

Restating the Scene of Foundation: Establishing Israeli Statehood and Culture in *National Collection* by Public Movement

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National Collection was a participatory tour performance presented at Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 2015 by Public Movement, a group that investigates public choreographies and forms of social order. This article discusses the work's examination of the interdependency between the state and its cultural institutions, both as a paradigmatic form and as historical narrative. By following the different stages of the performance score – the group's arrival at the museum's original building where Israel's 1948 Declaration of Independence ceremony took place, a march in public space to the current museum and the tour held inside – the article explores the ways in which *National Collection* 'restates' the aesthetic political scene of foundation and the museum's central role. Along with the embodiment of institutional authority, the performance formulates a significant critical dimension, conveying doubt and a constant sense of crisis embedded in establishing a state and prominent by displaying or reforming museum order.

National Collection, a unique exhibition presented by the performing research body Public Movement at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, questions the interrelations between national and cultural identity. Prepared over more than two years by Dana Yahalomi with the group's members and curated by Ruti Direktor, it was the first durational performance to take place at the museum, and the first to be defined as an exhibition.¹ The performance began on 27 October 2015, at the site of the original Tel Aviv Museum, where Israel's 1948 Declaration of Independence ceremony took place in what is now known as the Hall of Independence, and was followed by a one-time 'march' through public space to the museum's present location. There, *National Collection* took the form of a participatory group tour, an itinerant performance of forty-five minutes through the museum, for groups of about twenty-five ticket holders. Several such tours took place every day for six weeks, guided by six performers dressed (as in most of the group's works) in a generic white uniform.

The focal point of this multifaceted and theatricalized tour was a unique formulation of the foundation of the state of Israel, including a reconstructed replica of the Hall of Independence. However, *National Collection* left the context of Israel's Declaration of Independence unrepresented in detail, instead presenting 'the scene of foundation' (as I term it) and its setting as emblematic. This scene evokes history and politics (whose details are open to interpretation), but at the same time addresses the performative

nature of the founding of nation states, and the essential link of this mechanism to cultural institutionalization.

Representing a local event as a paradigmatic mode of action is congruent with the rationale of Public Movement (PM) and its previous works. Founded in 2006 by Omer Krieger and Dana Yahalomi, who remains its leader, the group has created about forty site-oriented performances. Its founders define the group as a research body that creates public choreographies, investigating forms of social order as well as overt and covert rituals.² According to Yahalomi, PM's patterns of behaviour are in fact 'pre-enactments'; that is, not re-enactments of historical and actual acts, but rather models or templates for future action.³ The group's works present tension between patterns of order and regulation on the one hand, and a controlled staging of an extreme disruption, crisis or accident on the other (for instance, an accident involving performers and a car, a recurrent motif).⁴ Military and state ceremonial movement is often emphasized, but the works also engage in civic issues and behaviours of resistance, such as demonstration patterns.⁵ Another typical form is the adaptation of discursive models (such as debates, campaigns or one-on-one talks) regarding the relation or conflict between cultural identity and political conditions.

In this article, I provide a detailed analysis of the phases of *National Collection*, elaborating how the work activated the scene of Israeli foundation and its fundamental aspiration to authoritativeness, while emphasizing the work's deeply ambivalent attitude towards the relationships between national identity and cultural establishment. In order to present the concrete and conceptual context for this highly nuanced and complex work, I shall first establish some of the historical details of the Declaration of Israeli Independence, and reflect on what performance analysis can contribute to an understanding of its meanings and enduringly open-ended legacy.

The scene of foundation

At 4 p.m. on an autumn day in 2015, members of PM, dressed in white uniforms, arrived at 16 Rothschild Boulevard – the building that served as the Tel Aviv Museum of Art from 1932 until 1971, and is now known as the House of Independence in recognition of its role as the venue for the Declaration of Israeli Independence.⁶ They brought with them a reproduction of one of the paintings that hung in Independence Hall at the declaration ceremony – *Holstein Switzerland* (1908), a landscape by German Jewish impressionist artist Lesser Ury. A reproduction of this painting already hangs permanently at the Independence Hall, and the original is periodically exhibited at the current Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

The plan of PM's performance exhibition, *National Collection*, called for an exchange of the Ury reproduction hanging at the Independence Hall for the one that the performers had brought with them. They would then march with the hall's 'original' to the new museum, indicating a conceptual hybridization between the artistic museum and the national one. However, despite careful preparation, the exchange was blocked by the manager of the educational department of the House of Independence, who asserted that the act had not been coordinated with the proper authorities.⁷ Consequently, the

route of exchange – from the rear wall of the hall to the door leading to the boulevard – was followed by two performers without actually replacing one copy with another. The reproduction they brought with them became the one that was carried at the head of the procession. The very arrival at the national site was a gesture that condensed the narrative of foundation, as well as being the foundational act of *National Collection* itself. It is also a reflexive reference to the group's first organized action in 2007, when they laid a wreath of white flowers on the steps leading to the House of Independence.

