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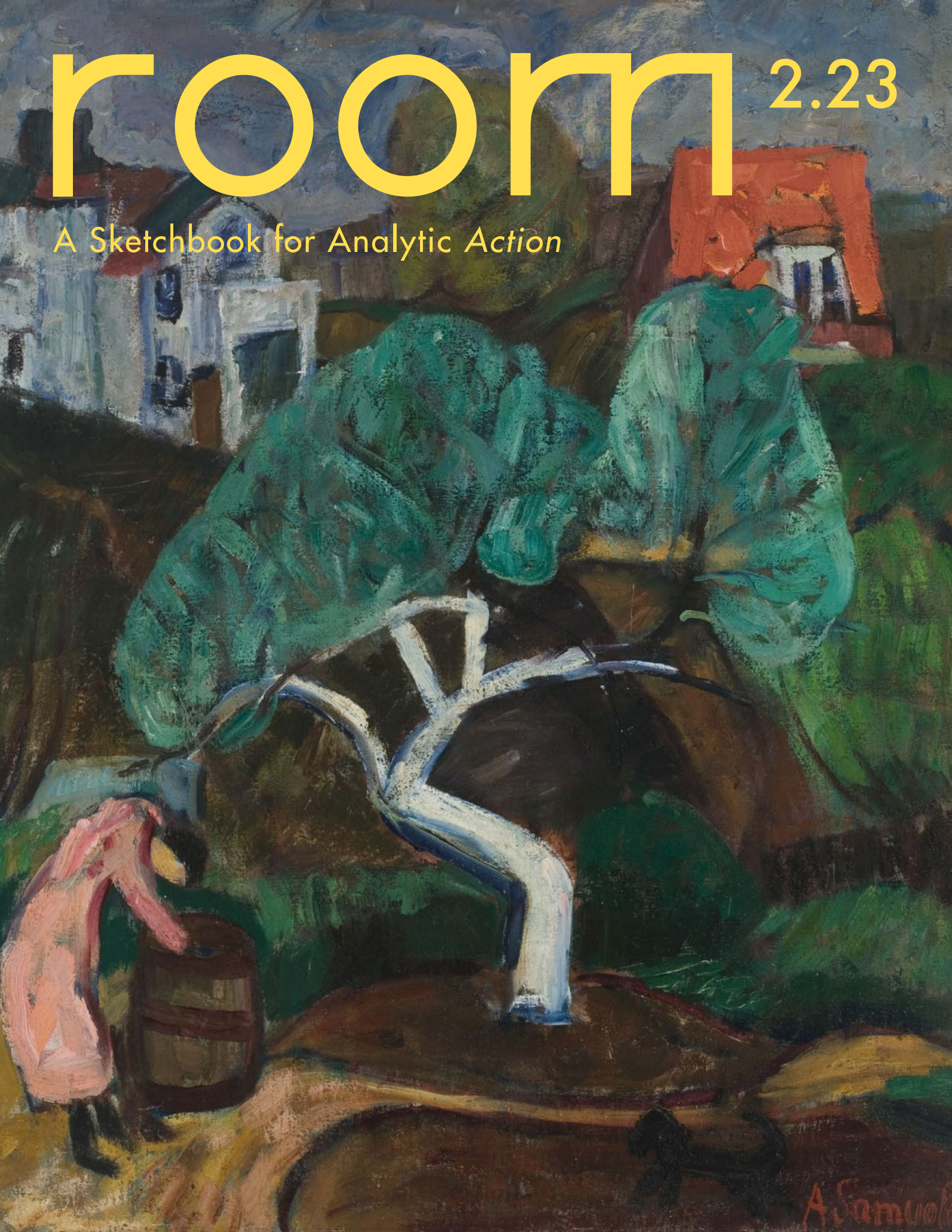
A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*



ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action* was started as a newsletter by a group of New York–based psychoanalysts in response to the trauma of the 2016 US election. Since then *ROOM* has become an award-winning, interdisciplinary magazine that is a forum for mental health professionals, poets, artists, and activists to engage in community-building and transformation by shedding light on the effect our cultural and political reality has on our inner world and the effect our psychic reality has on society.

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A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*
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Funding has been provided by the American Psychoanalytic Foundation through the American Psychoanalytic Association.

Contributors

Zoe Beloff's work has been featured prodigiously in festivals and exhibitions from the Whitney in New York City to the Pompidou Center in Paris to the M HKA Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp. With a bent toward social activism and public engagement, she favors working (like the great mid-twentieth-century muralists she is in conversation with) in community settings that are free and readily accessible to the public.

Karim G. Dajani, PsyD, is a clinical psychologist and psychoanalyst in private practice with a specialization in treating bicultural individuals. His research and writing include publications on psychological resilience and culture. He focuses on the part culture plays in determining an individual's role within a collective and on the experience of cultural dislocation.

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Limor Kaufman is a psychologist and psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City. She is on the faculty of Adelphi University, the School of Visual Arts in New York City, and the Israeli Leadership Institute in Israel. She is the recipient of the 2009 and 2015 New York University Psychoanalytic Society Grant awards for her writing and teaching about psychoanalysis, creativity, and art. Limor is a graduate of the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, the Organizational Consulting program at IPTAR, and the Couples Therapy program at the William Alanson White Institute.

Keiko Lane is a queer Okinawan American writer and psychotherapist currently practicing in California. Her work has appeared most recently in *Between Certain Death and a Possible Future*, *Queering Sexual Violence*, *The Feminist Porn Book*, *The Remedy: Queer and Trans Writers on Health and Healthcare*, and the *Feminist Wire*.

Debra Fried Levin leads NOPE: Neighbors Defending Democracy. For most of her career, she has raised money for political candidates and nonprofit groups, including US House, Senate, and vice-presidential candidates, as well as Florida State University, the Democratic Leadership Council, and NARAL, among others. She founded and leads a fundraising coaching nonprofit, MatchDotDollars (MatchDotDollars.org). Since 2017, working as a volunteer, she has spent most of her time leading NOPE.

Era A. Loewenstein, PhD, is an adult, adolescent, and child psychoanalyst. She is a training and supervising analyst at the San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis, where she serves on the faculty. Dr. Loewenstein presents locally, nationally, and internationally on various topics, including trauma and perversion. Since 2016, Era has been teaching and writing on fascistic states of mind. Her 2018 paper "The Agitator and His Propaganda Machine: Donald Trump and the Road to American Fascism" was published in *Fort Da*. Recently Era contributed to and edited a *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* issue dedicated to *Perspectives on Populist and Fascistic States of Mind* (2023).

Mireille El Magrissy is a second-year respecialization candidate at IPTAR and a photographer. She received an MA in psychoanalytic studies from Birkbeck, University of London.

Kerry L. Malawista, PhD, is a writer and psychoanalyst, a co-chair of New Directions in Writing, and the founder of the Things They Carry Project, offering virtual writing workshops for groups in need of healing. Her essays have appeared nationally, including in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Boston Globe,* and *Delmarva Review*, which nominated her for a Pushcart Prize. She is the coauthor of *When the Garden Isn't Eden* (2022) and *Wearing My Tutu to Analysis and Other Stories* (2011) and co-editor of *The Therapist in Mourning: From the Faraway Nearby* (2013) and *Who's Behind the Couch* (2017). Her novel *Meet the Moon* was released in September 2022.

Kim Curts Mattheussens studied German and English literature at Ball State University, the Katholische Universität Eichstätt, and Westfälische-Wilhelms Universität Münster, and creative writing at the Bluegrass Writers Studio at Eastern Kentucky University. She is an alum of the DISQUIET International Literary Program in Lisbon. Her work is published or forthcoming in the *Athena Review*, *Punt Volat*, *Southword Literary Journal*, and the *Common*, among others. She lives in Los Angeles.

David Morse has worked as a graphic artist, a schoolteacher, and an investigative journalist. He has hopped freights, restored old houses, raised three sons, and published a novel, *The Iron Bridge* (Harcourt Brace,1998). Caught up in the Darfur crisis in 2005, he journeyed to South Sudan in 2007 with support from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and the Nation Institute's Investigative Fund. His articles and essays on human rights and environmental issues have appeared in *Counterpunch*, *Dissent*, *Mother Jones*, *The Nation*, *Salon*, *TomDispatch*, and elsewhere. He is now writing a memoir about growing up white in the segregated schools of Arlington, Virginia, in the 1950s.

Eric Muzzy is a cinematographer, photographer, and printmaker. He has toured Europe and the US doing lighting for theater and has worked as a programmer in the libraries of the American Museum of Natural History and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

Mia Pixley, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and artist who uses her cello, voice, and music performance to study and represent aspects of self and other, community, and the natural world. Mia has a PhD from CUNY Graduate Center in NYC and a professional studies diploma in cello performance from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (class of '18). She has studied with Wendy Sutter (previously of Bang on a Can), Jennifer Culp (previously of Kronos Quartet), and Mark Summer (previously of Turtle Island String Quartet). Mia has performed on Grammy award–winning albums, Pixar shorts, and award-winning off-Broadway musicals and has toured annually on Windham Hill Winter Solstice Tour, led by multi-instrumentalist Barbara Higbie. Mia collaborates with artists within the San Francisco Bay Area and New York City and lives in the California Bay Area with her husband and their young son. In July 2021, she released her first full-length album titled *Margaret in the Wild*, which was followed by a collaborative poem-and-music project called *Passage*, created with psychoanalyst and poet Forrest Hamer, PhD, in April 2022. You can find all of Mia's music on streaming services and her Bandcamp.

Rachael Peltz is a personal and supervising analyst, faculty member, and co-director of the Community Psychoanalysis Track at the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California. She is an associate editor of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. She has a private practice in Berkeley, California, and works with adults, adolescents, couples, and families.

Diane Raptosh teaches creative writing and co-directs the program in Criminal Justice/Prison Studies at the College of Idaho. Her eighth book, *Hand Signs from Eternity's Yurt*, was published by Kelsay Books in June 2022. Her collection *American Amnesiac* (Etruscan Press) was long-listed for the 2013 National Book Award in poetry. The recipient of three fellowships in literature from the Idaho Commission on the Arts, she served as Boise Poet Laureate (2013) and Idaho Writer-in-Residence (2013–2016). In 2018 she won the Idaho Governor's Arts Award in Excellence.

Annita Sawyer, PhD, is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist with a BA and PhD from Yale, in practice for forty years. Her essays have appeared in literary and professional journals and are included among Best American Essays Notables List. Her prize-winning memoir, *Smoking Cigarettes, Eating Glass*, was published in 2015. Working to diminish the stigma of mental illness, she speaks to clinicians around the country. Her story highlights the dangers of fads in psychiatric diagnosis and treatment, the long-term effects of early trauma, shame, and secrets, and the power of human connection to heal.

Francesca Schwartz, PhD, is a New York based artist and practicing psychoanalyst. Her work has been shown in several solo shows including "Inscription" at Mu Gallery in Chicago (June 2022); "Inscription" at M.David & Co. Gallery in Brooklyn (February 2021); and "The Space Between" at Studio 1608 in Miami (November 2018); and group shows including "Space 1," at La Sapienza University in Rome (March 2022); "Between States" at M.David & Co. Gallery (September 2022); "Arrested Heart," at Postcards from the Edge, New York (February 2019); "Winds over Haiti," Hampton's Artists for Haiti, Southampton, New York (June 2018); "Prayer," New York School of the Arts, New York; and "Female," the National Academy Museum & School, (October 2017). Her work appears on Artsy.com and has been included in the publications *ROOM 2.18* (November 2020) and *Women United ART MAGAZINE* (May 2022). Several of her of her residencies have culminated in group exhibitions at the M.David & Co. Gallery in Brooklyn. She has shown recurrently at the Lichtundfire Gallery in New York, including "A Whiter Shade of Pale" (January 2023); "Out of Bounds" (October 2022); "Speed of Light" (June 2022); and "Featherweight" (May 2022). Schwartz has an upcoming solo exhibition at Strati D'Arte Gallery in Rome in June of 2023.

Cathy Sunshine is a freelance writer and editor in Washington, DC. She volunteers with NOPE: Neighbors Defending Democracy and edits their weekly newsletter, which goes out to activists across the country. She is the author of the blog *Third Age*, which considers the political and personal experiences of women in midlife and beyond.

Sara Mansfield Taber is the author of the new memoir *Black Water and Tulips: My Mother, The Spy's Wife* and the award-winning *Born Under an Assumed Name: The Memoir of a Cold War Spy's Daughter*. She has also published two books of literary journalism and the writing guides *To Write the Past: A Memoir Writer's Companion* and *Chance Particulars: A Writer's Field Notebook*. Her many essays and reviews have appeared in publications such as the *American Scholar* and the *Washington Post*. A practicing social worker and psychologist with a specialty in cross-cultural human development, she has coached writers and led writing workshops at universities and literary centers and for a wide variety of communities for the past three decades.

Elizabeth Wallace, MD, FRCPC, is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst living in Calgary, Canada. She maintains a private practice of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, and teaches and supervises psychotherapy in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Calgary. She is president of the Western Canada Psychoanalytic Society and Institute and a training and supervising analyst with the Canadian Institute of Psychoanalysis. She is a graduate of the New Directions program in psychoanalytic writing and enjoys writing creative nonfiction with a psychoanalytic bent.

Micki Wierman is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Howell, Michigan. She is also a fourth-year adult candidate at the Michigan Psychoanalytic Institute.

Contents

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Navigating Care

"We are all migrants through time."

—Mohsin Hamid, Exit West

Eighty years ago, Albert Camus wrote, "I want to express by means of the plague the suffocation from which we all suffered and the atmosphere of threat and exile in which we lived. At the same time, I want to extend this interpretation to the notion of existence in general." The chorus of interlocking voices heard in *ROOM* 2.23 echoes Camus's experience of suffocation, exile, and threat while challenging us to revisit the "notions of our existence" and make new use of what we find.

"What is it that makes us worry or wonder about each other? What are we tracking for?" Keiko Lane asks in **"Viruses, Vaccines, and Proximities: A Story in Five Scenes."** "It's the evolution of a kind of queer epidemiological cruising. A relationship to risk. A relationship to proximity. Each virus," she writes, "asks something different from us in how we navigate care and contact. They overlay each other, multiplying in complexities."

The authors in *ROOM* 2.23 open the playing field and suggest that not just each virus but each war and each migration "multiply in complexity" and ask for something different from us.

