

Toward a Dystopian Utopia: On Doris Arkin's Exhibition "Pietà"

Albert Suisa

Atmosphere: A Total Ground for Modern Existence

"Pietà," Doris Arkin's solo exhibition at Umm el-Fahem Art Gallery, is a total exhibition through and through: from the creation of quintessentially unique works and a thought out selection of other individual pieces specifically intended for display in this gallery, to the comprehensive planning and design of the entire space in preparation for the exhibition, painting and illuminating it anew to create the intended atmosphere and allow for a signifying juxtaposition of the works, against each other and beyond, as artworks/entities in their own right. The exhibition does not have a "curator" who selects the works and arranges them in the space to convey a specific, additional "message"; nor does it have a "designer" to furnish it with an added value not its own, at least not in principle. There have certainly been partners and supporters, but our concern here is the totality offered to us as a finished product, marked primarily with the imprint of the artist's intention. It is not an exhibition of "new works," luring the viewer once again with art's eternal riddles, but rather an exhibition, which makes it clear to the viewer soon enough: we have come to talk, to talk about something important, without unnecessary formalities.

To this end, Arkin willingly adopts a set of means, techniques, and methods to create an "atmosphere," which has become the very foundation of modern life as a whole, without exception, regardless of art, which denies it and defends itself against it out of false consciousness, while using it in every site, big time. Having already expelled "nature" from the realities and essences of modern life, architecture, design, and orchestration have also become an integral part of the work of art, at least from the moment it is showcased. The "atmosphere" is a more explicit, perhaps "down to earth," intention, which clings to the work's principally uncontrollable "intention." Therefore, in contrast to the quasi-free reflexive writing I used in my general text about Arkin's works, where I departed from the ostensibly neutral, "everyplace" stance of the "warehouse," here I will take it upon myself to discuss the thing which the exhibition entrusted me to

talk about at each and every stage. It would be my contribution to this unique discourse, which obviously does not replace the part of each spectator in this multifaceted dialogue.

Monuments as a Cover Story for Barbarity

Entering the thoroughly demarcated, meticulously designed exhibition space, one initially and forthwith enters the silent, solemn atmosphere that prevails in the place, even before being let in on its secrets, and before grim awareness begins to seep into one's heart. Already at the entrance, which is significantly elevated above the exhibition level like an observation post, the viewer is enveloped in awe, projected from a general, dim mausoleum-like ambience, divided into disparate compartments. The walk down the ramp to the space itself is experienced as a tangible, almost religious, entry into the subterranean realms of a still and silent world, mysteriously supervised by old chairs, carefully scattered, but empty of occupants, and therefore puzzling and eliciting emotion and thought.

Silently descending the ramp — assuming he ignored (and better so, in my opinion) the wall text that greeted him — the viewer arrives at an intersection, which splits into two different foyers. His gaze may hesitantly shift from the demarcated space of **Dark** and **Dystopia** which threaten him on the right, to the more restrained **Numbers** and **Meat** in the central space. He may first turn to **Numbers**, whose intense monument-like aura caught his eye from the very entrance at the top, reinforced by an enigmatic layout of empty, inviting domestic chairs, initially perceived in relation to **Numbers**. Along with the row of rusty chairs comprising **Meat**, which hang in a cluster facing the wall, these laid out chairs signify and point at **Numbers**. As aforesaid, from the immediate vantage point from above, **Numbers** radiates symbols from the state order, such as a flag or a military cemetery. A closer look reveals that it consists of a large number of luring rusty "shackles" — fastening links or hooks made of heavy, forged iron, once used to transport large water tanks to ships — arranged in perfect order, in a crisscross pattern, in the form of a truncated square. In the upper left corner of the square, deviating from it, is a small iron plate, with a few more shackles on it in free composition, wholly antithetical to the meticulous square arrangement. The mournful impression of a commemorative sculpture or a tombstone remains intact from up close. The thought thus springs to mind, that the shackle square represents the "numbers," the victims, while the iron plaque, which forms a part of it and transcends its boundaries, is the "plot." Or perhaps, better still, vice versa — the iron plate is the

Dark,
pp. 108-111
Dystopia,
pp. 105-107
Numbers,
pp. 77-81
Meat,
pp. 83-87

terrible, living drama, and the shackle square is the outcome: corpses; regimented, cold and orderly death, underlain by a terrifying meticulousness. The dead here are mere numbers, and no lifeline can be seen on the horizon of this drama; it is pending, doomed to continuous calamity.

From Noah to Moby Dick, through Odysseus and the medieval ships of fools, the chronicles of humanity's seafarers are many. All may provide us with some meaning, but the tension between the exemplary order of cold blooded death from the military-political order of shackles without a lifeline, and the dramatic storm taking place on the iron plate, ostensibly simulating a rickety raft more than a rescue vessel or a warship, suggests that we are concerned with a calamity devoid of resurrection and compassion; for this is a sculpture commemorating guilt, not heroism. Had we been in the realm of monumental Israeli sculpture of the State Generation onward, we could have suspected this to be a tribute to the illegal immigrant ships persecuted and deported during the British mandatory period. Since we are rooted in the present, way into the 21st century, in the heart of Umm el-Fahem, however, such bold archaism on the artist's part would be inconceivable. Perhaps we should merely extend the irony and fickleness from this association to a banal, all too familiar reality, in which, for decades, boats carrying immigrants and asylum seekers from Africa have sunk into the depths of the sea with no one to save them. Who hasn't seen the blood curdling images of fishermen encountering immigrant corpses — women and children, floating in the water like poisoned fish? Once a person is left in the lurch in the middle of the sea, who is to be considered an immigrant, and who a parasitic migrant? Briefly, we may be overcome by patronizing pity, but soon the initial empathy and embrace will give way to a compartmentalizing, disillusioned, rational, and sterile discourse: the immigrant problem is one thing, and the hardships of *les misérables* at sea is something else. Gradually, through the banality of the compartmentalizing political discourse, the enlightened states and their socio-economic considerations distinguish between asylum denial, which in this case could mean a fatal rejection, and "the problem of migrants at sea," deeming the latter a strategic problem of the merciful coast guard.

Prosecution Chairs and Prostitution Chairs:

One Assembly Line

At this stage, in the absence of a solution, the viewer will likely turn to the vacant, comfortable and inviting domestic chairs, watching over **Numbers**, puzzled by the fact that the one for whom the chairs were intended — the guard — is absent.

