

Introduction

Possessed Voices is a study of theatrical manifestations of the Hebrew language during the interwar period. It narrates the intriguing story of a largely unknown collection of sound recordings, produced throughout 1931–1965, preserving traces from the sounds and voices played in the early repertoire of the Modernist Hebrew theater (1919–1928).

The new political and social reality spanning across Europe during the 1920s, in the aftermath of the Great War, was formative for the Jewish national movement and, especially, for its endeavor to renew the Hebrew language and root it as the colloquial language of the Zionist enterprise. Between the pending demand of Zionism for a cultural reform, the accelerated processes of modernization, acculturation, and secularization, the traditional sociolinguistic structure of the European Jewry underwent dramatic transformations. The Ashkenazi multilingual province—which was comprised from an alloy of Yiddish as a vernacular language, Hebrew (*leshon-ha-kodesh*) and Aramaic as a medium for religion and cultural heritage, and the imperial languages (mainly Russian or German) as the official “state language”—began to fall apart. With the advent of modern Jewish nationalism, the language of religious creativity and prayer—Hebrew—gradually deviated from its traditional assignments. This process paralleled groundbreaking artistic and literary explorations, which reconfigured the cultural function of Hebrew in relation to its traditional qualities.

This book probes into the performativity of the Hebrew language played on Modernist stages in Europe between the two world wars, and examines the resonance of these voices in commercial sound recordings and radio programs broadcast during the first two decades of the State of Israel (established in 1948). The study examines four recordings of theater performances: three case studies from *Habima*’s formative repertoire, created when the theater was based in Moscow—a 1931 commercial recording of *The Eternal Jew* (premiered in 1919 and revised in 1923); a 1965 commercial recording of *The Dybbuk*

(1922); a 1961 recording of a radio adaptation to *The Golem* (1925)—and one case study from the repertoire of the *Ohel* Theater—a 1952 radio recording of the theater production of *Yaakov and Rachel* (1928).¹ These sound recordings enable access to aural traces from the voices engaged in hallmark productions of the Modernist Hebrew theater, all withstanding a prolonged presence of two decades and more on stages around the globe. The recordings document the performances featuring many of the original cohort of actors, and following—as much as possible—their original directing scheme. Analyzing the sonorities employed in theater performances, and the imaginations engrained in them, this book explores the shaping of the Hebrew language—how the theatrical enactment of the Hebrew plays conveys the emotive dimension of the dramas, and the manner in which the vocal rendering of the language binds its listeners together, creating a temporary *communitas*.

Basing my arguments upon the analysis of sound recordings, this study scrutinizes the theatricalization of the Hebrew language as a reflection of transformation processes in the multilingual Jewish cultural sphere in Europe. My main argument in this book is that in the early Modernist Hebrew theater, the recitation style, vocal delivery, and musicality of speech served as central components in the process of decoding the signs connoted by the spoken language. In other words, the intense semiotics of the musicality of the Hebrew as recited on the theater stage connected the mythical and biblical drama to the lives and affairs of the East European Jewry during the 1920s, transcending the semantic or lexical values of its utterances. This study proposes to apprehend the audible traces from this complex sonority, perpetuated and transmitted through acoustic media during the formative decades of the State of Israel, as a treasure repository providing Jewish immigrants, refugees, and survivors of anti-Semitic atrocities in Europe, with a venue for lamenting the decline of their home communities, and for creating a memory continuum that reconnects their diasporic past to their migratory present.

Modernist Hebrew Theater

Habima, the Modernist Hebrew theater collective whose performances constitute the subject matter of this book, was founded in Moscow in 1917.² Conceived as a dramatic studio under the auspices of the Moscow Art Theater (founded in 1898 by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko), *Habima* was established in the atmosphere permeated with the lingering afterechoes of World War I, under the long looming shadows of the Bolshevik revolution. It was founded by Menachem Gnessin, an educator

and an amateur actor, Hanna Rovina, a kindergarten teacher, and Nachum Zemach, a Hebrew teacher who envisioned the establishment of an artistic Hebrew theater. During the first five years, its prominent cohort of actors was formed, when it was joined by figures such as David Vardi, Aharon Meskin, Yehoshua Bertinov, Shoshana Avivit, Miriam Elias, Miriam Goldina, Tamar Robins, Fanny Lubitsch, Raikin Ben-Ari, Baruch Chemerinsky, Chayale Grober, Raphael Klatchkin, Zvi Friedland, Ari Warshaver, and Moshe Halevy—who later resigned from the troupe, immigrated to Palestine and established the *Ohel* theater.³

As Joseph Stalin was centralizing his political power after the death of Vladimir Lenin (in January 1924), the theater encountered increasing persecution by the Soviet Communist Party, and especially by the Yevseksia—the Jewish division of the Soviet Communist Party—that prevented the troupe from pursuing its artistic agenda in Moscow. In 1926, *Habima* left Moscow and set off on a global tour through Europe and the United States, spending almost a year in Tel Aviv (1928–29), and making Berlin its temporary home for an additional year (1930–31). The theater finally settled in Tel Aviv in 1931, becoming Israel's National Theater in 1958, on the tenth anniversary of the state of Israel.

