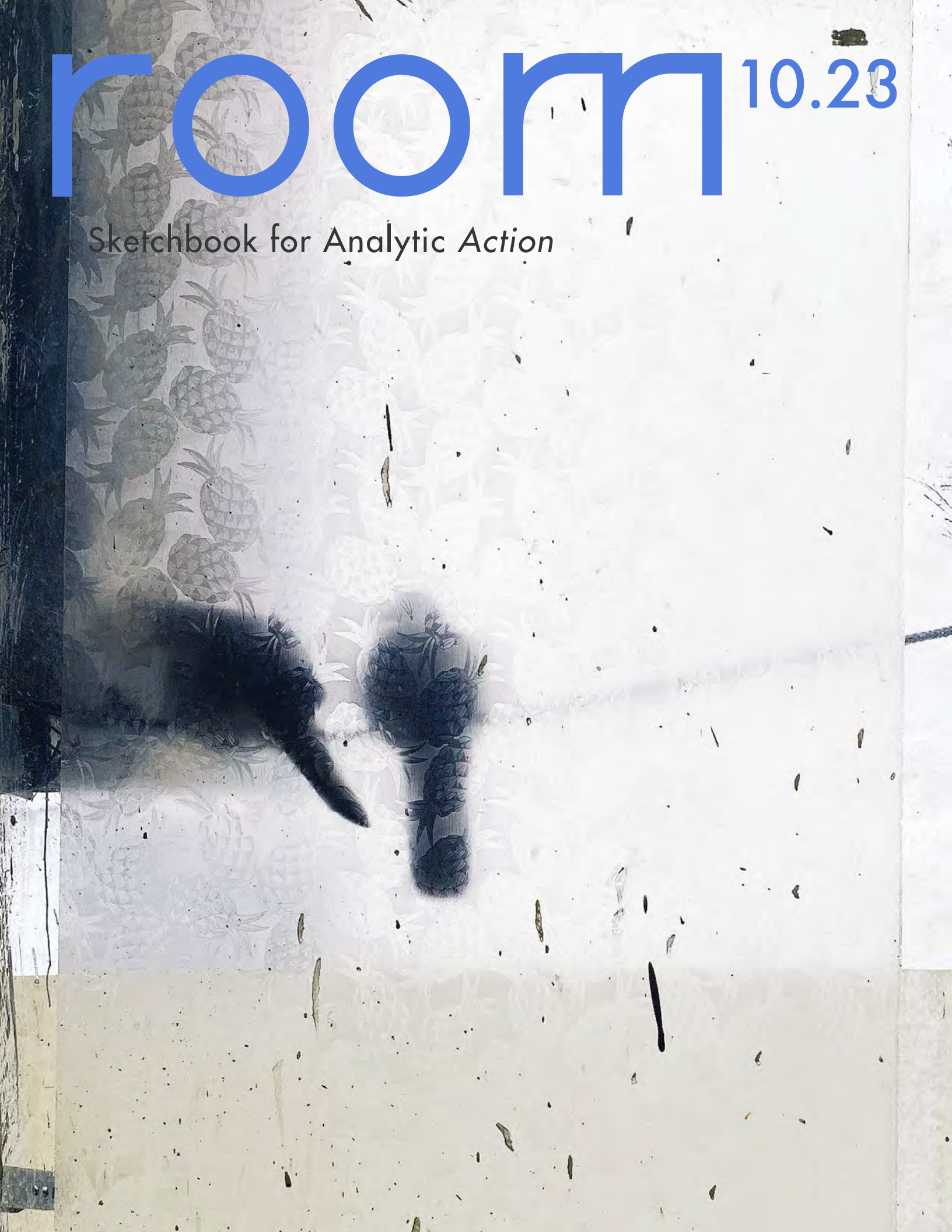
room 10.23

A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*



ROOM: A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action* is an open, global, public forum in which individual experience shared through essays, art, creative writing, poetry, and community projects enrich our understanding of the social and political world. We believe that the exquisite singularity of individual expression has universal relevance. *ROOM*'s unique approach offers greater familiarity with psychoanalysis as a lens for social discourse.

Cover photo by Foad Roshan

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A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*
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Contributors

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Jan Cunningham is a painter and photographer. She lives and works in New Haven. Her work is represented by the Anita Rogers Gallery in New York.

Laine Derr holds an MFA from Northern Arizona University and has published interviews with Carl Phillips, Ross Gay, Ted Kooser, and Robert Pinsky. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming from *J Journal*, *Full Bleed* + The Phillips Collection, *ZYZZYVA*, *Portland Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere.

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Robert Frey, MD, MPH, has been involved in international health for many years, including in India, Taiwan, Nicaragua, Cambodia, Sudan, and, most recently, in Haiti. He believes the interplay between the social-psychological and political dynamics of the country is an especially important study right now. He is a member of New Directions and plays keyboard and guitar in bluegrass groups.

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Admire Kamudzengerere completed the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten program in Amsterdam (2012). He mounted his first solo exhibition at Catinca Tabacaru New York in 2017, and that same year represented Zimbabwe at the 57th Venice Biennial. His work has was included in four additional international Biennials: Moscow (2013), Bamako (2017), Dakar (2018), and Cairo (2019). In the past two years he has been awarded two art fair prizes, the Purchase Prize by Northern Trust at EXPO Chicago (2017), and the On Demand Prize by Snaporazverein at MiArt Milan (2018). In addition to private collections around the world, Kamudzengerere's work has been acquired into the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, the Block Museum at Northwestern University, and The Art Institute of Chicago.

Marilyn Kohn has had a long career in fundraising. Most recently she was vice president for development at Temple Emanuel-El in New York City. Her seventeen years at Columbia Business School included running the executive MBA program. She also worked at Memorial Sloan Kettering and, prior to that, as a consultant. Her clients included Cancer Care, Facing History and Ourselves, and the Jewish Home and Hospital. She is on the boards of *ROOM* and Equity for Children.

Alice Lombardo Maher, MD, is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst in private practice in New York City. She graduated from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and the Psychoanalytic Association of New York affiliated with NYU Medical Center. In recent years she has been working to bring psychoanalytic theory and practice into the sociopolitical arena. She is the founder and director of Changing Our Consciousness, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the discovery of new ways of communicating across psychological divides as a way to address toxic polarization. She designed and taught an emotional literacy curriculum in an after-school program, co-created two mental health documentaries, and is presently involved in several dialogue projects, including one at Bay Community College in Michigan. Her book *Catalysis: A Recipe to Slow Down or Abort Humankind's Leap to War* was published in 2018.

Alberto Minujin is a professor at the New School University, New York. Minujin is the founding executive director of Equity for Children/Equidad para la Infancia, a nonprofit working to improve living conditions for deprived children (equityforchildren.org). A UNICEF senior officer from 1990 to 2005, Minujin is a mathematician with training in applied statistics and demography. From 2013 to 2018 Minujin served on the Board of Comparative Research on Poverty (CROP), a scientific committee at the University of Bergen. He has authored volumes, including *Leaving No Children and No Adolescents Behind,* Ibidem (2021), *Tackling Child Poverty in Latin America*, CROP-Ibidem (2017),*Global Child Poverty and Well-Being*, Policy Press (2012). In 2010, Minujin was awarded the Bicentennial Medal by the government of Argentina in recognition of his decades-long work on behalf of the world's most impoverished children and adolescents.

Diana E. Moga, MD, PhD, received her medical and doctorate degree in neuroscience from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and completed psychiatric residency and psychoanalytic training at Columbia's Presbyterian Hospital and the Columbia Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research. She is currently an assistant professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia University and teaches courses at the center as well as across the country on sexuality, gender, and critical theory. She is the co-chair of the writing curriculum at Columbia and the Roughton Award at APsaA and has just become a training and supervising analyst at Columbia.

Fasasi Abdulrosheed Oladipupo is a Nigerian poet and the author of the micro-chapbook *Sidiratul Muntaha* (Ghost City Press, 2022). His work has been published or is forthcoming at *Ambit* magazine, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Obsidian: Literature and Art in the African Diaspora, Oxford Review of Books*, *Stand* magazine, *Roanoke Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Olongo Africa*, the *Citron Review*, *South Florida Poetry Journal,* and elsewhere. His work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and *Best New Poets* anthology. Fasasi explores trans-Mediterranean migration, loss, sex trafficking, and, recently, transatlantic slave trade.

Eric Shorey is a licensed psychoanalyst working predominantly with the LGBTQ+ community in Brooklyn, New York. He is an advanced candidate at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research. He received his MA in Liberal Studies from the New School for Social Research. He has also been a DJ and event producer in New York's underground nightlife scene for fifteen years. He is a founding member of The Nobodies, an avant-garde alt-drag and performance art collective. His writing on popular culture has been published in *Vice*, *Nylon*, *Pitchfork*, and *Rolling Stone*.

Josephine Wright, MD, is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who has worked with adults, adolescents, and children for more than four decades in New York City. Besides devoting more time now to fiction and nonfiction writing and her Substack blog, *migrations and meditations*, Jo is also a supporter and activist in environmental groups and issues and an avid student of meditation practices. She currently divides her time between New York City and northwest Washington State, where she is part of a group developing an intentional, co-housing, eco-sustainable community village.

Elle Wynn is a psychotherapist working for two community mental health clinics in Manhattan and Brooklyn. She focused her undergraduate studies at NYU on creative writing and hopes to be able to make use of writing more in her professional life as she moves to attend an analytic training institute this year.

Contents

PHOTOS: COTTONBRO STUDIO

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From Hand to Hand

I have a fading flower in my hand
Don't know to whom I'll give it on this foreign soil.

—Landay poem by an anonymous Afghan woman[1]

"It turns out that when you meet the president of the United States, you are not allowed to have anything in your hands or your pockets, so the fact is I couldn't *show* President Biden Shegofa Shabazz's 'Letter to the UN' published in *ROOM* 6.23. I could only *tell* him about it," Layne Gregory wrote to me, correcting a rumor that had been buzzing about. Layne Gregory is one of the founders of the Asian University for Women's program Writing for Friendship.

None of us, and perhaps least of all Shegofa, ever imagined that her "Letter to the UN" (which had been rejected by at least four different magazines and newspapers before we published it) could have had such reach. Nor could we have imagined that within weeks the IPA UN subcommittee would invite Shegofa to speak to them, register a formal human rights complaint on her behalf, and work actively to find other platforms to amplify her voice.

ROOM is more than a magazine. It was conceived as a psychoanalytically informed community platform following the 2016 US election. Our editorial process is unique. In keeping with our belief that lasting change can only happen from the ground up, we open our doors and wait for readers to write. We never know, from issue to issue, what will rise to the surface of our collective consciousness. Like Shegofa, the authors of *ROOM* 10.23 are hoping against hope that their words, which are so particular to their separate histories and psychologies, might be heard, might have an impact.

But hearing them may have just gotten harder. The essays in this issue were written months before the horrors which are now unfolding in the Middle East. As I write this editorial, I am aware that it may now be more difficult for some of *ROOM*'s readers to read Diana Moga, a Jew, and Abdel Azziz Al Bawab, a Palestinian, describing their experiences. "Dispossession is simply an ingredient of my identity," writes Bawab in **"A World Not Good Enough."** "And yet this identity, so saturated with pain, I came to realize is a nuisance to *others*." For Diana Moga, "Psychoanalysis has been a way to hold on to conflicting world views, a way to make sense of (her) fragmented past and the pluralities of (her) identity."

But is it still?

In her essay **"Breaking Narratives,"** Moga tells us she was "disappointed and heartbroken when (she) heard that Dr. Sheehi could not present her analytic work with Palestinian patients at ApsaA's June conference." Eric Shorey is cautiously more optimistic. In **"Dragging Psychoanalysis,"** he implores our field to not just make room for the queer community but to go further and risk being transformed through the connection. "If psychoanalysis wants to make amends with the queer community, it will have to confront certain assimilationist assumptions inherent in its thinking."

ROOM 10.23 is all about taking risks. Some authors, like Dean Hammer and Robert Frey, recount risks that landed them in jail or simply came to naught. "The sound of hammers disarming mass-killing weapons [still] echoes in my mind, heart, and soul…" writes Dean Hammer in his **"Reflections on Plowshares Eight."** "Our midnight mission may not have had the dramatic effect we'd hoped, but at least we turned our conviction into action," recounts Robert Frey in **"Midnight Mission."**

1. Sayd Bahodine Majrouh, *Songs of Love and War: Afghan Women's Poetry* (New York: Other Press, 1988). Majrouh was a writer, politician, and dean of the Department of Literature in Kabul. While in exile after the Russian invasion, he founded the Afghan Information Center, which broadcast reports and analyses of resistance across the world. *Songs of Love and War* brings together all the Landays that Majrouh collected in the valleys of Afghanistan and the refugee camps in Pakistan. Majrouh was assassinated in Peshawar one month before its publication.

Others, like William Cornell and Elle Wynn, describe the life-ending risks involved when impenetrable walls are constructed socially or psychically to ward off, in Cornell's words, a "complex web of profound loss, abandonment, and shame." "When I heard he was Black, my immediate thought was that he was truly fucked, that he'd be dead in an hour," writes William Cornell in **"A Sovereign Nation."** "The sense of security [in the senior housing project] was false: there was nothing to keep these vulnerable individuals safe," Elle Wynn recalls in her essay **"A Lack of Interest."** Both of these authors experienced firsthand reality blasting through illusions of safety. They are not speaking metaphorically.

In **"Beyond Reason,"** John Alderdice also makes it deadly clear that nothing we are experiencing today is metaphoric or illusory. "At this inflection point in human history," he writes, "it remains an open question whether global leaders and their followers can put shallow, selfish, short-term political and economic interests aside in favor of global peace, stability, and reconciliation or even the survival of our own species, but the alternative is too terrible to contemplate."

Alderdice recalls the work he did with "three interlocking sets of disturbed historic relationships" in Northern Ireland and how essential it was, when facing existential threats, to develop new ways of thinking and working based on "complexity theories and the full breadth of human knowledge and science." His recognition that "old forms of understanding and ordering society are dissolving for reasons that are not so different from those faced by our predecessors half a millennium ago" leads him to hope against hope that if dramatic paradigm shifts had been possible once, surely they must be possible again.

Josephine Wright's **"Pages in the Park"** entreats us to look even further back when she finds a copy of *Antigone* that a stranger left on a park bench with the day's date penned above Sophocles' words "I have seen this gathering sorrow." Wright can only wonder whether "the dismembered book (was left) on this bench for others to be stirred and provoked by the discourse on responsibility, moral choice, self-examination, and action inherent in Sophocles's remarkable words." Whatever the stranger's intention, Wright's reflections pass their gift on to us.

