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Article abstract

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Materiality, Tactility, and Artmaking: An Exploration of Diasporic Trauma through Creative Pedagogy

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Abstract: This paper explores the role of artmaking and tactile materials in learning and overcoming “stuckness” (Hage, 2009; Cangia, 2021), a state of discomfort caused by mobility constraints through an autobiographical approach. I explore how the tactile material artmaking processes can generate educational sites, and serve as a pathway to process trauma. The findings of this paper can empower learners to harness the therapeutic potential of artmaking, fostering resilience and growth through the creative process.

Keywords: art education, pedagogical site, tactility; artmaking, diasporic trauma, art-based research, immigrant experience, a/r/tography, creative pedagogy

Introduction

In this autobiographical paper, I explore the powerful role of artmaking and tactile materials in expressing emotions and healing from traumatic experiences. I focus on the concept of liminality and its manifestation in a state of stuckness (Hage, 2009), where ambivalence and discomfort intersect. Ghassan Hage (2009) defines stuckness as a condition of liminality caused by mobility constraints. Drawing from the works of Hage (2009) and Flavia Cangia (2020), I examine immobility within the liminal conditions of my life as an immigrant. Living abroad for the past twelve years, I have confronted the persistent uncertainty arising from turbulent political and social transformations in my homeland, Iran. While the internet compresses time and space, bridging distant and local experiences, the physical separation from where I grew up and the incapacity to stand alongside fellow citizens during uprisings and resistance against oppression breed a profound sense of detachment and alienation. The inability to directly engage or physically participate in unfolding events in Iran intensifies traumatic feelings and amplifies the sense of detachment, disempowerment, and passivity. Caught between memories of my homeland and the realities of my present location, I navigate a liminal space loaded with traumas. One significant event that encapsulates this experience is the 2022 Women, Life, Freedom uprising in Iran. Despite being physically far away, I found myself emotionally entangled in the crisis, witnessing the brutal oppression through social media. This experience epitomizes the condition of stuckness, where I am perpetually suspended between the recorded images and imagined realities, unable to intervene directly. Guided by the methodological framework of a/r/tography (Springgay et al., 2008; LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019; Triggs & Irwin, 2019), as well as drawing from living inquiry (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay et al., 2005) and lifewriting (Leggo, 2010), I employ tactile artmaking practices that closely tied to the concept of liminality

(Van Gennepe, 1961; Turner, 1979) and being and living as an immigrant body. Specifically, I explore the interplay between creative expression and the contingent nature of liminality through tactile art forms like papermaking. By immersing myself in the tactile sensations of artmaking, I seek to confront the complexities of witnessing violence, injustice, and chaos from afar. This paper not only serves as an expression of my experiences but also aims to explore potential avenues for healing within the diasporic community.

An Invitation to Enter the Text

I would like to invite you, the reader, to the liminal site of this paper. The structure of the paper reflects the emotions and sensations that arose from an uncertain situation that has lasted for a while. Writing about those liminal and transitional moments after they are over is like retrieving fragments of memories, some painful, some doubtful, some forgotten, others distorted. Our brains tend to filter out many events that have happened before. We lose the details and only highlight the parts that troubled us or thrilled us (Hass, 2015). In this tension between forgetting and remembering, my mind travels between the “past in order to overcome all those haunting events that return to disturb the calm of a later moment” (Kaufman, 1989, p. 58). Aydin (2017) by reflecting on Nietzsche reminds us that concepts of active forgetting that enables “selective remembering; [...] defuses and neutralizes past experiences that are not beneficial for present and future life” (p. 125). One of the advantages of this active forgetting is manifesting a peaceful space for our consciousness (Bamford, 2019).

Based on the elusive feelings, recalling, and forgetting, I experiment with the structure of this paper in a fluid, relational way that moves between an autobiographical text, visual images, theory, narratives, and poetic reflections. I invite the reader to take the thread of ideas and weave them with their reflections and thoughts. In that way, potentially, together, we can create a generative, collective site of exploration that goes beyond the borders of this paper and revolves, evolves, and reshapes to a fluid, provocative pedagogical site of learning, wondering, and exploring. This can then lead to the free inquiry that Nietzsche also advocates for, which is an innovative and unique process of experimentation that allows us to experience new things (see Bamford, 2019). This approach to the inquiry leads to experimental thinking, which is an active exploration of an alternative research; its point is “to be curious toward the world and ourselves, to experiment toward truth, rather than to reach some specific goal” (Bamford, 2019, p. 14).

