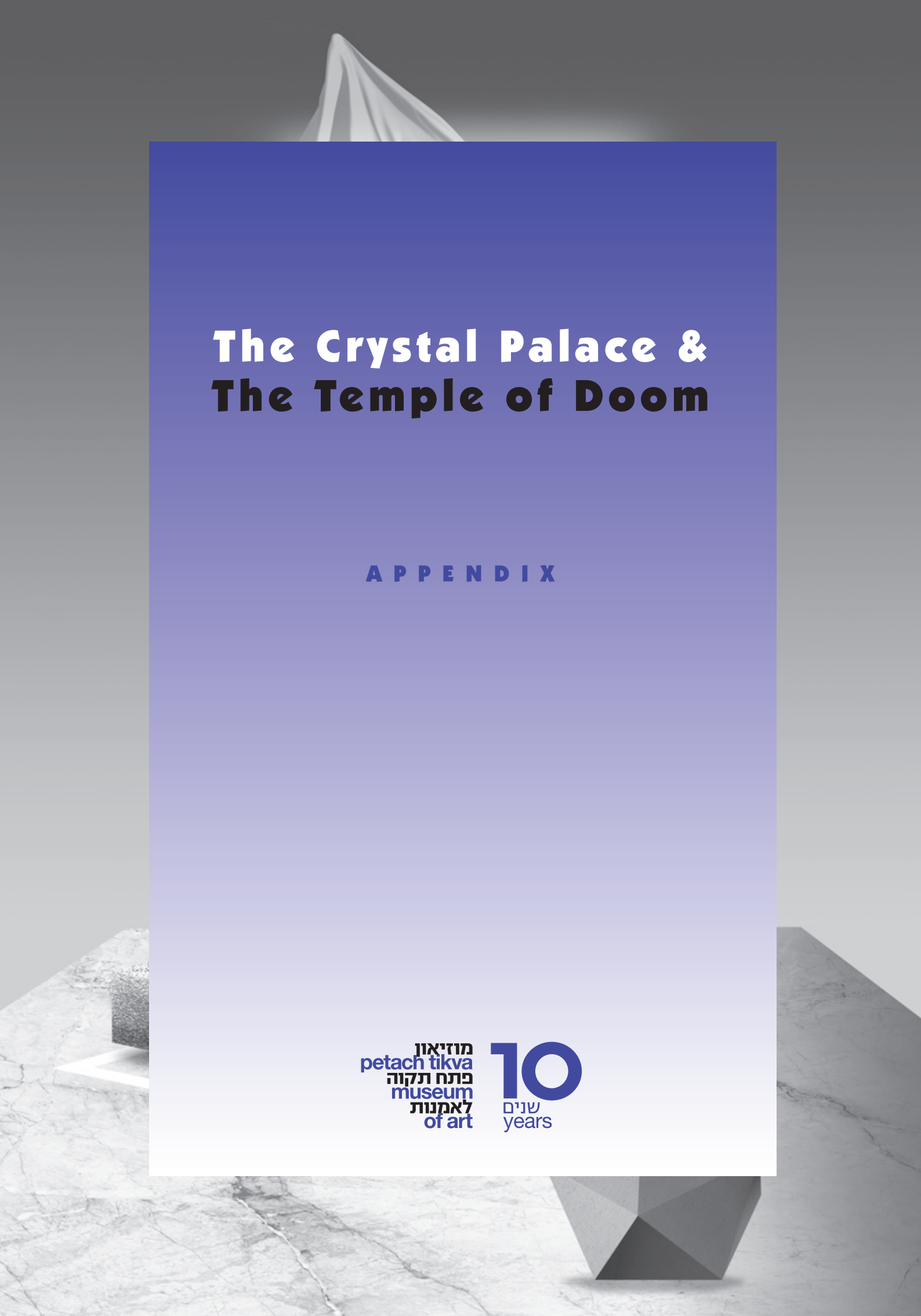
The Crystal Palace & The Temple of Doom

APPENDIX



מוזיאון petach tikva פתח תקוה museum לאמנות of art

10 שנים years

The Crystal Palace & The Temple of Doom

APPENDIX

Composition

Ronny Shani

One can stay in her room for days, weeks, months, and years, and embark on long journeys between its walls; journeys that spread backwards and forward in time and space. To look—at oneself, in the mirror, at the objects that fill the space, at what is seen through the window—and join or separate the sights and insights, turn them into a colorful garment softly or roughly textured; at times one will wrap it around to keep warm, other times just toss it aside, sickened. As the moments drag on, the garment will unravel, adornments will fall off, and patches will be mended. At one moment, while trying on the garment of her life, one will decide to leave the room, examine one's work in different conditions, perhaps add a peacock's feather to the lapel.

