

# Mapping memory

Nir Harmat

Pine by Leah Goldberg

Translated by A.Z. Foreman

*Perhaps the voyaging birds alone who find  
Their own route hanging between the sky and earth,  
Know how I pine between two lands of birth.*

The corpus of Josyane Vanounou's work is a continuum of fragmented memories, built out of forgetfulness and spotted with fragments of fantasy. She makes use of a sort of "memory prosthetic" to describe the process in which the renewed construction of the past creates alternative memories that imitate true experiences.

She follows in the steps of the French film director Francois Truffaut (in his movie, 'The 400 Blows', 1959), sprinkles a paper chase in the search for the "authentic" in terms of her personal past by way of a collective past or their joint cinematic representation. She raises questions about grasping reality and the construction of memory and her / our need to get a grip on "truth" or to reformulate it. Through these, she addresses journeying, migration from "there to here", belonging, language and assimilation.

The freeze frame in the last image of the movie serves as a spark that activates and starts the corpus of works displayed in this exhibition. Vanounou sketches the portrait of Antoine standing on the shore when his future is unknown, dozens of times, over and over again. Throughout the last scene he runs, while his sudden stop marks for Vanounou the start of her own creation. In the scene she has identified biographical elements of her own to the point that "I couldn't differentiate between the two. Reality and illusion have mixed and become a living memory - forged, invented, but made up of elements that actually happened." One of the effects of historical representations in various art forms is the closeness of the viewer to the past, the viewer serves as a witness to reconstructed history. Art is based on the viewers identifying with the events presented, in order to create for them memories that are not based on first-hand experiences, yet these are real-plastic memories, made from materials of emotional sensitivity..

The continuum of Vanounou's works unravels the link between the signifier and the signified, and uses these elements to dig below the single story. She makes use of various representational techniques that disrupt the authentic memory and disturb the linear continuity of the narrative. In her own words: "My work is not in a category that stipulates boundaries. I seek to melt the border between reality and fiction, I do not want to delineate. I work within or towards a category."

By borrowing characters that undergo a process of abstraction from Truffaut's movie, Vanounou carries out a sort of "stock take" of the present and tells her own story in an abstract manner. She utilizes the framework and structure of cinematic creation, and through them holds a discussion on the myth of childhood and lost time. Vanounou was born in France and immigrated to Israel in an attempt to crystallize identity. The French language and culture represent a significant part of her persona; as a result she finds herself a stranger there and here. "The state of existence of a floating identity, that she has learned to come to terms with" (Anat Gatenio, text of "Déjà Vu" exhibition, 2009). Memory and inspiration are the driving forces of this body of works, which facilitate deconstruction of the past. When she visited the playground of the school she had attended in Lyon (France), the playground, that in her mind's eye and in her memories was large and impressive, became with present day eyes small and lacking the aura that she had ascribed to it all those years ago. The gap between the memory of childhood and reality as experienced today becomes a new, different look, anonymous and yet known.

The exhibition is made up of multiple expressions that approach the subject via painting, video, and ready-made objects.

All these create an enigmatic space in which we look at history, memory, as well as the day dream of someone else. Vanounou breaks up the narrative, weaves the real and the fictional together which makes it a challenge to decipher the enigma.

# The blind look

Moshe Zuckermann

Francois Truffaut's 1958 movie "The 400 Blows" deals with the life of the young boy Antoine Doinel, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud. The story depicts Antoine's progress; he lives in Paris at the end of the 1950s, the son of an unloving mother and a stepfather. With the encouragement of his best friend (from a wealthy home), he carries out pranks and mischievous things and frequently skips school. When he explains one of his absences from class by saying his mother died, his lie is uncovered and he is punished. Antoine runs away and spends a night in Paris. The mother, whom he had seen in the company of another man, is forgiving and promises him a monetary price if manages to write the best essay in his class. In writing his essay Antoine copies from Balzac; his teacher discovers it immediately, and again Antoine runs away. He wants to escape once and for all from his home and finds temporary refuge at the home of his best friend's parents. Together with him he steals a typewriter from the factory of his stepfather, and wants to sell it to a fence for stolen goods, but does not manage to do so. While trying to return the typewriter to where it came from, he is caught by his stepfather and handed over to the police. The parents agree to transfer Antoine to a juvenile detention home and refuse to continue to look after him. Antoine also runs away from this institution that is run with extreme severity and military discipline. In the final scene of the movie he is seen running towards the sea, which he has never seen before.

