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Desert Margins

Drorit Gur Arie

I don't know if the King who sent me exists.

...

But ah! I can feel sublime traditions

From before time and space, life and being...

Fernando Pessoa¹

From Israel's center to Ofakim the road seems long, almost endless, as if it were a wandering route to a faraway land. The blazing summer light numbs the senses, but it is precisely this heavy heat that demands concentration, a focused gaze. An arid sandy land, strewn with Bedouin encampments, burning hot in the middle of the sky, engulfed by deathly silence. The southern concrete block housing projects have long conquered the virginal desert sands, but Joseph Dadoune still remembers the endless spaces open to the void, the blinding whiteness stretching all the way to the horizon from his childhood in the 1980s, when he came with his mother from Nice to the Land of the Patriarchs at the age of six. The mother, who became ultra-Orthodox, came here for sanctity's sake, and sent her only son to dwell under the wing of the *Shekhinah* in the "*heder*" and later – in a *yeshiva*. He persevered twelve years in the tent of Torah studies; a dozen years during which he traveled in and out of the country.

Dadoune's films are an odyssey gradually extending between different mental and geographical realms, from Israel and the Mediterranean Basin to Europe and the West, from wild desert landscapes to realms of sanctity and mysticism. In this ongoing epic a cinematic trilogy stands out, spanning *Universes* (2000-03), *Chanti* (2005-06), and the two parts of *Sion* (2002-07)²; it progresses along an axis that strives to generate an identity at once personal and artistic, in an attempt to contain various dissonances between West and East, secularism and religious observance, profanity and sanctity, exile and redemption, between external appearances and private mythology and codes concealed in the body of the work. Everything begins and returns to the point of departure – the Israeli town of Ofakim where Dadoune spent his childhood years. The "foundational sights"³ of the sequestered southern town and the powerful landscapes of the Negev were etched in the artist's consciousness; the more he travels and the more

time passes, the deeper this oscillation becomes engrained in him.

Dadoune does not create a documentary about the human melting pot in the development town, with its myriad colorful types, the crowded housing projects or the plights of material destitution. Consciously disregarding ordinary mundane depictions, which are prevalent in Israeli cinema and form the core of its discussion,⁴ Dadoune offers a personal point of view oriented toward the open expanses, toward those wild, dry landscapes on the outskirts of town that flutteringly touch upon its boundaries. The wide open landscapes not far away from the housing block in which he lives – a municipal dump, dry river bed, an improvised sheep farm – form a metonymy for peripheral sequestration and the perspective of an immigrant of Mizrahi origin, cast into the heart of a cultural wilderness. Dadoune introduces the issues of frontier, marginality, the *other*: life in a development town whose textile factories collapsed one after the other, putting an end to its inhabitants' hopes.

The term *Chanti* in the title of Dadoune's second film refers to "shanty town," improvised settlements consisting of shacks and tin huts erected without planning in rundown areas, whose inhabitants suffer from extreme poverty, poor sanitation, and grave unemployment. Ofakim is Dadoune's shanty town. In his work he inserts hints of poverty, pain, and destruction together with descriptions of the open biblical landscape striving for emotional and spiritual empowerment. In a panoramic landscape, which appears "larger than life," Dadoune performs various rituals, yearning for the archaic and primordial as a protective, uplifting locus. Time alternates between sequences, oscillating back and forth like a pendulum, preventing a foothold in the logical sphere. The work crystallizes in the space between an alchemical concoction in a ghostly steamy den and a contemporary cinematic language.

Universes is a self-portrait with mindset flickers; forms, colors, textures, and sounds that do not obey a narrative frame; an experiential-physical road movie that progresses into a mental world with a regularity of its own. Universes become interwoven – worlds devoid of spatial or temporal landmarks, fusing reality and illusion: Europe, the Middle East, Judaism, Christianity, Zionism, war, superstition, periphery and center. An assemblage of still photographs,

subjected to a unique scripting process,⁵ as Dadoune outlines a route of motion in them to generate slow moving images, a seismograph of consciousness. Silent pictures are replaced by scenes with Dadoune's enchanting voice singing, citing biblical verses and excerpts from his personal diaries, occasionally interrupted by a raw staccato scream, and then again – a silent echo; the scenes flow like the waters of a dark river, like pure poetry. The picture of the desert margins is taken in long shot, containing the static space as a backdrop, inviting the spectator to a meditative experience, into the realms of imagination and synesthesia.⁶ One must delve in, plunge into the boundless and indefinite chaos, in similar manner to observation of color-field paintings aspiring to the sublime.

