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Yali Nativ & Iris Lana

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Rotem Tashach –

The Choreographic Eye: On Bodies in Everyday Life

From the series

'Movement Material – Conversations with choreographers'

Episode 27

Commentator: Yair Vardi

With

Rotem Tashach, Choreographer, dance teacher, and dance history lecturer

Yair Vardi, Creator, performance curator, artistic director, dramaturg, and lighting designer. Artistic Director of the "Darom Arts Festival" in Ofakim. Lecturer in the Department of Culture, Creation, and Production at Sapir Academic College.

Recorded in 2022 at Rotem Tashach's home in Tel Aviv

Transcript: Ido Tsarfati

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Translation from Hebrew: Yali Nativ

Iris:

An audience stands on the stairs and in the foyer of the Yerushalmi hall on the second floor of the Suzanne Dellal Center. Small encounters with acquaintances, some small talk while waiting for the show. And then Rotem Tashach, with a microphone taped to his cheek, emerges from the door of the hall, addresses us warmly with a smile, calls out first names to those he knows in the audience, and walks among us, marking the whole waiting area with his movements and words. He moves and talks, and that's what he'll do throughout the performance.

As he moves among the people, he describes the situation of waiting that we, the audience, are currently in: our visibility. "How stressful it can be to be seen!" he says. The anticipation before entering the theater, the tension in the smiling

muscles. The whole situation is different from how we usually enter a show. It's awkward because a performance is supposed to begin inside, when I'm already seated comfortably in the dark. And then, after several long minutes, as if to calm us, he says, "Let me guide you, come on in, don't be shy."

It seems everything is about to settle into a regular show, but no. Even inside, he doesn't let us sit. He says, "Find a good spot in this area, claim some territory, find a place where you can stand comfortably, but don't sit in the chairs."
Waiting for the performance to start was unconventional, but even inside the hall, nothing is "as it should be", so people are standing, leaning, or sitting on the edge of the stage and against the walls, some on the stairs. Some are surprised, some are a bit irritated, some giggle. And Rotem? He attentively checks how we're doing: "A true portrait of social order, well done! Respect!" He juggles with virtuoso speech about the phonetic and etymological meaning of the words order, respect, seat, and way. "What is the way? I lost my way. Each in their own way. This is the way. She did it her way".
Then he says: "The space we are in is divided into three parts," and gestures somewhat ironically toward the stage, the seating area, and the narrow aisle between them, comparing the meanings of these words in Hebrew and English, thereby defamiliarizing the transparent liminal state we're in, the thing we came for, the performance, does not begin, and continues not to begin. Or maybe it already has? Rotem is entirely in the here and now, responding to people he knows: "Michael, move over just a bit," and goes on to quote Andrew Hewitt, who defines *social choreography*. From there, he describes different forms of social organization: from soccer games and military ceremonies to folk dances, explaining that each is a site of tension between individualism and collectivity, between the individual and society. Oh! So he's talking about us! I begin to understand that this social order, the way bodies are organized at any given moment, is what he's investigating with us. About us. Showing, reflecting, and

pointing to all these transparent moments, at any time, in any place and to the way they shape our body as it moves through them. Ah. We, the people, the audience, become part of the work, subject to the witty rhetorical tricks that Rotem offers, to his casual shifts between movement styles, and to constant changes in perspective and discourses. And after thirteen minutes, out of breath – and aware of being out of breath, he finally invites us to sit in the audience seats. But even then, we won't get to lean back and relax; the playful journey of *Throat Command* will continue to intrigue and disturb.

That was a description of the first part of *Throat Command* from 2022.
Choreography and performance: Rotem Tashach

Yali:
You're listening to an episode from the series 'Movement Material – Conversations with Choreographers'. In the previous episode, we spoke with Yoram Karmi, who said, "Movement material is a matter of evolution." Today, we speak with Rotem Tashach, who says: "Movement material begins with observing a movement phenomenon, a movement-based reality that takes place outside the studio, outside the stage."

