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Introduction: Israeli Critical Reflection After Post-Zionism, or The Opening as Interpretive Horizon

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Volume 21 Issue 2 (March 2019) Article 1**Oded Nir and Ari Ofengenden,****"Introduction: Israeli Critical Reflection After Post-Zionism, or The Opening as Interpretive Horizon"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol20/iss2/1>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 21.2 (2019)**
Thematic Issue **Materiality and the Time of the Present in Israeli Culture**
Ed. Oded Nir and Ari Ofengenden

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Abstract: This essay attempts to situate this special issue as an intervention, from a materialist perspective, in the field of Israeli cultural studies. We interrogate the common periodizations of Israeli culture, and its contemporary characterization as "post-post-Zionist." We try to show that the latter betrays an unacknowledged failure of historical narration, present throughout Israeli cultural production. We then argue that rather than being satisfied with this failure, the goal of Israeli cultural critique today should be to search for new ways to narrate "big" history, to reassert the indispensability of relating personal experience of the present, in all its details, to the making of history. We then explain how each of the contributions to this special issue takes this task upon itself—some more and some less explicitly.

Oded NIR and Ari OFENGENDEN

Introduction: Israeli Critical Reflection After Post-Zionism, or The Opening as Interpretive Horizon

We cannot not periodize

--Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*

For academic critics whose subject matter has anything to do with Israel, the last decade has marked a period of retrenchment or of the quick falling apart of a new academic consensus of the 90s, in which a new sense of freedom from the nation seemed to accompany harmoniously the rise to prominence of a host of new methodologies. Derrida, Butler, Kristeva, Foucault, Bhabha—the names of the new heroes of critique became commonplace in Israeli academic writing, displacing older, more discipline-specific, sets of concerns and problems, in which theoretical thinking had an entirely different place and role. The term Post-Zionism was often used to refer to this uneasy convergence of new academic critical methodologies with a political project that extended outside the academy: the pursuit of peace, which gave the whole affair its local color, seemingly distinguishing it from similar trends elsewhere. Indeed, if one considers the Israeli New Historiography—which has never been one for theory—as midwife to Post-Zionism, one can clearly see that the new local political commitment paved the way to the flourishing of these borrowed new theoretical discourses in the Israeli academy, rather than the other way around. It is this Post-Zionism that suddenly faltered in recent years, as common wisdom has it.

Beneath the surface, however, one could nonetheless sense the tensions between theory and peace, to use a convenient shorthand. The rejection of the new theoretical perspectives by some of the New Historians is perhaps the most well-known example. But others abound: Adi Ophir's writing on postmodernism, and his conviction that "in Israel, a true postmodern culture can never develop, because here there are serious issues, and real evil, and real problems" is nothing if not an attempt to protect the Post-Zionist political project from theoretical perspectives that would have none of it (Zemach 28). For it is not difficult at all to see how Derridean deconstruction or Butler-style performativity can undermine the utopian project of peace, or that of Palestinian nation-building. Nor does Foucault's writing, abstracted from its context of production, allow us to distinguish between Israeli and Palestinian power. Yet the label of Post-Zionism seemed to hold—as long as one did not look too closely, and as long as historical movement allowed for some contradictoriness to exist as its motor.

But the sudden end of it all around the early 2000s has transformed a living, developing contradiction into a site for forensic investigation. The feeling that something has ended seems to stubbornly resist conceptualization—it is never really clear what, exactly, has gone away, and what persists unperturbed. For it is not exactly that "theory" has been banished from Israeli academic writing, even if its marginalization is clear; some still use their writing to aid the pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation, even if more current endeavors in this direction seem repetitive, unnecessarily self-righteous, or simply lackluster or turgid; the anti-national impulse has also not entirely disappeared: current Israeli social and historical writing still has its sights on the nation and its institutions, however ambivalently or "complexly" it now characterizes them. Thus, one finds oneself today faced with an unrelenting need to narrate what, after all, happened to Post-Zionism. The past accounts of Post-Zionists themselves and their allies are of course no longer useful for this purpose—their narratives being those of Post-Zionism's righteous ascent, now simply constituting part of the subject-matter to be analyzed rather than a narrative we can adopt as our own, faced as we are with its quick decline (For an example of one such celebratory account, see Silberstein).

