Developing a New Program: The "Creator-Researcher Actor" as a "Postdramatic Writer"

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This article discusses three performance projects of the Tel Aviv University Theater Department, and is an attempt to explore the "Creator-Researcher Actor" program as a local pedagogical model that frees the actor from the relatively narrow confines of his/her role as a performer subject to the authority of playwright and director. Since the raw materials of the projects derive from non-dramatic texts rather than plays, the creator-researcher actor can be viewed as a kind of "postdramatic writer." Although the program is not ideologically labeled "Feminist Theater," indirectly it furnishes women actors with a creative space, "a stage of their own" that permits them to lay claim to their works and let their voices be heard. The article examines the poetics that transform the performers into speaking subjects, and how the creative power of writing non-dramatic texts is revealed through reading. Furthermore, it looks at how the attitude toward text as texture encourages stage strategies that place the corporeality and materiality of the verbal text by which the text is staged in the foreground as a component, so that the text strikes back.

An actor can inspire an audience only if he transforms himself into the author and director.
Vsevolod Meyerhold, "The Theater Theatrical" (1906)

This article discusses three performance projects of the Tel Aviv University Theater Department. These projects, based on popular culture as well as "canonical" literature, and theoretical and documentary texts, remained text-oriented. In each, the spoken words were particularly dominant—attributable to high verbal diapason, the stylistic chara-

cteristics of the language, or to the emphasis on speech acts as raw material for acting. Thus, the words acquired an almost physical realization, and functioned as a part of the theatrical means of expression. Through a description of the working processes and an interpretative reading of the performances texts, I shall explore the "Creator-Researcher Actor" program as a local pedagogical model that extricates the actor from the relatively narrow confines of being merely a practitioner who establishes self-presence under the authority of playwright and director. The artistic practice of the program guides the actor initially to cope with the theoretical aspects of the materials he has chosen, then to process them creatively, and finally to perform in them. Since the raw materials do not necessarily derive from plays, but rather from non-dramatic texts, the creator-researcher actor can be viewed as a kind of "postdramatic writer."

The term "writer" refers to Roland Barthes's concept of: "The Death of the Author," leading to the birth of the reader and to the multiplicity of intertextuality located in the reader:

> Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writing, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in the origin but in its destination. (148)

Barthes's "writer" may describe the creator-researcher actor's artistic practice since it creates an analogy between a *reader's reading-writing* and an *actor's creative work,* and reflects the trend to read against the text and write a new one. As one of the program's aims, the term expresses the fruitful relationship between critical reading and performative writing. Furthermore, the term "writer" reflects the difference between deconstructivist reading, in which the director's interpretation is a supplement to the playwright's text (Carlson 9), and the actor's creative, intellectual and emotional encounter with a text he has chosen and its transposition to the stage.[1] In this light, the question then becomes how the actor figures the relationship among

1. Marvin Carlson argued that the concept of "supplement," as theorized by Derrida, provides a new way of thinking about the relations between dramatic text and performance text based on play.

text, performance, performativity, and textuality without either sustaining problematic subject-object distinctions, or failing to sustain critical difference between text and performance, textuality and performativity. The interaction between the actor's creative work and his/her position within the active reading-writing process generates intimate connections with the non-dramatic texts. The text inverts, which answering to the questions of how and where, becomes the interplay of action and objects that are mobilized by the actor. In this way, as Hans-Thies Lehmann points out the text is staged as a component and by that it strikes back (46-48, 143-48).

From the perspective of gender, it is no coincidence that the projects were staged by women,[2] since at present most of the students are women actors who yearn to realize "one vision of my own," to quote the words of Virginia Wolf in *To the Lighthouse*. Although the program is not ideologically labeled "Women's Theater" or "Feminist Theater," it indirectly furnishes women actors with a creative space, "a stage of their own" that permits them to lay claim to their works and let their voices be heard.[3] The hierarchic and masculine structure of the local establishment theater, the achievement-orientation and competitiveness that characterize it and its "star system" leave scores of women actors behind each year. The program's pedagogical infrastructure deliberately transfers the active authority for producing a performance to the woman actor, and encourages her to ask: "What kind of reader-writer am I?" It is important, therefore, to examine the poetics by means of which they are transformed into speaking subjects, and how the creative power of writing non-dramatic texts is revealed through reading, and in addition how the attitude toward the texts as texture encourages stage strategies that foreground the corporeality and materiality of the verbal text.

Theater studies, like theater itself, is culture-specific, located in time and space. The program can be compared to a contemporary Devising Theater program, similar to the ones that exist in universities in the UK,

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2. So far, four performances have been staged in the framework of the program. In addition to the ones discussed in this article, Motti Levi staged parts of *Der Untergang der Titanic* by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, a text that was patently postdramatic in its transposition to the stage. The project, which took the form of the story of a journey through the Faculty of Arts, was supervised by Prof. Shimon Levi, the translator of the play, and Prof. Ben-Zion Monitz.
3. The influence of feminist(s) thinking and its implications for theatrical practice did not receive significant expression in Israeli theater. This is not the case in literature, visual art or performance art.

USA and Australia.[4] However, the context of the "Actor Creator Researcher" program development is different because of the short alternative theater tradition in Israel,[5] the constant tension between theory and practice in the department curriculum, and the well-known difficulties of changes.