Methodology

This paper employs a combination of a living inquiry through lifewriting (Leggo, 2010) and a/r/tography. Here I explore personal and collective experiences by using memory, autobiography, reflection, storytelling, and interpretation (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005). This project which relies on perceptual awareness, in an aesthetic understanding, I represent the way in which knowledge actively generates through sensing, feeling, and thinking. A/r/tographical research is a process of exchange that emerges within an intertwining of mind and body, self and other, and through our interactions with the world (Irwin, 2017). Writing, artmaking, and learning are linked and intersected with a/r/tography (Irwin, 2010; Springgay et al., 2005), in ways that complement one another. A/r/tography as a generative and innovative research inquiry explores

the complex, singular, and relational meanings that emerges from within the process of writing, artmaking, and reflecting on one's personal experiences (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008; Irwin, 2010; Springgay et al., 2005). Following Carl Leggo's (2010) writing and teaching, this project emphasises personal experiences as a source of inspiration. According to Leggo, "lifewriting and poetic inquiry are ways of living in the world" (Leggo, 2010, p. 68). Lifewriting is an innovative and critical inquiry that uses various media to explore personal experiences and stories (Leggo, 2000). He defines lifewriting as "a way of knowing and being that is grounded in the stories of our lives" (p. 9). As an a/r/tographer, through artmaking and lifewriting, specifically *poetic* writing, I reflect on my liminal experiences; I am concerned with "how learning is embodied, relational, and situated" (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 1229) in the context of living in precarious conditions. My a/r/tographical inquiry expands on the emergence of agency and overcoming the sense of alienation and the condition of "stuckness" (Cangia, 2017; 2021). Alongside the a/r/tographical approach and through attention to memory, identity, autobiography, reflection, meditation, and storytelling, I explore my lived experiences in both evocative and provocative ways (Irwin, 2003). These methodologies generate pedagogical sites to "see possibilities and recognize limitations" (Irwin, 2003, p. 65). I use a/r/tographical methodology "to make meaning, to change the meaning, and to understand the meaning" that is hidden behind the uncertainty of difficult situations (Springgay et al, 2005, p. 904). This methodology assists me in looking at the precariousness of my situation with a critical viewpoint, continually engaging in the process of questioning and searching for new possibilities, even in uncertain situations. It is worth mentioning that I mostly resonate with early approaches to a/r/tography as it newly emerged and detached itself from art based research in early 2000s.

Prelude

Liminality, Mobility, and Immobility

*I think about the distance between
you
and me
us.*

*Here
there
is the absence of my body,
Among the crowds,
On the lanes, roads, and those towering trees along the roads
What would occupy and sense the void of the body in space?*

Figure 1

Author, 2021, Residue, ink on the rock, Copyright by author.



In the heart of Iran, it all began with Mahsa/Jina Amini, a young Kurdish woman whose life was cut short by the morality police, enforcers of the mandatory dress code for women. Her death sparked a wave of protests in more than ninety cities across the country, and many cities across the globe where people demanded freedom. Despite the government's efforts to control communication by limiting internet access, videos from Iran still made it online. In this section, I share my experience of watching these events unfold from afar, feeling powerless as I could only observe through my smartphone. Being far away, I felt helpless, just witnessing without being able to take action, yet deeply affected by what was happening there.

*The people demand their rights
 Protested in capitals fearlessly
 The injustice was met with tear gas, bullets, arrests, and violence
 Hundreds of thousands were wounded in the fray*

*Children lie lifeless on the ground
 victims of the bullets sound
 Their mothers' screams, their dads' arrests
 The police deny.*

*The cemetery becomes a jail,
The University becomes a cage
The jail is filled with guiltless souls.*

I obsessively checked social media to stay informed about what was happening. My phone became a teleport that transported me to the center of the events. What I received were bits and pieces of recordings, sometimes a single image or a video that lasted less than nine seconds, without any beginning or end. The continuous stream of videos and images sometimes completed the puzzle of fragmented stories or one could see the incidents that being narrated from different perspectives, but always in pieces. These imageries were glimpses of hope, shards of despair, and often sharp splinters of horror.

*The pixels held secrets,
whispered truths,
and I, a distant witness, clung to their edges,
a mosaic of longing, fear, and wonder; the world unfolded in fragments.*

Every time I checked my phone, I felt disoriented among all the shaky, blurry footage that people posted on their pages. I was curious to find out the location of the sources that I received the images from because it helped me imagine myself in the scene. My phone acted as a bridge, a secret road that transferred me there, right in the middle of the events. I shouted, ran, cried, and felt the pain, but I knew my physical body was still, cold, and immobile right here, miles and miles away from the sites. My body never transferred through the device; it was on the couch, frozen, unable to move, and miserably observing everything.

