

FILM PERFORMANCE: AVI MOGRABI part of FORUM EXPANDED - HAU 2  
Berlin International Film Festival 2012.

One Short film: AT THE BACK.

Installation: THE DETAILS.

Accompanying band: Noam Enbar, Ariel Armoni, Adam Schefflan,, Yoni Silver –  
Israel 2012 – in charge with live soundtrack and sound remixing live.

By far one of the best events situated under the umbrella of Forum Expanded, this year's film-music-performance by Avi Mograbi and his band managed to strike a deep chord into the minds of viewers and programmers alike. Mograbi is rarely afraid of expressing his own sensibility in relation to the helplessness and passivity surrounding our everyday lives. Such a stance becomes immensely relevant when discussing the Israel-Palestine conflict more broadly. Mograbi belongs to that subliminal cast of artists who refuse to endorse military violence upon civilians and who do not hesitate to be immensely critical of Israel's internal and external affairs. The filmmaker and the artist have a particular duty to inform, challenge and stimulate the audience in order to highlight the mechanisms of hatred and rejection which populate the spectrum of oppression and war.

The artist's *raison d'être* becomes this ability to challenge the audience in an active, rigorous way. Often political events transform us into passive bystanders. This reality is reworked and reinterpreted by Mograbi in his filmic installation: *The Details*. In this case, with the help of four screens of which sound and image become intricately alternated we get a sense of a more immediate, quasi -visceral reaction to the wartime situations depicted. Such an enabling device is not the tenet of a mere provocation per se. It functions under a principle of emancipated freedom or as a vector of spectatorial dynamic participation.

By attempting to decipher or find our own personal algorithm around the stories presented on the screen(s), we are directly involved in the representational process. This means that we become critical not only of the people and events presented but also of our own ability to interpret and align our own argumentation with competence in relation to any subject or object. More than a mere self-reflexive mechanism, this strategy obliges us to acknowledge our own subjectivity and passivity as viewers during the whole process of 'exposure'.

Intelligently and carefully orchestrated sound is brought back and forth to the image, giving the image a certain kind of temporal quality, which can only be obtained via superimposition. This playfulness between images and sounds and their alternation, diegetically or non-diegetically is vividly rendered by Avi's new collaborative band. The result is more than just an example of filmic manipulation. At the core of this procedure lies the underlining principle of what we understand by 'details'. What lies in a detail? Is also a question for the public inasmuch as for the characters in the films. By focusing on details, Mograbi juxtaposes some very rigid schemes or impressions to the possibility of a more nuanced interpretation of events. We zoom in and out of 'details' - which through their repetitive and arresting use become more than what they were originally meant to be, just details. We see children expressing Arab phobia, we jump to a conflict between Mograbi himself and the Israeli soldiers at the border etc. Ultimately, by focusing on details or on actual phone conversations Mograbi ends up successfully defetishising war material to an

incomparable extent. We become more and more aware of the incapacitating and numbing effect of real life situations of this kind.

In the majority of his filmic interventions, Mograbi prefers to act from a distinctively individualized standpoint one that is at once vulnerable as well as empowering. By pushing individuality and personal experience to the fore, he then comments upon larger scale phenomena, revealing the faulty structures of our society, the very backbone of social injustice etc. Rarely intimidated by self-exposure Mograbi decided to tackle this particular film performance from a very personal point of view.

Mograbi started the session by giving a non-sentimental dedication to a Palestinian dissident who is illegally detained by the Israeli authorities and pushed into hunger strike. Mograbi's discussion of illegal detention and the issue of not knowing the victim very well reveals the exegesis of his thinking: affect is a natural component of our humanity and not knowing equals not caring or not intervening. It is easy to draw a line between Mograbi's speech and his political stance exemplified by his complex manipulation of images during the installation piece. The answer is there: the moment we lose our sympathy for suffering on screen we become numb and as a result we become fragmented, losing our togetherness. The installation ends with four different images of conflict/clashes between the soldiers and the civilians. The idea is not to complete the puzzle of images with our own thoughts; but rather to acknowledge the strengths and limitations of the film medium and those of the artist even. There is a particular kind of melancholy erupting from this specific decision of ending the piece in this interrogative way. Such melancholy pertains to the effort of the documentary filmmaker of remaining faithful to his or hers perspective upon the world with minimal alteration. In sum, a very thought provoking piece of work and an experiential adventure which will seduce many.

By contrast, the film *AT THE BACK* is a far more introspective and, at times, demanding viewing experience. One character, a woman, is filmed from the back, notoriously and without ease during a walk and exploration of Tokyo's city life. We come across mysterious architecture, ethnographic elements, rituals and the like. The premise is very simple though and anthropological in its impetus: what is the quest for this woman? What is the relationship between the subject and the filmmaker? In what way can the mechanism of filming be exposed and for what reasons? The filmmaker's fascination and friendship towards the subject and her experiences are obvious. Mograbi's will for documentation all signify an instinctual pursuit, one that remains pure no matter how often it becomes reworked or rearticulated. Mograbi shoots with the fanaticism of a man who is already aware that images can and should be re-conceptualized and re-used in and for the future.