It should be clear at the outset that any such attempt to conceptualize the death of Post-Zionism—or better yet, of narrating the unfolding of its demise—is always done from the perspective of a new social project, a new political and historical interpretive horizon. This new horizon usually remains implicit or even unconscious in critical writing of the current moment, yet its existence must always be insisted upon—the flight from politics or so-called grand narratives always inevitably and simultaneously being the assertion of some new such narrative. If materialism as a critical perspective—one which is common to the contributions in this collection—can be give a minimal definition, it resides precisely in the insistence that the world of narratives and ideas can never be wholly severed from the realm of materiality. One cannot excise a political horizon from interpretation any more than one can prevent an idea or narrative from constituting an imaginary solution to the contradictions of its material conditions of existence, to adopt Louis Althusser's definition of ideology (Althusser 109). Perhaps surprisingly,

therefore, materialist critique emerges as the commitment to engage with the new horizons contained in any reframing of Post-Zionism or its subject matter.

Thus, one should not be satisfied with any attempt to argue that the historiography that comes after Post-Zionism is simply a complex factual truth, one that does not easily fit any clear political divides. Assaf Likhovski has suggested the term "Post-Post-Zionism" for precisely such escape from Post-Zionism, which he traces in much contemporary writing, including texts by some of the contributors to this collection (Likhovski).¹

It is precisely Likhovski's imagined step out of ideology that is here a step into it, as Slavoj Žižek would put it (Žižek, "Introduction" 4). For it is not at all difficult to see that what is articulated by Likhovski as ethical ambivalence or complexity (or as what remains as purely contingent, to echo Žižek's terms), is on another interpretive level simply a failure to narrate history—picking up this time the reading methodology developed by Fredric Jameson (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 20–22; Jameson, *The Political*). The force of Jameson's interpretive system is precisely in positing the existence of several antagonistic interpretive "codes" or levels, the existence of which makes it possible for us to go beyond Likhovski's ethico-psychological reading. In Jameson's system, this latter ethical interpretation is subsequently transcoded (Jameson's term) into, first, the historical context in which it appears, and then reread once more in terms of the figuration of the capitalist system itself. It is precisely the contradictions articulated on each level that propels the reading into the next code or level: ethical or psychological oppositions lead one's reading to considering the historical context in which they appear and how it appears in the text; the forces that animate that context require that we read them as expressions of the deeper history of social form itself—the history of capitalism in our case.

Returning to Likhovski's conception of Post-Post-Zionism, it is not too difficult to see the ambivalence that he celebrates as simply an unresolved contradiction, most often between oppositional ethical or political judgments (for example, that in Post-Post-Zionist writing, certain institutions are seen in mixed light—as participating in a colonial enterprise but at the same time providing some basic human service for poor settlers). If in the Jamesonian schema, such non-resolution propelled the reading to the next code or level, as we suggested, the same does not happen in Likhovski. Here, the unresolved contradiction dialectically becomes its own resolution—the aporia celebrated as the telling sign of Truth, and closure enacted through the very attempt to deny it. Again, the imagined escape to the factual that Likhovski imagines demonstrating a point made brilliantly by Georg Lukács a long time ago: that the positing of seemingly bare facts or descriptions is always-already the assertion of some political narrative effort (Lukács 151–52).

Two interpretive roads lead out of Likhovski's intervention. The first has to do with interrogating the historical situation that makes such a position imaginable, if not necessary. This path leads from the historiographical failure of narration to the dismantling of the Israeli welfare state—an analysis that is not rehearsed often enough in writing about Israel, due to the near absence of Marxist criticism from the field. The second interpretive effort has to do with positing an alternative analysis of what is included in Likhovski's category of Post-Post-Zionism, one which would go beyond the ethical ambivalence that Likhovski celebrates towards the ways in which each text in the category constitutes some active reimagining of its subject matter in a way that makes it useful for our contemporary moment. Thus, for instance, one would wish to find some new theoretical framing of the turn to "micro-history" in the Israeli context—the highlighting of the realm of personal experience, or of historical dynamics not visible from the vantage point of the vantage point of "big history." One often-cited example would be Boaz Neumann's work on the *halutz* movement—the settler-vanguard of Zionism (whose related utopian imaginary is very different than that of American pioneering), or the even earlier (and truly pathbreaking) book by Tamar Berger on the history of Tel Aviv's iconic monument and mall, Dizengoff Center (Neumann, *Tshukat*; Berger). What is singularly important in Neumann's account is that the realm of subjective experience of the settlers is described in a manner completely alien and unrepresentable in the terms of previous historical narratives. The code that Neumann uses to describe the *halutz*'s subjective realm is neither the (already discredited) national narrative's seamless transition from National Fate to the actions of the individual settlers; nor the no-less seamless rendering of their action in terms of the dispossession and murder of Palestinians, as in the Post-Zionist version (an antagonism made clear in the Yoav Peled's and Horit Peled's hostile review of Neumann's book (Peled and Peled 97–103). Instead, Neumann describes the settlers' experiential world as a complex interweaving of desire and material forces that are legible in the settler's subjective experience, both

