

OPPONENT 'S REPORT OF MASTER 'S THESIS:**STUDENT: Tan Arden****Study programme: Directing of Devised and Object theatre / MA DOT****MASTER 'S THESIS OPPONENT: Kuburović Branislava****“Arden in Parallel with Plan: Research on Alternative Object and Form in Performative Installation Art”**

MA DOT - Master in Directing of Devised and Object Theatre
Department of Alternative and Puppet Theatre (KALD)

Arden Tan's Master Thesis is well defined in terms of topic and trajectory. It traces her artistic strategies of collecting materials from everyday life and their transformation into artistic material. It also addresses the dynamic of her changing perspective on performance in a long-term journey between visual art and theatre. Most importantly, it discusses using herself as both object and subject of her artistic research, which forms the basis of her visual, material, performative and dramaturgical strategies in both art and performance making.

The thesis maps out in detail her final project in MA DOT, *A Plan Without the Goal*. It also traces the *Arden Series*, her long-term series of works that began during her BA study in Fine Art Experimental Media at Prague College and has continued throughout her MA study in Directing of Devised and Object Theatre at KALD. It also candidly addresses some personal struggles during the process of working on her final performance and the difficulties faced in the shift from art to performance making during her study at MA DOT.

The consistency of using herself as object and subject of artistic research over a long period of time, paired with years of noting down and categorising her everyday life and actions – from the most banal to the most profound – has resulted in a highly idiosyncratic practice, combining body (as/and) object, text, action, and instruction, in performative installations and collaborative and participative performances. The thesis traces this practice in an articulate way, and brings each project in a relation with examples from art and performance, albeit always in a simple comparison with a single existing work of art and/or performance, which it briefly introduces and analyses, and which it fails to contextualise. The direct links made between individual pieces and some iconic works of art and performance fail to engage the rich connections between the 'white cube' and 'black box' that the thesis evokes as a dividing line in simple dichotomy of art and theatre.

This lack of contextualising is the main weakness of the thesis. Reference to theory is barely present in the text and seriously hinders the analysis of the otherwise rich and complex context of this practice. Despite the idiosyncratic nature of the work, there is a historical and theoretical context that relates to it and the thesis fails to engage with art and performance histories, theoretical positions, and contemporary debates in art and performance that would give to the work the context it deserves and help with its further articulation.

Together with this lack of theoretical grounding, the length of the thesis is another issue. The thesis conforms to the very minimum of the required length; it also includes comments from audience members that should have been added in an appendix to the main body of the thesis. It also lacks a formal glossary of terms which would have helped define and further emphasise the main principles and terms developed through the practice. The Manifesto, which concludes the thesis, does propose certain main principles but remains too cryptic and does not make up for the lack of the glossary.

A glossary would have also improved the existing confusion in the thesis regarding some of the current terminology in art and theatre. Most importantly, this confusion concerns performance as a term *and* a field of study; notions of performance art and visual performance are used in the thesis but not analysed (and not always properly understood). There is also an almost complete lack of literature in the bibliography referencing established and extensively theorised and analysed forms of art and performance relevant to this practice, even when it comes to the few given examples.

The pragmatic and rule-based approach to the practice could have been extended to the student's engagement with art and performance histories, theoretical positions, and contemporary debates, but not before and instead of a thorough and extensive study of the broader context of her works.

I recommend the thesis for the defence and look forward to some more thorough engagement with the context of this practice during the defence.

Marking A, B, C, D, E, F (will be filled in during defence):

Date: 12.6. 2022

Branislava Kuburović

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signature