Aiming to express the cultural energies of its time, from its inception *Habima* was committed to creating a Hebrew national theater that would demonstrate the fundamental principles of the Zionist enterprise. Prominently, it sought to infuse their audience with the ideals of the Hebrew revival movement. These tenets, as Gad Kaynar points out, included the regeneration of the Hebrew language, the renewal of artistic interest in biblical and Jewish heritage as dramatic substances, and the wishful aspiration to settle in Palestine and establish it as a national homeland for the Jewish people.⁴ This ideological scheme entailed the establishment of a somewhat artificial differentiation between the new Hebrew theater and the Yiddish theater—*ייִדיש טעאַטער* literally meaning Jewish theater—by contesting diasporic Ashkenazi representation models. Aspiring to untangle the rooted symbiosis between Jewish culture and Yiddish culture, *Habima* wished to disconnect itself from the prevailing Jewish theatrical tradition, and specifically to obscure its profound artistic roots in the Modernist Yiddish theater.⁵ *Habima's* performances rendered Jewish myths, Biblical dramas, and folklore plots familiar from the repertoire of the Yiddish theater, however, the troupe performed in the Hebrew language, adopting the Russian avant-garde theater as its main aesthetic inspiration and working method.⁶

From its first public stage endeavor in *Neshef Bereshit* (literally meaning “Genesis Gala”), which premiered in Moscow on October 8, 1918, *Habima's*

performances were praised for their vocal rendering of the Hebrew language. The evening was also commended by significant authorities on theater in Moscow, as exemplified in a review by the theater critic Sergei Glagolin: “The young Hebrew theater knows how to fashion the sounds of words so that the expressed idea becomes clear even when one does not understand the meaning.”⁷

Indeed, during the 1920s, many of the theatergoers that attended *Habima*’s performances held across Europe before a broad range of audiences did not comprehend the Hebrew language uttered on stage. In addition to the issue of language proficiency, *Habima*’s Hebrew was, from the beginning, rendered in the Sephardic (modern Israeli) dialect, which was alien even to those conversant in Hebrew, who mostly were of Ashkenazi origin.⁸ Yet, during its formative years in Europe and after immigrating to Palestine in 1931, *Habima* flourished, enjoying admiration around the globe, becoming the epitome and agent of the spiritual tenacity inherent in the reviving Hebrew culture and language. How, then, did *Habima*’s audience understand the Hebrew drama played on the stage? In order to clarify this question, one is compelled to examine the kind of considerations that informed the shaping of the language in the Modernist Hebrew theater: What sort of connection did this theater wish their audience to experience by listening to the Hebrew language? What sort of cultural associations, imaginings, and memories did the theater imbue its spoken language with in order for it to act upon the audience? What was the emotional and communal impact generated by the pronunciation style, rhythm, tempo, accent, and melodies enacted on stage?

The musicality of the Modernist Hebrew theater looms large in its sound recordings. Besides the accompanying musical score, rooted in Jewish folklore, the recordings reveal the thick East European accents of the actors—who were familiar public figures in the Jewish communities, both in the Diaspora and in Mandatory Palestine—and the bountiful rhythmic nuances *Habima* was famous for. The vocal timbres of those renowned actors reveal their unique sonic signatures and manifest a central aspect of their theatrical aura. Finally, the orchestration of the aural drama emphasizes the communal ritualized experience issuing from the sound on the stage: at times, the texts are recited in choral form, while at others, a leading actor chanting the dramatic text in a distinct musical recitation guides the dialogue.

Tracing the performed vocalities in the Modernist Hebrew theater through rhythmic structures, aural gestures, and themes, this study aims to understand the affecting qualities embedded in the Hebrew language. By analyzing four case studies, I will shed light on the various cultural and aural references through which the staged Hebrew was performed. The sonority of

the language, I argue, did not generate an autonomous semiotics, but rather created sounds that charged the drama with profound communal emotive dimensions.

Hebrew, in this book, refers to a specific language attributed—politically, ethnically, mythically, and historically—to Jews, and constitutes an aesthetic declaration through which national, prototypical representations are rendered. It is, by and large, through theatrical iterations that the convergence of these categories transpires. Despite its cultural specificity, this study should not be mistakenly regarded as circumscribed within an analysis of the exclusive sociolinguistic and historical circumstances under which the Hebrew language was renewed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Rather than operating as a semantic vehicle, Hebrew presents here a paradigmatic example for the analysis of language performance through its phonetic and musical enactments.

As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, by mobilizing synagogal vocal practices on the stage, the Modernist Hebrew theater created a precise and concise language that took into account the vernacular diasporic Jewish communities, borrowing regional Jewish dialects and shared speech habits. The theatrical manifestation of the Hebrew language displays the aural virtues of language performances, substantiating the ability of the language to reach the hearts and minds of its audience. This book, thus, frames the spoken language in the Modernist Hebrew theater as grounded on multiple modalities of expressive practices, such as spoken Hebrew and Jewish liturgical sensibilities supplemented by Yiddish intonation and other vernacular accents, and positions it vis-à-vis prevalent theatrical practices.

Melodies of the Hebrew Language

At the core of this book there lies a particular historical moment whereby Jewish sonority converged with Modernist theatrical recitation techniques. The Zionist cultural enterprise entailing the renewal of the Hebrew language presupposed that in order for Hebrew to gain “life” as a colloquial language, it must become a language of game and play; its semantic structure and phonetic properties were the pliable materials necessary for its frisky activation. This understanding fostered artistic explorations with the Hebrew language and its elocution, experimenting with existing and novel creative models.⁹ *Habima*’s recitation style, vocal delivery, and musicality of speech demonstrate the innovative theatricalization of the language.

