

SUPERVISOR'S RECOMMENDATION FOR THE MASTER'S THESIS:

Attachment to the state magister's examination report.

STUDENT: AVRAMOVA Tinka

Branch of study: MA in Directing of Devised and Object Theatre

Supervisor: Ewen McLaren

Tinka Avramova: CRASH AND BURN: Strategies to Access Performer's Authenticity on Stage

Master's thesis supervisor statement by Ewan McLaren

Tinka Avramova's Master's thesis concentrates on how she developed, through her work and research at DAMU, methodology for shared performance creation based on authenticity, by which she means personal authenticity of the main performers: her loyalty to the performer's true feelings, memories and perceptions. In her writing she takes us through a process of discovery that has led to an astonishing array of new works that have had quite an effect on the work of our academy.

I think it important that Avramova has chosen to create a meaningful, in-depth thesis with the unusual step of focusing as much on other works as on her official thesis performance, *Pull my finger*. While *Pull my finger* is fully discussed, it is discussed in the context of other seminal works of Avramova during her studies at DAMU, each of which provided her with key discoveries without which it would not have been possible, but moreover which led to a culmination of her *Identity Series*, a key performance created for DISK with Czech KALD program students, *Rockets and Bombs*. I feel strongly that a proper analysis of Avramova's trajectory would be incomplete without discussion of all these works, and in the thesis she manages to seamlessly connect her process of discovery through an impressive five different performance projects developed during her studies. Especially three works making up her Identity series including *Pull my finger* are in her words "an extension of the same research and thought".

Avramova glossary of terms she has used or discovered during her research provides us with the right context to follow her findings. First she explains what she means when she says she looks for authenticity on the stage and her discovery that originality in fact means creating specific to herself (and therefore authentic). Then, she seems to provoke with definitions of non-academic English and Czech words, but the end effect is a not a provocation but a challenge: she has challenged herself and her collaborators to avoid the kind of self-importance that can block a performer from finding the authenticity she so seeks.

In covering her early works *Lectures from My Father* and *For INTELLIGENT People Only* she relates how she shed her own personal blocks and an obsession with originality to get on with the process of discovering her own specific approach, revealing how she actually researched "stupidity" on the stage to get past linguistic

and cultural barriers while first working with Czech students from DAMU leading to her discovery that she wants to create openings in performance for authentic moments to occur onstage.

She then goes on to show how through her *Identity Series*, including the works *Doubting Identity*, *Pull my finger* and *Rockets and Bombs*, she developed a groundbreaking set of approaches, which she describes in the thesis main section, which include building a relationship of trust with the performers, embracing failure and embarrassment as part of the process and designing failure as part of performance to keep the performers authentic, giving the performers tasks that are more or less impossible to perform perfectly, using storytelling and the performers' real stories, and using movement and choreography not just as dramaturgical changes but as catalysts for exposing how each performer is different.

Avramova does not let her make her conclusions in an echo chamber but corroborates her discoveries with the approaches of other devised performance groups and artists whose work and significance jump across the Atlantic Ocean: Ann Bogart, The Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, Elevator Repair Service, Forced Entertainment and Goat Island.

I have a comment on the Czech translated title of the work: *Zničit a spálit* is a poor and mistaken translation of *Crash and Burn* which is not about destroying everything in our path like *Zničit a spálit* meaning *Destroy and Burn*. *Crash and Burn* is a description of a failure from which we can learn and rise from the ashes, it is about a process of learning by doing, not of destroying.

Tinka Avramova's thesis defense is a complex and clear overview of a remarkable process of discovery. She shows in it that she has gone much further than just learning the ABCs (how to bring together the American, Bulgarian and the Czech). Avramova's work is original in the sense that she has now realized that she has specific perceptions, abilities and observations in her: an ability to cross linguistic and cultural barriers to create meaningful devised work where the audience not only is on the edge of its seat wondering what will happen next, but content to know they are getting to know real people, through the vulnerability of performers learning to trust themselves.

For her unique exploration of how to create performance events using openings in performance to create unique, authentic moments onstage, equip her performers in new confidence in themselves and the power of their authenticity on the stage, her clearly stated reflections of her discovered approaches and methods, for her relation of what she is doing to the work of other devised theatre specialists, and the bold inspiration and encouragement her work gives to our profession, department and program,

I recommend Tinka Avramova's master's thesis for oral defense.

Date: 11.9.2020

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