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I Can't Think Today
The Crisis Of The Reflective Subject

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Abstract: This article explores the psychic tension between thinking, listening, and acting in a world that is not only saturated with violence, injustice and moral exhaustion but also in an era where we have constant access to it. War, famine and displacement dominate headlines, the thinker finds their concepts collapsing under the weight of the real; the therapist, trained to listen, encounters the constraints of containment; and the citizen feels overwhelmed and impotent, caught between scrolling and switching off, between protest and paralysis. What happens when suffering seems inescapable? When catastrophe is not an event but a condition? What is the ethical and political place of the one who thinks, listens or reflects, when the world demands immediate and certain action? This piece emerges from a place of psychic paralysis in a moment where my tools of comprehension feel too fragile to witness and carry the magnitude of what must be held. The question to ask is whether thinking is a form of doing or is it deferring responsibility, whether listening is a political act or a retreat from the fray, whether.

Moving between philosophy and psychoanalysis, in search of a clear answer, this piece is a refusal to certainty. It inhabits the unease of in-between-ness, the impossibility of neutrality, the pressure to act without clarity and the grief of being a body that (wants to) care, but doesn't know how to. In doing so, one may reclaim paralysis not as apathy but as a meaningful symptom of living with a mind attuned to too much. This article explores collective trauma that overwhelms the internal capacity to symbolize, think or speak. It asks whether this psychic fact is an embodied protest against the unbearable and what can the act of listening hold for us. Maybe philosophy's social commitment is not to clarity or coherence: but to stay with the trouble when neither action nor thought feels adequate. This is a meditation on that threshold.

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Introduction: Crises of Thought

It was election week in India. On the surface, the clinic retained its rhythm. Scheduled sessions, ritualistic listening and speaking, there is a music to this cadence. Still, the atmosphere felt different. Friends, patients and family: all spoke in the heightened frenzy with fears of a right wing sweep, desperate hopes with reprieve, speculations about violence that may be inevitable (whatever the result may be). The air itself seemed to be buzzing with contradictory pulls, there is something electric about this! There is anxious dread, careful anticipation, fear and fervor that collapse into one another. Before descending into the subjective depths of personal reflections, the collective storm takes us over.

When catastrophe becomes the condition of existence, it ceases to be an isolated event. To live today is to wake up each morning into a world already ablaze and constantly present at the "click of a button" with headlines of war, ecological collapse, authoritarian politics and intimate violence that arrives before you are even thinking of breakfast. More often than not, we don't choose to engage or withdraw, the engagement precedes us, pushes us, colonizes the very spaces of reflection. Action, unlike thought, is inescapably public; it is the space where humans appear to one another (Arendt 1958, 5). But what do we do when that public space becomes so saturated with fear and spectacle that the private spaces become inaccessible? When thinking is constantly foreclosed by the demand for immediate (and correct) reaction?

The title of this essay, *I Can't Think Today,* is not simply a lament. It is a description of a pervasive psychic condition. The crisis of the reflective subject is not an individual incapacity or weakness but a structural predicament. Theodor Adorno puts it as "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly (Adorno 2005, 39). The impossibility of living "rightly" within a damaged life, also seeps into the impossibility of thinking clearly within damaged time. Thought is not just a capacity that is exercised by us, but also a fragile activity that is conditioned by our environments, atmospheres and historical conjunctures. To say "I can't think" is to register a psychic collapse and a political suffocation.

Philosophy, psychoanalysis, political theory are all pressed against this tension: what is the place of thought when the world is on fire? Is reflection an act of retreat, or paradoxically, an ethical stance against immediate reaction? Arendt, in *The Life of the Mind,* suggests that thinking is not about producing an "answer" but about dwelling with the interruptions of judgement, opening up to plurality and hesitation (Arendt 1978, 175). The contemporary moment often seems to demand certainty in advance: immediate statements of allegiance, rapid responses in such a way that hesitation is policed. To pause, to linger is in its own sense seen

as suspicious, whose side are you on? In the clinic, this pressure is felt even more intimately. Patients arrive carrying their individual and political histories and presents. After October 7, when our news cycles were flooded with horrific images from Gaza, a young woman in her session described being unable to sleep for days, scrolling, caught between hope and dread. She is in India at this point, the threat is felt as a witness, but it is palpable enough for her to say "Something will happen when I am not looking, but if I look too much, I can't breathe." Her words echo the paradox, vigilance is demanded and unbearable. In that moment in the room, my task is to create some space to breathe, yet, I find myself breathless very often. In the space of awareness and staying updated and honest to my beliefs, the task of listening deeply becomes unsettling sometimes. The walls of my clinic reverberate with the pounding of hope and dread outside the room.