The Program and its Aims

The "Creator-Researcher Actor" program was devised in response to a time of crisis and change in the BA, MA and MFA curricula in the Theater Department at Tel Aviv University.[6] The economic crisis was affecting Israeli universities and engendered the decision to close the BA specialization tracks (acting, directing and design) raising the question of whether in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a theater department is a suitable venue for training a professional actor. This question resounded in view of the dominant status held by professional acting schools in the field of local theater—even more so since in any event the gates of the establishment theaters are closed to scores of young actors.

The MFA program concept, developed in the academic year of 2004-2005 by the then department chair Shimon Levi was the result of a comprehensive pedagogical conception that allocated space for the artistic experiments of young theater people, and a profound understanding of the changes occurring within the alternative theater in Israel. The program's aims, as formulated by Levi, were to impart tools to the actor, enabling him/her to be the deviser, developer, researcher and initiator of a performance that expressed the theatrical issues and cultural contents that interested him/her. The program has not trained actors, but rather invites graduates, profes-

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4. As stated by Deridre Heddon and Jain Milling, "historically, devising, considered an 'avant-garde' practice of performance making, needed a certain kind of enlightened patronage […] Universities have been key in the evolution of devising, not only because they have housed performances, but also because they have permitted residencies and taught devising on their courses" (277).
5. For books in English on the modern history of Israeli theater, see Ben-Zvi (1996). On contemporary alternative theater in Israel, see Yerushalmi (2007).
6. Until 2004, the duration of studies in the acting track was four years. The number of hours required for a BA was 260. In addition to the "actor's training" lessons, the students gained experience in the "University Theater" productions, which emulated the production processes of the establishment theater. In 2004, the number of degree hours in all tracks was cut back drastically to 132 and the number of "University Theater" productions was reduced. In 2005, the number of hours required for a BA was decreased to 120, and today there are no BA specialization tracks.

sional actors, teachers and practitioners who work in community theater to experience and develop their work. The final project— transforming the actor into performance initiator—offers alternative theatrical practice to the familiar partnership of actors in theater troupes that promote collective work while generally preserving the director's senior status. The curriculum has not claimed to transform the actor into a director, but rather provided a setting that supported the work processes thus enabling the actor to operate as a total theater practitioner, who develops a performance from an idea, up to its transformation into a performance by preferring materials that are not originally intended for the theater. Each project has two cooperating supervisors: one accompanying the creative work and the second accompanying the theoretical work. The term "caring," used by Nel Noddings and located at the center of her feminist philosophy, contains elements of concern and caring in the sense of taking care, and seems to characterize the supervision processes of the projects.[7]

Shimon Levi invited Ruth Kanner, one of the most important and prolific contemporary Israeli directors and an acting teacher in the department, to head the program. Kanner has developed a unique artistic language. At its center is story-telling theater, which places the actors in the position of narrators. She has a preference for non-dramatic materials, adapting literary texts that require renewed thinking about theater language.[8] One of the prominent characteristics of her works is emphasizing the verbal component in the theatrical representation. A verbal sign ceases to be transparent and undergoes a process of becoming "opaque." The words in her performances are plastic, charged with rhythm and stressed with intonations. Her theater language can be seen as variations on Artaud's aspiration to transform the language into a plastic-tonal element. Kanner's theatrical language is suggestive, orchestrating texts, costumes, music, lights and move-

7. Levi formulated the program shortly before the end of his term as department chair. Its implementation, development and fostering were continued by Nurit Ya'ari, present department chair.
8. The Ruth Kanner Theater Group was established in 1998 in Tel Aviv. Her latest works include, among others, *Amos* based on a novel by Moshe Izreeli (Best Performance and Best director awards, Akko Festival 1999), *Elijah's Revelation* based on a novel by S. Izhar (Best performance Award, Akko Festival 2001), *Bathers*, with a group of women actors and dancers of the Bat Sheva dance company, 2003, and *Dionysus at Dizengof Center* based on a book by Tamar Berger, in the framework of the Tel Aviv University Theater, 2004 (the performance was invited to participate in the Akko Festival, fall 2004 and afterwards was presented at Tel Aviv).

ment; usually this process occurs in deliberately small, intimate spaces where interaction between actors and audience is understandably intensified. Kanner holds various workshops, in which processes of stage transpositions are examined in relation to narrative texts by using techniques that seek to reveal the story-teller's personal voice, changing "identities" and points of views, while establishing the tension between narrative text and dramatic action, and constructing the tangible fictional world through transformations of character-space-time.

Invited to be part of the team leading the program, I taught a course I called "From Idea to Stage Creation: A Project Workshop," which had two goals. The first was for the students to actively read theoretical discourse about acting—the elusive element without which theater cannot exist. The articles I selected included feminist approaches to acting, with the aim of learning about alternative performative languages, and Hans-Thies Lehmann's book which exposed the students to the meta-concept, "postdramatic theatre," with its range of theatrical innovations and experiments. However, the result of a lack of video documentation was that many of the works presented as examples were unavailable to the students as "living" and tangible material. In retrospect, I believe that coping theoretically with terms associated with the theatrical practice of "postdramatic" theater (space—time—body) and the medial means, liberated them from focusing on cultural politics, and encouraged them to investigate a performative language and endow it with a conceptual articulation. The second goal was to facilitate an exposure of the works and present the questions and difficulties arising from the processes of dramaturgic work and rehearsal—or, alternatively, to hold a workshop in order to examine the preliminary ideas for the project. In this way, the participants became an "interpretative community," developing a common language that permitted questions and constructive critical views.