You're listening to *Creatures of Dance*, a podcast on Contemporary Dance in Israel. *Creatures of Dance* with Iris Lana and Yali Nativ. And today, an episode in the series "Conversations with Choreographers" with Rotem Tashach, choreographer, dance teacher, and lecturer in dance history. This episode features a concluding response by Yair Vardi, creator, curator, artistic director, dramaturg, and lighting designer.

Other participants in the series include: Iris Erez, Tamir Ginz, Uri Shafir, Yossi Berg and Oded Graf, Anat Danieli, Emanuel Gat, Noa Wertheim and Rina

Wertheim-Koren, May Zarhy, Yoram Karmi, Amir Kolben, Noa Dar, Anat Shamgar, and Ohad Naharin.

Iris: Hi Yali.

Yali: Hi Iris.

Yali: In the fall of 2021, we set out to meet dance creators to talk with them about choreographic practices, about how dance is made. We met them in their studios and in their homes, and we asked them: What is movement material for you? How do you think about the relationship between the dancing body and movement? We were curious to understand their working processes, or in other words, we wanted to peek "under the hood" of the creative process. To get inside the mind of the choreographer and hear from them about their unique ways of working and the mechanisms they use in the creative process. We were especially interested in talking about what is hardly ever discussed: the beginnings of creative processes, what movement material means to them, and how thoughts and imagination are translated into the body, into movement, and into working practices.

Iris: It turns out that there are different models; every one of the choreographers talks about movement material a bit differently and works differently. But we can say that what they all share is a discussion of the relationship between body and movement, the body as the medium of dance, their own body, and that of their dancers. They refer to the body as a central source and resource for movement material, and the encounter with the dancers' bodies is considered essential in the process of producing movement material. That's a common thread among all of them. From this arise questions about the role of dancers in the creation of movement material. Are they performers? Interpreters? Creative partners? And what is their status and position as people, as human beings, as subjects in the choreographic process? These issues inevitably lead to further thoughts about power relations between choreographers and dancers, and about hierarchies and

authority in creative processes.

Going under the hood, as we said?

Rotem: Hi.

Iris & Yali: Hi Rotem.

Iris: We're in your home, and thank you for hosting us in your bedroom.

As a choreographer, you've made quite a few works. What is the place or role of movement material in your working process, and also in the outcome, the finished work?

Rotem: It's almost always the last thing to surface, it always starts with some kind of discussion or observation of a movement phenomenon, a movement reality that usually happens outside the studio or stage, like how people sit in waiting rooms, how people walk in the street, why people use gestures or physical languages one way in one country and another way in another country.

These are the kinds of phenomena that occupy me, and I begin my work with them. Often, a spoken text is created, either a conversation between performers, or a monologue by me if it's a solo. The spoken text, what's actually said on stage, dictates what movements will accompany the text. Most of the time, the movements are illustrative; they demonstrate, they are meant to show very clearly and directly what's being said.

Iris: Directly?

Rotem: Yes, directly, explicitly, and openly to illustrate the text. It comes from a sense that words on their own aren't enough. People often ask me: "Why don't you just write articles?" or "Why do you need to bring words onto the stage?" For me, the combination of a clear verbal argument with movements that demonstrate that argument. That's the ultimate combination. Because it often

opens people's eyes and clarifies the point in an instant, what we meant, what we wanted to say.

Iris: So if I try to describe your working model, you begin with movements that already exist in the world, everyday movements or others taken from reality, you add spoken text, and from that, you extract additional movement material. These are the layers.

Rotem: Absolutely, absolutely.

Yali: But if we go back for a moment to the term *movement material*, then you're actually expanding that term. We come in and ask, "Okay, so how is movement material generated in the studio or in the choreographic process?" And you say, "I take it from the reality of the street, from outside, from everyday behavior." That's an expansion of the concept of movement material, and then you work with it.

