Chapter Twenty-Seven

Creative and Clinical Transformations of Trauma: Private Pain in the Public Domain

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This chapter considers the ways in which some artists convert their private trauma into public works of art. It aims to show how these works provide meaning, connection, and continuity in times of social turmoil and rupture. The oeuvres of Michal Heiman, a contemporary Israeli artist, and Charlotte Salomon, a German-born artist killed in Auschwitz, exemplify the creative solutions to personal and political tragedy. A case illustration is also presented to demonstrate ways creative techniques can be employed to master trauma in the analytic space.

Picasso once said that "Art is not Truth. Art is a lie to make us realize truth" (quoted in Chipp, 1968, p. 264). One can say something similar about psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is not life but through the illusion of transference one learns to better appreciate what life is about. In this chapter, I will address how both art and psychoanalysis, largely born from trauma, help us to better realize truth and appreciate life. This will be accomplished by considering both art and psychoanalysis as processes that function in the service of survival by overcoming the imprint of death, survivor guilt, death anxiety, and the psychic numbing associated with them.

The human condition is ironic because, on the one hand, we all possess a very powerful need to deny our mortality and the anxiety of death and annihilation. On the other hand, the more we free ourselves of these emotions and truths, the more restricted our consciousness and activities become and the less we allow ourselves to be fully alive. Freud (1915) acknowledged the importance of allotting death its proper place when he wrote "Would it not be better to give death the place in reality and in our thoughts which is its due, and to give a little more prominence to the unconscious attitude towards death which we have hitherto so carefully suppressed?" (p. 299).

I agree with Lifton (1987) who claims that artists who do not shy away from the subject of death or near death offer us ways in which to recognize death, to touch it, to enter into it, and to expand the limits of our imagination to imagine the real in order to survive and live in a world such as ours. It is my belief that clinicians can learn from artists who are adept at finding ways to combine reality and fantasy in a playful engagement with their pasts, all the while creating a transformational object of art, an object that synthesizes loss and attempts to repair it at one and the same time (Knafo, 2002; Segal, 1990). An important objective in the treatment of individuals who have experienced trauma, then, is the provision of creative, rather than mutually destructive, outlets for the expression of aggression.

MICHAL HEIMAN: MAKING ART BETWEEN BOMBARDMENTS

Heiman glances in the small screen of her video camera as she films herself. She wants to see her face. She needs to see her face. She seeks the mirroring validation of the many fear reactions she experiences as she drives in a car on

Mirror Test *by Michal Heiman (2001).*

her way to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv to teach at Bezalel Academy of Art. The car winds through streets that, over the last three years, have become perilous sites inviting numerous attacks by suicide bombers. Heiman wishes to document her fear as well as create a womb-like protective cell against external menace. She wishes to block out the danger by replacing her rearview mirror with one that mirrors herself, her emotions. Ironically, in her attempt to protect herself, she endangers herself, because while thus preoccupied, she might ignore external road signs that are intended to preserve her life.

Heiman (born 1954), a prominent contemporary Israeli artist, transforms her private pain in the public domain. Rather than focus on visions of external damage and ruin, she conveys what life under terror is about from the inside, hence her title for the piece, *Fish Bowl*.

Having been an analysand for over a decade herself, Heiman incorporates her interest in projective techniques for personality assessment as well as her awe of psychoanalysis into her art. She intends to screen these films in a museum space containing six couches. Audiences will watch as six people view the film for the duration of a fifty-minute hour. These six people must come up with one story; they must agree. Is it possible for her films to elicit only one story? Is it possible for different minds to give up one view of reality for another? The projective quality of Heiman's work, as well as the fact that no one "story" exists about the land of Israel, a land forever changing, renders such a task daunting.

Heiman does not merely create from the present-day trauma and turmoil she experiences and witnesses. As a young adolescent, she entered a closet she shared with her brother only to find her uncle who had hanged himself among her clothes. Because the family's public account of the uncle's sudden death involved his having suffered a heart attack, Heiman was asked to keep her version of the event silent, which meant keeping her trauma to herself, doubting its veracity, and struggling with feelings of guilt and confusion that it had aroused in her. Heiman vows to this day that a mirror in the closet saved her sanity. Rather than remain trapped in a restricted space with the dangling body of her uncle, she instead saw her own image reflected in the optically expanded room behind her.

It is interesting that the significance of Heiman's car mirror recalls the mirror that "saved" her in the confined closet of her youth. In both situations, she succeeds in overcoming the threat of death and self-annihilation by literally expanding the space beyond that of death's imprint and by reasserting her sense of self. Unsurprisingly, then, the mirror—whether real or figurative—has become an essential component of her art. Heiman looks into the mirror of her video camera as she drives to Jerusalem and has us look into the mirrors of our souls.

Artists like Heiman respond directly to the political tension and violence they are forced to live with. Making art in an age of terror, as she does, requires a curious amalgamation of the traumatic and the life affirming: a claustrophobic reality is transformed into a realm involving multiple possibilities. Yet, as in life, the artist does not allow for all possibilities, once elicited, to be actualized. Forcing her respondents to overcome the impossibility of interpretive closure places them in situations not unlike that of political leaders in the Middle East. For Heiman, the personal is political and the political personal. Both the personal and the political are subject to analysis. And, in the end, it all becomes fodder for her art.

