



# The Portrayal of Stories at the Playback Theatre in a Time of Crisis

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## **The portrayal of stories at the Playback Theater at a time of crisis**

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Since the recent violence began to engulf us, about twenty months ago, I find myself listening intently to interviews conducted with people who have experienced attacks, who have survived attacks and whose relatives have been either hurt or killed.

I listen to people's detailed descriptions, where they were at that moment, what they saw, what they heard, what the first thing was they discovered, what they did, what they said.

Stories of trauma, amazing stories of people who saved lives and of the rescued – many people whose lives were changed forever in a fraction of a second.

Sadly, new stories are added each day. It seems that the cycle of killing-trauma-grief-pain will never end. Here are some of them:

A soldier who saved the lives of a number of people at a check-post paid for it with his life. A woman who found herself standing alone in a restaurant ruined by an attack, after her husband and her two children had been killed. Only seconds before the four of them were sitting and eating together. Two policemen, who identified a suicide bomber, jumped on him knowing full well they were endangering their lives. They managed to neutralize the bomb before it exploded together with them. A bus driver who pushed a suicide bomber off his bus, wrestled with him and prevented him from pressing the button to set off a large charge. This driver saved the passengers on his bus and protected them. A man and a woman, owners of a food stall, found an explosive charge and moved everyone out of the area before it exploded. A security guard who noticed a car speeding towards a club crowded with people, shot at and killed the driver/attacker before he detonated the car bomb.

And many other cases.

After the wave of terror increased around the world and struck the United States on 9/11/2001, I heard, experienced, saw and latched onto human stories of victims from Israel, the United States and other places around the world. These are stories of trauma, of death, of fears, of wonderful saving of lives, and the common denominator for all these people is: "my life changed", "my quality of life has changed forever",

"my world is different since what happened" – it is controlled by fear, anxiety and suspicion.

The Playback Theater, a place and a space that enables people to tell what is on their mind and see their story from a distance, seems to me to be a creative and appropriate way to process these situations. It is a place where it is possible to cope with the traumatic stories by becoming attached to the creativity and the images.

The "Playback" is a place to cooperate with other people. "You can talk and people will listen to you", "you can tell stories", you can do a presentation, reconstruct, remember...and mainly you can process all the "expunged" details.

The trauma, the tough experience and the pain – is the dominant event. The traumatic story continues to accompany those who were hurt, and the circle close to them (family, friends) as well as all the "passive" spectators who witness the event from a "distance".

The trauma around us is alive and kicking, is echoed and reflected to us from every place every day, and even raises old trauma from the past. There is nowhere to escape to, so we have to find a way of coping and to process what comes up.

While writing these lines there is a memorial service on the television. Exactly a year has passed since the attack on the Dolphinarium in Tel Aviv. A suicide bomber blew himself up amongst a group of young boys and girls aged 14, 15, 16 and 17, who were waiting to go into a dance club. Twenty one children were killed and 150 were wounded, some severely. One mother lost her two only daughters that day – one aged 14, the other aged 15.5. She was left on her own. It is an inconceivable story. Hard to understand. This is the chief characteristic of the trauma stories. They are inconceivable, impossible in terms of human experience and difficult to digest.

In trying to understand the traumatic stories, I thought it wise firstly to define the concept 'trauma'. The concept trauma is borrowed from the field of surgery. It originates from Greek and means 'wounding and hurting that stems from penetrating into the body tissue'. Physical trauma is characterized by injury and damage to the tissue and it affects the whole organism.

Mental trauma is injury to the mental tissue, where the element of damage to the body tissue is absent or marginal and, here too, the effect is on the whole organism, both on the physical and on the sensual and emotional level.

**In the case of mental trauma, emotional shock is caused that is interpreted by the person as endangering his/her security, mental balance, honor, health and sometimes even his existence as a person.**

Thus the traumatic event becomes a break in the time sequence, between the before and the after, and indicates the collapse of the structure of the self (Bebyakar, 1989). The traumatic experience is the result of the encounter between a threat that forebodes tragedy and a chaotic personal experience. The result of this encounter is a very severe experience of loss of autonomy and blurring of the sense of self as it was experienced before.