Rotem: Basically, "Ad infinitum", yes. That's exactly the term we're looking at together, it's Andrew Hewitt's aesthetic dimension: something that's simply made up of form. It doesn't have to be purely movement; it could be sound, it could be visual. But anything that relates to aesthetics, the aesthetic layer through which we live our everyday lives, that, to me, is movement material. The way people stop at a traffic light, what they do with their bodies to pass the time while waiting in a traffic island, what happens to their hands in their pockets, what happens to their fingers, to their pupils, to their lips.How people look at each other as they pass on the street, or how they ignore each other. What kinds of technologies of ignoring exist, which, to me, are also a fascinating form of movement material. What kinds of glances are exchanged? Do people make space on the sidewalk? Do they keep the same walking pace? What happens to walking trajectories? All of these, in my eyes, can be called movement material. I see

them as part of a sampling from the aesthetic layer. For example, in *Paved Life*, there's a section dealing with sex as movement material, various types of physical touch as movement material. Why is there a division between massage, which is one realm, and sex, which is another realm, and contact improvisation, yet another realm? And then so many other physical acts of touch, each very distinct and separate from the other. Especially today, they've become very discreet and very much disconnected from one another.

Iris: They undergo regulation.

Rotem: Yes. And separations, and membranes of endless prohibitions between this act and that act and the next. For instance, I remember that when I arrived at NYU for my master's degree, the faculty greeted us and said: "Here in the department, in 2018, we don't hug with two arms, that's ethically forbidden, it doesn't allow the other person an escape route. The proper way to hug is to place one arm, usually the right arm, lightly across the partner's back, for a brief moment, without shifting your weight, and then release." So there was literally a very precise choreographic instruction, a very clear directive about how touch is allowed between faculty members and students, and between the students themselves, even if we know each other well, like each other, and spend a lot of time together outside the department. Still, to avoid lawsuits and possible risks of sexual harassment...

Iris: And inappropriate touch.

Rotem: Exactly. Inappropriate touch, we received this very clear instruction, and it applies to many, many other environments as well. Although in Israel, the prohibition or permission to touch in a certain way is much more intuitive, blurry, and broad, we still draw very clear boundaries between: "This kind of touch I will allow here, this kind of touch I will allow in another space, with different people."

There are specific ethical codes that govern these things. So, in *Paved Life*, we tried to say: "We, as dancers, know the need for touch and for physical and intimate closeness much more deeply than regular citizens, citizens who don't study dance."

Yali: Who's "we"? Dancers?

Rotem: Yes. We climb on each other, touch each other, say hello in a much more close and intimate way. As part of our profession, we know what it's like to be in all sorts of physical contact that don't even have names in everyday life, because they don't exist in daily life. There's no awareness, no imagination that's activated in daily life to even invent these gestures, because there is no "room of one's own", no studio that allows abstraction of movement from reality, and from that, the question "What can a body do?" Spinoza's question, which Deleuze later took up and developed. Not "What can this body do in this circumstance?" But rather, "What can a body do?" without any specific qualifier. I believe, in that sense, Spinoza kind of invented dancers, because the only way to answer such an open question is to also invent the space in which it can be asked. And only the studio is a blank canvas, no traffic lights, no faculty members, no other people, no, no, no... It allows us to begin answering that question practically: "What can a body do?" On the street, I can't roam around and allow myself to fully ask that question, because the street is full of pressing life circumstances you can't ignore. You have to be reactive to them. In the studio, you can ask those questions and start to find answers. And I think that's also what defines a dancer. For me, a dancer is someone who initiates that question in the studio. Then the endless range of options opens before them and, when they return to the personal-public-capitalist spaces, that question continues to echo, along with the possible answers. "What can a body do?" "What is the infinite spectrum of things a body can do, whether that includes touch or not?"

Yali: Within these working procedures you're describing, can you relate the relationship between critical theories and what happens in the studio?

Rotem: I think it would be fair to say that I get a lot of my inspiration from critical and philosophical texts, no doubt. But it's not my profession. I can read a chapter by Rancière, and keep reading that same chapter for several good years, then return to it, but it won't be important to me to write an article from it or to produce some real academic position in the world. Rather, to draw inspiration from it, to try to bring it to the stage, and to try to combine it with physical reality.

Yali: But that is a position that formulates itself...

