

MARTIN BUBBER

CREATURELY LIFE AND SOCIAL FORM

NEW JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND THOUGHT

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EDITED BY

Sarah Scott

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS

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This book is a publication of

Indiana University Press
Office of Scholarly Publishing
Herman B Wells Library 350
1320 East 10th Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47405 USA

iupress.org

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Manufactured in the United States of America

First printing 2022

Cataloging information is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-0-253-06363-2 (hardback)
ISBN 978-0-253-06364-9 (paperback)
ISBN 978-0-253-06365-6 (ebook)

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two among the infinite attributes, whereas Scheler's metaphysics assumes only these two.

28. *Ibid.*, 188.
29. Buber discusses this view in his essay "Imitatio Dei" (1926), in *Israel and the World*, 72-76.
30. Buber, "What Is Man?," 189.
31. Martin Buber, "The Demand of the Spirit and Historical Reality" (1938), in *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, trans. Maurice S. Friedman (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 182-85.
32. Buber, "What Is Man?," 189.
33. *Ibid.*, 198.
34. *Ibid.*, 197.
35. *Ibid.*, 190.
36. Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation between Religion and Philosophy* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), 38-41.
37. Buber, "What Is Man?," 191-92.
38. *Ibid.* The use of the word *depths* is likely an illusion to Ps. 130:2, "Out of the depths I call to You, Lord."
39. Buber, "What Is Man?," 191-92.
40. *Ibid.*, 195.
41. *Ibid.*, 193.
42. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 69-73.

SEVEN

MARTIN BUBER, METAPHYSICS, AND THE AESTHETICS OF BINATIONALISM

ZACHARY BRAITERMAN

IN THE FOLLOWING REFLECTIONS I want at once to hold apart and tie together two distinct but not separate things—the aesthetic and the political as they appear in the writing of Martin Buber about Palestine, Israel, and the idea of binationalism. To begin, there is Buber's own more than happenstance immersion in the art and aesthetics of fin de siècle and German modernism. More basic to Buber's complete oeuvre is the impact of Nietzsche, art nouveau, expressionism, and *neue-Sachlichkeit* on Jewish philosophy as a form of visual thinking about Jews, Jewishness, and place. Setting aside the philosophy of dialogue for which Buber is most well known, I will argue that the idea of unity is a "metaphysical" topos that Buber never left behind. Its forms only mutated, and we see its afterlife in the binational idea. As forms of first philosophy, seeing and imagining were and are the prism with which to think through critically the binational idea. Then, there is the imbrication of politics and aesthetics as distinct modes of being and the constellation of political thinking and projects around images. This imbrication brings to mind trenchant questions about what is real and what remains "irreal" in relation to aesthetics and politics, especially as they come together and fall apart in the imagining of utopian political visions. Finally, ideas about spirituality, the image of land and the Orient, and Jews in the Middle East center my discussion about Israel and Palestine.

Assuming that Buber was first and foremost a visual thinker, my purpose in this chapter is to consider the binational project as it appears in his thought in view of its pictorial aspect. The argument in these pages assumes additionally that the Zionism promoted by him was theo-aesthetic, not theo-political per se. This hunch about the combination of art and religious philosophy in Buber's thought is predicated on the claim that a picture constitutes a form of

visual thinking and that thinking is itself a visual act. This basic contention is the one made by Rudolf Arnheim in *Visual Thinking*, his classic study from 1966. Visual thinking was understood to be the act of drawing out essential features in combination with contexts and changes in contexts, filling in gaps and identifying structures, and, in the process, paying attention and discovering what matters. Arnheim's notion was that visual experience already constitutes a type of thought that involves the organization of a perceptual field via concepts and categories. Rather than present visual information as prior to or foreign to thought, visual activity is constituted as a basic form of intellectual processing, while thought is grasped in relation to acts of making and reading patterns. Buber's philosophy of religion and spiritual Zionism confirms Arnheim's view that more than a datum of cognitive awareness, every visual image is a proposition about human existence.¹

Invested in the imagination, visual thinking lends itself to dimensions that outstrip simple empirical existence and conventional common sense. Both in the concrete and in the abstract, visual thinking is basic to the dialogical constitution of the physical and the metaphysical, of politics and religion, of the real and the unreal—as separate figures of thinking, but also in relation to each other. Our investigation of the binational idea as a topos of Buberian philosophy will support Arnheim's contention that perception is always already intellectual and normative, while intelligence and normative value are always already visual. This includes the visualization of theoretical concepts, particularly in the absence of physically constituted objects, presenting the visage of a natural object in a “thoroughly unnatural constellation, not realizable on our gravity-ridden earth.” Objects are reduced to “few essential flashes of direction or shape” in both nonrepresentational painting and in abstract thought.²

For their part, the history of Zionism and the question of Palestine will be recognized as constituted as stylized objects of visual thinking and performance. The formation of both national communities depended on the formation of discrete imaginary communities out of larger regional and international confluences.³ In Zionist circles, the most radically utopian platform was and remains the binational idea—the idea of creating on an equitable basis a shared political compact between what in the 1940s would have still been called Palestinian Jews and Palestinian Arabs. But what was the binational idea? Was it a practicable political solution to the conflict between Jews and Arabs over historical Palestine? How is one to gauge concrete struggles over geographical place and the construction of historical memory and cultural consciousness? Was binationalism just an idea? Was it a picture? Should we see in it a type of pictorial and picturesque visual thinking? And if so, on what kind of vision did

that picture depend? Was that vision political, religious, or even “metaphysical” in its own unique way? As utopian, was it, per Arnheim, a “thoroughly unnatural constellation, not realizable on our gravity-ridden earth”?

In the pulling together of my thoughts for this chapter about the relation between Buber's early religious philosophy and his support later in life for the binational idea, I have depended heavily on Israeli geographer Meron Benvenisti's more recent book on the impact of Zionism on sacred Palestinian landscapes, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948*, and also on resources cited in that study. Buber's first Zionist writings and Benvenisti's promotion of binationalism are separated by only a little less than one hundred years. What separates them obviously is the historical havoc that sits between today and yesterday—the 1948 Israeli War of Independence; the Palestinian refugee catastrophe, or *Nakba*; and the Israeli occupation and colonization of the West Bank and Gaza following the Six-Day War in 1967, which Palestinians call the *Naksa*, or setback. Despite that distance, their thinking is characterized by a strange convergence. Buber, of course, was renowned as the philosopher of dialogue and mutuality and a lifelong Zionist. But against the Zionist political establishment, he opposed the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine even as late as the 1940s. He promoted instead the principle of Arab-Jewish coexistence and the creation of a binational polity. For his part, Benvenisti was among the first and most prominent exponents of the binational project in contemporary Israeli culture and politics. He was already arguing in the 1980s that Israeli settlements in the West Bank made impossible the partition of the land into two separate countries. Less interested in the empirical claim made by Benvenisti and many others today, I want to consider his appeal to old Arab Palestine as a sacred landscape. I hope to show that Buber, the philosopher, was no less a spatial thinker than was Benvenisti, the geographer, while Benvenisti's thought was no less “spiritual,” no less bound to “our gravity-ridden earth,” than was Buber's.

In my remarks for this volume, “binationalism” is not understood “simply” in terms of a project built on political ideas and ethical-utopian traditions, which, of course, for Buber it was. But reading through the lens of this foundational thinker of the binational idea, I conceive it in a spiritual dimension invested in images and the imagination, “art” and Orientalism, religion, and metaphysics. After quickly introducing Buber as a quintessential visual thinker, I will cut straight to comments about pantheism made by Benvenisti and to the work from the 1920s he cites by the Palestinian orientalist Tawfik Canaan (1882–1964). I do so in order to reconsider the project of a binational compact between Arabs and Jews in Palestine as at once aesthetic and metaphysical. In

this reading, Benvenisti's remarks offer the cue with which to grasp retrospectively how Buber's mature formulation of the binational idea was prefigured in his first mystical or metaphysical speculations. By "metaphysical" I mean the image of an overriding principle of unity as the truer form of being than the duality and division out of which it emerges. In this inverted and anti-Platonic metaphysic, nonseparation was for Buber the "realization" of spirit nestled in the foundation of a primary and unifying sensual root.

