Starved as I was for adventure, the bustle of Tel-Aviv did not attract me much as a youth; the life I craved for was much easier to imagine attained in Paris or New York City than in that shabby, ostentatious port. Mediterranean hedonism was antithetical to the ambitious, serious and 'pure' spirit that permeated everything I did - even my transgressions; those I wanted to be surrounded with - the rebellious, independent, non-compromised descendants of Proust, Kafka, Musil and Duchamp - were not likely to be citizens of Tel-Aviv. The clash of temperaments was simple and stark: I wanted to be *different* - a subversive freak, a member of the 'underground' or the avant-garde - whereas the people in Tel-Aviv wanted more than anything else to live the wholesome, *normal* life of an American or European. "There is no need to leave Israel in order to learn about what is new and happening in the world, they reassure one another; you can find everything right here."

In the last decades of the 20th century, Israelis developed on that basis a new ideology they named post-zionism. "The main aim of zionism has been achieved, the post-zionist says; Israel is *already* a nation like any other - a *normal* nation - just what Herzl wanted." The Tel-Avivnik adds: "As long as I am in my town, I am able to lead a *normal* life - to block out the war, ignore the Arabs, forget the fanatics and religious lunatics of the two sides and the history that ties them to each other, suffocating both." The pretentious bourgeois goes even one step further: "When I look at my *local* environment - my well-dressed friends and the glamourous parties they throw, the sophisticated restaurants and the lively bars we frequent and the good looking, fun-loving people in *our* part of the country - I can easily imagine them transplanted in Los Angeles, Sydney or Miami-Beach." The upscale suburbanite of Ramat Hasharon or Ra'anana shed tears of joy when they see their sheltered children skateboard or surf in their garish, imported outfits and expensive gear - "living in Israel but looking wholesome and 'camera-ready' "Kmo Behuz la-aretz!" - as if they were abroad.
To be normal in the post-zionist sense of the term is thus to be affected as little as possible by the harsh sociopolitical reality. The equation is simple: The more insulated from the environment the more privileged you are. In order to forget the conflict with the Palestinians you avoid meeting them; at this point, few ever visit the west bank voluntarily. If the sacred lands of Judea and Samara which are the core of the conflict ceased to exist few in Tel Aviv would notice. In order to forget the constant battle with the religious who try to impose their way of life on the rest, you avoid places where the religious community is all powerful. People shorten their visits to Jerusalem as much as possible, for instance, because the holy city is 'too heavy to bear'. The flight from reality does not stop even after you have managed to move to Tel-aviv, turning your backs on the rest of country; the socially ambitious within Tel Aviv shield themselves from anything outside their milieu - from the poverty and coarseness of the masses. The socially ambitious never go to the famed beach of their city nor eat in the market restaurants. To feel normal you must sieve from your life any traces of ordinary Israeli life.
"If you want so much to insulate yourself from the Israeli environment, the reader might be tempted to ask them, why don't you just pack up and leave?" Their likely answer would be: "Like other *normal*

human beings, we are attached to our families and love our language and our homeland; being proud jews, we cannot, moreover, bear the idea of living among anti-Semites in the diaspora; that does not mean, however, that we must spend our lives suffering! We live here as joyously and luxuriously as anywhere else!"

Insulation from the Israeli environment is an uphill battle with which many of my friends have been constantly engaged for years. Their primary aims are epistemological: In order to comprehend the world around them - project concepts, laws, and patterns thereon - they must fit what they see and hear under pre-existing categories. The concepts, patterns and laws, however, stem from books, foreign TV programs, the internet, Hollywood movies and international magazines, whereas the sense data, from the streets of the middle east. As a result, the epistemological challenge of the socially ambitious Israeli - fitting the imported concepts to the local reality - is frequently daunting: Reality tends to 'barge in' and frustrate their efforts like the proverbial unruly visitor who enters the movie-set in the middle of a shooting. Someone always dresses improperly; every picture-perfect occasion has a spoiler; designs are never fully realized and 'finish', never perfect; civility is skin deep; public orderliness is often violated - whether at the bus stop or the wedding buffet. It seems as if a mal genie took perverse pleasure in causing dissonance in the relation between your concepts and your reality, preventing you from ever feeling relaxed and fully at home in your surrounding.

The real reason for the chronic epistemic shortcomings that are endemic in certain Israeli circles has nothing to do, of course, with super-natural tormentors but with the simple fact that, having acquired their world-view mostly from foreign sources, it cannot be expected to fit wholly and tightly in a context, as different from the original as theirs; a certain dissonance is likely to remains in spite their best efforts to ignore or 'abstract from' the differences and forcibly apply it. In so far as they employ ideas that bare no organic relation to their context, the world will tend to appear to them unclear and indistinct.

Cognitive dissonance may be defined, then, as a gap between expectations and reality - when the former are 'frustrated' - namely, when our concepts seem arbitrary, our representations, 'removed from origin' and the laws, patterns and rhythms we project fail to hold. Usually, the pathology effect people who employ concepts and representations that were not derived from their environment but, foreign and remote sources; in virtue of their 'inorganic' relation to their context, the world tends to appear to them 'less real'. The conclusion applies, in particular, to the post-zionists of Tel-Aviv who try, by their own admission, to insulate to the extent possible from their immediate environment and found their vision of the world mostly on imported ideas; if our general hypothesis is correct, cognitive dissonance must be endemic in these ranks.

Another formulation of the hypothesis concerning the representations of the post-zionists' is that, in so far as they use as their 'building blocks' concepts and images that bear little or no relation to the actual conditions of their lives, their representations are not likely to appear 'realistic' either. Post-zionist culture has, in other words, an immanent difficulty with realism.

ormality