



Evil to the Core

31.10.2009-16.01.2010

Curators:

Galit Eilat, Ran Kasmy Ilan

Events, Performances & lectures

[Screening Program](#)

[Conference 1 Simulation,](#)

[Experiment and Re-enactment - 25.11.2009](#)

Participating Artists

[Rod Dickinson](#)

[Artur Zmijewski](#)

[Noam Gelbart](#)

[David Reeb](#)

[David Tartakover](#)

[Amir Yatziv](#)



Evil to the Core

Galit Eilat and Ran Kasmy Ilan

The year 1961 marked the entry of the voice of the repressed Israeli “other” into the heart of the local discourse upon the opening of the Eichmann Trial at Israel’s Congress Center in Jerusalem. This formative event presented to the Israeli public, for the first time, the voices of the survivors who served as witnesses. Later on, Hannah Arendt would write in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* about Eichmann’s testimony: “It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us—the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil.”¹

In the very same year of the Eichmann Trial, Stanley Milgram conducted his famous experiment in social psychology, “Obedience to Authority,” [4] at Yale’s Department of Psychology. He wanted to prove the argument that collaborators with the Nazi extermination program were “merely following orders.” The experiment explored the influence of authority on human subjects and the limit to which those subjects were prepared to obey an authoritative figure who instructed them to perform acts contrary to their values. The first series of experiments indicated that 65% of the participants agreed to administer seemingly real electric shocks of increasing intensity, from 15 to 450 volts, to another individual only because a figure of authority had instructed them to do so. While some voiced objection to the instruction and the act, none of the participants stopped the experiment before reaching 300 volts.

The exhibition “Evil to the Core” addresses issues pertaining to docility and obedience to authority, conformism, social responsibility, disobedience, and non-conformism in general, and in Israeli society specifically. The exhibition combines different materials, works of art, and documentary films exploring socialization, obedience, power, authority, and resistance. Three major methods run through them: simulation, experimentation, and reconstruction or reenactment, which may be regarded as methods shaping the reality of the present.

Amir Yatziv’s **Detroit** consists of a map which the artist found in a military training area, a video piece, and photographs. The title of the installation was borrowed from the IDF’s training area near Ze’elim in the country’s southern region. Is it accidental that an IDF training area was named after the American city of Detroit, once a bustling metropolis, and now a ghost town of sorts? “Detroit” is a 1:1 simulation of a Palestinian city of identical area. The simulation generates an alternative reality (at times sterile) which conceals the true reality. The fictive reality becomes a source for rich, luring stimuli, that may often overshadow the actual experience of reality, as in the case of movie towns, Disneyland, or “war games” held at the highest echelons of the military system.

In the video work accompanying the installation, Yatziv presents the architectural plans of the Israeli “Detroit” to various urban planners, asking them to analyze the city for him. They all express varying measures of discontent with the city plan, but none realizes that it is a city constructed for the sole purpose of simulation. The mosque architect is baffled by the fact that such a tall mosque was erected for a city of such scale, whereas another urban planner wonders why, in this new city, no road was paved to facilitate vehicular traffic between the commercial center and the residential neighborhoods.

The training city “Detroit” was intended to prepare soldiers for combat in a built-up area. It resembles a Muslim quarter, thus meeting the users’ needs in a simulation which would furnish them with a fantasy of an Arab city. The essence of this city is replaced by its fictive image. “Detroit” even contains live targets. A private company supplies extras with an “Eastern” look to play the Palestinians in the simulation. Is “Detroit” a simulation that went out of control during the operation in Gaza? The Gazan “Detroit” is devoid of flowering gardens; the city’s residents are mere extras, and the houses contain no books or any other sign of life. The simulation prepares the fighter for “better” confrontation in real time, striving to neutralize the element of surprise in battle by exercising which dulls the shock of encounter with the real. The simulation enables distant confrontation, based on previous experiences, and not on the initial encounter in the battlefield; at the same time, it might establish automatic patterns of action and cause numbness.²