Initially established as one of the ethnic theater studios directed by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, *Habima* studied

and worked with some of the most important theater professionals within the network of the Moscow Art Theater.¹⁰ The most significant voice and recitation classes delivered in *Habima's* training studio that contributed to *Habima's* forming of their professional artistic identity were taught by Prince Sergei Mikhailovitch Volkonsky (1860–1937), the director of the Imperial Theaters from 1899 to 1902. Volkonsky's lessons with *Habima*, which took place approximately between February and December 1919, included both theoretical lessons and practical workshops on stage speech and language diction.¹¹ These lessons were based upon two of Volkonsky's publications that derived from the theories of François Delsarte (1811–1871)—a French performance theorist and pedagogue—entitled *The Expressive Word* and *The Expressive Person* (1913).¹² Thus, in order to understand the guiding principle of *Habima's* vocal training we must briefly venture into Delsartism—a theatrical approach that gained popularity between 1880 and 1920.

The father of Delsartism, François Delsarte, designated a philosophy and technique of animated movements that developed from “mythic posing,” in Carrie J. Preston's terms.¹³ Like many key Modernist artists, writers, and thinkers, Delsarte retreated into mythical tropes, biblical typology, and ritualistic modes of expression.¹⁴ The centrality of myth to Modernist art, Preston explains, is an appeal to the ahistoric, and the foundational at a time of social fragmentation.¹⁵ The Delsarte voice system seemed especially appropriate for *Habima*, which based its initial repertoire upon Jewish myths, performing biblical stories, legends, and tales in Hebrew, and utilizing them for reflecting and propagating the Jewish national revival.

Although Delsarte is mostly remembered for his method of actor training, his early research was primarily devoted to voice and speech.¹⁶ Julia A. Walker describes the main innovation Delsarte introduced in his work on voice and speech. According to Walker, Delsarte “redefined the ruling paradigm of vocal instruction, shifting its emphasis away from a concern with vocal technique per se to an interest in the use of such techniques to engage the audience's understanding and emotional experience of the dramatic or musical piece.”¹⁷

The Delsarte musical training method provided a way of analyzing the aural features of the performed drama, from inflection and intonation to rhythm and phrasing, and of assessing their effect upon auditors. In this way, Walker writes, actors wishing to represent with “scientific accuracy” the various emotional states of their characters could appeal to the natural laws of expression recorded by Delsarte.¹⁸ As E. T. Kirby writes, vocal gestures, thus, were codified in terms of a simple, extensive, highly unified tripartite system: a neutral state was contrasted with the eccentric (active or forward) and with

the concentric (passive or backward).¹⁹ Walker explains that in tandem with his mythical gestural scheme, singers who trained with Delsarte were taught to sustain the most dissonant or unresolved note (for instance, the subdominant fourth) in the musical phrase.²⁰ As Walker writes,

Realizing that the effect of a sustained emphasis in a musical phrase might be comparable to sustained emphasis of a spoken phrase, he [Delsarte] postulated rhetorical effects that could enhance an audience's engagement with spoken language. Intonation, for example, indicated which words were to receive emphasis—whether by vocal force or, as Delsarte was fond of pointing out, by a softness which elicited the audience's desire to hear more (both literally and figuratively).²¹

Thus, similarly to music, emphasis could be used in speech to linger on a phrase in order to increase the audience's desire to hear it to conclusion. Paraphrasing Archibald MacLeish's famous poem "Ars Poetica" (first published in June 1926), we could say that voice, according to the Delsarte method, should "not mean but *be*."²² In other words, meaning is to reside as much in the way words were declaimed as in the semantic content of the words.

The Delsarte voice method, as interpreted and taught by Volkonsky, informed both Stanislavsky, who invited Volkonsky in 1912 to teach oratory and rhythmic recitation at the Bolshoi Opera and the MAT studios, and Yevgeny Vakhtangov—the renowned Armenian Russian director who worked with *Habima* and attended Volkonsky's workshops at the Moscow Art Theater. However, for *Habima*, Volkonsky's lesson had an additional impact. As Elena Tartakovsky explains, Volkonsky, like many of the teachers in *Habima*'s dramatic studio, did not understand the enacted Hebrew, and often could not grasp the cultural and national signification of the actions. And yet, *Habima* nonetheless managed to produce professional actors who would enrich the artistic harvest of the theater.²³ The dramatic recitation classes in *Habima*'s dramatic studio therefore demonstrate the poetic potential of Volkonsky's recitation technique.

Volkonsky's stage recitation method, which was taught in Russian, was supposed to train the actors to perform the plays in Hebrew. Despite the profound sonorous and lingual differences between these languages, Volkonsky trained *Habima*'s actors to move their facial muscles and to articulate words as if they were reciting Russian texts, thus omitting many characteristic sounds of Hebrew speech. Lacking the aural knowledge of the Hebrew language, Volkonsky could not teach *Habima*'s actors the correct pronunciation of the

Hebrew vowels and consonants; however, he could—and probably did—correct their speech according to the rules of articulation of the Russian language. *Habima's* actors, according to Tartakovsky, articulated the Hebrew texts using the consonants and vowels of Russian speech.²⁴

As I demonstrate throughout this book, the theatrical vocalization of the Hebrew language dramatized the Jewish myths taking into consideration the contemporaneous sociohistorical conditions of its creation. Accordingly, the amalgamation of Volkonsky's classic recitation style and Jewish substrata manifest an immanent paradox embedded in Zionism: established in the liminal turn of the century, Zionism was entrapped in between the progressive stream that grafted the Industrial Revolution, the development of science and technology, and the regressive impulse to return to the national past, articulated in modern mythopoetic terms. This foundational Modernist paradox—defined by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer as the dialectical relationship between myth and enlightenment—engendered a culture that was in myriad ways novel; however, it concomitantly gestured toward its traditional pasts.²⁵