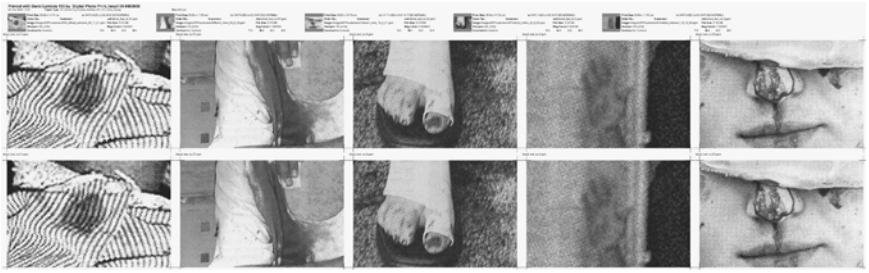
Heiman had encountered difficult times when she embarked on her personal analysis.[1] She was administered projective tests to aid in her diagnosis. Later she used these very tests as raw material for her creative endeavors. Transforming passive into active is one of the things artists do best. Heiman (1997) created her own projective test, the *Michal Heiman Test* (M.H.T.), first exhibited as *Documenta X* in Kassel, Germany (curated by Catherine David) in 1997. The M.H.T. is modeled after the Thematic Aperception Test (TAT), a psychological test composed of black and white drawings to which the subject makes up stories.[2] By replacing the drawings with photographs and adding several images in color, Heiman plainly states that the Israeli external reality—replete with its imagery of war, soldiers, and occupation—is so compelling and oppressively omnipresent that one cannot avoid its influence on the inner life of her subjects. Thus, her photographs consist primarily of people posing in front of "sites where battles were fought and memorial monuments were erected to the fallen, places of national heritage, of grief where blood was spilled" (Agassi, 1997, p. 10).

Heiman's version of the TAT is clearly more personal and deliberately political than the original. Furthermore, by having art spectators sit and volunteer to be "tested" in the space of a gallery or museum, Heiman brings her projective technique into a collective cultural space. How can one, she asks implicitly through her art, ever truly separate the private from the public, the personal from the collective, and the past from the present? How can art not reflect reality? The foreshortening that takes place between reality and the imagination emerges in spectators' reactions to images of a young girl pointing to the ever-changing map of Israel; two hands holding the mangled face of a corpse; an Israeli soldier with a rifle and a club staring at the back of a Palestinian man standing with his face to the wall in a refugee camp; a group of Egyptian prisoners with their arms in the air; a group of young Israelis posing atop an enemy tank; a family (Heiman's) posing in front of the Tel Hai monument; a stone pedestal whose inscription reads: "It is good to die for our country." Heiman's test is clearly one that fills in for most psychological

tests' cultural blind spots. It is a test that highlights the ways in which Israeli identity is composed of sacred places, tourist sites, evasive borders, heroic myths, and states of anxiety, emergency, and terror (Katz-Frieman, 1996, p. 10). Through her art, Heiman creatively plays with the dual struggle of surmounting trauma associated with being terrorized and that of being forced into the role of occupier and aggressor.

More recently, Heiman has been creating art in response to the Second Intifada (Palestinian uprising, begun in 2000). Continuing her interest in projective techniques, she has produced a new version of the Rorschach inkblot test that she calls *Blood Test*. Heiman replaces ink with blood taken from newspaper clippings—blood from victims of terrorist attacks; the blood of former prime minister Yitsak Rabin after his assassination, and blood from Arabs, Jews, and foreign workers.

In all these works, Heiman addresses the issue of repeated exposure to sensationalist images of atrocity. In our time and especially in Israel over the last three years, daily newspapers assail their readers with image after image of violence, blood, carnage, and destruction. It is known that viewing these images on a daily basis eventually inhibits their inherent shock value as well as one's interest in the personal suffering of those depicted. One suicide bomber's portrait begins to resemble another, and one victim's body becomes indistinguishable from the next. Heiman's aesthetic recycling of these horrific images compels us to undo our numbing defense so that we no longer remain indifferent (Sontag, 2003). We are forced to notice, contemplate, learn, and study the reasons for mass affliction. Heiman's focus on enlarged and close-up images of bloody hands and wounds divorced from personal signifiers additionally has us personalize these politically motivated acts. The crimson blood we all have in common when brutally injured or killed eliminates all differences between Arab and Jew. Thus, we all become would-be victims, and we all potentially have blood on our hands.



Blood Test, No. 4 *(series A) by Michal Heiman (2002).*

Today Heiman collects photographs of homes, buses, and vehicles that have been blown up and ripped apart. Photographers do not knock on doors in order to request permission to photograph. What was once a private enclosed space, privy to a select few, is transformed into public ruin for anyone to observe and even walk through. Photographers invade these spaces, just as the Palestinian bombers or the Israeli military already has. Her horror at the intrusiveness of photography in these cases has led Heiman to title her latest exhibition *Photo Rape*, a title that raises ethical questions regarding the rights and privacy denied the subjects whose interior homes and private selves lie ravaged and exposed. Heiman transforms these images into works of art that juxtaposes emotion and history, public and private, outside and inside.

The photographs are mounted onto enormous canvases, and their realistic yet strangely lit atmospheres create a Vermeer-like impression that succeeds in offsetting the grim subject matter. The tension between the erotic pleasure of color and the thanatopsistic scene results in an uncanny attractiveness. Placing the photographs on walls as backdrops for her spectators, Heiman poses the ultimate psychoanalytic question: "WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?" She thus forces her audience to concede a personal connection to what it sees. Heiman also elevates the effect of witnessing brutal raw images that are potentially traumatizing when left alone by inviting symbolic, verbalized accounts. By having her spectators/patients associate to what is seen or attempt to provide meaningful formulations for their reactions, Heiman becomes the artist/analyst who provides the structure in which to reexperience their trauma in order to help them work through the effects of that trauma.