My own critical contention is that the aesthetic-cum-metaphysical concept of unity in Buber's early addresses on Judaism underscores problems that dog binationalism as a political project. Against Buber, my more positivist assumption is that what first defines politics as "political" as opposed to "aesthetic" or "metaphysical" is the deliberate immersion into the very divisions and polarities, the vicissitudes and fractures, eschewed by Buber as an aesthetic and religious thinker. The argument here stands against the idea of "theopolitics" as Buber would have understood it in the 1930s (not as the transfer of the religious into the political as in "political theology" but rather the submersion of the political into the religious).⁴ For the particular purpose of these specific reflections, I will rather try to split the two sets (politics and theology, on the one hand, and politics and art, on the other hand) instead of fusing them. The point here is to argue that binationalism was and remains a project steeped in the visual imagination and in a peculiar group of visual figures. The metaphysical structure of the binational picture is based on the principle of underlying, undergirding unity, not the overlay of divisions and decisions by which we might ordinarily understand political compacts. A metaphysical figment, the picture of binationalism has always been more aesthetic than political.

I

The idea of unity that was the basic concept of Buber's earliest philosophical reflections is the key term with which to understand his promotion of binationalism. But this requires one to understand that arguments about Buber and binationalism require one to look past the lenses of epistemology, ethics, dialogue, and politics through which his thought is usually viewed. The alternative picture of Buber as a visual thinker builds on one that I have presented elsewhere, the main lines of which are as follows. His thought saturated by visual figures, Buber was a "Jewish Renaissance" thinker whose work embraced the history of religion, the history of Jewish religion, philosophical anthropology, prophecy, mysticism, Hasidism, Zionism, and the utopian political tradition. Lost in the usual impression and scholarly interpretation of his work is

how steeped it was in the aesthetics of form (*Gestalt*) and space. Oscillating between form and formlessness as the flow and the patterning of perception, a visually rich form of synesthetic thinking defined Buber's early oeuvre and would continue to bear on his thinking.⁵

I touch on some of that in the discussion that follows. But for now I want to provide a sharper conceptual frame with which to understand Buber's dialogical worldview, particularly in regards to time and space in relation to the aesthetic structure of the binational project. I start with what is more obvious. In terms of time and space, Buber's overall philosophy of dialogue would have seemed to be more naturally conditioned on the form of temporal sequence than a conversation would have to follow. In the course of a dialogue, first one speaks and then the other. Overlooked is that the *Gestalt*-frame for dialogue was, for Buber, always the spatial arrangement predicated on an almost static logic of simultaneous presence—I and You and the space in between. The structure is not unlike the one in painting by which multiple figures occupy the same space not in sequence but simultaneous to each other. This aspect of space as an open configuration would explain Buber's glancing interest in *I and Thou* and elsewhere to creaturely figures (a tree, a chip of mica, a human fetus, a cat, a horse). More than merely decorative, these are figures of thought that should be set alongside other figures, like the dancer Nijinsky and the Isenheim altar from a group of very early essays written around the time of Buber's 1913 *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization*, as well as alongside the image of biblical prophets and Hasidic masters that would continue to inform Buber's thought for the rest of his life.

The upshot would be that Buber was not able to imagine Jewish political and spiritual renewal outside a spatial *Gestalt*. Place was the necessary if not sufficient condition for the renewal of the Jewish people, and for the renewal of Jewish life as an expression of concrete life. This contention appears throughout Buber's early Zionist writing and also in his letter to Gandhi in which Buber defended the Zionist project after the rise of Hitler in Germany.⁶ But what kind of place? On the one hand, he defended a real place, a physically tangible place, and, on the other hand, not just any kind of place. Throughout the larger body of Buber's work there is the idea not just of *Gestalt*, not just the idea of the image, but also of perfected form, the perfected image, and perfect life. Perfection was central to the way Buber understood the life of Hasidism as well as Zionism, his interest in both stemming back to the same time in the first decade of the twentieth century. The mature vision of Buber's binationalism would reflect an ongoing commitment to Palestine, to the project of perfected place. Viewed in relation to Buber's larger pattern of thinking, the commitment to Palestine

as a political project would be to imagine it as structured as a correlate to the image of perfected space.

To be sure, Buber was not a philosopher of "totality" as understood by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. But for all the close and essential attention given to individual figures in tension and in dialogue, it remains true that Buber thought in terms of large compositional blocs and fluid patterns. In this, Buber's philosophy of dialogue "looks" more like a modernist *Gesamtwerk*, an abstract composition by a painter such as Wassily Kandinsky, a complex totality with no single center. In the modernist composition, associated by Kandinsky with nothing less than "the spiritual in art," what happens is not the overwhelming of the particular by the whole. Quite the opposite, it is the individual element—be it a color fragment or a tone—that determines the visage or the sound of the larger whole, or *Gestalt*, of the compositional sense and structure. Regarding Buber's thought about place and space, the energy here owes itself to the thought of his time—to philosophical vitalism, *Lebensphilosophie*, and German expressionist art. In this conception, place does not appear as dead matter to be simply shaped and reshaped. The binational idea depends on a kind of landscape, conceived not as a dead or passive block of territorial space but as infused by a live and living charge. Perceived as foundationally fluid, place is not simply subject to binary division. As in contemporary affect theory, Buber's politics is predicated on the capacity to perceive or to sense matter as alive and buzzing. As a seer, this is what Buber hoped to see.

II

Interested in religion, one should have already made note of the very title of Meron Benvenisti's text, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948*. With an eye on the principle of restorative justice, Benvenisti's book, published in 2000, is a tragic lament to the destruction of Palestine as a human landscape and physical space.⁷ Stretched over the place of the old Arab landscape, Benvenisti follows the historical mapping of Jewish Palestine and the creation of modern Israel. His study begins with a chapter titled "The Hebrew Map" and then proceeds to examine, in "White Patches," the Zionist Yishuv before chapters devoted to the Arab-Palestinian exodus and ethnic cleansing and then the uprooting and planting of the new Jewish-Israeli state as a territorial configuration. More meditation than political study, Benvenisti's work shows Arab topographies as organic, slow-tempoed and evolutionary, unmediated, authentic, aesthetic-poetic. In contrast, Jewish topography marks itself (or is marked by the author) in terms of rupture, sudden tempo, and synthetic spatial framing and as bureaucratic, brute, and ugly.

At issue are two points, one relating to the history of style and design, the other relating to the metaphysics of place and identity, both in relation to colonialism and violent conflict. The claims in other words, are not simply political. The Arab-Palestinian landscape is given the lush contours characteristic of romantic and neoromantic Orientalism, whereas Jewish settlements, both urban and rural, are presented in terms of modernism. (The iconography is not unusual; forgotten, though, in this representation is the memory of Arab Yaffa, with its own adaptations to architectural modernism in the 1920s.) On top of that is the metaphysical claim, the feel for what Benvenisti calls "metaphysical belonging" to the whole of the land. Benvenisti argues that the Zionists claimed this for themselves and denied it to the Palestinians, who were said to be immersed only in particular local places. Viewed metaphysically, the conflict is not so much to whom the land belongs as much as who belongs to the land.