There are two focuses of attention in the literature dealing with research into trauma. One deals with the causes of trauma and the other with the response to trauma and its results.

Krystal (1968) focuses on the causes of trauma and distinguishes between trauma in the individual's mental reality, without needing a threatening, objective, external cause, and objective situations, which by their quality and the distortion that characterizes them, are liable to be potential for anybody.

Lepanche and Pontalis (1967) define trauma by means of its intensity, the organism's inability to respond to it in an appropriate way and the long-term effects of the event.

#### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.)

According to the definer DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), this is a syndrome characterized by symptoms after exposure to an external traumatic factor connected to death or the threat of death, serious personal injury or **observation** of a happening of this sort threatening somebody else. A traumatic response to an event of this type is a feeling of extreme fear and helplessness. The symptoms which characterize the results of exposure to trauma include:

1. Re-experiencing the traumatic event

Through nightmares, pictures or memories of the event during waking hours, illusions, hallucinations, dissociated episodes like flashbacks, traumatized people re-experience the events in the present.

2. Avoidance of stimuli connected to the trauma and emotional numbness

There is avoidance in the spheres of thinking, feeling and activities like: amnesia linked to trauma, avoidance of stimuli that symbolize the trauma, reduction of interest in pleasurable activities and in inter-personal contacts.

3. Symptoms of increased wakefulness

Sleeping disorders, sensitivity to noise, concentration problems, memory difficulties, physiological wakefulness when exposed to events that recall the trauma and outbursts.

4. General symptoms

Accompanying the syndrome – depression and anxiety.

It is worth pointing out that the State of Israel is in trauma. It is a traumatic period for a whole nation, whose destructive results and injuries cannot be estimated yet. A whole nation watches television. In Israel almost nothing is hidden. All the details are shown time and again on television. The place where the event took place is shown, survivors and witnesses are interviewed at the place itself while the evacuation of the wounded is being filmed. The work of the rescue crews collecting every piece and remnant of blood and more is shown. Honking ambulance are shown, casualty rooms in hospitals, the families of the victims are interviewed, doctors, police commanders, and so forth.

Prolonged watching by the public of horrendous happenings raises the level of anxiety and foments a sense of living in uncertainty. Watching over a period of time certainly leaves its mark on each and every one of us.

Others claim that not everyone exposed to a traumatic event develops a mental disorder. This approach is based on the vulnerability/pressure model, a multi-factorial model that recognizes the importance of social and cultural factors and concrete

reality factors in creating the disorder, but does not overlook the factors connected to the individual suffering from it. (Witztum et al., 1996).

Symptoms of mental pressure that appear in traumatized people stem from the conflict between the wish to deny terrible acts and the wish to announce them out loud for all to hear. This is the central dialectic of mental trauma, which compels the traumatized person to fluctuate between a feeling of numbness and re-experiencing the event, and gives rise to a change of consciousness such as dissociated situations (Herman, 1994). In psychiatry, the severance between the brain and emotion and free association is called alexithymia.

It is free association that enables us to create, experience, go with the flow and use our imaginations in an unmediated way. After a traumatic event it can return us to the scene of the event. The alexithymia – cuts us off from free associations so that we do not experience the trauma again and again, but renders our lives restricted, impoverished and uncreative. Soldiers suffering from shell-shock have testified that their lives have become impoverished and restricted because of alexithymia – the detachment.

This detachment, which sometimes lasts for many years, is exercised in order to survive a traumatic experience. The detachment leads to a restriction of activities, to focusing on the need to exist, in order to ease the trauma experience, until the person is able to process what has happened and cope with the experience from a secure place.

