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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Freedom in Confinement

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Fine Arts

in

Theatre and Dance (Acting)

by

Noah Israel נה ישראל

Committee in charge:

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair
Professor Marco Barricelli
Professor Stephen Buescher
Professor Manuel Rotenberg

2022

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The Thesis of Noah Israel נח ישראל is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2022

DEDICATION

To Berne Israel (1932-1988), whose artistic power pulses through me with every step.

To Lowell Ensel (1995-2015), who wouldn't let me stop even if I possibly could want to.

To Leslie Felbain, who's joie de vivre keeps me playing bravely through life and who encouraged me to take this leap.

To Dad, Mom, Aaron, Katie, Yoshi, and Teddy, for supporting me fiercely from afar.

To Julia and Blueberry. I love you both dearly.

To the trees and the waves and the flowers and the bees and the red/gold/brown dirt and the sandpipers and the seals and the birds of prey and the mercury sunsets and the weird, weird succulents of San Diego. Thank you for making my quiet life here very interesting.

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File 3. *Napoli* Photo 3, Israel_Napoli_Gennaro3.jpg

File 4. *Napoli* Photo 4, Israel_Napoli_Gennaro4.jpg

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first acknowledge that I know so very little about acting. It continues to remain the beautiful enigma of trying to imitate real life that will give me something endlessly fascinating to work towards for the rest of my acting days. But there are a number of people who helped me get quite a bit closer to understanding it, and they deserve my deep gratitude.

Marco, from one sensitive soul to another, I am so grateful for your breadth of involvement in my journey. You have taken my hand and gently guided it on the road to living with language and thought. Your work with me in the classroom, in the rehearsal room, and on stage have all given me glimpses into the passionate, nuanced approach you have for marrying yourself to the text; which is now an integral part of my technique. Sharing the work of Gennaro with you is a gift that will keep me searching for similarly beautiful experiences throughout the rest of my career. The divine dissatisfaction that graciously lives in me was born out of my work with you.

Ursula, I have always kept the drawing of my 1st year voice near my desk. A distant reminder of what was once a voice comfortable in only a few lanes, now treads fearlessly towards the boundaries of expression. Even in just the last weeks have I grown more attuned to the resonances of my teeth and sinuses. There is so much to learn about the vibrations of our souls and the ways they materialize in the body, and your gentle, caring work with us has given me a huge first step on this wondrous road. Thank you for helping me truly believe that my vulnerability is indeed my strength. My voice, and I, are so much more fearless because of you.

Eva, you strike the perfect balance between specificity of critique and engendering a space to fail. Your kindness and patience with me, especially when I need to be reminded of my

operative words, lifting the ends of phrases, and making good use of all the sounds in every thought, have given me an instrument that (combined with Ursula's work) is excited to make language beautiful and alive in me. To use our percussive and fricative articulators to send our stories straight into the souls of the audience. How glorious it is to make music with simple words. You have given me that gift.

Richard, I didn't think the Meisner work was for me before I came to UCSD. Thank you for completely changing my mind. Getting my attention out of my head and onto the human being opposite me was the simple, profound work that I so desperately needed. That practice of listening continues to grow in me everyday. And yes, I am a king.

Stephen! I knew I loved movement work before I began my graduate studies. What I didn't fully realize was that I would start to understand it as the total foundation for acting work, not just one facet. You have always helped me ponder the most interesting questions about my own habits, pushed me to fail while full of joy, illuminated the specificity of the acting instrument that generates true audience engagement with performance, and have made me more comfortable with the uncomfortable than any other work I have engaged with. You're a big part of the reason that I see myself becoming a movement (acting) instructor someday. Thank you for seeing my humanity, in the classroom and out of it.

Kim and Carla, your belief and support of me as a teacher has given me the confidence and space to grow my own approach to teaching. I couldn't have asked for kinder, more patient mentors when it comes to this part of my development.

Eileen, the Alexander Technique is a beautiful practice that has meant so much to my body, and recognizing the simple power of ease in my system has impacted my work in massive ways.