A scratched record plays a lament. Dadoune's naked body is dragged through a field like a rag, cast away by two men. The meaning of this cruel ritual is elucidated in the artist's voice, reading out the punishment of a rebellious and stubborn son from Deuteronomy (21: 18-21): stoning, social ostracism of the non-normative and cursed. This is how *Universes* begins; one picture chases another: in one – the scream of the body parting from the soul, followed by the scream of a woman in labor, as birth, death, and rebirth are incarnated in the following scenes in a paradise of fantasy and femininity before the sin, before consciousness. Dadoune sprinkles self blame, torment, wallowing in pain, in cycles of self-destruction. He condemns himself to a contemptible death in public, on all fours like a wild animal, copulating and rolling in the thorny desert soil, standing against the backdrop of Sodom, the biblical city of sin, dressed like a bride with a calf's head in his hand, wavering on the border line between masculinity and femininity, between sanctity, passion and demonism, which recur incessantly in his next films.⁷

One by one the echoes of ancient traditions and rites of creation unfold on screen: Dadoune immerses his feet in a puddle, in the water's slow motion, seeking rebirth as in Christian baptism, as the trait of absolute Cleanliness regarded in Judaism as one of the ways to transcendence.⁸ He operates like the tribal wizard, casting the personal materials of myth on his body and surroundings, improvising with waste and organic substances, similar to the crosses of artist-shaman Joseph Beuys who employed found materials such as felt, fat, honey, blood, earth, dead

animals, as a creative, healing force. He places a pair of colored eggplants on his chest, like two lungs, breathing life into a flawed circulatory system, spreading a hemorrhoid ointment on the gnawed pages of a prayer book concealed in the synagogue depository, wrapping his body with dough in a ritual which is all filth and blood, as an extension of his brutal engagement with living chunks of meat. Bread and flesh are associated with the disgrace of the first man, who upon eating from the Tree of Knowledge was doomed to lead a life of labor and carry the burden of death – he lost his name, his tongue, his love. Time, which is ostensibly subordinated to man, is but a shuffled, disrupted, silent eternity⁹; they are also associated with Christ who sheds his flesh and takes the form of bread and wine. Meat in Dadoune's case is a material which embodies sin, anxiety, passion, touching on idolatry and bloodshed. "Meat is not dead flesh; it retains all the sufferings ... every man who suffers is a piece of meat," Gilles Deleuze notes in his analysis of Francis Bacon's work. Meat is the "common zone" and the "zone of indiscernibility" of man and beast.¹⁰

Dadoune stretches language, moving between formal minimalism and emotional overload, between sensuality and morbidity, between the physical and the metaphysical. His work insists upon monumentality and visual wealth. His images, intertwined in private imagery, originate in extensive cultural realms: from Greek mythology, the Bible, the occult, Christianity, and Islam to Art History and cinema. In-between black magic and occult, symbols of fertility and purity, Dadoune outlines a personal vision where nature and an eclectic, unraveled, postmodern entity coexist, in a union of identity rifts gathering in his soul like a split at the heart of the land. He operates like the pulses of subconsciousness, forcing the viewer to penetrate his private dictionary, to skip over the intricate symbolical hurdles, to dissolve the rational reading mode on the way to areas of consciousness seldom reached. His work should be read as an alchemical text which requires time to observe, to contain, "not to rush to interpretation, but rather to linger, reflect, respond intuitively to the meanings arising, and not reduce meaning to a single system ... to open up to the unconscious by letting the texts ..., the archetypal symbols ... and their primeval power reverberate within us."¹¹

Language belongs inside the mouth, in its interior which becomes a swarming arena between scream and silence, the contours of life and death. Dadoune puts a microphone into the mouth, casting the recorded sound of his heavy breathing onto the silent desert, accompanying the process with a primordial scream, like the whistle of the mute peasant that pierced the gates of heaven on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) in Shalom Asch's story. The scream bursts from the interior of the mouth, takes shape in a place where content and form are eliminated in favor of the intuitive, the pre-logical. The wide open mouth is "the hole through which the entire body escapes and from which the flesh descends," as maintained by Deleuze.¹²

The voice is a pivotal element in Dadoune's artistic strategy. He reads texts aloud, chants Eastern *maqamat* (musical modes),¹³ manipulates and distorts his voice with technical means against the backdrop of moving pictures and images, until it becomes inarticulate, heavy, incomprehensible, like the voice of a primordial father rising from the depths of history. The voice is bound up with the dimension of time and its progression, in an attempt to deflect it from its sequential course. Dadoune moves the vinyl strips of the records he creates as objects to accompany his films at slow speed, thus slowing down and fragmenting the audible, to generate an archaic voice that invokes distant memories. The frame's lengthy freezing during the film is another expression of his yearning for other temporal realms, which differ from the dizzying speed of the present time. A close-up of a black piece of cloth which Dadoune thrusts in the viewer's face nullifies and empties the gaze, extracting an experience somewhat reminiscent of Malevich's *Black Square* – yet another example of choosing that which preceded form and the bustle of time.

