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**weiterleben**  
**living on**  
**1995/2005**

Essay  
von/by  
Tom Keenan

Berlin 2005

Heute, am 17. Oktober 1995 ist es ein halbes Jahr her, dass uns unsere schöne Blume für immer verlassen hat.

## **Jasminka**

Allerliebste Frau und Mutter, Du warst unsere Freude, unser Glück und unser Stolz. Niemand konnte unsere Herzen so mit Wärme und Zuneigung erfüllen, wie Du, mit Deinem Lächeln und Deiner Erscheinung. Du warst in allem außerordentlich und jetzt bist Du nicht mehr bei uns. Und trotzdem bist Du ständig unter uns. Es ist schwer, sich mit dem Schicksal abzufinden, mit der Tatsache, dass Du nie mehr kommen wirst, mit Deinem wunderschönen Lachen und dass wir nie mehr zu viert durch Sarajevo spazieren werden. Wir bewahren alle Erinnerungen an die Momente, die wir mit Dir verbracht haben, wie ein Heiligtum. Wir sind unendlich traurig ohne Dich und wir werden Dich immer lieben. Dein Mann Berin und Deine Töchter Alica und Vanja.



## „weiterleben 1995/2005“

Sechzig Jahre nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg kommen die letzten Zeitzeugen aus dem Jahr 1945 in den Medien noch einmal verstärkt zu Wort, es wird von deutscher Not, von Leid und Entbehrungen berichtet. Kaum jemand gibt im Jahr 2005 den Menschen in Sarajevo eine Stimme und erinnert an das Gemetzel vor unserer Haustür. Die Erfahrungen des letzten Weltkriegs und ständige Medienpräsenz haben das Morden vor aller Augen im ehemaligen Jugoslawien nicht verhindert. Heute ist die Belagerung der Stadt Sarajevo durch die serbische Armee vom Mai 1992 bis zum Februar 1996 fast vergessen und die Verbrechen weitestgehend verdrängt, das Thema auf gelegentliche Nachrichtenschnipsel vom Kriegsverbrechertribunal aus Den Haag reduziert.

Örtliche Nähe und mentale Ferne kennzeichnen das Verhältnis der Westeuropäer zu diesem Teil Europas. Vom Lokal an der Ecke („Balkan-Grill“) kennt man Bosnien und Sarajevo in Verbindung mit Kelim-Folklore und Cevapcici-Romantik, blauem Meer (geografisch nimmt man es nicht so genau) und einer Winterolympiade, der Ermordung des österreichischen Thronfolgers und scheinliberalem Tito-Kommunismus im Vielvölkerstaat. Alte Vorurteile („die kloppen sich doch immer“) bestimmen die desinteressierten Kommentare zum „Bürgerkrieg“ auf dem „Balkan“.

Berichte und Bilder von Vergewaltigungen, Lagern und Massenmord durchlaufen das Kurzzeitgedächtnis und werden verdrängt. Den Granathagel auf Sarajevo und die allgegenwärtige Lebensgefahr der Bewohner durch Scharfschützen kann und will man nicht wahrhaben, man beruhigt sich mit humanitärer Hilfe und hofft auf Verhandlungslösungen zwischen den „Konfliktparteien“. Die Rolle der Medien in diesem Krieg und deren Einfluss auf Politik und Öffentlichkeit untersucht Thomas Keenan in dem nachfolgenden Essay „Publicity and Indifference“.

Unser Kunstprojekt beleuchtet die unterschiedliche Gedenkkultur in den Printmedien. Während heute in Deutschland der 1945 Verstorbenen mit einem Eisernen Kreuz, der Nennung des Dienstgrads und der Wehrmachtseinheit gedacht wird, sind in Sarajevo die Nachrufe wie Liebesbriefe formuliert. Die Erinnerung an die Einzigartigkeit der Person, der Liebreiz und Edelmut, die Vornehmheit, die Stimme, der Gang, das Lächeln und das gemeinsam Erlebte sind für Angehörige wie Freunde wesentlich. Der Mensch steht im Mittelpunkt und nicht die Stellung in der Gesellschaft.

Diese Nachrufe aus dem Jahr 1995 haben wir im Archiv der Tageszeitung „Oslobodjenje“ exzerpiert und sie werden übersetzt in der Berliner Tageszeitung „taz“ im Oktober 2005 zwei Wochen lang erneut veröffentlicht. Die vorliegende Publikation „weiterleben – living on 1995/2005“ gibt einige dieser Nachrufe wieder, verknüpft mit Bildern vom Alltag im heutigen Sarajevo.

## “living on 1995/2005”

Sixty years after the Second World War, the last contemporary witnesses of the year 1945 are having their say once more in the media, recounting the hardship, suffering, and sacrifices of Germans. Hardly anyone in the year 2005 gives voice to the people of Sarajevo or recalls the carnage at our doorstep. The experiences of the last World War and constant media presence did nothing to prevent blatant murder in the former Yugoslavia. The siege of Sarajevo by the Serbian army from May 1992 to February 1996 has nearly been forgotten, the crimes largely suppressed; the issue has been reduced to the occasional scrap of news from the war crimes tribunal at The Hague.

For Western Europeans this part of Europe is both geographically close and mentally far away. From the restaurant on the corner (“Balkan Grill”), Bosnia and Sarajevo are associated with kilim folklore and cevapcici romance, with the blue sea (one needn’t be too particular about the geographic details) and the Winter Olympics, the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and pseudo liberal Tito-style Communism in a multinational state. It is the age-old prejudices (“They’ve been at each other’s throats for ages.”) which characterize the languid commentaries on „civil war“ in the „Balkans.“

Reports and images of rapes, camps and mass murder pass through our short-term memories and are repressed. We are not able or willing to perceive the hail of shells on Sarajevo and the ever-present mortal danger posed to the city’s inhabitants by snipers, we ease our consciences with humanitarian aid and the hope for a diplomatic solution between the “conflicting parties.” The media’s role in the war and its influence on politics and the public is investigated by Thomas Keenan in the following essay “Publicity and Indifference.”

Our art project examines the varying culture of remembrance in the print media. Whereas in Germany the dead of sixty years past are commemorated with an Iron Cross, a reference to rank and the Wehrmacht unit they served in, in Sarajevo the obituaries read like love letters. Recollections of their uniqueness as individuals, their charm and grace, their noble-mindedness, their voice or walk, their smile, and the time spent together are important for family members and friends. The focus is on the human being and not his or her social position.

The obituaries were excerpted from the archives of the daily paper *Oslobodjenje* from the year 1995. In October 2005, over a period of two weeks, they are being republished in the Berlin daily *taz* in German translation. This publication “weiterleben – living on 1995/2005” presents a number of these obituaries, combined with images of daily life in today’s Sarajevo.

Today, October 17, 1995, it has been six months since our beautiful flower left us for good.

## **Jasminka**

Beloved wife and mother, you were our pride, our joy, and our happiness. Nobody could fill our hearts with warmth and affection like you, with your smile and your presence. You were exceptional in every way, but now you are no longer with us. And yet you will always be in our midst. It is hard to accept fate, the fact that you will never come back with your radiant smile, and that the four of us will never again stroll through Sarajevo. We will treasure the sacred memories of every moment we spent with you.

We are infinitely sad without you and will always love you. Your husband Berin and your daughters Alica and Vanja.



In memory of our beloved  
and exceptional son,  
brother and grandson.

## **Damir**

Dearest Damir, time may  
pass, but it cannot efface  
the memory of you and your  
noble countenance. Your  
inconsolable mother and  
father, your grandmother  
and your sister.

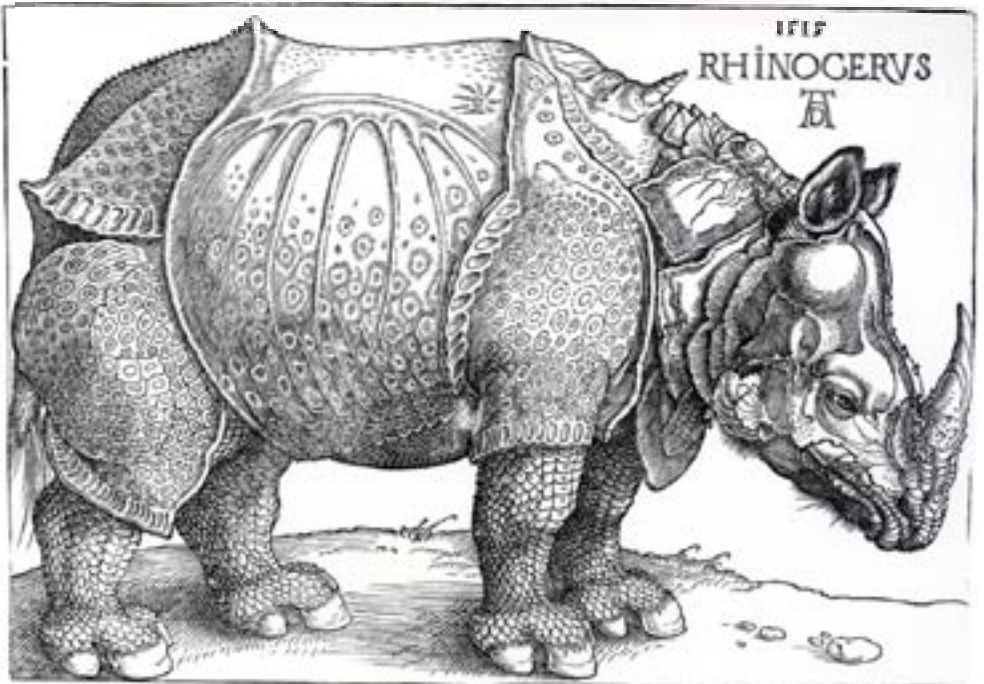


On October 19, 1995, it has been two full years since the criminals tore you away from our life together.

