

- designed the first modern turnpike and a significant portion of the Interstate Highway System.’ HNTB <<http://www.hntb.com/about-us/history>> [accessed 19 April 2011]
8. Court rulings such as *Sierra Club v. Lyng* have expanded the possible interpretations of ‘harm’ to an endangered species. Since 1981, ‘harm’ can mean management practices that result in: (1) modification of habitat, (2) isolation that prohibits breeding, (3) diminished food supply, and (4) reduction of viable habitats. Steven G. Davidson, ‘Alteration of Wildlife Habitat as a Prohibited Taking Under the Endangered Species Act’, s.v. ‘V. Fish and Wildlife Services 1981 Redefinition of “Harm”’, *Journal of Land Use Environmental Law* (1995). <<http://www.law.fsu.edu/journals/landuse/vol102/2davison.html#FNR113>> [accessed 19 April 2011]
  9. \$80 million from the 2006 bond program will be repurposed for the repair of the levees to meet the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s hundred-year-flood protection standards by 2012. An additional \$15 million will come from bond funds set aside for construction of the Trinity toll road’. Rudolph Bush, ‘Dallas unveils \$150 million plan to repair Trinity levees’, *Dallas Morning News* (17 April 2010) <<http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/dallas/headlines/20100417-Dallas-unveils-150-million-plan-4677.ece>> [accessed 19 April 2011]
  10. See ‘The Trinity Trust: Reclaiming Our River’ website for a calendar of celebratory events related to the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge. TTT <<http://www.thetrinitytrust.org/>> [accessed 19 April 2011]
  11. A data search revealed that both websites are owned by same registrant with identical domain servers. The *votosavethetrinity.com* site was created on 31 July 2007 (three months prior to the Proposition 1 vote in 2007); *grassboot.com* was created on 20 July 2009. Godaddy.com, s.v. ‘WHOIS Domain Check’ <<http://www.godaddy.com/search/domains.aspx?isc=gofn2001ac>> [accessed 19 April 2011]
  12. The US Lacey Act has been described as ‘a potent weapon in the fight against widespread and highly profitable illegal wildlife traffic’. Although the Fish and Wildlife Service plays a primary enforcement role, the Act is limited to the protection of plant life. The 2008 Lacey Act Amendment increased jurisdiction to include illegally taken or traded timber and wood products. EIA, s.v. ‘Lacey Background’ <[http://www.eia-global.org/forests\\_for\\_the\\_world/lacey.html](http://www.eia-global.org/forests_for_the_world/lacey.html)> [accessed 19 April 2011]
  13. The awards are given to ‘recognize those that have made significant contributions to conservation’. Founded in 1914, the award is named after Dr William T. Hornaday, a zoologist and ardent defender and conservator of natural resources. He is credited with helping save the Alaskan fur seal and American bison from extinction. USSSP, s.v. ‘William T. Hornaday Awards History Center’ <<http://usscouts.org/history/hornaday.asp>> [accessed 19 April 2011]

# The ART of FORGETFULNESS, the TRAUMA of MEMORY: Yael Bartana and Artur Żmijewski

Noah Simblist

Now an icon for the worst of humanity, the Holocaust is a reminder that any discussion of religious, ethnic, or racial essentialism has a logical endgame to which we can point in the past. Ironically, this iconic status has also allowed many to use the Holocaust to serve multiple and often contradictory ideological projects. Some religious Zionist Jews likened the late Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, to a Nazi when he proposed a two-state solution, while there are Palestinian protesters in the West Bank who liken Israeli soldiers to Nazis for their participation in the occupation. These particular cycles of accusation have much to do with the State of Israel, and the consequent occupation of Palestinian land in 1948 in the wake of World War II. The history of Jewish victimhood, with the Holocaust as its ultimate example, haunts any consideration of security and safety in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Holocaust left a real trace of equal complexity in its actual location. Some of the most infamous sites of the final solution such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, and the Warsaw Ghetto were located in Poland, and much of its Jewish population was either executed or expelled. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, it destroyed national libraries, archives, historical markers, and museums.<sup>1</sup> An erasure both of bodies and cultural memory occurred. Poland must live with its legacy as a graveyard for Nazi victims, as well as the subsequent

oppressive influence of the Soviet Union until 1989. When Poland overthrew Soviet rule, the country began a process of self-evaluation under a state of relative freedom, its future contingent on how it deals with its troubled past. Israeli artist Yael Bartana and Polish artist Artur Żmijewski have both addressed these histories in their work. Both approach this material without the customary reverence and allow for more provocative strategies that reassess the place of the Holocaust in our cultural imagination, while also exploring the more abstract relations between matter and memory.<sup>2</sup>