Writing is risky, and at this pivotal moment in our history it can be an act of moral defiance as it was for Sophocles. In **"Building Connection and Resilience,"** Carol Geithner shows us how it can also be an act of love. As one of the young women in her group wrote, "I cry for my entire country as the sky does for the whole planet." And in reading her words, we can cry with her, she is just a little less alone.

For over a thousand years, Afghan women have sung twenty-two-syllable poems called Landays, a name derived from the Pashto word for a sharp, poisonous snake. Landays are improvised as women get water from springs, cook together in kitchens, work in the fields, and dance at celebrations, and the most powerful ones, like the one in the epigraph above, become anchored in collective memory. The poems of Afghan women, like many of the poems, essays, and memoirs of our *ROOM* authors, are speech acts containing generations of grief, war, love, home, and hope. Some of the offerings in this issue of *ROOM* 10.23 are already anchored in collective memory, some will never be seen, and others are just now coming into being.

ROOM 2.24 is accepting submissions through January 5. Our hands are open. Our hearts are grieving. We are holding space. ■

Reader Responses:
- Abdel Aziz Al Bawab, MD
- Martha Bragin, PhD
- Arnold Richards, MD
- Shegofa Shahbaz

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Beyond Reason

For some years I have been warning publicly that we are heading into a third global conflict, and this, at times, led me to feel quite down about the prospects for humanity. This third global conflict is not simply a rerun of the disasters of the twentieth century, for before 1945, however terrible a war was and however many people died, the world would repair itself and in time the population of the world could be restored. With the threat of nuclear war and the reality of climate change, humankind has brought about the very real danger of our own demise.

However, when 2017 marked the 500th anniversary of the publication of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses, which triggered the Protestant Reformation, I began to see some more positive parallels with our own times.

In those days they had the disruptive technology of Gutenberg's printing press, invented in the 1400s and spreading challenging ideas, especially when Luther, Wycliffe, and others translated the Bible into the vernacular languages. We now have the disruptive technologies of social media spreading messages that impact our thinking. The amplification of conflicting messages promotes widening splits that undermine community cohesion, and artificial intelligence is also automating the firing of weapons at speeds that make human thinking and intervention impossible. Inexpensive drones and precision weapons reduce the possibility of having any safe space, and computers can mimic human thought so that you cannot tell the difference—disruptive technologies in our time, indeed.

Half a millennium ago there was also a widespread belief that those in authority (princes and bishops) were utterly corrupt and did not have the interests of the people at heart. In our time, too, there is a profound loss of faith in authorities of all kinds because of the justifiable anger about widespread corruption, broken promises, financial disaster, deep unfairness, and the undeliverable prospectus of equality. The result is a rise again in extreme nationalism and populism.

Opposition to the new scientific discoveries of people like Copernicus, Galileo, and later Newton made people realize that the leaders of their societies did not understand what was going on. It is also clear that many of today's political leaders do not comprehend the complex developments in science and technology or their implications, as was evident in their responses to the pandemic. However, in our time this has resulted in a disenchantment with all expertise, including that of scientists.

These three developments—disruptive technology, deep anger about corruption and unfairness, and disdain for the quality of sociopolitical leadership—led some people to challenge the thinking of their times. I began to wonder if something similar could be happening in our day. Our old forms of understanding and ordering society are dissolving for reasons that are not so different from those faced by our predecessors half a millennium ago. However, they seemed to have had a clearer idea of the alternatives: democracy instead of authoritarianism; the law guided by a moral code; and education and science replacing obscurantist forms of religious authority. But if major paradigm shifts had been possible in their day, surely there are possibilities for us and our children too. I began to think and speak more positively, not because we could avoid the terrible chaos and destruction of global war—I believed that we had gone too far for that—but because I thought perhaps the crises over these three issues and others would force us to take the thinking of humanity forward, so long as we did not allow ourselves to be destroyed by nuclear and environmental holocausts.

At this inflection point in human history, it remains an open question whether global leaders and their followers can put shallow, selfish, short-term political and economic interests aside in favor of global peace, stability, and reconciliation or even the survival of our species, but the alternative is too terrible to contemplate.

While we can always see the faults in others, we in Europe and the United States have adopted a deeply flawed approach to foreign policy and conflict resolution that is directly contributing to the catastrophic dissolution into chaotic violent conflict across the globe, and it has been getting worse. People everywhere are turning away from the ideals of rationality and liberal democracy. The liberals of the early twentieth century had to radically revise their understanding of society, and Freud, who declared himself a classic liberal, modified his psychoanalytical theories in the wake of the savagery of the First World War. A century later, crisis and war are forcing us to address unwelcome challenges to some of our key assumptions.

As a young man, I trained in psychoanalysis because I found the rationalistic perspective of the political science of those days unconvincing. It did not satisfactorily explain the violent and intractable political conflict in my own country. However, I could see that psychoanalysis took account of people acting against their own best socioeconomic and power interests. As I explored this in my own community and beyond, it became clear to me that rather than being won over by the offer of mere socioeconomic benefits, partisans in situations of historic conflict were often even more resistant to compromise when offered material benefits but could be open to symbolically significant offers. Revolutionaries and insurgents would often sacrifice everything for their cause, would frequently be committed more strongly to their comrades than even to their families, and often prevailed against overwhelming odds, especially when they were fighting professional armies that relied only on the material incentives of pay and promotion. I asked myself, *What is happening in the minds of those who are willing to put themselves in the line of fire for the sake of their cause?*

When experiencing existential threat, people may move from being rational actors to being "devoted actors" driven by faith or commitment to defend or advance nonnegotiable "sacred values," whether religious or secular. Anyone who tries to weigh up the socioeconomic values of faith in God, loyalty to country, or commitment to a political cause will be left bemused, for these cannot be judged by socioeconomic metrics. People in such situations make sacrifices because they believe it is "right," not because of a cost-benefit call.

After centuries of recurring violence in Ireland, we moved away from rational-actor models that focused solely on the law and political and economic structures and engaged in the analysis of three interlocking sets of disturbed historic relationships between communities of people—Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists within Northern Ireland; the people of Ireland, North and South; and the peoples of Britain and Ireland. We addressed these three sets of relationships in three matching strands of negotiations, and the outcome was three interlocking sets of institutions. Confirmation of the value of this analysis of multiple sets of communal relationships became clear not only in the success of bringing the violence to an end through the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, whose twenty-fifth anniversary was recognized in Belfast in April this year, but also later, when the neglect of them contributed to subsequent problems within Northern Ireland and between the United Kingdom and Ireland after Brexit. These British/Irish problems are linked with the requirements of two other external sets of relationships—with the European Union and the United States. They were only resolved when the British prime minister, Rishi Sunak, and the EU president, Ursula von der Leyen, abandoned the transactional regulatory arguments that had resulted in the standoff and returned to developing a positive working relationship with each other. This was an example of how developing a theory and praxis based on the complexity of relationships of communities rather than on the linearity of rational transactional political theory could produce a positive outcome in a previously intractable conflict.

Are there any indications of what kind of change in our thinking might bring us to the new paradigm I have talked about?

Today, interdisciplinary connections are key. We have to move beyond our professional and academic silos. Physicists, for example, have found they can understand everything about hydrogen and oxygen, but that understanding did not tell them what emergent properties to expect when the molecules were brought together as water. Ornithologists recognized that when trying to understand the murmuration of starlings, there is no point in trying to seek to identify a leader, for they know that no such individual bird exists. These flocks of birds are not led by one or more leaders, nor are they merely a collection of individual birds. As has become apparent in our field of psychology, exploring how people function (consciously and unconsciously) requires a larger and wider appreciation of the impact of culture, politics, genetics, and past generational resilience and trauma. Molecules, birds, and human beings function not on their own but as elements within systems—and some of them are complex adaptive systems. I have been suggesting that we need to move beyond the radical rationalism and individualism of some old-style Enlightenment thinking and embrace the emergence of complexity science, appreciate that our emotions are a part of how we think and are a positive evolutionary advantage rather than a flaw to be overcome in favor of rational thought, and focus on the significance of relationships between individuals and communities rather than simply on the individuals themselves.[1] These three elements, I am suggesting, may together point toward a path for survival and our next evolutionary way station. We cannot be sure. Indeed, one of the key insights of complexity science is that the resilience of systems brings outcomes that are not predictable. The challenge of moving to a new and different paradigm is significant, and there remains a real risk that we will wipe ourselves out before we can get there. However, if we focus on fairness, cooperation, community, and a radical new way of understanding based on complexity theories and the full breadth of human knowledge and science, might it bring peace, stability, and prosperity? If we expand our perspective beyond the "rational individual actor" to create caring and cooperative "ways of being" in community without losing our concern for the individual; if we can be informed by our emotions as well as rationality; if we can base our understanding on external reality and also appreciate the wishes, fears, and creativity we hold within ourselves; and if we can appreciate the lessons of history and use them to understand the complexity of "large group" relations, might we rebuild our resilience as a human race and stem off the catastrophic destruction portended by a third global conflict? I believe it is possible. ■

1. Alderdice, John, Lord, "Conflict, Complexity, and Cooperation," *New England Journal of Public Policy* 33, no. 1 (2021): Article 9.

PHOTO (PREVIOUS PAGE): MERT KAHVECI

PHOTO: PURSPECTIVE

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Breaking Narratives

I am writing to share my personal narrative and reaction to recent events at APsaA and in the Middle East. I am Jewish, and I lived in Israel from the time I was five, when we immigrated to Israel from Romania in the midst of the Lebanon War, to the time I was fourteen, when we left as the sirens wailed during the Gulf War. I watched Holocaust documentaries every year on Remembrance Day from the time I was eight years old. I dressed in white and blue and celebrated every Independence Day. I was taught that the State of Israel is essential to the safety of Jews worldwide. I loved the beautiful land around me, the wildflowers in the spring after the rains, the deserts and oases of the Negev, and I was grateful to the Israeli government for getting us out of Communist Romania. In school we sang of the land of milk and honey, and we told stories of our victory over the Arabs, of the Zionist heroes who had conquered and cultivated the land, turning it from a malaria-infested marshy swamp into the shaded lush green country we inhabit today. There was pride and strength and victory in those stories that overcame the darkness of Remembrance Day. Those stories and songs and narratives of Israel manifesting our destiny, the happy ending that our people deserve after generations of suffering and exile, the ruins of Masada, and the stories of the Temple, shaped my reality. But then this narrative began to crack. There was the rising of the intifada, the "problem" of the Palestinians, the bus stop ads warning us to suspect a bomb in any bag left behind, my three-year-old brother playing war games, and my father's rifle in the laundry room.

When the Gulf War began, everything shut down. Schools closed, wandering far from home was ill advised, and we ran to our sealed room every time we heard a siren. I can still picture my five-year-old brother wearing a gas mask. Turns out we weren't so safe. We left in a hurry, boarding a plane while my father stayed behind to handle our affairs, hoping he was safe. We flew overnight, and as we approached Montreal, a desolate landscape of snow stretched before us, and I knew my life was once again about to change drastically.

Fast-forward thirty years. I am listening to an episode of the podcast *Couched* and hear Dr. Lara Sheehi's voice. She is in Lebanon, on the other side of the border, probably no more than a two-hour drive north of the town where I lived. Her play outside her home is interrupted by the piercing noise of Israeli warplanes. She is evacuated from Lebanon twice, leaving behind the land she loves as it is bombed. She, too, immigrates to Canada, to a culture vastly different from hers. The parallels in our story make her voice strangely familiar. She is no longer other. We share commonalities. Her story helps me imagine: Palestinian children also singing their songs and telling their stories, of a beautiful land from which they were exiled; Palestinian families living under inhumane conditions, humiliated and endangered every day of their lives, without electricity for much of the day or access to medical care when they need it; mothers in Gaza knowing that any day, a bomb could fall on their house, killing their children in their sleep. Their situation seems hopeless and endless. I remember a close friend, also an analyst, telling me of her experience of Islamophobia, especially after 9/11. I remember the travel ban that separated families, leaving them to sleep in airports. I begin to think of what it must be like to be Palestinian in America and particularly what it might be like to try to give voice to the plight of Palestinians in America in general and within the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsaA) in particular.

Psychoanalysis for me has been a way to hold on to conflicting world views, a way to make sense of my fragmented past and the pluralities of my identity. I was disappointed and heartbroken when I heard that Dr. Sheehi could not present her analytic work with Palestinian patients at APsaA's June conference. I didn't want anyone to give up their political or religious beliefs. I just wanted a place where I could come and be moved by hearing how a Palestinian woman living in the occupied territories makes meaning of her life, a conference where Lara and my realities both mattered. I wanted a conference where we could hold these conflicting realities in mind and discuss them openly. After all, isn't that the mission of psychoanalysis? To talk about conflict in order to make it more tolerable?

One thing I have learned from working with people who have been othered because of their gender or disability or neurodiversity or physical difference is that their reality is vastly different from mine and that I am actually harmful to them as a therapist if I cannot surrender my world view long enough to understand theirs—what we call a trial identification. We also cannot help anyone else if we cannot as a people, as analysts, see our own trauma, the transgenerational effects of the Holocaust and its aftermath. I understand the chilling effect of Dr. Sheehi's tweet "f** Zionism." I understand the pain it caused and the wish to protect ourselves from such pain. I also understand that many confuse the age-old dream of our people to return to Jerusalem, to Zion, with the political movement of Zionism, which was deeply immersed in nineteenth-century colonialism and aimed to establish a Jewish-*only* state in the land of Palestine. Can we also understand what it was like for Dr. Sheehi to sit for eight hours at a checkpoint and be verbally abused and threatened by Israeli soldiers, which is what provoked those tweets in the first place? We have so much to offer the world if we can each hold our own traumas while making room for everyone else's. We may even find some commonality, and that is the last step of healing from trauma, as a patient of mine reading Judith Herman reminded me.

