

### **Opponent's notes on the thesis of Margaret Hannon *Neither here nor there***

Margaret promised in her *Introduction* to 'document the search for her path as a performing artist, look at aspects of how several artists found their paths, and how these informed, and inspired, the search for hers, both in process and reflection.' (3) While reading her thesis, I was most struck by the sincerity with which she sets out to fulfil her aim. Margaret has this ability to draw you in and touch you with her honest, almost innocent, light but not shallow quality. It is her fragile presence of a performer and a human being that opens something up in you: a compassion or a sympathy (particularly, when she sings). Where others give up, Margaret carries on with stubbornness fuelled by a true curiosity to get to the core.

Margaret's text reads as a journal, a diary, an autobiography, sometimes overlapping to the genre of an essay. This genre of a personal, intimate confession allows Margaret to dig in the real subject of the thesis. For it is not really stillness, achieving some skill (such as a handstand), truthfulness in acting, how to find inspiration or how to use breath in performance. The subject of the thesis is Margaret herself. The author uses her journal, her experience from the classes and from performances she had worked on as a reference. It might be good to stay consistent in listing the teachers and the names of the classes for better orientation of someone who does not know the context of the department. However, it is certainly a valuable material and Margaret does not use it to praise herself or her work, on the contrary. She uses it as a departing point to a dialogue, with herself, with her inner critic, the director in her. This is both the strength and weakness of this thesis. Sometimes, it would help to root theories and intuitions in the context of existing terms (perhaps from psychology, i.e. Jung or Hermans, when referring to different concepts of the self or the will). The author counts too much on the reader's knowledge. In this sense, it would be good to give proper definitions of, for example, *liminality* (an anthropological term) and *Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner* before engaging in a further discussion with these subjects.

As the author confesses, she's '*blessed with an agile imagination*' (16). The rhythm of the text changes as she stops to observe a falling leaf or a still statue in the park of Hadovka. These lyrical passages rhyme well with more concrete challenges the author had to face in rehearsals and put them in a surprising new perspective. In other words, Margaret has a very good observation talent. Her style of writing is very intuitive which reflects on the structure

of the text. The thoughts order themselves as in a Virginia Woolf's novel, jump from one theme to another, not by accident but by a looser or tighter relation, by a free association. Apart from the method of self-examining, self-reflection, we could speak of a method of *stream of consciousness*. The context of Margaret's search is not authorial acting generally, it is Margaret's acting and experience. Thus, the question is perhaps not 'how do I become this kind of actor' but 'how can I use what I already am'. Margaret does come to this conclusion somewhere in the middle of her journey. And it is surprising for her as it is for the reader because she writes it and we read it as if *in real time*. However, as in DJ, where we cannot really pretend the viewers aren't there, here, we cannot really pretend that this isn't an MA thesis. Therefore, despite this journey's documentary style, it might be useful for the author to read the text once, twice or three times after finishing it, to help the reader guide him through this fascinating heart opening trip without stumbles.

What is impressive is the list of bibliography. As she suggests several times in her text, Margaret is a passionate reader. Despite the genre of the text, a diary, a journal, a confession, a documentary of a search, Margaret does not rely solely on her experience, she finds material and quotes from other theatre practitioners, authors and other sources that confirm her conclusions. And that is perhaps something to consider. Finding sources that confirm what one thinks is certainly useful at some point. But it might also be interesting and fruitful to argue, to disagree, to deny, to discuss, to refuse, in order to strengthen one's position (or depart from it), even if it is a feeling or a hunch. For, as Margaret writes, '*the purpose of this thesis is not to get trapped in old ways*' (14). As Margaret's nature is sweet, this might be the biggest challenge for her. *To disagree*, I mean.

Margaret is aware that she is in process and that the process is a never-ending state of mind, it can never be finished. She can notice and capture phenomena that are often taken for granted. She can stop, examine them, question her relation to them, not in a theoretical way but in a very practical way, in rehearsals, workshops and performances. She can engage her curious mind and set off on a journey with an uncertain end. And that takes courage. As Margaret states, she's '*writing all these things so she does not forget again.*' (40) I have had great pleasure to observe Margaret on her journey and I am happy to see her finishing her studies with such work, but, more importantly, with discovered kindness to herself.

Despite some formal mistakes, such as the inconsistency of the format of proper citation (sometimes stating the title, sometimes the author in the footnote etc.), few typos (not Growtowski but Grotowski etc.), inconsistency of formal division into chapters (should we choose to read it as a formal thesis), inconsistencies of usage of italics throughout the text etc., I am happy to say it was great pleasure taking on Margaret's journey with her as a reader and I strongly recommend this work for the defence.

As far as the defence is concerned, I want to ask Margaret to clarify these terms used in her thesis:

- 1) Liminality (the origin and context of the term, not just the overlapping meaning into acting).
- 2) Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner. Please try to explain it as to a complete stranger unaware of this discipline.
- 3) Compare Robert Cohen's 3 levels (life level, dramatization level, theatrical level) to the three focuses (or states of awareness) of a DJ practitioner as defined by prof. Vyskočil.

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