Unlike Winnicott's (1951) transitional space, which is meant to soothe the child by living in this in-between realm bridging the inside and outside worlds, these images rip apart any illusion of safety and emphasize the very transitory nature of life and connectedness to people, places, and objects. Children, like victims of bombings, are helpless and unable to survive on their own. Indeed, Heiman is acutely sensitive to such juxtapositions. In one series of photographs, baby carriages and children's wagons are strewn adjacent to dead bodies and ruins from bombsites. There is no safe haven. Childhood illusions evaporate in the carnage. Mothers cannot guarantee safety and neither can museums or therapy. Yet, all is not hopeless in Heiman's world because her transformation of trauma into artistic expression reflects her ability to transcend what would otherwise be an overwhelming and unbearable situation. Surviving trauma, according to Robert J. Lifton (1987), involves being able to continuously imagine the encounter with death "in order to create past it, stay in it, and use it, yet move beyond it" (p. 258).

Heiman, like other artists (e.g., Otto Dix, George Grosz, Kathe Kollwitz) who create in an age of terror, does so by engaging, and having us engage, in

an ongoing dialogue with death. The traumatic reaction to terrorist events involves the dissolution of connection to social structures and people as well as a disintegration of the illusions that are needed to make a more or less tolerable fabric of life (Benyakar and Knafo, see chapter 5 in this book). The art object attempts to restore these broken connections and impose form onto the destruction if only by representing it within a new structure: the structure of art. The art object, by inviting dialogue with its spectators, also acts to restore threatened social connections (Rose, 1995).

A debate exists about the artistic representation of atrocities that reflects the hierarchical opposition between history and imagination (Van-Alphen, 1997). Adorno (1962) proposed his now famous dictum that "after Auschwitz it is barbaric to continue writing poetry," a statement that set up the tone for tremendous distrust of literary or artistic representation of the Holocaust. He and others concluded that although it is necessary to record and remember—that is, to be historians—one must not exploit the pain of the victims by creating anything that might allow others to derive aesthetic pleasure—that is, to be artists. The brouhaha surrounding a 2002 exhibition at the Jewish Museum, *Mirroring Evil*, on art of Nazi aesthetics, confirms this point.

Beyond the morally ambiguous terrain this type of art deals with lies the claim that the very nature of such trauma does not lend itself to artistic expression. Steiner (1967), for instance, argued that language has been demolished by the Holocaust and that "The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason" (p. 123). Yet, despite many allegations that one cannot use language after having been traumatized, there are equal claims that one *must* use language in order to master these traumas. Elie Wiesel, when writing about the Holocaust, describes the irresolvable paradox: "How is one to speak of it? How is one not to speak of it?" (quoted in Bohm-Duchen, 1995, p. 103). Milosz (1983) declares that, after horror, "people's attitude toward language . . . changes. It recovers the simplest function and is again an instrument serving a purpose; no one doubts that the language must name reality, which exists objectively, massive, tangible, and terrifying in its concreteness" (p. 80). Indeed, art borne of trauma is quite concrete and literal as is the play of children who have been traumatized. After author and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi complained of no longer being able to write, he continued to author seven books replete with powerful, desperate explorations of the essence of a human being in a world that stripped Jews of their humanity. Lifton (1987) argues that we need Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and Vietnam in order "to deepen and free . . . imagination for the leaps it must make" (p. 256). Laub and Podell (1995) provocatively assert that survival itself can be viewed as an art of trauma.

It is not a coincidence that many of these authors refer to the nearly impossible task of putting traumatic experience into words, a task recognized

by researchers who find that trauma is apparently not processed symbolically (e.g., van der Kolk, 1997). Clinicians who treat severe trauma are well aware that verbalization, the very tool of psychoanalytic therapy, is far from easy in such cases. Along with the challenge of employing language for something that is deemed impossible to put into words is that of working within a human relationship after it has been proven that human beings cannot be relied on. This is why clinicians need not be too disheartened when faced with the finding that every intervention we make in these treatments is, of necessity, largely incomplete and ineffective, because nothing we say can erase the memories or bring back lost loved ones and nothing we do can make the world a safe place or guarantee that demonic events will never again be repeated.

This is not to say that as analysts we have nothing to offer. We can be there with our patients, share their pain, and bear witness to the events that caused it. We can help them express their feelings so as not to choke on them and give words to their thoughts so as not to be mute or vocal solely through the body. Most of all, we can assist our patients to find meaning in their suffering, the only thing that ultimately helps them bear it. I sometimes find it useful to recall Ernest Becker's view on the essence of transference as "a taming of terror" (1973, p. 145). In the analysis of one who has suffered trauma, one tries to find a way of helping the traumatized person change from being, or perceiving oneself as, a victim, with its concomitant passivity and dependence, to being a survivor, a person capable of taking action to control one's destiny.

I believe that analysts can help their patients achieve this state by providing a creatively flexible analytic space, a space that at times may even come to resemble a torture chamber. The analyst might also assume the roles of victim, tormentor, and helpless bystander, as needed. Transference in these cases often entails a destruction of the therapist's preferred role as help giver. I am reminded of a patient who consciously identified with Palestinian suicide bombers as she perceived herself as destroying the treatment, herself, and me in one massive wave of aggressive acting out. In such cases, one of the challenges is to try to transform the immense rage and need for revenge into self-assertiveness, play, humor, and, if lucky, a creative product. Creativity and humor should not be considered mere peripheral or defensive activities because they allow us to appreciate the ridiculous and absurd in life all the while embracing the most important of human conditions.

An excellent example of this is Heiman's 2002 series, Holding. Modeled after the famous movie poster from *Gone with the Wind* of Clark Gable holding Vivienne Leigh in his strong, masculine arms, Heiman juxtaposes endless images of bombing victims being carried in the arms of their saviors. Mirror-

ing the exact pose of the cinema's romantic couple, Heiman's acerbic humor has us witness the passing (*gone* with the wind) of romantic fantasies of love and Eros, only to be replaced by desperate couples—both Palestinians and Israelis—scrambling for cover or medical assistance in a life or death situation. This is the new pairing she seems to be saying. This is today's form of human contact.

