**TTP-HUM136-2020-EKMDkerencohe@ekmd.huji.ac.il**

Dear Members of the Committee,

Dr. Keren Cohen is known to me as a member of the academic committee of the Israeli Association for Theatre Research, which I headed for four and a half years until February 2020. In this capacity, Keren fulfilled several organizational and administrative tasks with distinction. I also served as one of the official readers of her doctoral dissertation, following upon my great interest in her research prior to her submission of the thesis. I found her work on Robert Wilson original, thorough, and innovative.

In her dissertation, Keren demonstrates outstanding, but not surprising, proficiency not only in Wilson’s creations but also in the mutual influence between the aesthetics of the American avant-garde as compared to –and complementary to—those of the German avant-garde, with respect to Wilson’s innovations and integrations during the various, and varied, stages of his creative years.

Her familiarity with the two central traditions of theatre in our era decidedly marks Keren as a mature, serious, and dependable scholar. In her inimitable manner, Keren excels in showing how the new theoretical model that she proposes for analyzing the above influences (and others) is preferable to other intercultural models (such as that of Pavis, for example). She also demonstrates mastery of the methodology of her field, including exhaustive familiarity with the relevant scholarly literature, so that her thesis is a significant contribution to research on one of the most important artists of contemporary theatre.
Her general knowledge in the theory and praxis of theatre is very strong. She has an affable and “dialogical” personality, and I am aware as well that Keren is an excellent teacher and supervisor—qualities that are also discernible in the clear and incisive writing style of her doctoral thesis.
I have attached my report on her doctoral dissertation, “**Stranger in a Strange Land: Robert Wilson’s Aesthetics; A German-American Intercultural Perspective**,” in order to emphasize the Dr. Cohen’s keen research ability.

Dr. Keren Cohen’s in-depth and comprehensive work on the aesthetics of Robert Wilson is an important contribution to scholarship about one of the greatest directors of our time. It surveys, maps and analyzes the phenomenon of interculturalism in theatre in particular and in contemporary aesthetics generally, including the arts and other media. In the first part of the study, the author traces the German and American aesthetic context, both independently and with regard to their influence on Wilson’s works. Methodologically, Cohen disagrees here with scholars such as Pavis (the “hourglass theory”) and Fischer-Lichte and reconciles their approaches with the main object of her research. A key term in this dissertation is the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which, Cohen argues, is made up of synthesis and dialectics—tools that are used for a detailed, enriching, properly formulated, and clear discussion of the numerous streams of the European and American avant-garde.
Cohen chose to devote the five chapters of the second section of her thesis to Wilson’s key works, and she discusses them from a formal approach. With wisdom and sensitivity, she addresses, inter alia, the

special magical charm of the Wilsonian stage, and the intricate complexity of the elements of the language of performance represented in it (“artificial” acting, painting, lighting, music, rhythm—slow!—and more, all the while collaborating with leading artists over the course of years). She explains wonderfully the gap between Wilson’s stage “coolness” and its mesmerizing-sweeping effect.
In the course of her work, Cohen reveals extensive knowledge of the history of contemporary theatre and

she cites many dozens of figures from the theatre and various artistic fields, who have had contact or influence of one kind or another on Wilson, directly or indirectly. In this sense, I would recommend to every lover of theatre to read this doctorate upon its publication in book form, in order to learn, exceedingly well, about theatre in the Western world in the last hundred years. Moreover, Cohen has remarkable mastery of current theories in theatre studies, in the history of aesthetics and in the methodologies relevant to her research, and she wields this expertise effectively and critically—a testament to the confidence of a superior researcher who attends to the minute details of the subject of her research, in this case, Wilson, and of the relevant background, context, and influences upon him.

As someone who must be at least a little in love with the subject of her research, Cohen succeeded in navigating with restrained wisdom between the conclusion that Wilson tends more to the derivative and less to the original, and the conclusion that he is a genius who continuously evolves. Moreover, in the kind of thesis that Cohen undertook, she achieved an exquisite balance between the methodology that is forced upon the material and that which she generated independently. For this, she deserves special praise. In sum, this is an outstanding dissertation and absolutely merits a prize (the top 3%).

I highly recommend Dr. Cohen to your institution and am confident that her participation in your research team will add much to the research itself, to her colleagues and to her students. I would be happy to provide further detail if the need arises.

Sincerely,



שמעון לוי