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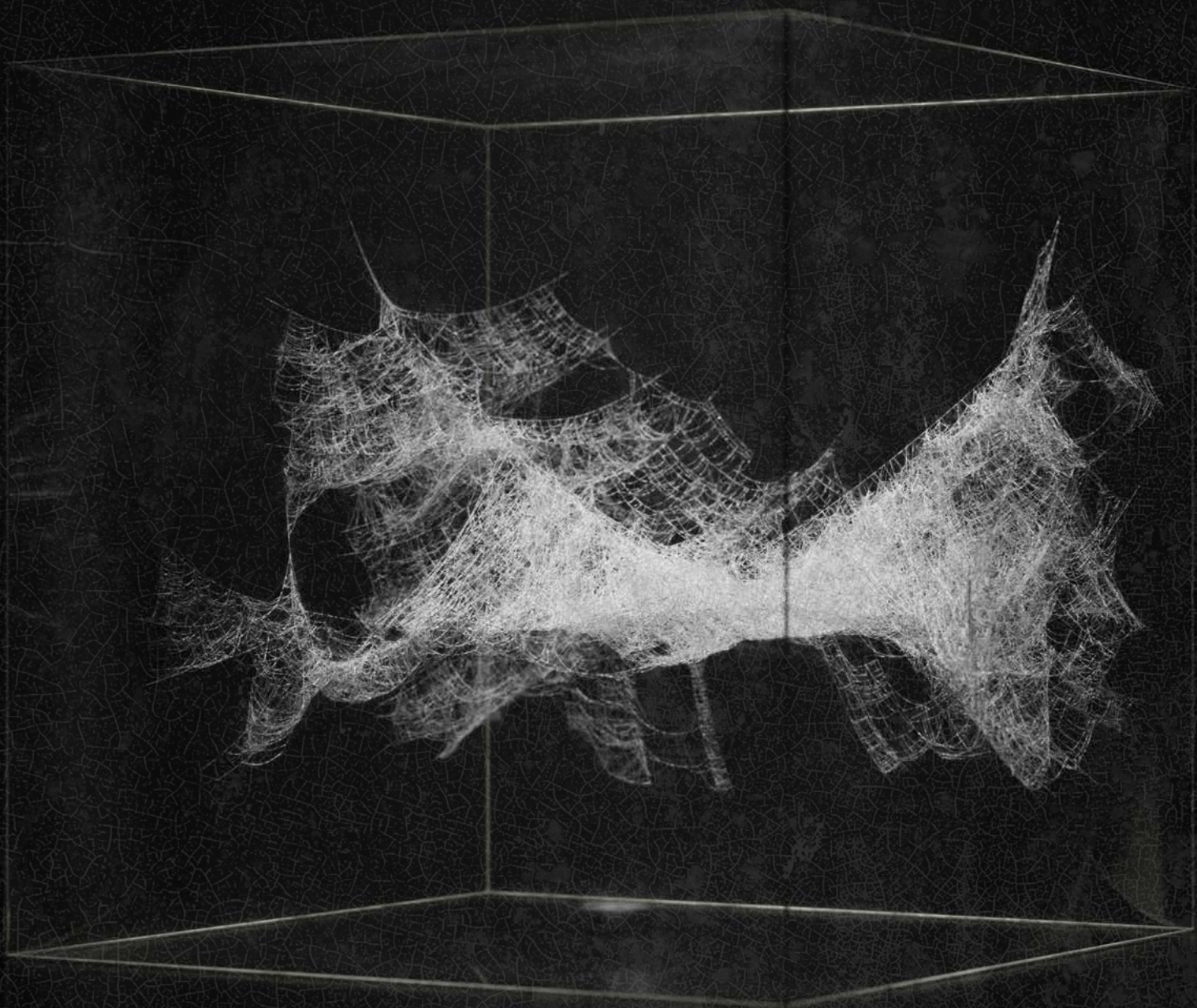
A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*



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 Razvan Flore

room
A Sketchbook for Analytic *Action*
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— 2023 IPA in Culture Award Winner —

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APsaA AMERICAN PSYCHOANALYTIC ASSOCIATION

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CIPS CONFEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT PSYCHOANALYTIC SOCIETIES

CFS Contemporary Freudian Society

IPTAR Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research

ICP+P Institute of Contemporary Psychotherapy + Psychoanalysis

NEW DIRECTIONS
WRITING WITH A PSYCHOANALYTIC EDGE

Contributors

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Keli Safia Maksud is an interdisciplinary artist and writer working in sound, sculpture, installation, text, printmaking, and embroidery. Concerned with histories of colonial encounters and its effects on memory, Maksud's practice favors the space of *in-between* and its threshold and works toward destabilizing received histories in order to expose fictions of the state. Maksud earned her BFA in painting from the Ontario College of Art and Design University, a diploma in art and curatorial studies at the New Centre for Research and Practice, and an MFA in visual arts at Columbia University. Her work has shown at the Cue Art Foundation, Goodman Gallery, Salon 94, Huxley Parlour, Bamako Biennial, National Museum of Contemporary Art–Seoul, Galería Nueva, and the Biennial of Contemporary Art Sesc_Videobrasil.

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Hala Al Sarraj, MA, is a psychologist from Gaza.

Ann Shenfield works across a number of media. Her animated films have received various international honors including selection in the Berlin Film Festival. Her poetry has also received numerous awards including the Judith Wright Poetry Prize. Her poetry book *A Treatment* (Upswell Publishing) was listed in The Age Best Books of 2023. Last year, she completed a four-year program of clinical and theoretical studies at the Australian Centre for Psychoanalysis, where she is currently a member.

Chiharu Shiota, born in Osaka in 1972 and based in Berlin, draws inspiration from personal experiences and emotions, exploring universal themes such as life, death, and relationships. Through immersive thread installations enveloping everyday objects like shoes, keys, and dresses, she investigates the idea of "presence in absence," conveying intangible emotions in sculptures, drawings, performance videos, and photographs. Awarded the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's Art Encouragement Prize for New Artists in Japan (2008), Shiota's work has been showcased in prominent institutions globally, including the Grand Palais, Paris (2024), Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2023), ZKM, Karlsruhe (2021), and Gropius Bau, Berlin (2019). She has participated in notable exhibitions like the Sydney Biennale (2016) and represented Japan at the Venice Biennale (2015).

Sahar Vardi is a Jerusalem-born anti-Occupation and anti-militarist activist. She received her master's degree in peace and development studies from the University of Bradford. Vardi currently works as an adviser on holistic security for human rights organizations and grassroots groups, and is active in on-the-ground protective presence work in different Palestinian communities, as well as protesting the ongoing genocide and war.

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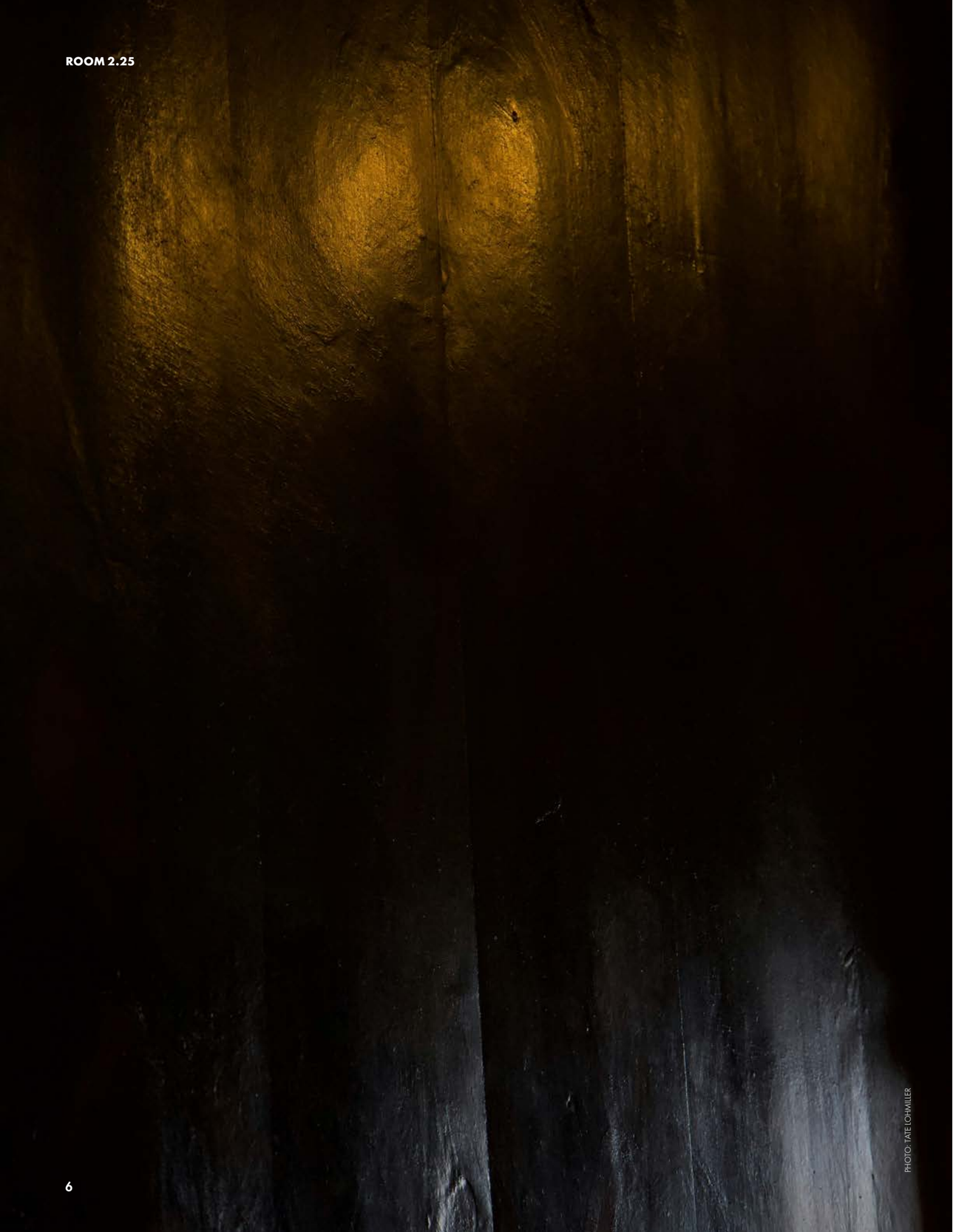

PHOTO: TATE LOHMILLER

Editorial
2.25.1

Hattie Myers
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In the Midst

I am the twelve-year-old girl,
refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean
after being raped by a sea pirate.

And I am also the pirate,
my heart not yet capable
of seeing and loving.

Please Call Me By My True Names
— Thich Nhat Hanh

The writers and artists in *ROOM* 2.25 bear witness to what must happen in ourselves, our communities, and our political movements for truth to be faced and change to occur. Some write from amidst genocide, others from their country's fascist turn, and still others from the impact of environmental catastrophe. Each of these life-threatening events inscribes itself differently on our souls. We live in terrifying times.

Hala Al Sarraj's **Will the Sun Rise Again in Gaza?**, Mohamed Omran Abu Shawish's **For How Long!? From Gaza**, Yianna Ionnaou's **Our Guernica**, and Sahar Vardi's **Activating Hope in Dark Times** come to *ROOM* through **a network of colleagues**, committed to justice, equality, and human rights who have been working closely with practitioners on the ground in Israel/Palestine and Gaza.

From Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital Abu Shawish writes, "each loss has cut deeply, each unique and irreplaceable. […] Every time I feel the pull to surrender, to collapse under the immense weight of my grief and exhaustion, I remind myself of all those who have anchored their strength within me (They planted the stakes of their resilience within my ribs)." Leaving her home in Gaza City, Al Sarraj recalls, "Many times, we felt it was the time for us to die. […] Entire families were erased from the records. […] What reactions should we have to all of that? What amount of emotions and tears? What yelling and shouting should be heard? Will our hearts keep beating?" And from the West Bank, Vardi adds, "Seeing society shed all compassion and take pride in these crimes is enough to drive any heart to despair…(but) resisting despair is not enough. Activism and resilience require hope."

There are moments of hope. In **War Alone Does Not Define Aleppo: Ammar's Story**, Mohamad Kebbewar recounts how a young boy, alone in Syria, manages to survive. But "What makes it harder," Abu Shawish reminds us, "are the relentless waves of false hope." "We kept reassuring our two kids that we were moving to a safer place," Al Sarraj writes, "although we knew we were lying to them."

What can we do? asks Ipek S. Burnett in **Hurricane after Hurricane**. "I do not know what enough is, none of us really know, but we are certainly not doing it. […] I have to explain to [my kids] how we are failing the earth, how we are failing one another and ourselves. It will confuse them, I know. It will break their eager hearts."

All the authors in *ROOM* 2.25 are telling us not to look away.

When Anastasios Gaitanidis' patient despises herself "for not doing more" in **On Hatred**, Gaitanidis feels the destabilizing impact of his own hatred toward activism's insufficiencies. Recognizing how hatred defends against more vulnerable feelings of powerlessness and grief allows Gaitanidis to imagine what collectively holding our hatred could mean. "It [wouldn't be] about managing or suppressing these difficult emotions, but about creating containers strong enough to hold them while they transform."

Interestingly, the only essay in this issue which speaks directly to the rise of authoritarianism in the United States is Max Beshers' **Free Radicals**. Fanned by cancel culture, Beshers's clinical work brings home to him how primal fears of annihilation and loss are defended against by political correctness and false binaries: "If those fears led to more successful outcomes in activist movements and helped us build a better world, then it would be worth the pain," Beshers concludes, "but I'm not sure they do."

Beyond the visibly protective barriers we construct to mark out good from evil, and to wall off who we love from who we hate, there are invisible barriers at play. In **Solitude, Resignation, and Hope**, Rina Lazar senses how "Within our psyches, the very task of digestion exceeds our strength, creating disassociations between the known, the internalized, and our psychic foundations." The unconscious barriers that exist within our psyches and between ourselves and others defend us from "a 'catastrophic encounter' with the truth of terrible and ongoing injury." Paradoxically, Yianna Ioannau describes in Our Guernica how today we are also experiencing a collapse of all barriers. There is a "dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside [...] a dissolution of the network of relations that lends us a sense of belonging, that shields us from alienation and, by extension, annihilation."

Akin to the integrative work of psychoanalysis, the art and poetry in this issue expand and reconfigure the temporal and spatial boundaries of our worlds. Destabilizing received histories, Keli Safia Maksud's work "interrogates how binaries like inside/outside, here/there, and us/them can be disrupted to expose their effect." Chihara Shiota delves into the extreme particularity of her personal experiences and emotions to find new ways to embrace the universal structures that hold us all together. Mary Buchinger's **The Ever-Restless Voice** and Ann Shenfield's **Like, adults** speak for themselves.

ROOM 2.25 implores us to join these analysts, activists, artists, and poets, as well as the creative writers featured in *ROOM*'s new literary supplement to find new ways to collectively hold the paradoxes, hate, terror, love, longings, and hope that make up, in Winnicott's words, "the common pool of our humanity." ■

Eight years after beginning as a local newsletter just a week after the 2016 US presidential election, *ROOM* has evolved into a powerful social platform reaching readers in more than 160 countries. *ROOM* archives the present moment while applying a psychoanalytic lens to global challenges. Each issue is carefully curated from submissions and made possible solely through reader donations. *ROOM* represents a community call to action.

Now more than ever—join us.

Mary Buchinger
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The Ever-Restless Voice

The home of night
fills with moving figures
fences come down
and brothers sit
with one another

fast food is the best
we can do for now
I know what I want
cannot be satisfied
still I make my order
and wait at the counter

the table's being held
it will be heaven
all of us together

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Free Radicals

It's Tuesday afternoon,

one week after the 2024 presidential election. I greet my next patient, Steve, and brace myself for yet another hour of holding someone else's terror while also silently holding my own. But this session starts differently. "I'm bothered by the fact that my partner voted for Harris," he confesses. We both know it's not because a vote for Trump would have been preferable. Rather, as a leftist, Steve is registering his frustration with the act of voting for any mainstream politician. "Voting for Harris conveys an okayness with the world. I can't be okay with the world, because then I would be on the wrong side." He pauses, then says: "I'm having trouble locating myself, politically. I feel like some of my friends are too radical—others aren't radical enough."

"Radical": I feel like I could write a memoir just on my personal relationship with that word. I was inspired as a teenager when I came across Angela Davis's famous declaration that radical just means "grasping at the root," and took it on as a kind of identity. In a college French class I proudly proclaimed to my conversation partner, "Je suis un activiste radical." Even then, it was more aspirational than true. Over the years, "radical" as a leftist political stance has tempted and haunted me. I was and am inspired by the wildly creative visions of a different world, without racism, without violence, without prisons, and yes, even without police. Yet many of the ostensibly radical leftist spaces I've been in did not feel creative at all. Rather, they felt stifled and ossified: everyone vying to show how much they conform to ideologies that verge on dogmatic, out-quoting each other to burnish their credentials, scared of being on the "wrong side"—like Steve, and like me.

In such spaces, it can feel risky to disagree about anything, even word choice. A conversation with an old friend turned sour when I took issue with describing the climate crisis as an "apocalypse," because that word evokes despair. Knowing we agreed about the essentials, I thought it was safe to explore different ideas. I was surprised when this led to an accusation that I didn't care about poor people. Suddenly I was on the wrong side, and it felt painful. I know what Steve means.

Or I think I know what he means, but then again, we are so different. While we are both gay men, Steve is an immigrant from an Asian country, bilingual and bicultural. His life is full of the tensions that come

from being between two worlds, something I only know academically. I'm a white man from the Midwest. We grew up in different bodies, in different countries. Perhaps I don't understand him at all. Then he says something that pulls me out of my head and right back into the room: "I have to spend so much time listening to white liberals, and it's exhausting." Instantly, a familiar panic arises within me—does he see me as a white liberal? I feel a chasm open between us: in my imagination, he is on the side of virtue, principle, and justice, and I'm on the side of complicity and complacence that voted for Harris. Knowing this is a false binary doesn't take away my anxiety.