The images of terrorized couples are horrific not only because they are bloody but, more importantly, because they show the terror, confusion, and desperation in the eyes of the people who run from death and, at the same time, run for their lives. Yet, as she documents the human state of emergency and alarm, Heiman masterfully creates a literal "holding environment" in them. The gesture of having one's fears and wounds physically and symbolically held reflects the artist's ability to contain her audience's most primal emotions and provide a safe space in which to express them.

Holding, No. 3 *by Michal Heiman (2003–2004). (Photograph by Moti Kimchi for Ha'Aretz, June 3, 2001, Tel-Aviv, Israel).*

K: PSYCHOANALYSIS IN CHAINS

I shall refer to a patient whom I saw in analysis as K, in honor of Franz Kafka who wrote of the terror of being subjugated to inexplicable human horror. K was a woman in her thirties and the product of a forced immigration from post–World War II Eastern Europe. She was born in the land of the lost and the dispossessed: a DP camp. K's father had been blinded in an "experiment" in a concentration camp during the Holocaust (Knafo, 1998). K's most prominent childhood memories involved suffering and abuse at the hands of her survivor father whose "nerves were shot." Mr. K. was a powerful and influential man in the immigrant Eastern European community to which they belonged. At the same time, he was blind, the victim of oppression, and he worked a menial job. Mrs. K, a career woman, was not at home much of the time, a fact that reinforced the inordinate attachment that developed between K and her father.

Mr. K was a strict man who did not hesitate to use corporal punishment. K often described the manner in which she provoked her father to administer harsher beatings by hiding from him, compelling him to aimlessly flail and thrash about the house until he found her. This "battle of wills" evolved into a "game" of mutual torture in which each party alternatively took turns playing the roles of victim and victimizer, but always ended with the father "ripping into" K.

K's choice of vocation was a subject filled with ambivalence and conflict. Whereas she viewed herself as a photographer, she associated photography with luxury, selfishness, and neglect of her Eastern European/father tie. She knew that photography was self-expressive and therefore had difficulty with the exhibition of these feelings in a analyst nonabusive, nonaltruistic mode. As a result, she experienced severe creative inhibition and hung her photographs with the picture side facing the wall. K thus expressed the ambivalence she felt regarding her father's blindness. Whereas she had become his eyes and offered to capture the visual world for him, she simultaneously symbolically "blinded" herself by depriving herself of the ability to view and portray the world from which he was excluded. As a result, she reduced her visual voice to that of "speaking to the walls."

Psychoanalysis became associated, in K's mind, with photography, self-expression, self-indulgence, aggression, and assimilation. Consequently, all the conflicts she experienced with her ethnic identity and her art were also experienced in relation to her treatment. Consciously, she appreciated that my background was different from her own and expressed relief at the fantasy that I was therefore in a better position to regard her objectively. Unconsciously, I believe that she was hoping to avoid the sadomasochism associated with her world by being in treatment with someone whom she viewed as outside of it. In the end, her feelings were too powerful, and they seeped into the treatment and even took it over.

K's self-perception as a victim was so deeply ingrained that it had become an integral part of her character. Life to her was a prison; trauma and pain were even idealized in her worldview. Her verbal expressions conveyed the sense she had of herself as a martyr. She employed very vivid language to communicate her profound feelings of persecution. K shouted at the top of her lungs for the duration of most sessions, as she related, in sadomasochistic terms, her experiences of being "spit on," "beat over the head," and "pinned against the wall." She was initially capable only of perceiving herself as the slave in relationships, a helpless prey of torture and cruelty. Nevertheless, in the transference, K acted out primarily by missing sessions or coming late and delaying the payment of her bills. She did not call to cancel her sessions and thus recreated the hide-and-seek game she had once played with her father. Like her blind father, I could not see her, did not know where she was, and felt angry at being treated so disrespectfully. And as with her father, K confessed her expectation/wish that I hit her and, ultimately, kick her out of treatment.

Coming face-to-face with the intensity of her aggression was extremely disconcerting for K and for me. However, as her life events and acting out behaviors were mirrored and interpreted, and her intense pain contained and held, she began to recognize and accept the pervasiveness of her sadomasochistic view of life. This was accomplished first by analyzing her relationships outside of the treatment and analyst, then, by analyzing the transference and her acting out behaviors. Transference analysis proved the most effective but necessitated our temporarily allowing the analytic space to be transformed into a concentration camp of her own making, wherein either she or I was cast in the role of prisoner and held in bondage. This was not always easy because it evoked powerful feelings in me as well (e.g., fight-flight), yet I knew it was essential to enter K's world of torture and violence in order to help her move beyond it. K's analogy of analysis with a concentration camp was a very somber matter, yet by casting me in whatever role she wished and watching me survive her repeated attacks, this world ultimately became a less threatening one.

My being a woman, I believe, was also a significant factor in K's treatment. K's mother was absent much of the time and, when she was present, K developed a disrespect for her that generalized to all matters feminine. Her overattachment and overidentification with her father prevented her from incorporating softer, more maternal, elements into her personality. Instead, she viewed reality as an arena in which she needed to fight for her life. And fight she did. Fighting with me and against me in the analytic space without being attacked in return gradually led K to allow herself to be "held" by me, which, in turn, allowed for a degree of internalization of my nurturing behaviors toward her. As she became gentler toward herself, the world became a friendlier and less persecutory place in which to live. One outcome of this change was her marriage to her longtime boyfriend with whom she established a home.

It was at times difficult to reconcile K's world of misery and torture with her artistic world. Much of her emotional life was unsublimated, raw, powerful, and angry. Photography was psychologically loaded and guilt inducing due to its connection to her father's blindness, resulting in K's experiencing acute bouts of creative inhibition. At these times, I directed her to experiment in a medium other than photography, and she chose clay. Because making art with clay involved tactile sensations more than visual ones and could easily be performed by a blind person, K's guilt was alleviated and her creative impulses liberated, which then allowed her to return to photography, her artistic medium of choice.

