

The New York Times Magazine

JULY 11, 1982

**HAS ISRAEL
ALTERED
ITS VISIONS?**

By Amos Oz

Israeli soldiers in

The Last Photograph: Ran Tal after Micha Bar-Am

Noam Gal, from the Exhibition's Catalogue,
Tel Aviv Museum of Arts, 2022. p.108-120

After

I

Ran Tal makes documentaries about what he calls the “Israeli project,” that is, about the changing face of society in Israel through its sites and the personalities that participate in its fashioning. Imbuing Tal’s cinema is great intimacy, a personal closeness to the stories and voices he encounters, as well as a powerful visual expression of the form, color, and material that make up institutions. Archival footage or long static shots of landscape, embellished with the searing voiceover of an interviewee, have long ago become Tal’s artistic signature. First-person testimonies recorded in brief personal sessions provide the soundtrack to visual material gathered from a particular place, usually belonging to the interviewee’s surroundings. In these sessions Tal records, that is, he presses the record button on a simple recording device and lets the conversation flow, with the assumption that large parts of it will eventually wind up on the editing room floor. The soundtrack retains the nature of a conversation: you hear Tal ask or comment, encourage but not pressure, and you hear the interviewee, very close. This is the case in his acclaimed work *Children of the Sun* (2007; see above p. 32)—where his mother and others of her generation tell him about their childhood and adolescence in the kibbutz, with only archival footage from the early days of that grand educational experiment accompanying the soundtrack. And the same goes for Tal’s other works, including his latest film about photographer Micha Bar-Am, *1341 Frames of Love and War* (2022). As in the film before this, an entire work that is nothing more than a conversation with former Prime Minister Ehud Barak (*What If?*, 2021), so too the film about Bar-Am is comprised of the speaking voices of its protagonists, that is Micha, Orna, and their children. And yet, the moments when Tal’s own voice is heard are of paramount import. In these instants, the film suddenly transforms from a documentary into a conversation—that is, from a means of unilateral conveying of facts whose validity is conferred by the neutrality of an absent creator to one of reciprocal and halting exchanges of memories and emotions. Tal’s own voice, often sounding questioning, hesitating, reluctant or withdrawn, is very

different from the confident tone of the narrator in the documentary films that have shaped local historical consciousness, from the Zionist epic *Pillar of Fire* onwards.¹ In fact, Tal records his part in the conversation in subdued tones, or he tempers his words in the final sound editing. Due to the infrequency of Tal's interjections, the voice is also far from the subjective, confessor/speaker familiar from the poetic documentaries of David Perlov or Moti Kirschenbaum, or of Alain Resnais. Tal's voice, which emerges suddenly in all his works, reminds that he, too, is part of the Israeli landscape depicted in the film, and a product of the same ideological project. While the archival footage visually situates the films firmly in the past, the soundtrack ushers them rapidly into the present: we see childhood and adolescence from the past but hear the wisdom of the here and now. Indeed, Tal's voice also changes over the course of his films; it is interesting to hear the maturing of his voice from *Children of the Sun* to his conversations with Micha Bar-Am. The coming of age of the unwitting creator, like history itself.

Tal's conversation with his interviewees is open and emotional. There are quite a few silences or self-conscious laughs, anger, a momentary dispute, a refusal to reveal something, a prolonged sigh instead of words. This type of conversation characterizes the soundtracks of *Children of the Sun* and *The Garden of Eden* (2012; see above p. 34), but it is in full force in Tal's current work. Unlike his previous films, in which the interviewee did not see the images that we subsequently see on the screen, the conversations with Micha and Orna Bar-Am were often recorded while countless photographs from their enormous archive were spread across their dining room table in their home in Ramat Chen, some of which eventually make it into the film. But in principle, Tal tends to keep the photographic image out of the conversation, insisting that the presence of visual materials limits the interviewee's memory, shapes it to fit the ready-made image instead of leaving the act of recollection unpredictable, deceptive, and able to infuse new meaning into the most familiar photograph. The allegorical space in Tal's work is born of that harsh separation between recorded conversation and visual materials edited afterwards. In this space, the image does not directly explain what the conversation is about, and the conversation does not straightforwardly elucidate the image. It is up to the viewer to draw their own conclusion about the ambiguous meaning of things, and in the process adapt to a situation in which documentary material does not convey one clear truth but merely stimulates an argument among several possible truths. As in