Gerhard, our time was brief, but the way you brought yoga into our lives was a pillar of my well being for that first year. Your gifts as a teacher were not lost on me.

Deb, thank you for proving to me that I could be a creator. Every question you asked reminded me of the multitudes that exist within my imagination. I have begun to embrace the journey of creation and release expectations due to your guidance. Thank you for the discussions, critiques, chats, and wonderings that keep me dreaming.

Jen, you have been kind and patient at a time when I have felt particularly vulnerable. Your guidance and grace cleared my mind of the cobwebs that the pandemic had instilled. I believe in my worth as an artist because you took the time to share yourself and your wisdom with us. I am forever grateful to you.

To the UCSD Dance Area, you have been so welcoming to me. Eric, Maria, Alison, Sadie, Miguel, Rebecca, I have felt beautiful in a body that doesn't always love back because of your work. Thanks for welcoming an actor in the magical dance studios.

Kyle and Linda, thanks for the music. Life is more beautiful with a song, and I always looked forward to our work together.

To my beautiful class: Lois, Jada, Jordan, Noah, Nati, Grayson, and Henry. You inspired me, challenged me, helped my voice grow in ways I couldn't have planned for. You forced me to figure out who I am. Thank you for your brave work, for I have learned so, so much from

watching you all grow. You all are stars, and I feel so warm shimmering in the light of your radiance amongst the night sky.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Freedom in Confinement

by

Noah Israel נח ישראל

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Dance (Acting)

University of California San Diego, 2022

Professor Ursula Meyer, Chair

What does the body learn when told not to move? Tapemouth Man showed me the beauty of that confinement. How specific can I be with the nudge of a foot, the taps of my toes, the grip of my fingers around the edge of a desk? Storytelling happens on the tiniest of scales.

I did not think I would be working under similar restrictions for the bulk of my grad school journey, but COVID-19 had different plans. Even in an industry that never guarantees work, I took for granted that I would be able to do the work that I came to school to do. I was wrong.

This new normal of forced confinement brought unbelievable hardships, but it also brought unexpected gifts. My teaching style slowed down as I listened to the needs of my students, and in that shift I've begun to develop new pedagogy around the inspiration to act coming out of mindfulness, slowly building back stimuli as we listen with our whole bodies. I spent time with my father and learned how to throw pots, the way his parents taught him. My work became intimate and personal, as I no longer had an ensemble around me everyday, and I discovered the deep-seated dream of telling the story of my grandmother, Berne, an artistic force in my life that I never got to meet. I don't think these gifts would have found me at this time without such restriction.

In Kimber Lee's play *To The Yellow House*, Vincent Van Gogh writes to his brother Theo, "One does not always know what he can do, but he nevertheless instinctively feels I am good for something... I wonder how I can be of use? How can I be of service?" Speaking those words for two unexpected nights on LJP's stage woke the bones of an artist and actor who had really wrestled with their place in the world. I knew I was on the cusp of finding my voice.

That's when I met Gennaro. Gennaro, in *Napoli*, has so much to say. But he is brought to his heels when he recognizes the moments of connection he has been missing along the way while trying so hard to get his own message across. Gennaro forced me to breathe and listen well.

In Hebrew, the word רוח means "breath", or "life", but also "spirit". The word גולם refers to a restricted inanimate being (usually made out of clay) that is breathed to life through prayer. As I begin my next chapter as an unapologetically Jewish artist, I am reminded of the struggles

that Vincent and Gennaro face. How to step forward? When to step forward? What do you miss if you don't listen?

But just like the clay pots I now throw with my father, I am relieved to know that by breathing and speaking life into the uplifted stories that my confined clay גולם body will be service to, I will be contributing to good work by continuing the oral tradition that my ancestors began thousands of years ago. The breath that moves me through the restrictions of antisemitism, of COVID-19, of my aching body, of any confinement that is to come, will set me free. Just like Gennaro, choosing to sit at the table with Amalia, through the night, instead of hiding away. My breath, my spirit, is a part of that lineage, and that is beautiful enough.