Creativity can be used to gradually restore the person's connection to his/her imagination and make the link between intellect and emotion, which will bring him/her back to his/her life. Working creatively can reactivate the free associations and connect the person to his/her creativity. By working on personal stories, for example, the person can begin to make connections between intellect and feeling.

### The Playback Theater – general rationale

Playback Theater – performance structure and basic principles:

This theater is based on the audience. Stories told by the audience are listened to and receive creative expression on stage.

A group of actors and a conductor are at the disposal of members of the audience, who come to see an unusual performance. There is no subject or text prepared in advance. The members of the audience realize very quickly that stories from their lives are the focus, and the actors, conductor and other members of the audience are there for them and even share very similar stories. A feeling of cooperation and togetherness begins to build up during the course of the performance, when the audience/participants understand they are in a safe place in which other people will listen to, accept and reflect their stories, displaying total respect and without passing judgment. With the correct direction, engendering a sense of security, people will come up with heart-wrenching stories.

Characteristics of the group in which I participate:

The structure of the Playback Theater group in which I act ("Playback" Tel Aviv, under the direction of Aviva Appel):

The conductor begins with a few words. After a short movement sequence each actor tells a personal story that the group reflects without choosing characters. Afterwards, the conductor invites the members of the audience to get to know one another and sometime to tell a brief story. The actors interpret the stories in short theatrical forms. After that the audience is invited to tell stories.

The storyteller comes up on stage, sits down next to the conductor, and while telling the story selects actors to act out the story as well as other figures who are important to him/her. Sometimes the conductor asks him/her what he would like to derive from the story or if there is something that did not happen that he would like to have happen. Once he/she has finished telling the story, all the actors in the group stand in a circle for a few seconds, and then we begin to prepare a 'stage' and stand "frozen" in preparation for portraying the story. At the end of the scene the actors turn to the storyteller. Generally the conductor asks the storyteller how he/she feels or whether he saw things in the performance that reminded him of his story. Sometimes a scene is added at the conductor's instruction.

At work sessions of the group of actors, the conductor and musician, we generally work on our personal material, tell stories and present our stories.

Our theater group has been working together for more than ten years. We have developed and matured and even delved deeply into stories and processes that each of us has undergone and is undergoing. There is no doubt that the length of time we have been working together contributes to the feeling of togetherness and confidence and this gets transferred to the audience.

Over the years the stories we have portrayed demonstrate the group's containing capacity. Stories now coming up at performance are becoming more and more serious, more profound and more meaningful. The stories presented over the last two years have reflected the situation in which we live more and more. There have been lots of stories of traumas of different kinds, from road accidents to divorce, fainting, forgetfulness and actual stories about attacks and loss.

There is something else that characterizes the pressured situation or trauma:

In our performances during the past year, stories from the audience flowed immediately after we finished telling and reflecting our own personal stories. There is a great awareness to tell and to see happenings on stage. When the performance is over some people have not managed to tell their stories. They generally come back for the next performance. This phenomenon of lots of stories coming up at once is indicative of a situation in which people do not have the patience to wait as well as of their choosing to involve others in their story. Many of the people who attend Playback performances cannot wait to tell their stories and see them performed.

The public meeting with a supportive audience and actors at their disposal generates an atmosphere of cooperation and security. The actual watching of the creative happening and creative reconstruction on the stage of their real story, enables processing and reconstruction to take place from a secure, even pleasant place. Sometimes, a number of new insights arise after people have watched their stories being performed.

It very quickly becomes apparent in the portrayal of the stories that the actors add details that were previously known only to the storyteller, which he/she had not revealed. Moreover, it often happens that there is a close tie and a parallel between the story being told and the actor chosen to act in the story. The collective unconscious is alive and living and functioning in the Playback Theater and helps the actors, the storytellers and the conductor to take the right path as long as they listen to their hearts.

How much more so during a traumatic period, such as the one we are in now? The collective unconscious allows the actors to use stage solutions that can, in various, possibly more feasible, ways make the trauma containable.

