor and the promises of vengeance of a ruler who can only keep their power by awakening negative affections? This is the first point that we can undoubtedly make here: today the spectrum of murderous consent haunts the world because there is no lesson that history gives us, no upbringing, not even an institution that can protect us from a tyranny that trivializes murder.

II Murderous Consent

Before we continue, we should clarify a potential misunderstanding. What do we mean by the term ‘murderous consent’? Nothing less than the indispensable dimension of our belonging to the world. If we want to avoid contenting ourselves with political ruse and empty words of morality, then it is a matter of principle to know how to identify this belonging. Let us begin. We must allow straight off that a *responsible* relation with another, if such a relation exists, must be founded on attention, care and aid. This relation demands that everyone everywhere be seen as vulnerable and mortal. Any other position amounts to a cynical subscription to the arrangements made by a casuistic proponent (of a clan, family, ethnicity, religion, party, etc.) who feels they have the authority to decree that in a given society (or somewhere else) there exists a specific category of individuals whose suffering and death can be met with indifference. We can go one step further: we can maintain that this is a matter

of the first principal of a radical ethics, an absolute, uncompromising, perhaps excessive, hyperbolic ethics, in the Derridean sense. Better yet, in contrast to particular morals (morals catechisms), we can acknowledge that this ethics of responsibility cannot have any exception. It must apply to everyone and cannot be reserved for one part of humanity or would be just as quickly compromised and brought to ruin. And we should not forget that this ruin (which is also conscience's ruin) occurs every time morality gives way to a calculating politics, a politics concerned with defending its own interests even when at the expense of its own principles and convictions.

Moreover, does history not offer us numerous examples of this? People trying to validate or justify their individual morals, dogmas, religious catechisms, and confused confessions in the face of terrible violence, as if they had to pay their place in society with an agreed upon blood? These validations and justifications are precisely what goes against the evidence of evil and cruelty. Precisely because this is the case (we might ask ourselves why it is so) we must look again to the principals of a universal ethics, one that is free of the murderous compromising of morals and politics. Would we not be deceiving ourselves to try to avoid what seems so profoundly anchored in human nature? Specifically, that men find ways of justifying acts of violence when it suits them (or when it upholds the forces that they support), the very same acts of violence that they condemn when committed by others. Why not just as well admit that it is impossible to not take advantage of others' suffering and death in a way that suit us and in so doing, allow ethical ruin altogether? But we cannot do this, really for one reason only: if we were to accept this ruin as our fate then violence would have no limits. Nothing would be able to contain and retain it. Ethics are needed precisely because if we relinquish the desire for ethics we sanction the reign of force. This force would then have the final say and could organise and uphold a generalised reification of whoever it chooses, submitting them to its rule for as long as it lasts.

This is why we need the principle of responsibility that we mentioned earlier: the principle of attention, care and aid that calls for the vulnerability and mortality of everyone everywhere. But this is not a simple task. As soon as it is done, we must likewise acknowledge the most tragic part of our finitude: that in the ordinary course of life we continuously make compromises with the demands of ethics. There are a thousand forms of vulnerability, a thousand confrontations with mortality that we – whether due to indifference, lassitude, impotence or, worse still, complacency – more or less deliberately decide to close our eyes to. We do this when our behavior, political choices, opinions or ideologies imply a rise in the vulnerability of other people or an increase in risk to their mortality. In other words, in practice our responsibility never lives up to the radicality that ethics demands; a demand that is necessary if we do not want ethics to become an individual moral (or a pseudo-moral), or rather violence's accomplice. And there is no way that it can be. Our finitude takes the form of an aporia. An abyss separates the only principle of ethics that really holds (that is to say, that is neither hypocritical, nor partisan nor partial and

already compromised) – as contaminated as this principle is by politics – and the actual practice of our responsibility toward the vulnerability and the mortality of others. Why is the principle contaminated? Because when the violence of adherence, of cause, of engagement, of all individual calculations makes us compromise, this principle is always damaged, derailed, ruined.

