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The Magnet and the Pool

Sound for a Silent Movie (1986) is a metaphorical sculpture by Nahum Tevet. What links the music that was played in the dark with the technical marvel of a moving picture? The appropriate term has to be montage. Although montage is a technical means of the medium, it has the status of an artistic principle: many events that blend together during a short time; the combining of different images into a sequence; or a soundtrack that by its adaptation to the image projected on the screen creates an illusion of movement. A further suitable definition of montage is one image for two texts. The birth of jazz, the silent movies, the talkies, were artistic revolutions; the subjects of the first films too were historical revolutions; but the accompanying music that was improvised in the movie halls was based on familiar works and hits. Tevet's sculpture begins on the floor and ends as a relief on a wall, in a way that forces the viewer to raise and lower his gaze alternately (the sign for the act "tilt" is perhaps the reason for the recurrence of the letter T). One may see the sculpture as an exhibit in a "cinema museum", a kind of abandoned set, an old fashioned editing room, projection booth or movie theater. A detail from *Sound for a Silent Movie*: a record placed on a hammer, which as it were strikes a painted table. Aluminum mirrors too are incorporated into the sculpture. The gaze and the sound are objects. Is this a metaphor for meeting half-way?

Every sculpture is a metaphor. A metaphor is not only a matter of words. It is a structure of consciousness, which forms the base of every thought and linguistic act - in everyday language as in the language of poetry. The word is the referential unit of the metaphor. The metaphor is the dream of the word. Any discussion of Tevet's sculptures must navigate through a tangled network of metaphors. A model is an implement which, by means of the fiction, seeks to explode an imprecise interpretation, in order to build a more precise interpretation. In the language of Mary Hesse, "a model is an instrument of redescription" (Ricoeur 1977:240).

If a model, like a metaphor, proposes a new language, then to describe a model we have to interpret it. Tevet's sculptures in the '80s have no connection to a given space. They create a space of their own for themselves, like a formula on a blank sheet of paper.

Tevet's sculpture is an emblem of the place. The absence of a foothold in space makes it difficult to construct one description of the sculptures. Tevet's sculpture is overburdened with the information of the elements that comprise it. One outcome of this is the existence of different descriptions. One could begin with just a description of the components: a group of clearly defined, simple objects, with distinct margins. The scale of the objects too is sharp and clear - the gaze can distinguish the differences between the sizes (the discourse on scale is important because we are not speaking here of a conceptual description, but about concrete objects). The scale of the objects is also their relationship to the human body. In the wall sculptures there is an arbitrary direction of movement (clockwise, for example). One can divide the objects comprising the sculptures into three groups: objects identifiable with the everyday (made makes), especially tables; bodies with a volume - such as boxes; and found objects (ready makes). Uniform-sized objects alternate with objects of different sizes and found objects. These create chains of questions and answers, cause and effect. The differences in color also send you to variegated descriptions. Does Tevet mean to speak about chaos?

Trying to map a painting or a sculpture, the gaze moves in two manners - similarly to when one watches a bird fly while walking. One may map spaces while imposing one space upon another, or by "imposing" it upon itself. One may also follow the transitions and changes along any axis in the space. The proliferation of the groups of objects in Tevet's sculptures turns the journey into a navigation through a monotone landscape. Tevet - who at the beginning of his path was an artist close to Minimalism - puts down a revolver, a boat, or a horseshoe magnet as points of reference: metaphoric images that allow us to connect among them in a narrative/poetic manner, or also by means of a relation of resemblance.

The model/metaphor/sculpture mechanisms are actually being discussed here. An epistemological discussion of models also entails a discussion of the concept of the archetype. Richard Serra, in a talk with students at Bezalel (1983), contended that a table fulfils the conditions for being an archetype of all sculpture. Tevet has laid a table and overturned it. The table is the hackneyed image of the philosopher. Perhaps its commonness in study rooms and cafés has made it into so available an image. I have chosen to invite David Hume and Thomas Reid to a discussion around the table. Underlying the discussion is the sceptical position of Hume, which negates any

presumption about the external existence of things. The discussion is about perception and knowledge (the question of prior knowledge also finds its place here). For the sake of the rhetorical claim Hume selects a hard white table. The question of its existence or non-existence arises several times. Reid formulated his arguments last, and actually constructed Hume's in a different form: First argument - as we move away from the table the size of its appearance vanishes. Second argument - the real size of the table doesn't vanish. Hume's third claim is formulated by Reid as a conclusion: we do not see the real table; we see only the idea of the table, the table that appears. From these arguments Reid derives a simple statement: Is this not a report on experience? (Sajama 1987:20-25). The conclusion, in this case, is the relevant one for the collection of wood and color in the sculptures before us. Tevet puts his cards on the table. The rules of the game have to be discovered by the viewer.

