



## **EDITORIAL: Jewish Theatre as an Anthropological Object**

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The question of the double is troubling. The original and its copy, the reality and its representation, ontology and gnoseology, form a confrontation that is sometimes pacified, sometimes conflictual. Myths and philosophical systems, rituals, and performative practices all provide varied answers to this question, which, along with Lévi-Strauss and other anthropologists after him, can be considered one of the human universals.

The thematic issue of *In Vivo Arts*, the fruit of the research carried out at INALCO in June 2022, focuses on the relationship between theatre and Jewish culture. Using anthropology and ethnoscenology as a lens for analysis, the contributions gathered here shed light on this historiographical blind spot. Body, speech, movement, context - these are just some of the issues that reveal the process of constructing Jewishness through performance, understood here as a total phenomenon.

It goes without saying that Jewish theatre is conceived as an anthropological object, both in terms of the disciplinary apparatus mentioned above, and as a situated phenomenon, with its own historical and cultural particularities. Each of the four contributions addresses, in its own way, one of these characteristic aspects: the rewriting of the textual canon, the gestural codes of the Yidishkeyt, bilingualism and the language quarrel, the construction of a "Jewish theatre" and of "Jewish theatre".

Marta Fusaro examines the *Exagogè*, a dramaturgical rewriting of the first fifteen chapters of the Book of Exodus, a text that has come down to us indirectly and in a highly fragmentary form. Using literary techniques borrowed from classical Greek theatre, Ezekiel, the author of this play, also makes the transition from the *read* text to the *acted* text. The "double" produced by the play replaces that produced by textual exegesis, and bodily performance replaces verbal performance. This transposition is accompanied by numerous textual innovations, which Fusaro highlights with great subtlety.

Michèle Fornhoff-Levitt places her approach within the framework of ethnoscenology and aims to define the theatrical Yidishkeyt. She identifies three main axes: the body – and thus gesture – the mind – and thus self-image – and language – in this case Yiddish. Fornhoff-Levitt emphasizes the ethnocentric nature of the Yiddish theatre, in which Jewish actors perform for



Jews. Its codification, verging on caricature, reveals its social significance: the Yiddish theatre is a performance of Jewishness.

Raffaele Esposito reflects on the synchronicity and contextualization of cultural phenomena, especially those relating to theatre. He analyzes the creation of two workers' theatre companies, Artef and Ohel. Both were founded by former members of Moscow's Habima company, the first in New York and plays in Yiddish, the second in Tel Aviv and plays in Hebrew. To what extent do differences outweigh similarities? Are origins more important than outcomes? Esposito takes the reader on a careful comparison of their repertoires and artistic programs, as well as their identity commitments: Yiddishism, respectively Zionism.

As for Achinoam Aldouby, she tackles one of the most striking issues in contemporary Jewish historiography: the safeguarding of Shoah testimonies. The theatrical creation, both text, and staging, plays an active part in the debate on the objectivity of the witness, whose status has been undermined in the post-modern world. Aldouby examines the performance, in Israel, of two plays that question the family transmission of the memory of the Shoah: *My Mother's Courage* (George Tabori, 1979) directed by Ayelet Golan (2012), and *My Hugo* (Ronit Kano and Shachar Sitner) directed by Naomi Yoeli (2020). Jewish culture has established rituals of remembrance, such as the Passover *seder*, which value each generation's actualization of the original narrative. Contemporary theatre suggests that the same process is, or must be, at work in transmitting the memory of the Shoah. Continuity is maintained through change, concludes Aldouby.

These four contributions prove that Jewish theatre can unquestionably be considered an “anthropological object”. Future research is bound to be prolific.