On April 4, 1968, Jane Elliott, a third grade teacher in Iowa, USA, turned on her television set to discover that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. There, in her living room, she decided to teach her 8-year old pupils a lesson in racism. The very next day, Tuesday April 5, she held the first experiment in racism in her classroom: she declared her blue-eyed pupils superior to the rest, bestowing upon them privileges at the expense of the others. Blue-eyed and brown-eyed pupils were disallowed to drink from the same drinking fountains. The latter were asked to wear a special collar around their necks denoting their inferiority. The blue-eyed students became almost automatically haughty, bossy, and cruel toward their brown-eyed peers. The next day, the roles were reversed—the brown-eyed pupils became the superior, whereas the blue-eyed became an untouchable minority.

Elliott, whose experiment is documented in the film *The Eye of the Storm* (director: William Peters) screened in the exhibition, conceived of a simulation which corresponds with the reality by which American society (like many other societies) chooses to compartmentalize itself according to racist-ethnic terms. In order to illustrate to her pupils to what extent such division is, in fact, based on prejudice and ignorance, she made them experience a process of re-socialization by means of a game of role reversal between privileged and inferior. In each of the experiment’s two days the pupils played different roles, learning first hand about the feelings of privileged versus underprivileged, experiencing the dehumanization generated by such a system.

The film documenting Elliott’s work (the exercise was subsequently developed for use with different groups, other than primary school children, and even repeated with adults) proves that ethnic, or any other division which allows for oppression of the other, requires little time to produce social structures and patterns. Ethnic and national divisions create affiliation groups based on physical or other relations of likeness, isolating or pushing aside groups which do not meet the parameters defining the group. This process is accompanied by either bestowal or denial of privileges and by domination via denial or erasure of the other’s rights.

In 2002 the Israeli government established the Immigration Administration, now better known as the “Oz Unit.” The Administration was allotted a considerable budget, field units, and motor vehicles. Labor migrants call the unit “Fifty Two Fifty” since the Unit’s cars’ license plates always begin with 52 and end with 50. Uri Bar-On, director of **52/50**, decided to focus on the violence perpetrated by the Oz Unit policemen during their operations to capture illegal labor migrants. For the production of the film Bar-On harnessed students from the Department of Film and Television at Tel Aviv University, and purchased several video cameras. He set up a call center to collect reports about police raids, and transfer the information to the film crews on site. Days and nights Bar-On went with student teams to follow the activities of the Immigration Police. His film crews documented Oz Unit raids on apartments and mobile homes in which migrants live, as well as their arrests on the street. They documented the immigrants’ stories about the policemen’s violence towards them. The film shows, among other things, how the Immigration Police often detain foreign nationals and harasses them merely because of their foreign appearances. This was the case with a doctor in the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center who was arrested together with an Israeli who tried to protect her from the violence of the

Unit's cops.

Apart from documentation of the Immigration Police violence, the film endeavors to examine whether the camera's presence and students' presence during the arrest of labor migrants will decrease the level of violence used by the Immigration Police during these arrests.

In **Machssomim**, Yoav Shamir follows soldiers serving in the Occupied Territories, entrusted with roadblock duty. As in the case of the Oz Unit, here too there is an encounter with a different community, and the soldier has the power to decide how the Palestinian's day will begin or end. The film documents the encounter of Israeli soldiers posted at various checkpoints in the Occupied Territories with the Palestinian population wishing to pass through these crossings and roadblocks between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, and even between villages or towns within the Palestinian Authority. Observation of the film underscores the lack of clarity regarding the policy or position the soldiers are supposed to exercise toward civilian population. There seems to be no clear instruction what is allowed and what is forbidden at the checkpoint, what language may be used, who is allowed to pass and why. The film presents the confusion of some of the soldiers who are given control over the lives of others, but do not know how to use that power. At the same time, it also presents those who take the responsibility given them too far, using it to exercise power and to humiliate those requiring the services of passage through the checkpoint.