To live at the heart of this abyss is exactly what it means to ‘belong to the world’, both from an ethical and political point of view. But it also means, more exactly, to lay claim to a community whether linguistic, cultural, historical, national, proletarian etc. All idolatry of belonging, all cults of identity, with their fantasies of purity, their historical speculations, their rewriting of the past, have a degree of this kind of compromise. They make up a risk factor: the risk of digging the whole of the abyss a bit deeper, to the point of obscuring, or rather, of suspending the responsibility that is our primary concern. There is no appeal to belonging that is not exclusionary and vindictive and so they always dig this hole. A collective identity that closes itself off, obsessed with its own fencing off and withdrawal, is a vindictive identity. Those who adhere to this identity seek to gather together, even to arm themselves, by creating negative affections that fracture society (fear, resentment, anger, hatred); they feel the cement of unity is threatened or believe they have lost it and hope for its restoral.

III The Demands of Justice

‘Murderous consent’ applies to everyone. It is part of how everyone belongs to the world. As such it is universal. But there are historical events that have greatly exacerbated this irreparability, such as those that the Balkans knew twenty-five years ago. This is why our theory of murderous consent and its offspring does not try to distinguish the innocent from the guilty any more so than it does victims from executioners. It explains, rather, why it is necessary to find justice. But what justice do we mean? A consequence of the acknowledgement of the universal scope of murderous consent, this dimension of existence, is that its evolution is not a matter of building accusatory lists. It does not put together a tribunal nor does it open a trial. The theory is rather concerned with setting the premises of what we call an “a cosmopolitan ethics”. And we have now arrived at the heart of the problem. Indeed the demands of ‘justice’, a word that is used to mean many things and which we are here trying to understand, can be defined when a shared concern for the state of the world brings ethics and politics together.

Being in the world is surely to find oneself within an aporia whereby we are, by our very finitude, poverty of experience and weaknesses of faculty (sense, imagination, understanding), always guilty of not being responsible enough. But “being in the world” is also to hear that internal voice that incites us to look for an answer by means of the invention of new paths. Paths that allow us to avoid the snares of resignation. It is to be driven by desire, a utopic one perhaps but necessary nonetheless. It is to escape the cowardliness of the selfish accommodation of other’s unhappiness and to escape that insidious dehumanisation of

life that considers violence the simple fate of existence and history. As Camus was well aware, our tendency to proliferate the consent to murder is perhaps the most worrying sign of our times, and it makes up the very essence of nihilism. Its major threat can be summed up in the simple form ‘what good would it do?’ What good would it do to stand up against radical evil, its corporal control, a control that disciplines bodies while intoxicating them with cruelty? What good would it do to oppose the deaf grip of images and discourse on peoples’ consciences; a grip that misleads them while pretending to wake them up! We know this voice well. It is the voice of terror and oppression. It can only ever be put to the use of the dark blood thirst that lays dormant in all beings. And it is here that an appeal to justice becomes necessary: another breath, another obstinate ‘contre-parole’ that whispers in our ear telling us that although the dimensions of murderous consent are inescapable, this does not mean that there is nothing to say or to be done on the individual or collective level.

IV The Multiplication of Silence

Nothing to do and nothing to say! This is the product of one of the miracles of translation. These miracles are never insignificant and they make us believe now more than ever in the creative magic and creative force of the shift between languages. The translator of the Serbo-Croatian edition selected a translation to the original titled *Le consenement meurtrier*: “murderous consent” that becomes “mortal silence”. This light shift of meaning (really we should say evident warping of the original) was not lost on me and is a change I fully condone. But which silence is meant here? That of the acknowledgement of crimes, of forgiveness, of justice? Let’s go back to the global-level. If there is a reason to acknowledge the universal scope of ‘murderous consent’, it is because there has never been a people in the world, there has never been a state that has not had to painfully withstand this silence. Whether we talk of the memory of a dictator with their lot of torture, disappearances and executions, notably in Chile, Argentina and Brazil or of the colonial and civil wars, the occupied lands and the compromising of this people or that through terror exercised by the occupiers. Whether we talk of totalitarian regimes or genocides, they are all haunted by the weight of silence, by its tricks, evasions and denials. But this silence, that is indeed deadly, is not confined to the cruel scenes of the world theatre. And what the reinvented title lays clear more so than the original is just how this silence reaches all circles of existence, as so many news stories and human dramas remind us daily. ‘Murderous consent’ occupies these walls of silence that victims throw themselves against. Victims of educational and conjugal violence and peoples whose place of study and work are poisoned by repeated assaults of mental and/or sexual harassment. If we think of the terrible solitude of people who throw themselves against these walls without ever finding an ear willing to hear the complaints that they hardly dare to form, if we imagine the embarrassed silences, the cowardliness, the shifting eyes, the distracted ears of people who do not want to see or hear, do not want to be