Looking past the retelling of political history, Benvenisti hits his own groove when he turns to write about the old sacred landscape signposts of Muslim memory, about saints, peasants, and holy sites. No mere turn of phrase, the very title *Sacred Landscape* evokes the author's own feel for the spiritual wholeness of the land. A good antiquarian, Benvenisti expresses a special fondness for Arab-Palestinian folklore studies from the 1920s and 1930s with a particular nod to Tawfik Canaan's study *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (1927). Benvenisti notes that Canaan was criticized by later Palestinian nationalist writers in the 1980s for not writing about national identity or about resistance to Britain and to Zionism. But Benvenisti reads this and other older studies with a sense of sorrow, for "this innocent, in terms picturesque, and pristine world that has disappeared, never to return."⁸

What catches our own interest is the particular language with which Benvenisti describes "the demise of the pantheistic cult of sacred trees and healing springs."⁹ In this, Benvenisti is clearly relying on Canaan's study. Already in 1927, Canaan laments how the "primitive features of Palestine"—what he characterizes romantically as simple, crude, uncontaminated, patriarchal Palestine—are fading before a "more sophisticated but more unnatural" European civilization.¹⁰ To set the scene for the investigation of Muslim sanctuaries and shrines, Canaan depicts the Palestinian landscape as one of bald hills with gardens and orchards here and there, solitary trees, and groups of trees. In this telling, every place, every "shrine, tomb, tree, cave, spring, well, rock or stone" was "invested with some religious reverence." Called superstitious and in opposition to orthodox Koranic strictures, this describes the local folk religion of high places and other landscape features marked out by acts of devotion at innumerable sacred shrines, in every village, on every

mountain, and in every valley, field, and stream, a landscape populated by spirits, demons, and saints.¹¹

From the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, Palestine is presented as an integrated geographical-spiritual matrix and immemorial temporal frame. With constant reference to the Hebrew Bible, Canaan is convinced that the Palestinian *fellahin* (peasant farmers) of his day are heirs and "in some respects descendants of—heathens, Jews, and Christians."¹² What one notes in Benvenisti's appeal to Canaan is the sense of his own attachment to an organic notion of land and spatial wholeness. With Benvenisti, the metaphysical pantheist model of bonding to particular site-places is more self-consciously naive. It is as if it is this pantheistic cult, which Benvenisti wants to join. Poignant, this metaphysical desire for an undergirding unity and sense of belonging suggests that binationalism as a critical Zionist project remains indelibly metaphysical, the aching and sentimental character of which has been ignored as such by political actors who fought and fight across both sides of the hard surface to the conflict.

Attempting to see past the impasse over landscape and memory, Benvenisti contrived his own set of cartographical redrawings. *Sacred Landscape* is in part a family drama, the author recalling trips through the countryside of Mandatory Palestine with his father, himself a geographer and cartographer. Feeling at home in the land and with his own eye of Canaan's study, Benvenisti remapped the area based on ideas that are just as staked in the imagination as those of any other orientalist. Having traced the way official Zionist organs drew a new and national Hebrew map over the old Arabic place names, Benvenisti would, in his own project, set out to denationalize the land and its landscapes. The concluding remarks to *Sacred Landscape* recommend the restoration and maintenance of old Palestinian holy sites and historical places such as castles, khans, mills, and olive presses. As part of a basic cartographical and narrative restructuring, Benvenisti calls the attention of his fellow Jewish Israeli nationals to the Arab geographical stratum underpinning the country that they claim as their own.

To draw out the notion of the old Palestinian landscape as a living organism, Benvenisti draws not so much directly from Canaan as from Israeli novelist Y. Z. Yizhar and Meir Shalev. It is in their work that one finds more clearly not just the tension between historical-cultural strata, but a bubbling life that roils underneath the surface, a sacred landscape as nature pantheism. That is the particular impression made by a passage cited by Benvenisti from Shalev's novel *Roman Russi* (*Russian Novel*, translated into English as *The Blue Mountain*, 1988). The novel chronicles the settlement of the Jezreel Valley in Israel across three generations. For our purposes, we will keep our attention on Baruch, a third-generation member of a cooperative village and the novel's first-person

narrator, and Pinness, introduced as the "old schoolteacher" of the local cooperative village established by Baruch's grandfather during the 1920s.

The central protagonist in Shalev's novel is undoubtedly the land itself, represented as a deep and vital force over which the Zionist pioneers have only a tenuous grasp. Two scenes call our immediate attention. In the first, the one cited by Benvenisti, the novel recalls an episode when archaeologists from London were brought to explore a prehistoric cave discovered by Pinness when he was a still a young man during the British Mandate for Palestine. The site of archaic human remains—*Homo sapiens palestinaeus*, it is quipped—the cave uncovers the subterranean depths over which the new Jewish settlement was fabricated. An uncanny figure, the cave is the site of a disorienting revelation: "Stepping back out of the cave, [Pinness] sat in on the entrance looking down on the broad, obeisant, fertile Valley at his feet. The humble cabins of the village, its infant streets and young shade trees, suddenly seem to float on the fallow, long-historied earth, bobbing on its countless strata. The first geometric fields of the pioneers looked like so much patchwork, mere cobwebbery. [Pinness] was still a young man, and the thought of vast epochs swinging over the Valley like pendulums induced in him a feeling of vertigo."¹³ In this passage, the one cited by Benvenisti, the novel reflects on the uncovering of the prehistorical past of the place, the sense of deep time that unmoors the present tense from any firm basis in reality. As revelation, the cave allows one to see the history of Jewish settlement in the valley as nothing but thin tissue.

A second scene from Shalev's novel, which Benvenisti does not cite, makes the same point. But here it is the biological past of the place, not the historical past, that calls the Jewish settlement into question as a surface phenomenon. Baruch, the grandson, is presented desperately at work on rooting out a wild native plant spreading like a rhizome over the vegetable garden and the hut of the now deceased family patriarch. The root is described as thickening and diving into the ground. The root Baruch finally pulls it out of the ground is as if ripped out from the bowels of the earth. Digging a trench, cutting through corn and clover and the ruins of old British military positions, his tearing out of the root leaves a deep hole. As described by Baruch in the first person: "A great hole remained in the ground, and from it rose a milky pestilent vapor thick with swarms of mosquitoes. Peering down into it, I saw the dense, murky water of the past swirling slowly, little grubs clinging to its surface and breathing patiently through their short air tubes. . . . A deep gurgle sounded from the hole. Shut up by the founders in the bowels of the earth, imprisoned in the trunks of the eucalyptus trees they planted, the soughing swamp began to surge toward me as it was touched by the sun's rays."¹⁴ Representing a depth dimension

beneath the surface of the historical present, the land itself is an undegirding, vital living form that confounds the feeble attempts by the Zionist founders to transform the place into an image of their own making. The power of nature as a living ensemble of forces is the same one captured by the thundering, "ear-blinding" roar of cicadas in the summer, clinging to jasmine bushes and olive branches, drinking fresh sap from the plants, "immemorially." Describing this nature-cacophony with a no uncertain biblical turn of phrase, Pinness likens the cicada song to "the true song of this country," "an obstinate trill that has no melody or notes, no beginning or end, nothing but the jubilant and admonishing proclamation of Existence that says, 'Here I am!'"¹⁵

While himself critical of the way in which Shalev obscures in his novel the Arab Palestinian landscape, what Benvenisti draws from poets and from fiction is the statement from Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, "The geography within history is stronger than the history within geography." Benvenisti then continues to cite the call by Yizhar to hear the land as "growing, an un-forgetting silence, unable also to forget even when it has already been plowed and has already brought forth fair, new crops. Something within it knows and does not forget, cannot forget."¹⁶ Land is not simply a material basis or substratum with which to support a superstructural ideological overlay, which might shape that land either this way or that. With its own memory, land is its own gnosis and expressive agency. Is this just a figure of speech? It is hard to tell the degree to which a writer not known to be "religious" is invested in such flights of fancy. And yet this appeal of Palestinian sacred landscape evokes the depth dimension of human dwelling. Only by integrating into its strata—forming an integral part of it, not as an alien invader—Benvenisti insists, can "the Israeli feel truly to be an 'image of his homeland's landscape.'"¹⁷ Spanning nearly the entire twentieth century, for Jewish proponents of the binational idea, the political vision turns on a metaphysical image—spiritual and pantheist, the vision of the whole, the Israeli Jew in the image of his land, the secularization of the image of God in man. A composite picture bifurcated between a thin surface and primordial foundations, the model is metaphysical before it is political—aesthetic and spiritual, not strictly empirical.