Rotem: Yes, but it doesn't exist in academia. Meaning, it exists in...

Iris: In practice.

Rotem: Yes. In the world of art, in the aesthetic domain. That's also my great privilege, the ability to be a layperson academically, or a scholar to a very limited degree academically, and still use these texts, because they stir a lot of curiosity and inspiration in me.

Iris: Since our topic is *movement material,* you essentially have an infinite supply of movement material, which is reality, from which you formulate something. Can you define how you formulate the materials for the stage?
Not just through an illustration of the text, but ultimately, what ends up on stage? After all, you don't just walk on stage or stop at a traffic light.

Rotem: Could you ask again, maybe?

Yali: I think she's asking about the choreographic mechanism.

Iris: Precisely, but in relation to the body. That is, what happens to the performing body, which is different from the everyday body... or in other words: if you use materials from someone walking down the street, what makes the performative body different?

Rotem: It is usually much more versatile. It flows from movement modes that are completely normative to movements that are very extreme, very dramatic, and absolutely not possible in everyday life.

Iris: Can you give an example?

Rotem: (Demonstrates) That's an auditory example, but its counterpart would really be very strange, extravagant body postures, sometimes over-the-top ugly, sometimes over-the-top beautiful, sometimes just over-the-top weird. Many things that can only happen in the aesthetic realm. I can go out into the street, behave strangely, move strangely, and show the inclusive, versatile movement language, such that it mixes all the possibilities, but then I'll be subject to sanctions by society. People will come and ask, "What are you doing?" In extreme cases, they might call an ambulance or all sorts of things.

This non-normativity needs to be moved or categorized in some way, by the police, or by regulation from passersby, or through 'insanity', that is, an ambulance. Without a doubt, this versatile manner that mixes all modes of movement or all movement possibilities can easily exist only in the performative space, or in the studio space, which I also consider a performative space.

Yali: So the movement material undergoes stylization? Aestheticization?

Iris: Augmentation?

Rotem: Augmentation, yes. Many things go through exaggeration, very strong emphasis, and many things go through what I consider the most magical place: the

discovery of the slippage from the normative into the strange, the place where I fall or fly into a very dramatic style, and the slippage back to the normative. I think that entering into and exiting from stylization is something that's very, very intriguing to the eye, and the eye finds it hard to resist. People always tell me, "The transitions, those are the most surprising and most fascinating moments".

Iris: And what kind of dancers do you need for your works?

Rotem: Thinking dancers. Those for whom the physical and movement reality of daily life is not taken for granted.

Yali: And is that social thinking? A kind of reflective thinking about reality?

Rotem: Yes, without a doubt. From the outset, I would say that the perspective that sparked my theoretical curiosity was much more the social angle than the historical one, the contemporary society, or the society of the 1980s, from the moment I was growing up until today. Trying to understand social prohibitions, social imperatives, and the very, very, fine, thin, primordial, elusive possibilities of deviating from established orders.

Yali: Did you think about that even before you read Foucault? Before you read critical theory?

Rotem: Yes.

Iris: There was nothing before...
Yali: There was.

Rotem: Yes. Absolutely. I remember very sharply the transition from childhood to adolescence, because it was mediated by a group of boys at school who were very, very violent towards me and the way I was perceived. My movement in space was considered feminine, gay, and therefore, received harsh reactions.

Iris: Where did you grow up?