## Osman

Dearest Osman, it is hard to imagine and to comprehend that you are no longer among us, that you will never come back and smile so happily, that you will never again gladden our hearts the way you used to. Your young life was cut short by brutes. Those who killed you have no heart, and know nothing of humanity. They have killed a part of us with you, but not our love for you. Dearest son, the memory of you, your kindness and your lofty spirit will always remain in our hearts, for your most beloved can never forget you.

Your most beloved: father Refik, mother Hanka, sister Fahrija, brothers Rasim and Ramiz, sister-in-law Sadeta, brother-in-law Enver and your cousin Amina.









Zur Erinnerung an unseren geliebten und allerbesten Sohn, Bruder und Enkel.

## **Damir**

Lieber Damir, die Zeit, die vergeht kann die Erinnerung an Dich und Dein edles Antlitz nicht auslöschen. Deine untröstlichen Mutter und Vater, Deine Großmutter und Deine Schwester.

Am 19. Oktober 1995 sind es volle zwei Jahre seit dem uns Dich die Verbrecher aus dem gemeinsamen Leben mit uns entrissen haben.

## **Osman**

Lieber Osman, es ist schwer vorstellbar und begreifbar, dass Du nicht mehr unter uns weilst, dass Du nie wieder kommst und fröhlich lächelst, dass Du uns nie wieder erfreuen wirst, wie Du das gerne getan hast. Unmenschen haben Dein junges Leben unterbrochen. Es haben Dich jene getötet, die kein Herz haben und die nichts von Menschlichkeit wissen. Mit Dir haben sie auch einen Teil von uns getötet, aber nicht unsere Liebe zu Dir. Lieber Sohn, die Erinnerung an Dich und Deine Güte und Deinen Edelmut werden immer in unseren Herzen bleiben, weil Dich Deine Allerliebsten niemals vergessen können. Deine Allerliebsten: Vater Refik, Mutter Hanka, Schwester Fahrija, die Brüder Rasim und Ramiz, Schwägerin Sadeta, Schwager Enver und Deine Cousine Amina.



Am 21. Oktober 1995 vollenden sich einhundert traurigste und schmerzhafteste Tage seit dem die Unmenschen das Leben unserer geliebten Tochter und Schwester unterbrochen haben.

## **Suvada**

Die Zeit vergeht, aber wir sind gebeugt durch den Schmerz wegen Deines zu frühen Abschieds und dieser Schmerz wird von Tag zu Tag stärker. Die Mörder haben Dich uns entrissen und nur wir, die wir Dich lieben, wissen, was es heißt ohne Dich leben zu müssen. Die Tränen können Dich uns nicht zurückbringen und die Zeit kann unseren Schmerz nicht mildern. Aber nichts auf dieser Welt kann unsere Liebe zu Dir und die Zeit mit Dir auslöschen. Wir dachten, unser Glück wäre nie zu Ende und nichts könnte uns trennen. Wir können uns nicht mit dem bitteren Schicksal abfinden, das Dich uns entriss, ohne Rücksicht auf uns, die wir Dich unendlich geliebt haben. Dein Edelmut, Dein Liebreiz und Deine Schönheit wird immer in unseren Herzen wohnen. Weil die Geliebten niemals tot sind, solange die, die sie lieben noch leben. Auf ewig von Schmerz und Trauer erschüttert, Dein Vater Mirsad, Deine Mutter Edina, Dein Bruder Samir, die Schwestern Mirsada und Jasmina und Deine Kusine Mirela.



On October 21, 1995 one hundred of the most sorrowful and agonizing days are complete since fiends cut short the life of our beloved daughter and sister.

## **Suvada**

Time may pass, but we are stricken by the pain of your premature death, a pain that grows day by day. The murderers have wrenched you away from us and only we, the ones who love you, know what it means having to live without you. Our tears cannot bring you back to us and time cannot ease our pain. But nothing in this world can extinguish our love for you and the time we spent with you. We thought our happiness would never end and nothing could separate us. We cannot accept our bitter fate, which robbed us of you heedless of us, we who loved you unceasingly. Your noble spirit, your charm and your beauty will always dwell in our hearts. For the beloved never die as long as those who love them still live. Forever stricken with pain and grief, your father Mirsad, your mother Edina, your brother Samir, sisters Mirsada and Jasmina and your cousin Mirela.

Am 24. Oktober 1995  
sind es 40 Tage seit dem  
Tod meines Bruders.

### **Almir**

Auch heute warte ich auf  
Dich. Ich kann es nur  
schwer begreifen, dass ich  
Dich für immer verloren  
habe. Ein Augenblick nur,  
dann war Deine zarte  
Jugend ausgelöscht.  
In meinem Herzen ist  
Leere und Schmerz und  
in meinem Herzen brennt  
ewige Liebe zu Dir.  
Dein untröstlicher Bruder.

Am 22. Oktober 1995  
ist ein Jahr vergangen,  
seit dem die Verbrecher  
vom Berg herab unsere  
Mädchen getötet haben.

### **Indira und Jasmina**

Unsere lieben, kleinen  
Mädchen, es ist zu wenig  
Zeit vergangen, um  
unsere Trauer zu mildern.  
Jeder Tag ohne euch ist  
trauriger und trauriger.  
Unsere einzige Freude  
sind unsere Söhne, weil  
wir euch in ihnen sehen.  
Alle Freude dieser Welt  
ist mit euch vergangen.  
Euer auf ewig untröstlicher  
Vater Nermin, Mutter  
Esma, Großvater Osman  
und Großmutter Naza.





On October 24, 1995, it has been 40 days since the death of my brother.

### **Almir**

I am still waiting for you even today. I can scarcely comprehend that I have lost you forever. Only an instant, and your tender youth was obliterated. In my heart is emptiness and pain. My heart burns with unending love for you. Your  
disconsolate brother.

On October 22, 1995, a year has passed since the criminals up on the mountain murdered our little girls.

### **Indira and Jasmina**

Our dear little girls, too little time has passed to ease our pain. Each day without you becomes sadder and sadder. Our only joy is our sons, for in them we see you. All the joy in this world has departed with you. Your forever inconsolable father Nermin, mother Esma, grandfather Osman and grandmother Naza.

Am 26. Okt. 1995 ist ein Jahr seit dem tragischen Tod unseres kleinen Sohnes vergangen.

### **Nermin**

Mein lieber Nermin, schwer wiegt die Wahrheit, dass Du nicht mehr unter uns weilst, aber wir werden uns Deiner immer erinnern und Du wirst immer Teil unserer Gedanken sein. Es lieben Dich Deine Allerliebsten, Dein Vater Ismet, Deine Mutter Nura und Deine Lehrerin Amelia.

Zur Erinnerung an den geliebten Bruder.

### **Stjepan**

Die verfllossene Zeit kann unsere Trauer nicht mildern und unseren Schmerz auslöschen. Jene sollen verflucht sein, die Dich von uns getrennt haben. Dein Edelmut und Deine Güte werden wir nie vergessen. Deine Schwester Vlasta, Dein Schwager Petar, Deine Cousine Stefa.





On October 26, 1995, one year has passed since the tragic death of our little son.

## **Nermin**

My dearest Nermin, the truth that you are no longer among us weighs heavily, but we will always remember you and you will always be a part of our thoughts. We love you. Your beloved father Ismet, mother Nura and teacher Amelia.

In memory of our beloved brother.

## **Stjepan**

The passing of time cannot assuage our grief and extinguish our pain. Let those be accursed who took you from us! We will never forget your lofty spirit and your kindness. Your sister Vlasta, your brother-in-law Petar, your cousin Stefa.



Am 28. Oktober 1995 sind anderthalb Jahre seit dem tragischen Tod meines Bruders vergangen.

### **Omar**

Wo immer ich auch gehe, überall sehe ich Dein liebes Antlitz, ein Antlitz, das man nicht vergisst. Deine Stimme klingt in meinen Ohren und mir fehlt am meisten, dass Du nicht mehr zu mir, Deinem Schwesterchen, sprichst. Das Leben ist ohne Dich nichts wert. Einen Teil von mir hast Du mit Dir genommen und in meinem Herzen ist eine Leere geblieben, die nie wieder gefüllt werden kann. Ich muss ohne Dich leben und ohne viele andere Menschen, die mir viel bedeuten. Deine einzige Schwester Elvira.

