

Tribute to Tempi

Systemic Thinking & Psychotherapy, 28, 19-23. <https://doi.org/10.82070/SYST20262805>

Presentation at the 2nd Panhellenic Conference on Women's Mental Health

War Museum, November 28–30, 2025

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After the deadly train accident at Tempi, dozens of artistic works were dedicated to the memory of the victims. Memory becomes art... and art becomes a bridge. A bridge of connection and remembrance.

Among the artworks created for Tempi, there was also an installation consisting of **58 nails**, placed about 500 meters from the tragic site. Fifty-seven nails were dedicated to the 57 victims, and one nail was dedicated to the missing, the relatives of the victims, and to collective mourning.

When the artist returned to maintain the installation, he discovered that the nails had been removed and only a few scattered pipes remained in the ground. He does not know why they were removed or what became of them. Perhaps they were stolen to be sold; perhaps someone believed that by erasing the symbol, the memory itself would gradually fade away.

Since we are discussing memory, let us recall a bit of mythology.

The tragic event—and it is not the only one—occurred in the **Tempi Valley**, a place linked with myths and traditions since antiquity, dedicated to the god Apollo Pythios.

There, the mythical monster **Python**, wounded by Apollo, had taken refuge and eventually died from the wound Apollo inflicted. Yet Python would always regroup, grow stronger, and thirst for revenge against anything that reminded him of Apollo—namely, youth and radiance. For this reason, every nine years purification rituals took place in Tempi, ceremonies in which mainly young people and children participated. During these ancient rites, a young man representing Apollo would travel from Delphi to Tempi and there set fire to a structure symbolizing the nest of Python.

In modern times, instead of the nest of Python burning, train carriages full of young men and women were consumed by flames.



Of course, there is no curse or “negative energy” in that place. The myth likely arose because of the region’s difficult and dangerous terrain, made even more dangerous after a major earthquake.

As for our times, we do not need earthquakes, cataclysms, or monsters for disaster to occur. The chronic dysfunctions of decades are enough.

It is the mentality expressed by the phrase: **“let’s go and see what happens”**. Sadly, this phrase is not only a remark but also a mentality that governs a large part not only of public administration but also of many citizens.

“Let’s go and see what happens” often leads straight to the cliff. Then comes the other familiar phrase: **“the knife will reach the bone”**. Meanwhile, time is wasted in arguments, and gradually everything loses its gravity until we end up saying:

“Remind me when it happened?” “Never mind, these things happen everywhere—it’s just bad luck”.

Tragic.

People forget. People become increasingly disconnected—from themselves and from others.

In defense of the human species, I would say that we are so trapped in our daily lives that past events do not always follow the trajectory of our thoughts. There are so many things we are forced to remember daily, so much we must learn and manage in a rapidly changing world, and so many unpleasant events invading our lives, that as a defense we push them into oblivion.

In the digital age, the violence of the world reaches us unhindered. As journalist Phoebus Oikonomidis wrote in an article in the *Vima* Newspaper: “it clings to our mobile phone alarm clock, throws salt into our coffee, mud into our living room, and rain onto our summer vacations”.

And what does all this bring to our minds? Awareness and vigilance? A sense of danger and fear? Amnesia, isolation, disconnection, deafness, and blindness? Perhaps all of the above, depending.

Yet however much time passes, there are things and events that we cannot—and must not—throw into oblivion. Memories that refuse to fade. People and events that truly existed and still exist. (Etymologically, the Greek word **“truth” (aletheia)** comes from the alpha privative and “lethe”, meaning oblivion. Truth is that which cannot be forgotten.)

Most people have not forgotten what happened at Tempi—and neither have we. That is why we responded to this call: to stand together with respect for the dead and the bereaved, with sensitivity and humanity for memory and connection.

At Tempi, one of the most tragic disasters in modern Greece occurred, with the victims being mainly young people. It revealed the fragility of our civilization, plunged us into mourning, fear, and anger, unleashed a storm of accusations toward institutions, and left us even more vulnerable regarding trust and the sense of safety.

The victims, together with their families, became **“ours”**.

The phrase **“text me when you arrive”**—written on walls, in books, poems, and articles—touched us deeply and expressed the pain we all felt for everyone. We mourn not only the



victims, but for the mourners too. They were called **Iphigenias**. Why? Another sacrifice so that ships may sail? Is such a sacrifice necessary for change? Must change in this country always demand blood?

In the hours that followed, discussions began about responsibility and negligence, about systems that failed, about dark points and omissions that defy common sense.

Mourning. Collective mourning. Traumatic mourning. Pain. Injustice. A demand for justice—because the sense of justice is fundamental to existence, to citizens, and to democracy.

European Chief Prosecutor **Laura Kövesi** stated that if the projects had been implemented, this tragedy could have been avoided.

How many tragedies must we endure before we correct ourselves? We are a people that do not learn from our mistakes and tragedies.