¹ Narrated by actor Yossi Banai, *Pillar of Fire* was a seminal documentary series produced by the Israel Broadcasting Authority about the history of Zionism from the end of the 19th century until the establishment of Israel in 1948. It aired in Israel in 1981, on the single TV channel that operated in Israel back then.

Children of the Sun, so in *1341 Frames*, committing the visual layer of the work to archival material alone sharpens the chronological divide between the image (testimony from the past) and the soundtrack (testimony from the present). By virtue of its being from the past, the visual layer has the undisputed status of authenticity, which competes with the truth of the interviewees who speak from memory, from hindsight. Also, this very rivalry is already charged with the deep cultural debate over what to believe more—a photograph or what someone says. More than in any of his previous works, the images in the film about Bar-Am fail to eclipse the interviewee's words, and these in turn sound no more sure or credible than the interviewer's comments. This obvious disparity between seeing and knowing is not a simple situation in which to find oneself, especially if you are from here—someone whose identity is fragile, hanging by a thread, and in constant quarrel between faith, language, and territory. In other words, Tal's filmmaking separates the verbal from the visual component, and both of these from the narrative. Moreover, each of these components is unstable, unable to sustain uninterrupted contact with the other two. And adding to this instability is the tendency to pause, to stretch our viewing across a particular static image and our listening to the pause at the end of a sentence. This pause, which strays from the usual sequence that regulates seeing and understanding in film and television to the point of boredom or of thoughts starting to drift, is essential for the preservation of that allegorical space, out of which arises the question of the film's meaning and of the truth of the things seen and heard in it. This pause makes reality itself ambiguous, incomprehensible. In it, things seem to be something else, not what they appear, and this is important for Tal.

Early on in his work, Tal seems to perceive the historical dimension of the great phenomena—Judaism, the Zionist movement, the kibbutz, death, art—as comprised of tiny particles of the quotidian. In his film *The Museum* (2017), the camera follows from up close the installation of the Dead Sea scrolls in the Shrine of the Book, perhaps the most sacred site of Zionist consciousness, to the soundtrack of a phone call between the curator in charge and her daughter who is “trying to commandeer her sneakers.” Years earlier, in *67 Ben Zvi Road* (1999; see above p. 37), the sounds of Radio Tel Aviv broadcasting soft pop interspersed with traffic reports, cynically anchored by a young Merav Michaeli, coming from a radio at the Institute of Forensic Medicine, accompany shots of counting mutilated body parts and autopsies from terrorist attacks in Tel Aviv. Yet, in the picture Tal makes of this country, it is not that history is made up of trivialities instead of wars, but that the trivial and war are inseparable, and it is this perception that seems to find its expression most of all in his latest film. “He also shot at home, after a full day's work, with a third of a [roll of] film still left, he wouldn't leave it empty, he would look for something to shoot at home to finish the roll,” explains Orna Bar-Am. She is talking about the

unbelievable segue of images from their archive that pass, one by one, in front of our eyes across the big screen, from burned-out tanks in the Sinai Desert to cats in the quiet kitchen in Ramat Chen, from crossing the Suez Canal to changing a diaper. Tal puts this mix of the historical and the quotidian into his conversations with various representatives of Israeliness, introducing weighty questions into lightweight exchanges. So it happens, in the film *The Garden of Eden*, in conversations with bathers at the Sahne National Park, that expressions of faith beyond Zionism and its moral challenges emerge unexpectedly. The same happens in conversations about self-fulfillment and creativity with guards in the corridors of the Israel Museum, and likewise with Micha and Orna Bar-Am. It sounds as if Tal and his interviewees are caught unawares entangled in existential thoughts, which become amplified when connected on the editing table to majestic images (rain falling on the Sahne National Park, rain falling on the Israel Museum, huge fire writings at night in the Jezreel Valley, Bar-Am's iconic picture of the liberation of the Western Wall).

