STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vesela Hadzhinikolova

on the dissertation entitled:

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

submitted as part of the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD)

Field of Higher Education: 8. Arts
Professional Field: 8.4. Theatre and Film Arts

PhD Candidate: Yanitsa Atanasova Shopova
Academic Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Anna Pampulova

The submitted dissertation comprises a total of 147 pages and is structured into an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, findings, anticipated contributions, references (62 sources), and acknowledgements. The research material is illustrated with 12 figures. The author has complied with all the requirements for preparing a doctoral dissertation.

The introduction sets out the relevance of the topic, the object and subject of the research, the main thesis, the research aim, ten clearly formulated research tasks, the methodology, and the limitations of the study. This framework provides the basis for the subsequent analysis and directs the reader towards the central research question, namely, how personal practical experience inspired by Gaga movement language can be conceptualised and transformed into an individual choreographic and pedagogical approach. The discussion follows a logical progression – from the historical and artistic context, through an analysis of Gaga as a movement language, to the application of the author's own practical developments inspired by Gaga movement language.

Chapter One traces the historical and artistic context of the contemporary dance scene in Israel. It examines the influences of German Expressionist dance and American modern dance, the role of historical and cultural processes, and their impact on the formation of a professional dance environment in Israel. The author describes the creative approaches of prominent choreographers, including Ohad Naharin, Rami Be'er, Noa Wertheim, Inbal Pinto, and Sharon Eyal, providing an in-depth analysis of selected works and the bodily language employed in them. The examination of specific works makes it possible to identify various approaches to

the organisation of movement, the use of space, repetition, musicality, and the interaction between the individual and collective body. I consider the author's effort to connect the historical discussion with the central subject of the dissertation to be one of the strengths of the first chapter.

Chapter Two constitutes the principal theoretical and analytical core of the dissertation. It examines the emergence of Gaga within Ohad Naharin's practice, the fundamental principles of this movement language, the structure of the sessions, and the role of verbal instructions and imagined imagery. An important aspect of the discussion is the comparative examination of Gaga alongside selected somatic practices, release techniques, and meditative approaches to dance. This comparative perspective makes it possible to identify similarities in approaches to bodily awareness and movement. The inclusion of the doctoral candidate's personal practical experience also deserves positive recognition. The chapter further examines the presence of Gaga within the Bulgarian dance environment through training activities, international exchange, the project "Shutdown", and interviews with Bulgarian artists. This section contributes to the relevance of the research and extends its scope beyond individual practical experience.

Chapter Three, "Personal Practical Developments and Methodology Inspired by Gaga Movement Language" is of substantial importance to the overall evaluation of the dissertation. The doctoral candidate presents original practical exercises and approaches aimed at generating movement material, developing bodily awareness, and shaping stage behaviour. Various means of working are explored: imagined imagery, bodily sensation, inner impulse, dramatic text, action verbs, partner interaction, and stage objects. The practical developments are examined through the work on the dance performance "Pastet", the student production "Dracula – The Bloody Truth", and the dance miniature "Collapse". In this way, the dissertation encompasses both work with professional artists and pedagogical situations involving students. One of the strengths of this chapter is the attempt to analyse practical processes rather than merely describe them. The author seeks to trace how the assigned tasks influence movement choices, responsiveness, interaction with partners, and the organisation of the material created into a stage form. From a pedagogical perspective, these practical developments are aimed at fostering independence, bodily sensitivity, imagination, and adaptability. These qualities are relevant to training in dance theatre, acting, and other practices in which the body plays an active role in the creation of an artistic concept.

I believe that the dissertation's contribution is most clearly demonstrated in the third chapter, where personal practical experience is transformed into original practical developments that are both described and analysed. According to the doctoral candidate:

"A clear distinction has been made between the official Gaga practice and the author's own choreographic and pedagogical work. Gaga is not taught, adapted, or presented as part of the author's methodology, but is regarded as a source of personal practical experience and methodological inspiration."

What is particularly important is not a claim to have created a universal methodology, but rather the doctoral candidate's endeavour to examine specific practical principles and their application in professional and educational settings. Among the principal strengths of the dissertation, I would highlight the relevance of the topic, the interdisciplinary approach, the connection between theory and practice, and the effort to distinguish Gaga from the author's own methodological choices and approaches applied in working with professional artists and students. Particularly valuable is the attempt to understand movement not merely as a physical form or technical skill, but as a process of exploration, conscious choice, interpretation, and the creation of meaning on stage. The submitted dissertation demonstrates that Yanitsa Shopova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and the ability to conduct independent scholarly research. I consider the doctoral candidate's work to have a clearly defined practice-oriented and applied focus and to contain findings that may serve as a starting framework for further developments in the fields of choreographic and pedagogical practice.

On the basis of the above, I give a **positive** evaluation of the dissertation and recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury award Yanitsa Atanasova Shopova the educational and scientific degree of **Doctor** (PhD) in Professional Field 8.4. Theatre and Film Arts, Field of Higher Education 8. Arts, provided that a comprehensive review of the dissertation and the materials submitted as part of the procedure confirms compliance with the applicable regulatory and academic requirements.

16 October 2026 Statement prepared by:

Sofia Assoc. Prof. Dr. Vesela Hadzhinikolova