Personally, I do not believe that Israel is a bulwark against repeated danger or suffering for my people. Israel will not protect my children from being bombed at a synagogue, from climate change, or from another pandemic. The Jews in Israel are living in constant danger, lives defined by threat, fear, and hatred. The conditions in the occupied territories, the ongoing expansion of settlements in the West Bank, and the open bombing of civilians in Gaza are fueling not only Palestinian pain but also hatred and creating a people who have nothing more to lose. Israel in its current manifestation, a Jewish-only state that claims to be a democracy, was a dream created by a traumatized people that worked for a while for some while traumatizing many others and now no longer works at all: "As former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, hardly a leftist, has noted: 'As long as in this territory west of the Jordan River there is only one political entity called Israel, it is going to be either non-Jewish or non-democratic. If this bloc of millions of Palestinians cannot vote, that will be an apartheid state.'"[1] We are not the chosen people literally. We do not get a happy ending no matter the cost. We are interdependent with the rest of humanity, and our actions toward our fellow humans matter. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is how interconnected we all are. I did finally find what I was seeking, a place of healing where both people's traumas could be acknowledged, where seeming contradictions and opposite world views could both be held, with the Combatants for Peace's seventy-fifth-year Nakba ceremony: "Like a ghost in the cellars of collective consciousness this anxiety haunts us, threatening to erupt, but repression and denial only increase the fear that runs rampant in the darkness. It is time to open the door to the cellar and wash it in light…" (Combatants of Peace activist Avia Meira Hirschfeld). What could be more psychoanalytic than that? ■

1 https://thethirdnarrat.wpengine.com/?p=144

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Dragging Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis was, and unfortunately somewhat remains, a field for the wealthy, which means that interactions with so-called lowbrow forms of art and entertainment are somehow outside the scope of what analysts have shown interest in. In a city as segregated by financial class as New York, the wealthy's interactions with the financially disenfranchised have become even fewer and far between, other than in the roles of server and served. It often seems like we're living in two different worlds with no bridge between them. To what extent is psychoanalysis' classism and presumed high-mindedness something that remains under-examined? Does the psychoanalytic field have disdain for supposedly lowbrow interests, things like video games, sports, and various underground youth subcultures?

I don't think it's melodramatic to say that the field of psychoanalysis remains guilty for its historically hideous treatment of LGBTQ+ and gender-nonconforming individuals—a history which this event is trying to reconcile with. It's no secret that until frighteningly recently, homosexuality and transgender identity were thought of as mental disorders, and the psychoanalytic "debate" about the pathological nature of non-heterosexual identity remains frighteningly echoed alive today. Outdated and patently bigoted ideas about trans people and queer people remain discussed and proliferated at psychoanalytic institutes, and I could tell you some blood-curdling stories about the things people in this field remain unafraid to speak: insisting that "transgenderism" is a form of hysteria or psychosis, linking borderline pathology to non-normative gender presentation, suggestions that the goal of treatments of gay men should be to make them more masculine, or even the idea that transgender people simply don't exist. These beliefs still have sway in our circles.

I think a lot of these misguided ideas about queer people, queer identity, and queer art are mostly born of ignorance, and it's incredible to watch the analytic hubris of thinkers who pathologize gender non-conformity without ever having actually interacted with gender non-conforming people. The straight world and the gay world remain quite segregated as well. My hope is that by actually seeing queer art in person, some of it starts to make a little more sense.

Because of many analysts' total unfamiliarity with actual, lived gay experiences, "gender dysphoria" and the surgeries that may or may not correct this condition take center stage in psychoanalytic discourse of gender non-conforming patients. Perhaps this is because that's all that gets seen in the consulting room, or perhaps that's because that's all certain analysts *want* to see—because it confirms some conscious or unconscious belief about the inherent sickness of gender nonconformity. But what doesn't get talked about is a phenomenon that's becoming known as "gender euphoria"—experiences of ecstatic pleasure, solace, and perhaps even healing brought about when a person's gender expression—which may or may not be typical in its presentation—is affirmed and celebrated. Drag explores the heights and depths of both euphoria and dysphoria, the agony and bliss of gendered experiences across the gender spectrum. In this way, drag may be considered an expressionistic negotiation of specific kinds of queer and gender-based traumas—or as a kind of (dare I say it?) sublimation.

People in general seem to have a lot of misconceptions about what drag actually is. In the book *And the Category Is...* writer Ricky Tucker explains how the house ballroom system—a specific subculture in queer nightlife predominantly created by trans, Black, and Latinx artists—arose due to the prevalence of family rejection of LGBTQ+ kids in those populations. The nightlife world is not simply a hedonistic landscape filled with depravity and indulgence. For many of us, it's a kind of family that has taken on a psychological and social importance far greater than that of our biological relatives. These queer families provide structure, history, mentorship, tradition, work, etiquette, ethics, meaning, support, and most importantly purpose in the same way that biological families do. Despite the universal importance of the Oedipal complex in our psychoanalytic cosmos, psychoanalysts are quick to ignore the role of the gay father or the drag mother—parents who step in to guide the queer children when their biological families abscond. To what extent does the gay family recapitulate the Oedipal situation or to what extent does the queer family escape traditional Oedipal organizations entirely?

I'd like to propose that queer nightlife—at least theoretically—functions as a kind of temporary utopia, a playful inversion of the increasingly dystopian elements of our hyper-capitalist world. In the real world, the queer body is a magnet for violence, denigration, exploitation, and hatred. In the night club, the queer body on display is rewarded, cheered, praised, showered with money, perhaps even worshiped as a source of *moral* good. In the real world, queer pleasure is treated as a literal political threat—and right-wing legislation and right-wing violence all over the United States are currently attempting to eradicate queer life from the public sphere, as we saw just last month in Colorado. But in the night club, queer life is treated as sacred, and queer joy is holy.

The saying that "drag is inherently political"—an idea that's become a little bit of a catchphrase in queer circles—is quite radical for people who still assume that drag is simply a man dressed as a woman doing a silly little dance. Even amongst gay communities, and especially before the rise of mainstream drag performers on television, drag performers are and were often subject to ridicule and stigma. Drag, to me, is defined as "artistic expression in the medium of gender"—meaning that it has little to do with crossdressing at all. If we are to expand our idea of drag, or if we actually go look at drag in real life, we can easily see pure avant-gardism in drag's provocative violations of normality and normativity. In truth, drag has always been political in the sense that the LGBTQ+ community's most important historical leaders have been drag artists and transgender people since the beginning of time. The recent right-wing characterization of drag as a form of "grooming" purposefully misunderstands the aims and aesthetics of drag in order to phantasmatically transform gender non-conforming people into boogeymen who threaten the "innocence" of childhood. Here I challenge fellow queer people: conservatives want so badly to outlaw drag for kids, but should the political power of drag be rendered inoffensive and family-friendly to begin with? Is our attempt at shaping drag into a non-confrontational art form in fact a betrayal of its transgressive potential? What if drag actually *is* threatening to structures of power—and what if that's been the point all along?

If psychoanalysis wants to make amends with the queer community, it will have to confront certain assimilationist assumptions inherent in its thinking. To what extent are psychoanalysts attempting to "normalize" queer patients by coaxing them into behaving more like straight people? To what extent are some analyses actually covert conversion therapies? To what extent does psychoanalysis continue to unconsciously pathologize gender nonconformity even as we supposedly accept queer lifestyles? This is where a confrontation with gender nonconformity in its most ostentatious form—drag—is necessary: for psychoanalysis to understand its own assumptions, it must actually see the thing it's making assumptions about. ■

PHOTO : BIGPT

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A World Not Good Enough

I remember the situation well. I was in the second grade. The classroom walls were jam-colored, the seats beige. We had just returned from recess, the lights were still off, and my friend Fuad had done something to wrong me.

I'm not sure what he did, but I recall a vague sense of betrayal. It was with hesitation that I pondered ending our friendship. It would've been simple. Us seven-year-olds had an idiosyncratic language system for the occasion: you ended a friendship by raising the pinkie to say خصمتك. Alternatively, you began a friendship by raising the thumb to say صاحبتك. These were the decisive signifiers, sealing or rupturing bonds in that primary school in Amman. The effects were as concrete as they were immediate. We used those fingers like a judge did a gavel.

I eyed Fuad, mulling over the best move. I had to act before the bell rang and class began. I called his name and stood up in my chair. I was about to give him the pinkie and end our friendship then and there. The air was still. The other seven-year-olds turned their heads. I glanced around. The teacher glared impatiently.

Fuad looked back at me, alarm in his eyes. My hesitation intensified: maybe the pinkie would be extreme… Besides, I didn't want to cause a scene and be bad. Maybe there was something to preserve about my friendship with Fuad. I'd just go halfway, something in the middle between friend and foe, between thumb and pinkie. The middle finger it is.

The teacher shrieked:

"Aziz! What in the world are you doing?"

"What did I do?"

"Shame on you. Where did you learn that?"

"What? It means half-خاصمتك , half-صاحبتك ."

"You know exactly what it means!"

And so, in that middle-class school with middle-class morals, a meddlesome boy raised a little middle finger.

In my moment of inventiveness, my seven-year-old self thought I was setting a sophisticated boundary. But my teacher's reaction puzzled me. I saw that there was something shameful about my spontaneity, perhaps even about me.

My teacher failed to mentalize me. She reflected to me an image of myself that was jarring, a projection I could not metabolize. It left me with a strange aura: I was shrouded in obscure badness. Here is an adult, far ahead of me in years and wisdom, who *knows* that there is something unspeakably bad about me and insists that I know it too. A pressure accompanied the aura and hailed me to identify with it, to assume the jarring into my being.

I would become more intimately familiar with this aura over the years. Within my family, I was destined for mischief. Although I redeemed myself by being studious, everyone knew I was up to no good. My aunt said she knew it from the way I observed my surroundings: mischief was in my eyes. I wondered if it was in my brother's blue eyes, too. It didn't seem like it. He inherited those eyes from our Slovenian grandmother, and they were adored all around. My amber eyes telegraphed trouble; his blue eyes telegraphed purity. Many nights as an adolescent, I shut my eyelids in intense prayer, asking God to make me look like my brother. To make me good.

But the badness wouldn't go away; it would be augmented through various consonant dynamics, reproduced relentlessly and pervasively on a broad social level, always seemingly saying something similar: you are trouble; you are a nuisance.

Growing up as a Palestinian in Jordan, I was a nuisance. Not far from our apartment, demonstrations would be held outside the Israeli embassy. The baton-armed Jordanian gendarmerie would act swiftly to repress them, crushing handfuls of skulls in the process.

In the movies I saw and the video games I played, the Arab was the brute to be killed. The news on television routinely showed us dying. In a world that haggled over the value of human life, ours were clearly expendable. In this context, the aura of obscure badness began to contour, and a signifier emerged to clarify the nameless wrong I felt: I must be a terrorist.

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Frantz Fanon explains that society is structured in such a way as to allow for the achievement of collective catharsis and the channeling of its aggressive impulses. Those positioned to bear the brunt of this aggression are caught in a logjam. The child's ordinary impulse is to identify with the "good guys," and in the representations, games, and narratives of the colonizer's culture, these are invariably the colonizers. Consequently, the colonized children find themselves libidinally turning against themselves.

This is to say, when your world is not good enough, you will be alienated from yourself.

When I traveled to America for the first time in the year preceding Trump's election, I discovered that the casual question about where I'm from rarely yielded a casual answer. The answer put people at unease. It turned friendly exchanges hostile.

"There's no such thing as Palestine!" retorted one blue-eyed man, who, after introducing himself as Latvian a minute before, now revealed that he had served in the Israeli military. He was left frenzied on that Manhattan sidewalk, and the history of Palestinian erasure played through my mind. It's a history of Zionism.

The founding father of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, wrote a letter in 1902 to Cecil Rhodes (one of the most famous colonialists of his time, in whose honor the white-supremacist colony Rhodesia was named):

"You are being invited to help make history. That cannot frighten you, nor can you laugh at it. It is not in your accustomed line: it doesn't involve Africa, but a piece of Asia Minor; not Englishmen but Jews…How, then, do I happen to turn to you since this is an out-of-the-way matter for you? How indeed? Because it is something colonial."

In other writings, Herzl revealed the quintessentially colonial binary undergirding his plans for Palestine: "We should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism." And so, recent European Jewish immigrants to Palestine would establish an exclusive Jewish state in a land populated by Arabs. Settler-colonial logic was in order: the natives would have to be eliminated to bring the settler into being.

In 1948, my grandfather was expelled from Palestine along with around 750,000 other Palestinians. His town, Al-Manshiyya, was destroyed along with 530 other towns. Zionist militias forcibly displaced 85 percent of the indigenous Palestinian population from the area that became the state of Israel.

This is the Nakba. It means "catastrophe" in Arabic, and it does not exist in the world's consciousness. The state of Israel has laws that ban the use of the word from textbooks and prohibit institutions from commemorating the Nakba. The Nakba is not an event in the past. It persists in the ongoing displacement of Palestinians.

As a descendant of refugees, my history is marked by the Nakba. Dispossession is simply an ingredient of my identity. And yet this identity, so saturated with pain, I came to realize is a nuisance to *others*. Palestinian pain is unacceptable, to say nothing of Palestinian anger.

Two thousand miles away from that Manhattan sidewalk and seven years later, a nursing aide at a New Mexico hospital wanted to know where I was from. I told her I'm Palestinian. Without missing a beat, she immediately asked: "Why do you hate us?"

I was baffled. After speaking to colleagues, I found out that she was neurodivergent. She was simply saying the collectively "quiet part" out loud.

The aura reared its head. Terrorist. Even in scrubs, I cannot be trusted. My pastimes are probably flag-burning and Jew-hating.

Whenever I'm asked where I'm from, irrespective of how unsuspecting and innocuous the interlocutor is, an anxiety arises. It signals danger. It demands I say "Jordan" and make things easier for everyone.

Speaking of Palestine summons a powerful affect. This affect is often defended against through unconscious processes that cast Palestinians as threatening and barbaric and demand they erase themselves. Processes where the externality of the colonial structure enacting Palestinian erasure is encountered in the interiority of the individual.

The demand for Palestinian erasure arises from a larger socio-historical structure, present mentally as a blueprint that maps out people's presupposed positions in the world. Positions imposed historically through violence and valued differentially according to colonial logics. This map is unconsciously pulled upon to be reproduced externally, in an injurious gesture echoing the original colonial trauma that birthed the world attempting to be reproduced.

Being Palestinian, then, is trouble after all. Our history is not just the Nakba but a long struggle against imperialism and colonialism, predating the Nakba. A Palestinian, as Ghassan Kanafani says, is a cause. A commitment to justice and liberation everywhere.

When your world is not good enough, you will be alienated from yourself. You join the struggle to remake the world, to return to yourself. ■

Looking into the Blue
2019
Monotype, silkscreen and litho on paper
39 × 28 in | 99 × 71 cm

Admire Kamudzengerere

catincatabacaru.com/artists/admire-kamudzengerere

Admire Kamudzengerere's work explores identity, politics, and society, often informed by the multifaceted structural and social issues that have marked Zimbabwe's last decade. Working in various media, he frequently reveals an unequal world in which the powerful ride roughshod over the weak.

"Drawing being decisively male, as a black artist, I find visual language very racist, explicitly aggressive, and violent. My artistic dilemma is how to engage the veins of unconsciousness in visual poetry and transfer them to a language of prose. I attempt to adopt feminist tactics, finding order and sanity. To draw in the dark such that I cannot see my own line and cannot change nor scrap anything."

