



ANTIPATHOS

Black Humor, Irony and Cynicism in Contemporary Israeli Art

FOREWORD

Antipathos: Black Humor, Irony and Cynicism in Contemporary Israeli Art is not a comical exhibition. Tami Katz-Freiman, the curator of the exhibition, was also the curator of *Postscripts: "End"-Representations in Contemporary Israeli Art*, an exhibition held at the University Art Gallery of the Tel Aviv University in 1992. This latter exhibition examined manifestations in Israeli art of the preoccupation with apocalyptic themes, with the "end of the world". In a way, the *Antipathos* exhibition reveals another – albeit different – aspect of the same phenomenon. This time the ridiculous and grotesque, the humorous and ironic and the gruesome and terrifying come together in order to attest to a nihilistic position. This exhibition, like other large group-exhibitions of Israeli art that the Israel Museum has presented to the public in recent years, is not merely an art exhibit, but also a document. A document reflecting the world views of two generations of young Israeli artists as well as a testimony to the differences between them. On the one hand, a generation whose belief in "great narratives," in comprehensive and unifying world views which pretend to offer a clear-cut explanation of reality, has been undermined, and now it reacts with despair or cynicism, born of acquiescence. On the other hand, a younger generation whose consciousness was already determined by the medium of television with its fragmentary representations of space and time, a generation for whom irrationality and the impossibility of a single interpretation of the world are a given fact. As it happened this exhibition is being held simultaneously with the *Post Human* exhibition (curator: Jeffrey Deitch), which presents the work of the international counterparts of these generations. No doubt, the artists of *Antipathos* and their contemporaries abroad have much in common with regard to their world views and artistic conceptions. Nevertheless, humor – black as it may be – self-irony, the utilization of somewhat impoverished materials and, at times, the resort to improvisation and simple means characterize the work of some of the artists of the *Antipathos* exhibition. In this respect it is distinguished from the art displayed in the *Post Human* exhibition, which is more dramatic, more pessimistic, more radical in its manipulation of the human image. The work of artists from Europe, the United States and Japan usually relies on significant financial input, which in many cases enables an impressive technical execution. It should also be remembered that for some time now the reality of international artists is shaped by, among other things, advanced technologies which have molded a new awareness of space, time, body and life (multi-channel TV, bio-technology, computerized simulations etc.), whereas Israeli artists work and live in a simpler world (even though existentially and politically more complex and intricate). Suffice it to mention one example: MTV aired its first transmissions in 1981 and began broadcasting in Israel only in 1992. I suppose that the uniquely Israeli experience of a real existential threat, derived from a continuous and concrete confrontation with the sons of another nation, is among the factors which engender a consciousness very different from that of young people in Europe and in the United States.

Yigal Zalman
Chief Curator for the Arts

"By providing us with the lovely illusion of human greatness, the tragic brings us consolation. The comic is crueler: it brutally reveals the meaninglessness of everything [...] Irony irritates. Not because it mocks or attacks but because it denies us our certainties by unmasking the world as an ambiguity."

Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (see: COMIC, IRONY).
(English: Linda Asher), New York 1988, pp. 126; 134

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Tami Katz-Freiman

In recent works by young artists one encounters an ever growing number of cynical and cruel combinations of humorous and ironic fictional representations and dark thematic worlds swarming with images of catastrophe, perversion and pornography. These cynical combinations touch the seam between the gruesome and absurd, the terrible and grotesque, the threatening and comical, thus generating a new species of crossbreeds in a weird self-detached hybridization that evokes medieval sculpture and the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. Just like their contemporaries in young localized literature and up-to-date rock music, the young artists involved in the visual arts were born into a world that has seen everything, grew into the arms of postmodernism, matured in front of personal computers and TV sets and absorbed intravenously a culture of



video-clips, spectacles and various sophisticated simulations. This cynical culture that offers innumerable substitutes for authenticity and quick gratification has divorced itself from the "real" and "natural" and set its discursive field within a sterile bubble replete with defenses. These artists conceive modernism, for example, as just one more chapter in history, a reference, a quotable raw material. They observe life through the media or computer screen with a cynical and nihilistic eye, devoid of any pathos or sentimentality, as if it were nothing more than one big game.

The exhibition *Antipathos* strives to point out some of the explicit manifestations of this tendency in young Israeli art and to diagnose its essential possibilities, while reviewing the recurrences of the same phenomenon in the work of older artists. In the exhibition we chose to show artists whose voices contain a "lightish" note, in whose art "the unbearable lightness of life" is discernible, alongside artists who employ strategies of "David Lynchian humor" – a macabre and cruel humor, disguised at times as saccharine, black humor, cynical, cold and indifferent, immersed in a "mystical," fantastic atmosphere. The first group includes known artists such as Gideon Gechtman, Zedok Ben-David, Naomi Siman-Tov, Philip Rantzer, Zvika Kantor, Uri Katzenstein, Belu-Simion Faineru, Anat Ben-Shaul, Atamon Ganor and Daniel Sack. These have presented, each in his or her own way, an alternative to the sober, economical, puritan and ascetic tone that had dominated Israeli art for so many years, thereby paving the way for new options of expression, and legitimizing the type of discourse, which was previously rejected automatically by the Art institution. Shown side by side with them are younger artists born in the sixties – Hilla Lulu Lin, Ram Bracha, Dan Reisman, Ori Drumer, Eytan Shouker, Aya & Gal, Reuven Cohen and Nir Hod – some of whom have had one or two solo-exhibitions, a few did not attend conventional art schools at all, while the rest have just completed their studies. In any case, the artists discussed here do not constitute a "group" with a common "manifesto" of any sort, but rather a very heterogeneous ensemble of individuals, each representing his or her own self and nothing else. The common factor emerges from the tone of the works, from their externalized anti-pathos, from their strategies, which enable their creators to engage in their own vomit, in decaying flesh and in perverse narcissism, without surrendering to "expressionism" or falling into the trap of the great meta-narrative of modernism ("art liberates").

