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In collaboration with **The Israeli
Film Council**

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Roe Rosen's work with the support of



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Dorit Inbar



Experimental film, by its very nature, explores the limits of cinematic creation. It challenges existing formats and subject matters within the existing frameworks in the field of cinema and television, offering a fresh take on the topics dealt with, the formal structures and the interrelations between cinema and a constantly changing reality.

The New Foundation for Cinema and Television has been at the forefront of filmmaking for 16 years, and alongside the creation of a wide-ranging body of hundreds of documentaries and dramas, has been at the forefront of experimental film and “new media” in Israel, with new and challenging projects that examine and expand the boundaries of filmmaking as we know it.

The Foundation is proud to see the completion of the experimental film project Neo-Barbarism, made in cooperation with “Rothschild 69”, and congratulates the filmmakers, and the directors of the project Noam Segal and Naomi Aviv, for the works inspired by the project’s complex subject, a subject that calls for the individual to grapple with reality and its governing forces, demanding his or her attention, reaction and even resources and life.

Filmmakers who have taken part in the Foundation’s previous projects in the field of experimental film have gone on to break into the center of the world’s stage and earn world renown for themselves and their work, and we are confident that the same will happen here, and that the works included in this project will become significant building blocks and influential factors in filmmaking in its most profound cultural, social and artistic sense.

With best wishes,

Dorit Inbar, Director General

The New Foundation for Cinema and Television





NEO-BARBARISM

Naomi Aviv and Noam Segal

“Shame, shame, shame – that is the history of man!”

Friedrich Nietzsche¹

“Small though it is,” claims Roberta Smith, art critic for the New York Times, “Israel has been providing more than its share of artistic talent to the global art circuit, especially where video and performance art are concerned...it suggests that a certain chemistry often exists between Israel — its history, landscape, politics and cities — and young artists wielding video cameras.”² Indeed Israeli art, and more precisely video art, is thriving, enjoying international momentum for the first time in its history. More and more contemporary Israeli video artists are establishing themselves professionally in New York, Berlin and London. Does this artistic boom testify to an Israeli society healthier and stronger than ever before? Maybe the opposite is true. The more the local small pond becomes turbid and shabby, the more the narcissi of video art teem and blossom in it, and the more the critical position of their works becomes sophisticated. Within art – which is never part of any political agenda – video art is a medium that produces more hostility than love. Nonetheless, it is true that the last decade has seen a renaissance in this field in Israel. It should be noted that the formation of the relatively short history of this artistic medium has also been contributed to by Israeli artists such as Benni Efrat and Buki Schwartz, who from the early 1970s took part in defining the medium, its borders and its language.

Neo-Barbarism is an exhibition based entirely on video works and video installations, although this phrase could refer to numerous and diverse bodies of work shown right now in galleries and museums around Israel. Nevertheless, the artists chosen to participate in the exhibition Neo-Barbarism are not concerned with defining the new term, but

are operating out of an artistic-political motivation that draws its logic from an Israeli reality going mad and from the way in which the “dumbness” threatens to dictate a destructive future for this conflict-ridden place. Crucial issues that cry out for a territorial solution have accompanied this place from the moment it gained independence, but it has never been so clear that those who do not speak the language of the occupier are seen as foreigners and as enemies within who are conspiring to destroy us and therefore must be subjected to various acts of deterritorialisation – that is, to be expelled from the country or have the historical memory of this place expelled from within them. The “neo-barbaristic” artists themselves are pushed into a corner in which they are forced to experience themselves through the eyes of the regime as those who are going to be defined as, and maybe already are, hostile citizens with the consciousness of a minority community loathsome and irrelevant to the fantasy of Greater Israel as a Jewish state with no enemies or opposition within. Their very humanist stances and their beliefs are vilified again and again by government members such as Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, as can be learned from Yisrael Beytenu’s website. Therefore, it seems that certain artists adopt “barbaric” modes of operation also in order to actualise the label that marks them as unfriendly to the contemporary political language, and maybe also in order to practice the experience of themselves and their values being alienated and excluded from the contemporary political agenda, an agenda that celebrates the frightening narrowing of the gap between the right and the left and the monstrous widening of the gap between the powerful and the weakened. The neo-barbaric artists are not concerned with exploring the human origins of violence or investigating the nature of hatred, envy or the fear of the other. Their point of departure is that the barbaric, i.e., the other, the foreign, the violent, is within us, and that it is as old as Man. So what is new in barbarism? – The strategies used in the

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

² Roberta Smith, “Sharing a National Identity”, *The New York Times*, August 11, 2010

struggle that these artists, as well as many others, are waging against its destructive consequences.

Almost all the artists participating in the exhibition reject the position of the prophet at the gate, who protests against injustices that never incriminate himself. The self-righteous attitude, in which an art work functions as an index of a social malaise, is replaced with a parasitic attitude and a willingness to put the creative individual in a position of betrayal and disloyalty, not only to the medium – the “host” from within which the artist carries out his or her eroding activity – but also self-betrayal, into which the viewers are co-opted as well.

A typical example of sophisticated displays of self-betrayal is provided by Roe Rosen, an artist whose works place the viewers in a position of moral ambiguity, attributed not necessarily to the smug society from which he extracts his protagonists, but to himself and to the viewers. Rosen himself is the exploitative element; it is he who behaves with insensitivity towards different sectors of the public, he who fails to shake off accusations such as: impersonation, racism, child abuse, pornography, prejudice and self-righteousness concerning values of religion or gender. The viewers of his works feel that they themselves are no less guilty than whatever intangible social body it is easy to point a blaming finger at.

Contemporary Israeli art features a variety of strategies of betrayal: the betrayal of the minority, the betrayal of the weakened. From betraying the various standards that have taken hold of the cultural products – artistic, literary, theatrical and especially TV and cinema structures (while simultaneously using them) – to betraying the rationality of traditional Western thought and creating autonomous enclaves of incomprehensibility and idiotism.

A new discourse flourishes on the Israeli street: the discourse of loyalty. Everyone discusses the proto-fascistic Loyalty Law, demanding a declaration of loyalty from citizens of Israel and from naturalised citizens. Hello Mussolini. This proposed law turns the state into a fetish that stands above any law. It contradicts the Declaration of Independence, that promised equality and tolerance for all the state’s “others”. When members of the government strive to turn the state into a fetish and its citizens and naturalised citizens into slaves; when the state seeks the right to penetrate into the depth of its citizens’ psyche and examine their consciousness – the day is not far when we shall see the realisation of an absurd scenario in which the regime of power, surveillance and control will order a genetic test of every embryo in order to detect the disloyalty genes that its parents or ancestors might have bequeathed it.

It is the discourse of loyalty spreading through Israel that generates the discourse of betrayal, since, when there is no way out, the only possible line of escape is a lack of self-loyalty and a willingness to move the self into a territory of undefined identity. Kafka demonstrates this in his story “The Metamorphosis”, in which Gregor Samsa turns into an insect or a bug vaguely identified as a semi-cockroach. Self-betrayal, and a mental transformation of identity, is what the State of Israel now demands of its citizens. It demands it especially of the Arabs: betray your loyalty to yourselves and your rights, stoop lower and lower before the state. It is Israel, armed to the hilt with means of murder, killing and primeval xenophobia, which instead of promising loyalty to its citizens and protecting their physical and mental safety and security, seeks to impose on them a law that duns their loyalty. In his 1651 essay “Leviathan”, Hobbes offered the state to human beings as a social contract or as a cure for their innate barbarism; for their innate tendency to jump at each other’s throats at the first opportunity. But today, the same state that was supposed to protect a population from behaving like a pack of wolves ceases to protect its citizens, instead attacking, impoverishing, damaging them, and then demanding their loyalty.

Not a single moment passes here without some injustice sponsored by politics, and what is contemporary politics if not smug spokespersonship from within the belly of capitalism, the worship of money and financial interests, and the abandonment of cultural capital and the healthy need to develop and increase it and draw from its strength. The media reflects exactly the same capitalistic interests and therefore is probably heading towards entropy. How far can you lower the common denominator, whose representative will always be seen as inferior to the policymakers? How far can you empty the flat, shrivelled, emaciated belly of the media? The format is the content: populist and aggressive forms running on empty is the outward appearance of television as well as its inner world.

The show Neo-Barbarism wishes to examine electronic media representations and the discourse of national paranoia, which is taking Israel back to the survival laws of the Diaspora and the ghetto. Avigdor Lieberman for instance, Israel’s Foreign Minister, has not actually managed to accomplish his Aliyah to a sovereign, secular and strong Israeli state, because of the diasporic phobias underlying his policy of paranoia. In the always persecuted and persecuting Israel, the people is given at any moment to a renewed outbreak of the traumas of the past. This evil spirit no longer accompanies reality as a shadow from the past; it itself is the reality, invaded and dominated by the demon

of history. The works of the artists participating in the exhibition Neo-Barbarism radiate some kind of “crazy” dialect, some kind of “babbling” language, some kind of comic jargon. It is not so much a cure for situations of distress and existential anxiety – situations which intensify the more the citizen feels that the state or the regime have lost their rationality – but rather a place of refuge.

Every system tends to be indifferent to the individuals comprising it, and its very existence produces indifference in each of its members. The neo-barbaric artist feeds on the materials of the insane reality, turning them into a Bakhtinian or Foucauldian Carnavalesque. The figures comprising the exhibition and appearing in the majority of the works are not exactly clownish or idiotic figures (though these do exist), but they possess a comic frequency and reflect situations of transformation and inversion, that exist in full accordance with the need to be loyal to oneself through a paradoxical presentation of wholesale betrayal. In other words: only those who are prepared to betray themselves are truly being loyal to themselves.

The barbaric parts that we have learned to hide, repress, sublimate and disguise – by virtue of being civilised people and mainly in order to make others think highly of us – come to the fore. The threatening forest seen from afar, beyond the private territory, advances and marches back inside. In many of the contemporary video installations shown in this exhibition there is a marked tendency to substitute the traditional formula of catharsis, and sublimation, art’s cultural inheritance, for a formula of confusion, lack of release and de-sublimation. This does not necessarily mean some previously unseen liberated expression, flowing out like epileptic saliva. Most of the artists taking part in this exhibition display an intelligent and skilful use of formats of entertainment and culture. In order to achieve some intellectual hygiene, they rummage through these empty formats as if they (the formats themselves) were burrows or lairs, and as if burrowing under them might lead to a line of escape.

The barbaric enemy manifests itself in formulaic entertainment, which demands a monopoly on the mob and dictates to it amnesia. The enemy is the outer skin of form that has cast out its content. The enemy is the glove that has consumed the hand. The enemy is the stultifying totem of television, and the way to escape its tyranny is to use the video camera and television and film formats to perform defiantly artificial theatrical acts of “escape”. For it is precisely where reality programmes have already lost the viewers’ “suspension of disbelief” – where the viewers’ disbelief is directed to the pretence of presenting

them with a “true” reality, or reality “as it is” – it is precisely there that a renewed, postmodern willingness is born, a willingness to trust what announces itself as artificial and processed. It is precisely theatre, with its mimesis, which is by definition far from reality, with its role playing and the actors’ necessary self-betrayal in order to better represent others – it is precisely theatre that offers us “highbrow culture” again, staged perhaps, but in a manner that lays bare its seams and takes apart some of its principles, allowing the possibility of a more distilled observation of reality. See the films of the Danish director Lars von Trier, “The Idiots” (1998) and “Dogville” (2003), and their preoccupation with moral ambivalence and evil.

