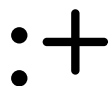


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Irradiated with Art

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The Chorea Theatre in Łódź carried out the ground-breaking project in 2011 and 2012 for its biography the Oratorium Dance Project [ODP].¹ The project was inspired by the film *Rhythm Is I*, documenting activities of Sir Simon Rattle, conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, and Royston Maldoom, choreographer and founder of Dance United, who engaged two hundred and fifty street kids from Berlin housing projects to perform choreography to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.² For many of these young people, it was their first encounter with dance art or performing arts in general, and this experience has initiated the process of changing their world view, self-esteem and attitude towards society.

The Chorea Theatre has responded to a similar challenge. A group of a hundred participants, led by the American choreographer Robert Hayden, the Earthfall Dance group and Chorea Theatre artists featuring the orchestra and choir of the Łódź Philharmonic Orchestra, created an unusual dance and music performance. The musical piece *Oratorium Antyk/Trans/Orchestra* was composed by Tomasz Krzyżanowski and Maciej Maciaszek for the purpose of the project, based on arrangements of music from ancient Greece. This project's purposes were primarily educational. It was addressed to children, young people and seniors from Łódź and the Łódź region, a post-industrial region considered as one of the poorest in the country, affected by the collapse of the textile industry. The group of participants included people from disadvantaged environs with limited access to participation in culture. Implementing the Oratorium Dance Project required of the artists the risky undertaking of going 'into the city', over months of engagement with workshops and relationships with their participants, which turned out to be a test of maturity that this team had not experienced before. This project and its results determined new directions of development for Chorea and new measures of its success and failure. For the Chorea team, the existential and social resonance of the project became the fundamental validation for art they wanted to create and promote. The theatre's activities after *Oratorium* were essentially a consequence of experiences resulting from producing *Oratorium*.

The Chorea Theatre was founded in 2004 as a result of collaboration between two groups working on research and educational projects

1 The premiere performances of the Oratorium Dance Project took place on 8 and 9 December 2011. The next performance was on 22 June 2015.

2 <http://www.rhythmisit.com>, [accessed: 31 June 2015].

conducted by actors and actresses of the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices. First one was *Dances of the Labyrinth*, working on the reconstruction of ancient Greece dances based on vase paintings, supervised by Dorota Porowska and Elżbieta Rojek; next was the *Ancient Orchestra*, reconstituting music of ancient Greece, supervised by Tomasz Rodowicz. The company was founded, therefore, on a hermetic experience of laboratory theatre work focused on actors' training and the search for artistically sublime forms of expression. The first Chorea performances were of this nature, cultivating the tradition of laboratory teamwork. The distinct change in forms of activities and performances came in collaboration with the Welsh company Earthfall and a conscious, intentional change of residence. In 2007, the Chorea company moved from a village in east Poland to Łódź, a special city on the map of Poland. Łódź used to be one of the richest industrial cities. Nowadays, Łódź, with its rich tradition connected with Polish schools of film and design, is still in the process of rising from ruins into which it fell during the decades after the Second World War and after the decline of the textile industry, which had been its main development potential. The post-industrial social and urban character of Łódź, as well as the socio-political commitment of Earthfall, created a new impulse for Chorea's development. The company started producing contemporary performances, rooted in the present day, not abandoning the informative experience gained from working on ancient Greek material but rather finding its own artistic language in the meeting of these two areas.

The first three years of residence in Łódź were spent introducing the company into the city's artistic environment. Changes taking place at that time were illustrated by the subjects of subsequent festivals organized biannually by Chorea. *Retro/Per/Spectives: CHOREA 2010* presented the company's achievements to date, while the edition *Retro/Per/Spectives: Łódź 2012* addressed Łódź history – the multicultural Polish-Jewish-Russian-German past of its inhabitants, emphasizing the international projects undertaken by the company. The third edition of *Retro/Per/Spectives: 2014* took up the theme 'Art Radiates'. As announced in the programme text by Tomasz Rodowicz, the festival's artistic director, it 'served as an open perspective for the theatre' and in practice became a presentation of projects resulting from work accomplished during the implementation of the Oratorium Dance Project.³