—Admire Kamudzengerere, 2019

DUST (diptych)
2017
Silkscreen on monotype
35 x 26 in | 89 x 66 cm each

Sticky Faces
2021
Monotypes on post-its (unique)
120 x 160 cm

Smileys 2/2
2021
Monotypes on post-its (unique)
80 x 60 cm

Unicycle circus in Zimbabwe
2021
Oil on canvas
51 × 57 in (125 × 144 cm)
Installation View

What happens in the dark? How does a community's behavior change through imposed restrictions and regulations? Seeing the world's superpowers playing war games via a race for a cure seems to be far from mankind's humanity and much closer to economic and weapon games. In Zimbabwe, the government abused its power of lockdown measures to crush the opposition party. The rise of corrupt systems, informal markets, hunger, and survival at sword's edge. I watch the destruction of the informal markets—street vendors, people who live day to day—in Zimbabwe and worldwide.

Charging Bull
2021
Oil on canvas
57 × 98 in (145 × 249 cm)

PHOTO: TIM HÜRNER

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On Agadez

To every door is a caller to dune.
The man at Amawil Market says he knows
The fastest pathway to Europe's back door.
Yet there is no pathway without rate-limiting steps.

No one says to him, the tales of the perished,
The peril that awaits people at Sabha; surely
Traveling is a hue of anguish, no one
Would tell you that, you and your ears.

Sun-drying under the open ambience of the desert,
The woman at the door of the town says,
You have a life here, men who are far from home
Are always men of thirst; they would surely find her useful.

She is a caller; this is what you have.
Use it now that you have it before the desert
claims it, before the worms make dust off it.
No one tells her hope is a fountain drawn upon mirage.

It has never quenched the lust of anyone.
No one could tell her the desert keeps no record of the legs
Of those who fall, and the sea has a mouth where gravitational jargon
Turned science of facade, and everyone becomes an heirloom to the old trade.

Old grief becomes a commonplace old train married to the track; it is expected,
A deluge of salt and memories of haunts. There is no literature yet
Telling us that in the past five decades the desert has witnessed more blood flow
than rain, and its sands mourn more bodies than the cacti he owns.

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A Sovereign Nation

IT HAD BEEN A MORNING OF RUNNING ERRANDS, and I was driving home to make lunch. I live on a major thoroughfare in the heart of Pittsburgh, adjoining the neighborhood of Garfield, a predominantly Black working-class neighborhood. As I turned the corner, I found the street blocked by police motorcycles and patrol cars. I was ordered to turn around. I parked nearby and then returned on foot to my street, again to be stopped by a patrol officer, who demanded to know where I was going. When I pointed to my house, he asked for my ID and then told me to go ahead to my house but "No farther; we are in the midst of an active shooter situation." The neighborhood was in lockdown.

I waited inside, but I could see the police presence steadily building in the street. The shooting was three blocks away. My son, who also lives in the neighborhood, called and asked if I was safe. "Are you okay, Pop? I got out of the shower to go to work, and I heard hundreds of gunshots. What the fuck is going on?! Police are everywhere. They let me through to go to work. Don't leave the house until this is over."

Some of our neighbors ventured outside, and word came from one that a heavily armed man had barricaded himself inside a house and was firing at the police. He had been squatting in this house he did not own, and the sheriff had come to serve an eviction notice. He started firing, and all hell broke loose. Nearby residents were being evacuated, and the police cordoned off several blocks. A heavily armed SWAT team was now in front of our house.

Slowly, as we gathered apprehensively in the street, a story unfolded from bits and pieces of what neighbors had known or had been gossiped about. The man, Bill, barricaded inside, had a few years earlier declared himself "a sovereign nation," accountable to no one. His life had been collapsing for several years. His younger brother, Big Joey, who had owned the house and was much loved in the neighborhood, had died. Bill had expected the house would be given to him. But Joey had no will, so the court gave the house to Joey's eighty-year-old father, who lived in another state and had no interest in the house. Apparently, due to family troubles, the father sold it to a developer rather than give it to his son. The developer paid $25,000 for the house, intending to renovate it and flip it. Bill moved in anyway, fervently believing it was rightfully his.

Bill's world as a sovereign nation was declared on the front door's handwritten messages: *Not for sale. No trespassing. WH lives here. Private property.* His brother Joey had been a welcomed member of this community. Bill was known to many in the neighborhood but quite feared by those living closest to him. Some of the neighbors knew he was heavily armed.

As I heard the stories of his proclamations of being a sovereign nation (he drove a car without a license and, in spite of numerous arrests, declared himself accountable to no law and continued to drive), I thought of a sovereign nation and an abandoned son and brother in a spiral of final despair and collapse.

In spite of an extensive record of arrests and clear mental health problems, Bill had been able to arm himself extensively. When I heard he was Black, my immediate thought was that he was truly fucked, that he'd be dead in an hour. But that was not to be the case. The standoff, accompanied by periodic bursts of hundreds of rounds of gunfire, went on for hours. The police realized that he was a man in trouble and that he did not intend to kill anyone. He was defending his nation. They were using drones to see if he had hostages (he was alone) or bombs and to discover the extent of his weapons. Bill skillfully shot each drone out of the air, but he never fired at a person. He refused to talk on the phone with his son. The police broadcast messages on a bullhorn to him from family and friends, begging him to talk or come out. But by then he had sealed the world out and himself in. And he had sealed his fate. After six hours of the standoff, the house riddled with holes from police fire, the windows blown out, he was dead, killed by police bullets.

As I was writing this essay, I wrote to Paul Williams, with whom I consult. He replied, "The shooting sounds horrendous and tragic. The fact that this man was allowed to get so profoundly alienated is terrible in itself, so his death is not surprising…This makes me think of my own definition of psychic homelessness. Our home exists essentially within ourselves, I think, and if we have had no internal experience of being welcomed into the home of the mind and heart of another person, we have no home and are doomed if we do not get help with this." Without a home, Bill had created a nation.

I have worked for many years with psychotic clients and have witnessed so very often the tragedies of the vicious, complex web of profound loss, abandonment, and shame warded off by nearly impenetrable psychotic walls that create some version of a sovereign, psychic nation, alone and bereft. A month earlier, the neighbors had requested a "wellness check" on Bill through the city. Bill turned them away. No Trespassing.

Garfield is a predominantly Black neighborhood that had been long abandoned by the city. Thirty years ago, 80 percent of the storefronts sat empty and abandoned on the street we live on, as did 60 percent of the housing in the neighborhood. The community organized to save itself. Wedged between two heavily gentrified neighborhoods that over the past decade have displaced thousands of long-term residents, Garfield has fought to protect and retain its people. With an engaged community board (on which I've served for more than twenty years), dedicated paid staff, and the support of local foundations and churches, the community has built subsidized housing and maintains after-school services, college readiness programs, a job placement center, a community newspaper, and—as best we can—close working relationships with the city government and police. Garfield is now a viable place to live—it is a community.

In addition to the emotional impact of the standoff and the hurried evacuations of the surrounding homes, there was extensive property damage from the barrages of bullets and the hurried setups of the SWAT teams in the backyards of the nearby homes. The three families most affected by property damage lived directly across the street from Bill in subsidized homes built by our community group. These women were skeptical that the city (not very well regarded in our community) would be of any real assistance.

As is typical of our community group, the next day we held a meeting with a trauma team for the nearby residents. The next couple of hours proved to be moving and—initially—heartening. Down the street from where we were meeting, neighbors from all around came to talk, offer support, and see what was happening. The atmosphere was one of grief, relief, compassion, and care. The block was swarming with city officials, police, evidence teams, and—of course—local news cameras. Our newly elected mayor, the first Black mayor for Pittsburgh, was there talking with residents and reviewing the damage. At that moment, I was impressed and hopeful. But sadly, the skepticism of the women whose homes were damaged proved to be all too true. The mayor's visit now seems mostly a photo op. The city is being very slow in responding to the needs of the residents. Three weeks after the tragedy, our community center held a meeting for a discussion of the aftermath of the tragedy, which was attended by more than one hundred residents. The room was filled with fear and frustration. But the meeting did not end in frustration. We were able to make concrete plans to see to the repair of the homes without waiting for the city. People turned toward one another. Once again, the community is filling in the gap, a community to which Bill had tragically been left an outlier. ■

PHOTOS : ARTEMIS PAUL

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A Lack of Interest

The obsessions I look into the least in session are those centered around true crime. Call it countertransference; call it a lack of professional curiosity. Label it what you will, but what remains is an utter absence of interest in the very stories that keep many of my clients perched on the edge of their seats, breathless as they recount a tale that has captured their full attention that week. Inevitably, bodies roll across the narrative like a boat skimming across the face of choppy waters. In moments, they've rounded a bend and are out of sight, out of mind, out of session. The climax hurtles forward, and the bodies become a number, a jail sentence, years and children left behind.

Still, I couldn't help clicking on an article in *New York Magazine* two years ago, well beyond my graduation and into my tenure as a therapist, about the Woodson Houses murders. When I read through the article, I recognized not only the halls I'd walked alone as a social work student but the serial killer's last victim, a woman whose sweetness and idiosyncrasies were out of a Southern Gothic novel.

Hunter College's field placement program is chaotic at best and utterly dysfunctional at worst. At some point in the fall of 2017, I ended up in a minivan with five other social work students, shuttled between sites in East New York and Brownsville. When we landed at Rosetta Gaston and the Woodson Houses, I felt the nerves of the students beside me ratchet up. The housing projects were vast and the center imposing with its cages over the windows and its large, nearly empty dining hall. When it was announced that I would be coming there to work alone, the Japanese student with whom I'd become closest over the course of the day squeezed my hand gently. "I'm glad it's not me," she whispered.

When I left work, the clients would occasionally tell me they prayed for my safe journey home. I dreaded the time when it would be dark before I left the center at 5:00 p.m., when the New York ice and winter nights would settle on an already-dark winter in my life. Traveling from the center to the opera felt like traversing entire continents; I felt displaced and ill at ease in both.

Despite the school's insistence that there would be adequate supervision, I was left alone in my placement for days at a time, and I often wandered the halls of Woodson Houses. Because of the color of my skin, I was called upon to accompany clients to NYCHA offices to make complaints about the state of their apartments; they assumed that a white woman's voice would be listened to when theirs was not. I'm not sure if it was. The New York City Housing Authority is, for better or worse, an egalitarian bureaucratic nightmare.

It is difficult to put into words the minor and major tragedies of a place like Rosetta Gaston Senior Center and, by extension, the Woodson Houses, where its members resided. Because of the relatively randomized, lottery-like selection for public senior housing, many of those I spoke to at Rosetta had moved from boroughs other than Brooklyn. Many had outlived children; the relatives who remained were often too aged or lived too far away to visit. Yes, they told me, they had a place to live, but they felt they'd lost their family in order to do so. Many feared living in the Woodson Houses for reasons other than a killer who'd struck in the building; they feared the constant elevator outages and the simple fact that in a fire, they would not be able to climb down the stairs. This was a fear that was spoken of in select company; there were those members whose children had died in the Twin Towers, and it would have been too cruel to speak of those fears in their presence.

But presence is what this essay is about—a presence and a lack thereof. The other in the room and an imagined other who never existed. The imagined other was the idea of safety, of having found a safe place within four walls with one's peers. It was a place where the Thanksgiving dinner was served early but with great seriousness and where the members' birthdays were celebrated with a massive white sheet cake monthly. And it was an other that proved to be false, not only with the murder of a center member's infant grandson just blocks away, discovered by this woman on the center's lone television, but with the initially unreported murders in the Woodson Houses.

Years later, I recognized the serial killer in the article as a man whose presence I'd asked about several times during my year at Rosetta Gaston but not enough times to justify any real interest; he simply made me uneasy, and his presence among the senior women did not make sense. He never met my eyes, and I cannot tell you what his voice sounded like. I have not wanted to know since he was caught and have not sought out sound bites.

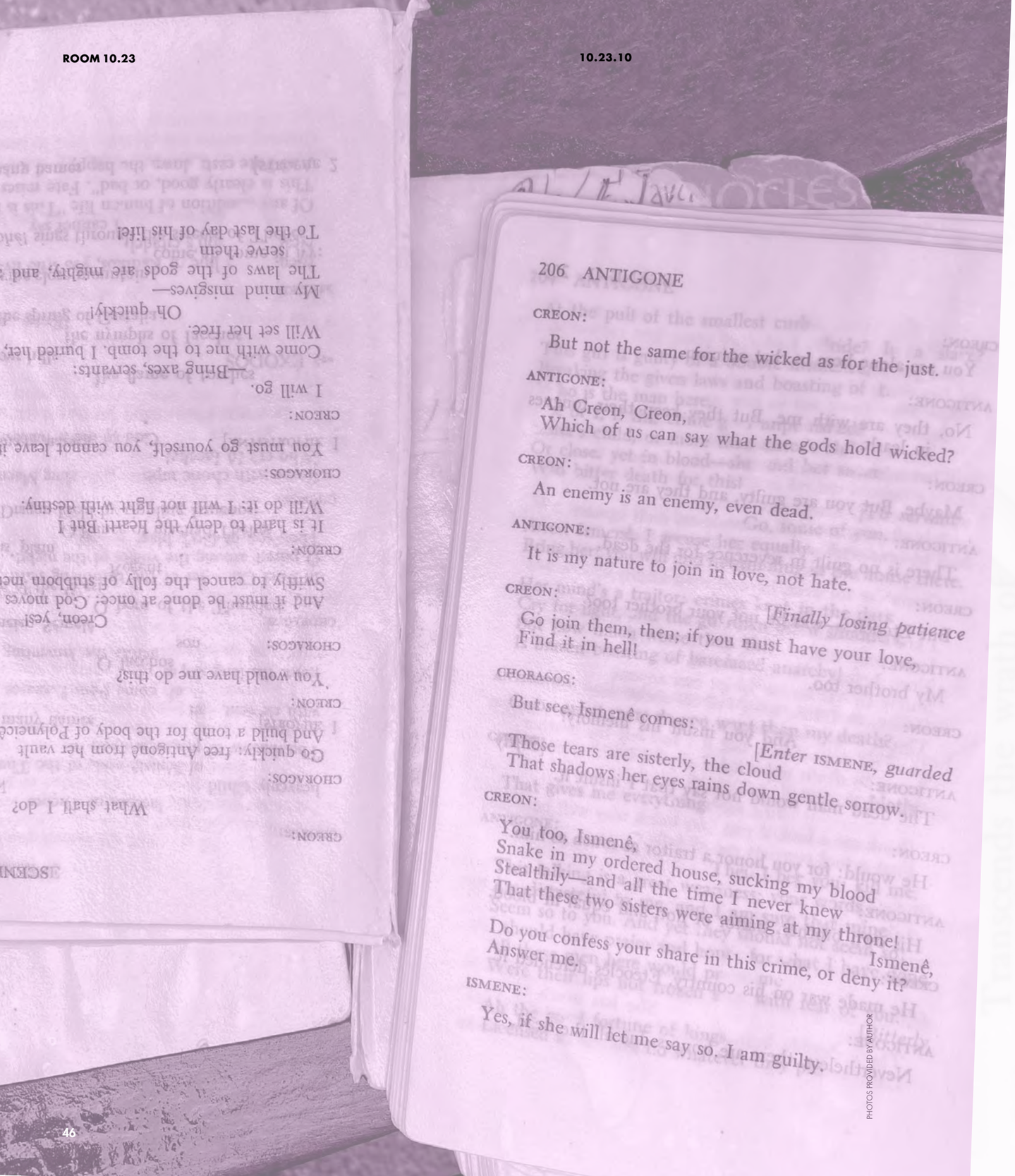
The killer—Kevin Gavin—was not a senior citizen, but he came to Rosetta Gaston as a sort of handyman; he often went across the street to buy lottery tickets and sodas for the senior women. I rarely saw him speak to other men. When I asked about him, I received few responses; my questions normally came during game time, trying to rouse up interest in group therapy sessions, and at that point many were already in supplication to the gods of kino or bingo.