III

The emphasis on the living character of what Benvenisti calls the sacred landscape—its underlying integrity and unity, not division—and the reference to nature pantheism and to the deep-seated desire to belong brings us back to Buber's early writings on Judaism. For the young Buber, it was a peculiar

metaphysics combined with a feel for deep sensation that served as the basis of the modern Jewish political project. As promoted by Buber, the Jewish Renaissance—Zionist Renaissance relied on affective roots and primary acts of human cognition understood in terms of seeing, hearing, and touching. National and spiritual renewal was founded on the renewal of perception. It should be no surprise that we find this interest in his 1901 speech, "Address on Jewish Art," at the Fifth Zionist Congress; there he railed against "ghetto sentimentality" in the face of an exile that had robbed the Jews of "the ability to behold a beautiful landscape and beautiful people."¹⁸ Zionism was going to cultivate a new Jewish art, a "new, strange, never before seen garden," the movement serving as a teacher for a living perception of nature and people, by means of which "we will behold and recognize ourselves."¹⁹

The erotic visual figure of the Orient was vividly pictured already in French romantic, pre-Raphaelite and symbolist—art nouveau paintings, in works of art by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Roddam Spencer-Stanhope, Odilon Redon, Frantisek Kupka, and George Barbier. Relative latecomers to this tradition were nineteenth-century and fin de siècle Jewish artists such as Maurycy Gottlieb, Lesser Ury, E. M. Lilien, Zé'ev Raban, and Reuven Rubin. Add to the list as well the dark-haired Jewish oriental beauties, dappled in gold and jewel-like patterns in works by Gustav Klimt. The Shulamite from the Song of Songs was an especially beloved figure in this art tradition that found its way into modern Jewish thought, most notably in Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* (1921). The Orient was always evoked in these paintings and letters in bright colors, representing the beautiful and the sublime, sex and sexiness, and everything associated with it, including death, a figure with generative power opposed to the age of degeneration in the modern Occident and the ugliness of Jewish exile.

Buber provided a philosophical frame to this discourse, the fusion of politics of cultural Zionism and aesthetics assuming a more systematic bent in his first three addresses on Judaism, the *Drei Reden* (1910s). A theoretical structure, the metaphysic provided a fundamental orientation that was to limn the difference between unity and division. In the first address, "Judaism and the Jews," Jewish life in exile is inorganic. Judaism and the Jews are split between the external world and the inner world. None of these things cohere: the world of our impressions versus the world of substance, the external experience of the world and its native surroundings, language, and mores versus the internal experience of the individual Jewish soul represented as a part of a "blood community" binding past and contemporary generations together into a single assemblage. But what does unification mean? In the second address, "Judaism and Mankind," the perspective broadens past the particular divisions that mar

and make ugly Jewish life in exile. Unification means not the expulsion but rather the organic combining of polar elements striving for psychological, social, political, ecological, and theological unity. Unity represents no lost Eden, no original ontological state but goal, redemption, and renewal. The demand for unity is born out of one's own duality. A Kabbalistic figure of thought in its psycho-theological isomorphism, it is existence itself that is rent and sundered. This includes the reality of God's being sundered from God's indwelling. Not simply political, the goal of renewal is the ontological redemption from duality, the very reunification of the godhead. In the third address, "Renewal of Judaism," Buber drove home the point that this striving for unity is an innate human and cosmic tendency exemplified within the Jewish soul. Now, unity is aligned with the undifferentiated, the absolute, and the unconditional. Renewal is the creative synthesis of purified tendencies into a united and organic whole.²⁰

My own purpose in this essay is to read these ideas forward in order to situate conceptually what was to become Buber's mature binationalism, in particular his rejection of plans to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state. With that in mind, I note the way in which the unity principle, as a peculiar form of religious-metaphysical thinking, was from the very start inflected by art and landscape painting. One of Buber's first published pieces was an essay on painter Lesser Ury (1861–1931) published as part of a series of Jewish artists sponsored by the Zionist Congress. Central to Buber's thinking about art was the rejection of any fixed and rigid boundary. What drew him to this artist in specific was the erasure of line by strong color in Ury's impressionistic landscape painting. More than an arbitrary aesthetic choice in respect to the history of style, this kind of art is held to represent an idea of cosmic reality, nothing less than a toppling of the picture of the Newtonian cosmos writ large.

In contrast to what Buber will later embrace in terms of *Gestalt*, the idea of a living and unifying form pattern, in this essay *Form* represents the antipode to life. As a rigid structure, "Form does not say anything about reciprocal relations, the reciprocity of things. . . . Form separates, color unites. Only color can tell about air and sun, fog and shadows: it puts the thing in context."²¹ We see here an anticipation of relationship being more than an interpersonal ethical orientation, but as bearing all the marks of strong color and color fields. "Here, all is given in the natural-material as mutual effect [*Wechselwirkung*]," and the "soul of the landscape . . . reveals itself in the reciprocal effect [*Auseinanderwirken*] of its elements, in the reciprocal shadings, mistings, intensifications, and deepenings." Already thinking about landscape and soul, Buber sees in Ury's art a visualization of that "moment in which one thousand life streams mix," a view of the world with its fluid and dynamic exchange of reciprocating

energies.²² More than the biblical characters who inhabit and the settings that locate Ury's biblical painting, one would look instead for principles like the "struggle of boundlessness," "world unity," and "infinity without rest." These are the elements that identify Ury's art as "Jewish."²³

All of the component figures from the essay on Ury—landscape, soul, religiosity, the infinite, sensation—come together only a little over ten years later in "The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism," published in *Vom Geist des Judentums* (*On the Spirit of Judaism*, 1916), another collection of essays from the same period as the *Three Addresses* (*Drei Reden*) and with which the first three addresses were later incorporated. While it would be fair to say that Buber, at this point in his career as a writer, was not disinterested in racial difference, one should note that he states quite clearly that he was more interested in what he called "supra-racial structures." The geographical object of analysis is not just this or that individual nation but rather "complexes of nations," in particular the great single complex of so-called oriental nations stretching across from the corner of Southwest Asia across to its far east.²⁴ Flying in the face of European anti-semitism and bourgeois German Jewish taste, the point is to embrace openly the oriental aspect of what we today would call "Jewish identity."

