No Aesthetic Outside My Freedom: Mourning and Militancy

Note:

These are three performance scores. They are written by Natalie Diaz, Christina Sharpe, and Brandon Shimoda.

A performance score is a set of instructions for performance, like the score to a piece of music. They can be followed or disobeyed. They are like rituals or like dances.

I asked these writers to create these scores because I wanted to build a space in which to mourn the Palestinians martyred by Israel over the first year of this ongoing escalation of genocide. I wanted to do so in a way that did not sacrifice a commitment to militant struggle and resistance in pursuit of Palestinian liberation and against the world. So I asked for help.

In October of 2024, Rasha Abdulhadi, Leila Awadallah, Fadl Fakhouri, Noel Maghathe, and myself performed these scores at the Poetry Project.

Myself, Fadl Fakhouri, and Noel Maghathe were scheduled to perform these scores as part of the Whitney ISP Curatorial Fellows' exhibition *a grammar of attention* on May 14th, 2025. This performance was cancelled by the Whitney.

We are now making these scores publicly accessible so that you may perform them in whatever space you choose. This work is not a work of art to be held inside the boundaries of an institution or a gallery. It is a means by which we might mourn and fight back against the brutality of the world.

Take these scores with you back into the world, to interpret in your own community, in your house, or your church, or your organizing meetings, or your protests. Their purpose is to create a space to feel, grieve, rage, scream, cry, so that we can carry on fighting each day for the survival of those the world is killing.

Share these scores. Photocopy them. Write your own.

They don't belong to anyone. They are for the dead.

--Fargo Nissim Tbakhi

Score: Natalie Diaz

Score 1: I was taught bloodstones can cure a snakebite, can stop the bleeding—

Bloodstones, both polished and raw, are in a pile between performers and audience.

Performer 1 gathers all the bloodstones and holds them out in their cupped hands. If a bloodstone falls, another performer can pick it up and set it back into Performer 1's hands.

The other performers begin to remove the bloodstones from Performer 1's hands, dividing the bloodstones as evenly as possible among them, until Performer 1's hands are empty.

Performer 1 then lies down on their back, hands at sides. The other performers kneel around Performer 1's head, feet, sides, holding their bloodstones.

One-at-a-time, the other performers take turns placing one bloodstone each upon and along the body of Performer 1 until their hands are empty. They will sit facing Performer 1 for 45 seconds. Then, while Performer 1 is still lying on the ground, the other performers will rise and stand, facing away from Performer 1. Next, Performer 1 will rise and stand, letting the bloodstones clatter to the ground.

Next, Performer 2 will lie down on their back, hands at sides as the other performers (including Performer 1, who is no longer Performer 1 but now a part of the other performers) gather the scattered bloodstones from the ground, dividing them amongst one another as evenly as possible.

The other performers will kneel at the head, feet, and sides of Performer 2 and begin taking turns, one-at-time, placing one bloodstone each upon and along Performer 2's body until their hands are empty. They will sit facing Performer 2 for 45 seconds. Then, while Performer 2 is still lying on the ground, the other performers will rise and stand, facing away from Performer 2. Next, Performer 2 will rise and stand, letting the bloodstones again clatter to the ground.

The performers will continue this sequence of actions until each performer has received the placement of the bloodstones upon or along their body. When the last performer has risen and let fall the bloodstones, all the performers together will gather the stones and set them in a pile in a location where they will be seen for the remainder of the event.

Score 2: Ash can make you clean, as alkaline as it is a grief—

Prior to performance: Each performer will bring 2-3 personal items they believe they need "to live right now," and will need in the world we are building alongside one another beyond Zionism and genocide. One item should be a photograph. Other items: 3 large blankets, a pile of at least 25-30 scarves, bandanas, handkerchiefs, and a box of matches preferably the large size.

In the center of the stage, performers will build a pyre beginning with any large items available to them. The pyre should be constructed so its shape is wider on the bottom and comes to a kind of point at the top. If there is a table, the table should be used—it can be turned upside down or right side up. Chairs can be stacked against or on top of the table. Other available items in the space will be collected by performers and added to the pyre. It should not be too big.

Performers will then place their personal items in or on the pyre.

Together, performers will unfold the blankets and spread them to cover the pyre.

Performers will work together to tie the scarves, bandanas and handkerchiefs together end-to-end, creating a single rope. When the rope is complete, they will walk the rope around the pyre, wrapping it, until it runs out.

Performers will encircle the pyre, at equidistance from one another, facing it. Standing but shifting their weight from left foot to right foot repeatedly. Performer 1 will walk to pick up the box of large matches and return to their place at the pyre. Performer 1 will walk to each of the other performers, one-at-a-time, opening the matchbox and offering them to take a match. While Performer 1 faces the other performer, the other performer will strike the match to flame and hold it between them. They will face each other until the match burns down or until one of them blows it out.