If he approaches the adjacent chair, then, from the depths of the other side of a hidden space, through a narrow opening created by a wall which delimits some covert core, another inviting chair will appear, vacant. He may realize that he alone constitutes a link, by virtue of the eye contact he creates between two more empty chairs, on either side. Now his gaze will return to **Numbers** and its setting in wonder: what is it about these works that they require so much supervision? Nothing quite like this was ever seen in the gallery. From one chair to another, his gaze might turn to the cluster of bar stools, which are not offered for sitting: hanging on the wall with their backs to the viewer, as if their imaginary occupants turn their backs at him for some reason; or, perhaps, it is their sitting mode, facing a "wall" or inside a "wall," that needs to be deciphered here.

At a closer look, the observant will realize that these bar stools are fundamentally different from the guards' respectable, high-quality chairs, and not just because of their purpose, which is perceptible from the different, deliberately dubious design that they project. As is the case with "found objects," however, they convey ambiguity and two different temporalities: those conjectured "at the outset," and those revealed at their "end." At the outset, above all, these chairs are a grotesque caricature of a false promise of pleasure and luxury, a result of mass production. In their ingenious formal design, they are wholly an expression of leisure culture and the cheapest, most short-lived pastime. Their quality is as poor as can be: thin, hollow tin, painted with cheap white lacquer, hence they will last for a very short time before their coating peels off, and their body warps, creaks, and rusts. In the end, however, they convey only fragility, oblivion, neglect; the pain of something abandoned and discarded, which no one desires. But now, in this unique presentation, the ambiguity of these chairs is doubled by what clearly indicates their past use: their feminine design, the chair's back as a bed rail on thin, spread-eagled legs, on the one hand, and the luxurious, feminine, hand-woven scarves or seat covers, given to each of them, on the other. In other words, we are dealing with female rather than male sitters. Now all becomes clear — and if we had even the slightest doubt, then the title, **Meat**, comes in and drops a cleaver on that doubt. The lowliest production and design industry corresponds here with the "human meat" industry, with prostitution and woman trafficking, which unite in the "atmosphere" design to form one assembly line, joining object and subject in a soulless "commodity." The **Pietà** scarves (see below) — introduced here as an indication of craft rather than production, knitted from quality wool, with a loving, "patient/agonized" (Heb. *savlani*) hand, as a soft, kind warmth —

Pietà,
pp. 113-116

cry out the contrast and vast gap between the possibility of grace and compassion, and the possibility of heavyheartedness and lechery erupting, wondrously, from the same creative (Heb. *yotzer*), productive (*yatzrani*), passionate (*yitzri*) human heart. These identical chairs are spewed out from the same blind, calculated, soulless assembly line, which strives for value and a well thought out consumerist atmosphere; the scarves, in contrast, each hand-woven by the artist in a unique, private, maternal weaving, absurdly and symbolically strive to correct the distortion, as if she had intended to re-endow each of the human spirits placed on these chairs as a nameless, faceless offering on the despicable altar of goods and profit, with its original given name.

Musical Chairs in the Heart of Dystopia

At this point, one can imagine, a cognitive/emotional dissonance is created in the viewer's heart with regard to the decent, bourgeois guard chairs standing empty in the hall as opposed to the industry and commerce debauchery chairs, and with regard to their latent interrelations whether by perplexed association or plain syllogism — depending on how far and deep one delves into the called-for affinity between the two: between outwardly forced decency and latent corruption and dubiousness. Doubt momentarily creeps in, that while the scarves signify the absence of women in **Meat** and reinstate it with a double, defiant presence, the absence surrounding the guard chairs is unexplained, and assumes the fear of a covert, dubious causal connection. Now, the viewer's necessary back-turning on the backs of **Meat** chairs, on the way to **Dystopia** and **Dark**, once again involves a thought-provoking encounter with another silent bourgeois chair, charging this empty chair with an unpleasant ambiguity, perhaps a personal one. The viewer may suspect that things are directed at him personally, and then decide to take action: to sit down on the chair and "observe" the thing, taking a stand, "dwelling" on it. If he does so, it will not be long before he feels a disturbing discomfort in his "backside." Getting up to find out what it is, he will discover one of the **Five Avoidable Deadly Sins** — war, exploitation, neglect, rape, and torture — inscribed in iron letters and well camouflaged on the edge of the upholstery fabric, in the center of the seat; one separate sin for each of the five "guard" chairs. The sin words, inscribed on the chairs of the absent guards, now accentuate Arkin's use of the museum guard's chair as a deliberate, meaningful ploy. Aside from a sophisticated remark about the art world moving away from explicit talk about

Five
Avoidable
Deadly Sins,
pp. 89-103

the world's misery and its partnership in the code of silence (Heb. "guarding silence") — a sensitive comment which requires an elaborate discussion of its own — the simplicity of the absent guard's chair is reminiscent of Cain's famous rejoinder: "Am I my brother's keeper?" This may be the reason why Arkin replaces Christianity's seven deadly sins, which are essentially cardinal vices a person commits against his God and is punished by the death of his soul — with five deadly sins of her own, essentially vices a person commits against his fellow man, as if saying "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you" as the fundamental rule on the way to the idea: "I seek my brethren," as an amendment to "Am I my brother's keeper?" As in *Pietà*, and as we will see elaborated below, Arkin empties her secular ethics of any theological guarantee, outright rejecting any partition between a person and the possibility of a dystopian reality which does not stem from man's own responsibility. The secular ethics proposed here are a human cognitive process, rather than an aspiration for divine values by acknowledging sin toward the heavens.

Now, disillusioned by one of the sin words, the viewer will approach **Dystopia**, and if he does not, **Dystopia** will no doubt do the work for him. For **Dystopia** is the only work of the six presented here that does not require a process in the immediate phase of its perception, because it is manifested by two direct symbols, clear to all inhabitants of this country, without exception: a wall and a sabra (prickly pear). **Dystopia** is a brilliantly simple, dynamic work, since its two components: the wall and the sweet-prickly fruit, are ambiguous symbols in themselves, and each contains an inner boundary of a split or flipped meaning, depending on the individual, the time, and the place. A wall may call to mind "tower and stockade," or alternatively, Masada/siege, and the sabra hedges — legitimate human/land boundaries either offering sweet hospitality or intimidating. In **Dystopia**, as in **Atrocities**, Arkin masterfully animates the material, charging her sculptures with visual movement, with the symbolic drama of historic events, much like the neo-romantic painters of the 19th century. From this perspective of movement, dynamics, and contrast, the dystopia, which is usually represented by the opposites of movement, by oppression and exclusion, conformity and stagnation, is partly manifested here rather through its negation by way of inversion, by rebellion, a breaching of dystopia, which in turn may enter a new dystopia. The identification with the rebellion, however, the soulful awakening it elicits, somewhat dulls the thoughts about dystopia. Indeed, the battered, rusty iron door, which is nothing but a terrible, gloomy prison, weary of containing, and the pile of rusty, shriveled