I was a member of the *Dances of the Labyrinth* group and became a member of the founding group for Chorea. I have been practising theatre training and observing Chorea theatre activities as a researcher since its beginning. I have had many opportunities to observe and participate in workshops and collaborate with company members on various occasions. I did not participate directly in the Oratorium Dance Project, but my evaluation of the situation is always an assessment of an 'insider', 'one of us'. In June 2015, I conducted a series of interviews with company members and young participants in the Oratorium Dance Project. This paper is based on information gathered during these interviews. It is an attempt to examine the specific, post-Oratorium activities of Chorea Theatre, which in my opinion remains a unique phenomenon on the map of Polish theatre not only among independent companies but

3 Tomasz Rodowicz, *Retroperspectives 2014*, [accessed: 6 February 2016].

also as a co-organizer of an important cultural institution in Łódź, the Art Factory.

For their interviews, I would like to thank Janusz Adam Biedrzycki, Majka Justyna, Dominika Krzyżanowska, Tomasz Krzyżanowski, Dorota Porowska, Tomasz Rodowicz and Elina Toneva, Ewa Otomańska, Damian Kukiłka and Jan Tarasiewicz.⁴

It was madness

The Oratorium Dance Project was a challenge from the start. The project was supposed to be supervised by the company Dance United, which had been strongly advocated by Mateusz Cieślak, the company's founder and coordinator. However, financial requirements of this charity organization were unmanageable even for the joint resources of institutions organizing the event: Choreia, Art Factory, the City of Łódź and the National Centre for Culture. A steadfast commercial attitude by Dance United resulted in Choreia's withdrawal from negotiations and left the company in a dramatic situation: with a launched project and obligations towards participants they had been recruiting for months. Voices of criticism, accusations of excessive ambition and megalomania directed especially towards Tomasz Rodowicz and Mateusz Cieślak, also came from the inside of the theatre.

'I wanted to hit the city hard. To challenge this community and artistic environment, not by provocation, but rather by inviting them to participate in a common undertaking', explained Rodowicz, president of the Choreia Theatre association and deputy artistic director of Art Factory. According to him, the fourth year of Choreia's activities in Łódź, when the theatre became clearly identifiable, was an appropriate moment to strongly mark its presence in the city.

The Łódź Philharmonic Orchestra gave this project the green light because its director at the time, Lech Dzierżanowski, wanted to change the institution's image and was therefore interested in introducing a new production to his repertoire and attracting a new, more diverse audience. Oratorium was a project that suited his needs, so he agreed to launch it almost immediately.

'The whole task was back on its feet so quickly only because the music was ready', Rodowicz acknowledged. Theatre members and composers Tomasz Krzyżanowski and Maciej Maciaszek in collaboration with Jakub Pałys raised the already high standards of the project even higher. They organized workshop participants into a 'young chorus', with which at this stage they had already been working for three months, teaching the singers very demanding polyphonic songs in ancient Greek. The only element the organizers were missing was a choreographer. As it usually happens in such situations, the solution came by accident. The idea was mentioned by Rodowicz during one of his conversations with Robert Hayden, who was going to start working with the Choreia team on *The Bacchae*, which raised the choreographer's interest and he agreed to join the project. Then the extremely hard work began.

Managing a huge, diverse group was quite a challenge. The workshop aiming at filling out the team of participants, the first in the series of workshops preceding the performance, took place in March 2011. These were conducted in Łódź schools, childcare centres, Monar centres

⁴ Interviews conducted 29–30 June 2015.

(an organization helping the homeless and people addicted to alcohol and drugs) and MOPS (social-assistance centres). Over five hundred young people participated in these workshops. Out of this group, one hundred and twenty people were selected. Eventually one hundred participated and remained until the end of the project⁵. The group was too big for the theatre to manage on its own. The mobilization of the Łódź artistic community became a necessity. Dance workshops were conducted by dance-theatre members, especially from Pracownia Fizyczna [Physical Atelier] and other companies associated with the Movin' Łódź initiative⁶ and independent dancers who hadn't known each other, did not share the same work ethic or methods. It turned out that in the case of instructors as well, fast group integration was necessary.

