

Why I Recite What I Write

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I usually introduce myself as a writer and performer of spoken-word poetry in invented language. I also use the term “phonetic poetry” or “sound poetry,” although there exists a wide range of other titles that might suit my work no less.

I guess my phonetic material originates in my mother and father tongues: Persian, English and Hebrew. Nonetheless, in the neighborhood where I grew up, a suburb not far from Tel Aviv, families of immigrants mainly from East Europe lived side by side with Jewish immigrants from all over the Muslim world. The bonding language between us all was Hebrew.

I began a career as a musician, but at a certain stage, took a sharp turn toward art studies. I created a limited body of visual works which consisted mainly of three dimensional puzzles. The titles I have given to each work played an important role in the overall concept and in the “reading” of that work. Those were my first steps toward realizing that text can play a role equal to elements from other media. In a work I presented in 1997 called “The Forbidden Museum” I used, for the first time, action, text, installation and objects. I used speech and body action to present objects which otherwise would have been hanging on the walls of a museum. This was when I realized that I can’t make a separation between text, voice and action.

When I started my way as a performance artist, text was only one of the means I had for communicating my ideas. Over the course of time, I started using verbal material as a pivotal performance tool: the text became acoustic raw material, language became substance, motivating and shaping the very act of speaking, and hence the body’s entire operation in space.

I would like to refer to two aspects of language which my work addresses: first, creating a lexicon of personal, invented language and composing poems from it; and second, developing speech techniques.

I am constantly building and expanding my lingual lexicon. The stages of this work are comprised of gathering language particles—I call them flakes—and writing them down in English letters, (no matter what their source is). Then I sort them into families by a variety of criteria.

The process of actual writing then starts with selecting and arranging different particles into language units of various lengths. These units should have a very solid quality. They should have integrity to the point that they can melt into each other. Otherwise they will drift apart from each other and find their way back to their original mother language. The next and final stage consists of creating sequences out of a few units, and exploring the structure which will contain them.

What guides me in the selection of specific phonemes and the rejection of others is not unequivocal. Among other cultural elements there is an inner recognition, originating in an early phase of my life, where the blend of languages heard at home possessed an illogical, musical-sensual meaning. The question of the parameters used to select the language flakes also applies to the laws of their arrangement.

Sometimes, my invented language begins to resemble the grammatical order of existing languages. In other words, the material “organizes itself” into what rings like orderly sentences. When this

happens, the required work is to decipher the musical - lingual code that makes things sound as though they have a familiar meaning. Once that code has been revealed, I reorganize the material again and again to break away from this code. This “reorganization” might seem like the deconstruction of language. In one way, it is: it’s the deconstruction of the established structures of established languages. But there’s more to it: I have an inner wish to find a different, unique structure, by gliding back towards the origins of speech and the physical experience of producing verbal sounds.

Indeed, I can’t talk about my writing without talking about the verbal manifestation of that writing. Writing, in my case, is simultaneous with speaking the language particles. The production of these sounds can be very gratifying. It is very much akin to munching food: operating the mouth is not so different when it operates empty—that is, when it speaks words—or when there is the presence of some substance—that is, food. The mouth, which serves as a strict checkpoint for food and air, serves at the same time as a tireless machine for the production and distribution of words. In other words, the mouth is the region of conflict for our intersecting mental and sensual functions.

When I use invented language, I’m interested in the overall sound and also how it feels. Sometimes the vocabulary of sensuous associations triggered by the language particles guides me toward a somewhat culinary arrangement of language. The substance of language might be described as “tasty,” and biting down on different language particles yields different “tastes.” When language is used as an excuse for taking pleasure in the operation of the mouth, it undermines the need to use structured language.

And it is that very specific need to use structures—but in an innovative and exploratory way—which guides me back to writing. So here I am left with the question first put to me, but in a reversed form: Why do I *write* what I recite?