

Reconsidering Tools in Dance Medicine

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The logo for 'TANZ KONGRESS' is a purple circle with the text 'TANZ KONGRESS' in yellow, bold, sans-serif capital letters. A vertical yellow line runs through the center of the circle, extending from the top to the bottom of the page.

'Times in Motion' was a round table format presented at Dance Congress under the thematic focus 'Testing Tools'. Dealing with "facets of dance medicine" it focused on four topics: 'Nutrition in Dance', 'Dancing in a Healthier Way – How Can That Work?', 'Fascia – Networks in the Dancing Body', 'Thinking Bodies/Dancing Brains – Dance and Embodiment'. These topics were introduced in keynotes by four experts to a small group of participants sitting around a "thematic table". After thirty minutes the listeners could move on to another table in order to select a new topic. This enabled the participants to listen to three of the four topics for thirty minutes each.

In 'Dancing in a Healthier Way' Margot Rijven introduced a form of diary-keeping. She explained that the diary-keeping was meant to serve as a self-monitoring tool¹ in order to collect information about one's own mental and physical well-being and thus prevent injuries. By writing down one's thoughts on a daily basis processes that one undergoes (such as weaknesses, strengths, habits, favors and avoidances in training, creative development etc.) can be followed and made concrete. In their session on "Fascia" Liane Simmel and Danièle-Claude Martin presented the physical structure of the fascia, a collagenous network of fibres that permeates the body, as well as its role in structuring the body and its principles. In 'Thinking Bodies / Dancing Brains' Anja Weber explained how the brain and perception works, with the help of visualised examples.

Even though the sessions were very interesting, one aspect seemed to stay behind: the tools themselves. Taking into account that the round table format was presented under the motto 'Testing Tools', we only encountered one tool (the diary mentioned above). Instead of working with tools or bringing in our own ideas concerning the creation of new tools 'Times in Motion' mainly served as an introduction to the above-mentioned issues in dance medicine. I asked myself: Are the discussed topics related to tools at all? And how can tools be created in the field of dance medicine?

A reference to the "Philosophy of Tools" by James K. Feibleman² might help to formulate answers: "Tools are artifacts which enable man to change material objects more than he could without them." Based on this definition, Feibleman extends the understanding of the term "tool" from simple artifacts to a complex system that can be a skill, an arrangement, an ability that is able to carry information or also signs. With this widened definition, "tool" not only means a material object that one can take into one's hands, but also a metaphorical device. It can be an objectified idea, or, in Feibleman's words, "thought in action"³ that "uncovers new areas of experiences and new dimensions of participation."⁴

So tools are created with a goal in mind. An object, an idea, an action becomes a tool by being used for a certain purpose; by being created to achieve a certain goal. How can tools be used in dance-medicine then? Let us take an example. If we would concentrate on a fascia-oriented thinking in dance instead of a muscle-skeleton approach, might this not open all kinds of areas in dance training? All the anatomy books show the muscles and bones in isolation. Though one of the principles of fascia-

¹ See the report of Helen Law, "Using Training Diaries in Dance: Helen Law reports on Healthy Dancer Diary developments in the Netherlands", in: Dance UK News, Issue 73, Summer 2009, p. 26-27.

² James Feibleman, "Philosophy of Tools", in: Social Forces, Vol. 45, No. 3, March 1967, pp. 329-337.

³ Ibid., p. 332.

⁴ Ibid., p. 336.

oriented thinking is that the body is one unit that is permeated with fascia – from the skin to the core and from head to feet. This perspective offers an alternative to the standardised and hierarchical understanding of the body and could therefore be used as a tool to change the treatment of dancer's injuries. When an injury occurs, the main tendency is to look closely at the part of body where the injury is located. This part of the body is then considered the centre of attention and the source of the problem. A more general picture of the body in motion though could reveal connections like i.e. posture problems that lead to the injury in question. This way fascia-oriented thinking in dance training can be used as a therapeutic tool.

At first I was disconcerted with the fact that except from the keynote on "Dancing in a Healthier Way" none of the sessions introduced a practical tool. Even though the speakers offered Q&A session, many questions remained unanswered, many aspects and potentials untouched. But while re-considering the event with some distance, I realised that perhaps the aim of "Times in Motion" was not to present tools to us, but to make us evaluate the given information and come up with our own individual ideas for tools. These could then create new perspectives and facets, not only in dance medicine but also for a therapeutical approach to dance or to dance pedagogy.