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דביר

## **Ethics and Responsibility in Israeli Cinema**

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## Abstracts

### **Abjection and the Ethics of Otherness: Israeli and Palestinian Documentary Cinema about the Second Intifada**

**Raya Morag**

The essay examines a certain shift in the politics of the body/corpse as an outcome of the “new” war. Perspectives on suicide-attack-induced trauma are compared via an analysis of the 2003 Israeli documentary *No. 17* (representing here an entire corpus); video recordings taken of suicide bombers before their missions; and the Palestinian narrative film *Paradise Now* (2005). Among the interrelated issues discussed are the ethics of the gaze; the phenomenology of suicide attacks; our willingness to become contaminated by the corpse as indicating our willingness to accept the other; and the distinction between discourses oriented towards the other and those which preclude such orientation. By proposing the body/corpse relationship as the basis for a new “materialistic” discourse, the essay contests the predominance of “memory discourse” in trauma studies.

### **On the Border: Ethics and the Face in Contemporary Israeli Cinema**

**Anat Zanger**

In what sense does an observing and documenting camera constitute an authority which contributes to a spatial dialogue and ethical discourse? Sites of transition such as borders, airports, and checkpoints serve as a contact point between military and policing authorities and the heterogeneous civilian population. In Israeli cinema, the presence of those sites provides an intersection between the physical-territorial and the cinematic image. This article focuses on the various modes with which the camera challenges the physical border demarcated by control points in order to gain access to the face of the “I” and the “other”. Following the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, the article identifies the face of the other as a catalyst of interpersonal contact and proximity. Four contemporary Israeli films are explored: the short fiction film *Ben Gurion* (Gil Levenberg, 1997) and the documentaries *Borders* (Eran Riklis and Nurit Kedar, 1999), *Checkpoints* (Yoav Shamir, 2003) and *Avenge but One of my Two Eyes* (Avi Mograbi, 2005).

## **“As Long As You Are Drawing and Not Filming, It’s OK”: Ethics and Accountability in *Waltz with Bashir***

**Shmulik Duvdevani**

The essay offers a detailed analysis of Ari Folman's animated documentary *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), arguing that the film's therapeutic aims are best understood as involving unresolved feelings of guilt and accountability which have haunted the Israeli psyche over the past two decades. The representation of Israeli soldiers during the First Lebanon War as "innocent children", naive victims of circumstances, is a direct response to the severe allegations pointed towards Israel and the Israeli army following the violent escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the second Intifada. The article also discusses the ethical aspects of animated documentary and the ways in which animation helps Folman cope with his traumatic experiences. Following the writings of Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida and Carl Jaspers, the article examines the film's rhetoric vis-à-vis the question of accountability. Despite its radical aesthetics, the film conforms to the "discourse of victimhood" which has dominated Zionist thought, preventing the film and its protagonist from taking full accountability for the actions in question. The essay concludes with an inquiry into the rhetoric of repentance and forgiveness in Udi Aloni's radical film *Forgiveness* (2006).

## **The Warrior's Gift of Death: Magic Realism in *Avanti Popolo***

**Judd Ne'eman and Yael Munk**

The essay offers a new reading of Rafi Boukai's classic Israeli film *Avanti Popolo* (1986). Boukai's feature, it claims, draws on the ending of an earlier Israeli film set during the Six Day War, Uri Zohar's *Every Bastard Is a King* (1968), two of whose minor characters become the protagonists of *Avanti Popolo*. Employing Jameson's theory of magic realism and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization, the essay analyzes the film's antiwar stance as expressed from the perspective of enemies building a relationship based on human solidarity. This stance is also examined in light of Boukai's speech at the Montpellier Film Festival in France, where the director expressed his radical opposition to the 1982 Lebanon War, a conflict fifteen years removed from the events of *Avanti Popolo*.

## **The Victorizer of Good Will: Anxiety, Denial, and Guilt in the Television Serial *Parashat Ha-Shavu'a***

**Itay Harlap**

The article examines the character of Shaul Nawi in the first season of the Israeli television

serial *Parashat Ha-Shavu'a* (2006). It argues that Shaul's distress, which takes the form of extreme mood swings, anxiety, and post-traumatic symptoms, is intimately linked to the various subject positions he occupies: a victim, a victimizer, and a bystander who witnesses wrongful acts perpetrated by and against others. The article discusses these multiple positions as they manifest themselves in Shaul's extreme reaction at the sight of a dead soldier. It argues that this is related in the series to the fact that Shaul, like all Israeli citizens, is unavoidably responsible for what takes place in the Occupied Territories, even if he himself refuses to take part in the occupation and is himself a victim in other circumstances.