The psychoanalytic frame is often imagined as a protected enclave, a place that is bracketed from the noise of the world. Yet, in practice, these boundaries are porous. Violence enters with the patient's words, with the clinician's anxieties, with the subtle shifts in atmosphere that keeps us on the edge. Wilfred Bion's dictum of working "without memory and desire" (Bion 1967, 43) may orient us toward openness in the encounter, but what happens when the world intrudes with overwhelming force? Can we ever suspend desire when the desire for safety, political change, survival itself press at the threshold of thought? Outside the clinic, this dilemma extends as we think about the predicament of intellectual work more broadly. Adorno's philosophy of negative dialectics offers us a model of thinking that refuses premature reconciliation. It insists on holding contradiction open, rather than resolving it (Adorno 1973, 5). But to inhabit contradiction is not a philosophical exercise, it is a lived necessity. The contradiction between private despair and public responsibility, between the need to think and the impossibility of thought is the world we live in. It is important to ask ourselves, what is the role of writing, analysis, philosophy in such a world. Is "thinking" not an indulging luxury when people are attacked for their political allegiances, when so many of us whisper our fears of violence.

The crisis of the reflective subject is not about distraction or fatigue, these are merely symptoms. It is an existential crisis in the conditions of thought. To reflect is to risk irrelevance in a time that demands alignment. To act without reflection (and by extension, belief) is to risk complicity in violence. The threshold between thought and action is fraught, it is contested. Bringing two thinkers here, Judith Butler on the insistence that ethics begins not with certainty but with the acknowledgement of opacity, the recognition that we cannot fully account for ourselves, or the other (Butler 2005, 42) allows us to see that thinking is not an escape, but to

bear the weight of opacity, to resist the violent clarity of propaganda and frenzy. Alain Badiou also notes in his critique of the "ethics of the Other," that the true site of ethics is not in recognizing vulnerability but in remaining faithful to an event, even when fidelity is inconvenient or dangerous (Badiou 2001, 12). What truths call for fidelity in a time when every day feels like a crisis?

In light of these, this essay does not offer solutions. There is no proposal of a new method to "manage" catastrophe or a definitive recommendation on ethics of thought versus action. It is just an attempt to remain with the problem, to articulate, in philosophical and psychoanalytic registers, the impossibility of thinking today and the necessity of not abandoning thought. There are no easy resolutions. The space of reflection is fragile but indispensable, the collapse is not just personal but deeply political. To confess "I can't think today" is not to name an incapacity, but to mark the contours of this moment. It is to register the foreclosure of thought and to ask whether there is some space to cultivate thinking, hesitation, faltering.

Catastrophe: As Condition

If we look at the word, catastrophe, an image of a sudden collapse conjures in front of us. The ground is splitting open, there is a fire storm or some sort of an explosion that breaks the fabric of everyday being. Right now, it feels like it is the air we breathe (literally, because Delhi's AQI is at *hazardous* levels most of the time). Rob Nixon (2011,2) formulated "slow violence" as the disasters that shape our existence, often not spectacular, but more attritional, "delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space." Slow violence accumulates in the atmosphere, the soil, the psyche. It does not arrive for once and for all but again and again like a relentless drip that erodes the stone. The atmosphere of catastrophe is not external, it reorganizes the conditions of a psychic life. There is an intrusion that we need to register, as a saturated constant presence. The election frenzy that I started with, is not a description of one event, but symptomatic of a longer duration of dread, a background of authoritarian consolidation and of intimate political violence. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, in Breathing: Chaos and Poetry describes this collapse of the respiratory system into the political: "The body of society is breathless because the semio-financial automatisms are suffocating it" (Berardi 2019, 35). Catastrophe, then, becomes a lived crisis of breathing and temporality and imagination. It is not a moment of shock, but a condition of suffocation. In psychoanalysis, trauma was once conceived as an encounter with an overwhelming event but contemporary trauma theory, from