It is possible that this mixing of epic history with its human particles also stems from Tal's biography. Born in the 1960s to one of Kibbutz Beit Hashita's founding families who was a partner in molding the utopian ethos of cooperative agricultural settlement (while completely suppressing every sign of individualism), he grew up in a society in which the basic principles and social structure were crumbling before his eyes. It was the recognition of being no longer the spearhead of an ideological revolution but just one story among the many of Zionism's manifestations. Even more, however, this disintegration symbolized for Tal, as for other artists, the distancing of the State of Israel from its founding vision, and its transformation into a political framework with which they found it almost impossible to identify. It is interesting to see that here too, the movement is not one-directional, from the founding and unifying historical ethos to disintegration into private episodes. As a brief comparison between *Children of the Sun* and *What If?* shows, it is that one can tell different stories from the same archival material. If Ehud Barak is a product of the selfsame ethos that Tal traces, that is, he himself was born and raised as a "child of the sun" who became a major player in some of the main junctures in present-day Israel, then, what we have here is Tal's fascination also with the private narrative. Lured by what has unraveled from the unified utopian community, he assembles an alternative collective narrative—one born from a broad, sweeping view of the place and the people who shape it.

Looking back seems to be a guiding principle in Tal's work. It is apparent in the historical materials he is drawn to, the kind of questions he poses to his interviewees, and perhaps more generally, his attraction to "sages," to yesterday's leaders who have lived through and seen enough of historical events to partake in a final reckoning. Tal is their successor, in age, in relationship to the land, and

in the representation of that relationship. His early film *Merchant of Feelings* (1994), which traces the last days of filmmaker George Ovadia, already marks Tal's tendency to construct the complete Israeli panorama on a retrospective-subjective gaze, on a person's self-reflection about the course of their life and part in Zionism's great and turbulent story. Tal will turn this inclination into a cohesive stance on the relationship between truth and art. He upends the conventional contractual agreement between the camera and the viewer in the documentary film (you won't tamper with reality and we will always believe you). He invents hidden actions, such as constructing the film from beginning to end on the editing table, or generating situations and not just chancing upon them, or the precise layout of a formal composition, or the absolute reliance on the work of remembering. Tal seeks to transport the findings that he unearths in various archives and institutions to beyond the concrete representation of a particular truth, to more than the realistic formula on which most documentary cinema relies. Those who look back, who let in the reality around them, but who let out a fiction about it. He once described how:

"Because of some kibbutz scandal, at the age of 80, my grandparents were forced to leave the kibbutz, after giving their lives to that place. And I remember coming to visit them in Afula. They had moved to Afula, to a third floor rental on Yoash Street, with an elevator. Luckily, they had some reparations from Germany to fund this adventure. Grandfather was already blind, an amazing man, completely lucid. And during that visit I tried to understand from him if he regretted the choices he had made in his life, after deciding one day to become a Zionist, then to become a communist, then going to a kibbutz, and here he is at the age of 80 in a rented apartment in Afula. He wouldn't agree to say that he would have done it differently, on the contrary, he claimed that he would have done the exact same things and made the exact same choices. I tried to understand it. He's probably just saying that. At that age, it's hard to tell yourself that you've made mistakes. And I think only in the end did I realize that he perceives his life as a life of meaning. He lives a meaningful life, he lives in a historical time that Jews haven't been able to live for thousands of years. And he was present at all these intersections and made his choices, and he sees his life as a life full of meaningful choices. He never liked the word happiness because it is a word from the world of consumerism and television. He likes the word meaningful more."