The exhibition outlines different types of anti-pathos, ranging from the ironic model characteristic of the modernist position to the various forms of parody, cynicism and **pastiche** – a postmodern practice par excellence. The age distribution enables a keener insight into the differences, which I believe are of cardinal significance, between these divergent strategies. It is tempting to consider the age factor as a sole explanation for the differences and leave it at that, yet it would be much more rewarding, through them, to probe into the unavoidable effects of the "post-postmodern" technological era on the work of these artists. Since, thematically speaking, we are dealing here with rather similar tactics, the differences in attitude are implied by nuances of dosage and temperament, which determine the melody of articulation. But here, I believe, a fundamental difference starts to show: the ironic undertone, employed by artists like Gechtman and Rantzer, no doubt allows for

Pastiche

Webster's *Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary* defines pastiche as "1. a literary, musical, or artistic piece consisting wholly or chiefly of motifs or techniques borrowed from one or more sources. 2. an incongruous combination of materials, forms, motifs, etc. taken from different sources; hodgepodge." The practice has been known in art history since at least the eighteenth century. However, postmodern pastiche reflects, along with selectionism, the postmodern ethos of "anything goes" and is manifested by stylistic mixture. Jean Baudrillard and Fredric Jameson, theoreticians of post-industrial society and culture, analyzed this concept in Neo-Marxist terms. Thus according to Jameson: "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a particular style, speech in a dead language; but it is a neutral practice of such memory, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs." Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146, July-August 1984, pp. 53-92; p. 85. See also: Margaret A. Rose, "Post-modern Pastiche," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 31, January 1991, pp. 28-38.

Common to all these is a paranoid world-view that presupposes a conspiracy of history, thought-control, a symbiosis between the human nervous system and the computer, nightmares of matter-transference and preoccupation with living flesh, with body tissues that undergo transformation.

The philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson spoke of humor in similar terms. At the beginning of the century the Dadaists and the Surrealists, especially Francis Picabia and Max Ernst, used Bergson as their model. According to his theory, laughter is a pure intellectual procedure, free from emotions, that requires "a momentary anaesthesia of the heart": "Laughter has no greater enemy than emotion [...] In a society of pure intellects we should probably weep no more, but we should still laugh..." Alan to the spirit of the exhibition is also the ironic philosophy of Richard Rorty. In his book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Rorty juxtaposes the concept of irony – a strategy the individual adopts in view of the circumstances – and the concept of solidarity, denoting inter-personal relations in the public domain. Paradoxically, it was the principles of modern metaphysics which enabled the liberalization of the Enlightenment that, according to him, hindered the attainment of those same ideals. Rorty shifts the discussion from the politico-public sphere to the domain of the individual and criticizes the metaphysical aspiration to create great theories, to initiate meta-narratives that would change the world. Being "ironical liberal," Rorty deems central the personal human expression pertaining to the understanding of the individual's precarious position in the world. Without dwelling on details, one might say that Rorty shares Michel Foucault's "ironical view on the vicissitudes of modernity, as well as the cynicism underlying Jacques Derrida's" sophisticated deconstruction. The cynical point of view no doubt enjoys a very privileged position in the ongoing theoretical discourse and best represents the new consciousness that is currently evolving, following the breakdown of the logocentric signifying chains.

Here, however, a word of caution is warranted. Despite their exposure to a medley of theories, the artists of Antipathos do not adhere to this or that theoretical rule. None of them (with the exception of Ori Drummer who considers himself an ideological anarchist) bears the standard of revolution, or wishes to comment on the new consciousness. They were simply born into the process of change and are performing from within a new reality. The principle of dissonance is emerging from the gaze itself, a gaze that travels through countless images, drowns in an ocean of information and switches channels. The incongruity – a central feature of the definition of humor, as aforementioned – is present in their works by virtue of their being samples of the world that surrounds them. The principle works on several levels: starting with an assortment of hierarchy inversions (high-low, high-tech-low-tech, organic-mechanic etc.), and ending with hybrid aesthetic. Hierarchy inversions are found in the debasement of the sublime heroism of the pathos-filled mausoleum erected by Gechtman for himself, as in the upgrading of the marginal and trivial in Fainaru's living-room and in Rantzer's works. Another dissonance exists in the presentation of a nightmarish-horrible image (eye in a teacup or insect on a towel) as a daily routine reality in the works of Lin and Ganer, as in the tension between high-tech and low-tech images in Drummer's work, which crossbreeds organic images (tissues) and technological images of robots, and in the collaborated work by Aya & Gal, who created a new human species, a spooky synthesis of a Barbie doll, superman and a body-builder. The principle of dissonance is found also in the gap between the elitist context (exhibition in a museum) and the artistic methods and images, taken directly from an inferior marginal culture, for example – the figure of the transvestite in Cohen's work, which was painted in the technique of sign-painting, or the "dignified" images (Rembrandt) that Ben-Shaul borrows from art history and processes by blowing paint on glass.