The movie "The 400 Blows" is the first part of a cycle of movies about Antoine Doinel, which Truffaut produced over a period of twenty years. The other movies: "Antoine and Colette" (short movie, 1962), "Stolen Kisses" (1968), "Bed and Board" (1970), "Love on the Run" (1978) - in all of them Jean-Pierre Léaud stars as Antoine Doinel. From the third movie the actress Claude Jade also stars, playing Christine, who accompanies Antoine's life as his girlfriend, wife and in the end as his divorcee.

Why this detailed description of misdeeds of Antoine Doinel as part of the text for an art exhibition of Josyane Vanounou in Tel-Aviv in 2020? The immediate reason is to be found in the use Vanounou makes of the final scene of "The 400 Blows" as the basis for the reconstruction of Antoine's run to the sea. She depicts a long series of variations of the character of Antoine, as it appears on posters for the movie. Despite the fact that it is talking about the same static character (on the poster), the combination of a large number of variations that flow one after another, create an illusion of movement, at the beginning divorced from the movie and then by direct reference to the cinematic scene shown to the viewer in parallel with the rapid movement of the characters depicted. The other reason refers to an autobiographical detail in Vanounou's life: a class photo probably taken in the period when Truffaut's movie was made, is presented as a negative of a group picture. In a video clip it also appears to us as a stream of characters: a negative of the heads of girls in the class are presented in continuous chronological movement, which in the end stops at a

negative of the head of the young Josyane Vanounou - and from this moment onwards Vanounou moves over to the medium of painting: the lips of the character in the black and white negative are colored red, pouting for a kiss and a lazy smile with a continuous repetition of the print "kiss and smile" accompanied by the sound of the kiss.

The biographical intertwining of these two elements in the exhibition even intensifies, if we take into account that the cinematic "Antoine Doinel" cycle holds within it not a few basic biographical truths from Truffaut's life. The biographical memory of the director, translated into a cinematic creation, kindles the memory of Josyane Vanounou's childhood as an artist - she returns to her time in school, which is also the school time of (the fictional character) Antoine, and similar to just how Antoine runs, at the end of the movie, to beyond what he had not known before (the sea), so the character of the young Josyane (and in fact of the whole childhood in the class that appears in her memory, even as a negative) to the then still unknown - becoming a woman blowing an erotic kiss and a smile.

Yet, what memory are we talking about here? Individual memory? Or perhaps a collective, cultural memory? In Truffaut, the players in his film cycle a long time ago became cultural icons, key names in the history of French cinema in the second half of the twentieth century. And yet, in terms of communicative memory this sprawls at the most across a time period of one and a half generations back, a faded memory. Dedicated cinema lovers and members of the profession know Truffaut, and these protagonists, but it is questionable if this how things are for the general audience nowadays. However, also in respect of the individual memory - in the case of Josyane Vanounou and the girls in her class - it can be argued that things are getting dimmer. Are not the narratives of our lives but a frequently changing palimpsest? It is not for nothing that Vanounou employs negatives of the photos of the girls (including the photograph of herself as a girl) to raise that period of her life from the spirits. The formal dimming symbolizes very well the weakening of the ability to grasp a clear and defined past, the embodiment of what we have experienced, certainly what has formed us. Antoine running at the end of "The 400 Blows" towards the sea, which he does not know, represents not just running towards an unknown past but also, and perhaps even more, every run without a clear objective, void of hope. The image of a static announcement, variations of which appear as a repetitive series, give it its own running movement, and could be used, in that sense, as a paradigmatic exposition of life's experience (at least in the same movie): Antoine who runs away time after time from life's depressing and alienating connections, does not know where he is running to, only from what he is fleeing, and therefore, in terms of his life story, he is running on the spot. So too the kiss turned into a smile that turns into a smile that turns into a smile and so on. In terms of the dim figures of the little girls in the class photo, the erotic kiss is the guarantee (that the girls will become women). However, through mechanical and automatic repetition based on its appearance, it in fact takes on uniqueness and identity. Not for nothing is it symbolized as red lips against a background of a white face that does not appear, as Eros-less eroticism. These kisses are also running on the spot.