For a moment I entertain the fear that Steve will see through me and declare that I am not radical enough. But then, like a kaleidoscope, things rearrange and I see what he's been trying to tell me for quite a while: despite his confident public persona, he is tormented by the fear of not being radical enough, and perhaps even scared that I will judge him in this way. Steve works in a field where identity is front and center. In fact, more than once he has voiced the idea that due to past wrongs, perhaps only Black people should work in this field. It's not clear where this thought originated, but Steve worries a lot about what it means for him, a non-Black person who is passionate about this subject. In particular, he is anxious about what his colleagues think of him. Sure, they respect him now, but what if that changes?

As he talks through this, I'm reminded that being on the wrong side always comes with the risk of loss. Even before the emergence of cancel culture, I felt the inherent brittleness of being on the right side. In college we used to call it "having good politics," a designation that was hard to win but very easy to lose. For Steve, and for me, the fear of being on the wrong side is also a fear of being kicked out of the group, losing colleagues or losing friends. If those fears led to more successful outcomes in activist movements and helped us build a better world, then it would be worth the pain. But I'm not sure that they do.

I know that I can't help Steve resolve the complex racial politics of who is allowed to work in his field—I'd look silly trying. What I hope I can offer him, what I hope psychoanalysis can offer to all aspiring radicals, is a different way of thinking, and certainly a different way of feeling. Reductive ideas about right and wrong can feel terribly abstract and intellectual, and they encourage the suppression of whatever feelings we don't like. Instead, the situation calls for an emotional aliveness, alongside the logic, that can help steer a course into something richer and deeper.

I'm in my own process of trying to find my way through this. My earlier attempts at activism were hampered by how I related to my own identity, which went something like this: I'm here as a white person to reckon with the harms that white people have done, but if whiteness is bad, how could I possibly do anything good? Psychoanalytic work has pointed to a way out of this double bind. Rather than trying to run away from the unwanted parts of the self, I can get to know them. I can accept the fact that I contain plenty of unconscious racism. The sadistic racial fantasies that drive the likes of Derek Chauvin have in some form found their way into all of our psyches. When we can get to know our own aggression, including racialized aggression, we're much less likely to act on it. Then there is a chance of a real working-through, a healing process that might help us to dream boldly, to imagine new solutions for the problems that beset us.

Near the end of session, I wonder aloud if Steve might want to share some of these feelings with his partner—the one who voted for Harris and got us thinking about all this. But Steve isn't sure about that.

"Talk to him? I don't know. It's not something I share with anyone."

"So—these concerns about your work and politics, you're not really talking through this with anyone else?"

"No, it's hard enough to put words to it in here."

I feel a glow from within as the late autumn sun goes down. Up until this moment I had not realized that Steve was sharing this part of himself only with me. He has found a space here that is safe enough for complexity, for questioning things.

In our last minute together, I say to him: "You know the writer Zadie Smith?" (He does). "She says—I'm paraphrasing—that some things simply can't be classified or labeled."

Steve ponders this. "I don't disagree," he says in response, "but I still want to be on the right side." And I think, as I shut my office door behind him, that it is quite difficult for us to think outside of binaries, but it is still worth reaching for. ■

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Solitude, Resignation, and Hope

For over a year now, we have been at war in Israel, Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran. The continuation of war has become a fixed, soul-crushing fact. Many of us have come to think more contemplatively as an act of survival, as a way to anchor our souls and psyches. I want to record my impressions and paint a picture for you of a particular experience of psychic loneliness that I have noticed accompanies all of us here, in varying degrees, during these most traumatic times.

I am talking about the painful solitude of being in a war outside our country while functioning inside Israel as a family-like collective. As a nation we are conflicted and divided, trying in different and difficult ways to preserve and change our home in order to find a way to live a life worth living. But even within our togetherness in this struggle, the sense of solitude does not dissipate. On the contrary, it is intensified. It is a solitude that I especially see mirrored in the experiences of my colleagues and patients who, like me, oppose and actively protest this war and our government's policy.

I cannot begin this essay, however, without marking the number of days since the date this war began. This is the count we all count. This is the count of the days of those held captive by Hamas. This is the count of days since October 7. Perhaps this is the basis for our sense of solitude. We are a wounded family.

On this, the 416th day of war, time has lost its natural progression. Days accumulate rather than pass, creating one endless day that offers no promise of a new morning. While the psyche continues its movement beyond time, even when appearing frozen, we find ourselves in an unprecedented reality where pain accumulates, despair creeps in, and blood stains the lands of Israel, Gaza, and Lebanon. Our protests, continuing for nearly two years, seem to fall on deaf ears. Our cherished home has transformed into an unrecognizable place where both sides have been drafted into what increasingly feels like a bloody holy war. This is no longer a land where we can all live meaningful lives.

The current situation cannot be divorced from our origins as a state—a genesis that held great promise for the Jewish people but not for those who already lived in what became Israel. I once wrote that "we were the future," but now we find ourselves returning to events we promised would never happen again, events that have caused terrible harm to all the inhabitants of this land—Palestinians and Jews alike. We have been the victims and the perpetrators. From a wounded and split psyche, we warned against these events but they occurred, not just as memory but as a premeditated and soul-deadening execution. The protection we yearned for (the government's protection of its citizens) has long been inactive. Home is no longer that same home. The social organization that served as a second skin to our severely wounded psyche is badly hit.

In the therapeutic space, we occupy a privileged position that allows us to experience trauma as if for the first time, thanks to the presence of an other, with whom we relive the experience. Outside the therapy room, however, we remain isolated, repeatedly experiencing national trauma without a participating witnesses. We don't live it together; rather, we are under its spell, alone in a crowd, constantly observing unbearable testimonies. Our obligation to participate in others' suffering—that of both strangers and loved ones—leaves us wounded anew. Each one remains outside comforting dialogue even while being part of an endlessly talking community that has been injured or traumatized.

I personally find myself like a page torn from its diary, still connected by threads to the binding. Connected to this place, fighting for it, yet feeling lost, defeated, detached, and lonely. This loneliness stems not from physical isolation but from our collective transformation into discrete units. We communicate yet remain wrapped in invisible barriers of varying thickness. These metaphoric barriers extend beyond our interpersonal relationships to our internal psychic experience. Within our psyches, the task of digestion exceeds our strength, creating disassociations between the known, the internalized, and our psychic foundations. This is not splitting between good and evil. We separate our conscious awareness from that which is impossible to digest and integrate. This is the barrier construct to prevent a "catastrophic encounter" with our truth—the truth of the terrible and ongoing injury continuing without an expiration date in sight.

One can speak of gradients in the depressive position, about knowing and not knowing, experiencing and disconnecting. On this road there are no rest stops, no service stations, no exits. This can be described as a malignant solitude of the psyche. However, one could say that this very splitting also allows us to maintain hope, to assume there could be something "reasonable" and perhaps even good in the distant future, and to fight for it. There is a kind of splitting/dissociation in the service of the life forces, one that also allows some room for psychic movement, even if a narrow one. But as the war continues and as our protest against it becomes more forceful, yet still ineffective, a sense of submission and resignation penetrates every tissue and the narrow space of hope shrinks.

A few weeks ago amid the terror of war in Gaza and Lebanon, when Israel turned toward Iran in a chain-reactive response to a response, a patient said to me, "Do you understand that things will never return to how they were? The dialogue that was still possible in the past can no longer exist today… It's a terrible feeling of solitude. There's no one to talk to."

RESIGNATION

The beginning of the war paralyzed many of us. I confined myself to working from home, unable to join those doing remarkable work outside. Facing the external destruction of what was being done against us and in our name, along with our internal terrors, I found myself—along with many of my patients—withdrawing into an encapsulated shell. Paradoxically, our breached home felt like a protected space. This initial paralysis wasn't simply freezing, fighting, or fleeing, though it contained elements of all three.

Our early experience in the war reminds me of the "resignation syndrome" reported among refugee children in Sweden. Resignation syndrome is a condition in which children lost consciousness upon learning of their impending deportation. While our situation differs, I now prefer this term over "encapsulation" to describe our collective experience. We retreated in response to our powerlessness regarding our government and the surrounding devastation.

Signs of submission are now manifest in widespread "broken-heart syndrome" and a creeping sense of giving up, even as we continue protesting. We each bear our burden alone, as support networks feel increasingly inactive. Twelve months of war and ten months of political upheaval have scattered us, making both giving and receiving support increasingly difficult.

Early in the war, we felt the worst had happened, with no return possible to our previous state. This activated what Winnicott (1974) called the "fear of breakdown"—a fear of something that has already happened but wasn't fully experienced. Now we are learning that the fear of breakdown is not the worst; the "dissolution of fear" itself proves more devastating. While rage and fear can motivate resistance against both external enemies and internal corruption—they are signs of hope—beneath our protests lies a terrible realization—a state of resignation and moral injury that sticks to our skin. We are beaten; we find ourselves giving up while we are still there, protesting.

A DRAMA OF BELONGING AND HOMELESSNESS

We Israelis fell under the spell of "national revival" and the power of belonging, perceived as essential for people whose lives are a national project of one kind or another. Now, as Rozmarin has written, **"**We remain victims of history, unable to resist the fatal course onto which the next generation will now march" (2009). Is this march dictated by reality?

These are the questions that are arising now in many therapeutic encounters: the question of belonging and choice, the question of "we" or "I and my family," the question of staying versus migration**.** As therapists, our psyche collects the griefs of both our patients and ourselves and is supposed to bear them. But we are a wounded group of therapists and patients, trying to meet and help and be helped. Trying to treat the hurting child and to treat the ailing mother as the roles change in a dizzying sequence. The intensity of recent events inscribes itself differently in each psyche, yet it creates a shared experience of abandonment, homelessness, and loneliness—the burden of the psyche in evil days.

Klein (1963) attributes the sense of loneliness to our unfulfilled yearning to be understood without words—ultimately longing for our earliest maternal connection. However, our current situation involves not just individual longing but also collective belonging. As Rozmarin (2024) argues, belonging to community, involvement with others accompanied by a sense of ownership and responsibility, fundamentally shapes our identity, sometimes overshadowing even primary attachments. That is why the sense of belonging, whether chosen or forced, remains deeply ambivalent, capable of both enriching and wounding our psyches, enabling us to feel at home and/or to detach, unbelong, and migrate (literally or psychically).

As we find ourselves negotiating the need to belong with the need to detach, the therapeutic space can serve as a zone for intersubjective encounter between people who, in varying degrees, experience barriers between themselves and others, and within themselves. Rather than encouraging submission, it enables an active engagement with difference, and gestures toward a new collectivity based on an ethic of similarity rather than historic identity. This ethic of psychic encounter does not give up on the dimension of hope. ■

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PHOTO: LIMANOIDE

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Hurricane after Hurricane

October 9, 2024. I am checking the news once again. Fast and furious, Hurricane Milton is approaching Florida. The white spiral on the screen swirls and swells. The headlines announce each increase from Category 3 to 4 to 5. As the storm grows, terror, angst, and feelings of helplessness multiply. How vulnerable we humans are. And how oblivious we are to our vulnerabilities. We have SUVs, HD smart TVs, AI assistants, virtual reality games, wireless home security systems, all this technology, and yet we are made of skin and bones. We cannot withstand the force of 150-plus mph winds.

I refresh the page and read that Tampa Bay's mayor has warned that when Milton hits, single-story homes will become coffins.

I follow updates, the impossible traffic facing those fleeing and the incalculable risks borne by those staying behind. Meanwhile, I am far from the threat, across the continent, vacationing on an idyllic island in the Pacific Northwest. I walk out to the deck and glance at the waters. It is low tide. Then I return to my phone, refreshing the screen to see new predictions for landfall in Florida.

I have become familiar with this pattern in recent years, witnessing my own tumbling deep into the rabbit hole of news cycles. I see it in slow motion, as if in a movie where the camera's focus goes from the calm Pacific to turmoil flashing on the screen. This impulse to constantly check the news for updates on disasters feels like an addiction. I click, compulsively read headlines, jump from website to website, losing myself in the narrative of the catastrophes: environmental, corporate, political. "I want to know what is happening in the world," I tell myself in self-defense. "I need to know, I am a citizen, a human being, after all."

What I read—wars, famines, disasters, never-ending hostility, hatreds—I try to keep to myself. My kids are young; I want to shield them while I can. Yet on the eve of Milton, I relinquish control. I tell them about the approaching hurricane. My five-year-old has questions. The winds, the rain, the coast, the homes. "Where is Florida, who lives there?" he asks. "People we don't know," I say. "*People*," I underscore. I tell him everything I can in earnest. "You're safe," I remind him. "We are safe," I repeat. I cannot offer it as a promise but as a mantra. At least for now.

The next morning, my son asks to see images, photos of the aftermath. We survey the devastation on the screen while cross-legged on the couch, supported by cozy pillows and covered by wool blankets. We see streets turned to rivers, roofs torn apart, trees with broken branches. I avoid photos of survivors as much as I can, those faces frozen in time with anguish.

Long before I had kids, I read *A Chorus of Stones* by feminist essayist Susan Griffin. It has been almost two decades, but I still remember her question and my own knotted self-awareness: "Encountering such images, one is grateful to be spared. But is one ever really free of the fate of others?" No, we are not. How can we be? We are interconnected, we all share this earth, we share life. Yet here I am with my pillows and blankets, scrolling for news updates from a faraway state, and there they are, with power lines down, unhoused, perhaps injured or far worse.

We are safe. Until we are not.

I ask myself, What can one do hurricane after hurricane? Wildfire after wildfire? All the droughts, floods, displacements? How can one go beyond witnessing? Write checks to the organizations helping with recovery efforts? Send letters to the congressmen and congresswomen demanding legal measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and policy changes to encourage clean energy investments? Make personal commitments such as installing solar panels, eating less meat, recycling, and riding bikes? Can these actions add up to something effective in the end? What is the definition of effective when it comes to environmental collapse? Where is the end?

Hurricane Milton dissipated on October 13, leaving behind more than a thousand damaged homes, ravaged farms, devastated families, and more than thirty people dead. People we don't know. *People*.

There is a poem by Jane Hirshfield, "Let Them Not Say." I have been reciting it often:

Let them not say: we did not see it.
We saw.
Let them not say: we did not hear it.
We heard.
…
Let them not say: they did nothing.
We did not-enough.

Milton came and went. Like Katrina, Harvey, Ian, Maria, Sandy. There will be more storms, and with more frequency. So let us say it loud and clear, and with conviction despite our regret, sorrow, outrage, and dread. Let us admit: "We are not doing enough!" I do not know what enough is, none of us really knows, but we are certainly not doing it. This fact, I must also tell my kids in earnest. They already notice it. I have to explain to them how we are failing the earth, how we are failing one another and ourselves. It will confuse them, I know. It will break their eager hearts. But better brokenhearted than ignorant, because soon they will see me again, head bent forward, one hand pressing against my temple while reading the news, mouthing the words: Category 3 to 4 to 5, state of emergency, evacuations in order. Maybe the threat will be far away; maybe it will be nearby.

We are safe until we are not. We are never free of the fate of others–our kids in particular.

Doomscrolling on the sidelines is not a solution in the slightest. I also know fatalism is not acceptable. Apathy is worse, even lethal. Each is a "pathology of perpetration" that normalizes the physical and ecological but also the systematic and psychic violence that goes hand in hand with climate breakdown. They perpetuate problems and prolong suffering, personal and collective, by enabling and extending social injustice, economic inequality, political and corporate corruption, and environmental degradation everywhere.

I am not a climate scientist, economist, or policymaker, but a career in psychology has taught me that I would rather be alarmed—searching for answers, visions, and a way out—than be numb. And motherhood has taught me that we are always stronger together in our sincerity, even in the most vulnerable moments, especially in the most vulnerable moments. So here is a new mantra: "My heart is awake. Our hearts are awake." I hope that if nothing better, we can at least let them say that. ■

Uncertain Journey, 2016/2024
metal frame, red wool

Views of the exhibition Chiharu Shiota *The Soul Trembles*, Grand Palais, Paris 2024
Scenography Atelier Jodar

Art is a way for me to communicate the intangible emotions, memories, and experiences that shape our lives. My practice is deeply rooted in my personal journey, yet it speaks to universal themes of existence, death, and connection. I am fascinated by the concept of memory, how it fades with time but at the same time is preserved in mundane objects. For me, memory is not just something we think about; it's something we can feel in our bodies. Without memory, I wouldn't be able to explain who I am.