*In this liminal space,
I existed twice: here and there and nowhere at all. Am I able to cross the threshold?*

I followed the photos wherever they took me, sometimes willingly, at other times forcibly, through different sites, places, and locations. I wandered between here and there, passing through fragmented footage and entering different sites of events, familiar and unfamiliar places where I have never been in person, such as small cities on the west side of Iran like Zahedan, Sanandaj, and Izeh. In my imagination, my digital body appeared and disappeared in many places. Once, I walked on the street among people, and then I suddenly transported in a car, observing everything from a window. Another time, I found myself on the roof of a building screaming “Zan, Zendegi, Azadi” (Women, Life, Freedom) which is one of the primary slogans of the uprising. I lived through all these blurry, fragmented images and inhabited many bodies as I scrolled down on my device. My body and my mind were lost among all these virtual and physical spaces.

*Blurred, and fragmented,
I inhabited countless skins,
lost in the liminal spaces, where pixels held secrets,*

and my soul wandered, unanchored, yet alive.

The distance was real; it seemed I was living between the physical and digital sites. In that situation, social media is activated by posting and reposting videos, photos, and hashtags. That space becomes a transitional space that is activated by action and the reaction of people inside and outside of Iran.

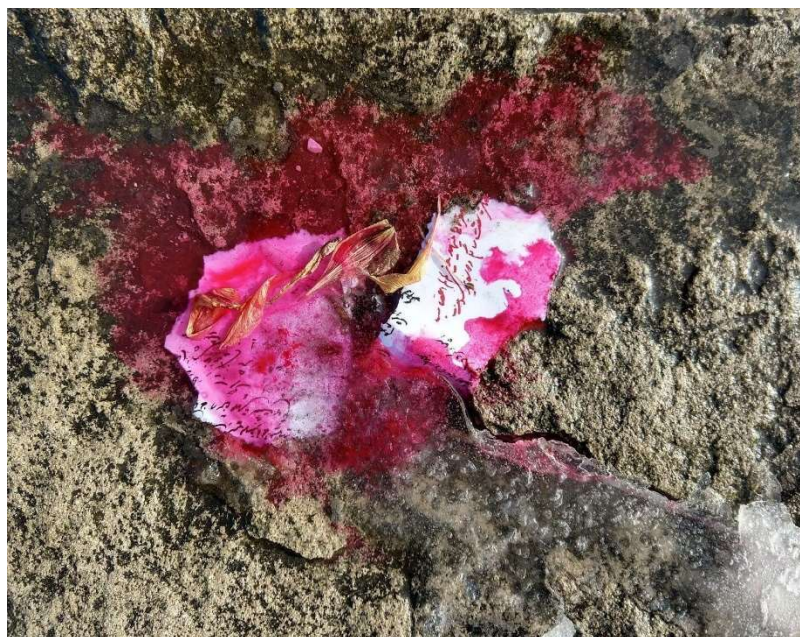
*I walk to calm down
 C a l m d o w n
 But
 I fall down and
 circle around the dawn
 My eyes were open when I blinked
 I saw
 Colors dancing before my eyes,
 Red
 Red.....
 orange.....yellow,
 Red,
 Red
 Red..... red.....red..... Colors mingle with each other.*

“I am not here....I am not there.....”

*My absent body pushed my present mind
 I lingered right between the two and blended
 Sink
 and fade.....*

Figure 2

Author, 2021, Residue, ink, and screen print on paper installed on the rock.



This painful experience creates a feeling of stuckness and immobility, which prevents me from acting upon anything. The collective trauma becomes the lived experience of my body. Psychological trauma is an emotional response to a distressing event or series of events that can harm a person's sense of what is real, meaningful, and valuable (See Aydin 2017). According to Aydin (2017), "If the trauma is not sufficiently banished, the gap between the reality of the carnage and previously held assumptions about self, others, and the world become unbridgeable" (p. 129), and this mental state can persist for a long time and affect the mental health of individuals. The vital coping strategy of people who are impacted by trauma disrupts the continuity of their growth and damages their beliefs and hopes.

*I'm stuck in a limbo of uncertainty.
Witnessing the horrors of violence
Motionless, still...
In the silence, echoes of cries,
A symphony of chaos...
I remain motionless, frozen,
a distant observer.*

I was wondering how and when I will be able to function. I read, here and there, about the responsibility of artists to visually respond to what was happening at the time. But it was not possible. I was stuck. I could not write or make anything about this event. Ghassan Hage (2009) writes about the conditions that could lead to physical or metaphorical stuckness. He explains how stuckness could occur in different contexts and he highlights the precarious life of dislocated people with a lack of social mobility that causes a feeling of stuckness (p. 99). The condition of stuckness results in “physical and existential immobility” (p. 98), “that is, the feeling life is going nowhere” (Cagnia, 2020, p.700). This quote kept recurring in my mind: “Life is going nowhere....”

*I can't move, can't make a sound.
my heart pounding.
I am frozen in time,*

Waiting...

