

Re/examining our Future(s): Theatre Studies in Israel and Performance Studies

Although the institutionalization of performance studies as an independent discipline has been relatively slow, its ideas have been tremendously influential (Balme, 2008). This is the case of theatre studies in Israel in terms of research and the collection of courses offered by programs of three theatre departments. Still, the question can be asked, why performance studies have not become institutionalized in Israeli academia, a fertile arena of cultural studies, which are the anchor for the performance studies discipline. Moreover, the constant tension between practice and theory in theatre studies, one of the main issues in performance studies pedagogies, and the cultural diversity which characterizes Israeli society has given impetus to this question and, as I will claim, has transformed it into a cultural matter.

The aim of this paper is to focus on aspects which are part of the *raison d'être* of performance studies, such as – devised performance (as opposed to text-based performance), the anthropology and ethnography dimension of the discipline and promoting activism in the margins of the cultural field – and through them to discuss why theatre studies in Israel could not transform into performance studies. Examining what didn't happen and why is to begin asking about the possible futures of theatre studies in Israel.

As an Israeli theatre researcher, I'm inspired by the rich pedagogical ideas which developed, and have mostly developed now by performance studies practitioners and researchers on both sides of the Atlantic. One can assume that it results from the uniqueness of performance studies as suggested by Diana Taylor: "Performance studies is unique not because of what it *is* but because of what it allows us to *do*." (Schechner, 2002). This paper seeks to offer a local perspective and an opportunity to add my personal contribution to the pedagogical aspects of theatre studies in Israel.

About the Author

Dorit Yerushalmi, Chair, theatre department, Haifa University. She received her PhD from Tel Aviv University (2004) and was awarded a postdoctoral grant from the Dan David Prize at Tel Aviv University (2005). She is the co-editor of "*Do Not Chase Me Away*": *New Studies on the Dybbuk* (2009), and co-editor of *Zmanim, A Historical Quarterly*, Special file: Israeli Theatre – Historical Viewpoints (2007). Currently working on a book on directors and directing in Israeli Theatre.