### **Ethnicity, Trauma, and Ethical Responsibility: The Mizrahi Woman in the New Israeli Cinema**

#### **Raz Yosef**

The article explores the relationship between trauma, gender, and ethnicity in the Israeli film *Or* (Keren Yedaya, 2004). The film presents several routine days in the life of Ruti, a Mizrahi prostitute, and her daughter, Or. I argue that *Or* is a critical Mizrahi feminist film, one that exposes the hegemonic social gaze as a political mechanism of power and violence terrorizing the Mizrahi female body. The ethnic, class and gender oppression of the Mizrahi female subject—an oppression she comes to internalize—creates a traumatic experience which is expressed both in the film's narrative and in its cinematic apparatus. Because the trauma is chronic, it cannot be transformed into post-traumatic memory, and so the Mizrahi woman is destined to repeat it over and over again. Two of the film's aesthetic strategies—the immobile camera and the absence of reverse-shots—expose the realistic illusion of cinema and disrupt the viewers' (especially the male viewers') identification with the cinematic image. This "wounding" of the cinematic apparatus traumatizes the viewers, demanding that they take ethical responsibility for the traumatization of the Mizrahi female body in Israeli society.

### **The Psychological Thriller and the Family Drama: On Ethics and Terrorism in *Frozen Days***

#### **Boaz Hagin**

The article examines the ethical aspects of Danny Lerner's first feature film, *Frozen Days* (2006). The film, I argue, explores the experience of living with the chronic trauma of terrorism and rejects one common definition of terrorism as violence perpetrated against noncombatants or innocent targets; it does so by placing the experience of being a victim of terrorism within the genre of the psychological thriller, which challenges the

dichotomies of innocence and guilt, involvement and non-involvement, and even the real and the virtual. The film's protagonist, while clearly a victim, also seems to take part in illegal or immoral acts and to bear a vague sense of guilt or responsibility for some kind of wrongdoing that is never explicitly pointed out in the film. At the same time, she embodies an identity that straddles the line between "combatant" and "noncombatant." The film thus raises ethical dilemmas related to subjectivity and responsibility and places them within the context of Israeli experiences of terrorism.

## **A Trail of Mud: On Trauma and Ethics in Israeli Film and Literature**

**Nurith Gertz and Gal Hermoni**

The article discusses ethical issues involving "otherness" and victimhood in relation to certain traumas endemic to Israeli society. Several Israeli cinematic and literary texts (*Waltz with Bashir*, *Winter Games*, *Hirbet Hize*, and others) are shown to point back to a core trauma embedded in Zionist discourse—that of the Palestinian expulsion of 1948. As the texts under consideration show, understanding this and later traumas can serve as a basis for an ethical attitude which recognizes both the trauma of the other as a victim and the trauma of the self as a perpetrator.

## **The Responsibility of the Gaze: Reflections on Ethics and Documentary Film Following Bill Nichols**

**Raz Yosef**

The article explores ethical issues in documentary cinema following the writings of Bill Nichols and other theorists of non-fiction. In his work on "axiographics," Nichols examines the ways in which ethical values are embedded in the configuration of space, the constitution of the gaze, and the relationship between observer and observed. For Nichols, the difference between fiction and non-fiction is to be understood in terms of the difference between the erotic and the ethical. Whereas in narrative cinema the gaze is gendered and eroticized, in documentary film the object of desire is the historical world and the real social actors who inhabit it. Documentary works therefore invite an ethical interpretation. Moreover, whereas fiction films do not necessarily indicate the ethical positions of their directors, in documentary film an indexical bond exists between the image and the ethics which produced it. Formal characteristics such as camera position and the filmmaker's presence in or absence from the shot reveal the particular ethical code governing the filmmaker's behavior. Whereas Nichols uses the term "ethics" in a general sense, more recently other scholars such as Michael Renov view documentary film in light of Emmanuel Levinas's ethical philosophy.



# **Axiographics: Ethical Space in Documentary Film**

**Bill Nichols**

Translated by Tami Rubin, edited by Shmulik Duvdevani and Raz Yosef.

## List of Contributors

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**Prof. Nurith Gertz** is Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Literature and Film at the Open University of Israel. She headed the Cinema Studies Program at the Department of Film and Television, Tel Aviv University. She currently heads the Department of Cultural Creation and Production at Sapir Academic College. She won the Brenner Prize for Literature in 2009 for her book *Unrepentant* (Am Oved, in Hebrew), which was also nominated for the Sapir Prize for Literature. In 2010 she received the Israeli Book Publishers' Association Golden Award. Her recent books include *Captives of a Dream: National Myths in Israeli Culture* (Valentine Mitchell, 2000), *Holocaust Survivors, Aliens and Others in Israeli Cinema* (Am Oved, 2004, in Hebrew), and, with George Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory* (Edinburgh University Press and Indiana University Press, 2008).