Similarly, Josyane Vanounou gives her own opinion about this, and does so through both personal and supra-personal reflection. In the text attached to the visual displays at her exhibition, and as an artistic part of it, she writes:

It was a weekday / Perhaps the next day / But it wasn't a market day / It was wintry / The colors changed from black to white / I moved to the head of the line towards / the yard of the older ones / The benches were waiting like / a gallows on which there was an executed person / Now unavoidable / He used to be here / He was also waiting / It wasn't despair or fear / It was worse than fear because it was a blind look / like of a dead hare / He would never be drawn / and no player in the world would grab him

It wasn't Monday morning / It was between 11 o'clock and noon / The light was very bright / I closed my eyes / I didn't move anymore / The neck was tense / I waited with the face towards the lens / We all stood pressed together / next to each other / Paralyzed and scared / It wasn't despair or fear / It was worse than fear because it was a blind look / like of a dead hare / He would never be drawn / and no player in the world would grab him

I can't say what time it was but / straight away with the first steps on the asphalt / that was gray and hard / the cold grabbed us / The time was not routine / The yard was empty and quiet / The storm won't be long in coming / The first drops already / trickle onto our cheeks / It wasn't despair or fear / It was worse than fear because it was a blind look / like of a dead hare / He would never be drawn / and no player in the world would grab him

The memory staggers, doesn't let you establish with certainty the time of occurrence. The power of the experience is encoded to the point of feeling death, not real death but a death-like experience that goes beyond fear, that cannot even be represented (artistically) any more, not by an artist and not by a player, death of the "blind look". Youth is meant to be an experience of continuous happiness, a combination of innocence, discovering the world and the joy of life. That at least is what adults think. However, childhood no less is likely to embody a dreadful fear, an anonymous fear, the fear of life. Childhood escaping the real existence of passing beyond the infinite spaces of the unknown, of the sea. And there is no guarantee they will have freedom, that redemption will come. All that is possible is to run, running and hiding in the hope that there is perhaps something "there", that arriving breathing heavily at the water line of the sea is only the beginning, and there to find it not reified earlier or later like the mechanical kiss of red-erotic-style lips against a background of a white identity-less face mask. "We have to describe for ourselves a happy Sisyphus", wrote Albert Camus about someone who is capable to be considered the embodiment of the existential catastrophe of an inhuman physical effort, suffering devoid of hope that lasts forever. The contemporaries of Truffaut and Antoine Doinel considered this a supreme existentialist battle cry. That is certainly a possibility that could be adopted, Perhaps it is even right to adopt in view of the existential void. But it cannot be excluded that we are talking about an uncompromising simplification for someone who already in his childhood experienced the dead look of the blind hare.

# Artistic studio

Dov Or-Ner

The studio is the place where reserves of imagination are created.

A world in which things are thrown out and sketched on sheets of paper and are used to transmit mental signals from the past.

A world in which pictures live their lives.

A world in which objects are capable of rebelling and living as images.

A world in which films are created without a beginning and without an end.

A world that operates as a store of images that serves as a mirror in which we can look at our own images.

A world of faces scattered there, and they testify to the search and the struggle for their creation.

The faces are not simply two eyes, nose and mouth.

They are the tension that exists between personal identity and the social mask.

The portrait serves as an alternative for the real, physical faces.