It is hard to conceive a pithier and fiercer dissonance than the one prevailing in the aesthetic level of some of the works, at least in those of the younger artists. It is found in the freakiest crossbreeding between the "vomited" or "bare flesh-aesthetic," which has to do with the representation of the repugnant, perverse and nauseating, and the sterility of the "fictional-futuristic aesthetic," which adopts cyberpunk, high-tech and computer images. The concept "David Lynchian aesthetic" may prove instructive in this context, although the phenomenon is as widespread in science-fiction movies and in numerous horror films. The Slovenian scholar Slavoj Žižek** characterizes it ingeniously, when he speaks of Lynch's dual portrayal of the human body, or – better still – the flesh, the things that happen beneath the skin. That is to say, the partition between the surface (the external fabric of things) and the inner level (the subcutaneous occurrence, the quivering tissues). One may

each of which is subjected to a different set of rules within the framework of one association of ideas. This state produces a momentary discrepancy in our thinking, which progresses simultaneously in two channels. A similar explanation was given by the physicist Timothy Ferris, according to whom laughter is born of the interaction between two key programs in the mind – the one constructing feasible models of reality and maintaining them constantly, while the other wishes to undermine and refute them. Both Koestler and Ferris remain faithful to the ancient tradition, which conceives a direct relation between humor and enjoyment. (Timothy Ferris, *The Mind's Sky*, 1992; Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* [1905], and "Humor" [1927], *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, London 1960 & 1961; Arthur Koestler, *Humor: Scientific Discovery and Art*, 1964; Donald Knight, "The Way of Humor," *Artforum*, vol. 29, January 1991, pp. 93-101)

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

German philosopher. Laughter is, according to Nietzsche, a substitute for the ultimate emancipation of the individual. Challenging any theory or political program which aimed at "ameliorating" the human race, Nietzsche presented the ironic metaphysics of the craving for power as an alternative model to Socratic irony. It was Nietzsche who also pointed out the distinction between a "bird's-eye" and a "Troy's-eye" view on the world. The one captures reality from above and *geo facto* presupposes that it has an idealistic existence, while the other, being apical, watches the bourgeois world from below, calling attention to "low" truths – to hidden layers of sexuality and violence that underlie its seriousness. (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* [1883-5], Hamondsworth, Middlesex 1969, part IV)

Henri Bergson (1859-1941)

French philosopher and writer, winner of the Nobel prize for literature (1927). Bergson dedicated an essay to laughter, where he described it as a purely cognitive state. His interpretation deviates considerably from the traditional theory of humor, which attributes, as we have seen, an emotional dimension to the act of laughing. He identified the comic element as the human aspect that reveals man's likeness to an animated object, that same aspect which underlines his stiff automatic behavior and gives the impression of a purely mechanistic, lifeless movement. (Henri Bergson, *Le Rire* [1900], in *Oeuvres*, Paris 1958)

For the first time a new sound is heard in Israeli art – the voice of a terminal humor, indulging in perversion and sweet narcissism. A realistic and practical view, devoid of nostalgia and great dreams, cannot be the revolt of yesteryear.

No one would think today that any artistic defiance could change the world.

argue that the metaphorical quintessence of Lynch's aesthetic lies in the interrelations between the broken and torn surface and the subcutaneous occurrences. In the same vein, the decaying ear in *Blue Velvet* (1986) or the repulsive creature in *Dune* (1984) can be read as a comprehensive metaphor for his perception of reality; the facade of normalcy of our global suburban bourgeois living-room conceals a dark world of passions and madness, like a flimsy and fragile coating, like skin over flesh. The malignant, wicked and subversive element (the "real" according to Žižek) appears unexpectedly in the warm and friendly surroundings (the "reality"), in the peaceful and normal domestic ambience, illuminating the grotesque dimension which lurks behind the romantic and innocent lawn. Thus viewed, the decay illustrates the tension between the ordinary, the bourgeois, the apparently routine (the surface), and the quivering "piece of life," the abcess, the infected spot (the introduction of the repulsive slimy creature into *Alien I, II & III* [1979, 1986, 1992]), or that of the man-fly into Cronenberg's *The Fly* [1986] has a similar effect. Žižek refers to it as "the absolute living creature – the pure essence of life," namely, pure libido in its most concrete and plastic form of skinned organicity – a glimmer of body-less life – the perfect corporality. According to Žižek, herein lies the fundamental ambiguity of the postmodern image: the "hyperrealist" strategy evokes disgust over the real, yet it also serves as a barrier enabling the subject to maintain distance from the real, guarding him or her from its intrusion. In the postmodernist discourse one hears time and again references to the "essence of the spectacle," whose reality is replaced by an image of itself. Under these circumstances the individuals are bereft of their character of involved social agents and their role is reduced to that of passive spectators of a colorful spectacle. Žižek calls our attention to the fact that it is precisely this tactic of "derealization" that constitutes a hypersensitivity to reality as something vulnerable.

Lynch can be dubbed the "Fallen of our *fin de siècle*," at least with regard to the big spectacle that he stages in his films by means of a delirious mixture of cynicism, irony and camp, which penetrates the darkest corners of our soul. His undeniable appeal for younger artists is explained by the fact that his films clearly address the world of the young, including the identity crises of puberty, intensified by the encounter with such a brutal reality. A peculiar feature of his films is the unexpected close-ups, which seem to be lacking any narrative context and are edited like a video-clip in frames that cast the viewer into mysterious and distant worlds. In these close-ups Lynch seems to breathe life into objects, which appear to be gazing back at us, suggesting that their innocent art harbors another meaning. Artists like Hilla Lulu Lin and Eryan Shouker strive for a similar effect. The touch is neutralized completely, insofar as it has been proved to be destructive, hurting and painful. The subject is reduced to a pure receptive gaze, an indifferent gaze that observes the world from without. The objects of these artists seem to be aware of the fact that the painful dimension is inherent in the contact with reality, even on the most microscopic level. Thus, an alternative reality must be created, a new skin must be transplanted, with the knowledge that any transgression, any encroachment upon the inner world, cuts – so to speak – the living flesh, touches open nerve centers. Lynch's influence is also evident in the atmosphere radiating from Nir Hod's glass cabinet, which seems to be aiming at capturing and treasuring extinct species of passion, as from Dan Reisman's poetic work, which displays a strange tree – quasi organic, quasi mechanical – with bleeding branches. Similar to the manner in which the horror effect converges with the comic dimension in Lynch's films, here too the nightmarish situation turns out to be part of the daily routine. The escape from terror into dullness is perhaps a new kind of disillusionment, for the effacement of the nightmare's anomaly and its equation with the routine often seem like an intricate version of a defense mechanism, a means of denial or blunting the edge of the horrifying stimulations of reality, whereto these artists were born.

