Preface

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This issue of *Theory and Criticism* includes nine articles, four essays, a photo portfolio, and a book review section. **Amos Morris-Reich** criticizes the approach that views the concept of territory through the larger political lens and proposes instead that we investigate it by means of cultural genealogy. For example, "Territory," he argues, "is a key element of a secular Israeli ethos, and precisely for this reason it can be used to study the religious tension built into the secular Israeli culture." Morris-Reich criticizes, among other things, the epistemology of the discourse about space as was outlined in a special issue of *Theory and Criticism*, subtitled "Space, Land, Home."[1] He observes that "in the analysis [of the Israeli space], there is an evident tendency in many cases to prioritize the political over the cultural." For me this critique has a symbolic aspect. *Theory and Criticism* 16 was the first issue for which I served as editor, and the present issue, No. 36, is the last. I admit that the politics of space and the political economy of space have been a central topic of this journal throughout my years at its helm.

Nitzan Lebovic criticizes contemporary critical political theory, which, he argues, marks the present with the catastrophic tools used to describe Germany in the 1920s. He analyzes the representation of a state of emergency or a state of exception as a central paradigm in "political cinema." He also examines the relevance of this critical perspective to Israel, in particular because of the obsession with the state of exception as a sweeping and total exegetical political system. One must note that in the last two decades, and particularly since the early 1990s, the work of Carl Schmitt has enjoyed an unprecedented intellectual flowering in Europe, the United States, and Israel. One of the prominent formulators (and brokers) of the contemporary critical theory exception is Giorgio Agamben. Lebovic points to the latter's catastrophe approach, which identifies the essence of the political as a Manichaean conflict. This view of the conflict is based on the distinction between friend and foe and, according

1 *Theory and Criticism* 16 (Spring 2000), "Space, Land, Home."

to Lebovic, calls for the destruction of the political system and its implantation in an uncompromising political dichotomy: "Biopolitical cinema holds up a dark mirror to contemporary politics and empties the ethical argument of content." Thus, he argues, the two antithetical poles of the state of exception — the affirmative pole and the critical pole — are reinforced, rendering politics superfluous.

There is no doubt that the state of exception is the dominant political paradigm today, but the collapse of the two positions — the totalitarian and the critical — requires attention. Admittedly, the difference between the affirmative stand and the critical stand is signaled delicately, but the moment it is signaled a vast abyss yawns between them. Even if both positions are critical of liberal politics, they are in radical discord when it comes to the sources of their violence and ethics. One stand sets itself as a paradigm that expresses a totalitarian-like sovereign; the other, as a reflection and resistance to the state of exception, for example, that of the partisan. As against the secular time of politics — which is an empty frame devoid of content, a sort of dreary repetition of the same events — Benjamin seeks to create a singular moment, a one-time illumination like a camera flash. This is the flash that interrupts the daily continuity, just as holidays interrupt the monotonous flow of workdays by bringing up experiences from the past and introducing segments of another time — political-theological time — to the historical continuum. This time is not linear; rather, it reflects a movement that can no longer posit these categories as independent of each other. For example, it is impossible to understand the history of modern imperialism and the resistance to it without understanding the complementary link between the political theology of the occupations and the liberal politics of the metropolis. From the perspective of the victim, the political system is indeed empty of meaning, and this is what creates the polarity of the exception.

In contrast to Lebovic, who deals with the awareness of the crisis in the contemporary political-theological discourse as part of the crisis of modernism, **Pini Ifergan** signals what he refers to as Carl Schmitt's and Hans Blumenberg's avoidance of dealing directly with the crisis of modernity. Ifergan's article addresses political theology and the way in which the mutual relations between the theological and the political are formulated: genealogical relations (theology is the surrogate mother of fundamental political concepts), analogical relations (the political is analogous to the theological), or more complicated relations of representation. Ifergan reminds us that the motive for clarifying the relations between the two is not necessarily the theological discourse but the modern political and legal thought that sought to investigate

the nature of the political in the modern age. He describes the correspondence between Blumenberg and Schmitt in the years 1971 to 1978, which developed in the wake of Schmitt's observations about Blumenberg's *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.[2] For Ifergan, the important theoretical contribution made by the discussion is the possibility not only of examining the relations between the two concepts, but also of altering their meaning on the fly. The genealogical axis posits the discreteness of the categories and the time gap between them, but also the hybridization between them. On the surface there is a difference here between the genealogical axis, which combines, and the analogical axis, which separates. According to the first interpretation (the genealogical), the use of theology is chiefly a product of the work of the past, while according to the second (analogical) interpretation the use of theology is a product of the work of the present. Analogy as a methodological principle makes it possible to import theological language, theological semiotics, and theological logic into the political in present time. Whether we denominate the analogy theological-political or political-theological, it limits the space between the theological and the political because it is represented by the image of God in the temple of the political.