While ostensibly about spiritual geography—Buber maintained with great polemical force that none of the great world religions owe their origin to the West—the essay was at base an exercise in synesthetic thinking. Inverting all the dominant axiological binaries between "occident" and "orient," the essential and spiritual difference as posed by Buber was one between a motor-type personality versus a "sensory-type." The essay builds on a crude binary opposition between the occidental type of consciousness dominated by vision and the oriental motor personality for which the world is perceived in motions. In the Orient, sight is not sovereign. There is instead a close connection of all the senses, and these with the "dark life of the organism." Interconnected, an impression made on one sense passes through all of them. Rather than in a perception of single things as separate, the oriental type of person perceives the world in aggregate nodal points with an infinite motion flowing through him. The oriental type of person, one who senses rather than perceives, can be called a "subject" in a very restricted and weak sense.²⁵ This is the reason why all of the great world religions grew out of oriental soil. To the essence of the orient belongs the realization (the making actual) of a unified image of the world as "disclosure of the world's inner substance."²⁶

In this apologetic for Zionism, the Jew is found in the Orient not as a foreign interloper but in the spirit of kinship and spiritual belonging, part of a larger transracial ecosystem. Buber thus restructured the entire conception of

Judaism. Against the abstractions of the German idealist tradition and liberal Judaism, Buber was one of the first thinkers to turn attention back to the mythic dimension in Jewish religion. In "Myth in Judaism," as well as in *Vom Geist des Judentums*, Buber laments the sublimating spiritualization in prophetic literature by which God is divested of sensual reality. YHWH is turned into the God of the universe, the God of humanity, the God of the soul who no longer walks to and fro in physical concourse with human beings and material reality.²⁷ While Buber would not have expressed it this way, the god who appears in this essay and in "The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism" is pagan in its attachment to land and landscape. As Buber himself insists, the biblical text is itself filled with images of field, garden, and vineyard, the soil itself standing in as an object of divine threat and promise. God is painted as lord of the field, of agrarian festivals, of a "nature bound life." The Bible's is not a world-conquering message, but one at home in native land, finding there on the scanty Canaanite soil a place on which to build a model community, to which the human experience in exile (*galut*) compares as an unnatural and fenced-in space.²⁸

Against the expression of aesthetic thinking that substitutes for politics, what anarchist-socialist Gustav Landauer (1870-1919) wrote to Buber on Buber's support of the German war efforts apply equally to this kind of writing about myth, the spirit of the orient, and Judaism. For Landauer, such thoughts were "very painful . . . very repugnant, and border on incomprehensibility. Object though you will, I call this manner aestheticism and formalism and I say that you have no right . . . to try and tuck these tangled events into your philosophical scheme [*schönen und weisen Allgemeinheiten*]: what results is inadequate and outrageous."²⁹ In his letter to Buber, he argued, "Historical matters can only be talked about historically, not in terms of formal patterns [*formalen Schematismus*] . . . I gladly grant that behind this is the desire to see greatness; but desire alone is not sufficient to make greatness out of a confused vulgarity."³⁰ In relation to Zionism, Landauer's criticism would have been posed in terms of a sharp reaction to the kind of aestheticism that might only have obscured the dense historical and political knots that tangle Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine. What remains an open question is whether binationalism was a political solution to that tangle or, understood aesthetically and metaphysically, its antithesis.

In this particular case, rather than follow Paul Mendes-Flohr in his classic study of Buber's turn away from the "mysticism" rejected by Landauer to "dialogue," I would suggest modulating the idea of a radical split between the early and mature Buber.³¹ When all is said and done, these early mystical thoughts on unity and dualism remained the metaphysical basis on which Buber built

his vision of the binational idea. The metaphysical indeed transferred over into the political for Buber, leading to considerable confusion. Buber's entire philosophical apparatus was built on a conception that begins with the need to orient the human body in abysmal space, both ontologically and politically as represented by a form of modern crisis consciousness. The dream of a binational, Jewish-Arab confederation in Palestine was drawn out of this same conceptual root. Buber's mature thought developed and modified that earlier orientation. The life of dialogue was meant to draw the most diverse gathering of people possible into a perfected common space free from domination. The idea is not distinct from the earlier writing on community.

By the end of the 1920s, Buber's mature thought had turned from the cozy *Gemeinschaft* idea to a more modern, more complex *Gesellschaft* point of view. This too was a shift brought to bear on his understanding of Zionism. In the late essay "Two Peoples in Palestine" (1947), he proposed economic-technical and political-spiritual action. *Politics* refers to the platonic sense according to which one "builds and gives form to society and state." *Technical* signifies the spiritual will to create an "all-encompassing, fruitful, and lasting peace among the peoples on the face of the earth." As a way to stimulate "the whole of Palestine," Buber viewed economic development, especially a huge irrigation enterprise, as the way to increase arable land and supply energy to local industry: "From being a divided territory made up of a dynamic Jewish element and an Arab element that is still fundamentally static, it would come to be a united land humming with intense productivity."³² A land that hums—the image presupposed a sonorous plastic form. It is a machine image but vaguely pagan, this technical project whose end was meant to sustain two people in one elastic place. The turn to technology, the expansion of space, the unification of a space around national difference, the creation of international institutions as a way to settle conflict were all together thought to constitute nothing less than a design for the earthly form of the kingdom of God.

Buber was aware that refusing to enter into relationship will collapse the struggle for "perfect space" back into the non-space of violent chaos. In light of the increasing threats to Jewish life in Europe, his political prognosis for Palestine missed the mark, but the diagnosis did not. He vociferously rejected the tragic view of two irreconcilable national claims, understanding that the ultimate success of Zionism requires peace with the Arab world. A binational state would have guaranteed free Jewish immigration and Arab rights simultaneously in the same place. The particular scheme was doomed from the start, given Arab opposition to unrestricted Jewish immigration. As one British commentator observed, "I personally think Buber's solution, the so-called

bi-national State is the figment of the constitutional imagination. If [Jews and Arabs] work together, you don't need it, and if they don't work together the constitution doesn't work."³³ It was never going to happen. For Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and the rest of the Zionist leadership, open Jewish immigration was a nonnegotiable Jewish political interest that the Arabs of Palestine, as they were called at the time, were simply unable to accept.

Throughout almost the entirety of Buber's literary oeuvre, his thinking about the kingship of God, politics, and political community was based on a metaphysics of undergirding unity combined with art, design, proportion, figments, imagination, and fabrication. This was the rich conceptual soil out of which grew one of the most important and influential expressions of binationalism as a resolution to the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine. Reading Buber alongside Benvenisti and Canaan, the point should have been obvious from the very start. The binational idea was always already a religious idea, steeped in religious ideas. One is surprised only to find this metaphysical root in Benvenisti or binationalism so early in Buber. Both thinkers sought to locate the Jewish people vis-à-vis an integrated sacred landscape, an oriental landscape, vital and growling and humming, a landscape that resists duality and partition. What both feared and hoped to resolve on an equitable basis was the reality of historical collision, clashing sacred cartographies, and political violence.

IV

Viewing its object from a historical distance, *Sacred Landscapes* is caught up in reverie and memory, on recalling old Arab-Muslim place names and their religious associations, almost all erased out in the countryside by the Zionist project. Like Tawfik Canaan, who once held the office of the president of the Palestine Oriental Society, Benvenisti's is an Orientalism committed to sympathetic claims regarding indigenous place and presence. Indeed, Benvenisti's analysis sheds almost no light on the basic question about the location of a Jewish place vis-à-vis larger Arab space, in both Palestine and the larger Middle East, except to observe that a long time ago, traditional Jews and Muslims were welcome at each other's holy sites. Ironically, Buber's binational idea—steeped in artificial constructs of Jewish cultural memory, the Bible and art, and Jewish political exigencies in relation to Europe—has the more complicated relationship to Orientalism. Touching on the relationship between the Orient as actual and imagined place, the aspect of Orientalism of interest here in relation to Buber and to the question of modern Jewish identity is more theoretical than the Orientalism of empire and bayonets.

