

Urbanite Restored Behavior in the Tel-Aviv's Purim Balls of the 1920s

The implications of Richard Schechner's performance theory (developed with Victor Turner and alongside Erving Goffman's Sociological model) reach far beyond the theatre stage, into the realm of the social construction of identities and meanings. My proposed paper will exploit a meticulous and details-sensitive recreation of the notable Purim balls of 1920s Tel-Aviv, carried out merely from primary sources, and will focus on the wider ideological implications of the balls. The performative analysis reveals a complex interaction of organizers, performers and audience. In particular, without necessarily performing definite roles as did costumed actors and other professional performers in these mass-amusement events, the audience did play a vital performative role, as these cultural performances accord with the "six axioms of environmental theatre", defined by Schechner. In particular, the flexible and variable performative focus was an intentional recreation of what was perceived as an intensified urban environment – a flooding of stimuli, in accordance with the notion of urbanity articulated in both literature and scholarship, which constituted an urban "alienated" performative self. Purim balls thus demonstrated a restored urbanite behavior. Due to the relative lack of a real urbanite "flâneur" experience in Tel-Aviv of the 1920s, the balls had a vital role in the extensive attempt to create such an urban discourse within its Zionist context. The notion of "performative identity" and the sensitivity to social and discursive functions of cultural performances outside of the theatrical frame thus enable us to grasp ideological and political meanings of the restored behavior in Purim balls within the emerging urban Zionism.

About the Author

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