Or Aleksandrowicz considers a missed perspective on modern architecture — ”the materials of which the architecture is made.” Questions like “what does the building look like?” and “what does the building do?” more or less cover the range of modern architectural discourse; but “what is it made of?” is an outlier in this discourse. He writes: “On the surface this would seem to be a fundamental question, without which buildings cannot be erected in the real world. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see it as a major issue that generates the core of the modern architectural discourse. When an architect finally gets around to talking about the material, it generally indicates an urgent need to move on to something else.” Why is this observation important? Since “the material is not an innocent object; it always brings something nonmaterial to the building site.” Aleksandrowicz turns this perspective onto the politics of building materials in the year 1909, when construction got underway on the new neighborhood of Ahuzat Bayit, north of Jaffa. He shows how the construction materials employed in that neighborhood were chosen in order to solve the problem of Jewish labor. The use of cement and bricks as the basic material for Jewish construction carried an ideological charge, not just a technical one.

2 Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 2nd rev. ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976); English: *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

Ariella Azoulay examines the category of prostitution and criticizes the notion that it is a stable category with lineaments that are more or less coherent. This epistemology ties different classes and types of prostitution together as a single stable category that is supposed to be self-understood. Azoulay argues that this epistemology is the product of the historical changes in the status of women, and in particular of the emergence of modern citizenship. Through a reading of historical documents from the late eighteenth century through the Second World War, in which she notes the absence of a stable category of prostitution, she seeks to reconstruct the fuzzy link between the exclusion of women from citizenship and the exclusion of prostitutes from the public space. She maintains that the removal of the heterogeneous and the leveling of the notion of prostitution parallel the exclusion of prostitutes from the public space.

Shoshana Maruoma-Marom examines the political economy of the Israeli welfare policy in the 1950s and 1960s and the emergence of what was referred to then as the "distressed strata" or the "second Israel." She asserts the existence of two parallel welfare policies or channels. One was based on the assumption of supply and of proximity to the ruling party. The other was based on principles derived from the Poor Laws of nineteenth-century England. Maruoma-Marom analyzes one particular historical episode — the report on the Israeli welfare system submitted to the United Nations in 1961. It was written by Philip Klein, a professor at Columbia University in New York and a United Nations expert on social policy. Klein wrote that the contrast between the welfare allowances set and basic living expenses was truly astonishing. He noted the ethnic and racial element that underlay the system, including the resistance put up by the well-off strata to the recent immigrants from North Africa and Middle Eastern countries. He reported that he had frequently heard veterans insist that these immigrants were primitive and burdened by a totally different mentality and that there was no possibility of integrating them culturally. Klein also emphasized the link between the system's racist elements and its epistemology of poverty. The approach to the problems of social dependence and ways to solve them was unrealistic, because the needy were held to be lazy and unstable. The government buried the drafts of Klein's report because of its harsh criticisms, especially of the racist foundations upon which the welfare system was based. Most of those who relied on the social-assistance mechanisms for the poor were Jews from North Africa and the Middle East.

Hannan Hever expounds J. H. Brenner's opposition to the establishment's political interpretation of the pogroms of 1905 and argues that this stand derived from a total rejection of all concrete and institutionalized positions in the arena of Jewish politics.

Hever argues that we are dealing here with an extremely radical existential version of the affirmation of subjectivity — that is, the affirmation of human existence as such, based on the rejection of every mainstream political and social option, including nationalism. By so doing Brenner cast a heavy shadow on the possibility of the political constitution of a modern Jewish subject. Hever explains that Brenner did not reject the very act of literary creation but took a different and radical step: He set literature on its true foundation, which is the very act of writing, and rejected literature as an imitation of human speech. Writing can provide a large and diverse space of implicit possibilities that challenge the ostensibly stable meanings defined by speech. It makes it possible for rejected voices and excluded possibilities to make themselves heard — or at the least to be written.

Yochai Oppenheimer examines Mizrahi writing about the body and studies how the topic is played out in the works of Dan Benaya Seri, Albert Suissa, Sammy Bardugo, and Ronit Matalon. Oppenheimer maintains that critique of Zionism has overlooked the body and contributed to the fixation of the conceptual discursive space, with its traditional binarisms between health and sickness, between beauty and ugliness, and between a sound male body and a castrated male body. “This set of polar images,” he writes, “was sufficiently strong and stable to cast the Mizrahi body in a role similar to that of the rejected Diaspora body.” The assignment of the Mizrahi physique to this role perpetuated the view of the Ashkenazi body as the model of manliness. Oppenheimer tries to show how Mizrahi authors, working against this discourse, express a critical awareness of this matrix of locations and how they have developed an exception from the standard patter of representation. He argues that “the Mizrahi body was discovered to be fascinating raw material that is not synchronized with the reproduction of the national, Zionist, Israeli, or even Jewish, Diaspora body, the other. Fiction gives it independence and provides it with the capacity to evolve in an unexpected and uncontrolled fashion.” I believe that Oppenheimer’s suggestion can be considered also when we examine the literary canon, viewing it as Ashkenazi ethnic writing, whether in *Infiltration* by Yehoshua Kenaz, or in David Grossman’s *The Book of Intimate Grammar*.

