

In my neck I feel the weight of my behind.” (From a monologue of the hanged“  
(.man in a poem by Francois Villon, free translation, from memory

### **”On “Mother Tongue**

I hang myself upside down, sucking milk from an intravenous tube. My“  
mother’s voice, singing a Yiddish lullaby, bursts forth from a speaker in my  
navel.” This is how Hadas Ophrat describes the work he exhibited in Berlin in  
2001. Later on, in his book “Ever Never” (Gvanim, 2004), he would write “In  
my mind milk is always related to blood. Mother’s milk and the blood  
relationship [...] the fact is that when you milk a cow or sheep to the end,  
”.blood comes out

Hadas Ophrat strives for independence and autonomy. In “Milky Way” he  
embodies an entire kibbutz, and here he makes do with a family unit – a  
mother and her son. He recreates and merges the blood/oxygen connection  
between the mother and her fetus, with the relationship between mother and  
infant, and reduces them to a pseudo-medical mechanism. Not only does the  
IV bag warrant such a description, so does the entire concept of replacing a  
natural (disabled) system with an artificial system. Yet what happens when a  
“malfunction” isn’t biological but rather “philosophical-emotional,” and the  
“false mother” cannot solve the problem, but rather (like any art at its best)  
.expose it in its full force

The recorded voice of the mother (in addition to her symbolic representation  
as an IV bag) bursts forth from the loudspeaker. The use of speakers is not  
unique to this work. They appear in three other works on this disc (“The  
Laughing Man,” “Self Portrait with Flower” and “Insomnia”), as well as in many  
of Ophrat’s sculptures (from “Hunting/Screen-Sound” at the 2000 Sculpture  
Biennale in Ein Hod, to “Auditory Evidence” at the Avni Gallery, 2005. Even  
the combination of milk and speakers has already appeared in “Sheaf,” which  
was exhibited at Kibbutz Be’eri and Kibbutz Nachshon: powdered milk  
sprinkled on the speakers was sent flying in the air by a live broadcast from  
(.the kibbutz dining room

In terms of artistic language, the use of speakers corresponds with the  
tradition of separating voice from character, as customarily used in the Noh  
and Bunraku theater arts that Ophrat studied in Japan. The speakers are a  
contradiction in terms. On the one hand, they epitomize the futuristic attraction  
of technology, the coldness and emotional cleanliness it offers; yet at the  
same time they contain (and emit) pieces (although, without substance) of the  
.past, with all of its pain and its noise

The technical aspect of “Mother Tongue” consists of a futuristic aura, as far  
removed as possible from the Schlemmeric elegance (Oskar Schlemmer,  
sculptor and stage designer from the Bauhaus School, and one of Ophrat’s  
artistic “forebears”), or even the sterility of an operating room. One minute  
before “take-off” the artist looks like a poor-man’s astronaut, checking IV  
valves and speaker wires, and the next minute, when he pulls the chains and  
he is upside-down, the skirt is slipped over revealing the speaker underneath  
The mother’s voice is heard from somewhere in the vicinity of his neck. Not to

mention his face that is red with the effort, or the drop of milk stuck to the tip of ...his nose

The artist, upside-down like the fetus, also reminds one of “hanged man” from a deck of Tarot cards. This card (with all the hardship it entails) represents the ability to look at life from a new and different point of view, and even to be reborn. But the hanged man in “Mother Tongue” is also removed and without territory, the wandering (and tortured) Jew. This is not the first time that Ophrat strays from the personal space to the national space. (Even on this disc: in “Settlement” he strays towards the history of the pioneers, in “Milky Way” he conquers a “kibbutz” by walking around the road that surrounds it, and in “Tom” he attempts to recreate the tribal bonfire.) When a work like “Mother .Tongue” is presented in Berlin, it brings along its own historical context

The initials “HO” (Hadas Ophrat) are stamped on the soles of his shoes. It isn’t merely the artist’s signature, or the echo of the Christian stigma (as he once proposed in an interview), but rather a reincarnation of the insignia branded onto the hide of sheep (the slippers he is wearing are, in fact, made .of sheepskin), or even the letter “J” stamped in the middle of the yellow star

Half an hour I’m up there,” (he writes about the hanging in his book, “Ever“ Never”), “give or take. Now the blood starts to rush to my head. My eyeballs feel like lead. Pressure begins to build in my blood vessels. I already had one ”.of them burst

The emotional difficulty recreated as physical pain, is the piece of life with which the work is imbued, the price that Hadas Ophrat imposes on himself for his poetic-technological fable. The pain appears here in its human, and most direct, form. It isn’t the glorified pain of “Settlement,” or the stylized and theatrical pain of “The Laughing Man,” not the bored-amused philosophical endurance of “Milky Way,” and not the *ex post facto* lyrical pain of “Tom,” nor the symbolic pain of “Blind Journey to Barcelona”, and for this reason, does it .move me so deeply

Marit Benisrael, March 2005