The laws of survival of the art shown in this exhibition, that is, neo-barbaristic art, can be likened to the laws guiding martial arts such as Judo or Jujutsu. These state: adopt the violent energy of the aggressor, co-opt it, rob them of it in order to turn the situation on its head and undermine their stability, or lift the terrifying Cyclops one millimetre above the ground in order to empty it of its strength, its source of energy, and overcome it. The neo-barbaric practice proposes using the energy of the major, dominant other, in order to extract from it phases of gaping, unsolvable paradoxicality.

An extreme case of such paradoxicality can be seen in “For the Love of God”, a piece by the British artist Damien Hirst. This piece, considered the most expensive item of modern art ever, consists of a platinum cast human skull from the 18th century, encrusted with 8,601 diamonds worth 99 million dollars and weighing 1,106.18 carats (including a pink diamond, weighing 52.4 carats, located in the skull’s forehead).

The moment of birth of this flickering skull, exhibited in total darkness, has every chance of becoming the moment marking the birth of 21st-century art, in 2007, exactly one hundred years after the birth of 20th-century art with Picasso’s “Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. Version O)”. Like Picasso’s painting, Hirst’s piece is based on a primitive mask (though Aztec rather than African). Hirst’s skull also recalls the golden death mask of the Egyptian king Tutankhamun, though the latter was made by an anonymous artist to the order of an omnipotent ruler, rather than by a private artist, whose joy of life as a new billionaire has been threatened by death, which is reflected in everything and triumphs over everything. The piece “For the Love of God” is an emblem of the 21st century, distinguishing it from the 20th century. How and why? – Because of the money. The same money that guides the television shows, the theatre and the films made for the masses – money, and nothing else. Money is rating and rating is money and so on repeatedly.

Money is what causes a dwindling of the spirit among leaders, government and academia. Money changes language. Money even became attached to the last war in Gaza, operation “Cast Lead”, contributing to it the military-political idiom “target bank”. “The question is how funny money is,” wonders aloud Suzie Rosen, the satanic stand-up comedian starring in Roe Rosen’s film “Hilarious”, shown in this exhibition.

The exhibition Neo-Barbarism deals with the moral consequences of artistic representation in an age that is fed up with the victim’s cry, preferring instead to perform a “ventriloquistisation” (from the word ventriloquist) of the sovereign’s voice and deal with the digestion system of the artist and art. No one can claim to own the intuitive phrase “neo-barbarism”. If it has appeared so far, it has been hand in hand with a sense of regression into unbearable moments of extremity, moments in which culture is threatened by the civilisation it has developed.

In Israel, a state which from its inception has worshipped only at the altar of the Moloch of security (joined by money), art struggles for its very legitimacy. Nevertheless, Israel has been the site of an intense and sophisticated artistic activity, whose peaks are customarily located in the conceptual art of the 1970s. The art made in the last two-three decades has also shown the positive influences of conceptual thinking, bequeathed to the young by 1970s artists who today work as art teachers at major institutions. As in the rest of the Western world, contemporary art-making in Israel enjoys maximum openness and total freedom in terms of what is allowed and what is not allowed. Everything is allowed.

As background for the thriving of “new-barbaric art” in Israel, a place that lives on outrage, we should point out the tendency of local art to stir clear of the sensational and immerse itself in the sublime. We are used to assume that when reality is so powerful and absurd, art does not even try to compete with its jungle-like intensities. Therefore it makes sense that in England for example, a place where existential security is not threatened on a daily basis, and where there is what can be imagined as mental space and leisure, an art would emerge for instance that is permanently fascinated by a “gothic” culture of death and decadence, violence, degeneration, animalism and a lot of body-/carcass-snatching. Over there it is only natural to nurture artists such as Damien Hirst or the Chapman brothers, who repeatedly break their own records abusing conventional morality and good taste. In the United States as well, the rich compost can grow an abundance of new-gothic phenomena, such as Paul McCarthy or Mike Kelley, or a distinct discourse of betrayal

in the vein of Sherrie Levine, who appropriates canonical paintings by male artists who have changed the face of art history.³

It seems that in the last decade Israeli art has learned to extract from reality also a growing stream of works whose default choice is to wallow in cultural patterns that evoke disgust, vulgarity and nausea. It is possible that in art, as in medicine and mathematics, the formula of a minus multiplied by a minus indeed yields a plus. Against an atmosphere of permanent political paralysis, and when the general despair emerges as an existential consensus, it seems that Israeli art is changing: it is no longer lyrical, abstract or sparse, it is no longer minimalist, conceptual or cerebral. In a more liberated than ever artistic space, a de-sublimative genus has grown and ramified. Its roots can be traced back to 1970s body and performance artists – such as Yocheved Weinfeld and Moti Mizrahi, or to 1980s ones like Uri Katzenstein, among whose most refined actions as an artist-shaman is a consistent drawing of his own blood, used as ink to write and draw on walls and paper surfaces. Young women have literally fainted during some of his performances. Sigalit Landau, who since the 1990s has been operating out of urgency and postmodern cultural alarm, has consistently worked to reinforce the radical spirit and transfuse it into the blood of Israeli art. These artists are joined by a long list of wild-hearted artists who stuff their canvases with myriad scenes of destruction, hunting, and with images of odious carcasses. Avner Ben Gal, Ruti Nemet, and even aesthetes like Gil Shani, Jossef Krispel and Guy Goldstein are some of the names whose works’ blood circulation can be invigorated by stuffed or dead animals. They are joined by self-compassionless arch-absurdist such as Gilad Ratman, Lior Waterman, Assi Meshulam, Eitan Ben Moshe, Roman Baimbayev, Maya Zack, and even a delicate artist such as Sharon Balaban, who has developed a minimalist video language.

The day before undergoing Caesarean surgery for the birth of her second child, Balaban sent us some edited material for the exhibition Neo-Barbarism, in which she proposes a new recipe for “carcasses with whipped cream”. The film shows the pregnant belly of the artist and her hand, armed with a container for spraying whipped cream. The belly is placed in front of perching vultures in a feeding station. The station itself is full of carcasses, including the rotting head of a camel, facing the camera as it fills up with airy whipped cream, in front of the astonished birds. The barbarisation does not lie in the fact that Balaban displays a field of carcasses (on the contrary: the organisation and maintenance of a feeding station for scavengers is a regrettably rare ecological-cultural act), nor in the fact that she drags her pregnant belly to

³ Sherrie Levine creates exact replicas of these works and signs them with her own name. In other words, her act of betrayal includes stealing the work, taking over the artist’s hand-written signature, and converting the male voice into a female voice, which has long been reintroduced, partly thanks to her, into the history of contemporary art.

this killing field. It is the sprayed whipped cream trickling into the rotting meat that counts as a deviation, an estrangement, an unacceptable, uncivilised, vulgar, nauseating act.

The artist Gilead Ratman, long before he was awarded a grant to go and complete his studies at Columbia, and certainly before he and his camera started following a group of Americans who believe in the redemptive powers of drowning themselves from head to toe in scary swamps (this is not a metaphor), had also honed a theatrical, surrealist, anxious-comic channel of expression, uncommon in Israeli art. In this exhibition he shows a video made as early as 2002. The film is so repulsive that no one can watch it straight through. "Let My People Go" is a kind of social experiment, in the course of which the artist and his friends enter a flat, sit down and start drinking alcohol. The experiment ends with an urgent dash to the bathroom, a ceremonial bending over the toilet seat, and each drunkard's unique style of projectile vomiting; the viewers are not spared visible changes in the texture and hues of the vomit. In the background, with no less nauseating pathos, we hear the patriotic voice of a singer from the early 1970s performing her version of the popular song "Let My People Go". This song has had a rich history encouraging movements of liberation from slavery and oppression in America. In Russia it was popular in the days of the Jewish prisoners of Zion, who were jailed just because of their wish to identify with or join the State of the Jews. Ratman only managed to exhibit this work for the first time two years ago, and only in the small gallery space of one of the local art school. In a new video installation, also shown in this exhibition, Ratman systematically fragments every moment that pretends to show the viewers even the merest scrape of a plot.

In 2002, the same year Ratman made "Let My People Go", Lior Waterman made his "Blood Sausage", a video in which a bloated blood sausage explodes in the viewers' faces. In an adjacent room viewers could recover in front of another of Waterman's video works, in which a school janitor stands in front of a barbeque holding a flame-thrower. He is ordered to stand by the grill and turn over charred hands whose contorting flesh recalls the days of the terrorist attacks in the Second Intifada.

These works may be difficult to watch or digest, but they enjoy a directness that makes the deconstruction played games by art works since the 1980s seem superfluous. Another "dirty formula" with an element of sabotage that should be mentioned here is the artist Assi Meshulam's 2005 project "The Book of Evil: a message of filth". The black book sketches a new myth

that seems to continue the Old Testament while making ironic use of its format: the book is printed in Biblical script and uses Biblical language to tell the history of the days in which the cursed earth was ruled by a new species of cruel creatures, a hybrid of humans and dogs, scavengers.

Etymologically speaking, the term neo-barbarism derives from the Greek word barbarus. In Ancient Greece the barbarus were those who did not speak Greek and whose language sounded to the founders of the cradle of Western civilisation as no more than a babble, blah blah. The barbarians were therefore the foreigners, and the identification of their language as no-language was merely a ruse used to define Greek identity. Thus the distinction between Greek and non-Greek was linguistic, and according to Greek logic – those who did not speak Greek could not think, and therefore could not take part in political life. Aristotle claimed that Man is a political animal, and gave the barbarians as an example for creatures who are outside human nature.

Thus the barbarian was and still is a person representing the opposition to civilisation. The barbarian stands outside culture, the laws of the place, the laws of the time and the spirit of the time, he acts impulsively, with no agenda or ideology and therefore is seen as the ultimate enemy of social order as such. Being Other, he is perceived as irrational, unpredictable, faceless, and therefore – dangerous. The barbarian is the one who threatens to burst out of nowhere and destroy the cultural fabric.

The 20th century is seen as a century of barbarism: starting with the First World War, which coincided with the erosion of the Enlightenment project and Humanist ideas and with what is known in culture as "the metaphysical crisis" (which resulted from the disappointment with secularism as a new religion, and the lack of understanding that as with every religion, secularity also has a daily practice that needs to be maintained).

The only attempt in the history of art to refer to the concept of barbarism took place during the First World War. There was no more "barbaric" trend or movement than Dada. Think of "Dada", not even the movement's activities, just its name. What is suggested by the choice of a group of educated, multilingual people to give themselves a sonic, pre-linguistic, primeval name? It is a wish to define their ambition to erase everything and start from scratch; to go against the political and cultural collective loss of head during WWI and change the history of art in the most radical way. The exhibition Neo-Barbarism draws inspiration from the only radical trend known to art ever since. In "The Dada Manifesto, 1918", Tristan

4 Tristan Tzara, An Introduction to Dada, in Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 81.

Tzara declared that “morality is an injection of chocolate into the veins of all men.”⁴ Sweet and deadly. Dada chose defiantly “anti-artistic” modes of operation as a reaction to the fact that 50 million people were sacrificing their lives on the altar of the barbarity that grew from European cultural centres. All this happened before the genocide of the Second World War. As we know, just over half a century after that horror art started to grope for the proper way to react, and even then it was under a constant critical assault. For example in the exhibition “Live and Die like Eva Braun” shown by Roe Rosen at the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem, in which he prompted the viewers to “betray” the discourse of the survivors and enter the head of Hitler’s lover. The late Tommy Lapid cried out on television, and as a member of the government even threatened to stop governmental support for the museum.

We are left with Dada as an exemplary case in which a group of artists around the world (not only in centres such as Zurich, Berlin and Paris) felt sweeping contempt towards all that was done in the name of culture and sought to reflect a cacophonous experience of complete distrust in everything that culture represents: from language to law, reason, structure or institution. Dada artists and poets truly believed that in the face of this Great War it was impossible to write poetry, impossible to paint a picture, impossible to stage a performance, impossible to operate in existing frameworks and formats, because these – culture’s rightful heirs – had been proved responsible for the horror and were infected with it. During Auschwitz and after Auschwitz people actually continued to write poems.