The body is the location that sets Dadoune's work in motion, whether his own body – bleeding, beaten, secreting, secularized and desecrated, which sheds off its familiar external appearance in favor of an indefinite form under the black sheet of cloth – or the bodies of others: the victim of nocturnal lust in a deserted parking lot in his autobiographical documentary *Chanti*¹⁴; the witch, the prostitute and the widow in *Sion*; or the primordial monster whose beauty and femininity are denied under a suffocating helmet of hair amidst the spaces of the War Museum

in Athens in his film *Bunker Buster* (2006). The body sketches an identity, gender, place; it is a receptacle of repressed anxieties and desires, a battlefield between flesh and spirit, between allowed and forbidden; it articulates Dadoune's conflicted attitude toward motherhood and femininity, unfolding Sion's adventures as a flesh and blood woman and as an allegory. As already noted by Michel Foucault, it is the power inscribed in the body that generates the modern subject. The psyche is a vehicle of "anatomy-politics"; deployments of power "are directly connected to the body – to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations and pleasures."¹⁵

Chanti is projected simultaneously on two screens placed back-to-back. The pictures and sounds incessantly switch between the screens, forcing the viewer to physically-sensorially experience the dichotomies and contradictions presented in it, while constantly moving between the projections which prevent viewing the entire picture at one time. In this film Dadoune explores systems of attraction-rejection toward the body, as well as power and authority relations between different types of masculinity. He addresses Western stereotypes and their fictions concerning the sexual "nature" of Mizrahi masculinity and the latter's social construction as an embodiment of the *other*; a product of fantasies, passions, and anxieties – masculinity which is perceived as primitive, brute, and violent. Another model of masculinity to which the film refers is that of the diasporal Jew, regarded as undermining the distinction between man and woman – a man whose body is weak, flawed, and effeminate, "exiled not only from his people, but also from his own sexuality." This model of masculinity is opposed to that promoted by the Zionist ethos – a robust, muscular man whose strength is acquired by working the homeland.¹⁶

The main scene in *Chanti* features a brutal, humiliating, violent male ritual, thrice repeated: a band of dark skinned musclemen abuses a lean youth whose upper body is exposed. They lay him down, touching and pulling his body organs, blowing/ejaculating puffs of thick cigarette smoke at his face to the point of stupor in a sexual act of passion and loathing between victimizer and victim, which grows more and more violent, a near-rape with a homoerotic dimension. Dadoune thus converses with gender images of political correctness and with macho rituals and initiation rites prevalent in Israeli military culture. Nature

takes part in the oppression, and the desert scenes become loud, vociferous, and threatening. The dogs bark and death materializes in the figure of a ewe leaning over her dead cub as a cloud of smoke billows in the conflict-ridden local landscape amidst the ruins of biblical Teqoa.

In his personality and body, Dadoune embodies an assembly of identities. His films do not hesitate to expose such representations as those discussed by cinema scholar Raz Yosef, who maintains that Israeli heterosexual masculinity cannot imagine and conceptualize itself without its sexual, ethnic, racial *others* in contrast to which it generates its official discourse. "Zionist phallic masculinity is constituted through the force of exclusion of the queer, the (homo)eroticized Mizrahi and the Palestinian male 'others'."¹⁷ Thus, through the physical and sexual perspective in recurring rituals, Dadoune addresses mechanisms of power, domination and subordination, exploring arrays of authority and obedience.¹⁸ The exclusion to which Dadoune subjects himself in the role of the homosexual in the stoning ritual in *Universes*; the blurred gender and political boundaries of passion in *Chanti*; the rituals whereby Dadoune "inseminates" both the soil and his actresses, like the defiant "penetration" into the interior of culture and power institutions (the Parisian Louvre and the War Museum in Athens, in which he similarly performs physical and sexual acts and rituals aimed at self-liberation and revival) – are all a part of the same preoccupation with the essence of power and its deconstruction.