Like some of PM's other actions, this phase of the work was not created for a designated audience, except for two photographers from the art museum, and myself, having been informed about the event by Yahalomi. When I arrived at the site at 3:30 p.m. that day in dark attire, the usual activity was under way: a guide was describing the historical ceremony to a group of tourists. On the floor lay a laminated document, an enlarged copy of the personal, typewritten invitation issued to the members of the People's Council and other invitees:

Dear Sir,

We are honored to hereby send you an invitation

To the Session of the Declaration of Independence

Which will take place on Friday, 14.5.1948, at 4 p.m. in the hall of the museum.

We ask that you keep confidential the contents of the invitation and the location and time of the assembly of the Council.

Invitees are requested to arrive at the hall at 3:30 p.m.

Sincerely,

The Secretariat

Personal invitation/Attire: Formal dark clothes

Israel's Declaration of Independence, on 14 May 1948, was a short and hasty ceremony organized at a time of emergency. It took place on the final day of the Mandate of Palestine, six months after the UN General Assembly had voted to support a plan to partition Palestine into an Arab state, a Jewish state and an internationalized Jerusalem. The Zionist move to declare statehood was proposed by David Ben-Gurion, head of the largest political party and of the People's Administration – the thirteen-member cabinet that had, from April 1948, been managing the country's Jewish population and what is known in Israel as the War of Independence. Following the declaration, this body, elected from among the members of the People's Council, a larger parliamentary body (thirty-seven members), became the provisional government, with Ben-Gurion as provisional prime minister and minister of defense. Upon the departure of the British forces, five regular armies of the Arab League's member states – Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq – joined the war as expected.

At a time of war, the first museum's first-floor gallery (a semi-basement with thick walls) was deemed safe enough for the modest ceremony, and offered institutional formality. The museum was the initiative of the city's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff, in whose private residence (one of the first houses in Tel Aviv) it was first established while

he still resided there. The single-storey building was expanded to three and the house was renovated again in 1936 (in the international style, by architect Carl Rubin), the year of Dizengoff's death. It was chosen for the declaration ceremony after considering several institutional locations, including Habima Theatre (culturally established as the national theatre, although recognized as such only in 1958).

At 4 p.m. Ben-Gurion stood on a stage at the centre of a long table in the gallery. On either side of him on the stage and at floor level sat most of the signatories, representatives of numerous parties of the People's Council who were united for a moment around the agreement to realize the declaration. Over three hundred invitees (notables, public figures, foreign representatives, journalists) sat in the crowded hall. Their role (which included spontaneous applause) was amplified by the masses of people gathered outside the museum, as well as by a live broadcast: the first transmission on the new Kol Yisrael (Voice of Israel) radio station. Ben-Gurion opened the half-hour session with a knock of the gavel, and read aloud the final, hastily written draft of the Declaration of Independence. Immediately after the reading, the Blessing of Praise (*Shehecheyanu*, thanking God for reaching a unique moment) was recited by Rabbi Yehuda Fishman-Maimon (a signatory himself). Then Ben-Gurion invited the members of the erstwhile People's Council, now the Provisional State Council, to sign the declaration. Twenty-nine of the thirty-seven members were present (only two of them women) and signed the declaration during the ceremony. The rest, mostly absent due to the state of war and the siege of Jerusalem, signed it retroactively. Ben-Gurion closed the ceremony by announcing, 'The State of Israel is founded, this meeting is concluded'. The event ended with the anthem of the Zionist movement, informally recognized as the national anthem, though officially established as the state's national anthem only by retroactive law in 2004.⁸

The scene was designed in about twenty-four hours with objects culled from a familiar past, rearranged in the Zionist present, and which gave form to the nationalist iconography of the future. Prepared by the graphic artist Otte Wallisch, it was dominated by the light blue of the cloth covering the table and the pleated curtains behind it.⁹ Over Ben-Gurion's chair hung a large photographic portrait of Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), known as the 'visionary of the Jewish state', establishing a visual affinity that invested the former's foresight and leadership with the latter's manifestation of authority. It was flanked by two elongated Zionist movement white-and-blue banners (chosen as the state flag a few months after the ceremony).

Paintings from the museum's collection were displayed on the walls, probably curated by Wallisch himself. Although the paintings belong to the background of the scene, one may regard them in these circumstances, as Ruti Direktor observes, as a 'first Israeli exhibition', in the sense of a first exhibition of art in the independent sovereign state of Israel.¹⁰ The paintings befitted Dizengoff's vision implemented by the first director of the museum, Dr Karl Schwarz, and featured mainly works by Jewish artists from the eighteenth century onwards. The museum director since mid-1947, Dr Haim Gamzu (also an art and theatre critic), had placed great emphasis on contemporary art produced by local Jewish artists in Mandatory Palestine. However, although Gamzu probably assisted in the quick curation, this strand found no expression in the conservative ethnocentricity

of the 'first exhibition', which displayed works mainly by Jewish European modernist artists such as Marc Chagall, Jozef Israëls, Mané Katz and Max Libermann.

