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Mourning of Art

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Panel: The Art of Mourning

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Mourning of Art

Insomnia, lack of appetite, stomach cramps, muscle cramps, loss of concentration, anxiety disorder, diarrhea, constipation, loss of motivation and desire, shortness of breath, burning eyes, outbursts of laughter and crying jags, and so on. You can have one or some or all of those for a while once you lose a beloved one or a thing irretrievably. Once you come to understand that that someone or something not only vanished but also perished. Once you find out that in the face of immanent death the world looks and maybe “is” empty.

Well, friends and family help. Death rituals help. A two-year-old child hanging around and endlessly demanding food and toys and attention not only annoys but helps. But if you have lost your family, too, your friends, the people that would mourn with you, anybody or anything that would call you back to the basic needs of life, then things get a bit more complicated. That is not about the essence of loss but about its dimensions and the human capacity to cope with those dimensions. Maybe you have lost a city, a country—you lost something so big that it is not even big anymore because you have also lost your capacity to compare what is big and what is not, what you can mourn after and what you cannot. Maybe there is nothing left in you that would energize you to deny, to be angry with, to bargain with, to be depressed about and to accept the loss. Maybe all you know is that you have lost something, but you do not know what you have lost with it.

Well, then, maybe medicine helps. Long walks in the woods, lying in the darkness with eyes wide open for hours, being excessively absorbed in daily routines, drunkenness, over-exposure of feelings and the deep, long silences help. Everything that soothes you and anything that drives you even more crazy and intolerant than you already are helps. At least, these feelings are indigenous to the living. Some reminders of the fact that gone is gone, and you should go on. These things help you go on, although you generally do not really know why you should go on. But still, you generally go on. “Why should I” and “why not” don’t make any significant difference sometimes. But even this helps. These all help. But they don’t heal.

In the face of loss, the urge to be healed can become a moral issue. Well, how and when can the question of “healing” pop up, let’s say, after a mass death? When do witnesses begin to think about purification of the body and the senses after a suicide bomber explodes herself/himself, not only in the middle of a crowd but also in your head? What do we understand from the word “healing” really? Is it the ability to comprehend loss in such a way that it doesn’t haunt you anymore, and so that you are free, cleansed, and purified? Is that possible? Is it an epiphanic and cathartic moment where death and life and existence reveal themselves “as such” so that you are healed? Is that possible? Or is it only a capacity to bargain? To calculate? To exchange loss with a portion of comprehension and peace of mind so that you can go on? And is that possible?

There is nothing wrong with bargaining and calculation. Bargaining and calculation are necessarily human and politically correct. And there is nothing wrong in the search for healing and purification. Mourning has no heroes, no absolutes, no moral truths. Mourning is not an art.

But art can mourn. Art can seek for consolation, redemption, resurrection. Art can make calculations and seek a catharsis. Just like a mourner does. But no more than that. Art talks about the things that we always

talk about. Art reveals the things that we already know about. Art fails where we fail. Art is not a savior, art does not redeem, nor does it heal. It just speaks with you, it speaks in you, it speaks you. That's all.

Why not think in very basic terms: The thing can be healed only if the dead returns, not in a zombie style, but as if nothing had happened. As if someone turned the clock back. The thing can be healed only when we do not die, when no one dies, when we do not even have the idea of dying. The thing can be healed only when there is no wound. This is a ridiculous point to arrive at. But I already did.

I can understand the need to draw a better conclusion, something that is at least less ridiculous and more instructive than the conclusion that I drew here. Such as: "Art makes us remember. Art makes us understand. Art immortalizes. Art pays tribute. Art consoles." Yes, it does. But it does not heal. I think healing is possible only when you accept that it is impossible. And the writing of mourning is possible only after a manifestation of inability and failure. Only then comes the irrational hope to resurrect the dead, and the inevitable failure that follows, and the hope that pops up again despite the inevitable failure, and the inevitable failure again, and hopelessness which pops up in the middle of hope; only to speak the innate humanness that resides in us.