Whether a denial or an anarchist ideological position, for this futureless generation, humor – black as it may be – is no doubt one of the means of challenging the dominant rationalistic model and of speaking its piece with another voice. In this respect they are not unlike many other artists before them, who throughout history chose the position of an outsider, on the border between the amusing village fool and the fearless critic. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that for centuries the ruling thought of the West had rejected humor, claiming it was irrational, hostile and irresponsible. This is the main reason for its marginality, hence it was redeemed only for short intervals, usually in the framework of non-canonical low culture (folk-art, caricatures, comics etc.).

Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

French philosopher. His works deal mainly with the methodology of history and notably the history of ideas.

Jacques Derrida (born 1930)

French philosopher. His critical theory of language focuses on the relation between language and politics. A central concept in his thinking is the concept of deconstruction, which implies a critical method of analyzing texts by breaking them into minute details and examining the interrelations between those details. Foucault and Derrida, along with scholars like Jacques Lacan, are considered the founding fathers of the post-structuralist discourse.

Society of the spectacle

the term, which has become commonplace in critical postmodernist discourse, refers to the post-industrial society, characterized by a shallow and mimicking spectacular dimension. The term derives from the title of a book written by Guy Debord, in which he described the "society of the spectacle" as a society that preserves culture as a "dead object." In his article "Contemporary Art and Spectacle," Hal Foster elaborated the term "spectacle" and defined it as the complete inversion of live, real and authentic elements. Our culture is presented by him as a culture that has severed itself from the "real," and compensates for its loss by permanently idolizing the previous era, wherein the "real" is supposed to have been alive and kicking. With the denial of this feeling of privation, with the nostalgia for lost authenticity, the "spectacle" operates through our yearnings for "perfect" images that are meant to provide us with an illusory "perfect" self-image. The spectacle is, in fact, a simulation of the real thing, a total illusion woven by a set of effects which fascinate and lure the consumer-spectator, but also exclude him and impose on him a passive role. (Hal Foster, "Contemporary Art and Spectacle," in *Revolutions – Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Seattle, Wash. 1985, pp. 79-96)

* Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, New York 1989.

** Slavoj Žižek, "Grindings of the Real, or When the Phallus Appears," October 58, Fall 1991, pp. 45-68.

This cynical culture offers quick gratification and innumerable substitutes for authenticity and sets its discursive field within a sterile bubble replete with defenses. The common factor emerges from the tone of the works, from their strategies of externalized anti-pathos.

a state of noncommitment, which always comes – be it as it may an aloof and by-passing state that eludes moral responsibility – from the realm of affect, speaks with pain and yearns for utopia, and one can still detect in it an ethical position and discuss it in terms of sincerity and sensitivity. Such an irony mixed with yearnings can be found in the writing of Milan Kundera for example. By contrast, the cynicism and pastiche strategies common to a greater part of the exhibition's younger artists evade any representation that strives for sincerity, at least in its expressive sense, although thematically, they delve into emotional depths and treat a personal world, an identity of the most private and probably most intimate nature – the body's flesh and its various excretions. This position can be read as a survival strategy, as a "no-choice" situation which dictates a disregard to pain. The film director David Lynch best portrays this complex position: on the one hand, a sober and cynical view, and on the other hand – an emotional intensity hitherto unseen.

The age divide also traverses the sources of inspiration: the older artists are still loyal to visual-plastic image borrowed from art history, even when they draw their inspiration from the so called "low art" (everyday objects, kitsch, nostalgia, domestic environment and magic), since its appropriation has by now become quite an old and accepted practice in art history. Conversely, the younger artists are influenced by the cinema more than anything else. If you are born with color-TV in your living-room, no wonder you find MTV's video-clips, an interview with Michael Jackson, or the TV series *Twin Peaks* more appealing than any elitist refined model of Israeli art, not to mention more distant models from art history. Film directors like David Cronenberg, Peter Greenaway and David Lynch are more relevant to their work than artists like Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp or Joseph Beuys. Their imagery is anchored to a cinematic image that derives not only from "quality" films, but also from the category known to us as "B" movies – horror films, **[trash/camp]**, science-fiction and **[cyberpunk]**. Common to all these is a paranoid world-view that presupposes a conspiracy of history, thought-control, a symbiosis between the human nervous system and the computer, nightmares of matter-transference and preoccupation with living flesh, with body tissues that undergo transformation.