In a critical time of interregnum, a period of change in civil order, the tangible performativity of the foundational scene essentially strives to establish the authority to found. The issue of foundational authority is most relevantly formulated by Jacques Derrida's discussion of declarations of independence in a lecture he gave in 1976 at Charlottesville to mark the American bicentennial. In his words, the signing of a declaration is a *coup de force* that becomes a 'coup of writing' – that is, taking the right to sign in the name of the people.¹¹ However, this crucial moment is caught up in a cyclical logic which Derrida dubs 'fabulous retroactivity': those who sign validate the declaration with their signature in order to gain a signing identity; the act they perform turns them into those who have the right to perform it.¹² It is unclear, Derrida claims, using J. L. Austin's speech-act terminology, whether writing one's signature is a constative – that is, drawing its power from what has already happened – or a performative act, which creates a new reality.¹³ Between these two options lies an ontological and political void or blank. Derrida's assertion finds symbolic expression in the fact that the Israeli declaration was put to blank parchment – to which an ordinary piece of paper with the typewritten declaration was attached – and the declaration text was only added later, with 'fabulous retroactivity'.

The way out of the void – covering up a self-defeating logic – is to link invented reality and identity, which Derrida calls 'the simulacrum of the instant', with the instances that exist 'behind the scenes'.¹⁴ Derrida emphasizes the conjunction of a reliance on the law, the extension of authority on behalf of 'the good people', and the dependence on external *logos*, which is expressed theologically by 'appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World' (in the final paragraph of the American declaration). Following this inclusive attitude, it is patently clear that the declaration of independence of the nation state is an act of dependence: on historical circumstances, political interests, international recognition, and a performative mechanism of validation.

Derrida's emphasis on theological justification of authority is expressed, in the Israeli text of the declaration, by 'placing our trust in the rock of Israel', i.e. 'the Protector of Israel' (*Zur Israel*, in Hebrew), while Jewish identity, integrated with the national one, is frequently mentioned.¹⁵ In historical terms, the foundational scene draws into the present the traumas of the past in order to construct a future at a critical moment. It is found, above all, in the prominent mention of the Holocaust in the declaration text, concluding that the Jewish community 'gained the right to be reckoned among the peoples who founded the United Nations'.¹⁶

At times of actual crisis sovereignty is indeed, as Carl Schmitt notes, the power to decide on the instauration of a state of emergency or exception.¹⁷ However, it should be noted that the sense of emergency was also manifested in disruptions and in the trivia related to the impromptu nature of the 1948 ceremony, emphasizing the theatricality of its production and temporariness. Like other details based on partial documentation, memoirs and oral accounts, these kinds of narrative also found their way to the scene's mythology – such as the loan of Herzl's picture and the flags from other institutions, covering the stage with a carpet lent by a shop, café chairs (supplied by a company, though

by common story they were borrowed from nearby cafés), and power cuts that disrupted the radio transmission. A perplexing caesura of silence occurred at the beginning of the ceremony, when the orchestra (seated in the mezzanine) did not get its cue to play the anthem. People started to sing the anthem, and the orchestra played it retroactively at the end of the event.¹⁸

In addition, the ceremonial scene does not consist of an ultimate, one-time realization of political imagination. The foundational moment justifies itself by assuming a shape that reiterates previous creational acts, while forming the setting and the score for optional simulative reiterations in the future. The declaration was restaged at the original hall to mark the state's first decade in 1958, aiming to revive the public sentiment of involvement that had preceded the Declaration of Independence, and at the same time formed to deliver the retroactive success of its sovereign outcomes.¹⁹ Wallisch once again designed the reconstructed setting, with Ben-Gurion's personal involvement and with many of the original participants. The painting exhibition retained its Jewish emphasis, but some of the originals were replaced by others. Ben-Gurion delivered a speech, but the role of reading the declaration out loud was given to the actress Hanna Rovina of the Habima National Theatre. Another famous Habima actor, Aharon Meskin, recited the Yizkor prayer (a memorial prayer appealing to God to remember the deceased). The theatrical event encompassed the public space – including flags hung in the boulevard and adjacent streets, transmitting the re-enacted ceremony outside by loudspeakers and even having the police band play outside by the entrance.²⁰

In 1978, on Israel's thirtieth anniversary, the hall was restored for another small-scale re-enacted ceremony (in the presence of the Prime Minister Menachem Begin), including a symbolic act of signing the declaration. The 1978 reconstruction became a permanent setting inaugurated in 1982, and the original painting exhibition – belonging to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art collection – was replaced by reproductions printed on paper. The process of reconstruction continues with recent efforts including the House of Independence Law legislated in 2009, regulating the status of this national asset. Conducted by the Tel-Aviv Municipality and the Eretz-Israel Museum, the Declaration Hall was renovated again in 2011–12. The chain of reconstruction continues with comprehensive urban planning of preservation that will enhance the accuracy of the hall, as well as making the site an updated museum.²¹

PM's performative arrival at this arena at the beginning of *National Collection* is a condensed *gestus* that cannot, therefore, be disconnected from the already 'sanctified', historicized and simulated charge of both scene and site. In some of the photos documenting the 1948 scene (usually in black and white), one can observe a painting hanging to the left of the stage: it is *Holstein Switzerland* by Lesser Ury, the original of the reproduction carried to the site by PM, which became a central component in *National Collection*. This marginal image becomes a metonym of the concept of national collection, which is not an official state collection archived and exhibited by Tel Aviv Museum of Art, but rather a procedure that comes into being, conceptually offered by PM to mark the moment of fusion between art and politics, state and museum. The

painting – a reproduced token of a reproduced national site – diverts the grand familiar iconography to an unplaceable landscape: a bent tree and sky.

