

OPINION

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On the dissertation for acquiring the educational and academic degree

Doctor

Academic specialty Theater Studies and Theater Art, 8.4

Author:

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Subject:

Use and Function of Space in the Theatrical Performance from 1968 to the Present Day

Academic Supervisor:

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Sofia, 2021

1. Data on the procedure

The documents and materials presented by Petar Borislavov Denchev meet the necessary requirements. The four publications presented on the topic are reference to the dissertation. All deadlines have been met. The doctoral student demonstrates serious competencies, motivation and a perceptive personal position in the process of creating the dissertation.

2. Characteristics of the dissertation

The volume of the dissertation includes a total of 332 pages. The structure of the dissertation contains an introduction, an exposition in five chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The bibliography includes 98 cited sources, of which 87 in Bulgarian and 11 in Latin.

The introduction presents the intention and hypotheses of the research, sets its theoretical focus and structure. In the main sections of the dissertation: Chapter I "The problem of space", Chapter II "Modeling of space", Chapter III "Modeling of space in the Bulgarian theater: from its appearance to the end of World War II", Chapter IV "Manipulation of space" : stable tandems between director and set designer in the 60s,

70s and 80s of the XX century in the Bulgarian theater”, Chapter V “Occupation and emancipation - the postmodern space from the 90s of the 20th century to the present day”, the author elaborates on the topics mentioned in the titles.

The academic community has before it a comprehensive study that marks the basic concepts, characteristics and evolution of space in the theatrical performance. An important starting point of the dissertation is the presentation of space as a separate aesthetic category. The role of political and ideological influences is emphasized. The echo of processes that transform the aesthetic from visual to social event is felt. Emphasis is placed on the formation of short-term or long-term creative tandems between director and set designer. The author seeks to prove the emancipation of space as its own quantity. Attention is paid to the characteristic architectural elements of the spaces - site-specific. The environment is thought of as a performing object. The dissertation is an attempt to supplement Bulgarian theater studies with a text focused on the problems of space.

Petar Denchev outlines areas of comprehensibility that help us to orient ourselves in an environment of examples, technical terms, author's concepts, theatrical texts, critical reviews.

The author defends the hypotheses set in the text that the space in the theater can be separated as an independent form, that it is a unifying category through which we read the phenomenology of time.

3. Key contributions of the dissertation

The dissertation has indisputable contributions to the systematization of information about the evolution of the stage space, from the architecture to the materials used in the stage realizations. Historiographically, the text has covered a huge field. The work positions the practices and tendencies in the construction of the theatrical space in relation to the modernist and postmodernist ideas. The dissertation can support the analytical view of the set design issues in the context of theatrical research in Bulgaria.

The research work provides enough information for future research projects to those who will contribute to an even better understanding of this kind of theoretical issues. The dissertation is a valuable scientific and theoretical research, with high public, social and creative significance.

4. Notes:

Getting acquainted with the presented in the dissertation of Peter Denchev I would like to comment on some points that I find debatable. I hope that the comments, remarks and some disagreements will be accepted as a benevolent position corresponding to the exactingness of the author of the work.

Petar Denchev, quite understandably, has not the artist point of view of the problems of space, and it is important to clarify that the problems of space are not only artistic

and I find it a plus to think about them beyond visual-aesthetic categories. It is for this reason that the ideas about the ideological modeling of space or the social context and political influences in the space of the theater, which seem to be the basis of the dissertation, could be articulated and brought out more categorically. This perspective dominates the presentation and there the author obviously feels at home. In this sense, I find problematic the title of the work itself, as well as the titles of the individual chapters ("Use and function of space", "Modeling space" and "Manipulation of space"), which mislead us to the expectations for consideration of practical disciplines related to visual-compositional tasks.