¹ It is important to note that the term "Post-Post-Zionism" has been used to describe other new historiographical directions. See for example Peled and Peled; Neumann; Feige.

desire and material surroundings continuously transformed by the settlers' own labor, which provides a kind of contradictory motor to the whole process.

Very briefly, we can say that the turn to the realm of private experience allows for momentary relief from the Post-Zionist narrative of settler colonialism, making possible the imagining of new elements that are invisible from previous vantage points. Dereification, following Adorno's cue, would be a good name for it, an operation most sharply visible in Berger's writing, in which details that are unassimilable to the narrative are constantly juxtaposed to narrative building itself.² Or better yet call it estrangement, that Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, which designates the emergence of a new dubiousness or opacity of the familiar (Brecht 179–205). This latter concept allows us then to see the turn to the personal in Post-Post-Zionist writing as the birth of a new hermeneutical demand. In other words, the personal or the "micro" comes slowly but surely to designate an opening or a gap—making visible a new distance from the straightforward narrative of colonization (and from the long-defunct national one of emancipation), articulating a need to mediate between the hitherto invisible private sphere, and the familiar big or public movement of history.

The escape to the private sphere, or to the realm of immediately perceivable social relations, is not only present in Post-Post-Zionism, but also in other recent attempts at cultural periodization. For instance, Yaron Peleg's 2008 *Israeli Culture Between two Intifadas* situates Israeli 90s literature in tension with what belongs to the realm of "big history" (Peleg 3–6). In Peleg's account, 90s Israeli literature takes its distance from the political in general; emerging literary voices seem preoccupied with romantic coupledness, precisely as an escape from allegories of collectivity that dominate earlier Israeli literature. Thus, literature itself becomes charged with potentialities for new historicity, new imaginings of the present to which "big history" is oblivious. One should mention in this regard that if this turn to the private is new in the realm of historiography, no such newness is easily discernible in the case of Israeli literary criticism. As Yigal Schwartz argues, Israeli literary criticism seems to be suffering from a certain weakness of the imagination:

Many of the literary studies in [the late 80s] use models from the field of minority discourse, and feminist and queer theory, to explore narratives of social and national groups that have hitherto been silenced, marginalized, or that have disappeared altogether. Women's narratives, those of Mizrachis, Arabs and others, all of whom are "Others" within the new Hebrew culture [...] all of the newer critical projects take a clear oppositional stance towards the metanarrative produced by Zionist historiography. And in this respect—and this in my mind is a point of weakness—these new literary historians are strongly connected with their predecessors' metanarrative, both in terms of critical themes and methodologically. (Schwartz 19)

Schwartz's evaluation is true of contemporary Israeli literary criticism as well—new literary histories and critical works seeming only to reaffirm and deepen their predecessors' critical positions and periodizations, rather than rebel against them. That entails a certain repetition of the specific narratives of transformation: Peleg's turn to the romantic couple, for example, echoes prominent critics' argument that 1960s literature marked a departure from the politicized literature of previous writers, making the exploration of (universal) subjectivity its proper realm (Shaked). Thus, the newness or potentiality that accompanies historiography's turn to the private sphere is much reduced in the context of literary criticism. Yet what is important for our purposes is not the failure to break free from previous periodizations, but the existence of an impulse to do so—which is evident in Peleg's work just as in other attempts—an impulse to break free from older conceptions that seem today like so much historical dead weight.

It is therefore crucial to further develop these impulses, since as long as the opening thus created does not lead back to a transformation of "big history," as long as the latter stays undisturbed, these new potentialities remain unrealized like so many utopian reflexes and impulses. This is by no means an easy task: to use these seeds to forge a new "big-historical" narratives always requires an act of invention; the recognition of the new narrative being possible only in backward reflection, occurring only in repetition as Phillip Wegner puts it (7). Thus, we would do well to resist the impulse to contain these openings in older narratives, or celebrate the contradiction made visible as its own imaginary solution, as Likhovski does. For it is only in resisting the urge to ignore the hermeneutical demand to renarrate history that the possibility of a new history is preserved, and with it the seeds of new historicity: that ability to imagine the present as part of our process of self-making, extending from the past to the future.

