Looking at Remembering: Photography, Monuments and Memory††˘˘††Meir Wigoder

Is it a coincidence that two women rather than men set out on a two-year journey across Israel to photograph 180 monuments all over the country? Both Drora Dominey and France Lebée-Nadav characterize their collaboration as an adventure. It may not have been as dramatic as the journey of the heroines in Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise*, or as hallucinatory as the wanderings of the heroines in Jacques Rivette's *Celine and Juliet go Boating*, but it did provide them with an alternative way of looking at a landscape blemished with so many military macho symbols of a society that expects women to bear and groom children for the army, just as they are expected to be the torch-bearers of memory should their sons or husbands not return from battle. These photographs are not only records of particular places that signify landmarks in the history of Israel's armed conflicts, but are also a testimony to spaces that Dominey and Lebée-Nadav traversed on the highways and byways to reach all these locations. Hence, this collection of photographs follows in part the genealogy of national heroes and famous battles. In doing so it makes us wonder about the type of journey we are being invited to join: at a time when the practices of subjective and collective memory are being questioned, we wonder whether the collection of these photographs of monuments does not run the risk of complying with the State's hegemonic view, which tries to create a national memory in order to represent a united society that has a singular linear historical development? Or, is this project meant to have a critical and ironic outlook on the role that monuments play in Israel precisely because it presents a miscellany of styles of monuments that span more than 50 years of this country's history? This project raises complex questions about the relationship between memory and history; memory and forgetfulness; subjective and collective practices of memory; and about the relationship between art and politics.

Dominey and Lebée-Nadav's project reflects a mixture of aesthetic and political considerations without having an overt dogmatic agenda. As part of Dominey's critical view of the way Israeli monuments from the 1960s and 1970s were created by noted male artists (Yechiel Shemi, Yitzhaq Danziger, and Yigal Tumarkin for example), she claims that their monumental style emphasized the collective aspects of memory and left little consideration for the personal perspectives of ritualizing grief. On the aesthetic side, their project led them to photograph a wide array of monuments, from the early figurative style, to the brutalist, the modern and the colorful toy-like post-modern style of monuments. The political and cultural aspects of their work are underlined by their typological sensibility, exemplified by the way they recorded an array of monuments of different sectors of the Israeli army, Israeli society and the minorities. Dominey and Lebée-Nadav agreed not to photograph monuments beyond the 1967 Green Line border and decided not to include Holocaust monuments, as though the entire project was to remain a strictly Tsabar (native Israeli) affair.

The subject of monuments is already discernable in Dominey's sculpture from the 1990s, which had been informed by a feminist critique of Israeli sculpture. One of the earliest references in her work to monuments is detected in the installation "Ofek-Gabot", which deals with the national and social myths surrounding the first Zionist and socialist pioneers. Dominey places on easels large photographs of water-towers that are riddled by bullets (fig. 1). In one of the photographs proudly stands the statue of Mordechai Anilewiez at Yad Mordechai. The water-towers are not only symbolic of the male-dominated narrative of this country but also echo the entire fortress mentality, which typified the way the early Jewish settlers expanded their hold on the land.

The antidote to this type of macho signification is provided by Dominey in another set of sculptures that she made out of wash-tubs (fig. 2). The phallic perspective of the water-towers against

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

the horizon is now replaced by a feminine view, asserting the connection between the tubs and the ground. The spectator must crouch in order to look at the water vessels from close up.[1] The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be viewed from these contrasting perspectives. While most of the early Palestinian villages function like Dominey's tubs, because they were built on the terraces of hills in order to blend in with the landscape, the Jewish settlers first flattened the hill-tops and only then built their homes on the highest elevations in order to be visible and have a commanding view. Dominey and Lebée-Nadav's project explores the tension between the "feminine" landscape and the prevailing "masculine" monuments. It also reminds us that every monument that is erected to perpetuate the Zionist narrative, has its counterpart in the form of ruins and clusters of cactus vegetation, which attest to the Palestinian point of view on the conflict—hence, this dichotomy emphasizes the disparity between the *built-monument* and the *natural-monument*; between an act of construction and the traces that represent loss and absence in the land.[2]

