



Contemporary Art Collectives in Israel

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In the last two decades, there has been a wide emergence of art collectives in Israel. They often work in mixed cities, such as Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, which are inhabited by Israeli-Jews from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as Israeli-Palestinians, migrant workers and asylum-seekers. The appearance of these art collectives, alongside new forms of urban and socially engaged art, are part of an interesting turning point both in the way art is made and perceived in Israel, and both in the way citizens respond to social and political matters. Following the current social and political developments in Israel, with emphasis on the 2011 Israeli protests for social justice, I will examine the ways art collectives respond to issues such as the high cost of living, inequality, and socio-economic divisions. Some of the collectives' activities include organising gardening workshops, offering temporary solutions to social problems, such as a free public kitchen and libraries, and organising alternative tours in neighbourhoods. Although the researched collectives often share similar aesthetics and methods, there can be found essential differences between them. I will, therefore, ask questions regarding the type of spaces that are created by these art collectives, the communities that are established there, and the relation of the collectives with official authorities.

During the presentation, I will highlight several key notions, in which to explain the collectives' potential of creating spaces for dialogue, communal and political activities. One of them is Homi Bhabha's idea of "third space" and the way it is adopted within Israeli context. "Third space" is often located in the geographic and social periphery and maintains dialectic relations with the dominant political, social, and economic hegemony. It holds the potential of challenging hegemony and suggests new meanings on culture, politics, and identity (Tzfadia and Yacobi, 2011). Another set of conceptual tools that I will be using come from the Jewish experience, mostly notions of 'nomadism', 'land', and 'home'. These terms have a specific set of meanings linked to the understanding that biblical and historical narrative continue to play a central role in the construction of national identity, even amongst younger generations (Newman, 2004). Connected to insights from political scientists and sociologists concerning liquidity and activist tactics, the researched art collectives will be a lens in which to suggest alternative understandings of identity, space, and community.



צילום: שי הלוי

Image 1. Empty House, Empty House, 2011 © Photograph by Shay Halevi



Image 2. Meir Tati, Help, 2010 (part of public art projects by in Musrara neighbourhood) © Muslala collective



Image 3. Onya collective, The Ramp, 2014 © Onya collective

References:

Newman, David, 2004. "From National to Post-National Territorial Identities in Israel-Palestine," in Adriana Kemp, David Newman, Uri Ram and Oren Yiftachel (eds.), *Israelis in Conflict: Hegemonies, Identities and Challenges*, Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, pp 21-46.

Tzfadia, Erez and Haim Yacobi, 2011. *Rethinking Israeli Space: Periphery and Identity*, London and New York: Routledge.