



The Lost and Found Warehouse

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Abstract: This is a brief fictional exploration of what happens over time to lost, stolen, forgotten, forfeited, and mis/displaced experiences, both internal (affective) and external (actual events). In this tale, I imagine a place—"The Lost and Found Warehouse"—where experiences are stored in relative security but almost certain obscurity. A.G. Green, Middle Manager, oversees the Warehouse and makes efforts to keep its contents organized and available to the general public in order that they might someday retrieve that which they have lost. I did not consciously write this story with Mahmoud Darwish or the Palestinian Diaspora in mind. A dear friend, a Palestinian sister, read it and because it resonated for her, she asked that I submit it for review for this special 2009 issue of *Human Architecture* on Mahmoud Darwish. As it turns out, this serendipitous occurrence is in keeping with Darwish's philosophy on writing and reading. In an interview in *BOMB Magazine*, Darwish stated, "My happiest times are when the public reads and interprets an aspect of my poem that was not clear to me. The life of the poet is conditioned by the reader." (2002, issue 81, www.bombsite.com/issues/81/articles/2520) Indeed. May your reading continue to condition the lives of the poet within us all.

PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS: A WITNESS, A TELLER, AND A KEEPER

"There is enough of unconsciousness to liberate things from their history. And there is enough of history to liberate unconsciousness from its ascension."¹

Mahmoud Darwish is a "teller," a wordsmith, a poet, and a meaning maker.

¹ Darwish M. (2007) "In Her Absence I Created her Image" in *The Butterfly's Burden*, Washington/Copper Canyon Press.

He has become one of the strongest voices that speak of the Palestinian condition. And yet Darwish, like many artists and poets, is not just a *voice* for a Palestinian consciousness. Through his life, his work and his person, he has become a repository for the many feelings and thoughts, hopes and desires of the Palestinian Diaspora—the dispossessed, the oppressed, the lost and the invisible. He is the rage, he is the justice, he is the keeper and he is the teller. He remembers, he experiences and he tells.

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I am not a teller. I am a witness. I am a psychotherapist. I have worked with those in exile, and I have worked with those who live in their home city, state and country of origin and feel displaced. I have sat with people who dig deep into their physical and psychological journeys to figure out what they need now to cope with the experience of being displaced, abandoned and restless. I have been witness to and suffered myself due to countless losses of consciousness due to small and large infractions of the human spirit, of injustice. I have often felt out of place but I remain in my "hometown."

It is hard to bring forth and make meaning of all that assaults us, especially when we are forced out of place.

But I am a witness, perhaps a keeper, but not a teller.

Darwish, like the middle manager A.G. Green, who is the protagonist in the short story I offer below, is aware that he has limited power to change reality² but he does have access to a broad range of emotional and psychic states and seems to believe in its power and authority.³ Darwish and A.G. Green are both keepers, protectors and guardians of powerful experiences, not all their own, and both must do the best that they can in their

² In the aforementioned interview in *BOMB Magazine*, Darwish states, "Then, I became close to the Israeli Communist Party. This introduced me to the notion that poetry can be an instrument of change. I took this very seriously until I arrived at my own conclusion that poetry changes nothing. It may have an effect on how people feel, but it has not effect on reality. The only person it changes is the poet himself." (www.bombsite.com/issues/81/articles/2520)

³ Ibid (www.bombsite.com/issues/81/articles/2520), Darwish speaks of his youth and his burgeoning interest in becoming a poet, "I began to dream of becoming a poet. I believed the poet was a mysterious figure with superhuman faculties."

work to honor and care for these experiences.

Indeed the complicated internal and external circumstances that makes up the Palestinian identity and it's physical land, necessitates a keen and humble eye and mind to contain, categorize, make sense of and keep alive the multitude of experiences and expressions that are lost to others as they struggle to maintain their memory, or their parents' memories, and/or their desire for their homeland.

I did not write this story with Mahmoud Darwish nor the Palestinian Diaspora in mind. A dear friend, a Palestinian sister, read this story and it resonated for her. She asked that I submit it for the special 2009 issue of *Human Architecture* on Mahmoud Darwish. I am pleased to have been able to do this for it is in keeping with Darwish's philosophy on telling. He states, "My happiest times are when the public reads and interprets an aspect of my poem that was not clear to me. The life of the poet is conditioned by the reader."⁴

Now, perhaps, for this brief moment, I become the witness, the keeper and the teller.

THE LOST AND FOUND WAREHOUSE

"First we take years to think and analyze—sometimes forfeiting full lives to our relative material inactivity—and then for many reasons, some quite unreasonable if you ask me, we don't show up for the big hurrah." —A.G. Green, Managing Supervisor

What had once been a lost and found box became, by necessity, a warehouse, a

⁴ IBID, FALL 2002, NYC/NY.

huge, open space that was absolutely indispensable to house all the lost feelings, thoughts, and desires of so many who had never come to reclaim them.