One of the paradigmatic examples for this ingrained temporal contradiction is the decision to adopt the Sephardic pronunciation. Notwithstanding the fact that Ashkenazi Jews were the majority in the *Yishuv* at the beginning of the twentieth century, and in spite of their difficulty in mastering it, the desire to return to the Land of the Fathers and to the ancient Hebrew language motivated their decision to adopt the Sephardic pronunciation.²⁶ For *Habima*, the decision to recite the drama in the Sephardic Hebrew meant leaving behind the familiar rhythmic speech patterns of the Ashkenazi dialect. As this study demonstrates, in order to manifest its nationalistic incantatory function, and support the performance of memory, *Habima's* dramatic recitation replaced the measured Ashkenazi dialect with a melodious speech rooted in the vocal practices of the East European synagogues. Thus, the audience, who were largely unfamiliar with the musicality of the Sephardic speech, could understand the drama through its familiar religious rhythmic manifestations.

Possessed Voices

Deeply embedded in the scopic regimes of modernity,²⁷ the Jewish body—its representation, visibility, and gender signification—has been the focus of myriad studies, within and beyond Jewish exegetical and literary traditions.²⁸ Against the “corporeal turn” in Jewish studies, this book traces the trajectory of voices migrating from their acting bodies—from the theater stage to the disembodied voices aired on the radio.

Habima's theater productions on Israeli radio devised its staged performances as voices suspended by the radio waves, permeating domestic and public spaces through acoustic capacities. The voices of *Habima's* leading actors—familiar on account of their staged performances—gained prominence in the Jewish cultural life, and especially in Mandatory Palestine. Bearing the epithet of “the mother of the nation,” Hanna Rovina, often considered the first lady of the Hebrew theater, epitomized the flow of iconic voices from the fictional theater sphere into the public domain. Rovina’s vocal qualities were enhanced in all of her stage appearances, and her vocal signature became a well-known acoustic token. The admiration that Rovina’s memorable performance received led to her participation at the opening ceremony of the first Hebrew radio station—then named Kol Yerushalayim—on March 30, 1936, in which she recited Chaim Nachman Bialik’s prose poem “Megilat Ha-esh” (Scroll of Fire).²⁹ Thus, although the medium of the radio severs broadcasted voices from their corporeal anchor, in the case of theater voices, it does not generate disembodied voices. Rather, the body of the performing speaker transduces into a metaphysical spectacle conjured by the act of listening and the force of memory.

Kol Yisrael (the Voice of Israel) was, from its inauguration (as Kol Yerushalayim), and up until 1968, the only electronic mass media active in Israel. As such, it operated as a central vehicle for the implementation of the renewing Hebrew language, providing a virtual shared space in which the language was publicly actualized, aimed at “inducing public memories,” as Tamar Liebes points out.³⁰ The daily address in Hebrew strengthened the linguistic infrastructure of the Zionist community, which was, at the time, only partial and fragile, updating the language to fit the colloquial needs of its speakers. On a cultural level, the broadcast was an essential contribution to the fashioning of the identity of the Zionist revolution, connecting the *Yishuv* in Palestine with the Zionist movement in the Diaspora.³¹

Furthermore, the Hebrew division of the radio served as a laboratory for the development of new expressions and for experimenting with various lingual registers and styles of speech. Most importantly, the radio had the power to disseminate the new spoken Hebrew throughout the country, as part of the Zionist aspiration for sovereignty. In tracing the complex interplay of cultural, political, and linguistic factors influencing the radio audience, I wish to study the dynamic relationship between membership in an audience and membership in a community and ask how the radio extended the structure of feeling among Jewish immigrants. Analyzing radio recordings of theater productions, I examine how the bilingual factors break down into detailed sonic associations, through accent, speech cadence, rhythm, melody, and tempo that partake in the shaping of a national identity.

Along with the media transformation, dramatic leitmotifs altered. The focus on the transfiguration of *Habima's* performances from staged corporeality into vocal reproduction enables us to understand the rupture in Jewish life and culture in the face of body-language severance. The transfiguration of the performing bodies into an invisible, yet essential vocal form, is central not only to the understanding of the language-experience of *Habima's* performances, but also for understanding the idea of the body as a medium in post-Holocaust Israeli culture. Implicit in this argument is the analysis of voice not only as a force that animates the poetics of drama, but also as a bodily corpus: the way sound engages and manipulates its listeners through auricular participation, its incantatory function and effect, the sort of conjured presence it summons.

Thus, if theater (in)spirited the Hebrew language, the radio medium transformed the Holy Tongue into a present living memory subsumed within its listener's corporeality. We must not confuse such presence with haunting voices of the dead, as the performance of the Hebrew language was far more tangible and feasible than the volatility of ghosts. The transformation of theater performances into radio dramas entails the loss of the material body, rendering it an ambiguous gesture, shifting between hope and despair. On the radio, the voices permeate into radio waves, becoming ethereal and uprooted; at the same time, the un-bodied voices enter the domestic and public sphere through radio broadcasting, and take up animation supremacies. They are voices possessed by their former embodiments, and they themselves acquire the ability to possess.

