

# SUPERVISOR'S ASSESSMENT OF A WRITTEN THESIS

**Thesis title:** Experiencing Emptiness  
**Thesis author:** Aleksandra Katarzyna Ziółkowska

**Programme of study:** Authorial Acting  
**Programme type:** MA

## **Definition of objectives and their fulfilment:**

The author's aim was to make sense of her lived experience as well as to reflect on her theatre work and authorial acting studies – all this with special attention paid to the feeling and notion of emptiness. This objective has been well fulfilled, moreover, the subjective nature of the topic has been well connected with relevant work of established authors-theatre makers (Brook, Grotowski, Brecht, Vyskočil).

## **Topicality of the thesis topic (and relevance of the selected methodology in the case of a Master's thesis):**

Both the topic and the selected methodology are perfect examples of nowadays issues. The experience of emptiness as well as the urge to fill the void with numerous and not necessarily coherent activities have been common to people of the so-called "millennials" and "z" generations. The causalities and interrelations have not yet been studied enough to bring any conclusions, but the "void feeling" is said to be connected with the boom of internet, social media and overflow of information. Aleksandra's thesis, however, has no ambition to objectivize social phenomena. She studies emptiness from the other side – from within. This given, her methodology – practice-based research and autoethnography – is relevant not only as a tool for the reflection of personal experience, but also as a contrast to methodologies that objectify, generalize and label it. Thus, rather than parroting the menaces of the internets, Aleksandra looks into her unique experience, even through the writing the actual thesis, and says: "I noticed that the main link to the sense of emptiness in this chapter is death. Fear of death, fear of the end." It can be said, that the very writing of the thesis has been used as a methodology. Using methodologies based on embodied thinking, Aleksandra comes to a finding: "We ourselves are the "door" that we can open – with our voice, movement, imagination."

## **Scholarly contribution, originality of the thesis, and its utilisation in practice:**

The thesis is original because it reflects on Aleksandra's unique personal experience. In her writing (as well as in her authorial presentations), she is able to "open the door" with all the

vulnerability that it takes, while, at the same time, she has capacity for self-ironizing. This humorous note lightens the burden for her as well as for the readers (audience), but also points to its heaviness. – This whole approach to practice-based research and authorial creativity is a scholarly contribution to the cultures of academic writing and publishing. In more specific practice, it can inspire students (and even senior researchers) as an example of author's openness up to vulnerability, which does harm neither to the author nor to the audience, but helps the author to find and research a personal topic in ways that are understandable and relatable by the others.

#### **Logical construction and structuring of the thesis:**

The construction of the thesis is logical, because most of it has been written as a coherent piece of work, which can also remind us of a story. The numbering of the chapters is rather unusual for an academic work, which is refreshing. The thesis shifts between self-reflexions and reflexions of the experience with specific psychosomatic disciplines, studied at the Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy. As an attempt to anchor all these in existing approaches and literature, the last chapter connects the personal, work and study experience with Brook, Brecht and Grotowski.

#### **Formal requirements and requisite contents of the thesis, including its length:**

The formal requirements and the length of the thesis meet the expectations. Some objections can be raised to the manners of quoting and referencing sources. E.g. p. 14, where Ivan Vyskočil is quoted through an article by Martina Musilová, even though the original text is well accessible in English and should be quoted and referenced directly. As to the contents, it fits the holistic, processual and reflexive nature of the studies at the DACP. Graphically, the use of stills from video recordings of Aleksandra's authorial presentations are enjoyable.

#### **Level of language, style and terminology:**

All well acceptable.

#### **Reviewer's opinion on the result of the check by the Theses system:**

Aleksandra's thesis is an original authorial work, the development of which I have witnessed from the very beginning. No check by the Theses system, no opinion needed.

#### **Evaluator's overall summary:**

Apart from what I wrote above, I find it important to look back at Aleksandra's thesis writing as a process. She and I discussed her possible topics in the framework of the Thesis Preparation Seminar and it was only later that she asked me to consult her thesis as she couldn't work with her original supervisor anymore. I accepted the invitation gladly and suggested rather strict rules, because there wasn't much time left until the planned defence and because I saw myself in Aleksandra's hesitations when it came to putting something down on a blank sheet, which would later become an academic text – a thesis! The rules and due dates worked partly (for both sides), however, Aleksandra turned out to be brave enough to forget about academic styles and rigorous requirements and to keep making sense of her experience and DACP studies from her personal point of view. The down side of this approach, in which I strongly supported her, was that the flow of her authorial writing made her forget about the MA thesis necessity to relate to existing influential concepts. I was surprised by Aleksandra's readiness and capacity for referencing and quoting theatre-makers she found important – at the last moment. The most fascinating thing on this thesis for me is the fact that the authoress offers a number of remarkable definitions, even though she keeps repeating she "only" presents her points of view and doesn't aspire for any rigorous definitions. Two examples:

"When some friends ask me how I could describe my studies, I quickly answer them: "They are acting studies, focused on individual work, creating and writing our own theatrical projects and monodramas, we

work with the voice, with the body. We focus more on getting to know ourselves and our abilities than on building an acting creation. We mostly work with texts that we have written ourselves".

"This is the final piece that students work on by themselves together with pedagogues, their supervisors. We prepare an etude of about ten minutes on any topic using our own text. We fill this space with movement, sound. We use the "tools", that is, the voice, the body, with which we have worked throughout the year. It's hard to write a concrete definition here. The specificity of Authorial Presentation lies in the distinctiveness and individuality of each of us. We often bring up personal topics, although, of course, this is not the rule."

### **Questions and topics for discussion at the oral defence:**

I would like to suggest topics for discussion, drawing on this extract: "I wanted to write in this chapter what Dialogical Acting is - not because of an academic definition, but what Dialogical Acting is from my point of view and in the context of experiencing emptiness. I think I managed to "discover" here many important aspects, such as boredom, social context, fear of being not enough. I wrote earlier that I consider Dialogical Acting as a good "method" of acting, but I think that above all Dialogical Acting is a kind of good "indicator" of how I can think about my life."

...It is acceptable for the author to write about DA from her own point of view, not for an academic definition. However, Aleksandra uses words that ask for an additional explanation. She puts "method" in between quotation marks (which we all do when the situation forces us to use the word in connection with DA), but what does she mean when she says she considers DA a good "method" of acting?

Q: Could you elaborate on your theatre work outside DACP and describe your experience of being between theatre and non-theatre?

Q: What role does emptiness play in this?

Q: How come you now consider DA a good "method" of acting?

Q: What do you mean exactly by "indicator"?

### **Recommendation of the thesis for the oral defence:**

Recommended.

**Recommended grade:** A

**Date of elaboration of this  
assessment:** 14. 9. 23

Markéta Machková

Name of the thesis supervisor

(date and signature)