

## Preface: Sex. Money. Noise.

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In the early 1970s the Italian poet, filmmaker and intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini, whose artistic and public resonance was at its apex at the time, created *The Trilogy of Life* — three films based on premodern story collections: *The Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio's book written during the 14th century plague; *The Canterbury Tales*, based on Chaucer's rhymed text from the end of the same century; and *Arabian Nights*, based on stories from the Moslem golden era. In the stormy days after the 1968 protests, the beginning of the militant wave in Europe, the imperial war in Vietnam, and coups and counter-coups in Latin American, Pasolini turned his back to the political present and turned toward the distant past — but not towards the ancient and glorious past of the tragedy (like in his films *Oedipus Rex* or *Medea*), but to the folktales, love stories, stories of pillage and heresy, written in the European vernacular languages or in Arabic and taking place in the village, the town, the monastery and the market; and the society that preceded the great regulation by the modern state and the general unification of capital. These are childlike films, full of innocence and enchantment, films that try to return to the initial charm of the cinematic medium before it was fully immersed in consumer culture, films that are neither actual nor ideological, that Pasolini created in order to “show bodies and their prominent symbol, sex.”<sup>1</sup> The bodies — talking, laughing, grunting, flatulating; not distinct people, psychological individuals, but rather generic or allegorical characters, or just jumbles of organs;

1 Pasolini's articles “Trilogy of Life” and “Rejecting the Trilogy of Life” (from which the quote is taken), alongside his poems and articles about his work, were published in 2010 in issue 24 of the Journal *Mita'am*, which was dedicated to him.

and sex as a realm of pleasure and lust, involving the activation of the organs but also wandering and wondering.

Thus, it is a presentation of sex and not of sexuality: of sex before the emergence of the “science of sex,” before the inquiring, regulating and supervising social system of organizing the soul of the individual and management of the population — all the things that Foucault began to articulate in the same years the films were made; a presentation of sex before it became the object of moral concern, a series of injunctions and interdictions, a code of behavior (Pasolini presented that kind of sexual discourse in his movie *Love Meetings*, in which he interviewed people from different population classes throughout Italy about sexual matters — premarital sex, the use of prostitution services, divorce, homosexuality, equality of the sexes — and then he turned to “experts” who organized the answers and drew social conclusions from them); as well as presenting sex before it was the object of emancipation, even before the demand to liberate it — to release latent urges, to let passions run free (liberation whose radical version Pasolini showed in his movie *Teorema*, in which a mysterious visitor arrives at the home of a middle-class family in Milano and seduces each one of its inhabitants — a seduction after which they detach from the family structure and each and every one of them turns to the drive). In *The Trilogy of Life* — films that are a fantasy about the pre-modern as a site of episodality, lack of a center, anomia and movement — sex is, in Pasolini’s words, “the last bastion of reality.”

But right after he finished making the trilogy Pasolini realized he was wrong, and one cannot separate sex from sexuality. That even in their seemingly innocent form, these bodies are already subject to instrumental regulation; that sex was desecrated by accelerated modernization, neo-capitalism and the consumer society, until it became a fungible resource, so that the archaic, happy and vital body cannot exist at all, not even as a fantasy. There is no sex that evades the system of sexuality, that is not immersed in the political world of power, including liberating power. From here Pasolini proceeded to an incisive and dark inquiry into the relationship between sex and governmental power in the epic novel *Petrolio*, whose writing he never finished, and in the movie *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*. And then he was murdered on the beach of Ostia by a youth whose sex services he had bought or by political forces that wanted to silence him, in a single blow of death, where sex and power came hand in hand.

This year Pasolini’s centennial was marked with numerous events around the world, in cinematic retrospectives and academic conferences. His films were shown again in cinematheques in Israel, and an international conference was held in

Jerusalem under the title “Pier Paolo Pasolini in The Light of the Orient.”<sup>2</sup> Pasolini has long since become a cultural hero, the very culture he abhorred, in many cases while blurring the political and sexual scandals that accompanied his life and his work. But the questions he raised almost 50 years ago were not blurred, and they are now as relevant as ever.