We are a people with many virtues but also many flaws. Societies often survive by remaining silent and forgetting. Our people carries unresolved grief—from the Nazi occupation, the economic crises, natural disasters, the Mati wildfire, and now Tempi.

With Tempi, that silence broke.

In this sense, the demand for justice is not only legal; it is **ontological**. It concerns our relationship with truth, as social psychologist Antonis Androulidákis says. It concerns our relationship with life and death. Freedom and justice are not gifts—they are daily pursuits.

People must remember and speak, because whatever happens to our civilization, the human voice remains the mirror of our ability to express ourselves.

Those who mourn and remember commemorate. They ask for goodness and justice to prevail so that their pain does not remain merely a name carved on a stone, and so that the dead may regain their subjecthood—because they existed.

No one asks for revenge. Retaliation rarely restores harmony. What people ask for is justice and dignity.

My mind turns to Aristotle's "**Nicomachean Ethics**". Aristotle refers to the Trojan king **Priam** as a model of dignity and inner nobility. Priam ruled while his kingdom was being destroyed; he endured the murder of his son Hector and the desecration of his body. "I endured what no mortal has endured: to kiss the hands of the man who killed my son, begging him to return the body".

How similar this feels to the parents of the victims.

And Euripides, in "**The Suppliants**", speaks of what we owe to the dead, emphasizing that preserving and extending memory is humanity's effort to unite with true knowledge and with life and death—to gain awareness of existence.

We are psychotherapists. For psychotherapists, politics is not the starting point—but we are citizens of a world and of a polis, and the world and the polis are part of the therapeutic journey. As part of this I don't know for how long we will be able to retain our neutrality, when so many tragic things happen in this world.



Mental health does not exist in a vacuum. The social context affects our minds and our wellbeing. Disasters, wars, femicides—these disrupt our ideals and values, our trust and our sense of safety; all the things that shape our lives.

They create disorientation not only about the world but also about ourselves. We must protect what is safe, just, beautiful, and noble. Let us not become numb from endless scrolling.

Let us not forget to think, to speak, to share, to connect, to deepen. Let us not forget where we come from and what shapes us; what goes on around us, and what we need in order to live, not merely survive.

Let us not forget to play, to stand in solidarity, and be tender—to “**rise upward**”, as the etymology of the word *human* (*anthropos*) suggests in Greek.

If experiences—especially traumatic experiences—are not expressed and shared, trauma becomes chronic. Expression is replaced by symptoms such as violence, as psychoanalyst Kostas Nasikas noted, and individuals lose part of their human dimension.

Silence and oblivion are not therapeutic. We live in cities and politics with no soul—with no awareness of their psychosocial dimensions. We need a mature and compassionate language from both citizens and politicians. We need a dose of tenderness in order to see in the darkness.

And since we are speaking about tenderness, woman is a symbol of tenderness. She gives birth, welcomes the newborn with lullabies, nurtures life, and since ancient times has been the guardian of rituals and the one who bids farewell to the dead through mourning and lament.

I would like to close with words about tenderness from writer and Nobel laureate **Olga Tokarczuk**:

“Tenderness is the most modest form of love. It is the kind of love that does not appear in the scriptures or the gospels, no one swears by it, no one cites it. It has no special emblems or symbols, nor does it lead to crime, or prompt envy. It appears wherever we take a close and careful look at another being, at something that is not our “self”. Tenderness is spontaneous and disinterested; it goes far beyond empathetic fellow feeling. Instead, it is the conscious, though perhaps slightly melancholic, common sharing of fate.

Tenderness is deep emotional concern about another being, its fragility, its unique nature, and its lack of immunity to suffering and the effects of time. Tenderness perceives the bonds that connect us, the similarities and sameness between us. It is a way of looking that shows the world as being alive, living, interconnected, cooperating with, and codependent on itself”.

It gives me hope that today we are still speaking about the collective mourning of Tempi. We share grief, we empathize, we remember—we become tender and supportive, we love. We create meaning, and when we can share meanings publicly, we create the conditions for change. We evolve. We shape civilization.

We obtain a flow and continuity... we become historical beings. We are historical beings because we have a past that is meaningful to us, affects our present, and redefines our sense of what is important. What is worth conserving and transmitting to the next generations.



The human experience, our memories travel through time and reach those that have not yet been born, but who will at some point turn to our writings, to the stories we told about ourselves and the world.

The accident at Tempì is one more tragic collective experience. Remembrance, Connection, Mourning and Tenderness can become a process of collective reconstruction, a substratum of social and political action, where society finds its voice, meaning and self-awareness.

Finally, I will share something written by a teacher from Crete about memory:

“If you love your homeland, love its children. Fill their minds with stories, memories, and images. Otherwise, the place will cease to exist, and everything you tried to build will collapse silently. Memory leads you to tomorrow. Memory corrects mistakes. Memory is a wise elder who advises you before decisions are made. It contains everything—art, music, stories, values, fairy tales, struggles, joys, and tears. It is like a deep imprint on the earth. Speak the truths. Write them down so that memory is not lost—and with it, the kindness of people”.