PSYCHOSOCIAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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'THE WORD REMAINS' [1]

War Diaries in Ruptured Time and Space

Magda Schmukalla

Me and my partner are in our kitchen, in our home in London. Our two children are upstairs in their room, watching their usual kids' series. I am preparing the batter for Polish pancakes, which I loved so much as a child, when suddenly we hear a high-pitched and extremely loud tone coming from my phone. For what feels like a long and intense second, I am disturbed and intuitively prepared for some extreme situation. But then a thought breaks through and draws me back to the reality of my Sunday afternoon: this siren is the test-alert about which I read in the papers this morning and about which people spoke on the market, when I bought apples for the pancakes. It is a test, a trial. It is not real![2]

I am relieved. I continue whisking the batter. My partner and I laugh nervously to thaw our bodies which froze for the second when the siren pierced through our everyday. It had freaked us out. While not linked to a real threat it still had brought into our life a material reminder of the possibility that an emergency or rupture could any time brutally change our life from one moment to another; disrupt our life to an extent that would go beyond a certain level of comprehension.

Since the 24th of February 2022, people in the whole of Ukraine have been living with the reality of air alerts. The piercing sound which announces potential or actual catastrophic emergencies has itself become part of the everyday. What for me felt and feels like the unimaginable exception, too extreme to be true, in Ukraine has become normality where bodies and minds live in a state of constant yet not always conscious alert. *Diaries of War and Life* documents the beginning of this shift towards the ordinariness of exceptions. The diaries are a compound archive of experiences, events and effects that characterised the first weeks of the full-scale war in Ukraine.

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They contain descriptions of the shock, of loss, of fright, depression but also describe love, longing, and the importance of quotidian joy. Each of these descriptions, however, is marked by the presence and effects of a rupture or a catastrophic shift, the before and after the war.

This essay aims at acknowledging and tracing this experience of rupture through the words and word-arrangements that were captured in the diaries. More specifically, it aims to understand how the diaries trace the rupture that a war has torn into both material and psychic structures, which shaped everyday life in Ukraine before the war. In the last year, we have become used to seeing the destruction caused by the war through images of destroyed bodies or buildings, but what is less obvious is how a war destroys psychic arrangements. By showing how the ruination of external and cultural environments is deeply intertwined with internal experiences of collapse, this essay aims at better understanding the damage caused by a war to psychosocial forms of subjecthood, i.e. a form of subjecthood and experience which considers psychic and social-material processes as mutually constitutive and dialectically intertwined (Frosh, 2014; Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). It does so by tracing how a war destroys material and culturally symbolic structures that are necessary for experiencing life through coherent and shared parameters of time and space as well as by constructing an intersection between material-feminist understandings of physical void and a psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious to theorise the non-temporal locus towards which being is catapulted when material and psychic structures are in ruins.

In times of war a society, I argue, slips towards the realm of unconscious being, which is a form of non-being that accumulates in the margins or cracks of what is consciously acknowledged as liveable and grievable life (Butler, 2016). The diaries, however, also show that such a rupture in psychosocial subjecthood does not automatically lead to chaos or despair, but rather to alternative arrangements of words and psychosocial matter, and with this to alternative arrangements of a collective subject. I call these alternative arrangements 'word remains' and attribute to them the radical creativity and criticality of feminine subjectivity.

Disrupted Time

'Last night I had my first panic attack in 7 days', writes Olha K. one week after the full-scale war broke out in Ukraine (March 2, p. 44). Like documented in many other diaries, she describes how the emotional response to the military attack arrived with a delay, as if the body needed more or a different kind of time to acknowledge a radical shift or rupture that had just taken place. In her description of the panic attack, she highlights the experience of losing a sense of time and orientation:

> I realized that my memory erased all my movements from the previous week. i realized that I have been sleeping not in my apartment for 6 days now. why that? right, I had a plan to move from pokhyla's place to virmenska, to move out on February, 24, to stay there for a month, while vlad stays in portugal. where are the keys to the virmenska's place? who's in there now? i don't know. i gave the keys to ira kovalchuk, she hosted someone there. what else have I forgotten? how did it all even start? what plans did I have for the day? for the week? for next year? (Olha K., March 2)