Cathy Caruth to Judith Herman, insists on the temporal paradox of trauma. It is not just that the event is "too much," but that it arrives belatedly and returns with fury. It rearranges our relationship to time. Caruth (1996, 4) speaks of trauma as "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available." There is an atmosphere of recurrence and an unending aftershock. In the clinic, this truth emerges in fragments. A patient sits before me and expresses concerns over her political differences with her father. She oscillates between fury and despair: "He doesn't care who gets hurt. How is he so blind?" Her question is not just political, it is existential. Winnicott reminds us that the infant's sense of being is dependent on recognition by the caregiver; to not be seen is to risk annihilation (Winnicott 1971, 121). What this patient is experiencing, is a second-order annihilation: her father's refusal to recognize the human cost of political victory is maybe experienced by her as an erasure of her own ethical being. In this sense, catastrophe intrudes not only as the external violence of elections and riots but as the psychic violence of misrecognition within the family. The distinction between event and condition is important here. My patient's distress is not reducible to a political win/loss, it is structured by a long duress of discomfort within the family. This political reality is braided in the family histories with patriarchy, colonialism and dominance. This is a continuous reality that is endured, resisted or sometimes transfigured. Within this frame, Adorno's "wrong life cannot be lived rightly" takes a new form. It is not only that life under authoritarian capitalism is distorted, but that the distortion seeps into the possibility of thought itself. This is not to resign to silence, but to remember that thought emerges in duress, in fragments, sans coherence. Adorno's Negative Dialects becomes a description of the lived experience: thinking as the effort to hold contradiction open when reconciliation would be premature, false or violence (Adorno 1973). To say that thought falters in catastrophe is not to sanctify or romanticize the faltering. Alain Badiou warns, in Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil, against reducing ethics to the recognition of suffering. He critiques the "ethics of the Other" for collapsing politics into pity and spectatorship, rather than fidelity to transformative truth (Badiou 2001, 13). If catastrophe is a condition, then fidelity cannot mean waiting for the next event to anchor us; it must mean remaining faithful to the truths already revealed within the ongoing disaster. For instance, the truth that authoritarian violence is not anomalous but systemic; the truth that recognition is not guaranteed within intimate bonds but must be fought for politically and psychically. Reframing this can force us to consider the role of the reflective subject. If catastrophe is a condition, then the question is not when to think, but how to think within suffocation. Berardi's language of breathlessness is a metaphor, for the labor of thought as the effort to reopen some airways,

to create pockets of breathing space amid suffocating atmospheres. In a way, this is the work of the clinic itself. The analytic hour is a chamber where the patient might breathe differently, not because the catastrophe has been locked out but because it is invited in, named, held. Yet, sometimes offering this breath feels like a risk of suffocation for myself. This is the paradox, catastrophe demands recognition but it threatens to annihilate the very capacities one needs for this recognition. Judith Herman (1992) writes that trauma can shatter the victims sense of self and world, creating a crisis of meaning that resists integration. The process of recovery is to reconstruct meaning without denying rupture. In a collective sense, it means for us to allow the thought itself to be reconstructed as a form of survival. Thinking is not a restorative activity for lost coherence but a testament to the fracture. To think is not to resolve but endure contradiction and create (fragile) tethers. The notes I scribbled this week for a session read "Pulse racing, mine and hers. Going around in circles. Couldn't breathe." These fragments exist as a presence of feeling when there is no narrative closure. For how else can one speak of suffocation, except in gasps? Catastrophe is a temporal structure of trauma itself: belated, recursive, inassimilable. To reorient this definition is not metaphorical but clinical, historical and ontological.

This reshaping includes:
Politics: Not crisis management but as life under ongoing duress
Philosophy: Not abstract reflection but work of breathing in suffocating times
Psychoanalysis: Not a cure but accompaniment within damaged times

The *event* has happened and is already happening. The catastrophe is not a rupture in continuity but continuity itself. I don't end here for the fear of inviting despair. The condition of such a catastrophe is not totalising. If violence accumulates slowly, so too can acts of care and resistance. Nixon (2011) reminds us that slow violence can also be countered by slow activism, forms of persistence that don't seize headlines but sustain life. In the clinic, this is the slow labor of listening. In politics, the steady building of solidarities that do not yield to spectacle. These are not solutions but practice runs of endurance. The reflective subject is not extinguished but transformed, no longer a sovereign thinker contemplating events from a distance, but a fragile witness that exists within them. To confess "I can't think today" is not only a symptom of failure but a gesture of survival, an acknowledgment that thinking must be remade in fragments, in rhythms of suffocation and breath.

Thinking: Action or Deferral?

