REVIEW

by

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of a dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD)

Professional Field 8.4: Theatre and Film Arts

Doctoral Candidate: Yanitsa Atanasova Shopova

Doctoral student at the Department of Theatre, New Bulgarian University

Dissertation Title: "Contemporary Dance in Israel – Imagination, Choreographic Methods and Artistic Practices"

Academic Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Anna Pampulova

1. Relevance and Significance of the Topic

The submitted dissertation focuses on a highly topical phenomenon that remains insufficiently researched in Bulgaria within the fields of contemporary dance theatre and the performing arts: the development of the contemporary dance scene in Israel and, in particular, the examination of Gaga, the movement language developed by Ohad Naharin.

The topic is undoubtedly significant in both artistic-practical and theoretical terms. In contemporary performing arts, questions of bodily awareness, the transition from inner impulse and imagined imagery to physical action, and the release from habitual, automatic movement patterns are central to developing an authentic stage presence. The research is especially valuable because it goes beyond a historical and theoretical overview to seek and establish concrete practical applications in the Bulgarian context (for the period 2021–2026) and in the doctoral candidate's own pedagogical and choreographic practice at New Bulgarian University.

2. Structure and Scope of the Dissertation

The dissertation comprises 147 pages (including nine pages of bibliographic sections and image sources). Its structure is logically organised and includes an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, references, and appendices.

The bibliography contains a total of 62 sources (53 published sources, of which 49 are in English and four in Bulgarian, as well as nine unpublished sources comprising interviews and personal materials). A further 12 bibliographic entries identify image sources. The references demonstrate the author's sound familiarity with, and in-depth knowledge of, international academic and specialist literature on the subject.

3. Assessment of the Content and Methodology

The research methodology is qualitative, interdisciplinary, and multifactorial. The doctoral candidate successfully balances historical-contextual and theoretical analysis with a comparative examination of choreographic practices, observation of rehearsal and teaching processes, semi-structured interviews with artists, and reflection on her own experience.

- Chapter One ("Overview of the Development of the Contemporary Dance Scene in Israel from the Beginning of the Twentieth Century to the Present") outlines the origins and evolution of contemporary dance in Israel. The analysis of the interplay between German

Expressionist dance (Ausdruckstanz), American modern dance techniques, and local traditions (Yemenite, Hasidic, and biblical) is valuable. Key institutions (Inbal, Batsheva, Bat-Dor, Kibbutz, and the Suzanne Dellal Centre) and notable choreographers (Rami Be'er, Liat Dror and Nir Ben Gal, Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak, Noa Wertheim, and Sharon Eyal) are examined in detail. The analysis of landmark works such as Anaphase, Aide-Mémoire, White Noise, and OCD Love offers important insights into the relationships between individuality, collective memory, social context, and embodied emotion.

- Chapter Two ("Gaga Movement Language as a Choreographic and Performance Practice") constitutes the theoretical and practical "heart" of the dissertation. An important distinction is made: Gaga is not a static or complete dance "technique", but an open-ended "practice" and "language". The concepts described as "heavy experience" (thick tissue), "juiciness", float, shake, and quiver, as well as the role of verbal instructions and bodily imagery, are analysed in detail. Interesting parallels are drawn with somatic practices, release techniques, and dance meditation ("5Rhythms"). The contribution of tracing the introduction of Gaga into the Bulgarian dance context during 2021–2026 through interviews and analyses of training activities is also highlighted.
- Chapter Three ("Original Practical Developments and Methodology Inspired by Gaga Movement Language") represents the practical application of the author's work. The doctoral candidate describes the mechanism through which her personal experience of Gaga is translated into the development of her own choreographic and pedagogical methodology. Her original understanding of "dance grammar" is explained. Specific rehearsal processes for the productions "Pastet", "Dracula – The Bloody Truth", and the miniature "Collapse" are analysed, together with pedagogical work involving students in the Bachelor's Programme in Theatre at New Bulgarian University (the "Dance Theatre" and "Acting" modules).

4. Scientific and Applied Research Contributions

I accept the contributions identified in the dissertation abstract, while placing particular emphasis on the following:

1. **Theoretical and analytical contribution:** For the first time in Bulgarian art studies and theatre studies, such a systematic and in-depth analysis is undertaken of the contemporary dance scene in Israel and of Ohad Naharin's Gaga system/movement language.
2. **Contextual and documentary contribution:** The introduction and influence of Gaga principles within the Bulgarian dance and theatre environment during 2021–2026 are documented and analysed through field research and interviews with professional artists.
3. **Methodological and applied research contribution:** The introduction and conceptualisation of the term "dance grammar" as an original system for organising and transforming movement.
4. **Pedagogical contribution:** The development of an applied methodology for working with acting and dance theatre students at New Bulgarian University, supporting the activation of imagination, the release of physical inhibitions, and the development of an organic stage presence.

5. Comments, Recommendations, and Questions to the Doctoral Candidate

The dissertation makes an exceptionally favourable impression through its depth and clearly defined limitations. Nevertheless, in order to encourage a constructive discussion during the public defence, I would like to raise the following question:

- **Question:** To what extent does the concept of "dance grammar" that you introduce succeed in preserving the organic freedom and spontaneity inherent in Gaga movement language when applied to work with actors (rather than professional dancers), who often rely more on dramatic text than on purely bodily impulse?

Recommendation: I recommend that, in her future publications, the doctoral candidate expand the bibliography to include more Bulgarian theoretical sources in the fields of physical and dance theatre, in order to situate her work more firmly within the national academic tradition.

6. Conclusion

The dissertation "Contemporary Dance in Israel – Imagination, Choreographic Methods and Artistic Practices" fully meets the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act of the Republic of Bulgaria, its Implementing Regulations, and the internal regulatory

documents of New Bulgarian University. The submitted dissertation abstract accurately reflects the content and principal conclusions of the dissertation.

On the basis of the strengths of the dissertation outlined above and its undeniable applied research and pedagogical contributions, I give my entirely **POSITIVE ASSESSMENT** and confidently recommend that the Scientific Jury award the candidate the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) in Professional Field 8.4: Theatre and Film Arts.

Date: 10 October 2026

Place: Sofia

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Elitsa Lukanova