Mireille el Magrissy reminds us in **"The Coptic Saint of Lost Objects"** that not everything can be integrated. "To resemble, to look like, to take from, to appear in reference to another is partial and fragmented." As you will see, in this issue of *ROOM*, we might consider adding the word "uncanny" to this list.

Karim Dajani, Era Loewenstein, and Rachael Peltz each had parents who were forced to leave their homes suddenly. And for each, to quote Karim Dajani, "The wounds of war, forced migration, dispossession, and dislocation (have) never fully healed."

Dajani was born in Beirut to a Palestinian family expelled from Jaffa in 1948. Along with carrying childhood experiences of irreparable violence, Dajani carries an early memory of being told that Freud was "a great Jewish philosopher who taught us that people forget what they already know." **"Oedipus in Arabia"** turns what he can never forget into theory. In it he extends Freud's Oedipal complex across "the spectrum of human differences." The cornerstone of psychoanalysis, Dajani teaches us, the Oedipal complex "must entail consolidating one's core ethnic identity while opening it to the world in a dialogical manner, in a manner of mutual influence."

Looking back from her home in the United States, Loewenstein in her essay, **"Fascism: The Appointment in Samarra,"** questions if there is any place in the world that is truly safe from fascism. "The course of our lives is capricious; wars, atrocities, and political upheavals shape our destiny. Ideologies and propaganda mold our views of what is real and what is true."

Era Loewenstein tells us that her father fled Vienna on March 11, 1938, the day of the Anschluss, and arrived in Jaffa carrying only a suitcase and "full of ideals and hope… for a just, liberal, secular, socialist new Jewish homeland." Fourteen years later, Loewenstein was born in what had formerly been called the Dajani Hospital. The Dajani Hospital, a place where Palestinian, Jewish, and international medical professionals worked together, had been named after its director and founder, Dr. Fouad Ismail Bakr Dajani. In her essay Loewenstein tells us, "By the time I was born, the hospital's original name was already erased. Now it was called Tzahalon Hospital." "Tzahal" is not just the Hebrew word for "rejoice," but it is also the acronym for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). "By changing the name of Dajani Hospital to Tzahalon, an entire history was wiped out. Not only the life work of Dr. Dajani but also the rich history of the Palestinian residents of Jaffa."

When I asked Karim Dajani if he knew that he shared

the original name of the Tzahalon Hospital, he told me it wasn't a coincidence. It turns out that Fouad Ismail Bakr Dajani was a relative of his. The uncanny figures large in psychoanalysis. Freud was very interested in what, in German, is called "Unheimlich," which quite literally means "something that has the feel of home but is not home." There was something that felt uncanny about these authors arriving in *ROOM* 2.23 together, both coming from and not coming from the same home.

Rachael Peltz's parents also experienced "indescribable horrors in Nazi Poland and post-war Germany" before coming to the United States. In **"A Parable for Our Time,"** Peltz says she is glad her parents did not live long enough to experience the total disillusionment that she has come to feel. "How much my identity—my joie de vivre—depended on keeping what they [my parents] thought about life here alive. How much my own experience of hopefulness was contingent on some very basic principles of democracy that America, the best country, represented."

Uncannily, taken together, these authors help us appreciate, perhaps, that we are all "vacationing in countr(ies) balanced on a fault line and ravaged by forces of nature as well as politics," as Elizabeth Wallace writes in **"What the Pandemic Did to My Mind."** Peltz's despair is as palpable as Loewenstein's, and she "guards," in her words, "against plummeting." Like Dajani, Peltz encourages us to embrace a new psychoanalytic mission and "find a way to realize internal social objects imbued with hope in a world gone bad."

But how is hope realized in a world "gone bad"? How do we balance on a fault line?

Thirty years ago, the poet Adrienne Rich also wondered how to find the power to imagine a way of "navigating into our collective futures."

"If you are lucky," Dajani writes, "you learn to make art with your pain."

Both Annita Sawyer's **"Depathologizing Psychic Disruption"** and David Morse's **"Lightning Sketch"** speak to finding that power through art. Sawyer writes that we must begin "to see things with new eyes, (and) "stop pathologiz(ing) human reactions to genuine trauma." And in his deeply personal account of aging, Morse literally illustrates how art and life require "giving your love to a subject, opening yourself wide until you can see what the subject is telling you."

The psychoanalytic art of listening, mourning, and recalibrating offers a powerful road map with which to navigate into our collective futures. Reading **"Russian and Ukrainian Therapists Speak,"** we accompany Micki Wierman as she bears witness to unimaginable horror and extraordinary resilience. "...to read and bear witness for one another is a very simple and magical thing," writes Sara Taber in **"Hallowed Spaces."** "Just placing one's experience outside one's own body," she writes, "is mysteriously transformative—sometimes in tiny and sometimes in enormous ways." Being part of a community, Taber has learned, is simply a matter of "being seen, of being accepted and appreciated, of being part of something, taken in, and looked after."

Before writing *The Plague*, Camus wrote in his journal, "What lights up the world and makes it bearable is the feeling which we usually have of our links with it—and more particularly what joins us to other people." Linking associations, ideas, and communities is analytic action. In light of this analytic mission, *ROOM* has opened its doors to creative community projects, as well as to readers' responses to essays. Like *ROOM*'s online art gallery, the new community projects section holds a special place in *ROOM*'s analytic archive as we continue to move through these times together. ■

ROOM 2.23 Community Projects

The Things They Wrote is a book of essays and poems collected from Kerry Malawista's *The Things They Carry Project*.

@Work: Beloff's and Muzzy's public art exhibition at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research of fourteen essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community Action—NOPE: Cathy Sunshine's interview with participants of the community organization NOPE: Neighbors for Defending Democracy.

Passages: Mia Pixley's interdisciplinary project based on a poem by Forrest Hamer.

Reader Responses to _ROOM_ 10.22

David Lotto on Sebastion Thrul's "The End of the End of Psychoanalysis."

Scott Baum on Michael Eigen's "Touching Psychic Fibers."

Our arms are wide open for submissions through May 1. We would love to hear from you.
analytic-room.com/submit

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OEDIPUS IN ARABIA

I heard of Sigmund Freud as a child at one of the group gatherings that took place at our house in Beirut. My parents were Palestinian intellectuals with a large social circle. Groups gathered in our living room almost nightly. During one of these evenings, when I was eight years old, a guest uttered, "Sigmund Freud suggests children are sexual and that we all have this thing he calls the Oedipus complex." Some people around the room expressed indignation. I pressed him to tell me more because I felt excited about what he was saying. He told me Freud "was a great Jewish psychoanalyst who taught us that people forget what they already know." I was gripped from the inside out because I was always trying to forget what I already knew. *One day*, I thought, *I will study Freud's works.*

My childhood was spent trying to survive the material impact of living through a war. I had to flee, leaving behind scores of despairing people I loved. The wounds of war, forced migration, dispossession, and dislocation never fully heal. If you are lucky, you learn to make art with your pain. I imagine Sigmund Freud was one of the lucky ones.

I traveled a long and winding road before I was able to train to become a psychoanalyst, to fulfill my childhood dream. Psychoanalytic institutes are collectives. They are run by groups of volunteers with coordinated practices. They have a culture. This seemed self-evident to me. And yet psychoanalytic institutional collectives appear committed to a worldview that denies the centrality of the links between groups or cultures and the unconscious.

The institutional cultural practice of denying the centrality of culture and the collective puzzled me. After all, much of Freud's pain, and humanity's pain for that matter, was linked to racism, poverty, and war. He was a Jew living in a place and time of rabid and virulent anti-Semitism. His father did not have much money, and the family struggled. He was discriminated against in academia for being Jewish. He witnessed the ravages of WWI and lived through the buildup to WWII. He was forced into exile to save his family. Our personal histories, a Jew from Vienna and a Palestinian from Jaffa, are ironically similar.

In my training, the Oedipus complex was presented as the central organizing principle in the unconscious of individuals and described as a family drama that revolved around the management of sexual and aggressive impulses toward parents and siblings. That made some sense, but like it was for Freud, the sources of many of my problems were the results of racism, poverty, war, and dispossession. These are large-group problems. They involve culture and the coordination of thought and practice in large groups of people and between large groups. What does psychoanalysis have to say about the links between large-group cultural practices and the unconscious of individuals?

The types of answers institutional psychoanalysis provided were unsatisfactory to me. According to this view, the group and its culture are secondary to individuals and their instincts. Racism, war, oppression, and poverty are the results of individuals behaving badly and corrupt leaders having an outsized influence on the group. Those who tried to conceive of the problem in terms of cultural practices and unconscious social systems were expelled or obscured.

Ideas about the centrality of culture and collective in the structuring of the unconscious have been largely walled off, extruded from our canon. Nevertheless, they reappear. A central idea that keeps blooming in the cracks of concrete walls regards the social unconscious in all its permutations or the ways groups and their cultures are reproduced in individuals and the ways individuals reproduce their groups and their cultures in their perception, thinking, and comportment.

Freud's ideas about culture were cultured in that they reproduced the cultural assumptions and positions of his large group—Colonial European culture. He struggled to see the ways his mind was ethnic, structured by the cultural practices of his place and time. His unanalyzed Eurocentric social unconscious compelled him to equate European culture with civilization. He took his point of observation to be absolute and saw other groups and cultures as less civilized or more savage. In doing so, he reproduced a glaring social problem—the belief in the supremacy of one's culture that tends toward the denigration of difference and the oppression of Others.

Freud was advised to reconsider his views about the role cultural and social systems play in structuring the mind. In 1927, the first American psychoanalyst, Trigant Burrow, published a groundbreaking book where he suggested the unconscious is structured by arbitrary social systems or cultures. He agreed with Freud's elaboration of the dynamic unconscious and the centrality of sexuality, but he also saw the mind as being fundamentally social because perception is mediated by shared social coordinates or ideas. He coined the term "social unconscious" and defined some of its properties. No good deed goes unpunished. Freud expelled him from institutional psychoanalysis and excised his theories from our canon.

The unconscious, for Burrow, is both universal and particular or ethnic. It is universal in that all people have an unconscious, and it is ethnic in that "arbitrary social systems" or cultures produce different ways of seeing, thinking, and being in the world. Cultures consist of shared ideas and practices that make communication between individuals and the coordination of practices among small and large groups possible. From this perspective, a human subject is inseparable from the group and its cultures because the group's cultural system is mental. The mentalization of cultural systems produces a social unconscious that ties the individual to their groups and their cultures in a most fundamental, obvious, and deeply unconscious way. The mind is private and dynamic while being fundamentally relational and social.

Trigant Burrow suggested a "social developmental model" that contains uncanny similarities to Winnicott's "individual developmental model," particularly Winnicott's ideas about the earliest stages of development, where infants learn to give up omnipotent modes of thinking by recognizing their separateness and dependence, and the hard limits of reality. The successful negotiation of this "primitive" phase of development, according to Winnicott, allows the child to give up their omnipotence, accept their dependence on others, and develop a capacity for concern and the ability to play and work.

Similarly, Burrow suggested that the social dimension of our unconscious is gripped by the illusion of our group or culture's absolutism (compared to Winnicott's individual omnipotence). We (large groups and the individuals that make them up) take our cultural and psychological position to be fixed and absolute—"Our way is natural or godly or superior." From a fixed absolute position, we compare everything down from us, locating ourselves at the apex and others downstream from us. According to Burrow, this is a social developmental problem. Giving up our group's and culture's absolutism is as necessary for group development as giving up our individual omnipotence is necessary for individual development and growth.

What would a resolution of the Oedipus complex that includes culture and collective in its basic conception of the individual-collective look like? It would entail the mournful recognition and the working through of our individual omnipotence *and* group absolutism. On the individual level, we work on accepting our dependence on people and on managing our destructive impulses toward them. On the social level, the work consists of giving up the illusion of our group's and culture's absolutism and seeing others as existing relative to us rather than beneath us. This is as much an individual task as it is a group one. Expanding our analytic culture to include insights on the group and its cultures is taking action on a group level, a precondition for group maturation.

Combining the two levels, we can say that the Oedipus complex is about the management of aggressive and sexual instincts and drives toward parents and siblings *and* about becoming a member of a group with an ethnic identity and particular cultural practices. In other words, the Oedipus complex is ethnic. Its analysis must entail consolidating one's core ethnic identity while opening it to the world in a dialogical manner, in a manner of mutual influence. This, to me, is about the respectful application of psychoanalysis across the spectrum of human differences.