There is a certain perceived "smartness" in instant opinions, the urgency to tweet before the facts of an event unfold. This produces an act of suspicion towards thought. Thoughts seem indulgent, they seem like a betrayal of urgency. History suggests that the suspension of reflex is a political gesture too. Hannah Arendt (1978) places thinking at the heart of responsibility, insisting that it is the failure to think that enables banal operations of evil. To think, is not to delay action but to prevent the slide into automatism. It can often feel like the world is burning faster than we can catch it. The dilemma is not between thinking vs acting, but whether thinking can still be counted as a mode of action. The psychoanalyst's consulting room, with its rituals of retrospection may seem like deferral but Bion's injunction that the analyst work "without memory and desire" (1967, 42) is a radical form of presence. It is an opening to what cannot yet be symbolised. To think, in this way, is to hold space for shapelessness. Adorno reminds us that thinking is not an innocent refuge. The gesture of reflection does not dissolve the contradictions of a damaged life, it is to insist that thought must remain restless, non identical and refusing closure. It is not a safe alternative to action, but a refusal of reconciliation with the intolerable. It is a praxis of negation. For Arendt, thought lays the groundwork of ethical responsibility and Adorno casts it as a fragile act of resistance. What then, is the psychoanalytic scene? Patients often accuse themselves of "thinking too much." Analysis, they worry, permits endless ruminations when life is passing by them. A proposed reimagination of this idea is that the unconscious form does not appear as a reflection, but as an interruption; in slips, dreams and gaps. Freud (1930) saw civilization itself as a result of renunciation, as a compromise that generates discontent. To think psychoanalytically is to remain with this discontent instead of pushing for resolution. Thought, in this idea, becomes about encountering our desires and law. Butler (2005), in Giving an Account of Oneself, argues that thought is not fully transparent, never capable of offering justification. Thinking is to confront the opacity of the self and the impossibility of full self knowledge. This opacity is not a failure but the very condition of ethical relation. If actions demand a ground, thought reveals that the ground is always unstable. To think is to remain exposed, vulnerable, accountable without certainty.

In our present atmosphere of acceleration, opacity is intolerable. News moving to a 24x7 cycle demands clarity. It rewards immediacy and slow labor of thought becomes a liability. What circulates here is analysis as a performance: instant takes and moral certitudes. The death of nuance is not a cultural lament but a psychic reality that indicates how reflective subjectivity risks obsolescence. The notion of habitus is a reminder that action is rarely the

product of pure deliberation; it emerges from embodied dispositions, social fields that pre-structure our responses (Bourdieu 1990). To think, in this sense becomes about interrupting our sedimented reflexes and "practice (of) freedom" that loosens the grip of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977). Let's consider a clinical moment, a patient walks in, consumed by rage, both personal and political. She starts the session with a complaint about how the (therapy) room feels like a vacuum, "what is the point, people are out there, dying. We are here, talking." There is a protest in support of Palestinian resistance that her father has "banned" her from going to. "You can't convince him, neither can I." She is right. At some point she decides to sit down with her father, not to convert him, but to remind him that his control wounds her. The conversation does not alter the political (or the personal) situation, but it alters her relation to it. The grief allows her to sit and create a path of action that keeps account of the fragile precondition. Arendt (1958) wrote of the vita activa (the life of labor, work, and action) as distinct from the vita contemplativa. She insisted that action without thought becomes mere behavior, absorbed into systems of power. Inversely, thought without action risks impotence. The tension is irreducible. What psychoanalysis adds is the recognition that both thought and action are mediated by unconscious processes: fantasies, defenses, repetitions. To think or act is never simply a choice; it is a negotiation with forces beyond conscious mastery. The Lacanian Real is what resists symbolization, what cannot be thought. Analysis often circles around the impossible kernel that defies articulation, thinking always entails a confrontation with its own limits. To think is to approach the edge of the unsayable and to fail productively. This failure is not paralysis, it can generate new possibilities. Desire itself is structured by this impossibility; our acts emerge from what we cannot fully know.