sabras (prickly pears), rotting and frothing amid its walls, until it shatters them with a mighty wave, leave no doubt that this is a siege and the rebellion against it at once. The lush *sabras*, with their fine thorns, in the depths of the strait, which gradually transform into shrunken, rebellious entities that grow ominous pikes of protest, illustrate the time and morphology of the real ongoing torments, calling to mind the tension, movement, and great danger, imprisoned in it as in an active volcano, rather than a long-extinguished one. In other words, since each individual can situate himself in this image according to his historical consciousness and identity, at this stage the question of where exactly the dystopia is located is either hanging by a thread or denied. In any case, interestingly, in **Dystopia**, Arkin does not wrap the work with her own touch of *pietà* (compassion) as she does in **Meat**, a touch that clarifies the position of the work itself. When she says that "the colors of the doors vaguely reminded me of the JNF blue fund-raising boxes in the Jewish school in Uruguay," we understand her private intention, but by this she only reaffirms the work's ambiguous nature, rather than offering a conclusive answer.

Dark: Dystopian Utopia and the Code of Silence

Raising one's contemplating eyes toward **Dark**, which hangs next to and above **Dystopia** in the same demarcated space, clarifies and focuses the gaze, or possibly freezes it instantly. **Dark**'s gripping image, a dystopian-utopian space colony of sorts, hovering in a no-place, which has become the one and only "place"; a threatened, confined penal colony, closed, sealed off, and without a heaven, entirely flat, devoid of a horizon and a flag, set in an infinite divine wasteland, arousing real horror. **Dark** is Babylon, but without the tower and without the romantic utopian horizon — one city, one language, several things; uniform architecture and color without contrasts; black, eternal night, stagnation, darkness. **Dark** is, in fact, an image of the world, discarded in the universe as one of its real possibilities, of a perfect dystopia, terrifyingly perceptible, which has turned itself into a utopian dystopia or a dystopian utopia at one and the same time. The brilliant insight that **Dark** conjures up is precisely this: being physically and logically tied to **Dystopia** in one space as a possible synecdoche, it indicates that, contrary to popular belief, dystopia is not the opposite of utopia; it is, rather, the way leading to it. In the petrifying image of **Dark**, utopia and dystopia unite in a final, deadly realization. Utopia is made possible when dystopia prevails within it as the nature of the world. The question thus presses once again, and this time it is difficult to repress: where exactly is the dystopia found?

Dark does not provide an answer. It is a total passivity of a black hole, with desperate human hair ladders hanging from its cells like silent, hopeless cries for help. Indeed, **Dark's** threatened quality is gripping, and we closely follow the sculpture's movement in the compartmentalized space, how it takes **Dystopia** under its auspices and turns to **Meat** with blind, mesmerizing eyes, inspiring it, too, with its darkness. **Meat**, on its part, turns its back on the world (reciprocal relationship with the voyeur, who does nothing at all), but also on **Dystopia** and **Numbers**, while **Numbers** itself is lost at sea in infinite solitude, in a vicious circle of drowning in numbers without a savior in sight...; an ostensibly puzzling chain of codes of silence and loneliness, to be deciphered through **Dark's** revelation and enlightenment: the rational and compartmentalized world of Cartesian grids thus heading toward a dystopian utopia. For **Meat**, I am guessing intuitively, is **Dark's** basic nourishment, its inner logic, and by the same token — the logic that makes both **Dystopia** and **Numbers** possible is associated with some basic law of society, that moves toward a dystopian utopia. The guard chairs, which likewise maintain an eye-contact chain among themselves (as opposed to the viewer, who, having sat in one of them, is now in solitude), watch, quietly for the time being, the compartmentalization and the code of silence, which prevents any possibility of contact. **Meat** knows nothing about **Numbers**, and **Numbers**, long imbued in the grief of the depths, is naturally utterly alienated from the oppressed of other dystopias, despite the fact (how cunning) that each of these works on its own, namely the essences of oppression and exploitation they represent, can be **Dystopia**, **Meat**, and **Numbers** at once.

Dystopia, then, is an injective, monovalent thinking: a wall is a wall, and a siege is a siege, but the symbol is always ambivalent: a wall is always also a siege at the same time, in a deadly combination of multi-dimensional, polyvalent, mental compartmentalization — science, race, economy, nationalism, media, politics, etc. — of thought based on the distinct rhetoric of the various disciplines. But where is this contemplative dystopia located in human reality? In countries? Leaders? Laws? Culture? Society? The human psyche? In the very paradox of individualism and society? To answer the question here from a global socio-political point of view would be presumptuous or simplistic, but it seems to me that in the exhibition's overall installation, Arkin outlines at least a principled direction for an answer: a rhetorical compartmentalization of the discourse ("prostitution is a free profession, a livelihood, economy" or "immigrants are a danger to security and the nation"), combined with the mental exclusion it creates; the principle

of systematic separation, as well as the dichotomy, separation, split, and anti-dialecticism, between all the important components of modern life in enlightened societies: science, technology, law, politics, media, culture, and society. Apart from absolute dictatorial states — of which **Dark** is the perfect model, since in such states all these elements are inseparably united in one entity through terror — the logic of separation and compartmentalization between and within systems of knowledge and discourse and within social and cultural organization practices is, first and foremost, an essential principle. It is structural element in all aspects of the enlightened countries — distinction between the private and the public, between the religious and the political, between the economic and the political, and so on — even before the dystopia, naturally created by this differentiation, is exploited by politicians and tycoons, by various ideologues and other players.

Pietà: Between Pity and Compassion

Let me start by saying: In my general text about Arkin's works, I wrote that in her compassionate maternal movement, Arkin's **Pietà** distills the abstract line of the Christian Pietà art tradition — the image of the Virgin Mary cradling her tortured son, the dead Christ, after being taken down from the cross — one of the three best-known icons of Christianity to this day, representing the sorrowful mother who shares in the suffering of Christ (the other two being Mater Dolorosa and Stabat Mater). The Italian word *pietà* denotes "pity," but in the well-known series of icons depicting the "Lamentation of Christ" in the Passion, it is often signified by the term "compassion" — co(m) = with, passion = torment — meaning "to suffer together," a term whose prevalent translation is "mercy." Adjusting and marking the sound of transition from *pietà* as "pity" to "compassion" in Arkin's **Pietà** is crucial, because "pity" contains a passive condescension which distances one from the torments themselves, whereas "compassion" sounds like an active verb, as actual participation or sharing in the torments, and at the same time implies a desire to prevent or ease the torments themselves. It should be noted that this transition from pity, primarily attributed to God, to human compassion, occurs and is symbolized in Mary, the mother, perhaps because "pity" — divine pity, but also human pity — is fundamentally masculine, paternal, "imparting," and hierarchical emotions, "pity for..." while compassion, ascribed to humans, is feminine, maternal, egalitarian, and participatory, because it is founded on the "identical," "suffering with...". Preserving this distinction in Arkin's work is mainly implied by voiding the iconography of

the Christian *pietà* of its visual and theological symbols — the Virgin Mary, her crucified son, and, at all events, the Holy Spirit — and its refinement into a "graph," an abstract symbol of "the compassion," turning it to humanity via a new, secular artistic "grapho-icon."