As Patrice Pavis has claimed, it is difficult to determine the relationship between theory and theater practice "because it is ceaselessly displaced in theatre activity; its place is neither exclusively before the performance on stage—in preliminary work on the text—nor exclusively afterwards in the reflective account, but rather at every step of the way" (89). However, the bridge between theory and practice is one of the issues that preoccupied and still preoccupies theater researchers, as Reinelt and Roach insisted: "In a way, theory gives theatre back again to the body of politics since it allows performance to be articulated in terms of politics: representation, ideology, hegemony, resistance" (5). Although theory is a crucial factor in establish-

ing the performance context in the framework of the program, the relations remain ambiguous, and the question of what comes first—the creative idea or the theoretical issue—arises regularly.

Be Beautiful: From Beauty Manuals to a Cabaret

Be Beautiful, the first project to be staged (2006), was the initiative of Natalie Feinstein, who invited to accompany her Shir Goldberg, a director at the beginning of her career, performers Karin Teper and Efrat Kormzin, musician Adi Zussman, and choreographer Roy Saruk. The topic derived from Feinstein's personal experience. She recounted that during her childhood and teens, she was a tomboy with a buzz-cut who played soccer, climbed trees and didn't like to play "girls' games." Her curiosity to discover the hidden laws of "femininity" *comme il faut* led her to peruse the old-fashioned beauty manuals, *Be Beautiful* and *Your Beauty Is in Your Hands*, which were lying around her parents' home. The desire to subvert the "ultimate" look of "woman," as reflected in the current mass media, encouraged her to choose these beauty manuals as the raw material for her project.

Since the stages along the path to the students' final project had not yet been structured at this point, most of Feinstein's energy was directed toward a creative search rather than toward grounding the work in theoretical terms—for instance, humor in feminist(s) contexts and feminist experimentation with the cabaret form (Aston, *An Introduction* 94-96). They conceived a cabaret show, feeling that the use of the archaic Hebrew in the manuals (which were published in the 1950s) would help produce humor, and also that the key to the performance language actually lay in the transposition of the instructions into performative speech acts. By performative, I mean that they are time and space dependent; they happen. As explained by Austin, the performative speech acts do what they mean, answering it answers to questions of effectiveness (4-11).

Although Feinstein invited Goldberg to direct, the group's work was not hierarchic. In fact, they implemented practices of women's theater troupes: cooperation, equality, willingness to listen and a kind of democracy (Aston, *Feminist Theatre Practice* 24-26). Initially, they read the manuals together and held discussions on the topics that emerged from them, for example: What makes a woman feminine? What does it mean for us to be women? Which woman would I want to be? Gradually, the group reached more intimate and exposed areas. Later, the question arose of how to trans-

form the instructions into performance text. The answers became clear through trial and error. They learned fragments of instructions by heart and kneaded them by using movement and structuring random dialogues between different texts. Each student performed private rituals—for instance, the preparation of a facial mask with olive oil, honey and lemon and its removal with milk and presented topics such as diet, hair care and the right way to walk. All these were based on a sentence or paragraph from the manuals, whose language they applied to the work. Some wrote texts that reacted to the instructions, others created improvisations and so on. Toward the end of the workshop, musician Adi Zussman joined in and began to compose songs in rhyme inspired by the language of the manuals. During the course of the workshop, the verbal instructions became a theatrical element with a musical and even a material presence.

The performance comprised fourteen musical numbers—among them "Buy yourself an alarm clock," "Charm," "A Scrutinizing Look in the Mirror," "Brush, Brush, Brush," "Menstruation," "First Steps," a part of a recipe from the manual *This Is How We'll Cook*; a text of a verdict handed down by the State of Israel to Erika Orbush Frishkin (who murdered her husband after he had abused her for years), and the number "It's Just Me and the One in the Mirror Here," based on Leah Goldberg's poems, which were edited and performed by Efrat Kormzin. The mise en scène assumed a poetic character by means of a doll whose features were reminiscent of Goldberg's. The performers addressed the audience directly together and/or separately, even, in certain cases, from within the audience, deconstructing "beauty rituals," a cultural issue that is discussed extensively in *The Myth of Beauty* by Naomi Wolf. The emphasis on "over display" techniques, on rehearsing/constructing the female body as a spectacle, endowed the performance with the character of a women's cabaret whose artistic uniqueness in the local context resided in the way it dealt with the question "How do I look?" and its use of theater language for exploring the enslavement to beauty.