At the risk of falling into schematic categorization, I would say that the works of the younger artists communicate cynical sophistication, playfulness and smooth wit, whereas those of the older artists – nonchalance, at times even sloppiness, although not so much on the physical level, a sort of complacency, as though declaring that they don't take themselves too seriously. In other words, in the works of the older artists (**Gechtmann**, **Ben-David**, **Kantor**, **Rantzer** and even **Katzenstein**) a wink (or a kick) still lurks at the end of the sentence, as a last vestige of modernism, whereas the monotonous voice bursting forth from the works of the younger artists recalls a voice indifferently recounting a terrible catastrophe, neither winking nor kicking. However, evolving at both ends is an anti-heroic statement, devoid of pathos, about life and art at the close of the twentieth century – the age of final paradoxes. And behind, this statement is to a large degree fresh and provocative given the seriousness and the refined asceticism which characterized the visual arts for many years in Israel. For the first time a new sound, hitherto unheard in Israeli art, is played here at full volume – the voice of terminal humor fascinated by perversion and entrapped in sweet narcissism. The indifference of expression only serves to reinforce the shock effect. The indifference reflects not only a private pattern of personality, but also spreads onto socio-political models. Politics is perceived (at least by the younger artists) as a cynical and unromantic business calculated in clear terms of gain and loss. The dilemma of "here" and "there," which was intertwined in Israeli art right from the outset, does not interest them in the least, just as they show no interest in formulating or extracting any "Israeli" aspect from their art. They perceive "Israelism" as nothing more than a geographical indication, and any attempt to regard Israeli art as corresponding or contradictory to the Zionist ethos is conceived by them as pathetic. Such "post-Zionist" political consciousness may derive from basic indifference, born of an inner conviction that real involvement and influence are impossible, and in any case, it is symptomatic of the total bankruptcy of absolute values and big ideologies.

Avoiding hierarchical value-laden thinking and dodging a firm stand on any subject may be interpreted from a larger time perspective as a critique on the imposition of this or that avant-garde value and, hence, seen as an ideological revolt, namely, as a new pathos. And indeed, the idea of *Antipathos* can be associated with the old concept of revolt: it is as yet difficult or impossible to come up with unequivocal conclusions about the

Trash/Camp

closely related art forms usually made only by, and about the members of marginal ideoregressive communities. Trash is the generic name of literary or artistic material of poor or inferior quality, whereas camp is usually associated with bad taste and extravagant gestures presented in an ironic and humorous manner. (Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," *Pariian Review*, vol. 31, Fall 1964, pp. 52-53)

Cyberpunk

derived from the words *cybernetics* and *punk*, this term denotes a synthesis of technological world with an underground marginal subculture and street anarchy, and a human-computer symbiosis. The term was probably coined by the science fiction critic Gardner Dozois. Its origins can be traced back to a specific branch of the science fiction genre, which corresponded to the world view of American computer hackers. Today one can refer to cyberpunk as a generational phenomenon pertinent to a number of cultural domains – music, visual arts, films and fashion. Author William Gibson is considered by many as the progenitor of cyberpunk. His books outline the effects of today's technologies on a waning future high-tech society, on the verge of technological disaster (*Neuromancer*).

Other devout cyberpunk writers are Bruce Sterling, John Shirley and Lewis Shiner. The difference between traditional science fiction and cyberpunk lies in the latter's message – a subversive social statement based on the definition of power as control over data banks ("information wants to be free"). It is the counter-culture of the computer age. In order to understand cyberpunk one should realize that it does not deal with a futuristic scenario, but rather with a metaphorical depiction of our own reality. Since 1988, the most loyal mouthpiece of cyberpunk is the magazine *MUNDO 2000*.

Blake Runner, *Videodrome*, *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, *Terminator 2* and *The Lawn Mower Man* are some examples of cyberpunk-influenced films. Brian Michale, poetics researcher, attributes the legitimacy of science fiction in general, and of cyberpunk in particular, to the accelerated postmodern exchange of models between high and low strata of culture. "Cyberpunk SF can thus be seen... as SF which derives certain of its elements from postmodernist mainstream fiction which itself has, in its turn, already been 'science-fictionized' to some greater or lesser degree." (Brian Michale, "POSTTYPE: MUNDOS/MUNDOISM," chap. 10 in *Contemporary Postmodernism*, London 1992, p. 229)

The cynicism and pastiche strategies evade any representation that strives for sincerity, at least in its expressive sense, although thematically, they delve into emotional depths and treat a personal world, an identity of the most private and probably most intimate nature – the body's flesh and its various excretions.

crystallized nature of the current artistic exposition. I, however, believe that the basic difference between the old model of rebellion (in the manner of Dada, or even in its actual form as epitomized in the exhibition by the works of **Kantor**, **Gechtmann** and **Rantzer**) and the new anti-pathos lies in the fact that among the younger artists revolt as an ideal was outmoded long ago. It is simply does not interest them. It is not a revolt, because there is no reality worthy of revolting against, and no real alternative worthy of constituting. *Post factum*, successful attempts to discard conventions will perhaps be defined as a new type of pathos or social critique. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the dissolution of dichotomies and the endless transformations of point into counterpoint are unique to our *fin de siècle*, implied by the state of things and not conceived, at least not in real time, as a revolt or an ideology. A realistic and practical view, devoid of nostalgia and free from great dreams, cannot be the revolt of yesterday. It dodges any responsibility, offering, at the most, an alternative, and at best – ready to assume a sort of defiance, and even that only if it is implicit in the things themselves.

As we shall show later on, there is just as many alternatives as artists in the exhibition. Hard as we may try, we will still find it impossible to extricate one possibility, a sure recipe for anti-pathos, as it is impossible to choose an exclusive and privileged model from within the plethora of divergent possibilities. One thing is sure, however: we are confronted here with a radical challenge (albeit unintentional) to any circumstantial selectivity, to reducing the soul to a single linear explanation. The multiplicity of possibilities, the dualities, the contradictions and dissonances are an integral part of the exhibition.