It was her personal perspective on grief that attracted Lebée-Nadav to the project. Early experiences of loss in her own childhood contributed to shaping her vision. As a French immigrant in a foreign Israeli culture, she found the public rituals of mourning both fascinating and troubling. In one personal project she began to photograph every year in her son's school the memorial ceremonies for the soldiers who had died in the wars, in full awareness of the irony that these photographs might one day serve to remember her own son if he were to die in battle (fig. 3). Lebée-Nadav's foreign background led her, in another project, to search for the traces of European style architecture in the entrances to buildings in Tel Aviv. These entrances mark the transitional spaces between the private and the public spheres of life. The very quietude of the photographs and the sharp transitions from darkness to light, make them look like modern tombs whose ghostly quality is reminiscent of the empty streets that Eugene Atget photographed

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

in the late nineteenth century; spaces devoid of people, which made Walter Benjamin remark that Atget's photographs look like the scenes of a crime (fig. 4).

Dominey and Lebée-Nadav's work relies on photographic "estrangement", a critical formalist term used in literature and photography to describe the task of defamiliarizing reality in order to make it noticeable to the viewer. The degree to which Dominey and Lebée-Nadav succeed relies mainly on three types of photographic angle: the frontal angle runs the risk of coinciding the view of the photographer with the implied official view of the monument, which assumes a spectator standing opposite it during the memorial service. (The texts on the monuments imply that there is a front and a back and indicate to the spectator where to stand.) Looking at the monuments from the sides provides diverse opportunities to emphasize or dwarf them in relation to their surroundings: a perspective that can either create the impression that the monument blends in with the landscape; or show the extent to which it is an intrusion. The view from behind, which Lebée-Nadav and Dominey rarely use, is the most radical because it has the effect of canceling out the commemorative value of most monuments and leveling them into a single sense of platitude.

The aesthetic considerations of exploring the landscape of monuments brings up similar issues to those faced by American landscape photographers in the 1980s. The work of photographers like Richard Misrach and John Pfahl are examples. Misrach set out to depict the terrible damage done to the Nevada desert after American army maneuvers had destroyed the terrain. But in fact, the photographs create a dissonance between the intended political and ecological message and their aesthetic effect: the most pleasing pictorial effects are the craters, which designate the damage done by the bombs and missiles. Likewise, the plumes of smoke in John Pfahl's photographs of power stations are meant to signify to us how terribly they pollute nature, but in fact the beauty of the photographs relies on these effects of smoke rising from their

chimneys.[3] Similarly, Dominey and Lebée-Nadav's photographs aim to show us a landscape of death through the sheer accumulative power of all the monuments, but they also individualize each monument in an aesthetically pleasing way that makes us appreciate how their formal shapes integrate within the landscape.

Lebée-Nadav selected her Bronica camera for this project. It ensured her mobility while providing her with a suitable size of negative to enlarge the photographs without them being grainy. The 6x6 medium range format camera is traditionally associated with the body rather than the photographer's eyes because it is held at waist level and provides a "navel-view" of the scene. (In extreme situations, when Lebée-Nadav and Dominey did not want to look up at the monuments, in order not to emphasize their dramatic stature, they used a ladder to look at the objects from a greater height.) This format camera lies between two types of viewing practices: its mobility is reminiscent of the 35 mm camera, which we connect in our minds with the roaming view of the urban "passant" who glimpses reality through a series of chance encounters and captures the "decisive moments" in the streets. This format provided photographers such as Robert Frank and Lee Friedlander with the agility to capture the urban landscapes during their travels (Lebée-Nadav notes that she was engaging in a dialogue with these photographers).[4] On the other side of the spectrum, the medium format belongs to the sensibility of larger format camera techniques, which are used outdoors to create a much more stable and timeless impression of the landscape. Consequently, the formal tension in Dominey and Lebée-Nadav's photographs results from the way they use the camera either to photograph the monuments from close by (thereby using the square format, which is related traditionally to portrait photography, to create a more personal relationship with the monuments) or, in including the monument in a much larger view, they create a tension between the square format and our expectations of seeing landscapes in the rectangle panoramic viewing format.[5]

