



Supervisor's Report:

Alena Kopečná Bc "Formal Experiments in Selected Plays by Tim Crouch" MA thesis

Since the early 2000s, Tim Crouch has become the hub of substantial scholarly interest that has diversely engaged with questions of spectatorship and ethics, experimentalism and the grotesque. Alena Kopečná's thesis explores the contexts and the implications of Crouch's dramaturgical methods, paying particular attention to audience and spectatorship. Using Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* (2008) and Émile Coué's ideas on autosuggestion, Ms Kopečná investigates the ways Crouch's theatre might be said to 'activate' his audiences. While Crouch's work has been persistently viewed through the lens of Rancière – see Bottoms, Delgado-García, Henke and Pilný to name the most prominent – the reference to Coué has some interesting and original potential. The thesis works with only three plays: *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree* and *The Author*, however the decision to limit the analysis to these plays is consistent with the focus on autosuggestion and activation.

The organisation of the project is straightforward and logical. Chapter one works to situate Crouch's work within an ambitiously varied, but associated, set of contexts from British theatre to experimentalism. Arguably, each of these contexts might have been expanded in greater depth. For instance, there are some apt points concerning Brecht, Meyerhold, Grotowski and Brook in section 1.5, but they are lightly touched upon and seem to have little impact on the close reading of the plays in subsequent chapters. There is also something of an overlap with section 1.6 here that might have been better exploited. All forms of experimental theatre share a desire to alter relations with the audience one way or another, and the audience (as Freshwater, among others, details) has frequently been characterised as passive and in need of an awakening delivered by the performance. Crouch, with his acknowledgement of Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*, seems to move towards a different notion of audience and yet simultaneously also uses many of the tools of earlier experimental theatre makers to (as the thesis argues) 'activate' (or maybe aggravate) his spectators. Section 1.6 swivels away from such issues and towards charting the discourse around the audience and participation via Bennett, Kattwinkel and White. The survey of this material opens some stimulating and difficult questions about what is meant by 'participatory' performance and the challenges that arise with regard to agency and evaluation. Throughout the chapter, Ms Kopečná demonstrates a solid knowledge of Crouch's work beyond the plays under discussion and highlights its relation to the development of In-Yer-Face theatre and post-dramatic forms in order to integrate the concepts brought by Rancière and Coué with a sense of spectatorship.



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The following core body chapters are built on detailed close reading and attention to story, form and audience in each of the selected plays. Chapter two puts Rebellato's essay "When We Talk of Horses: Or, what do we see when we see a play?," to good use while examining *My Arm*. Similarly, Coué's description of the force of autosuggestion seems to fit the play neatly. However, I wonder to what extent this is just a new term for the willing suspension of disbelief that must happen for all theatrical performances? Is there any substantive difference? If so, what is it? Chapter three provides a detailed analysis of *An Oak Tree*. Here, as Ms Kopečná notes, the role of the audience is somewhat different. In this regard I would ask about the usefulness of Rancière here – what is activated in spectators by this play? What ends does such potential activation serve? Chapter four treats Crouch's most studied play to date, *The Author*. Ms Kopečná navigates the discussions of this play lucidly. I would like to hear more about how Coué may be brought to bear of this work though. This part of the critical framework seems to ebb away in the chapter.

Final more global points for discussion at the defence would concern:

- (a) how Ms Kopečná sees her thesis in relation to existing scholarship on Crouch that does not play a role here – in particular I am thinking of Ondřej Pilný's reading of these plays via the grotesque.
- (b) to what extent does the argument apply to Crouch's other plays?

Overall, the thesis showcases a wide range of knowledge and a strong selection of scholarly and critical references that are engaged with overtly and often reflectively. Citation of sources displays high level of competence and awareness of discursive conversation. With regard to the more practical dimensions of the work: on the whole this is an articulate stylistically consistent piece of writing. Presentation and format are excellent indicating strong attention to detail.

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade the work either "very good" / 2 or "excellent" / 1 depending on the result of the defence.

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