On the march with a cultural treasure

Thesis 7 of Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History' draws a connection between triumphal processions that display looted 'cultural treasures' and a contemporary perspective on nationalist militarism. According to Benjamin, under such formal nationalist displays lies historical and latent crisis:

Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which current rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried in the procession. They are called 'cultural treasures' and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment.²²

Viewed with cautious detachment, PM's march with the reproduced 'spoils' among new and renovated cultural sites in Tel Aviv may attest to the toll taken by the founding of the liberal nation state.

Carrying the Ury reproduction they had brought with them, PM members left the House of Independence, and crossed the street, passing by a bronze statue of Dizengoff riding his horse. They marched in two lines (most of the time four on each side and another performer at the back) for about an hour, from Rothschild Boulevard to the current Tel Aviv Museum of Art on King Saul Boulevard, carrying the picture vertically before them. Along the route they repeatedly halted the progress of the march by reiterating a movement phrase whose composition included fragmentation and delays – standing to attention and at ease, and shifting the couple who hold the painting while raising the picture diagonally and sometimes horizontally. In this manner they created their own simulated version of the course of history, from the primordial to the contemporary, which includes caesuras and disruptions. This choreography did not imitate any trait of the scene of foundation, and yet delivered the sense of a moment that was a liminal suspension between times.

The route of the march with the 'cultural treasure' crossed the up-scale area of Rothschild Boulevard, passing by cultural centres such as Habima National Theatre and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, heading for the new museum, adjacent to the Cameri Theatre and the Israeli Opera. To use André Lepecki's terms, the march was a 'choreopolitical' demonstration of authority:²³ The idiosyncratic movements in uniform accentuated the ubiquitous presence of militarism, exercised by people who can be seen as young trained soldiers – a normal sign in Israel's urban life, where soldiers are visible everywhere to the point of becoming invisible to many, though not to all. In an area of comfortable urban life and established institutions, this kind of movement embodied the urban majoritarian character of this public space. However, the march can also be seen as an abstracted representation of power, since the group's uniforms have no specific identifying marks. Moreover, although it clearly diverged from the everyday flow, the small group of marchers became integrated into it without causing great disturbance.



FIG. 1 (Colour online) *National Collection*, on the march, at the Culture Square. Photograph by D. Ben-Shaul.

The performative interruptions revealed the city as an archive of memories and, at the same time, as a space of oblivion. The march neither circumvented any direct expression of Palestinian presence in the recent past, nor exposed the layers of previous buildings, routes and cultural functions beneath the neoliberally motivated urban renovations, such as the building of the former Eretz-Israeli Theatre (TAI) – now a bank – on Rothschild Boulevard. Yet the momentary reframing invited attention to forgotten marks along the route. Lepecki associates such a choreographic option with the notion of ‘still-act’ coined by anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis, describing it as the moments that interrupt the flow of the present related to the rule of capital.²⁴ Seen through the bodily and visual composition of the march, everyday-life moments could look like a tableau, emphasizing unique moments such as the bride and groom who happened to be photographed on the boulevard as the marchers were passing (while being photographed as well by the museum’s photographers). Another peculiarity arose when the march passed by Menashe Kadishman’s sculpture *Uprise*, so familiar in Tel Aviv’s public sphere, which sported a pink bikini as part of a breast cancer awareness-raising campaign.

At the Culture Square (designed by the sculptor Dani Karavan and habitually called Habima Square), the group crossed a large reflecting pool, walking in the water from one corner to its diagonal opposite – moving in a precise straight line and at the same time breaking the formal shape of the square. The picture (part of the choreographic tableau within the pool’s frame) was held flat over their heads, bringing to mind the carrying of a stretcher or a cross, while the whole composition was reflected in the vibrant water, thus imbuing the firm military march with a sense of instability and implicit (stylized and beautiful) danger.



FIG. 2 (Colour online) *National Collection*, on the march, at King Saul Boulevard. Photograph by D. Ben-Shaul.

The march was purposely delayed for a few seconds by halting and standing next to the current museum building, across the street from an army communications tower, a familiar icon of supervision and militarism at the heart of civilian urban life in Tel Aviv. For a moment, the marchers became part of this tableau of authority – just long enough for the image to become a ‘still-act’ associated with a potential crisis. The obvious local connotation, in this case, is of wars, never-ending since 1948. Although PM does not aim to take a stand, the ambivalence of being identified with power while connecting this position to a menace and vulnerability was somehow clarified by this straightforward composition of an intensified military symbol.

As the march neared the Museum, Benjamin’s much-quoted reflection on Paul Klee’s painting *Angelus Novus* (Thesis 9), where progress is figured as a storm driving the angel backwards into the future as the wreckage of the past piles up beneath its gaze, offered an increasingly relevant intertext for interpretation (although according to Yahalomi it was not a conscious inspiration). At the time, the museum was holding

an exhibition of materials from the Walter Benjamin archive, titled *Exilic Archives*, featuring, at the entrance to the exhibition near PM's replica of the hall, the original *Angelus Novus*. The affinity to the march resides both in the bodily postures of the angel (without forgetting it is also an iconicized picture) and in the concept of history as a constant crisis. The angel's movement from the past to the future may be seen as a choreographic code or prism through which the PM marchers carry a picture that is taken from the past, at a moment of a national vision, then involved in a process of piling up ruins and reconstructions, and heading towards the new. Nevertheless, the marchers' transitional walk faced forward, contrary to the movement of the angel.