People from different cultures and social positions are fundamentally different while being entirely the same. This is a living paradox that needs to be accommodated in our theories and practices. In embracing the ways my culture, ethnicity, and social position are not like yours, I became more able to see the many ways your culture and ways of being are like mine. ■

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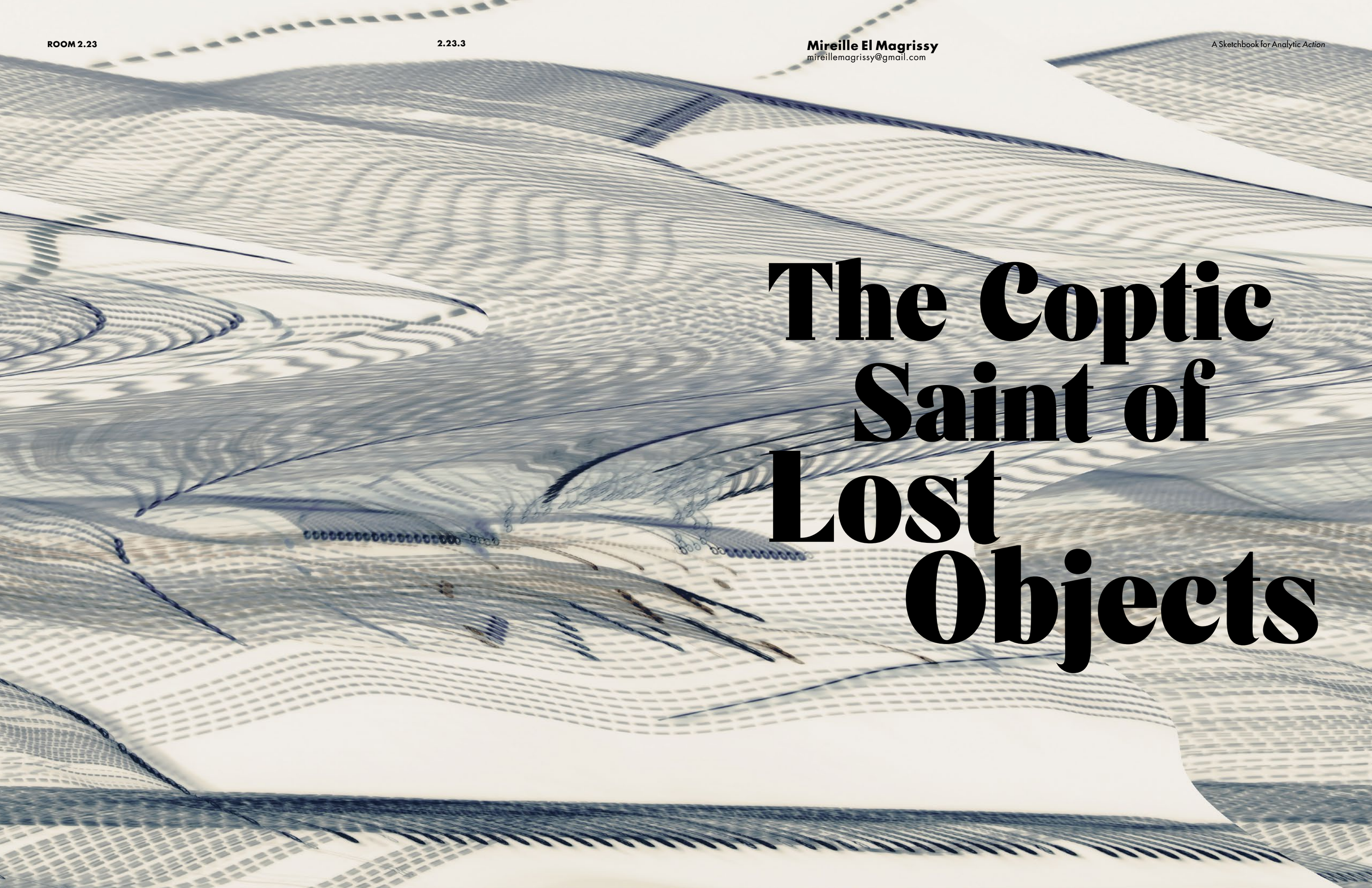

The Coptic Saint of Lost Objects

Stop here!

The police officer calls out, waving his arms in my direction.

Can you see that you have just crossed a red light?

It is late December. I am driving past the same square that I come across almost every day when I am in Cairo. It's the same one that I used to pass on my commute from home to school every morning growing up. I remember looking out from behind the glass window, suspended and held in time by the dreamy winter fog. There was an eeriness about the unusual quiet of a perpetually bustling city on those empty early-morning rides. Scanning the cityscape across the Nile River, I would spot the Cairo Opera House, the Cairo Tower, and the National Egyptian Museum. I mark these places in my mind's eye every time I pass by them like a tourist visiting for the first time. As though I still need to pin them on Google Maps and follow the blue line to know how to get to them.

I continue to ask: How do I belong to them and they to me? Can I access and transmit something of them and them of me? Moving within space inside my own internal reveries throughout childhood, I never retained street names and their corresponding visual markers. I didn't know the square I passed every morning was called El-Galaa Square until I was older. I came to notice the names of squares after the role and significance of Tahrir Square in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Through the imagined possibilities produced by the symbol of the square, I began to question and search for meaning behind other meanings. Behind images, regressions, power dynamics, landmarks, ruminations, ruptures, separations, and associations.

Your ID? the officer immediately asks.

It's neither one nor many. It is constituted by deviation. It cannot be biologized, but it is not separate from it. It is somatic, but it doesn't have separate organs. It is an overlap between nature and culture.

You were driving between two lanes. Did you realize this?

I am neither here nor there. I am preserving myself while witnessing that it's a privilege to afford self-preservation without constant fear of dislocation.

Where were you heading?

I am destined to an object. We should affirm this object, but we should also negate activity that comes from an object.

He examines my ID card, turning it over from front to back several times.

I just want to tell you that I like your name. Can you pronounce it for me? It's not Arabic, is it?

We are reminded that not everything can be integrated.

He reaches inside his pocket and takes out a picture of what looks like a Coptic Christian saint.

Now remember, look at him next time you don't know where you are heading, and he will help you find your way.

Is this the famous saint of lost objects? I wonder. I am taken back to when I was eleven years old, on a day when I lost a watch that I really loved. It was a blue toy watch you could ask any question to, and the words "yes," "no," or "maybe" would appear on the display. I recall a sense of disorientation in that moment of not having this object to ask my questions to. It seemed to have fallen into the sea while I was swimming, disappearing from sight in an instant. I can see myself at my aunt's house, sitting and sulking on a leather chair with my wet swimsuit still on, leaving a permanent water print on my seat. The grown-ups were not happy about me ruining the chair. I was consumed with searching for my lost watch.

I can hear my aunt's consoling voice while I was crying a great deal. She sat me down next to her on the bed and told me that she had an idea. We could pray to a particular saint together who helps people find lost things, and maybe with his guidance it will appear. My aunt's saint had a French name. It was Saint Anthony, Antoine, of lost things. The officer's saint's name is Saint Wanas, Coptic, ⲁⲃⲃⲁ ⲓⲱⲁⲛⲛⲏⲥ, Arabic, القديس ونس. I look at the object in the officer's hand, a photograph inside a plastic cover wearing away at the edges. He reaches into the cover to pull out the picture and give it to me. I thank him for the thought and tell him to keep it for himself.

Here is an offering of an image of a saint instead of a fine or a request for a bribe. He is letting me off the hook because he and I share something in common that we can silently locate. An affiliation to a minority group of Christians in Egypt. Religion is required to be written on national identity cards. Legal identity is intertwined with one's given religion, and for Christians certain personal status matters are governed by the church rather than the state. An embodiment of histories and practices, institutions and affiliations influences the inflections of Egyptian, Arab, Christian, Coptic Orthodox, colonized, colonizing, classed, and gendered layers of selfhood.

The officer sees his gesture as a moral deed and an exchange of solidarity. Or maybe it's an attempt at flirtation, because we also know that the traffic rules are not rigidly being followed by anyone anyway. I happen to be the one driver needing divine intervention today. He overlooks the transgression of one law for another we have in common through the idea of a shared minority identification. Mythical aspirations, connections to saints, miracles, and revelations sustain a melancholic sense of loss and longing, the fantasy of a lost object, the image becoming both a resistance and a subjugation, an act of rebellion as well as a collusion with other forces of authority.

As he gives me back my ID, his curiosity ensues… *But you don't look Egyptian. Who do you look like? Mama or Baba*?

It depends where you are looking from, the margins of the image or the center. To resemble, to look like, to take from, to appear in reference to another is partial and fragmented.

Releasing me, the officer provides me with further unsolicited directions.

If you want to turn back, you can take this left and go around the square again. If you wish to carry on, you can reverse just a tiny bit, take a right, and continue all the way across the bridge toward the river.

I repeat the same drive around the square a few more times, like a Sufi dervish dancing to a beating drum or a transfixed worshipper circling the Ka'aba, caught up in the pulsating sounds of familiar traffic. Across the bridge, the scattered scenery slowly begins to turn into the tall buildings of the Manhattan skyline, merging into the Hudson River. In a state of seemingly constant jet lag, I map my direction on Google Maps, finding my way back home to and through psychoanalysis. I use the same subway lines almost every day. Yet I still search the difference in the duration of time between each train and trace the names of the different stops to decide my direction. Each potential option a yes, no, or maybe.

Yes. I'll take the B train today. ■

PHOTOS: MARIOLA GROBELSKA

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What the Pandemic Did to My Mind

I became aware of a fault line forming in my mind as reports of a spreading viral infection appeared in the news. I was on vacation in Guatemala in February 2020, a welcome break from my busy psychoanalytic practice in Calgary. I arrived eager to study a new language and explore the colonial city of Antigua. I also happened to be vacationing in a country balanced on a fault line and ravaged by forces of nature as well as politics. Antigua bore the mark of disasters in its ruined but atmospheric facades. It was in this most vulnerable of locales that I felt the shifting of tectonic plates in my mind as COVID-19 went viral in the space of only a few weeks.

The tremors in my psyche were signaled by a strange aversion to reading. I was perplexed, as I am a voracious reader while on vacation, reveling in the opportunity to escape into thrillers or to delve into the next picks for my book club. However, to my astonishment, linking words together on the page became arduous. My paperbacks languished. In retrospect, my mind was starting to alter, under pressure from a world of stealth particles that had become threats to my thinking.

My sense of disorientation was no doubt magnified by being far from home and immersed in novelty. My crisp, early-morning walks to the language school couldn't have been more different from my daily trips to my office in winter-clad, resource-rich Calgary. I passed through cobblestone streets vivid with purple jacaranda blossoms and ruined facades of earthquake-torn buildings, all overseen by volcanoes keeping a rumbling watch over the city. The smell of tortillas frying in hole-in-the-wall shops filled the air, as bevies of uniformed children chattered on their way to school. My husband and I met daily with our Spanish tutor, Anna, under leafy trees in a little park full of international students sitting at tables with their local teachers. The chirp of Spanish words rose to join the chorus of birds above us. Anna not only introduced us to Spanish but provided an intimate window into daily life in Antigua, so distinct from ours.

Through my Spanish lessons, I was discovering words rich with history, linking them together to connect to the people around me and to make deeper meaning of my experience in this fascinating culture. This was one side, the creative side, of the mental fault line that was opening up in me. On the other side of the crevice, my mind felt fractured and estranged. My access to news was digital and disembodied, as my rudimentary Spanish was not up to the task of speaking to locals about the impending viral storm. My cell phone became an extension of my arm as I was driven to try to make sense of what was happening. I, like so many of us, had no frame of reference for this invisible COVID threat. As with the smoke and ash rising daily from nearby Mount Fuego, were these viral signals merely foreboding or imminently dangerous?

When the Canadian government announced a mandatory fourteen-day quarantine for anyone entering Canada, beginning on the very day of our return from Guatemala in mid-March, my fear ignited. The feel of the world had altered so radically in the space of only a few weeks. How had we traveler citizens so rapidly transformed into pariahs, outsiders potentially carrying pathogens into our own country? We had become dangerous "others" alongside the COVID virus. My only experience of quarantine was when I had red measles at age six, more than fifty years previously. I remembered lying in bed in the dark, with cool cloths on my feverish forehead, covered in a spreading red rash, and attended to by my anxious mother. She was anxious because she was no stranger to the ravages of infectious disease. My mother was born during the Spanish flu pandemic, and her cohort, unlike mine, bore the impact of disabling infections such as polio. No doubt my associations to this early childhood quarantine contributed to forces pulling my mind to a more primitive, and divided, mental space.

The early days of the pandemic created a miasma of vast uncertainty in the world that seeped into our collective minds. Mental fault lines throughout the population manifested in paranoia and a preoccupation with scarcity, along with polarization of the world into "good" and "bad" people, places, and countries. My own anxieties were fueled by surreal photos of empty shelves in our local grocery store, forwarded by our son as he attempted to fill our larder in anticipation of our arrival home. A powerful wave of annihilation anxiety was sweeping through the population, leading to panicked stockpiling of toilet paper and canned goods, betraying a regressive focus on basic bodily needs. As my mind fractured, so did the minds around me.

PHOTO (PREVIOUS PAGE): KONSTANTIN MISHCHENKO

To my puzzlement, into the vacuum created by my failing ability to read and think plummeted a mindless word game called Wordscapes. I downloaded this digital game onto my cell phone for reasons that I could not explain at the time. It appeared harmless. The game involved moving six or seven letters around on the screen to create as many words as possible in a limited time. I later realized that Wordscapes really means "word escapes," and escape into this strange virtual space I did, compulsively, without awareness that this "symptom" that I developed in Guatemala would flare during my quarantine and inflame me for almost two years during the pandemic.

My digital compulsion was astonishing to me, as I was not really into screens. I had never played a game on my phone before, had not watched television in years, and video games held little appeal. I preferred paper books with pages to e-readers. Yet I spent more and more time engaged in a consuming arranging of letters, losing sleep, and rationalizing that it was "good brain exercise." This was very strange behavior, and I now attribute it almost entirely to COVID regression and the resulting fault line that opened in my mind.

As a psychoanalyst dedicated to and fascinated by words, it is not surprising that I was drawn to words while under duress. However, in my professional work, I use words connected to the body through emotion and metaphors, words used creatively and symbolically. In contrast, my escape game involved manipulating words in a concrete rather than a symbolic way, as collections of disparate letters. The meaning of the words was irrelevant to the game. But crucially, unlike COVID-19, this word puzzle could be solved. I was attempting to self-soothe through an action symptom. And as with addictions in general, one can never get enough of what does not satisfy. My own experience of mental fracturing has helped me comprehend the tidal wave of addictions and mental health problems that struck alongside the viral pandemic and which I have lived through with my patients. While my fracturing was delimited and without serious consequences, my experience was humbling, then and now.

Fortunately, on the other side of my mental fault line, across the chasm from "word escapes," I maintained what I now think of as a nourishing "mind glue." During my quarantine, I continued with my Spanish lessons online and signed up for Duolingo. "Duo" is two, a dyad, a relationship with language that I continued almost daily throughout the pandemic. My Spanish words connected me to my tutor, Anna, and to all those who speak Spanish as their mother tongue, people I wanted to converse with and learn about. These lively words are imbued with relationships and bodies. They are words that touch, in contrast to the lifeless, random letters of my game. My early Spanish lessons were all about "¿Como te llamas?" and "¿Que haces?" Who are you? What do you do? How are you? How do you feel? Relationally infused words helped me to stay alive and connected with myself and others, particularly when my mind was under attack.

The concept of autoerotic capability has been helpful to me in considering the impact of quarantines, lockdowns, and isolation on the minds of myself and others. Autoerotic capacities are the grown-up equivalent of the infant sucking her thumb. These capacities allow us to have a fantasy life, to imagine being with others, and to be alone in a creative space. Such capacity is crucial to keeping one's mind intact when under strain. As I understand it now, my Spanish lessons were an autoerotic wellspring that helped me counter the eroto-sensory deprivation of isolation and virtual work. In contrast, my addictive symptom was a stimulating but poor facsimile. Given that autoerotic capacities vary greatly between individuals, I wonder if those who managed COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions most successfully were those best equipped to maintain and develop their autoerotic capacities. Music, art, storytelling, learning, baking sourdough are not just hobbies but an exercise of autoerotic capability.