Rotem: In Yavne. It caused a very significant shift from a child for whom the range of movement possibilities wasn't limited at all... I could climb on the community center building and jump from the roof, go to the wadi, do cartwheels, shimmy, be masculine, be feminine, be many things, with absolutely no awareness of any separation between those possibilities. And then suddenly, to be under a very strict magnifying glass. It was paralyzing, unpleasant, traumatic, and so on. But thanks to these experiences, I also managed to understand other people. What happens to women or to girls I went to high school with. How they were placed under paralyzing membranes, but different ones than those applied to the homosexual. What happens to the 'ars'? (a local slang for a macho/troublemaking male). What kinds of paralyzing membranes are placed there? What happens to the kids from the privileged military housing projects, whether Mizrahi or Ashkenazi? Two very different kinds of bodies: the military and old Yavne. And then, of course, when you leave Yavne. My family moved to Tel Aviv when I was eighteen, so this gaze is extended to other places in the world. Why in Austria can I move a certain way? Or why do people in England and Switzerland move through space in a way that reflects politeness in a very different way from here? What's going on with eye contact? Why is there suddenly no eye contact? Why do people stand on the right side of the escalator and let others pass? What's going on here with this polite order? It was very sharp; the differences were very clear. But also, in every other place and every other situation. I believe that the trauma of high school revealed the artificiality of prohibitions, and once that happened, the artificiality of prohibitions became very present for me, no matter what space I entered.

Iris: You know, one of the things that happened to me after our last conversation is, when I take walks in the park, I refuse to walk on the path. I say to myself, "Rotem, Rotem, Rotem, you're not going to walk on the path."

Rotem: For me, full disclosure, I have to admit, it's not operational. I'm a coward in everyday life. Meaning, if the strategy, as de Certeau calls it, is the path, then I walk on the path, because I'm still afraid of the disciplinary gaze. It doesn't matter whether it comes from the outside, or it's an internal gaze I apply to myself, but I feel more comfortable and more at ease crossing at a crosswalk, standing at a proper distance from the person in front of me at the security check, and trying to avoid as many frictions in daily life as possible.

Iris: Can you define a kind of movement world that characterizes your works?

Rotem: Yes. I would say it's really quite mixed. It includes many movement languages, most of which are autobiographical: gymnastics, classical ballet, the movement language of Anat Danieli, the movement language of Ohad Naharin, since I wanted so badly to be in Batsheva, my body, like the bodies of many dancers in Israel, adopted it. And many other movement languages from choreographers I admired over the years, like Pina Bausch, like DV8, and a mix of all those highly recognizable, highly distinctive languages blended in a "soup" of the everyday, behavioral, gestural... Yes, that's more or less it.

Iris: Do you explore your own body? Is there a kind of embodied research involved?

Rotem: Yes. Wow, I think that's a conversation in its own right.

Iris: That might be...

Rotem: The research into the body is very connected to... I try to understand the biomechanics of health in relation to how the skeleton is aligned, how the muscles

are maintained day to day, how can I achieve maximum strength or maximum flexibility, even at the age of 46, and with a lifestyle that isn't the healthiest, to say the least. And also, because part of my livelihood depends on teaching... I have to teach other people how to do handstands, back handsprings, hand hops, forward rolls, slides, pirouettes, so I have to stay in shape. That compels me to engage in self-body exploration on a daily basis.

In addition, there's the not-so-short list of ailments I have, which constantly makes me curious about the body, to heal it, to try to ease the conquests of the past, not conquests that I made, but the past in which I was conquered, my body was conquered. So, for example, in *BN2* and in the last two works, which are solos that deal with trauma from high school and the attempt to break free from that trauma, there's a lot of focus around the throat muscles, around the hyoid bone, actually the *hyoideum*, the bone the tongue rests upon.
I have done a whole research project, which involved watching anatomical films, trying to understand physiologically what's happening, to free the voice, freeing vocal expression, and trying to understand how traumas paralyze or clamp certain muscles, and the great potential that lies in softening them, massaging them, activating them, and becoming aware of them.

In the last two works that dealt with trauma, one focused more on the politics of visible movement, and the other on the politics of audible voice. So in the second one, which dealt with the politics of audible voice, there's a strong effort to show throat movements, neck movements, and to vocalize different sounds, because voicing is also the movement of the muscle. You can move the throat and neck without making a sound, but often the act of producing a sound is itself a movement. There's an 'aha!' (in high pitch) and there's an 'aha' (in low pitch), and there's a huge difference in how the muscles work. This is fascinating movement material in my view.

Yali: How do you work with dancers? How do you teach them? Do you even teach them?

Rotem: No.

Iris: Nothing?

Yali: What do you do with them in the studio?