² See for example the opening section of Berger's book, in which events that are charged with political significance are juxtaposed to biographical details that have no place within this narrative (9).

It is from this vantage point that it now becomes possible to understand what is common to the essays in this collection. Each essay constitutes, usually only implicitly, a possible new beginning, an attempt to somehow escape from the force field of previous historical narratives, both national and Post-Zionist, but at the same time resist a too-early containment of the contradiction they thus create. Rather than some thematic or methodological commonality—one which if undeveloped remains some monadic order with no clear relation to its outside—the essays in this collection are united through the way they intervene in their context. In the absence of a new narrative to replace the Post-Zionist one, what is common to all of the essays is the search for an opening, each constituting one determinate strategy of initiating a break from what is imaginable, resisting its assimilation to existing narrative frameworks.

We thus request that the reader be content with a somewhat unsatisfying situation: the absence of an already-positively articulated unifying logic to the essays included in this collection: methodological, philosophical, or one of subject matter or clear generational divide. No such logic exists, as of yet—and there are good reasons for that, on which we will touch below. If we for a moment expand our purview to other attempts to define a what comes after post-Zionism, different than Likhovski's, it should be clear that no such new logic yet exists. For example, in Michael Feige's long review essay of Berger's *Dionysus in Dizengoff Center* (an essay published 6 years before Likhovski's intervention), he suggests quite another definition for post-post-Zionism: the complete adoption of postmodern methodologies by Israeli historiographies, one that is absent from the first wave of post-Zionism, according to him (Feige 204). Berger's book is for Feige one of the early signs of such an "after" to post-Zionism. Yet another definition for post-post Zionism comes from within the post-Zionist camp itself. Horit Herman Peled and Yoav Peled use it to name new positions that abandon the quest for a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine, which they view negatively (Peled and Peled). Paradigmatic for them is Boaz Neumann's writing, which we discussed above. It should be clear how incompatible these three approaches are: Likhovski's implicit anti-intellectualism cannot be reconciled with Feige's demand for full "postmodernization"; Meanwhile, the anti-closure ideology guiding Feige's postmodernism does not sit well with the Peleds' demand that post-post-Zionism will be defined according to a political horizon—a principle of closure if there ever was one. It should thus be clear that no clear definition for post-post-Zionism yet exists.

If there is one shortcoming that is common to all of these, it is that all of them still conceive of what comes after post-Zionism using the conceptual coordinates established by post-Zionism. A quick Žižekian allegory would perhaps be most effective in explaining why such attempts, and perhaps any other too-hasty calls for positive definitions of what comes after post-Zionism, would not help us at this moment. It is worth quoting Žižek at length here:

A recent scientific report describes how future biotechnology could be used to trick a prisoner's mind into thinking they have served a thousand-year sentence. Drugs could be developed to distort prisoners' minds into thinking time was passing more slowly. According to Rebecca Roache,

There are a number of psychoactive drugs that distort people's sense of time, so you could imagine developing a pill or a liquid that made someone feel like they were serving a 1,000-year sentence. A second scenario would be to upload human minds to computers to speed up the rate at which the mind works. If the speed-up were a factor of a million, a millennium of thinking would be accomplished in eight and a half hours. Uploading the mind of a convicted criminal and running it a million times faster than normal would enable the uploaded criminal to serve a 1,000-year sentence in eight and a half hours. This would, obviously, be much cheaper for the taxpayer than extending criminals' lifespans to enable them to serve 1,000 years in real time. (Žižek, "The Seeds" 269–70)

Thus the manipulation of our experience of time seems to offer myriad possibilities for the prison-industrial complex (think how much more profitable could prisons be!). But Žižek's point is of course completely different: "does imagining the consequences of the manipulability of our perception of time only along the lines of how it could render serving a prison sentence more productive not provide an extreme example of the misery and limitations of our imagination of the future?"

Our point is here that the existing approaches to post-post-Zionism are much like the punitive approaches to the potentialities of the malleability of our experience of time: they prove unable to come up with radically different possibilities for thinking through the same historical material. This is true of the escape into subjects' immediate experience implied by Neumann's approach, just as by Feige's intensified postmodernization or by the Peleds' definition of post-Zionism as the abandonment of the "two-state solution."