Charles Darwin tells us that it is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one most adaptable to change. Eventually, fully vaccinated and less preoccupied with the viral invasion, I lost interest in playing my word game without even noticing it. I found it hard to imagine what had driven me. And I had accumulated streaks of hundreds of days on Duolingo. My mind had imperceptibly healed, as I adapted enough to this strange new world to mend my mental fault line. I was relieved when I was able to enjoy books again, savoring the turning of pages rather than the driven flicking of my fingers across a screen.

When the viral catastrophe is behind us, I wonder how I, and we, will carry not only the antibodies but the psychic fault lines inscribed in us by living through a pandemic. Will our minds smolder and smoke like Mount Fuego, forever vulnerable? Or will we emerge essentially strengthened? ■

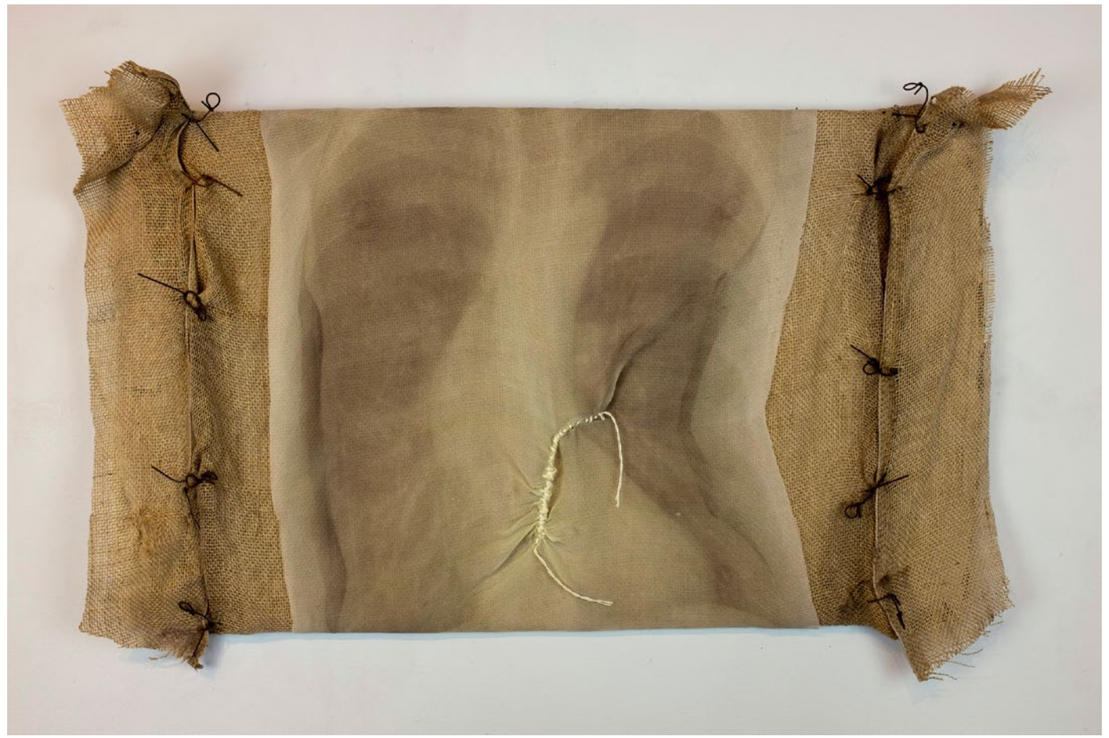
I am interested in the word, the image, the symbol. I am in love with bone. I am fascinated with the body and the end. The body is an impermanent landscape which we cannot truly know until we have also contemplated its disappearance. Part of this encounter rests on inhabiting my body as a woman. The blood flows mysteriously and then departs, marking seasonality. I meditate on corporeality and femaleness. Always the questions: What does the body retain? What is encrypted? What is memorialized? I am drawn to elements of bone, dye, chiffon, paper, wood, and found objects. I like some materials for their precision, others because of their elusiveness. Once in hand, alchemy takes over, and what happens is unexpected. So it goes, as the unconscious emerges. I tear apart, unravel, and desecrate in an effort to get to the center. I collage to bring cohesion to what feels fragmented. I assemble what is fragmented within myself and those I have lost. I devour. I cannibalize. I resurrect. By altering and reassembling the image, I encounter the space between longing and loss, memory and erasure, permanence and dissipation. I inscribe experience, even as it recedes. The body is inscribed; the word is written. We linger in some ways, yet we are destined to vanish. I bear witness while I am here.

Untitled1
2023
42" x 113"

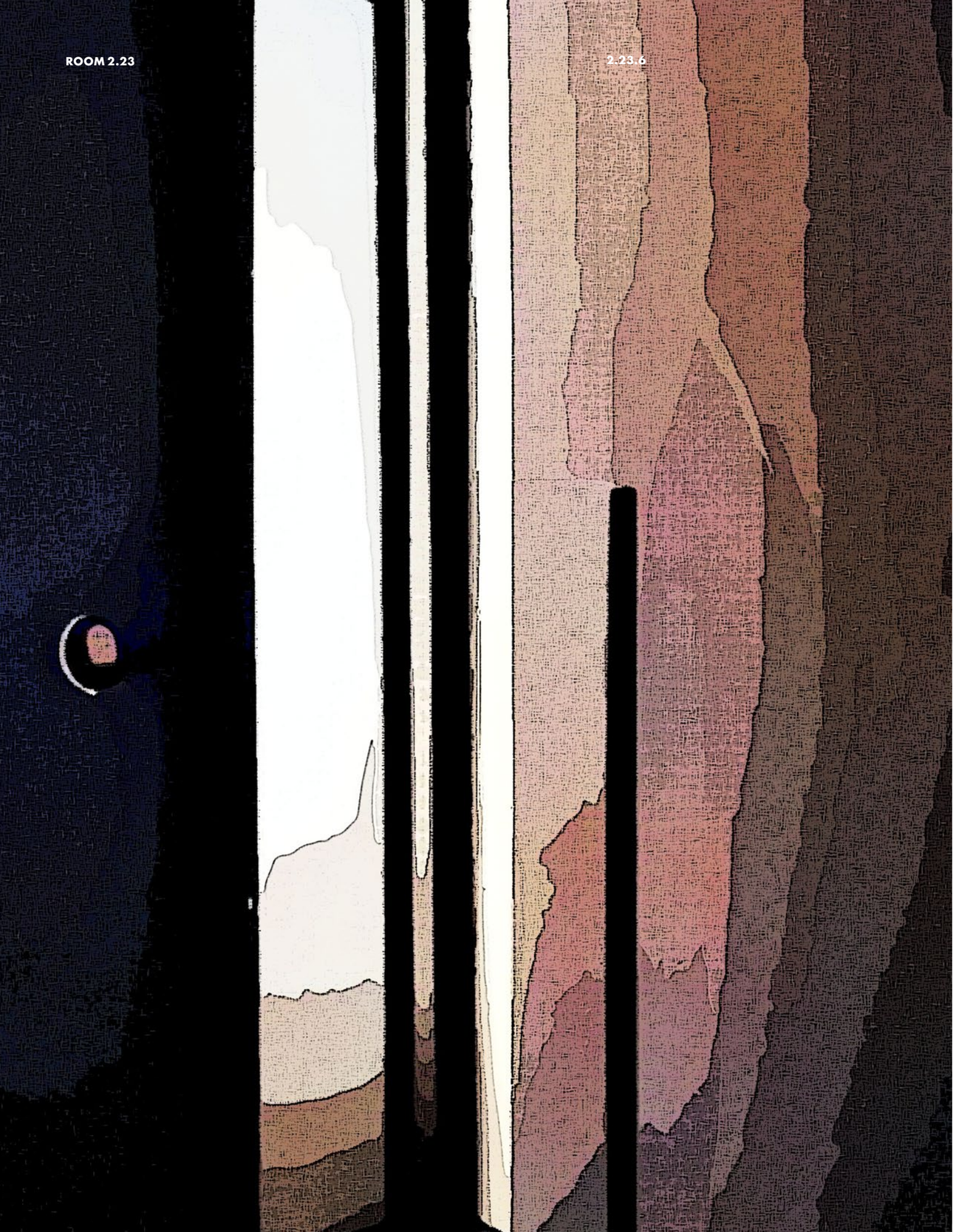
No Regret IV
2022
48" x 14" x 57 "

Passing Through
2023
50" x 34"

Not Moving
2023
41" x 65"



Return to Water
2023
17" x 31"



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Hallowed Spaces

I have been thinking a lot lately about what it is that makes for a sense of community, of being seen, of being accepted and appreciated, of being part of something, taken in and looked after.

As I think back on my life, I have most felt a sense of community in the least likely places. I was raised abroad, and all through my growing-up years, I often found myself feeling foreign and out of place when I set foot in my passport country, while overseas, at odd moments, in places I had the least right to do so, I would feel accepted and taken in. This experience has repeated itself throughout my life.

One moment that stands out for me is the dark, bone-chilling moment in 1978 when my boyfriend and I arrived at dusk at the remote field station in Patagonia, where we were to study whales for the next eighteen months. The caretaker of the camp was nowhere to be found, and the house, set on a vast, empty bay in the bleak southern Argentine steppe, was locked tight. The sea was roaring, the winter wind was gusting madly, we were instantly chilled to the bone, and we had no idea what to do. We had next to no Spanish, were dressed in ragged hippie jeans, and possessed of only the ignorant, blundering willingness of youth. After half an hour of wondering which thornbush we should sleep under, a truck arrived from over the cliff. A wizened Patagonian couple who knew us not from Adam or Eve—or perhaps only as Adam and Eve—magically stepped out of the old Ford. The old man, in an ancient beret and thin jacket, with quiet, self-assured dispatch, built a fire in a ring of thornbushes and set upon it a slab of mutton pulled from the truck. His wife, patting us and cooing soothing phrases we could barely understand, punctuated frequently with "*pobrecitas*," for "poor little ones," then handed us sizzling morsels of meat set on hunks of old "campo bread" from a burlap sack, as the man shared with us swigs of wine from a seasoned leather bota. After assuring themselves that we were fed, the sparkling-eyed old couple then squeezed us into the cab of the truck with them and drove us for half an hour over a rough dirt road to their home. Once there, in the tiny abode that consisted of a kitchen and a bedroom, they ushered us into the one additional room: a guest room possessing two simple cots. In that hallowed, lightless space, the lovely old woman, cooing her motherly chant, motioned us to climb into the beds and tucked us in.

That night, though the wind howled and we were utter strangers to our hosts, and though our only communication, really, was through the body, I felt utterly and thoroughly seen, accepted, embraced, and looked after. (Loved.) I felt, immediately, "in community."

Over the course of the next months, we got to know Don Pepe and Dona Sara well through that great human gift that adds to the sense of connection begotten via the senses. Through language, we traded with the couple stories of our lives and exchanged our perspectives on the world, and as we got to know other warm Patagonians, my initial sense of community deepened.

In some ways, that experience, and the many experiences I have had, of often feeling utterly alone in the world and then utterly cared for, have shaped, without my awareness, the work I have done throughout my life. Trained as a social worker and psychologist with a specialty in cross-cultural human development and become, by pure need and instinct, also a writer of literary nonfiction/memoir and personal essay, I have found myself, for the last three decades, using the teaching of writing to foster a sense of community. Offering a space for people to simply express their feelings and pour their experiences onto the page, to share their heartfelt tales, and to read and bear witness for one another is a very simple and magical thing. Love tumbles around the room; people hold hands in the face of what life casts us. Just placing one's experience outside one's own body is mysteriously transformative—sometimes in tiny and sometimes in enormous ways. On the page, you can see yourself and what you think more plainly. The experience of writing in a nest of safety, where participants write simply for the sake of self-expression, in a context free of competition and judgment as to the "quality" of the writing, where there is no seeking of recognition or publication, offers people a rare sense of comfort and freedom. The other great, great boon of these workshops is the wonderful sense of community and connection that results. Writing and sharing writing with others in an atmosphere of witness, solidarity, and support is deeply confirming. We gain a deep sense that we are all united in this human odyssey. ■

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The Things They Wrote

Sharing our stories helps us to understand our experiences and begin to move forward in our lives. One year after the devastating COVID-19 pandemic overwhelmed the world's healthcare system, the *Things They Carry Project* was launched, offering free online writing workshops (co-led by a therapist and writer) for frontline workers. TTC workshops offered our nation's nurses, doctors, and other frontline workers a safe space to write about all they endured–from exhaustion to terror to hopelessness–and a supportive group to hear their stories. Writing groups connected these brave workers, and now we, too, can listen to their voices. This collection offers a selection of the powerful and moving stories shared by the group participants, giving us all the chance to witness and empathize with their experience and its aftermath.

The *Things They Carry Project* is a national community project in which dozens of volunteer writers and therapists lead writing groups for frontline health care workers to tell their stories and find hope together. *ROOM* is honored to publish *The Things They Wrote*, a collection of their essays and poems. The book is available for free in *ROOM*'s online community project alcove or preorder a print copy.

CLICK HERE

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Lightning Sketch

Ilse is just back from her mother's funeral in Germany. Not yet unpacked, she opens her carry-on suitcase in the kitchen and takes out a small framed something. She'd deliberately chosen a small suitcase to avoid the temptation of bringing stuff home from her mother's house—to leave such keepsakes to her three siblings and nieces. But everyone insisted Ilse should take this drawing, which her mother had kept displayed in the TV room alongside family photographs.

Our last visit was in June of 2019. COVID had discouraged Ilse from going back, despite her mother's decline in the three years since. But she'd called her mother every week to talk. Her mother was ninety-six, ready to die, and her passing was peaceful. At Mutti's gravesite, where the family buried the urn with the ashes, they tossed rose petals. Mutti loved roses.

Ilse handed me the drawing.

It's lovely, a pen-and-ink sketch of a small house, with the suggestion of a house next door. More than lovely. Something about it has magic. How do I put such evocation into words?

The lines give the house substance. The drawing is only about six by eight inches, but it has weight. The minimalist strokes of the pen convey essences, volume carved out of the space represented by white paper. Whatever sinews of domestic German architecture may show, it is a particular house with history, memory, lives inside.