If Orientalism as a scopical regime was dependent on a dominant point of view, the point of view of the Jewish orientalist was bound to be more complex. On the one hand, not unlike Benvenisti's, Buber's view of the Orient was from the intruding subject position of a Western observer. On the other hand, unlike the native-born Benvenisti's, the viewpoint positioned by Buber was European, even if from the underside of Europe. While the political Zionism espoused by Theodor Herzl and inherited by Ben-Gurion played the colonial card, the motivating cause of Zionism was not European empire but the vulnerability of Jewish belonging, especially in the face of European antisemitism. Like most Zionist writers enmeshed in colonial patterns of thinking, Buber was unable to see Arab culture on equal terms. But for Buber and others like him, the point of view sought was not supposed to be that of the place from above. While the binational idea in Zionism might have had something to do with what philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy calls "the community of a people" in relation to the idea of landscape, for them this had nothing to do with nationalism and patriotism per se or with the idea of possession and ownership.³⁴ A critic of political Zionism, Buber expressed the desire to locate the Jewish people and Judaism "in" the country, not over it.

Should it come as a surprise that Buber couched his own Orientalism against the occident or that Jews and Judaism should be seen as such ambiguous figures by Jews and non-Jews in a larger scholarly discourse saturated by antisemitic overtones? As part of what is a much broader mapping of an entire field of scholarship, Jews and Judaism appear as frequent objects of racial orientalist antisemitism, particularly among German Indologists interested in Aryan origins. That is one basic conclusion from Suzanne Marchand's study *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*. But Jews and Judaism also appear as participants in and objects of orientalist discourse at its best. Marchand pays a great deal of attention to the great practitioner of the art Ignaz Goldziher, for whom Islam was a "living, breathing, malleable tradition" and for whom the sympathetic study of Islam worked in tandem with the project of mid-nineteenth-century liberal Judaism.³⁵ And then there were the next generation of what Marchand calls the "furor orientalist" of the 1890s, whose interests were not historical per se but rather aesthetic, religious, philosophical, and critical-political. This generation of German orientalists was committed to cultural and spiritual renewal, to the intertwining of Europe with the people of other continents, and to the truth and superiority of art, ideas, and wisdom from the East. Counter-cultural, flamboyant, and antibourgeois, they made a decided break with liberal, nineteenth-century Eurocentric conventions modeled on classical Greek and Roman antiquity. Among these neo-Romantics Marchand includes Buber,

without much discussion, along with Franz Rosenzweig, Abby Warburg, Ernst Troeltsch, Rudolf Bultmann, C. G. Jung, and Gershom Scholem. German Zionism is also included as part of this little cultural constellation.

Against the German Jewish liberal century, the embrace of a stylized image of "the Orient" by a new generation of German Jewish intellectuals represented a "self-affirmation" one could identify as "auto-Orientalism."³⁶ What makes Jewish auto-Orientalism a unique and peculiar form of Orientalism is that it was not a discourse of the Other as much as it was a discourse of the self, of the self as Other to the self. With a predilection for East European *Ostjuden* and mysticism, German Jewish cultural performance from this period would show not a little dress-up and masquerade, photographed in oriental drag. Jewish auto-Orientalism would have involved not the imposition of an alienating grid mapped over and on top of an Other but rather an animating mask, a fictitious claim to an "identity" that would have been perceived at the time as one's own true self by the very people already marked off as "oriental" and "Semitic" by members of the "Aryan" majority. What we are calling "auto-Orientalism" is actually another modern variation of Jewish identity formation identified by Asher Biemann in *Dreaming of Michelangelo*, a book whose subject is Jewish cultural affinities with Rome, art, sculpture, and the Italian Mediterranean by an earlier generation of German Jews. In both Biemann's book and Marchand's study, what one sees is the finding of oneself through the critical lenses perceived through distant mirrors, the self as it becomes Other to itself, transforming itself in the process, as the poet or the subject comes to life before colorful images.³⁷ Michelangelo and the Mediterranean, or the Orient and Palestine, were the erotic geographical figures transforming German Jewish thought and culture.³⁸

What should any of this spiritual alienation from Europe have had to do with "the real Orient" in which actual people already lived in place? In a technical sense, these German Jewish performative peregrinations were "unreal." The auto-oriental Jew—the self as the object of auto-Orientalism—turns out to be more virtual than real. In this, we follow Marchand when she quotes critic of Orientalism Edward Said, mainly because she wants to argue against him. First, she contends that Said was too quick to reduce the entire project of Orientalism to imperialism; second, to do so, Said had to ignore the Germans (including Germanophone Jews, especially Goldziher), who would further complicate the politics of cultural Orientalism in ways that complicate Said's political model. But the following remark by Said quoted by Marchand is for us the most important one. As if conceding Marchand's point, Said writes, "There was nothing in Germany to correspond to the Anglo-French presence

in India, the Levant, North Africa." And this is the upshot, Said's conclusion being that "moreover, the German Orient was almost exclusively a scholarly, or at least a classical, Orient: it was made the subject of lyrics, fantasies, and even novels, but it was never actual."³⁹ Said continues to claim that German Orientalism was not original, that it just worked off techniques learned from the British and French. This was to miss what was strange and exotic, and also powerful, not about the Orient itself, but about German Orientalism and the particular case of German Jewish auto-Orientalism, including German Zionism, as identity formation.

Said's remark about the nonactuality of German Orientalism stands in the face of Buber's embrace of the spirit of the Orient as predicated on "realization"—that is, the making real (*Verwirklichung*) of a unifying impulse. As a performance, there was something deeply nonactual, or virtual, more real than real, in the images of the Jewish East in Poland and the Hebrew Orient in Palestine that captured our German Jewish auto-orientalists. Readers of Jewish philosophy might recall something similar about ideas and reality in the discussion of prayer by the philosopher Hermann Cohen in *Religion of Reason*. An idealist, Cohen understood prayer in terms of lyric poetry (an only slightly different variant than the lyric identified by Said) as the dialectical deidealization whose purpose is to suffuse the real with ideality. In the fuller-blooded German Jewish philosophy of "furor orientalistis" such as Buber and Rosenzweig, figures like "the orient" or "the Shulamite" from the biblical Song of Songs are supposed "to realize" their object with physical presence. The Orient gives Jewish life its special character. The energy of its light and revelation makes the object more "real" and in the world, as opposed to ideal.

In this dialectic, a virtual Judaism realized in figures drawn from the Orient works against the principle of "realization" for which they were employed because these figures make the projects of liberal Judaism or postliberal German Jewish Renaissance all the more nonactual, fantastic, and lyrical. German Jewish philosophers sought to situate figures of Jewish life or religious life, to situate even the idea or presence of God, in the real, physical world of space and time. But what comes out in the end is just how steeped in the nonactual the actual actually is. In Buber's case, the more real he tried to be, the less real was the result. This is endemic to the image-work of utopian thinking. It is the unreality of the real in this type of thinking that continues to complicate the project of binationalism in the spirit of aesthetic performance and religious renewal. That this might come to impact destructively the fate of the Arab indigenous people in Palestine was barely perceived and beyond Buber's imagination in the early 1900s, when this discourse first emerged, along with political Zionism, out of the vortex of European antisemitism.

Looking past both Benvenisti and Buber, the entire question about binationalism in Palestine would hang not on the reality and unreality of politics and metaphysics but on powerful biopolitical dynamics that the idea of binationalism would be unable to contain. To push the conversation into twenty-first-century theoretical parameters would be to consider models in which two subjects of sovereign power—subjects of and subjected to sovereign power—no longer assume the status and function of individual moral subjects (e.g., the geographer, the philosopher, the novelist, the Jew, the Arab). No longer interested in the local, we would have to look past the state form itself as a national and nationalist identity structure toward the organization and regulation, the protection or destruction of populations and organic life itself. In this global view—as such no longer a local or subject-bound expression of political thinking—the bio-political maps astringent and unforgiving political dynamics unmoored by ethics, individual responsibility, solidarity, and other subjective frames essential to the ethical orientation in politics represented by binationalism.