Some examples are pertinent in order to illustrate how the verbal instructions became performative speech acts reflecting the tension between the beautified outer covering and the regimented body. When the audience entered the intimate auditorium, the performers, wearing elegant black dresses, were sitting half-frozen next to a large, family table positioned diagonally and containing the remains of a fancy meal. They are holding a mirror (or a large silver spoon serving as a mirror) and staring at their reflections as well as at the audience. Their *gestus* explores Elin Diamond's idea of linking feminist approaches to Brechtian theory, whereby she pro-

posed the strategy of "looking-at-being-looked-at-ness," which inverts the representation of the female body upon whom the "male gaze" is imprinted (84-88). The voice of an absent announcer issues the instructions of the day from *Your Beauty Is in Your Hands* in an authoritative voice:

> Buy yourself an alarm clock of the type that rings twice, since it is a mistake to jump out of bed directly into the everyday worries as soon as the clock rings. You must set the alarm clock so that it wakes you five minutes early. When the clock buzzes, declare war on your comfort, do not turn over on the other side to doze for another moment. Stop the ringing. Get rid of the soft blanket, but continue lying down and resting for a few seconds, directing your thoughts at the tasks of the day.[9]

The announcer's speech acts demonstrated that the mirror is not transparent and "objective"; it has a voice, and the voice belongs to a king/man, as Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert suggested in their ground-breaking book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. As the announcer's voice receded, the performers enumerated the "woman's" tasks mechanically. The inflation of the tasks seemed absurd and ridiculous, and their vocal realization raised the spectator's awareness of a process of dehumanization:

> Toil, get dressed, comb hair, put on make-up, put on face cream, eye cream, body lotion, go to work, put on nail polish, do shopping, worry, slice, wash face, shower, cook, launder, knead dough, change bed-linen—sheets, blanket covers, pillow-cases, hang up washing, clean—toilets, bake cake, pay bills. Take off bra, scratch, call plumber, scrub, do errands: supermarket, post office, bank, say sorry, buy battery, make love, turn off boiler, change light-bulb. Make a sour face. Miss opportunities. Pickle cucumbers.

In the next musical number, the family table was broken down into three tables that functioned as mirrors, stages and altars. At first, the tables functioned as mirrors in the song "A Scrutinizing Look in the Mirror," which was inspired by the chapter of the same name in *Be Beautiful*, instructing women to shut themselves up at home and examine their bodies with a tape-measure. The verbal admonitions, "Don't cheat, don't squash and don't pull in, and don't get angry, don't round out," became rhymes, and the tape-

9. Quotation from the play, thanks to Natalie Feinstein.

measure (*seret medida* in Hebrew) became a verbal motif, broken down into the syllables di-da-di-da, pronounced in an overly sweet and delicate tone. The irony lay in the fact that the performers were wearing suffocatingly tight corsets *à la* 1950s, which emphasized the "flaws" in their bodies. Not one of them has the slender, narrow figure referred to in the song. As the performers held tape-measures and measured/bound themselves in front of the mirror, the lyrics gradually became self-accusatory.

The subversiveness of the performance was embodied in the collection of musical numbers demonstrating the suicidal giddiness of the feminine identity that was being constructed in front of the mirror, and which reflected the ideal beauty desired by the patriarchy. The segment "Brush, Brush, Brush" was a demonstration of compulsive shampooing and combing while rhythmically repeating the instruction "Brush." "First Steps" is a clumsy, funny dance in elegant high-heeled shoes, which demonstrated sadistic instructions uttered by the performers as orders to themselves and memorized while acting them out: "don't cross Your legs, lest you should move like a ship on a stormy sea," "Don't spread your legs, lest you should waddle like a duck!," "Don't take men's steps!" and so on. The words of the concluding song, "Be Beautiful," set to gentle and harmonious music and performed in an ironic manner, summed up the extent to which the sight of what is seen in the mirror is poisoned, and the extent to which it poisons the body. The song gradually became a recording, indicating that the consciousness is saturated with the gaze that poisons. Thus, the theatrical style and the radicalization engendered by the instructions in the beauty manuals created a double effect: On the one hand, they exemplified the tangibility of the language that regimented the feminine body and occasioned its dehumanization. On the other, the conspicuous playfulness in the linguistic expressions generated reflexive impulses that drew attention to the theater language itself.

Transposing the written instructions of "Beauty Worship" into a spoken, sung and acted text enabled the performers and their audience to hear "The Laugh of the Medusa" and to experience vitality, *joie de vivre* and the power of creation—to cite the ideas of Hélèn Cixous. The performance reinforced the option of an alternative mirror and triggered the belief that it is possible to expand the repertoire of possibilities of "the beautiful" seen in it, to discover what is creative, amusing, generous and clever as well as what is tired, confused and disappointed.

As a first product of the program, the performance reinforced the belief in a work procedure that grows out of an actor's ideas and initiative. On the other hand, it highlighted the need to frame stages at which the actor should

cope with the theoretical aspects of his/her creative ideas during the course of the work.[10]

Ephraim: From Lyric Prose to a Story-Telling Theater

The adaptation of *Ephraim* (staged in 2007) was carried out by Rodika Kremnitzer, a veteran actress who registered to study after many years of not acting. The project was conceived in Ruth Kanner's workshop. Kremnitzer's husband, Yitzhak, a retired actor, participated in the exercise. *Ephraim* is linked to a long tradition of adaptations from literature to theater in Israeli theater, but its uniqueness in the local context resides first and foremost in the choice of Yoel Hoffman's novel. Hoffman, a researcher and translator of Japanese culture and poetry, published his first book in 1986, and was considered by literary researchers to be one of the most interesting contemporary Israeli authors. His works, which have been described by researchers as lyrical prose and as an expression of postmodernism in Hebrew literature, have not yet been adapted for the theater.[11]