I concluded my essay by saying that **Pietà** "functions as a signifying super-icon, innate to Arkin's sculpture as a whole," presenting arguments through a general view of the works transpiring in a "warehouse." Now, in the exhibition bearing its name, **Pietà** clearly functions — and not accidentally, as will be seen below — as the enigmatic core of all the works, and apparently serves as a key to observation of the world's irremediable sorrow represented thus far in the exhibition, for two reasons. One stems from the **Pietà**'s location in the exhibition, from its double compartmentalization, hidden in the back, isolated in a kind of crypt, separated from all the works, on the one hand, and not watching any of them, other than the guard chair next to it, on the other. The second reason stems from the character of **Pietà**, which differs fundamentally from all the other works — namely, as per the immediate realization, that **Pietà** belongs to the individual's fundamental psychological-moral order, it suggests an insight regarding a possible spiritual human existence, while all the other works engage with the real, realistic vale of tears informing the dystopian reality of our lives, which gauges itself according to the manner of the Sodomites (Heb. *midat Sdom*, referring to abuse of rights in Jewish law), rather than the measure of compassion.

That said, one must be very careful in posing **Pietà** as a conclusive reproof, as a simplistic answer to the world's sorrow, although we can trust that deep down Arkin indeed believes so, for she has built a micro-chapel for her **Pietà**. Moreover, if we go back to the soft, warm scarves, each uniquely hand-knitted from fine, expensive wool, placed on the fragile, gloomy chairs with great attention as a kind of comforting gift of a caring mother/sister — are they not reminiscent of the **Pietà** fabric? And if we go back and take a closer look at **Dark**'s menacing infernal black cells and notice the hidden, albeit absurd and seemingly unsupported hair ladders dangling from them like a lifeline — do they not express the literal meaning of com-passion, of suffering together body and soul? When we learn that these hairs belong to the artist herself, who hand-wove them into the ladders, something shivers inside us. We fathom her principled position beyond all doubt, even if she does not dare — no one is perfect — boast it personally: compassion is devoting oneself body and soul for the sake of the sufferer.

Still, as aforesaid, we cannot regard this as a "reproof" or an "answer," for if that were the case, then **Pietà** would have had to flutter over the entire exhibition as a merciful, compassionate mother of all living in her temple, rather than being bashfully or hesitantly hidden inside an isolated crypt. Thus, it would be more accurate to regard the touch of the **Pietà** in the works as a personal appeal, formulated as an existential philosophical question rather than as a rebuke and an answer. The guard chair, next to **Pietà**, implies this, since the person sitting in it or standing next to it, if he has already sat in one of the chairs, is, in fact, the only one who makes eye contact with all the other works in the space through the chain of other guard chairs/sins, after having necessarily passed, one must note, all the other works. Surely, standing there he is initially struck by great wonder, evoked by an even greater question: How is it possible that these sins still exist, as in time immemorial, in our enlightened society?

To wit: the question being posed here, in my opinion, is the opposite of Abraham's question/request to God before He destroyed Sodom. Sodom was, without a doubt, a dystopian utopia, and yet, what Abraham finally addresses to God is a request, articulated as a theological question: Is there not one righteous man in Sodom? In other words, is Sodom at all possible in the world, in a world that has a God in it? God knows. In our context, however, in a world devoid of a God as an ontological entity/authority to which one may turn, the very introduction of the question in this version implies the possibility of hopelessness, just as happened in Sodom. The personal *pietà* touches in **Meat** and **Dark** are already a denial of the biblical possibility, of Sodom as a total dystopia. These touches turn out to be a tribute to a hopeful fact, ultimately underlying all dystopian works: there is always at least one righteous man in Sodom. In which case, the inverted question raised by Arkin's **Pietà** is: How is it that there is "only" one righteous man in Sodom? Why are there so few compassionate individuals, operating in the dark? Hence, the personal touch here is not despair or sanctification and self-justification via the absurd path of artistic creation, but rather optimism, articulated by way of question and immense perplexity.

Doris Arkin's Disassembled- Disassembling Sculpture: Between Psychoanalysis and Deconstruction

Albert Suisa

The discussion of Doris Arkin's sculptures will focus exclusively on the general commandment "Remember!", on memory as the essence of the soul, and on the act of remembering. It will constitute an archeology of the very observation of the sculptures, their materials, the way they were chosen and treated, and the knowledge underlying them, regardless of a specific installation. The sculptures here hang by a thread in the mind as notions embodied in matter, as reflections on Arkin's memory and remembrance.

**Memory is a Crypt, Recollection
is Placement in an Ossuary**

As in the craft of deciphering the traces of memory, Arkin's sculptures will be examined here while tucked away — whether disassembled and packed in wooden crates, wrapped in cloth, or covered in thick nylon sheets — in the storeroom adjacent to the "requiem hall," the artist's studio, where they are intermittently assembled and taken apart. As in the act of recollection, thought and creativity were also invested in the "packaging," which conceals more than it reveals. The wood boxes call to mind coffins or steamer trunks, the fabrics call embalming or shrouds to mind, and the

nylon sheets — a cover or a mask. Arkin removes the tombstone, opens a window, raises a nylon sheet, allowing for a glimpse of dismembered sculptures; like an open jigsaw puzzle, which spawns a new, constantly changing body. These are sculptures without fixed organs, assemblages "that are unstable, vulnerable, susceptible to tearing; one-off installations prone to falling apart, with a built-in disintegration potential,"¹ which have no single origin or assembly option. As such, they hint at the ironic, melancholic fate of most artworks in the world: every work of art is, a-priori, a double memory, but works of art, whose sole purpose is to serve as eternal memorials, are literally immersed in the oblivion of museum crypts and state treasure repositories throughout the world, as humanity's collective unconscious. Therefore, the sculptures must also be considered in light of the possibility that they might find themselves trapped in the paradox of the archive — which over time transforms into "*genizah*" from the crypt to the ossuary and onward, deep into the unknown — and not only through the representation modes of the period's select masterpieces, granted the preferential showcase of general selective memory when grace befell them.²

