Performance as Research: My Work with the Deaf Actors of the Ebisu Sign Language Theatre Laboratory

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Ebisu Sign Language Theatre Laboratory was formed in 2014 as part of the GRAMBY (Grammar of the Body) research project that investigated compositionality in sign language (gramby.haifa.ac.il). The lab is an ensemble of 8 performer-researchers – 7 deaf and 1 hearing – all using Israeli Sign Language (ISL) for everyday communication. Employing performance-as-research methods, they study their own language to explore its poetic and performative potential. The exploratory improvisations combine ISL with gestures and physical theatre in order to create performances that are accessible to the deaf and hearing alike (we do not use simultaneous interpreting). Ebisu ensemble has created 3 original performances so far (the first, It’s Not About Ebisu, played at SBU in 2016), and will begin work on its 4th piece next year. In this presentation, I will discuss Deaf culture, the creative dialog of a hearing director with deaf actors, and the Let the Body Lead the Mind method, which I developed with the actors.

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