In this book I argue that the theater voices recorded and broadcast on the radio served as a fundamental venue not only for assimilating language, but also for opening up a path for social lamentation over the annihilated European Jewry.³² I suggest that while the drama enacted in the Modernist Hebrew theater depicted a fictional world populated by fictional characters, the voices and sounds it staged were structured as a sign system familiar to its listeners from Jewish religious vocal practices (such as cantillation or liturgical singing).³³ In other words, the vocalities in these performances transgressed the imaginary threshold of the fictional, verging on a social ritual. A more general claim lies here—which follows a venerable tradition, advocated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his writings on the emotive role of melody within speech delivery—that the vocal has no fourth wall; it forays from the fictional sphere into the so-called reality, and when the listeners are able to encode its sounds, it draws them into a shared affective communal experience.

Possessed Voices gravitates between two distinct historical periods and narratives: the 1920s theatrical manifestations of the Hebrew language, and

their audio reproductions at times in which the processing of the Holocaust and World War II traumas had not yet come to pass publicly. In this sense, this book challenges Jewish and Israeli historiographical narratives aimed at the “negation of the Diaspora,” in the face of the apparent rupture between pre- and post-Diasporic Jewish existence and the public silencing during the 1950s and early 1960s of the abovementioned atrocious experiences. Rather than provide fixed points of temporal or cultural orientation, the recordings I study enable the infiltration of the past into the present.

The present, as Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht argues, has turned through technological media into a dimension of expanding simultaneities—a “broad present” that juggles concurrent worlds, assuming elusive identities, lacking clear contours. Gumbrecht defines an essential tension that inhabits such an expansive present: on one side lies an insistence on the concreteness, corporeality, and presence of human life. On the other side, however, technology projects a radical virtualization which abstracts the body and sensory contact with the world.³⁴

Between these two powerful vectors, our new present began to unfold. For this reason, digital technologies require critical acts that address the separation of the time and place of the live performance in 1920s from its recording date and the circumstances of its much later audio reproduction and performance. This gap insinuates that the recordings preserve within their sonority the strata accumulated during the ongoing repertoire of their performance. The firming of theatrical knowledge by technological media creates a performative construct by which the “show” could, theoretically and acoustically, be played and replayed. The continuing resonance within the aural cultural sphere poses some fundamental issues vis-à-vis the analysis of the performance: What sort of vocal images did *Habima*’s performances stage in the 1920s? How did this stage language evolve? And, how were these images perceived years later, in their audio reproductions?

Nostalgic “Sound Souvenirs”

Habima’s audio files reiterate aural instantiations that bear an affinity to the staged experiences of the theater. Yet, one cannot avoid asking, is it the liveness that we are listening to, or are those, perhaps, the disembodied voices of the dead that resound through the recordings? Reproduced years later on the radio, *Habima*’s voices bespeak the world “before.” Their cries, lamentations, and prayers belong to a world obliterated in World War II. In that sense, they manifest, through nostalgia, the rupture from a vanished culture.

Nostalgia, as Svetlana Boym explains, expresses a yearning for a different place and time, often one that has passed long ago, or, perhaps, never existed. Coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer as a medical term, “nostalgia” was said to confuse the present with the past, the imaginary with the real.³⁵ The aural traces from the Modernist Hebrew theater, I argue, are objects of nostalgia, as they evoke imaginary affective experiences by intimating a memory of a fictional place and time through sounding iconic dramatic voices, reverberating with a rhetorical topos based upon Jewish sonority.³⁶ Thus, the language and melodies presented in these recordings do not only act as remains from theater productions but also as mnemonic signs of afflicted imaginations from the eclipsed Jewish culture in Eastern Europe.

Friedrich Kittler depicts the ability of sound technologies to retrieve residues from a sonic world, and thus to constitute a cultural repository of audible “souvenirs” from a specific reality.³⁷ The recordings of the Hebrew Modernist theater performances, all produced three decades or more after their original stage debut, indeed present traces of voices distinctly recognized as belonging to a concrete historical and artistic realm, created before the decay of East European Jewry in the Holocaust. These recordings are remnants from voices that belong to a declined world and will, therefore, be explored in this study as artifacts of “communal nostalgia” that conjured up memories among the European immigrants in Mandatory Palestine and Israel, enabling them to process and lament their lost pasts.

The conceptualization of the ways whereby voice reproduction assumes an ambiguous position in between the theatrical tradition in which it was formed and a space of nostalgic reflection outside it, is effected mainly through the notion of “vocal imagination,” extrapolated from Jonathan Sterne’s synaesthetic concept of “sonic imagination.”³⁸ The vocal imagination, it is proposed here, heals the temporal and spatial discontinuity between the voice and its experience in the past, negotiating its reproduction as a creative force for developing a retrospective cultural understanding, and the experiential ground of the interpreter in the present time. The recording of *Habima’s* theater voices reflects a wish to incorporate these voices into the soundscape, underlying the passion for producing their presence, even as disembodied entities.

Probing into the vocal imaginations of theater performance, this book is grounded on performative listening, as delineated in Kafka’s short story “The Animal in the Synagogue,” discussed in the preface. In its modernist context, this form of listening was constructed through its increasing domestication, first by the gramophone industry and later through the radio. This study is thus premised on the idea that listening cannot be detached from the subjective identity of its listener and the surrounding material and social conditions.

Without attempting to essentialize hearing, this study probes into listening as a hermeneutical action that coincides with Theodor Adorno's attribution of recorded sound as one that "belongs to the pregnant stillness of individuals."³⁹ Adorno, in this citation, highlights the temporality of a listening that always awaits a future site for becoming. Performative listening to *Habima's* sound recordings, thus, stems from their capacity to satiate the nostalgic desires of the newly displaced and dispersed immigrant populations for those imagined communities left behind in their homelands, and to reinforce their connection to their mythical past.