In both films the photographed subjects are aware of the camera's presence, yet we are not told whether this presence changed their behavior: whether the Immigration cops exercised less power or whether the soldiers in the checkpoint exercised greater discretion during their shift. The exposure to an Israeli camera is exposure to the Israeli public which largely supports the soldiers' activity at the checkpoints or the activities of the Oz unit, hence it does not cause the photographed subjects inner conflict.

Rod Dickinson's works progress along the axis between simulation and reconstruction, exploring ideas pertaining to belief and social control. The works present events which were supposed to take place, yet ultimately did not, or alternatively—events that have taken place. In the exhibition, Dickinson presents **The Milgram Re-enactment 2002** (in collaboration with Graeme Edler and Steve Rushton) consisting of an installation reconstructing Stanley Milgram's laboratory in detail, alongside a video reenacting the experiment with actors. The work offers viewers sensory confrontation by virtue of the physical presence in the laboratory, which calls to mind a return to a crime scene to study the evidence and experience them up close. By means of the reconstruction the artist generates a system of simulation as part of which the viewer can participate in the experience.

Milgram's experiment is one of the most important and provocative ever to be carried out in the field of social psychology, and it is still studied. It was repeated once by Milgram himself, and several more times by psychologists and social psychology laboratories, each time altering one element of the experiment. In all cases the participants were told that the experiment was a memory and learning test. They did not know that they were taking part in an experiment about obedience. The subjects were ostensibly given the choice between the roles of teacher and learner; the latter was, in fact, an active partner to the experiment and was let in on the secret. The teacher (subject) sat in one room with the researcher; the latter wore a white smock and observed from behind the teacher's back. In front of the teacher was a box with multiple switches (an electric shock machine), with the voltage level marked above each switch. Even the marking of lethal high voltage did not stop the majority of the participants from continuing.

Some ten years after Milgram's experiment, the Stanford Prison Experiment conceived by Philip Zimbardo, Milgram's classmate at the James Monroe High School in the Bronx (class of 1950) was performed. The experiment studied the participants' confrontation with prison reality. Several offices in the basement of Stanford University's Psychology building were cleared, and fitted with bars. Via a newspaper ad, male college students were recruited and randomly divided into the roles of prisoners and guards. The former were "arrested" by the local police and led blindfolded and handcuffed to Zimbardo's mock prison, where they were stripped naked, disinfected and dressed in prisoners' uniform by the "guards." The latter were given warden uniforms and full freedom to exercise authority. The experiment, which was supposed to continue for a fortnight, went out of hand on the second day, with the prisoners' mutiny attempt, which was forcefully suppressed by the prison guards. It was terminated prematurely after six days, and was never reenacted scientifically on ethical grounds.

In his video **Repetition**, artist Artur Zmijewski reenacts and documents Zimbardo's prison experiment. Zmijewski placed an advertisement in the newspaper, offering readers to take part

in an experiment for hourly pay. The experiment continued for seven days, and as with Zimbardo's prison experiment, the participants were randomly selected to perform the roles of prisoners or guards. Zmijewski, like Zimbardo, took upon himself the role of superintendent of the temporary prison, wholly devoting himself to his self-assumed role. In Zmijewski's work we evince the power relations constructed between prisoners and guards within days. Unlike the original experiment, the prisoners and guards in this work choose to protest against the prison manager, collectively deciding to end the experiment.

The reenactment used by Dickinson and Zmijewski may be construed as a staged, ritual modus operandi at work in many apparatuses. It is intended to cleanse the collective conscience and heal the wounds. The reenactment has a symbolical theatrical dimension: taking an intricate, often emotional event, encoding it into an easily digestible product and providing local rationalization, a process which makes for an illusion of order. The reenactment dissociates the past from any sentiment in an attempt to rejuvenate reality which has crumbled at that point; therefore it occurs outside time, as it were.