Everyday life is usually configured of a multitude of practices and encounters each of which is in some relation to others. Commonly, we perceive the events of everyday life as either preceding or following or overlapping others, with this perception allowing for the experience and memory of a life that develops *in* time. Such flow of time places the presence between experiences of old and new, between past and future, and between young and old, experiences which create a sense of life as a movement. At times, however, this experience of a continuous flow is disrupted and time suspended, leading to, as Lisa Baraitser demonstrates, very different felt experiences of time—of 'time *not passing*', of time pooling or slowing down without end (Baraitser, 2017, p. 2).[3]

Diaries of War and Life documents how the full-scale war in Ukraine initiated such a suspension in time. While a before and after the beginning of the war can for many war chroniclers still be distinguished, the time of the 'after' turns into a blurred or fragmented mass in which daily life is no longer structured around the familiar flow of clock time, or of dates in the calendar and arrangements between friends, families, or institutions, but predominantly by irrupting news about survival or death of individuals and the rupturing sound of air alerts. Ihor K., whose diary records 79 air alarms in 55 diary entries, writes:

> Air alarm 2:19–7:41 AM
>
> The father of one of my students was killed at the training ground in Novoyavorivsk.
>
> Mykola is alive. At the time of the bombing, he was already in another place. (…)
>
> Alarm 7:55–8:41 AM. (March 14, p. 70)

While recurring patterns of micro-practices such as shopping, meeting friends, working, studying, taking a shower, or cooking usually fill days with

meaning and form patterns around which a life as movement can be experienced, a war attacks any form of routinised arrangement or continuum. In doing so a war not only destroys bodies and buildings but also a sense of self and the self's positioning in time. It leaves a rupture in chronological time and plunges people into a threshold where time does not evolve in familiar periods and forms but feels unpredictable and unmemorable, leaving a gap at the centre of the self:

> I have been in a real mourning for the future, which will definitely never be the way I imagined [...] and for the past too, which will never be the way it seemed to go on forever. After all, they just shot my past and future down. And now I have to live with this emptiness in my chest. I have to live with this hole, through which the wind sings and even rain drops; sometimes crumbs of food and other trash fall there, but nothing can fill it anymore because the loss is too vast. It has hit me through. (Anastasiia I., March 22, p. 234)

What stands out in Anastasiia I.'s description of her experience of mourning is the materiality of an embodied gap that comes to the fore when chronological time as a continuity of past and future is destroyed. This means that chronological time is not only a cultural construct which shapes external, social matters but a structured entity or object which fills up the subject from within. When this entity or arrangement of chronological time, which is created and enacted through routinised actions and organised around shared and internalised calendars and clocks, is lost, as in the case of war, the subject is left with the experience of a hollowing out, an experience of unbecoming, in which the impression of being filled and solid is replaced by loss and the permeability of a void. Yet, what Anastasiia I.'s image also shows is that this void is not simply nothingness or absence but another space or locality which is ruled by unusual and uncanny sensations. While experienced as hollow it is not empty or static. Flows of air and matter pass through it yet seemingly nothing of meaning or durability can accumulate in the space that opens when time is shot down. Only crumbs of food and other trash fall there.

In actually or potentially attacking residential buildings, in displacing and separating families, and creating environments in which planning ahead or linking to previous actions or routines is made increasingly difficult (destruction of time) a war does not only destroy flesh and physical matter, but it also destroys the internal symbolic edifice of chronological time which in modern societies is a crucial paradigm for meaning making practices. But when destroying the meaning that is formed and held together by known pasts and futures the rupture caused by the war also reveals meaning's other, namely an experienced void or vacuum, which is

life in its permeable and unpredictable form. A rupture in common signifying chains and practices makes this bare materialisation of life's other experienceable. It initiates felt encounters with life's energy prior to or beyond any structuring routines and contexts. Psychoanalytically speaking, it triggers encounters with unconscious or foreclosed formations of what is usually experienced as reality, moving subjects towards a so-called 'non-temporal locus', the unconscious, which according to Lacan is 'another locality, another space, another scene, the between perception and consciousness' (Lacan, 1998, p. 56).