Rather than enter into the biopolitical itself, I want to conclude these reflections with a type of visual thinking we could point to as “landscape thinking.” Common to Buber, Benvenisti, Shalev, and Canaan is an ongoing interest in land. In particular is the way in which the subjective presence of human figures and human cultures assume a place vis-à-vis land. As it has appeared in these pages, the land itself already enjoys and suffers what theorist Jane Bennett calls a “vital materiality.”⁴⁰ Surging underneath the thin veneer of the Zionist project, the land itself is a growling, singing, humming force. Combining characteristics drawn from mysticism, folklore, political geography, technology, and literature, these characteristics are meant by our writers here to buttress thinking about Palestine, belonging, and the binational idea. In the process, they complicate the picture by combining human and inhuman categories of experience and thought, along with the political and the mystical.

Almost all of the authors touched on in this essay are humanists who understand land as an inhuman presence in relation to human belonging and to problems of human belonging—indigenous and Palestinian-Arab, indigenous and pagan, oriental and Hebrew, Israeli and modern. Against the thin veneer of duality, under this or that surging picture of “unity,” individual and collective human figures and compacts are meant to occupy an abiding presence not just on the land, but in and with the land. In their urgency, what none of these discussions capture is the central point made by Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Ground of the Image* about the uncanny nature of landscape itself. Against the humanist tradition in

art, landscape is ultimately recognized by Nancy in its purely inhuman dimension as a void that overwhelms any trace semblance of human presence.

While I will shy away from Nancy's analysis, I want to stay with it in the interim. In ways that will remind us of Buber, Benvenisti, Canaan, and Shalev, Nancy's discussion of the landscape is broken into three parts: location, occupation, and representation. Reading this essay on landscape painting, particularly in relation to the *paysan* or peasant, our own fretful thoughts are with mental pictures of the orient, imaginary constructs of the Palestinian *jellah* (tiller) and the Jewish *halutz* (pioneer).

1. *Location or Country (Pays)*. What is the country? The “country,” any country, a country such as Palestine, is a corner, a corner cut out of indistinct expanse, out of an expanse like “the Orient.” As per Nancy, the country is “the space of a land considered from a certain corner or angle, a corner delimited by some natural or cultural feature: a row of trees or a road, a river or a ridge, etc.”⁴¹ Suggestive of the notion of primordial indigenous space, the country as understood by Nancy is without and prior to administration or the invocation of property. At this initial point in its presentation, “the country,” a country such as Palestine, escapes clear geographical, juridical, political determination. Such as it first appears, the human figure is manifested as belonging to and in relation, being attached, holding and being held. One is “in it” in a relatively simple way.⁴²
2. *Occupation/paysan*. As a dimension of landscape painting, the *paysan* is defined by the indigenous tiller, whose presence is defined in terms of the occupation of place, occupied by or with belonging, taken up with time and space. One could think of *The Harvester* (1956), the famous landscape by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, with its human figures at work, at rest, and eating in a yellow field with its hilltop view receding into the distance. As presented by Benvenisti and Canaan, the *paysan* represents the type of belonging that “the Arab” in Palestine enjoys as if naturally. As projected by the early Buber, it represents the mythic condition of primal innocence that Zionism would restore to the Jewish people. As confirmed by Canaan, this occupation of the land is understood by Nancy as profoundly pagan. As per both Buber and Canaan, this spiritual disposition is deeper than any monotheism and orthodoxy, Jewish or Islamic. It reflects the

folk religion of local gods present "in each corner of the field, at each limit of the domain, or in the spring, etc." Inside the landscape, the *paysan's* life is lived in the continuous presence of the gods, occupied as much with the gods as with sowing, bulls and thunder.⁴³

3. *Representation/landscape/paysage*. Nancy's final point would be one that escapes Buber and Benvenisti, Shalev or Canaan. Unlike Nancy, they fail to see the uncanny capacity of landscape to absorb and dissolve all presences into itself. The peasants, princes, and gods who do appear "in" the landscape disappear, reduced to a diminutive presence to be entirely given over and lost under the vast dome of sky and before the receding horizon. Nancy's analysis should strike with terror anyone invested politically and emotionally in Zionism and the question of Palestine. The peasant (Palestinian farmer or Jewish pioneer) can be just as easily replaced by anyone, by travelers or by walkers. Disinterested in their presence, the landscape, as such, contains no presence: "It is itself the entire presence." All that remains there is "imminence itself, the limitless opening of place as a taking place of what no longer has any determinate place." The bigger view corresponds neither to "determinate figures, circumstances, or actions" nor to anything human. No longer sacred, the landscape "opens onto the unknown" as profound dislocation and disappearance.⁴⁴

With its overarching sense of sacred landscape, the metaphysics of unity and presence that undergirds the binational idea in Benvenisti and Buber feeds unwittingly into the nihilism marked out by Nancy in the landscape tradition in painting. Myth and folk religion, binationalism, a connected sense of place and of belonging to place—all that to which Buber and Benvenisti hold dear would seem to shrink before an inhuman dimension in relation to which human figures fade away into insignificance. As Canaan himself feared in the preface to his study, what Benvenisti calls the sacred landscape can hold for only so long. The same warning was called out by Buber against the impact of colonialism at the end of his essay "The Orient and the Spirit of Judaism." Geological and topological segments remain indifferent as the gods take flight or before the expulsion of a human presence, indigenous or otherwise. In our view, the imagination of any shared human compact in Israel and Palestine would have to step away from the landscape pattern of thinking, a nihilism without God or the gods that lends itself to nothing less than the country's depopulation.

As per Nancy, Israel and Palestine represent landscapes that "[open] onto the unknown." With Jewish settlements thickly rooted throughout the Palestinian West Bank, the country today appears to a great many people inside and outside Israel and the Palestinian territories to be on the cusp of an unequal and nightmarish form of apartheid binationalism. Today, it might very well be the case that Buber's vision, which struck many in the 1940s to be a hopeless fiction, turned out to be prophetic after all. Assuming that neither national community will actually dispossess the other, Buber's general conception continues to hold after the passage of so many years. Regardless of the precise future territorial configuration, that conception would be one that is *expansive*. It is expansive in the refusal to bifurcate person from person, community from community, morality from politics, and spirit from power. At the same time, his is a *narrowing* conception, in that each party to this space makes do with basic needs, forfeiting the surplus that comes at the other's expense.

In perhaps his most clear-eyed political thinking, *Paths in Utopia* (1947), Buber was to plot the "image of perfect space" in a now unmetaphysical way. Like a draftsman working in virtual space, he drew out this image with lines that allow no fixed definition, allowing the scheme to recalibrate the shifting zone between the individual and collective according to the free creativity of its members. Buber described, "The relationship between centralism and decentralization" as a "problem which . . . cannot be approached in principle, but . . . only with great spiritual tact, with the constant and tireless weighing and measuring of the right proportion between them." A "social pattern," utopia was based on a constant "drawing and re-drawing of lines of demarcation."⁴⁵ An "experiment that did not fail," the Jewish Village Commune in Palestine (i.e., the *kvutza*, kibbutz, and *moshav*) owed their success to the pragmatism with which its members approached the historical situation, their inclination toward increased levels of federation, and the degree to which they established a relationship with the society at large. Single units combined into a system or "series of units" without the centralization of state authority.⁴⁶ "Nowhere . . . in the history of [the] Socialist movement were men so deeply involved in the process of differentiation and yet so intent on preserving the principle of integration."⁴⁷ They discovered "the right proportion, tested anew every day according to changing conditions, between group-freedom and collective order."⁴⁸

Setting aside this or that particular proposal (all the varieties of either a one-state or two-state option), this image of a mobile patterning of lines would be the model with which to structure an equitable-basis Arab-Jewish, Israeli-Palestinian compact or system of cohabitation in Israel and Palestine. Scaled up from the commune to the country as a whole, the utopian path is constituted

out of bifurcating and intersecting lines; a sense for proportion and constant rebalancing; getting right the relation between centralization and decentralization, between integration and differentiation; the combining of single units and series of units into larger working patterns that maintain the integrity of the individual component piece. Subject to shift and flux, there is no metaphysical or messianic tendency toward unity and unification, no appeals to the orient or to any sacred landscape, and no tendency to the dangers that such appeals to autochthony inevitably invite. With no secure basis or guarantee, Zionism and the question of Palestine hang together over a catastrophic abyss. About this, Buber was right.

