

Two Layers of Authenticity in Scenography

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My purpose in this paper is to try to define two lines of authenticity inherent in the scenographer's work, representing two layers of the scenographer-audience contract underlying the theatrical show.

The first issue affecting authenticity lies in the outer, interface design of the production, namely, in the basic and immediate agreement enunciated and established by the production design with the audience. Right upon the audience entrance into the boundaries of the theatre space, the design creates and provides all the necessary information suggesting the authenticity of the theatrical event.

Israeli fringe theatre often takes place in spaces of ancient buildings. The Khan theatre in Jerusalem, the Hebrew Arab Theatre in Jaffa, Wadi Salib Theatre in Haifa, all reside within ancient Moslem sites. The Acre (Akko) Festival takes place within an archeological site dating back to crusaders time. The spaces are comprised of very distinguished stone halls, all of them non theatrical spaces.

In the spirit of new alternative theatre, there are many attempts to use the space while soliciting a different kind of agreement than that suggested by the initial one. The spectators are asked to believe they are not present in a theatre, and the boundaries between concrete and imaginary space are effaced and blurred.

The second level on which the scenographer deals with the issue of authenticity lies in the traditional, realistic sense, namely, the kind of sets provoking audience responses such as: "this is so real!" This kind of authenticity has to do with locality and familiarity; it is emotionally effective when theatre and audience share the language of a specific local visual culture and collective memories.

In the paper I will draw on various instances relating to these unusual spaces and different meanings of authenticity in Israeli and Palestinian visual culture.

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Tal Itzhaki graduated from the College of Art Teachers in Ramat Hasharon and the Department of Theatre arts of Tel Aviv University. She taught art and theatre design at Tel Aviv University; the College of Art Teachers; the Wizo-Canada College of Design; created the Theatre Design program at the Department of Theatre, University of Haifa, and served as its Head for nine years. She was a Visiting Professor of Theatre for three years at Barnard College, Columbia University in New York, where she co-authored and designed productions such as *Neighbors* and *Xandra*. She now teaches at Sapir College.

Itzhaki designed sets, costumes and puppets for over 120 shows for all major theatre and dance companies in Israel. Among many others, she designed *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Antigone*, *Trojan Women*, *Women in Parliament*, *Rosmersholm*, *Blood Wedding* and *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *The Silver Tassie*, *The Crucible*, *A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Inherit the Wind*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *The Odd Couple*, *Company*, *The Curse of the Starving Class*, *Telemachus Clay*, *Montserrat*, *Mench Meier*, *Fear and Hope of the State*, *Top Girls*, *Fen*, *Cloud Nine*, *The Conduct of Life*, *Neaptide*, *Beautiful Thing*, *Everybody Wants to Live Luggage Packers*, *Ephraim Returns to the Army*, *A Woman from the Earth*, *Men in the Sun*, and *Qatr al Nada*.

Itzhaki has also translated plays from the English, is the secretary of the Israeli Association of Stage Designers, designed and curated stage design exhibitions, among them the Israeli exhibition of Stage Design at the PQ in 1991, 1995, 1999 and 2003 and served as referee in local and international design competitions. She delivered papers on theatre, scenography and scene design at professional and academic conferences, among others in Seoul, Jaipur, Maryland, Helsinki, Canterbury and Prague. She was one of the founders of the "Fringe Centre" in Tel Aviv.