Performer 1 will walk to the next of the other performers and repeat this action of facing the performer, offering them the match, facing them while they strike the match to flame, and continue facing them until the match burns down or until Performer 1 or the other performer blows it out. Performer 1 will do this until all performer except for Performer 1 have struck a match to flame and held it until it burned down or was blown out.

Then, Performer 1 will turn their back to the pyre and face the audience. They will take a match from their matchbox, strike the match to flame and hold the flame out toward the audience. They will let the flame burn down or blow it out.

Finally, the performers will face away from the pyre and lie down on their stomachs, in a line facing the other side of the room. They will like with their hands at side and face to the ground for two minutes. Then one-at-a-time, each performer will lift their head and torso with their arms, followed by pulling their legs beneath them, in a very short sprinter pose and lift up, running to the other side of the room, to the place beyond this genocide.

The pyre should remain while any other scores are performed.

Score 3: Why not now go toward the things I love?

Performers center themselves on the stage, in a tight circle, back-to-back-to-back but not touching.

For one minute each performer silently imagines their body is capable of holding and shaping their ancestors' grief.

After the one minute, one performer cries out: *My body is the messenger of my ancestor's grief.* The performers, still in their tight, back-to-back-to-back circle, begin to shape their bodies in the shape or shapes of their ancestors' grief. They hold this shape or continue to reshape for two minutes.

After two minutes they still their bodies, standing in the same tight, back-to-back-to-back circle.

For the next minute, each performer silently imagines their body is capable of holding and shaping their land and water's grief.

After the one minute, one performer cries out *My body is the messenger of my land and water's grief.* The performers, take a few steps outward, still back-to-back, but widening their circle, and begin to shape their bodies in the shape or shapes of their land and water's grief. They hold this shape or continue to reshape for two minutes.

After two minutes they still their bodies, standing in the same tight, back-to-back-to-back circle.

For the next minute, each performer silently imagines their body is overflowing with holding and shaping their own grief.

After the one minute, one performer cries out: My body is overflowed with holding and shaping my own grief. The performers, take more steps outward, making the circle even wider than before, and begin to shape their bodies to express the overflow of the grief they hold. They move in this overflow for two minute.

After two minutes, they do not return to the circle but instead turn toward one another from where they are standing, having stilled their bodies. One performer cries out: *I need you to help be the messenger of my grief.* All the performers will call back to the cry: *We will be the messengers and the receivers for one another's grief.*

The performers will begin to interact with one another's grief—including the grief of their ancestors' and the grief of their land and water and the grief of their self—taking each other's shape, shaping each other, moving arms or legs, weaving, twisting, pushing, pulling one another in the through the shapes of the grief they share for two minutes.

After two minutes, each performer will cry out one of the following cries: *I am alongside you*. Or, *You are of consequence to me*. Or, *I will not leave you alone to your grief*. Or, *You can cry here*. Or, *I can cry here*.

At this point, they will begin to move, shaping their bodies with and through their grief, together, repeating any of the previous phrases they feel in their body, in any order, at any frequency, even in repetition if they choose. They will continue to shape and hold, or shape and reshape, almost dancing or even dancing, riding the edge of the ecstatic, until exhaustion. (unlimited time)

Score: Christina Sharpe

To Mark, To Hold, To Labour, To Bear

"I have nothing soothing to tell you / that's not my job / my job is to revise and revise this bristling list / hourly"

--Dionne Brand, ***Inventory***

A Note: This performance is designed to be undertaken by one person with the help. at some point, of the audience.

A set of instructions to bear witness to the ongoing atrocities in an attempt to hold each life at least for the amount of time it takes to make a mark. To make a mark is to be marked. The holding is accumulative.

Score: A set of instructions:

There is an easel with a large writing pad on it. One of those large pads of white paper that you can rip sheets off of and that people use in meetings.

There is a person standing at the easel. They are making one mark after another marks. As the audience comes into the space the person is already at the work of mark making.

They may use whatever kind of writing implement they like. But the made mark should be legible to at least some of the audience. The implement therefore might be a thick sharpie, a or a calligraphy brush and ink. Ink and brush might be preferable so that the mark is both individual and not exactly reproducible but it should be a straight line. Or a backslash or forward slash but the lines should proceed one after the other in whatever direction or arrangement the mark maker determines. BUT they should not be crossed out to make groups of five or ten for easy counting. The mark making and witnessing of the mark making are and should be overwhelming.