Rotem: No, no, no. Usually, we start by talking about what's annoying, what's aggravating.

Yali: Interesting point of departure…

Rotem: Because that's the most alive thing. And because I believe it's something you can keep discussing without drying it out. Because what aggravates usually continues to aggravate. And we're always very committed to continuing to understand what that aggravating thing is. So, some kind of movement phenomenon, some kind of social phenomenon that exists in or manifests through movement, and we begin by talking about it and trying to analyze it. And from that emerge phrases that become the performers' lines.

Yali: Lines.

Rotem: Yes.

Yali: In text, words.

Rotem: In words. Literal, everyday, spoken words, just like we use in daily life. And then, like we said in the beginning, comes the staging – of "Okay, so what do we do with it? How do we put it on stage? What? Will we do a split? A pirouette? Not move at all? Move in slow motion? In fast-forward? Will it be neurotic? Will it

be ‘new agey’ and calm? The world of choices is infinite, but it is completely subjugated to the symbolic meaning of the language, to logic.

Yali: Iris, what would aggravate you? What would you tell Rotem in the studio?

Iris: I don’t know how to place myself in the situation of the studio.

Yali: What aggravates me? When people stand too close to me. Wow. I can scream at them.

Rotem: Infuriating!

Yali: It aggravates me so much!

Rotem: Yes.

Yali: So, what would you do with that?

Rotem: Let’s go into the studio and find out…

Iris: Wow, Yali, I didn’t know that’s super important. You should have told me this a long time ago…

Rotem, I want to ask you a question. Can you name a few dancers who… for example, choreographers… or can you refer to bodies you love watching move?
Yali: Maybe not necessarily dancers, but movers.
Iris: Movers.
Rotem: It’s not necessarily recognizable or famous people. It could be a close friend whose gestures are inspiring. It could be things that are very, very familiar and well-known to everyone, for example, Trump’s gestures. The way his hands close and open like an accordion is something highly noticeable. I can’t stand it, and it annoys me, but it’s inspiring, because it’s annoying. The way he stood behind Hillary Clinton (speaking of standing too close)…

Yali: Right.

Rotem: It wasn't even that close, but it was almost directly behind her, like a meter or a meter and a half. I remember that I couldn't continue listening to the debate at all…

Yali: And she didn't even know.

Rotem: And she didn't know, yes. There was something truly disturbing about it, and it stayed strongly etched in memory. So it could be things like that, toward which I feel a very strong negative response. But it can also be things that really delight me and move me, because they perhaps reveal a great freedom someone has to make a certain movement.Yali: Power.

Rotem: Power, yes.

Iris: And if I try to insist, nonetheless, on the world of the stage, on the world of dance?

Rotem: Ours here in Israel? People we know?

Iris: No. No.

Rotem: Pina Bausch. Pina Bausch without question.

Yali: She herself? Or her corpus?

Rotem: The corpus is so much her that she succeeded in erasing the subjectivity of all her performers.

Yali: Though actually the claim is the opposite, by the way…

Rotem: Could be.

Yali: That she let each person be who they are. "Who are you?" "I'm from Japan." "I'm from America." "I'm from spaghetti."

Iris: She did it so well, they thought it was their own selves.

Rotem: Yes.

Yali: That's an interesting thing you're saying.

Rotem: I don't know how to answer it, but I know that her movement language certainly seeped very deeply into me, and I don't easily let go of it. That's

something I'm still influenced by to this day. Who else? It's endless. But it's not monolithic, it's not like "I'm all about Madonna and her moves," or "David Bowie and his moves". It's one move here, one move there. These are things that soak in and...

Iris: Register.

Rotem: They register. They usually register very strongly and accompany me for a very long time.

Yali: Do you notice when something registers?

Rotem: Yes!

Yali: How?

Rotem: It's memorable.

Yali: It's a moment you remember.

Rotem: Yes.

Iris: Rotem, I feel like crying.

Rotem: Why?

Iris: From the way you speak!

Yali: From pleasure! It's registered in the body, as pleasure.

Rotem: In that case, please, there's plenty of tissue.