In her film *The Gleaners and I* (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse, 2000), director Agnès Varda stitches a narrative that seems to weave itself—like fruitful sauntering. Throughout her journey she examines different aspects of the concept of gleaning: agriculture, art, urbanism, society, economy. These join to create a composition, like tapestry on which Varda's aging process unfolds. The most important concept that emerges from this elusive outline is relinquishing ownership; flowing freely within the whirlpools of the ocean of capital. Putting aside the fact that the subplot of the film is hoarding.

Gleaning, notes one of the women interviewed in the film, is very different from picking: you pick a hanging fruit, but glean something that sprouted and grew on the ground. It seems that the difference is not simply linguistic, but also physical: the difference between a leisurely stroll between the trees, reaching out and pulling a sweet, juicy fruit hanging from the branch, to crouching close to the earth, near the roots. The feelings that these actions arouse are completely different, although the result is similar. Perhaps this is why I find parallels between these two ideas. For me, gleaning, like sauntering, is a desire to enjoy the fruits of consumerism and capitalism while free of commitments, quite literally. Meaning, the desire NOT to be the owner of the field, the orchard, or the vineyard, but rather to have a little taste, just enough, from the artificially produced superfluous yield of the land.

The "Gleaners and I" would have been a fitting title for the exhibition *The Crystal Palace and the Temple of Doom*. Like the gleaner and the flâneur, the 11 artists also go out into the streets and "take" pictures, curating their own collections and binding together pieces from the outside and the inside to create a parallel reality. The process might be compressed with a formula of P^2: Perception + Process + Production = Presentation, with which they pass on this mental distillation for others to use as they desire.

The Hebrew word *Leket*, on its myriad derivatives, has several possible translations to English:

1. Gleaning, which is the act of collecting leftover crops after harvesting, but also the collection of information bit by bit; closely associated with

2. Collecting , which refers to the collection of things (particularly literary works) and binding them together; but there is also

3. Gathering, particularly the conduct of a food-gatherer, meaning, a person who picks wild herbs for nourishment; and next we have

4. Eclecticism, which describes someone who selects or uses single elements from different sources, methods or styles.

In *Leviticus*, the word Leket appears in a direct agricultural context, and refers to ears of grain that fell from the reaper's hand or the sickle while harvesting, and should be left for the poor. It is somewhat ironic that Leket in the sense of a select collection represents the exact opposite: the best of the crop. Certainly not something one will want to leave for the poor, free of charge.

One of Varda's charismatic participants is a man filmed while wandering throughout the city wearing high fisherman's boots, which protect him from the city's hostile soil, and has been living for years of a plethora of products that he found in the trash: "For me," he explains, "salvaging is an ethical matter." Like the others, he too regards the margins—dumpsters, junkyards, and abandoned fields—as the ultimate mall, where one can find the whole world. When we speak of sauntering, or *flânerie*, this lack of commitment towards objects is not expressed just in the traditional sense—that of strolling, of being a window shopper, a collector of experiences, and a hoarder of steps and glimpses—but also in the absence of a defined goal for the journey, and willingly relinquishing a certain purpose for which one has to leave the house; it is a deliberate purposelessness, defiant in its idleness—an action deeply contrasting the contemporary reality that advocates the illusion that time is money.

The Cocoon of Karlibach

"I am a travelling man. I am on the road almost 11 months a year," declares the protagonist of Sholem Aleichem at the opening of his introduction "to the reader."[1] In her essay *The Art of Arrival*, Rebecca Solnit notes: "Maybe being still is how you turn your attention from the logistics of your own trajectory to the passage of all the other beings and their shadows. To arrive, then, is not about immobility but something else, perhaps confidence, clarity, satisfaction, attention."[2] In the same essay, which seeks to examine the meaning of arriving rather than the journey whose end it supposedly indicates, which wonders whether it is harder to be still than to keep moving forwards, Solnit writes: "You travel to get somewhere, and you travel for the sake of adventure, for the scenery, for being in motion, for discovery, for being uprooted […]" The fruit that was not picked has no difficulty remaining on the ground, useless. Quite the contrary, in a sense, staying in the same spot will allow it to fulfill its true purpose: to complete the cycle of nature.

In his book *Sepharad*, Antonio Muñoz Molina identifies the self preservation impulse with the lack of movement, with the compulsion to remain inside the house (the only place, according to him, where one does not feel stateless): "If there is one thing that hardly ever changes, despite the different places and the changing times, it is the room you lock yourself inside, the room which one, to avoid a calamity, must never leave […] All human miseries derive from not being able to sit quietly in a room alone."[3]

Molina recalls a sequence of fragmented images, posters of movies made of random scenes, which "illuminated one another with many and immediate associations," just like the sights of the city (in this case, Tel Aviv): Karlibach Street that transforms in real-time in front of the spectators eyes; from caterpillar, to cocoon, to butterfly and back again—back and forth in time and space; images in a film, words in a book, sights, odors, and background sounds. Without a narrative, free from "…the weight and vulgar conventions of the scenario […] revelations in the present, with no before or after."