Continuity and consistency within the perception-consciousness system means that what is perceived is experienced as in line with a systematically arranged experience of reality. A rupture in this system or symbolic contract, however, does not simply cause a gap in experience and knowledge of reality but brings to the fore what is opposite to what is perceivable, grievable and conscious, namely an unconscious non-temporal place—the consistently excluded. A place that is not structured according to the laws of chronological time or geographical space but is out of joint and yet sits at the centre of a person's embodied presence. A place where time pools or loops without rim, or as Ruta R. writes in her diary: 'Today it's been a month since the war began. A month has passed but February 25th hasn't yet come to me. Time has become too lengthy in the most awful way possible. Every day I've been living for a year, but February 25th isn't coming closer' (March 24, p. 74).

Disrupted Space

Like in the case of ordered and chronological time, a sense of ordered space makes individuals feel safe and alive (Ivinson & Renold, 2013, p. 371). Buildings and public places of a city are tied up with people's identities and images of themselves and others, but also with their most intimate feelings. The city space materialises cultural imaginations of a society's past and future, but it also forms an extended container with symbols and sites that remind a person or group of different events or phases in their life. Attacks on residential buildings and public sites during a war should therefore, as Robert Bevan argues, not be seen as collateral damage but as a strategic element of the violence used to weaken and, in some cases, systematically destroy a society, which usually finds it form and language in shared routines, laws and public infrastructures (Bevan, 2007).

The city space is thus not simply built of stone and mortar but also formed of and entangled with the language, signifying chains and affects that shape people's internal, psychic worlds and experiences. As such semiotic and aesthetic arrangement or text (Gottdiener & Logopoulos, 1986), the city is an extension of internal configurations of social subjecthood and embodied

self. Its physical and aesthetic intactness and consistency are tightly interwoven with intact and consistent maps of a person's self while attacks on such external spaces coincide with traumatic ruptures in a culturally shaped subjectivity, potentially leading to extreme experiences of internal fragmentation.

On day eight of the war, Kateryna L. writes in her diary: 'Cities moan … Their moans stab my heart. Cities howl like real living things. Cities are also hurt. They bleed in smoke. They fall apart when missiles hit them' (March 3, p. 82). When a country is under attack, psychic pain does not have a defined place. It does not sit in some people while not in others. It is not an event of the individual mind but takes place at the threshold between internal and external worlds. For it is a pain that is triggered by the violent transgression of known boundaries between subjects and objects, between cities and soul. The pain felt when living under consistent threat of potential or actual attacks is felt as a pain that spreads across cities and landscapes. Objects turn into living beings suffering and expressing a pain that cannot be held while an internal sense of subjecthood and liveliness is being hollowed out, vacated:

> I've got an impression that I lose some part of myself every day. How can we rebuild a place where 100 people died? How can you visit a 'rebuilt' theatre if hundreds of people were buried alive in its basement? I imagined our Frankivsk theatre in Mariupol theater's place. People are hiding under our theatre as well, many people. And this building is like a living being. It's like a close person. You walk there, pass this building all your life, sit on its stairs, enter it to see a play, look at it, love it, every day. How is it possible? I have no energy left. I just feel how it gets harder to breathe. I feel like a little powerless human. My legs and arms are weak and constantly trembling even when I think I am standing calmly. (Anastasiia B., March 17, p. 202)

In times of war, the destruction of houses triggers a disturbance of psychic edifices with the reverberations of a bomb being felt beyond the geographical and physical scope of the detonating force. A building is no longer experienced as an external structure that is simply there to hold and organise independent individual lives or events, but physically and symbolically entangled with the presence and survival of life itself. Being intact it turns into an important material and symbolic defence against looming attacks. Yet when collapsing, this container of bodies as well as memories and hopes, tears down internal symbolic structures and destabilises meaning-making chains from within. The systematic occupation and annihilation of houses and public sites hence expels a person not only physically but also psychically from a known or familiar place inside a cultural and

socio-historical context or continuum, catapulting them towards the state of a 'powerless human'—of a human who has been brutally ripped off their cultural shell and defences.