Am 27. Oktober 1995 vollendet sich ein Jahr seit Deinem Ableben.

### **Sreten**

Lieber Sohn, die Zeit vergeht ohne Dich und bringt uns nicht das Vergessen, sondern ewige Trauer und Leid, dass wir Dich jungen und edlen Menschen verloren haben. Wir werden uns niemals mit der harten Wahrheit abfinden können. Solange wir leben, lebst auch Du in unseren Gedanken und in unseren Herzen. Deine Mutter und Dein Bruder.





On October 27, 1995,  
a full year has gone by  
since your passing.

### **Sreten**

Dearest son, time goes  
by without you, and  
brings not forgetfulness,  
but unending grief and  
suffering at having lost  
you, the young and noble  
person you were. We will  
never come to terms  
with the harsh truth. As  
long as we live, you, too,  
will live in our hearts and  
minds. Your mother and  
your brother.

On October 28, 1995,  
a year and a half have  
passed since the tragic  
death of my brother.

### **Omar**

Wherever I go,  
everywhere I see your  
sweet face, a face one  
does not forget. Your  
voice rings in my ears,  
and I miss most of  
all that you no longer  
speak to me, your little  
sister. Life is not worth  
living without you. You  
took a part of me along  
with you, and left an  
emptiness in my heart  
that can never be filled.  
I have to live without  
you and without many  
other people who mean  
a lot to me. Your only  
sister Elvira.

On October 29, 1995, it has been 40 days since the death of my beloved grandson.

## **Mirza**

My dear Mirza, it is hard to believe that you are no longer in our midst, that you no longer work out with your friends, that you no longer play with your sister, and that you no longer open the door for your grandmother. But your countenance, your beauty, and your kindness are forever in my heart. Your faith in a better tomorrow, and your sister and your parents are what keep me alive. Your disconsolate grandmother.





Am 29. Oktober sind es 40 Tage seit dem Tod meines geliebten Enkels.

## **Mirza**

Mein lieber Mirza, es ist schwer zu glauben, dass Du nicht mehr unter uns weilst und dass Du nicht mehr mit Deinen Freunden trainierst, daß Du nicht mehr mit Deiner Schwester spielst und dass Du Deiner Großmutter nicht die Türe öffnest. Aber Dein Antlitz und Deine Schönheit und Deine Güte sind immer in meinem Herzen. Dein Glaube an ein besseres Morgen, und Deine Schwester und Deine Eltern halten mich noch am Leben. Deine untröstliche Großmutter.

On October 18, 1995, it has been six sorrowful months since death snatched away from us our dearest son and brother.

## **Amin**

Dearest Amin, there are no words to describe the pain and grief we feel for you. Through your death we have lost the blessing you gave us with your warmth and cheerfulness. Only we, who knew you and have lost you, can know our suffering, how sorely we miss you. With every beat of our hearts we will feel the pain, grief and emptiness you have left behind. Only death can heal our wounds. We will forever love you and mourn you: your father Mizah, mother Suada and brother Aldin.





Am 18. Oktober 1995 sind es sechs traurige Monate, seit dem uns der Tod unseren lieben Sohn und Bruder entrissen hat.

### **Amin**

Lieber Amin, es gibt keine Worte, mit denen die Trauer und der Schmerz um Dich beschrieben werden könnten. Mit Deinem Tod haben wir all die Freude verloren, die Du uns mit Deiner Wärme und Deiner Fröhlichkeit beschert hast. Nur wir, die wir Dich kannten und verloren haben wissen, wie sehr wir leiden und wie sehr Du uns fehlst. Solange unser Herz schlägt, werden wir Schmerz, Trauer und die Leere spüren, die Du hinterlassen hast und nur der Tod kann unsere Wunde stillen. Wir werden Dich ewig lieben und um Dich trauern: Dein Vater Mizah, Mutter Suada und Bruder Aldin.









Huse Džabek

Mladen Ključar

Vehida Bešlić

Muhamed Fetahović

Sajda Kurin

Mehmed Šerićija

Isma Oibović

Rasima Jabić

Faruk Šehović

Smajo Račić

Ođevdel Fetahović

Junuz Švakić

Mirsada Bruj

Munib

Muhamed Zubović

Mustafa Ibrahim

Marija Knežević

Verica Činović

Sabir Rizvo

Gordana Bogdanović

Hajrija Smailić

Kemal Džabić

Sinija Džabić

Elvir Puzović

Muhamed Borovina

Vasko Rija Begirović

Jelena Čavrić

Pašaga Tih

Red Džugović

Hasija Karavčić

Senad Zukić

Amir Kuvšić





Ahmed Fala

Marta Gennov

Nedžad Bakićević

Eno Kragić

Olivera Subašić

Neven Lukić

Đorđe Žutić

Zeljka Savić

Enisa Šepić

Marko Šušteršič

Torlaković

Kulka Matićević

Beska Šarić

Adriana Vukić

Adriana Čeraga

Maja Osman

Selma Kovač

Đorđe Đurđević

Almir Šehović

Ala Čeraga

Roza Horvatić

Armin Galić

Olivera Tolić

Đorđe Đurđević

Ena Begović

Marko Šušteršič

Hariz Džurđević

Enisa

Ena Begović

Marko Šušteršič







ON THIS PLACE SERBIAN CRIMINALS  
IN THE NIGHT OF 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> AUGUST, 1992 SET ON FIRE  
NATIONAL AND  
UNIVERSITY'S LIBRARY  
OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA  
OVER 2 MILLIONS OF BOOKS, PERIODICALS  
AND DOCUMENTS VANISHED IN THE FLAME

DO NOT FORGET,  
REMEMBER AND WARN!

## Publicity and Indifference:

### media, surveillance, “humanitarian intervention”

Thomas Keenan

The price of eternal vigilance is indifference.

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

In his too-hasty indictment of the 1999 NATO air campaign over Kosovo, Stratégie de la déception, Paul Virilio suggests that there was a determined relation between “the ‘humanitarian’ dimension of this very first ‘human rights conflict’” (30) and the “truly panoptical vision” (28) which NATO brought to bear on the battlefield.<sup>1</sup>

After the eye of God pursuing Cain all the way into the tomb, we now have the eye of Humanity skimming over the oceans and continents in search of criminals. One gets an idea, then, of the ethical dimension of the Global Information Dominance programme, the attributes of which are indeed those of the divine, opening up the possibility of ethical cleansings, capable of usefully replacing the ethnic cleansing of undesirable or supernumerary populations. After oral informing, rumor, agents of influence and traditional spying, comes the age of optical informing: this ‘real time’ of a large-scale optical panoptics, capable of surveilling not just enemy, but friendly, movements thanks to the control of public opinion. (31-32)

This “global telesurveillance” (32) is for Virilio the signature of the “globalist putsch” he denounces, “a seizure of power by an anational armed group (NATO), evading the political control of the democratic nations (the UN), evading the prudence of their diplomacy and their specific jurisdictions” (74).

The tropes are all-too-familiar, and not just to readers of Virilio. Democracy sacrificed to speed, accountability to total visibility. As if surveillance were just one thing. As if the images produced by the global panoptics were self-evident in their meaning or effect. And as if every project taken on by the Western military alliance, or what his Foreign Minister Vedrine memorably nicknamed the hyperpower, was irremediably contaminated. But those are obvious commonplaces. What is interesting is the question of betrayal, denunciation, of this “informing [délation].” What difference does all the watching make? Especially where ‘ethnic cleansing’ is at stake – or to call it by its legal name, where genocide is underway? Virilio’s dissident position, that what is truly to be feared and resisted is less the killing itself than the practices of global control it alibis or sets in motion, is at once unjustified and deeply flawed from a political standpoint.

But, interestingly, it also runs counter to the most cherished axioms of the international human rights and humanitarian movements. Since the end of the Second World War, indeed, the non-governmental movement has looked forward to the prospect of up-to-date information about crimes in progress, coupled with access to the public opinion that might enable them to be interrupted. With the creation of a rich and increasingly robust global network of human rights monitors, and the ability to relay acts of witness and evidence around the world in near-real-time, something like this transparent world is increasingly real. “The media will carry the demand for action to the world’s leaders; they in turn must decide carefully and positively what that action is to be,” runs the axiom in its clearest formulation.<sup>2</sup> But what of the reaction, the action, and the public? Kosovo – where a limited military intervention probably prevented a genocide, protected a terribly endangered civilian population, and finally stopped a military and paramilitary apparatus that had

terrorized mostly Muslim civilian populations in southern Europe for most of the 1990s – was rather the exception than the rule. Global telesurveillance and human rights monitors did not help much at Vukovar, Omarska, or Srebrenica. Nor did these terrible names confirm the omnipotence of NATO, or the unaccountable power of the transnational human rights movement. After a decade of genocide, famine, and concentration camps, the very value of publicity – whether that affirmed by the movements or condemned by Virilio – seemed questionable.