In recent years it seems as if large sections of the affairs of the polis appear as “sexual politics:” relations between the sexes, gender identities, the sexual body and the body that is compelled to become sexual — all of these are heated issues in the public discourse in the Western world and beyond. Sexuality has become the litmus test of politics: the new culture wars are fought surrounding the right to abort and the rights of sexual minorities, the attitude towards transgenders and the stance towards the #MeToo movement. One of the powerful effects of the Trump era, which is still extant, is the sexualization of politics, in terms of the issues under discussion and the positions expressed, but also in the mode of discussion, which is conducted in impulsive outbursts and with bare tongues. Does this mean that the Freudian revolution has completed its course, and all public affairs must now be understood as forms of expression of routes of desire and relations of identification and transference? Or rather differently: that the culture wars between progressive liberals and conservatives are an ideology that covers over social conflicts that are not necessarily sexual and therefore are also less sexy? One way or another, the new sexual politics creates different positions of speech and forms of complaint, ways of comprehensibility and regimes of truth, and along with them new interdictions and forms of censorship and self-censorship. Its speakers speak out of a position and speak the position, and the gap between the two is shrinking. This brings back Pasolini’s questions: has sex completely seeped into sexuality, into the field of power and sense, to the systems of declared positions, or does it still maintain an un-disciplining and undisciplined dimension that can traverse the political sense and exist as a bastion of reality? What relationship has now been created between permission and prohibition, between sexual liberation and the moral codification of sexuality? What is the connection between the call for the complete liberalization of society in the new sexual politics and the neoliberal economy, with its mechanisms of multiplication and accumulation — the multiplication and accumulation of capital but also of desires and identities?

2 Pier Paolo Pasolini in “The Light of the Orient,” organized by Dr. Chiara Caradonna, The Department of Romance Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 20–22 June 2022.

This issue is about some of those questions. Its second half is devoted completely to sex and sexuality: the transformations of feminism and its concepts of truth, the vicissitudes of political correctness, the mother-daughter relationship in an era where the very definition of being a daughter is changing, and sex as a mystery and stumbling block in the structure of sense. Whereas the first half of the issue discusses two additional subjects, money and noise: money in contemporary economic thought, between national neoliberalism and leftist critique of the present neo-feudal condition; and noise as a disturbance, incompatibility and critique, but also as amplification and proliferation, in Christian Renaissance painting and in sound works in Jerusalem. The title of the issue combines those three subjects — sex, money, noise — without tying them together; the period after each one of them signifies a stop and fragmentation.

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Lea Dovev's article, which opens the issue, poses a seemingly simple question: What does noise look like in a picture? Which is to say, how can the silent visual contain a sonic expression, and what is the form of that expression when it does not indicate organized and harmonious music but rather glaring sound? Dovev turns to three paintings of the *Coronation of the Virgin* by the early Renaissance painter Fra Angelico. With a close reading and careful decoding she shows how the musician angels and the instruments they are holding serve in these paintings as a mystery and a challenge to the entire pictorial array: what seems at first like a celestial and regal picture of hosts of angels welcoming the Virgin and her son, gradually emerges as a complex picture with strange musical ensembles and blank spots. The music in these paintings is therefore a site of destabilization of the boundaries of pictorial representation and a digression from the totality of the perspective that was only recently established in European painting, and it thereby indicates the ability of the "studio reason" to outwit the rational-humanist reason, which supposedly guides Renaissance painting. From here on Dovev presents the destabilizing and disrupting meanings of noise, from critique of the domination of the visible at the dawn of the modern era until the release of dissonance in the early 20th century avant-garde. The article insists on the gentle listening required to identify the noise and discern its cultural and social meanings. That is the tension at the basis of the article, which reverberates or multiplies the tension in the paintings: the noise therein is as subtle as can be, and cultural critique comes from within its internal configurations of meaning.

Gal Hertz conducts a different process in his article: he engages in critique from the outset, a leftist critique of neoliberal economics, reads it against itself, and shows where it fails in the challenges it poses itself and those presented by contemporary political economic reality. Hertz turns to some of the sharpest leftist thinkers of the last generation: Yanis Varoufakis, Nancy Fraser and Albenaz Azmanova, who note that after the 2008 economic crisis, and all the more so after the jolt of the coronavirus epidemic, the neoliberal era ended and we are at the dawn of a new economic order: techno-feudalism, as Varoufakis calls it, or cannibalistic capitalism, in Fraser's words. This order is characterized by wild speculative market economics and a narrow plutocracy, but also by the strengthening of the status of the state, the rise of a populist right, and a conservative drift; on the other hand, wide protest movements and socialist organizations, with new-old political utopias of post-capitalism. Hertz shows how even though the economic analysis of the present moment is sharp, the prospects of deliverance from it still rely on a dated "liberal normative grammar." Which is to say, the proposed solutions — printing money and funneling it directly to the citizens, strengthening the regulation institutions, and anchoring civil rights and "social justice" — are based on a liberal and actually capitalist conceptualization of state, citizen, recognition and rights, and do not provide a solution to the modes of subordination and exploitation of the new neo-feudal order. Hertz argues that the present political-economic critique cannot be merely economic (and therefore procedural) or merely political (and therefore idealistic); it must merge the two and offer a counter-realignment of concepts and values.