required to speak, then we see there is a deadliness in the silence of these ‘witnesses’ who evade their testimony.

Is consenting and keeping quiet one and the same? Decidedly not. There are infinitely more active and directly participative forms of consent than a simple silence. There are different degrees of compromise. Actively taking part in collective murder, exercising terror, stealing, raping, killing is not the same as doing nothing against it, not having the words to denounce it.

One of the objections that might be made against the generality of consent is this: we do not consent to something just because we say nothing out of weakness or fear. Two answers immediately arise. The first is that the boundary between passivity and activity is porous. When considering the affects of violence, both cases produce the same result, namely that the attentiveness, care and help that the vulnerability and mortality of others requires slips away. Both cases imply the same suspension of ethics. It is this very inciting radicality that the notion of ‘murderous consent’ confronts us with. Let us focus on this eclipse. It prohibits our conscience from taking refuge in distinctions that might aid in exempting ourselves from responsibility. It incites us to maintain, in contrast to all accommodation of the suffering and death of others, that when we let a crime happen, we go against responsible ethics as much as we do if we were to actually commit the crime.

The second reply to this rebuttal regards the confusion or rather the concern intrinsic to the notion of consent. Where does this consent start? When exactly can we say, confess, acknowledge to ourselves that we have consented to violence? We have to keep in mind that no one has perfect lucidity; no one is aware of their own thoughts to the extent that they can be entirely clear on their motivations when they decide to keep quiet or let something go on. Because the ego is not transparent to itself and because identity is always confused, we are not able to keep to a casuistry of our motivations enough to decide what we can blame on a collective terror. This is true for all forms of violence, whether domestic, social, political, military, or genocidal.

This ‘mortal silence’ that the Serbo-Croatian language and the miracle of translation have imposed on ‘murderous consent’ should therefore be understood in several ways. This plurality becomes all the more meaningful when we realise that it invites the temporality of consent. That is, the time that precedes the murder, that goes alongside its execution and that succeeds in its wake. Indeed *mortal silence* designates first and foremost an absence of words: the very slumber of critique. Violence does not take hold of a society out of nowhere. Again, in order for a part of the population to be targeted, hate speech must have already endeavoured to poison the people’s conscience for a long time. This happens over the span of years, sometimes decades, however long it takes to produce what we have called elsewhere “the sedimentation of the unacceptable” (Crépon 2008). Once something is broken beyond repair as is the case in mass crime, genocidal violence and pogrom, we must always come back to this first silence, this initial lack of criticism which is in itself an eclipse of responsibility. How is it possible that something we never thought we would

be able to tolerate ends up becoming permitted, digested by society? How do we then explain that when there was still time no ‘contre-parole’ was strong enough, armed enough and disseminated enough to oppose this deaf, insidious depot of resentment, hatred, of desire for vengeance in peoples’ hearts, those feelings that clear the way at each step to the path of crime?

The time then comes when the worst occurs. Painfully silence changes course. It is no longer a simple disarming of critique but an accomplice to crime. It no longer matters whether it is active or passive. It is not really true – it has never been true – that people are ignorant of the crimes that are committed in their name, or that are at least claimed to be committed for their interest. Strange interests indeed, ones that turn the very people who these crimes are for into hostages of violence. Mortal silence accompanies the repeated massive, obsessive presence of violent death, and in the end the terrible habituation to it. It is hard to give a universal analysis of this presence as its trauma is so irreducible and singular. No one could ever know how to bear witness in someone’s place to how war has upturned their very existence. Again, to speak of ‘murderous consent’ is to address three dimensions: the universal because no one escapes it; the particular, because there are concrete historical-political situations that expose a given community to such suffering; and finally the singular, because in the end each individual is faced with this adversity at the irreducible crossroads of their unique history and particular identities, or rather traps, of belonging.