\* \* \*

Visiting Sarajevo at Christmas in 1993, less than a year into its suffering, the Archbishop of Paris Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger noted the strikingly public or visible character of the carnage there.<sup>3</sup> In an interview with Zlatko Dizdarevic of Sarajevo's *Oslobodjenje*, he compared the siege of the city to the horrors of World War II, but with a significant difference:

Here, however, there are no secrets. There are journalists here, from here pictures are transmitted, there are satellite communications, all of this is known. In this city there are soldiers of the United Nations, well armed, and nonetheless it all continues to happen. This is unbelievable; this is overwhelming. One man yesterday told me that everyone here feels like they are animals in a zoo that others come to look at, to take pictures of, and to be amazed. And then, those up in the mountains also treat them like animals, killing them and 'culling' them.

Dizdarevic asked how it was possible that, "all of this goes on without any end in sight, in spite of the fact that we are surrounded by hundreds of cameras [... and] that everyone knows everything and sees everything"? Lustiger responded: "There is no answer for that – I really do not have an answer. However, that means that it is always possible to get worse and worse."

Lustiger's bold and uncompromising position, as rare as it was at the time, has now achieved the status of common sense. Among the too many would-be 'lessons of Bosnia,' this one stands out for its frequent citation: that a country was destroyed and a genocide happened, in the heart of Europe, on television, and what is known as the world or the West simply looked on and did nothing. "While America Watched," as the title of a documentary on the genocide in Bosnia broadcast by ABC Television in 1994 already put it.<sup>4</sup>

The surveillance was as complete as the abandonment.

Bosnians, said one to the American journalist David Rieff, "felt as you would feel if you were mugged in full view of a policeman and he did nothing to rescue you"<sup>5</sup> Or, as Rieff himself put it, "200,000 Bosnian Muslims died, in full view of the world's television cameras, and more than two million other people were forcibly displaced. A state formally recognized by the European Community and the United States [...] and the United Nations [...] was allowed to be destroyed. While it was being destroyed, UN military forces and officials looked on, offering 'humanitarian' assistance and protesting [...] that there was no will in the international community to do anything more" (23).

But what does "in full view" mean, and what is the particular ethico-political force of this condemnation: not just genocide, but genocide in the open, transparent mass murder?

There is no denying the simultaneity of this watching and that destruction. They happened together – and what happened should not have happened. But what did the surveillance and the watching have to do with what happened? What links the thing we so loosely call

“the media” and its images with action or inaction? Or more precisely, when something happens “in full view,” why do we expect that action will be taken commensurate with what (we have seen) is happening? And what about that humanitarian assistance: what sort of “action” is it?

This trajectory of this program – from the camera to a response, but maybe nothing “more” than a humanitarian one – appears everywhere today, in military and political and historical discussions of so-called postmodern wars or humanitarian crises, in legal or ethical commentaries on genocide and catastrophe, and in critical media-studies analyses of what has been called the CNN effect or the-role-of-the-media in contemporary conflict. And what seems to concern us the most, for better and for worse, are the media. It seems as if we cannot talk about what happened in Bosnia or Somalia or Rwanda without talking about the media. <sup>6</sup>

Consider, for (and unfortunately only for) example, the brilliant series of articles in the New York Review of Books in which Mark Danner chronicled the high and low points of the battles over Bosnia in the United States and Europe. He was in Sarajevo for much of it, but his articles insistently begin in watching television. <sup>7</sup> “To the hundreds of millions who first beheld them on their television screens that August day in 1992, the faces staring out from behind barbed wire seemed painfully familiar,” begins his 4 December 1997 report on the camps of Western Bosnia. The opening sentences of his 20 November article tell a similar story about Srebrenica:

Scarcely two years ago, during the sweltering days of July 1995, any citizen of our civilized land could have pressed a button on a remote control and idly gazed, for an instant or an hour, into the jaws of a contemporary Hell. Taking shape upon the little screen, in that concurrent universe dubbed “real time,” was a motley, seemingly endless caravan, bus after battered bus rolling to a stop and disgorging scores of exhausted, disheveled people. [...] every last one a woman or a child. The men of Srebrenica had somehow disappeared. Videotaped images, though, persist: on the footage shot the day before, the men can be seen among the roiling mob, together with their women and children, pushing up against the fence of the United Nations compound, pleading for protection from the conquering Serbs.

From 1992 to 1995, says Danner, we watched, and what we did and didn’t do with what we saw was all the less forgivable, because we could see. <sup>8</sup> Many other versions of this protest could be enumerated, but the precise formulations of and differences among them are less interesting than their ubiquity. The recurrence of the gesture (we watched “all that” but we did not act as we should have), across so many different accounts and styles and methodological predispositions, mirrors somehow the phenomenon it describes: the omnipresence of the gesture is the very ubiquity of the camera, the image or specter of the camera that now seems to haunt our consciousness, and indeed, the in-full-view-of-the-camera seems now to have become the most privileged figure of our ethical consciousness, our conscience, our responsibility itself.

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This was not always a rebuke. Television, publicity, surveillance of the affirmative sort, was supposed to help. This was the situation Michael Ignatieff described some years ago – before Bosnia and Rwanda, when the crises were those of starvation and Cold War proxies – in an essay on “the ethics of television,” now the first chapter of The Warrior’s Honor. <sup>9</sup>

Television is also the instrument of a new kind of politics. Since 1945, affluence and idealism have made possible the emergence of a host of nongovernmental private charities and pressure groups – Amnesty International, [...] Medecins sans frontières, and others – that use television as a central part of their campaigns to mobilize conscience and money on behalf of endangered humans and their habitats around the world. It is a politics that takes the world rather than the nation as its political space and that takes the human species itself rather than specific citizenship, racial, religious, or ethnic groups as its object. [...] Whether it wishes or not, television has become the principal mediation between the suffering of strangers and the consciences of those in the world's few remaining zones of safety. [...] It has become not merely the means through which we see each other, but the means by which we shoulder each other's fate. (21, 33)

Ignatieff allows us to orient this inquiry toward the special relationship between television and humanitarianism. International humanitarian action of the *sans-frontières* variety is unthinkable except in the age of more-or-less instant information. As Rony Brauman has underlined, the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1864 is linked non-coincidentally to the possibility of high-speed transmission by telegraph, and contemporary relief operations since Biafra and Ethiopia have been born and bathed in the light of the television camera and the speed of the satellite uplink.<sup>10</sup> Humanitarian action seems not simply to take advantage of the media, but indeed to depend on them, and on a fairly limited set of presuppositions about the link between knowledge and action, between public information or opinion and response. In some cases, like that of the international human rights movement, as Alex de Waal has argued, the conditions of action rest all too heavily on the concept of “mobilizing shame.”<sup>11</sup>

In the humanitarian arena proper, the pioneering French activist turned politician Bernard Kouchner put the coordination between media and intervention in a simple epigram: “sans médias, pas d'action humanitaire importante, et celle-ci, en retour, nourrit les gazettes [without the media, there is no important humanitarian action, and this, in turn, feeds the papers].” Kouchner calls this “la loi du tapage,” the law of noise.<sup>12</sup> And among military thinkers, practitioners, and diplomats, the sense that television imagery or news dispatches “drive” decisions about intervention has by now gained a name of its own – “the CNN effect” – and is the topic of vigorous debates.<sup>13</sup>

What does it mean? Thanks to what is loosely termed “public opinion” in the media age, which displaces or warps of state institutions and power through emergent alternative centers of power like the media and non-governmental organizations, the so-called “famine movement” (or what Alex de Waal has nicknamed the “Humanitarian International”) has emerged as a political actor, and of a new sort: apparently unlimited by traditional notions of sovereignty, accountability, borders, interest, and the rest.<sup>14</sup>

We need to understand the “humanitarian action” which triumphed in Bosnia as something different way from either of the two obvious options: it was neither inaction (a passive acquiescence or a cover-up, a fig leaf that disguises the actual doing-of-nothing), nor a heroic new non-state politics of the sort anticipated by many of the founders of the movement. It was an action that – precisely because it offered the possibility of a reference not to national interest or the defense of the state but to what it called, alternatively, “human beings,” “victims,” “misfortune” or “suffering,” and did so by way of public opinion and the image, which is to say by reference to the order of the ethical – opened the possibility of a political



discourse that, for better or more often for worse, did not have to justify itself in political terms. In Bosnia, humanitarian action was action indeed, action that threatened to totalize the field of all possible action: not simply to hide inaction or offer alibis for not doing other things, but more radically to interrupt, to render impossible, to actively block or prevent those actions.