Jacob Abolafia's article also discusses the current political-economic discourse, not from the direction of critique but rather fantasy. Abolafia traces the "Singapore myth," and shows how the combination between a strong national political sovereignty and unrestrained market economy — one of the main problems for the intellectuals Hertz discusses — is an ideal for others. Singapore became in the last decade a code name for political economic success and a role model for the right in Israel and the UK, for instance in Naftali Bennett's "Singapore plan" and the British "Singapore on the Thames." But a code name for what exactly? Abolafia argues that it is not the real Singapore that captures the imagination of the global right, but the fantasy Singapore — the fantasy about the coexistence of the conflicting elements of the global right: a free market and social conservatism, opening trade borders and national pride; freedom and surveillance, movement and regulation. It is not the authoritarian and human rights-violating Singapore that is celebrated, even though it is clear that those are precisely the characteristics that make it dear to those

who yearn for it. It is Singapore as an idea of the national neoliberal right in an era when it is threatened by right-wing populism, liberal cosmopolitanism and left-wing populism. Abolafia's article shows how the analysis of a fantasy — the fantasy itself — leads to an understanding of the political reality composed of whitewashed plans, ideal platforms, biases and distortions.

The art portfolio in this issue is not composed as usual of visual works but of sound works. Liora Belford curated a collection of scores she calls "Scores for Social Acoustics in Jerusalem" — 16 works by Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish artists referring in different ways to Jerusalem, the divided and joint city, to specific sites in it and to social life in its areas, through the sounds, voices, words and sentences articulated and heard in it. These scores, text scores that follow post-World War II forms of writing experimental music and its entrance into the exhibit spaces of visual art, offer different ways to codify the urban acoustics and intervene in them. They show the relationship between listening, articulation and inquiry, not only through audio recordings but out of an examination of the social audio space through its activation. The scores are meant to be read and performed in Jerusalem and thereby to acquaint their listeners with the jumble of voices reverberating in it — the state, religious, institutional voices, as well as those that are repressed and silenced. This connects the portfolio to Lea Dovev's article that opens the issue: in order to hear the city's noise the listening must be active, multi-layered and subtle.

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The second half of the issue is devoted, as aforesaid, to the questions of sex, sexuality and #MeToo. Orphée Senouf-Pilpoul begins her article with the #MeToo protest, in which women's complaints based on their personal experience receive the status of truth, and reads it alongside declarations about the decline in the value of truth at the present time, referred to as the "post-truth era." In her article she attempts to clarify the relationship between those two phenomena as central social-discursive phenomena of the times. But Senouf-Pilpoul conducts her articulation of the present moment by exposing its genealogy in American feminism: from Carol Hanisch's statement that "the personal is political" in the late 1960s, through the intra-feminist critique of that statement, to the eruption of the #MeToo protest. Senouf-Pilpoul shows how "the personal is political" was harshly criticized in the 1980s and 90s for the act of confession at its center, the self-help culture to which it was affiliated, and its presumption as to the precedence of personal experience, as if it were spontaneous, prelinguistic, and free of any codification and interpretation — critique led by central

intellectuals of American critical feminist theory. So that the present declarations of the #MeToo protest do not express a simple return to “the personal is political,” but its transformation: Senouf-Pilpoul proposes that at its core is actually the insight that “the impersonal is political.” Women’s personal experience is now understood as a collective utterance at the basis of claims of sexual harm — an utterance composed of numerous and simultaneous and therefore not personal stories of harm, stories that are not articulated in order to prove the inherent vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society, but presume it. Thus, the proliferation and feminization of the truth do not necessarily lead to a decline in its status, but open a horizon for its re-articulation through the relationship between conditions, experience, and expression.