Noam Gelbart's animation piece **Experiment 5.6.5/10** depicts an (imaginary) experiment in randomly selected subjects who were told that they were selected due to their alleged superior qualities. The subjects were given a random set of laws and rules which they had to obey. In return, they were told, they will feel a considerable improvement in their quality of life. The ostensibly arbitrary rule list was extracted from Jewish rabbinic law. In the third week of the experiment, one of the participants succeeds in exploiting the paradigm in his favor, thereby garnering status and power. He becomes a mentor and an educator capable of giving instruction on his own. From here the path is short to full and violent destruction of the experiment.

Milgram's and Zimbardo's experiments were preceded by Dr. D. Ewen Cameron's CIA-funded experiment held in Canada between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s, which set out to examine whether it is possible to blot out past behavioral patterns and reconstruct new ones in their place. In order to eliminate existing behavioral conditioning, Dr. Cameron gave the subjects electric shocks far beyond the level allowed at the time. He drugged his patients with hallucinatory drugs and various stimulants, putting them in a state of unconsciousness which lasted many weeks. Simultaneously, he repeated to them instructions for new behavioral patterns. Cameron succeeded in eliminating his patients' past behavioral habits, but he was never able to prove that the soul's shattering and transformation into a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) could indeed facilitate construction of new patterning or healing of the patients who came to him seeking help. An investigation of the American Senate revealed the existence of numerous such experiments exported from the United States to other countries, attesting to their faulty nature.

Cameron's *modi operandi* are nowadays exercised throughout the world by people who are considered normative, following instructions from above under pretexts of scientific research, national security, and state of emergency, while releasing the individual performing them from personal liability. These *modi operandi* include isolation of the studied subject from contact with reality by means of sensory isolation, including white noise played incessantly, blindfolding to outside images, covering the hands, and disruption of sleeping and eating patterns by detachment from the outside or from any other element that preserves a temporal continuum.

The film **Total Isolation** (from the series "Horizon" produced by the BBC) documents an experiment conducted on several subjects, who volunteered to suffer sensory deprivation for 48 hours. The subjects were given an identical cognitive test before and after the experiment. During the experiment they experienced different levels of sensory deprivation, after which a decrease in their cognitive functioning was clearly registered.

The film **The Human Behavior Experiment** (director: Alex Gibney) links Milgram and Zimbardo's experiments, addressing the mechanism producing blind obedience or submission to power, events where systems of power are at work, which allow for domination of others' lives, and the way in which this power is exercised destructively when the system does not lay rules which clearly restrict the use of force or the domination of others. For example, the soldiers posted at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, who abused prisoners suspected of various activities against the American military government. Interviews with these soldiers reveal that during their duty as prison guards, they thought they were optimally following the orders given them. Their own photographs present abuse, humiliation, and torture suffered by the prisoners which call to mind the methods of Dr. Cameron and Zimbardo. Excluding one interrogator, who documented and publicized what he saw at Abu Ghraib, the majority of soldiers blindly obeyed orders and never asked themselves whether they were legal, and whether they can indeed be

relieved of responsibility for the very prisoners for whom they were responsible. They did not ask themselves whether their actions were abusive and humiliating, violating the other's basic rights or humanity.

In Israeli Tamar Yarom's film, **To See if I'm Smiling**, a harsh picture arises from the testimonies of six female ex-soldiers, who describe their intoxication with power and lack of differentiation between good and bad during their military service, including having their pictures taken with the bodies of Palestinian interogeos who had been tortured. The film consists of a set of interviews with women who served in the Occupied Territories. Several years after their service they look back at their military past which haunts them, trying to confront the civilian reality in relation to the time they had served as soldiers. The monologues of the film's six protagonists indicate distress, suffering, and guilt feelings. It is incomprehensible how they could have been so easily pulled into a world of wrongdoing and acts of violence perpetrated by soldiers against citizens and detainees; why they agreed to collaborate, to be a part of the system of silencing which kept the squadron's secrets?

The delayed confession is perceived as akin to assuming responsibility and confrontation with the past, especially since the exposure of the secret is public, and often involves pain and admission of guilt without a trial. The disclosure, in this case, is media exposure, demanding daily confrontation of the guilt. Simultaneously, an act of transference takes place, whereby anyone who listens to the confession or admission assumes responsibility by virtue of the knowledge, absorbing part of it from the confessor.