Listening to Theater

Ephemerality is the fundamental performative paradigm that theater historiography grapples with. Given the impossibility of overcoming the fleeting nature of the theatrical event, the challenge to access the past is often mitigated through the claim that performance actually "becomes itself through disappearance," as Peggy Phelan convincingly suggested.⁴⁰ Hoping to recuperate something from the experiential dimension of the live event, historians cling onto any remaining or fragmentary relics related to the performance. The scarcity of visual documents renders the attempt to retrieve the sensuous elements of the performance as speculative and, hence, as incomplete. Thus, bringing the past into the present summons attentiveness to hidden dimensions of "performance remains," in Rebecca Schneider's prolific term;⁴¹ to listen carefully to stratified timbres entombed in them. The voices and sounds of the stage that have been preserved may account for such latent strata.⁴²

The sounds of the past are, by their ontological nature, doomed to phenomenological loss, immersing into the permanence of the eerily mute archive. The emergence of recording technologies at the end of the nineteenth century succeeded in recuperating both the fantasy and aspiration to listen to bygone iterations. Recorded voices pierce our present, enabling us to experience, once again, idiosyncratic, specific expressions. In this sense, digital technologies skewed the stringent disjunctions that separated the material vestiges from the "authentic" experience of the performance, producing new kinds of remains, inviting us to reformulate our historiographical approaches to the theater archive.

In this book, I listen to past voices out of their aural remains. This quest resonates historical sound studies in its basic tenets, while proposing another method: within the extensive literature on sound studies and historiography, theater sound is unique in its transmedia focus, namely (1) the recording

and reproduction of the live event; (2) the significance of place to the listening experience and to the formation of a theatrical community; and (3) the ideological aspects of vocal dramatic recitation on the theater stage and on the medium that preserves and broadcasts it.

Recent scholarship on theater history has investigated aurality within the theatrical apparatus. In stark contrast to works that necessitate a filling of the aural void by reimagining the voices that were played at the Wooden O in Elizabethan London, or to those of renowned actors such as David Garrick or Sarah Siddons, this book distinguishes itself from other sources in the materials it explores.⁴³ It presents and studies evidence from the aural aesthetics of the Modernist Hebrew theater, and analyzes them in their artistic, cultural, and ideological contexts.

What does it mean to listen to theater? Theater, as we learn from its etymological roots in the Greek word *theatron*, literally “a place for viewing” (from *theasthai* “to behold”), is defined primarily as a visual event: when we go to the theater we ask for good seats so that we can *watch* the action. However, as an audience, we are equally engaged in the act of *listening* and occupied with the acoustics of the performance space. The etymological roots of the word *audience* reside in the Latin *audentia*, which literally means hearing or listening, and points toward the significance of sonic aspects in the configuration of the shared experience. An audience’s reaction to the *mise-en-scène* depends equally upon the aural dimension, which includes factors such as sound reproduction, reinforcement, and resonance. Listening to theatrical drama enables us to focus on the dramaturgical interpretation implied by the connotative space and the metaphorical meanings that are created by speech intonation and vocal execution.

“Listening,” as Jonathan Sterne maintains, “requires hearing but is not simply reducible to hearing.” “Listening is a directed, learned activity: it is a definite cultural practice,” according to Sterne. Addressing Modernity’s turn toward listening, Sterne credits listening with the development of “audible technique” or a “set of practices of listening that were articulated to science, reason, and instrumentality and that encouraged the coding and rationalization of what was heard.”⁴⁴ Listening is thus distinguished from hearing as a dynamic faculty of perception that is learned, and that is historically and culturally variable.

Following Sterne, I analyze audio recordings of theater productions as a site of cultural production as well as a locus that promotes the accumulation of cultural capital through aurality. I engage with both the spatial production of a unique sonority and the embodied specificity of a vocal phenomenology. The concept of listening is therefore developed in this study as a historical method and theory through which aural strata are incorporated into the subject. I read

sound as a representational medium but, more specifically, I narrow in on the capacity of sounds to materially structure social relations between subjects.

Centering on the extralinguistic performance of the Hebrew language in the theater and on the semiotic shaping of this language to imbue signs eliciting affection, this book undertakes Michael Bull and Les Back's invitation to regard sound as a modality of knowing, as expressed in their edited collection *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Like numerous other resourceful writers in the prolific field of sound studies, such as those assembled in Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld's *The Oxford Handbook for Sound Studies*, Back and Bull advance their core notion of "deep listening," calling for an auditory attention that would trace a myriad of meanings embedded in a distinct sound.⁴⁵ However, the disinclination of these studies to address the visual trajectories inherent in sonic practices and discourses potentially replicates the ocular bias, and eventually reflects an incomplete cultural sensory understanding.

In *The Sound Studies Reader*, Jonathan Sterne defines this sensory partiality as an important identification of sound studies. He argues that this partiality stems from the key terms employed to describe and analyze sounds belonging to multiple traditions and are constantly problematized under academic exchange.⁴⁶ This book aims to overcome this bias by approaching sound within its performative context, and by applying a comparative approach to transmission media. It will show the interaction between voice, identity, and presence on the theater stage and in sound recordings, examining, at every phase, the tools that create exuberant sonic imaginations.