Tal arrives at the scene of an event years after it has taken place, after the life recounted to him in these conversations has already been lived, and he encourages in his protagonists the same retrospective gaze, the same reflective wisdom. Therein lies the possibility of understanding the Zionist project as an

extraordinary experiment, in its dimensions and its consequences. In which the bodies entrusted with its realization (the kibbutz, the archive, the museum, the national park) are unable to fulfil their utopian mission and certainly cannot prevent the deep, personal and identity crisis born of displacement, immigration, and their ghosts that were present at this experiment's very inception. Tal is looking for the heroes and landscapes of a story that has already ended. The present, from wherein he creates, the era to which he, as a mature artist, belongs—the Israel of the current millennium, of the second intifada, of the destructive lightning strikes into Gaza, of missiles before and after elections, of creeping privatization of public services and increasing social disparities sponsored by the slick image of the high-tech nation, of a corrupt political culture and polarizing media—this era, is absent in his work. Ehud Barak's soul-searching ends with Netanyahu's rise to power; Bar-Am's self-reflection ends even earlier. Apparently, the Israel of the Netanyahu era, which appears for a few moments in a lamentable scene in *The Museum* during a special government session, is not the space where Tal looks for a reckoning with Zionism. His filmmaking prefers to go after someone who has already left the stage. But from another perspective, in one of our last conversations, Tal remarked, "the feeling that we are living in some present, is itself problematic, it's all one time, we just simply can't fathom it. I hold no special value for the immediate, that documentary cinema so adores. The immediate is entertainment. I'm looking for something that is broader than this division between the here and now and other times."

II

Present throughout the entire history of the realization of the Zionist vision and its progress was the camera—the most revolutionary technological cultural engine of the last century. Still and film cameras played a key role in shaping the country's political identities and opposition to those identities in ways that even the photographers themselves and the viewers of their work were not fully aware. In this context, it would be difficult to point to a photographer whose influence on the picture and perception of the country was greater than Micha Bar-Am. From a survey of his work in the leading magazines of the last century—*Life*, *The New Yorker*, *Paris-Match*, *Stern*, and of course, all the local newspapers—it seems he was present everywhere, all the time, at every war and military operation, political upheaval, mass demonstration, and significant cultural event. Bar Am is 92 today. He hasn't been photographing for years. Instead of a camera, a recording device belonging to Tal, Bar-Am's junior by decades, now sits on a table inside the Bar-Am's home amidst their vast archive. Tal's documentary action, which separates word from image and reassembles it after the fact, is again a latent reckoning, a postscript. In the measures of time

(biological age and historical period), medium (photojournalism as opposed to documentary film), and artistic mission (documenting in order to realize, but also to repair, as opposed to looking at the documentation in order to understand ourselves), Tal succeeds Bar-Am. Where they meet is in their ability to sense a crisis.

On the other hand, Bar-Am precedes Tal in senses deeper than the historical or aesthetic. Bar-Am's photography and its legacy lie above all in being first on the scene of a moment that he perceived to be significant. Not only does his rapid camerawork remarkably capture the human composition at the instant of the unfolding of a historical event, but it also does it before any other. When Bar-Am becomes an independent photographer and joins the international ranks of the legendary Magnum Agency, this changes the face of journalistic photography in Israel. To this day, the interpretive discourse around his work (a discourse that is not sensitive enough to the changes Bar-Am has undergone since the early 1970s, especially after the Yom Kippur War), includes the question of his camera's affiliation with the young state of Israel's military and political steps. Yet, what is indisputable is the power of the images he continually succeeded to extract from the Israeli reality, and which dictated the dynamic code in local photojournalism. The camera's presence, and sometimes the photographer himself in these images (the hint of a fingertip, a silhouette), is never denied. The effect of these meticulously crafted, split-second images—a mine blast in Sinai or Levy Eshkol raising his fist—were often lost on the viewer who only saw them in newspapers or on the covers of magazines that were shaped by design constraints and editorial headlines. Surrounded by the boxes in Micha and Orna's archives, their effects can still be vividly felt; that same urgency of being-there-before-everyone, of feeling how this urgency stems from a belief that these are exceptional historical moments, that this is a time when people are redrawing the world's maps, and that the camera has a part in it all. And what that photographic moment looked like: Bar-Am peering into the viewfinder and clicking, quickly winding the film, not knowing what will come out, moving on to the next event, clicking and winding, and finishing the roll, and sending it from the front back home to Orna who develops the contact prints, sends them to the news agency or newspaper, and then methodically logs every photo, date, event, in hundreds of notebooks filled with tables in meticulous handwriting, detailing every moment Bar-Am photographed over the course of fifty years. From the first conversation in Tal's film, it is clear that Orna's knowledge of the subject is an equal match with Micha's, even though she entered the picture after him, and chose to follow him. We hear them arguing over a series of photographs on a contact sheet entitled "Action in Lebanon, February 1972":