But again, those who survive military attacks physically experience this vacated material-cultural void, the internal/external scene of ruptured structures, not as simply empty but filled with rubble, corpses, and smoke, which are the physical and psychic relics of incomprehensible loss and violence and in excess of what can be acknowledged or processed—individually and collectively. The brutal destruction of buildings does therefore not only take away the presence of composed and stable entities and structures, it does not simply end societal being, but unleashes experienceable aspects of an incomprehensible and unbearable yet present other reality or matter. This other reality or void is, as the feminist-materialist theorist Karen Barad writes in relation to the quantum vacuum, not a nothingness or lack nor is it simply another entity or 'something', but a materially present and psychically experienceable state that is composed of the dynamism or energy of unstructured, trashed, or exploded psychosocial matter; which is matter prior or beyond any measurement or conscious symbolic, socio-cultural configuration—matter ripped off its holding context or frame. The psychosocial state unleashed through military attacks on familiar cultural environments hence frees the presence and experience of an 'unending dynamism' in which the psychic and social self is 'dispersed/diffracted through time and being' and with this in touch with its 'infinite alterity' (Barad, 2019, p. 531)—i.e. with a reality that is other to what a person and society is able to know if themselves—the unconscious, non-temporal locus, the consistently excluded.

Psychically, this means, I argue, that a society whose material and cultural edifices are under attack moves collectively closer towards the realm of the unconscious, which is the 'indefinable something' with no predictable or measureable compositions of time and space; a psychic site that is filled up with the matter of pre-ontic being and trauma and 'apprehended in its experience of rupture' only (Lacan, 1998, p. 56). A war, hence, initiates a shift from an ordered and recognisable, communicable form of being, psychically and socially *in* time and space, and towards an unmeasurable yet present void which usually is not seen or recognised in times when material or psychic amenities are not under attack.

Disintegration and Darkness

A subject who occupies a place in a spacetime continuum, a conscious subject, is always already caught up with its non-temporal, hollow, indefinable unconscious other. Yet, being brutally pushed towards the city's void or the psyche's unconsciousness unleashes painful experiences of loss

and displacement, a loss of orientation and identity. With the temporal and spatial structures of an external environment being under attack also the scaffolding of internal structures (built of laws, memories, relationalities, identities) disintegrates, reviving a felt knowledge of the psyche's archaic state, i.e. of an embodied state before, during and close to birth, when no clear distinction between inside and outside, between self and other can yet be distinguished (Schmukalla, 2022). Psychoanalytically speaking, this state is a state prior to any recognition of loss or lost object, prior to any felt or feared castration by an external authority, and prior to a symbolic order which would allow for conscious, rational communication. For the modern subject an encounter with this pre-ontic subjectivity leads to extreme abject sensations of physical and mental unbecoming (Kristeva, 1987) or sensations of mental chaos and disintegration. Yelyzaveta B. who fled with her sister and her sister's partner to Poland writes:

> I can't recognize my reflection in the mirror at all. I've spent a long time, examining it; my reflection looks like a picture of an unknown girl in the Internet. I am frightened by how my ribs and shoulders are protruded. For the first time in my life, I think it's too much: I am too slim. What I look like is sharp corners, ribs, shoulders and elbows added by dark circles under my eyes. There are shades not only on my face but all over my body as if I myself were about to become a shade. I have become faded and darkened with nothing but eyes on my face: two jewels, also sharp and wicked. I want to hide away from my own looks but there is no place to hide away. (March 15, p. 215–216)

Describing the blurring and darkening of her known posture and look, Yelyzaveta B. captures the transition from a known, imaginary self towards an encounter with psychic life and the body in its unknown, blurred, unconscious formations where the boundaries to others, other bodies, other times, other places, disintegrate. Such drastic expulsion from a known, contextualised space and body drags the subject towards sensations of muteness and death:

> Now I noticed that everything I lived for, what I burned for, and what I aspired to before the war (…) left me and lost its meaning. And not only that, but life in general lost its meaning, so when I honestly asked myself: 'What's wrong with you?', I heard in response only: 'I think you just do not want to live. (Anastasiia I., April 6)

Where everyday routines and symbols arrange life into meaningful forms that can be lived in a shared and recognisable time-space continuum, a war destroys this continuum and pulls experience towards a non-verbal,

supposedly meaningless state, associated with the indeterminable yet real possibility of sudden destruction and untimely death. Death is no longer something that has its place and time, attached to the end of an imaginary life path and away from youth but a possibility that could become reality and the end of it at any moment in and beyond time, not allowing for stark or fixed patterns or rhythms to occur. Constant yet unpredictable howls of sirens, missiles smashing buildings and bodies, destroyed city landscapes or news feeds documenting the many losses are inextricably interlinked with the destruction of psychic landscapes, unleashing the presence of an overwhelming destructive force which is turned against whatever is left. And this boundless fear of dying, the fading away of life as an embodied path of coherence and stability, also intrudes and shapes the moment of writing, expressed for instance in the fear of writing the last words in Khrystia M.'s diary:

> The situation is tense. For some reason, there were two sirens in a row. It is rare for Kalush. It's strange. Am I afraid? I'm afraid now. There's a heavy lump in my throat, like a stone. I can't move. I can't speak. Everyone near me in the bomb shelter is discussing the news. In Kyiv, a rocket just hit the area of the underground passage at the train station. I'm afraid. I am afraid that these words […] I do not believe these words will be the last. But if […] If so, I don't know. I want to cry. I feel cold all over my body. (March 2, p. 51)

Writing a war diary happens with a felt knowledge that words and this life could end at any time. Writing and speech, usually symbols and the mortar of life, turn into potential sites of destruction and death. Not only are buildings and bodies in danger of annihilation, but also the diary entry, the narrative, the possibility of arranging a life around beginnings and endings, is under threat.

A war kills bodies and destroys buildings. It traumatises particularly those who have lost a loved one and those who have lost their home. But a war also attacks on an internal, psychic level. For in rupturing culturally configured and trans-generationally shared arrangements of time and space, a war also causes, as traced in the words of the war chroniclers, internal damage and displacement. Here 'internal displacement' does not refer to those refugees who had to leave their physical homes while remaining within their country's borders, but to everyone who experiences a psychic form of displacement or rupture in material-discursive and emotional arrangements which are crucial for forming a coherent and communicable experience of self and interpersonal relationships. 'I'm not fighting at the frontline', writes Bohdan S. (March 25, p. 239), 'but I'm already dying […]'.

Remains

For those who must cope with such experiences of internal displacement, a turn towards a collective, national identity and unity is often a life-saving psychic mechanism and form of resistance. Another path towards preserving a coherent self and sense of continuity is, as evidenced in many diary entries, the enactment of symbolic everyday routines and encounters such as cooking, planting, drinking coffee, or making love. 'I love everyone', writes Olha K., one day before acknowledging her first panic attack. 'Everyone who writes about being alive, everyone who helps, everyone who does something, hugs, calms down, sends music, news, cooks to eat, strokes a cat, goes to the pharmacy, takes photos, or saves lives' (March 1, p. 43). Each of these micro-practices becomes a sustaining action against incommensurable destruction and despair—a protection against the void that opens around the gaps torn into external and internal structures. But there is, I argue, yet another mechanism of human survival, a form in which life continues against the odds of a suspended time and destroyed space, that can be observed in the diary project. This other form of survival and resistance, I argue, is the act of writing about the war and rupture in words that remain close to the void and unconscious alterity of the self, which means in words that are formed without there being a narrator's self who could master the narrative; i.e. a form of writing that persists even if there is no story to tell nor a composed protagonist who walks through time and space from beginnings to endings.