As for the title Neo-Barbarism – it is an ironic title. In fact, the politically correct postmodern person cannot point at someone else and label them “barbaric” without being themselves suspected of barbarism. Still, this name keeps coming to mind in front of art works that point to a situation of cultural-political monochromatic paralysis (no one thinks any longer that there is a difference between right and centre and left – all the parties in Israel have offset the differences between them and none of them really has an agenda or a future plan). We shall insist on neo barbarism as an idiomatic phrase rather than a formal term. As already mentioned, there are no barbarians but ourselves (even if around the world there are wars between civilisations that define each other as barbaric). The works shown in this exhibition suggest that there is no choice but to demonstrate an act of betrayal, sometimes physiological, in order to get rid of materials that our own bodies cannot live with. Vomiting your guts out is not a pleasant act. Throwing up emerges as a non-voluntary but indispensable reflex of the rebelling

body, refusing to digest foreign matter, obliged to throw it up in order to put its own functioning in order. Although this act appears repulsive and arouses aesthetic reservations, no one would claim that the vomiting itself is violent or offensive or that it is in danger of causing injustice to the other. Vomiting is actually linked with a moment of great vulnerability. Sometimes the act of vomiting-condemning formulates itself (in the words of the poet Byron) as a combination of anger and rhyme, that is – rage and violent contents that are poured into stocks or shackles (or what is called “style”) which we impose on the work in order to control the form and the content.

The barbaristic virus fills the holes in the net and corrodes language. In quite a few works in this exhibition, words express no more than a murmur. The directionless virality has no marked borders, hovering among all the worlds like a terrifying shadow, devoid of ideology. The Israelis, used to repressing the past and shaking off lessons, suffer from the repression of the now and its automatic ejection from the living memory, from the consciousness of what is present and what is becoming. It is a constant coming to being of a special disorder connected to daily events. It is a kind of frustrating neurosis that does not react to any evil spirit, apartheid, poverty, hunger or oppression. The weak are weakened and get weaker. The insensitivity has become a kind of scar whose scab was formed years ago. It seems that even our fingerprint has changed so it is unable to turn us over to any border control mechanism (see Gal Weinstein’s work in this exhibition, in which he performs the metaphoric act of burning his fingerprint). The brutality-producing mechanism has entered an inertial phase: everything flows and coagulates at the same time.

It seems that in Israel too, times are ripe for making art created out of rubbing your head against the wall, out of situations of constraint, helplessness and the disagreement of a despairing minority. It seems that the time has come for an aesthetic of escape (which is totally different from aesthetics of escapism); that this is the time to form an utterance with the least meaning possible, in a language in which the content and the form deterritorialise each other; a language of artificial and alienated theatrical rituals and empty physical gestures; a language that pretends to be standard but whose components do not produce a “statement” in the traditional sense of the critique of pure reason.

This is the time for passive-aggressive art, the art of “stepping on the gas in neutral”. The exhibition of video installations entitled Neo-Barbarism does not wish to suggest a definitive meaning for the phrase chosen in an intuitive flash to refer to singular works of art created in Israel in the

שמאל:
אתי ויזלטיר
קדושת האסלה
2010
יודאן
בחנות איטל הרס, אבי דך,
מעצב פנים

:Left
Eti Wieseltier
Reliques
2010
Video
Courtesy of Itai Heres, Avi
Dach, Interior Design

last decade. Most of the works shown produce kinds of spiral, Deleuzian “lines of escape”, within given, suffocating media and forms, and against them. They yield to the definition “minor literature” suggested by the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari in 1975. They defined “minor literature” as the literature of a writer who belongs to a minority yet writes in the dominant, major language. The emblematic example with which they demonstrate the term is the Jewish Kafka, whose parents spoke Yiddish and then Czech, whereas he chose to write in the occupying language – German. However, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the German used by Kafka is a hybrid instrument made of a complex combination between the consciousness of the I and the consciousness of the collective with which Kafka was associated; minor language is a collective system of expression of a member of a minority who speaks the dominant language, which in any case permeates the political field which has already “contaminated every utterance with it”.⁵ The minor writer performs, in the major language, sober moves and estrangements that can be seen as a political act, albeit devoid of a declared ideology. The minor writer does not seek freedom and emancipation, as is perhaps expected of artists as such, “only a way out—to the right or left or anywhere at all. I made no other demands, even if the way out should be only an illusion. The demand was small; the disappointment would not be any greater—to move on further, to move on further! Only not to stand still with arms raised, pressed against a crate wall.”⁶

The neo-barbaristic artists “exploit” major formats and manipulate them as if their works were a new animal species that feeds on the hosts’ materials, devours them, digests them and produces energy from them. The works of these artists/pirates, whose studio, real or virtual, or maybe only their computer, often looks like the loot-filled cave of some Ali Baba, offer various nonconformist perspectives and transgressive stratagems whose purpose is to try and undermine, endanger and “betray” the matrix, the archetype, the dominant structure, the governing and dictating framework, what Deleuze and Guattari call “major language”.

It is as if these artists operate on behalf of some collective or marginal community with a threatened socio-political identity, positioned within the spiral bubble skin of a status quo, a dead end. Most of them work with narrative video forms that include a clear performative aspect and comic frequencies that sometimes amount to unruly disruption. The characters appearing in these works, usually the artist him- or herself, function as intense implementation tools, without purporting to start a revolution: kinds of digital

tigers in environments of despotism. Their works expose a collection of ironic ruses, demonstrating more than anything the idea that under every mechanism of dominance that loses its balance, a new mechanism of dominance is produced, which they (and us) are forever an integral part of.

The barbaric, like a dark object of desire, lurks within us. The terrorist imagination also lies in wait in each and every one of us. Thus, according to the apocalyptic French philosopher Jean Baudrillard: “An allergy to all definitive order, to all definitive power is happily universal... No need for a death wish or desire for self-destruction, not even for perverse effects. It is very logically, and inexorably, that the rise to power of power exacerbates a will to destroy it. And power is complicit with its own destruction... It has been said: ‘God cannot declare war on Itself’. Well, It can. The West, in its God-like position (of divine power, and absolute moral legitimacy) becomes suicidal, and declares war on itself.”⁷ Substitute “Israel” for “The West”.

The Works

The viewing public at the exhibition Neo-Barbarism will be greeted with two outstretched arms, amputated from the shoulders. Each arm is wearing the sleeve of a black leather jacket and is itself steel-cast and gold-plated. Each hand holds a paper cup for begging with the simple inscription “for my art”. This is the polished sculpture made by the artist-designer Eitan Bartal.

Inside, in the dimly-lit exhibition space, Uri Katzenstein will perform a new modest performance called “Weight”, which he chooses to define as a reactive experiment. In fact it is an electric shock treatment. No one will faint this time. The experiment has been medically tested. No blood. No compositions of noise and distortion. No one is going to roll Katzenstein up in a carpet, pour petrol over him, set him alight and throw him out, as happened in the first performances he staged in New York in 1980.

The first works made by Katzenstein, who remains a kind of healer-shaman with tons of dense energy, featured expressions of anxiety that generated in him the need to nail live eels to the stage as if they were sex organs dancing a raging and twisting dance. These days, in his gradually softening version, with a lot less spiky punk, Katzenstein sticks to a surprising, disturbing yet addictive 50 watt electric current (the wattage allowed by the Israeli Institute of Standards), which is inserted into the viewers’ body. The electric shock will be accompanied by the seductive artist-shaman wearing the costume of a damaged gypsy troubadour and softly touching the viewer’s body. Katzenstein sits on a high bar stool, wearing black trousers and a white shirt, a black curly wig and

⁵ The suggestion here is to replace the term “minor literature” with the term “minor art”. The citation is taken from the introduction to the Hebrew translation of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans and intro: Dr. Raphael Zagury-Orly and Yoram Ron, Resling, 2005, p. 17. “Since the political field has already contaminated every statement in the minor literature, since ‘what the solitary writer says already constitutes a communal action, and what he says or does is necessarily political... minor literature finds itself positively charged with the role and the function of collective, and even revolutionary utterance; it is literature that produces an active solidarity... not at all for ideological reasons, but because it provides a collective utterance, missing everywhere else in this milieu. Only in this way can the Kafka’s revolution be political without being ideological”.

⁶ From the introduction by Zagury-Orly and Ron (op. cit.), citing Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy”. Trans: Ian Johnston.

⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*. Translated by Dr. Rachel Blouil, *Le Monde* 2 November 2001

reading glasses. In his mouth there is a boxing mouth guard made of black plastic, which hinders his speech and distorts it. On his fingers there are steel rings connected to two visible thin electrical wires. A light shines on him, attracting the audience to approach him. A dog sits by his side. Behind him there is a simple video screening of his sleeping son. Katzenstein himself exudes serenity, generosity and pleasantness. Whoever comes up to him gets a gentle handshake or a startling stroke, during which the current is conveyed, and a whisper in the ear generously promising that “Next time I’ll teach you something new”. The ritual, Joseph Beuysian in spirit, ends with rough singing accompanied by a ukulele. Katzenstein performs a little song written by Ohad Fishof. The performance – plus the appearance, the curls, the glasses and the dog – is so minor, human, steeped with desire and sadness. Katzenstein’s cracked voice, as if soaked with alcohol, brings to mind the possibility that the soul of Theodorakis or Hadgidakis has reincarnated in his body.

“To Be Continued” (2009), Sharif Waked’s video installation, brings to the discussion a fantasy about a desperate use of the ultimate weapon – “Let me die with the Philistines”. The work ironises the familiar format recorded by a suicide bomber on the eve of a mission. It is an encoded replica transmitted in video. In a performance that has already become a ritual and a convention, the terrorist reads his last statement in front of the camera before performing the act that will give his death the status of a martyr’s death. After dying amongst his victims and the enemies of his people, the release of the video for transmission functions as a symbol of resistance and heroism among the family and the community to which he belonged. The design of the film preserves the memory of the suicide while justifying and glorifying his action and his commitment to the struggle.

“To Be Continued” features the beautiful actor Salah Bakri in the role of the terrorist. He is wearing a belt with the deadly charge and an army issue balaclava on his head. On the wall behind him there is an encouraging verse from the Koran (in Arabic calligraphy) with a decorative painting of two Kalashnikovs (or are they M-16s? – trying to clarify the matter with the artist has failed to yield a definite answer). On the table in front of the Shahid lies a text from which he reads the last message. The sheet of paper itself is also flanked by a Kalashnikov or an M-16, this time looking like the real thing. The gun is lying on the table like a borderline between the camera and the terrorist. However the message – read as a declaration and a testimony of the deed that the character is about to perform – turns out to be a reading from the classic “One Thousand and One Nights”⁸ (a collection of stories that never “die” since each person who tells them not only gives

them a renewed lease of life but also creates his own new version).

Waked’s film creates a delay in time and a suspension of the suicidal act. For it never ends: when it technically finishes it begins again in an endless loop, like an arabesque. It is another incarnation of the story of the king who executed his wife after discovering she had been unfaithful to him, and started marrying a new virgin each day, only to execute her the next morning. Until the canny Shahrazad, the daughter of the vizier in charge of supplying the virgins, decides to marry the king and change the decree, or at least delay it, by using her charms as a storyteller and with an endless string of historical tales, comedies, tragedies, poems, erotic stories and fables – all lacking a moral or a lesson and mostly meaningless. The fascinated king is obliged to delay the execution until he has heard the end of the story, which never comes. Just like Shahrazad, who succeeds in deferring her death to an unknown time by means of a rhetorical trick that has no beginning and no end (that cures the king of the wound of betrayal and allays his pain and his deadly anger), so does Waked’s suicide bomber.