So all existing attempts to define post-post-Zionism ultimately fail in producing actual newness. And this failure, we argue, should be seen as symptomatic of the current moment rather than as a fault of

these particular attempts. And we can now suggest a materialist account for this failure. This explanation would come as no surprise to those familiar with Marxist accounts of postmodernism, and of the results of neoliberalism: it is of course late capitalism's dissolving of historicity—of our sense of the present as a space for historical practice—that blocks our historical imagination.³ And one should remember the material origins of it: what used to be a matter of collective project, of some kind of collective self-making towards a specific goal, becomes more and more mediated by the irrational "invisible hand" of the capitalist market. In Israel, this would mean the dissolution of state institutions and the nation as its imagined subject. Time—that imagined time of progress of the nation—disintegrates as a result of the alienation from the collective project when the market mediates a growing part of subjects' social relations. The failure to come up with a convincing new historiographical paradigm under the heading "post-post-Zionism" is a result of precisely this socioeconomic transformation.

Thus, the materialist position would be that there can't yet be a unified logic to new historical and cultural writing on Israel—not as long as a significant new social project has arisen. It should be noted in this regard that post-Zionism itself was a product of such a moment of social and political transformation. Politically, it was associated with the 1990s peace process (a conscious association asserted in many post-Zionist texts) For example, see Morris 107–08; Migdal and Kimmerling). Yet the more controversial argument is that the 1990s pursuit of peace contributed, unconsciously, to the neoliberalization of Israel: the attack on the national system had the unwitting effect of making Israelis put their trust in the only alternative that existed to the state: capitalist market forces.⁴ Post-Zionism as a system of interpreting history is therefore a result of a social and economic transformation; it provides the "cultural revolution" the education of subjective practices, that enables the transition into neoliberalism.

A positive new post-post-Zionism depends on precisely such socio-economic newness. And therefore, any smart materialism would avoid such a direct new definition, because it is not yet possible. One way of thinking of our Israeli moment is that post-post-Zionism is still unconscious. It cannot be articulated consciously yet within the symbolic order—only a future act of resignifying (analogous to the psychoanalytical process) would retroactively endow all Israeli history with its post-post-Zionist meaning. But unconscious content depends for its expression on visual rendering, on figuration and form, as in Freud's classical analysis of dreams. (Freud 207–26) And therefore, another way of saying the same thing is that post-post-Zionism must, for now, be expressed figuratively rather than conceptually. So that cultural or historical writing about Israel today should perhaps be read like works of art, rather than for their intended argument, if one seeks to trace what is post-post-Zionist about them. Such a project is of course outside the scope of this essay collection.

The important point for us is to insist again on our materialist conclusion: that a conceptual definition of what comes after post-Zionism, one that is truly new, *is still impossible*. And for that reason, it would be a mistake to try to provide a positive definition of what unites the contributions to this collection: all we can do is point to the ways in which each contribution diverges, perhaps only in part, from familiar post-Zionist procedures, methodologies, and contexts. In other words, at this moment, a commitment to historical-materialist analysis resides precisely in *not* trying to define positively what comes after post-Zionism, until a new collective project is articulated; any position that insists on the opposite should be read as squarely *opposing* materialist cultural analysis of Israeli culture.

Let us be absolutely clear: it would be wrong to say that the time is not ripe for such attempts to think about what comes next; what we are arguing is that such attempts are doomed to fail as long as they are not part of a new collective or political project.

It is precisely in this light that one should read the intervention by Orit Rozin in this collection (which is an elaboration of her overarching project). If we were simply to insist on what makes her essay similar to post-Zionist writing (busting the myths of national ideology), we would be no better than the incarceration scientist in Žižek's allegory above: failing to see otherness by understanding new objects only within the conceptual coordinates of what's familiar. Instead, Rozin's essay should be read for what distinguishes her from the post-Zionist (and the national) narratives. Rozin's work highlights subjective experience in a way that is not assimilable to familiar historical narratives—the national one or the Post-Zionist one. Rozin's essay explores the 1960s kibbutzes located on the border between Israel and Syria. The Israel-Syrian dispute over water and land had turned these Kibbutzes into a civilian frontline, investing the attitudes of their inhabitants with great national-symbolic significance. Rozin detailed

³ The original formulation of this thesis appears of course in Jameson's account of postmodernism (Jameson, *Postmodernism*). But it has been picked up by many other critics (examples are Fisher; and Cray).