Another model with which to imagine the political future in Israel and Palestine is the more rooted expression of what I would also call "auto-Orientalism" emerging out of Ammiel Alcalay's *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture*.⁴⁹ Published in 1993, Alcalay's text explores the systemic marginalization of Mizrahi Jewish cultures in mainstream Jewish and Zionist discourse, both popular and academic. It should be clear now more than ever that, philosophically, this marginalization has distorted the very concepts with which we think Jewish politics and culture, not just in Israel, where the problem is most acute, but also in the United States, where "all of a sudden" we are now having to rethink Jewish-Muslim relations and the phenomenon of race in Jewish culture. A literary scholar who works in Arabic and Sephardic Jewish literature, Alcalay shows what happens when signifiers like "Jews" and "Arabs" get hardened and homogenized by their respective nationalisms. If this was not so clear in 1993, it is painful and obvious today. The author presents Levantism as an alternative perspective with which to carve out a capacious common space for a diversity of peoples, most urgently in the modern Middle East. At work here is the critique of the Eurocentric nature of the entire Zionist project, its inability to deal with others (not just Arabs and Palestinians, but also Sephardic Jews, religious Jews, and diaspora Jews).⁵⁰

In 1993, the critique was more new than it is today, now practically mainstream in academe. What is unique to Alcalay is that unlike most forms of post-Zionism or anti-Zionism, he actually takes it for granted that Jews are not a foreign, European implant into the Middle East, based on the experience of Sephardic/Mizrahi Jews in opposition to mainstream Zionist discourse. Placing Jews as always and already in the East, Alcalay loosens up the conceptual field of Jews and Arabs, especially today when these formations seem so calcified, first by nationalism and now by religion. At the same time, Alcalay's text puts under question the stylized picture of nomadic placelessness with which the Jews and Judaism are figured in so much postmodern and critical theory.

Alcalay would represent a post-European and a non-European expression of Jewish identity and cultural placing of Jews and Jewish culture. Contrasting Levantine writers to Kafka, Alcalay writes about "their concrete and sensuous attachment to the fact and memory of a native space." In relation to the future of Israel and Palestine, that this picture could lend itself to either this or that practical outcome and political arrangement is precisely its strong point. This image is the understanding that Jews belong to the Middle East and that Israel is a Middle Eastern country. It surpasses, as such, the theoretical mode of exile and homecoming offered by Martin Buber from a hundred or so years ago on which he sought to trace a path to utopia.

NOTES

1. Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 296. On secondary literature relating to Buber as an aesthetic thinker and to aesthetics in the German Jewish Renaissance, see Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Martina Urban, *Aesthetics of Renewal: Martin Buber's Early Representation of Hasidism as Kulturkritik* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Asher Biemann, *Inventing New Beginnings: On the Idea of Renaissance in Modern Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).
2. Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 113, cf. 128.
3. On early Zionist aesthetics, especially in relation to Jugendstil art, see Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry before the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). On the construction of a unified Palestinian identity, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
4. On the invaluable distinction between political theology versus theopolitics as relating to Carl Schmitt and Buber, respectively, see Samuel Hayim Brody, *Martin Buber's Theopolitics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), especially 62–64.
5. Braiterman, *Shape of Revelation*, especially the introduction, but see also the first chapter, "Form," and the fifth chapter, "Space."
6. See Martin Buber, "A Letter to Gandhi," in *Land of Two Peoples: Martin Buber on Jews and Arabs*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 111–26.
7. Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 5.
8. *Ibid.*, 253.

9. *Ibid.*, 252–53.
10. Taufik [sic] Cnaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (London: Luzak & Co, 1927), v.
11. *Ibid.*, especially 1–5.
12. *Ibid.*, 278–79, 280. One could read the constant reference to the Hebrew Bible in Cnaan's account to what contemporary Bible scholars today credit as the Canaanite origins of biblical religion. Much of Cnaan's account reads like crude early twentieth-century theory of "primitive religion," which is interesting as a reflection of Cnaan's own thinking. More pertinent historically is how later in the text, Cnaan points out how the establishment of Muslim shrines in Palestine were part of the attempt, after the Crusades, to secure parts of the countryside with large Muslim populations, by locating shrines at such strategic junctures as Jerusalem, Ramleh, Gaza, and Acre (see *ibid.*, 299). This is part of the backdrop behind the ethnographic account of the Nebi Musa Festival around Easter, starting and concluding in Jerusalem. One notes that it is here and later in the text that the biblical references drop out of the book's discussion for a more clearly Islamic milieu.
13. Meir Shalev, *The Blue Mountain: A Novel*, trans. Hillel Halkin (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 268.
14. *Ibid.*, 250.
15. *Ibid.*, 316.
16. *Ibid.*, 340.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Martin Buber, "Address on Jewish Art," in *The First Buber: Youthful Zionist Writings of Martin Buber*, ed. and trans. Gilya G. Schmidt (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 48.
19. *Ibid.*, 51, 52.
20. Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1967), chaps. 1–3.
21. Martin Buber, "Lesser Ury," in Schmidt, *First Buber*, 65.
22. *Ibid.*, 67–68.
23. *Ibid.*, 83.
24. Martin Buber, "Spirit of the Orient and Judaism," in *On Judaism*, 56.
25. *Ibid.*, 58–9, 64.
26. *Ibid.*, 60–2.
27. Martin Buber, "Myth in Judaism," in *On Judaism*, 102.
28. Martin Buber, "Spirit of Judaism," in *On Judaism*, 70–74.
29. Martin Buber, *The Letters of Martin Buber: A Life of Dialogue*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer and Paul Mendes-Flohr, trans. Richard Winston, Clara Winston, and Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1991), 189.
30. *Ibid.*, 190–91.

31. Paul Mendes-Flohr, *From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber's Transformation of German Social Thought* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).
32. Martin Buber, "Two Peoples in Palestine," in *Land of Two Peoples*, 200.
33. *Ibid.*, 206.
34. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 53.
35. Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 330.
36. *Ibid.*, chap. 5, especially 212–27.
37. Asher Biemann, *Dreaming of Michelangelo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), xv, 5, 43–44.
38. Cf. Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Fin de Siècle Orientalism, the *Ostjuden*, and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation," in *Divided Passions: Jewish Intellectuals and the Experience of Modernity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 77–132.
39. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 17, 19, quoted by Marchand in *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, xviii.
40. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
41. Nancy, *Ground of the Image*, 51.
42. *Ibid.*, 53–54.
43. *Ibid.*, 55–57.
44. *Ibid.*, 58–59.
45. Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 137. The material in this paragraph has been taken and revised from my discussion in Braiterman, *Shape of Revelation*, chap. 5, to make better sense, in particular, of the binational idea in Buber's mature thought.
46. *Ibid.*, 142–48.
47. *Ibid.*, 145.
48. *Ibid.*, 148.
49. Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).
50. On the relation between nationalism, ethnicity, and religion, see Yehouda Shenhar, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).