Yael Bartana  
*Mur i Wieża (Wall and Tower)*, 2009  
 Single channel HD  
 video projection, 15 min  
 Polish and Hebrew  
 with English subtitles  
 Courtesy of Sommer  
 Contemporary Art, Tel  
 Aviv

Yael Bartana's work *Wall and Tower* is part of a trilogy entitled ... *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, shown in its entirety at the Polish Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in June 2011. It follows the first part of the trilogy, entitled *Mary Kozmary (Nightmares)* (2007), in which a spokesman for the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP), played by Sławomir Sierakowski, calls for the return of 3,300,000 Jews to the land of their forefathers. This gesture not only evokes the Holocaust but also the Palestinian right of return: if European Jews return to Poland, they will create a void that Palestinians displaced by Israel in 1948 would most probably fill.<sup>3</sup> In *Wall and Tower*, the JRMiP has succeeded in gathering a group of activists to build a kibbutz in the Warsaw district of Muranow, a Jewish residential district before WW II and site of the Warsaw Ghetto. A large bronze memorial to the Ghetto figures prominently in the film and acts as a silent reminder of the site's history. The activists in *Wall and Tower* are dressed like the

idealist Zionist pioneers who built identical structures in Palestine during the 1930s. Instead of teaching themselves Hebrew from their native Polish or Yiddish, a practice that grew from a belief in cultural renewal, *Wall and Tower's* activists must teach themselves Polish from their native Hebrew.

The original Zionist pioneers came primarily from Europe and Russia to Palestine in the early twentieth century. Fleeing anti-Semitic environments, they were also moving to Palestine from a proactive ideology both secular and socialist in nature that drew on Jewish historical and cultural connections with the 'Land of Israel'. Until WW I, the earliest incarnations of kibbutzim appeared in Palestine under Ottoman rule, though increased Jewish immigration occurred during the British Mandate in the 1920s and 30s.<sup>4</sup> The *Homa Umigdal* (wall and tower) project began in 1936 as Kibbutz Tel Amal. Its objective was to seize land purchased by the Israel Lands Administration that could not be settled due to native Palestinian hostility towards the increasing Jewish presence. Built by groups of forty people in a day or overnight, these kibbutzim enclosed an area of 35 metres by 35 metres, surrounded by barbed wire. Between 1936 and 1939, fifty-seven of these outposts were constructed.<sup>5</sup>

It is possible to think that Bartana is creating a symbolic intersection of two moments, the Warsaw Ghetto and the Wall and Tower kibbutzim. This alone might tell the story of two opposing moments of Jewish history where militarism and architecture mixed. But *Wall and Tower* was more than improvisational building, it became a foundational way to practice architecture and urbanism in Israel. The wall may function as a defensive measure but it also works offensively by allowing for the tower's panoptic surveillance. *Wall and Tower* is not only used as a model for Israeli military bases and the separation barrier that today roughly weaves its way along the Green Line, it is also used for civilian structures. This is one of many methods used for what Eyal Weizman has called the 'optical urbanism' of a 'civilian occupation'.<sup>6</sup> Bartana is not only referring to one instance of Israeli architecture, she is also talking about Israeli architecture and urbanism in general. Is Bartana suggesting that the JRMiP are acting as settlers,

militaristically occupying Warsaw through the smiles and civilian clothes of idealistic youth? There is an ominous quality to the barbed wire along the walls toward the end of the film. Perhaps this indicates Jewish trepidation at returning to the scene of a crime.

