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Preface

Eitan Bar-Yosef

The old Tel Aviv Museum was full to bursting; the ceremony was about to begin. Surrounded by members of the People's Council and the Provisional Government, David Ben-Gurion stood behind a long table covered by a light blue cloth. A huge portrait of Herzl hanging above him, framed in between two great blue-and-white flags, Israel's first prime minister was preparing to address the nation. The British Mandate was over. Outside the building, on Rothschild Boulevard, masses of people had gathered to celebrate the historic day: 5 Iyar, 1958.

What? Yes, indeed – 1958. As part of Israel's tenth anniversary celebrations it was decided to reenact the state's Declaration of Independence, in the same venue



Photograph: Moshe Pridan, Government Press Office

and with the original participants.¹ The ten years that had passed did not make the task easier. *Ma'ariv's* reporter commented that “one can reenact a historical event, but one cannot reconstruct the thrill and the feeling of a historic action – especially when the ‘protagonists’ are not played by actors; rather, the protagonists themselves return to their original roles.” But not all the protagonists were fortunate enough to play themselves. In the first row of the invitees sat “the five widows of the five signers who had passed away.” The passing years had not only grayed the hair and etched the faces, but had also raised some politicians and lowered others: “Many who were then among the most important members of government now sat at the table only as ‘extras,’” noted the reporter.² As if anticipating the problem, the organizers invited the leading stars of Israel’s national theater, Habima, to take part in the ceremony. Aharon Meskin recited “Yizkor” while Hanna Rovina (and not Ben-Gurion) read the Declaration of Independence.

The presence of the actors (who were not mentioned in *Ma'ariv*) heightened the dramaturgical dimension of the event, which was meant to replicate the desire, now lost, that had preceded the declaration of the state. Hamutal Tsamir, who has traced this replicating mechanism in Israeli literature of the 1950s, has employed the critical insights of David Lloyd, Adi Ofir, and in some respects also Homi K. Bhabha to describe how the declaration of the establishment of the state moves the nation, with a single thrust, “from linear-progressive time, based on the sense of continuity with its true and original essence, to a commemorative-reproductive time.” Therefore, “from this moment on, the nation must create anew, again and again, the sense of progress and its goals, the desire and the legitimation for its existence.”³ And so, although the state has already been established and the desire long fulfilled, time and again Israelis are required to reestablish the tower-and-stockade settlements, expel the British, drive away infiltrators, conquer Gaza, “chop off the hands” of terrorists and declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz Israel, to be known as the State of Israel.

1 On this reconstruction see Assaf Zeltzer, “The Tenth Anniversary Celebrations of the State of Israel 1958–1959 and the Integration of the Re-enactment of the Ceremony of the Declaration of the State as Part of the Celebrations,” <http://ihi.org.il/media>.

2 “Reenactment of History,” *Ma'ariv*, 27.4.1958, p. 2.

3 Hamutal Tsamir, 2008. “From History to Myth: Mythizations of Nativity in the Poetry of the State,” in Yotam Ben-ziman (ed.), *Memory Games: Concepts of Time and Memory in Jewish Culture*, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, pp. 102–103.

The tension between linear time and circular time, between national time and personal time, is explored in several of the articles in this issue, which is being published against the backdrop of a new Palestinian uprising. It is not surprising that many Israelis rely on the view of “reproductive time” to describe and understand this wave of violence. The center-right leaders, headed by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, refuse to recognize the connection between the Palestinian violence and the intensification of the occupation. Instead, they insist that the events derive solely from the Arabs’ eternal hatred of the Jews. “I’m asked if we will forever live by the sword,” Netanyahu said in October 2015 in a session of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Security Committee; he responded with a firm “Yes.” Netanyahu went on to link one conception of time – that is, the eternity of the violence – with a different temporal conception, which is reflected in the cyclicity of commemorative events: “There is talk these days about what would have happened if some person or another had remained [...]. It’s irrelevant.”⁴ “Some person or another” – that is, Yitzhak Rabin; “these days” – that is, twenty years after his assassination; “It’s irrelevant” – because we are doomed, in any case, to live forever on our sword. Two texts in this issue, Michael Feige’s article and the portfolio curated by Gilad Reich, deal explicitly with the assassination of Rabin, but the shock waves of that murder, and of its repression in Israeli culture, can be felt in other essays in the issue, which deal, as noted, with different perceptions of time.