**The Found Object: Memory is a Thing
in an Ocean of Things**

Many of Arkin's sculptures are based on, arranged around, or contain a found object (*objet trouvé*), such as rusty wires, autobiographical manuscripts, a collection of military buttons dug from the ground, and more. These are the leftovers of something larger, at times vast in its scope of meanings, which function as a remnant, a trace, a medium of memory. Arkin, however, is not concerned with ecology or recycling, nor with all the historical affinities with neo-surrealistic, conceptual, or postmodern artistic trends to which found objects may tie her. Any sheer randomness or, alternatively, conscious conceptual intent, is removed from Arkin's found object. The act of finding here is tantamount to an inner illumination of the private memory, which is illuminated by the found object, or indicates that the found object has become illuminated, because inner illumination has shed light on it, although ostensibly, it was not actually lost. As in recollection or daydreaming, the sudden, abstruse finding of the found object is an unsettling, gripping meaning. Moreover, it is not a purely aesthetic fascination or whim: as with the multitude of buttons in

Requiem pp. 35-36 which are gathered in a kind of ossuary apart from the sculpture, the found object functions as a mesmerizing, magnetizing "medium"; as a phantom, which becomes a memory fetish. It constantly evades perception: not a recycled material, not a lost nostalgic object or a readymade, and at the same time — it is all of these together for the memory work. It is a relic from another jigsaw puzzle lost forever, a trace, a hidden signifier/reminder which has no signified yet — a readymade of memory. Like a person's name, the found object too already floats in the river of a preceding memory: memory, any memory, is like water in water.

**The Studio as a Clinic:
Memory is a Jigsaw Puzzle
whose Origin is Lost**

As in traditional anamnesis in the clinic, the found object, excavated and uprooted from the world, is laid in Arkin's inverted "requiem hall," where it is led to purgatory, in long anticipation for its unknown organs/memories/meanings to be assembled, on the way to metamorphosis, to the resurrection of the living-dead. In practice, however, there is no telling who is lying there in the studio, the found object or rather the artist, for it is not

enough to find the remembering/reminding object; one must also live with it, dub it, converse with it, and be dubbed by it. It is a tough, uncompromising negotiation because the pretense of transference and counter-transference here is sincere, responsible, and moral; therefore, as in the clinic, it must be mutual — one that rejects muscle outright. For, beyond the unmediated belonging to Arkin ("Arkin's"), the found object now contains a tremendous, threefold tension: between "Arkin's object," "the object for itself," and "the object as a the work of art," paving a path, a three-way split of sculpture/memory. Like the Socratic-Freudian memory, the found object conjures up something we sought because it was previously known to us, but in Arkin's work there is no real epistemic connection between the search and the finding, but only an intuitive, not entirely deciphered affinity/clash.

Before ever becoming a culture of "art/memory," the primitive sculpture was primarily a "creation," earth, dust. Classical sculpture was faithful to this process until its pretentious climax, masterfully articulated in modern humanism. In postmodern sculpture, which is all about a deconstructed, alienated interdisciplinarity, there is already an affinity to the industrial product, founded on oblivion

and the destruction of memory. This tragic historical process endured by sculpture/memory is essential to the very construction of Arkin's sculpture throughout its various phases, from the act of laying down of the materials to be used for its construction. Therefore, the act of sculpture here, by its very essence, is set in motion over and over again, with great effort, not only through the recollection/creation itself, but whenever the need arises to recollect/reconstruct the sculpture. These ever-changing jigsaw sculptures originate in a jigsaw puzzle, the origin of whose image is unknown; it is veiled in a tangle of possible "translations" — hence also "interpretations" — of the lost memory.

Anamnesis: The Impossible Return to the Origin

Shrouded in darkness, towering above all the others, is the impressive sculpture **Anamnesis** pp. 37-39 (memory/remembrance): a giant sphere, an impossible tangle of rusty wire, reminiscent of an extinguished planet. It is all deep scars, black holes, raveled knots, and multiple sling stones, that have wounded its spiky, prickly body. Despite its theoretical, intricate "deconstructability," **Anamnesis** maintains the unity of its crumbling, obscure

form as a fateful grip, even in the darkness of storage. **Anamnesis** is a pivotal entity, which also gave its name to Arkin's first solo exhibition and to an entire suite of prime sculptures in Arkin's oeuvre, which make up a complex psycho-philosophical puzzle of remembrance and testimony.

As its title suggests, **Anamnesis** refers to the basic act that a person seeking recovery in psychoanalysis and psychology must perform to be cured of mental anguish: to recollect and recount one's memories. In and of itself, however, **Anamnesis** in fact indicates the sheer impossibility of this task, as an endless, absurd, Sisyphean act. It is a primitive body, a quintessential rhizome, a tangle that has no fixed measure or limit, no beginning and no end; a multidimensional labyrinth, which is nothing but a dark, fragmented tuber, protected by millions of thorns, undermining the very possibility of a single, exclusive anamnestic "narrative." In its visual and sensory material impenetrability, **Anamnesis** takes the immanent autonomous pretension of psychoanalysis, and shifts it to an even earlier dimension than the metaphysics of Socratic recollection, and this precedence seems to precede both existence and epistemology. It turns one to metaphysical questions regarding memory, even before completely destroying the possibility of any unity of the subject.

**Texto: Remembering is
Transcribing, Rewriting**

What illuminates the visible darkness of the primal, primitive **Anamnesis** are the three spheres of the cultural sculpture **Texto** pp. 40-41 which conceptually orbit it like planets around an extinguished sun, moving around and against it with the tension of a quintessential cognizant/psychic gravitation. Each sphere is made of Latin letters cast in bronze, mediated by wax runners collected in the foundry. The bronze letters, attached to one another in a concentric circular sequence, constitute the body of the sphere itself, without a supporting frame, forming the sentence: *A mi me mima mi mama* ("My mother pampers me") in Spanish, Arkin's "M"/"mother" tongue (both pronounced *em* in Hebrew), a sentence repeated over and over again around and into the sphere. It is a sentence whose alliteration creates a proximity between words/concepts, conflating them into a unifying, gratifying artistic fragment, an age-old artistic-literary device well-known in all languages. In practice, however, **Texto** is not a coveted beautiful object which guarantees the indulgence and pampering of the alliterative sentence. It is difficult to find a beginning and an end in the sentence inextricably cast round and round, and any attempt to read it

in its entirety causes dizziness and frustration, resulting in disappointment. To maintain the graphic composition, created by the circles of letters chasing each other, it was necessary to replace the identical letters found in close proximity to one another, with other, better matching letters, otherwise the composition would have been disrupted. Hence, in order to place the different letters together in the right relation (compositional proportion) to one another, and in relation to the shape of the sphere which they physically create, it was necessary to interrupt, fragment, and disrupt the text so as to preserve the drawing and maintain the harmonious circularity of the sphere. At this point, **Texto** offers an important comment about the act of recollection: The "original" memory is distorted in favor of actual recollection — the harmony of the composition and the smoothness of the round image, which strives for formal and aesthetic perfection at the expense of the integrity of meaning. In short, beware of memory, and beware of remembering.