No more withered by aged cardboard liquor boxes (“after all”—they thought—“why replace such a container when it was so rarely used?”) that are half sagging and stained, wetted by seasonal losses. No more discarded crates that sit not quite in a corner but near enough to one so as to direct the very occasional seeker to the lost and found box that is “in the corner.” It was a valuable service indeed to the individual but unlimitedness preempted this humble humanitarian gesture.

No, things got too big for this box. With so many opportunities—by chance or by intention—to leave behind just a small bit of themselves and not notice for years, if ever, that in fact they had lost something, the quantity became overwhelming. And the fact is that even if someone did, at some point, realize that they were missing something, the process of recuperation is a painstaking undertaking, often involving years and years of a particular kind of singular focus. So as you can see, storage space became absolutely indispensable.

The fact remains that to find that which was lost is a backbreaking task. First one has to retrace their steps, thoughtfully, carefully and one must be able to do so and keep track of their steps while enduring the countless interruptions that constitute the mundane chores of everyday life. This act of finding is both a physical and mental feat. One needs to go backwards—heels first, toes next (this being in and of itself a very unsettling order of events for how can we feel grounded if we are walking backwards?)—trying to remember a series of moments, hours, days, weeks, months,

years—so that one may invent a thread-like connection to the actual place that they probably had that loss. It has been known to necessitate years and years of backwards walking all the while standing erect and looking forward while in the present. Just thinking about this makes me dizzy. And I assure you that this is by no means a linear process. Nope, sometimes these threads of remembering are erroneous and one needs to begin the process again.

And then, to terrible effect, when there is success in identifying where the loss occurred, often those places either no longer exist or they have express shipped their items to the Warehouse long ago. (As I told you earlier, no more “corner” boxes. They all end up here one way or another and in a quite timely fashion I might add. Our system, while not exactly comprised of high-end technology, does work quite well on that end of things.) You can only imagine how this can drain the hope out of anyone.

Mind you, not everyone performs the laborious acts of detective work to find what they have lost. Some folks don’t even necessarily know that they have lost anything at all. There might be a sense that something has gone missing, but the preference is to either ignore this or to imagine that one is just imagining what they are feeling. Well, at least that’s my theory on why so many find their way here. You know that feeling though, don’t you?—we all do. You’re at the front door in the morning, checking and re-checking your pockets, making sure you have keys, money, drivers license, etc. And yet, still you are not quite sure that you have everything.

No, the Warehouse is full of lost feelings, thoughts and desires and there is a high probability that many of these items will not be moved, reclaimed nor repos-

sessed. And yet the Warehouse still stands, receiving the shipments, filling up the space and in the end functioning as if it was functional. It's a one-way street, I tell you, the items come in and rarely leave. If I had my way, things would change so that the system could work better, but then...well, I'll get to this in just a bit.

Let me tell you a little about the physical plant of The Lost and Found Warehouse. It is quite a large storage area, your typical industrial steel warehouse with five, no make it six, levels counting the basement. From the outside, it's a kind of pitiful sight, but on the inside it's not so bad. It has surprisingly good natural light. We have a southern exposure, so this is, as you might imagine, quite useful when we are trying to help the occasional customer to locate something. It is also a very nice benefit for the employees, and myself—it really makes the day better to have some sunshine in our midst.

Unfortunately like many large industrial storage sites—places where products of the quick producing, fast paced, blah, blah, blah modern world are stored (we've all heard and critiqued the pitfalls of industrialization and modernism, but as the saying goes, there is no way to fight it because you can't turn back the hands of time) it's not so easy to get here. If you don't have a car, or a friend with a car, or taxi money, unfortunately you are plain out of luck. It is not accessible by train or any form of mass transportation, which is a shame because truly, perhaps more people might decide that they could set out on a journey to find what they had lost—they could take all those steps backwards and even make that final connection—"Aha, that is where it probably is" and set out to actually reclaim that which was lost.

But then again, it could not reasonably be so that it is the lack of transportation that inhibits a trip to the Lost and Found Warehouse. There are so many deterrents, really, if you think about it. People have a lot of work to do, or they are sick or have a toothache, or "dinner is getting cold."

I got my job here quite by accident, or actually, maybe it was by intention but certainly not my own. You know how they say that some people are born leaders, or born losers, or born to ____—well you can fill in the blank. Well, it seems that I was born to be living my life situated within the realm of lost feelings, thoughts and desires. I suppose if that was what I was born to do then my vocation in this lifetime has been to figure out how to catalog, contain and ultimately return them to those to whom they have been lost.