⁴ See Nir "Towards"; Daniel Gutwein argues that the pursuit of peace directly contradicted the social results of neoliberalism, to which the left turned a blind eye (see Gutwein "He'arot").

exploration of primary sources makes it possible for her to reconstruct the structure of feeling of border Kibbutz members. The latter is revealed to include much more than some flat loyalty to national duty; the Kibbutz inhabitants' ability to negotiate the emotional impact of constant bombardment is explored in detail by Rozin, who stresses these emotional adaptive mechanisms, even to the point of arguing that collective structures themselves function as coping apparatuses.

It is important that we notice the way in which Rozin's apparently straightforward narrative takes its distance from both Israeli-national accounts and Post-Zionist ones. This has little to do with explicit opposition to national ideology, but with a rather subtler subversion. Practices and institutional frameworks that were hitherto considered part of the national effort (either positively or negatively)—from reinforcing concrete shelters and public sing-alongs, down to the representational strategies in the Kibbutz's own publications—are here reframed as necessities of coping with immediate reality from the subjective perspective. The national is thus transcoded in terms of subjective experience in Rozin's account, allowing for a distance from both national and Post-Zionist narratives. It is in turning the realm of subjective experience into a semi-autonomous interpretive code that is what relates Rozin's work to the overarching theme of this essay collection. One should treat this code as an opening of history, as offering the beginnings of new narratives of Zionism and Israel that are neither national nor post-Zionist.

Tamar Berger's essay, strongly related to her latest book, offers the reader a multi-layered analysis of Israeli suburbanization. The break from familiar narratives is enacted differently here, becoming visible in the essay's narrative form no less than its content. For Berger's unique style, as we argued above, constantly juxtaposes stubborn detail to analysis, insisting that gaps remain visible as so many question marks or challenges. These narrative cul-de-sacs or challenges ("These are hypotheses. It is uncertain whether the missing data lie hidden in the database of the Central Bureau of Statistics") have their counterpart in the disjunction between the different analytic codes mobilized by Berger to approach suburbanization: the more sociological register of the descriptive content of suburb-dweller clashes with the architectural code that governs the logic of the suburb-without-a-metropolis, that is then again juxtaposed to more theoretical encoding of the suburb's significance, the most dramatic of which is the eradication of time and the existence of eternal present: "The suburb is to a great extent the present. Not the contextual present, but the one chiefly defined by immediacy, efficiency, functionalism, a sort of timeless life in a hyper-space that is a non-space."

None of these codes seems to wholly subsume the other, leaving ultimate synthesis a problem for the future. Yet there is one register that seems to be a good candidate for such future operation, even in Berger's open analytical framework. This code has to do with real-estate and land politics in Israel, a register that makes it possible to provide a single account for both West-Bank construction and construction of suburbs within Israel itself. For as Berger notes, privatization of both construction and land depends in the Israeli case on "a public ownership on a scale unparalleled in the western world," or the state's strong role in the orchestration of the process of private enterprise's rise to dominance in housing construction. Thus it becomes possible to treat West-Bank Israeli construction as part of a larger totality of housing contradictions. It also, perhaps, makes it possible to relate the disappearance of time to the severing of any material relation between collectively and its temporality (or the imagined nation) and housing projects.

If the break with previous historical narrative remains implicit in most of the essays included in this collection, Oded Nir's essay tackles the decline of Post-Zionism explicitly, contrasting the historical imaginary of contemporary Israeli literature to that of the Post-Post Zionist turn, described by Likhovski and others. Nir presents a quick survey of current Israeli fiction's exploration of the past, arguing that one should notice its difference from Israeli literary postmodernism of the 80s and 90s. What was registered as a liberation from history in the previous moment is now recast in terms of a problem—a paralyzing loss of historical imaginary and temporality. In opposition to the literary attempt to go beyond postmodernism, Nir argues that Post-Post-Zionism should be seen as an entry into postmodernism of Israeli historiography. Thus, literature seems to be "ahead" of historiography: literature is attempting to imagine an exit from postmodern condition, while historiography is only making its entry into it. Yet it is the closing argument that provides the materialist anchor of Nir's essay. The gap between literature and academic criticism is traced by Nir to the unevenness of the process of privatization in Israel—the publishing industry becoming exposed to market forces before academia. Thus, it is the unevenness of the dismantling of the Israeli welfare state that is expressed in the gap between literature and humanities academic research.