What alarms me now is the idea that people felt safer in the center than they did out of it; that they walked down the hall connecting Woodson Houses to Rosetta and visibly loosened their shoulders and their smiles when they approached. The sense of security was false; there was nothing to keep these vulnerable individuals safe. In fact, even the buzzers on the doors were rendered useless by the center's dining room, which kept its door wide open in the mornings for the garbage to be dragged out. NYCHA employees flitted through like jolly, gray-sweatshirt-wearing specters, but it was well known that residents "needed to file a ticket" before asking them to look into repairs. Wait times were often eight or ten months. The presence of a NYCHA logo meant nothing but a sad shake of the head.

Why my clients and I were not warned to be safe inside when an unsolved brutal murder had occurred above our heads less than two years prior is unclear. Why social work students before and after my tenure were left in those houses for days at a time without oversight, being pulled upstairs to take pictures of peeling paint and leaks in the apartments of homebound seniors, I do not know. The presence of safety was certainly felt, but what was actually existent was a malignance, a predator. The last victim, a woman who spoke perilously little English but was well loved for her flamboyance and her suggestive, waggling eyebrows, was especially vulnerable, as she was small and drowsy. She often slept in the center, head against her chest, wearing a bright red basketball jersey; she felt safe in that place. Eventually, I, too, felt safer there, and my departure came with much sadness. I felt attached to the clients and to the quiet religiosity that reminded me of being back South. But that safety remained an illusion, and I often wonder what's left of the place after COVID and Kevin Gavin worked their way through.

What I know but cannot say to clients is that bodies that add up in true crime are not as weightless as our television binges would have us believe; matter is neither created nor destroyed. That weight rests somewhere. It rests often in the place where people are already bogged down underneath a terrible burden—of poverty, loneliness, and alienation. And the sagging of their shoulders does not prevent more weight from being added. ■

PHOTO (PREVIOUS PAGE): JR KORPA



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY AUTHOR

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PAGES IN THE PARK

The sodden pages were splayed out on the bench below a Riverside Park Conservancy banner. I glanced up and down the promenade, hoping to alert the book owner. It was 7:15 a.m. on Sunday, July 16, and it was raining. The park was empty. Earlier, I had skimmed the *Guardian* and the *Times*, read Bill McKibben's latest *Crucial Years* piece, and checked the air quality, the expected heat, and the latest news on the devastating fires, heat waves, and floods the world over. My usual morning routine.

I had to get out ahead of the day's pollution, heat, and expected thunderstorms and away from my despair. I needed trees, birds, flowering shrubs, and I knew where to find them: Riverside Park, the wonderful miles-long park that runs along the upper western edge of Manhattan next to the Hudson River—a short walk from my apartment.

I had been photographing rain within the hearts and throats of flowers when I saw the pages on the wet bench that overlooked the West Side Highway and beyond to the racing waters of the Hudson. Looking more closely, I recognized the pages as the play *Antigone*. The two pages on top, 206 and 229, upside down from each other, were not consecutive. Had the reader taken the chunk of the book containing missing pages 207–228 because they had particular significance? Or was the intent to highlight these two remaining pages in the hope that a passerby would pause to read them. To alert them—me? —to the 2,500-year-old moral discourse on these pages? Carefully lifting the remaining wet sections, I found a torn cover and identified the book as a copy of the 1959 Harvest Books edition of *Sophocles: The Oedipus Cycle*, translated by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald. How strange! I had only recently given my worn copy of the same volume to a local thrift shop as part of my effort to downsize my enormous library, which includes multiple translations of all the existing plays of Sophocles.

At home later, I turned to the University of Chicago Press's *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles I* (Second Edition, 1991) containing David Grene's translation of *Antigone*. Lines 592 to 1173 of Grene's version corresponded with the missing pages. They follow the impassioned dialogue between Antigone and Creon, upon confirmation that she, by partially burying the body of her dead brother Polyneices, has disobeyed Creon's decree that the body must be left untended, as carrion outside the city walls. This dialogue—part of which is on the waterlogged page 206 left on the bench—is about the conflict between the law of the state or dictator and a conflicting moral imperative of the citizen. In this case, that is Antigone's sense of a higher order of moral obligation to provide funeral rites for her brother, even on the penalty of death. The other page exposed on the bench, 229, picks up where Creon, having buried Antigone alive in a subterranean cave, is suddenly anguished by the subsequent prophecy of great loss and misery befalling him and his family. He changes his mind and rushes to undo what he has done. His last words—visible on page 229 on the bench—are "The laws of the gods are mighty, and a man must serve them to the last day of his life!" Grene's rendition of the same speech: "It may be best, in the end of life, to have kept the old accepted laws."

Pages 207 to 228 appeared to be missing from the bench altogether, except for page 210, which was partially visible. Our unknown bench sitter had written the date, 7-15-23, across the top, and when I lifted the overlapping page, I saw that they had also written "July 15, 2023, Saturday" in blue inked script with a mature flourish, as though to emphasize our time and place: *This is now! The twenty-first century!* Standing in the early-morning rain, looking at those pages, wondering about intentionality, about meaning, I had an uncanny feeling of presence. As though the unknown reader had been there only moments before. As though these pages were from the same physical copy I had recently donated—that this book went from my hands to the hands of the unknown bench sitter, who only hours earlier had written the date on page 210 and left the dismembered book on this bench for others to be stirred and provoked by the discourse on responsibility, moral choice, self-examination, and action inherent in Sophocles's remarkable words. And why write the date on this particular page above the tragic words "I have seen this gathering sorrow…"?

In the Grene translation of the lines of this chorus speech referring to Fate, the passages chillingly evoke concerns of our times: false news, hate speech, distortions of truth, and suppression of science. Grene's lines 599 to 603 correspond to Fitt's passage below that handwritten date:

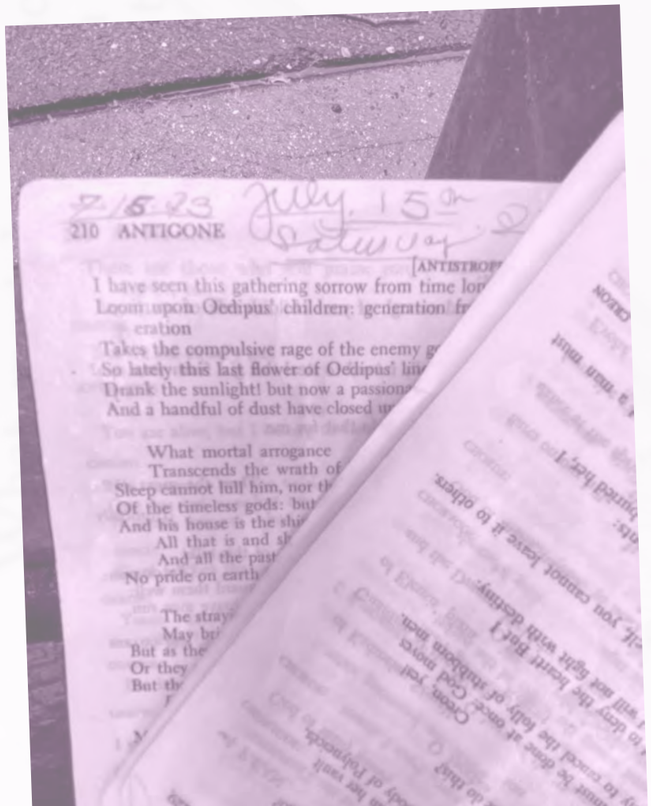
> Here was the light of hope stretched
> over the last roots of Oedipus' house,
> and the bloody dust due to the gods below
> has mowed it down—that and the folly of speech
> and ruin's enchantment of the mind.

Later, in lines 616 to 622, Grene renders the ominous words penned long ago by Sophocles as:

> For Hope, widely wandering, comes to many of mankind
> as a blessing,
> but to many as the deceiver,
> using light-minded lusts;
> she comes to him that knows nothing
> till he burns his foot in the glowing fire.
> […]that evil seems good to one whose mind
> the gods lead to ruin,

At the time Grene made this 1991 translation, much was already known about our impending planetary crisis. In 1988, Dr. James E. Hansen warned the US government that rising greenhouse gases from extraction and burning of fossil fuels would result in global warming and untold harm to our biosphere. Even before then, Exxon executives began spending millions to suppress climate science, falsify the findings of their own scientists, and distribute false "science." The massive Exxon PR budget was used to propagate false hope and false blame including inventing the concept of your personal carbon footprint, thereby laying responsibility at the consumer's feet. Whether it was our unknown park bench reader's intention or not, the words of Sophocles in *Antigone* seem ready to be applied to these, our troubled times.

We are left with so few of Sophocles' many plays. There is evidence that there were other Theban plays in his opus, and the three we have are not meant to be a trilogy. Nevertheless, it is intriguing that *Antigone*, though chronologically the last story of the Theban myth, was written and performed when Sophocles was in his fifties, while he was a state treasurer and a general involved in both military and diplomatic action. This was a time of his life when he was intimately concerned with matters of state power and democracy. His *Oedipus Rex* was written a few years later, and his *Oedipus at Colonus* was written close to his death at age ninety, at the time Athens faced its devastating ultimate defeat in the Peloponnesian Wars.



That Sunday morning, I left the pages as I found them, planning to return later in the day. In order to mark the location, I looked up at the Riverside Park Conservancy banner above. It bore an image of the Jeanne d'Arc statue. Surely this placement of the pages from *Antigone* underneath the Jeanne d'Arc banner was not a coincidence. Jeanne d'Arc died at nineteen for defying the state for what she thought was a moral cause. Antigone was about nineteen when she defied Creon. Sinéad O'Connor was twenty-six in 1992, when she tore up a picture of Pope John Paul II after singing Bob Marley's song "War" on *SNL*. The list could go on. Greta Thunberg was recently charged with the crime of "disobedience to law and order" and fined. The young environmental protester Manuel Paez Terán was shot to death by the Georgian state police in a forest park in southern Atlanta when, as part of an environmental protest and occupation against the clearing of the suburban forest park to create a "cop city," he refused to leave his flimsy tent and peacefully defied the police order. The Georgia state legislature has now defined environmental protesters as domestic terrorists.

If nothing else, these ancient words and our modern-day Antigones—all brave young people brutally punished for standing up to the great powers of their day—must bring to our attention the need to grapple with these great timeless and universal moral questions. And alert us to the dangers of our own times, which call us to follow our moral conscience and not to fear the pyre.

Later that day, I returned to the park. The sunshine and the people had come out. Happy dogs were playing and barking joyfully. The velvety purple morning glories were fully open, and the sunflowers were nodding in the breeze.

All traces of the wet book were gone. ■

Doin' the Goddess Dance by Denise Elizabeth Stone | An example of an image paired with the writing prompt "Write about a special gift (or superpower) you have, something that people turn to you for…"

Building Connection and Resilience

I have been honored to be a group facilitator in the Writing for Friendship program serving young women from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and fourteen other nationalities represented among the students attending the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh. The university's mission is to serve women whose higher education has been severely restricted in their native countries. In groups of five or six, we gather together for ninety minutes over Zoom to write once a week for six weeks. We breathe in the relative calm of our collective pause, and we share moments of beauty or experiences of kindness we observed over the previous week. And then I invite them to write, to give words to their strengths, their stories, their dreams. After the writing portion, we listen to each other's writings "as if listening to a poem," and we share what resonated or what we appreciated in each group member's unpolished yet remarkably poetic writing that we've just heard.

It is extraordinary to feel their joy and sense of discovery as they experience how writing can be therapeutic, can forge connective tissue among previous strangers, and can encourage and allow them to hear themselves.

"I'm so happy I found a chance to go to myself and search."

I have the honor of witnessing firsthand how moving it is for them to hear how their own reflective writing touches others in the group, builds connections and courage, and helps to reduce the sense of isolation that often comes from being far from family and culture.

"Someone to hear us, from deep heart."

There is an atmosphere of discovery as soon as I share a visual image or poem and invite the young women to share their thoughts and feelings in response. We all benefit from their varied perspectives as we follow the guideline that there are "no wrong answers." This key ground rule helps to unleash their creativity and reduce the internalized critical voices most of us have. We make room for the quiet voices too. Next I offer them an open-ended writing prompt.

Following the pattern in the poem "I AM…" write your own poem. This poem invites group members to explore their hearts with beginning lines such as "*I CRY…I DREAM…I WANT…*"

"I dream…of connecting with my truest self."

"I cry for my entire country as the sky does for the whole planet."

I have been astounded by what they are able to convey, all with various English proficiencies, and their beautiful use of metaphors.

"Kindness cleans our hearts."

"My mother's laughter brought me the universe."

A photo of sunlight entering through an opening in the roof is paired with the prompt "*Write about how the light gets in…*"

"The light gets in through books."

"We are shining a light on each other in our group."

"Light is the self-realization of my worth."

"I'm like a room with light. Without light, we don't perceive the environment or the colorful world."

"Education is light and empowerment."

Sometimes they give each other tips on making friends. Or speak of how feeling gratitude can be an antidote to sadness. Some grapple with ambivalence, the confusing feelings about a loved one both caring and bringing pain.

Facilitating these connections and building on these young women's existing strengths has given me some of the most meaningful and interesting moments of my thirty-five years as a social worker. I've been moved to create my own new metaphors and perspectives as an individual living in a complex world, either during the shared silence of writing to the same prompt or after a session, when I sometimes write to integrate what I've experienced during the group. By creating a container for a small community of women to hear and witness each other as they build trust and try to create meaning in their challenging lives, the groups foster resilience, mutual support, and a sense of hope.

"We needed someone to believe in us." ■

DISPATCH

Asian University for Women—Writing For Friendship Program

Writing group facilitators needed!