The Playback Theater is a "live" theater. The stories are true-life stories. The people who share their stories with others enable themselves and others to be together: storyteller, audience, actors and conductor. The work created by the presentation of the story increases the energy during the process of portrayal, as long as the portrayal is done faithfully, while listening to the storyteller and the heart. What is created is a multi-directional flow that links everybody together. The story reverberates with everybody and creates a portrayal that induces personal associations and stories. Portrayal creates togetherness, and togetherness leads to a sense of security.

The life-stories bring emotions to the surface and enable everybody to undergo the process together. To tell a story, to see it "live" on stage, in the presence of "witnesses" allows the person "to be". The strength to exist resides in the strength to express.

It is the portrayal that enables the success of the playback process. It is cooperation on a deep human level that induces authenticity, acceptance and giving, and legitimizes what we feel. Moreover, the Playback enables people to have an experience of creativity and collaboration through listening. The portrayal is subjective and internal; the truth is in the eyes and heart of the beholder.

For the audience, this energy is derived from the associations and memories that the story arouses. For the actors, the performance of the story in a creative way is a direct link to inner feelings and associations that arose and an expression of all the components together: the portrayal, the associations, creativity and feelings.

Questions that arose during the writing of this paper:

1. As I stated in the introduction to this paper, in Israel the whole nation is in trauma and everyone is connected to the experience at one time or another. As stated, the symptoms vary from person to person. This is also the internal map of our Playback group. All its participants are residents of the State of Israel, and as such, we find ourselves exposed to a traumatic situation both as a group and as

individuals, each in his/her own way. Being actors we have to be attentive to ourselves and to the traumatic stories of fellow group members. I have often asked myself how all this affects our way of working. What is required of us? What ways of coping are open to us? What helps and what interferes? Should the actors distance themselves from the story in order to recreate it on stage in a creative way that can lead to healing?

2. The Playback Theatre gives us the option to tell our story to witnesses. Does this option really help us to cope with the trauma? Does the experiential power of looking at the story being performed contribute to processing the trauma by the storyteller/observer, or does the very fact of re-hashing the details, the experience, have something damaging about it...?
3. I would ask the actor the same question: How does it affect you to go on stage to portray traumatic stories? Does it strengthen you or weaken you?
4. Current traumas arouse past traumas. The present situation forces us to recall traumas from the past, whether by association or when passing by a place that reminds us of the trauma. Some people argue that the role of Playback is to regulate the stories, and to choose some that are not traumatic. Is it right to regulate the evening's stories, to enable people to 'space out' and breathe, or should free associations lead the evening?
5. I often asked myself when would it be the right moment for a person to tell a Traumatic incident that happened to him? Could it be too soon?
6. What about the audience? It seems to be that all of us have a history of "prior Trauma" that include every one in the audience; I ask myself how it could effect them?
7. Is this situation of people telling stories, at a performance, about traumatic events that happened to Them, is something that happens only here in Israel in our group or is it happening around the worlds these days?

I am going to check that through the stories.

## **Stories**

Many stories have accumulated in the last two years and it is difficult to choose from them. The stories are all rich and varied in terms of how they can be expressed on

stage, the experiences the people have undergone, the reactions we got after the performances and the many layers each of them contains.

People who have undergone special or traumatic experiences report on the picture that has stuck in their memory and that is what comes up first. Likewise, the stories that I am presenting are those that have left the strongest impression on me. Many of the stories told touch on stories from my own life. Being able to take part in them has given me the possibility of processing my personal material, coping and healing. For this I am thankful to Playback.

The story I have chosen to begin with is about an attack that took place about eight months ago and was extensively covered by the media. Firstly, I want to present the story as it was told at the Playback performance and the portrayal done by the Playback actors. Afterwards I will present my personal thoughts on possible implications of the story.