Being disoriented, physically and psychologically, brings about anxiety, frustrations, and feelings of stuckness. It is difficult to envision the future when one feels trapped by brutality, social and political corruption, and injustice. It feels like “living in the limbo of an endless present and the prolonged wait” (Cangia, 2021, p. 699). Stuckness is a liminal condition, a tension that feels like being ‘caught suspended’ in the “limbo of an in-between phase of transition” (Stenner et al., 2017, p. 142).

Life in limbo

Between memory and reality

spaces of thoughts

places of living

the past and present

now and then.

S u s p e n d e d

The concept of liminality was offered by French sociologist Arnold Van Gennep in 1909 and regenerated in 1963 by his English follower Victor Turner, a cultural anthropologist. Arnold Van Gennep (1873-1925) published his book *Rites of Passage* in 1909, stressing the importance of transitions in many societies and introducing the concept of liminality for the middle stages of ritual passages (transition rite), the period between the end of the pre-ritual (rites of incorporation) and the beginning of the post-ritual state (rites of separation) (Van Gennep, 1961; Thomassen, 2015). By categorizing and defining rites of passage into three subcategories, he identified transitional phases as patterns and stressed the importance of understanding these conditions. Victor Turner emphasizes referring to the rites of passage as a key aspect in understanding the structure of human experience in the transitional stages of life. He encountered Van Gennep's book while he was experiencing a threshold waiting for his US visa, which was delayed because of his

refusal to enter armed military service during World War II (Thomassen, 2015, p. 44). Turner's lived experience of suspension caused him to recognize these transitional stages as thresholds not just in a tribal context. Later in his scholarship he expands it to nontribal or "modern" societies (Thomassen, 2015, p. 46). He interpreted the rituals of the Ndembu tribe, a Bantu ethnic group inhabiting the northwestern region of Zambia, that hold deep cultural and spiritual significance of the threshold as moments of creativity. Turner's analysis showed that his viewpoints towards the ritual went beyond just reflecting the social order during transitions. For Turner, "liminality served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods but also to understand the human reaction [experience] to liminal experiences as they shape personality, [...] agency, and binding thoughts to experience" (Thomassen, 2015, p. 42).

*To act is
to think, to take action, to move.
To be active is to live and thrive
To do is to create and achieve
To make is to shape, transform, experience, explore,
and become animated.....*

Turner (1977a) refers to liminality as "experimentation and inventiveness" or as "a play of ideas, words, symbols, and metaphors" (p.33). Alexander (1991) writes that for Turner, "liminality is a realm of pure possibility [or] potentiality" (p. 33).

*Limbo is a state of being
where nothing is certain or clear
a place of suspension and waiting
between two worlds that might be near
but not quite within reach or sight
A limbo of words and worlds
where silence and doubt are the norms
and hope is fleeting.*

The connection between liminality and mobility in its primary stages, as Nelson Graburn & Maria Gravari-Barbas (2012) argues, could be understood by comparing the structure of the movement to the everyday ritual journey of our life.

Life is a succession of events marked by changes in state. It is both cyclical, in that the same time marking events occur day after day, year after year, and it is progressive or linear in that we pass through life a series of changes in status, each of which is marked by a different (though similar) rite of passage (p. 23).

Paul Stenner (2017) discusses that “liminal experiences are experiences that happen during occasions of significant transition, passage or disruption” (p. 14). He asserts that “we experience liminality when the forms of the process (socio-psycho-organic-physical) that usually sustain, enable and compose our lives are, for some reason, disrupted, interrupted, transformed or suspended” (p. 14).

*I live still, quiet, frozen, shocked, and immobile.
In the midst of the blurry, shifting images and videos, full of action, reaction,
resistance, courage, blood, tortures, death, execution, and arrests,
I just stared at the screen of my phone, scrolling through dreadful images, videos,
sounds, and voices watched events from a distance, and experienced it through the screen
of my phone; the images were repeated from different angles by multiple people.
All images, scattered videos, mixed together in my head.
They surround me even when I close my eyes,
in my walks, in my classes, in my meetings...
all the images and the pain were with me, heavier than all the objects that I carried.*

The act of moving in physical space is linked to social, political, and geographical components that can block, interrupt, or slow down.

*Suspended between here and there,
Stuck in place
Immobile,
Frozen
Losing imagination.*

The brutal crackdowns, excessive police violence, the use of lethal weapons, and executions of Iranian protestors made it hard for me to remain hopeful. These brutalities eroded my imagination and cast doubt on the meaning of hope, freedom, and mobility. It shattered my thinking and challenged my faith in human action. The only thing I could do was watch everything from social media helplessly as my dreams of a better future were slipping away.