It may also be associated with two earlier versions of Benjamin's 1933 text, 'Agesilaus Santander', in which the angel of history recursively arrives from the future and returns there voluntarily, pulling man towards it by staring at him. That is, the faces of angel and man are turned towards each other (a reversed Janus face), while the man's face is turned to the future. 'Agesilaus Santander' concludes with the words of the narrator/Benjamin: 'And so, scarcely had I seen you the first time than I returned with you to where I had come from'.²⁵ These words may be read almost as a literal choreographic description of the performers' return to the origin of foundation and being pulled (or leading recursively) towards the new.

The Ury reproduction was 'collected' from the Independence Hall, carried through the streets and delivered to the art collection to which, in fact, it already belongs. The march ended by crossing the entrance hall of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art towards the Independence Hall replica, walking backwards for part of the way, and hanging the picture on the wall of the replica hall. The picture eventually became the point of tangible contact between the political–national collection and the artistic one. Once the one-time march had taken place, the beginning of each of the dozens of indoor tours turned into a simulative practice – a reiteration of the original act of entering the museum.

Replicating the scene of foundation

At the beginning of each tour, a representative of PM, wearing a black skirt, blue blouse and white shoes – the colors appear on the group's logo and flag – offered a short explanation about the group and upcoming tour, next to a display of the group's material. Each participant was also given a red, yellow or green sticker and asked to attach it to his or her clothing – its function would be learned later on. Immediately thereafter six PM members in white uniforms appeared from the main entrance and crossed the lobby. They walked in a formal manner, reminiscent of military and state ceremonies, as they had in the march, leading the participants to upper and lower galleries, transition spaces and underground storerooms. Along the route, the cumulative bodily patterns practised by the performers and followed by the participants came to correlate with the circular and multi-layered 'archival' order of the museum.²⁶ The primordial force that created a reality thus became a collection of cultural assets and exhibits, and perhaps potential stock for a new foundational scene that might take place in the current museum, leading in turn to the establishment of a newer museum, and so on.



FIG. 3 (Colour online) *National Collection*, at the replicated Independence Hall, Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Photograph: D. Ben-Shaul.

In an upper gallery that exhibits part of the museum's permanent collection, the participants met the first exhibit attesting to the museum's status and cultural capital: the Ury reproduction that PM brought and 'planted' in one of the galleries among the priceless originals in the museum's collection. Two female performers walked up to the picture, stood in front of it, broke the formality of the movement by lightly kissing each other, and then removed the reproduction from the wall, leaving behind a blank space. The performers carried the forward-facing reproduction to a lower floor while the participants gradually grew accustomed to the circulating, vertical pattern of movement. Next to some stairs the performers turned to face the participants, and in this position (reminiscent of the *Angelus Novus* drifting backwards) they held the act of entering the gallery housing the Independence Hall replica briefly in suspension. Once in the gallery, they ceremoniously hung the reproduction painting on the wall to the left of the stage (as they had done at the end of the one-time march), where it remained for the remainder of the tour, in its 'natural place'. The route from the artistic collection to the national setting was completed (again) and reversed, after turning the latter into an art exhibit.

Unlike the other reconstructions made at the original site (in 1958 and 1978), the entire replicated hall in *National Collection* was dislocated. Consequently, part of its architecture was reconstructed as well, including the high windows that recalled the original site's semi-basement appearance. The setting bore great similarity to the documentation of the 1948 Declaration Hall, but was based mainly on the present reconstruction of the Independence Hall, acknowledging its status as a simulacrum composed of replacements (entailing inaccuracies), since most of the original items have been dismantled and lost. As in the 'official' reconstruction, the PM setting included copper plaques on the table indicating the seats of Ben-Gurion and the personages by

his side – the missing protagonists who had been merged with the political–theological iconography of the vacant scene. PM actively created its own tangible version of what Pierre Nora calls a ‘place of memory’ (*lieu de mémoire*) whose function is to halt time and to commemorate. More specifically, being part of a sequence of retroactive re-creations, it displayed what Nora identifies as the tendency to create a movement of objects within objects and memories of memories, *ad infinitum*.²⁷ On the walls of the replica hung an exhibition of thirteen paintings: the Ury, which was a reproduction of a reproduction, and about half of the originals from 1948, gathered from the art museum’s collection for the first time since the previous re-enactments, and serving as a genuine point of contact with the 1948 scene.

Once in the replica setting, however, PM’s performers simulated not the 1948 ceremony, nor the 1958 re-enactment, but another form of live performance – the national site’s instructive tour format. Trained actors delivered the narrative, using typical illustrations such as a short recording of Ben-Gurion reading the declaration, activating the gavel on the table (three knocks, as habitually performed by the national site’s guides), showing pictures (using a ring binder similar to the usual one), quoting the blessing, and reading Golda Meir’s autobiographical account of the ceremony. As I experienced in several variations at the national site, the guides work hard to render the historical event closely and vividly, encouraging the guided groups, who occupy the invitees’ chairs, to applaud after the recorded reading and rising to sing the anthem. In PM’s instructive ceremony the routines embedded within a performance at the art museum mainly exposed the methods as theatrical and pedagogical rather than evoking a dramatic belonging to the original moment.