Avi Mograbi's film **Z32** centers on an ex-soldier in an elite unit who participated in an act of revenge for the murder of six Israeli soldiers, an action in which two Palestinian policemen were murdered. He confesses and reconstructs the killing event for his life partner and the viewers. His testimony relates to his part in the murder and to the charged feelings that have burdened him since. In the film, the ex-soldier reconstructs the night of the event several times to his partner. In addition, he returns to the scene of the incident with Mograbi, and reenacts the revenge for him. Much like a murder reenactment which is invalid as judicial evidence, yet serves as confession to a crime committed, albeit not judicial, in this case, too, the reconstruction and the repetition of the killing process combine personal with collective guilt, the desire for absolution with reconstruction of the power intoxication during the military revenge. To us, viewers, the act of reconstruction serves as a type of catalyst for cleansing our consciences, through participation which does not require assuming responsibility.

Artist David Reeb's video work, **Ni'ilin 1.5.2009**, begins with a tear gas canister fired into the yard of a house where the owners and political activists ("Anarchists against the Wall") are present.³ Directly thereafter, a group of Border Guard fighters climb to the roof of the house. The soldiers present no document authorizing them to penetrate the house, even when they are asked to do so. In order to scare off the activists, they throw tear gas at them and at the house owners from the roof. The roof serves the soldiers as an observation and firing post at demonstrators in the streets near the house. When they climb off the roof and leave the family home, one of the commanders says to his subordinate who stands next to him: "We must detain them, and you don't do that. You have to enter their homes at 2 AM and arrest them, before they ever come here." Reeb documents this moment in the video in his painting Bougainvillea. He isolates the preliminary event by painting one frame from the video, featuring several soldiers marching on a dirt road, and next to them a flowering bougainvillea shrub sprawling beyond the yard of the house.

The presence of "Anarchists against the Wall" disturbs the soldiers' work. The Anarchists refuse to take for granted the force exercised by the soldiers and submit to it. They always demand to check whether each and every act taken by the soldiers—in this case, entry into the home of a Palestinian citizen—was authorized. The Anarchists group exercises its civic power; it does not obey the code which determines that the physically strong is the dominant. This introduces a nuisance or generates confrontation with the soldiers who must address their demand, which is opposed to the approach of the majority of soldiers toward the Palestinians whom they regard as unequal; the Palestinians houses and property are perceived as territory subject to control, hence, they believe, the soldiers are not forced to obey civilian laws, at times not even the laws of the army.

Eyal Eithcovich, director of the film **Enraged**, follows the story of four members of the activist group "Anarchists against the Wall" through their struggle. The group's activity has met with harsh oppression by the State. Hundreds of Palestinians and scores of Israelis and foreign nationals have been injured, and hundreds of arrests have led to dozens of indictments.

Nevertheless, the group continues its activity, refusing to forgo the message of refusal to be enemies and the partnership in a popular struggle against the Occupation. The film depicts the group's activity and the violence in the Occupied Territories; a horror vision in which soldiers, settlers, leftist activists, and local Arab citizens all take part. Eithcovich lets the images, which are often powerful and elusive (especially the depictions of confrontations during demonstrations), speak for themselves, rarely intervening.

"Anarchists against the Wall" was established in 2003 with the intention of operating against the "Separation Wall" erected by Israel on Palestinian land in the West Bank. Since its inception, the group has worked in close collaboration with the Palestinians in a joint popular struggle against the Wall in the West Bank, the siege, and the attacks on Gaza specifically, and against the Occupation in general. Over the years, group members have participated in hundreds of demonstrations: whether in West Bank villages and towns organized by Palestinian local popular committees or in Israel proper intended to present the Occupation and its harm to the Israeli public, and to call upon the public to join in the struggle. "As Israelis we are well aware of the privileges granted us by the occupation regime, even when protesting against it. We can move relatively freely from place to place. The army and police forces are more hesitant in exercising extreme violence against us, and the civil law system to which we are subordinated gives us basic rights which our Palestinian partners are denied, since they are subject to military law. Therefore, we have chosen to transform these privileges into tools of solidarity to the best of our ability. The joint demonstrations are not only a political message regarding the very feasibility of cooperation, but also a way to stand by our Palestinian partners."⁴