“Micha: In short, I went out for the first foray -
Orna: No, you did not go out!
Micha: Orna ...
Orna: Listen, sorry. Look, you went out, you photographed the shooting plane.
Micha: No!
Orna: You photographed the shooting plane!
Micha: No! Not yet.
Orna: You photographed the prisoners, the swapping of cigarettes, storming a hill, and the next day you photographed the two dead people whom the IDF killed overnight ...
Micha: Orna, please ...
Orna: At night ...
Micha: Don't help me right now ...
Orna: I'm telling you that it's ...
Micha: No, not true!
Orna: Do not say it isn't.
Micha: So ...
Orna: What, so everything I wrote is wrong?
Micha: Yes. I will explain to you ...
Orna: Excuse me! Sorry, you're mistaken, you're simply mistaken. Do you want me to show you in contacts?
Micha: I remember the ac...
Orna: So you don't remember. So I'm reminding you, it was ...
Micha: You take everything ...
Orna: But that was then ...
Micha: It's not, that's not how it happened.
Orna: So tell me how it happened, but this story, it was February '72.
Micha: Oh ... so basically ... what you [Ran] have here, uh, is a family event.”

Throughout this quarrel, the photographs—to be more exact, a photographic sequence that was interrupted when Micha was shot and injured by a weapon that was held by one of the dead men he is photographing—serve as both background and evidence for the various allegations. This argument over the facts behind the photographs demonstrates photography's very immediacy, and situates the photographic moment as one of life and death, alongside the urgency of the task to preserve the facts so that they remain as close as possible to what happened in that instant, lest they change with the passing of time. As a counter to this “family debate” is Tal's strict rule not to film the interviewees but to create a film from the archive, from Bar-Am's stills. And Tal tends to be a stickler with regard to rules—in *Children of the Sun*, there is only archival footage, in *The Garden of Eden*, the camera is static throughout,

in *What If?* only Barak speaks—rules which, according to Tal are supposed to protect the film from the story, that is, to prevent the materials that have yet to be revealed during research and work on the film from overshadowing the final product. The inflexible rule of a film composed out of stills precedes the argument between Orna, Micha, and Ran over what happened as opposed to the evidence left behind by the camera. But it also testifies to understanding in hindsight: Tal understands that the aesthetic code through which one can view Bar-Am's archive is already embedded in its form. A continuous, very long, but finite series of arrested images. It is a cinematic understanding. If we saw them in a book or an exhibition, we wouldn't attach any significance to the fact that such a comprehensive and central photographic archive is static, and full of puzzling information gaps simply because it is made up only of stills. Yet, when the medium is supposed to move and doesn't, the feeling that something is missing, that something is wrong, this immediately charges our encounter with Bar-Am's story.

Indeed, Tal exploits the visual effectiveness of the “Bar-Amian” photograph, the cultural tendency to become mesmerized by the power of war photography, a tendency that still encourages big-budget television and cinematic productions in Israel (especially when archives that had been censored for more than fifty years are opened) and garner high ratings. Tal's subsequent translation of Bar-Am's photography into the enlarged and glowing arena of film proves the endurance of this sweeping visual impact years after the event was photographed, and of the centrality of the image of war in Israel's visual history. Challenging this impact, which Tal's restrained cinematic treatment serves only to amplify, are the raw and cryptic conversations with the Bar-Ams that slowly bring into focus the figure that is largely responsible for the shaping of Israeli visual history and who at the end of his life wants to absolve himself of this. Thus, both Tal and Bar-Am come to this key archive after all those photographs were taken and after what those photographs cost the photographer and their many viewers. The film ends with an important, but ambiguously worded confession:

“Micha: When I started, I had a hope that the world could also be bettered maybe, so it's a kind of naive belief that ... photography can also be useful. Today, I don't think ... I can keep thinking, but I can't run and fight with the camera.
Ran: You're actually one of the important documenters of the Israeli project. How do you feel about it today?
Micha: I have ambivalent feelings about the outcome ... Because I am naturally a fervent optimist, I try to maintain optimism despite what is happening around us.
Ran: Could you perhaps be a little more specific?
Micha: No. Because then I get dragged into issues that I try not to think about... the fact that you can't see the horizon saddens me.”

In the moral debate around documentary photography, the essential question posed for about one hundred and fifty years, which concerns the justification of the camera's action in the face of atrocities and disasters, appears decided and the judgment rendered, that the camera cease; even if its products are immense, the camera itself is impotent. Yet Tal raises the question again here and casts new doubt on the verdict: Although the horrible images from Sabra and Shatila did not prevent the next slaughter, they did stop the country's great documenter from photographing it. If there are no photos from the next slaughter, but there are words or the camera is surrendered (as Orna says in the final words of the film), this is the most important testimony to what the camera has done and still does for life in this country. And here, Bar-Am's sober words at the end of the film, after the trauma of Lebanon and the first intifada, and also of color and digital, mark anew the whole story as a fragmented series of clashes of recollection and forgetting typical for someone who has lived a long life. Not as a continuous and logical story of a unified life's course, and certainly not of a cohesive local history. Perhaps the concept of identity, into which criticism of the ostensibly recruited photography of Bar-Am and other "state photographers" has been said to fit, doesn't really fit the present story. The concept of identity that involves continuity will make it difficult for us to accept that one's views and actions in the past are inconsistent with one's views and actions in the present, especially if one is a central figure in the wide-ranging processes of shaping collective consciousness. This continuity of identity is also the basis for the continuity on which the documentary and fictional cinematic act is founded. But Tal's conversations with the Bar-Ams, heard against the background of frozen and disjointed images, suggest converting identity into identification—the former is an absolute and finite idea, the latter an endless, sometimes fruitless effort whose result is the self. The story Tal presents to us is not really the story of the country, nor so much is it Bar-Am's biography as it is the story of political and artistic identification that only symbolizes the difficulties of the identification of this place and life in it. Such a story has something critical to say about holding onto a certain identity, in relation to the self and in relation to others, and about the moral horizon of giving an account of actions that were done in the name of that worldview—by photographers and viewers alike.

III

While Tal is still in the editing room, and following the thoughts presented here, another action is proposed—to take apart and reassemble *1341 Frames* into a cinematic installation in a museum space as a retrospective thought on photography and documentation in Israel. Bar-Am's photography, which Tal

has translated onto the luminous surface of the movie screen, can return to the institutional locus of the work of art—the museum—and revert to photography once more. Although Bar-Am's work has been showcased in many exhibitions at leading institutions in Israel and around the world, few have tackled the two core questions in the relationship between photography and the museum: the question of the original and the question of display. In most photography exhibitions at art institutions, it is expected that the original, and not a copy, will be exhibited. Should the original be missing, a copy is printed and framed, the same as any other original and valuable artwork in a museum. This is not a curator's technical observation. Embedded in such curatorial-institutional behavior is the assumption that the photograph has a single source, that this source is usually a print on paper that needs to be protected from exposure to light and changes in temperature and humidity. All of this is understandable and familiar, and has long been the subject of criticism surrounding the socio-economic motivations in the treatment of photography promoted by a group of qualified connoisseurs, but that also completely denies photography's internal logic. The photograph is itself a reproduction; hence, there effectively never was an original.