Yali: It's so nice to be in your bedroom.

Rotem: A delight.

Iris: It's lovely in Rotem's bedroom!

Yali: That was wonderful.

Rotem: Thank you. Thank you.

Yair Vardi's Response to the Conversation with Rotem Tashach / 21.6.22

Iris: We invited Yair Vardi, artist, curator, and artistic director, to formulate a personal perspective on themes that came up in the interview. We asked him to point to unique dance-related issues that emerge in the conversation and to relate to these issues in contexts that interest him.

Iris: Hi Yair

Yair: Hi

Iris: So, what do you think about the interview?

Yair: So what do I think? Super interesting, I mean, it's just such a pleasure to listen to Rotem Tashach.

Iris: Right!

Yair: And he really is a unique phenomenon, and I'll try to say why I think he's a unique phenomenon, or why his work just keeps expanding and expanding. And I want to actually refer to this term *movement material.* I think that Rotem, in the interview, formulates it a bit differently, but I want to go a bit further. So I'll say that I've known Rotem for many years. I curated, managed, and accompanied many of his works, both within the A-Genre Festival framework and in Intimadance as well. In fact, I co-directed Intimadance with him.

Iris: You mean your acquaintance was when you were the artistic director and he was a choreographer?

Yair: I was the artistic director and he was the choreographer, and then the two of us were co-artistic directors. Then Rotem performed in my piece, *Cultural Basket*, as a performer and creative partner.

You can talk about Rotem Tashach's works in relation to *movement material* and what kind of movement aesthetics they produce, but I feel like talking about the opposite. That is, about what Rotem sees, observes, and works with when he talks

about movement material. And here, unlike other dance makers, for whom movement material is something that develops from their own bodies or from their dancers' bodies as a form of self-expression, I think that what Rotem Tashach does is more like an artist-anthropologist. What interests him is the material of the human movement. That is, how human beings use their bodies. More broadly, how society uses the body.

In *Israelica*, for example, he analyzes the typical Israeli street, yes? How do we walk? How do we bump into each other? How do we avoid bumping into each other? What spaces do we allow one another? He compares everything to a football game. He even starts with Homer. And he actually builds a kind of foundation through which he tries to demonstrate a cultural phenomenon based on a day-to-day 'Israeli choreography'. How do we use space? What is the choreography of the space? And how do we perceive our collective national body images? That is: the masculine body, the embodiment of the 'Sabra', how the postures of our bodies express our culture, and so on. This is movement material par excellence. The Israeli identity embodied in my body is, in fact, an Israeli movement material.

Rotem's body, and the bodies of the dancers he works with, are trained bodies. Rotem doesn't work with non-dancers. He works with dancers. And he works with super-skilled dancers. He seeks out that skill, and he even says so in the interview. He talks about 'thinking dancers', but in his works, both he and the dancers are always highly skilled. Because let's say he wants to present a posture that could be considered a Zionist-Israeli posture, he does it through the dancer's body, because the dancer's body knows how to take that and intensify it to the point where it becomes an aesthetic image.

That's why he never gives up on dance. It's not just that dance is his topic. Actually, it's not his topic at all. Take Jérôme Bel, whose subject of his works is

the field of dance itself. That's not Rotem's subject. Rotem's subject is the human body, or the human body as reflected in the culture from which the person comes. His medium is dance.

And then something really interesting happens with this term *movement material*, because the movement material does not belong to the dancer, and it does not belong to the artist; it belongs to society. And the artist becomes a kind of conduit to demonstrate this. If in Rotem's earlier works he dealt with public choreography, and the choreography of the public, and with certain conceptions of the body that show us what it means to be an Israeli body, after many, many years working on this, he begins to explore the relationship between muscle, nerve, and physiology. And he begins to teach us, or to present to us, embodied phenomena that we don't fully perceive. He begins to reveal to us, from his trained body, from his own private practice, phenomena related to the connection between the brain, nerves, muscles, and behavior.