Amir Locker-Biletzki's essay offers what seems initially to be simply an enlargement of or addition to the Post-Zionist historical narrative, by bringing it into dialogue with the mostly forgotten Marxist analysis of Zionism. As Biletzki shows, to the critique of Zionism as a form of settler colonialism, the

Marxist critical tradition adds a critical layer that relates the more local Zionist enterprise to the expansion of capitalism into Palestine, in the age of what Lenin famously called monopoly capitalism (in which the expansion of capitalism into areas hitherto untouched by it has become essential for its survival). Lenin's well-known position—that communists should fight on the side of the colonized bourgeoisies' national liberation movements—is here put in an ambiguous light through a discussion of Indian Marxism, which helps Locker-Biletzki present the Zionist compromise between socialists and private capital as problematic. Yet what seems like a simple addition to the Post-Zionist critique can be read as making possible a different political emphasis: that what went wrong with Zionism is precisely its acceptance of capitalism as a form of organizing social relations, even as "the Israeli bourgeoisie, which developed out of the first *Aliyah* peasantry, was for many years politically subordinate to the political domination of the Socialist-Zionist labor movement," as Biletzki emphasizes. Thus, Biletzki's criticism subtly makes impossible the political alliance between Israeli and Palestinian bourgeois classes to which liberal Post-Zionism lends itself. It is in this way that Biletzki's critique offers an alternative understanding of liberal Post-Zionism's failure, and suggests the contours of a new collective project.

Yiftach Ashkenazi and Omri Grinberg's essay addresses what is perhaps one of the most commented-upon novel in Israeli fiction: Anton Shammas' *Arabesques*. Ashkenazi and Grinberg's programmatically survey this body of commentary, which helps them frame the newness of their own interpretation of the novel precisely in terms of its irreconcilable difference from its post-Zionist interpretation—which is of course what ties their essay to this collection's theme. Thus, summarizing their survey of other scholar's reading of the novel, Ashkenazi and Grinberg contend that "despite some of these scholars' reflexive efforts, *Arabesques* is a novel that produces an ideological subject" in their writing. If Ideology, as they argue, is to be defined through Althusser's definition of it as the material production of subjectivity, then these readings of *Arabesques* implicitly view the novel as always-already participating in the ideological production of subjectivity. Against these readings, Ashkenazi and Grinberg argue that *Arabesques* in fact undermines this basic ideological operation, resisting the very impulse towards representation that critics attribute to it. But of course, one must acknowledge that any universal denial of representational possibility is always articulated against a particular, historically situated, representation. This particular representation for Ashkenazi and Grinberg, in the case of *Arabesques*'s critical reception, is precisely its Post-Zionist reading and its arguments over the identity that it articulates. It is this interpretation that this essay seeks to leave behind, moving towards a yet undefined, perhaps non-ideological, interpretive possibility (if such a possibility could exist in the first place).

Of all the essays in this collection, Hannan Hever's is the truest to the post-Zionist interpretation of Zionism and Israeli culture—that is, if it is to be judged only in relation to its content. To see the newness in this case, we would indeed have to read the essay against its own intentions, and against its immediate context—both of which inform precisely the imagination-less position of punitive technologies in Žižek's allegory above. Hever's essay presents us with a historically-situated political exegesis of one of Israel's most renowned poets, Yehuda Amichai, whose writing has many times been celebrated as resisting Israeli national mythology. Hever expertly situates Amichai's early work within its broader context—emphasizing in particular the parallels between his work and that of other writers of the "State Generation." Hever shows that indeed Amichai's poetry seems from our perspective to resist Israeli national ideology—through its use of irony, but also through imagining Israeli sovereignty to be a universal Westphalian one, in which the violence of revenge is forbidden by the sovereign. Yet, as Hever argues, Amichai's aesthetic strategies (and others of his generation) should be seen as part of a larger imaginary apparatus, in which these strategies were used to support precisely their opposite: a non-universal sovereignty whose origin and continued existence depend on violent acts of vengeance (the latter displaced from retaliation against European non-Jews onto the body of Palestinians). By carefully historicizing Amichai's early work, Hever exposes his participation in the illusions of Israeli ideology, against recent celebrations of Amichai's supposedly resisting stance.