Moreover, the sequence was dismantled by elements that challenged historical decorum. PM’s flags were placed at the entrance, featuring diagonal bands of blue, black and white. The highlight of the ceremony was the toast and raising glasses of wine with the participants, and the singing of the group’s anthem (composed especially for the event) with solemn pathos. The 1948 ceremony aspired to interweave ideological dogmas – to establish religious identity as national identity while anchoring this formation in the universal spirit of utopian equality known from the 1789 *Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen*. PM’s ceremonial version did not abolish these values but rather shifted the symbols of identity to the ‘Public Movement nation’, thus activating a method or a matrix of becoming a public of citizens, a gathered ‘collection’, which included the audience, of a new national collective.

PM’s repertoire in itself could be described as the cultural treasure that had been brought to the museum’s archive by making the foundational scene part of its material and symbolic capital. This appearance of congruence between the group, the state and the art establishment creates what Chantal Mouffe describes as ‘coming to terms with the constitutive nature of power’.²⁸ At the same time, the tour offers, in Mouffe’s terms, a constant stance of antagonism regarding first and foremost the doubled authoritative position of sovereignty and museal economy, an agonistic dimension whose practices convey ‘the democratic character of a society’ and ‘can only be given by the fact that no limited social actor can attribute to herself or himself the representation of the totality and claim to have the “mastery” of the foundation’. It is shown through the over-formal

demonstration of power, through the reductive nature of the simulacrum, as well as when the restrained acts are compounded by planned disruptions – of undercutting the division between interior and exterior, running through transitional areas, or turning marginal spaces into the focus of action. These moves do not deliver an explicit political stance but rather function as a method of displaying the destructive potential that resides in the ‘mastery of foundation’.²⁹

States of emergency

The agonistic dimension is rendered most directly through public manifestations of crisis, and no less the outcome of practising authority – destruction, the need for shelter, being refugees, emergency evacuation and ruins. This dimension is associated with the procedures of the museum and its collections, starting with an image included in the exhibition in the replicated hall, diverging from the Jewish ethnocentric line – *Ruins with Accessories*, by an unknown artist from the mid-eighteenth-century school of Giovanni Panini (1691–1765). According to oral accounts, this original was indeed included in the 1948 ‘exhibition’. The poetics of ruins – often connected to classical monuments and familiar cultural treasures – are not only a sign of physical destruction but can also be understood as a visual reflection on the power of time or history.

Unlike the image of ruins, which could easily go unnoticed, the latent crisis became an explicit articulation of destruction – and thus a turning point in the tour – when the participants were led away from the replicated Hall. Three performers marched towards a five-by-three-metre wall (made of fibreglass casting) that led away from the gallery. Their march was occasionally interrupted by punctuated movement and the recurring exclamation ‘And’, signalling the shift from one posture to another and formalizing the rhythm. The performer in the centre lay down and the other two kicked the wall, which toppled down into the hall as the kickers retreated. The centre performer rolled away, just seconds ahead of the falling wall. She was lifted horizontally by four other performers and carried out, again walking backwards, with the participants following. The falling wall reveals the setting as a temporary stage set – of history making, and of the *National Collection* piece (the replicated hall), which is also destined to be dismantled and to become ‘Ruins with Accessories’.

The order that permeates the museum is manifested not only in spatial division into galleries, as well as in discipline or in security, but also in collecting practices, such as selective and hierarchical modes of exhibition, preservation and safekeeping or storing and concealment, which, through the work, are tied to over-control and a sense of emergency. This came to the fore when the participants were led to the subterranean service area, where the performers stood guard at the door to a storage space, reciting a text about the mutual containment of the museum and the state. Once inside, participants found themselves enclosed by crates (as if collected or stored) and separated from each other. This incursion to the behind-the-scenes space made the participants party to the institution’s practices. At the same time, it marked a shift from festive collaboration in the foundation ceremony to a connotative bomb shelter, while subjecting the participants to a physical and symbolic state of control, associated with incarceration and restricted

movement. These practices continued when the participants were split up and led back up by different routes.

This subterranean staging took place in proximity to a separate action, *Debriefing Session II*, performed concurrently with the tour.³⁰ A PM agent gave an account to a single addressee (anyone who booked a place, and not necessarily a tour participant) about the group's research into Palestinian paintings before 1948, most of which disappeared after the war. It was held in a small underground archive room unseen by participants on the main tour. The action's components – its subject matter, the ready-made archival setting, and its performative one-on-one discursive situation, whose rules precluded photography or recording – stressed a concealed dimension that could not be easily represented. The subversive secrecy of the action's form thereby embodied its content. Each single participant became an agonistic accomplice, a potential (whether cooperative or otherwise) agent of knowledge of the political unconscious – the erasure of the Palestinian narrative that is not included either in the Israeli story of enculturation or in the collection of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.³¹

The tour participants were not necessarily aware of their spatial proximity to *Debriefing Session II* (unless they took part in it). From the storage area they reconvened upstairs in one of the gallery foyers. As PM discovered in their research, there is an unpublished regulation specific to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, regarding the treatment of exhibited pieces of art in a state of emergency, as determined by the museum's experts. Colour-coded marks determine the hierarchy of importance by which the artworks are to be evacuated: first red, then yellow, then green. Supervised by a representative, each participant in turn was taken individually by a performer – held at the neck or with a hand resting on the back – on a quick walk through a permanent-collection gallery. While segregating each participant in this coercive manner, the group member pointed out some discreet stickers marking the works, while whispering the evacuation procedure, first practised during the 1991 Gulf War (which included missile attacks by Iraq), and most recently used during the 2012 Israeli military operation in Gaza. The participants had all been marked with similar stickers at the outset of the tour, but only at this point did they become aware of their hierarchical cultural and civil meaning. At this moment, the participants experienced an ethically troublesome equation between the human and the collected assets.