The person/s at the easel is attempting to make a mark for each child who has been murdered by Israel. After some minutes have passed the person who is making the marks will pause and say the following:

"The first ten pages of the accounting of the dead are filled with the names of infants who did not even reach their first birthday. More than 100 pages are filled with the names of victims under 10 years old, and the first adult names do not appear until page 215."
I am making a mark for each child who has been murdered in Gaza. I am making a mark for each child who has been wounded in Gaza. I am making a mark for each child who has been orphaned in Gaza.

The person at the easel will continue with the mark making: make 100 marks, make 200 marks, make marks. The person will make as many marks as they can in the time that they have.

BUT while the person should begin this work as a single person making each individual mark, they do not have to continue to do this work alone. The person may invite a person/s from the audience to take over the mark making. Or to share in the work of the mark making. It us up to the performer how this should occur.

BUT as each page is filled it the person will remove the page and lay it gently and carefully on the ground.
The idea is that the person will score the paper, score the world with the fact of the person whose death they are recording having lived. The person will score the paper, score the world with the fact of the person whose life they are recording.

The person/s will score the paper, score the world with grief for the dead and the living.

The person/s mark making is an inventory of the time of this grieving.

The person/s will change and charge the air some way with the labor of their attention, with the making of the mark, with the marking and holding of a life.

Instruction: At the conclusion of the performance the mark maker should speak this.

This marking is a record of the world scored with grief.
This marking is an attempt to hold a life with the labor of this attention.
This marking is a partial and ongoing inventory of the time of this grieving.

Score: Brandon Shimoda

This performance score is motivated by two thoughts: one expressed as a question, the other as a serenity prayer. The first is by Yasmin El-Rifae, from *Radius: A Story of Feminist Revolution*: "Rather than wondering about the efficacy of addressing men, can we think of breaking into their awareness as a by-product of us speaking to one another?" The second is by Cristina Rivera Garza, from *Grieving: Dispatches from a Wounded Country,* translated from the Spanish by Sarah Booker: "When we mourn the death of another, we accept from the outset, whether consciously or unconsciously, that the loss will change us, forever and in definitive ways."

Score

This performance involves two people. It can be performed by many people at once (there can be parallel performances, without limit), but each individual performance should be comprised of two people. However, the definition of "two people" is open to the interpretation of the people and/or the person.

The two people should—together and wordlessly—go out into the street and look for/find an object with a flat surface. It must be found on the street, in the garbage, from what has been left out on the sidewalk. The object can be of any dimension, short, long, narrow, wide, thick, thin, but it must have at least one flat (or flattish) surface. For example: a piece of wood, a 2x4, a book, a box, a garbage can lid, a record sleeve, a plate, a leaf. The two people should agree—together and wordlessly—on the object.

It is likely the audience will not see this part of the performance. It is important that the two people have this time together, alone.

The two people will carry the object back to the main performance space where the two people will use it as a table. The two people will—together and wordlessly—find a the right (natural and necessary) place to put the table.

They will sit down on opposite sides of the table, facing each other.

Once the two people have settled into their sitting positions and are comfortable, they will look at each other.

One of them will look at the other *with the eyes of a grandparent*.

One of them will look at the other *with the eyes of a grandchild*.

Each person will decide for themselves which eyes they are looking with.

They will not tell the other person which eyes they are looking with, because: they will not have to.

They will look at each other with the eyes of a grandparent and/or with the eyes of a grandchild for as long as feels right (natural and necessary). They will agree—together and wordlessly—when that right (natural and necessary) moment and place has been reached.

Note: In the introduction to *We The Gathered Heat: Asian American and Pacific Islander Poetry, Performance, and Spoken Word*, queer Sāmoan poet, mental health educator, and community leader Terisa Siagatonu writes: "In Samoan, the word *vā* means the space between the between-ness: not empty space, not space that separates, but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All ... the space that is context, giving meaning to things. Sometimes, the space is between you and I. Sometimes, it's between us and land. Us and water. Us and ancestors. Us and future ancestors. Us and our shadows. Us and our wounds. Us and our ache to be free."

The space between the one looking at the other with grandparent eyes and the one looking at the other with grandchild eyes is *the space that relates*.

Once they have reached that right (natural and necessary) moment and place—once they have, in other words, become a grandparent and/or grandchild to each other—they will begin, for the first time, to speak, out loud, to each other.

They will speak, out loud, to each other, *with the heart of a grandparent* and/or *the heart of a grandchild*; they will speak to each other with that particular love that is infused and full with transgenerational and transmigratory curiosity, compassion, wonder, anger, encouragement, intervention, exhaustion, contemplation, and a desire to bring each other into an awareness of what has happened and what is happening, what they have seen and are seeing, what they have felt and are feeling, what and who has been lost and is being lost, who has been and is being martyred, what they have done and what they are doing; and they will begin by asking each other a question.

Do Something