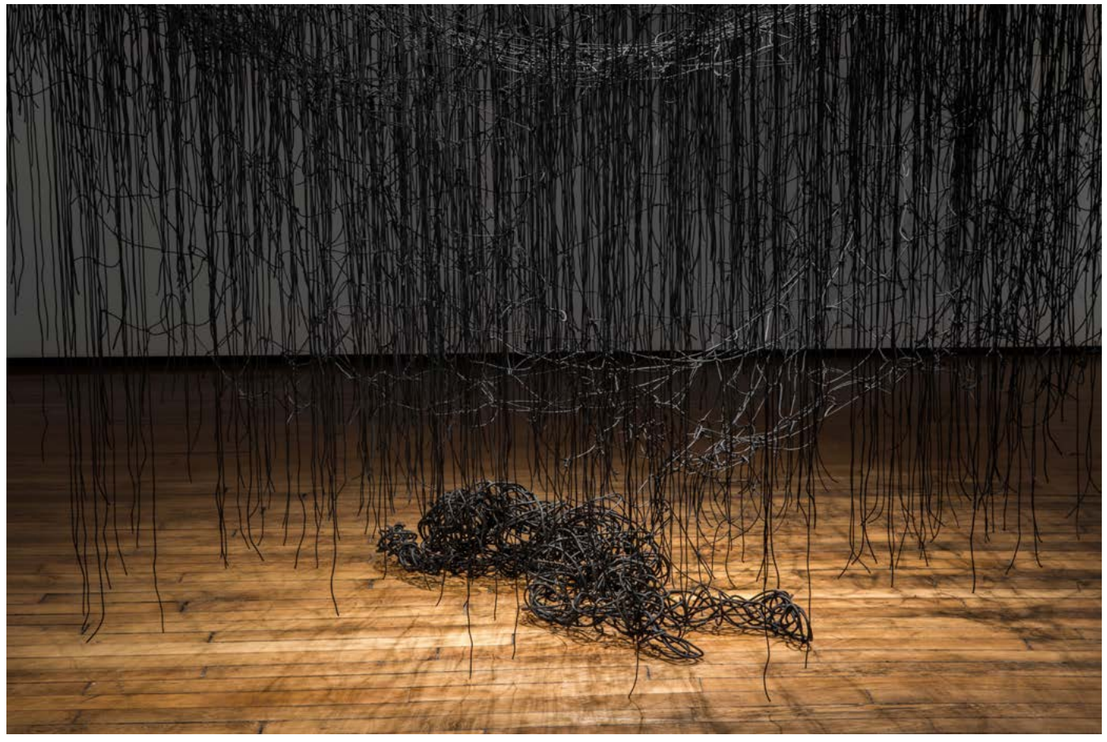
I use everyday objects—shoes, keys, beds, chairs, suitcases, and dresses—as symbols for human experience and existence. These objects are charged with personal and collective memories. Through my installations, I encapsulate these memories within massive, intricate webs of thread. The threads create a visual representation of the invisible connections between the physical world and the intangible realm of our emotions, memories, and consciousness. It is this sensation of "presence in absence" that I explore with my work.

The thread is delicate but also strong, representing how relationships can be fragile but still lasting. As the thread moves through space, it connects objects, forming an extensive pattern that shows the many connections between people, some obvious and some hidden. The thread acts as a symbol for how our experiences are all linked—how the past, present, and future affect each other, and how we are all connected in ways that are often not easy to see. I want to make all these connections visible.

Originally, I wanted to be a painter, but during my studies, I felt stuck. It seemed like everything I was creating had already been done before. The thread allowed me to extend the pencil line of the drawing into space. I feel like I am drawing with thread in the air. The installation fills the room to the moment where you can no longer trace a single thread. By engulfing everyday objects in a web of thread, I create an atmosphere where the viewer can feel the presence of universal existence.

Ultimately, my work is about searching for meaning in the chaos of life. I can't imagine being anything other than an artist. My work is an exploration of how I navigate the complexities of existence, and I want to extend this feeling into something universal. Although we may never truly know what the other is thinking, I believe we share similar experiences and emotions in life. When people enter my installations, I hope that they can recognize this feeling. Through my installations, I invite the viewer to reflect on their own relationships in life, to question how they confront loss, hold on to memory, and make sense of the world around them. I want to create a different space from ordinary life, something that transports them into another universe. Art is a powerful way to communicate emotions, ideas, and experiences that words alone often cannot express.

—Chiharu Shiota



Life Unknown, 2023
Installation: metal, rope

Galerie Templon, Paris, France
Photo by Adrien Millot
Courtesy the artist and TEMPLON, Paris – Brussels – New York

Form of Memory, 2018
Installation: black wool, brush without bristles

Kenji Taki Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Photo by courtesy of Kenji Taki Gallery

Seven Dresses, 2015
Installation: white dresses, black wool

Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, Saarbrücken, Germany
Photo by Sunhi Mang

Accumulation-Searching for the Destination, 2014/2024
suitcase, motor, red rope

Views of the exhibition Chiharu Shiota The Soul
Trembles, Grand Palais, Paris 2024
Scenography Atelier Jodar
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Uncertain Daily Life – Death Bed, 2002
Installation: tiles, water, shower, bed, mud, pump

Kenji Taki Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Photo by Tetsuo Ito

In Silence, 2002
Installation: black wool, burnt grand piano, forty burnt chairs

Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, Germany
Photo by Sunhi Mang

PHOTO: FABIAN JONES

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On Hatred

I remember the first time I truly wrestled with my own hatred regarding the destruction of the environment. It happened a few years ago while I was watching news footage of another oil spill devastating pristine waters. The familiar surge of rage rose within me, but this time, I stayed with it instead of turning away. The screen reflected back not just environmental catastrophe but my own complicity in the systems that perpetuate it. My car keys sat heavy in my pocket. The plastic water bottle on my desk suddenly felt like an accusation. In that moment of recognition, I understood something essential about hatred's dual nature—how it can both separate us from and bind us to the very things we claim to despise.

This convergence of personal recognition and systemic violence has led me to explore hatred not just as a clinical phenomenon but as a mirror reflecting the fractured relationship between our inner and outer worlds. The recent work of Sue Grand (2023) on "perpetrator fragments" resonates deeply with this exploration. These fragments, she argues, are not just psychological residue but living ghosts of historical trauma that haunt our attempts at connection. They are the invisible threads that tie our personal grievances to collective wounds, making the boundary between individual and societal hatred increasingly permeable.

In my consulting room, these threads become visible in unexpected ways. A patient—let's call her Sarah—once spent several sessions exploring her hatred of corporate executives who prioritize profit over planetary well-being. "I hate them all," she declared, hands gripping the armchair, knuckles white with tension. "The politicians, the CEOs, everyone who's destroying our future." As she spoke, I noticed a subtle shift in her posture, a slight collapse inward. "But really," she continued, her voice softening, "I hate myself for not doing more."

Her words struck a chord with my own struggle with environmental activism's insufficiency against the machinery of ecological destruction. In that moment, I recognized how hatred often functions as a defense against more-vulnerable feelings of powerlessness and grief. The perpetrator fragments that Grand describes seemed to be at work here—Sarah's hatred of corporate leaders contained elements of her own internalized aggression, her sense of complicity in systems of destruction.

The consulting room itself becomes a container for these complex dynamics. Another patient, deeply involved in climate activism, spoke of his recurring nightmare in which he transformed into the very oil executives he despised. In his dream, he found himself signing permits for drilling, rationalizing destruction with the same arguments he fought against in his waking life. This dream material revealed hatred's uncanny ability to create unconscious identifications with its objects, a phenomenon that Grand's work helps us understand through the lens of perpetrator introjects.

This interplay between personal and collective hatred feels particularly relevant in our current moment. Josh Cohen's (2024) exploration of this emotional state in *All the Rage* illuminates how our digital landscape has transformed anger into a commodity, packaged and sold back to us through social media's endless scroll. I notice this in my own behavior—how easily righteous anger about climate change can dissolve into the false comfort of simply sharing an article, the momentary satisfaction of adding my voice to the digital chorus. The algorithms that feed our news feeds seem designed to keep us in a state of perpetual agitation, what Cohen calls the "permanent rage economy."

Walking through recent climate protests in London, I witnessed both focused and dispersed expressions of rage that Peter Sloterdijk's work helps us understand. The organised chants and coordinated actions represented what he calls "banked rage"—focused, purposeful, collective. But I also saw the scattered, individual expressions of frustration: the lone person screaming at police, the cynical tweets shared from the sidelines. I recognized myself in both expressions, understanding how easily one can slip into the other.

The transformation between these forms of rage often hinges on what Grand calls "dialogues of rage"—spaces where hatred can be explored without either suppression or acting out. Recently, I've begun hosting monthly "grief circles" in my consulting room, repurposed for the evening into a community space. During one particularly powerful session, a group of climate activists gathered to share their experiences of eco-anxiety and rage.

As we sat in a circle, one participant—a former corporate lawyer turned environmental advocate—spoke of her hatred for her former colleagues who continue to facilitate environmental destruction. As she spoke, her narrative began to shift. The hatred that initially presented as righteous anger toward external others gradually revealed deeper layers: shame about her own past participation in corporate harm, grief for lost professional relationships, fear about an uncertain future. The group held these revelations with remarkable tenderness, creating space for hatred to reveal its underlying wounds.

Another participant, a young teacher, shared her rage at industrial pollution, only to break down crying about the asthma her child developed living near a factory. Her hatred of corporate polluters was inextricably linked to maternal grief and guilt—feelings that could only emerge when her anger was witnessed without judgment. A farmer spoke of his fury at corporate agriculture, his voice cracking as he described watching his family's land destroyed during increasingly severe floods. In these moments, individual hatred began to transform into a shared recognition of vulnerability and loss.

This collective holding of hatred points toward what a psychopolitical praxis might look like. It's not about managing or suppressing these difficult emotions but about creating containers strong enough to hold them while they transform. In my own journey, I've found that acknowledging my hatred—of environmental destroyers, of systemic injustice, of my own complicity—opens space for a more nuanced engagement with both activism and analysis.

The clinical implications of this understanding are significant. When working with patients grappling with eco-anxiety and environmental grief, I've learned to pay attention to hatred's protective function. Often, it serves as a shield against overwhelming feelings of helplessness and loss. One patient, an environmental scientist, initially presented with intense hatred toward climate change deniers. As we explored this hatred together, it gradually revealed itself as a defense against the terror of his own scientific predictions. His hatred of deniers protected him from fully facing the implications of his research.

This defensive function of hatred appears in subtle ways across my practice. A young activist's contempt for "apathetic" family members masked her deep fear of alienating loved ones through her environmental commitments. A businessman's hatred of "extreme" environmentalists concealed his guilt about his industry's environmental impact. In each case, hatred served as both a shield and a bridge—protecting against unbearable feelings while simultaneously pointing toward them.

The hatred I feel watching another forest burn or another species disappear hasn't lessened. But it has grown more complex, more connected to love—love for what remains, for what might yet be saved, for the human capacity to face terrible truths and still work toward change. This is perhaps what Grand means when she speaks of hatred's ambivalence: its potential to both destroy and, when properly held, to catalyze transformation.

In the consulting room, this transformation often begins with small moments of recognition. A patient recently shared her shame about feeling hatred toward her young children when they demand plastic toys or insist on car rides to school. As we explored these feelings together, her hatred revealed itself as a complex knot of maternal love, environmental conscience, and societal pressure. By acknowledging these "unacceptable" feelings without judgment, we created space for a more integrated relationship with both her children and her environmental values.

The clinical work of holding hatred requires a delicate balance. Too much focus on its destructive aspects can reinforce shame and inhibit exploration. Too quick a move toward transformation can bypass necessary encounters with grief and rage. I think of it as being similar to working with dreams—hatred, like dream material, needs to be approached with curiosity rather than immediate interpretation or resolution.

As I write this, my office window frames a sky heavy with unseasonable warmth. The weather itself seems to mirror our collective disorder. Yet on my desk sits a small potted plant, recently given to me by a patient who has begun transforming her climate anxiety into community garden work. It reminds me that even in our hatred of destruction, we can find seeds of regeneration.

The challenge, both personally and collectively, is to remain present with hatred's intelligence without being consumed by its fire. This requires creating spaces—in our consulting rooms, our communities, our political movements—where hatred can be witnessed and metabolized rather than simply acted out or suppressed. Only then might we discover what lies beyond hatred: not its absence but its evolution into something that connects rather than divides, which creates rather than destroys.

In the end, hatred may be one of our most honest responses to a world in crisis. It marks the places where our love for life encounters its destruction, where our desire for connection meets systemic alienation. By learning to hold hatred with consciousness and care, we might transform it from a force of separation into a catalyst for collective healing and action. ■

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PHOTO: MATHIAS REDING

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War Alone Does Not Define Aleppo

Ammar’s Story

Aleppo has a long history with trade and industry. It was part of the ancient Silk Road and an important administrative center of the Ottoman Empire, literally at the crossroads of cultures. Textile production was an important craft: During Ottoman times, the work was done by hand; later, when the French came to Syria, they brought with electricity and machinery, as did the Germans. Since that time the textile sector and industry overall has thrived in Aleppo, where there is a culture of problem-solving and unceasing opportunities. From early adulthood, young men work on textile or printing machines, learning their craft bit by bit until they perfect their skills. After three to five years, they either buy a small machine and become a small-business owner, or they team up with another business and become a partner.

Having ambition and drive is the usual thing to have in Aleppo. My name is Ammar and I am part of this culture.

Bab al-Hadid, the neighborhood in which I grew up, was an important district in the old city within eastern Aleppo. When I was in secondary school there I wanted to be an engineer like my father. I would leaf through my father's engineering textbooks, mesmerized by the yellowing pages heavy with typeset printing spilling the theories of electrical engineering, diagrams, and charts.

In September 2012, when the rebel groups captured Bab al Hadid, my life turned to hell. This is what it was like living under ISIS. People in military uniform were at the roundabout. They were on every street and inside every mosque. Missiles and bullets landed very close to my home, but my family braved the storm. I saw a boy I knew pushing his brother in a wheelchair. His leg had been amputated. That image was now common across Aleppo and perhaps the country. I put together a motor for a wheelchair to help my paralyzed grandmother be more mobile, and volunteered as an electrician's assistant. The fear of possibly dying at any moment pushed me even more to do something with my life.

My family was displaced to Membej, a village outside of Aleppo which was being administered by the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Almost immediately it was captured by ISIS. We lived there for three years before moving back to Aleppo in 2015 so that I could finish high school.

When we returned to our city, the war was still going on but it had slowed down. I barely recognized it. My family's house had been partially destroyed. I was afraid my name would come up on the army reserve list and I wouldn't be able to take my high school exam. I knew I had to find a way to "be somebody" or I would have to serve in the army. Even through those years, I recall being hopeful. I wanted to do a PhD in Malaysia because they didn't require a visa from Syrians. Malaysia is a Muslim country and I thought maybe there I could build a new life and have my own family. Russia was also giving many scholarships to Syrian students, and I remember thinking about how I might apply. I still wanted to study technology. The first week I was back in Aleppo, I taught myself 3D Max by watching tutorials on YouTube. Learning software was my way of feeling hopeful and responsible for rebuilding my hometown.

I settled into a former sewing shop underground in the Sulaimanieh District. Before the war, Sulaimanieh was a liberal Christian neighborhood filled with art and artists and where women had a great deal of freedom. Now it lay on the border between the eastern and western parts of the city, dangerously close to the front. My new home was dark and windowless and cramped with rolls of cotton cloth of many colors: red, violet, white, and black. The owner of the sewing shop had sought asylum in Norway and was granted refugee status, so the shop was untouched from the night he left. Power came on only two hours a day and some days not at all. My parent's financial situation was very dire: I didn't have enough money to buy candles and I didn't want to burden my family with the cost. Alone in the sewing shop, I lived by battery light, and when my battery died I walked to my uncle's home on King Faisal Street to charge it. Darkness offered physical and psychological isolation, so I would cram my studies to finish before 10 p.m., in case the battery ran out. If the battery ran out while I was awake, I would experience the true horror of being in complete darkness. Meanwhile, the war was burning up the identity of Aleppo the way a recycling plant processes plastic and glass. Missiles and bombs were going off in different parts of the city. Even when missiles didn't crash near me, I heard the sound of firing and crashing. If living in a war zone for my youth wasn't hard enough, then sleeping underground in an industrial space without electricity felt like being brought into the clutches of the devil. To alleviate my loneliness, I went to the Al Tawheed mosque to study, see some light, and save the battery of my lamp for the night. The mosque was spacious, with four minarets. Across the street from each minaret, there was a church. This had been a neighborhood, before the war, that embodied the peaceful coexistence of religions.

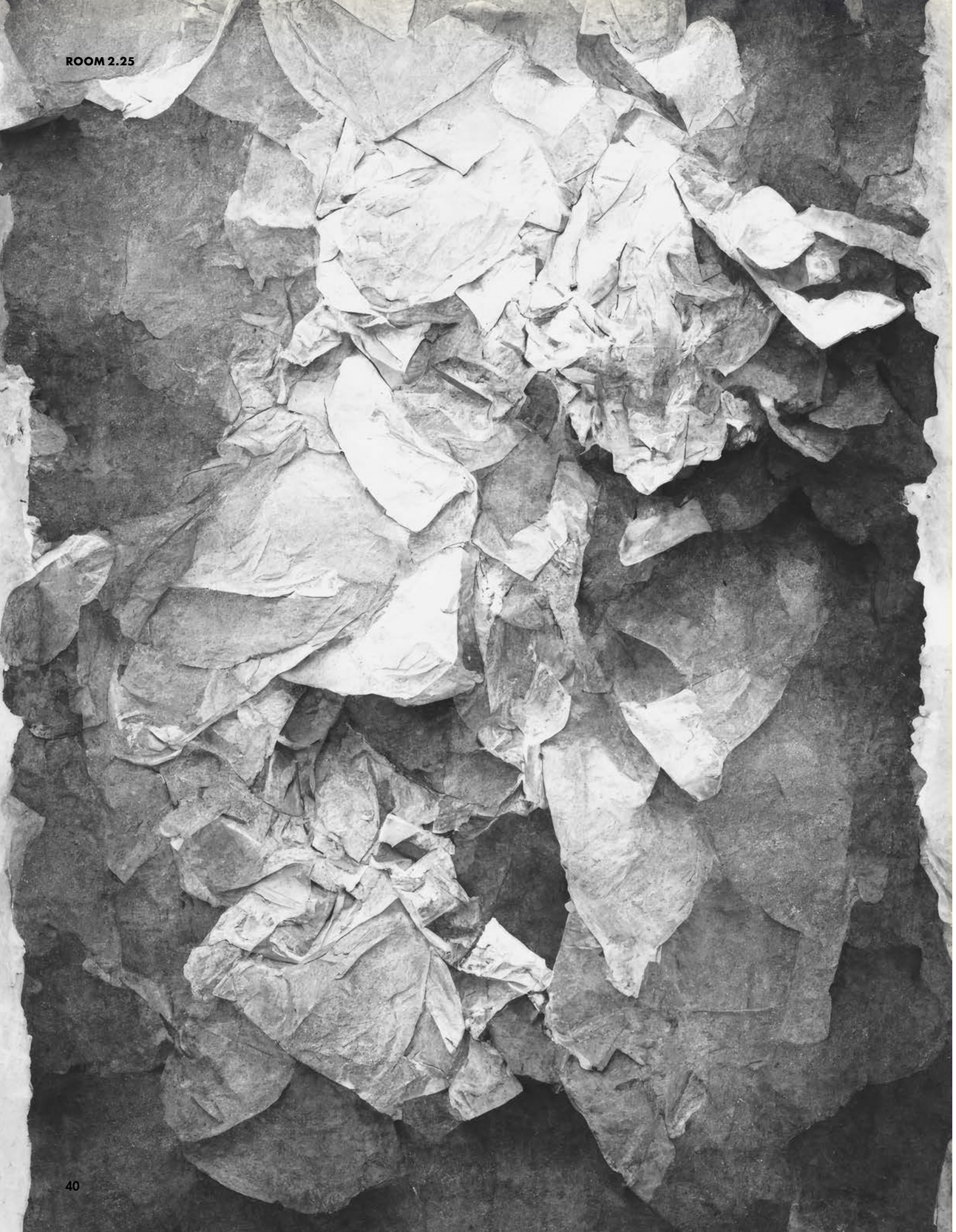
I thought often during this time of Mohamad's farewell sermon, the last words from the prophet. Even during this period of lawlessness, I could fall back on his words, and they gave me peace and helped me find my own garden in life. ISIS disfigured Islam in unrepairable ways. ISIS troops created so much evil on the land and spilled so much blood that even Muslims started to denounce Islam when they saw ISIS in action: property destruction and beheadings.