What can be known, said, and lived in a state in which the time-space continuum and kinship relationships are transindividually and transgenerationally disturbed? How does life happen and flow if the contours of time, space and relational orders have been attacked and blurred? Do speech and subjectivity survive such a rupture and if so how? The texts in *Diaries of War and Life* offer answers to these questions. They demonstrate how experiences of body, of subjectivity, and kinship bonds persist even when a known or familiar connection to order and symbolic arrangements is lost. Being continues but shifts towards the reality of the void or gap that emerges when conscious images and ideas of who 'I' or 'we' are incapacitated or ruptured. A sudden encounter with this hollow place that is vacant of the usual structures and edifices triggers sensations of powerlessness and disorientation. Yet, while no longer 'something' or 'someone' the matter and psychic life of the void or the unconscious is also not nothing, but rather, as Barad puts it, 'a desiring orientation toward being/becoming, innumberable imaginings of what might yet be/have been' (Barad, 2019, p. 529). Or to put it in psychoanalytic words, losing the self yet continuing to be[4] means moving close to life in its desiring, demanding, unrealised, or unrecognised form, or closer to life in its unconscious

formations as the 'something other (that) demands to be realized' (Lacan, 1998, p. 25).

In the realm of the void or unconscious being, thinking goes on but is untied from the usual symbols and frames, the usual points or figures of orientation. In such a situation, words, written or uttered, I argue, are remains or remainders of desired pasts or futures, of times yet to be realised and imagined, times that yet 'be/have been', and that are placed close to the gap that opens up when conscious and familiar arrangements of time and space are brutally disturbed. Such 'word remains' do not communicate the state of being, they are not part of an ontology nor expressed within the law and language of the historical subject, a subject experiencing and moving along the path of history, but these 'word remains' spring from an embodied vibrating, desiring force which pushes a voice into being in moments when life and death cannot be told apart. Such words are close to the indeterminable yet present energy of the void or unconscious, where relations and laws sit in unknowable and uncontrollable forms, and the subject emerges not as a separate, speaking entity, but in gestures towards desired, not yet realised forms of subjectivity or community.

'Word remains' turn the suffering caused by the trauma of the rupture into 'rhythms, signs, forms' (Kristeva, 1987, p. 8) and as such witness the crisis of structure and closeness to the void. These word creations are not spoken from within the realm of the law or narrative. They are uttered without knowing beginnings or ends, without knowing the terms of punishment or reward. They are words that cannot be mastered for they rise directly from, or are close to, the gaps torn into the realm of mastery and knowledge.

'Word remains' spoken from or close to the unconscious are further not words that can be used to work through wounds. They are not words through which justice can be restored, for they are themselves structured by the reality of the wound or gap (Schmukalla, 2022). In fact, many of the words captured in the diaries are often aggressive, envious, or at times nationalist, forming images of violent forms of revenge against Russians, but being uttered in the precarious form of a war diary, they also always are vulnerable, interrupted, incoherent, irritated, unstable, unpolished, or hushed. As words they are under the same threat as the buildings and bodies of a city under attack, and as such they moan and bleed. They acknowledge the moment of unpredictable endings and yet continue to arrange letters. They push against a state of felt lawlessness or injustice not by imposing a different or old law, not by pretending unity where there is disintegration, but by surviving the attack's muting and humiliating force and by doing so uttering a forceful desire for change and being.

Such words, I argue, belong to the non-ontic state that concerns ethics not ontology. Or using the imagery of a Greek war myth, they are the words uttered from the position of Antigone, not Creon; a position that is not

determined by culturally established laws and borders, but by an embodied knowledge of felt kinship and interpersonal dependency and with this by the knowledge of the pain that is caused by indeterminable and violent transgressions outside the law. Such words then do not utter what being or life means or how it could be organised, but are a reminder of life's precariousness, its formation prior to becoming and recognition. Words uttered close to the incommensurable yet present void, which is not nothing, nor something, but a form of being that utterly challenges the being we know and are able to control. Being able to continue writing or uttering words in this state means speaking from the site of a desiring, unrealised civilisation, which speaks beyond the means and concepts of the war: 'I don't attack you', writes Kristeva in relation to poetic language which is formed close to experiences of the abject, 'I speak (or write) my fear or my pain. My suffering is the lining of my word, of my civilization' (Kristeva, 1987, p. 14).