According to gender theorist Judith Butler, the definition of firm, stable sexuality enforced from the outside may be brushed aside by the subject's choice, when deciding where to position herself along the sequence of distinctions, identities, and different kinds of desires flowing and changing in various contexts and times. Since we all take part in the performative game of gender and participate in it even when we opt for the macho masculine figure or the stereotypical feminine one, both men and women can equally undermine the stereotypes via a bodily figure of "in-betweenness" that does not obey the rigid dictates of gender.¹⁹ In this spirit, Dadoune photographs himself in a wedding dress, his thin, fragile body exposed as a site of gender performativity oscillating between femininity and masculinity. Elsewhere he assimilates into other

identities, male and female, often operated by some dark or satanic force.

At the same time, the grotesque presentation of his body, repeated time and again in his works, does not stem from gender protest, but from a sense of guilt associated with the Talmudic Jewish perception, which infuses the Jewish male with considerable anxiety concerning his fertility.²⁰ Dadoune also ties physical eroticism with torn text fragments and the written Hebrew letter.²¹ As a graduate of an ultra-Orthodox *yeshiva*, a school whose being is centered on the Jewish-Hebrew text, Dadoune represents the distinctive Jewish inclination toward the textual. “Judaic culture’s enthusiastic embrace of textuality as a generative (and regenerative) matrix founded a way of life. It cultivated the mystique and even the erotics of the text in its physicality: the touch of the *tefillin* on the male body, the kissing of the *mezuzah* at the threshold, and the dance around the Torah scroll,” Ella Shohat diagnoses.²² In the case of Dadoune, who has wandered throughout his life as a homeless person between countries and continents, the text forms an anchor and a safe haven.

Dadoune skillfully activates the imagery of the ancient Jewish text and richly stratified epic poetry. The film *Sion*, masterfully starring Ronit Elkabetz, tells the mythological story of Jerusalem – the city, the nation, the woman, “Knesset Israel” – and is constructed as an allegorical interpretation in cinematic language.²³ The project has two chapters: a short silent black-and-white film and an hour-long color film, with soundtrack comprising music, growls, mutterings, screams, and bitter crying. The color film moves at a dizzying speed from picture to picture, from one image to another, from a melancholic sound of violins to cries of despair. It is striking in its fidgetiness, in its violent cuts and its correspondence with the tempestuous spirit of the biblical text, especially the depictions of destruction and mourning in the Book of Lamentations, while unfolding with turbulent language the deeds, tribulations, pride, madness, beauty, withering, contamination, and sanctity of that “Sion.”

In the history of Jewish thought, Zion is mainly identified with the *Shekhinah* (a female personification of the divine entity) and with the matron, Knesset Israel (“congregation of Israel,” God’s divine spouse, or the matronita); a set of symbols and concepts imbued with sexuality, earthiness, and spirituality is

constituted around it.²⁴ “Sion” with its myriad facets represents a broad range of women, undergoing various transformations from its depictions in the biblical sources, through the writings of the Sages, to Kabbalah literature. From a female entity which was once “The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth” (Lamentations 2:15), to a deserted, outcast wife and a gloomy widow: “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! ...; She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her” (Lamentations 1: 1-2). At the height of her moral debasement, she is a prostitute, whose sons are doomed to be punished for her sins: “How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers” (Isaiah 1: 21); while on the other hand, she is the desired Shulamit, the dark-skinned daughter of Jerusalem, from the Song of Songs; a beloved wife whose husband, God, is to relive and dwell within her, and revive her with Jeremiah’s prophecies of consolation.

Dadoune’s Sion assumes a light woolen dress, coughing, her naked back attesting to rupture and illness. In other scenes she fills the screen with her femininity, lying with legs parted and bleeding in a wheelbarrow; a biblical shepherd in wretched Oriental gown; a bird-woman aspiring to hover above the Valley of Hinnom in Jerusalem; and a prisoner captive in demonic fetters of temptation. An entire series of costumes, each with different make-up and material emphasis, generate different relationships between the figure and the environment in which it is photographed. At the beginning of the film Sion is seen leaning in the rocky landscape covered in a coat of gray steel wool, symbolizing the gap between the faded splendor that has dissolved and a material reality of destitution and poverty. The figure brings together polarities of nobility and baseness, female softness and desert rigidity, regal majesty and mental fatigue, which also recur in her image as a beautiful bride trapped in the tangle of her wedding dress made of white tulle. One minute Sion is a Gorgon-Medusa whose black hair is disheveled about her distorted face, the next minute she assumes the evil face of Lilith in the kingdom of *Sitra Achra* (the other side).