K, a casualty officer, told that she was traveling by car with a good friend to a wedding in the north. On the way they were shot at by gunmen. K was badly wounded and her friend was killed on the spot. An Arab passer-by called for help. At the hospital, despite her severe injury, she kept calm and maintained a high level of morale, all the while her mother was at her side. Inside, she was in turmoil but to the outside world she showed "business as usual". The hardest thing for her is that she is still not able to visit the grave or the family of her friend who was killed, and is incapable of visiting his grave.

K wanted to see herself going to visit her friend's grave, and she chose actors for the roles: K, her mother and her friend.

There was a scene of the attack on stage and of K's meeting with her mother, after which, and after some hesitation, "she went" to her dead friend's grave and began to talk to him. She told him how hard it is for her. It is hard to put on a show of being strong. It is hard for her to conceal the pain of him being killed. She told him how much she misses him and apologizes for not being able to visit him until today. The friend cooperated by making a movement, but without saying anything. He joked with her, showed her that he was not angry and then disappeared.

K was very emotional and told us after the performance that she had immigrated to Israel with her mother and brother, after the mother persuaded them to leave France. A few years ago her brother was killed in Israel. She had to keep going in order to

prevent her mother from collapsing. Some months have passed since she was wounded and no physical signs of it are evident.

It seems to me that one of the ways of coping with trauma is to pretend "business as usual" to the outside world. This is a case of what we call the "thermos effect". After getting a heavy blow, it looks perfect and unblemished on the outside, while inside the glass has shattered into fragments.

This applies to K, who tells that towards the outside world she pretended "business as usual", while inside she felt tremendous pain without being able to express it. This caused dislocation as well as making her incapable of coping with the difficulties that arose, particularly with the things she wanted to see in the story.

The "Playback" helped her to experience and contain the pain while she was not alone, to visit the grave together with other people, and together to cope with the loss and the horrendous spectacles. From the awful situation she was in, she made a shift to a situation where, with other people, she can enable herself to cope with situations and problems that previously seemed insurmountable to her.

What is important is that a traumatic, inconceivable event became containable through Playback. The very attempt to understand what really happened to her, where she stood and what she was experiencing, and reflecting this to her, reduced her level of anxiety. We all underwent a transformation with her.

I have chosen the second story in order to illustrate how a current tense and traumatic situation stirs up traumas from the depths of the memory.

At the start of the performance, after our opening that includes personal stories and their portrayal, as soon as the moderator asked if anybody had a story, Y jumped up from where she was sitting in the back row and shouted out that she had a story and she had to tell it right then.

Y told that she has been living in the United States with her family for some years, and had come to Israel to celebrate a friend's birthday with her. On the way to the Playback Theater she passed through the street where the house she grew up in stood. Her memory struck her straight away. When she was five her mother committed suicide by jumping off the roof of their house. While she was on her way to the performance, all at once all her feelings returned to her and she had to talk about them

and share what had happened to her. Y has an older sister, who to this day has not recovered from what happened. She is a depressive and has not built a family life with children for herself. It is very hard for Y that her sister refuses to talk to her about what happened. For Y it is very important to talk about it, but they have not managed to get close enough to each other.

Y asked to see what happens between her and her sister. Actors were chosen for the portrayal: Y, her sister and the house.

In the portrayal, Y told how satisfactory her life is. She has a home and a family. While she was talking she "met" the "house" which tells her about the great pain it carries inside it. It reminds her of what happened. Y is "reminded" and searches for her sister. Her sister is far away on the stage. She does not make contact with her. Y tries to get closer to her, but her sister dodges her and runs away from her and from the house. A chase develops and then a struggle, at the end of which the sisters remain on the stage hugging each other.

What we have here is an example of the different effect of the same traumatic situation on members of the same family. One of them wants to tell the story, to talk, to get closer, reminisce and process what happened, and the other is living a life of avoidance. She does not want to remember or to touch anything that might remind her of the trauma, and therefore she does not want to meet her sister.

I do not know if this trauma would have arisen with the same degree of intensity at another time, maybe it would have. What is clear to me is that the immediacy and the urgency with which the story was told as well as the outburst of emotion are characteristic of the last two years, expressed in the need to tell the story there and then.