In David Tartakover's series of photographs, **I Am Here**, the artist digitally inserted his figure into various events and places. On his body he wears an emergency services vest, yet Tartakover's vest bears the word "Artist." The images are press photographs from the Separation Wall in Abu Dis, from Qalqilya, Ras Atiya, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Hebron, always drawn from incidents related to the Occupation. Hebron 180303 depicts an IDF soldier holding his weapon in the foreground. At another level of the photograph, the inscription "Are you Jewish? Yes=life No=death" may be read on the back of a T-shirt. Tartakover's figure is seen in the background, wearing his "Artist" vest, as if he were a witness to the photographed event not by virtue of his actually being there, but rather due to the fact that he inserts his figure into the photographed event. By positioning himself within various acts taking place around him, Tartakover assumes responsibility: he places himself as both an observer who does not look away from the occurrences and as a witness who brings to us his testimony, motivated by the knowledge that the freedom for individual opinion is not a right, but a duty. Disregard for personal responsibility does not release the individual from responsibility for the actions of the society in which he lives. All the members of the collective share in the responsibility, and they all have the right to doubt and explore whether they want to be a part of it. Refusal to take responsibility for the actions of society and setting oneself apart from it forms an existential threat to that society. Disobedience (resistance), on the other hand, is an attempt to correct society, rather than to undermine it. The conscientious objector functions as an agent of morality who operates for the sake of social change, since obedience contradicts his moral principles. The conscientious objector does not disregard the law, and the collective does not have to acknowledge his rightness. The duty is to acknowledge conscientious objection as part of honoring human dignity and freedom. Disobedience takes place vis-à-vis the leadership of society, when each individual is given the right to protest, via an act of objection, against instructions which contradict his personal moral values.

Leading an individual life in keeping with an independent moral agenda is utopian, and can fully occur only under laboratory conditions. Such individual existence is eliminated by the presence of others, and is based on the relationship with them. This system makes the individual suspend his ethics, his personal checks and balances, and to "assimilate" into the collective paradigm. It is an expression of the individual's mental dependence on authority, manifested by his voluntary integration into a hierarchical system. In return the individual is granted relief stemming from the detachment from personal liability by virtue of "belonging" to a collective. It is this belonging that lends the collective its power. The individual is the arbitrary signifier of the collective, and the function of authority is to eliminate his personal characteristics (his personal imprint) so that he may serve as a pawn representing something beyond his personality; this act inevitably eliminates the significance of the other as well.

Notes:

1. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 252.

2. Another tactic of estrangement employed by the military establishment involves language. The assimilation of academic and philosophical terminology in diluted, flattened form to generate alienation of the conflict and dehumanization of the other party, while keeping a well-reasoned and clean discourse. For instance, the “cognitive burn” a la ex-Chief of Staff and present Minister, Moshe (Bogie) Ya’alon, refers to war as a sterile territory where cognitions prompt action. Similar examples include the division of the population into “involved” and “non-involved” (for their definition as innocent or naïve citizens would inevitably render the soldiers, by definition, criminals), or expressions such as “scenario” and “leveraging” intended to alienate the other party in order to efface its existence. Such simplification of reality introduces a problem often dubbed “the human element.” Elimination of the other in the name of some justice enables the perpetration of acts against him which would have been considered unbearable if applied to a “human being”.

3. The weekly encounters between soldiers and leftist activists have taken place for several years in Bil’in, and recently also in Ni’ilin, and they carry the nature of a ritual. The encounter takes place every Friday, around noon, usually after the noon prayer in the village mosque. The soldiers, village inhabitants (Bil’in or Ni’ilin), and activists report every Friday in unbalanced forces, for a chronicle foretold.

4. From the group’s Hebrew website: <http://www.awalls.org/hebrew>