

Foreign Advisor Assessment Review

Review of the Thesis Summary: “The Performativity of Plastic Language in Contemporary Kazakhstan Drama Performances” by Anna Tsoy

Dear colleagues from the scientific community and the dissertation council, it is my great pleasure to present this review of the doctoral thesis submitted by **Anna Tsoi** entitled “**The Performativity of Plastic Language in Contemporary Kazakhstan Drama Performances**”.

This summary of the doctoral research undertaken by the candidate Anna Tsoi accounts for a significant and ambitious contribution to the study of contemporary Kazakhstani theatre, situating itself at the intersection of performance studies, choreography, and drama. The candidate’s focus on the concept of “plastic language” (here rendered into English as “malleable body language”) is particularly noteworthy, as it provides a framework for understanding how corporeality, movement, and gesture operate within the evolving theatrical landscape of Kazakhstan. From a Western academic standpoint, this work is commendable both for its attempt to expand international awareness of Kazakhstani performative practices and for its engagement with theoretical traditions in performance and cultural studies.

The introductory sections demonstrate a strong awareness of global shifts in theatre from the 20th century onwards, especially the move away from textual authority toward embodied and performative modes of expression. The author effectively contextualises this transformation, linking it to broader developments in European avant-garde and post-dramatic theatre, and acknowledges key theoretical figures such as Richard Schechner, Judith Butler, and Erika Fischer-Lichte. This grounding in established Western scholarship ensures the work is legible to an international academic audience and highlights the author’s capacity to engage critically with transnational discourses in theatre studies.

One of the dissertation’s most valuable aspects lies in its application of these theories to the Kazakhstani context, a field that remains underrepresented in Anglophone scholarship. The author convincingly argues that the body and its plastic language are central to the construction of contemporary stage texts in Kazakhstan, and she supports this claim through a range of examples drawn from recent productions. This provides a vivid sense of the diversity and dynamism of Kazakhstan’s theatrical scene. The use of site-specific laboratories and interviews with practitioners further enriches the study by grounding theoretical reflection in lived artistic experiences and processes.

From a methodological perspective, the dissertation is ambitious in scope. The candidate combines cultural-historical, phenomenological, semiotic, and comparative approaches, drawing on Russian and Western traditions as well as on her own experimental practice. This pluralism is both a strength and a challenge. While it allows for a multifaceted analysis of plastic language, there is a risk of methodological diffusion: the breadth of approaches may at times obscure the clarity of argument. A more tightly focused methodological framing could have helped the reader follow the development of the research hypothesis with greater precision.

The thesis' originality is another strength. The author explicitly positions her work as the first substantial study of plastic language within Kazakhstani drama, and she successfully substantiates this claim. The integration of choreographic and dramatic arts, and the exploration of their "contamination," is a particularly useful conceptual move, reflecting the hybridity of much contemporary theatre. Furthermore, the emphasis on the role of the plastic director as a distinct creative agent is a fresh contribution that aligns well with global debates about collaboration and co-authorship in performance-making.

At the same time, from a Western examiner's perspective, certain aspects could benefit from greater critical reflexivity. The dissertation is enthusiastic in its advocacy for Kazakhstani theatre, but occasionally this results in descriptive rather than analytical passages. For instance, while the cataloguing of performances is valuable, the argument would be strengthened by deeper comparative reflection with international case studies, showing more explicitly how Kazakhstani practices both align with and diverge from global trends. Similarly, while Butler's and Fischer-Lichte's frameworks are invoked, their adaptation to the Kazakhstani socio-cultural context could be more explicitly theorised. How, for example, does Kazakhstan's post-Soviet history, its multilingual and multicultural society, or its geopolitical position influence the performativity of plastic language in ways distinct from Western contexts?

In terms of presentation, the dissertation summary demonstrates an impressive command of both Russian and English academic idioms, though some of the English terminology ("malleable language" versus "plastic language") could be standardised for clarity and some typos remain in the English translation. Nonetheless, the clarity of conceptualisation, especially regarding key terms such as "performativity," "embodiment," and "plasticity," reflects a high level of scholarly maturity.

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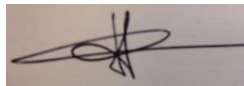
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In conclusion, this dissertation represents a pioneering and timely attempt to theorise and document the role of plastic language within Kazakhstan's contemporary dramatic theatre. It succeeds in bridging local artistic practices with international theoretical discourse, thereby contributing both to the visibility of Kazakhstani performance art and to the enrichment of global performance studies. The candidate demonstrates originality, scholarly depth, and a commitment to situating Kazakhstani theatre within a wider international context. Based on the available material, the study appears to offer an original and significant contribution to performance scholarship and would seem to merit recognition at the doctoral level.

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