And this action had as its field or condition the image, sometimes precisely the image and sometimes more generally what we nickname “the media” or “real time.” Recall that for Walter Benjamin, in the Artwork essay at least, the invention of the motion picture introduced nothing less than a temporal explosion, “the dynamite of the tenth of a second,” such that in what remained, the “far-flung ruins and debris” of our daily lives or our familiar terrain, would open up “an immense and unexpected field of action.”<sup>15</sup> Film and today television do not only collapse and annihilate, as is so often said, time and distance – they also make unprecedented times and spaces available for action, real virtualities that are marked by the affirmation of possibilities of engagement, “action,” as well as by the negativity of this “dynamite.” Field of action, yes, but what kind of action? The answer is also Benjaminian, though this time in a different way. The privileged example at the close of the Artwork essay is war, what he labels the aesthetics of mechanized warfare, which he says is discerned more clearly or best “captured by camera and sound recording” and not the naked eye (242, 251). Today cameras don’t simply represent conflicts but take part in them, shape not only our understanding of them but their very conduct. We need to attend to these sounds and images not just as accounts of war but as actions and weapons in that war, as operations in the public field which today constitutes an immense field of opportunity for doing battle, as weapons in what we too easily call “image contests” or “publicity battles.”

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“There was a cameraman there” – this is a fragment from a news report about a man shot by a sniper in Sarajevo.<sup>16</sup>

Mr. Sabanovic got in the way at a particularly dangerous Sarajevo crossroads. That is why there was a cameraman there to film his near death. Because the spot is treacherous, the chances are good that a few hours of patience by a cameraman will be rewarded with compelling images of a life being extinguished or incapacitated. (12)

What difference does it make that a cameraman is there, as he or she so often is? No matter where, it seems, a camera regularly happens to be there, when something happens to happen. So much so that it has become a cliché, a veritable commonplace, to say that today things don’t happen unless a camera is there. Of course, it takes not just a camera, but an entire network of editing, transmitting, distributing, and viewing technologies – and agents – that extend out from the camera, to make what McLuhan so famously and confusingly called a global village.<sup>17</sup> But it begins with the camera and its operator, with their already having been there.

What the journalist here wants us to understand is the complex structure of that “there” – was it a place where cameras waited patiently for things to happen (a particularly dangerous crossroads), or a place where things happened because cameras waited patiently (compelling images of lives extinguished)? The camera is there because of the danger, but its silent witness transforms the event and its “there” – that is what matters here. Thanks to the camera, what it means for the event to occur, its taking-place, undergoes a mutation. The crossroads so precisely targeted in the sniper’s gunsight is also the blurred

intersection of what our impoverished theoretical vocabulary allows us to call only event and representation, occurrence and image. This confusion cannot be written off as one more version of a timeless ontological conundrum (which comes first?), nor caricatured as a postmodern prejudice for the discursive over the real, nor simply eliminated with a declaration of the moral superiority of the things themselves. The confusion itself is all too real and – especially in the case of events like those at this crossroads – it constitutes something like an exemplary ethico-political difficulty and opportunity for us.

What is at stake, finally, in this confusion is a certain experience and definition of public space and time, of publicity and of a crisis in our sense of public information and exposure today. The corollary, of course, of the cameraman's being there is that, in some sense, we are too. The camera metaphorizes the becoming-public of the event, because we who watch and listen are also caught in the intersection of the sniper's and the cameraman's viewfinders – not as potential victims exactly, but in some other sense as targets of those vectors (borrowing this sense of the word from McKenzie Wark in *Virtual Geography*).<sup>18</sup> What do we do in watching and listening? When I say “we,” I mean that hazy thing called the public, a rich concept sent to us by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and in need of extensive rethinking. If the public means us, us in our exposure to others, then today “we” cannot be something given in advance, not the sum total of all of us somewhere or sometime, not a community or a people but rather something that comes after the image, a possibility of response to an open address. The public, we could say in shorthand, is what is hailed or addressed by messages that might not reach their destination. Thinking about the images at hand, we could even say that what makes something public is precisely the possibility of being a target and of being missed.

So the television image constitutes a field of action – not just a representation of actions elsewhere but a field in or on which actions occur – a public field, we could say, but only if we're willing to part with some of the cherished predicates of that concept.

We can begin with this snapshot, or live feed. Somalia, December 1992. The first American soldiers of Operation Restore Hope land on an Indian Ocean beach at Mogadishu, met not by clan fighters or starving children but by hundreds of reporters, camerapeople, technicians ... whom, as it turns out, the American military had informed in advance of the time and place of the operation. Kouchner's claim that without television, there is no humanitarian intervention, seems to come true in a multiple and almost perverse way here: not simply that images – there, of starving children – could shame governments into action, but that armies will undertake humanitarian rescue missions for the publicity value alone, and that publicity could also bring the mission to an end.

What happened there? We are not finished understanding the complex of clan politics and paramilitary violence, the liquidation of the post-colonial and post-Cold-War state, famine and even starvation, and the succession of interventions, humanitarian and armed ones, and then nation-building which followed them.<sup>19</sup> But the images (from the starving children to the gun-belted fighters, the brightly-lit landing and the camcorder pictures of a helicopter pilot held hostage and a dead soldier dragged in the street) and the phrases (Mad Max vehicles, warlords, the photo op invasion and the CNN effect, and the Mogadishu line) have already decisively shaped the interpretation and practice of humanitarian interventions in the decade since that fateful night in the lights.<sup>20</sup>

The lesson of those lights was already clear, the morning after the event, to the grand old man of American foreign policy, George Kennan, who awoke that morning in December

1992 to watch the soldiers landing in real time, surrounded by reporters and interviewed on the beach, and offered a harsh assessment of the damage. He told his diary, and then the opinion page of the New York Times, that he had finally seen enough:

If American policy from here on out, particularly policy involving the use of our armed forces abroad, is to be controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry, then there is no place – not only for myself, but for what have traditionally been regarded as the responsible deliberative organs of our government, in both executive and legislative branches. <sup>21</sup>

Kennan – the architect of the Cold War, the author of the doctrine of “containment,” Mr. X himself – watches his era end on his television, not with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Europe, nor with the great borderless coalition and its triumph in the Gulf War, but with chaos on an African beach, disaster breaking out of new world order with such energy and confusion that it threatens to tear apart the institutions of government and publicity themselves. What is threatened in Mogadishu, not by the clans but by the cameras and the soldiers who are drawn to them, is nothing less than the basic structures of ethics and American democracy – responsibility and deliberation. The rational consideration of information, with a view to grounding what one does in what one knows, now seems overtaken and displaced by “emotion,” and responses are now somehow “controlled” or, better, remote-controlled by television images. What disappears beneath the image or behind the screen is the place of politics itself. There is, Kennan confesses, not only no place for him but no place at all for a decision, for the organs that regulate the link between knowledge and action. Television – that virtual place – displaces the public place, substituting emotion for reason, immediacy for the delay proper to thought.

In somewhat more complex, but no more theoretical, terms, Paul Virilio has suggested that this phenomenon, the displacement of the traditional rational-critical experience of the public sphere by what is nicknamed “emotion,” characterizes in general contemporary televisual publicity:

The space of politics in ancient societies was the public space (square, forum, agora ...). Today, the public image has taken over public space. Television has become the forum for all emotions and all options. We vote while watching TV. [...] We are heading toward a cathodic democracy, but without rules. [...] There is no politics possible at the scale of the speed of light. Politics is the time of reflection. Today, we no longer have time to reflect; the things that we see have already taken place. And we must react immediately... Is a real-time democracy possible? An authoritarian politics, yes. But what is proper to democracy is the sharing of power. When there is no longer time to share, what do we share? Emotions. <sup>22</sup>

This compelling immediacy of the media, the magnetic pull of the image and the microphone, has been testified to by the highest officials of our government and military. <sup>23</sup> Images, they certify, do make things happen and sometimes too quickly. We can and should dispute the contention that discussion or sharing disappear in the putative instantaneity of the live transmission (as if it does not have its own temporality, its own internal structure, its delays and frames and decisions) but there is no debating the claim that the image (and especially the image of catastrophe) has the power to circumvent or pressure political institutions, and not just in democracies. <sup>24</sup>

In Somalia events did seem dictated by this CNN effect, with the attendant displacement of deliberation by emotion and hence the short-circuiting of the public sphere, whether it was a matter of the starving children, the proud international forces, or the dead American soldier. But what then of Bosnia, where everything seemed to be visible as it happened, and yet, on the contrary, it is said, virtually nothing happened in response? As David Rieff wrote, “no slaughter was more scrupulously and ably covered” and “it [did] no good” – “we failed”:

the hope of the Western press was that an informed citizenry back home would demand that their governments not allow the Bosnian Muslims to go on being massacred, raped, or forced from their homes. Instead, the sound bites and “visual bites” culled from the fighting bred casuistry and indifference far more regularly than [they] succeeded in mobilizing people to act or even to be indignant. (223, 222, 216).

If the lesson of Somalia was that cameras made things happen, and sometimes too quickly, Bosnia seems to tell the opposite story: a brutal combination of overexposure and indifference. Somalia was hyperactivity; Bosnia inactivity, just watching. This was the clichéd meaning for which Sarajevo became the metonym. We are back to where we started: let me cite a few examples, from war correspondents themselves, of the trajectory that travels from a certain expectation about the putative power of images to despair at their failure and even to anger, from Mogadishu to Sarajevo.