*Bound by ropes and chains
The mind, however, flies and roams freely
across the lands and seas and skies.*

Gestures of Hope

*The endless suffering, the injustice, and the inequality
The formless
The unspoken words
The unheard isolated sound*

*Transmitted, evolved, and revolved
 Weaved to form a strong message,
 “Women, Life, Freedom”
 It crossed over the borders
 walked out of the frame by breaking the borders
 it turned into an action
 and became a face of hope.*

The Women, Life, Freedom movement ebbs and flows, as a moment of despair and hope toward freedom. Hope had never been so concrete, and fear became alien to people on the streets, at schools, and in every corner that freedom echoed. It reminded me of what German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1984) once wrote: “knowing concrete hope subjectively breaks most powerfully into fear, objectively leads most efficiently towards the radical termination of the contents of fear” (p.5).

After six months from the first day of the Women, Life, Freedom protest in Iran and the death of Mahsa/Jina Amini, I was finally able to reflect on my feelings. During the uprising in Iran, performative actions, such as the liberating act of women walking on the streets without a compulsory hijab, creative art objects installed in transitional urban spaces, graffiti and slogans on the street walls, all marked the public space and manifested the resistance of the people against the oppression. From these actions in opposition to political and economic forces, a strong form of solidarity emerged inside and outside of the country through which a new sense of “the people” reconstructed, that were interdependent, precarious, and persistent (Butler, 2015, p. 72). Protestors’ collective actions inspired hope among many Iranians, both within the country and in the diaspora. This showed that meaningful change was possible, and that a more just and equitable society could be realized.

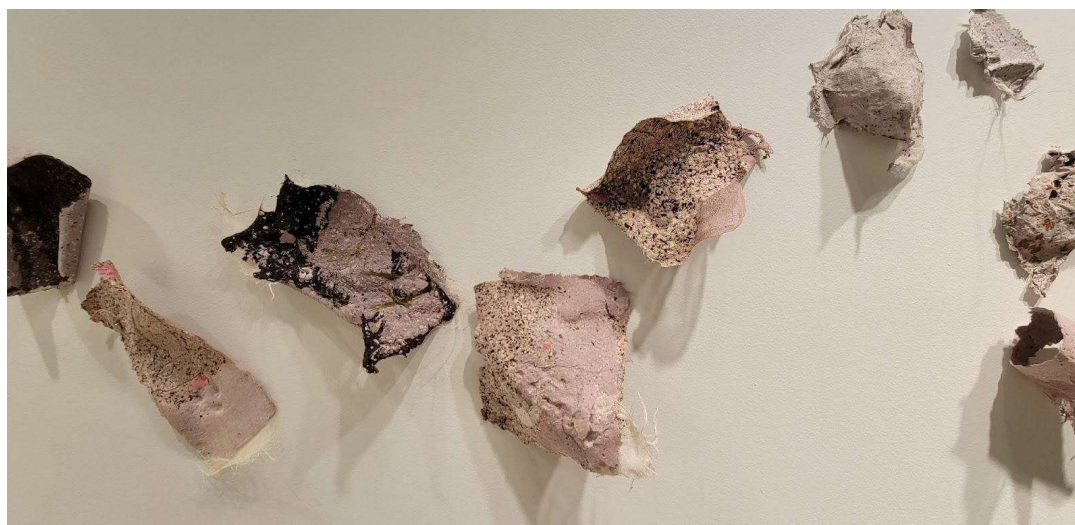
Fascinated with how the movement concretized hope for a large segment of the Iranian society and diaspora, I developed an installation that engages with hope and freedom in the sensory presence, material manifestations, as well as inventive potential. The installation includes sculptural organic shapes, like fragmented bodies, that emerge from the floor and curve upwards, creating a fluid path that transcends toward the sky. In order to notice the details and characters on each paper sculpture, one had to get close to it and take some time to dwell on the material presence. The paper sculpture included embossments that symbolized bruises and wounds of protestors. These pieces also held the laces and skin of the arbutus tree along with fragmented Farsi and English letters and words. These words and letters are the remnants of a healing practice that I developed while witnessing the uprising from abroad. I incorporated the combinations of the alphabet used in Omid word (hope) on paper. The generated new terms sometimes were accidental extension of the original terms, but more importantly, repeating, disassembling, and reassembling as letters that organically engaged with the pulp paper. I practiced this process and I decided to use the piles of outcomes as a pulp for this project.

The shredded paper used in the sculptures is more than just a material; it's a canvas for the word "Omid." This practice aligns with the concept of active forgetting, a process that discards certain concepts to reconstruct them anew. It became an exercise in rebuilding words that had been emptied of content due to societal and governmental cruelty. By deconstructing and then reconstructing these words, I symbolically hope to recover the meaning.