It is important to note that during the entire time that the analytic space took the form of a torture chamber, this milieu simultaneously became an artist's studio, a place where K imaginatively created images that would ultimately set her free. It was in this third space (Winnicott, 1951; Ogden, 1994), a space that bridged the past with the present and external and internal worlds, that K and I finally sculpted a new self, a self both angry and free. Accepting this change was inevitably fraught with conflict because it represented Americanization and the possibility of getting her needs met and of being treated with dignity and respect.

As K gradually relinquished her masochistic stance, she began to take on more assertive roles in her life. Although photography did not entirely disappear, it receded into the background. In its place, K's political activity, initially employed in defensive identification with her father, eventually became an area to which she brought her creativity and in which she took charge and legitimately sublimated and expressed her angry feelings. Her activism required multiple public speaking engagements in which she came to excel, which is significant since she began treatment with a phobia of public speaking. K had finally found her voice.

CHARLOTTE SALOMON: SUICIDAL ART

Charlotte Salomon (1917–1943), like Heiman and K, experienced childhood trauma (a family history of multiple suicides) that assumed a new form in the context of social tragedy (Nazi persecution).[3] Before she was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943, twenty-six years old and five months pregnant, Salomon completed a barely veiled autobiographical picture novel titled *Leben? oder Theater?* (Life? or Theater?), a brave life-confirming artistic document that prevailed over the somberness of its inspiration and content. Salomon crafted this amazing work of art because, in her words, "I have a feeling the whole world has to be put back together again." Rather than follow in the footsteps of the women in her family—her mother, grandmother, and aunt—all of whom had committed suicide, Salomon chose instead to transform her private trauma into a work of art, a work that has become a noble testimony to the power of spiritual preservation.

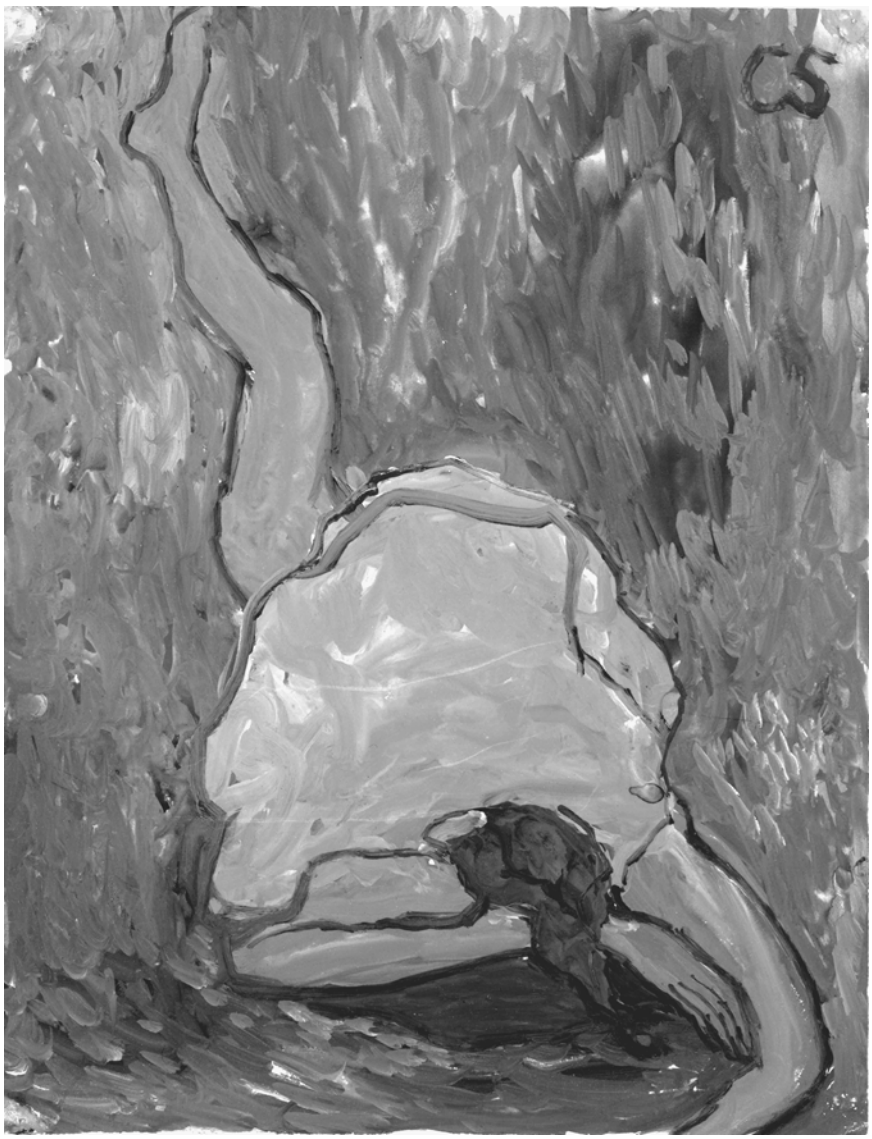
"*C'est toute ma vie*!" Salomon exclaimed to Georges Moridis, a doctor and friend in the Resistance to whom she entrusted her oeuvre before being ushered to her death. Indeed, the work she had frantically produced between 1940 and 1942, while exiled in France's Cote d'Azur, was her life and more. In addition to being a poignant coming-of-age story set among increasing Nazi oppression, it was the way she found to stay alive, to choose life over death, and to become immortal through her art.