The cognizant/psychic context here is quite clear: the text/speech, which represents memory, is not memory itself, nor does it overlap memory. The gap between them is quite dramatic, possibly never bridgeable at all. The text/speech is nothing but a translation, a medium, a support, a bridge, a trace, a bypass,

a hint, an echo, and so on, of the primal memory itself, which cannot be represented, let alone reached. Moreover, the repetition, oral memorization, and even learning innate to any act of recollection are utterly antithetical to the wild, cryptic, one-off unity of the original memory. The three textual spheres, which recur in varying dimensions, from large to small or vice versa, introduce the repetitive element of memory, which is diminishing in value and quality, or intensifying quantitatively and compulsively. **Texto** addresses the dual internal contradiction inherent in language, between its being a secondary vehicle for representing the absolute "unknown" (as opposed to the Freudian "unconscious"), and its being a means of autosuggestion by way of repetition and domestication of the unknown: every person has a compulsive memory, of which s/he no longer knows what is fictive and what is real. **Texto**, as the essence of therapeutic recollection (anamnesis), offers too many comments about the very possibility of memory. I shall herein refer to some of these observations, which are embedded in the work's visible, known stratum.

Texto fuses two of Arkin's sensual and aesthetic childhood memories: one is overt, associated with the textual/spoken memory of "*mi me*" (my/me), and the other is covert,

and related to the *jouissance* that goes beyond the "mi me" representation. Its circular and spiral qualities, the revolving movement-around concurrent with the attempt to break inward, to penetrate the heart of memory, are inspired by the Chinese puzzle balls — precious objects made of ivory. These balls, which are carved into the ivory block with inconceivable craftsmanship, sometimes form some dozen enmeshed balls, out of and within a singular organic solid ivory block. Such balls were found in Arkin's childhood home, and she was sometimes allowed to sit on the sofa and play with them, inserting her pinky as deeply as possible, while spinning the balls inside each other. This sensual experience was fused in **Texto's** image with the first-grade experience of reading: the experience of phonetic signifiers, charged with psychic meanings in a poetic sentence which is supposed to anchor signifieds of love and pampering in one repetitive expression characterized by memorization and assimilation of the signifieds and signs into one psychic coinage. Here too, however, as in the double-edged sword of memory, **Texto** possibly alludes to a situation in which it is rather textual/spoken, poetic or abstract memories, learned by repetition and memorizing, that preserve repressed memories, articulating their dark, ironic antithesis.

Thus, according to **Texto**, apart from language as an external mediator of the wild memory, the distance of "remembering" from "memory" is also multiplied by the positive or negative aesthetic aspect of remembering itself. The aesthetic aspect is likewise a concealing element, since it is founded on pleasure or suffering re-experienced during the process of recollection, interfering with the exploration of the truth. The wild "ivory," forgotten because it was transformed into a coveted object, encapsulates the built-in conscious and moral problem of memory, which is, like the found object, always partial and selective, always already a part of the infinite continuity of reality and consciousness, and therefore always beyond the complications of repression, always lacking. Ivory is a valuable material cut from the tusks of an elephant, cruelly killed for the amusement and aesthetic pleasure of man. In cultural memory, the Chinese puzzle ball represents a harmonious combination of art, aesthetics, and mythology with "nature"; at the same time it represses the barbaric act at its core. **Texto's** round, ostensibly gilded surface strives to preserve the circular sensual harmony and the yin-yang symbolized by the Chinese puzzle ball, but the lyrical text about the mother and about pampering, which was

jumbled while connecting the bony bronze letters that hardened and dimmed into the circle's harmony, attests to some fundamental flaw in memory; it suggests the impossibility of restoring the original memory, while also undermining the very pretension of psychological anamnesis.

**From Anamnesis to Chronicle:
Remembering is Essentially
a Moral Choice**

A therapeutic anamnesis is not an amusement or a nostalgic gathering around the family album. The memory is always aroused by pain, suffering, injustice, wrongdoing, or loss that occurred in the past. Hence, to some extent, the act of remembering is affined to a claim for justice and redress for injustice, and in any case – to morality. In anamnesis, a person seeks not only remedy to his soul, but also, simultaneously, justice and principled law.

If remembering is a claim for justice, then forgetting is injustice, and denial is violence. It is at this very point that the seemingly difficult transition in Arkin's work takes place; a giant leap from questions of private anamnesis to testimony of concrete events, drawn from the universal chronicle and pertaining to the world's misery. A chronicle, distinctly synonymous

with trace and memory, contains a terrifying paradox. On the one hand, it is ostensibly a fair solution to the problem of selective repression of private memory ordered by oblivion and denial; but on the other hand, by its very nature, it is a phenomenal, unbiased memory, a memory without a subject who remembers and distinguishes between trifles and fateful or catastrophic events. Furthermore, the national and universal chronicle is a battlefield, where memory is a selective social construct, based on a systematic, institutionalized path to oblivion. A fundamental, moral paradox of the chronicle: the memory of Amalek is closely bound to its erasure from the face of the earth.

**Fui: The Memory Industry as the End
of the Subject and Utopia**

The Holocaustic-Kafkaesque sculpture **Fui** (I Was), pp. 42-45 which may be interpreted in various ways, articulates the rift and horror that render the transition from the private-biographical to the general-public a conscious moral necessity, according to Arkin. **Fui** is a paper shredder, whose function is to shred a continuous strip of paper bearing autobiographical memoirs in different languages, written in the first person, especially collected, assembled,

and treated with a compassionate, kind hand. The memory of the lives of generals and statesmen, scientists and intellectuals, businessmen and athletes, as well as masters of ordinary life thus transforms into a pile of shredded paper that will be a part of the work when it is next shown; the work's history will thus merge with the history of the people whose memories will be shredded in the next exhibition. For this reason, the work was designed to be provocatively hung as a guillotine or gallows for all to see, dread, and heed.