So in *BN2*, where he basically lays out how he stays fit, yes, or how he maintains his body. He presents us with a collection of quirky, strange, extreme exercises that almost look like body art. But he reveals to us how many facial muscles we don't use. Why breathing is actually the body's biggest movement. That becomes the aesthetic movement material of the piece.

Iris: And he also speaks.

Yair: And he also speaks. I think Rotem understands that movement, too, has its limitations. Meaning, if I want to make arguments that try to analyze the culture we live in, the bodily culture we live in, our bodies in the world, and its physicality, there has to be a meeting place between word and movement. And he uses demonstrations, which is also very interesting. The movement demonstrates the idea or the word, and the word demonstrates the movement.

Iris: He even uses the word “illustrations.”

Yair: Yes.

Iris: Which is almost a curse in the world of dance.

Yair: Which is almost a curse. Illustration, when I demonstrate a situation, is really a curse. But when I demonstrate a phenomenon, and I have no choice but to use both the idea, the word, and also its more abstract expression in movement, in the body, they complete one another. I think that the accurate abstraction in Rotem’s case is that the idea cannot be understood without interpretation through words.

Iris: Textual

Yair: Textual and physical interpretation. It’s impossible. The idea won’t be complete. Because the material we’re working with is the body, it’s the material that comes out of the body. And to define, Rotem seeks definitions; to define that thing, we must use words. And then we create a truly two-directional relationship. And the image that comes to mind is hand in hand. Yes? And it’s not possible without both.

Iris: What an extraordinary artist he is. Exceptional!

Yair: He is exceptional. He is exceptional, and I also think on a global level.

Iris: Really?

Yair: Yes. Because I think that at the level of using dance as a tool to define movement and physical phenomena, and connecting that to conceptual frameworks, he is globally unique. I haven’t seen anyone like that.

Iris: What do you think about the theoretical contexts he places himself in? With the disclaimer, he says, “I’m not a philosopher, but I do read, I’m familiar.”

Yair: Rotem really demonstrates this in his work, and he does it beautifully. Because Rotem isn’t busy with… again, I’m going back to *movement material*, he’s not doing the thing of “I read an article and I’m developing movement material

from it." That doesn't interest him because he isn't truly concerned with dance as a genre. He is concerned with dance as a genre only when it serves to express anthropological, social, and cultural research. And that's very, very different.

Because there is this whole genre, a very broad one, both European and Israeli, of "We're dancers, but we also think. We're not dumb. We also think." So we take an article into the studio and develop very personal movement material based on the ideas in that article, and we create connections, and then we conceptualize our own movement material. And that's a process Rotem doesn't engage in. Because he's not interested in conceptualizing his movement material. What interests him is conceptualizing the movement material...

Iris: That already exists.

Yair: That exists. Exactly! So everything becomes a means of expression. Theoretical research for him is a means of expression; it enriches the process, and it's already a means of expressing discoveries of phenomena that can be identified. What I've become really interested in, in recent years, is exactly that. I think the artist's expertise isn't in producing artistic objects in the end. I think our expertise as artists lies in our knowledge of the world, our ability to read phenomena in the world, and to identify and propose alternatives to existing structures in the world. Now, the proposal of alternatives can take the form of artistic objects, yes. But even here, I think we need to expand the term "artistic object," because artists can... we can consider an artistic object to be, say, a completely different way of thinking about how to build roads, in Rotem's context. Because in the end, what art and the creative world of art does, unlike any other practical profession, is to create new structures. Artists must create new structures!

Iris: Thank you very much, Yair.

Yair: Thank you, Iris.

Credits:

Iris Lana is a dance researcher and lecturer at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance and Seminar HaKibbutzim. She led the establishment of the Batsheva Dance Company Archive and the dance section of the National Library's digital preservation project for dance collections.

Yali Nativ is a teacher and researcher of dance in sociological and anthropological contexts. She is a senior lecturer at ASA, the Academic College for Society and the Arts, and writes about arts education, the sociology of the body, movement and performance, and dance in Israeli society. Her current research focuses on aging professional dancers. Yali is chairperson of the Israeli Choreographers' Association.

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