As an analytical historical method, listening is premised on the inextricable reciprocity of subject and object; thus, sound recording sets the historian's physical sensibilities as a central vehicle in the affective understanding of the performance. Approaching sound reproduction technologies from a theatrical perspective implies the reclaiming of the corporeal within the auditory and scholarly experiences, and sets the voice as a dynamic expression that bypasses the barrier of presence and absence, transcending the fictional to tap into the real. This book shows how the ghostlike resonance of the voices staged in the Modernist Hebrew theater resurrected the Jewish diasporic vocal imagination as an integral component in the Israeli soundscape.

This endeavor, however, meets profound methodological intricacies. Despite the awareness of the central role played by the spoken word in dramatic arts, theater and performance scholarship have not hitherto developed a critical vocabulary that would capture how actors sounded. Regina Bendix points to the exclusivism of musicology, prompted by its resorting to an esoteric system of notation for the study of voice and aural performances. She argues that an interdisciplinary approach to sonority of performances

was, until recently, sporadic, as anyone not conversant with musicological terms and notation would hesitate to participate in the discourse, or would, rather, defer to the authority of an expert in the field.⁴⁷ This book attempts to contribute to the fashioning of a terminology that might aptly describe and analyze the theatrical aspects of dramatic vocal recitation.

However, listening to theater on sound recordings generates a completely different experience than that of listening inside a theater house. In stark contrast to the ephemeral performative experience in the theater, in the case of recorded sound, digital and analogue technologies preserve and reiterate ad infinitum transient instantiations. Yet, due to the transient nature of the performative event, we don't know how close the audio recordings are to the live performances they document. The art and manner whereby deploying sound technologies mediate, translate, intervene in, and alter modes of performance and listening are often neglected. This book aims to contribute to the consolidation of a methodology that poses the digital audio collection as a dynamic, fluid repertoire subject to continuous transformation over time. It examines the fluctuation and bifurcation between the time and place of the live performances and their recorded reproduction in order to understand the reverberation of these Jewish vocalities vis-à-vis the immigrant society in the Israeli cultural sphere.

At the core of this research there lies an extensive archival fieldwork conducted in theater and sound archives in Israel and Europe, from which visual and textual evidences related to the scenography, creation processes, and critical reactions to the performances are studied. Each audio recording is examined in relation to three dimensions of resonance: (1) as a trace of theater performances produced during the 1920s, each audio recording is analyzed in both its theatrical and its social-historical context; (2) as sound reproductions of a theater events, this study considers how the perception of the performed voices, and of the Hebrew enacted on stage, is altered by their transformation from a staged performance into reproduced, apparently disembodied, recorded voices; (3) the study examines the resonance of the staged voices in relation to their much-later audio recording circumstances. Befitting a cross-media study, this work applies a comparative approach to its subject matter. Its primary interest is the reverberations and alterations in the vocal imagination echoing on the stages in Europe and (pre-state) Palestine during the 1920s vis-à-vis its replication, nostalgic enactment, and perception on the radio as disembodied sound reproductions made during the 1950s and 1960s, within a different cultural orbit.

In listening, as Deborah Kapchan writes, “method *involves* practice,” in which the scholar becomes a resonating instrument letting his sources permeate him, much as in the case of spirit possession.⁴⁸ Listening positions

the subject simultaneously as connected with the performed sounds and as distant from them. Accordingly, my listening is aimed not only at studying the source—the voices of the theater performances—but also at making it a resource. The audio recordings are, hence, examined as vestiges of the theater performance created in a specific sociohistorical context; as sonic instantiations, manifesting a distinct vocal aesthetics; and, as artifacts of nostalgia.

The four chapters comprising this book are devoted to four case studies, unfolding according to the chronological order of the productions. Each chapter tells a different fragment of the story and, together, they comprise a melodious plot line entangled in the twentieth-century catastrophe that befell the European Jewry. The first chapter focuses on a 1931 commercial recording—produced in London during *Habima's* years as an itinerant theater troupe—of Hanna Rovina performing the Messiah's mother lamentation from *The Eternal Jew* (1919/1923), a dramatic legend by David Pinski. This play is based on an ancient Jewish legend according to which on the very day of the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, the Messiah was born. The recording sounds Hanna Rovina delivering a lamentation over her son in a trembling voice which evokes sonic associations to synagogal liturgies. Specifically, this lamentation mostly draws on the synagogue service of the Ninth of Av (Tishá' b'Av), commemorating the destruction of the first and second Temples.

This chapter focuses on the vocal representation of grief as an essential phase in the national path of redemption. Probing into Rovina's aural sensibility, the opening chapter asks how it resonated with the roving experiences of *Habima* in tandem with the wanderings of Jewish immigrants. It examines how the syntax of decline and revitalization in the mythical drama crosses the fictional threshold and penetrates, through liturgical vocalization, the Modernist Jewish realm of territorial displacement and cultural uprooting. The trajectory of this chapter follows three performative occasions in which Rovina performed the lamentation in fluctuating historical circumstances: *Habima's* staging of Pinski's play in Moscow; Rovina's recitation before the German Jewish theologian and philosopher Franz Rosenzweig at his Frankfurt residence in mid-January 1928, during *Habima's* German tour; and as issuing from the 1931 commercial record, delinked from the *Habima's* theater performances. The chapter posits that the liturgical melodies woven into this monologue endow the drama with communal and national meanings that bind the audience through their religious communality.