When I returned to Aleppo, I was so scared that I wouldn't be able to catch up on all the studies that I had missed during the time that we were in Membej, but I was able to pass my high school exam. I was accepted into engineering school at the University of Aleppo, and it opened a new chapter in my life. I felt had done my job and I had faith in God. During the first few weeks of university, I was nervous and didn't want to speak with other people, but in the second term I made new friends and specialized in civil engineering. Still, every day, I would say goodbye to my new friends as if it were the last time I would see them. Missiles crosshatched the sky like the stars in a Van Gogh painting.

I don't expect to be happy. I just want to be productive, and the university has helped me feel that I can be. I find myself hoping that that war in Syria will bring something positive, like the industrial and scientific revolutions that happened in Germany and Japan after World War II.

Having ambition and drive is the usual thing to have in Aleppo. I am part of this culture. ■

This essay was submitted prior to the 2024 revolution in Syria that began with the attack on Aleppo, November 29, 2024.



Ann Shenfield
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Like, adults

that morning
I overheard
a woman saying

they were my age
but they were like,
adults

in the park
the leaves performed
their irregular ballet

hints of amber
amid goldenrod
skimming on the air

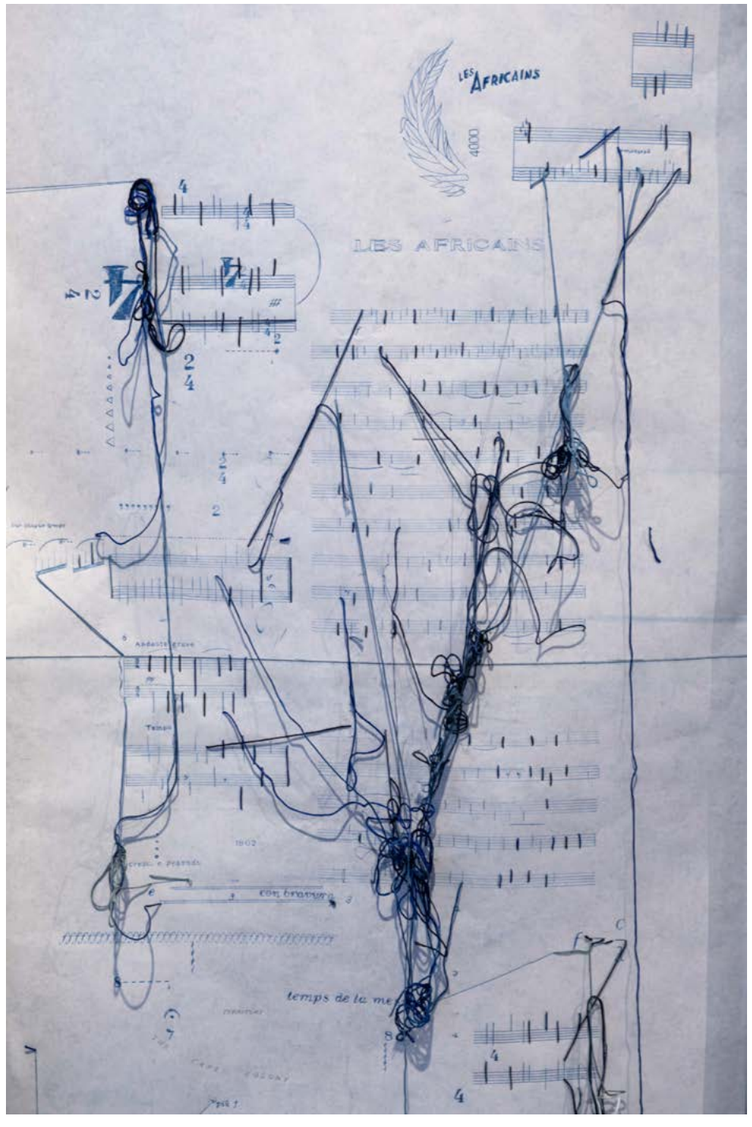
each leaf
singular
like people

I'm trying
to recapture
that moment

but it's as if
I'm still muted
or like when

you catch yourself
in the mirror
or even on screen

and for a moment
you take yourself
for another



if I say the sky's small arithmetic its inscription, its echo
embroidery and drawing on carbon paper, metal stud, metal tracks
2023

Photos by Leo Ng

Keli Safia Maksud
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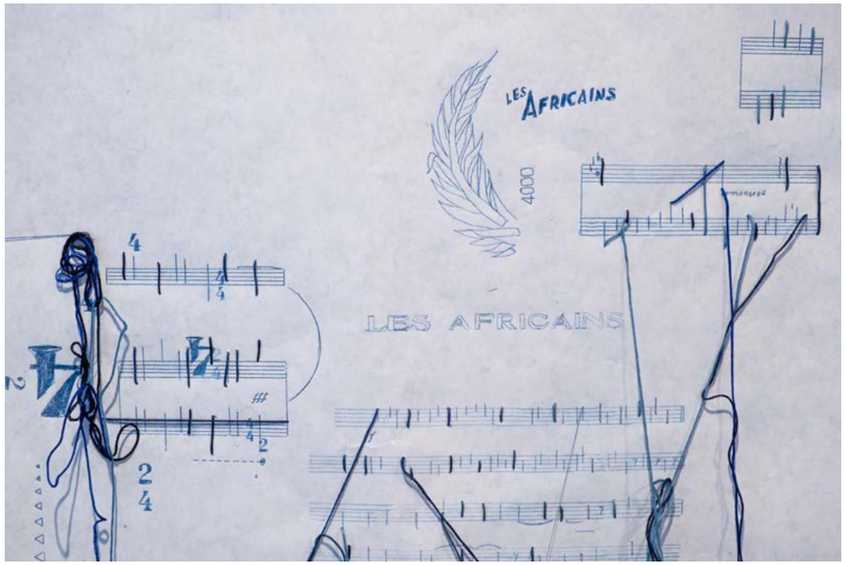
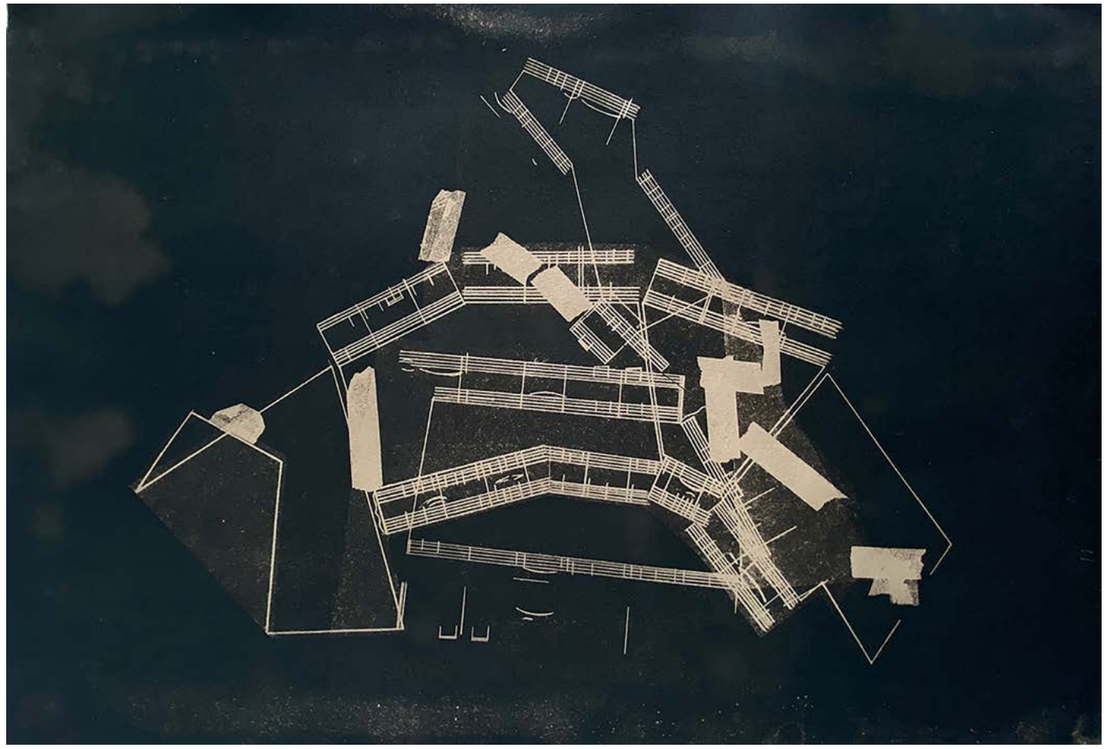


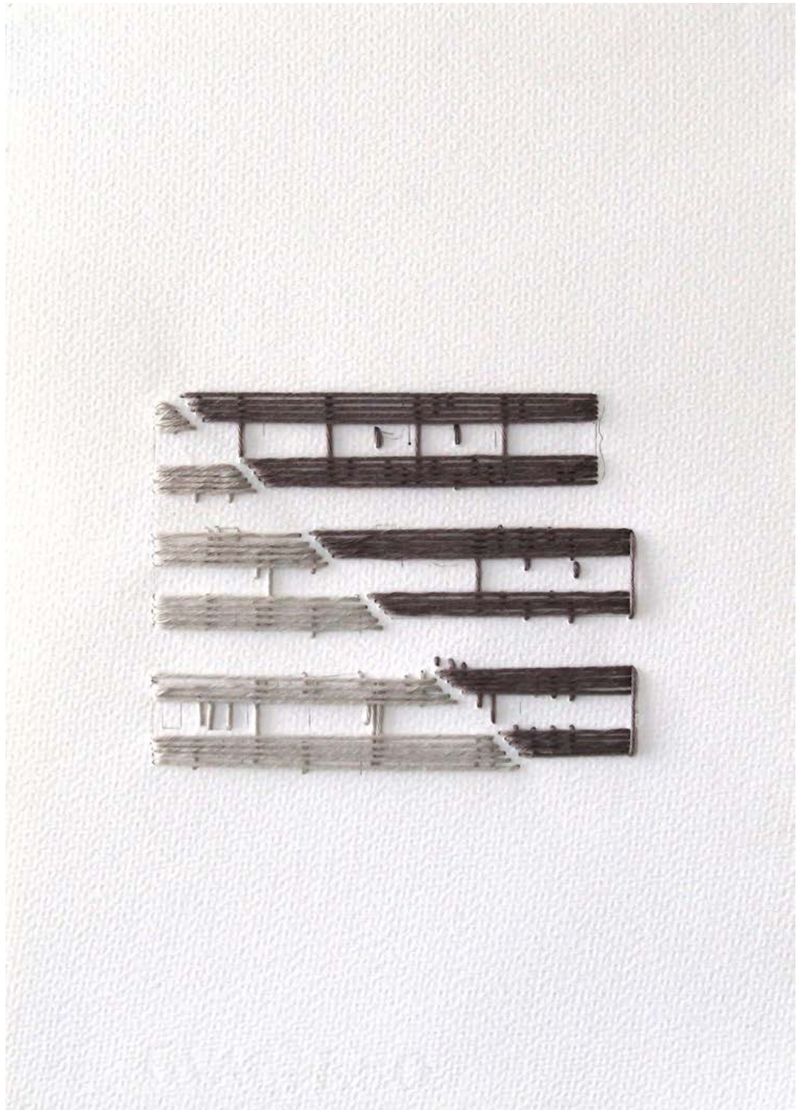
My practice investigates the intersections of space, identity, and power as enduring legacies of colonialism. Working across installation, drawing, sculpture, sound, and embroidery, my works explore diagrammatic systems of representation emerging from architecture, cartography, spatial planning, and music (specifically, national anthems), calling attention to how space and time are ordered. On the one hand, these systems are communicative tools used to realize concepts and ideas into material construction, and on the other, tools that regulate, surveil, and enact an architecture that governs how bodies move through space. I am interested in the standardization that such systems present as unitary languages of homogeneous experience and how those whose experience falls outside such constructions of sameness are denied and othered by and in it. Central to my research is a consideration of the "line" as the substrate of all these systems, enforcing and rearticulating binaries like inside/outside, here/there, and us/them. I aim to disrupt and reconfigure these colonial structures by "breaking the line"—a gesture that challenges the epistemological supports that legitimize and secure the violent reproduction of enclosures of captivity and the nation-state model. Through this process, my work unsettles spatial and temporal constructs, opening up possibilities for alternative ways of being, moving, and relating to space and to one another.

Topographies of Sound
embroidery and drawing on carbon paper
2022

Photo by Camille Blake



Untitled Compositions I
Cyanotype and cyanotypes dyed in Mate Tea, 15 x 21 inches
2021



Anthems
Embroidery on Paper, 2020

Anthems
Embroidery on Paper, 2020

Circles of Witnessing

The following narratives emerge from a project in which we asked practitioners and activists we knew—friends or esteemed colleagues—for anything they wanted to write about their experience of the unfolding war in Gaza and Israel/Palestine. We believed our colleagues were on uncharted ground, trailblazing a terrain not many wanted to witness. We wanted to hear what they were going through and to let them know that what they were seeing mattered to us. We believed that in the midst of an unfolding catastrophe, those closest to the fire are letting us know about the layer of the psyche, which, Dorothy Evans Holmes writes, is saturated with murderous aggression and the "crimes of humanity and their history" (p.642, 2016).

How were they making sense of this "radioactive" (Gampel,2000) deluge in live time?

We understand that no one is trained to meet this level of cruelty, brutality, and atrocity. We imagined that they were reflexively accessing their clinical wisdom and therapeutic souls in order to orient, engage, and survive—or help others survive. Robert J. Lifton writes that survivors of mass violence can possess "certain kinds of wisdom and [which] can be a reminder of pain, possibility, and hope" (p.xxxvii, 2023). We wanted to capture this knowledge, born in the immediate aftermath—and in the midst—of overlapping catastrophes.

For these writers, the length of time it has taken to curate and reach a public that cares has been disheartening, and mostly, the sense that their writings can make a difference at all has evaporated for some. We still feel committed to making sure their visions and voices are published within our professional and activist communities.