Only nine months into the siege, in a dispatch that won her the first of many prizes for coverage of Sarajevo, CNN’s Christiane Amanpour reported on a creeping despair with the televisual:

Take any day in the life of this city. The sights are so familiar, perhaps they have lost their impact. ... Around noon another mortar falls. More people are killed and injured. They are rushed to the hospital. The emergency ward is full. Surgeons labor to save lives. The operating theatre is awash in blood. Early on in the war the staff were patient with photographers, hoping perhaps their pictures would shock the world into doing something. The world has done nothing and the doctors have lost hope and patience. <sup>25</sup>

Years later ... Giles Rabine, reporting live for France 2 from Sarajevo on July 13, 1995, just after the fall of Srebrenica, commented simply that, after thirty-nine months of televised siege, “the Sarajevans have had enough of being interviewed, being filmed, being photographed; they’ve had enough of us watching them die, live, without trying to do anything to save them. And who’s to say they’re wrong?”

They were not wrong. Roger Cohen of the [New York Times](#) took this as the premise for his searching front-page report on “postmodern war” in the besieged city one Sunday in May 1995. Postmodern for many reasons, but mainly because it’s a matter of images, of what the reporter finds to be a dangerously blurred boundary between event and representation, and of a certain paralysis, the apparent re- or dis-location of the field of knowledge and action to the screen of a monitor and the entry of those representations back into the field of the things and events they ought simply to represent. Here is his lead for an article headlined “In Sarajevo, Victims of a ‘Postmodern’ War”:

Faruk Sabanovic, a pale and gentle-featured youth, is a thoroughly modern victim of war. He lies in the main hospital here with a video of the moment when he was shot and became a paraplegic.

There he is, outside the central Holiday Inn, walking briskly across the street, his hair ruffled by the wind. The crack of a shot echoes in Sarajevo’s valley. He falls. He lies on

his side. He is curled in an almost fetal position. A United Nations soldier looks on, motionless.

A Sarajevo man arrives, screaming abuse at the soldier, who eventually moves his white United Nations armored personnel carrier. This slight movement is enough to cover the civilian as he rushes out to retrieve Mr. Sabanovic, whose lithe body has turned limp.

"It's strange when I watch the video, I feel like it's somebody else," said Mr. Sabanovic, who is 20. "But I remember it so well. After I was hit, I felt my legs in my chest. Then I saw my feet. I tried to move them. But I could not. This United Nations soldier was looking at me. He did nothing. He just looked. For me, it was so long."

The scene is shocking, doubly so by virtue of the videotape. The civilian victim is not only crippled by a sniper but is also in possession of the images of his attempted murder. The reporter can thus not only interview the person but watch TV with him. And the image is somehow not just of Faruk Sabanovic or of what happened to him on the street in Sarajevo; it is for Cohen an allegory, an image of something else, more confusing, an image of the confusion and loss of orientation – in images – which have affected our sense of reality itself. Watching this tape, with its inert star next to him, Cohen seems paralyzed by the sight of people watching: "Faruk lies ... with a video"; "a United Nations soldier looks on, motionless"; "this United Nations soldier was looking at me – he did nothing – he just looked."

Thanks to images like these, we are all like that UN soldier, just looking, or like the cameraman, waiting. That is their rich allegorical meaning, their hermeneutic supplement: they mean the inaction that they demand of their producer and their viewer.

The images capture more than the maiming of Mr. Sabanovic; they capture the increasingly surreal and sordid nature of the three-year-old Bosnian war. A civilian is shot on a city street; a television cameraman, waiting at a dangerous crossroads to see somebody killed or mutilated, films the shooting; a soldier sent by the United Nations as a "peacekeeper" to a city officially called a "safe area" watches, unsure what to do and paralyzed by fear. The elements of this troubling collage are also elements of what some military analysts are now calling "postmodern" or "future" war.

In the tape, in the hospital, Cohen sees an image from Sarajevo and in it the whole new troubling thing metonymized. As the space and time of what happens shifts onto the screen, even "there" in Sarajevo, all sorts of boundaries are collapsing with it. He enumerates the transformation or the decay that coincides with the emergence of the videotape: states are replaced by militias or other informal groupings; armies and peoples become indistinguishable; central authorities disappear; and "live images of suffering, distributed worldwide, sap whatever will or ability there may be to prosecute a devastating military campaign." Looking is not acting, in Sarajevo or in New York, and for Cohen the diffusion of images goes hand in hand with a more disturbing dispersion or evisceration of the conditions of action: lost are centrality, authority, borders and clear distinctions, principles, and all the rest.

The triumph of images figures this for Cohen: images sap the will in war, he says, and yet paradoxically it is a war of images, fought with images.

Mr. Sabanovic got in the way at a particularly dangerous Sarajevo crossroads. That is why there was a cameraman there to film his near-death. Because the spot is treacherous, the chances are good that a few hours of patience by a cameraman will be

rewarded with compelling images of a life being extinguished or incapacitated.

A “compelling image” is, of course, a weapon, and the cameramen sometimes seemed like the best gunners the Bosnian Government had, being deprived of almost all other military equipment. Certainly most of the journalists in Sarajevo understood this, and recognized that their work was not simply impartial ... didn’t Somalia suggest, after all, that images could be compelling, that tele-guided public opinion could force action?

Cohen, in the late spring of 1995, has seen enough to withdraw that conclusion. There are no compelling images: “Thus, just as the world has long watched the crushing of Sarajevo – so endless as to become increasingly unreal – the people of Sarajevo may now watch from their hospital beds the moment they were crippled, so abruptly that comprehension is difficult.”

The image sparks a crisis, not just in action but in comprehension, and the sentence that speaks of it also tells the story of a more profound disturbance. “People can watch the moment they were crippled, so abruptly that comprehension is difficult,” he writes, but just what exactly happens so abruptly, the crippling or the watching? Surely Cohen means the suddenness of the rifle shot itself, caught on tape, but his dangling modifier betrays the ambiguity he is most alert to, the difficulty of discerning event and video repetition. In the face of this difficulty, Cohen proposes some reservations, or some objections, which although they are not formalized, and hesitant at best, do constitute something like a systematic critique of this ‘postmodern’ condition – it troubles him and with him, “reality”: Sarajevo becomes surreal, unreal, endless ... there is too much watching, too much mediation, even there in Sarajevo, so that even the subject of the image is himself alienated from it, split from himself. “I feel like it’s somebody else,” says Sabanovic, now sharing the position of the immobilized one who just watches. The sniper and what Cohen calls “the twisted video” together reduce everyone to a paraplegic – inert, paralyzed by fear, just looking. And yet Cohen finds a moral for the story in the prone 20-year-old, “a strength and a conviction that rise far above the banal violence of his video with its succinct accounting of a directionless war in which civilians die live on camera.” Without direction, pulling the very subject of the image apart from himself, the war of “live death” comes to mean for Cohen at once an excess of imagery and a failure of the promise of those images – no action, no comprehension, only difficulty and a certain indetermination. Faruk Sabanovic, for his part, thanks the camera: the United Nations, he says, is “just here to ease consciences. ... And I know they brought me to the hospital in their ambulance only because the camera happened to be there. I have to say that I despise them.”

So in the end the two viewers of the tape disagree about its effects while agreeing that it has one, and these opinions recapitulate what I think represents the crisis of a certain idea of publicity. The symmetrical opposition of the interpretations – Mogadishu and Sarajevo – confirms that what is in question is the theoretical status and the actual function of the public image. Sabanovic believes in the CNN effect: “they brought me to the hospital only because the camera happened to be there.” Cohen fears that the camera and the watching cripples our responses, that “images sap the will.”

The strong version of his hypothesis has also been articulated by Jean Baudrillard, who thus forms a symmetrical pair with Virilio.<sup>26</sup> Baudrillard suggests that “Bosnia exemplifies total weakness” ... “the West has to watch helplessly,” in a “military masquerade where the virtual soldier ... is paralyzed and immobilized” (87). And “the Bosnians .... end up finding the whole situation unreal, senseless, and beyond their understanding. It is hell, but a somewhat

hyperreal hell, made even more so by their being harassed by the media and humanitarian agencies .... thus they live amid a type of spectral war” (81).

Some American commentators have drawn radical conclusions from this proposition, and although it is in a certain sense highly disputable there is nevertheless something extremely important at stake here, which this radicalization can help clarify. In a recent collection of essays, called *This Time We Knew* and edited by Thomas Cushman and Stjepan Mestrovic, the editors attempt the measure the significance of what seems an obvious failure ... the last time around, we might have been able to say we didn't know what was happening, but throughout the second genocide in Europe in this half century, we have no such excuse. Because of television and the rest of the “daily barrage of information and images,” it is not possible for “even the most disinterested viewer to ignore the grim reality of genocide.” Their “Baudrillardian” hypothesis:

Lack of action proceeds ... from the fact that the mediated images of the world are mere representations that lend an air of unreality to the things they represent. ... Media watchers lose touch with reality, ... stand passively by or engage in self-serving forms of ineffective action, ... [their] voyeurism and individualism feed[ing] on televised images of evil.” (79)

And that means that the crisis is not merely one of inaction. In fact, what is lost in Bosnia is nothing less than the Enlightenment, and with it the discovery of the public sphere as the site where knowledge and action are articulated. They feel obliged to ask, then, “whether there is any relationship between the degree or extent of public information and practical or moral engagement by those who receive it” (7).