The Greek term *pathia* denotes suffering, feeling, sensation. Hence, "anti-pathia" indicates contrariety to feeling, aversion. However, as aforementioned, this definition does not exclude the possibility of patently dealing with emotion, though not necessarily in its usual expressive sense, but rather as a device for producing an effect of feeling. In other words, the effacement of the individual hand-writing is not meant here to provide a critical distance. Unlike **[Brechtian alienation]**, this estrangement, born of horror and terror, aims at producing a cold sweat. Nir Hod's wax sculpture, for example – a self-portrait whose long hair is scattered by the wind – seeks to reach emotional depths, wants to make us cry, even though it bears absolutely no imprint of the artist's hand, and no trace of "Weltschmerz." Whereas pathos contains all the possibilities of the absolute, of the linear rationale, of the sublime, of value judgement and of the great narrative, anti-pathos reflects their collapse, implying a denial of any model and an indulgence in private passion, in unprejudiced multifariousness and in the production of effects.

Anti-pathos can be attained through images, as in the case of **Zvika Kantor**, who conflates a strawberry with a garlic, a cornstalk with a feather and a plastic flower; through inscriptions like Naomi Simon-Tov's: "It is not heroic enough," through "impoverished" materials like those used by **Philip Rantzer**; through self-irony as is the case with **Uri Katzenstein**, who uses his own blood to scribble a cliché voicing a "low" experience, and with **Gideon Gechtman**, who exhibits a "butterfly collection," the wings of which are made from collages of the artist's own obituaries; or by the representation of the repugnant, the perverse, the repulsive – what later on we will be calling the "vomit aesthetic" – like **Hilla Lulu Lin**'s eyes in tea-spoons, **Eytan Shevker**'s close-ups of scarred skin, **Daniel Sack**'s amorphous scound, **Atanor Goner**'s shower curtain with insects, or the flesh and metal crossbreeds in **Or Drummer**'s computer work. Anti-pathos is also maintained in **Ram Brecha**'s Aeronautical Salon with its floating *Diver*, in **Zadok Ben-David**'s hovering sculptures that defy historical sculptural conventions, as well as in **Reuven Cohen**'s "degraded" **[transvestite]** paintings.

One of the central principles of the exhibition is that of incongruity or dissonance, which constitutes the comic situation according to most of the philosophical and psychological definitions of **[humor]**. In this context, it is only right to emphasize that the "Black Humor, Irony and Cynicism" appearing in the exhibition's sub-title does not of course indicate a style or an independent content, but rather a type of view, an angle of looking at things. It is, however, indicative of the types of "intensity" communicated by these works. But as we shall shortly see, although not without humor and abiding by the idea of incongruity, and although their dissonance is mostly surprising and even terrifying, these works do not engender laughter or a pleasing experience usually associated with the act of laughing. At most they produce a twitch, a reflex resembling laughter. One could call humor of this kind – laugh-less or "poker-face" humor, but at any rate, this is not a "healthy" humor.

Brechtian effect of alienation

German dramatist Bertolt Brecht's instructions for his actors were to distance themselves from the characters they play by "performing" them, a strategy which was meant to make the familiar alien to the spectator and awaken in him a critical consciousness.

Transvestition/Drug

the practice of wearing clothes of the opposite sex. The phenomenon is by no means a new one, and suffice to mention that for centuries men played female parts at the theater and opera. In modern and high-modern art, transvestition served to examine the limits of sex and gender, as for example in the works of Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray and Andy Warhol. In recent years, not least thanks to Warhol's activity, transvestition has become quite widespread a form of entertainment, particularly in the so called Drag shows, in which men perform as women.

London and New York clubs are the main scenes of the Drag subculture, but its influence is also evident in fashion magazines, video-clips, commercials and films, as well as in the works of some contemporary artists, most notably those of the American photographer Nan Goldin and the French artists Gilles and Pierre. "Men dressed up as women are not necessarily transsexuals who want desperately to become women [...] They love to put on fancy dresses and make-up, to assume fictional characters and above all they enjoy having fun [...] The most famous Drag Queen of all time was Divine [...]. Dressing up as women allows men to express their innate feminine aspects. The externalization of these qualities is grossly overstated, usually in a vulgar way, but nonetheless performed with pedantic perfectionism and with a lot of humor." (Shav Flanz, "A Short History of Drag," *Kor Hev* April 17, 1993)

The incongruity theory identifies

[humor] with the ability to apprehend an inner discrepancy in a given situation. The incongruity can be a result of hierarchy inversions, of the gap between "high" conventions of representation and "low" hierarchical arrangement (or vice versa), of an unexpected and logical encounter between divergent contexts etc. Identifying and decoding the incongruity produce enjoyment, the natural expression of which is laughter. The German philosopher Emanuel Kant perceived laughter as a pleasurable emotion, which is evoked by the sudden shattering of an expectation. Sigmund Freud saw the joke as a device for outsmarting the repressive inner censor, a bypass which enables the removal of lust pleasure. The author and philosopher Arthur Koestler spoke about the collision of two contextual patterns.

LIST OF WORKS

All works are from the artists' collections, unless otherwise indicated.
All measurements in centimeters, height before width before depth.