And it attempts to grasp the ungraspable, to incorporate life.

The face of the faces in constant movement, avoids turning into an image.

The portrait turns into a mask that serves as an unmoving face.

In an attempt to turn the faces to being active, the drawings of the images undergo an alchemy process through cinematic animation.

Video clips are items, aimed at mental areas and highly influenced by the atmosphere of the studio.

The collision between the light beam bearing the image and the darkness around it cause the internal tension that exists in the creation.

Sometimes extraneous factors enter into the work, such as the film of another artist, trapped and turned into an integral part of the entire creation.

We find ourselves in a complex visual and psychological space, accompanied by emotions that sometimes contradict each other.

What happens in the studio testifies to the innovative esthetics that can develop into every sort of contemporary art.

2019

# Archeology of the cinema

Danny Warth

In her video clip Josyane examines memories of her childhood through a film that is a prototype of childhood memories, "The 400 Blows" by Francois Truffaut, 1959. Truffaut himself took the model for the school from a film that influenced him, "Zero for Conduct", 1933, by Jean Vigo, which addresses a universal issue: school and childhood.

Truffaut's initial idea was to call the film, "Antoine's truancy".

Josyane's drawings of the person of the actor (Antoine) take us back to the earliest days of the cinema when they used such devices as the zoetrope, which created an optical illusion of movement using a static picture, chronophotography.

In his time as a film critic, Truffaut came out against the classic French cinema, and in fact started a new approach that became known as the New French Wave. Truffaut like his colleagues in the New French Wave: Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, in their first films turned their backs of French cinema that had dominated until then, which they called "Dad's cinema".

The need to create a new language led Truffaut to put into "The 400 Blows" elements connected with the genesis of the cinema; such as the zoetrope (or praxinoscope), all these hints that Truffaut incorporates in his film are a subtext to the film's central story: the stuffed horse, which is a wink to the galloping horse in the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge; puppet theater that emphasizes the enchantment of children, which Truffaut prefers to concentrate on more than on the show itself. In "The 400 Blows" Truffaut presents the origins of the cinema as a medium of fairs.

The scene in the film in which the actor (Jean-Pierre Léard) is seen together with the director (Truffaut) going into a sort of zoetrope, highlights the importance of the scene for Truffaut. In a zoetrope the images that rotate inside it lose the gravitational force as a centrifugal force. The whizzing round creates a sort of Utopian fiction. This is the first escape of Antoine Doinel from reality.

Viewers watching from above recall the parade of children at the beginning of Josyane's two video clips.

Josyane's work starts from the point where Truffaut ended his film, in a freeze frame. The frames run similar to the attempts made by photographs at the beginning of cinema, and this brings us to the much talked about scene of the freezing of movement at the end of the film, on the picture of the actor. Truffaut does a zoom-in on the frozen faces, and again stops the movement. He freezes the picture: this is the freeze frame of the actor who stops running and turns round towards the camera's lens. This look wipes out the border between Antoine Doinel and Jean-Pierre Léard, and it is the only moment where fiction meets reality.

I want to especially emphasize the freeze frame at the end of the film as the moment at which Josyane starts her own work. At this moment the running of Antoine ends because the landscape stops it:

"He turns towards the camera and so ends his role as actor"

This look is the look of stills. It's true fiction. The freeze frame is Josyane's starting point when she reproduces the frozen photo by way of a series of frames that create a sort of chronophotography.

I would like to say a few words about Josyane's second video, in which we see a girl with red lips that becomes a series of pictures. The picture of the girl is made from a photograph from a family album, a class photo from school. In the photo can be seen the girls who have been photographed in the schoolyard smiling towards the camera like movie actors, almost at the same time as in the film "The 400 Blows", Antoine Doinel, who spends his entire life running away, runs away with his friend from school and steals the still photo of Harriett Anderson from Ingmar Bergman's film "Summer with Monika", 1952, from a Parisian cinema.

Music: Jean Constantin