For almost two years now, a group of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and writers has worked with AUW to provide "friendship" writing groups primarily for Afghan refugees, though also for Rohingyan refugees, as well as a sprinkling of young women who attend the university from sixteen other Asian countries.

Our sixth series of groups will begin in January 2024. The students are wonderful—enthusiastic, resourceful, resilient, and tenacious. Many have been through a lot. Some have lost family members, witnessed extreme violence, experienced sexual violence, suffered from food insecurity, and/or lived in refugee camps. Some have no idea when they might go home again or what awaits them after their university visas expire. The groups focus on offering simple writing prompts that encourage reflective writing, storytelling, measured self-revelation, and appreciative listening to others, all as a way to help the women experience the emotional usefulness of writing and make meaningful, new connections with one another.

The groups run for eight weeks, an hour and a half a week. While they are not therapy groups, they are therapeutic. The students have loved them, and our research suggests they have been very successful. The facilitators have also found them deeply meaningful, and many now are leading their third or fourth round. (All facilitators receive training, individual mentoring, and ongoing weekly group support.) As the program grows, we continue to need new volunteers.

If you'd like to learn about Asian University for Women, please visit asian-university.org.

If you'd like to learn more about facilitating a writing group or to sign up, click here or visit https://bit.ly/3Se1cBH.

If you have other questions, please contact Melissa Coco or Shari Nacson at auw.writing.groups.facilitation@gmail.com.

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The Story Circle Project: Latinx Women in Queens

This is the individual and collective story of a group of Latinx women in New York City. Over the course of a year, twenty-four women participated in Story Circles, with three to seven participants in each, sharing their journeys to the United States: the trauma beforehand, the obstacles and brutality of migration, and the struggles, challenges, and opportunities they encountered in the United States. The women (cisgender, heterosexual, LGBTQ+) came from Latin America and the Caribbean; they are undocumented, most live in western Queens, and most have children.

We used a digital storytelling method to facilitate their creation of recordings and videos that reflect the stories of themselves that *they* wish to tell and to use the power of storytelling to empower them in their own lives.

The process of storytelling was also a process of healing. In the conversations, we witnessed a cross-pollination of knowledge between participants and between the project members and participants, as well as an understanding of their personal lives in the larger social and political arena, giving them a sense of self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-confidence. The voices in the video speak from a position of strength and leadership. They make visible the ties of the networks that help them move forward and give them the extraordinary motivation to build on these ties, to give back to the community and to others.

To read more and see the videos, visit *ROOM*'s online community projects alcove. CLICK HERE

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Midnight Mission

We'd have looked a motley crew, if it hadn't been so dark. Five of us were on a midnight mission, a small band in dark clothing, struggling up a black hillside a few miles outside Rifle, Colorado. For every dusty yard gained, we slid back a step or two, trudging past broken boulders and scattered sagebrush in our climb up the mountain. No flashlights, since we were planning a criminal act. We tried to be quiet in case there was a guard. The nearest ranchers were in bed, miles away.

This was as close as I'd been to being a revolutionary. As a sophomore in college in 1969, I'd at times imagined being with a band of romantic radicals seeking to better the world, perhaps by robbing the rich and distributing to the poor what was left after cheese and cheap wine. I'd been steeping in philosophers and politics. I especially liked William James. I could understand such things as "sow an action, reap a habit, a character, a destiny." I wanted character and destiny. I was vulnerable to the suggestion of a risky mission for the betterment of the world.

My companions were less romantic, if perhaps more dedicated. Chuck and Fred were my parents' ages. They were plumbers who had tended our community's pipes and cisterns for years. They were also Quakers and ex-cons. Each had done prison time as conscientious objectors during World War Two. After the war, they had moved their families onto subsistence farms in western Colorado, holding to their pacifist ideology by living on sub-taxable income to avoid contributing to the defense budget.

Now they planned to strike against the powers of state in a different way, and for a different reason: to keep western Colorado from being nuked.

Yes, nuked. The remote areas of Rulison and Rio Blanco had been selected for an experiment. Oil companies believed that natural gas could be profitably extracted from the vast reserves of oil-bearing shale lying under large tracts of the West. Under Operation Plowshare, sponsored by the federal government, they planned to explode nuclear bombs underground, releasing natural gas into the caverns created. This they planned to sell into the nation's energy grid.

An oil-company-funded construction boom ensued. Worker housing projects popped up along the Colorado River near Grand Valley. Media carried a statewide public relations effort. Eventually four bombs detonated deep underground in two blasts, at Rulison and Rio Blanco. Each had several times the power of the Hiroshima bomb, and produced a "bump" felt many miles away, transmitted through the layers of shale and granite. These precipitated a blizzard of complaints and claims from people as distant as Denver, to the east, and Salt Lake City, to the west.

Back home, my mother made a complaint. She was sure the bumps had helped along the cracking walls of our old house. Along with most other people in the area, she wasn't eager for more. An inspector showed up and dutifully took pictures.

By coincidence, an enterprising artist named Christo had also discovered the area. This was years before he became famous for, among other feats, wrapping the cliffs of Dover in plastic. He was drawn to the beauty of Rifle Gap as a stage for one of his dramatic constructions. Christo planned, for the sake of art, to drape a red curtain across the entire canyon, framing the mountain scenery. The curtain would hang from a heavy steel cable, anchored high up at both sides of the canyon. The locals were impressed, since the strange, temporary construction was going to cost a good part of the price of a school.

By the time of our mission, Christo's inspiration and funding had produced a wrist-thick cable hanging a couple of hundred feet above and across the canyon floor, anchored with massive concrete bunkers at each end. The curtain wasn't yet in place. Chuck and Fred, with the help of myself and two of their sons, were intent on hanging a huge sign on the cable, visible to visitors and media looking up from below

We fixed roller skates the width of Christo's cable onto the underside of a long wooden beam, and made a sixteen-foot sign to unfurl from the beam. The roller skates were meant to roll out on the sagging cable and carry the unfurled sign to the middle of the arc, where it could be seen by anyone looking up at the project. We expected our message would be carried by all the TV stations and newspapers taking pictures of Christo's curtain. In massive letters, our sign said: DON'T NUKE COLORADO!

Clambering upward with our burden by the light of the Colorado stars, we got to the concrete bunker that anchored the cable on the west side of the canyon. We positioned the wooden beam's roller skates on the cable, unfurled the sign, crossed fingers, and let fly. The thing zoomed out along the cable with a metallic swish and disappeared into the dark.

Feeling triumphant, and satisfactorily revolutionary, we slid back down the mountain, jumped into Fred's old pickup, and went home.

That night, the wind picked up. Winds channeled down the canyons of Colorado can be impressive. Boulder has clocked one-hundred-mile-per-hour gusts. Rifle Gap is no different.

When we returned to the scene of our crime the next day to survey our handiwork, there were construction crews and media standing around the project. Some were looking upward. Sure enough, our sign was there, proudly hanging from the cable for all to see, bringing our message to the relevant powers and the world at large. "DON'T NUKE COLORADO!" Success!

Except that it was blank. The wind, lashing down the canyon for several hours, had whipped every trace of paint off the plastic sheeting.

All that remained was the evidence of our good intentions. Chuck and Fred tried to explain to a few media people what the sign might have said without implicating themselves. It was a small satisfaction to hear, later, that Christo's expensive curtain had also lasted only a few hours before ripping to shreds in the same wind. He still declared it a success.

Perhaps we were successful, too, in some small way. I'd read that William James, near the turn of the last century, worried that radio dramas might elicit feelings that couldn't immediately be turned outward into actions, making people accustomed to an emotional stimulus without a resulting response in action. He felt that a population conditioned to passivity, to not acting on feelings—such as outrage over injustice, or sympathy for the vulnerable—would weaken democracy. We acted on our feelings.

Our midnight mission may not have had the dramatic effect we'd hoped, but at least we'd turned our convictions into action. Chuck and Fred wrote letters to the newspapers, held meetings, and spoke with church groups. There was public sympathy. And there were no more nuclear blasts in Colorado.

We told ourselves we'd beaten the bad guys, that people could triumph over corporations, and courage could triumph over money.

It was easy to ignore the fact that the gas obtained turned out to be radioactive. ■

PHOTO, PREVIOUS PAGE: JR KORPA

Jan Cunningham
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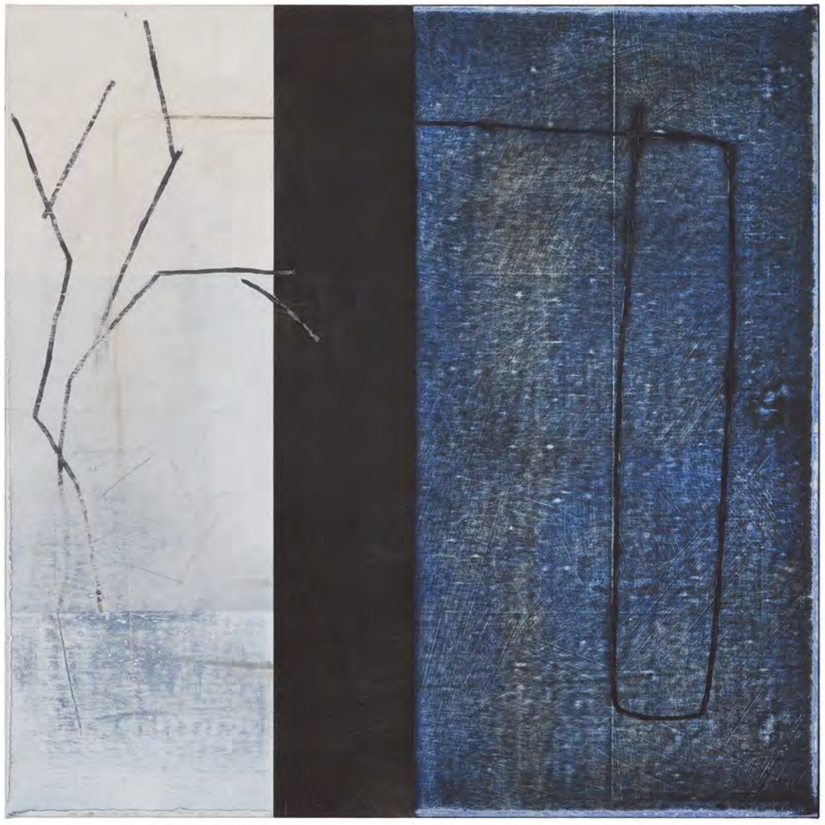
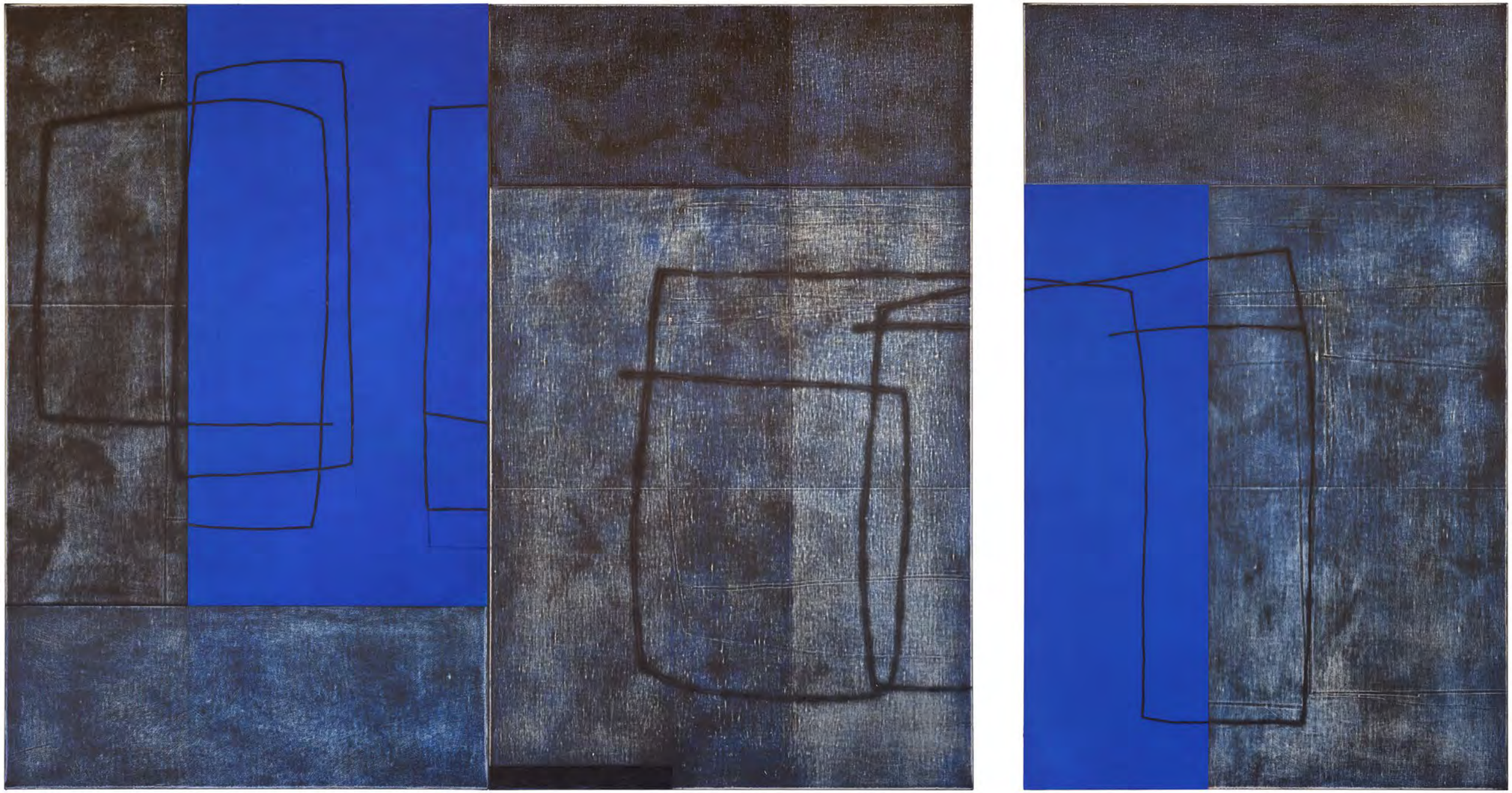
The paintings, drawings, and photographs that make up my practice grow out of close observation of my surroundings, an awareness of the past, and memory. I am fascinated with the materiality of color and light, the mysteries of proportion and scale, and the relative and often great distance between two points in close proximity to each other. It is my hope to make present in the work the moments of equilibrium, the rhythms of disclosure, and the different realities that I discover in the act of looking and making. I hope these discoveries, evolving over time, will prompt recognition on the part of the viewer, as they have in me.