Waked’s choice of the text from “One Thousand and One Nights” turns out to be an enchanting but endless choice. As such his choice joins the central theme of the exhibition Neo-Barbarism, which is concerned with frustrating the viewers’ urge for unequivocal meaning and with emptying the conventions of the medium of their core power and content. Waked, however, allows the viewers to give themselves up to the voice of the storyteller, and this, after all, must have been the bewitching element in Shahrazad’s stories.

The clever video piece “To Be Continued” emerges as an exercise in subversive cinema, a variant of what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam call “Media Jujutsu”⁹ – films that manage to undermine the stereotype presented in them by following the rules familiar to us from martial art practices in which the attacked makes use of the opponent’s or aggressor’s power in order to turn their position of weakness into an advantage. Shohat and Stam link the idea of “Media Jujutsu” to a variety of transgressive concepts and a number of ruses used in various cultures, for example as criticism of contemporary globalisation, or to debunk mechanisms of domination. “Media Jujutsu” is a stratagem intended to divert the powers that be against themselves, or at least loosen their hold on the oppressed, occupied, repressed minority. “All systems of dominations, we assume, are ‘leaky’”, claim Shohat and Stam, “the point is to turn such leaks into a flood”. This means, according to them, taking parasitic action, “kidnapping the dominant” and setting up a new space for communication. This practice deterritorialises the binary of dominance and submission, as well as defamiliarising familiar materials and channelling

⁸ This collection of multicultural stories, tells us Jorge Luis Borges in his essay “The Thousand and One Nights” (1984), deals with the myths through which the enchanted East was revealed to the West. The circumstances of their arrival in the West are also a-historic and mythical in character and their sources are diverse. The very word “thousand” in the title represents what it is impossible to count. The addition of “one” to a thousand is like adding one to an infinite number. Borges discusses the concept of the infinite that accompanied the stories of One Thousand and One Nights, claiming that the book is a “labyrinth”, “a book that never ends” and “that one can get lost in”. Incidentally, various scholars claim that “One Thousand and One Nights” is based on an ancient profession of nocturnal storytellers who specialised in bringing relief to those suffering from insomnia. Some say that the first to hear these stories from a professional was none other than Alexander the Great.

⁹ Shohat, Ella, and Stam, Robert, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, New York and London: Routledge, 1995, p. 328–333.





and diverting their energies to alternative routes. In their list of strategies that transform the hegemonic or dominant culture, Shohat and Stam include the concept “Brazilian Anthropophagy”, a “cultural cannibalism” that advocates the devouring and eclectic swallowing of a variety of traditions, including Eurocentric traditions, in order to produce a metabolic synthesis: absorbing different materials from the environment, processing them, producing energy from them and spewing out the waste. The Brazilian movement that espoused anthropophagy called for art to devour European techniques in order to further the struggle against European supremacy (and the West’s dominance) and convert it to an alternative. Anthropophagy (cannibalism) appropriates the existing discourse, taking on the power of the dominant discourse and rearranging itself against it.

There are of course different types of stratagems of this kind, for instance the concept of “excorporation”, which refers to the “robbing” of corporations’ symbols and advertisement labels in order to expropriate their control of the commodity market, or the “garbage aesthetic” that can be seen in the 2009 film “Waste Land”, documenting the works of the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz, or in the short Brazilian film “Isle of Flowers” by Jorge Furtado from 1989, tracking the path of a tomato from the garden to the dump. Other concepts are the “hunger aesthetic”; “nomadic aesthetic”; “exile aesthetic”; and “the aesthetic of the minority” known as “minor literature” in Deleuze and Guattari’s essay. All these are now joined by what the writers of these pages call “the aesthetic of neo-barbarism”, an aesthetic that turns barbarism against itself.

In Roe Rosen’s “Hilarious”, a video shot in a television studio, we can see the neo-barbaric “harassment” of the familiar format of stand-up comedy and of the stratagem of humour itself, with its liberating force in the face of existential dread. If standard stand-up comedy sometimes has the status of sharp satire that succeeds in shaking up the viewers and pointing to despicable blind spots in their social, political and mental lives, then the video work “Hilarious” has a strange status: it is fundamentally frayed, and functions as a mechanism whose victims are all of us, including the artist.

In this fictional television show, the gifted actress Hani Furstenberg plays Rosy Rosen, a provocative comedian with obscene bodily gestures, who operate as an automatic “stand-up machine”, as a spectacular and seemingly subject-less implementation tool. She performs boldly in front of an audience who have come to laugh and find themselves sweating with embarrassment, ambivalence and an effort to understand what the hell is going on. Rosy Rosen starts with a very short personal confession in which she tells the

audience that “today I went to see my doctor”, immediately abandoning the personal and opening a Pandora’s box that will not be shut until the end of the performance. She moves on to a series of jokes about Jewish, Italian, Swedish and even Arab doctors. “An Arab doctor, what’s wrong with that, there are Arab doctors too... What’s up with you, you don’t like sex?” The humour mechanism gradually breaks down, seemingly unable to come up with any reasons to laugh. The jokes have no punch lines and include bad news. They turn out to be stressful, monstrous, horrifying, devoid of clear political agenda or recognisable ideological orientation. These jokes, more than anything, betray the natural mechanism of humour and the heroic principle attributed to it by Freud (Freud believed that humour has the ability to unravel horror and deep anxiety).

However the work of art itself turns out to be directed against the media and the television formats which we all live, formats that offer a reversal of the form and the content. It happens in reality shows and in weekend supplement features, and it happens in satirical shows as well. The TV world is occupied more and more intensively with emptying its shows of any content. In “Hilarious”, the television format, as an entertainment machine, becomes the subject of the piece. The work’s troublesome, incomprehensible, absurd content offers a reflection of the format, which, like other formats dedicated to entertainment shows and otherwise, rolls down its trousers to create a sensation, lest the spectators leave.

Rosen’s de-sublimative works reach aesthetic-professional-virtuoso-sublime heights, only to fall from them and drown deep in the filth, with no escape. The mechanism of betrayal operates again and again, and in more layers: if it seems to the viewers that Rosy Rosen acts as an impersonal, subject-less machine, there comes a moment in which she is transformed and becomes a beautiful pregnant Swede who is about to die in the attack on New York’s Twin Towers. When she is asked by a goldfish what is her final wish, the camera shows a close-up of her sweaty face. And with no technical manipulation, just by using her acting skills, she suddenly turns into a beautiful, stunning, glamorous and tragic Swede. “I am about to die”, she answers the goldfish with an expression of fathomless sorrow mixed with defiance, “and I don’t want anything”. For a moment, against the viewers’ will, their identification mechanism is triggered, immediately broken by the actress’ automatic return to her role as a laughter machine and to her unfunny jokes and her repertoire of obscene gestures. The same process unfolds at the end of the programme; after thanking the audience and bowing, with the music and the applause, Rosy Rosen mutters with a huge smile: “Thank you, thank you, I have cancer”. The viewers are shaken again: Is there or isn’t there a human subject here?

And if she has cancer, does it permit her to say the monstrous things she has said?

The applause are accompanied by a cheerful version of the song “The Right to Live in Peace”, also marked by betrayal. It is a completely uncheerful South American leftist song, a classic written by the freedom fighter Victor Jara, who was executed by Pinochet. The entirely female band in the studio, incidentally, has been infiltrated by two artists: Ruti Sela, blowing a trumpet with blasts that sound like an especially rude joke, and Doron Rabina, playing an organ that sits in his lap like a pet dog, in perfect drag (in all of Roe Rosen’s works, gender reversals are a fundamental theme); a betrayal of himself, of his own gender?


Maya Zack’s “Black and White Rule” is an episodic film echoing a psychological drama about which the viewers have no available knowledge. There is an emphasis on the meticulous and expressive design of the space, with numerous period instruments creating a super-rational 1920s environment. The highly professional atmosphere follows an agenda that revolves around a couple of horribly groomed dogs. From the outset, it is clear that the measured and mechanical functioning of the anonymous characters and of the well-trained dogs – directed to walk on their hind legs with their heads upright in a sickeningly elegant prance – is about to be broken or interrupted. Everything invites disruption. It is only a matter of time before the routine machine, which sustains itself, goes haywire and attacks itself.

The film moves between two adjacent spaces. In one of the spaces there are a black and white tiled floor, training facilities and podiums for presentation and experimentation, and a meticulously dressed dog trainer. He is conducting a series of training games and measuring the limbs of the two pedigree dogs. The dogs’ white fur is neatly designed in pet-lion style. They demonstrate circus skills and seem to belong to the species of champions, used to participating in competitions and winning medals. The trainer sometimes deviates from his focused activity, taking breaks in which he swallows and spews out ping-pong balls or performs a few quick tap dancing steps of his own. He himself goes through a process of “becoming animal” or “becoming a dog machine”. In the second space, in the adjacent room, there are piles of documents. Among the data cards, registration booklets, maps, diagrams and other bizarre instruments, we see a young neurotic woman, half-scientist half-draftswoman. The woman, dressed in conservative Victorian elegance, concentrates on observing and surveying what is taking place in the training and experimentation hall. Seized with productive yet restrained desire, she draws the dogs in different anatomical postures, crosschecks data, compares x-rays, operates a metronome, collects data, measures, paces, types and maps. It gradually