Tevet calls this series of sculptures *Painting Lessons*. Its declared concern is the acquisition of knowledge by way of learning. The concept "lesson" and the sculptural scene, which is charged with so much information, hint at a need to allude to the crisis of knowledge and of the power connected with it. Is it possible to think in painting the same way that it's possible to dream in color? Tevet teaches or learns about painting's cutting capacity: cutting spaces for the objects that hide in them. In his lessons he points to a dialectic between the effect of the surface and a possible among them in a narrative/poetic manner, or also by means of a relation of resemblance.

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What is the significance, for the sculpture. of pictorial thought? The floor in *Painting Lessons* is like a white canvas. Paint can turn into an image, so sculptures with an identical morphology but of different colors will represent different images. The hierarchical tension between form and color is preserved. Tevet puts his objects through a process of elimination and addition, and the comparison invited is the series of decisions the painter makes about his brushstrokes. The directions of the chains of objects and the varying treatment of color expand the space. producing different speeds of making and of viewing. The decisions on avoidance or elimination are not reported to the viewer, but they are the sum of Tevet's sculptural process.

I want to say "the joy of knowledge", and to this joy to connect the happiness of *Painting Lessons*. In the space between an ironic gaze and a happy and untroubled innocence, there are remnants, or perhaps traces. Is the transition the signified? *Painting Lessons* are a super-metaphor or a chain of metaphors on metaphors. Either way, metaphors don't have a saturation point. One may also speak in praise of nonsense: a sculpture that is entirely a chain of syllables, the happiness of a little child who is learning to speak. The dictionary will define a table as an object with an environmental value. When this conditioning is put to the test of perception, a difference is revealed between children and adults. Children will choose the strangest presentation of the object, the placing of it at an unexpected distance and angle. Adults will choose a frontal presentation, the whole meaning of which is "table". Tevet's tables subsist between these two worlds. His sculpture is positioned between two poles - the geometrical and the concrete. The geometry deals with an idea world of points without magnitude, lines without thickness and planes without boundaries. The concrete is units of texture, surface, and meetings between various surfaces. Is Tevet speaking about the extent to which emotions are involved in perception?

At the basis of the imagination, which is activated by language, is an attempt to expose new relationships by means and out of the described model. In this attempt emphasis is placed on the equivalence of the different forms of the relationships. This equivalence creates the mobility between one expression and another, and supplies the rationale for the imagination. This is the prologue to the story about the imagination, and also to the story about discovery. Hence we can talk about different versions of the frame story of Tevet's sculpture.

Aristotle defined metaphor for Western culture. A good metaphor, in his opinion, hints at an intuitive apprehension. similarity and displacement. The region between rhetoric and poetics is the living space of the metaphor. Tevet's sculpture subsists in this sphere. Rhetoric deals with classification. The rhetoric of sculpture is founded upon a historical discourse and on what it is common to call the formalistic aspect of the artistic discourse. Classification and sorting supply a static description of the sculptures. In this way meanings are displaced from the classificatory dictionary usage. The aspect discussed here is a shifting of meaning (see *Sound for a Silent Movie*). The object with the form of a fingered fan in Tevet signifies the shift as an image, even a symbol, of shifting. Four shifts of an oblong, connected to each other, remain as the single sign of a table that has

disappeared. The fan is generally made from layers of wooden boards of varying thickness. The shift exists in it in other dimensions as well: volume, color, construction. An image of a fan, produced by a carving technique, appears on boxes in several of the sculptures.