This issue opens with **Eran Dorfman**’s article, “The Return of the Everyday.” The everyday, Dorfman argues, is a mechanism whose function is to repeat events so as to weave them into the fabric of life. This mechanism is not permanent and universal, but rather rooted in historical, sociological and philosophical circumstances that need to be exposed and analyzed. Dorfman shows how the concept of the everyday took shape in late modernity in the wake of processes of secularization, urbanization, and the acceleration of the pace of life. These processes led to the weakening of old institutions (the church and the community) and the rise of new institutions (the state and capital) in ways that reshaped the experience of the everyday and its repetitiveness. From this point on, the everyday is perceived first and foremost as the vague arena of repetition that is cut off from “real” events. The article examines the repetitive function of the everyday as reflected in the work of Michel de Certeau and in the study of phenomenology. Because neither of these

4 “Netanyahu: I Don’t Want a Binational State, but We Need to Control All of the Territory for the Foreseeable Future,” *Ha’aretz*, 26.10.2015 (online).

accounts provides a satisfactory model of the changes in the role of the everyday in modernity, Dorfman then turns to the theories of Freud and Benjamin regarding the “shock” underlying events. This shock requires either rejection or assimilation, two possible responses that are anchored in history and culture and create different types of the everyday. The article ends by turning to the Israeli case and reading the 2011 social protest through the prism of the everyday and its repetition.

To be sure, Dorfman does not deal explicitly with the current wave of violence, but his article suggests that Netanyahu’s outlook (“We shall forever live by the sword”) represents a ritual return that reenacts, again and again, the primordial and distant event until it becomes mystical. This is Freud’s mechanism of “afterwardsness” (or deferred action), but with no hope of escaping from the cyclicity. Nor does Dorfman relate to the assassination of Rabin; nevertheless, the article implies that while Rabin indeed tried to break away from the forced repetition of war, and was murdered because of that, the “Rabin cult” – that is, the return to the assassination as a manifestation of despair over the possibility of peace – is not so different from Netanyahu’s cult of living by the sword. The cyclical return to Rabin’s assassination, Dorfman suggests, may lead to a repetition of another kind only if it adopts different content, not “the murder of peace” but rather some aspiration for normalcy, for another kind of “everyday.”

Michael Feige’s article returns, as I have noted, to the assassination of Rabin in an attempt to explain the identity of the assassin. This is achieved by analyzing the sociological categories that shaped Yigal Amir – and, more broadly, by exploring the complex interaction that exists in Israel between religion and ideology, ethnicity and class, centrality and peripherality. For years the National Religious camp, and the settler leadership within it, sought to attract Mizrahi Jews, but cultural and social difficulties kept the Mizrahim from full integration into this community. Feige notes in particular the newcomers’ difficulty of internalizing the unique codes of the ideological-theological views of Rabbi Kook’s followers. The settlers spoke about redemption and about a revolutionary Jewish state, but generally refrained from translating their worldview to radical acts of violence. Those who joined the community, like Amir, but could not quite understand this gap between rhetoric and action, tended to interpret it as weakness. And thus, Amir’s multifaceted biography led him to the margins of the settler community, which involved a selective adoption of their values without adopting the restraints against the use of political violence. This, Feige argues, also explains why a large percentage of

political murderers in Israel have come from the ethnic margins of Gush Emunim and of the ideological settler community. The article concludes with a significant timely question: Is it possible to apply these conclusions to other groups within the settler and National Religious communities, such as the “Hilltop Youth,” and does the logic that motivated Yigal Amir also motivate broader groups today?

The tension between center and margins is one of the themes of **Dror Harari’s** article, which examines Pinchas Cohen Gan’s series of artistic “activities” in the first half of the 1970s. These activities played an important role in the performative turn in Israeli art. A striking and unique performative characteristic of Cohen Gan’s activities was his use of the “transplantation” technique – namely, introducing a foreign element into a defined arena (ecological, cultural, aesthetic), in a vain attempt to integrate it into that environment. Harari demonstrates that these activities not only reflected the rising spirit of conceptualism but also provided an autobiographical mechanism that enabled the artist – the immigrant from Morocco, the “refugee” – to move gradually into an exploration of the self and of his cultural, political and social identity. These futile transplantations transformed Cohen Gan’s foreignness and his failure to assimilate in the Israeli melting pot into artistic acts that also reflected, *inter alia*, the historical circumstances of the period (Israel between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War) and the revival of the discourse on utopia.