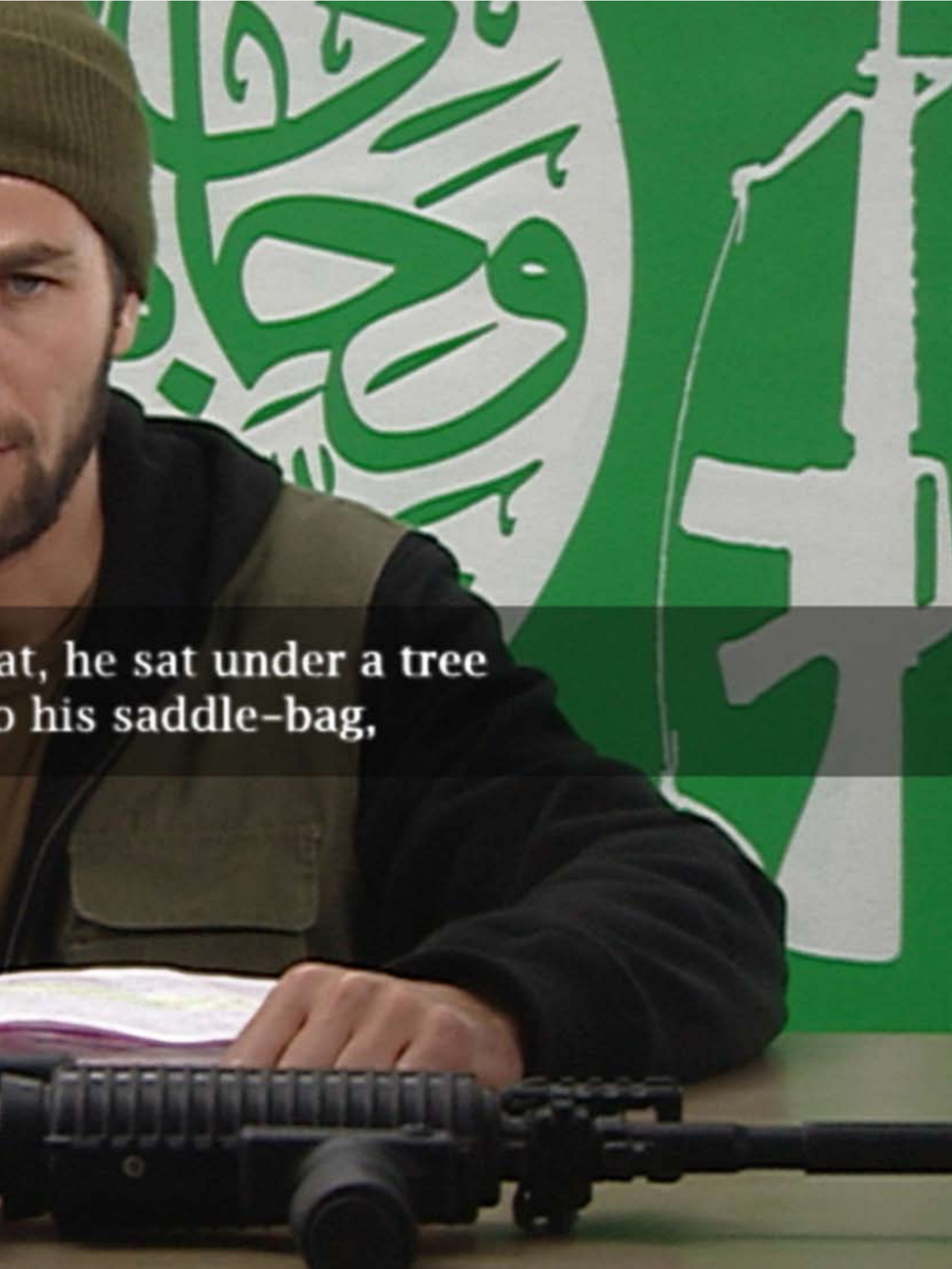
becomes apparent that the main subject of the survey may be to yield more and more pretty drawings (of the kind that Maya Zack excels in). All the purposeful activity in the control room occurs under growing pressure, as the draftswoman tries to get a grip on things. The activity in the training hall is not entirely clear either. And then, the trainer injects the dogs with something and something is broken. The well-oiled machine stops and the chaos begins. The dogs deviate from their automatic functionality and the demon of the wild primeval animal seems to burst out, attacking the trainer/torturer and rendering the experiment worthless. The drama as seen from the control room looks like a chaotic, jumbled and reckless event in which the dogs and the trainer get hopelessly entangled. In the end they all die, except the scientist-draftswoman. She goes out to the training hall and examines the results of the event that got out of hand. It seems that she is incapable of examining what she sees unless it is through one of the “rational” instruments at her disposal. She looks at the unfocused scene of the event through a large glass frame with a grid. As it comes into focus, the picture brings together the net of the grid and the rhizomatic event, in which wires coil inseparably around the dogs and the trainer until they become one multi-limbed unit. This is a crucial and constitutive moment, in which the artist confronts the symbol of progressive, enlightened, utopian, rational modernism with the ultimate symbol of postmodernism – the Deleuzian Rhizome (Rhizome: a term taken from the field of botany and referring to types of roots that expand horizontally, making it impossible to follow the direction or structure of their expansion: roots of grass, for example) – a metaphor for complicated, evasive, dead-end and irresolvable situations of creation and thought.

The film’s plot may point to the rebellion of the oppressed and the exploited, in this case the dogs that turn on those who control them, their designers, the scientists and all those who made them look like they do today – after thousands of years of genetic experiments and crossbreeding that generated hundreds of dog breeds. Human diversity seems limited compared to canine diversity. In one of the books by the philosopher Daniel Shabtai Milo, a science-fiction novel called “The Carriers of the Brain,”¹⁰ it is suggested that one day the tables will be turned, that is: “Man performs on his best friend manipulations that the Helsinki Accords on human experimentation rightly forbid. But anything that is possible will be done one day, this is a great rule in science. Within a few dozen or hundred years, Earth will be populated by Doberman-, Labrador-, Dachshund- and Poodle-like homo sapiens, and the same will be true for at least all the other four hundred breeds that have been engineered so far. Man is the next dog”.

¹⁰ Daniel S. Milo, *les porteurs de cerveau*, les belles lettres, 2003

A man with a beard and a brown beanie is shown from the chest up. He is wearing a dark jacket over a tan tactical vest. He is sitting at a desk with an open book in front of him. A rifle is positioned on the desk in the foreground. The background features a large green and white calligraphic emblem, possibly a religious or organizational symbol. A semi-transparent grey bar is overlaid on the image, containing white text.

oppressed by the hea
and reached into



at, he sat under a tree
to his saddle-bag,

Maya Zack's film, like its name ("Black and White Rule"), presumes to operate within a legal framework that presents the viewers with a moral dilemma – which is resolved. In the end almost everyone dies, except the character of the researcher who keeps a seemingly-objective distance from what is happening. Zack reports the events with an irony that denotes a Kafkaesque dead-end; the destruction of an old mechanism becomes in turn a new mechanism, and the scientist/draftswoman/artist is part of the same tortured perpetuum mobile, "made of office paper" (as in Kafka's "writing machine").

Like Kafka, Maya Zack adores machines and instruments. "The machine, to him, is never merely technical", explain the philosophers Raphael Zagury-Orly and Yoram Ron, in their essential introduction to the Hebrew translation of Deleuze and Guattari's "Kafka – Toward a Minor Literature". "It is always linked to more complicated systems that it is only part of, along with other parts, the raw materials and the mechanisms, but also: the staff, the men and the women, the powerful and the weak, the executioners and the victims." This machine, according to them, is the desire that operates like a machine, that endlessly produces and experiences, that lacks nothing, that always sustains itself (in contrast to common opinion, based on the psychoanalytic schema, that says that desire is created from a lack and is always in deficit). "Kafka's greatness", claim Zagury-Orly and Ron following Deleuze and Guattari, "is that he understands that men and women are part of the machine not only when they are at work, when for example they are in contact with the technical machine at the factory. The fact of their being an inseparable part of the machine is most emphasised when they are not working: in their extra-curricular activities, in their resting times, their loves, their protests, their angers."¹¹ "In fact the irony exposes the impossibility of offering real change, and the necessity of confronting this impossibility, before clinging to any alternative, innovation or transformation. It shows how every change is ultimately deceptive, how it paves the way for new bureaucracies."¹²

"Totem", Boaz Arad's video installation, is a fetishistic assemblage that grows out of the earth like a pagan body, developing an assortment of arbitrarily combined organs and materials. This impressive golem-totem is terrorising and humorous, potent and impotent all at the same time.

Arad's installation follows Zarathustra's recommendation, "only believe in a God that can dance",¹³ and moves like an entertainment unit on wheels. Its lower part is built like a transparent vitrine, displaying piles of small objects that

seem to have been stolen from some One Dollar Shop according to an uncontrolled craving for their colour: brushes for various uses – yellow; chocolate-and-nut bars – yellowish-golden wraps; baskets in different sizes made of simple plastic materials – yellow as well; plastic whistles, spools of string, casts of utensils, dolls and beads – all yellow. The collection's eclecticism and the devotion to the colour bring to mind a covetous bird building a nest in which it hopes to host a mate. Above the packed vitrine stands an old television set, held in place by protruding iron hinges, connected in turn to a monkey-wrench-like tool. The leg of a desk lamp is stuck in the monitor's bottom, pointing a vulgar beam of light at the neatly polished crotch of a used wooden figurine of an African fertility goddess. The television screens a video which features the face of the artist himself, connected via a kiss to a pigeon chick. The chick seems to be suckling from Arad's throat; his funnel-like gaping mouth is providing it with chewed food but can also, at a stroke, decapitate its tiny head. The endless looping of the film creates the feeling that these mouths, the artist's and the animal's, will never be satisfied.

The totemic lump, with its gangly joints that seem to have been soldered together by the artist's desire, can be seen to allude to a rough mechanism for the production of meaning or belief for anyone who needs it. Arad's totem is also portable – even if its wheels are a bit loose, they still allow it to wander around from tribe to tribe. It recalls those colourful plastic-cast figures that sometimes stand in shopping centres: a human-size Indian, for example, that at the push of a button will open its mouth and push out a note forecasting the user's future.

Arad's totem is a simulacra of a desire machine that feeds and gets fed at the same time. The constant constitution of desire – for yellow knickknacks, for suckling a pigeon chick, for the emission and adsorption of heat, pulse and life hanging by a thread – stitches everything together without lacking anything. It is also a kind of intensive "bachelor machine",¹⁴ a smug and satisfied collective unit, functioning as a metonymy for a familial living machine: it flaunts the appearance of a dumb, muscleman bouncer, with the fertility goddess above it meant to ensure the continuity of the family unit. The absurdity of the whole object radiates subversion and betrayal of traditional family values and their seemingly self-evident place in the social order.

Gal Weinstein shows a video piece that points to the possibility that our own body will turn us in or incriminate us, thus performing a kind of self-betrayal. The film features a cultural, symbolic, formalistic, clichéd act of burning the artist's fingerprints. More precisely: burning the graphic inscription of the particular fingerprint. First

¹¹ From the introduction by Zagury-Orly and Ron (op. cit.), p. 11.

¹² Ibid., p. 13–14.

¹³ Thus Spake Zarathustra, op. cit.

¹⁴ See Kafka – Toward a Minor Literature.

Weinstein dipped his finger in ink and made a print of it on a piece of paper, then the print was mapped and enlarged, and then the fingerprint's lines were recreated with cotton wool fibres glued onto the paper with great gentleness. These lines were set fire to in a controlled manner, the flames sketching their outline. The result is like "action drawing" with fire, a kind of automatic drawing-writing. Every fingerprint flattens a person into a two-dimensional graphic sign, reducing their identity to an identification mark that reveals nothing about their personality. In this case, the two-dimensional is treated with material, with a process, with movement, transforming the two-dimensional and returning it to the three-dimensional as a relief, an inscription in fire, before the video photograph empties the image again. The same goes for the act of scorching: it exposes the fingerprint, illuminates it and consumes it, emphasising its topography and denying it, hiding it and inscribing it. The act of burning the fingerprint leaves behind an alternative mark, thus pointing to the absurdity of the act, and to its playfulness. The insistent gap between the personal identification mark and the individual's actual identity refuses to disappear. Nevertheless, the playful act itself makes us think about sabotaging biometric surveillance methods; about the temptation that criminals or wanted people must often feel, and realise, to erase the possibility of identification and exposure from their treacherous body organ, to sabotage the surveillance regime and deceive the "big brother".

Up till now, Sharon Balaban has not been on the list of the usual suspects of neo-barbarism taking part in this exhibition. In the last decade she has been working on an impressive crop of "home movies" that tend not to go over one minute in length and are screened in endless loops. The films are produced with simple means and a minimalist language, but enjoy surrealist contents. Their stars are simple objects, as well as the artist's bodily organs, undergoing surprising and amusing defamiliarisations and very gently bringing up subjects such as sex, gender, monstrous hybrids and becoming animal.

For the work shown in the exhibition *Neo-Barbarism*, the heavily pregnant Balaban unflinchingly arrived with her video camera at the vultures' feeding site. Time after time she stands at the site, which is crammed with large rotting carcasses, as if she were offering her foetus, the fruit of her womb, to the hungry mouths. The bald headed Kings of the Birds rummage through the repulsive rotting meat, stained with flies and teeming with maggots, and are certainly not indifferent to her surprising offering. Balaban stands still in the desolate site, wearing a black white-dotted dress, her bare belly ensconced in a motorcyclist's helmet. Through the helmet's big

gaping mouth peeps a belly stretched to the point of bursting. We witness the artist becoming a kind of hybrid feeding machine, spraying durable whipped cream from a German made Schlagfix container. The whipped cream pours out of the mouth of the helmet/belly, collecting in the pile of carcasses. The vultures, whose feeding site was organised for the sake of ecological balance, are seduced, by an enigmatic and bizarre act, to gorge on whipped cream straight from the head of a dead camel, or, alternately, straight from the pregnant belly that proudly taunts them. The vultures approach Balaban with interest and a large group voraciously jumps at the helmeted, swollen belly. Whipped cream has earned special status as a comic hero in slapstick movies, and the act of throwing it at the surprised faces of people in authority has long become a symbol of protest and humiliation customary at political and economic conventions. Still, what is a pregnant woman doing in a feeding site for vultures? What does whipped cream have to do with the head of a dead camel? What does a pregnant belly have to do with a protective helmet soldered to the belly, to the artist's body, like a big funnel of a mouth that seems ready to throw out the baby with the bath water and sacrifice it? The feeling is of sabotage, of intentionally damaging and hurting the body of the pregnant subject, as a way of expressing protest and basic resistance, resistance for its own sake.