Arriving at the other side of the gallery, the participants could then browse through copies of an emergency instructional booklet for museum workers (which does not contain the sticker procedure), and watch from above another variation of personified pictures performed at the entrance hall: 'a choreography of first-priority paintings taken to the bomb shelter, a choreographed composition of paintings marked with a red point', as an announcement put it. This sequence included prostration and dragging postures – another transference of the emergency evacuation of art pieces into the human body, leaving open to audience interpretation whether to see the performers as objectified humans (or state subjects), personified pictures, or an indication of the ethical need to prioritize human rather than cultural assets.

Beginning with the falling wall, the aestheticized metonymic references to crisis shifted from an explicit connection with the historical moment of 1948 evoked by the



FIG. 4 (Colour online) *National Collection, Rescue*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Photograph: D. Ben-Shaul.

replicated setting, to the application of emergency to the vulnerability of cultural assets related to the museum itself. It was followed by emblematic articulations of crisis, among them a large concrete-slab installation, dubbed *Rescue* by the group, planted in a contemporary art exhibition. Among the ruins, the group members performed a choreography of emergency evacuation, including erotic compositions and iconographic poses such as the *Pietà*.

Crowded together in a stairwell, the participants viewed, through a glass, a dance performed outside (to the sound of Talking Heads' 'Burning Down the House'). At this point, the modern-day poetics of ruin took a canonical form: the participants were left in a subterranean corridor in front of another reproduction, this time of *Imaginary View of the Gallery of the Louvre as a Ruin* (1796), by Hubert Robert, known as a curator and artist who played a key role in turning the Louvre into France's national museum. Yahalomi recounts that the whole process of *National Collection* started out with two images: the site of the Declaration Hall, and this painting. The final abstracted gesture was thus a gaze at an iconic picture, capable of stimulating, among other interpretations, historical, universal, and reflexive contemplation about the power of time, demonstrated through the ephemeral fragility of establishing halls for culture. This reproduction, as well as the Ury one, was subsequently left to the museum's collection: this requirement by the museum, as sponsor of the asset, was readily met by PM, since they produce actions rather than long-lasting objects.

Summing up, or, is it possible to declare who rules?

In *National Collection*, PM questioned the interweaving of national and cultural identities, emphasizing their dynamic relations: as much as the museum is a central

venue of enculturation, the foundational act serves to establish the authority of the museum. In the different stages of the performance score, a dialectical double bind was created. On the one hand, disciplined semi-militarist choreography seemed to embody the institutional order as an act of identification that either incorporates participants or turns them into the subjects of behavioural regulations. On the other hand, the performance conveys a constant sense of critical doubt – critical as it pertains both to criticism and to crisis.

Obliquely reacting to the paradigmatic performative mechanism embedded in the scene of foundation, the work rendered the agonistic dimension in several ways: putting forward a strategy of simulation can guarantee the authority to found, that is, at the same time, caught in a reductive chain of restating; the integration of disruptions, delays and exceptional incidents, part of PM's repertoire, that not only indicate an actual or potential break in order, but compel a stop in the route that allows a second observing look; comprehensive disclosure of the crisis that is incorporated into the process of history making and cultural production; and inclusion within the performance – or beside it – of the hidden or the political, both oppressed and repressed. Instead of re-establishing authority, such practices question its activation and articulate the criticality involved in establishing a national-cultural identity aiming at a unified 'we'.

I do not think it is relevant to aspire to a decisive resolution to the double bind evoked by the work, since it is deconstructive ambivalence that defines its methodical attitude. Nevertheless, I do maintain that this ambivalence is, eventually, ascribed to an inclusive critical dimension that contains the display of power. PM does not embody power and authority as much as it manipulatively 'gives itself' to the institutional order while the museum fulfils its expected role – it remains in control of the performance. Details such as jumping over banisters or hurling stones at the museum's glass in one of the acts (while dancing outside) cannot 'defeat' this hegemony; nor was such a simplistic result intended by the group. Yahalomi rejects the relevance of the work to the notion of institutional critique, and one can claim it is overused (or belongs to the 1980s–1990s). Whether the terminology is still relevant or should be renewed, a narrow view of the work as a strict case of criticizing the hegemony of the museum's economy (with or without sufficient efficacy) would miss the complexity by which the conjoint establishing of sovereignty and art is examined.