The important point is that there is a sharp discrepancy between what we know and what we do, and this discrepancy has been neglected in most previous analyses. Yet this gap between knowledge and action is full of meaning for apprehending history as well as the present. In addition, this contrast causes us to rethink the success of the so-called Enlightenment project: the passive Western observation of genocide and other war crimes in the former Yugoslavia amounts to a toleration of the worst form of barbarity and gives us pause to wonder whether, behind the rhetoric of European progress and community, there is not some strong strain of irrationality that, if laid bare, would call into question the degree of enlightenment the civilized West has managed to attain at the century's end. (8)

It is not clear just how far these two are willing to go in “calling into question” the Enlightenment axioms that the “gap between knowledge and action” in Bosnia provokes. The specter of “irrationality” – always opposed to a normative reason – and the progressivist hint in the word “attain” suggests that they remain committed to the project that has become questionable. But what happens if we seize on this insight – that the Enlightenment and its public sphere are in question – and try to move beyond the simple desire to recover it, to rescue it from its temporary loss. Suppose it were, precisely, the problem ... What failed in Bosnia? We often say that we failed, and we imply that we are just this well-known public of the “so-called Enlightenment project.” But the more we rely on and retreat to the sense that the public sphere collapsed, the more we shore up just the notion whose apparent solidity may be implicated in the disaster. What if the belief in this public was part of the failure, if the faith in the obviousness, the evidence or self-evidence of the pictures and the automatic chain of reasoning they inspire, was not what failed but the very failure itself? What is at stake is the program which expects that, as David Rieff puts, “one more picture, or one more story, or one more correspondent's taped stand-up in front of a shelled,

smoldering building would bring people around, would force them to stop shrugging their shoulders, or like the United Nations, blaming the victims” – one more picture would force something to happen – what if just that expectation about information and illumination was part of the problem?

To draw out the most radical conclusion from Cushman and Mestrovic: what if it is some part of the “Enlightenment,” and not its failure but rather the faith we put in the informative power of images, that didn’t just fail to stop what happened but allowed it to go on? What if, because the cameramen and the images were there, and because they are supposed to make a difference simply by virtue of what they showed, the disaster continued?

Hypothesis: to the extent that we imagine or take for granted the articulation between knowledge and action, which seems to define the public sphere, it is bound to fail. But what can only be thought of as a failure in those terms is, in another sense, the success of a political strategy, and if we continue to think that images by virtue of their cognitive contents, or their proximity to reality, have the power to compel action, we miss just the opening of “new fields of action” (Benjamin) that they allow.

So what if we think about this understanding of publicity not as a failure or as the re-emergence of irrationality, but as an alibi, a conceit or a consolation? These are words I borrow again from David Rieff, in *Slaughterhouse*, who suggests that it is this that has failed in Bosnia: a naive hope, a consolation and a conceit, the consolation of images and the dream of public information. Here’s the collapsed public in a sentence: “People ... console themselves with the thought that once they have the relevant information, they will act. It is an old conceit” (41). “It was the conceit of journalists ... [:] if people back home could only be told and shown what was actually happening in Sarajevo ... then they would want their governments to do something” (216).

The conceit or fantasy of this kind of public sphere must, after Bosnia if nowhere else, contend with what we could call the rule of silence – no image speaks for itself, let alone speaking directly to our capacity for reason. Images always demand interpretation, even or especially emotional images - there is nothing immediate about them. This implies a second rule, that of unintended consequences or misfiring - the story of Bosnia is that of images which might have signified genocide or aggression or calculated political slaughter seemed for so long to signify only tragedy or disaster or human suffering ... and hence were available for inscription or montage in a humanitarian rather than a political response. So what failed in Bosnia is an idea or an interpretation – and a practice – of publicity, of the public sphere as the arena of self-evidence and reason ... an idea which now must be challenged, not to put an end to the public sphere but to begin reconstituting it.

As it happened, the images were open enough to demand only that we “do something,” and the problem concerns, in short, this something. The naive consolation is precisely that its content or meaning is self-evident, even analytically implied by the information itself, by “what is actually happening.” And “do something” they did, in fact, something which amounted to, as Rieff puts it in the sharpest phrases of his book, “administering the Serb siege” (147) and “became accomplices to genocide” (189). The combination of the traditional tasks of peacekeeping – which require military observers to be stationed on or between the front lines, and hence in the zone of any possible offensive military operations like air strikes – and the new humanitarian tasks of escorting convoys across lines of confrontation meant that the “humanitarian” operation was an active impediment to any other action. Not just the “fig leaf” which Rieff too lightly calls it (189) but an



affirmative choice: “the wish that there be no intervention” (176). And this project was best accomplished by undertaking the other intervention: stationing peacekeepers close enough to Bosnian Serb forces that they would either be targets of Western air strikes or easy hostages for the Serbs, and escorting the convoys that always made it necessary not to, as the UN put it, “compromise the humanitarian mandate” by antagonizing the aggressor. “This convergence of interest between the UN and the Chetniks was not an exceptional situation,” as Rieff says, but the very structure of the situation (175).

And it happened thanks to the images, from which we expected something rather different. But images, information, or knowledge will never guarantee any outcome, force or drive any action. They are, in that sense, just like weapons or words, a condition, but not a sufficient one. Still, the only thing more unwise than attributing the power of causation or of paralysis to images is to ignore them altogether. If they can condition some action – and indeed, in Sarajevo and elsewhere, that’s exactly what happened – then it is only at the risk of this very indirection, the unexpected outcome, we might say: here, the humanitarian one. We cannot, at least not without repeating what seems to me to be the basic strategic error here, not expect the unexpected – we cannot count on the obviousness of the image, fall for the conceit that information leads ineluctably to actions adequate to the compulsion of the image, precisely because images are so important. There is no compulsion, only interpretation and reinscription, and the image dictates nothing.

\* \* \*

This fate of the image – left to wander and to drift from context to context, nothing but surface and frame – is what we can call, borrowing words from the reporter in Sarajevo, its “banal violence,” the banality of a “succinct accounting” on video. The image has no guaranteed meaning, and remains only to testify, to demand, to induce a responsibility – even if, as Avital Ronell argues about the videotape of Rodney King being attacked by the LA police, “it is a responsibility that is neither alert, vigilant, particularly present, nor informed.”<sup>27</sup> The responsibility of the viewer is co-extensive with the lack of self-evidence of the image: it dictates nothing, compels nothing. It can always be used, though, which is to say that it can and must always be interpreted, and the terrible failure of Bosnia was that a certain understanding of the public sphere – “the thought that once [people] have the relevant information, they will act” – allowed or even produced an interpretive complacency. “Surely one more picture, or one more story, or one more [...] stand-up ... would bring people around, would force them to stop shrugging their shoulders” – nothing is less sure, less certain, precisely because we think that it is.

The question of surveillance teaches us, finally, that there is no ‘finally’ where its images are concerned. Images never speak for themselves, never make anything in particular happen, even if they seem often to make something happen and are now indispensable in war. In Bosnia, they opened a gap, issued a call, and in response came the humanitarian option, displacing all others.<sup>28</sup> This means that the accounting, however succinct, does not stop – the image remains, without guarantees, always available for reinterpretation and reuse, of necessity the focus of an endless vigil and a struggle for reinscription. The battle takes place in public, in fact the public sphere is constituted by the irreducibility of this battle ... not the public as the last refuge of that dream or consolation of information properly acted upon, but another public, space and time, virtual and visual and nevertheless real enough, tenuous, uncertain, where everything is open to abuse and appropriation ... shaky ground indeed.

\* \* \*

Some years ago, Virilio warned in *Le Monde Diplomatique* that, far from merely offering new opportunities for exploration or relaxation, the media of which telegraph, telephone, radio, and film were the merest announcements have by now radically accelerated and generalized the transmission of event and signification, and indeed absolutized it to the point of instantaneity, such that places no longer matter. He wanted us to believe that, when surveillance is ubiquitous and its output moves at the speed of light, new media now threaten to deprive us of places altogether, inducing not simply vertigo or disorientation but a more radical “de-situation.” In an age of real-time communications, of “instantaneous, globalized information,” Virilio saw nothing less than the disappearance of the world itself in a “tyranny of absolute speed”.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, the vertigo is absolute and unceasing, depriving us of ourselves. Far from creating a new world citizenry, a virtual community of humanity freed of allegiances to anything other than other humans as such, blown by the technologies of “anywhere” out of the local particularities of place and identity, what disappears here is humanity, the relation to the other. When what happens there happens here too, in real-time, for Virilio what we lose is the fold of reflection, the gaps and delays that make decisions possible and debatable, that divide them into and across more than one instance.