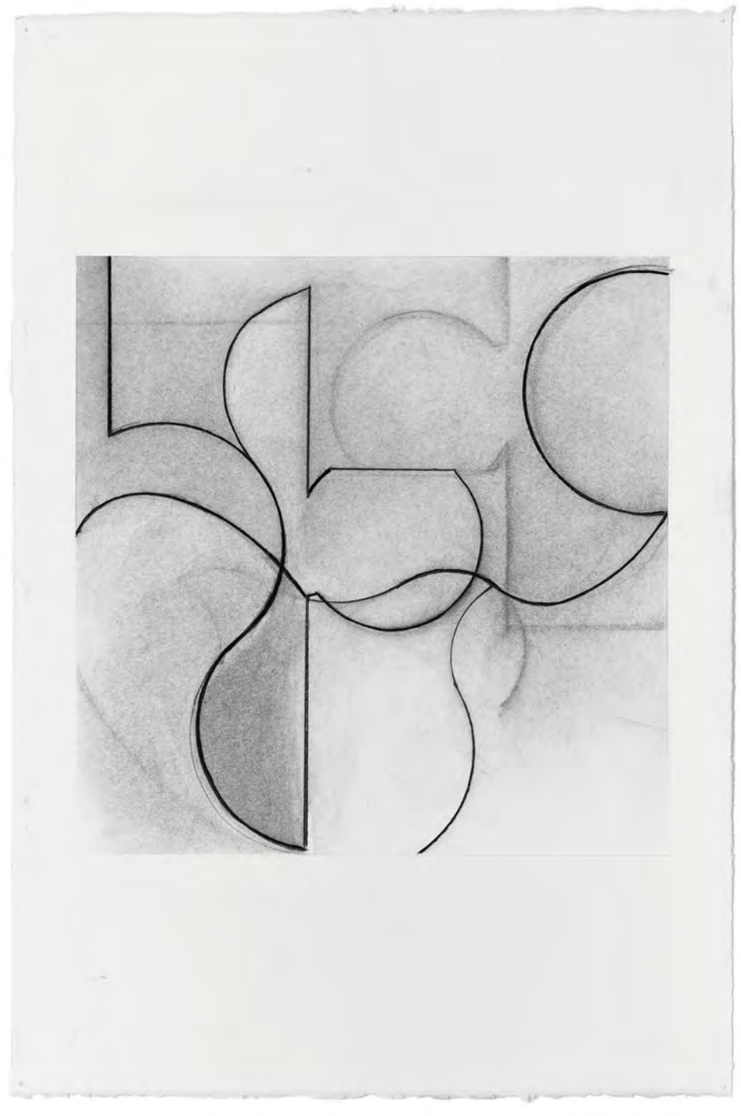
Hant
2023
oil on linen
24 x 24 inches

And More
2018
oil on linen
9 x 9 inches

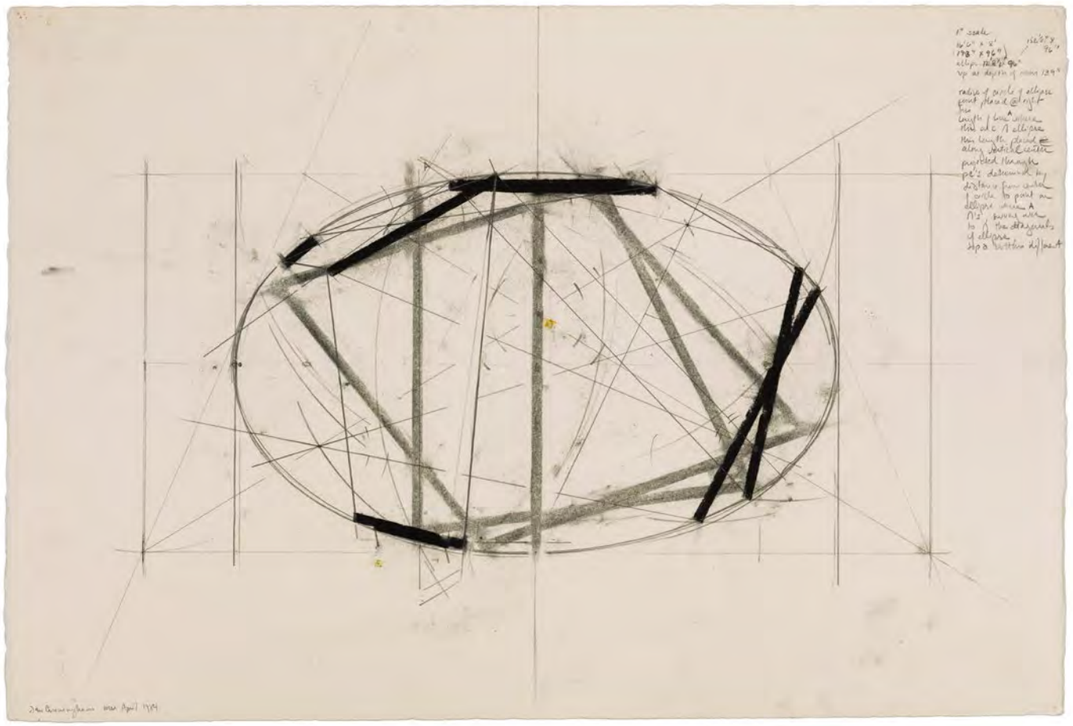


Dance
2023
oil on linen
60 x 116 inches

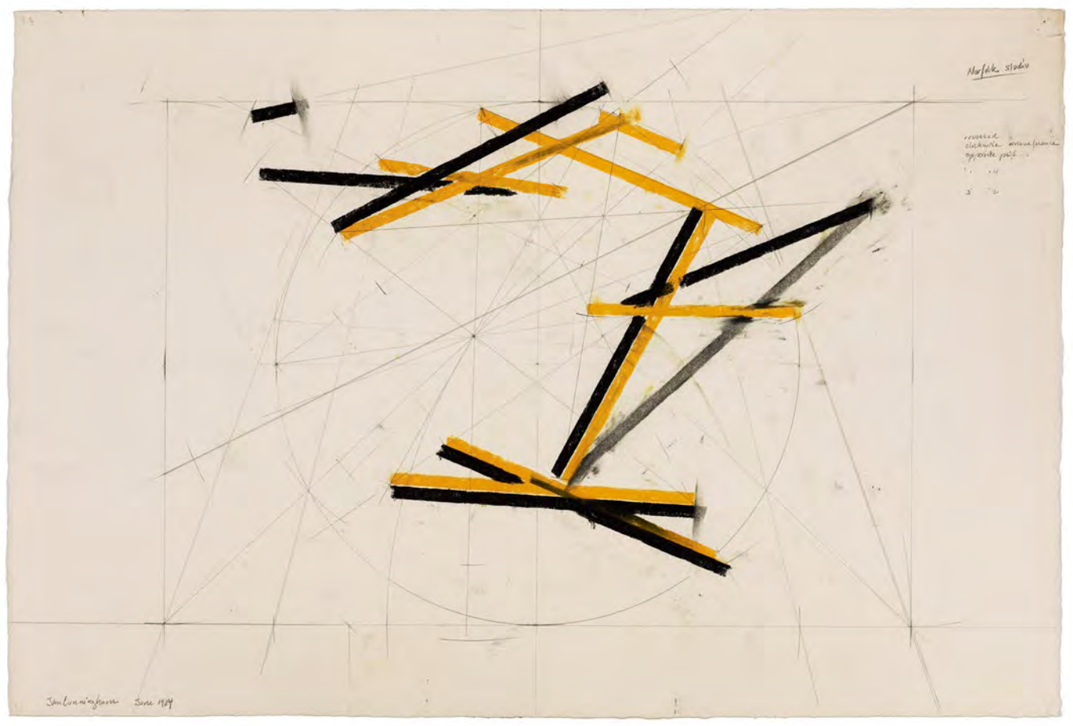
Arabesque Drawing XIII
2015
charcoal on paper
22 x 15 inches



Arabesque Drawing III
2015
charcoal on paper
22 x 15 inches

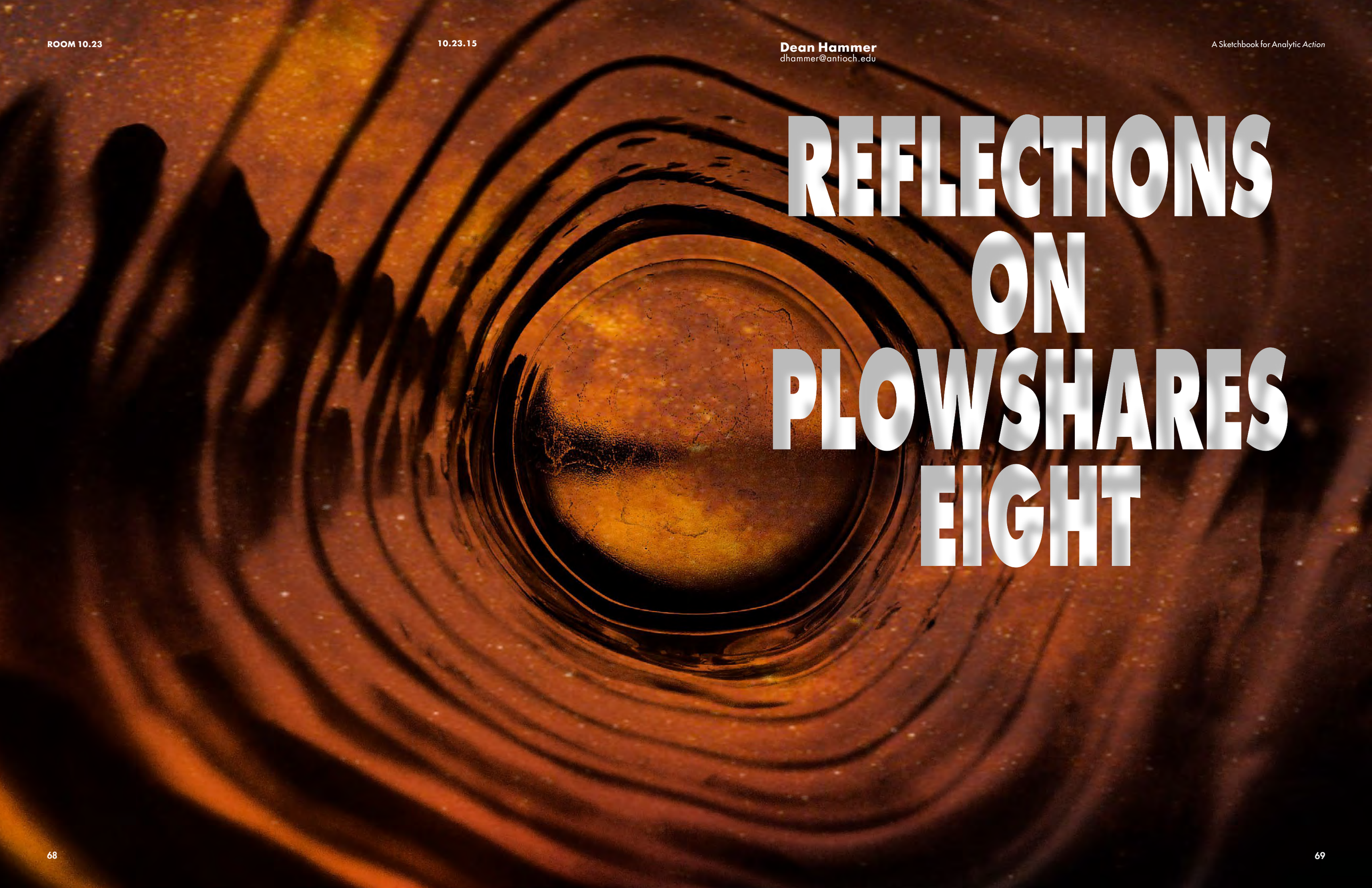


Ellipse Drawing (5)
1984
charcoal and graphite on paper
15 x 22 inches



Ellipse Drawing (8)
1984
charcoal, graphite, pastel on paper
15 x 22 inches

Dean Hammer
dhammer@antioch.edu



REFLECTIONS ON PLOWSHARES EIGHT

“It will take a long time before we understand what we did at GE King of Prussia.”

Phil Berrigan shared this reflection with me during a jail yard walk shortly after the Plowshares Eight action in September 1980. The name of the action is derived from the biblical vision: “You shall beat your swords into plowshares. And you shall study war no more.”

With household hammers, we disarmed two nose cones for the Mark 12A warheads built by the General Electric Nuclear Missile Re-entry Division in King of Prussia, PA[1]. The sound of hammers disarming mass-killing weapons echoes in my mind, heart, and soul, evoking memories of that day at GE and the succession of Plowshare actions in the United States, Europe, and Australia[2]. The reflective process forty years later offers a new understanding of this lived experience, personally and as an act of resistance to genocidal weapons. The process of sketching the Plowshares Eight narrative stirs deep appreciation for the privilege of participating in a community of conscience. We disarmed components of genocidal weapons in the tradition of Gandhian *satyāgraha*, non-cooperation with institutional violence. We intended to obstruct the preparations for nuclear war. Our legal defense was grounded in the Geneva Conventions and Nuremberg Principles of the United Nations. These international law codes instruct citizens to save innocent lives if they hear screams from a burning building, even if that requires “property destruction.” At our trial, Daniel Berrigan, Phil’s brother and one of the Eight, testified: “The components of nuclear weapons are anti-human and anti-property. If the nose cones were to be filled with Ping-Pong balls or buttermilk, we would have left them alone.”

At the time of the Plowshares Eight action, I was not aware of my status as a third-generation Holocaust survivor. Fifteen years later, while interviewing my parents to complete a genogram for doctoral training, I discovered new information about my ancestors. My father disclosed that paternal family members “died in the Hitler thing.” This acknowledgment disrupted the silence of my family trauma. The impact created a long-lasting cascade of connections and insights. The new understanding of my family story shed light on my activism as a transgenerational errand to prevent the unleashing of nuclear Auschwitz. Peace activism served as an act of solidarity with family members held captive and killed in the concentration camps, rendering a paradoxical sense of consolation and authenticity during two years in various prisons for protesting nuclear weapons. The immersion in scenes of horror and brutality of the Nazi Holocaust during my childhood religious formation engendered my activism, inscribing a vow not to walk quietly to a depraved execution. Resisting nuclear weapons honored the memory of family members who were victims of genocide.