Examination of the concept "shift" exposes another concept that is connected to it - reduction. The frozen movement of the things that compose Tevet's sculptures is a simple simulation of reduction. Equilibrium and harmonious movement comprise and complicate what is perceived as a simple example of reduction and shift. Three axes of movement hold the celestial bodies in their fixed orbits: rotation (of the body around itself), revolution (around another body) and yaw. In Tevet too the objects perform these three movements. The nail that attaches *Ursa Major* (1984) to the wall undermines the attempt to describe a world (and one may speak here of a de-idealization of the attitude to geometry). And the wheels incorporated "frivolously" into some of the sculptures are also objects of shift and reduction.

Flemish painting has been compared to the microscope and telescope. In Tevet, the multiplicity of details, the images of seeing implements, and the surfaces riddled with holes, tell about the reduction of the gaze. The picture of the world seen from the sculptures is like a view seen by a bee trapped in the room - thousands of views that unite into a single image. Another possibility is an image of a room reflected in mirrors fixed on the walls. The mirrors are not totally parallel: each one reflects only a partial concept of the room and of the things imprisoned inside its walls. Tevet places a perforated board before us.

Aristotle's analysis of the mechanism of metaphor distinguishes between a shift from a common usage of a concept, and a borrowing from a concept that has an original meaning, with no memory or analogical structures. Sorting and classification of things produces a static description. The process of discovery in Tevet's sculpture entails a negation of the static description. The transition from a table to a record on wheels continues as wheels on a record on wheels (in the sculpture 886). The movement exists in the obsolescence, in the wearing-out of the "record". In the '80s the needle-arm of the pick-up stopped. Records became objects of nostalgia and lost their commercial value. The records are worn and hackneyed metaphors. The wooden parts of this sculpture suddenly look like a huge record library that has been emptied. This metaphor too is worn

and emptied. Like a pathologist, Tevet works with a surgeon's scalpel and sterile gloves in his theater of metaphors. The transition between one thing and another creates an ironic shift, a joke that sounds like a scratched record. Analysis of the chain of representations makes possible an exposure of new concepts that still have life in them.

Another description of the shift might be appropriate: "Comparison of others' attempts to setting off on a sea voyage in which the ships are drawn off course by the magnetic north pole. Discover that North Pole. What for others are deviations, for me are data by which to set my course. I base my reckoning on the differentia of time that disturb the 'main lines' of the investigation for others" (Benjamin 1983:43). Walter Benjamin proposes a formulation that is similar in its poetry to Tevet's sculpture, to his images and to questions about them. I am drawing a dividing line between musings and a systematic philosophy. Sculpture as collection of musings - this is all that art can be.

Friedrich Schleiermacher says: The only thing which is presupposed in Hermeneutik is language, and everything to be discovered, which includes the other subjective and objective presuppositions, must be discovered out of language" (Dews 1987:12). Are we to see the historical aspect in Tevet's sculpture as a given, while all the rest has to be revealed? Perhaps we can discuss the mother-tongue. and also the local aesthetic canon? Language is infinite because each of its components is reflected in some way in the others. The result is a situation in which the semantic horizon explodes. The concrete expression of this metaphor is what is seen in Tevet's sculptures.

It's worth saying some more about the concept "horizon".¹ The horizon signifies what becomes vague, or what has a vague meaning. Every experience has a horizon of its own. Hence every experience hints at the existence of further possibilities: in the process of experiencing, further meanings of the thing itself are revealed. The horizon predicts future actions in relation to the object and also limits what suggests itself as a new possibility. In principle, the horizon of the object "table" is more charged with expectations than the object "chair". Tevet inverts this principle. In his floor and wall works he sometimes denies his tables a horizon, and instead charges the chairs with a set of expectations. The chair that lies there and traps another object (a kind of cone-hat-antenna) in *Painting Lesson No. 6* of course has an expanded horizon.

The question of how closed the wall works are is also a question about their finitude. The little child's chair hanging in the sculpture 886 has to do with the past, with

getting old. The concept missing in these works is, paradoxically, expectation, and this arouses sensations of mystery, to the point of the unpleasantness of horror. Tevet's wall sculpture is read like aerial photography - a Gestalt reading. In the process of observing the wall works, is a third and dominant factor involved, in addition to the viewer and the object? At the moment of looking, in the immediate present, a vacancy of emotions exists. This vacancy is the dominant factor in time - parallel perhaps to the moment the camera button is pressed. Tevet's wall sculpture subsists only by virtue of a given historical past. The meeting between the metaphysical and the historical description gives birth to a complicated discourse. Is this a problem that arises from a picture hanging on a wall?