If we appreciate the full value of her statement to Dr. Moridis, then the bookends of this masterpiece are highly significant. Salomon chose to open her musical theater with the suicide of her aunt Charlotte, after whom she was named. Although her aunt's suicide took place four years before Salomon's birth, the artist considered this event an apt one to begin the story of *her* life. Born into a legacy of willful death, her blood tie was one against which she would struggle for the remainder of her life.

The work concludes in Nice where she was exiled along with her maternal grandparents. While there, her grandmother, unable to bear life anymore, made a suicide gesture. As if to speak both to her grandmother and herself, Salomon desperately draws attention to the sun, flowers, and mountains. Finally, she states that her grandmother has a choice: to write or die. The grandmother chose death. Not long afterward, it became inevitable that Salomon confront the same choice: to take her life or to undertake something, as she put it, "wildly eccentric." *She* chose the latter. Salomon chose the path of creativity. "I will create a story so as not to lose my mind," she announced. Indeed, between her bookends of death, Salomon created a space for mourning—mourning the many losses she had had, mourning the future she would never have. In the end, Salomon's *Gesamtkunstwerk* can be considered a type of memorial.

Salomon *knew* the essence of trauma. She strove to make sense of the trail of family suicides under conditions in which she found herself increasingly isolated and endangered as a Jew. Unsurprisingly, then, her work came to reflect the familiar discontinuity, disruption, and fragmentation associated with traumatic experiencing. Although the entire oeuvre (1,325 gouaches each measuring roughly 13" x 10"; 784 were numbered into a final version by the author) was completed using only the three primary colors, indicating a strong life force; the pictures themselves reveal an intensity that belies psychological and realistic danger (Salomon, 1981). It is a work of urgency, a work that suggests impending doom. Its images are at once intimate and claustrophobic.

More than twenty characters speak in soliloquies and dialogues in thousands of scenes from Salomon's external and internal life. Images alternately present close-ups, long shots, flashbacks, and montages, winding from one person to another and from one angle to another, in a serpentine composition. Sometimes, the artist employs multiple angles to suggest the passage of time, placing the most recent events in the foreground and earlier incidents in receding



Life? or Theatre?: A Play With Music *by Charlotte Salomon (1940–1942). Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam. Copyright Charlotte Salomon Foundation.*

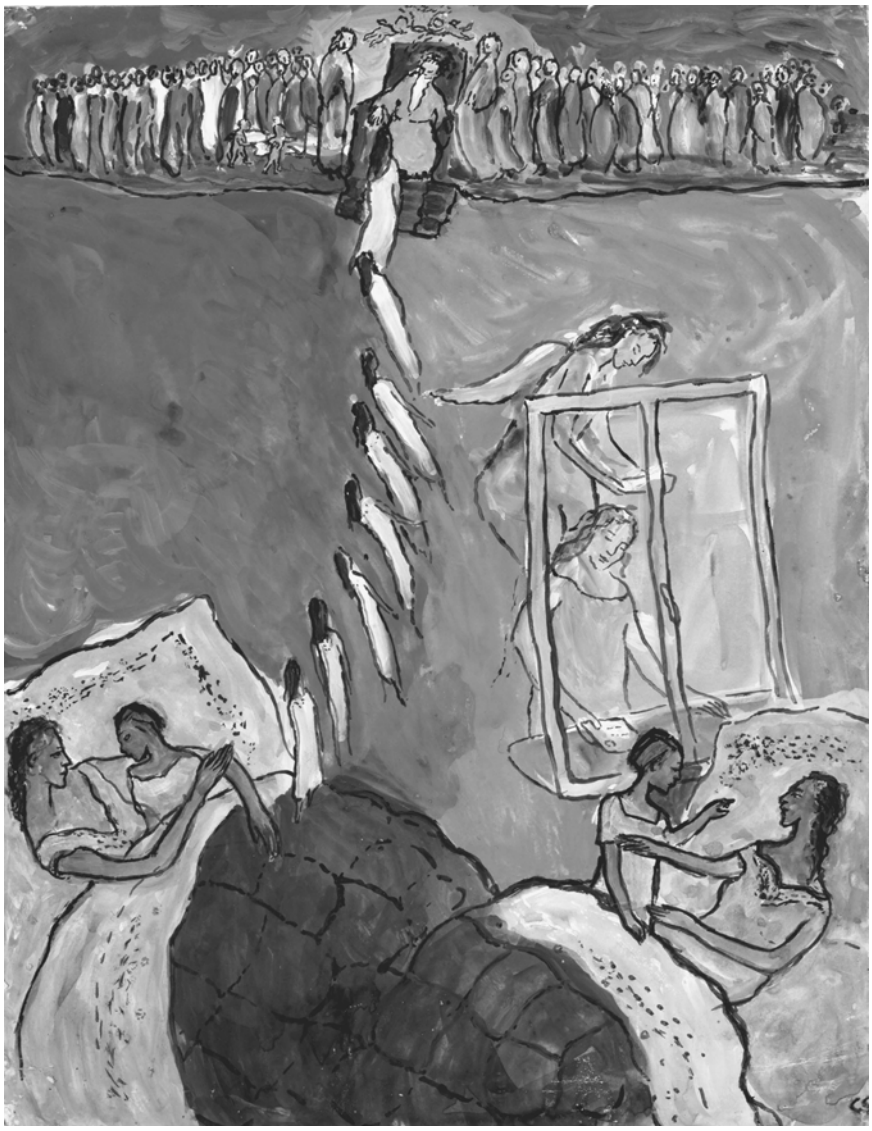
planes. At other times, she applies an aerial perspective, dispensing with ceilings in order to peer into the rooms of a house. In yet others, she sets the images swirling about the page with no discernible order. Finally, she sometimes breaks up scenes in a comic-book style. It is often difficult to know where one scene ends and the next begins. At times, her use of multiple selves in one

frame is dizzying. Whereas many pages depict one or two characters, it is not uncommon for a page to be inhabited by dozens of characters or for the same scene to be portrayed a dozen times or more. Although Salomon thereby attempted to achieve cinematic effects, she often created a whirlwind of text, color, and image that must have reflected the confused and terrified state of mind in which she found herself.