Seen in a three-quarters view from the gable end, the edge of the roof shows just enough suggestion of sag to capture the work of gravity over time. The front steps emerge from a crisscross of lines, an angle of handrail. You expect to see someone stepping out the door. The moment belongs to the house. At the sun-washed gable end, a jumble of squiggles says rosebush; a few gestural pen strokes of window disappear into space to hint of more. The artist knew when to stop.

I look up. "This is great! Who's the artist?"

She smiles. "You."

Ilse points to the lower left, and I see it: my signature, modestly concealed under the squiggle of rosebush. Alongside it is the date: June 2019.

I'm dumbfounded. Also delighted—as who wouldn't be, to recognize genius and discover its one's own? But dismayed not to recognize my own fairly recent work. My dismay, I should add, is that of an eighty-one-year-old man with memory loss, a man haunted by the prospect of dementia, a man whose mother had Alzheimer's.

I let the delight win out.

"You don't remember?" Ilse asks.

After a few seconds' struggle, it comes to me by degrees—that time at our last visit when I sat sketching her mother's house. I can summon the feeling of sitting down on something—I don't recall what—the sensation of my drawing hand in motion, the intensity of my gaze, the freedom. And that moment of knowing when the sketch was finished, when to stop. I can call up those sensations now.

More vaguely, I remember handing it to Ilse's mother—a page from my sketch pad—feeling a bit like a schoolboy.

More interesting to me now, a couple of weeks after Ilse's homecoming and the initial shock of that sketch, are the directions it takes my thinking.

One such direction, beyond the unnerving lapse in memory, is simply how capricious memory can be, how selectively we remember, and—if I were to explore this in more depth—what determines those unconscious choices, if they can be called choices at all.

I remember some of the tiniest decisions old friends have made forty and fifty and sixty years ago—when, for instance, a friend in middle age declared she would no longer be bound by her mother's dictating the amount of orange juice she was entitled to drink in the morning. She decided on a larger glass. I remember other ephemera: old song lyrics (old advertising jingles, for god's sakes)—yet fail to remember who among my cousins, colleagues, and good acquaintances has died.

I remember very little of that trip to Germany in 2019—my first with Ilse—perhaps because, speaking no German, I often felt outside the circle of conversation. I kept to the sidelines. Hid under the rosebush.

I find myself wondering if that relegating myself to the sidelines figured in my willingness, outside any spotlight, to relax and rely more wholly on my artistic instincts—relax into the spontaneity that feeds creative breakthroughs in whatever I am doing.

I compared notes with my son Eli, a professional chef accustomed to the quick decisions that go with his training and his craft. He said those moments of letting go happened for him in cooking, as in playing tennis and shooting pool.

Yet another direction the incident took me included a small stab of regret: my decision decades ago to give up the visual arts for writing and teaching. I had shown early talent as an artist, but in my teens my lawyer father, who had weathered the Depression, dissuaded me from pursuing art as a career.

That untaken path haunts me, like the phantom limbs amputees describe. When another of my sons, Bob, showed talent and passion for drawing and painting, I encouraged him, much as I wish I'd been encouraged. Today Bob lives in a small village in the South of France, thriving as an artist and somehow patching together a living. I take joy in his creations and see in him the part of me that will always be an artist.

Bob responded to my e-mail query to say when he first arrived in Europe, speaking only English and isolated from surrounding conversation, he too had sketched with a different concentration. "In social situations," he observed, "we're constantly thinking of ways to respond, of moments in the conversation that will allow us to say something witty or intelligent, to feed our ego… The energy spent on that need does not allow us to create Art, because Art is about giving your love to a subject, opening yourself wide until you can see what the subject is telling you."

A few days before Ilse's return, I was walking in the woods with Eli, who was visiting to look after me in her absence. We came across an unusual sight: an ash tree from which lightning had ripped a great strip of living wood from the crown all the way down the trunk with such explosive force as to cast the strip aside, delaminating some of the wood fibers and curling them wildly like loops of frizzed hair.

I was entranced by the magic of it—the good luck and special karma attached to lightning-struck wood that goes back to ancient times, probably to prehistoric times.

We returned with a handsaw, and, at my direction, Eli cut off a twelve-foot-long piece that showed the strike most dramatically. We took it home. And while he cooked one of his inspired meals, I found a way to mount the strip of wood outside my house, alongside a door. Good luck for the house and its occupants. Eli was pleased.

At eighty-one, I need all the good luck I can find or create.

And Bob, in a follow-up e-mail, encouraged me to return to sketching—to let go of my old regrets and the sociopolitical complications and ego that cloy my writing, to give myself over to pen and paper and that love of a subject that might help me as an old man experience "the deep beauty of age!"

Not bad advice. So yesterday I walked onto the horse farm across the road, carrying a sketch pad and drawing pencils, using my cane to navigate the uneven ground. Concentrated on the horses. And was pleased to see their curves take shape on paper, their stance, their haunches, their power conveyed in a few loving lines. ■

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The Stages of Grief: A Guide

1. Pyromania
Kids snug in bed, you will meet him at the Chevron, your dead lover. You have walked two miles in heeled boots and darkness. You want to suffer. To feel, finally, *something*. He is waiting at the wheel, smoking a joint. A sweet smell shudders from the muffler on the long black DeVille. The jerrican is thirsty for cheap unleaded. A box in the back plays a twisted blue cover of the Supremes' "Come See About Me." You make off for Sepulveda Pass, feel his heat, slide close on the red leather seat. Skirball exit. Gas. Match. Breaking News calls it apocalyptic: 422 brilliant amber and citrine acres, the mansions of Bel Air in flames; at the Getty, medieval illuminated manuscripts, irreplaceable icons of faith, and van Gogh's *Irises* just barely saved; schools shut down for two days. You will wake up hungry for the first time in weeks.

2. Synesthesia
When your bereavement leave is up, go home for lunch every day to play piano. An urn sits in a brass box on the lid. One day you will play Chopin's "Funeral March" and smell him, your beloved, clean-shaven, anise and sidewalk after rain. In your left hand, repeated lenten B-flat and G-flat chords are the sweaty interior of worn black leather shoes, pacing. Melodic grace notes in the right hand are a citrus candy bouquet of wildflowers held behind his back. As the music progresses to a calming lullaby, you inhale the soft, wet coat of your childhood dog, the shampoo and stink after her bath, breath like marrow and chicken neck. A meadow opens. Fresh grass crisp sky. When the dirge arrives again, slowly, the two will slip away, leaving a heavy scent. Dark velvet roses.

3. Transference
Well-meaning people will say the word "closure." You close the door, step into the closet, breathe in the salty inner collar of your beloved's coat, searching the pockets for secret messages. Your sister places his clothes in a banker's box near the door. Your therapist says *your love needs somewhere to go*. Her words blow in one of those fierce Santa Ana winds, knocking off last year's leaves, awakening the apartment, which grows stilts, crosses over the 405, and sets down in a bare lot in West Los Angeles. An aging man spends his days walking your street, speaking in a golden language that piques and salves like ginger and turmeric and warm milk. When the rains come, give him the coat, the shirts. He will pace the sidewalk in worn black leather shoes at midnight, singing your name.

4. Atemporality
Linear time will be replaced by space and the solid continuity of things: the blue velvet chair, its mahogany armrests shiny and smooth like the knees of your beloved's favorite trousers. Time is a watch whose battery has stopped. The measurement of a wrist, not the measurement of a day. Circular time began when Hera batted away baby Hercules from her breast. The milk's spray a band of frozen time in dark sky. "Galaxios," from the Greek word for milk. The beginning of a cycle of desire and its denial. The world passes by in its silly progression. Time circles the system, which is flat like a pancake. There is no progress now. Time moves around you in constellations, so far away it cannot touch you. In this realm of no-time, you will find an unexpected freedom. Within it, air to breathe.

5. The Doppelgänger
From the window, a picture of morning gray greets you with its list of tasks. Dress, brush, wake the kids. In the kitchen, the surprise of last night's dishes, residue of wine and drowning ants, and on the cold tile floor the other you, wrapped in pale yellow bathrobe, heart held to chest like a delicate animal. The you that is you rolls her eyes, chops up cucumbers and carrots for the kids' lunches, smearing Nutella on a croissant for one, onigiri and small sausages cut in the shape of octopuses for the other. Lipstick and heels, backpacks and sneakers. One by one, each steps gently over the other you that is you, the one who sleeps at the threshold, still waiting for whispers from the beloved to come in from the crack under the door. Under the eaves, a house finch lines its nest with dull feathers. Along the garden path, red tulips raise their fists to the sky.

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Vaccines, Viruses, and Proximities

A Story in Five Scenes

1.

I'm catching up with a friend who asks if I've had the monkeypox (mpox) vaccine. He and I know each other through the particular lineage of queer writers obsessing over AIDS. We have different generational and embodied experiences of queer plagues, and we've both been profoundly shaped by them. He tells me about his new job and the hetero coworkers who were confused by his easy decision to get the vaccine. We laugh together about the assumptions of heteronormativity, that a domestic partner equals monogamy. I haven't gotten the mpox vaccine, I answer him. There is still a vaccine shortage, and in the current shape of my life, I'm not at risk.

This wouldn't always have been true. In the ACT UP years of a still-unfolding and catastrophic HIV crisis, I was, at times, at significant risk of contracting HIV. Not just because of who and how I fucked but because of who and how I loved. In the early nineties, we insisted on not letting anyone slip beyond the boundaries of touch. Nights spent crawling into hospital beds with friends and lovers to wipe sweat from their bodies, rub lotion into cracked and bleeding skin, and nap mouth-to-mouth in the tiny bed. Co-regulation in hospital time is breath and it is also skin.

One of the biggest challenges to my enactment of queerness during COVID is my decision to shift my psychotherapy practice entirely to telehealth, removing my body from proximity to my clients' bodies. I told myself this is to keep them safe from me, safe from one another. In order to keep my still-immunecompromised loved ones safe from the worlds that enter into my work so that I can fully inhabit all my worlds.

And yet the fantasy that we can keep each other safe is as faulty as the fantasy that in psychotherapy we can keep from being touched by each other. Isn't it?

2.

In the first few weeks of the mpox vaccine rollout, one of my clients started our Zoom session angry and teary. "I can get the vaccine," she says. "I have time to wait in line, the job security to miss work, the social capital to be out and visible waiting in the damn line and answering intrusive questions about my sex life. But my girls can't."

She's an organizer in queer and trans justice movements. Her "girls" are trans women. Some are undocumented. Some are sex workers. Some move through a heterosexual social world. Some of them have fled countries where they were fighting for survival. And in some of those countries, monkeypox was already endemic. Because industrialized nations hoard vaccines and treatments, monkeypox hasn't been eradicated, though it could have been. This is both an epidemiological crisis and a metaphor.

I remind her that the panic and frustration she and her girls feel is not their personal failure but endemic to a system they are trying to survive within that was never designed for their survival. It isn't enough for either

PHOTOS: PREVIOUS PAGE: ALEXANDER ANT; OPPOSITE PAGE: RESOURCE DATABASE

of us. Between and after clinical sessions, I spend time strategizing with old ACT UP comrades who work in public health. I made the same calls to them in the first pre-vaccine year of COVID. And sometimes still, as the numbers change, as infections stop being tracked, as we try to assemble the best anecdotal evidence we can as a form of queer public health strategy. Epidemiological opinions are out of the recognizable scope of my practice. And they are part of our queer mutual aid and harm reduction.

Advocacy is a clinical disclosure. How quickly I can answer biomedical questions. How quickly I can make calls to access information. I have confusion sometimes about how to titrate between the urgency of resource gathering and the desire for unrushed space for clinical exploration.

Does rushing in jump over clients' internal experience? Maybe this is the point. The felt dilemma isn't just the isolated pain and shame of individuals but the result of systemic failures of care. And shouldn't that be my job? It's a disclosure. Not just of my relationship to viruses, but also of how I will relate to my clients and our shared communities. That I won't keep a particular kind of distance. There is also vulnerability, a clinical shame, of not being successful in helping.

I wrote endless versions of this essay during the first two years of COVID. Not in the aftermath but in the ongoingness. The tangle is mutable and endless. Just like the psyche. Just like how bodies are changed and integrate but do not lose the embodied mark of our stories.

3.

Waiting in line at Kaiser Hospital for the bivalent COVID booster, it's hard not to listen as the nurses at each injection station ask the same questions: *Have you had COVID recently? Have you been exposed to someone with COVID symptoms? When was the last time you took a COVID test? When was your last COVID vaccine?* As I arrive at the front of the patient line, the nurse I've been listening to motions me to the empty chair and asks the set questions. After I answer, he looks at me, and over our masks we make eye contact. "Have you had the monkeypox vaccine?" he asks. He's Asian, and I track him as queer, as he must have tracked me as also Asian and queer. The white nurse working with him looks at him, then at my medical record on the computer screen, then at me nervously. I wonder what she sees when she looks at me: a late-forties cis woman, a wife listed as my next of kin. I wonder what he sees, why he asked. I haven't heard him ask any other patients about mpox. "No," I say, "but is it available here? I know people are still struggling for access." We're now speaking in code. Am I looking for resources for my clients? For my beloved queer friends and family? For a ghost of myself longing to be back in a different time and place?

This is queer flagging in a time of foregrounded viruses. What is it that makes us worry about each other or wonder about each other? What are we tracking for? It's the evolution of a kind of queer epidemiological cruising. A relationship to risk. A relationship to proximity. I push up the sleeve of my T-shirt, and the nurse taps the needle, then injects the singular vaccine.

4.

One of my clients seroconverted just a few years before COVID. A gay man who came of sexual age in the late 1990s, he was ashamed of his status conversion and frozen about the possibility of reengaging in sexual intimacy. He insisted that he wasn't willing to risk anyone else's exposure.

COVID quarantine and isolation slowed the urgency of questioning his own boundary. And now, a few years into COVID vaccines and easy test access, he was starting to contemplate dating and sex, wanting someone to connect with.

Then, mpox.

For the first few months of the mpox outbreak in the United States, he felt relief that he wasn't at risk and hadn't reengaged in sexual intimacies that would risk himself or anyone else.

After the mpox vaccine rollout slowed community transmission, he came to session one day and said he was contemplating the vaccine. He desired contact. He was questioning how to do it safely.

Touch hunger, contact hunger. Our relationship to viral risk is a disclosure of relationship to proximity. Each virus asks something different from us in how we navigate care and contact. They layer over each other, multiplying in complexities. Just as our lives grow fuller and more complex.