Is there a risk of infinite deferral? In political contexts, hesitation can also function as complicity. The demand for more thinking and nuance can be weaponized to stall urgent change. For Badiou (2001) ethics does not lie in endless contemplation of the Other's suffering but in *fidelity* to the event that ruptures the given order, to insist upon consequences. This fidelity requires reflection. To remain faithful without giving into dogma demands restless vigilance to ensure that thought does not harden into ideology. This is the paradox, thinking is both the ground of action and its perpetual interruption. Patients stepping into the consulting room often demand advice, "What should I do?" and are met with frustrating neutrality that does not supply action but insists on reelection; which might feel like evasion. What emerges in this pause is not emptiness, but the possibility of a different act, to open a space where something other than compulsion might appear. Analysis or reflective distance is not equally accessible. It becomes important to ask if the analytic hour, with its insulated temporality, risks

reproducing privilege: allowing some to dwell while others have to endure immediate violence? This critique is not to be dismissed, Bourdieu invites us to acknowledge that habitus is not evenly distributed; the capacity to reflect is a form of capital and not inherently virtuous. This is not a call to abolish reflective practices and demand reactions. The task is not to choose between thought and action but to cultivate forms of thinking that are interventions: interruptions of reflexivity, refusal to false reconciliations and openings for grief. Perhaps the question is not whether thinking is action or deferral, but what kind of temporality it is enacting.

Here is a small "cheat-sheet":

- thought can prevent the descent into banality: Arendt
- thought must resist premature closure: Adorno
- opacity is the very condition of ethics: Butler
- thought is structured by impossibility: Lacan
- thought must remain faithful to rupture: Badiou

The overall suggestion is that thinking is neither a luxury nor a delay, but a practice of remaining with contradiction.

To think, then, is not to delay life but to keep it open.

Naming the Dread: Psychic Overload, Collective Trauma

The weight of the world does not arrive in neat sequences, it is accumulated. The violence we witness often feels like a repeated pounding. Rob Nixon (2011) called it slow violence, the attritional force of harm that stretches across generations and geographies. For those living in crisis, it is like a sudden blow that floods the terrain that is already cracked by drought. In such states, the psyche is at the risk of disintegration from pain and relentlessness. The tools of survival, like symbolisation, thought, relation; become fragile and inadequate. The collective trauma bleeds into psychic overload threatening continuity of being. Trauma is fundamentally an event of powerlessness (Herman, 1992). The body and the mind are subjected to something overwhelming that is outside the subject's control. The traumatized psyche is not wounded by the event alone but with the failure of safety: the social world collapsing, the absence of a witness together fails our capacities to think. Trauma is a breach in experience. It is not about the event, necessarily, but about the unassimilated return of the presence (Caruth, 1996). In clinical language, we may call it dissociation (the inability to integrate thought and experience);

in lived experience it can feel like deadness. A suspension of vitality that mutes the pulse of thought and feeling. This suspension is not always visible. A patient may continue to work, care for their children, come for sessions and "look" normal. Yet, beneath the rhythms of an ordinary life, one senses a hollowness. One patient describes scrolling through her feed compulsively each night before bed. This "feed" of food shortages, xenophobia, beauty standards, cat memes till she is physically unable to keep her eyes open anymore seems like a ritualistic numbing to avoid thought. The failure of the psychic environment to provide a holding space (Winnicott, 1971) suspends her in a limbo. Collective trauma also amplifies this liminality. Dori Laub (1992) writes about how Holocaust survivors were not devastated by events exclusively but by the impossibility of speaking them into existence, given the absence of reliable witnesses. Trauma, he insists, requires a listener to prevent disintegration. But what happens when the society is traumatized, when everyone feels like the survivor and witness, victim and observer? The boundaries of public and private collapse. The (clinical) room fills with stories that echo in news rooms, the therapist also struggles to find psychic breathing space when only collective breaches the walls of the room. Franco Berardi (2009) wrote how our contemporary moment is marked by a crisis of semiocapitalism: language itself becomes saturated, exhausted. We are bombarded by messages, stimuli, and demands to respond. Under these conditions, the psyche does not metabolise meaning at the pace of its arrival. The consequence is panic, depression or paralysis. Berardi symbolizes this as a crisis of breathing: the social body is grasping for air. In the consulting room, this shows up in patients speaking with fragmented sentences, some flood the hour with data or stories or fears but both who cannot pause long enough to feel. It is *thought* being hijacked or replaced by compulsive repetition. Psychic deadness emerges not as a defensive choice but as the after effect of overload. To bare existence, one might shut down. This results in also an incapacity of dreaming, awake and asleep. Freud would insist that dreams are road to the unconscious, Bion would label dreaming as the mind's way of metabolising experience. The disappearance of dreaming is not merely a loss of fantasy, it is a collapse of the psyche's ability to symbolize and experience psychic meaning. The weight of the social world invades the interiority of an individual to muting its vital processes. Herman (1992) stresses the importance of safety, remembrance, and mourning in recovery, but in contexts of ongoing crisis, safety is not assured. How do we restore safety when the fabric of the society seems fractured? How does one remember when the traumas accumulate, each new layer forced upon the old? Felman and Laub (1992) argue that testimony is not just recounting but an event of relationship. To bear witness is to also take the responsibility of co-creating meaning in the face of trauma. The risk of maybe