The event is split into three screens, as if the division into three can produce some logic and help the viewers digest the gnawing and alienating bizarre performance. The work seems to court a status of incomprehensibility – that lacks nothing. Incomprehensibility that deviates from traditional thinking – which seeks to give meaning to what cannot be understood and cannot be formulated. The triple-screen video piece *Schlagfix* behaves like an assemblage whose components are put together without comprising an utterance, without shedding light on each other and without carrying the promise of producing unified meaning – therefore it can be referred to as a rhizome.

The vulture's guzzling feast emerges as a perfectly cultural act, confronted by a mute and silent "barbaric" ritual, that seems to be responding to distant drummers, to ungraspable and illusive music, of the kind heard by Kafka's dog in "Investigations of a Dog" (inspiring it to wonder philosophically about canine nature). The artist invades a territory that is not her own, forcing on the vultures an expropriation of their territory and turning it into an area that exists outside any logic. There, in limbo, she creates a non-violent yet still transgressive estrangement. It is as if she is obeying a voice that comes from outside rational Western thought, outside the dominant language, the hegemonic culture, civilisation, the principle of sublimation, creating a disruption and a threat to the social order, a kind of Antigone who carries





a mark of Cain on her forehead, always residing nowhere.

The work resists summarisation or reduction, nor does it develop in a linear fashion. It unfolds with chaotic, neutral arbitrariness, indifferent to logical thinking. Deleuze would have probably suggested that it is not the problem that Balaban's film posits that we need to solve, but rather the system that thinks that there is some problem or logical contradiction here.

Keren Cytter's video work "No Title Yet" is based on what is defined as "the theatre of repetition", a theatre that offers a language of dynamic signifiers and gestures, that hover in the space of the show with no phenomenological orientation. Rather than mediating between two characters standing on stage, this language functions prior to the words.

Cytter's film introduces the viewers to a theatrical experience that takes place in a number of parallel set-ups. On the stage there is a table, some portable clothes hangers, lighting poles and various stage props. Downstage there is a book cabinet and an unmade bed. The actors play family members having destructive conversations on stage, as well as behind the scenes, with audience reactions heard in the background. The viewers, lost among a number of situations that refuse to be harnessed together into a traditional plot, are momentarily unable to grasp what is happening in front of their eyes. The video work seems to be documenting the bizarre show, yet it has no concrete beginning or end. The work keeps unfolding and moving in a spiral fashion, between the front of the fourth wall¹⁵ and the back of the stage. Cytter's visual language is realistic and direct, and she seems to compel the viewers into a "suspension of disbelief" and into devotion. The removal of the fourth wall creates estrangement and alienation and highlights the mimetic act. Cytter, who has been called by the curator Daniel Birnbaum "one of the emblematic artists of our moment",¹⁶ disarms her characters of their concrete identity. She challenges the concept of the subject as a stable and unified entity, turning it into an empty mask of fluidity and disharmony. Among the characters: three children, two women, a man, a director. All the dialogues are performed as if the actors were obeying some disintegrated, fragmentary stage instructions, asking them to spew out a bunch of clichés and juggle between the authentic and the staged. Cytter has referred to her characteristic use of clichés in the catalogue of her show in Kunst-Werke Berlin in 2006: "A cliché for me is an absolute truth, it is like the practical bible, it is something that passed through many people and it is that one sentence that stuck with them all."¹⁷ The mechanical clichés never stop revolving around their axis. Launching them out of context into the space of the stage creates narratological chaos and a rift of meaning: "Let's get

married"; "I can't live"; "Stop improvising"; "He doesn't love me" – sentences said by the different couples – Between the woman and the child or between the son and his mother? Between the man and the lover or between the actor and his wife? Between the director and the actress or between her and her lover? The gestures accompanying the sentences are also emptied out, resonating simultaneously onstage and behind the scenes.

Disconnecting the voice from the speaking subject, a central tool in Cytter's work, intensifies the estrangement. In an article in the art magazine *Artforum* she says that even utopian hopes about overcoming the crisis of the authentic have themselves become clichés and "readymades".¹⁸ Thus she follows a practice of mimicry while blurring the gap between the real and the staged. Cytter wishes to expose the synthetic nature of the recited sentence and the cinematic mechanism that drives the characters and confronts them with the filmed situation. The manner in which she uses the practice of mimesis brings to mind Walter Benjamin's discussion of the ability to become similar, the mental capacity for assimilation and mimicry, the ability to identify common patterns of action and to adopt them. This approach to the mimetic ability examines the process rather than the final product.¹⁹ The mimetic ability thus described questions and destabilises the foundations of the link between the sign and the signified, between the represented and its representation. Cytter actualises the dismantling of the signifiers, the disintegration of the subject and the decline of the regime of harmonious identities. In this sense, her drifting among different identities, her use of emptied clichés and her endless repetition grasp some of the essence of contemporary barbarity. Anselm Franke, in an essay on the characteristics of contemporary theatre and performance entitled "Afterword on the Theatre of Transgression", insists that the mimetic should be perceived as "A mental mobilization of subjective becomings, an ecstatic reversal of the regimes of identity, a travel through the land of de-subjectivations and subjectivations."²⁰ Gilles Deleuze suggests that the most important dimension in performance is the absence of any representation, and the endless movement: it is not the subject presenting it that is important, nor the meaning represented in the context in which it is presented. The body's movement "Power of becoming a force perpetually in the making. Through moving and jecturing processes, the body emerges as an assemblage of virtual and actual expressions with the capacity to affect and to be affected by other bodies."²¹

Gilad Ratman shows two video works. One, the above mentioned "Let My People Go", from 2002, in which it seems that the central protagonist is the vomit thrown up by the participants. In the middle of the night, some young people go into their flats

¹⁵ "The Fourth Wall" is a theatrical term referring to the imaginary wall that separates the audience from the stage. On the stage there are the three real walls of a room, and the audience, as it were, peeks into the world unfolding on the state through a transparent fourth wall.

¹⁶ Daniel Birnbaum, "True Lies", *Artforum*, March 2010, pp 191.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 193.

¹⁸ pp 197.

¹⁹ Anselm Franke, "Afterword on the theatre of transgression", in *Voice Over*, Laspis, Sweden and Sterberg press, Berlin, 2009. pp 65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 67. The term is a philosophical concept coined by Michel Foucault and elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. It refers to the construction of the individual subject.

²¹ Elena del Río, *Deleuze and the cinemas of performance: powers of affection*, Edinburgh press LTD 2008, pp 12-13.

one after the other. They are staggering drunkenly like cats without moustaches. Each seems to be preparing to go to bed – washing his face, taking off his shoes and his clothes, and so forth. It soon becomes clear that none of the characters can hold their heads straight, their dizziness influencing the viewers as well. Slowly they collapse in the bathroom one after the other and throw up into the toilet, on the shower stall floor, in the white sink and in bed. Afterwards they move restlessly in their beds, hovering between relief and suffering, between purifying emptiness and self-disgust. In the background, as mentioned above, Zmira Chen sings the song “Let My People Go”.

The work has an inverted textual dimension – the “Let Go” functions as an encouragement for rebellion, as if spurring the contents of the stomach to rebel against the body and the body to revolt against the contents of the stomach. Either way there is an element of liberation in the discharge. The celebration of the Dionysian, according to Friedrich Nietzsche, is not merely part of a ritual in Greek culture, but a fundamental aspect of human nature, revealed in the thriving for “obliteration of the customary manacles and boundaries of existence.”²² On the mental plane this urge is revealed in the attempt to attain an ecstatic rapture in which “the subjective fades into complete forgetfulness of self.”²³ This ecstasy (in Greek *ek-stasis* – standing outside the self) is a powerful experience of transcendence that goes beyond a merely sensual pleasure, beyond even the sense of space and time. In the ecstatic state, the private consciousness of the I dissolves, merging with the borderless being of the absolute. as the thinker Georges Bataille described this experience.²⁴ The Dionysian pursuit of ecstasy expresses a deep longing for self-annihilation, for doing away with the separate being of the individual.

Another work by Gilead Ratman, “Alligatorriver Multi Channel”, consists of a big subwoofer speaker extending 8 monitors of various sizes like an octopus extending its tentacles. Each monitor shows a different nocturnal event, collected and re-processed from the store of unused materials shot while Ratman worked on his 2006 piece “Alligators”. The scenes are surrealist and trippy, and occur in different sites in a forest. Each monitor shows a different scene in varying lengths. There is no one ideal viewpoint from which the viewers in the exhibition can encompass the whole composition. At the same time, all the soundtracks of the eight different videos flow into the same sub speaker, which mixes them into a distorted, cacophonous, monotone sound. The audience hears a mixture of voices, endless distortion. The different soundtracks consist of trance rave music, the buzz of cicadas and grasshoppers, coiling sounds, jackals’ howls, human coughs and noises

and forest sounds. The creatures appearing in the collection of scenes, sort of hybrids between humans and animals, themselves tend to produce growls and gibberish.

The motif of repetition features heavily in this work, both in the soundtrack and in the image, resulting in a grotesque carnivalesque approach to the image and the characters. In one of the scenes, for example, a man wrapped in fur stands in the middle of the night in a bog that comes up to his knees, looking around in all directions. His behaviour makes no sense. Another scene shows a massive night time rave; the dancers are half naked, wearing wigs. In another scene, a man with big grey hair stands outside a colourful tent coughing lengthily; he keeps going in and out of the tent with no apparent reason. Another monitor shows a couple on a tree, either cuddling or making out. The couple climbs down with difficulty – thus exposing the mechanisms behind the situation. A romantic scene becomes a cumbersome act. On another monitor, a big man with long and straight blond hair repeatedly strokes himself and his hair while playing an undefined instrument. Another man sits opposite him on a speaker that stands in the water. On the one hand the viewers can detect parts that seem to be taken from the theatre of the absurd or a carnival of identities, and on the other they are exposed to the conditions of work behind the scenes. There is an imitation of reality while blurring the gap between the real and the staged, as in Keren Cytter’s works. Other scenes show a heap of bodies lying one on top of the other at the crack of dawn, a man putting a stuffed animal on a fox in the middle of the forest, empty bottles floating on the water, people walking in the water, getting out of the river, going back in, and so on and so forth. No cinematic purpose, no theatrical, literary or narratological purpose. Just a Sisyphean absurdity.

Anselm Franke, in his essay “Afterword on the Theatre of Transgression”,²⁵ claims that Foucault declared the actor to be modernity’s true lawbreaker, a paradigmatic counter-figure to all Western philosophy. Franke suggests that the actor, in his authentic essence, goes against truth. The actor, he believes, is close in essence to the child, the insane, the wild. The actor offers an area of incoherence, of nonsense, of epistemological mistakes. The actor’s use of the transformative power, of the mimetic ability, is impossible to neutralise or contain under fixed categories of pathology (like for example the insane or the primitive). The hybrid creatures that Ratman creates can be seen as Kafkaesque animals that kill any symbol or meaning and empty any signifier. “It is not a matter of a resemblance between the behaviour of an animal and that of the human, even less a play of words. Now there is neither human nor animal since each deterritorialises the other in a conjunction of flux, in a continuum

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone, 1993), vol. ii, p. 115.