As such, **Fui** is the monster of the global mega-chronicle, which inheres a fundamental split: on the one hand, compassion and empathy, on the other — alienation and cruelty. The twofold split of **Fui** is, in fact, built into the post-capitalist order of production, which fuses man and machine to the point of the subject's disappearance. Personal or collective anamnesis — from personal biographies in countless media to national communication spacecraft — is, without a doubt, one of the greatest, most quintessential modes of production of our time; it is also an important part of the most powerful economies of the modern era, through which new nations are regularly constituted. Any simple personal computer,

multi-channel TV, or iPhone is, in fact, such a "*Fui*" machine; "bottomless" black holes, as one of Arkin's sculptures. This memory industry, however, produces a colossal mega-memory that no imaginary archive or supercomputer, monstrous as it may be, can ever contain, let alone process. Thus, as in all modern production, destruction and annihilation are part of an internal logic, integral to the production process itself. It is impossible to produce something new without taking into consideration the elimination and destruction of a preceding, older product, and in an ironic paraphrase — "ye shall ... bring forth the old because of the new."

The term "*fui*" in itself contains the whole paradox of memory: I-am-now, I-was in the past, and I am no longer "there," but I recall "traces" of myself in the past, which will never return. The word "*fui*" collects itself in the present from the shredder of past time, but while the struggle of the formerly-living memory against recollection in anamnesis faces only a few years, the dead memory, the autobiography in **Fui**, faces the horror of eternity. Between the endless straits of past and future, the word *fui*, attesting to its ephemerality and finitude, tries to extricate itself outside of time via an absurd act of remembering and writing. The sculpture **Fui**

is a reversed Babylonian myth of sorts, from an optimistic utopia to a hopeless apocalypse. As opposed to "one people," one language, and one speech in one city, and one tower of memory whose top reaches unto heaven, into eternity, which shatters into a historical jumble of nations and short-lived languages, in **Fui**, one ephemeral individual is fused to millions of others to create a jumble of different languages, private and temporary, united in one continuous utopian, universal memory, shredded in "time," falling into nothingness. **Fui** indicates the end of utopia and the exposure of the modern myth of universalism as a cover story for the total loss of utopia, and of the revolutionary messianic value innate to the effort of historical collective human memory. By virtue of the hopeless split built into it, **Fui** concludes the sculptural suite of **Anamnesis** and heralds the necessary transition to the chronicle, to disarming the Angel of History from the chronicle's indifferent triviality.

**Requiem: Remembering and
Recollecting Mean Lamenting
and Mourning**

The work **Requiem** pp. 35-36 seizes the living flesh. As its title suggests, its image is an expression of the memorial ceremony, a prayer for the eternal rest of the "deceased":

an iron plate on which to lie down, an iron netting as a shroud, and between them — myriad buttons simulating human skulls that face eternity as well as the built-in nudity of being-towards-death. The never-ending human holocausts or the Day of the Dead come to mind, but while the requiem service expresses a clear, distinct theological order of history (memory), here, in the context of quintessentially secular sculpture, it seems to address the supernatural (metaphysical) issue of the sustenance or immortality of the soul (Heb. *hisha'arut hanefesh*) and endurance of memory after death. The heart of **Requiem** is its primary found object: countless buttons presumably from military uniforms, dug out of the ground, perhaps from a battlefield. Hence, while the religious requiem ceremony takes place before the burial, before memory is signed and sealed, Arkin's **Requiem** is akin to exhumation, removing the gravestone to reveal the sealed memory.

There are numerous professional and symbolic psychological explanations for the patient lying on the couch in the traditional clinic, but if we recall the "requiem" practice for the found object lying in Arkin's studio, then metaphorically we may liken the patient lying to a living-dead, and the anamnesis — to disinterment, de-crypting. The therapist's

disappearance behind is initially intended to allow the "transference," the conjuring up of ghosts from the past, without the therapist's utopian rectification demand in the present. Contrary to the metaphysical-messianic aspirations of the Angel of History's despondency vis-à-vis the wreckage of the past in Walter Benjamin's thesis, however, the anamnesis process in Arkin's work seems to be not only a yearning for amendment and healing by doing justice, but also acceptance and parting by lamentation and grief work.

Requiem denotes "repose." If we shift the "requiem" memorial ceremony to the Freudian clinic, then anamnesis is a process whereby a person tries to find proper rest in the present following a lost memory from the past. But unlike the Socratic philosophical anamnesis, which turns to the metaphysical-ideal, and therefore denies death and its discussion, thus already supporting a certain peace of mind, a psychoanalytic anamnesis is always grief work, lamentation, and preparation to accept the (Heideggerian) being-towards-death. The patient eulogizes himself, comes to terms with the loss and converts it into a new, possibly immanent ethical meaning, since the return to the origin is not possible, and the promise of a future redemption no longer exists either. Just as the endless oral repetition of "*mi me*"

and "*a mi me mima mi mama*" is distorted and depleted of meaning, so the memory is but a dwindling portrayal of a fading life.

Requiem, which is a cold comfort to "*être/je etais*" (being/I was), is also immersed in the nihilism of the sculpture **Fui**. Because here, too, as already hinted in **Fui**, a sudden shift occurs, albeit obscure and incomprehensible, from the lamentation and mourning of the self for itself, to the grief over the loss of the Other. **Requiem's** healing, impersonal nature (the monumental iron plate, the countless buttons/skulls, and the iron mesh, which goes far "beyond") possibly expresses a meaningful transition or miraculous leap of Arkin's private memory work. It heralds the intuitive, undeciphered transition from private recollection to general chronicle, and this is where its significance lies. The hollow iron mesh, absurdly weaving the memories into one another and allowing for sober transparency onto the death of others, is the important emphasis in this sculpture, in which a transition is made from subject to *Dasein* (being there), to any human being facing death. The laborious, patient and tolerant, painful and hand-wounding weaving of the iron mesh shroud, as well as the sewing of the **Pietà** discussed below, is all about the affinity, albeit sudden and not easily explicated, between

remembrance and "remember!", between memory and the act of recollection, on the one hand, and morality and responsibility for the other, on the other.

**The Name Causes!: The Name
as a Signature of the Memory
of the "Other"**

Naming plays an important part in the double resurrection of these dry bones in art — of ancient memories which materialize anew, of found objects, and of the memory of the world's misery. This final, concluding step is taken with great care by Arkin, because the name, memory's foundation of all foundations and pillar of all wisdom, must include the memory of the things themselves, the act of creation, the work's evolution, origins, artistic contexts, worrisome intentionalities, and at the same time — enable the work of memory and the entire array of associations concealed in it, rather than imprisoning it within a single, simplistic sense. In Arkin's oeuvre, there are no untitled works. "Namelessness" would be an antithesis to the subjective psychological aspect, being responsible for the other, which knows itself at this stage of the sculpture's "signing and sealing." Purposeful, caring intuition in the process, and the naming at

its end, unite here in a sculpture, which is a "signature/name," as if Arkin gave her own name and parentage, her patronage, her "pietà," to a work for which she bears full responsibility. As opposed to the *Bereshit/Shemot* ("In the beginning, names!"; Heb. Genesis/Exodus) of man before the Break and The Fall, which set in motion the necessity of textual memory of the ancient name, Arkin gives names at the end, after the Break and before the violent, blatantly immoral oblivion, as a dressing, a last defense, and a final signature against oblivion/obliteration.