testimonies being trapped in an echo chamber can bring us close to fear of simple repetition, fear of it never being digested. Still, Laub would insist that broken speech creates threads of connection, however fragile. This is the task of psychoanalysis in times of collective trauma: to not cure, or restore but remain present, in the limbo of overload, offer a fragile witness to all that cannot be integrated. If psychic overload is the collapse of thought, then the clinical task is of holding space for "non-meaning." Sometimes, there is nothing to say, no interpretation to bring things together, only a holding space that will survive silence. Winnicott (1971) reminds us that the capacity to be alone develops only in the presence of another. The capacity to survive overload may depend less on explanation than on accompaniment, the therapist's capacity to remain alongside, to breathe when the patient cannot. In accompaniment, silence is not avoidance but a recognition of experiences that exceed speech. There is a kind of silence that feels therapeutic, but there is also a "void-like" silence of deadness. The therapist being pulled into this suspension can also become a refusal of vitality. Eigen (1996) notes that therapists must cultivate our own sensitivities and capacities to feel without collapsing. He describes psychoanalysis as a practice of staying alive to feeling, even when feeling threatens annihilation. In contexts of overload, this task becomes nearly impossible; therefore also urgent. The ethical challenge is not "how to cure trauma" but living alongside it. Collective (and to some extent, individual) trauma reshapes subjectivities. There is no going back, there is no restoration. The question is how to survive with the cracks. Berardi (2019) finds poetry as a way of slowing language, of resisting the acceleration of semiocapitalism, of breathing. Perhaps psychoanalysis, in a way, is a form of poetry. It is an insistence on slowness and lingering.

To form this pipeline of psychic overload leading to deadness is not to pathologise survival. It is to recognize that when we are flooded beyond capacity, a way to endure the pressure is also suspension. These attempts may seem fragile or not enough, but these are maybe human attempts to live through unbearable. Our role, towards ourselves and others, becomes of maintaining shelters, to not force vitality but to accompany suspension till another form of aliveness can emerge. Thoughts can collapse, deadness can pervade but the presence of another (maybe faltering), can matter. Witnesses don't repair, they can prevent collapse. To dwell in this paralysis is not to valorise incapacity, but to take seriously how we register crises in the body and the mind. The political charge emerges from our suffering, not in spite of it.

Listening and Staying: As Political Praxis

It begins in the consulting room with silence that feels so dense that another body is present in the space. The patient, a young man, arrived after communal violence that broke in his neighborhood. He sat for several minutes, just breathing, his eyes cast down. "If I tell you, does it change anything?" This question was not a request but a test of whether his words will impact the inner reality or the outer in any way. To hear him, is to take a position to hold his fear without evacuating it into platitudes, to let him stand when the world would rather remain deaf (This particular protest and the dislocation of Muslims was barely covered by the media, I too, live nearby). This is the fragility of listening, not just as a therapeutic technique as political praxis. Butler, in Precarious Life (2004) argues that the capacity to apprehend the vulnerability of another not outside political contestation. Whose lives are heard, who is grievable, is already structured by power. When the young man wonders if his telling me changes anything, he is intuiting this terrain: to speak is to risk one's words being absorbed into a public where some griefs are dispensible. The face of the Other addresses us with an infinite demand (Levinas, 1985) and to listen, is not to acquire information but to recognise responsibility that precedes choice. This responsibility destabilises the fantasy of neutrality. To say "I am only listening," is also an implication. Historical practices of listening show the breadth of this principle. In South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the act of public testimony became a form of collective witnessing and framing it as a national responsibility. In Chile, under Pinochet dictatorship, women crafted arpilleras, textile tapestries depicting disappearance and repression as an art form that allowed silence and grief to circulate in embodied forms when words were dangerous. The Gandhian practice of *satyagraha* in India, reframed non violence as a mode of listening to the truth of suffering, refusing the state's injunction to respond with violence. These practices are not apolitical, it reshapes the conditions of reality. This is why analytic work insists on containment and why political listening often requires ritual or communal scaffolding. Without such forms, testimony can collapse into retraumatization or a perverse voyeurism.