— JUDY ROTH, MANAL ABU HAQ, MAYA MUKAMEL

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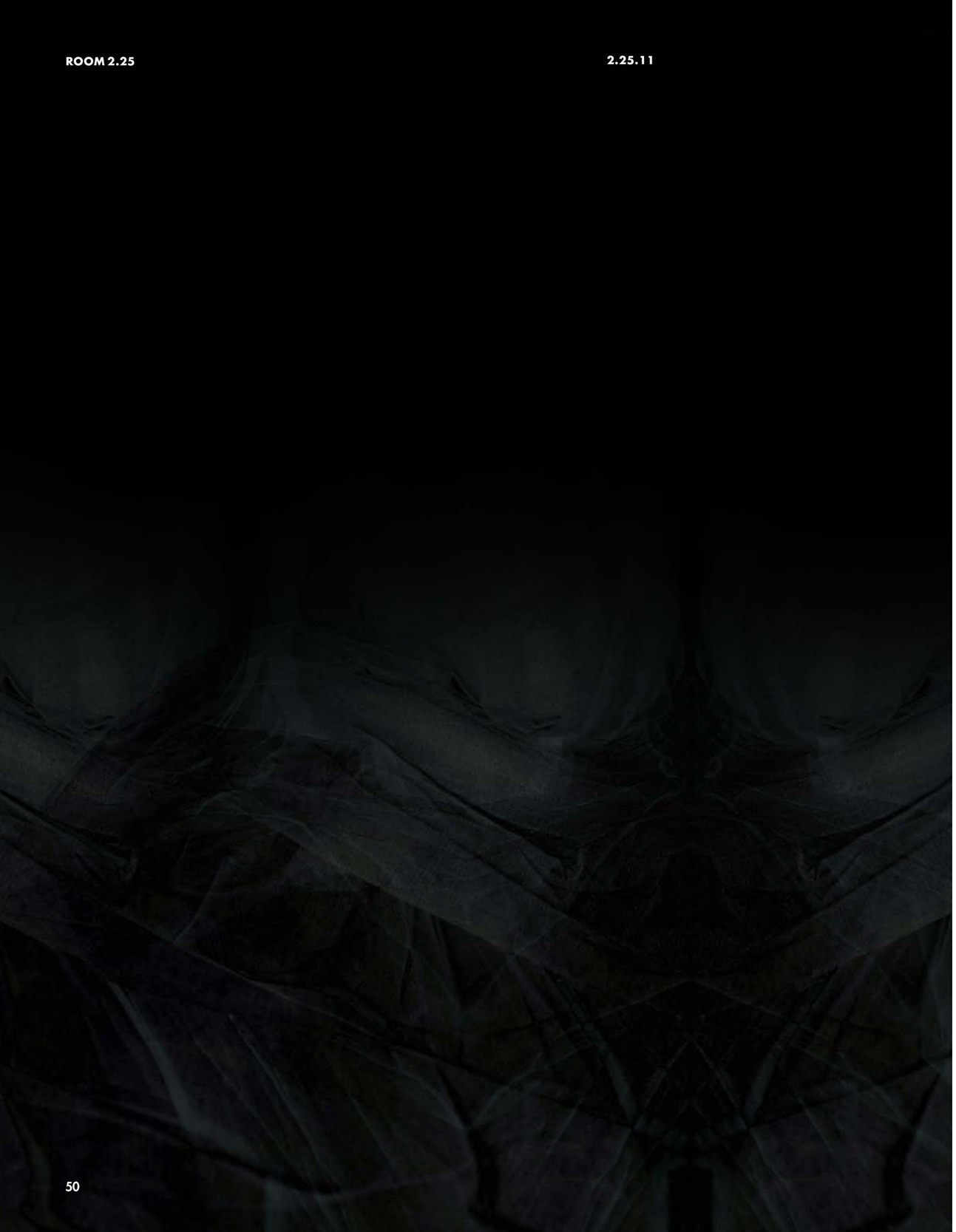

Will the Sun Rise Again in Gaza?

As if the sun had set on the sixth of October and had never risen again in Gaza, until today we live in deep darkness.

It's when you leave your inner self and move into the unknown; it's when you are forced to flee from your awareness, from your assets, from yourself, to move as a physical creature and start to find any place or shelter. Literally, you are not aware enough to ask yourself, "What is this? Is this real, or am I watching a terrifying movie? Am I awake?"

After a massive bombing in Gaza City, where I used to live, my family and I left home for the first time to seek safety. I know it was very heavy on my kids' hearts to hear and see all the explosions in our neighborhood. My husband and I were aware that there is no safe place in Gaza.

As the Israeli forces had ordered civilians to do, we evacuated to southern Gaza. We moved, carrying our heavy bodies, to the unknown for the first time in our lives, reassuring our two kids that we were moving to a safer place, although we knew we were lying to them.

Since then, safety has become more than an aspect in our life. And for the first time, we experienced shortages in basic needs: literally no food, no water, no electricity or cooking gas, no fuel for cars, and it became harder to make phone calls.

Everything changed, and we were exhausted by everyday details; the heavy near-daily bombing, especially at night. Many times, we felt it was the time for us to die. We knew about friends, relatives, very respected and well-educated people who were killed in massacres. Entire families were erased from the records. They bombed everything in Gaza: civilians' houses, restaurants, hotels, universities, schools, hospitals, private sectors, shops. They even destroyed historic landmarks and any sign of civilization. They killed mothers in front of their children, killed children, and burned the mothers' hearts. Within all of that and much more, there were no medical supplies. They targeted doctors; hundreds of them were killed with their entire families.

I sometimes ask myself, what reactions should we have to all of that? What amount of emotions and tears? What yelling and shouting should be heard? Will our hearts keep beating?

I saw the answers reflected on the faces surrounding me, and on mine. We have no reaction to all of that. Is it numbness? I do not think so, but we do not have the luxury to grieve. We do not have the place, time, or energy to show how we feel, neither to ourselves nor our people. We have not processed the reality yet. I am not sure if we are aware or not, but we are all wearing the masks of "OK."

And I am still wondering, did we survive or did those who died survive, and it's not us?

After two months, they again forced us to flee, even farther south. They ordered us to move from Khan Younis to Rafah, again to the unknown. I miss my self that I left in my beautiful home in Gaza. I am going further away from it.

I have this contradiction in me; I wish to return to Gaza, the city that I love, but I hope to leave it for a safer place in any country, which is forbidden for all Gazans. We don't have the option to leave!

And yet, as much as I wish for this war to end, I am afraid of that day. I cannot imagine our reactions, and I cannot imagine what happened to Gaza. ■

PHOTO: ALI GABR

For how long!?

From Gaza

My experiences at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, January 2024

THE FIRST SCENE:
Dozens of wounded as a result of the bombing of a house above Abu Dalal Mall arrive at the hospital. They are treated despite the scarcity of capabilities and the huge deficit in medical supplies. One of the injured, whose brain matter and intestines are out, takes his last breath (gasping) and there is nothing that can be done. The doctors' decision in light of the principle of differentiation between the wounded? Whoever has more hope of survival is dealt with. He is left to die in peace. The family stands around him, feeling helpless and with pain in their hearts. I am called to deal with the situation and try to ease their burden and move them toward acceptance. The minutes pass very slowly and his family looks at me pleadingly, *Please do something,* but unfortunately there is nothing that can be done, as his medical condition is hopeless. It is not humanly or emotionally possible for the family to accept this matter; finally this young man gave up his soul, and the screaming started.

How can we get over this pain and how can we forget what we see in his family's eyes? What if we were in a similar situation with someone close to us?

Ohhh … my God, your kindness and mercy to us …

THE SECOND SCENE:
These children, Muhammad and Bassem, were rescued from under the rubble of their homes, which were mercilessly bombed by the Israeli occupation over their heads. They lost all of their family members. I worked with them in Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. They were in a state of shock. They had not spoken a single word for three days. They were stunned and have derealization (disconnected from reality). After a great effort that lasted for hours, they sat down and began to interact with me in a simple way. Oh God, have mercy on these little ones.

THE THIRD SCENE:
I had a very tragic and painful assignment yesterday: A young man in his forties, whose house included all of his family members—father, mother, brothers, their wives and children, and his wife and children—was bombed by Israeli warplanes. He woke up three days later in Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, not knowing what had happened to them. He did not remember anything, and thought he and the others were all simply injured. In fact he had lost all but his thirteen-year-old son, Samir, who suffered fractures and burns all over his body and was lying in the same hospital in another department. I was called to help the medical staff deliver the news to him, have mercy. Oh God.

I started talking to him and checking on his health, then I accompanied him to visit his son in the other section and gave them the opportunity to speak and check on each other. Then I accompanied him to a place with some privacy and started talking to him about the last moments before the bombing and what he remembered—where he had been, what he was doing, and what he knew about his family, and I began to tell him, little by little. I started with his eldest son, his wife, and his parents, and with every piece of news he screamed, suffered, and cried. Oh my God, have mercy upon him.

It was a difficult time, passing very slowly, as if death was looming over our conversation. As soon as I completed the task, I felt extreme stress, collapse, and terrible pain in all parts of my body until I could no longer stand. Oh my God, have mercy on us.

My experiences with war as a professional and a human being

FEBRUARY 6, 2024

Fact: Death was not the only painful aspect of this war, although it was the hardest for some. During this war, I personally lost three of my cousins, one of whom was my childhood friend, Rami, who fled from northern Gaza to the Nuseirat camp in search of safety. Rami, a kind and loving person, returned from a trip to Turkey just before the war. His daily Facebook posts showed his travels. Rami faced this war as if it was not part of his plans for the near future. He left **as if he had never existed**. The phrase "as if he had never existed" echoed in my ears, as my uncle Fares said in his farewell to his martyred son Omar, saying that Omar died as if he had never existed. Experiences of loss became great pain and trauma, initially thought to be long-lasting, but as the war intensified, the shock of death diminished, overwhelmed by the daily chaos, as the death reached beyond comprehension.

The shock of loss lost its luster, and phrases such as "Who was martyred now will rest" and "I wish we had died before this" appear. Despite my long career in mental health, I find it difficult to categorize these responses to their grief. However, there is a scene in the Qur'an that resembles this reaction, where people say similar words in the face of impending doom. Amid war fatigue, other losses such as preoccupation with home, hunger, poverty, shattered prospects, lack of hope, and despair of receiving help weigh heavily on people, forming the cognitive triad of depression.

But succumbing to the clutches of depression was not an option for people here. The depletion of life and its necessities, the life of displacement, living in tents, high prices, and the inability to access the basic necessities of life made giving in to depression a luxury that the people of Gaza did not have.

Despite my well-known solidarity, at the beginning of the war I was preoccupied with the basic needs of my family and staying with them, and while I was immersed in the shock of loss and war, I overlooked the dilemma of my eldest son, Ahmed, who was expected to finish high school and prepare for university. Ahmed lost this academic year. His ambition and intelligence, demonstrated through accomplishments such as obtaining an Access Scholarship, mastering the English language, and leading community initiatives, charted a bright future for him. His question during the war: "What will happen to me? The year has passed!" And it hit me like a thunderbolt. His subsequent request to move to the West Bank to attend school highlighted his specific needs. To meet them, I joined the only hospital in the central middle area and gained the strength to interact more logically with reality.

Ahmed has actively engaged in and supported various initiatives for children, but the ground offensive of the war forced us to leave our home and be displaced to Rafah, which is supposed to be a safe place according to the instructions of the Israeli army. However, even there, we were pursued by bombing. During this displacement, we lived in a tent, reminiscent of the experiences of displacement in 1948. However, I did not stop my professional work and immediately became involved in psychological interventions. My passion for work was mixed with the feeling that I was helping myself and my family to recover. Work diaries became nightly stories, helping my family members endure through shared common humanity and self-compassion.

And how many questions still remain, waiting to be answered: How long can we withstand? When will the war stop? Will Ahmed continue his studies and go to university as planned? Do we really live in a world that understands the meaning of humanity and its rights, or are we in a jungle devoid of all feelings and humanity?

For how long?!

JANUARY 2, 2025
It has been over fourteen months since the war began, and the weight of loss is a shadow that never leaves. Each name etched into my heart feels like another thread unraveling the fabric of who I am. I lost Amani, my dearest friend and trusted colleague, a psychologist whose compassion knew no bounds. She was someone who shared my dream of healing our people, someone whose laughter could brighten even the darkest moment. Her absence is a constant ache, a silence that screams in every corner of my life. Then there was Kholoud, another cherished colleague and psychologist, a partner in the daily battle to mend broken spirits. Kholoud had this incredible way of connecting with people, of making them feel seen and understood. Losing her was like losing a part of our collective strength, a blow that left me struggling to find the energy to continue. I carry the loss of my cousin Rami, a soul so full of life and love that his absence feels like a cruel joke. And then my brother-in-law, whose steady presence and quiet kindness were a foundation for our family. Both were taken too soon, leaving behind a void that no words can fill. And Dr. Saeed Judeh, my cousin and the only orthopedic surgeon in northern Gaza. His loss wasn't just personal; it was a wound for an entire community. He gave his life to serving others, and his death feels like a betrayal of everything good and just in this world. Each loss cuts deeply, each one unique and irreplaceable. Together, they form a tapestry of grief that threatens to engulf me entirely. And yet, I have not allowed myself to stop. I have not had the luxury to mourn fully, to scream, to collapse under the weight of it all. Every time I feel the pull to surrender, to collapse under the immense weight of my grief and exhaustion, I remind myself of all those who have anchored their strength within me. They planted the stakes of their resilience within my ribs. They are the ones who instilled their hope, their resilience, and their trust in my ability to stand firm. I continue to stand, not only for myself but for them, so that they do not crumble alongside me. Their faith in me is my foundation, and their unspoken plea for me to remain standing gives me the strength to endure, no matter how heavy the burden becomes. What makes it harder are the relentless waves of false hope. Every announcement of a ceasefire, every promise of peace, feels like a cruel trick when it inevitably shatters. The hunger, the poverty, the endless struggle—it all compounds the sense of abandonment. The world has left us to fend for ourselves, to bear the unbearable alone. And yet, deep in my heart, I believe in a justice greater than this world. I believe that oppression and darkness cannot endure forever. It is this faith that keeps me going, the belief that the lives of those I've lost—Amani, Kholoud, Rami, Saeed, and so many others—will not be in vain. Their memories fuel my resilience, their love and light propelling me forward when all I want to do is stop. They remind me that even in the face of unimaginable loss, there is still strength to be found, still hope to hold on to. And so I continue, one step at a time, refusing to let their sacrifices be forgotten. ■

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Our Guernica

I live in Nicosia, Cyprus, just over 400 kilometers from the Gaza Strip, a short boat ride through the Mediterranean. And yet, right now, this neighboring land seems to be further away than any other place on the planet. A quick search for directions on Google Maps generates a mere "can't seem to find a way there."

In every sense of the word, Gaza is cut out: a piece of land that is inaccessible, out-of-reach, forbidden, off-limits, a place without a way to get there.

This prohibition is eerily familiar to me. My childhood unfolded against the backdrop of the so-called "dead zone," the forbidden strip of land that cuts across Cyprus from east to west, separating the north from the south and dividing Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots into the "us" and the "them." I grew up with the sight of barbed wire, patrolling soldiers, and military barrels full of bullet holes neatly stacked along the streets of my hometown. The prospect of war still features prominently among common childhood phobias here, even though there hasn't been active warfare since 1974. I know all too well that every cut-out land is filled with leftover wounds, visible and invisible, insidious and malignant.

Wounds in Gaza won't heal for generations. While still in the torrent of ongoing destruction, they continue to multiply, deepen, fester. As I try to wrap my mind around the harrowing testimonies of Mohamed Abu Shawish and Hala Al Sarraj, around what is unfolding currently, at this moment, just 426 kilometers from my current location, my mind's eye intuitively conjures Pablo Picasso's monumental 1937 painting *Guernica*. Over the past several months I have seen hundreds, perhaps thousands, of pictures and videos of emaciated women and children, of buildings reduced to rubble, of vibrant streets turned instantly into a single shade of gray, of death. And yet, at this very moment, I resorted to this man-made image of war, which art historian T. J. Clark aptly described as "our culture's 'Tragic Scene'" (2017, para. b). Clark's use of the phrase "our culture" is both intentional and meaningful:

> And for once the phrase "our culture" seems defensible—not just Western shorthand. There are photographs by the hundred of versions of *Guernica* . . . being carried in anger or agony over the past thirty years in Ramallah, Oaxaca, Calgary, London, Kurdistan, Madrid, Cape Town, Belfast, Calcutta; outside US air bases, in marches against the Iraq invasion, in struggles of all kinds against state repression, as a rallying point for *los Indignados*, and—still, always, everywhere, indispensably—an answer to the lie of "collateral damage" (2017, para. b).

Guernica, as a violent scene of destruction, death, dismemberment, despair, does indeed stand for "the lie of 'collateral damage,'" the human cost of war, and, as such, it deservedly became "our culture's 'Tragic Scene.'" Picasso created and named this painting after the bombing of Guernica, "the most ancient town of the Basques and the centre of their cultural tradition" (Steer, 1937, p. 17), which was carried out by Nazi Germans in collaboration with General Franco and, according to historian Xabier Irujo, possibly even as Göring's birthday gift to Hitler (Irujo, 2021, p. 43). The entire town was levelled to the ground almost at a whim. It is not surprising then that it came to represent "the lie of 'collateral damage.'" What was most uncanny about my sudden turn to *Guernica* at this moment, though, was finding out that Picasso created the painting immediately after reading the account of George Steer, then special correspondent for *The Times*, who published one of the first eyewitness reports of the bombing. Quite literally, *Guernica*, this "Tragic Scene" of "our culture," emerged as a *response to a testimony* that sought to describe to the world the horror of witnessed destruction. Steer writes for *The Times*, two days after the bombing:

> When I entered Guernica after midnight houses were crashing on either side, and it was utterly impossible even for firemen to enter the centre of the town. The hospitals of Josefinas and Convento de Santa Clara were glowing heaps of embers, all the churches except that of Santa Maria were destroyed, and the few houses which still stood were doomed. When I revisited Guernica this afternoon most of the town was still burning and new fires had broken out. About 30 dead were laid out in a ruined hospital (Steer, 1937, p. 18).

Hala's testimony of the destruction she witnesses in Gaza is equally detailed, yet even more disturbing:

> They bombed everything in Gaza: civilians' houses, restaurants, hotels, universities, schools, hospitals, private sectors, shops. They even destroyed historic landmarks and any sign of civilization. They killed mothers in front of their children, killed children, and burned the mothers' hearts. Within all of that and much more, there were no medical supplies; they targeted doctors, hundreds of them were killed with their entire families.

Whereas Steer makes use of the passive voice to describe the consequences of the bombardment (the churches "were destroyed," fires "had broken out," the dead "were laid out"), Hala uses an active voice ("they bombed," "they destroyed," "they killed"). Her voice is filled with agony, anger, disbelief, and it is incriminating: the "they" points to a man-made catastrophe, calling out "the lie of 'collateral damage.'" Each image she paints so vividly becomes an inflicted wound, it contorts the face of humanity, it molds into *Guernica.*

Mohamed's testimony of what he experiences and witnesses at a Gazan hospital where he works is similarly telling: The doctors, he describes, operate on "the principle of differentiation between the wounded: whoever has more hope of survival is dealt with"; the rest are left to "die in peace," and Mohamed is left to witness the pieces—the insufferable losses of devastated relatives, their wailing cries, their fall into bottomless despair. What he is forced to witness, bear, and bear witness to, is truly impossible for anyone outside to fathom, to conjure, except perhaps as a painting.