Graphically, Hoffman's books are characterized by short lines, long spaces, Hebrew vowel signs, and short, numbered paragraphs. *Ephraim* contains 200 paragraphs, the fifth of which mentions that Ephraim is 50 years old: "This is the fiftieth chapter and he (namely, Ephraim) is fifty, which is unclear. You have received a person. And what are you going to do with him?" In this book, as in his previous books, the thinking revolves around the language (and around itself). Here too, words from foreign languages wander around the language of the story and display their foreignness—for instance, the word *cocorocz* ("corn" in Hungarian) written (in black chalk) on the board in the kitchen. In Hoffman's language there is sound and form: words have a taste that can actually be savored. Words are things, things that excite the heart just like objects.

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10. Feinstein also took responsibility for the rest of the life of the performance, which earned a great deal of artistic success in Israel and also at student theater festivals abroad. To this day, the performance is staged to full houses in and outside of Tel Aviv. For more information, see ⟨http://www.bebeautifulcabaret.com⟩.
11. It should be mentioned that postmodernism in Hebrew literature is a hybrid creature, as Smadar Siffman admirably described it. On the one hand, it is clear that the writers who are identified with postmodernism tend to deconstruct plot, subject, representation of reality and language; on the other, in a place where physical existence is so uncertain, where national and personal identity is so unformed, postmodernistic uncertainty becomes a way of life. The nature of the writing preserves the tendency to hear something modernistic, to seek a goal, a direction.

Ephraim is a special and one-time story about an amazingly banal topic: a crisis in a twenty-year marriage, love and passion that have waned and turned into a strong, but distressing relationship. The entire story is told in the first paragraph:

> Ephraim thinks that another woman will understand him well. What most annoys him is the compote stains. How she sits in the kitchen and drinks and the compote drips off her lower lip as if something were defective in size. The other woman [so he thinks] will not be subjected to the laws of gravity. Transparent drops of water will rise up from the sink to her.

Yoel Hoffman the author, the literary critics, the readers, as well as the directors of Keter Publishing House, which published the book, are all present in *Ephraim*, as are historical, literary and philosophical figures such as Immanuel Kant. Hoffman observes the search, the writing and the reading with a sober, yet ironic view. He suggests that his readers throw the book into the garbage bin, make themselves tea and look at its color through the glass, just as the characters do. He meets and accompanies the characters: sometimes, like a kind of director, he wants to help them improve their fate, and sometimes, like a spectator, his heart is saddened by the fact that there are forces and motives in the world that are stronger than the author.

In the selection process, Rodika omitted the self-reflexive aspects and preserved the flimsy plot of Ephraim and Yosefa. The adaptation begins with Ephraim's intention to leave Yosefa. Every detail of her behavior drives him crazy. He dreams about another, ideal woman. He tries to leave several times, but is filled with fear and pity. In the beginning, their love was wonderful: "There was something of the sound of the hyacinth in Yosefa's character." Later on, something crucial was damaged, and the crisis occurred. The baby that had been born seventeen years previously and had subsequently died constituted a buffer between them: "Ephraim in one room and Yosefa in another room and the spirit of the dead baby in the passage" (paragraph 30). Ephraim leaves Yosefa in Tel Aviv and goes to Haifa. He meets a woman and also sleeps with her, but he misses his wife/home. "Magnetic Forces" operate between Haifa and Tel Aviv, so that even when Ephraim wants to return, he takes the wrong train, and instead of traveling south, he travels north and arrives in Acre. Yosefa, for her part, closes up even more. As a result of her fear and suffering, she cannot even utter a sound or open her mouth. In total despair, she travels to Haifa by train to look for Ephraim, but finds the door locked. She returns home empty-handed. Her heart is

heavy and life is draining from her body and she wants to die. Ephraim gets stuck in Acre on his way to his wife/home; perhaps he dies, there is no way of knowing. The story, therefore, is about parting, saying goodbye, falling in love again, as well as connecting and integrating. After all, Ephraim and Yosefa are doomed to live between the pages of the book forever. Their names are actually intertwined: "Y/E/O/P/S/H/E/R/F/AI/A/M," and this braid cannot be cut from Ephraim's hair or from the sweater Yosefa is knitting (paragraph 76). Thus, the dramaturgy emphasizes the same things and the low tones that exist in Hoffman's work and usually do not come under the aegis of canonical local literature.

Any concretization of the fictional world (literary or dramatic) may be interpreted as a reduction of the scenes that the reader stages in his "secret theater." In order to preserve the unique experience of reading Hoffman, the acting work focused on speech acts rather than on movements. The story was retold in his unique language. While the streams of consciousness do indeed become monologues entailing physical realization, the minimalism of movement endowed the event with the character of a radio play. The text was spoken in the third person with no dialogues. The actors did not represent characters in the conventional way; rather, they applied a mode classified by Bert O. States as a "collaborative mode" (29-34), that is, acting that involves addressing the audience directly—a dominant channel of storytelling theater. The actors wore the identity of the characters, but from the standpoint of narrators. In this way, they functioned as double agents: They served as the personified narrative of Yosefa and Ephraim, and were also in a position of embodying them.