The process of papermaking is a journey in itself. It involves shredding the papers, soaking them, disassembling them, and creating new pulp. Paper pulp is a material that is made out of different shredded fibres or recycled papers that have been soaked in water which result in a pasty substance that the papermaker uses for creating new papers. I added the skin of the arbutus tree to my pulp, a symbolic gesture that holds personal meaning for me. In the first few days of living in Vancouver, I encountered a tree in the verge of shedding skin on one of my walks. I was amazed by the liminal stage of this tree. The Arbutus tree has symbolic and formal significance. It is a broadleaf evergreen tree that grows up to 30 meters tall and usually has an irregularly rounded crown and a crooked or leaning trunk. There is a thin, smooth, reddish-brown bark that peels in thin flakes or strips to reveal younger, smoother, greenish-to-cinnamon-red bark underneath. This tree is always in a state of transition. Its trunk, body, and skin constantly changing from old to new. The Arbutus tree contains the eczema-like peel of reddish-brown bark around its body which symbolizes an ability to grow in the midst of suffering or in a precarious state. When the tree's old skin is peeling off, a new one is born. It exists in the boundary of life and death, a liminal space that fascinates me. It reflects the nature of living things as if we are all in limbo. Using arbutus skin, for me, represents the strength of the innocent victims who lost their lives fighting against inequality and injustice. The process of making this body of work assisted me in envisioning the ways in which hope, and freedom could be shaped and reshaped while simultaneously engaging imagination and feelings.

Figure 3

Author, 2023, The Gesture of Hope, recycle paper, the skin of arbutus tree, textile.



*A Sunday evening
I lingered in the silence of the studio
Where shreds of scrap paper lay on the table
The paper held the fragments of my mind
that spilled in ink when I was weary, worried,
Caught between two worlds. Here and there
I remember it,
I was lost, still, motionless, frozen
hopeless
I see no glimpse of light
Is this despair I feel?
What does it signify?
The words have lost their meaning,
Like hollow shells, they lie,
Devoid of any sense.*

*Hope..... less
Hope Less
Omeed
Om..... meed*

Omeed, hope, a word in two languages

*I traced their curves and lines, their dots and dashes
I wrote them big and small, I made them fill the page
What does it mean to me, this word of light and shade?*

OMEED

o/m/e/e/d

Om.....eeeeeeeeee.....ddddddddd

Hope

H/O/P/E

I

*wrotewrotewrotewrotewrotewrotehopehopehopehopehopehopehopeomeedomedom
eed*

*I rip the paper, into squares.
the words, dismantled, broken, and transform into pieces*

The voiceless, the void...

*I pour the water on the torn paper pieces
They become firm, dancing with the waves, moving.
I wonder,
They find a new shape, a new rhythm, a new life
Will they vanish in the tide? Or begin anew?*

*I put my hand on the bucket
In my fingers, the words and letters sit,
It said:
"Possibilities"*

Figure 4

Author, 2023, The Gesture of Hope, recycled paper, the skin of arbutus tree.



Figure 5

Author, 2023, The Gesture of Hope, recycled paper, the skin of arbutus tree.



Spinning Story

*And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
.....
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying.
(Eliot, 1934, Retrieved from *Releasing the Imagination*, Greene, 2000 p. 5)*

My shoulders were heavy with pain and sorrow as I walked out of the house. Images of women and men in the streets, with their fists raised, fighting against dictatorship and injustice, and screaming their demands, while escaping, running, and fighting, all accompanied me outside of the door. As I walked outside, I felt a gentle breeze caressing my cheeks and face; I breathed in, then closed the door and breathed out; for a second, I felt empty and light-headed. I lost my balance, but quickly grabbed the door handle and stood straight. I needed to hurry, I had to go to a class. I felt heavy, the sun was shining on my face; I closed my eyes for a second and saw people

in the street screaming their demands, running, and fighting. My phone alarm snoozed, I opened my eyes and found myself right in front of the door. I have to leave; I am going to be late.

It was a sunny day in Vancouver. From the moment I left the house until I reached the school, my mind was there. In Iran, right in the street.

Before stepping into the classroom on that day, I attempted to clear my mind of the thoughts and worries that hung over me. As a student and a teaching assistant in the class, I had to be lively and optimistic. I needed to gather all my energy and be present in the moment with the students. I recall that my body and mind were scattered everywhere. I felt pieces of my body slobbering, shifting, limping across the space.