Hila Amit relies on contemporary queer theories to examine the temporal nature of life in the State of Israel. Israel’s national narrative is anchored in a heteronormative view of time, in which the collective time axis (marking milestones such as wars and memorial days) is interwoven with the individual time axis (dotted with moments such as time of conscription, time to marry and to bear children). Amit’s article – based on qualitative research among several dozen queer Israeli emigrants living in New York, London and Berlin – presents emigration from Israel as a practice of alienation from Zionist ideology and demonstrates how queer culture can undermine and ultimately subvert the Israeli regime’s temporal-heteronormative nature. Emigration signifies a severing not only from Israeli territory (and from its political, social and gender order), but also from the concept of “the future,” which is embodied in the ideological dictum to encourage childbirth in order to perpetuate the Zionist undertaking. This is demonstrated most clearly in Israeli mothers’ decision to cut the tie between their offspring and the homeland by means of a symbolic act that also has practical consequences: not registering their

children as Israeli citizens. Nevertheless, the fact that the children are often those who strengthen the emigrants' ties to the state that they have left demonstrates the difficulty of creating a coherent radical narrative.

The role played by the mother-son relationship in Zionist culture is the focus of **Dana Olmert's** article. The last two decades have witnessed a significant rise in literary representations of what had been, until then, a rather marginal character in Hebrew fiction – namely, the soldier's mother. Olmert traces the roots of this character in an early story by Yosef Haim Brenner, "Hu Amar La" (He told her) (1905). Exploring the Jews' use of force and self-defense in pogrom-stricken Russia, the story suggests a connection between the identity of the ideal national mother, as depicted through the son's consciousness in the story, and the image of the bereaved "mother of the sons." Olmert argues that Zionist nationalism indeed sought to distance itself from the ideal of religious martyrdom, which is identified with the passivity ascribed to the diaspora Jew. Nevertheless, the role assigned to the mother in the Zionist narrative reveals continuity between the ideal of martyrdom and the new national ethos. Zionist ideology requires that the mother help her son realize his manhood, whose formation reaches a pinnacle and is tested in military service and in battle. Thus the discussion in Brenner's story initiates the image of the ideal Jewish mother whose son seeks to become a warrior.

Daniel De Malach reveals the reciprocal, sometimes surprising links between the rise and fall of the kibbutz movement, from 1967 onward, and Israel's continuing effort to increase Jewish control over the land. To that end, the article focuses on three historical junctures: the Six Day War and the settlement based on the Allon Plan that followed it; the peace agreement with Egypt and the shift in the focus of colonization from communal-agricultural settlements to "community settlements" (on both sides of the Green Line); and, finally, the Oslo Accords and the abandoning of the effort to promote "self-labor" in agriculture. The article demonstrates, on the one hand, the influence of these events on the kibbutz movement. Its revival and flourishing after the Six Day War were related to its renewed position on the frontier following Israel's conquest of new territories, whereas the crisis that beset the movement in the mid-1980s and the processes of privatization that began in its wake derived, *inter alia*, from the political developments that limited the amount of agricultural land available for Jewish settlement and again separated the Palestinian workers from the Israeli economy. On the other hand, the article demonstrates that the kibbutz movement had substantial influence over the shaping of the defense

policy before 1967, including how the wars were fought, and subsequently also over the intensification of Jewish colonization in the occupied territories and the institutionalization of the occupation.

Oded Erez's article, which concludes the articles section in this issue, revisits the "everyday," as reflected in the encounter between continental philosophy and the Israeli sphere. Erez offers a political theory about the practice of quotation, through an analysis of songs by HaBiluim, an irreverent Israeli musical group. Erez traces the group's poetics in light of a long and varied interpretive tradition that sees quotation as a subversive act that exists in the space between the everyday, the aesthetic and the political. At the heart of this reading is de Certeau's theory of the everyday (that Eran Dorfman, too, examined in the beginning of this issue) and the new relations that it formulates between activities of consumption and production, reading and writing. Combining quotation from the Israeli everyday with humorous and ironic effects, HaBiluim's songs generate alienation based on the gap between the concreteness of what is familiar in the everyday Israeli experience and the artificiality of the artistic act. By using canonical texts and fragments as if they were everyday objects or raw materials, and approaching everyday objects and features as quotable things, the songs grant the Israeli everyday the status of a text open to a new reading – while the canonical texts of Hebrew literature acquire the status of "things," objects available for practical use that does not sanctify them.