Pointing a camera at a monument is no simple task. It raises a few fundamental questions: is it a tautological act that confers a similarity between the way photographs and monuments are meant to resurrect the past and be used for commemorative purposes? Do photographs and monuments attest to the same need to mark a definitive "place" where actions took place in order to remember them? Do they both impart the same kind of witnessing techniques? Barthes had commented that far from being able to make us recall all that had happened on a certain occasion, the task of photographs is mainly to prove that the event had taken place.[6] Photographs provide a dichotomy between the photograph's ability to assert that the scene was actually observed by someone and the camera's mechanical ability to take a photograph of a place or an event even if there was no one standing behind the camera (modern technology has led to the "autonomous" camera); the former view attests to the subjective aspects of photography and the latter to its objective and passive character.

Hence, what kind of a sense of viewing presence, or lack of one, do the photographs in this book reveal? Do they attest to the point of view of these two huntresses, who traveled across the country in order to bring back their prey and reveal these locations, with the aim of strengthening the idea that a monument is capable of encapsulating a collective memory that is always antithetical to the memory of another community whose memory is being neglected or entirely erased here? Or, is the choice of presenting us with so many "unpopulated" monuments (except for two instances where people are seen) meant to present an impression of how all these *overlooked monuments* appear when they are not attended, and are therefore unable to perform their memorial task because there is no-one standing before them and reflecting on their significance —

a point that rehearses the idea that forgetfulness is part of the memorial practice?

The title of the book, *Everywhere: Landscape and Memory in Israel*, gives us some clue to the answer. The singular meaning of each monument is leveled by the quantity of sites, thus reminding us that most of the time we pass by these locations without even noticing them because they have melted into our everyday existence. Only once a year, on the appointed hour, when people stand in front of the monuments for a moment's silence, do we understand the tentative relationship between photography and monuments: at the designated moment the siren arrests movement and turns everyone into a stilled photograph. Its wailing sound threads together all the personal and collective feelings of grief all over the country and then dies down, slowly releasing people from their frozen positions. It is precisely during this moment of silence that everything gets reversed: the photographer/traveler/witness is forced to freeze while all the inanimate object-matter suddenly comes to life and we become aware of even the slightest movement of paper blowing in the street or leaves in the forest, which would otherwise go unnoticed.

The moment of the siren is the only time when the photograph and the monument coalesce, for otherwise their roles are very distinct: the monument, belonging to the continuity of tradition and to ritualistic space, represents the distant past. The passage of time can render monuments either more significant or irrelevant. The monument can mark a specific event by commemorating it in the "real" place but it can also do so anywhere else. The monument tries to transcend time and act as a pure memory, in contrast to the photograph that is limited to testifying to a particular moment that had once taken place in time. The photograph belongs to those shock effects and fragmented moments that record events as never having ripened. The photograph is more descriptive and does not necessarily carry the narrative weight that the monument encapsulates. The photograph is more capable of simply testifying to the fact that the event had taken place - a factor that enables later generations to identify with the event and even construct their own memory from the photographs (as is often the case when young Israelis go on memorial-tours to the concentration camps and recognize the railway tracks that they had first seen in photographs.)

In our post-modern age the dichotomy between the monument and the new advance in camera technologies has led memory, in Andreas Huyssen's words, "to migrate into the realm of silicon chips, computers, and cyborg fictions."[7] Huyssen argues that it is a mistake to believe, as many critics of post modernity do, that cameras and technology create an entropy of historical memory leading to a collective amnesia that results in an unwillingness to engage in active memory of the past. In fact, he claims that ever since the 1980s the media have done a lot to create a climate of memory that has led so many people to become obsessed with the past, leading to the creation of many monuments, museums and data banks. The ability to get more information and more quickly has only enhanced the available amount of information from the past, which is stored in such a way as to be delivered speedily in the present. He adds that maybe the success of the museum and the monument in the present is, nevertheless, something to do with what television and the Internet deny: there is a need for the material quality of the object: "The permanence of the monument and of the museum object, formerly criticized as deadening reifications, takes on a different role in a culture dominated by the fleeting image on the screen and the immateriality of communications."[8]