Silence has still a third sense to grasp and is by no means the least difficult. This is when the time has come to settle the scores of violence, but the healing process of past wounds, the worry of their marks is compromised by a falsification of history. What is withheld or rather confiscated in this ultimate silence is easy enough to guess: confessions to the crimes perpetrated; the symbolic reparation of the harm done to victims; and finally the condemnation of criminals that took an active part in the ordering, orchestration, condoning, or execution of these crimes. This silence is the eclipse of responsibility that turns a blind eye and manifests as the denial of the debt that suffering and mourning have created. The eclipse suspends the attention, care and help that the other’s vulnerability and mortality call for. In it are the actors’ refusals to admit to the part they played. When this happens the violence done is multiplied. Again, this phenomenon is not restricted to any particular culture or historical event. Rather its universality is striking to the imagination. Wherever we turn we find the same thing: the varying weight of this silence that haunts traumatic scenes throughout the world. Scenes that follow, like a tumour in our memory, the half-buried, masked, hidden, minimalized memories of a passed terror. A terror that a society either does not know how to, does not want to or cannot make the topic of common knowledge, of common consensus or at least a topic of dissemination and debate. The stakes are the same from Latin America to Australia, in the United States, China, Russia, Japan, Cambodia, Vietnam, Rwanda, South Africa, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (without saying anything of Europe): we can encourage or refuse them, go with or against

the acts but individually or collectively those who commit acts of terror, their proponents and supporters always try to oppose these strategies of silent evasion, these work-around tricks, these techniques of distortion to the evidence of fact and in so doing impede, for their various reasons, the conjoined march of truth and justice.

How could we assume, even for an instance, that this ultimate silence isn't 'murderous'? How could we keep it going? It is undoubtedly murderous from the moment it disrupts what is vital to society: the very relation between the living and the dead. Herein lies the meaning of this denial: it refuses to let those condemned by violence to rest in peace. This murderous consent is reproduced each time a crime is denied, each time criminals are protected, each time the facts are watered-down, each time reasons are given *a posteriori* to justify the unjustifiable. Not only is the rendering of justice then put off but the very possibility of an effective, durable – dare we say sincere – peace is compromised. When a society (and such societies exist all around the world) is destroyed and forced into mourning by the events of an extreme violence that have left their mark on families in a neighborhood, city, etc., there can be no peace so long as the call of the dead still sounds. This call is not nothing. If our lives both individual and communal can be defined as 'living with' then we live as much with the dead as we do with the living. In order for life with others to be possible, it is vital to contain or rather to regulate the place taken by the dead. Indeed it is the essence of the dead to invade – this gives them an undeniable political power. Is there a ruler who, lacking in popularity and success, out of ideas, propositions or solutions, has not given way to the temptation of making the murderous talk? It has always been so, because he who is able to make himself the ventriloquist of the dead is bestowed a formidable power. Nothing gives rise to collective emotions more. Nothing provokes anger more, excites hatred and resentment more than the awaking of vengeance. A strange chiasmus: the more the society of the living keeps quiet, trying in vain to turn the page discretely, the more the dead talk or are made to talk.