As always, the texts that appear in the Essays and Criticism section converse in varied ways with the topics discussed in the articles. This section opens with **Ilai Rowner's** complex and sensitive reading of Michal Ben-Naftali's essayist style. Rowner examines the unique characteristics of this writing, as a landmark in contemporary essay-writing in Israel and as a work of literature in its own right. According to Rowner, Ben-Naftali's essayist writing has not only creative and intellectual importance, but political significance as well. When Ben-Naftali exhorts us "to think about concreteness in terms that are neither historical nor sociological" she is proposing an alternative to the hegemonic discourse that shapes philosophy and literature in Israel.

Reviewing three books on activism and civil society organizations in Israel-Palestine, **Chen Misgav** discusses the possibility of promoting political and governmental change in the territory west of the Jordan River. He argues that given the conditions that increasingly limit the ability of radical activists to promote their aims within established politics and deliberative democracy, direct action in the

public space becomes imperative. Such action also allows activists to cross physical and mental borders and to create collaborations with those who are defined in the established discourse as enemies.

The question of activity in the public space is sharpened in **Gilad Reich**'s essay, which precedes and explicates the portfolio he curated for this issue: works created or placed in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. Some of the works (or "artistic actions") deal with the assassination of Rabin; some were created many years before the assassination, when the square was called Malchei Yisrael (Kings of Israel) Square; and some deal with political and social tensions beyond the assassination. Reich turns to the conceptual world of Mouffe and Laclau to propose viewing the square as an agonistic space that aspires to keep afloat the conflicts expressed in it and not to silence them in the name of the old liberal striving for consensus. Thus, by means of images that he brings together, Reich locates (and creates) a conflictual consensus that makes possible a radical politics of multiplicity.

Moran Shoub marks the fiftieth anniversary (1965–2015) of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem with an essay that documents a series of visits to the museum – beginning with Paul Klee's angel (not "The Angel of History" but another, more minor, angel) and ending with the little dog of the museum's general manager who roams the museum freely (albeit close to his owner's leg). Shoub exhorts her readers to follow the dog and try to break through the aura of sanctity that envelops the museum. She herself does this in a series of actions on the seam between the artistic and the personal.

The three concluding essays in this issue deal with various aspects of contemporary Hebrew literature. **Omri Ben-Yehuda** considers four studies by Yochai Oppenheimer and Ketzia Alon. Ben-Yehuda agrees that Mizrahi poetry opens up new political spaces. Nevertheless, studies that present Mizrahi poetics as a decisive alternative to the hegemonic voices miss an important opportunity to linger over its riven, wounded and imperfect aspects. These complex aspects offer the possibility of connecting to the dissatisfaction, detachment and feeling of alienation that characterize large swaths of Hebrew literature in general.

Hannan Hever focuses on Amos Oz's latest book, *Judas*, to highlight the growing engagement of Israeli writers with the question of betrayal. On the one hand, the novel suggests that in Israel of the 2000s the intellectual's betrayal of his people – that is, the act or statement defined by the national consensus as joining the enemy – is actually the most loyal and ethical response. On the other hand, Oz refuses to

surrender his position as a left-wing Zionist who continues to serve an imaginary Israeliness that no longer exists. He thus develops a more intricate approach that softens the dichotomy between loyalty and betrayal and postpones the outcome of this dialectical move, thus leaving himself only on the threshold of betrayal.

And finally, **Omri Herzog** and **Yael Shenker** examine the state of the study of Hebrew literature in the universities. In an essay defined as “A report to the Academy (of Literature),” they ask what role the literature departments themselves have played in the weakening of the discipline, pointing to three main problems: the sharp disconnection between the academic study of literature and the contemporary literary marketplace, with all the aesthetic, political and economic mechanisms that drive it; the petrification of critical thought (which leads to what they call “radical conservatism”); and the disappearance of the figure of the engaged intellectual. Consequently, they seek to chart directions of thought and movement that will help invigorate the discipline, refresh the critical discourse and strengthen the humanities. I can think of no better way to conclude this section – and this entire issue – of *Theory and Criticism*.