The meaning of the monuments in Dominey and Lebée-Nadav's work is also a result of the way they were recorded and exhibited. But this meaning is not necessarily stable because the images had

undergone their own journey and dissemination: it starts with a reference book that the authors used like a tourist guide. *Gal'ed*, a book especially published by the Ministry of Defence for the families who had lost their sons and relatives in battle, maps the community of pain with photographs and descriptions of all the monuments in the country.[9] The second stage was the exhibition at Sadnaot Ha'omanim (Artists' Studios).[10] The gallery space conduced to a strong connection between the large-size photographs and the actual size of the monuments. The way the photographs were hung enabled the creation of a new dialogue between the monuments that in reality stood far apart from each other. The entire exhibition process enabled the construction of a spatial experience, correlating the artist and photographer's sense of travel with the spectator's own need to walk around the gallery.

By transferring the photographs to the book, the large public monuments are again uprooted and diminished in size as they are placed in the terrain of the page that is held in the hand and is perceived in the interior - a reminder that grief and mourning always start from the individual experience - one that led Lebée-Nadav to remark that every parent in our country has an unfortunate contract with the State: it asks them to sacrifice their sons while promising in return to provide the families with a fitting collective memorial if they die. Only when this contract starts to fail, for ideological and cultural reasons, does it become possible to discern a shift in the way families render their sense of loss for their sons. Recent criticism toward military and State rituals has caused parents to seek more personal forms of memorial practices: the use of home-video films, the creation of "private-museums" in their homes, and the need to add more personal anecdotes to the tombstones, exemplify the way people are seeking to move away from the collective forms of memory in order to individualize their memory practices.

In the final transformation of the monument from being a sign that stands for the invisibility of the event it represents in the past, to becoming an accessible photographic object in the present, we notice the saddening silence that has befallen these objects. This silence seems to have made it all the more imperative for the act of writing to accompany these images, as though Dominey and Lebée-Nadav needed someone else to witness their own testimonial act in order to complete its meaning. As we leaf through the monuments in this book and let the pages pass quickly through our fingers - revealing the variety of solid square photographs that are either paired or presented separately opposite an empty white page; and move on to view the running photographs that are arranged in a single file like a view from a moving car; or piled as many squares in a neat grid much like an overview of a cemetery - we can take flight in our mind and imagine all these locations from the bird's-eye view forming clusters of dots on a map of this country. At this point their shapes start to resemble the printed dot matrix of the newspaper page that delivers to us on a daily basis the tragic news of death; or it may resemble the game in which a young child is required to trace a line and connect the dots until an image appears on the page.

I will leave it to the reader to imagine the feeling of excitement and dread that the child would feel if he had to play this game with our spatial-dots of monument sites - what haunting image would emerge on the page? It is this that makes me hope that this book will also become a guide for a future generation of photographers who will set out on a journey into the fast-changing Israeli landscape where the erection of monuments competes with the speed of real estate construction, and who will find other ways to interpret this landscape in a critical manner. For this is a landscape, that in its extremity, attracts the settler-families to live in areas that are guarded by a web of fences and watch towers to create safe "reservations", which themselves act like monuments for their unrealistic idealistic

ideals; or, on the other side of the spectrum, provides a “safe” haven for the remnants of the Left and the new-age families who choose to live in places that no longer remind them of the reality in which they live, hoping that in their new hide-outs of “home away from home” they will be able to block out the madness and the irrational political violence that has gripped them for so long. This is a violence thrust upon us by the growing power of the electronic media, whose graphic designers have become the new architects of virtual monuments whose ability to make us recall the dead in our “zapping-minds” relies on the short amount of time the image remains on the television screen.