The political theology that retroactively validates the authority to found appears in the iconography of the replicated hall, but at the same time extends to the entire displayed dominance of the cultural institution. The dramaturgy that conjoins past, present and future in a state of crisis becomes subordinate to the 'white cube' of the museum and to the archival non-linear arrangement of its collections. The museum is shown to have the power to turn the critical sediments of history into exposed displays. In it the simulation mechanism – deeply tied to restating the state – is directly related to the production of exhibits. However, *National Collection* enables a further perspective on the museum's own subordination to political mechanisms and its dependence on them. Consequently, the entire museum – a typical cultural construct deeply involved in the politics of establishing the authority to rule – can be seen as a 'state exhibition' or as a phenomenon of restating.

NOTES

- 1 For Public Movement members and the entire team of *National Collection*, as well as for the museum's description of the work, see 'Public Movement – National Collection', Tel Aviv Museum of Art, at www.tamuseum.org.il/about-the-exhibition/public-movement-national-collection, accessed 15 December 2016.
- 2 For the group's rationale and corpus see 'Public Movement', at www.publicmovement.org, accessed 15 December 2016.
- 3 All statements by Dana Yahalomi are from conversations we held and panels that accompanied *National Collection* in 2014–16. On pre-enactment see Oliver Marchart, 'Public Movement: The Art of Pre-enactment', in Florian Malzacher, ed., *Not Just a Mirror: Looking for the Political Theatre of Today* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2015), pp. 146–50.
- 4 For more details see Daphna Ben-Shaul, 'Critically Civic: *Public Movement's* Performative Activism', in Atay Citron, David Zerbib and Sharon Aronson-Lehavi, eds., *Performance Studies in Motion* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), pp. 118–30.
- 5 For PM civic practices see Ben-Shaul, 'Critically Civic', pp. 126–30; see also a discussion of PM's performance *Civil Fast* (2012) included in Daphna Ben-Shaul, 'The Performative Return: Israeli and Palestinian Site-Specific Reenactments', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 125 (February 2016), pp. 42–7.
- 6 I consistently use the literal translation of the Hebrew name: the House of Independence. The official name of the whole site in English is Independence Hall.
- 7 According to the manager, Isaac Dror, the cooperation with PM was fertile at the stage of research, but he could not allow implementation of a change in the Hall of Independence. Author interview with Isaac Dror, Tel Aviv, 30 November 2016.
- 8 For detailed description of the ceremony in 1948 see Mordecai Naor, ed., *The Friday that Changed Destiny* (Mikveh, Israel: Yehuda Dekel Library, The Council for Conservation of Heritage Site in Israel, 2014) (Hebrew and English).
- 9 The ceremony was also produced and prepared by Zeev Sherf, Avraham Rivkind and Rudolph Sidner with the help of other workers.
- 10 Ruti Direktor, 'The Viewer is a Citizen', *National Collection*, exhibition brochure (Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2015).
- 11 Jacques Derrida, 'Declarations of Independence', *New Political Science*, 15 (Summer 1986), pp. 7–15, here p. 10.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 On declarations of independence as performative utterances see Yoav Kenny, 'Declaration', *Mafte'akh: Lexical Review of Political Thought*, 1 (Summer 2010), at <http://mafteakh.tau.ac.il/en/2010-01/02>, accessed 18 December 2016.
- 14 Derrida, p.11.
- 15 See 'Declaration of Establishment of State of Israel', Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx, accessed 15 December 2016.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Concepts on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 5–15.
- 18 See, for instance, anecdotes mentioned in Naor, *The Friday that Changed Destiny*, pp. 27–9, 217.
- 19 See Eitan Bar-Yosef, 'Preface', *Theory and Criticism*, 45 (Winter 2015), pp. 306–14.
- 20 See Assaf Zeltzer, 'The Tenth Anniversary Celebrations of the State of Israel 1958–1959 and the Integration of the Re-enactment of the Ceremony of the Declaration of the State', doctoral thesis, the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2006 (Hebrew).
- 21 See 'Independence Hall', Prime Minister's Office, at <http://eng.ihl.org.il>, accessed 15 December 2016.

- 22 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in Benjamin, *Selected Writings 4, 1838–1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott *et al.* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 389–400, here pp. 391–2.
- 23 André Lepecki, 'The Choreopolitical: Agency in the Age of Control', in Randy Martin, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Art and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 44–52.
- 24 André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 15–16.
- 25 Walter Benjamin, 'Agesilaus Santander', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 1927–1934*, Vol. II, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone *et al.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 713–15, here p. 713.
- 26 In Diana Taylor's terms, physical memories and habits that constitute the group's 'repertoire' are congruent with the durable nature of the archive. See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 16–20.
- 27 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representation*, 26 (Spring 1989), pp. 7–24, here p. 20.
- 28 Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 100.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Debriefing Session II* was activated by Hagar Ophir, who led the research, and Nir Shauloff. For full text see Alhena Katsof and Dana Yahalomi, *Solution 263: Manual on Debriefing Session Delivery* (New York and Tel Aviv: Ingo Niermann Sternberg Press, 2015), pp. 52–74.
- 31 In April–October 2016 *Debriefing Session II* (activated by Amir Farjoun and Ruth Patir), and a short variation of *National Collection*, were hosted in the Guggenheim, New York, as part of the exhibition *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art in the Middle East and North Africa*, curated by Sara Raza. See 'Guggenheim: Choreographies of Power by Public Movement', at www.guggenheim.org/event/choreographies-of-power, accessed 19 December 2016.

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