The next story is about anxiety and loss of dear ones as well as about loss of control over the situation. In fact, what happens to those dear to us is not always within our control.

H tells about very great fear that accompanies her. She is scared of losing her young daughter (16.5 years old). Her daughter suffered from depression and has been hospitalized a number of times. H is trying to help her return to a routine, to school. Outwardly, H displays strength, but inwardly she is very anxious and full of fears about losing her daughter. The feeling that accompanies her is that it is as if her

daughter is drowning and she tries to extend a helping hand. H is trying with all her might to fish her daughter out of the water.

H chose actors to play her role and her daughter's.

In the portrayal, the daughter stood next to a prop with fabric on it, pulling the black fabric and battling with it. H stood at the other side of the stage, trying to attract her attention by calling. The daughter does not make contact with her. She is focused only on her pain. H tries to move close to her, and after a struggle they are in a situation where H is pulling her daughter with all her might and manages to break her fall really close to the floor. She extends a hand to her and with great difficulty "pulls" her into a position where the two of them are sitting side by side. H caresses her face and says she is here with her and won't leave her and that she loves her very much.

H was very emotional while watching the portrayal. She said that that is precisely what she feels. People in the audience cried. There was a feeling of cooperation and excitement. The audience, together with H and the actors underwent a whole process of pain; a struggle to save and change.

After the performance H said it had been very painful but very important for her to see it. At the same time it had been helpful that we had not tried to make the situation look rosier than it was. It is now clear to her that she will find the strength to help her daughter.

These days the sense of anxiety about our dear ones is common to a whole nation. In Israel it is a daily situation. No day passes without parents worrying about their children who have gone to school or are returning home afterwards. After every attack there is a fixed ritual that only serves to raise the level of anxiety: the telephone system in the region of the attack gets overloaded and crashes. Sometimes a lot of time passes until people are able to verify the safety of their dear ones. Almost every day there is an announcement of "impending attacks" in one place or another, which also raises the level of anxiety. Regular, simple activities like going shopping at the supermarket or sitting in a café or just walking in the street have become a source of tension and suspicion, with people continually looking around them. In Israel today there are armed guards examining bags and purses at the entrance to many restaurants, cafes, shopping centers, shops, supermarkets, recreation halls for family festivities (weddings, bar mitzvah, circumcisions).

About a month ago, I went shopping with my 12.5 year old daughter in a popular Tel Aviv street to buy her some fashionable clothes. We had been planning the outing for a few days. After about fifteen minutes she wanted to return to the car and leave the place. "I do not have a good feeling and I can't see any security personnel, every other person looks suspicious". My attempts at persuasion were to no avail; the fact that we saw two border policemen patrolling the street did not help either. She was scared, so we returned to the car and went somewhere else.

As I have already said, questions raised by the audience also came up in our Playback group. During a very intense period of attacks, about a year ago, we "broke down". While doing a performance, we tried to "contain" a traumatic event that one of the members of our group had been through, but it burst out and "overflowed" into the performance.

We had come to the performance with the sad knowledge that a member of the group had lost her baby after she was forced to give birth early. The feelings arose from a short story told by one of the actors at the beginning of the performance that caused us to portray in depth what had happened. This led a member of our group to tell a story, sitting next to the conductor.

This is unusual situation in a performance for our group. We open our performance with telling our stories and reflect them with short forms without choosing characters. This time the conductor invited the actor to sit at the teller's chair, tell the story and choose actors.

The story:

This actor and his wife had also lost a baby during an early birth and the other group member's story had taken him back to that day and the awful situation they were in. He related how the baby was born perfect, and what was missing for him was that he never said goodbye to the baby because he had mustered all his strength to support his wife.

He wanted to see how he would say goodbye to the baby.

He chose two actors: the "baby" and himself.

In the portrayal the father spoke to the baby, played with him, told him about the dreams he had of seeing him grow up. The baby played with him. Afterwards the

baby told him he was now an angel, and the father put him down to sleep with a lullaby.