V Ethical Gestures

Nothing to say! Nothing to do! Let's come back to this. What the considerations of 'murderous consent' endeavor to evolve is not only a matter of the universal dimension that is constitutive of our belonging to the world (which is also the violation of a principal). It is just as much about ethical gestures that we can propose as certain tentative paths. That is, what we propose while still fully aware that we cannot entirely get away from murderous consent. That this is impossible is a result, as we saw, of our finitude. Empathy and compassion are limited to the power of our finite faculties. The radicality that ethics demands presupposes infinitely vast sensibility, imagination and understanding. Things that are simply not within our range. In other words, we can only put ourselves in the shoes of a limited amount of people in order to give them the attention, care and help they request. But these limitations that define our

condition are also an opportunity. They remind us that the object of violence is not a general set, an abstract category that defines some group (community, religion, nationality, language, etc.), but rather a discontinuous adding-on of individuality. Better yet, the first side-step we can take in to escape the fatalism of consent consists in expressing the irreducibly singular character of the subject of our responsibility: each individual's vulnerability and mortality. Individuals, not abstract concepts require attention, care and aid. Individuals whose vulnerability and mortality cannot be generalised or confused with a collective entity. This means that, even though murderous consent remains an inescapable dimension of our being in the world, we manage to escape it every time we are confronted, rather exposed to an instance of vulnerability; to another's mortality at risk. We recognize this individual as irreplaceable and unique and therefore we respond to their singularity. This is how we express what violence disregards, what it considers negligible; but what nonetheless resist violence's hold: Uniqueness, the very essence of what violence seeks to destroy and thereby erase.

What options do we have to answer? We can distinguish four: rebellion, goodness, critique and shame. This list is, of course, not exhaustive but the elements in it have a point in common: without being specifically manifested they do not exist. They presuppose gestures or signs that contradict, that go against the spoken and gestural logic of murderous consent. But what is this logic? As war always uses this logic, it is now time to say a few words about it. The needs of force impose consensus' menacing rules. In other words, this logic normalises what is said and done. Its common denominator is the acknowledgement of a certain legitimacy in violence or more so, it excludes the possibility that we can show reluctance when violence is used and that we can hear a different voice. In this way this aggressive normativity prohibits us from protesting against, for instance, confirmed violations of human rights. This normativity demands at best, that we close our eyes and plug our ears, at worst that we applaud or take part in active massacre. Regulate, exclude, ban! We see now that this consensus is the terror of consent. It is always ready to use any and all forms of coercion and blackmail. There is no way out for the people it is exercised on. Everyone whose opinions or sensibilities do not conform to this violence are accused straight off of treason. This has always been the case. Those whose convictions stop them from taking part in the bloody celebrations are 'traitors'. 'Traitors' again, those who are adamant on not understanding why so much hatred has erupted all of a sudden. 'Traitors' finally, all who refuse to acknowledge that the targeted people are enemies to be demolished; that it is a matter of principle that a targeted people should be deprived of attention, care and help, in one word, of their humanity.

We can deduce easily enough the nature and the meaning of the ethical gestures that can be raised against this logic. Their nature is also what makes them courageous. These gestures oppose the brutality and policies of the consensus imposed by violence. They oppose this way of seeing, of speaking, of doing that invalidate others. Is this insignificant? What can rebellion, goodness, critique

and shame do when confronted with the extreme violence on which our considerations pivot? We can already imagine the objections that could be made against the place we have given these gestures. We could say firstly that the moral scope of individual choices is not political enough and only concerns and commits the person who makes them. These choices only appease the guilt of the person who is not able to change the misery of the world, who is powerless against it. They do not change the misery itself. Does it then follow that murderous consent and its 'poor' offspring, are really the ultimate version of the unhappy conscious? Is only a process that is typically individual and far from political action susceptible to overturn an objective situation synonymous with violence? We would perhaps answer that these objections are made due to lack of imagination. What is forgotten in making these objections is the subversive power of these gestures, a power we cannot measure. It is all a matter of links and chains. Our political and ethical choices are articulated by considering what connects us, what holds us together; what we allow to bind us and what we have the strength to separate ourselves from. This is precisely what rebellion, goodness, critique, and shame all have in common: they undo certain ties in order to tie others. To connect and disconnect, in other words: to separate in order to unify differently. If mortal silence is the vector of an unfair complicity, we must acknowledge that only those who know how to break these chains have the strength to stop it.