Robert Jay Lifton, an expert witness for the Plowshares Eight trial, testified, “There will be no winners in a nuclear war. The survivors will envy the dead.” His research conceptualizes the genocidal mentality and the superpower syndrome undergirding nuclear madness. Lifton’s psycho-historical perspective illuminates how the testing and use of nuclear weapons by the United States in 1945 perpetrated psychological and spiritual trauma. A moral compass shattered. The atomic bombing of innocent Japanese civilians opened Pandora’s box and “justified” the power to commit socially sanctioned nuclear genocide. The superpower syndrome reduces millions of innocent victims to collateral damage. Dreadful images of radiation sickness and nuclear winter devastate our psyches, causing most people to relegate the unthinkable consequences to the margins of awareness. An overriding sense of entrapment and demoralization prevails. As nuclear saber-rattling grows louder in the world today, there is greater urgency for the global community of citizens to understand and disrupt the escalating risks of global self-destruction. The activism of Martin Luther King Jr. and the late congressman John Lewis encourages us to be creatively maladjusted in response to institutional oppression and to “make good trouble.” The echoes from our disarmament action carry various levels of meaning. This reflection focuses on two levels: 1) an emergency alert for greater understanding and responsiveness to the dangers of global self-destruction; and 2) an emancipatory call to imagine and act for a world free from nuclear weapons. Looking afterward forty years later generates immeasurable gratitude for the inspiration of this jailbreak from malignant normality. ■

PHOTO (PREVIOUS PAGE): YVES BERNARDI

1 The Plowshares Eight were found guilty of criminal mischief and other charges. Some of the Eight were released on bail three months after the action, while others refused bail and served two years during the decade-long appeal process. In April 1990, we were resentenced to time served. Dean Hammer (VT), Molly Rush (PA), and John Schuchardt (MA) continue to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons, and the other five have joined the great cloud of witnesses.

2 A history of Plowshares actions in the United States, Europe, and Australia: https://ickevald.net/plowshares/plowshares-chronology-1980-2018.

Alice Lombardo Maher
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Waging Dialogue: Talking Across Divides

Alice Lombardo Maher sees the kind of deep listening that is central to the analytic process as crucial for bridging the sociopolitical divides that threaten American democracy. From designing and implementing after-school programs, hosting years-long Facebook groups that encourage engagement between liberals and conservatives, and conversing with the host of a Christian conservative talk show on YouTube, she has devoted much of her forty-year psychiatric and psychoanalytic career to fostering communication where stakes are high. She is inviting *ROOM* readers to participate in her latest initiative, Waging Dialogue: Talking Across Divides. Individuals from different ideological centers will have the chance to participate in an ongoing dyadic process and to reflect on their interactions in groups.

To read more, visit *ROOM*'s online community projects alcove. CLICK HERE

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Collectively Remembering Coline Covington

Five members of *ROOM*'s editorial board decided to read and discuss Coline Covington's latest book, *Who's to Blame? Collective Guilt on Trial*, the third of a series of writings that interweave psychoanalytic ideas with political, social, and group theories, to arrive at the possibility of a moral world. This was not intended to be her final writing on the topic, only to lay out some of the theoretical problems involved in thinking about acts of destruction and possible paths to repair and reconciliation. In her last weeks of life, Coline learned of our plan to honor rather than just review her book, for which she was touched and thankful.

Covington's book tackles the question of whether collective blame, guilt, and reparation are necessary and effective steps in holding individuals and nations accountable for acts of evil, atrocities visited on others on a large scale. Her case examples include America's centuries-old perpetuation of slavery, Germany's responsibility for the Holocaust, the current war between Russia and Ukraine, and other examples of our human capacity for destructiveness.

Covington wonders whether collective guilt is a viable concept. Can descendants of regimes that perpetrated crimes against humanity be held accountable for acts they did not perpetrate and made to participate in acts of atonement? Is it guilt or shame that is actually the relevant variable? Can we ever undo evil? Is it collective guilt or collective responsibility that is at issue? Does it require different models to account for guilt at the individual vs. collective level? She considers hatred, evil, revenge, commemorative gestures to embody guilt and reparation, and the overarching question of whether owning, atoning, and repairing are ever fully possible. When considering her thoughts about post-Holocaust Germany, we explored the difference between mere gestures and truly shouldering responsibility, as well as how long this kind of healing requires. If we assign the working-through of culpability to public acts of owning guilt, taking responsibility, and bearing shame, are we acting on a mistaken belief that one can ever "move on"? Perhaps such ownership can only ever be attempted, incomplete and needing to be monitored. We want to believe that guilt cleanses us, restores our goodness, but our humanity requires external controls, a rule of law.

In Kleinian theory, there is always an ongoing flux between constructive and destructive processes, occurring intrapsychically and in exchange with the external world. The central challenge is to be able to preserve the possibility of goodness and psychic equilibrium by bringing progressive and regressive trends together in such a way that we own our destructiveness, but repair and progression triumph. Can this happen on a world stage?

We are honored to have been able to learn from Coline's life works, to have had her support as a reader, contributor, and proponent of *ROOM*, and for this opportunity for scholarly and searching conversation that captures her extraordinary devotion to the possibility of occupying our compassionate humanity more fully. ■

The book can be purchased from the Routledge website, as well as from other stockists like Amazon.

PHOTO: LIMITROFE

Laine Derr
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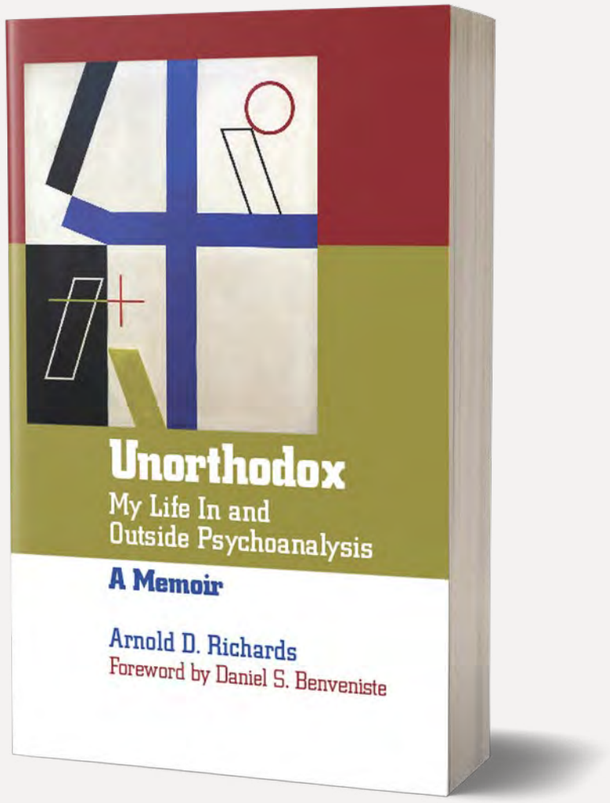
Child Therapy

What animal would she be?

I bought a bride
who speaks a tongue
I do not know, lips
tasting the weight
of sugar. From twelve
to twenty her pickled
father, laughing as he
sang, prepared a path
for me, rinsed with blood.

A deer in moonlight, tall
and gravid, is still a deer.

Unorthodox: My Life In and Outside Psychoanalysis
A Memoir by Arnold D. Richards



From the foreword by Daniel S. Benveniste, PhD

"Arnie doesn't promote the illusion of psychoanalysis progressing in some sort of rational and orderly development. No, for Arnie Richards, psychoanalysis is a human tradition. It's in the hands of a thought collective that pushes and shapes psychoanalysis as a function of history, institutional politics, personality cults, rivalries, schisms, innovations, animosities, collaborations, and group dynamics. His story is unique insofar as he is an insider who became a participant-observer and then an advocate for outsiders, whether they are analysts, psychologists, social workers, mental health counselors, or even representatives of excluded theoretical perspectives.

"Beyond all this, Arnie has illuminated his memoir with photos, poems, and documents that amplify his story and bring it to life. One could easily critique his memoir as just being his perspective—and indeed it is. But, oh, what a vantage point he has for conveying his perspective. So, sit back and enjoy this trip into the life and work of a real troublemaker—a world-class psychoanalyst who has made a career out of making good trouble for psychoanalysis."

Arnold D. Richards, MD, was editor of JAPA from 1994 to 2003 and, prior to that, editor of TAP. He is a member of the Contemporary Freudian Society and an honorary member of the American Institute for Psychoanalysis. He has published a series of five volumes of his selected papers: *Volume I: Psychoanalysis: Critical Conversations, Volume 2: Psychoanalysis: Perspectives on Thought Collectives, Volume 3: The Psychoanalyst at Work, Volume 4: The Peripatetic Psychoanalyst,* and *Volume 5: The World of Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalysts*. He has also co-edited four books. In addition, Dr. Richards is the editor in chief of the website Internationalpsychoanalysis.net and of IPBooks (IPBooks.net).

For more information or to purchase this book:

Visit click here or scan the QR code

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SATURDAY, DEC. 9, 2023 ■ 12 PM EST

LIVE VIA ZOOM

Join us for a discussion with three *ROOM* 10.23 authors Robert Frey, Dean Hammer, and Josephine Wright.

We will be discussing taking public action in dire circumstances: what it is like to take the action, what goes into the decision, and what kinds of consequences can result. With three authors from the issue, we will look at the decision to step out of the regular flow of life to make a statement, to put your life on the line, and to try to stop something from happening.

To RSVP, click here or scan the QR code.

Roundtable Organizing Committee

Elizabeth Cutter Evert
Richard Grose

The Unseen: Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: Community Psychoanalysis into the Future

March 16-17, 2024, in Washington, DC. It will be a hybrid in-person and online gathering.

REGISTER: Click here or visit bit.ly/468lfVA

Our world is on fire! Global crises necessitate a proactive response from psychoanalysts and psychodynamic therapists. The wars around the world, COVID-19 pandemic, climate crisis, mass displacement of refugees, economic and political turbulence and historical racial injustices challenge us to leverage our expertise, resources, and ethical responsibilities for the betterment of society.

In this two-day conference, featured speakers Daniel Gaztambide, Psy.D., Francisco Gonzalez, MD, Kimberlyn Leary, Ph.D., Paula Kliger, Ph.D. and Congressman Jamie Raskin will explore the intersection of the personal and social unconscious, and how psychoanalysts must engage with the sociopolitical world. The conference will offer a liminal space for participants to immerse themselves in dialogue about contemporary society. A short film, *We Are Human First*, will serve as a catalyst for deeper conversations about psychoanalytic applications beyond the consulting room. Through small and large group experiences, participants will have opportunities to share reflections in a reciprocal learning environment. We will delve into theoretical discourse and clinical material with the aim of legitimizing community psychoanalysis as a vital component of psychoanalytic institutional training.

The conference is co-sponsored by ApsaA's Department of Education and ApsaA's Psychoanalysis in the Community, Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, Contemporary Freudian Society, Harlem Family Institute, Massachusetts Institute for Psychoanalysis, Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California (Community Psychoanalysis Track), Oregon Psychoanalytic Center, and Washington-Baltimore Center for Psychoanalysis.

Generous support from ApsaA-DPE and other sponsors has enabled us to create a joint event that deepens the connections between institutes, institute-affiliated analysts, and community-based clinicians and agencies. Our ultimate goal is to extend the reach of psychoanalytic thought beyond traditional institutional and individual psychoanalytic therapy. We aim to nurture a national and international hub for creative engagement among diverse clinical practitioners, administrators, activists, artists, and all those dedicated to strengthening the application of psychoanalytic thinking in the community. We also aim to encourage the establishment of new local centers and networks. We are building our new community to help heal our separate and shared sociopolitical worlds.

Essays — Poems — Creative Writing — Community Projects — Books for Review

We welcome clinical, theoretical, political, and philosophical essays, as well as poetry, creative writing, memoir, and announcements.

For more information and to submit your work, visit analytic-room.com/submit

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A Podcast for Analytic *Action*

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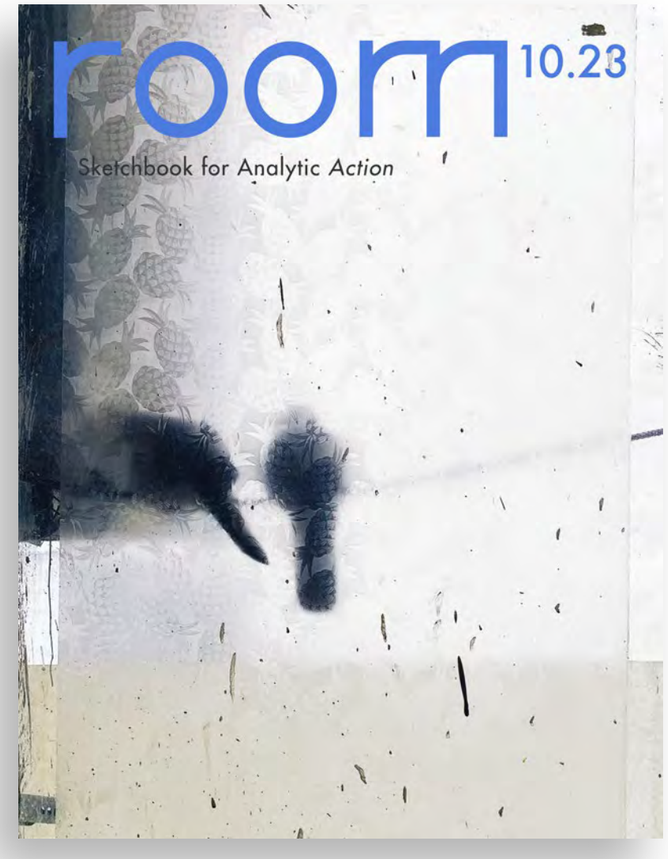

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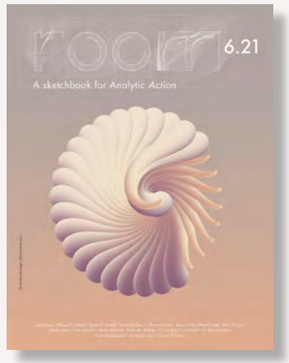

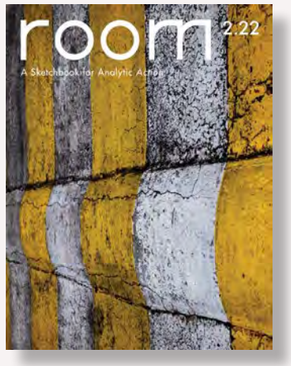

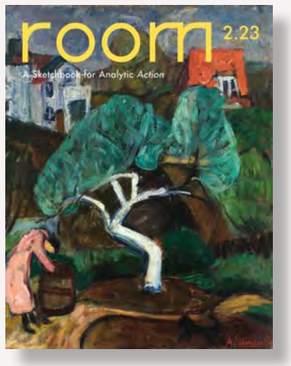

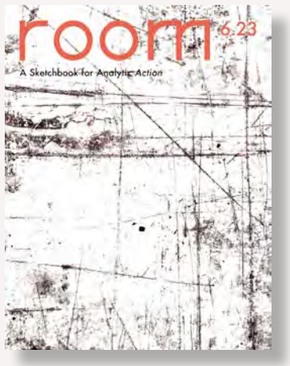

Each issue bookmarks a historic momemt in time.

Collect them all.

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