**Dr. Boaz Hagin** is Lecturer at the Department of Film and Television, Tel Aviv University. He is the author of *Death in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), co-author with Thomas Elsaesser of *Memory, Trauma, and Fantasy in American Cinema* (Open University of Israel, 2012, in Hebrew), and co-editor of *Just Images: Ethics and the Cinematic* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011) and *Deeper Than Oblivion: Trauma and Memory in Israeli Cinema* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). His articles have appeared in *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, *GLQ*, *Cinema Journal*, *Camera Obscura*, *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, and *Psychoanalyse im Widerspruch*.

**Dr. Itay Harlap** teaches at the Department of Film and Television, Tel Aviv University, and at Sapir Academic College. His dissertation is on traumas in Israeli society as reflected in contemporary Israeli television dramas. He is the originator and organizer

(since 2011) of "Fiction", an annual conference of television studies at the Department of Film and Television, Tel Aviv University.

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**Prof. Ram Loevy** is a director, scriptwriter, and producer. He is Professor Emeritus of Film and Television at Tel Aviv University and a laureate of the 1993 Israel Prize for Communication. He also teaches at the Sam Spiegel Film School in Jerusalem and at Haifa University. His many feature films, documentaries, and television series include *I, Ahmad* (1966), *The Bride and the Butterfly Hunter* (1974), *Hirbet Hize* (1978), *Indian in the Sun* (1981), *Bread* (1986), *The Film that Wasn't* (1994), *Mr. Mani* (1996), and *Close, Closed, Closure* (2002).

**Prof. Raya Morag** is Associate Professor of Film Studies and director of the Smart Family Institute of Communications at the Department of Communication and Journalism, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her research explores post-traumatic cinema and ethics; perpetrator trauma; documentary cinema; New German Cinema; films on the Vietnam War; Israeli and Palestinian documentaries about the second Intifada; and corporeal-feminist film critique. She is the author of *Defeated Masculinity: Post-Traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of War* (Peter Lang, 2009) and *The Defeated Male: Cinema, Trauma, War* (Koebner and Resling, 2011, in Hebrew); and *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, London and New York, 2013). Morag served as guest editor for *Studies in Documentary Film's* special issue on Israeli Documentary Cinema (April 2013). Prof. Morag is a recipient of an Israel Science Foundation Grant (2013-2017) for her current project on The Perpetrator Figure and Societal Trauma in Cinema. She is an artistic director at the Rabinovich Fund for the Arts, and Writes a cinema column in *Haaretz, Literature and Culture*.

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**Prof. Judd Ne'eman** is Professor Emeritus and former Chair of the Department of Film and Television, Tel Aviv University. A laureate of the 2009 Israel Prize for Cinema, he has produced and directed many feature films and documentaries invited to festivals

and shown worldwide, including *Paratroopers* (1977), *Seamen's Strike* (1981), *Streets of Yesterday* (1989), *Nuzhat Al-Fuad* (2007), and *Zitra* (2008). He has published essays on Israeli cinema and on war films. He was a visiting professor at the Tisch School of the Arts, NYU (2003-2005) and a fellow at the William Joiner Center for the Study of War, University of Massachusetts, Boston (2008). He currently heads the graduate film program at Sapir Academic College and is preparing for the production of a new feature film, *The Thousand-Yard Stare*.

**Prof. Bill Nichols** is Professor of Cinema Studies at San Francisco State University. His book *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 1992) has been seminal in applying contemporary film theory to the study of documentary filmmaking. His other books include *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Indiana University Press, 1994), *Introduction to Documentary* (Indiana University Press, 2010), and *Engaging Cinema: An Introduction to Film Studies* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010). He is the editor of the two-volume anthology *Movies and Methods* (University of California Press, 1976, 1985) which has played a crucial role in establishing film studies as an academic discipline.

**Dr. Raz Yosef** is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Film and Television, Tel Aviv University, where he currently heads the undergraduate Cinema Studies Program. He is the author of *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema* (Rutgers University Press, 2004), *To Know a Man: Masculinity, Sexuality and Ethnicity in Israeli Cinema* (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2010, in Hebrew), and *The Politics of Loss and Trauma in Contemporary Israeli Cinema* (Routledge, 2011). He is the co-editor of *Just Images: Ethics and the Cinematic* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011) and *Deeper Than Oblivion: Trauma and Memory in Israeli Cinema* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). His work on gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationalism has appeared in *Theory and Criticism*, *GLQ*, *Third Text*, *Framework*, *Shofar: Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, *Camera Obscura*, and *Cinema Journal*. Dr. Yosef is a recipient of an Israel Science Foundation Fellowship (2010-2013).

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