At the end the atmosphere was heavy and there was a feeling of: "How do we go on from here?" There were tears in the audience. It was really hard to breathe. The conductor asked the musician to play, and the actors joined in spontaneously, singing out loud. After that we could breathe freely again. And the performance continued.

Was it appropriate to deal with that at the performance? Some people can say it is wrong to involve the audience in this matter. I think it was the right way. The story came out at a time of pressing need. It could not be ignored. We could not put his fillings aside; we could only go with the process accompanied by the audience. I think that the people that were the audience that day had gained a very important things: they took a part in a bigger "family" were they been trusted as a supportive members and there for they new they can trust this group to hold any story they choose to bring. The next story came from the audience with no hesitation, was about a young man who recovered from a big tumor in his had. He lost the sight in one eye and wanted to watch a trip he went to, with friends when bees attacked them. He wasn't afraid because he couldn't see them.

In summary, the questions that arose previously about whether Playback does indeed contribute to our coping with traumatic experiences and with the troughs that remain afterwards are the questions I have considered while writing this paper.

In my opinion, undergoing traumatic moments together has great healing power, and this power grows when it is combined with a sensitive and varied creative process like the one that exists at the Playback Theater. Just as we, as citizens of the same country, undergo tough experiences together, it will also help us to experience together the process of processing them.

When people go through a trauma together, meeting to process it has great healing power. The very fact that people are in touch with the same pain together, in a creative and symbolic way in front of witnesses, looking at the horrors and containing them together, helps to cope with the difficulty. People in the audience do not have to

tell stories, but they are nevertheless participants in the process of coping with the reality.

In this way the meetings and the coping take place in public and at a bit of a remove from reality. It is important for the meetings to be regular (monthly) and in a fixed place. The place should be pleasant to allow the experience to take place in surroundings that feel far from the site of the actual trauma. The permanent setting should give a sense of security. Being together has a healing element because the general feeling is that a person on his/her own cannot deal with the trauma, or get through it. Consequently, people come to meeting after meeting and get to know each other.

I will answer the questions:

1. Actors, conductor and musician must come ready to a performance. To be with the teller, listening with all our heart, no judgment and be there for him to act out of love and empathy. That would help to reflect a story even if it is traumatic or hard.

I think there is no need for the actors to distance themselves. On the contrary- It would help them and the teller to be as loyal and truthful as they can, to themselves and to the tellers' feelings.

2. This option helps heal the trauma. Relive the story by watching it in a safe place with more people around him, let legitimation to this person's feelings, fears or any other hard feelings that he had experienced. He is no longer alone with them.
3. The same for the actor. Letting those hard feelings out would only help processing what is going around him.
4. I think the performance is a reflection of the reality, the actors' stories that day. I think that the evening can be led by the conductor as far as a point where the emotions and the stories will "take over". Our "job" is to be there for the audience.
5. When a person is ready that is the right time to tell a traumatic story. This means that he is saying to us: I am ready to face my fears. The right time is something personal.

6. As I wrote at my answer to question 2, I believe it could only help others as well, and can let them into a path of dealing with their own fears.
7. It is hard for me to answer. But still I think that people would come up with traumatic stories in places where they had experienced them, but maybe not as strongly as in Israel today.
8. More than that I think that it has to do whether the specific playback group would give them the confidence and the safe “holding” place.

As an actor who has been participating in Playback for over ten years now, as a spectator, a resident of Israel and as a teller of stories, I can see how Playback contributes to the reinforcing, holding and supporting of the individual by the many. I see the playback as a live through place who enable people to unload heavy stories and share them with others.

**I can say it clearly with full confidence: play back theater helps to heal.**

The very act of relating the experience and observing it from a secure place and at a bit of a distance, enables people to reconnect with their emotions, healthy resources, creativity and free associations, which were impaired by the trauma. Things begin to flow again. Flow is life and a full life is a creative life.