Why then, is the question here of the original relevant and tied up with the question of display? The reason is that journalistic photography, like that of Bar-Am's and countless others working in this creative field, has no origin other than the instant when the photographer clicked on the shutter and something was imprinted on the piece of film inside the camera. What happens to this image from that moment forward is not really in the artist's control—the image will be printed and distributed in black and white or color, cut vertically or horizontally, cropped on the right or left, spliced and retouched, all at the discretion of the corporation that commissioned the image. These considerations themselves are a consequence of conditions of production, distribution, and consumption, that is, of display, and these are often foreign to the development and cultivation of collections of works of art in a museum. In other words, why should new, meticulously framed prints of Bar Am's photographs, seen in the past by tens of thousands on the covers of newspapers and magazines in Israel, Paris, New York, Berlin and Los Angeles (and this was primarily owing to Bar-Am's powerful style), be considered a more correct or faithful display of some particular artistic statement? Moreover, perhaps this question is even superfluous now, given that the era of news photography in print is already behind us, and photojournalism's cultural platform is not a uniform-sized newspaper broadsheet but varying-sized screens. What does this say about the possibility of placing such a photograph today in a museum? What is the right way to reintroduce photojournalism into the spaces where the discourse on the definition and the effects of art takes place?

The conversations in the editing room also turn to documentary cinema. More precisely, while Tal is still working on *1341 Frames* in the editing room with the film's editor Nili Feller, outside, Israel is undergoing one of its most turbulent moments. Despite a global health crisis that sanctions a new and oppressive zoological politics of "social distancing" and "herd immunity," the street is roiling with protests calling for the replacing of the government and governmental actions to crush them, and public discourse is violent and polarized. The stages for criticism, the newspapers, the parliament, schools, courts, are shrinking. Tal's new film is almost ready for release, but the theaters are closed. Even when they open, after the "third wave" of the Corona virus, movie theaters are no longer the bustling arena of public discourse. The movie theater's single-channel structure—from the glowing projection screen to the rows of dark and quiet seats—neutralizes any such discourse, notwithstanding this or that pandemic (although there were in the past a few films that did send crowds into the streets). At the same time, the marches and demonstrations every Saturday evening, across the country, are the only public events allowed during the government ordered lockdowns. In Jerusalem, the route of the demonstration from the Knesset, passing by the Israel Museum on the way to Balfour Street, the site of the prime minister's residence, and the demonstration in front of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, remind us that a demonstration and a museum share the logic of display, of expressing ideas in a public forum. Then, when the museums and the malls reopen, we ask ourselves where is the Israeli public, where does it meet as a society, and how is all this dictated first and foremost by freedom of movement?

In order to propose freedom of movement for a documentary work that reckons with the identification of this place, one must try to disrupt something in the physical tethers of the movie theater. But how do you really put freedom of movement into a film? First, one has to adopt Tal's familiar aesthetic code, and separate sound from image, that is, private listening (with personal headphones) and public viewing (everyone looking at the screen). Second, transfer the same "1,341 frames" from the timeline of the cinematic sequence (frame by frame) to the axis of the museum space (you choose where to go), where simultaneous, parallel, and comparative observation is possible, even a spontaneous pairing of a soldier at the Western Wall and Eichmann. This means going back to the editing table and relating anew to Tal's film as a visit to the Bar-Ams' archive, which this time contains both photographs and audio recordings, and putting together an exhibition from this strange and rich collection. And third, freeing the viewer from the necessity of the narrative and letting them roam freely among different parts of the re-edited cinematic work, or leave in the middle, or go back and re-watch one of the episodes. This voluntary involvement in the weaving of a story, like any political involvement, is confusing, even embarrassing, but that

is where responsibility begins. On a more fundamental level, as I learned from Tal and his filmmaking, which in its totality is a tribute to the past and a quest after its traces, Tal's tribute to Bar-Am invites also a tribute to Tal. In each of these stages—from the front page to the movie screen to the museum space—it is the recognition of what has already been done, and an objective look at the difference between me and those that came before me, which is another way of saying "what is to be done," and this too is a kind of responsibility.

Noam Gal
February 2022