Dadoune thus echoes Jewish mythical symbols and occasions, corresponding with Jewish demonology where the forces of evil repeatedly fight against the sparks

of illumination and sanctity. The outcome of Sion's demonic mating is an abortive rag doll, possibly a distant echo of the story about the lost infant, a symbol of the destruction of the Temple, the dynasty, and the covenant. The figure of the "First Eve," Lilith,²⁵ is incarnated in the "gluttonous" Sion, and subsequently in the deserted mother, the black widow, and the proud queen in the halls of the Louvre, whose kingdom was lost. Dadoune folds and entwines one form in another, heaping the pain of history on Sion's shoulders, stretching arms to a Jewish and universal iconography: the feeble Sion, as perceived by Zionism, reflects exile as a lonely, humiliated old woman; juxtaposed by Sion, galloping in a sickle cart in a deserted industrial space, echoing the roots struck by the new Zionist ethos. Dadoune's Sion has taken the man's place in representations of the nation, and she assumes a Janus face as the diasporal Sion and as the courageous pioneering Sion conquering the desert, whose booty – decapitated animal heads – recalls Judith holding the severed head of Holofernes. The symbol of Jewish female heroism reverberates from the days of the First Temple to the female soldier and leader of our time.

Sion, who bursts into the temple of the ancient East in the Parisian Louvre decisively hoisting a black flag of rebellion, recalls Marianne, Delacroix's personification of Liberty – but she is also a woman in a black mourning robe, collapsing on the floor in the puddle of the black cloth, tired of exile. A whirlpool of raging, stormy black silk fills the space of the Louvre in Paris toward the end of the film. Sion's penetrating black figure is infused with abstract magical force, and she activates the silent space, casting a spell thereon. The moral strength she demonstrates vis-à-vis the glorious beauty of the Louvre, standing for the infinite power of the West, within which she is presented in all her aesthetic wretchedness, insult and sorrow, is a certain "*tikkun*" (mending), according to Dadoune, in the relationships between East and West. In the intersection between Orient and Occident, beauty and ugliness, neo-classicist wealth and visual leanness, imaginary and real Orientalism wrestle one another, generating a rare moment where the low-spirited, sorrowful Sion sheds off her fetters under the protective wings of the West, and is crowned as an ornate queen in haute couture Christian Lacroix dress, a queen whose hour of redemption was chanted

by Shlomo Alkabetz in a love poem for Jerusalem:²⁶

Shrine of the king, the royal city.
Rise up from your ruins,
Too long have you dwelled in the valley of tears.
To you He will act mercifully with compassion.

Arise and shake off the dust.
Dress yourself with your clothes of splendor, My people,
With the help of the son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite king.
Come near to my soul, redeem it!

Awake, awake!
For your light has come, Arise, my light.
Wake, wake – sing out your song.
The glory of God upon you is displayed.

Be not ashamed, be not distressed.
Why are you bowed, and why do you yearn?
In you shall the poor children of my people be comforted.
The city upon its ashes will be rebuilt.

Jerusalem awakening from its destruction assumes a bride's face as she welcomes her beloved. The desperate facial expressions of Ronit Elkabetz as the robbed Sion, exposing her distress and shame in the glorious Louvre hall; the transition into an empowering interior space mediated by prayer; Dadoune's momentary freakish appearance as a redeeming angel or as the harem's eunuch; and an entire repertoire of bodily gestures and objects (a shiny mirror, brooches, an elegant sash) – all these transform the Louvre into an Ali Baba cave or possibly an ancient shrine, introducing questions about the relationships between ruler and ruled in the post-colonial era, lending the film a current political vein. Sion marches slowly in the Louvre, in search of her culture, passing by a myriad of cultural treasures torn from the ground of the ancient East and taken into the

Western museum; empathically lingering before *The Intervention of the Sabine Women* in Jacques-Louis David's 1799 painting exhibited in the 18th-Century hall, recalling her own torture and rape, and leaving the hall upright.

What is the code to reading Dadoune's entire oeuvre, including *Sion* – the culmination of the trilogy discussed here, which offers keys and insights to reading the exhibition route as a whole? His work goes beyond customary definitions and cinematic narrative.²⁷ Resiliently winding between several styles and languages, it cannot be fused under a single definition. It contains the melodrama of silent movies, channeled into the iconic figure of actress Ronit Elkabetz: Sion-Elkabetz as a cinematic diva and as a state of mind, is animated in the pure visual language of silent cinema,²⁸ in a language that speaks from the cavities of memory, from within the body, in theatrical gestures of radical emotions and self-conscious pathos, that operates directly on the viewer's gut. Moreover, the film contains the spirit of camp²⁹ in Elkabetz's manners and movements which may be read ambiguously: as hysterical, meaningless amok gestures, but also as a physical code drawn from the tradition of Mediterranean lamentation and mourning, which takes the work to another level of interpretation. This shift is supported by the numerous rites and rituals running on the film strip, which also contain camp characteristics – “a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders.”³⁰ The heavy make-up on Elkabetz's face, the images of the pregnant belly swelling as if by a pump and its blue-and-white marking; the rag fetus, the red paper heart – all these contain something wild and self-conscious.