As we already said, it is easy to read Hever's essay as a masterful and forceful reiteration of Post-Zionist itinerary. There is nothing more post-Zionist, it would seem, than reveling Amichai's apparently ethical work as working in the service of Israeli apologetics for the Naqba. That Hever critique is articulated against recent attempts to present Amichai as opposed to national ideology seems again to reaffirm Hever's radical post-Zionism. However, it is easy to demonstrate the difference of Hever's current intervention from post-Zionism proper if we take into consideration the very different context in which these are articulated. Early post-Zionist writing (including Hever's!) was mostly done in Hebrew, in Israel, articulating itself against a national hegemony; it was, as we said above, a practical project (producing knowledge more suited to achieving peace with Palestinians), and not primarily an ethical

one. Consider the difference from this essay: written in English, against a group of scholars who mostly write in English too, based entirely in the US—and none of which representing Israeli national hegemony (which doesn't exist any longer, in the strict Gramscian understanding of hegemony). The practical project of peace is completely gone of course, and Hever's writing (as all of ours') in the US unfortunately has little effect to the opposite. Rather, the ethical dimension has now become the dominant feature of such interventions. It is in this way that Hever's writing cannot any longer be considered post-Zionist—the transformation of the intervention's context changes its very nature. As to what new effects such interventions produce—that is for the future to say, as we argued. A materialist perspective of our current moment, as we insist throughout this essay, simply demands that we not try to define this newness, and resist attempts to assimilate new essays to the familiar paradigms.

The effects of neo-liberalism are the direct object of Yael Munk's, Ari Ofengenden's and Eran Kaplan's essays. Yael Munk looks at Israeli films that reflect the deleterious effects of neoliberalism. She examines Uri Barabash's *Salt of the Earth*, Yaki Yosha's *Still Walking*, Jonathan Gurfinkel's *S#x Acts* and Tom Shoval's *Youth*. Where previous interpreters see liberation, Munk relates individuation and subjectivization to violence, and especially to the phenomena she calls new-violence--the way neoliberalism has inaugurated a violence filled apocalyptic space following the implosion of the values of the nation. It is this perspectival reversal--what was previously seen as freedom now transforming into violence--that makes Munk's essay part of this collection's interrogation of new critical perspectives.

Ari Ofengenden focuses on the effect of globalization on production and consumption on Israeli films. Films such as different as *Late Marriage*, *Broken Wings*, *Nina's Tragedies*, *Bonjour Monsieur Shlomi*, *Campfire*, *Turn left at the End of the World*, *Sweet Mud*, *Kadosh*, *Hahesder*, *Ushpizin*, *Fill the Void*, *Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem* and *Zero Motivation* are being made for the gaze of the Western other, have a sensitive alienated hero facing coercive institutions such as a religious court, a traditional family, an army base or the kibbutz. Ofengenden shows how the films affirm western individualism for the global usually European spectator. Language has also been greatly affected by globalization, films becoming both multilingual and using language which is easily translatable.

Eran Kaplan uses the film *Fight Club* as a paradigm of vicissitudes of subjectivity under neo-liberalism. He then applies it to the social protests that have erupted in Tel-Aviv in 2011. Kaplan analyzes the middle secular Ashkenazi class that has been most active in the social protests as disaffected in comparison to their parents' generation who have benefited greatly from the social welfare state. Protesters in their quest for a non-sectarian politics, did not acknowledge that the transition toward neoliberalism and the dismantling of the welfare state are intimately connected to the settlement project of the West Bank. Kaplan calls for a universal social justice that begins with the weakest groups that suffer in the state; Palestinian residents of the occupied territories, non-Jewish refugees, foreign workers and Arab citizens of Israel. He compares the social justice protest to a "fight club" a largely symbolic and politically ineffectual movement destined to fail and be reintegrated in the reigning political order. It should again be clear that Kaplan's political assessment of the movement is of a completely different kind than that of the 90s Post-Zionist left. The political problem of the movement, according to Kaplan, is precisely that it failed to articulate a new and different position with regards to settlements in the occupied territories and its relation to neoliberalism.

Shiri Goren looks at the corpus of writing of Ronit Matalon that intervenes defiantly against the policies and actions of the existing political establishment. Goren analyzes the novel *Bliss* as relating through its style and language a reading experience of continual crisis. She looks at Matalon's use of figures of the disintegrating body as a kind of anti-national allegory, stressing the way in which pervasive violence makes itself felt in the lives of all protagonists in the novel. While Goren's essay can be seen as reiterating Post-Zionist critique, one can see newness in the feeling of ever-present crisis that structures the reading experience: a much more generalized crisis of reality itself, one that cannot be avoided by ignoring it. It is this move from ethics to necessity, one that relates Goren's argument with that of Munk's that characterizes this almost imperceptible newness, one that demands the articulation of new history--and with it a new relation to the present.

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