



**FACULTY OF ARTS**  
**Charles University**

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

**Opponent's Report**

**Alena Kopečná, "Formal Experiments in Selected Plays by Tim Crouch" (MA Thesis)**

The thought-provoking work of Tim Crouch offers ample space for innovative critical assessment, and as such is a most plausible topic for a Master's thesis. Alena Kopečná's work presents a well-structured argument concerning three of Crouch's most important plays, which is well set in a number of theoretical contexts and demonstrates a good awareness of previous scholarly work on Crouch. The writing is generally lucid and elegant, and the chapter on *An Oak Tree* stands out in particular as an excellent piece of original scholarship, foregrounding the relationship between the Hypnotist and the second actor as a metaphor for power distribution in conventional theatre.

Having said that, some of the outlines of the theoretical contexts in the introductory chapter are somewhat hazy. It is unclear, for instance, how the candidate interprets what Rancière refers to as "the paradox of the spectator" (p. 15). More importantly perhaps, the introductory chapter fails to make a clear distinction between an active spectator who is "emancipated" in Rancière's sense and a spectator who is directly involved in the performance; this problem is later reflected in some of the candidate's discussion of Crouch's work (see, e.g., p. 27). The introductory chapter should also albeit briefly refer to the inspiration that Crouch has drawn from American conceptual art of the 1960s and 70s, as much as this is a territory that has been covered in some detail by others.

Related to the point concerning audience participation and spectatorship raised above, the following matter should be addressed in the thesis defence: Tim Crouch is repeatedly on record as disapproving of participatory theatre. How does this scan with the candidate's argument? Furthermore, can his disapproval be reconciled with the way he works with the audience in *The Author* (as interpreted in the candidate's work)?

Another issue that may be addressed at the defence is Crouch's use of technology in *My Arm* and *An Oak Tree* – how can this be harmonised with the principal idea of stripping theatre bare of its fundamentals, which has been discussed by numerous commentators (including the candidate herself)?

By way of a suggestion for further development of the candidate's work, should she continue with her analysis of the work of this fascinating theatre artist, her reading of *An Oak Tree* would



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be usefully extended to a discussion of theatre and trauma, which might also address the prominent use of music in the play.

There are only minimal formal glitches in the candidate's work, such as wrong formatting of references to journal articles, some needless repetition of earlier points in the introductory section of the chapter on *My Arm*, and the somewhat jarring, repeated use of the phrase "the play's message".

I recommend the thesis for defence and propose to grade it as "excellent" (1) or "very good" (2), depending on the outcome of its defence.

Prague, 9 January 2020

Prof. Ondřej Pilný, PhD