The guiding idea for structuring the mise en scène was the sentence "Overall, the space is the hero of this story (that is, the space between one person and another)" (paragraph 37). The acting space that demonstrates its concrete identity as theater maximizes its availability to serve as a site for signifying the mental relations of the characters' distance and closeness.[12] The audience sat in two rows arranged in a semicircle with ample space between them. In the first part, the actors were physically close to each other but the characters' consciousness is far apart; in the second part, the characters' consciousness moved closer together, but the actors were far apart: Rodika-Yosefa in the acting space and Yitzhak-Ephraim in the audience

12. Two black planks are placed at a distance from each other. In front of one of them, there is a table and a chair; in front of the second one, there is a chair and a small chest with a teapot and two glasses on it.

area, moving between the rows and sitting there as if he were a part of the audience. The consciousness proximity was also illustrated by the fact that they looked at each other.

The embodiment of Ephraim and Yosefa received additional substance as a result of Rodika and Yitzhak's family ties, Rodika's "foreign" accent (traces of Romanian), and the effect of their physical presence. Thus, the movements of rapprochement and distance, intimacy and alienation that are heartbreaking in Hoffman's book were depicted powerfully in the stage rendition, since the lives of Yosefa and Ephraim, "marginal" people, became the center of the theatrical experience.

As a student, Rodika began her journey to the final project from a position of an "Other." The preliminary positive reception of the exercise empowered her not only vis-à-vis the community of students in the department, but also vis-à-vis her work partners: her husband and an actor friend who served as a "third eye" during the rehearsals. With stubborn determination, she fought for her ownership of her stage creation. To this end, she terminated the cooperation with the actor friend and availed herself of the students, to whom she felt closer from the point of view of the artistic language. Gradually, she increased Yosefa's part in the adaptation, and indirectly used her as a lever for making her voice heard as an independent performer. An additional and no less crucial stage in Rodika's empowerment was the theoretical presentation of the work, which demonstrated the systematic research she had conducted on Hoffman's œuvre, and the range of issues arising from the transposition from a literary text to the performance text—for instance, how the direct communication with the audience served as the key to the realization of the characters' separate conscious space.

One of the insights that became a creative lever for Rodika was Hoffman's sentence: "And there is the temptation to compare Yosefa to Penelope waiting for Odysseus" (paragraph 183). In accordance with Hoffman's ironic inversions, the journey of Ephraim, the non-conquering non-hero, is not a return journey but rather a journey of abandonment. Ephraim is in need of support in order not to fall; the scar on his head is a mark of a fall in his childhood; Yosefa's suitor is a parody of Penelope's suitors. Rodika, influenced by feminist approaches, did not perceive Penelope as the symbol of a devoted, patient and obedient woman who spent her entire life in the shadow of her heroic husband, but rather as a woman who discovered talents and abilities within herself and managed her life independently. Rodika gave Yosefa a mouth, and metaphorically speaking, Yosefa helped Rodika reweave the cloth of her art as an actress. In the texts she chose for the stage

figure Yosefa, one can hear the voice of a subject's logic, moving away from hegemonic logic. As a stage figure, Yosefa was someone who presented herself as a passive and withdrawn character but who also stored exciting life experiences within herself. In this way, she retold, defined and grounded the tension between the complexity of Hoffman's poetics and the simplicity of the narrative in the transposition of *Ephraim* to the stage.

Chapter 2: Bedtime: From Documentary Material to a Speaking Chorus

Chapter 2: Bedtime by Halit Michaeli (2008) also originated from an exercise she submitted in Ruth Kanner's workshop. In contrast to the performers in the projects described above, Michaeli did not have a professional acting background. She joined the program immediately upon completing her BA studies in the community theater track. In the process of the work, she invited Yael Motzafi and Ella Dan (BA students) to be her partners. Michaeli, a native of Kibbutz Eilon, belonged to the last generation to be born, raised and educated according to the principles of "Communal Education." She chose to focus on the time period that summed up the complexity of the communal sleeping arrangements: bedtime in the children's house, where the child was transferred from his parents' custody to the authority of the educational team. The performance text was based on segments from Shmuel Golan's book, *Communal Education*—a collection of the various essays and articles he wrote between 1931 and 1960—and the night guards' notebooks that Michaeli found in the Kibbutz Eilon archives.[13]

Chapter 2: Bedtime is linked to the tradition of depicting history on the Israeli stage, the use of the *Masechet* genre, and the current artistic works about the kibbutz phenomenon[14]—for instance, the exhibition titled *Communal Sleeping Arrangements—Group and Kibbutz in the Israeli Consciousness* (Curator: Tali Tamir, Tel Aviv Museum, 2005), and the docu-

13. Shmuel Golan, a member of Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek and a teacher, educator and thinker, was one of the people who laid the theoretical and practical foundations of communal education. He was greatly influenced by Freud's approach, and believed that communal education could contribute to the advancement of psychological research and reveal new horizons for education in general. His book was published in 1961.
14. *Masechet* is a performative genre associated with the working settlement that explores the Zionist vision. For more, see Kaynar 2003.

mentary film, *Children of the Sun* (2007, dir. Ran Tal), which made use of amateur films found in kibbutz archives. These works, which deal with the glory and the decline of the kibbutz movement, examine one of the formative experiences of the Zionist movement.