Rebellion, goodness, critique and shame, they all have the power to spark such a rupture. Indeed what is rebellion if not the introduction of disorder to a system that is supposed to be unanimous? A system, the merciless mechanisms of a murderous administration. It remains protected so long as no one takes the risk of contesting its criminal abuses. Everyone then is an accomplice: everyone who conceives of and launches the infernal machine, everyone who keeps it working, everyone who lets themselves be carried by it, whether out of cowardliness, indifference or complacency. To rebel while there is still time either individually or collectively is to add a grain of sand against this unanimity and in so doing add the promise of disruption. Above all it is to assert the desire for things to be different. Think of all those forms of action in the four corners of the globe that spur from civil disobedience; the creative ways people have found to show their refusal. To disobey, this has always meant to separate oneself from a legal system, from decrees of unjust regimentation as well as from the instruments that see that they are respected. But this also means changing sides, to find oneself possibly on the side of the vanquished or the victims. That is, those for whom the sole existential meaning (and therefore political meaning) of a morally corrupt system is the exponential increase to their vulnerability and the danger of a violent death.

The scope of goodness is even more meaningful. Whoever experiences the violence of a juridical system, police officer, politician or military is exposed to a feeling of abandonment that is not the least of the cruelties that are then exercised. Suffice to say proof of this is found in the simple reminder of those practices that physically but more so psychologically and morally isolate a

person; practices that have always served to refine cruelty. Whoever is forced to go through these becomes a being excluded from society, a rejected, a pariah. An experience shared by everyone who sees themselves as victims throughout history: to be or to feel abandoned. This amounts to experiencing a painful absence of support – a lack of an elementary solidarity –; it amounts to suffering the melting pot of violence. But, in their way, gestures of simple goodness fill this absence. These gestures are the basic forms of attention, care and help that vulnerability requires: a look, a smile, a word of comfort, an extended hand, the appeasement of hunger or thirst.

We have already addressed the matter of critique. But let us now specify what makes it helpful! When murderous consent is calculated, orchestrated by authorities whether civil or military, there is always an apparatus put into place: discourse and images whose invasive presence on the walls of a city, on the radio and television or on social media is meant to provoke, not a feeling of abandonment but rather of powerlessness. There can be no doubt as to the effect such an invasion seeks: to turn the people that its hammering targets into hostages of a new language; to provoke a depressive paralysis in their hearts and minds. It is precisely this wide-spread impression of powerlessness and the resulting belittling that critique can correct. It breaks the ties of propaganda and verbal consensus that habituate us to murder. It reinstates an analysis free of ideological strangleholds. At the same time it restores, at least minimally, trust in language without which we have no final defense against the worst.

Let's finish with a few words on shame. Its ethical significance is considerable. We saw that within the gradation of silences there is one that comes from denying that a crime has been committed. This is when those who took part in a crime actively or passively distance themselves from it: either they didn't know or they were caught in the gears of a machine and couldn't have done otherwise. Neither in their soul nor conscience do they feel guilt or responsibility. It is not here necessary for us to be reminded of how such a reaction multiplies the affronts to the victims; a reaction we see all around the world; where scores are being settled, where the executioners of yesterday try to survive in a society just beginning to heal and reconstruct. Shame, however, describes the opposite movement. To experience and manifest shame is to accept the part one played in the violence done. This is why there is perhaps no feeling more directly joint to murderous consent – that is, there is no feeling that takes it into account more explicitly. Shame is the very impossibility of distancing ourselves from the violence that we did not see coming, that we did not know how to stop, or against which we will always never have protested enough.

Evanston, April 2019

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O smrtonosnom ćutanju

Apstrakt

Predavanje se fokusira na nasilje i tvrdi da nije delovanje već ćutnja i nečinjenje ono što postaje ‚smrtonosno‘, s obzirom na to da smo prisiljeni na trajni i nemogući proces odlučivanja između odgovornosti za drugoga i mogućnosti odgovaranja na bilo koji poziv u pomoć. Ipak, takva vrsta prihvatanja nije konačna i autor nudi određene alternativne strategije: pobunu, dobrotu, kritiku i sram.

Ključne reči: nasilje, pristanak, odgovornost, pobuna, dobrota, kritika, sram