This is a memory that I recall from one of my precarious life experiences. According to Harvey (2002), the bereaved person can learn to move from being overwhelmed by grief to find a way to cope with it, to carry it along as a constant reminder that enriches our lives in many ways and helps us to live with loss and through it. Nietzsche (1967) discusses that our mind could actively forget negative memories. Active forgetfulness, as Aydin (2017) interprets from Nietzsche, “is the ability to suppress negative and traumatic memories, which is a necessary condition for a culture to uphold and develop itself further, [...] by shutting down the doors and windows of consciousness for a while so the individual is not bothered by the noise of and battle with past demons. It is a kind of defence mechanism that blocks harmful thoughts, enables a positive spirit, and makes a place for the new” (Aydin, 2017, p. 130).

I recall *active forgetfulness* as I entered the class and wondered if I would be able to practice it. Then, I walked in with all the complicated struggles and thoughts in my mind.

Figure 6

Dyed natural wool, 2023, photo by the author.

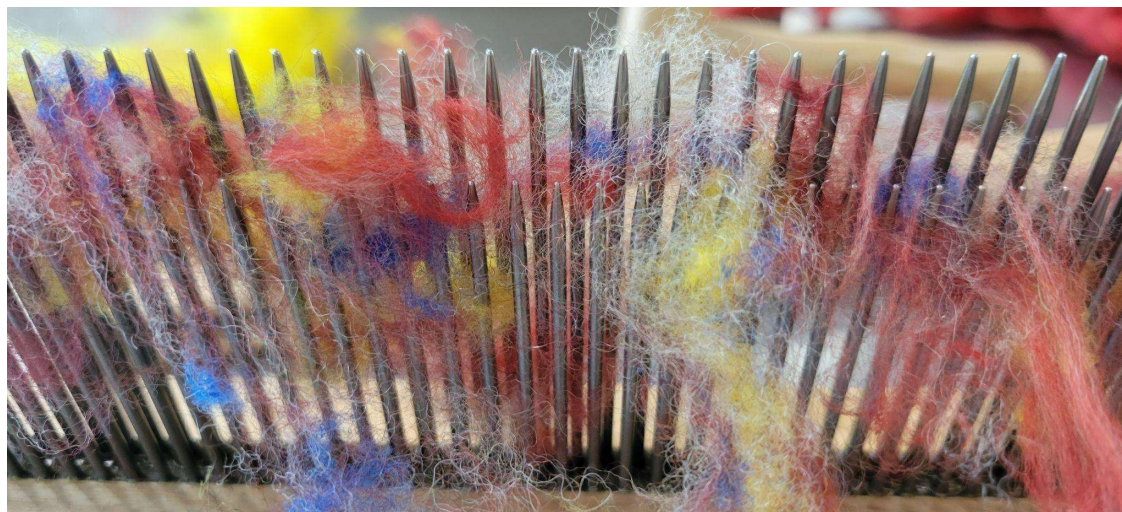


Figure 7

Left: *Author feeling the wool, 2023, dyed natural wool, photo by author.*

Figure 8

Right: *Author feeling the wool, 2023, natural wool, photo by author.*



Different types of wool were presented to the students that day. Everyone had the opportunity to touch and feel the fibers. I took a piece of wool, which was dyed fluffy soft, and airy. The hairs moved in the air as I moved my palm, very light and delicate. In order to protect them from flying in the air, I had to close my fists and hold my fingers close to each other. In the class that day, we learned how to spin wool on a spinning wheel.

The process of spinning and forming wool was very challenging, requiring precise movement of the fingers and hand. There is a lot of patience and persistence involved in this process. The transformation of the wool into thread has a beginning and an end, but the outcome depends on a variety of factors. For instance, the hand movements and the pressure on the wool, the rhythm of the foot on the spinning wheel pedal, and the speed of the hand all affected the quality of the threads. These factors and processes shaped the final product, something new and informative.