The word *hashkava* (putting to bed) indicates the daily ritual of the parents putting the child to bed; the word *ashkava* means burial. This double meaning characterizes the topics that Michaeli sought to link and deal with. The work is called *Chapter 2* because it is a segment of a whole on which Michaeli intends to continue working. *Chapter 1* will be called *Hakama (Waking up)* a title that is associated with the establishment of the kibbutz, as well as with a certain time in the daily kibbutz schedule (between three o'clock, when the children wake up from their afternoon nap in the children's house and go to their parents' homes, and eight o'clock, when the children return to the children's house).

Inspired by Derrida's concept of archiving, Michaeli collected objects which represented the communal sleeping arrangements.[15] The archive she built was a kind of "memory bank." The entrance into the performance space, a long, narrow corridor, was designed as a dark museum, a kind of gloomy consciousness space. Michaeli sat on a high chair near the entrance to the auditorium, reading from a book. Tall, dimly illuminated stands display, among other things, a detailed drawing of "the children's house," a lone pair of children's underpants, a bright, white sheet, a jug and two old plastic teacups, the book *Communal Education*, and the night guards' notebooks. These objects were used in the performance, during which the spectator was exposed to additional objects such as the "baby-sitter"—a speaker attached to the wall of the children's rooms, enabling the night guards, who were in the baby houses, to hear what was going on in the various children's houses and respond to the children's needs. The "baby-sitter" emits various sounds during the performance: children's laughter, water dripping and a bell ringing.

The "empty" and intimate acting space demonstrated its ability to function as a memory site/sight. The stage composition consisted of white sheets spread out into two rows, reminiscent of the detailed interior plan of the children's rooms in the drawing at the entrance. The sheets functioned as signifiers of the children's beds, an infant at its mother's breast, a play area outside of the children's house, and, in the last scene, graves. Three small,

15. Archiving, which is identified with one of the main functions of the museum, is described, among other things, as "an address that accommodates, gathers, accumulates, collects infinite layers" (Derrida 31).

wooden seats were placed at some distance from one another behind the rows of sheets. The performers wore identical nightgowns/dresses. The printed design on the soft, light-colored fabric was the same as that on the pair of a child's underpants, and the spots on the edges of the garments implied stains of tea, the beverage a child was given when he/she woke up at night, a kind of "magic remedy" that was meant to calm him/her down.

The dramaturgical and theatrical utterances demonstrated the relation between the ideology and its implementation. The performance began with an ideological text—the thesis of communal education—and continued with a text containing practical instructions for the night guards. The final part focused on everyday life, and the apparently marginal documents of the night guards. Each text enabled different voices to be heard and stressed—mothers, children and night guards, so that intimate situations and interactions could be represented. The texts were uttered by the performers, either in unison, as a sort of spoken chorus, or solo, as monologues that addressed the audience directly. In their stylistic essence, the texts are not "transparent." Thus, the opening text is formulated in rich, old-fashioned Hebrew. The establishment of a critique view was not uttered in a critical, judgmental tone, but rather as an attempt to understand and mediate the principal objectives of communal education. Its transformation into a raw material for acting conjured up the complex story of the family on the kibbutz: the child, the parents, the nanny, the children's house, the parents' room, the boundaries of belonging, authority and responsibility, and the tension between the various educational figures and the open and hidden messages. The text did not just provide ideological mediation but also anticipated the human drama that occurred in its implementation and was exposed powerfully in the last part of the performance.

The construction of the images was based on movement, gestures and sound effects, and the stage syntax on the repetition of the same text. For instance, three interactions among mother, child and nanny were performed in mime simultaneously with the verbal text explaining the child's gradual transferal from his/her mother to the nanny and the underlying educational rationale. The first interaction demonstrated the mother's difficulty in separating from her child and the nanny's reaction, which was marked by pulling the sheet/child and spreading it out. The second demonstrated the child's difficulty in separating from his/her mother, with the performer's speech acts transforming the text into a bedtime story. The third represented children for whom the sojourn in the children's house was also a source of joy. These picture-story moments performed by switching roles demonstrated

the complexity of the feminine-maternal and the child's experiences that derived from implementing the ideology. They were not only an illustration of "what was" but rather a stage translation of Michaeli's memories of childhood scenes.

The final unit used texts from the night guards' notebooks (printed by the Kibbutz Movement's Education Department and used in every children's house from the beginning of the 1970s onward).[16] The pages were designed as charts, and the night guards were asked to fill out the events of the night. They were required to fill out the answers to the following questions on the lines designated for this purpose: "Child's name," "The time the child woke up," "How did he/she wake up: crying—calling someone—What did he/she say—How long did he/she stay awake?", "What did I do?—How did the child react?". The texts constituted extremely valuable cultural documents. We learn about children repeatedly waking up frightened, receiving a cup of tea instead of mommy; about the difficulties of guards who were responsible for dozens of children at one time, and about mothers who left requests or instructions for the nannies; all in the form of short, laconic sentences.