The clustering of images also reflects the combination of memory and fantasy, from whose archives she drew the content of her stories. Some occurrences are pure fictional representations. Her mother's death, which took place when she was a child of eight, for instance, was not an event Salomon actually witnessed or even knew about (she was informed that her mother died of influenza). In fact, she was told of the family suicide trail only after her grandmother tried to hang herself in Nice. Her grandfather, apparently upset by his wife's suicide attempt and the encroaching war, callously confronted Salomon with the family birthright (four women and two men had committed suicide) and even prodded her to take her own life. It is not difficult to understand why her grandmother's suicide attempt served as a pivotal catalyst for Salomon's creative endeavor. She simultaneously witnessed the suicide of her grandmother and was told about the suicide of her mother for the first time, both suicides involving women who jumped from an open window to their deaths. Salomon depicts the two suicides in her work, one witnessed and one imagined, condensing the important women in her life and thus combining adult pain with childhood longing.

Salomon's strong need to imagine how the event of her mother's suicide took place has her depicting the episode from both inner and outer perspectives. In one frame, we look directly into the mother's face, which is attached to profiles of her husband and daughter. Then we see her dreamily looking out of the window. As the coloring becomes darker and more ominous, we observe her from behind. And, finally, all that remains is a stark empty window frame. The next frame is a close-up of her dead face. Before the death, we witness a child who was very attached to her mother and who empathically watched as her mother became increasingly depressed and disinterested in life. Intimate conversations take place in bed during which mother enlightens daughter about how beautiful it is in heaven and that she would like to go there and become an angel. She promises to write from heaven, and after her death, Salomon repeatedly checks the mail for the letter that never arrived. Endless repetitions reflect her attempts to master a life that was quickly spinning out of her control.

The relationship between image, text, and music are very intricately interwoven in *Leben? oder Theater?* Although Salomon's work is visual, it is also highly texted. Scenes are additionally escorted by suggestions for musical accompaniment culled from opera and other sources. In the first part of the



Life? or Theatre?: A Play With Music *by Charlotte Salomon (1940–1942). Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam. Copyright Charlotte Salomon Foundation*

work, Salomon added text onto tracing paper, which was superimposed onto the painted pages. It is not coincidental that she dispensed with the tracing paper and began to include text directly on the painted pages at the point at which she meets Alfred Wolfsohn (renamed Amadeus Daberlohn in the play).

She also has Wolfsohn/Daberlohn comically enter her tale to the tune of the toreador's song from *Carmen*.

Wolfsohn was a kind of voice therapist, called in to help Salomon's stepmother, singer Paula Lindberg (renamed Paulinka Bimbam), with her voice. The entrance of Lindberg and Wolfsohn into Salomon's life was radical. Salomon idolized Lindberg and received much love, warmth, and attention from this extremely positive maternal figure. Adolescent idealization swings back and forth between her stepmother and her Svengali-like mentor, both recipients of serious crushes, creating palpable and shifting oedipal tension. One painting pictorially illustrates Salomon's primal scene tableau: she is in the lower right corner facing the viewer while, in the background, Wolfsohn and Lindberg are literally making beautiful music together.

Salomon met with Wolfsohn, often in secret, and absorbed many of his ideas, which are evident in her oeuvre. Wolfsohn's theories, clearly influenced by psychoanalysis, are allotted a great deal of space. His axiom, "You must first go into yourself—into your childhood—to be able to get out of yourself" is quoted four times. Page after page exists of text that winds around his disembodied head floating in space. Indeed, at one point, Salomon drew Wolfsohn/Daberlohn's figure 191 times above each phrase of a rather lengthy pontification. Wolfsohn believed that geniuses are made, not born, and that one becomes an artist only by getting in touch with one's inner self. He also preached that creativity was born of trauma and suffering. "The emotional life of the singer," he said, "must suffer a great upheaval to enable that singer to achieve exceptional results." When reading these words, it is impossible not to think of the exceptional results achieved by Salomon in her musical masterpiece.

Salomon's epic, although heavily influenced by the political conditions under which she lived, allots little space to the actual depiction of these events. Nonetheless, she does chronicle the Nazi attacks on the Jews that accelerated in 1938 and culminated in Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938. Her father was arrested and sent to Sachsenhausen, a labor camp. Salomon depicts with brutal clarity scenes of Nazis marching and a guard standing over the bowed shadow of a figure her imprisoned father had become in the camp.

As the work proceeds, Salomon's images become more sloppily produced and text assumes a more central place. This is partly because Salomon shifts her focus from actual memories to psychological complexities. Toward the end of her oeuvre, Salomon's text progressively crowds out image until it completely takes over. It is clear that Salomon was feverishly trying to complete her work as she sensed that time was running out. Irregularly sized letters and disembodied words become bolder and demand more room, often with barely a space between them. Her last words are: "And with dream-

Mirror Test *by Michal Heiman (2001).*

Life? or Theatre?: A Play With Music *by Charlotte Salomon (1940–1942). Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam. Copyright Charlotte Salomon Foundation.*

awakened eyes she saw all the beauty around her, saw the sea, felt the sun, and knew, she had to vanish for a while from the human plane in order to create her world anew out of the depths. And from that came *Life or Theater?*" Her final image is one of herself seated at the beach in her bathing suit, paintbrush in hand. She looks out to sea and contemplates her death, a death that she willingly embraces but a death not caused by suicide. In large letters printed across her back are the words "LEBEN ODER THEATER." In the end, Salomon chose *both* life *and* theater.