Up close, *Guernica* is admittedly a shocking spectacle, massive in size and disturbing in content. I still remember vividly when I first saw it, as the centerpiece of the 2017 exhibit "Pity and Terror: Picasso's path to *Guernica*" at Madrid's Reina Sofia museum. Looking at it, one is initially flooded by images of humans and animals in anguish, and then, very quickly, the painting produces a striking sense of spatial disorientation, such that one is forced to ask: Where am I? *Guernica*'s spectator is unsure as to whether the scene that is being witnessed is unfolding inside or outside, within walls, under a ceiling or in an indeterminate outside. This spatial entanglement is so prominent that in his analysis of the painting, Clark asks: "Can we talk of an 'outside' and 'inside' at all in Guernica? Are the two kinds of space distinct?" (2017, para. i).

This collapse of the boundary between inside and outside, which induces in the spectator a sense of profound spatial disorientation, is paradigmatic of the collapse of the parameters that sustain a basic sense of reality in experiences of catastrophe. In war, this collapse becomes utterly literal: the actual destruction brought upon familiar spaces, both private and public, material and spiritual, bodily and mental, renders the distinction between "inside" and "outside" obsolete. The experience then inevitably becomes one of disorientation, disbelief, foreignness, unreality. When the parameters of reality collapse, the relationship between time and space falters and the guarantees of consistency and predictability that lend reality its symbolic support collapse, so that one is left to contend with an existential doubt which undermines the very experience of being human in a knowable world. This is the question that Mohamed so urgently poses in his testimony: "Do we really live in a world that understands the meaning of humanity and its rights, or we are in a jungle devoid of all feelings and humanity?" Like the spectator of *Guernica*, utterly disorientated, Mohamed seems to be asking: "Where am I?" How might one position oneself in time and space when living in a dystopia where the living merge with the dead? In her own testimony, Hala speaks to this effect, and her words are haunting: "Literally, you are not aware enough to ask yourself, 'What is this? Is this real, or am I watching a terrifying movie? Am I awake?'"

The dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside, so brilliantly rendered in *Guernica*, is at the same time a dissolution of the social link—the network of relations that lends us a sense of belonging, that shields us from alienation and, by extension, annihilation. Hala's words capture this well: "I am still wondering, did we survive or did those who die survive, and it's not us?" In this context, Mohamed's agonizing question becomes especially urgent, echoing out from within a "dead zone," as if to grasp on to the social and the simply human: Is Gaza part of a world which understands the meaning of humanity, or is it cut out, part of a "jungle" outside any guarantees of legitimacy?

The disruption of time and space, inside and outside, before and after, makes sustainable living impossible; it engenders prolonged fear, despair, hopelessness, helplessness, death. As Mohamed so aptly explains, "Experiences of loss became great pain and trauma, initially thought to be long-lasting, but as the war intensified, the shock of death diminished, overwhelmed by the daily chaos, as the death reached beyond comprehension. The shock of loss lost its luster." How can we receive these devastated words, these intolerable experiences? What frames of reference do we have in order to assimilate a state of being that has surrendered to death? How can we create an opening so as to allow these cut-out experiences to enter, when they come from a place where "the shock of loss lost its luster"?

Over the past century, especially since World War II, the mental health professions have developed numerous

models of intervention to deal with human response to disasters, from psychological first aid to elaborate models for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder and complex trauma. We have even answered the call to produce interdisciplinary approaches to trauma (Caruth, 1995), by bringing together perspectives from disciplines as diverse as neurobiology and psychology, literary theory, history and anthropology. However, all of our accumulated knowledge seems to center around work with survivors, it presupposes a future, it assumes there will be an aftermath to catastrophes, a space and a time when we can attempt to restore, once again, the boundary between inside and outside, the guarantees of legitimacy, and a sense of consistency and predictability. But for Mohamed and Hala, and the multitudes of people trapped in cut-out lands, the horrors of the present are ongoing, enduring and continuous. It is plainly absurd, an oxymoron, to even speak of post-traumatic stress responses while in the midst of trauma.

In a recent interview, Dr. Samah Jabr, the chair of the Palestinian ministry of health's mental health unit, highlighted the impossibility of capturing the mental catastrophes experienced by individuals who are caught up in a never-ending living nightmare, through currently available diagnostic systems:

> Trauma in Palestine is collective and continuous. PTSD is when your mind is stuck in a traumatic loop. In Palestine, the loop is reality. The threat is still there. Hypervigilance, avoidance—these symptoms of PTSD are unhelpful to the soldier who went home, but for Palestinians, they can save your life. We see this more as "chronic" traumatic stress disorder (McKernan, 2024, para. d).

Indeed, in the aftermath of a catastrophe, the very symptoms of acute distress may prove symptomatic; in the war zone, they become necessary survival skills. And yet, when employed long enough, systematically, daily, they can just as easily lead to a breakdown of one's capacity to go on living, both mentally and physically. After having to tell a seriously injured man who came out of a coma that all of his family members except his son had died in the bombing that injured him, Mohamed felt the weight of his experience in his body: "I felt extreme stress, collapse, and terrible pain in all parts of my body until I could no longer stand."

Mohamed and Hala, both of whom are mental health experts, draw attention to the impossibility of forming a psychological response under life-threatening conditions of extreme and prolonged distress. Living in a war zone where no space is safe, where necessities are lacking, where death is always already imminent, exceeds and exhausts every human capacity for adaptation. "Succumbing to the clutches of depression was not an option for people here," writes Mohamed; "the depletion of life and its necessities, the life of displacement, living in tents, high prices, and the inability to access the basic necessities of life made succumbing to depression a luxury that the people of Gaza did not have." In her own testimony, while struggling to make sense of this inassimilable reality, Hala arrives at the same conclusion:

> I sometimes ask myself, what reactions should we have to all of that? What amount of emotions and tears? What yelling and shouting should be heard? Will our hearts keep beating? I saw the answers reflected on the faces surrounding me, and on mine. We have no reaction to all of that. Is it numbness? I do not think so, but we do not have the luxury to grieve.

The psychological realities that Mohamed and Hala describe, where having an internal experience commensurate with a terrifying "outside" becomes a "luxury," simply exceed not only our ability to intervene as mental health professionals using the tools available at our disposal but also, insofar as their realities remain cut out, our ability to really, truly bear witness to the "inside" of their experience. From within Gaza, even the dead seem to be cut out. Mohamed's testimony makes a brief but chilling reference to the vanishing of the dead, when he recounts his experience of losing a childhood friend and resonating with the words of his uncle who lost his son and said of him: "He left as if he never existed." When the future seems foreclosed, the function of the past, of memory, loses its meaning so that loss and death amount to erasure. Mourning the loss of loved ones in collective disasters is not an individual affair. Without a community to contain, remember, and honor their passing, they too become cut out, and vanish as if they never existed.

How can we receive these harrowing voices then that come from within this ongoing catastrophe, from a cut-out realm, from a place where we very literally "can't seem to find a way there"? And yet, these testimonies are offered to us as possibilities. Mohamed and Hala somehow, admirably, find the courage to write from within a war zone; they risked their lives to produce a testimony which resists the collapse of the social order and the resulting "nothingness" of "guarantees, ideals, and legitimacies" (Davoine & Gaudillière, 2004, p. 15).The act of offering their testimonies defies silence, and their voices cut into the world outside, from within violence and destruction; they signal out to a social link. "When the boundaries of inside and outside have been breached, it is only in between that it is possible for anything to be shown," write Davoine and Gaudillière (2004, p. 59). Mohamed and Hala produced a testimony despite the destruction of all guarantees, thereby carving out a space between the inside of their lived horrors and the world outside, where it becomes possible for something that would have otherwise remained invisible, inaudible, to be revealed and to be known. It is not clear to me what miraculous life force propelled them to speak. For "when the guarantees of speech have been destroyed, how to construct an Other to whom to speak?" (2004, p. 16). And yet, they both manage to do so, and they do so powerfully, resolutely. Perhaps they were propelled by the same life force that led Hala and her family to go on being despite knowing that "there is no safe place in Gaza." "We kept reassuring our two kids that we were moving to a safer place," she writes, "although we knew we were lying to them." Mohamed, too, carries on with grit and determination, in part, to support his son and his family. While living in a tent, he carried on working and supporting: "My passion for work was mixed with the feeling that I was helping myself and my family to recover. Work diaries became nightly stories, helping my family members endure through shared common humanity."

While the war in Gaza has shredded the communal fabric to pieces—not only through displacement and killing but also, like in Guernica, through the destruction of collective memory, of cultural heritage sites, and of cemeteries—both Mohamed and Hala, and I imagine countless others, manage to sustain their humanity, for their families, for their children, for those moments, however fleeting, when the prospect of a future still seems possible. In those moments of being-with, perhaps the deadness begins to thaw so as to re-find the cut-out parts of living. It could be that elements of what Davoine recognizes as healing in the intimacy of a therapeutic encounter become engendered by these moments of familial connectedness, even from within a tent: "Only the alliance of two people sharing the experience in the present can reach these cut-out parts, by acknowledging that the dissociation occurred *with reason* . . . " (Davoine, 2022, p. 56, emphasis in original).

I would like to think that our efforts to listen deeply to these harrowing voices, to all the cut-out voices of "our culture," is a way of creating an opening through which to enter into what Winnicott so aptly called "the common pool of humanity, into which individuals and groups of people may contribute," so that it becomes "a source from which we may all draw *if we have somewhere to put what we find*"; this is what constitutes, for Winnicott, "the location of cultural experience" (1967, p. 370, emphasis in original). Drawn out from under the rubble and placed within "the common pool of humanity," the testimonies of Mohamed and Hala are no longer cut out. Like *Guernica*, they paint the "Tragic Scene" of "our culture" and form "still, always, everywhere, indispensably—an answer to the lie of 'collateral damage.'" One can only hope that as their voices are increasingly heard, they can become transposed, from a cut-out realm to the location of *our* cultural experience.

Guernica is painted in shades of gray in its entirety. If one survives looking at it long enough, closely enough, one will, sooner or later, discover close to the bottom of the canvas a small white flower clenched in the fist of a dismembered hand. ■

PHOTO (PREVIOUS PAGE): DMYTRO BAYER

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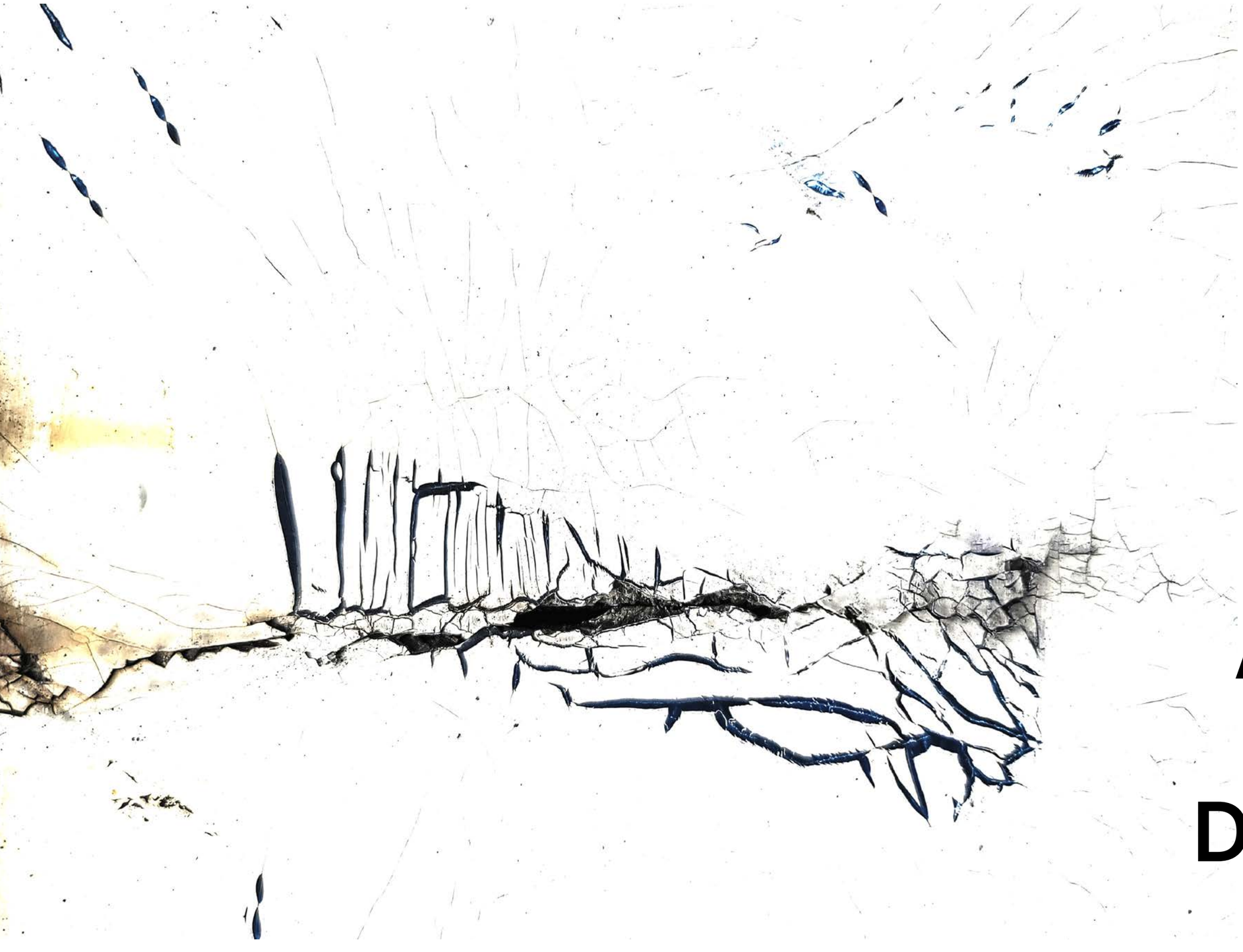

Activating Hope in Dark Times

Over my twenty years of activism resisting the Israeli occupation, the question of how one does not lose hope surfaced many times. In a way, it is to be expected in such a long struggle, when the mechanisms of oppression against which we fight only became more entrenched, sophisticated, and normalized. One answer is that we have a moral obligation to continue to resist as long as injustice exists. This is an argument based on faith that there is right and wrong—and that at some point things will be different. Faith that no occupation lasts forever, oppressed people eventually reach independence, and justice will prevail. Faith is hard to hold. Over years of activism, I have found that focusing on what we are able to achieve in our work has helped me hold on to hope.

In the past, in the popular struggles of villages like Bili'in, in the steadfastness of Palestinian communities in Masafer Yatta, in the powerful protest movement in the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, I saw firsthand how Palestinian communities resisting and activists joining them have agency. I saw how resistance makes a difference. For me, this was the material from which hope was made.

In 2023, Wadi a-Siq, a small shepherding community east of Ramallah, had 180 residents. Settlers from nearby outposts threatened the community regularly. They would scare their sheep so they scattered, attack residents, come at night to vandalize homes, and create roadblocks at the entrance of the village to scare the children who came from other towns to attend the Wadi a-Siq elementary school. The community resisted, they refused to leave, and invited Palestinian, international, and Israeli activists to stay in the village. While settler attacks continued, people in the community felt less threatened knowing they were not alone in this.

But then came October 7. As happened in so many other villages, settlers, some in military uniforms, came fully armed to the village of Wadi a-Siq and wreaked havoc. Residents were told they would be killed if they didn't leave within twenty-four hours. The women and children left almost immediately. Younger men stayed a few more nights, packing everything that could be dismantled. On October 12, five days after the Hamas massacre, armed settlers came and forcibly took three Palestinian and five Israeli activists who were there to accompany the community as they left: they were beaten, tied up, and kept for hours. The Palestinian activists were tortured, stripped naked, and one of them was sexually assaulted (Ziv, 2023).

The limited yet significant feeling of success of an activist community that had created a protective presence in the village and had seen their community regain a feeling of safety in their homes was all gone in five days of violence.

This small form of hope we used to center on disappeared. Furthermore, while our activism doesn't yield the small victories it used to in the West Bank, when it comes to Gaza, we activists are even more at a loss.

There was a time when we actually believed that if Israelis knew and recognized the crimes of occupation, they would cease. While we criticize and challenge this idea, at the same time, anyone interacting with Israeli society has to hold on to this hope in some way, even if not as a theory of change. In the aftermath of October 2023, this conviction has all but disappeared. When we speak about the crimes and atrocities in Gaza—the tens of thousands of children maimed and killed, starvation, unprecedented murder, and complete destruction—these facts are met not with denial but with justification and support. Seeing your own society shed all compassion and take pride in these crimes is enough to drive any heart to despair.

Against this bleak background, I search for tools not only for social change but for hope. Tools to resist despair. Reading on this topic, learning from other communities and places, I have seen these five methods used:

1. Drawing inspiration from the courage, struggle, and perseverance of those most affected by the systems of oppression we fight. For me, today, this is the conversation I have with a friend in Gaza, distributing food to displaced communities far from his own house that no longer exists, hearing him contemplate whether he should leave or not, and choosing time and time again to stay and continue the work.
2. Concentrating and celebrating the change we can see, and gaining faith in the process of change. Both through small victories and seeing personal and social change. For me, today, this is the conversation with a bystander at a protest who first yelled at us that we are lying about children being killed in Gaza, and left our long conversation heartbroken from the understanding that this is happening, and wondering what she is to do about it.
3. Acting in community, supporting each other, creating safe spaces, and practicing self- and mutual care within them. Sharing food after a violent protest, holding each other as our hearts break time and time again, and insisting on continuing to talk and think together.
4. Connecting to the past. Seeking inspiration from past struggles and past public attitudes, and using these to inform and inspire a path forward. This, today, reminds me that these crimes will end. Eventually.
5. Redefining meaning and value of action beyond its intended goal of dismantling the system of oppression. There is a fair amount of psychological research showing that sharing trauma, having witnesses to your trauma, helps victims in dealing with it. This is both a psychological need and a political one. The presence of activists means injustice is witnessed and recognized, and those facing it do not do so alone.

