



Jennifer Abessira: The Intensity of Images

Prof. Hagi Kenaan

Head of Philosophy Department at Tel Aviv University

Jennifer Abessira is a photographer who works in between Tel Aviv and Paris, but the actual site of her art is her Instagram account. She posts her palpable images daily, creating an intimate journal that belongs to the public. Privacy, for her, is not opposed to being in the open. She does not need a “room of her own,” a studio in which the world’s imposing presence – its noise and flux of images -- could be bracketed. She knows that artistic creation has a strange autonomy, one that is inseparable from the immanence of a life. “To be alive is to be on the alert, to constantly respond to the things I see, to be intensive.”

Intensity is the ABC of Abessira’s existence. And, her art is the best image of that intensity –just as “the human body is the best picture of the human soul” [Wittgenstein]. But, as Abessira knows, the truth of existence is ultimately paradoxical: the intensity of inner life can become meaningful only if it is expressed in form. It would otherwise remain void. And yet, precisely in taking on form, the Inner undergoes an essential change: it is inevitably transfigured, distorted, falsified. Expression is therefore not a re-presentation of a given authentic emotion, but a way of conjuring up an emotion in the already overcrowded space of daily images. This congested space is where Jennifer Abessira operates.

The fact that contemporary experience is inundated with an incessant flow of images is a starting point for her. “Images can all too easily hide the truth of things from us, but they are often our sole access to that truth.” Images – their shining, their beauty– are what she both loves and distrusts and this distrust and love is what her work constantly negotiates. She

proceeds through constant attunement to what would be “the right image” in the right place and time. But the colorful images she creates are not about capturing the evanescent now and have nothing to do with photography’s nostalgia for the lost presence of bygone moments. Showing everyday objects, routine actions, minute and large scale architecture – as well as a multitude of image-appearances in books, magazines and TV screens -- her images refuse to pursue -- or idealize -- the authenticity of the instant. Instead, she wants her images to be active rather than reactive. She wants them to do actual work within the domain of the visual. For her, productive images have a purpose, which she understands *a la* Godard: “Il faut confronter les idées vagues avec des images claires.” Vague ideas hide the void from us. Clear images open up possibilities, new ways of feeling, speaking and acting vis-à-vis the impossible.

In Abessira’s life, her images function as a coordinate-system for managing the formless and chaotic. She has always been attracted to archives and archival work and, in this sense, “Instagram comes in easy, with the simple platform it provides for organizing things.” In her Instagram journal, chaos and void do not disappear. They are fully present. But, they appear through idiosyncratic modulations of order instantiated by a system of sardonic hashtags: *#She Wanted to Die but She also Wanted to Live in Paris/ #A Girl is a Gun Peow Peow/ #Tel Aviv Forever/ # The Triumph of Vegetation is Total/ #Contribution to a Theory of Architecture, etc.*

Abessira carefully tags her images. Her hashtags are the verbal seams of a multi-leveled visual matrix. Encountering her work, we look at a new *atlas* of images that dreams of an infinite catalogue while speaking to us in an intensity that cannot be represented.