

Opponent's notes on the thesis of Polona Golob *Movement and Creativity*

As Polona explains in her *Introduction*, her thesis is an attempt to explore the methods and principles of movement education at the Department of Authorial Creativity and Pedagogy. Polona chose to explore this theme mainly through her set of reflections from the three subjects taught by Petra Oswaldova, Jiri Lossl and Michaela Raisova which she sometimes complements by her own reading of secondary literature. Polona divided the text into a clear structure by selecting three main topics from the two-year movement program. Body posture, space and imagination. Each chapter includes few examples of exercises based on Polona's own experience with them and the impact they had on her development. As the author admits she did mainly common sports such as tennis, running, skiing and volleyball before coming to the Department. Therefore, her thesis can be viewed as a documented personal journey.

Polona is a very diligent student. The transformation she went through over the two years, and I am now speaking from the position of a movement practitioner whom she worked with, is notable. At the beginning, Polona was rather stiff in her posture and had a somewhat hard manner of moving, using muscles over her intelligence. Not intelligence in the common sense but intelligence of body. It was precisely the intelligence in the common sense, in other words, thinking too much about everything we did, what often prevented her from succeeding in the task with ease. She lacked softness and kind attention to her own body. However, she was willing to try everything that was offered. This openness, enthusiasm and curiosity affected her development to a great extent and her honest notes from the classes provided her with a solid base for her exploration.

Throughout the thesis, Polona looks back at her experience and tries to connect certain topics with theoretical texts by Feldenkrais, Zarilli, Barba and others. The used bibliography is not rich but it is sufficient for the genre Polona chose, and that is a self-reflection, reflection of a process, diary, personal notes complemented with examples from other sources or free associations. It is worth noting that Polona also used Eva and Jarmila Kroschlova's text (with her own translation) that has not been translated into English, for example in the chapter dedicated to balance and walking. The author's position towards the topic or the work is that of a student. As such, the text reflects a student's perspective. However, as she also gives examples of the exercises, there is an implicitly suggested theme of pedagogy. Despite what the topic of the thesis '*exploring methods and principles of movement education at KATaP*' might suggest, Polona does not go into pedagogy itself and thus the text rather stays in the area of self-reflection.

It was perhaps Polona's strong need of a structure that shaped the text into a question *how* the movement is taught at our Department which puts more emphasis on the expectations of a general overview of methods and principles. In other words, it burdens the text with the expectations of a reader that strives to learn something about advertised methods and principles of movement classes at KATaP. Since Polona did not have previous experience in the area, these topics are sometimes viewed imprecisely. For example, when referring to the standing position in Tai-chi (Taiji), Polona uses a picture of without realising there are more styles and schools with slightly different rules and practise, such as Chen tai-chi (which is what I was trained in and what we used in the classes) or Yang style etc.

Thus, one might ask why her question was not rather *what* did I learn here. That would change the point of view from the outside to a more in-depth inner analysis of a process or development which would put the text more clearly into the genre of self-reflection, self-exploration. Moreover, to explore three topics is, perhaps, rather ambitious. Choosing one theme would have also allowed Polona to go deeper.

The greatest attention is focused on the first chapter, *Building a Posture*. Some of the exercises are selected well as to document the process of learning to stand or walk properly and what does actually happen during these normally automated events. Some, however, have not been understood in depth and are described imprecisely. To give one example, the partnering exercise on page 20 is described in a way that might lead to confusion and misunderstanding what this exercise is about. On page 19, the author claims that *'in the first months of training, there is no clear separation between finding and using your centre.'* As a pedagogue of movement, speaking about my classes, I must object. As a thesis opponent, I might suggest that adding the two words *'for me'* would have helped me, as a reader, to orient better in the text and understand from what perspective does the author look at the topic. In my opinion, the greatest weakness of the thesis is precisely the misunderstanding of this perspective.

The strongest chapter of the thesis is, in my opinion, the Chapter on Principles of BMC (30) where Polona looks at the topic from an interesting angle. She uses her experience and manages to connect it with a secondary source material by Cohen thus creating a thorough analysis leading to an interesting open questions regarding movement, its perception (the inner view) and its effects and possibilities (the outside view, towards a performance) in relation to space and creativity. Unfortunately, this chapter is the shortest.

As the author claims, the main theme of her thesis is *transformation*. Transformation of a body and of mind. Polona proves on several occasions throughout her work, that she is capable of an honest self-reflection and that her point of view does not rely solely on self-absorbed experiencing. It is driven by Polona's strong need of grasping the topic and understanding the process.

The thesis fulfils all formal requirements and I am happy to recommend it for the defence.

Questions for the defence:

- 1) On page 18, you use an 'impulse exercise' right after talking about balance, centre and the importance of feet. How do these principles connect to the exercise? Thinking about the structure of the class, why do you think this exercise comes right after the walking? What else can this exercise be used for (what other principles it can help explore)?
- 2) You refer to Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner but you do not give explanation or a hint of what it is. Could you, in your own words, provide a 'definition', your understanding of this discipline?

Other complementary questions:

- 3) To clarify the partnering exercise, how would you give instructions to come back from the squatting (the position of both partners holding each other's arms, thus staying in balance, on their feet, with their pelvises just above the ankles) back up to the standing position? (avoid instructions such as 'go up' and think about direction, intention, using the foot consciously, knees, etc.) Notice that the language of the instruction influences how the exercise and its purpose is perceived and received.
- 4) On page 21, you describe the 'tango' exercise. Why do you think it is important to have bent knees? (you state it is for a good grounding position, which is correct, but only partly)

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