A group of wall sculptures is called *Jamma'in*. Jamma'in is the name of a spring and natural pool in the Beit-She'an Valley, a place that no longer exists. Tevet tells us that the place was destroyed as a result of agricultural development of the area. Jamma'in is an actual image of personal memory for him, like the "tzakpar" for Arieh Aroch (Fischer 1966: 7-8)² Hebrew and Arabic do not distinguish between the word that describes the sense of sight (*'ayin*, eye), and the word that describes a spring (ma'ayan). The same word is used for two different concepts. The wide net of metaphors attached to these words confirms the claim that culture (language) dwells in the layers of the sub-conscious. Boats are a so very present actual object in Tevet. and are connected to metaphors of water. Water is the absent concept. A wave movement is defined in opposition to the movement of the conductor, the material within which it passes. This definition applies to wave of light, sound and liquid. Tevet's objects are as it were sunken in water. Boats float beside table legs.

I'm looking for the focus in the story of reflections in Tevet's sculpture: the story of Narcissus and its psychological explanation. The process of the investigation of vision/perception is perhaps analogical to human thought³ In Paul Ricoeur's view. as summarized by Kenneth Baynes: -Human existence can be viewed only mediately, in the mirror of the objects and acts, symbols and signs in which it is manifested. 'Reflection' is then construed as an essentially hermeneutic enterprise, mediated through the interpretation and critique of 'signs scattered in the world- (Baynes 1987:9). Tevet investigates the mechanisms of intelligence. Learning by way of reflection occurs in the course of a discussion in which doubt is cast on any certainty. The focus is where the things intersect.

An essential dualism underlies the reflections in Tevet's work. The simplest colored expression of this is in the things that are painted in stripes. The dualism and the reflections are presented in a more complex manner in the sections that expose the inner structure of the boards. As if the sculpture were saying: The good in me is the bad in you". Another facet of this statement subsists in Tevet's strategical model - a position of critical principle of "like/dislike", which is common in contemporary art and derives from the social and cultural circumstances. Another aspect of the same principle is the didactic one, which deals with the correct and the mistaken: dualism always takes a moral position.

The dualism also expresses itself in a doubleness of feelings - delight at the beauty of the object, but at the same time disappointment that we will not be able to know it completely. We should also mention the possibility of discovering the indifferent beauty. Abstraction is the filter of the feelings. The meeting between beauty and clichés is one of the conditions that avantgarde art seeks to fulfill. Malevich painted a black cross on a marble board. The black square and the white canvas on which it is painted are metaphors for an eclipse. The illusion about the autonomy of art dissolved a long time ago. Tevet proposes two views of utopia - a positive route and a negative route. The use of wood and paint subsists here as an anti-technological and romantic metaphor, one that is opposed to the ambitiousness of the Constructivists. The bitter lesson of the ideology of the Italian Futurism is imprinted in its aesthetic. One can understand what is learned in *Painting Lessons* as an allusion to evil, or at least to power. Reflection, in Tevet's sculpture, concentrates the historic aspect of the ethical discussion.

Two poles - work and communication - are confronted with each other.⁴ The line stretched between these two poles is cut at additional points. It is worth illuminating the eroticism that reveals itself at one of the intersections: theatrical bits of "Action Painting" seen from the point of view of the prompter; the mechanistic virtuosity of the whirligig does not detract from the sensitivity to color. The abstract qualities of the other language reveal possibilities of expression like those of the spoken language. This is the message that Tevet repeats in his lessons. Chance, a conventional avantgardist strategy, plays an active role here. In the flood of familiar objects the gaze dips into, it is possible to discover something new. At every moment, Tevet's sculpture exposes relations that have existed a long time. For this reason the intimacy that distinguishes him makes an objective discussion difficult. Intimacy, by the way, is a condition for any real progress.