Aya & Gai

Untitled 2, 1992
Iron, glass, neon, plaster, epoxy and wax
157 x 25.5 x 25.5

Zadok Ben-David

No Secrets Under the Light, 1993
Wood, iron, plastic, glass, textile and paint
140 x 300 x 300

Left Hand and Right Continent, from the series *Innerescape*, 1993
Painted aluminum
180 x 250 x 30

Anat Ben-Shaul

Untitled, 1993
Airbrush on glass
42 x 52

Untitled, 1993
Airbrush on windshield
38 x 102

Untitled, 1993
Airbrush on glass
60 x 57

Untitled, 1993
Airbrush on glass
61 x 58

Ram Bracha

The Diver, from the series *Aeronautical Salon*, 1992
Color photograph
108 x 108

The Bee, from the series *Aeronautical Salon*, 1992
Color photograph
108 x 108

Gideon Gechtman

Nature Mort No. 8, 1992
Hebron marble, marble-patterned formica, plastic fruits and framed color photographs
Table: 95 x 105 x 83
Plate: 105 x 83
Photographs: 44 x 34 each

Butterflies, 1993
36 framed photographs and video film
14.5 x 20 each
Video: Yotam Gechtman

Atsmon Ganor

Untitled, 1993
Printing paint on plastic sheet, aluminum and troweling
Curtain: 200 x 180 x 10
Hanger: 2 x 77 x 7
Towel: 120 x 68
Courtesy of Givon Gallery, Tel Aviv

Ori Drumer

Untitled, 1993
computer-work
150 x 300
Huge print courtesy of Abud' Printec

Nir Hod

Dreams Are My Reality, 1993
Oil on canvas, glass, wood, slough, leaves, artificial eyes and snakes
110 x 204 x 124
Courtesy of J.F. Rosenheimer,
Klar Shmaryahu

My Eyes Are Not The First To Cry, 1993
Sculpture: wax casting, hair, artificial eyes and background music
Base: painted concrete casting, marble and fan
148 x 42 x 42

Daniel Sack

Untitled, 1993
Plaster, pigments, fiberglass, acrylic, epoxy and strings
255 x 220 x 34
Untitled, 1993
Oil paint on wall
420 x 420

Reuven Cohen

Untitled (*Gay*), 1992
Acrylic on plywood, neon, wood, stainless steel, polyester, perspex, silk flowers and "Crembo" wrappings
187 x 102 x 46

Untitled (*Asaf*), 1992
Acrylic on plywood, electric bulb, silicon, iron wire, plaster, tin, wood, glass and stainless steel
176 x 152 x 26

Hilla Lulu Lin

My Heart is Very Strong Like a Used Elastic Horse, 1993
Porcelain, plastic, photograph, formica, teapoons, tin, feathers, synthetic fur, polyester, painted gravelstones and industrial calling fan
500 x 300 x 300
Courtesy of Artifact Gallery, Jaffa

Naomi Siman-Tov

"It Is Not Heroic Enough", 1992
Oil on canvas
64 x 44.5
Courtesy of Mary Faouzi Gallery, Jaffa

Belu-Simion Fainaru

Presentation of the Bride, 1993
Room installation
Metal, wood, glass, plaster, water, play-dough, textile, neon light, rubber, feathers and hair
400 x 400

Zvika Kantor

Ten Commandments and other Vegetables, 1992-1993
Plastic flowerpots, glass, wood, plastic vegetables and fruits and internal light
Flowerpots: 62 x 62 x 82,
78 x 78 x 60; 78 x 78 x 60
Courtesy of Givon Gallery, Tel Aviv

Uri Katzenstein

Ritual Reality, Action No. 5, 1993
Performance, video film, monitors, acrylic on wall and blood

Dan Reisner

Untitled, 1992
Wood, polyester, textile and leaves
165 x 100 x 80

Philip Rantzer

Untitled, 1993
Wood, textile, water, iron, water pump and paper
129 x 230 x 97
Courtesy of Artifact Gallery, Jaffa

Mother and Child, 1993
Textile, paper, fur, glass and iron
51 x 38 x 20
Collection Ellen and Jerome Stern,
New York

Eytan Shouker

Inter Surface, 1992-1993
A series of eight photographs
Kallotype print
12 x 18 each

The catalogue is arranged according to the Hebrew reading direction, from right to left. The texts printed in the Artists' section of the catalogue were written by Yoni Katz-Freiman, unless otherwise indicated.

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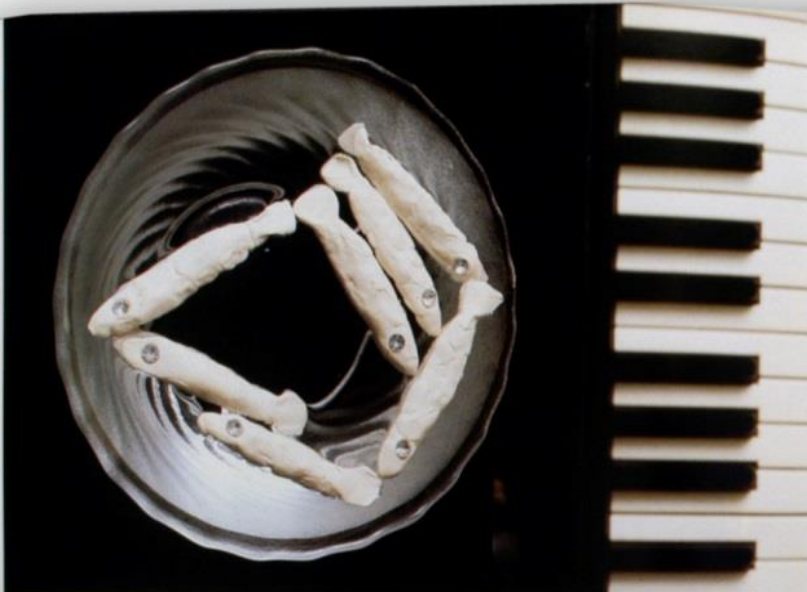
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Born in Romania, 1959.

