

SUITE 511

"The Thing Itself" is Jonathan Levy's new video work to be screened during his exhibition, "Suite 511". The video was shot during one full night in suite 511 at the Royal Beach Tel Aviv Hotel, with Ofri Zusmann, a young woman with whom he exchanged reflections about life, expectations, triumphs, disappointments, and experiences that tie them to their respective status in Israel of today. The storyline is simple: An older man meets a much younger woman in a hotel suite. They stage scenes for the camera, during which a fascinating dialog develops. Jonathan follows her lead, as if not directing the discussion, however carefully and religiously opening thematic and challenging doorways for them both.

The video is a reflexive act on Levy's photographic and cinematic oeuvre, taking it further than "According to Accepted Conventions" that was shown three years ago in the final exhibition of the Postgraduate Fine Art Program at Hamidrasha¹. "The Thing Itself" is comprised of several planned scenes that were conceived by Jonathan and Ofri in several earlier sessions. These scenarios offer a loose framework for the protagonists to act in, allowing Jonathan to examine the boundaries of acting and to uncover cracks in which a generous space is left for improvisation resulting in intriguing encounters.

At the onset of the video two parallel realities exist, one between the actors in the suite and the other with the semi-fictional characters in the room as well as outdoors in the city and in the hotel's public spaces. This fragmented editing weaves a sort of "narrative tension", a dialog that appears to go nowhere, a pendulum between the desire to withdraw into oneself and to escape outdoors, as if there is a fear to get to the point. But is there a point? Does subject matter have to have meaning, or is the only meaning actually no-meaning at all? Why do we expect every film or video to "get to the point"? Isn't "The Point" fundamentally subjective? Why is it so hard to just observe, for sake of perception alone?

Albert Camus claimed, in reference to the Post-modern era, that the only meaning is no meaning at all. The abundance of images flooding us results in a complete loss of meaning. Scenes of suffering and violence are shoved in our face to a point they become meaningless. In this respect, Jonathan Levy's work is a post-postmodern move, trying to bring back meaning to the no-meaning. The scenes in the film appear devoid of meaning: swimming in the pool, watching a movie, all scenes from classic cinema that take on new meaning as weaved into the continuum of "no-meaning". Alternatively, one can say that these "imitations" of the original ("Lost In Translation",

Curated by Sali Haftel Nave ¹

Sofia Coppola, 2003) connect and create yet another layer of post-postmodern meaning.

Levy's work also raises a question about medium and genre. Is this video-art or a short cinematic film? The camera is forever present, talked about, moved, scenes expose it, it is a third presence examining both protagonists. In this respect one can see the influence of Guy Ben-Ner's work, exposing the means of creation while barring the viewer from entering the film's reality. Levy's work allows for a greater degree of freedom, e.g. allowing the actors to abandon their role within the scene and expose the making itself. Levy also references reflexive cinema, a film genre that developed at the onset of modern cinema during the 1920's. In contrast to narrative cinema, the reflexive cinema, as its name implies, reflects upon itself and exposes its production means to the viewer. Either way "The Thing Itself" is a significant step forward in Jonathan Levy's work, both technically and in the way he deals with its subject matter, throughout the video.

Sharon Toval
Curator