Unfortunately, I didn't get the right kind of training, nor education, or at least not the exact kind I would need to step up the ladder of success, so here I am in the middle world of middle managers who know too much and are not blessed with authority to make decisions and take action on their own.

You may wonder then, who exactly are my bosses, and to be perfectly frank with you, I ask myself this question more frequently than I would care to admit to you. I mean not only is it difficult not to be able to tell someone exactly who you work for, but honestly there are many times I wish I had a stronger sense of my bosses for any number of reasons. Sometimes you just want authority to come down and structure the chaos. Make some big decisions. Make decisions for you. I mean, even if they couldn't figure out how to do this with the content of the Warehouse which I completely understand (as we all know how complicated it

is to deal with these things)—the least they could do is make some brilliant and future thinking decisions that would make it easier for me and my employees to sort these things out.

What I have thus far surmised in my time here is that I don't really have a boss. There is a vague but very large Board of Directors that oversees the Warehouse and makes sure that it keeps going, but they aren't exactly visionaries. I mean, I could really use some help in both slowing down the pace of what comes in here or at least one day a week when the doors are closed, but they allow shipments to come in, small or large, at any time of day and any day of the week.

So, I am charged with the task of keeping it all together here, in spite of the fact that we all know that lost feelings, thoughts and desires can get way out of control and desperately need a great deal of structure and organization.

Being a middle manager in the Lost and Found Warehouse is no easy task, no siree, not at all. I have to keep organizing and re-organizing because it always seems that there is more coming in than going out. I don't really have fellow workers because being middle management, I am charged with telling others what to do, even if it is just small things like "arrange that aisle so that nobody trips and there is no lawsuit." And like I said, because I don't really have authority I can't really change anything, like when workers get breaks, or time off, or cost of living allowances. Nope, I just get to tell them what to do, small tasks, and of course, because I appear not to be a visionary because my bosses are not visionaries, then I am not particularly respected around here. Middle management is a lonely place indeed.

The workers don't really know what I do for them and I suppose even if they

did know they wouldn't necessarily appreciate me more for it. And the Board of Directors don't really know what I do for this Warehouse to keep it going and to keep the workers happy, and with them too, even if they did know it, I doubt they would be very appreciative, because they are paying attention to the Warehouse just enough to keep it going. It's not exactly a heartfelt investment of their time. Although I did hear that at one point, many of them were so very eager to join the Board and they believed in the Warehouse and imagined that it would facilitate a sense of community. It does seem like such a simple and humble gesture to store lost items and hope they are returned. But I guess the Board got disillusioned at some point and turned their philanthropic gestures elsewhere.

I really do do things that make the workers' lives better—really—and it is important to me that at least you believe this. Perhaps you want an outline or a strategy plan, but I don't have one because even if I did no one but me would pay attention. But I'll give you a brief overview of my job responsibilities and how it helps my workers and the Warehouse and even how it benefits the Board of Directors.

One of the most important functions of my job is to carefully evaluate each item that comes into the Warehouse and make sure that it can be contained until someone comes and claims it. You'd be really surprised how out of control these lost feelings, thoughts and desires can be. Things can get really crazy here and that means the workers as well. So it is my job to make sure these feelings don't get under the skins of the workers so that they can keep doing their job effectively, even if this means that often I am stung, bitten, smitten, hurt, dirtied, cut, offended and many other things by all these lost feel-

ings, thoughts and desires that I need to log in.

The workers don't quite understand how much I shield them and that's a shame really. It would be nice to have some appreciation of just how much I take on for them.

Mind you, on an everyday basis, I don't feel like a victim or a martyr. It is true that sometimes I think that my work makes me suffer too much at the end of the day (though there really isn't an end to the day—its more like when I doze off for a few hours—for as you know middle managers get little sleep because we are always so worried about what we are supposed to do according to our superiors but so constrained in what we really can do) or I feel so lonely in my position as middle manager, but for the most part, I am oblivious to the intensity and the enormity of the task at hand, that is until I sit down and think about it.

So, I do get "emotional" depending on how the day is going but because I am a middle-aged man and a middle manager, expressing any feeling is out of the question. And I do mean out of the question. Even my job description mentions something about "no affect stimulation at any time." The words explain that the uncontained expression of any feelings is bound to excite the employees that would then cause a diminishment of focus on the job they have to do. Unfortunately, while I understand this need to keep order at the Warehouse, which often does mean not getting involved in confusing and confused states of mind and heart, they don't offer any alternatives, such as extra breaks after a particularly trying off load of a truck, or a day long retreat so that we can clear the air and get on with our work.

So on some days, I spend just a few minutes extra in the very dimly lit restroom. I carefully remove my worn grey fedora and rest it on the edge of the sink. Then I look into the mirror, adjust my posture and begin to stare at myself and make sure I am really me and really there and I wait to see what happens. Sometimes, a few tears will start to form in both eyes, but never in the same place or at the same time. I watch as these vague forms begin to slowly make the trip down my cheeks. I contemplate the pace and form of these tears and feel just a bit grateful that I have them, that they are not lost.