But this final, caring intentionality likewise embeds an internal contradiction no less than the deconstruction and reconstruction of memory. On the one hand, the entire essence of a "name" is a-priori remembrance, therefore there is no language without names, because a language is learned by memorization and memory (**Texto**), which infuse the name with an "other" generic quality, beyond the given name. Therefore, when Arkin gives the general title **Atrocities**^{P.46} to a sculpture which draws on the atrocious private case of rape and massacre of Nigerian women by members of the Boko Haram militia, this general name, which seemingly condemns the private case to oblivion, calls upon the viewer to explore and remember the private case; a moral,

responsible demand directed at the viewer of the chronicle's banality of evil, beyond all language. Thus, by giving **Icarus** pp. 47-49 thousands of glowing watch faces, like countless extinguished suns (anamneses), she reminds us of the forgetting of *chronos* — time — at the core of any pretentious fall and euphoria, based on forgetfulness and denial, of any "Icarus."

Pietà: Memory is the Double-Edged Sword of Consciousness

Pietà pp. 113-116 is a soft wall sculpture; a long, delicate scarf, made of thousands of old monogram decorations, hand-sewn together. In its generous hanging on two metal sheet holders, it functions as a signifying super-icon, innate to Arkin's sculpture as a whole, against the horror of the nihilistic **Fui**. In its compassionate maternal movement, it refines the abstract line of **Pietà**: the image of the Virgin Mary cradling her son, the dead Christ, after being taken down from the cross — one of the best-known Christian icons to this day. A powerful, unequivocal super-icon, the *pietà* has been consistently treated in art from various aspects: political-theological, social, psychological, gender-minded, etc.

The monograms in Arkin's **Pietà** shawl are an industrial vulgarization, prevalent since the beginning of the 20th century; mass production of what was previously considered a unique work of art intended for dignitaries or for major organizations, countries, leaders, popes, nobles, artists, and so on, who used to turn their names into a coat of arms or a heraldic badge. Industrial production was intended for the lower classes, who used monograms mainly for marking basic private property, primarily clothes, objects and furniture, but also for self-esteem. Today, the use of monograms on items of clothing is very rare, but, lo and behold, the industrial monogram has become a historical transformer of memory/value, depleting the subject and abandoning him to an anonymous force. If we bear in mind that today's brands and logos are the legal heirs of the heraldic monogram of the past, then we will realize that the importance of the monogram was not lost; it only changed its signifying function: from a mark of self-value or possession by means of a given name to an indication of belonging to a prestigious bank, represented by an object or a general symbol of luxury, outsourced; Louis Vuitton's monogram provides the guise of anonymous luxury to millions of anonymous people around the world.

Arkin's journey into the essence of the **pietà** began with a fateful attraction, while looking for buttons for a garment. A cardboard box containing a small number of monograms stood on the counter of the haberdashery shop — delicate, well-crafted items from other times. The monogram is an initial, the "capital" letter of a name, intended for personal use or the marking of one's most intimate belongings, such as dowry items. Acting on that attraction, Arkin intuitively bought the entire quantity, which soon turned out to be insufficient. Insufficient for what? Only the heart knows. This was the onset of an acquisition quest in Europe that took on the nature of rescue and redemption, alongside a multidimensional reversal: the private object, which became a currency through the nihilistic industry, would return to its source through the one-time remembering work. Namely, a "lost object/memory" would become "a found object/memory," literally, by means of an actual act of artistic compassion and grace. In other words, as opposed to the industrial act, the sudden attraction to one monogram required transition through thousands of anonymous monograms, and the private memory encounters the contingency of thousands of potential memory signifiers of others, always crying out for redemption. The transition of the found object's symbolic value

from the private/individual to the general, or to the absolute other, is a recurring motif in Arkin's work, as in the **Requiem** buttons, the **Icarus** watch faces, the woven linen mats in **Sábana y Mantel** (Sheet and Tablecloth) pp. 50-53 etc. But while the passage of value through the prestigious capitalist bank is entirely voided of all moral significance, the value in Arkin's **Pietà** preserves the com-*passion* — the pity and compassion of the Christian *pietà*, which similarly turns from the "individual" to all of humanity.

While in Christianity that "individual" is a super-entity, the Passion of Supreme Providence itself, symbolized by the trinity of the Christian *pietà*, however, in Arkin's **Pietà** the divine/theological guarantee is shifted and transferred to the individual's responsibility, who pities without any reward or guarantee. That is to say, in Arkin's work, ethics precedes theology: the **Pietà** here is a grapho-icon (as opposed to iconography), which empties the ancient icon of its visual (the Virgin and the Crucifix) as well as theological (divine compassion and forgiveness) symbols, to resume being a secular human icon, purged and new. Like the fringed garment (*tzitzit*) in Judaism, the **Pietà** scarf here functions as an "object" that signifies the purpose of recollection, the "do" and "do not"

commandments (ethics) stemming from the very act of recollection, without presenting an external example which will guarantee the value of compassion intrinsic to remembering.

As opposed to suffering and injustice, which evoke the repressed private memory in the clinic, the memory that arises spontaneously on the way to **Pietà** originates in the positive sentiment of longing, of nostalgia. But longing and nostalgia, the desire to return home, are also sentiments based on the beautification of memory and on repression. If this be the case, in linking the *pietà* to the deconstruction of Arkin's remembering work, one is reminded that memory is a redoubled double-edged sword. Compassion for a fading memory evolves here into a deconstructive exploration of nostalgia as a purifying, refining recollection. Nostalgia, which is nothing but a reactionary yearning for a beautified past, is based on oblivion which is essentially a sentimental demand for an affirmative continuation. At the same time, however, it is also a human demand for sustaining and refining an ideal value and meaning from the past to the present. Indeed, Arkin's **Pietà** is wholly a refinement and bestowal of compassion, which is also purged from the "mercy" of lordship, from the individual to the general, to the infinite other.

1. Arkin in an email correspondence with the undersigned, July 2020.

2. In Jewish tradition, *Genizah* is a hidden repository in a synagogue where timeworn, damaged, or otherwise flawed sacred manuscripts and ritual objects are kept before being buried in consecrated ground.