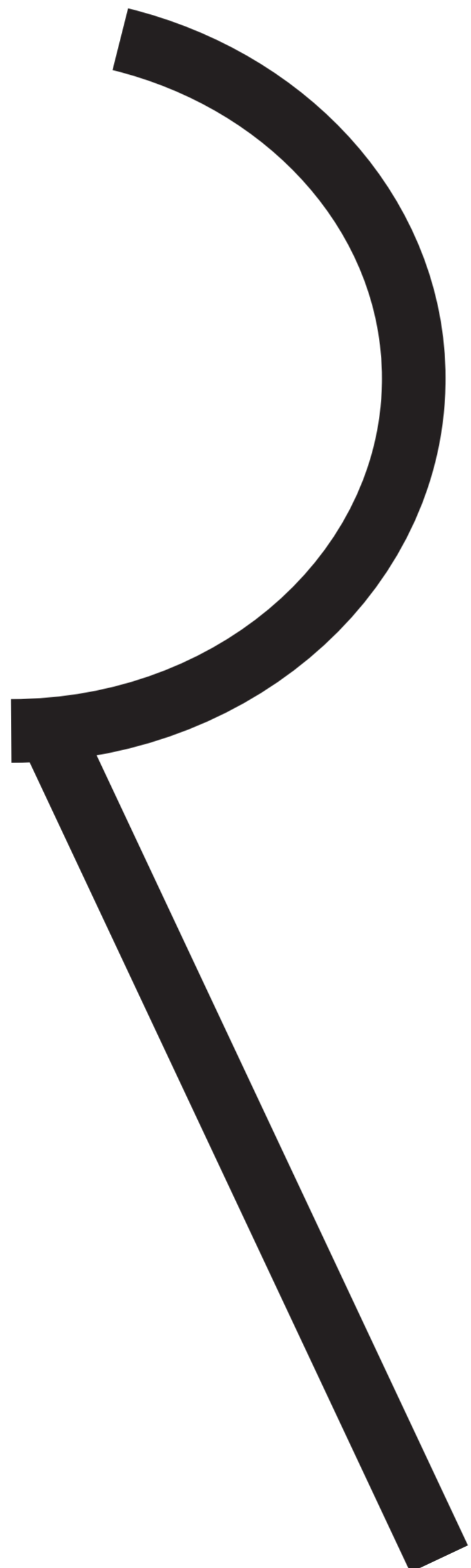


*In the evening, an occasional passer by was likely to find the leafy streets of my neighborhood quite and largely deserted; come eight o'clock, his sweet silent thoughts were sure to be shuttered by the drum roll of the night news and the darkness enveloping him, by the TV-blue clouds which every window suddenly blitzed. No matter who he was or where he stood, the hapless stroller would have been exposed to the sights and sounds unless his eyes were covered and wax poured in his ears. Listening to the news was a civic duty, admitting few or no exceptions; even on the bus, the latest information about a military operation or a terror attack was blasted from every speaker and no one ever dared complain; every hour on the hour, an even sequence of high pitch beeps signaled the passengers to ignore their respective individual concerns for five minutes or so and let group-consciousness take the rein. Gradually, I started feeling someone was playing with me fast and loose and developed a serious aversion to the group-universe that I and everyone else was forced to inhabit.*

The group spirit requires nourishment and maintenance; the members must be placed together frequently in large assemblies in order to experience their set membership concretely - in space and time - and those who refuse to do so must be sanctioned. Watching the rallies on TV is a poor substitute - a 'booster' for those who have attended them before; in order to acquire a group-being, its self-celebration must be occasionally experienced first hand. Independence day was one such occasion; when I was young, people lined the streets every year to watch battalions of soldiers in formation flanked by tanks and heavy trailers carrying cannons and missiles that traversed the avenues and the airplanes flying above in the sky. The holocaust memorial day was universally observed first; shrieking sirens signaled everyone to stop what they were doing and stand erect in memory of the dead. Cars and buses stood still on the highways; the city centers were eerily quiet. For a minute or so, the entire nation remained frozen; everyone was thinking about the same things. Only later, the national celebration took place; the masses poured into the center of Jerusalem in the evening of the next day. Youth organizations provided an avenue to acquire group-sense in an early age. They taught the young to be civic minded and devoted to the larger whole. In bourgeois schools like mine, the boy scouts were dominant; ever since I was ten, I went dressed in khaki uniform to join the biweekly activities of my group. On Saturday afternoon the entire 'battalion' stood in formation; the Israeli scouts retained the para-military character of the original organization. In leftist circles the young donned mostly the blue shirts with red strings of the Young Pioneers; presumably, they were preparing themselves to join a kibbutz. The national religious youth - a jewish version of the christian socialist youth movements - had a movement of their own; they distinguished themselves from the orthodoxy by wearing knitted rather than solid skullcaps. The same was true in most European countries, where the youth was divided between nationalist, socialist and national religious subgroups.



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