²⁵ Anselm Franke, “Afterword on the theatre of transgression”, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, “What Is Minor Literature?” *Mississippi Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3, *Essays Literary Criticism* (Winter/Spring, 1983), pp. 13-33. p. 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

of reversible intensities... The animal does not speak 'like' a human but extracts tonalities without signification from language; the words... climb up – on their own – bark and swarm being dogs, insects, or mice that are actually verbal. To make the sequence vibrate, to open the word to unheard-of inner intensities, in short, an asignifying, intensive use of language... a circuit of states which form a mutual becoming – within an arrangement that is necessarily multiple or collective.”²⁶

“Becoming animal” for Deleuze and Guattari is certainly not mimicry; it is rather like the mimetic ability described by Benjamin, an endless process that undermines and shakes the foundations of the link between the sign and the signified. “When someone or something is in the process of becoming, what he becomes changes to the extent that he himself changes. The becoming creates a ‘node’, an encounter or a link between two heterogeneous terms that deterritorialise each other.”²⁷

Lior Shvil’s installation is split into two channels: one a television set showing a kind of TV profile-interview: “The Confession”, and the other a large screening of “The Trailer”.

“The Confession” is a solo performance by the artist himself, in the role of a kosher butcher airing his murderous tendency; a tendency that has developed in direct contrast to the figure of the ideal pioneer that was his grandfather. The atmosphere designed by Shvil to support his psychopathic character relies deliberately heavily on the generic conventions of horror films: a damp cellar, fire, smoke and quick camera movements. The butcher himself is naked, wearing only a blood-stained long white vinyl apron; his gloves are black; he wears a black band around his head and his long blackened nose highlights his Jewishness. Behind him hang lumps of meat and signs with captions such as “Gewald, Just Above, Oy”. The butcher is standing next to a cold metallic table holding a terrifying knife, chopping something that looks like a corpse wrapped in nylon, while making smug, horrifying and disorderly statements in English spoken with a thick Israeli accent. “I am gonna cut your dick” he promises with a deranged smile, explaining, as if he were a chef in a television cookery show, how to cut up a human corpse. Then he turns to the invisible and inaudible interviewer: “What would you like to ask?” and now he stands on a podium in the corner of the butcher shop (a Confessional?), with two Stars of David painted on a sheet of plywood behind him. The butcher confesses that he does not like the Stars of David. When his grandfather came to Israel, he tells the implied interviewer, he had an ideology, he fought constantly, in all the wars. He himself, he says, developed doubts about ideology. He says that in the place where he himself comes from – “reality

is totally fucked up, people die all the time, a shitty reality. A reality that you constantly want to cut up, finish off, kill. I left all this shit, but with pain and with memories, so the killing for me is not a desire but pure habit. For me killing is like jogging for you.” During the confession, quick transitions show the viewers his professional meat-pounding skills. In a hybrid dialect of English, Hebrew and Yiddish he speaks of his love for the smell of meat, for blood and for spilling organs, concluding his confession with a huge smile, claiming that he is truly living his real nature: “I’m a murderer but a happy, liberated murderer”.

Another monitor screens “The Trailer” for the programme “The Confession”. The preview is made in aggressive advertisement language, with vulgar graphics and murderous typography and large, bombastic captions in Hebrew and English, like “Let me out”, “I’ll cut his dick off”, “The Terror”, “Third Generation”, “Always”, “Burn”, a Batman symbol with a question mark on the back. The artist-butcher-murderer-Jew looks full of energy and fighting spirit – sharpening knives, chopping up corpses, getting blood all over himself, and finally we see the caption: “You like it!”.

The work has two main layers, one biographical and the other cultural. Shvil’s Zionist ideologue grandfather, a kind of collective portrait of Israel’s founding generation, is incorporated into the figure of the grandson as a kosher-butcher, but with a demonic reversal. The familiar narrative that aspires to a moral “good” has been lost. The supreme, unified and collective “good”, represented in the culture and in the myths and constantly recycled on primetime television, is emptied of its contents. There is only a derisive theatrical display of symbols, confused, clichéd identities. Shvil performs a linguistic transgression through his transition between a major language (English, as well as the familiar TV format, from cookery shows to profiles) and a minor language (Yiddish, Hebrew, Gibberish) and through his games with centre and periphery, presenting the viewers with a human beast, a hybrid creature, a mixture of the fighting founders of the country and the blood-thirsty money-grabbers that Yitzhak Rabin nicknamed “a fallout of wimps”.

Yuli Aloni-Primor is the youngest artist in the exhibition. Her piece is called “Garbo”, a name taken from the logo stitched on the back pocket of a pair of jeans worn by a manikin in the shape of a boy. Aloni plays with the double meaning of the word Garbo, which brings to mind the boy’s fantasy about the adored godly actress, and also takes into consideration the Italian term “garbo”, meaning tact and grace.

The installation “Garbo” consists of several objects and two miniaturised video works, shown on the screens of two walkie-talkie sculptures

connected to a vacuum cleaner that has a long suction pipe. The vacuum cleaner is also held by the boy-manikin, who as already mentioned is wearing a plaid shirt and jeans. However the zipper in his trousers is slightly open, like a slight hint undermining his innocent looks. His body is turned towards the objects sticking out of the wall, in which the little videos are screened. One is a graphic-minimalist-line-drawn animation clip in an endless loop, showing a young man who is following a young woman. Holding his erect sexual organ in his hand, the young man walks past the young woman in a mechanical gait, while slightly brushing against her, which is probably enough to cause him to ejaculate, and so on repeatedly. The other walkie-talkie screens a clip showing a young man with a shock of hair and a bare chest dancing ecstatically to trance music. The video is interrupted and distorted, the picture jumping like during a transmission fault on a domestic television set. Loudspeakers attached to the walkie-talkie sculptures play the soundtrack: an amorphous performance of an unidentified song. Only the words “Sachki, sachki” (play, play) can be heard clearly, directing us to the poem “I believe” by Shaul Tchernichovsky (originally a utopian poem expressing a deep wish for socialism, patriotism, and faith in the human spirit). Next to the screening walkie-talkies hang two provocative self-portrait photographs of the artist, seen directing a seductive gaze at the camera. In one of them she shows off her bra-wearing body, her hands rolling down her trousers from the waist towards the groin. In the second photograph she is wrapped in some splint-like construction, a metal pipe coming out of her mouth as if to feed her. Is she paralysed? Or maybe disabled? She seems to be playing the role of a constrained woman in some erotic fantasy.

Another component of the installation is a round mirror hanging on the perpendicular wall. The mirror seems to be sucking in a woman-manikin. Only the manikin's legs stick out of the mirror, as if they were the legs of Icarus about to follow him into the depth of the sea, like in Bruegel's famous painting. She is wearing black fishnet stockings and garters on her legs, and high-heeled shoes on her feet. Again it seems that the lady being sucked into her own reflection is nothing but an object of desire, or one of the fantasies of the boy holding the vacuum cleaner pipe. Perhaps the manikin represents the young Bob's fantasy in which his mother is wearing fetishistic items of clothing while admonishing him to behave nicely, politely, or, like they say in Italian, with Garbo.

The various parts of the installation constitute a kind of mini-pornographic mechanism, crossbreeding sex with archaic radio-communications (moral police?); bringing to mind what Walter Benjamin called “mimetic modern machines”. The surreal organism created by Aloni-Primor – comprising

as mentioned a walkie-talkie, a vacuum cleaner, a boy-manikin with unzipped trousers, a metallic soundtrack carrying a forgotten utopian memory and photographic portraits of the artist, as well as an auto-erotic organ in the shape of a mirror and manikin legs in sexy attire – functions as a productive machine whose various organs are wired together. The boy, vacuuming leftovers and dusty waste seemingly discharged by the communications sets, may be seen as receiving or being fed, but also as emitting and feeding the means of communication with the contents of his fantasy-rich inner world, which seems to contradict his appearance as a highly polite, probably slightly Oedipal boy, a good boy helping his mother with her housework.

Eti Wieseltier's film is screened-emptied-drained into a toilet and is called “Reliques”. It was filmed in a real site revealed to the artist while scuba-diving at Yolanda Reef in the area of Ras Muhammad in Sinai. It is a kind of primeval underwater kingdom, full of romantic ruins sunk way back in time. The ancient remains seem to suggest a developed culture, advanced enough to accomplish a sophisticated design of modern man's emptying tool – white, shiny, cool porcelain, standing in sharp contrast to the contents it is designed to receive. Piles of toilet seats, in spectacular compositions of romantic ruins, have descended to the bottom of the sea and slowly merged with the underwater wildlife. Seaweeds and shells, fish and sea anemones have found refuge among the tiaras of white porcelain toilet seats made to support man's bottom. It seems that Yolanda was the name of a Cypriot freighter carrying whisky, toilet seats and a BMW car. Some say it sank in April 1980 while others insist that its remains were already discovered in the early 1970s. Who or what hit it? Again, some say Bedouin pirates disrupted the work of the lighthouse in order to commit robbery, while some believe that the ship's crew got drunk and lost its bearings and its control.

The film “Reliques” wishes to bow to the greatest myth of 20th-century art, the piece that sought to declare itself “non-art” – Marcel Duchamp's “Fountain”. Greek mythology's Venus and Moshe Shamir's Elik may have been born from the sea, but neo-barbarism in art was born from the “Fountain”. The materials of Wieseltier's video and its installation deal with the reincarnation of the urinal, its sinking and discovery in the depth of the sea. Descending into the depth, into the holy site, is like making a pilgrimage to the depths of consciousness and its storerooms, but first of all it evokes the case of the toilet seat, still as fresh and as relevant as ever. “A point which I want very much to establish,” said Duchamp, “is that the choice of these ‘ready-mades’ was never dictated by aesthetic delectation. The choice was based on

28 Marcel Duchamp, cited in Hans Richter, *Dada Art and Anti-Art*, London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1978, p. 89.

29 Tristan Tzara, “An Introduction Dada,” in Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 402.

30 *Ibid.*, pp 403-405.

a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste – in fact a complete anaesthesia. I realised very soon the danger of repeating indiscriminately this form of expression and decided to limit the production of ‘readymades’ to a small number yearly. I was aware at that time, that for the spectator even more than for the artist, art is a habit-forming drug and I wanted to protect my ‘readymades’ against such contamination.”²⁸

Tristan Tzara, one of the founders of the Dada movement (that co-opted Duchamp, as did Surrealism later), insisted that participants in Dada “had repudiated all distinction between life and poetry”²⁹ and determined that “the real aim of art (was) integration with the present-day world... because it seemed to us that literature and art had become institutions located on the margin of life.”³⁰ Since then, Art’s status in life has hardly advanced towards any centre. Life, after all, does not wish to integrate with art. Duchamp’s legacy continues to have an influence in the new millennium; his overt reference to random creative processes, his language experiments and games and his insistence on the importance of ideas over retinal entertainments have left an indelible mark. The conceptual act continues to resonate. It is hard to imagine the direction contemporary art would have taken without him. But it is also hard to believe that Duchamp himself would have been pleased with everything that proclaims itself to be carrying his signature. He himself, aware of the danger of repeating his acts, publicly retired from the art world in 1923, merely six years after the circumstances of the showing and mysterious disappearance of the “Fountain”. But it is the idea of the readymade that trickled down into the depths of contemporary art. Ironically it is precisely the readymade – which provided a dangerous formula for generations of artists who have sworn by their commitment to a “non-hierarchical aesthetic” – that is less understood than all his other actions. The readymade was not invented in relation to the aesthetisation of everyday materials and objects of mass production, nor was it shown as a static object (especially in view of the fact that the urinal-fountain had to wait many years before being realised as a replicated object for display) but as a catalyst for cultural interaction, and in direct relation to the fact that art itself is a cultural construct made by humans. The object’s display was only one addition to the “common event” known as “The Richard Mutt Case: Buddha of the Bathroom”. The case itself was a test case for the power and status of the “Society of Independent Artists”, which Duchamp himself was one of the founding members of. The urinal only instigated the famous interaction that stated that it had to be removed from public display, claiming that it was immoral, vulgar, plagiarism and “a plain piece of plumbing.”³¹ In the early publicity the

society had promised that any independent artist paying six dollars would be allowed to take part in the exhibition, but nevertheless when Richard Mutt sent in the “Fountain”, it was rejected and disappeared (there are a few replicas in existence made and signed by Duchamp in 1963, but he admitted signing them in a “moment of prostitution”). In fact, the original object was never exhibited, it only appeared in the small, free and uncensored magazine (any article was accepted in return for a contribution of 4 dollars) of which Duchamp was one of the editors, in a brief report on the case, with a beautiful photo by Alfred Stieglitz. Only there the work became realised as an idea, a concept, resulting from the cooperation between the editors of the magazine, the photographer, and the journalist who contributed the item.