There were many unexpected events along the way. Spinning the wool was not just a way to create yarn but also a way to connect with my inner self. As I worked the wool between my fingers, I discovered a deep connection with my innermost thoughts and emotions. The rhythm of the spinning wheel became a meditation, allowing me to quiet my mind and reflect on the intricacies of my life. With each twist and turn of the wool, I saw my own experiences mirrored in its fibers, the challenges I've overcome, and the unexpected twists and turns that life has thrown my way. I spun the wool to bring together my scattered, fragile, restless memories and experiences and to understand their shapeless forms. The circular motion of spinning was like a constant dialogue, layering, weaving, and reinterpreting all the events, traumas, past and present. Through spinning wool, something powerful emerged: It was through the process of trial and error that I realized that the mistakes and unexpected outcomes were quite rewarding. Spinning taught me to let go of my frustrations and to have a sense of control and to follow the movement of my body. This gave me more space to experiment and explore my creativity. I embraced the unexpected outcomes and turned them into opportunities. In this way, creativity and imagination are cultivated in the face of uncertainty. I recall Shaun McNiff's (1998) writing that suggests trusting the process, trying and stepping into the unknown, and maybe staying in uncertainty for a while until something new emerges (see also de Cosson, 2004). Many times, I tried spinning the wool and redoing it from the beginning. It took me some time to feel the wool and move my fingers according to its pattern, then smooth it out and hold it between my fingers in a way not to break it or give it away. I needed to hold it just enough in a way in which the fiber and my hand became aligned with each other and began to correspond and adjust to each other's movements. When the movements align, the wool effortlessly shapes and turns around the wheel and finds its new shape, becoming a thread. As I moved my hand and watched the wool transforming into a fragile thread, I reflected on how this act of creating something out of nothing required me to be calm and respectful of the material. This is what I learned from working with wool. My interaction with the material created a pedagogical and contemplative place in which I learned to slow down and get engaged with the movement and rhythm of my body and the material. The process of transformation of the wool to thread on the wheel by the movement of my hand weaved in my mind and travelled through all the pain and uncertainty of my precarious life at that moment. The simple act of creating something with my hands gave me a sense of hope and purpose. Ingold (2011) wrote about the correspondence between the material and the hand; he argued how "one makes through thinking and [...] thinks through making" (p. 6). He believes knowledge grows through the process of making rather than the product itself. By working with wool and interacting with the material, I learned to cultivate patience in the face of uncertain situations and to embrace my vulnerability to gain a deeper understanding of how making by hand can help me heal.

Closing Reflection

As inspired by A/r/tography (Irwin et al., 2018), my guiding methodology emphasises the intricate interplay of language, images, materials, situations, space, and time, which made this paper to be structured as if being in a state of in-between, shifting between methods of poetic writing, theoretical texts, and images. This way of writing aims to encourage new modes of

interaction with the text, focusing on the fertile spaces of the in-between where the meaning is conjured, negotiated and contested.

This paper shows the interplay of artmaking and meaning making. It investigates the ways in which the process of artmaking, engaging with material, and tactility constitute a creative pedagogical platform. It explores and addresses the diasporic trauma of the disembodied experience of observing violence in the country of origin. Participating and engaging in movements for justice through social media could create conditions of vicarious disengagement, leading to the feeling of disempowerment. Reflecting on my own experience of the Women, Life, Freedom uprising in Iran, I explore the ways in which artmaking and engaging with materials fosters a sense of agency, connection, and belonging in the face of disempowerment and alienation. Artmaking becomes a process of healing and creates a space that stirs my imagination and suggests how to cope with emotional distress. Papermaking and textile art have become practices that resonate with me due to their tangible and process-based qualities, offering paths for transforming, reclaiming, and restoring materials as a means of expressing the anxiety and unpredictability inherent in liminal conditions. In the twist and turn of yarn, I find comfort, the wool representing the threads of memory, the turn became the act of adaptation. These materials turn into pathways for my autobiographical story, an interplay of agency, structure, transformation, and resilience. Each step involved in the process of making paper or spinning yarn embodies perseverance, offering an opening for change. I learn to cultivate attentiveness to the material itself, the passage of time, and the surrounding space. As I engage in the papermaking process, I find myself accompanied by patience, observing the gradual metamorphosis of the materials. For instance, in my project titled *Hope*, I experimented with recycled papers and the bark of the arbutus tree; exploring how wet pulp would shape and fold as it air-dried. Through this practice, I witnessed the profound impact of time on materials, the unpredictable nature of their forms, and the organic transformation of wet pulp into distinct shapes. Moments of waiting became integral to my work. For example, waiting for the wet paper pulp to conform to the molds, observing its changes patiently while it gets dried, and embracing the spontaneous forms. In these moments, I learn about the process of cause and effect, the importance of both having patience and agency as an artist, and recognize that while I could guide the process, the unpredictability of the materials open up a relational space that stimulate my action. Observing material interactions resonates with Tim Ingold's (2011) discussion about the material agency that "is processual and relational" (p. 1). As I witness the interactions of pulp and water with their environment, I draw parallels to my experiences as an immigrant observing events from a distance. Just as I patiently await the transformation of materials in my artwork, I navigate life's uncertainties, finding solace in the gradual unfolding of events and the organic evolution of myself in uncertain conditions.

The insights presented in this paper hold significant value for both educators and students. For educators, these findings offer a blueprint for integrating artmaking into pedagogical practices, enabling students to actively engage with the material world, bear witness to its transformations, and cultivate their capacity for change. By incorporating creative engagement with materials such as papermaking and fiber art into their pedagogy, educators can create a meaningful environment for students to interact with the material world and experience its transformative effects, leading to increased participation, empowerment, and agency. This process involves more than

just alleviating anxiety; it is an active form of learning that fosters personal growth and development. In addition, the findings can empower individuals facing challenging circumstances to harness the therapeutic potential of artmaking, fostering growth through the creative process.

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