But resisting despair is not enough. Activism and resilience require hope.

Speaking to an activist friend about this, he referred me to Albert Camus's *The Plague*, arguing that what the book clearly depicts is that doing the right thing, the decent human thing, is all we can do, including, and maybe especially, when there is no hope.

My great-grandmother was sixteen when the Jewish community in Hebron was attacked in 1929, sixty-seven of its members murdered. She and her family were taken by a neighbor into his home, and the neighbor and his son stood guard with word at the door not to allow any attackers in. That decency, that humanity that defied the religious-national divides that at the time were just being constructed, is the reason I exist.

I argue that stories like this don't only move us to tears, they also plant hope—they do so because they prove that these divides are constructs. They prove that people can, and do at times, choose to defy them and, in that, expose their falsehood—the racism that these divides are. In that defiance we see hope for what could be.

I started writing this text from a genuine quest for practical tools for myself and my community to fight the despair that we often feel. I started writing it as a call for help, from the reader who is not here with us, who has the time, energy, and knowledge, to help us. That request still stands, but while writing I also realized how much of this learning, this creation of knowledge, must be collective community work: collective thinking, collective learning, collective reflecting, and collective action. Dare I add that it lies in holding hope collectively; holding it for one another when some of us are too tired to do so; allowing it to spread through us from one person to another, actively creating hope where we cannot find it. ■

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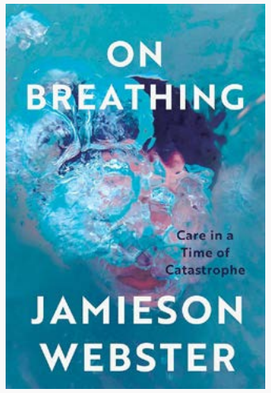

On Breathing: Care in a Time of Catastrophe

By Jamieson Webster

Catapult: New York, 2025, 272 pp., $27 (Hardcover)
ISBN 9781646222414

SOME PHENOMENA COMBINE A simultaneity of omnipresence and subtlety. This is particularly true of breathing. A certain degree of distance from the continuous conscious experience of breathing seems necessary in order not to irritate the breathing rhythms that are essential for survival and to relieve our perceptual apparatus. Our attention is only focused on breathing when the regular flow of breath is disturbed or when there are abrupt changes in breathing frequency. At the same time, it is surprising that the subject of breathing has attracted so little psychoanalytical interest. Jamieson Webster, New York psychoanalyst and professor at The New School for Social Research, addresses this gap and examines the phenomenon of breathing from various perspectives. Based on the thesis that one of the main assumptions of psychoanalysis is the forgetting or repression of sexuality, she assumes that "we must add breathing to our list of amnesias" (p. 4) and even states that breathing is a "hidden navel in our field" (p. 20). For Webster, the pandemic and the birth of her second daughter, which brought her "back to an intimacy with air and breath that I had forgotten" (p. 3), were decisive factors in her preoccupation with the topic.

And so Webster's treatise begins with the infant's first breath, the moment of the first assurance of its own autonomy and existence. The first breath is a first step toward individuation, as the infant is separated from the care provided by the mother's body via the umbilical cord after birth. Breathing therefore forms a point of contact between subject and object, inside and outside. Following Winnicott's ideas, the author traces the developmental lines of the infant's maturation. She describes how the cry, as a modulation of breathing, enables survival and interaction. She illustrates how the root of all oral pleasure lies in the use of the lungs and air. Recalling René Spitz's dictum that the baby sees with the mouth, Webster defines what it means to breathe: All the gratifying activities of sucking, babbling, singing, and crying are alloyed with the respiratory apparatus and air. This inseparable connection can also be found in further development. In psychoanalysis, the talking cure, speech is dependent on the modulation of breathing. The breathing and the air that we share with others is, on the one hand, in a position that connects us with each other and, on the other hand, as it is inherent in the act of birth, separates us from others. The connecting element is found, for example, in the act of speech, when the baby can be calmed by addressing the primary object, the breathing can relax and lull the infant into a peaceful state, which Webster refers to as "lung to lung" (p. 24) communication. The importance of language is central to her Lacanian approach, and she develops a figure of thought that assumes a close connection between breathing, language, and sexuality.

Based on her own experience as an asthmatic and as a mother of an asthmatic son, Webster outlines psychodynamic considerations on respiratory diseases. The interactional moment she emphasizes can already be found in Winnicott (1941), who recommended further exploring bronchial diseases in their interpersonal dimension. Webster leads the reader to the considerations of analysts of the first generation: for example, she refers to Otto Fenichel's assumption that asthmatic attacks—think of the call or cry for the mother in a performative guise—represent a longing for maternal protection, or Sándor Ferenczi's hypothesis that asthmatic illnesses arise due to an inadequately caring environment. Webster builds on these ideas; according to Webster, asthma attacks throw the child back to an early being, a physical being, in the absence of an object. The references to the work of Maria Rhode (1994) on "autistic breathing" (p. 48), in which phenomena such as hyperventilation or loud breathing are understood as an autistic barrier against the other, are also extremely fascinating. This reveals an object dimension of breathing that relates to the Other; e.g., in which the object is excluded.

Webster reminds us that breathing phenomena were and are involved in a variety of neurotic symptoms and refers to the first patients of psychoanalysis, who developed swallowing difficulties, feelings of suffocation, and coughing tics. Nowadays, we experience the importance of breathing in anxiety disorders, with their high prevalence, and in a heightened form in panic attacks, in which the ability to breathe seems to be lost.

Webster succeeds in explaining psychoanalytical

concepts and theories almost casually and pointedly in her publication. For example, readers learn about Wilfred Bion's conceptualization of projective identification and his reflections on the intrapsychic experience of the infant, Wilhelm Reich's thoughts on breathing, or Otto Rank's remarks on the trauma of birth (1924), in which the first experience of fear coincides with the first breath. Webster goes on to consider symptoms such as "vocal tics, hiccups, laughter, yawning" (p. 214), which make use of the breathing apparatus. The clinical considerations are interwoven with anthropological explorations and digressions on the history of the development of breathing. Of course, the book does not do without a consideration of "Eastern spiritual practices, yoga and wellbeing" (p. 107). With a critical distance, which is particularly directed at the profit-oriented exploitation of this practice, Webster reports on her own experiences as a yoga practitioner and introduces the reader to the basic assumptions of yoga.

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Starting with the second part of the book, titled "Asphyxiation," the focus shifts from clinical explorations to embedding the phenomenon of breathing in the socio-cultural matrix. After the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, air underwent a caesura in the attribution of meaning, from a neutral and nurturing environment to a potentially death-bringing carrier. Breathing in and out was framed as a potentially lethal act, and the connection between air, breathing, and death, forced its way back to the surface of consciousness. Webster herself worked in a New York hospital at the time and describes the unbearable anxious-aggressive behavior of the hospital staff, who succumbed to the unreflected countertransference experience in the face of their patients' struggle for air.

However, the signifier of suffocation in this part of the book is by no means limited to those affected by and the victims of the pandemic. Webster broadens the lens of observation to include the political situation in the United States, the prevailing racism, police violence, armed conflicts, and the climate crisis.

The threat of COVID infection has made people aware of the limitations of their own freedom. Individually experienced restrictions, e.g., through the temporary curfews, which referred to the connection with others, consequently deconstructed the phantasm of individual freedom. How painfully this was processed, and how insufficiently digested, was shown in the regressive movements of COVID deniers and conspiracy theorists. Webster also analyzes the fentanyl crisis as "another epidemic of death by breathlessness" (p. 130), with the majority of people dying of respiratory failure.

The killing of George Floyd, with his desperate cry "I can't breathe," which was repeatedly quoted and remembered in the subsequent protests of the Black Lives Matter movement, is also an example of social asphyxiation for Webster. Floyd's example illustrates how the universal right to breathe is denied, fed by racist motives. In view of the history of slavery and this perpetual racism, the example is certainly only one prominent example from years gone by. Suffocating or cutting off the air we breathe is a practice of warfare and is also found in the implementation of the death penalty. Murder through the use of gases reached its tragic climax in the gas chambers of German concentration camps.

According to Webster, racist ideologies and actions, as well as the coronavirus pandemic, always take place against the backdrop of the climate crisis. She sees the climate crisis as "a backdrop of collective death by toxic air, extreme temperatures, wildfires, and smoke inhalation, as well as deaths by drowning due to rising sea levels, or excess rain and floods" (p. 134). Webster reminds us that we depend on trees and plants to produce the air that surrounds us and gives us life, and thus considers our relationship with the environment and what the Viennese psychoanalyst and philosopher Esther Hutfless (2023) calls the "more-than-human Other." A relationship that must be repeatedly denied, split off, and is repeatedly exposed to massive attacks as the relationship to the nonhuman Other. In the denial of the crisis, as we experience it again and again, the denial of limitation, the desire and the illusion of limitless availability, as it is constantly nourished by capitalist systems and neoliberal ideologies, also breaks through. The aggression with which humankind confronts the earth and the atmosphere that protects it can only be understood as "suicide" or "ecocide" (p. 187). When Webster states an imminent "global asphyxiation" (p. 211), this unfortunately proves to be by no means a dystopian fantasy but rather a realistic future scenario in view of global developments. The man-made climate crisis will rob us of the last air we have to breathe.

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In my opinion, one of the strengths of the publication lies in the fact that the interweaving of inner and outer realities, the situating of the subject in sociopolitical spheres, conveys what she later formulates: "psychoanalysis does have a social aspiration" (p. 233). In her explanations, Webster repeatedly zooms out from an individual to a social level.

On Breathing is a truly exciting exploration and enthralling experience, not least because of the structure of the book itself. The book itself is reminiscent of a psychoanalysis; it is associative, at times almost erratic, but this is less confusing than it is appealing. In the end, a mosaic of the phenomenon of breathing emerges from the theoretical and narrative gems. In Freudian tradition, there are repeated borrowings from poetry and literature that breathe great vitality into the text. Readers with a background in psychoanalysis might complain that the theories are only touched on the surface in this way rather than having their complexity revealed. However, *On Breathing* is not a textbook. I am unsure whether Webster would even be interested in categorizing it. At a time when psychoanalytic work is increasingly subordinated to an academicized psychology, this work allows us to unite the in-between, between science and art, which can be understood as the nature of psychoanalysis (Kohon, 2019). This book can therefore be recommended to the general public and psychoanalysts alike.

If we bear in mind that the translation of the Greek word *psyche* is "mind" and "breath," we can only be surprised at the blank space in the psychoanalytical literary canon, as already noted at the beginning. Well; just as the unconscious itself, breathing also appears to remain "Other" in the Lacanian sense: "One can work with breath, but we will never master it in our lifetime" (p. 69). However, a successful approach is now available. ■

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COURTESY OF ALASTAIR HUNTLEY

Survival Story: Responding to the Opioid Epidemic in Rural New England

The Upper Valley Region is a testament to life's striking contrasts. This picturesque area, bisected by the Connecticut River, extends across New Hampshire and Vermont, encompassing several towns. Among these is the affluent enclave of Hanover, New Hampshire, known for being the home of Dartmouth College. Yet venture a few miles from the Ivy League town, and you're transported into the heart of isolated rural landscapes. Here, much like in other rural corners of America, the shadow of substance use and the opioid crisis has been cast over some inhabitants. In response to a surge in overdose fatalities, harm reduction has become an indispensable resource in the region.

Survival Story: An Artistic Approach to Harm Reduction was inspired by my hands-on experience in harm reduction across both states. A pivotal moment occurred as I sat in a mobile phlebotomy van, under the dim glow of a headlamp, preparing to do a blood draw on a participant in the HIV/hepatitis C treatment program with which I work. Her reluctance to seek treatment at local hospitals due to fear of judgment and trauma underscored a common narrative of stigma experienced by people who use drugs.

After being overprescribed pain medication following surgery, I developed opioid use disorder (OUD) and saw firsthand how stigma and a lack of empathy created negative outcomes. It's a story I am resolved to change.

Building on his experience, Huntley created workshops that combined visual storytelling with Narcan training, and brought together individuals in recovery, healthcare professionals, and community members. Collaborating with the DALI Lab at Dartmouth, he is now transforming "Survival Story" into an interactive web-based experience. To read more, click here or visit analytic-room.com/community-projects.

Caving with Rainbow-Covered Headlamps

By Martin Perez

I DOOMSCROLLED YOUTUBE FOR caving deaths on a tiny, illuminated screen while I rode north on the BART commuter train in San Jose the other evening—Milpitas, South Fremont, Union City, names blaring on the overhead speakers every few minutes—and I learned of a young man named John, who, in a tragic underground accident, spent twenty-eight exhausting hours suspended upside down, stuck in a foot-wide tunnel with only his rainbow-covered headlamp to comfort him, before succumbing to a horrible death because he chose to keep going down the narrow, suffocating, immovable, cold stone walls of Nutty Putty rather than turn back, and his catastrophe reminded me of David Rosler in 2011, Thomas Edward Benning in 1995, Tim Smafield in 2007, Rachel Cox in 1989, Robert and his brother in 1999, Brett Smith in 2013, David Carson and John Brock in 1980, Bejamin Miller, Robert Svensson, Eric Tskale, James May, and Joseph, Amy, and Charlie, who in the last fifty years also perished or very nearly perished in similar horrors, all clinging to life by a more loosely bound thread than they had perhaps imagined, but irony wasn't lost on me because, let's be honest, I also grasped tightly to a rope of unknown length and girth as I travel the overpopulated but somehow still alluring Bay Area, and no matter how brutal a death someone else experiences, I always managed to think about myself rather than the losses the spelunkers' families endured—like John's father, who gave him that rainbow-covered headlamp and whose son's grisly death has a rabid social media following fifteen years later—so, in existential panic, I pulled my gaze from the claustrophobic weight and scanned the narrow tube I sat in and knew while I was not suffocating, nor in peril like those doomed cavers, I too lived in a dangerous world, and I too didn't measure the consequences of my choices adequately, and I too got sticky in the ungainly spaces I crawled through. And yet, just like that, an ad appeared on the same tiny screen featuring Patrick Duffy from old television shows like *Dallas* and *Step by Step* and *Patrick Duffy is still alive*, and everything I felt from claustrophobia to secondhand fear like pushing on the passenger floorboards of a car when the driver tailgates, to a sense of empathy for all who died dissipated, and I got back to my regularly scheduled life.

I saw a clear, vulnerable sandwich box on the light green seats nearby and the crumpled white napkin inside, discarded, left for someone else to toss away, and I realized that even if I'm not watching seventeen-minute after seventeen-minute videos on my phone that remind me of mortality, I had other reminders like my niece's recent passing at age thirty-four, and my brother-in law's cousin's death from stomach cancer several days before that, or my father who passed a couple of years ago from Parkinson's, or my mother four years prior.

The ride ended normally enough and people exited the train just as normally, and I thought about the next day, when I'd have to do it all again. People die in threes, and that was why my mother used to scan newspapers when I was a boy–which I thought was silly–to find the thirds because then maybe she could be at ease, and I haven't done anything less as I watched my videos. I ended up quickly googling death rates, and, in fact, it's not threes that people die in but in *one-hundred and seventy thousands*, or, if I wanted to feel safer, only one caver every fifty-six days. ■

PHOTO: VIKTOR MOGILAT

Tangerine

By Ornella Antar

HER GRANDMOTHER WARNED her not to fall into the trap. She didn't say what it looked like, or when or how one might typically encounter it. She used the article "the," not "a," as if there was only one trap to fall into, and everyone must look out for it at all times.

She does not remember the exact sentence her grandmother used. In her head, it was a one-word sentence, although she is certain her grandmother couldn't have uttered the word "trap" on its own. It must have been part of something like "beware of the trap," but she can only recall the Arabic word her grandmother chose to use for "trap": *el-tahelké*. A floating, singular word, like a tangerine hanging from the ceiling.

He gave her a Band-Aid to cover the childish scratch now stamped on her knee, like the ephemeral tattoo her mother once tried to convince her to get instead of a real one. She pulled up a chair facing his desk, crossed her legs—placing the injured knee over the other, slightly bent forward—crossed her arms, and opened her mouth.

A verbal diarrhea. Was he even listening to her? He could either focus on her rambling or edit the articles, and judging by the quality of the writing in the next day's print, he wasn't listening.

She said: "Would you believe me if I told you that my only wish is to go back to the beginning of things? To when I was fifteen years old. I wasn't particularly aware of anything that happened to me before that, so it doesn't matter. I just wish I could go back to my first conversation with Isabel on MSN Messenger.

"I met her for the first time at a conference about the younger generation's reading habits (or lack thereof) held by a bunch of old people. Very creative topic and not patronizing at all. I said something about TV shows not encouraging the youth to read. They actually took it into consideration and debated it for a while. At the end of the event, a young man with ginger curly hair and weird eyeglasses approached me and my two classmates, Jessica and Joanna. The school had elected us to attend the event because we were the only ones in our class of about ninety students who read books. Puts the whole theme of the conference into perspective, huh?"

He laughed but didn't lift his eyes from the screen or his fingertips from the keyboard. He went on. And she went on, too: "This guy was launching a weekly youth section in a local newspaper and wanted to see if we were interested in contributing. He wrote his phone number on a piece of paper and handed it to Joanna. I took it from her and promised to give it back later. I never did, and she never asked. I sent him a long SMS to which he never replied. I didn't want to call. Then I found him on Facebook, added him as a friend, and sent him my first article, which ended up in the newspaper. That's how it all started.