Beautifully cinematic with high production values, *Wall and Tower* opens with Slawomir Sierakowski speaking to JRMiP pioneers who look up at him adoringly as he calls for Jews to return to Poland: ‘Heal our wounds and we’ll heal yours.’ Immediately we see a pioneer walking away from the Warsaw Ghetto memorial and toward a new JRMiP icon that combines the Polish eagle with the Jewish star. Inspiring leadership messages continue as the camera shifts to groups of bustling workers who respond with renewed vigor. Pioneers bring in supplies in ceremonial fashion, digging foundations and building walls with a communal spirit. The soundtrack oscillates between bombastic nationalist songs and the melancholic melody of a lone harmonica. After the pioneers finish building their wall and tower they bring in gravel to fill the area between the walls, just as 1930s kibbutz-builders did. There are also glimpses of contemporary Warsaw to remind viewers that this is not an image from the past. Finally Sierakowski arrives through the newly finished enclave with a red flag emblazoned with the JRMiP crest. The flag is ceremoniously relayed to the top of the tower, one worker raises the flag as the pioneers smile again and applaud. Following the kibbutz’s inauguration the film intercuts between scenes of people laying barbed wire and the images of the newly built communal Polish language school that teaches words like ‘land’, ‘freedom’, and ‘peace’. Finally, we see multiple angles of the completed camp with little human activity, the ritual hanging of Zoltan Kluger’s photograph of Jewish pioneers building Tel Ammal, and as darkness falls a searchlight scans the surroundings from the watchtower. Its light falls on the Warsaw Ghetto memorial, highlighting the faces of the brave rebels who died in their struggle against oppression.

To what degree is this film an act of mourning? And if the film mourns, for whom or what does it grieve? Perhaps it

grieves for the millions lost in the Holocaust that the Warsaw Ghetto memorial evokes. Or it mourns the loss of Palestinian land and agency at the creation of the State of Israel. Perhaps the film mourns both losses, and the ruin of innocence. A common assumption in Zionist narratives is that Jews were led like lambs to the slaughter, but Holocaust survivors learned from the past and took on building the state of Israel—a supposedly blank slate to remake a nation—and Jewish culture rose from the ashes stronger than ever. But Jews quickly found that Palestine was not a blank slate and sacrificed the imagined nobility and innocence of Zionist ideology. If Zionist pioneers had recalled what it was like to be disempowered, surrounded by walls and left as refugees, then perhaps they would have thought twice. The occupation of Palestinian land became a loss of loss – the loss of the possibility that victimhood can yield compassion.

Much has been written about mourning and memory, especially in relation to the Holocaust. Judith Butler has asked when mourning is successful, posing a question to Freud’s answer that mourning succeeds when the mourner can exchange one object for another. For Freud, if someone’s spouse dies, for example, the mourning is successful when they remarry.<sup>7</sup> Butler argues that one need not forget but instead must work to find the loss within the loss of this process of exchange: that is, if we simply replace one person with another, we also let go of the loss itself. One might assume that this is good but perhaps there is something valuable to be maintained by holding on to some aspect of loss. Butler writes ‘Grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am.’<sup>8</sup> The constant reminder of Jewish victimhood often appears as the reason behind Israeli aggression. This is a simple mode of exchange in which aggression is justified because it must replace victimhood. Seen in light of Butler’s notion of grief, however, for Zionist Jews to succeed in their mourning of the Holocaust they must also address the loss of their own innocence. This also allows for a process of exchange—Jewish victimhood to Jewish strength – but by holding on to the loss inherent in this

exchange, Jews could use this constant awareness of loss as a source for the seeds of empathy. Bartana's film points to this process and uses a performative architecture to propose a radical form of mourning, one that is not about the erasure of a Jewish past and its replacement with the State of Israel. Rather, Bartana's mourning occurs in Poland, exchanging a Jewish past with a Jewish future at the same site, too close to completely forget the loss that took place there.

This act of revisiting a site of mourning also appears in Artur Żmijewski's video *80064* (2004), in which the artist convinces a Holocaust survivor to refresh his tattoo from the camps. Unlike Bartana's video, which uses formal strategies of Hollywood and propaganda cinema, Żmijewski uses low-tech subdued visual techniques of video documentary. It opens with tired wrinkled face of an old man, sitting in a tattoo parlor. A man (Żmijewski) stands opposite him and asks his name. The old man replies that his name is Joseph Tarnawa and that he was born in 1912. Żmijewski asks if Tarnawa was a prisoner in Auschwitz. He answers yes, and that he was taken there in 1942 for no reason that he could discern at the time. He remembers arriving and seeing the famous phrase *arbeit macht frei* (work will make you free) on the gate. Showing a photo of himself in a striped uniform, the old man tells Żmijewski that he has a number on his left arm, which he recites from memory. Żmijewski asks him to show his number. He rolls back his shirt to reveal a faded tattoo. Tarnawa tells the story of how it was done with a stencil, which is why he has such a 'nice number'.