The reflection doubles the little table into a cube, which is none other than a little empty cage. Language is put in the prison chamber, whether the prison is true or false. The cages are open on two sides. The picture of the mirror can also be the "horizon", in the sense of the point where things go vague. Here the concept of horizon is expanded. If we look from the horizon in the opposite direction we will be able to speak about the point of darkening. The concept of darkening entails the claim that the act of perception is not perfect. The act of looking at one of Tevet's sculptures always involves what has already been seen. The last act of looking contains the accumulation of the previous experiences. Is this the story of art? Walter Benjamin's words about art's loss of its aura are perhaps one possible meaning of darkening. It is not in vain that Benjamin and Freud have been confronted here. The argument between the private and the social - or art's commitment to reality - arises with every attempt to understand culture and art. This, in effect, is the essence of the modernist and postmodernist positions. Which of the two is the reflection in Tevet's mirror?

Do the shreds of modernism reflect in the fragments of the mirror, like the image of a reality that lacks any ideology? Is this the image of a non-dogmatic ideology? Tevet's sculpture pulls back into memory modernism's principle of oblivion. This is an essential characteristic of looking at the past through his kaleidoscope. A problem arises when we want to bridge between two systems that have different terminologies. If the purpose of Tevet's sculpture is translation, seeing the translation as an instrument of communication makes us forget the distortion created in the process of substitution. The highest function of the translation is not to serve in communication, but to paint anew the origin of language as magic. Tevet, as a translator, tries to release the hidden meaning. The question that arises about the role of the sensation in knowledge has already been asked.

"Our forefathers took their fates in their hands and came to this desert island to build a life of freedom, equality and happiness", writes Yoav Levitas (Halevy) in the opening of *Pitcairn* (1977:7). In the conclusion, he writes: "The dark sea remains, rippling at the foot of the cliffs. And the sky remains, like a dome, dark and dim, with clouds hiding its stars. And between them, there floats a border, the chain of lights of the boat. Tomorrow the tourists will come ashore on the island. They'll buy, and photograph, and walk in the footsteps of the founding fathers. They'll eat and they'll drink and they'll kiss and they'll go back to their boat" (1977:188). Between the opening and the conclusion of *Pitcairn*

there stretches an analogy to Tevet's sculpture. Levitas writes about the descendants of the mutineers of the *Bounty* and about the failure of the egalitarian society they tried to create.⁵ His esoteric book is a text about a text, an allegory about the breaking and corrupting of the collective dream: modernism eliminated or rejected the existence of the subject.

I find parallels between the beginnings of modernism, the oblivion and the dream (for example, the metaphysics of Constructivism), and the beginnings of Eretz-Israel. I am speaking of Eretz-Israel as a laboratory for testing the ideology of the 20th century. Tevet's sculpture is a test-group in this experiment: the emblem of modernism versus the emblem of the place. The reversed, erased, and lacking inscription "ACIFIC OCEAN" that appears on a yellow table in *Sound for a Silent Movie* hints at this problematic, in the way it is pronounced too (compare the attraction the modernist artists early in this century had to the cultures of the East). This is the metaphor of the conductor, which is so important when pointing to the place. to history. Is Tevet's sculpture the sublime object of ideology (whether he speaks about the history of art or whether the object is an expression of his private story)? One can also speak about an expression of the collective story of Israeli art.

Tevet is a sculptor of "Yes - and yes". The sculpture *NO* (reversed "NO", 1986), which negates the negation, declares this explicitly. The template cut like a mirror image of the word "NO" is sawn into the top of a painted table that has been shifted from its place. A wheel tramples this template in *Painting Lesson No. 4*. The wheel resuscitates by negating the negation. This concept too has become a bit worn. Have we received a postcard in Cyrillic letters? Are we to read, in Russian, the sound of the moan, "oy", or do we have before us a word in another language, that is only written in Cyrillic characters - "I", in Spanish: "yo"? Tevet makes few declarations. The objects, like "Yes" and "No", are complete sentences constructed from a single word. Precisely for this reason a great depth is created - in the slowness in which the declarations are grasped, in the discussion on art and culture.