At the same time, *Sion* cannot be viewed without an attempt to subject the storming physical movement to a dramatic, restrained and moderating process, manifested in the static, still, sublime background: the monochromatic landscapes of the desert, standing monumental and empty as eternal backdrop vis-à-vis the frenzied broken plot and the figure's mechanized, restless action. The same applies to the immortal Mesopotamian sculpture in the tranquil Near East hall in the Louvre, standing in all its majesty against the figure's agitated historical journey and its oscillation between threshold situations of madness, in her struggle to survive the *dibbuk* and the evil on the way to royalty and redemption.

Sion may be read (beyond contextual veils), also as visionary literature

evolving – as an extension of grand traditions from the pantheon of epic and Eastern poetry – in broken sights, parts of speech, oaths and prayers, that deviate from the prevalent language. Dadoune skirts speech, shattering the work's hermetic reading in order to articulate through and within it a world all his own, both intellectual and popular. Any attempt to erect foundations for the work's construction and to generate a cohesive analogy is doomed to collapse. *Sion* is a type of revelation, a borderline situation which cannot be delimited. Each moment is autonomous and unique; it precedes neither the next moment, nor any other moment. *Sion* is the first revelation of language, the body's language. In the film, which overflows with symbolical baggage, more is hidden than revealed. The silences are replete, leaving *Sion* with all its glory in the dark, as an incomprehensible, mysterious piece. This is also where its power lies. Gershom Scholem's treatise about the language of lamentation befits Dadoune's philosophical-cinematic process:

It exposes nothing, for there is no content to the essence revealed in it (and therefore one may say, in the same breath, that it exposes everything), and it silences nothing, for its entire existence relies on the revolt of silence. It is not symbolical, but only refers to the symbol; it is not concrete, but on the contrary – it neutralizes the object. ... Lamentation is the phase where language tragically carries its death, for henceforth it no longer expresses anything, nothing positive, but only the literal boundary. Since, as aforesaid, all languages transpire in two areas – the exposed, expressible area and that of the symbolized and silenced – every language takes part in the lamentation passing from one area to the other. ... Language destroys itself, and therefore the language of lamentation is the language of liquidation. ... Lamentation is the manifestation of that which is most profoundly inexpressible, the language of silence. It is an infinite language, yet it bears the infinite nature of destruction, which is, in some respects, the finite power of that which is extinguished, which never reaches the finite. ... In human languages, it is hard to find a word that is more silent and weeping than the Hebrew expression *Eicha* ('how could it be') with which the lamentations for the dead begin – the infinite violence by which

each word negates itself and is re-immersed in the infinity of silence. ... The lament is to poetry what death is to life. ... The lamentation song touches upon the mythological order. Myth seeks an outlet to an inaccessible world where one may or may not be – a world which, from time immemorial, no one has reached by departing from another. In this world, the mythological magic (which may have originally been linked to it) dissolves, shattering on the unprecedented linguistic phenomenon of the border. The structure of the lament destroys all possibility of accentuating the spell inherent in it, converting it into magic.³¹