When concluding her autoethnographic analysis of the transgenerational inheritance of the Korean war, ethnographer Clara Han points to the gendered dynamics that were at play when confronting the legacy of the war. Han observes how naming the inherited violence and the desire for sustaining 'relatedness against and despite the corrosion of war and displacement' (Han, 2020, p. 154) was a task that had been taken over almost entirely by the girls and women of the family. She argues that in the wake of war kinship, community, and, I would like to add, subjectivity cannot be attained by claiming 'mastery over a narrative as in the contest between fathers and sons' (p. 154)—this path of human inheritance is as if blocked by the ravaged internal structures that the war has left behind. Instead, relational life and subjectivity have to be formed in or close to the archaic region of the feminine or maternal, where words are present yet without fixed meaning; where life exists not in paths but in cycles and rhythms as well as 'through attention to the small, the diminutive, the low' (p. 154)—the domestic everyday. It is in this convoluted and unruly everyday that feminine structures and forms of subjectivity and communication are present and needed. Structures that as psychoanalyst and artist Bracha Ettinger argues are formed in closeness to a felt knowledge of the ab/presence of the m/Other, so close to intrauterine experiences of entangled part-bodies and the non-ontic yet real state of the subject's absence (Ettinger, 2006). It is not that this is a place where thinking and words are not present. Yet thinking and words function differently, leading to unexpected and vulnerable words and thoughts which are formed in close awareness of life's precariousness and pain.

'I finally started writing a diary, together with the students. We created a chat in Telegram yesterday and now there are 44 participants, although they are mostly girls', writes Bohdan S. (March 3, p. 237). So, when looking at *Diaries of War and Life* I wonder whether the task of writing a diary, of

archiving and speaking beyond the collapse of external and internal structures, of collecting and preserving the crumbs, the rubble, the corpses that occupy the void, where known communication and laws have been replaced by brutal force, can be seen as a deeply feminine form of resistance. Feminine not in the sense that it is restricted to 'girls' but a task that requires a desiring subject, a subject 'that might yet be/have been' and thus a subject which is able to speak without having to conquer and control the narrative or the place of a father or law.

'All that remains is a broken window, a broken cobblestone, a broken life', writes Viktoria Y. at the very end of her diary (March 5, p. 84). The end of her diary also forms the end of a cycle during which I read 24 of the translated diaries, with each diary ending abruptly, leaving me with no knowledge of the writer's whereabouts and wellbeing, and hence with an experienced trace of the rupture described by the chroniclers. At the same time, the end of each diary would also move me to the next diary and with this back to the beginning of the war, throwing my imagination and thought, again and again, back to the 24th of February 2022, to the beginning of the war that still has no end. In reading the chroniclers' words that were written close to the void or abyss that the war had torn open therefore meant that reminders of the reality and truth of the war, which I had felt so strongly in February and March last year but since had repressed, had re-entered my life. As such these war diaries stand as 'word remains' or as living monuments of an ongoing catastrophe, whose truth can only be known by those who remain close to life's unknowable and indeterminable other, i.e. close to a feminine, unconscious knowledge of life's unpredictable yet present and desiring dynamism and energy:

> The word remains
>
> And in someone unchanging remains – muteness.
>
> The truth stands, shelled and still on guard.
>
> And the sun will remain, no matter what the card turns out. (Victoria Y., March 5, p. 84)

Notes

1 Viktoria Y. (March 5, p. 84). Emphasis added.
2 Test-alert message was sent by the British government to all citizens in the UK on Sunday 24th of April, at 3 pm … the actual alert was triggered at 2:59 pm.
3 Emphasis in the original.
4 'Even if I lose myself, I am' (Lacan, 1966, p. 136).

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