

OPPONENT'S RECOMMENDATION FOR THE MASTER'S THESIS:

Attachment to the state magister's examination report.

STUDENT: SCHREZENMEIR Theresa

Branch of study: MA DOT

Opponent: Ewen McLaren

Theresa Schrezenmeir's Master's thesis reflects on her thoroughly committed exploration of dramaturgy based on unexpected relations between people and things. These things can be both haptic (touchable) and intangible (principles, physical laws, themes, vibrations and more). The thesis describes how she explored interrelations to the maximum extent possible, in ways that are dehierarchized, freed from conventional categorizations and received knowledge. The associations Schrezenmeir explores between these elements are elementary yet groundbreaking, opening territory for readers to imagine new ways of narrating, to perceive and explore being and perceiving through organizing performance and shared cultural activity.

Appropriately, Schrezenmeir uses form to reflect content in these writings. The reader that follows repeated requests to use word and letter games, images and photographs in rich appendices soon finds her or his own perceptions shifting. In the main text of the thesis Schrezenmeir also constantly provides a series of well-researched thoughts and quotes by philosophers, archeology theorists and other researchers and artists considering ways of exploring (forgotten or) new and unexplored combinations of materials, interweaving ourselves and the world of things around us, things both natural and manipulated or "manmade".

It is refreshing to read of artistic practice and related research that already shift one's perceptions as one reads about them on the page. First we are shown how dramaturgy can weave together different associations into what she calls **textures**, then we are shown a remarkable series of intercombinations of possible meanings in everyday objects, sounds and contexts. Like the viewer of Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* or the reader of the Strugatsky brothers' science fiction book *Roadside Picnic*, one invests time and effort reading until one suddenly approaches a point where seemingly well-known "objects" (perhaps better described as things) lose their original "meaning" and familiar hierarchy of associations. Everyday found objects and materials around us become charged with new meanings and potentials. The effect is dizzying and disorienting and that is a good thing. (While studying the thesis this reader found the constituent parts of his reading glasses functioning according to new principles, associating them in quick succession with windows, crude oil and plastics, mass production systems, chemicals, the shape of his head, mechanics, and the physics of light but also with eyes of other creatures, gaps and portals and wormholes in the universe...) Suddenly a surprising amount of other overlooked or misunderstood connections can be revealed. Schrezenmeir shows us

that eventually in this way the maker could arrive at a place of "speculative pragmatism": instead of predicting what knowledge to apply in order to understand or make connections, to simply embrace the kind of openness that will lead to new perceptions.

I have a comment regarding the English used in the thesis. I am a native English speaker, but I also have tolerance for non-native English speakers creating "in-between" language cultures or thanks to the influence of multiple language cultures, such as in the brilliant writing of Gertrude Stein. And in many ways Schrezenmeir's use of English connects, in the sense of form equals content, with her research and its commitment to undermining ossified and outdated structures of meaning. Now, there are a few occasions in the thesis where the use of English actually may be communicating the opposite of what Schrezenmeir means to say. For example on page 31, she says: "Few people... gave the feedback...", meaning "not many people", a disappointingly low amount of people. Only by rereading the sentence several times was I able to understand that Schrezenmeir meant to say "A few people... gave feedback that...", meaning "several people", or not just one. Here the meaning is thus very different of what she wants to say. On page 51 she states "As in the discipline of Archaeology, objects are found with a timely gap and bridged with a narration". The meaning of "timely gap" is not "a time gap", a "gap in time", "timely" means "done or occurring sufficiently early", and I think Schrezenmeir did not mean to say this. In any case a work expecting us to shift our perceptions can lose some of its strength if the thoughts it communicates confuse or say the opposite of what is meant. I mention these examples because her research is important and groundbreaking, but the English would need to be carefully edited if we were to consider recommending it for publication.

A question to be addressed is in regards to response and feedback of strangers. I am not referring to applause, nor to shouts of indignance or disapproval. Even the most up-to-date anthropological approaches still expect us to find non-intrusive ways to gather information about people's responses. I understand thoroughly that the starting place for our work has to be the maker and her or his artistic team, and that their observations and responses of team members and close associates critically important. Still, "strangers", or people attending her presentations and encounters who are outside of knowledge of her research surely offer important insight, perspective, and associations the artist and her team may not have seen themselves. Schrezenmeir refers quite often to artistic team members and peers and mentors giving feedback, but this does not often seem to be from attending people from outside the research themselves. I would like to ask the author to elaborate more on attending people's feedback. In particular I would like to ask the author: What are some examples to of strangers' feedback to the project 22. *In a bar. As you are*, feedback that surprised her or helped her decide to take a new direction, because she designed this project to make sure stranger participants would also have direct contact with the materials and things she is researching.

Another point has to do with principles Schrezenmeir articulated halfway through her Master's studies, at the beginning of her second year of her M.A. studies. These are about 1. facilitating only encounters that raise questions and topics, 2. continually updating and monitoring project all elements, and 3. a strategy for taking care of interpersonal relations and focusing down or expanding on the

research process with that in mind. How well were those three principles followed during the second year of her research and how well did they work?

Lastly, it is interesting that the thesis bibliography shows virtually no sources written before the year 2000, with the exception of a book on experimental anatomy from 1991. Perhaps Schrezenmeir is referencing a relatively new meeting of philosophy and artistic practice, but it seems there must be quite a large body of older anthropological or archeological studies available, even ones from feminist, queer and/or post-colonial perspectives. Also, ways of observing and interpreting the world in ancient times might serve to open our minds about associations we need to discover and interweave today. I would like to ask the author about older sources. Even while we are discovering new territories and perspectives, shouldn't we also be turning to older, even ancient sources to help undermine or break down our present-day prejudices? Did she come across such texts? Could she delve more into the experience and observations of past artists and writers as she explores this creative practice further? If yes, what direction would that research take, and if not, why not?

I recommend the thesis for the defense.

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