Żmijewski asks Tarnawa if that was an important moment for him and he answers repeatedly no, no, no—as if acknowledging the power of the tattoo to allow his experiences during the Holocaust to maintain a hold on him. Żmijewski asks him if he shows it to people. These increasingly intrusive personal questions, which may provoke grief or shame for Tarnawa, are asked and answered with an equally deadpan unemotional quality. Tarnawa answers that he shows the number to anyone who asks because—lifting his arm to the camera—he is a survivor and the number for him clearly

symbolises his survival. He says that he saw many people die, as well as piles of bodies on a carriage pulled by prisoners that he would pass on his way to work. He then remembers a Nazi named Palitsch who would walk on people as they slept at night, and explains that he and every other prisoner became reconciled to the idea that they would die and had to endure and avoid conflict. At this point Żmijewski asks him about the present, if he ever dreams about the camp. He answers yes, there are moments but mainly it is all forgotten.



Artur Żmijewski  
*80064*, 2004  
Single channel video,  
projection or monitor,  
11 min. Polish with  
English subtitles  
Courtesy the artist,  
Galerie Peter  
Kilehmann, Zurich,  
Foksal Foundation,  
Warsaw

Tarnawa asks if there is anything else. Żmijewski says that he wants to 'renovate' his number. For the first time Tarnawa looks sad and afraid, asking if they can give up the idea. He says that it is not necessary, if it was fuzzy then maybe, but it is so clear and has not been changed. He worries that if it is changed it will be corrupted. Żmijewski stands over him, shrugs nonchalantly and says that it will remain the same and they won't corrupt it. This discussion raises the question of what 'it' is. Is the tattoo a signifier of his survival? A sign of horrific memories? Proof that the Holocaust did indeed happen to those that doubt it?

Tarnawa says no again and Żmijewski reminds him that they had discussed and agreed this already. After all he sitting in a chair with his shirt rolled up in a tattoo parlour. The discussion continues about whether the number will maintain

its authenticity; after a few more protests Tarnawa agrees. Żmijewski explains how the healing process of the wound will work and what Tarnawa must do to care for it properly. Tarnawa asks ‘Why are you imposing this burden on me that I have to take care of it?’ He sighs, his question unanswered and the tattoo artist takes over, putting on rubber gloves, dipping the needle in ink and starting up its loud buzz. The ink is dark and black on his skin and Tarnawa looks vacantly into the distance without flinching. As a coda, later we see Tarnawa in a living room, sitting in a chair. Żmijewski asks him off camera to show us the number emblazoned on his arm with renewed clarity. The artist asks him, ‘Do you like your number now?’ Tarnawa answers no, he never liked it but ‘it looks nicer now... more eye-catching... now everyone will be able to tell that I have renovated it, like some piece of furniture’.

The discomfort between art and the potential objectification of suffering in *80064* brings up Theodor Adorno’s famous statement: ‘to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric’.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the discomfort in this video has to do with the relation between representation and memory on several levels. First, Tarnawa could seem a pawn in Żmijewski’s artistic project, his body acting as a literal sign of the Holocaust and its legacy. A second representation, beyond this body on film, is the number as a representation on and of that body. By renewing the ink on that tattoo, Żmijewski follows the impulse behind many Holocaust memorials: to construct a public unflinching reminder of a history that we must never forget. Is the tattoo itself the work or is the performance of reminiscence, doubt, negotiation, and renewal of the very site of violence the work? If we were to have seen only before and after images in a photographic series, we would never have known the man that wears this sign. Żmijewski does not hide his role in this performance and as a result the memorial is about a conversation that reveals more contradictions than it resolves. In this sense, the video acts differently from most Holocaust memorials, which use the monument to record memory with unchanging permanence.<sup>10</sup> As cruel as it may seem, Żmijewski shows the Holocaust as something that must constantly be renegotiated.