Because I'm still working remotely, all these conversations are on Zoom. I'm tracking the limitations in pandemic time. My client is wanting contact. And though our contact isn't in the realm of the sexual or the physical, I wonder what his desire evokes about what he is and isn't getting in our work. He has appreciated the ways I've negotiated to keep people safe. And that safety comes with loss. As he contemplates the mpox vaccine, he becomes curious to know what risks I'm taking outside the clinical space. I recognize that he's asking for both mirroring and differentiation as he tries to sort through his own risk assessments.

I'm compelled by these clinical dilemmas, and I'm tired of writing this essay. Rewriting and updating at every viral turn.

Queer desires have a history of shame. The anxiety of saying "I want." Vaccines amplify that question. Forcing us to say, "Yes, I want." Vaccines are aspirational. They say, "I would like to be close enough to you to be a viral risk to you. I would like to be affected by you. I would like to affect you. To allow you to be a risk to me. To allow contact to be a risk to our separateness. To allow your breath to enter my breath."

5.

Is the determination to conjure queer intimacies the enactment of survival under conditions of global health inequity and the perpetual threat of annihilation? I obsessed over this question during the early years of the HIV crisis, before any meaningful medication was available to steady T-cell counts and immune systems. I asked it again when it became clear that the medications would be primarily available in industrialized worlds and only to people with economic access. And I obsess about it again, now, while sitting with my therapist. He's a gay man who lived through the early years of HIV. We have our own shorthand for plaguetime, now differentiated from the current iteration of plaguetime.

I've sat with my therapist throughout COVID, mostly on Zoom. We've talked about vaccines and community care, risk assessments and harm reduction, and the uncomfortable privilege of relative safety. I've checked when he's been vaccinated, feeling my present tense care for him align with my young, selfish, panicky need for him to be well. I don't ask him whether he's getting the mpox vaccine, where it falls within the current shape of his life. We go back and forth about my not asking. I'm not especially compelled by the specificity of his sexual life. I am edgy and anxious about his wellness, his relationship to risk. His relationship to survival. This is the collision of my AIDS history and his. I sought him out years ago because of his AIDS history. I don't know exactly what it is, but I know that it is. I don't know who or where his ghosts are, but I know that they are.

There is a screen between us. Actually, there are two screens between us, his and mine. Though from each of our vantage points we are aware of the edges of only our own. I'm tired of the endless metaphors I can make of viral and virtual distance. I'm tired of the repetition compulsion of writing this essay.

I'm tired of this, I tell him. I don't know if I mean monkeypox, COVID, HIV, the constant navigation of a biomedical system designed for profit and not embodied connection and care. Or if I mean the clinical dilemma of allowing enough space for people's psyches to churn over their own associations and histories relative to viruses, as though they are only individually and not collectively associative. As though we aren't still, always, simultaneously in relationship. That even separateness and distance are forms of embodied relationship. I pause in my frustrated, haunted ranting. He takes a deep breath. I take a deep breath. What is co-regulation if not breath and mirror? Through the screen he nods, and I nod back. ■

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

@ Work, an exhibition of the work of artist Zoe Beloff and filmmaker Eric Muzzy, was installed at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research

Together Beloff and Muzzy have created @Work, an exuberant documentary public art installation that includes fourteen life-size canvas banners depicting images in oil of essential workers who were so vital to the survival of the city and all of us during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Each banner is over seven feet in height, five feet across, and features brightly colored, playful, realistic, and symbolic representations of fourteen essential working people of New York City. They range from a cashier at a grocery store to a dock worker to a ferry operator to a teacher to a respiratory therapist. The portraits speak to a long tradition of the representation of workers in mural form. Warm, human, wry, alive, and yet iconic, idealized and lifted up as examples of how work, when it does not oppress, brings dignity and equality.

i To read more about Beloff's and Muzzy's @Work, visit *ROOM*'s new online community projects alcove. CLICK HERE

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A PARABLE FOR OUR TIME

I have been thinking for some time now that I'm glad my parents are no longer alive. It would break their hearts to witness what has happened to what my father used to describe as "America, the best country!" As a child I spent many a Fourth of July with him, lining our sidewalks with a procession of small American flags leading up to the huge flag hanging from the front awning. Of course, we had many arguments over the dinner table as I and my brothers got old enough to think differently about the United States, especially concerning race, foreign policy, covert operations in more places than I could ever have guessed… BUT this is the place my parents were eventually able to land—albeit with false papers[1]—after experiencing indescribable horrors in Nazi Poland and post-war Germany. What I didn't know about myself is how much of their experience of the United States I carried. How much my identity—my joie de vivre—depended on keeping what they thought about life here alive. How much my own experience of hopefulness was contingent on some very basic principles of democracy that "America, the best country," represented.[2]

On June 24, 2022, the day the Supreme Court overturned the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that recognized a woman's right to terminate a pregnancy, Heather Cox Richardson posted the following:

> The Dobbs decision marks the end of an era: the period in American history stretching from 1933 to 1981, the era in which the U.S. government worked to promote democracy. It tried to level the playing field between the rich and the poor by regulating business and working conditions. It provided a basic social safety net through programs like Social Security and Medicare and, later, through food and housing security programs. It promoted infrastructure like electricity and highways, and clean air and water, to try to maintain a standard of living for Americans. And it protected civil rights by using the Fourteenth Amendment, added to the U.S. Constitution in 1868, to stop states from denying their citizens the equal protection of the law.
>
> Now the Republicans are engaged in the process of dismantling that government. For forty years, the current Republican Party has worked to slash business regulations and the taxes that support social welfare programs, to privatize infrastructure projects, and to end the federal protection of civil rights by arguing for judicial "originalism" that claims to honor the original version of the Constitution rather than permitting the courts to protect rights through the Fourteenth Amendment… (Heather Cox Richardson, "Letters from an American," June 24, 2022)

With this death knell to the era of my childhood and my parents' "best country," I have come to learn about myself in new ways. For the first time in my life, on the evening of the 2016 election, as it became clearer who had won, I felt on the verge of hopelessness. I knew of loss, of shallow breathing and an awareness that my world would never be the same without a precious loved one—my father and, much later, my mother. But not this. This heaviness left me motionless, searching for air. The next morning, I awoke downtrodden, in a gray fog, barely able to get myself to where I needed to be. I knew I was upset, but I didn't recognize what was happening to me. (This reminds me of one other time I didn't know what was happening to me.*) From that day on, I have had to guard against plummeting. It has become a disciplined practice. Of course, I have bursts of joy and moments I am able to embrace the beauty around me—life with my partner and children, the inspiring words of writers that renew my capacity for hope, cooking a good meal, time with friends, my patients, in the garden watching the butterflies, a good dance class, singing loudly, walking by the sea…

> *Picture this. A Midwestern spring afternoon. Must have been after school, sun low in the sky. Possibly waiting to greet her father after his workday. A child of nine practices her cartwheels on the flat section of her grassy backyard. Pleased with herself as her legs shoot straight up, she lands on her two feet and is suddenly struck by not knowing who she is. She watches the body (her body?) from above with the acute sense that "it" will eventually die. When she instantly recognizes that "she" and "it" are the same person, she is engulfed in panic. "If it dies, I die."
>
> After that day, life is never quite the same for her. The strangeness of what happened remains a mysterious cloud that threatens to rain down on her once again.
>
> A child at the dawning of adolescence realizes she will one day die.
>
> A grown-up at the dawning of old age realizes her country is dying.

I read an article by Rachel Aviv published in the *New Yorker*, about a group of children in Sweden who presented with the same symptoms in which they were all but dead, having lost their will to live after losing hope in a world that held no place for them. After their families were denied asylum in Sweden, they ended up in hospitals with feeding tubes attached to their stomachs to keep them alive. Influenced by the initiative of one Swedish pediatrician, eventually more than 160,000 Swedes signed petitions calling for a reversal of the asylum rejections, allowing the children to remain in Sweden, after which time they gradually returned to life.

I was riveted by this story in ways I didn't understand and felt compelled—as if I owed it to them—to think and write about their story. In the process of that thinking and writing, I discovered that for some children hope is intrinsically connected to being grounded in a world that holds and hears them. When that ground and those ears cannot be found, their minds and bodies shut down and they/we land somewhere on the continuum of dead/alive beings.

I have begun to think about the story of these children as a parable for our times. As the level of crises in the United States and abroad continues to intensify—particularly as we "progressives" in the US feel a terrible sense of betrayal by our fellow country people and concurrently impotent to stop the cascading destruction of democracy as we knew it—I am finding myself and many of my patients alternately more overwhelmed and dysregulated, needing much more help calming down, or feeling helpless and shut down in less extreme "dead-alive" states. Like the children who oscillated between states of sympathetic fight-flight to ultimate dorsal collapse, we follow in the footsteps of their nervous systems.

On a more personal level, I discovered that the experience of hopelessness is terribly threatening. We children were the embodiment of our parents' hopes. Hopelessness has no place. Living in a country that no longer registers our voices (unlike our activist years, in which we felt we had the capacity to change the world—create an effective movement, end the war in Vietnam, shut down universities, fight good fights…) renders us as helpless and useless as they were during the Nazi occupation. I couldn't save them, and now the country they bestowed with hope no longer holds us. I am failing them just as the "apathetic" children failed their parents when the Swedish authorities rejected their appeals for asylum. We are all "pipe children" (in the words of Joshua Durban), whose mission it is to realize internal social objects imbued with hope in a world gone bad. That is who we are. ■

1 The recent Ken Burns series, *The U.S. and the Holocaust*, documents the restriction of Eastern European Jews fleeing Nazi persecution to seek asylum in the United States during WWII. My parents were among those Jews, hence they obtained false papers.

2 I began this paper with a sudden realization while writing a talk for a conference in Italy. In the talk, I proposed that feelings of impending doom have been building for the past forty years as trickle-down economic policies evolved into a full-fledged cascade of desolating neoliberal and neoconservative fundamentalism, decimating any vestige of "civil society" as we knew it. As I described tracking the multiple vectors of this cascade, I arrived at a strange new place I had never considered.

ROOM 2.23

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A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*

FASCISM

The Appointment in Samarra

Since the 2016 election of Donald Trump, I frequently think of the Arab fable "The Appointment in Samarra" as it was retold by the British author W. Somerset Maugham. The speaker in the story is Death, who, interestingly, is portrayed as a woman. Here is how the fable goes. There was a merchant in Baghdad who sent his servant to the market to buy provisions. Soon after, the servant returned, white and trembling, and said, "Master, just now when I was in the marketplace, I was jostled by a woman in the crowd, and when I turned, I saw it was Death who jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra, and there Death will not find me." The merchant lent his servant his horse, and the servant mounted it. He dug his spurs in its flanks, and as fast as the horse could gallop, he went. Soon after, the merchant went down to the marketplace, and he saw me standing in the crowd. He came to me [Death] and said, "Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning?" "That was not a threatening gesture," I said. "It was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

The lesson of this fable is obvious: not only is there no way for us to escape death, but the circumstances of meeting our death are unpredictable. My family's and my own history have taught me that the course of our lives is capricious. Wars, atrocities, and political upheavals shape our destiny. Ideologies and propaganda mold our views of what is real and what is true. My history also taught me that just as we cannot escape death, we may not be able to get away from fascism. Fascism, unfortunately, as Hannah Arendt has taught us, is here to stay. Increasingly we are witnessing the rise of fascistic ultra-right parties in Poland, Hungary, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Israel, and here at home in the American MAGA movement. It is as though the horrors of the 1930s have returned. It is becoming apparent that hideous fascism may be a permanent by-product of modern democracies.

The allegory of the servant who tries to escape Death is especially apt, considering the nature of fascism. Fascistic movements are known to mobilize the masses under the spell of an omnipotent and charismatic leader. The hidden aim of this mobilization is not to improve the lives of the adherents but to bring about the destruction of millions of innocent people. When the fascistic delusional bubble confronts the limits of the external reality, tragically, the adherents themselves often become victims as well. Historians and political scientists have pointed out the fascination of fascistic regimes with death and the endless deployment of destructiveness. The slaughter begins by inventing an enemy, a group of people that are defined from the outside by characteristics that they have not chosen and that they do not have the power to change. The specification for becoming an enemy may include people's physical or mental health, race, skin color, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. These targeted groups are then stripped of their legal rights, becoming, as Arendt has pointed out, homeless in their own home. They are eventually expelled or exterminated. Once this invented enemy, whose only "crime" is belonging to a particular harassed group, is wiped out, a new enemy must be chosen to keep the destructive machine going. The Nazi ideology first targeted the disabled and the mentally ill. Later it zeroed in on the homosexual, the Bolshevists, the Jews, and the Roma people. We now know that there were already plans in place for wider and wider circles of persecution. Arendt noted that in 1943 Hitler proposed a draft for a comprehensive new health law suggesting that after the war, all Germans would be X-rayed and that families with a history of lung or heart disease would be incarcerated in the camps.

My father fled Vienna on March 11, 1938, the day of the Anschluss—the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany.

He was twenty-two years old and a second-year medical student. He escaped to Palestine, carrying with him only a suitcase. He crossed France, taking a boat from Marseille to Alexandria, Egypt. From there, he embarked on another boat, which brought him to the Port of Jaffa in Palestine. On his arrival, he changed his name from Gerhart to the biblical Hebrew name Gideon. By changing his name, perhaps, he hoped to erase the deep feelings of loss and betrayal that he must have felt. Growing up, I could never understand why the citizens of Vienna enthusiastically embraced Adolf Hitler's victorious arrival in Vienna in 1938. The sight of the masses of Austrians welcoming Hitler's motorcade, chanting and saluting *Sieg Heil* while waving thousands and thousands of little swastika flags, was incomprehensible to me. Watching Trump's political rallies with the sea of his MAGA supporters waving large Confederate flags or Trump flags, some of them depicting him as bare-chested Rambo holding a bazooka, makes me feel humbler. I now understand that it can happen here in the United States as well.