“There are distinct apocalyptic elements in 14 of the 100 canonic Israeli dramas included in *The Canon of Hebrew Theater*,” observes **Zahava Caspi**. She examines the apocalyptic narrative in Joseph Mundy’s *The Governor of Jericho* as a paradigm of the way in which Israeli drama has chosen to react to (liberal) Zionism’s discarding of its ideals. According to Caspi, the apocalyptic narrative allowed playwrights to

examine the implications of messianic Zionism, especially after 1967; "the apocalyptic codes that function in Israeli drama are overt symptoms of the ontological and epistemological crisis that has beset Israeli culture since then." Caspi's perspective is that of ethics. She endeavors to lay bare the author's intentionality — a classic goal of ethical hermeneutics. This argument takes us back to Lebovic' article on political cinema. As in the political position of the state of exception, so too in Joseph Mundy we find an apocalyptic genre that moves in the tense gap between Holocaust and redemption. This observation provides further support to that of Lebovic above.

The photo portfolio that separates the articles section from the essays section features the separation wall and proposes it both as an object for photography and as a cultural and political object. **Meir Wigoder**'s instructive text and photographs address the tension between culture and nature: the normalization of the wall, the naturalness of its colors and shape, its ugly aesthetics that have become part of the perspective of space. Wigoder points to the now transparent foundations of the wall, which imply that its conversion into a natural object has been successful.

I consider the essay to be an important element that mediates between critical inquiry and a political position. Essay-writing creates a space that is hopefully liberated from the constraints of academic writing, even when it is critical, and makes it possible to formulate a complex political position that can be stated explicitly. In his contribution, **Hannan Hever** notes the Ashkenazi ethnic aspects of Dan Miron's new Hebrew translation of Sholom Aleichem's Tevye stories. He points to the tension of the power relations between Yiddish and the Hebrew that it projects. **Tali Lev** and **Erez Cohen** describe Margaret Mead's visit to Israel in the summer of 1956 and her take on the Israeli melting-pot project. **Tamar Arenson** looks at two poems by Miri Ben-Simhon and how binary categories are inverted and blurred in them. Finally, **Dalia Gavriely Nuri** looks at the relocation of a sycamore tree from an intersection on the outskirts of Holon, which she interprets as a semiotic act.

The book review section closes this issue with three reviews. **Mahmoud Kayyal** examines the representation of Arabs in Hebrew poetry and literature; **Tama Halfin** explores the forms of writing about Kibbutz in Israel; **Haviva Pedaya** reads contemporary Mizrahi writing in Israel, and discerns their various internal codes.

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This is my last issue as editor of *Theory and Criticism*. I would like to thank all of those who have toiled with and helped me over the years: the editorial secretaries, the copyeditors, the members of the editorial committee and of the inner editorial board. I cannot think about *Theory and Criticism* without Sara Soreni, the managing editor, with whom I have had the pleasure and honor of working since the early 1990s, and more closely during the last ten years. Ms. Soreni has overseen the editing and production of this journal from its very first issue to the present — 36 issues all told. I would like to express my profound appreciation of her professionalism, her rare devotion, and her immense contribution to the entire *Theory and Criticism* project.

I would like to extend my appreciation to Ronna Brayer-Garb, who edited the book review section across nine issues. She did it with wisdom and elequence. Thanks also to Tal Arbel, Orna Yoeli and Dr. Tal Kohavi for their participation in editing several other issues. Thanks also to Dr. Meir Wigoder, the art section editor, who contributed to the journal his creative energies immense knowledge and his elegance.

I would like to express special gratitude to Dr. Shimshon Zelniker, the former director of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, for his support for me, even when the sky was overcast and ominous. He defended this journal in harsh periods of public and legal delegitimization, even when he did not agree with the positions it championed. He permitted me a vast amount of freedom as editor; his criticisms were always voiced after the fact and never in real time. I would also like to thank Prof. Gabriel Motzkin, the present director of Van Leer, for his trust in me, despite our strong differences of opinion on a few occasions. I esteem and appreciate the fact that he was able to navigate the shoals of internal and external crises out of a commitment to liberal positions and without infringing the journal's critical spirit. Whether he agreed or not, he gave *Theory and Criticism* a shelter. I am certain that the incoming editor, Prof. Leora Bilsky, will promote critical theory as she understands the term and will lead it forward to explore new vistas. I wish her all the best and success in the years to come. I would also like to thank the personnel and staff of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute for these many years of intellectual and social growth we have shared, and of which *Theory and Criticism* has been an integral part.