Orit Yushinsky’s essay is about a tangential issue, but from a different and possibly inverse position. Yushinsky turns to the current political correctness discourse and analyzes it through a Lacanian prism: she understands its new normative standard, which relies on the demand for recognition of the collective identity of disempowered groups, as a current manifestation of the “discourse of the university,” the current scientific discourse, combined with the “discourse of the master,” the hegemonic normative discourse. But in those discourses, argues Yushinsky, there is a lacunae noted by the “discourse of the analyst”: the subject is not absorbed beyond recognition into the social group to which they belong, because subjectivity itself is a site of conflicts and contradictions, identifications and counter-identifications. Political correctness, she argues, attempts to relieve those tensions and offer absolute belonging and clean language, whereas the discourse of the analyst poses unclear language — complex or disjointed — that traces the contradictions and tensions in the subject, and tries to benefit that subject without unraveling them.

Two texts were translated for this issue. They were both written by women theoreticians, they are both associated with psychoanalysis, and they are both about sexuality — whether gender or sex; but a gap yawns between them. Around each one of them appear elucidating and interpretive essays that deepen the discussion they offer. The first translation is an essay written in the late 1970s and since canonized, by Luce Irigaray, a renowned French philosopher and psychoanalyst and the founder of the feminism of sexual difference. It is an intimate and philosophical essay about the mother-daughter relationship in a patriarchal world, and the ways of giving birth, attachment, bondage and bequeathal that characterize that relationship. The essay is written from the position of the daughter, in first person, and is addressed to the mother. It expresses the complexity of the relationship, where the impossibility of dissimulation, the blurring of identities and the mirror relationship all pose obstacles

to the symbolization of femininity and the constitution of a separate and valid separate female subjectivity. Irigaray laments that situation but is also drawn into it, in an effective and physical expression, in the language of the dualities and mirrors of the unseparable relationship. Tal Menahem wrote a comprehensive introduction that places the essay on the spectrum of Irigaray's writing as a turning point from the critique of the sexual-difference-erasing male thought, typical of her early writing, to a positive proposal that articulates a feminine subjectivity distinct from the male one in her later writings. Menahem emphasizes the relational dimension of Irigaray's thought and the social transformation embedded within it, as well as the female genealogy that Irigaray demands rehabilitating, and whose readers are invited to join her.

Irigaray's essay is followed by two original essays that follow in her footsteps, but not like the daughter following the mother: they interact with her but at the same time direct at her some of the most burning challenges of the present time and place. Yael Mishali takes Irigaray's abstract and paradigmatic mother-daughter relationship to a concrete social reality in the class, ethnic and gender margins of Israel. This leads to the disruption of the complex feminine and maternal bequeathal, and the daughter can turn from the mother not to a man but to another woman, and with her establish an intimate relationship that will lead to self-awareness and social critique. With bi-vocal writing, Mishali echoes Irigaray's style, but repays her philosophical project: she borrows her language to turn it against her. Shai Lee Horodi, on the other hand, in a short and dense essay, performs a transgender articulation of the theory of sexual difference, and echoes Irigaray not in order to critique her but to develop her to the extreme —, to a different conceptualization of trans existence. Through the reading of two paintings by Ilya Repin and Francisco de Goya, and of the dead end of male bequeathal that they reveal, Horodi offers the connection between sexual difference and sex change, suggesting that sex change does not have to be understood as an expression of gender reassignment and correction of the body to accommodate it to the mind, but as an externalization of an indelible gap within the living female existence.

The second translation for this issue is of a chapter from the book "What IS Sex?" by Alenka Zupančič. Zupančič, who belongs to the Ljubljana school, whose most famous representative is Slavoj Žižek, poses in her book an original combination of ontology and psychoanalysis: she proposes that sex should be discussed ontologically, namely from the point of view of its essence and not its social manifestations or historical constructions. At the same time its essence does

not stem from its distinct entity or unitary idea at the heart or the horizon of its different manifestations; its essence is in its realness, in Lacanian terms, namely in what is not there in the perceived reality, which Zupančič defines as its inherent non-relation in principle (and we should note how different her argument is from Irigaray's referential concept); in the incongruence between it and the common social existence. It is sex as surplus enjoyment, as negativity within the social order. Zupančič's discussion moves from questions of conceptualization to reading in Soviet author Andrei Platanov's story "Antisexus," and from there to the question of value in capitalist economics. From here she attempts to discuss the possibility or impossibility of sexual liberation. Yuval Kreminitzer wrote a principled introduction to the text, which explains the main points of Zupančič's argument and discusses its philosophical and political implications. He sees it as a proposal that belongs to the tradition of critical theory, but one that indicates an (ontological) turning point therein, and emphasizes the social, cultural and even natural discontent (that is, which is already present in nature) in sex itself, so that all sex — not just the non-normative, queer kind — is an-other sex.