- ¹ Fernando Pessoa, “Passos da Cruz, XIII” in *Poesias de Fernando Pessoa* (Lisbon: Atica, 1944), pp. 59-60. The excerpt was translated by Richard Zenith.
- ² It should be noted that the arrangement of Dadoune’s work in a trilogy is loose and changeable, and fits into various arrays as theme and variations; see, for example, the alternative trilogy introduced in Ruth Malul Zadka’s essay in this book.
- ³ In his work, Ch.N. Bialik promoted a lyrical system based on “foundational sights” (*mar’ot shtiya*), namely – strata of primary scenes. The word “sights” originates in the reservoir of perceived experiences; the Hebrew term *shtiya* (foundational) is tied with the more modern term *tashit* (an infrastructure or a formative element). Bialik situated the “foundational” sights at the core of anything a man is bound to see and experience in his adult life.
- ⁴ The first films to address the relationship between the “first Israel” and “second Israel” were created in the 1960s by Israeli directors such as Menahem Golan, Ephraim Kishon, and Boaz Davidson. In films such as *Salach Shabati* (Ephraim Kishon, 1964), figures of both Ashkenazi and Mizrahi origin are described grotesquely to form a social satire about the class-ethnicity relationship in nascent Israel. *Fortuna* (Menahem Golan, 1966) unfolds the stereotypes of the Mizrahi Jew in the melodrama genre, and “second Israel” is presented as a society typified by obsolete values, narrow-mindedness, and superstition. The young generation of North African and Asian origin is depicted as striving to bridge the ethnic and educational gaps and the social backwardness, at times at the cost of “Ashkenazation” and loss of identity. Even contemporary films, such as *Aviva My Love* (Shemi Zarhin, 2006) and *The Band’s Visit* (Eran Kolirin, 2007), discuss the periphery, and the Mizrahi figures in them endeavor to break down the wall of geographical and cultural sequestration.
- ⁵ For an elaboration on the scripting manner, see Fabrice Flahutez’s and Ruth Malul Zadka’s essays in this

book.

- ⁶ Synesthesia in literature fuses different sensory perceptions into a sensorial-poetical unity to generate an original combination of meanings and a quality that cannot be logically grasped.
- ⁷ The image of the ram’s horn, for example, oscillates in Dadoune’s work between the Western symbol of demonism and the biblical image of the Sacrifice lamb, which attests to the depth of faith and the subsequent divine award: culture and flourishing. In Dadoune’s work this image may be read in terms of *tikkun* (Kabbalistic mending of the world) and atonement.
- ⁸ The ethical treatise *Mesillat Yesharim* (“Path of the Just,” 1740), by the RaMCHaL (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), systematically constructed as a process of ascending the ladder of righteousness and piety, notes the trait of Cleanliness (being completely clean of bad traits and of sins, amongst those who abstain from financial, social and sexual engagements) as a level of righteousness.
- ⁹ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985).
- ¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, “Body, Meat, and Spirit: Becoming-Animal,” *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 21.
- ¹¹ Ruth Netzer, *The Quest for the Self: Alchemy of the Soul: Symbols and Mythology* (Tel Aviv: Modan, 2004), p. 289 [Hebrew].
- ¹² Deleuze, “Body, Meat, and Spirit” (n. 10), p. 24.
- ¹³ *Maqamat* (plural of *maqam*) are the modal structures underlying Mizrahi and Arabic music; interrelated musical scales (usually comprising eight notes). The Arabic word *maqam* also refers to a geographical place and a psychic location, indicating an identity-related affinity.
- ¹⁴ The film *Chanti* opts for the documentary-reportage genre to emphasize the directness and immediacy of its making. Dadoune neutralizes the distinction between the raw materials and act of filming in situ, and the processed end result, exposing the viewer to what usually remains hidden: the director’s instructions and the technical means used in filmmaking.
- ¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), pp. 139, 151-152.
- ¹⁶ See Michael Gluzman, *The Zionist Body: Nationality, Gender and Sexuality in Modern Hebrew Literature* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2007) [Hebrew]. Gluzman proposes to read the major tradition in Hebrew literature as “a discourse that reshapes the Jewish body and Jewish masculinity”; his book engenders historiography, introducing the will to shape the male Jewish body and masculinity as an organizing principle of Hebrew literature. Other scholars have also explored the cultural-physical

characteristics of the New Jew, partly based on the image of the Mizrahi man. The ideal of the New Jew is no longer a fair-skinned *yeshiva* boy who perseveres in his studies, but rather a robust youth ready to fight. See also: Michael Gluzman, "Longing for Heterosexuality: Zionism and Sexuality in Herzl's *Altneuland*," *Theory and Criticism* 11 (Winter 1997), pp. 145-162 [Hebrew]; Raz Yosef, "Ethnicity and Sexual Politics: The Invention of Mizrahi Masculinity in Israeli Cinema," *Theory and Criticism* 25 (Fall 2004), pp. 31-62 [Hebrew].

¹⁷ Raz Yosef, *Beyond Flesh: Queer Masculinities and Nationalism in Israeli Cinema* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. 1.