In general, the difficulties experienced by the author in refining the concept of space are impressive. He considers it as architecture, building, room, then as part of the stage action or emphasizes its materiality, plasticity and volume. Somewhere the doctoral student talks about theatrical space as a school, community center, theater building, amphitheater, other times about space as an arena for confrontation between naturalism, symbolism, abstractionism, expressionism, conventionality, etc. stylistic devices, and elsewhere as an environment for ideological propaganda-expression mechanisms. All of the above is part of the complex equation of a theatrical event, but it creates the feeling of an out-of-control scope of the study. Such a broad distribution of the problem requires a precise classification and categorization of the elements, which in my opinion are lacking.

Petar Denchev states: "The establishment of lasting (or short-lived tandems) between directors and scenographers is essential for the development of ideas about space precisely because of this basic dynamics of relationships, which has been established since modernism."

I am not convinced that the statement is correct, or at least I think that further clarifications are needed. As it is one of the main theses of the research, I will pay special attention to it. I think that this idea is fully valid only when it is not personified and time-bound. The tandem between director and set designer is essential, no matter who the participants are and no matter how lasting their relationship is. The processes in the field of contemporary art, technology, alternative performative practices, multiculturalism, the development of the screen arts, cybernetics and virtual worlds are no less important than the "development of ideas about space", especially since the 1960s, even Stanislav Lem's ideas about the cognitive ocean and the idea of space as an intelligent environment. I assume that in Bulgaria the effect of these processes comes ready-made as theatrical influences, mainly from the East and the West, without understanding their roots and reasons. Perhaps this is the reason why bright achievements are personified as personal successes without being related to the context from which they originate.

The author claims: "All this is *subjective*, but such is the point of view of the study, such is its focus", when he explains what are his reasons for choosing one or another

tandem. It is quite natural for the purposes of such work to find the appropriate focus and this to lead to the selectivity of these examples. I am impressed by the large amount of work that has been done, but I could not say that the dissertation gives the impression that nothing has been missed, especially in Chapter V. The "subjective" is not a sufficient argument appropriate to the nature of such a research work. The problem arises from the transformation of the theatrical space into an abstraction (because of its blurred outlines) and from the attempt to explain its development (in any of its aspects) through a formal feature - tandems. The use and functions of the theatrical space are an escape point, standing much higher than the stability of the relationship between director and set designer. Such a formal feature can hardly prove anything more than a historiographical presence. We can recall that radically innovative use and introduction of a new stage language through the functions of space are also created by authors who are both directors and set designers. In the context of this study, we can call them the Tandem Man. Do we not remain indebted to such phenomena? In this sense, I think we need precision to the criteria and a clearer justification.

The team work between a director and a set designer is a presupposed connection in the creation of a stage event since Modernism. It is always a partnership, even if it is a one-off. Continuity in the work process does not guarantee continuity in the creative process. Very often the tandems are looking for a new experience, pushing away from the previous one, avoiding repetitions, with which they seem to want to prove to themselves and the audience that they are capable of staging vitality. A tandem is a hierarchical presence that does not change substantially regardless of the number of practices. For the stage event, it is irrelevant whether a tandem meet once and breaks up or is a long-term life and creative choice. For this reason, it is difficult to determine after how many joint productions we can talk about a "tandem", in the sense of the term used in the dissertation, and on the other hand whether it has no reverse effect and leads to routine, predictability and fatigue of ideas. Tandems are often caused by pragmatism, sometimes by family or personal partnerships, but to be as objective as possible, there are many cases in which the leading sense of control and dominance of the director, a form of expression of his power. To bring out the formation of tandems - long-term collaborations, as a sign of introducing a new perspective in terms of theatrical space is insufficiently justified, and the uncritical attitude towards them seems one-sided.

5. Conclusion:

I find Petar Denchev a diligent and creative professional. He has successfully integrated his rich knowledge into an ambitious, thematically and structurally complex project, such as his dissertation. I am impressed by the large amount of historiographical work that has been done. I support the work because of the construction of a detailed overview of archives of political and ideological influences on the theatrical space.

In conclusion, I recommend to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to vote positively and to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to the doctoral student Petar Borislavov Denchev in professional field 8.4. "Theater Studies and Theater Art".

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Venelin Shurelov

Sofia, October 1, 2021