

## **Howard Lotker – Opponent for Clara Siersch's Masters Thesis**

*THEATER FOR GROWING – GROWING THEATER – Masks and the art of being nobody*

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June 27 2018

Dear Colleagues:

**It is my pleasure to give Clara Siersch's master's thesis a high evaluation, and thus to recommend that it pass, and is worthy of receiving a master's degree.**

First to its strengths: the thesis presents a very detailed, exact, and persuasive first person narrative, analysis, and argument about the relations between the use of masks and 'unmasking' back towards an unachievable but important ideal of 'neutrality' in order to get a perspective on what one shows and doesn't show, what one uses and doesn't use in communication – essential in Gestalt therapy, actor training generally, and in the specific context of KATaP's Authorial Acting Program (AAP) and Lecoq technique. She traces her personal relationship to these practices accompanied by quotes from relevant literature, communicating about the subject in a sophisticated but clear and precise way.

I think that generally she proved what she set out to prove – that the ways in which Gestalt therapy, actor training, AAP's Dialogical Acting with the Inner Partner (DAWIP) and Lecoq training all use a similar concept of neutrality and neutral masks to discover people's habits in being that are limiting for individuals, and to find a way to get beyond them. The goal is not to neutralize the personality, but rather to expand the expand the potential field for action and emotion onstage and in real life. She also correctly emphasized the influence of Japans' Zen Buddhism and Noh theater on these varied practices. She also correctly pointed out that all of these paths that are heading towards neutral states take a while to successfully experiment with until they can be comfortably and joyfully embodied.

However I could not give her thesis my highest recommendation, or even an extremely high one for the following reasons: I think that there should have been more consciousness of and reflection about theater and performance history, anthropology

and philosophy as a whole, and how contemporary thought and practice relates to this (for example in ancient rituals, Aristotle, Plato, Philosophy of Yoga, Nietzsche, post – structuralism, phenomenology, Dialogical Self Psychology, Rhizomatic thinking, etc.). Sometimes Clara's thesis will touch on these more general trends and ideas that they are a part of briefly without giving a deeper context, or brief quote to support them.

Also although Clara's written voice is a pleasant, clear and precise one throughout the thesis, it would have helped give some variety to the work, and helped to prove her case in a more detailed and objective way if she had spent more time detailing exercises and work by and feedback from other students/participants as well, and also from teachers leading exercises in more detail.

Another big problem for me was the almost complete lack of pictures and drawings in the thesis. Since she is writing about masks, neutrality, and other basic experiential psychosomatic conditions, it would have been great to use a lot more imagery from different cultures, cultural settings, and classes that could help to prove or to illustrate the arguments. She also should have included a link to a video of her authorial performance so those who are interested can watch.

**All in all, in this thesis the strengths in Clara Siersch's thought, arguments and writing outweigh its negative sides, so it is with pleasure that I highly recommend that it pass!**