In “Zipper”, Benni Efrat’s video work, there is a turning of the tables of the type that seems binary but points to total chaos. It is a fulfilled prophecy, in which it is unclear who is threatening whom, or who is deterritorialising whom – nature man or man nature. The screen is split horizontally. The implied, invisible horizon line zips together two events, the encounter between which is loaded and apocalyptic. The lower part of the screen shows a wide multi-lane road, full of vehicles and the heavy traffic typical of a major artery. We can only guess the resulting massive pollution. Above the moving traffic, meanwhile, like a roaring monster, in the upper part of the picture, rages the sea, its waves breaking in the opposite direction to the traffic. The effect is simple, clean, but stomach-churning, as threatening as a sign from heaven, as an ecological catastrophe, as nature’s violent revolt.

To summarise Benni Efrat’s moral ambiguity, his barbarism which turns against itself (and therefore can be called neo-barbarism), we should mention a project he thought up in 1980 and has not been able to realise ever since. Efrat wished to perform a small post-conceptual act, with an atomic effect that would radiate and eclipse his entire oeuvre: he proposed to place a cigarette-pack-sized piece of enriched and charged uranium on the top of Mt. Everest. According to him, the radiation would spread no further than a certain radius, which he has of course calculated. And that is it. In 1980, by the way, Efrat’s artistic career split in two. Before 1980, that is in the 70s, when he was considered a groundbreaking and pioneering minimalist-conceptual artist in the field of video-art; and after 1980, when everything that he had done was re-dated according to the year of his expected death. Since that year he has dedicated his entire oeuvre to a critique of humanity, which on the one hand sabotages nature in every possible way, and on the same hand continues to multiply in alarmingly suffocating geometric progression.

31 The claim appeared in the editorial of the second issue of *The Blind Man*, edited by Marcel Duchamp, Henri-Pierre Roche and Beatrice Wood, New York, May 1917, next to a beautiful photo of the “Fountain” by Alfred Stieglitz.

His conclusion: only an atomic bomb would solve the problem, and let him die with the Philistines. He has ordered his body to be burned and the ashes spread above Mt. Carmel, near the sea. The inscription on the gravestone, he says, will read: "I am not here".

In the parapsychological script-play written by Lior Waterman for his new video installation, he assigned the role of the hero to a dolphin in an aquarium. In his behaviour, Waterman's dolphin is far from resembling a pet, although the screenwriter relies on new-age assumptions that attribute to the dolphin therapeutic powers. Here the dolphin is a kind of communicator – a tyrannical and worshipped medium who manages the lives of some of the characters in the video and even blackmails them sexually and financially. The dolphin itself has a mediating medium – it makes itself heard through a ventriloquist or a spokesperson shown on a television screen. The dolphin's spokesperson is a bottom. Through the bottom an absurd dialogue develops between the wily dolphin and the humiliated characters seeking its words. The perverse dolphin, having adopted the dominant language of the human beings that have abused it, and whose moral perversion is no different in essence from the perversion of many "coaches" who presume to give guidance to human beings who have lost their way, speaks the following words through the bottom: "You must understand, we are really at a dead end. There is no real solution to the suffering at the moment; the louder you shout the more you get. The more you are capable of, the more your suffering is destructive. That's why there's no choice but to let things stay as they are. To avoid becoming a burden. Someone has to pay the price and it better be the weak ones. Otherwise it will simply be worse."

Waterman's video installation consists of a pair of loudspeakers installed one on top of the other, with a net sloping over them. The image of a dolphin is screened on the net. The image and the image's voice unite into one source, but with a hierarchical inversion: the voice coming out of the speakers has a tow image. In the vicinity of the loudspeakers on which the dolphin is swimming stands a television set which shows the image of the speaking bottom.

Lior Waterman graduated from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design about a year after the Twin Towers had collapsed in a spectacular performance that had seemed to be ingrained in them from the arrogant and dominant moment of their erection. He was born as a wild and unruly artist and thanks to him, as well as many others, it seemed that the Israeli art scene had finally gone nuts. Waterman the artist was gradually revealed as an actor, singer, screenwriter and playwright. Within the television-theatrical formats his

penchant for the absurd and the grotesque has intensified, creating an overlap between the mode of expression and the content. In almost all his works he manages to mess with sacred cows without using steamroller force or breaking a sweat.

Ruti Sela was also characterised from the early stages of her career by a natural, provocative and unrestrained wildness. All her works feature a vulnerable subject "speaking" in a minor language, the language of minorities and of the frayed margins. In the documentary film she shows in this exhibition – "Nothing to Lose" – she joins a community of drunken night birds loitering in the city of Toulouse, France. It seems that Sela (and the camera that has long become one of her body organs) becomes one of them, although she does not speak their language. French is the dominant language in Toulouse, but the drunkards' stuttering chatter belongs to a universal dialect, it is the same uninhibited babble, the same unsublimated crushed linguistic gravel, that instils in the extroverted subject a good feeling of transgressive transformation. Indeed, a group of congregating drunkards often tends to perform idiotic acts and play the classical subversive role of the clown, whose performance offers a grotesque mirror image of those in positions of authority and dominance, and of the representatives of reason and sobriety.

The work consists of two videos displayed one above the other. One shows the static image of a person sleeping on the roof of a car in an underground car park. The camera is fixed, one long shot focusing on one image. Above this screen there is a higher screen showing the second video, which is all frantic and Dionysian nocturnal restlessness. On the crowded street of Toulouse, a moustachioed man asks the artist to turn her camera on him. She acquiesces and responds with a close-up of his mouth and his magnificent moustache. Cut. In a typical young people's flat we see two young men speaking in French. Rock plays in the background, the table is crammed with bottles of alcohol, cigarette butts and piles of papers. Suddenly the two start playing, spraying each other with the contents of the bottles, laughing out loud, climbing on the furniture and on one another. Cut. Night, outside, a bar, a constant drone of conversations in French, alcohol-laden tables, a man carrying an armchair to the corner of the street. A drunkard stands near the road, blocks the traffic with his body, starts to sing and forces passers-by to join him in a staggering dance. The street is buzzing with people, the drunkard is whistling, offering a flower in his mouth to the artist with the camera. Cut. Night, a public park, a revolving carousel with a heap of cheerful youths. A bench in the park, a group of aimless boys. Cut. A club, dark, music,

drunk people dancing. Cut. Outside the club, a pair of dogs. At the street corner a young man with a bare bottom tries to hold a dart between his buttocks. The camera moves to a street party, a crowd of people dancing and drinking. Glasses and bottles breaking. The cheerful group is blocking cars, banging on windows and doors, jumping on motorcycles. Their eyes are alight. Couples kiss. Cut. A flat, two girls are putting make-up or paint on each other's faces. Alcohol, cigarettes, a girl dancing. Cut. Street, night, a group of girls singing, the boys are whipping each other's bottoms. One of the guys goes to the toilet between two cars. There is a big smile on his face. A few youths undo their trousers and, one foot behind the other, bend over like a group of sprinters on the starting line, baring their bottoms in the headlights of the cars driving towards them. In the middle of the road the bottom-bared group decides to compose a human pyramid.

The lower screen still shows the underground car park. On one of the cars, like a calm, wrapped-up baby, the same person is sleeping. Perfectly still. Once in a while a car is seen starting up and leaving the car park. Nothing disturbs the revelling drunkard's sleep of the just.

Avner Ben-Gal shows a new 80-seconds-long film called "What's happening Kahalani / Burn Jerusalem to the ground". The entire film is steeped in desperate provocation and betrayal – content-wise, theme-wise, form-wise. As if to say: Enough. No more. It must be stopped. Israeli arrogance; religious isolationism in all its guises; the destruction of the fabric of life; the injustices visited constantly on the Arab residents – their neighbourhoods, houses, rights; religious coercion; the endless war over Jerusalem's sovereignty – the most problematic city in the world, and the wish to own it as whole and unified, corrupt as it may be.

The problem of Jerusalem, with its ideological, political and urban aspects, is the core issue of the conflict in the Middle East. You do not have to be a pessimist in order to doubt the possibility of a solution for this issue. Neither does the gap between the universal fantasy about Jerusalem and the crazy reality encourage a solution. "The Temple Mount is in our hands", declared colonel Motta Gur back in the Six Days War, and it seems that the battle that started then has never ended. In Israel, since 1967, government policy on the issue of the capital has never been discussed or examined. Meanwhile the city is disintegrating.

The film's name is based on the name of a musical sound piece opening the CD that Ben-Gal released in 2001, to coincide with the exhibition "The Eve of Destruction". The CD included various electro-metallic pieces, edited like a soundtrack for a war film. The film "What's happening Kahalani / Burn Jerusalem to the

ground" consists of that soundtrack, for which the artist edited materials from YouTube documenting fighting in built up areas during the Yom Kippur War. The materials show, amongst other things, tanks, soldiers, bombings, explosions, fire and smoke. The footage was edited in October 2010, with the failure and hysteria of the 1973 Yom Kippur War serving as its inspiration. At a point in the soundtrack coinciding with a video photo of a soldier shouting a command into a two-way radio, Ben-Gal planted the updated order: "Burn Jerusalem... I repeat: Burn it with all its seven gates. Advance on Jerusalem and burn it to the ground. Its buildings, sons, loved ones, finish them off...".

When he released the CD, Ben-Gal already noted that although the name "The Kahalani Brothers", chosen for the group of musicians and for the album, echoes the name of the war hero and former government minister Avigdor Kahalani, it actually refers to the Jewish terrorists known as "The Kahalani Brothers". The sorry affair began in the early 1990s, when Kiryat Arba was a central hub of activity for far-right activists. The Kahalani brothers announced that they intended to murder an Arab, and yet, or perhaps for that purpose, they received from a neighbour (who was subsequently revealed as a Shin Bet agent) a vehicle and two M-16 rifles. On 2 September 1994, the brothers parked their vehicle on a dirt road leading to the village Batir, where they stopped a cyclist named Shami. One of the brothers raised the rifle, pointed it at Shami's head and shot him from point-blank range. Shami survived and the Kahalani brothers were sentenced to 12 years in prison. Upon their release, after only eight years, they returned to live in Kiryat Arba.



יולי אלוני-פרימור

בני אפרת

בועז ארד

אבנר בן גל

שרון בלבן

איתן ברטל

שריף ואכד

ליאור ווטרמן

אתי ויזלטיר

גל ויינשטיין

מאיה ז"יק

רותי סלע

קרן ציטר

אורי קצנשטיין

רועי רוזן

גלעד רטמן

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