My father refused to return to Vienna until he was eighty years old. He would vacation yearly in Switzerland and Germany, but he could not make himself visit Vienna. I joined him in Vienna for his first and last visit on the occasion of his eightieth birthday. We went to see the house where he lived on Hohe Warte 32 (the High Place in German). As a son of the director of the Israelite Institute for the Blind Child, my father grew up in the director's apartment on the first floor of the building. At the end of the war, the three-story building was bombed by the Allies. After it was repaired, it became a local police station. There was only a small plaque memorializing the previously world-renowned institute. My father and I could not approach this plaque, however. We stood in the garden. While my father was pointing out to me the apartment where he grew up, a young policewoman in uniform stepped out of the building and told us firmly, in German, to leave the premises. My father softly replied in German that he was born there, but the policewoman could either not hear him, or she was not interested. She ordered us to leave. It was so poignant to me to witness my father being expelled once again. During this visit, I asked my father for the first time why he fled Vienna. He laughed anxiously and said that he feared his Nazi high school classmates, who knew where he lived, would hunt him down and kill him.

Heading toward Palestine in 1938, my father was full of ideals and hopes. My parents, like many of their relatives and friends, were socialists. They considered themselves to be lucky pioneers who would take part in the creation of a just, liberal, secular, socialist new Jewish homeland. This was how it came about that I was born in Jaffa some fourteen years after the Anschluss and five years after the Israeli War of Independence and the founding of Israel in 1948. The hospital where I was born used to be called Dajani Hospital. Established in 1933, it was a private hospital in Jaffa where Palestinian, Jewish, and international medical professionals worked together. The hospital was founded and directed by Dr. Fouad Ismail Bakr Dajani. By the time I was born, the hospital's original name was already erased. Now it was called Tzahalon Hospital, named after a nearby Israeli residential neighborhood. The word "tzahalon," in Hebrew, suggests the acronym "tzahal," which is Hebrew for Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Tzahal also means to rejoice. By changing the name of Dajani Hospital to Tzahalon, an entire history was wiped out, not only the life work of Dr. Dajani but also the rich history of the Palestinian residents of Jaffa.

Jaffa was the largest Arab town in Mandatory Palestine. It had a large professional and prosperous Palestinian population. I now know that out of the seventy thousand Palestinians who lived in Jaffa, about 80 percent were forced to flee their homes. Yearlong Palestinian sniper attacks on Jewish passersby in Tel Aviv initiated intimidation and terror against the Arab residents. The IDF compelled them to flee and abandon their homes. When I was growing up, Jaffa was a beautiful Israeli artist colony. We used to visit the quaint art galleries that were built in the "abandoned" Palestinian homes. Throughout history, people have taken over the property and lands of others, rejoicing in their victory and enjoying their confiscated or looted homes and lands.

As an Israeli teenager, I was inspired to love our motherland, or our "moledet," as we called it. I joined the socialist youth movement Hashomer Hatzair, the Young Guard. Each year we participated in arduous hikes that lasted three to four days. We carried backpacks filled with sleeping bags and heavy food cans. We loved these hikes, and sitting at night around a bonfire, we sang sentimental folk songs about our love for our moledet. During our hikes, we often passed many places called "khirbet" (ruins in Arabic). They all had Arab names. Usually located on hilltops, these ruins would have olive trees here and there, perhaps a fig tree. In a few spots, we noticed the remnant of a wall built from local stones next to a row of sabra cacti. Colorful wildflowers carpeted the ruins in the spring. In the summer, the ruins were covered with thistles. We never wondered what was there before. We did not know that these "ruins" were once lively Arab villages. It is astonishing to me that we did not know that in 1948 the Israeli government gave orders to bulldoze these villages. When we did wonder, we were taught that the Palestinians had fled their villages. We believed the Zionist propaganda that claimed the Arabs, unlike us, the brave sabra, the young Jews who were born in Israel, were cowards who followed their leaders' recommendations to flee their homes. We did not know about the Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948. I discovered the fact that 700,000 Palestinians—men, women, elderly, and children—were expelled and forced out of Palestine on foot or by boats only when I was in my fifties. Many Palestinians were tortured and slaughtered during the Nakba. Some women were raped, and many homes were looted. It was only then that I discovered that most of the Palestinians were forced to leave their home and villages due to terror and intimidation by the Israel Defense Forces. To this day, Israel has not accepted the reality of Nakba and has not taken responsibility for it. In my early twenties, I could no longer tolerate the rise of fanatical, religious, and messianic nationalism in Israel. The movement that propelled fanatic young Jews, many of them Americans, to build illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank repelled me. Feeling that the steady rise of toxic nationalism was poisonous to my soul, I left Israel and immigrated to the United States at age twenty-six.

Now in the United States, I have come to believe that there is no escape from the cyclical temptation of fascistic states of mind, states that, as Christopher Bollas noted, give people license to carry out genocide. I have come to accept the fact that even if I try to flee fascism's clutches, I may not be able to. I have reconciled the horrifying yet sobering realization that fascistic states of mind, as Christopher Bollas so astutely demonstrated, are lodged in all of us. Fascism seems to be an unavoidable part of the human condition. ■

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Russian and Ukranian Therapists Speak

I attended a symposium featuring analysts and therapists who are living and working in Ukraine or Russia, as well as those who have fled from their homes in those countries. They have come together in virtual town halls to support themselves and one another during this war. Those working inside Russia work with patients who live in Ukraine, and vice versa. Some are continuing to work with their patients, and some have stopped. All, for their own reasons or reasons outside their control. Stop and think about this for a moment. Imagine you are Ukrainian, working with a patient who lives in Russia. Russia has just invaded your country. Bombs are going off in your neighborhood, and you are preparing to go downstairs in your home apartment to shelter from these shellings—from the country your patient lives in. Imagine what that might feel like as the therapist. Imagine what that might feel like if your patient is in support of the war. Imagine what that would be like if your patient feels deep regret and shame about the war. All the while, you are trying to stay alive yourself, keep your family alive, your neighbors, trying to keep your country free.

Now flip the situation around. You are an analyst who lives in Russia, and you see patients who are living in Ukraine. Your country has invaded their country. You may be ashamed and not in support of the war. How do you think your patients will view you in the light of their reality? How do you feel pride for your country? What has been lost here, inside yourself and the world you live in, in Russia? What has been gained? Do you secretly want to win the war? Do you want to lose the war? What if you have left Russia and now want to disavow yourself of your affiliation with your home, your heritage? A heritage that is so intricately linked with Ukraine, like family, friends, like neighbors. How do you wrestle with *living* with this daily?

This is what was presented to us in real time by people who are living in this experience. I sat and listened to their stories of what it is like working with patients during this ongoing war. It was profound. I wondered if there were going to be moments when bombs would go off or sirens would be heard and I would helplessly watch them leave our symposium to seek safety. That threat was real. Thankfully, it didn't happen. However, I was acutely aware that I was sitting in Boston, in an upscale hotel. I wrestled with how to wrap my mind around *that* reality. The reality that while I wanted so badly to stretch my legs from hours of sitting in uncomfortable chairs, my Eastern European colleagues were sitting with me on the screen, aware their lives were in jeopardy.

One woman told us how she can no longer smile. Literally. She recalled how she used to smile all the time and how after the war started, her face hurt because there was nothing to smile about. She described how her muscles were in a foreign position, which caused her physical pain. She talked about how at times when she tries to force herself to smile, she physically cannot. And when she is able to, it does not look the same. The light in her smile is gone. Such a simple expression yet so much depth and meaning.

Another person talked about how he was looking at the sky on what he described as a beautiful day in Odessa. He recalls being mesmerized by the dancing planes in the air, and suddenly the planes began bombing the buildings around him. He was not jarred into action and panic but learned the meaning of depersonalization at that moment. He depersonalized to shield himself from the sheer terror and danger of being blown up himself.

I listened to a woman's retelling of her profound depression, where she no longer felt the need to cook for herself, her husband, and her children. She stopped it all. She said to herself and her husband, "What is the point? We are going to die anyway." Her building had been bombed. She recalled her husband fought with her and told her she had to keep going. She got up and went and cleaned the toilet. Let's talk about some real shit here. Her practice is gone, and she now volunteers with whatever she can.

It embarrasses me to say that I was thinking to myself, *How can she live without her income?* But then I thought about it further and realized there likely isn't much of a society to speak of at this point. *That* is the point. Everything has been shattered.

We were told the town halls were filled with silences. How do you speak of such trauma, such evil, atrocities, despair? Words fail me here. I understand that silence now, or I tell myself I understand that now. But in reality I don't. I barely had a sliver of what it must be like for them. And yet they continue to find ways to connect with one another and across country lines.

I thanked them for allowing me to witness their experiences, and I could barely speak myself. How can you think about "thinking analytically" when confronted with that terror? Their experiences. It felt wrong, and I wrestled with this in my mind and in my heart in their presence. Ultimately, I was choked up with emotions, and I shared my dilemma and ended up simply sharing my gratitude and appreciation for their bravery and strength. Their silences were different and profound. Most in the room cried with me, and those on the screen shed some tears as well. It is a grief and terror I hope to never experience in my life. But we need to be witnesses to the trauma and be open to feeling it, to help our colleagues and ourselves, to be able to hold and tolerate the horrors of humanity. ■

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Above: A NOPE canvasser prepares to knock on a voter's door in Virginia in 2021. **Above right and right:** NOPE volunteers consult the MiniVAN canvassing app on their phones while knocking on doors in Virginia in 2021. Photos: Sue Dorfman. **Above, far right:** Liz McNichol, Debbie Goldman, and Debra Fried Levin canvassing in Virginia in September 2021

Community Action—NOPE

NOPE: Neighbors Defending Democracy is an all-volunteer group based in Washington, DC. Canvassing for Democratic candidates in battleground states, they approach voters with a respectful curiosity that seems related to the stance the analyst takes in practice. Surprisingly often, this leads to fruitful conversations across ideological, geographic, racial, and class-based divides. Debra Fried Levin, leader of NOPE, calls door-to-door canvassing "political therapy." After Trump was elected, she says, "People were distraught. There was a sense of helplessness. Yelling at the television did nothing; we needed to turn our fears and frustration into action. At NOPE, we've learned that directing our worries into knocking on doors and talking to real people—getting outside our blue bubble—is effective, both politically and personally. It offers a sense of community and hope."

i Cathy Sunshine interviewed NOPE volunteers Renee Blankenau, Debbie Goldman, and Liz McNichol about their experiences knocking on doors. To read the interview and learn more about NOPE's activities, visit ROOM's new online community projects alcove. CLICK HERE

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DEPATHOLOGIZING PSYCHIC DISRUPTION

The van climbs ever higher. I marvel at the spare, rocky landscape and the vast distances on every side as we make our way, curving upward, sometimes perilously close to the edge. Above it all, the Big Sky takes my breath away. Despite the many references I've read and the photos I've seen, I never imagined this experience: its vast enormity as an experience. I am in Wyoming for the first time.

How profound it feels to be thrust into a new world, stunned by its unique beauty, the feel of the air, new fragrances, new animals. I saw a magpie for the first time in Wyoming. Bald eagles flew overhead. What dazzled me most were the light and the wind, and especially the sky that never stopped changing. I could have stood still and watched all day, transfixed. In fact, I had intended to do just that, but the pandemic intruded, and we couldn't stay.

On March 13, 2020—less than a week after I'd arrived—then-president Donald Trump declared the growing COVID-19 epidemic a national emergency. Immediately, schools closed. Social events were canceled. As the virus spread, workers sickened and died. Factories shut down. Shops and restaurants emptied. The elderly were especially vulnerable, and thousands died every day. Then tens of thousands. Then more. Hospitals were overrun; gurneys with perilously ill patients spilled into the hallways, while depleted staff worked around the clock.

That summer, Yale sent a survey seeking mental health professionals who could offer services to members of the community working on those front lines. Nurses, doctors, aides—all hospital staff—were overwhelmed with fear and anger, exhaustion, and unspeakable grief. The survey asked if I had experience working with individuals who suffered from significant anxiety, depression, or trauma. It noted the importance of caretakers taking care of themselves, stating explicitly that it was not inappropriate to seek help from another clinician to secure comfort or relief from intensely stressful circumstances. This nominally reassuring message was aimed at the stigma attached to mental health treatment in general and the shame of admitting to symptoms that are an inevitable aspect of these disrupting times, further exacerbated by COVID's relentless demands on medical professionals in particular and the depths of this stigma in the medical profession.

Would we characterize as mentally ill a distraught adult whose parent had just died? Or one who lost their job out of the blue, who could no longer count on having enough to eat? Or whose children were suddenly unable to go to school and now never leave the house, fretting when they can't play with their friends?

I sense that the pandemic has changed many of us. I assume that we'll look at one another and our anxieties, depressions, and trauma reactions with less judgement and more compassion in the coming year—but can we hold on to that? What does it really mean to see with new eyes?

My neighbor Art's family is from Wyoming. He grew up under the Big Sky; it's nothing new to them. But Art described his young nephew Max's frightening first encounter with the ocean. He was visiting his grandmother—Art's mother—who now lives on Cape Cod.

I picture Max standing apprehensively, frozen in the sunshine, squinting in the bright light. He raises his palm to shield his eyes and stares at the dark blue-gray ocean, water stretching to the farthest edge of his view. His grandmother bends close to his ear and points to a line in the distance where the sea meets the sky. "The next land out there is England," she says. Max lowers his arm as his eyes adjust. He listens to the sound of the waves. They crest, then crash; they pound the sand. White spray fills the air, while rivulets rush up, then pull back, leaving a sudsy foam outline to mark which made it farthest inland. He leans forward and surveys the sand warming his toes, sunk up to his ankles. Closer to the water now. Closer. Clutching his grandmother's hand, he takes a deep breath and tries out a toe in the water.

If you'd never seen an ocean, how could words alone convey the overwhelming delight of what I've known from time on the sea: full sail heeled in a strong wind, the whoosh of frothing waves as the boat cuts through the water? Could this description counter a small boy's fear when he comes face-to-face with the vast gray sea?

I've traveled to new places and been astounded by the scenery. Years ago, I returned to Connecticut after a visit to my niece in the Southwest and realized that I'd learned the names of more wildflowers and weeds in Arizona than I knew at home. I promised myself that I'd pay attention to the beauty and interesting flora and fauna where I lived. I don't think I followed through.

When I exclaimed to Art about the sky, he told me that his Wyoming family felt claustrophobic visiting his Western Massachusetts summer backyard. The old trees' vast canopy of leaves—precious shade to natives here—cut off the sky and left them feeling disoriented and anxious, unable to breathe. I reminded myself that familiarity is not a given: what appears obvious or delightful for me may be terrifying for someone else.

I think about seeing with new eyes, of feeling fully alive and present, sure that I'll never forget this scene or take it for granted. Then how, in reality, we move on, get distracted, and stop looking. The pandemic experience feels as if it will change me and others around the world. Yet will I remember, beyond noting it for my obituary?