Whether through architecture or the body, both Bartana and Żmijewski approach a site loaded with history through Butler’s process of mourning through exchange. Bartana exchanges a Zionist narrative from Poland to Palestine by inverting it. Żmijewski exchanges one tattoo for its copy, but with radically altered intent. Both use video to document and retell these performances of grief. Yet grief is rarely apparent; it lurks beneath the sleek formal eloquence of *Wall and Tower* and the seemingly direct documentary style of *80064*. Despite the provocative approach to the material, each shows great restraint, avoiding fixed truths, simple demonstrations of collective mourning, or the illusion of the objective historian. These strategies are in the purview of projects like Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Washington or Berlin Holocaust museums or Steven Spielberg’s Shoah Foundation, which work under the dictum ‘never forget’. Is it possible that there can be a remembering in excess? Tarnawa argues against ‘renovating’ his tattoo not because it would bring up something that he would rather forget, but because he is worried that the authenticity of the original tattoo, a trait that he remembers regularly, would be lost and replaced by a more present articulation of memory—one that takes account of the past but places it in the present tense.

Paul Ricoeur writes of the relation between forgetting and the persistence of traces. He reminds us that there are many different types of memory and consequently many kinds of traces, that the survival of images is about the process of recognition: ‘Recognizing a memory is finding it again. And finding it again is assuming that it is in principle available, if not accessible.’<sup>11</sup> Ricoeur presents a subtle and sophisticated understanding of memory that allows a present relationship with the past (quite different from Freud’s suggestion that we repeat a traumatic event in order to forget it). While Żmijewski’s double tattoo might seem like an act of forgetting because it was instigated by someone other than Tarnawa, it becomes a re-recognition of the past through the visible present. Bartana’s repetition is more complicated. The kibbutz copy, transported through time and space to

contemporary Poland, does not repeat the same past. It repeats one past in order to recognise another. This is why the barbed wire is so haunting. Is this wall and tower an echo of the Jewish occupation in Palestine or Nazi concentration camps? Does this barbed wire keeping Jews in its bounds act in terms of their safety or imprisonment? Conflating these historical moments causes a complex *aporia* where we might find that it is both.

1. Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 1998, p.21.
2. Bergson claims that 'memory is the intersection of mind and matter'. Henri Bergson (1896), *Between Matter and Memory*, trans. by N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991, p.13. For Bartana this matter is architecture, for Zmijewski it is the body.
3. Helen Thomas, a longtime White House reporter, most recently echoed this radical suggestion, and was heavily criticized for being anti-Semitic as a result. Jeremy W. Peters, 'Reporter Retires after Words About Israel', *The New York Times*, June 7, 2010. It should be noted that not all Israeli Jews are of European descent. A number of Jews came from countries in the Middle East and North Africa as well. Bartana is playing with the notion of the Zionist as a European colonialist.
4. Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999*, New York: Knopf, 1999, pp.37–160.
5. Sharon Rotbard, 'Wall and Tower (Homa Umigdal): The Mold of Israeli Architecture' in *A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture*, ed. by Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman, London: Verso, 2003, pp.39–56.
6. Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, London: Verso, 2007, p.111.
7. Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols, ed. and trans. by James Strachey *et al.*, London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–74, vol. 14, pp.243–58.
8. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, London: Verso, 2004, p.35.
9. Theodore Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shiery Weber, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967, p.19.
10. For more information on a wide range of Holocaust memorials see James Young, *The Texture of Memory*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.
11. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p.433.

# INTERVIEW

Avi Mograbi and Ahuvia Kahane

AK: Tell us about your last film *Z32*.

AM: *Z32* is a film that started with the testimonial of an Israeli ex-soldier talking about his participation in a revenge operation in 2002 involving Israeli elite units targeting unarmed Palestinian policemen in revenge of attacks on Israeli troops the day before. The soldier agreed to tell his story as long as I did not expose his identity. This led the film to become technically complicated as I chose—unlike standard television-documentary strategies—to fit him with a new face, a 3D digital mask that allows his eyes and mouth to be seen, the organs of expression. The rest of the face is a scan of the face of another person. It turned to be a complex film with questions about guilt and responsibility. This has to do not only with the soldier and his girlfriend, who participates in the film, but also with the film-maker, that is, me—or rather my character as the film-maker in the film – who has to question his own integrity and responsibility when he offers space in the film, a 'shelter' to an assassin, in a sense.