נולד ב-1959 ברומניה.
 לימד בין 1978 ל-1982 בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1982-1984 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1984-1985 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1985-1986 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1986-1987 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1987-1988 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1988-1989 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1989-1990 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1990-1991 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1991-1992 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1992-1993 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1993-1994 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1994-1995 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1995-1996 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1996-1997 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1997-1998 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1998-1999 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 1999-2000 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2000-2001 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2001-2002 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2002-2003 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2003-2004 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2004-2005 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2005-2006 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2006-2007 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2007-2008 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2008-2009 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2009-2010 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2010-2011 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2011-2012 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2012-2013 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2013-2014 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2014-2015 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2015-2016 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2016-2017 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2017-2018 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2018-2019 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2019-2020 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2020-2021 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2021-2022 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2022-2023 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2023-2024 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה. 2024-2025 עבד כמורה למוזיקה בבית הספר למוזיקה אוניברסיטת חיפה.

Studied: 1978-82 Fine Art and Philosophy, Herta and Paul Amirson Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Chicago; Selected One-Person Exhibitions: 1984 Midway Gallery, Chicago; 1986 Janco-Dada Museum, Ein Hod; Mabot Gallery, Tel Aviv; 1988 X+ Gallery, Knokke, Belgium; I.C.C., Antwerp; 1989 Avantgarde Gallery, Antwerp; Musée D'Art Moderne, Brussels; 1990 Fichersulle Art Gallery, Brussels; Equilibrium Gallery, St. Niklaas, Belgium; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst te Gent, Ghent, Belgium; 1991 Hugo Moens Gallery, Dessel, Belgium; Sara Levy Gallery, Tel Aviv; 1992 The Museum of Israel Art, Ramat Gan; Noga Art Gallery, Herzliya; Huberus Wurschik Gallery, Düsseldorf; Ric Urmel Gallery, Ghent, Belgium; Selected Group Exhibitions: 1985 Sculpture in the Park, The National Park, Ramat Gan; Frontline, Ein Hod; Museum of Art, 1987 Tel Ha '82, Contemporary Art Meeting, Inside-Outside: An Aspect of Contemporary Sculpture, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst (M.H.K.A.), Antwerp; 1988 Fresh Art, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; 1991 The Presence of the Absent: The Empty Chair in Contemporary Israel Art, University Art Gallery, Tel Aviv; Rooms, Artists' House, Tel Aviv; 1992 Routes of Wandering: Nomadism, Journeys and Transitions in Israeli Art, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Time of Sculpture - Time of Photography, Borschof Studio's Gallery, Tel Aviv; National Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea; Documenta IX, Kassel, Germany; Dreams A, Mary Faouf Gallery, Jaffa; The 2nd Sculpture Biennale, Ein Hod; 1993 Sculpture Towards Theatre, Janco-Dada Museum, Ein Hod; Bat Yam Museum, Arad Museum; The Israeli Proposal to the Venice Aperto, Artifex Gallery, Jaffa; 44 Artists from Documenta IX, Raymond Bolag Gallery, Zurich; America, Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, travelling exhibition in Brazil; There, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; The Venice Biennale (Turkish Pavilion)



כלי-סמיון פיירר, הובסת כלה, 1993. נגזרת מתוך סריבט (חזר)
 Belu-Simion Fainaru, Presentation of the Bride, 1993 (detail from a room installation)

"Rabbi Hanokh told this story:
 There was once a man who was very stupid. When he got up in the morning it was so hard for him to find his clothes that at night he almost hesitated to go to bed for thinking of the trouble he would have on waking. One evening he finally made a great effort, took paper and pencil and as he undressed noted down exactly where he put everything he had on. The next morning, very well pleased with himself, he took the slip of paper in hand and read: 'cap' - there it was, he set it on his head; 'pant' - there they lay, he got into them; and so it went until he was fully dressed. 'That's all very well, but now where am I myself?' he asked in great consternation. 'Where in the world am I?' He looked and looked, but it was a vain search; he could not find himself. 'And that is how it is with us' said the rabbi."

Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*, New York 1961, p. 214



כלי-סמיון פיירר, הובסת כלה, 1993. נגזרת מתוך סריבט (חזר)
 Belu-Simion Fainaru, Presentation of the Bride, 1993 (detail from a room installation)

"סיפר רבי חנוך
 בעשה בעולם שמחמת טעושותיו היה נקרא כפי הנהגתו בשם נולד, כמורה
 בשעה עם מטיטורו פתחיה היה לבוש את בגדיו, וכשהיה על כך נכבד
 הישם היה לעולם קרובה לפשט את בגדיו ולשבת. ערב אחד ארץ את לבו,
 לקח נלחו ופרשו ורשם בשעה ששטם את בגדיו, והיה תהה כל מלבוש.
 במסר הוציא את הלחן וקרא 'הובצ' - תהה הוא כאן, נשל והשם אותו,
 'הובצ' - הרי מנהגים הם כאן, נשל ולבש אותם, וכן כל השאר, עד שהיה
 לבוש מלבו. 'הובצ' אגיל' שאל את עצמו בתורה תורה, 'הובצ' אגיל,
 ביום-ביום ולא יכול לבוא.
 כך ארץ גם לבו, אמר הרבי."

סיפור בסיסי, חזר מן הסיפורים הישנים של רבי ב

* יצולם הישום והמראה מתוך סריבט (חזר) על-ידי האמן
 * The artist's portrait and the quotation from Buber were chosen by the artist.