The centrality of the body in this dynamic is in somatic registrations of hypervigilance, disrupted breathing or even gut related symptoms. Clinical accounts of therapists experiencing heartburn, stomach sinking or breathlessness in response to testimony are present too. This embodied resonance reminds us that listening (and speaking) is not only cognitive but affective, enacted in shared environments. Postcolonial theorists remind us of whose bodies are considered audible, accents and silences that remain overdetermined. When the subaltern

speaks, the problem is not merely whether they have a voice but if anyone is listening in a way that makes their speech intelligible sans assimilation (Spivak, 1988). Listening can be both radical and complicit, to hear without acting risks voyeurism, to act without hearing risks paternal hierarchy. Butler (2005) insists that giving an account of the self is always partial, fractured, contingent on recognition. This means, listening entails acceptance of incompleteness. Meeting the patient's needs with presence instead of performing perfect attunement. If listening is praxis, it is because there is an intervention in circuits of erasure. When we resist the flattening of complexity into spectacle, to listen slowly and find spaces to speak without resolution is active participation. It is to say that grief is not to be swallowed by statistics and abstraction. Listening sustains the possibility of futurity, not as redemption but a horizon of potential of "not yet conscious" (Bloch, 1986).

Listening, and staying by extension, is not a cure or a closure. It is a commitment to dwell consciously and allow psychic defenses to loosen. If listening is the entry point into responsibility, staying is the endurance. Lauren Berlant (2011) in Cruel Optimism, talks about attachment to fantasies of resolution and how they can be damaging. To stay, means refusing the cruel optimism of instant repair and accepting that some wounds won't heal, some losses will remain unmournable. It might also be important to think about morality and ethics. Morality demands clarity of right and wrong, with answers. Ethics, attend to the ambivalence, to the ways responsibility can be inescapable and impossible. Butler in Undoing Gender (2004) emphasises that to be undone by the Other is a part of ethical life, to remain with that undoing is to accept vulnerability as constitutive and not as an error. Fanon (1963) described the psychic disintegration by colonial violence along with ambivalent temporality of decolonisation, a space where old structures are collapsing but new ones are not born yet. To stay here is to endure contradiction, to resist the nostalgia for colonial order and fantasies of instant liberation. To create spaces to be altered by what one hears, to acknowledge that thinking itself is a form of responsibility. This ethic resists both cynical detachment and utopian purity. This choice to stay is countercultural. It is affirmation that neither the clinic nor the polis can be purified of ambivalence. It is insistence that our task is not to repair into coherence but inhibit fractures with as much fidelity and complexity as we can bear.

Conclusion: On Recalibrating Care and Responsibility in Crisis

The patient I described earlier once asked me, "Do you ever feel like therapy is useless?" Partly as an attack but more as a recognition, it was as if he caught me on the very threshold I had

been circling. Their words hung in the room, not as a challenge but as an acknowledgement that none of us were exempt from the crisis of responsibility. Care may falter not because one does not wish to give, but because the very capacity to give and to remain open, receptive, alive to the other; is eroded by fatigue, dread, or deadness. Responsibility is often seen as a heroic posture with the ability to rise to the occasion. The patient's questions revealed the threshold where he wasn't asking whether care is good in abstract but whether it could survive collapse. This suspension between aliveness and deadness, between available and being withdrawn is given a language in psychoanalysis. Psychic retreats are responsiveness in order to preserve some fragment of being. To expect responsibility to flourish here is to miss the fact that responsibility itself needs to be recaliberated. It cannot be measured with fantasy metrics like giving endlessly or showing up flawlessly. Honest responsibility is uneven and fragile. It begins in knowing our limits and expanding slowly. Recalibrating here, also means moving beyond individual frames. Mutual aid networks, reading groups, informal therapy groups are not substitutes but acts of hope and care that emerge in absence of state structures. To know our thresholds also means building capacities to recognise care without survival is unsustainable. Recalibrating is also an act of abandoning fantasies and embracing grounded dreams that hold how it is not extinguished by collapse but transformed by it. The patient's hum remains with us. It is not loud or triumphant or heroic, but alive. Maybe this is what responsibility in a crisis finally is: a commitment to hum alive and stay present. To remain, however faintly, in relation.

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