The performance text displayed characteristics of "feminine writing." The words organized themselves into networks of rhythm, tones, sounds and musicality, and were woven into simultaneous and interrupted structures without a sense of beginning, middle or end. Their rhythmic articulation—whether in a individual voice or in a collective voice, whether as supplementary or interruptive utterances, whether with pronunciation charged with emotion or as a "dry" report—clarified, demonstrated and stressed the textual performance as a dynamic arena in which there were testimonies of the material body, and simultaneously gave body and voice to silenced testimonies. In this way, multiple voices could be heard. Following is an example from the text that includes performance instructions illustrating the principle of the speaking chorus:

> **They interrupt one another:**
> **Halit:** Saturday
> Dana/11:30/crying/impossible to calm [her] down. We fed her and changed her. The time is 1:30 and we're still rocking her. The time is 2:15 and we're still here. Hope the nightmare will end. The time

16. The communal sleeping arrangements were customary on kibbutzim until the 1980s, and during that decade, this custom was gradually replaced by that of children sleeping in their parents' homes.

> is ten past three. The nightmare has started again. We changed her and spread [cream on] her. She calmed down at ten to four. /4:45/ She woke up again/ (Altogether:) She received food.[17]

Michaeli read-wrote the texts as a kind of polyphonic musical score and edited them along a timeline extending from the 1970s to the 1980s. The specific editing conveyed the collapse of the communal sleeping arrangements—among other reasons because of the mothers' refusal to implement them. This was expressed in laconic announcements such as: "Hello, guards. Nimrod will sleep at home. Thank you, Smadar." The presence of the performers, who sat close to one another on stools during this segment, not only created a polyphonic chorus of nocturnal events in the children's house on the kibbutz, but also conjured up in the audience's imagination the complexity of the mother-child bonds and the price exacted for the "communal sleeping" experiment.

The circle that opened with a distant ideological text closed in the last moments of the performance with a recording of the *Internationale*, sung in Hebrew by Michaeli's grandfather. She stood in the center of a ring of dim light and stared at the "baby-sitter" from which the warm, grief-stricken voice issued. The light gradually faded. Therefore, a powerful analogy was created between the temporariness of a theatrical performance and its tendency to erase its changing images on the timeline on the one hand, and the conclusion of a chapter in the history of the place where we live on the other.

Michaeli's reading-writing indicated deconstructivist poetics that perceived texture in the text. She wove and intertwined her stage creation bit by bit and wrote it as if in fabric. The serially and cyclically split writing joined the small repeated parts together and imbued the entire work with wholeness so that the entire length of fabric was greater than the sum of its parts.

Closing Words, Opening Questions

The program goals and the interpretative readings of the performances give the impression that the creator-researcher actor combination relates not to a specific, stable and defined art form, but rather to a rethinking of the actor's role in theatrical activity. The program's uniqueness in the local context lies in its task to transform an actor educated according to the accepted tradition of "actor training," into the entrepreneur, dramaturge and per-

17. Quotation from the script, thanks to Halit Michaeli

former. In this way, it appears to be a program which provides a proceeding from Performance Studies to Theater Studies and back. Similar to a performer, the creator-researcher actor's creative procedure occasions the abolition of the present-absent author (director or playwright), and undermines the dichotomy between written text and performance text. Furthermore, it places the actor between the exterior and the interior of his work, and forms a different kind of intimacy and responsibility for the performance.

As a "postdramatic" writer, the creator-researcher actor uses words as material, works with their phonic values (vowels, consonants), breaks sentences down into words and words into syllables, builds new meanings that differ from the original utterance, and establishes balances and dissonances between word and action. Thus, in *Be Beautiful*, strict verbal instructions become words in rhyming songs and stylized speech accompanied by movement. In *Ephraim*, Hoffman's lyric prose becomes refined, minimalist story-telling bordering on radio drama. In *Chapter 2: Bedtime*, the words become a vocal texture, a polyphonic speaking chorus. The power of the words in these performances does not reside only in the conveying of the meaning, but also—and mainly—in the performative affectiveness of the language characteristics. The Hebrew language regains its vivacity and vitality. The point of friction between the "drama" contained, hidden or implied in the non-dramatic text and its theatrical means of expression is the locus of the creator-researcher actor's writing—the site from which he/she speaks his/her "selfness." To a great extent, the moments when the "I" is constituted in the performances discussed above are the experience of insult: the insult of a woman in front of the regimenting mirror, the insult of the abandoned wife, the insult of mothers, children and night guards as a result of communal education. The constitution of the "self" from an experience of insult is the thread linking the three extremely different works. Thus, unintentional though it may be, "the personal becomes political."

I was invited to join the program team immediately upon completing my doctoral dissertation on the history of directing in Israel. In the past, I had held workshops for BA students in the Theater Department to encourage creation from non-dramatic materials. I particularly accompanied the projects in the process of grounding them in theoretical contexts. This generated various questions, for instance: how can the exposure of young theater people to contemporary theories and theater creatively, conceptually, intensify what has become obvious for veteran theater people and researchers? How can the balance between creative energy and intellectual energy in students' work processes be maintained? Does the program's "ped-

agogical strength" lie in encouraging ongoing investigation processes, in collaboration between supervisors and students and among the students themselves, in the insistence on the cultural validity of work in the margins and in responding to local theater's needs? I believe that this special blend rescued the program from being a kind of cultural mimicry, and contains, to a large extent, the key to future development.

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