But that's not what is most important to tell you about regarding my job and this Warehouse.

While one might think that I am rewarded most for my performance regarding customer satisfaction, truly, the Cataloging and Containment of that which enters through these doors is what I am most valued for and is the most formidable part of my job given that not many customers show up here. So, our job tasks focus mainly on the receipt and storage of items.

Here they are below. I am reproducing these papers so that you can get an idea of what the work is like here, both in the tasks and the evaluation of job performance. But please, don't pass this around because if my "bosses" see them, it could mean it would mean the loss of my job.

(I am so excited to be able to review these with you. I so rarely get an opportunity like this.)

1. Cataloging Protocol for the Lost and Found Warehouse Receivable Items

Cataloging Protocol for The Lost and Found Warehouse Receivable Items

1. Cataloging of items received in the Warehouse must be formally entered into the Log.
2. All categories in the Log must be properly filled out. These categories are as follows: Date Received, Date Shipped, Shipping location (where the item was shipped from), Proper Categorization of content of shipment (see Containment Protocol for the Lost and Found Warehouse of Receivable items for further instruction on categorization), and full name of the Person Receiving Shipment.
3. Once the Cataloging Log is properly filled out, then The Containment Protocol must be followed.

2. Containment Protocol for the Lost and Found Warehouse of Receivable Items

Containment Protocol for the Lost and Found Warehouse of Receivable Items

1. Given the highly unpredictable nature of items received in the Warehouse, caution is of the greatest importance in dealing with these items.
2. Given the highly unpredictable nature of items received in the Warehouse, a cursory evaluation will serve as the basis for Categorization. If during this cursory evaluation, the item seems to be of high risk, immediately call your supervisor who will follow the High Risk Containment Protocol
3. After completion of the cursory evaluation, check the box in the Catalog Log whether the item falls under Feelings, Desires or Thoughts.
4. While it might be difficult to be absolutely sure of the category, it is nonetheless completely necessary to check only one box in the Log.
5. Place the item in a color-coded folder and store in a box with same folders. Be sure that the box is dated.

3. High Risk Containment Protocol

High Risk Containment Protocol

Please be aware that this protocol is confidential and should only be the knowledge of supervisors! Any deviation from this will be cause for immediate dismissal!

1. Remove all personnel from the immediate area.
2. Place item in plastic container and immediately put the lid on it.
3. Put color-coded label on the container, identifying the contents as close to one of the three categories as possible.
4. Carefully store item in containment area.
5. Log the information in the High Risk Containment Protocol Log.

On that rare occasion, when a customer actually comes into the Warehouse looking for something, often they are not quite sure what it is that they are looking for. It is my job to keep teaching and coaching my employees to be able to gently guide the customer towards what they might be needing to find without too much pushing of our own agenda (i.e. if one aisle is overflowing for example, the customer service representative might be inclined to steer the customer towards that aisle so that we can get rid of what seems like overstock). It's so easy to just go where it is obvious.

I have a tip list or a cheat sheet that I have been in the process of writing for some time. This is what I hope will be my lasting contribution to the success of the Warehouse. My legacy, if you will. This list will be specifically geared to help in-

sure customer satisfaction and protect my workers. I don't seem to be able though to ever get it to the point where I can hand it out to the Warehouse employees, because always there are things that seem not right.

For example, no matter how many times I revise it, this list always begins with the same suggestion: "proceed with caution but with care and grace."

Now the reason I keep revising this list is because the employees can't seem to get through that first tip. They stutter on the word and then smirk when they get to the grace part. I am never really sure if the reason for their smirk is a defense against having stuttered or if they just truly don't know how to react when they think about care and grace. Embarrassment maybe?

Professional Tips for Good Customer Service and Satisfaction

Compiled and Written by _____, after years of professional service as Middle Manager in the Lost and Found Warehouse

1. Proceed with Caution but with Care and Grace
2. The Customer is not always right, but always treat them as if they were. Often, they don't know yet that they are not right, but they will eventually get there and need your assistance in numerous ways.
3. Good hygiene and clean, sharp clothing make a person attractive and approachable.
4. Be timely and considerate in your treatment of your fellow workers.
5. Always check and re-check your paperwork so that when assisting a customer, you know exactly what the Warehouse contents are.
6. Be sympathetic but not overly so when a customer comes in and is confused and afraid. Don't distract them from their search by focusing on their confusion.
7. Be confident with the customer and the customer will be confident with you and with themselves.
8. Finally, know that you can count on me to help you in any way in improving on your job performance.

Sincerely yours,

A.G. Green, Managing Supervisor