Can the pandemic teach us to see one another with new eyes? Can we understand the extremes of emotion we're experiencing during this time and learn to avoid pathologizing our human reactions to genuine trauma, recognizing the effects of losses beyond comprehension? I want to change the way we see these conditions. I want to make clear that, rather than items on a checklist for a psychiatric diagnosis, these symptoms are predictable reactions to our environment—the circumstance is the pathogen; fear is the germ that causes infection.

Will we collectively be able to sustain our stunned appreciation of the devastating toll from those early pandemic days—of watching, powerless, as people die alone, unable to breathe? Knowing loved, respected doctors were driven to suicide? Will we remember what we learn and continue to act on it before we pass judgment? Can we think to ask ourselves, "What has he been through that would provoke symptoms like that?"… "What trauma might they have survived to need those ways of coping?" so that one day not one of us is afraid to seek care from another clinician?

It's just an ocean. It's just a mountain. It's just a flower that doesn't grow where you live.

It's just grief and he's depressed. It's just that her grandmother died, and she couldn't say goodbye. ■

PHOTO (PREVIOUS PAGE): GUILLAUME BOURDAGES

Small Details

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When Z. was away at a psychoanalytic conference in Rome, her patient D. came into her home office for his Tuesday-afternoon therapy appointment. He probably sat in her waiting room for a couple of minutes, then walked into her office and looked at her desk, her drawers, her black record book where she writes down payments. She had a lot of cash hidden in the left cover.

He might or might not have taken some of the cash. He might or might not have found the copy of the talk she was going to be giving about him in Rome, titled "The Psychotherapy Session as a Thriller." Did she or didn't she lock her file cabinet before she left for the airport in her typical rush? She knew she did not ask D.'s permission to tell his story—their story—breaking confidentiality, exposing the shady details of his secret gambling, womanizing, and drug dealing. He might or might not have stolen into her bedroom, snuck into her bed, hiding under the covers, pretending he was her lover or her son, checking her bedside table, looking at the labels of her medicines, trying on her night cream and perfume, searching for signs of men, other men, husbands, lovers. Was it he who stole her Mexican turquoise bracelet or her silken underwear?

Then he walked into the kitchen (didn't he?), nibbling on her leftover pasta puttanesca, drinking her Montepulciano, finishing off her half-eaten pear. Was it then that he, her boy, walked in to find a wild-eyed stranger in their home? He might or might not have been pretty startled, scared, freaked out. But D., walking into one of his favorite roles as the maître d'—charming, seductive, taking charge—probably offered him a glass of wine, asking him about her. The boy asked D. to leave immediately. D. told the boy he would, yet invited him to have a drink, apologizing that the pasta was all gone. D. asked the boy where his mother was and told him he was her patient.

The boy might or might not have believed him. He was very anxious, trying to figure out his next step, assessing the possible risks. D. told the boy to calm down: he knew this was weird and scary, but he was just a normal guy and one of his mother's long-standing patients. D. told the boy he came for a session and did not know that his analyst was gone. She must have forgotten to tell him—not always on top of the small details, though a deeply caring psychoanalyst who was helping him get a grip on his life.

The boy might have nodded, angry that his mother hadn't left enough cash in the kitchen drawer, not knowing about the black book and all the other things D. knew about: the patient files, the medicines in her medicine cabinet, and so much more. D. proudly told the boy he might know things about his mother that the boy didn't. He was a gambler and a card player, and he knew how to read his opponents and his shrink. D. told the boy that he knew how it felt to have a mother who was a therapist. His father was also one. He still remembers looking at all his father's patients strolling in through the back door, eavesdropping through the hole he made in his bedroom wall, listening to their stories. It was so much fun! Those crazy patients! D. might or might not have asked the boy if he wanted to hear about what happened to him this week, since he was her son and he bet he was a great listener. He needed to talk because he was in trouble. The kind of trouble he could not talk to his girlfriend about. He seemed pretty agitated and maybe a bit drunk.

D. and the boy might or might not have pretended to be a patient and a therapist sharing stories, changing roles, two therapists' sons—two boys, a bad boy and a young boy not knowing his badness from his goodness yet—drinking wine together, staining her golden velvet couch, sharing anecdotes about her, taking revenge on her for her Roman holiday. She should have made sure she canceled D.'s session, double-locked her files, her bedroom door, her medicine cabinet, but definitely she should have removed the evidence of her transgressions, the theft of D.'s story. ■

PHOTO: FROMPASTTOFUTURE

PHOTO: SABIAN SYMBOLS

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To Sing in the Presence of Quaking

To sing in the presence of quaking
is to summon the cosmic being. I have
been trying to walk theistical paths
with tactical feet like a row of ghost deer.
I am just beginning to grok that the bunch
of white male slave owners, then in
their twenties, were pretty much lame-ass
system designers. So, if you're sensing
an edginess, lady, the lap of the world
is a map of the unmet needs of men's pain.
And *money*—the miscreant word for *I need
some warmth to protect me*. My old honey
locust to rock me. A smooth lunular amulet.
That place within us which isn't yet gouged.

PHOTO: INTRICATE EXPLORER

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Passage

Passage is an interdisciplinary call-and-response poetry, music, and prose project inspired by grief and created at the height of the pandemic. The project hinges around a single poem written by poet, scholar, and psychoanalyst Forrest Hamer, PhD. Dr. Hamer sent me, a practicing psychologist, cellist, vocalist, and composer, his poem, "Passage," after I had asked if he had any poems about the ocean—the greatest destroyer, life-giver, and, in many ways, teacher of loss. Hamer's poem spoke deeply to my feelings of grief. Held by his words, I was inspired to create a series of musical pieces. Afterward, I shared the music with him. He was, in turn, touched.

Moved by this experience, I wondered if others would like to feel held in their grief via art and art-making. I decided to invite four psychotherapy colleagues to listen to the project and share their isolated written responses with me. Without their knowing what the others had written, my colleagues' responses fit perfectly together. It was as if they had been in deep communion with one another across the whole process. Thus, *Passage*, while inspired by my singular experience of grief, became an unintentional demonstration of the universality of loss and the power of art-making as a healing practice. I offer them as an invitation for others to create from and to feel communion with what challengingly and ineffably unites us.

Passage, a poem by Forrest Hamer, PhD

I was sitting on waves in the middle of a rocking
ocean, and I looked as far as

I could see in many directions
and all there was, was sky.

And I sent myself into each noticed thing—
the ocean, and its rocking,
the waves, the distances, the sky.

I did this to make myself whole.
I did this to survive

what otherwise would sink me.

i Listen to Mia Pixley's cello music, and read how Natalie Hung, Leah Oliver, Anjali George, and Hannah Wallerstein were inspired by *Passage* in *ROOM*'s online community projects alcove. CLICK HERE

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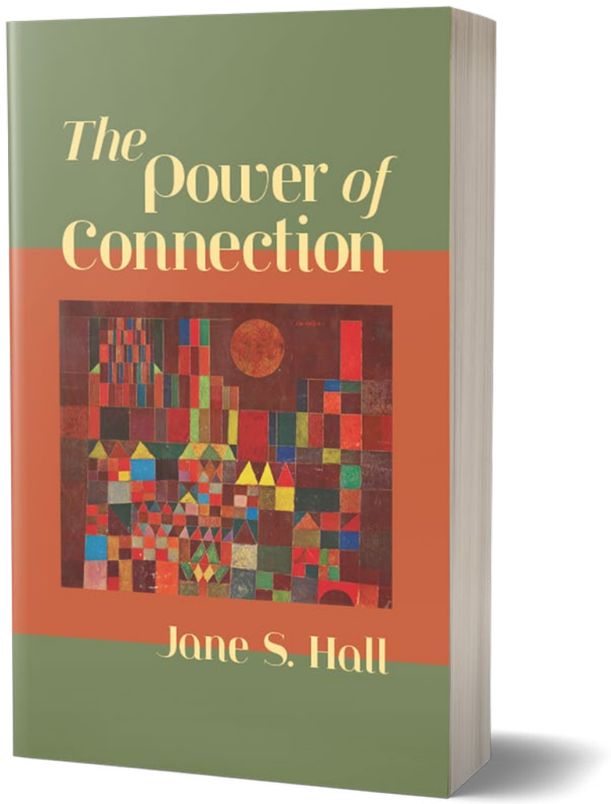

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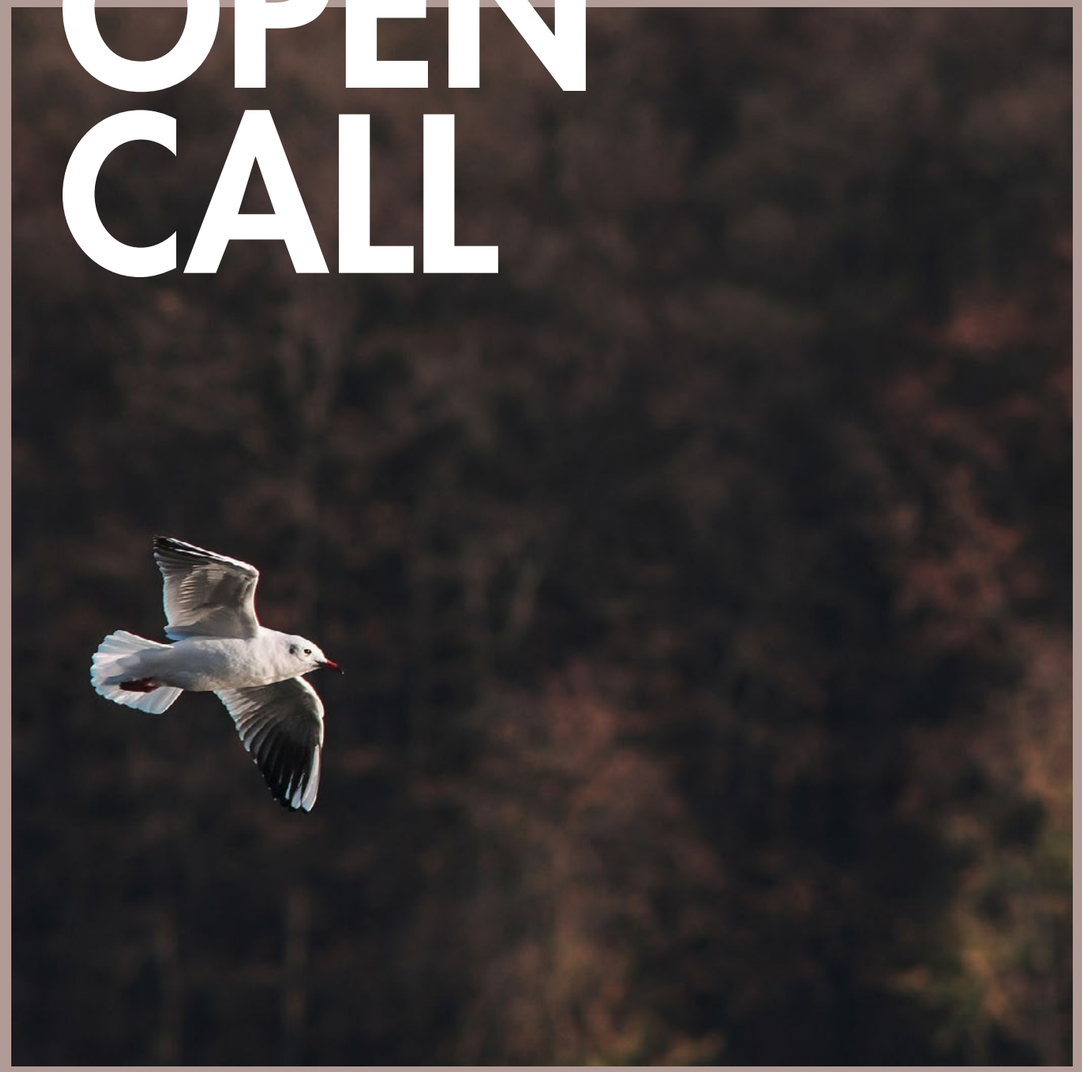

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MARCH 25, 2023 ■ 12 PM EST

LIVE VIA ZOOM

We will discuss with Karim Dajani and Era Loewenstein, questions of culture and fascistic thinking as two concepts that define much of our predicament today. Against this background, we will then hear from Cathy Sunshine and her colleagues about their experience canvassing in this country. We will think about ordinary democratic processes in the context of the ubiquity of culture and, unfortunately, also of fascistic thinking.

To receive the Zoom invitation link, please join our mailing list by visiting:

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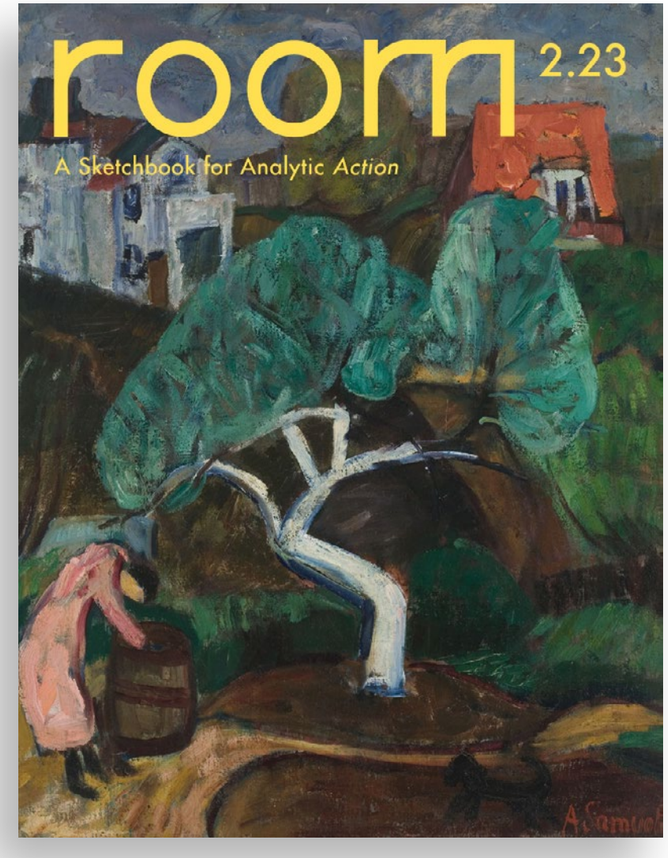

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