AK: The soldier in *Z32* tells his story with frightening 'plainness'. He does not seem to be trying to impress anyone. He reports on his own actions and feelings objectively, with a kind of matter of factness. It is both powerful and frightening.

AM: I don't think he is trying to impress anybody. This person has told his story many times. As often in cases of post-traumatic stress, he is in constant need to retell his story. The fact that he tells his story is not a revelation, for him or anyone. I find it overwhelming, unsettling, that he tells his story in detail. Through his descriptions you are able to imagine the situation, the way he saw it. The other part of it,

of course, is that he is transmitting the story to his girl friend in the hope she will repeat it, and thus understand what he went through and offer him forgiveness.

AK: You are embroiled in the real-life situation in the Middle East. Can you be ‘inside’ the image and look at it from the ‘outside’? Like Velasquez, in *Las Meninas*, in which, inside the painting, reflected in a mirror in the middle of the canvas, we see the observers, the King and Queen of Spain, and also the painter Velasquez himself, ‘painting the painting’. It’s a classic paradox ... once you are emotionally and physically involved are you implicated, involved in ‘impossible’ situations?

AM: The choices are hard once you are emotionally involved and even morally implicated in a situation. It’s hard to detach yourself and read or observe a story with ‘distance’. Maybe this is one of the reasons I chose to create an artificial distance in the film, commenting on the story and on the transfer of the story into film and into art by singing ... I mean me, myself. Accompanied by an eight-piece ensemble gathered in my living room I sing songs written by Noam Enbar (who also collaborated on the script), reflecting on the morals and the actions depicted in the film—a commentary, like a Greek chorus or Brecht’s distanced reflections.

AK: You speak about your comments in the manner of a Greek Chorus ... are your films social commentaries, or works of art in the traditions of cinema, art, philosophy, poetry? The urgency of the situation on the ground makes this question less academic and in need of an answer, far more ethically salient.

AM: It’s hard to separate the different personas—myself as a citizen, a social activist or as a social commentator, as an artist, as a teacher, etc. Those are all one. It’s hard to see myself as one thing and not the other, or one thing separated from the other.

AK: There is humour in your films; in *Z32*, for instance, in the lyrics of the sung ‘commentary’. Humour is perhaps not the

right word. These are wry, dark moments on the gallows... (a Jewish kind of thing to do: ‘That must be very painful,’ says the passerby to the Jewish Pogrom victim who is lying by the roadside with a huge gash in his side and breathing his last. ‘No, no,’ says the Jew, “it only hurts when I laugh ...’ In any case, there’s a certain levity of tone in your films that’s even darker than the tone of many grim documentaries.

AM: Actually it’s not a preconceived idea to use humour or to use it as a reflection of my pessimism. This is part of my personality. I cannot separate the personal and the public, the ethical and the artistic. I find the absurd and the funny moments in a situation. The humour is not necessarily such that it would expose the light side of the situation but rather the sarcastic or grim. The personality of the filmmaker here has contributed a great deal to the work and is reflected throughout – that I participate in most of my films, it makes sense. Again the films become objects that are a reflection, maybe not a coherent reflection, maybe not a documentary reflection, but a reflection of the thoughts of the artist. So this is for me an obvious situation.

AK: Are your films the work of a private auteur, or are they—like Mike Leigh’s movies, a team effort?

AM: I work alone. *Z32* was an exception, in the sense that two different aspects of the film had to do with working together with others. Normally I would be a ‘one-man band’, shooting part of the film, editing it, participating, writing, etc. In *Z32* the digital special effects were made by professionals. I was in a way in their hands, which was a strange situation. Also, there is music in the film and I am not a musician although I sing in the film. This was a collaboration with musicians and with Noam Enbar. This was a different way of doing things for me. Maybe this is a new start because in the next film I plan to collaborate with the main character, my Arabic teacher, who will co-write and co-direct the film with me. So this will be different. I am very happy about it.