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1. See for example Smadar Shefi, “Gigit Lelo Tahtit,” *Studio* 25 (Sept. 1991): 42; Tali Tamir, “Gufiyya Umigdal,” *Mishqafayim* 34 (Sept. 1998): 59-61; *Drora Dominey, Sculptress 1990-1993* (Catalogue, curator: Ellen Ginton), Tel Aviv Museum, 1993.
2. For a pioneering research on the subject of monuments, see Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its character and its origin,” *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982): 21-51.
3. Richard Misrach, *Bravo 20*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990; and also John Pfahl’s, *Altered Landscapes: The photographs of John Pfahl*, Carmel, CA. : The Friends of Photography, 1981. and Estelle Jussim, *A Distanced Land: The Photographs of John Pfahl*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990.
4. Lee Friedlander, *The American Monument*, Eakins, The Eakins Press Foundation, New York 1976.
5. The tension created by photographing a landscape with a square format camera is perceptively discussed by Sarah Breitberg-Semel in *Dalia Amotz, Photographs*, Tel Aviv Museum, 2000.
6. Roland Barthes and Siegfried Kracauer debated most effectively the problematic role photography played in aiding our memory and representing the past. For a discussion of their writings on this subject, see Meir Wigoder, “History Begins at Home: Photography and Memory in the Writings of Siegfried Kracauer and Roland Barthes,” *History and Memory* 13: 2 (Spring/Summer 2001): 19-59.
7. Andreas Huyssen, “Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6: 2 (1993): 249.
8. Ibid., 255.
9. Ilana Shamir (ed.), *Gal’ed — Memorials for the Fallen in the Wars of Israel*, The State of Israel, Ministry of Defence, 1989.
10. Smadar Shefi, “Beli Belorit Uveli To’ar,” *Haaretz*, March 8, 2000; Sigal Barnir, *Studio* 115 (July 2000): 72.

Abstracts

Avner Ben-Amos

Theaters Of Death And Memory: Monuments And Rituals In Israel

Avner Ben-Amos's essay addresses the notion of monuments as stage sets that provide a theatrical setting for those few days in the year when ceremonies take place to commemorate the dead. Precisely because the monument is often overlooked by the traveler or the urban passer-by, the function of the ceremony is to highlight its meaning. Ben-Amos considers the way these sets provide the necessary conditions for the rituals to take place before an audience that participates in the action. He describes the accoutrements that are used to create symbolic meanings and claims that the repetitive ritualistic patterns of these ceremonies are meant to transform the monuments into "natural objects", which in turn make the sacrifice of the soldiers also appear to be "natural". The efforts of the State to perpetuate the memory of its fallen soldiers through monuments and rituals is one of the sources of its power: it contributes to ensuring that more and more generations of young people will follow in the same path and willingly, or at least unprotestingly, go to their death.

Hannan Hever

Before The Graves

Hanan Hever juxtaposes Nathan Rappaport's sculpture at Kibbutz Negba (1953) with Batia Lishanski's sculpture at Kefar Yehushua' (1953). Hever provides a consequential link between the terms of production in which the sculptures were created, their placement in space, their effect on the environment, and the way they have been represented in the photographs. Each stage reaffirms the relationship between cause, effect and reception in order to contrast the ways in which a male and a female artist create a sculpture. Rappaport's sculpture represents three figures who symbolize the struggle to hold Negba during the 1948 war. The individual, private figure, becomes a symbol of a larger collective, itself symbolizing the nation. Batya Lishansky's sculpture deconstructs the symbolic codes common to the hegemonic national discourse and represents four roughly carved figures. The woman artist's figures lack the fine, concrete and precise portrayal of the figural bodies that Rappaport's sculpture commands. Lishansky's figures bend over, disrupt the symbolic tight order and therefore represent an allegory, which - through its mechanic mode of representation - represent a world of ruins and destruction rather than obey the dictates of the narrative of national redemption.

Yael Shenker

"The World Is Filled With Remembering And Forgetting"

Yael Shenker invites us to gaze at Chulikat - an act that starts with her search for Dicky, who had fallen there during the battles of 1948; to read about this location in Yehuda Amichai's poems; and to look at the photograph of Hill 138.5 at Chulikat. Shenker's discussion of this site is tinged with the fragile possibilities that writings, monuments and photography can offer for remembering. She distinguishes between "live memory", representing the poet's attempt to recount a personal memory in order to return to a moment prior to a death, and "dead memory" that represents what the monument offers, as it is meant to recall all those fallen soldiers who no longer have a say.

Shenker does not combine all these possibilities of memory in

order to create a division between them; instead she seeks to delineate the boundaries between them as she searches for a conglomeration of memorial acts that will enable the observer to participate in the act of remembrance, and belong to a community of memory. In doing so, Shenker makes as aware of the dialectical relationship between the present and the past, between presence and absence, and between memory and forgetfulness.