Although Salomon's work did not succeed in saving her life, it seems to have given her life a purpose. It allowed her to visit her past, no matter how painful, in the context of a terrifying present and future. It brought to life her youthful passion and creative spirit. It connected her, in her isolated exiled state, to those most dear to her and breathed life back into the dead, in blatant refusal to accept their disappearance from her life. It helped her battle the death forces in her by facing the truth about her family and the world. It helped her to find herself. She wrote: "The war raged on and I sat by the sea and saw deep into the heart of humankind. I was my mother my grandmother indeed I was all the characters in the play. I learned to walk all paths and became myself."

CONCLUSION

Creative Repair: The Art of Trauma

The art discussed in this chapter is an art created at the intersection of personal, aesthetic, social, and political experience. It is art made in the service of survival. The creation of art when facing death involves the aesthetic response to human emergency. It represents an attempt to shift the power relations by handing power to the weak and helpless, to those most in need of safety and support. It is a warning system as well as a form of resistance against destructive forces (Stiles, 1992). Kristine Stiles (1992) has given the label "destruction art" to works that "situate the body in the center of the question of destruction and survival" (p. 75). Paradoxically, although the content of this art is destruction, its purpose seems to be aimed at preventing trauma from destroying the survivor's power to fantasize and diminish her spontaneity and individuality. Instead, this art is in the service of mastery over destruction, loss, numbing, and mourning.

Freud realized the relevance of mastery in such phenomena when he wrote *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). There, he observed that nightmares of shell-shocked soldiers challenged his theory positing that all dreams are representations of the fulfillment of ungratified wishes. Freud came to regard

such dreams as constituting a violent attempt to master and overcome trauma. Childrens' games (e.g., *fort da*), played in the shadow of loss, were understood as serving a similar function. In their play, children repeat everything that has made a great impression on them in real life, and in doing so, they abreact the strength of the impression and as one might put it, make themselves masters of the situation (pp. 16–17). Freud extended this argument to artists, especially as it concerned creativity related to trauma. Unsurprisingly, then, the works of both Heiman and Salomon involve endless repetitions as they compulsively attempt to master a situation veering out of control. Their aesthetic repetitions assault viewers and induce in them sensations felt by the artists themselves, and thereby have them share the psychological burden, as well as the ethical responsibility, of containing them.

Although it is definitely possible for us to feel traumatized by witnessing repeated scenes of bombings or suicides, the aesthetic response to such art is far from simple. Despite the difficult content of the artworks discussed here, there also exists a clear attempt to discover and communicate truth—truth about humankind and truth about one's inner world. This attempt is not unlike the task facing psychoanalysts. We, too, embark on a joint journey with our patients, a journey that takes us to the depths of the human spirit. Sometimes, we do not like what we see or recoil from the intensity of emotion and experience. Nonetheless, we know that it is truth that ultimately sets people free from their pain and symptoms. That truth, often relentlessly pursued by artists, is a truth often avoided by most. Although Heiman and Salomon clearly struggle to deal with their personal and collective trauma, their art compels us to acknowledge, if only through unconscious identification, that we are all survivors of devastation from wars, holocausts, and nuclear disasters, and we all live with the imprint of death and the guilt that surrounds it. Artists possess the gift of using aesthetic form to present us with these unpalatable truths in order to help us digest them.

In addition to their heightened sense of inner and outer reality (Greenacre, 1957), artists also have a strong need to repair the bleak and damaged world they see before them. According to Melanie Klein's theory, creativity is born of the depressive position. It is the infant's wish to repair the destroyed harmony with the mother that propels it toward a creative solution: the restoration and recreation of a lost world. "True reparation," writes Segal, "must include an acknowledgement of aggression and its effect" (1991, p. 92). Art, therefore, involves the balancing of ugly (aggressive) and beautiful (reparative) elements because it takes into account the reality of separateness and loss.

In certain ways, Klein's theory reminds me of the response found in the Jewish mystical tradition of the Kabbalah to people who question why there is evil in the world or how a benevolent God can allow evil to exist. The Kab-

balah teaches that because God made humans his partner, Creation remains unfinished. It is only through *Tikkun Olam*, acts of healing and repair, that Creation is completed and the world restored. Indeed, artists possess the singular ability to restore life from the most broken and damaged pieces. Thus, Michal Heiman takes a world shattered by human bombs and uses embraces and blood to glue the shards back together again, and Charlotte Salomon adds color and humor to the tune of suicide and mass annihilation in her epic tale.

The artist, like the mother in Bion's theory, becomes the container of malignant projections from the environment and gives them back to spectators in a form they can handle. This does not mean that art born of terror is easy to look at. It simply means that such art may render our reality easier to look at and our lives easier to bear.

Psychoanalytic treatment of trauma offers the patient similar avenues of repair. Although K captured the world in her photography, she was initially unable to look at that world or have others look at it. Only after transforming the analytic space into a cruel and sadomasochistic play arena was K able to confront her darker side, the side that was passed onto her by family tragedy. The psychoanalytic space, with its continuity and lack of judgment, created a structured and accepting setting in which to play with and play out the most horrific of experiences. Psychoanalysis, then, offers its traumatized patients the ultimate creative experience: the possibility of creating a survivor who is strengthened rather than destroyed by trauma. If analysts succeed in achieving this, then they too participate in the creative process, a process that ultimately embraces life while unflinchingly staring death in the eye.

NOTES

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1. All information about Michal Heiman's life and career are taken from interviews and conversations with the artist over the last several years. She has read and given permission to print this chapter as is.

2. In 1998, Heiman created a second "test" modeled after the TAT. Her *M.H.T no. 2, Ma belle-mere, Test pour femmes* (My mother-in-law, test for women), includes sixty-seven cards with photographs of Heiman's mother-in-law at the time.

3. All biographical information on Salomon's life is taken from Felstiner's 1994 biography of the artist.

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