The formulation of a negative dialectic comes out against tradition. A dialectic tries to create a positive value by means of a thought-mechanism of negation. The debate between idealism and materialism always returns to idealism. One may say: much has changed - but everything's the same. The fashionable attitude in the West says yes to the

Marxist ideology. The cynical use that artists and critics make of this ideology does not exist in Tevet's sculpture. He does indeed offer a dialectical model - but his is a more complex stance that relates to dialectic as a way of thinking only. The appropriate metaphor is borrowed from the relation between the bud and the leaf. As much as we may fill such a dialectical model with meanings, no new truth will be revealed. Such a model will always create a distance from the subject. So with Tevet: a negative dialectic recognizes a dialectic of disturbance, blocking and damage. In a world of rhythmic recurrences of human expressions, an obstacle is the only thing that can be formed as an exhibit. The rhythmic recurrence of history is blocked by Tevet's barricades. The subject is born from denials, slight inhibitions, limitations that unite into an identity. Tevet's sculpture performs various disturbances (the clear disturbance is to the sense of sight). Another possible interpretation, on a simple reading, will be a defense mechanism, an abstraction of the concept "struggle" or, a quest for the challenge of freedom. This is perhaps the militant aspect of his work.

A number of further remarks: a holistic reading is a necessary condition for the validity of the meanings. One may understand Tevet's sculptures as a story about the fiction of modernism: the cube becomes a threatening symbol of bureaucracy - until the Constructivists end up as furniture designers. In various sculptures of Tevet's the cube serves as an ammunition cupboard, a hiding-place for wooden pistols. In contrast, in *Jamma'in II* it is buried in a crate. From this is derived the ambivalence towards the past, the disappointment implicit in nostalgia: of the kibbutz, nothing remains except a landscape postcard, a memory of childhood and of wondrous days, Tevet laments. The elegy for the loss of modernism contains (of course) an iota of happiness. The whirligig is the action of modernism. Tevet's objects cavort (even the black monochrome sculptures prance) more than they are supposed to. The complex show is based on the optimistic attitude to the past: we live forwards and look back to the past. The readiness for happiness, even if it doesn't come, protects us from brutality.

In a period that views beauty with suspicion, as a sign of the ratio's self-abnegation in the face of seduction - the meeting with the beauty of the sculptures is not easy. Weakness is a sign of oppression. If we examine this question without basing ourselves on surrender, the archetype is love. The ability to give an object its birthright is, according to Tevet, in the spirit of "live and let live". As a final result, instead of pulling everything

into the depths of the earth, he also proposes "die and let live". Tevet perhaps does not believe that things are getting better- but the wealth of sights revealed in his *Painting Lessons* stands up against the bad, the dull and the meager. And from this another good rises - that of generosity and breadth of heart.

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- ¹ Until the last quarter-century painting did not take an interest in the concept of "horizon". Leo Steinberg identifies an important turning-point in Robert Rauschenberg - from the vertical to the modernist theories of Clement Greenberg (Steinberg 1972:82-91).
- ² In a talk that appeared in *Kav*, Arie Aroch speaks of his early failures at painting from memory, of his need to change the form located in the memory and arrive at a concrete form that gets its right to exist from its abstraction. Aroch defines this abstraction as "objects that will be clear, and at the same time severed from the figurative, from reality". In the article he replies to the question "What is a tzakpar?": "This is a tzakpar".
- ³ Itamar Levy writes about Tevet's work: "One may compare the action of the eye looking at painting to the structure of an abstract psychological conflict". He bases his statement on Freud's articles on sexuality: "The secret and the separation (of the child) are the beginning of the sense of aloneness, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and a step towards emotional independence" (Levy 1982:87).
- ⁴ In the periodical mentioned above, Arie Aroch says: "You can form an impression of a table and a chair and you can paint them: the table is a table and a chair is a chair, and they have a right to exist in reality as in the picture. But someone who is drawn to paint from and wants to paint them whatever happens - for the sake of communication - can start with a form that's half a chair, a form that is drawn to the table, and ends at the middle of the table. The forms are so familiar that you identify them. If you take the chair and the table in their simplest forms, you can place them together in a form that is definitely a new form" (Fischer 1966:11).
- ⁵ *Pitcairn* is based on a book by Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hill. The history of the destruction of the collective settlement founded by the *Bounty* mutineers is described through an exchange of letters between two twin sisters aged 100. They had quarreled in the past over love, one became the leader of the island and the other left, and at the age of 100 they meet again.