The second chapter focuses on the creation of the Jewish community by the enactment of a shared rhythmic pattern, as manifested in a 1965 sound recording depicting *Habima's* third staged production: a performance based on *The Dybbuk*, or *Between Two Worlds*, written in Russian (between 1914–18) by folklorist and ethnographer Shloyme-Zanvl Rappoport (1863–1920) under the

pen name S. An-sky, and translated into Hebrew by Chaim Nachman Bialik. *Habima's* 1922 production of An-sky's play was renowned for its use of the materials collected in his ethnographic expeditions (1912–14). Its dramatic scenes feature religious rituals, folk songs, tunes, local stories, and social habits customary to the Jewish life that, within two decades, would vanish forever from the European cultural scene. This chapter charts the trajectory of the adaptation of voices and sounds associated with Jewish communities to the theater stage, and finally, of their transmutation into disembodied acousmatic voices in the 1965 audio recording. At the center of this chapter lies the recurring melodious rhythmic pattern governed by dynamics of “rise-fall” as a reflection of the messianic politico-theological idea whereby redemption may only emerge after it passes through despair, grief, failure, and calamity.

Probing into shared rhythmic speech patterns, this chapter explores the mode whereby the shift from the stage to the radio reflects and propagates the conceptual and performative alteration in the notion of “community.” Following Freddie Rokem, this chapter proposes that the dramatic rendering of the communities documented by S. An-sky and utilized by *Habima* in 1922, metamorphoses, in the 1965 radio reproduction, into a public lamentation—a *communitas* of mourning—over these demised communities.⁴⁹ In this sense, we could, perhaps, suggest an interpretation according to which many Jewish immigrants, mostly refugees from Europe and survivors of the Nazi atrocities, were, in this sense, possessed by nostalgia for these sounds.

The third chapter of the book discusses a 1961 recording of a radio adaptation of *Habima's* 1925 performance of Halpern Leivick's play *The Golem*, directed by Boris Illich Vershilov. In this chapter, I focus on the aural materialization of the emptied interval that amalgamates the “rise” with the “fall.” Regarding the creation of the golem as a figuration of “the revival of the Hebrew language,” I argue that *Habima's* theatrical shaping of Hebrew in *The Golem* marks a paradigm shift in their approach to dramatic recitation that reflects transformation processes entailed in the troupe's experiences of immigration and displacement. Furthermore, as I demonstrate in this chapter, when mediated as ethereal voices broadcast on the radio, the aural reproduction of *The Golem* subsumes a nostalgic reflection on the revival of the Hebrew language, this time as the medium that resuscitates the obliterated European Jewry.

The Golem was broadcast on the Israeli national radio during the Jewish New Year holiday in September 1961, a few weeks after the denouement of the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem—an event that was extensively covered by the Israeli radio.⁵⁰ During the course of the trial, Israel's national radio broadcast hours of testimonies by Holocaust survivors who, for the first time, unfettered their silence to bear witness of what befell “there,” thus metamorphosing from mute living bodies in the Israeli public sphere into broadcast “disembodied”

speech. This chapter analyzes the sound recording of *The Golem* as a fictional reaction to the radio mediation of the Eichmann Trial, and to the representation of trauma on the radio, by underlying the split between voice and body, and pondering on the moral justification of physical retribution.

The fourth chapter presents a 1952 radio recording of a 1928 theater production of the Russian biblical play *Yaakov and Rachel* by Nikolai Aleksandrovich Krashennnikov, translated into Hebrew by Avraham Shlonsky. This play was adapted to the stage and directed by former *Habima* member Moshe Halevy, and performed by the *Ohel* theater—an amateur theater troupe that worked under the patronage of the General Labor Federation of Jewish Workers in Mandatory Palestine (*Histadrut*). The vocal aesthetics in this recording are intriguing: despite the fact that all the participants in this production were Jews of Ashkenazi origin—mostly newcomers from Eastern Europe—the actors’ speech imitates an Oriental accent and intonation. More specifically, they perform their text in a melodious, rhythmic, dramatic declamation that alludes to the liturgical cantillation of Yemenite and Sephardic Jewish traditions.

Unlike the previous chapters, this chapter presents sounds and rhythms that were new, foreign, and unfamiliar to the *Ohel* actors who performed them. Probing into the experience and meaning of performing sounds imported from Arab cultures, this chapter examines how Jewish immigrants perceived and performed Hebrew against the backdrop of the Zionist diachronic historical narrative of the Jews’ “return” to their origins in the Promised Land. The idea of nostalgia is articulated here as the longing for an imagined biblical land that portrays the roots of Jewish immigrants in Palestine. Analyzing recorded fragments from *Yaakov and Rachel*’s radio adaptation, I describe the symbolic aural gesture of the “return” to the mythical homeland—the experience of source—as one that brings to the stage the migratory experience; namely, a sense of displacement, alienation, and estrangement as central tokens of this movement. *The experience of source* is explored throughout this chapter across its various materializations in the *Ohel*’s audio recording: (1) by questioning the ability of the archival recorded source to conjure theatrical performances; (2) through the embodiment of the Hebrew biblical source; (3) in the vocal invocation of the imagery that nurtured the Hebrew performance; and (4) through aural dynamics manifesting indigenous dispossession.

Through the practice of “cross-temporal” listening, this book proposes to redeem the voices of the past from their performative ephemerality. It argues that the adaptation of the live drama from the stage to the radio conveys a lament over the lost expressions of the East European Jewry, invoking them as aired voices resurrecting from the decayed Jewish diasporic culture, perceived by prevalent Zionist thinkers as a disembodied existence.