“This goes beyond CNN. Actually, CNN is history,” Virilio told a reporter. “And it has nothing to do with the current surveillance of parking lots and street corners by security cameras. [...] We’re witnessing today the deployment of a new, global tele-surveillance system whose impact will be far more profound than that of the traditional television.”<sup>30</sup>

But as surveillance goes global and speed crosses the barrier into instantaneity, do time and responsibility, and with them the possibility of democracy, disappear? Storage and montage happen in so-called “real-time,” of course ... excess time is built into the transmission, into the mediation that defines any technology of inscription. “No longer time to share”? Not quite.

In addition to the vertigo of acceleration, there is also a more subtle vertigo of deceleration, of slow motion. What Benjamin called “the dynamite of the tenth of a second” means that fast and slow cannot simply be opposed to one another. What is destabilized is the privilege of the present, the experience of the human subject and its self-present reflection (deliberation, reason, judgment), which would seem to regulate the transformations of speed. But only the most classical metaphysics of the subject and of presence can see in this the end of politics, the disappearance of the public sphere in the pure surface of the image. And only an excessive commitment to some ideology of the real imagines that time and decision evaporate in the light of the television screen. What speed teaches us is that this surface is itself folded, temporally or rhythmically complex and heterogeneous, that there is always an ‘interior’ lag which divides the subject from itself. It is this division which makes possible, in fact, the sharing that defines democratic conflict. We cannot simply say, ‘warning! slow down!’ – as if the distortions of speed could be undone and the self-identity of the present reinstated, and with them an anachronistic definition of the political, the public, and the instance of decision. We can say, though, that the vertigo of deceleration – the slow motion of even the fastest and most “compelling” image – tears us apart from our solid selves and opens the possibility of a decision, even of a properly political relation to others, in the question it poses. We are not quite out of time, but the image does not provide the answer for us either.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Thomas Keenan teaches media theory, literature, and human rights at Bard College, where he is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and directs the Human Rights Project. He is author of Fables of Responsibility (Stanford UP 1997), and editor of books on the museum and on the wartime journalism of Paul de Man. His current manuscript is called Live Feed: Crisis, Intervention, Media, about the news media and contemporary conflicts.

## NOTES

1.) Paris: Galilee 1999; Strategy of Deception, trans. Chris Turner, New York: Verso, 2000 (trans modified when necessary). "Hasty" because, as the example of Richard Falk shows, some left opponents of the war later became convinced of its necessity and justification. See "Kosovo Revisited," The Nation, 10 April 2000.

2.) Miles Hudson and John Stainer, War and the Media, Phoenix Mill (U.K.): Sutton Publishing, 1999: 300.

3.) Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, "I am Ashamed as a Man, ...," interview by Zlatko Dizdarevic, Oslobodjenje (European edition), 6 January 1994; <http://www.bosnet.org/archive/bosnet.w3archive/9405/msg00021.html>.

See also Lustiger quoted in Zlatko Dizdarevic, "What Kind of Peace Is This?," New York Times Magazine, 10 April 1994: 21.

"Here in Sarajevo, hundreds of TV crews parade before our very eyes; dozens of foreign journalists, reporters, and writers. Everything is known here, right down to minutest details, and yet, nothing ... ."

4.) "While America Watched: The Bosnia Tragedy," Peter Jennings Reporting, ABC News, broadcast 30 March 1994.

5.) David Rieff, Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West, New York: Touchstone, 1996: 140.

6.) Think of the feature films already available about the conflict in the former Yugoslavia: even skipping Marcel Ophuls' war reporter epic-doc The Troubles We've Seen, from the British Welcome to Sarajevo to the Spanish Territorio Comanche to the Serbian Pretty Village, Pretty Flame, the war apparently cannot be portrayed without putting a reporter and cameras at the center of the action, which is to say, the war can-not be presented and its story told without putting its immediate presentation and the tellers of its story, then and there, at the heart of the story itself. See "Media Art in the Balkans, a special issue of Afterimage 28, no. 4, January/February 2001, esp. the article by Dina Iordanova.

7.) Mark Danner, "The US and the Yugoslav Catastrophe." New York Review of Books 20 Nov. 1997: 56-64; "America and the Bosnia Genocide." New York Review of Books, 4 Dec. 1997: 55-65.

- 8.) And consider, if you can bear it, the former President of the United States, whose extraordinary (in so many ways) confession, in Kigali in March of 1998, of his and our inaction in the face of the Rwandan genocide put him squarely – and immobile – in front of the television: “Today the images of all that haunt us all: the dead choking the Kigara River, floating to Lake Victoria. [...] We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. [...] All over the world there were people like me, sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and the speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror” (“Remarks by the President to Genocide Survivors, Assistance Workers, and U.S. and Rwandan Government Officials,” 25 March 1998, Kigali Airport, <http://clinton4.nara.gov/Africa/19980325-16872.html>). For further information, see Samantha Power, “Bystanders to Genocide,” The Atlantic Monthly Sept. 2001: 84-108.
- 9.) Michael Ignatieff, The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience. New York: Metropolitan/ Holt, 1997.
- 10.) Rony Brauman, “La pitié dangereuse,” in Brauman and René Backmann, Les médias et l’humanitaire: Ethique de l’information ou charité-spectacle, Paris: CFPJ, 1996:, 9-60
- 11.) Alex de Waal, “Becoming Shameless: The failure of human-rights organizations in Rwanda,” Times Literary Supplement , 21 February 1997: 3-4.
- 12.) Bernard Kouchner, Le malheur des autres, Paris: Odile Jacob, 1991: 210.
- 13.) The literature on the CNN effect is already significant, including books (all in the Bibliography) by Benthall, Neuman, Seib, Minear et al., Strobel, Gow et al., Girardet, Rotberg and Weiss, Ignatieff, Moeller, Gowing and Livingston.
- 14.) Alex de Waal, Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa. Oxford: James Curry, and Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997: 65.
- 15.) Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Trans. Harry Zohn, Illuminations, New York, Schocken, 1969:, 217-251.
- 16.) Roger Cohen, “In Sarajevo, Victims of a ‘Postmodern’ War,” New York Times, 21 May 1995: 1. Cohen retells the story in Hearts Grown Brutal, 377-79.
- 17.) Marshall McLuhan: “As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree. It is this implosive factor that alters the position of the Negro, the teen-ager, and some other groups. They can no longer be contained, in the political sense of limited association. They are now involved in our lives, as we in theirs, thanks to the electric media” (5)
- 18.) McKenzie Wark, Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.
- 19.) See, on the trade of images for food, McKenzie Wark, “Fresh Maimed Babies,” Transition 5, No. 1, Spring 1995: 36-47.
- 20.) I have addressed some of these questions in “Live from .../En direct de ...,” in Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, Back to the Front: Tourism of War/Visite aux armées: Tourismes de guerre (Caen: F.R.A.C. Basse-Normandie, 1994), 130-163.
- 21.) George Kennan, “Somalia, Through a Glass Darkly,” New York Times, 30 September 1993: A25.
- 22.) Paul Virilio, L’écran du désert: Chroniques de guerre, Paris: Galilée, 1991: 71-72

23.) Larry Minear, Colin Scott, and Thomas G. Weiss, The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action, Boulder: Lynne Reinner, 1996: 46

24.) See Samuel Weber, "Television; set and screen," in Mass Mediauras: Form Technics Media, Stanford; Stanford University Press, 1996: 108-128.

25.) Christiane Amanpour, Cable News Network, 26 January 1993. That was in January 1993, when she was just back from Somalia; in July of that year she again reported something similar:

Those of us who've stayed in Sarajevo – which is the majority of the press corps – have been welcomed throughout most of this year. People have looked at us as their conduit to the West, and perhaps have looked at us as being able to jog, perhaps, some conscience in the West. The attitude towards us has been changing – certainly, in the last month. People have seen that really nothing has changed, that promises have been made and broken – promises from the Western allies have been made and broken. And people look to us and sort of vent their frustrations on us. ... So the tide is turning somewhat, but that's a measure of people's despair, I suppose. (CNN, Larry King Live, 30 July 1993)

26.) Jean Baudrillard, "When the West Stands In for the Dead" and "No Pity for Sarajevo," trans. James Patterson, in Thomas Cushman and Stjepan G. Mestrovic, eds., This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia, New York: New York University Press, 1996: 87-89 and 80-84.

27.) Avital Ronell, Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994: 305.

28.) See David Campbell, "Atrocity, Memory, Photography: Imaging the Concentration Camps of Bosnia – The Case of ITN versus *Living Marxism*," Journal of Human Rights 1 and 2, forthcoming 2002: "it is simplistic to assume that an image, in and of itself, can provoke a particular reaction the possibility of which did not exist prior to the production of that image."

29.) Paul Virilio, "Alerte dans le cyberspace," Le Monde Diplomatique, August 1995; "Red alert in cyberspace," trans. Malcolm Imrie, Radical Philosophy 74, November-December 1995: 2-4.

30.) Bruno Giussani, "For a Philosopher, the Net Is a Whole New Perspective," New York Times on the Web, 9 December 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/library/cyber/euro/120997euro.html>

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