One of the exercises recommended by Georges Perec relates precisely to the significance of these "before and afters," when one wishes to know and understand a city deeply and widely: look at a new building and try and remember what had once stood in its place.[4] In the "white city" that Tel Aviv had become, there are many opportunities to practice this exercise. The emotional manipulation imposed on the city—its beatification, whitewashing, and adornment—generates a real-estate, financial, and social manipulation that transforms the city's character and residents, bringing to mind a "before" and "after" advertisement: in the "before" photo we see a gray, dreary city, whose dilapidated balconies of its eclectic buildings are a symbol to its decline; in the "after" photo we see the Levantine Disneyland in sleek European clothes and full make up. None of the photos reveal a spark of life; the pores of its skin are never bare. "Tel Aviv," noted Shimon Adaf in a story that accompanied the exhibition *Urburb*, "has spat on the present."[5]

One-Piece

At an age of relentless, inherent reproduction, it seems that Walter Benjamin's aura no longer exists. Originality is purely conceptual, specific to new associations formed between existing exhibits. Words, the interpretation, and the textual background that accompany it, create a new line—a painting or a drawing. The only place where we can still find the aura of the original—albeit one that is naturally comprised of countless components, not all tangible—is the city itself. The ultimate inexhaustible creation of a group, anonymous and infinite as the city, that like it, has a similar before and after, yet the only thing that matters is the present.

Let us take Benjamin for instance. The ultimate flâneur, the godfather of sauntering, was honored with a plaza named after him in Berlin. With the number of names that this city has to atone for with

monuments and squares, we could safely assume that he was not necessarily at the top of the list. It is quite possible that Walter-Benjamin-Platz, located in the western part of the city, adjacent to the river of consumerism known as Ku'damm, would have made him slightly miserable. It is walled by a reproduced U shaped building, occupied by nondescript shops. On one side of the square stands a fountain, and on the other side a kiosk selling Italian coffee. Only one shop might be worth mentioning, due to the irony that can be found only in Berlin: it offers clients to print a 3D replica of their hero. Every city is a tool.

I have been admiring Berlin's public transportation system for years: an unparalleled infrastructural model, even in times of strike and construction work. The transparent urban dance in which people pass from one place to another, in precise timing based on seamless shifts and transitions, is part of the choreography that transforms the city from a collection of streets, separate quarters, to a tapestry made of one piece, like Varda's film, that has geographic, cultural, historical, and social continuity. This infrastructure allows the massive metropolitan to flow cohesively, to be more than the sum of its parts, to be an existence more than a place. To be a real city.

It is never quiet in a city like that, not even on a holiday afternoon. There is relative non-noise, but not silence, the kind that allows one to hear the wind blows, the leaves move. It also has no darkness. There is a relative absence of light, but not complete blackness, like there is outside of the city on a moonless night. "Hedgehogs Lane" was the name I gave to a section of Spalengraben Street in the old city of Basel, which leads to the Spalentor, one of 3 still-standing gates in the old city walls. The special thing about Hedgehog lane, and perhaps about Basel in general, was its inconceivable quietness. A city—a western metropolitan for all intents and purposes—home of 195 thousand residents, a cultural and art capital, with an international airport operating only a few kilometers from the city center, and yet, in its heart there are areas where one can wander and discover that he can hear a hedgehog scratching and electricity running through the cables. The same quietness that allows one to realize that the cocoon is no longer a caterpillar, and if we would wait there for a short while, idle, we could witness the emergence of the butterfly.

The foundation of any writing is reading, not necessarily in the literary sense of the word, but rather as a process: observation, internalization, assimilation, interpretation, insight. From there, one can carry it forward; save it for a rainy day or use it immediately. The sidewalks of thought are paved over scruffy roads that once ran between thorny bushes. Now they are surrounded by towers, rails, street-signs. All of these—sentences, words, punctuation marks, verses—are what forms existence, the foundation of the composition.

Ronny Shani is a flâneuse, writer, editor, and translator.

1. "To the Reader," *Sholem Aleichem – Selection*, Miskal Publishing (Yediot Aharonot Books), 2008 (Hebrew).
2. *Orion*, blog.longreads.com/2014/10/15/the-art-of-arrival
3. Harcourt, 2003, translated from the Spanish by Margaret Sayers.
4. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, Penguin, 1975.
5. "The Conditions of Living Memory," from the exhibition's book *The Urburb* for the Israeli Pavilion at the 14 Architecture Exhibition, Roy Brand and Ori Scialom (eds.), Sternthal Books, 2014.

מוזיאון
petach tikva
פתח תקוה
museum
לאמנות
of art

Petach Tikva Museum of Art

Director and Head Curator: Drorit Gur Arie

The Crystal Palace and the Temple of Doom
July – October 2015

Artists: Eden Bannet, Michal BarOr, Ariel Caine, Yael Efrati, Maayan Elyakim, Liz Hagag, Elisheva Levy, Hilla Toony Navok, Tchelet Ram, Alona Rodeh, Yariv Spivak

Curator: Hila Cohen-Schneiderman

Appendix

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