"Then, on a whim, I added Isabel on Facebook, too, and we started talking. Our first conversation on MSN Messenger ended up being far too personal. She told me about Omar, her crush, and mentioned something about a local theater in her city, a melting white chocolate bar, and I talked to her about Daniel. We agreed that Omar and Daniel were similar. They probably had nothing in common except for toxic behavior.

"I don't remember the first time Isabel and I met in real life or whether the meeting was awkward. I just know that she is my only connection to the beginning of things. She is the only person who was present in my life then and who remains now. This is why I like talking to her. Even sharing a bed with her was beautiful when I ran away to her city and spent the night at her place the evening before she got engaged. She later got divorced.

"There were things we didn't know about each other, things we didn't tell each other, and things we'd make up just to throw the other off and shy away from further questions. At first, she told me she hadn't had sex with Eugene. Later, when she admitted that they had, I didn't ask why she had claimed otherwise. I didn't know she had a third brother until she invited me to his wedding. We didn't talk much on the telephone.

"Do you think it's possible to start over without ever leaving? I told Isabel about the woman in the nail salon who had the word *Beirut* tattooed on her wrist, and the only thing Isabel said was: 'That woman can never start over.' Do you remember what Younes told me when I asked why he didn't stay in Canada forever? He said the magnet here is still strong. It's pulling him back.

"I always thought I'd remain light, carrying my house on my back like a turtle. But now there are too many things tying me to too many other things. Lately, my life keeps resurfacing, and I want to scrape it off, but it's not salt on the surface of the salt pans."

He picked up a fresh pack of cigarettes from the pile on his desk, surrounded by papers and emptied packs. Holding the pack upside down, he patted it against the palm of his hand, like the bottom of a newborn baby reluctant to cry. One pat. Two pats. Then he tore off the transparent plastic wrap, squeezing it in his fist. When he finally opened his palm, the crumpled wrap unfolded one last time, like a crushed insect struggling to survive. He offered her a cigarette. She replied with a dismissive hand gesture. She wanted one but couldn't bother to be interrupted, neither by his question nor by the puffs of smoke that would escape her own mouth.

She continued: "Every time I'm alone, my mind starts racing. So, what now? I can't be alone? Have I been miserable my entire life without even realizing it? Twenty years? It can't be. You can't hide misery this long. But then, I know that sadness in my heart; it is neither new nor recent. It's been sealed inside me for so long, it carries a musty scent, aged in my chest. A sadness that smells oldish like an abandoned house, a yellowed book, or, hmmm, like, bad fruit. Kind of moldy, you know?

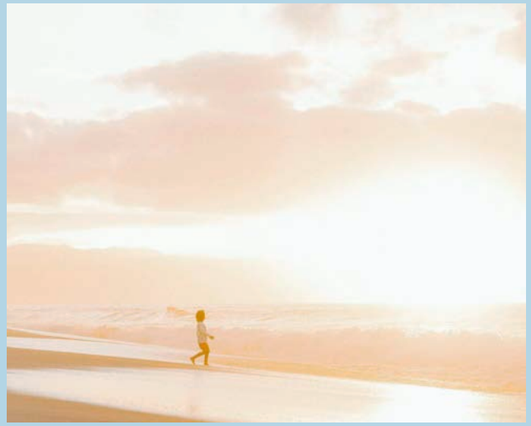
"When I used to think about the possibility of losing my memory (it happened to our neighbor), I'd be scared. My memories were my most prized possession. But now they're turning against me. When I'm sad, I catch myself tilting my head side to side, like silent old women at a funeral. It scares me.

"Years ago, when I was still in high school, there were times when I felt unhappy. I only remembered this period recently, which tells me that this, right now, is not the first time. I don't know what made me unhappy back then; I just remember feeling lonely. I was sad, but I'm not sure I cried. This followed the autumn I spent with Chris in our summer town. When we returned to the city, he had forgotten about me and stopped responding to my texts. I sent him a message saying: 'You left me alone.' He said I was exaggerating. My whole life, people have thought I was exaggerating. I wasn't.

"This is definitely not my first time. You know how I know this? When I was a kid, spending long summer days with my grandmother, I was sad too. I'd spend the entire day with her, and we never seemed to get along. Once, during a playdate, I struggled to open the cap of a plastic water bottle. Sometimes, they're sealed for life! When I asked my grandmother to help, she said, 'You don't know how to do anything.' Later that day, I went to my bedroom, shut the door behind me, and felt incredibly sad. I didn't love her at that time. And then, I'd just heard about antidepressants, which were crudely referred to as 'medications for the nerves.' I remember thinking, if I went to a 'doctor of the nerves' and told him everything that had happened to me, he'd surely prescribe me some. I was so angry, but I never cried. Mind you, I was only eight, but I could have used some gummy bear Xanax.

"You know, earlier, when I tripped and fell on the stairs, I could've stood up right away. Besides the scratch on my knee, I wasn't hurt. But I didn't want to get up. I wanted to stay there, flat on the stairs, like slime smeared on the floor or dough dropped on a marble countertop, spreading out. Me, on the floor, was the only thing that made sense in a long time. I wanted to be physically in tune with how I felt. I didn't want to get up."

He looked at her as though she had just entered the room. "What's this nonsense? Not wanting to get up … You're twenty. Let's go get a drink." Her knee wasn't hurting anymore. She was walking to the rhythm of a soft pain stinging, and it wasn't until years later that she realized she had always been in the trap. Born in the trap. Around her, the night was cold and lit by cheap neon signs. She finally fell silent. When she opened her mouth, all that escaped was condensed air, thick with the smell of moldy tangerines. ■



I Went to Honolulu and Found Most of It Missing

By Nandini Bhattacharya

I WENT TO HONOLULU and found most of it missing.

The lead vocalist at the Blue Note in Honolulu wore a strapless black mermaid dress. It was like skin on her, fitted everywhere except at the chest, where her boobs threatened to overcome the hem.

"This song is the closest to my heart, so if you have two hands, jive along. Of course, I realize not everyone has them."

Out of the blue she said that. Such attunement to different ability. Or had she seen the man on the balcony?

The day before the concert at Honolulu's Blue Note, I'd seen a man with no arms on a balcony. At least I think I had.

He was standing on a balcony of an apartment building facing the highway, statuesque. Well built. No arms and two solid stumps jutting six inches or so out of his shoulders. Our tourist bus was stalled in traffic, unluckily; I was getting a good, long look at him. But the distance between us and that wavering, pulsing air and light of Hawaii made it hard to be sure.

The light in Hawai'i is like any other place. Around the beaches and parks where the rich live and hang out, it is molten vanilla. Near the airbase, off the highway, at this man's apartment building, it is the sighing ghost of million-year-old dead forests. At first I thought I was seeing things, or not seeing things like the man's two perfectly present arms. The man, even in silhouette, was well muscled, sturdy, standing on a balcony. Why would he be armless?

Then our bus moved on.

Did everyone in Honolulu know about the man on the balcony? Did the lead vocalist mean him? Was he famous, even? A local phenomenon? A freak, showpiece? Or were there many people in Honolulu missing chunks of themselves?

The lead vocalist's black mermaid sheath kept threatening to give up the fight with her boobs, slink down her front, making her hitch it up surreptitiously at first and less subtly as the evening wore on. She couldn't possibly be comfortable in that dress. It seemed capable of great injury to her circulation, so tightly did it ring around her waist, hips, knees. Her thighs and knees had to be smashed against each other by that dress, like the supposed mermaid tail's solid undivided flesh, obeying the couture metaphor's insistence. Pleated flounces below the captive knee clamp popped up in sections like flippers every time she kicked back her stiletto-heeled feet in rhythm with her song. Mermaid, or monk seal in heels.

The monk seals of Hawai'i were what we had come to Honolulu to save. Monk seals are a threatened species, with only about sixteen hundred of them remaining worldwide. Every day, my friends worried about the seals, the tourists stumbling in or encroaching on their terrain, the attacks on their habitat by fishing boats, plastics, pollution. We were, in particular, hoping to see one of them give birth soon. That seal mother was big with pup but late and apparently exhausted. Her lastborn was around, separation anxiety running late, regularly torpedoing his pregnant mother's body without ceremony or notice. Anticipation and dread throbbed side by side in the environmentalist community, like the lead vocalist's melded thighs and knees.

At the Blue Note, people were clapping, swaying, jelly rolling their hands and arms in response to the music. Everyone seemed to have both arms and hands. The legs I couldn't see, of course, because the club was dark, and because of the tables. The lead vocalist—or should I call her nightclub singer from now on?—treated us to snippets of her biography. Divorced, with a child, activist-artist, thirty-eight.

At concerts, do you ever wonder which band members are sleeping with each other, or is it just my dirty mind? Or at least which one's sleeping with the singer? Drummer? Most likely? Or is it bass guitar? Or sax? Least likely?

I went to a beach town in Oahu the next day. I was on the road of and to Aloha. I was reluctant because I didn't care for Aloha, had never cared for it from the beginning of the trip, but my friends did and wanted me to care, to experience it and find inner peace, so I was a fellow traveler on the path to inner peace, which seemed very far off to me, but my activist friends were more optimistic.

What did the man without arms on the balcony feel about Aloha, optimism, positive attitudes?

How was I to think of him, anyway? Unarmed? Disarmed? Stoic? Suffering? Abject and discarded, or heroic survivor? Thinking raised tougher questions. How did he live? How did he go about the day, eat, clean himself, open doors or pick things up, touch his children's heads,

PHOTO: KEVIN TURCIOS

caress his wife? Did he have children or a wife? I very much hoped he had a family, a support system standing solid and serried behind him like cliffs on a boulder-strewn beach. If he didn't, he had to eat, wash, pick things up, open doors by himself. How did he do those things?

I thought, what do you do from one day to another if you are a man with no arms in a low-income apartment on a balcony in Honolulu on a Saturday morning, looking out at the island around you, maybe a home, maybe a place of last resort, the final port of call, the last frontier? And also, by what unknown string of connections had his shadow fallen over a concert evening at the Blue Note where the monk-seal-in-heels singer hoped everyone had enough hands to clap along with her heart's bliss song? Because the real man with no arms was unlikely to be at the concert where the singer was kicking back her heels as she belted out notes. And if he was there, and had arms, would he clap, and for what?

I forgot him. A little. It was a long afternoon at the beach town with little to do and lots of rain, the kind of afternoon whose very emptiness short-circuits your feelings, your analytical mind, ability to engage with, absorb new surroundings. Takes you back to a past, wet, sad century, the suffering of natives. Memories of kings and queens cut off at the knees by American business. Things unhinged, uncoupled, missing. Not your own, yes, but when you are there . . .

An island is a body of land surrounded by an ocean deep and plotting on all sides with distant continents.

The day after the concert at Blue Note, the monk seal mother had still not given birth. She lay like a glistening cigar against a parapet on the beach, most people not bothering to observe the sign saying she needed a fifty-foot berth, especially since she might give birth any second. Tourists in Havaianas and strappy sandals and sneakers and barefoot went tramping, padding past her. Her flippers moved very slightly now and then, nothing of the Blue Note mermaid's flounce in them, maybe no music in her heart either, maybe because as soon as she gave birth and returned to the water, a whole gang of seal boys and men would show up to mount and impregnate her again.

But the monk seal is no pushover, no floor-rug fruit de mer on the sand. One mother with her pup, feeling a snorkeler getting too close, went on the warpath. The snorkeler now misses one buttock and half a shoulder. Her head might have gone missing too were it not inside her snorkeling helmet, because it had been inside the mother seal's jaw lock. Still, two weeks after discharge from the hospital, the snorkeler had to return. Doctors diagnosed her skull badly fractured by the monk seal's clamped jaws.

You could go missing, the monk seal had spoken, if you missed the nonnegotiable boundaries the animal world sets against humans. Don't lose your head, snorkelers and surfers.

How did the man without arms lose them? In that island paradise, where soft breezes blow and tsunamis threaten, what does it take to become armless and still remain standing, a lone man on a balcony on a Saturday morning? Did he lose his head metaphorically during a brawl, and then his arms objectively and correlatively? Or did he fight some foreign war for the country that occupied the island more than a century ago without permission or right and hasn't let it go since, still clamping it between the jaws of capital and empire? Did he lose his arms then? Or had he had an industrial accident? Did he qualify for extraordinary veteran's benefits, or workers' comp? Or was it a surfing adventure gone wrong, both arms exacted as punishment by someone to whom the ocean properly belongs?

He is a kauwā now. The lowest of the low in recent recorded Hawai'ian history. Like the untouchables of India who somehow millennia ago found their humanity gone missing by some priestly diktat. Kauwā were the untouchables in the ancient Hawai'ian caste system. Forbidden joy by the kapu code of living. Forbidden life itself. If a Hawai'ian kahuna or ali'i noble needed a human sacrifice, a kauwā was summoned and had no choice but to submit.

The Blue Note singer said she was a Maui girl. Who touches her, I wondered again. When she wears her mermaid monk seal outfit and back-kicks her spiked heels in a frenzied guitar-mauling spree, which band member does she dare? *Carpe diem. No Kapu tonight if you hold me. Touch me not, mostly, but touch me when I tell you. Don't worry, I don't bite. You'll keep your arms, your hands. I just need your applause, your touching.*

That would rule out the man with no arms, the modern kauwā.

And more than a century ago, even before the island's head vanished inside the maw of the great American empire, Western missionaries came to Hawai'i and saw men and women missing clothes, riding and sliding along the whipped-egg-white-crested plumes of the ocean on wooden logs. Animals, the missionaries concluded quickly. Maybe worse, since they were, after all, forked bipeds, unlike seals, sharks, whales, and dolphins. Devils. And so the missionaries made the men and women find clothes. Shifts, sacks, and rough-hewn gowns turned cavorting bipeds into shuffling knock-kneed landlubbers. A new kind of kauwā. Cut off at the knee like their sovereigns, if not armless like the man on the balcony. Their innocence, such as it was, gone missing.

So much missing. Answers to questions about concupiscence and carnality in female-led bands in Honolulu, at the Blue Note next to the restaurant of the greatest surfer of all time, Duke Kahanamoku, now icon of rich white boys and girls. Answers to questions about what handless concertgoer's plight weighed on the singer's mind that night at the Blue Note. The missing arms of the man on the balcony. Hawai'ian national sovereignty. The monk seal's freedoms. The insolent snorkeler's flesh. The hands of phantom concertgoers that will not clap. The corded bare legs of naked pre-Christian Hawai'ians. The souls of kauwā and kahuna and ali'i. The treasures of the 'Iolani Palace, the royal residence, gone missing helter-skelter all over the world, the docent told us, after the takeover of the islands by Sanford Ballard Dole Pineapple in the grim dusk of the nineteenth century. And lately, huge chunks of Hawai'ian land secretly bought up by Salesforce founder Marc Benioff; no one knows why. ■

room 2.25

ROUND TABLE

SATURDAY, APRIL 5 ■ 12 PM EDT

LIVE VIA ZOOM

Join members of the editorial board and *ROOM* 2.25 authors Rina Lazar (Israel), Mohamad Kebbewar (Syria), and Anastasios Gaitanides (UK). They will share thoughts on how they, their friends, and their patients are responding to the extraordinary stresses of contemporary life, as experienced in their very different countries. We will have the opportunity to discuss each presentation and to reflect on how we are responding to this time.

To RSVP, click here, visit our website, or scan the QR code.

Roundtable Organizing Committee

Elizabeth Cutter Evert, moderator
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ROOM poetry editor Elizabeth Kandall is delighted to be involved with this conference in which considerations of Bion's relationship to poetry as well as readings of original poems written in response to Bion quotes will be part of each day of the conference. Several *ROOM* poets have expressed interest in participating.

For more information about participating in Bion-poetry workshops, contact claire@analytic-room.com.

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— Vaclav Havel

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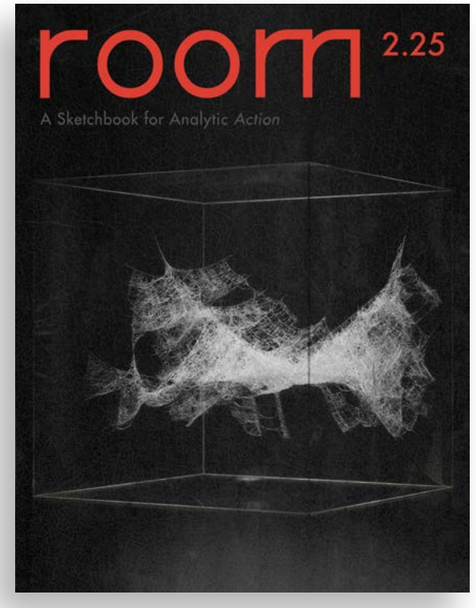

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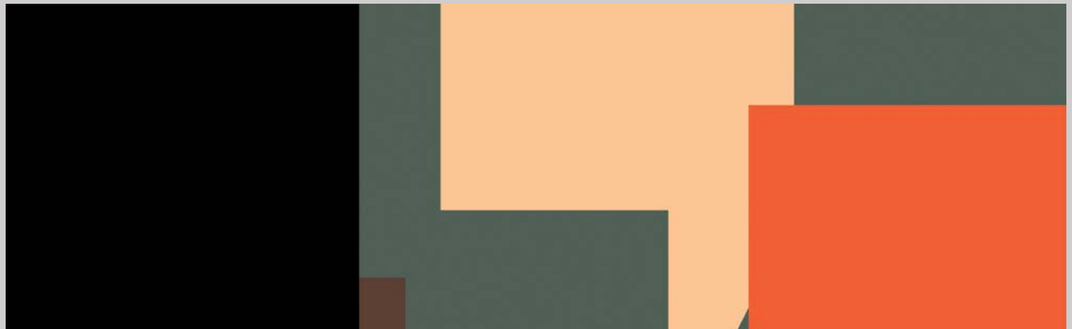

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