¹⁸ In this Dadoune is close to Israeli filmmaker Amos Gutman whose films avoided conventional, ideal representations of sex, both homosexual and heterosexual. Sexuality in his oeuvre is identified with power and control, violence and death. The power relations are enacted in sex via rituals of submission and mastery, where men challenge and seduce one another, fight and touch each other, in a game of dependence and subordination. Gutman, who passed away from AIDS in 1993, does not offer catharsis in the form of redemption. In his films *Makom Batuah* ("A Safe Place," 1977), *Nagu'a* ("Drifting," 1979), *Bar 51* (1986), and *Hesed Mufla* ("Amazing Grace," 1992) he acutely criticized the politics of the normalization of sexuality. See: Raz Yosef, "The Politics of Normality: Sex and Nation in Gay Israeli Cinema," *Theory and Criticism* 30 (Summer 2007), pp. 159-188 [Hebrew].

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 166-277.

²⁰ Daniel Boyarin identifies manifestations of this anxiety in the Babylonian Talmud, in the chapters presenting "a learned discussion of traditions comparing the size of the penis of our hero with that of others of the Holy Rabbis." The Talmudic Jewish body, according to Boyarin's analysis, is haunted by terror and anxiety, and the text addressing the male body reflects great anxiety over reproduction in the culture of our Sages. See Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), p. 197.

²¹ In *Universes*, Dadoune reads out a written text, a horror story about an infant snatched from his mother, an expression of childhood memories blended with feelings of guilt and anxiety. In a concert held in Paris in 2004, Dadoune stood on stage and read thoughts from his "Book of Fears." The accentuation of the book and the written word recurs in the concluding scene of *Sion*, which ends with a silent prayer and the lips touching the pages of the Bible scroll as an expression of historical and political *tikkun* and redemption.

²² Ella Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006), p. 76.

²³ For a discussion of the allegory of Zion in Judaism as a formal key to the film *Sion*, see Ktzia Alon's essay in this book.

²⁴ See Mor Altshuler, *The Messianic Secret of Hasidism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 86-91. The tenth *sefira* in the Kabbalistic Tree is called *Malchut* (Kingship) or *Shekhinah*, *Kneset Israel*, and *Zion*. Representing the corporeal dimension, it is shaped as a receptacle. The *Zohar* notes that its union with the *sefira Yesod* (Foundation) – the propagating male force – is the basis of life and the idea of sacred sexual coupling. The relationship of God and his *Shekhinah* are described in the Scriptures as familial relations in a saga beginning with marriage, continuing with the infidelity of Jerusalem, and culminating with the destruction of the Temple and exile of the offspring. In Kabbalistic literature the image of Jerusalem as "Heaven's gate" was given an explicit sexual air; in the *Zohar*, this coinage is used to denote the private areas of the *Shekhinah*, the divine bride, and her womb is dubbed "Zion" and "Jerusalem." The Kabbalah transformed prayer under Heaven's gate into "arousal below" (*etaaruta de letata*, אַתְעוּרָתָא דְלִתָּתָא) – which awakens the passion of coupling in the upper worlds – "arousal above" (*etaaruta de le'aila*, אַתְעוּרָתָא דְלַעֲיָלָא). See Altshuler, *ibid.*, pp. 152-56.

²⁵ Lilith is described as a succubus who seduces men, impregnated by their masturbatory emissions, producing demon children. In the *Zohar* she appears as Lilith the prostitute, the black Lilith. In the "Alpha-Beta d'ben Sirah," Lilith is identified as a "First Eve," who was created with Adam, yet was banished due to her insistence on sexual parity, demanding to "be on top." This Lilith is attributed with the qualities of a demon that kills babies and endangers innocent women when giving birth. See: Gershom Scholem, *Devils, Demons and Souls: Essays on Demonology*, ed. Esther Liebes (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2004), pp. 60-64 [Hebrew]; see also: Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* (n. 21), pp. 95-96, 118.

²⁶ Mark Frydenberg, *Siddur Haverim Kol Yisrael* (Sabbath evening prayer), p. 11. Thanks and appreciation to Mor Altshuler for her illuminating comments regarding descriptions of Zion as a multi-faceted woman in the Jewish source texts and as a reflection of the nation's life.

²⁷ One may, indeed, spin a thin plot line between the arid Eretz-Israeli desert landscapes and the Louvre Museum, and between "Sion" the bride and mother and her embodiment as a sorrowful widow.

²⁸ In the absence of sound, body language and facial expressions were a major form of expression in the silent movie.

²⁹ My profound thanks to Ariel Schweitzer for an enlightening discussion of the affinity between Dadoune's work and the tradition of silent movie and camp.

³⁰ Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 57.

³¹ Gershom Scholem, *Sur Jonas, la lamentation et le Judaïsme*, trans. Marc de Launay (Paris: Bayard, 2007). The excerpt was freely translated from Avner Lahav's Hebrew translation (2007).