'Fortunately, there were some really experienced people among instructors, such as Krzysztof Skolimowski', Majka Justyna recalled, who was Robert Hayden's assistant on the Oratorium project, instructor of the children's groups and a Chorea member since 2011.

Thanks to his instructions, we quickly developed common working practices. This way, though not much older than our participants, we were learning responsibility and cooperation. None of the instructors was ever left alone with the group. There was one instructor for each five participants, so there was nowhere to hide in the room. Sometimes big projects face the problem of people in the last rows drifting because no one is paying attention to them. We managed to avoid this trap. The number of instructors was enough to keep attention at the highest level.

The project was addressed to socially and economically disadvantaged environments, and was directed principally at people who do not have everyday contact with art. It should be emphasized that the main criterion for participation was not the level of social and economic exclusion but rather talent or even more what Rodowicz called a 'tension in the will muscle'. Participation was voluntary and participants could decide to quit at any moment. Those who decided to go through the working process, however, were expected to demonstrate responsibility and determination in their choice by showing up regularly for workshops conducted at an intensive pace (twice a week and, by the end of preparations, even every day).

'This was a test for us and for them', Rodowicz emphasized in his interview.

This job, just as any other job we undertake, was a test of character, predispositions and talents at many levels, starting with engagement and presence. Even at this level there was a selection, not conducted by us but rather spontaneous. People counting on something more, something else, easier work or less effort dropped out. Diligence and regularity can overcome many barriers and despite an initial lack of skills, you can shift to the side of art.

5 The detailed list of institutions from which participants were recruited is available at the Oratorium Dance Project website. http://www.oratorium-chorea.pl/o_projekcie_chorea [accessed: 31 June 2015].

6 The Movin' Association is composed of Physical Lab [Pracownia Fizyczna], Alter Dance Theatre [Teatr Tańca Alter], Pro Dance Theatre [Teatr Tańca Pro], Movin' Łódź [Łódź w Ruchu], Skład Group [GrUpa Skład], Ananda, KIJŃ, the cinema of dance foundation [fundacja kino tańca], contactimprovisation.eu.

In the case of Oratorium, it was clear that instructors' activities will not take the form of art therapy. It was an artistic challenge, without any privileges. All artistic and pro-social activities of Choreia are marked by this attitude. When it comes to work, there is no distinction between professionals and amateurs, people with or without disabilities. The preferred attitude includes facing the challenge, first and foremost the music Choreia works with. 'Easing up' is unwelcome. If an element of a project turns out to be unfeasible for some objective reason (other than laziness or lack of will), we look for an equivalent activity that would retain artistic quality and perform its function within the structure, and at the same time would be feasible. In this job, there is no line of least resistance.

One aim of ODP was creating a space within performing arts for an integration of various generations (participants were divided into age groups: 8–12, 13–35 and 50+) as well as environments, which in different circumstances would not have the opportunity or willingness to meet. This combination, however, resulted in a difficulty: the lack of a common denominator in terms of motivating and enforcing rules. Initially, people of different social statuses created separate and, to some extent, antagonistic groups. Though there was no strategy planned in advance and sometimes artists' lack of pedagogical training was visible, thanks to consistent enforcement of the rules of partnership these conflicts were resolved on the spot. Of course, during the whole project the theatre was working closely with teachers from institutions from which participants were recruited. Eventually, consistency and intensity of a long-standing work produced results.

'Groups of different origin mixed, because determination and talent took over and they are independent from material situation', said Rodowicz. After weeks of work people were functioning as a team, they noticed each other's skills and started to trust each other. The same applied to their relationship with instructors. Repeated absences of participants forced them to increase the frequency of rehearsals and even though it was an endurance test for instructors, it resulted in the more intense contact with people. 'Suddenly you realize that you know these people, you know who is who', the director added.

Based primarily on music, the project also had the premise of bringing professionals and amateurs closer together through common work, not in the form of mentoring but rather of partnership, which in the case of this particular, difficult music produced surprising results. The young chorus had been working for months by Choreia methods and mastered rhythmic structures to such an extent that when they were rehearsing together with the professional orchestra and chorus, the professionals had more trouble keeping up with the composition's demands. This experience, demonstrating the value of regular work and the effectiveness of the adopted teaching method, boosted the level of self-confidence of both instructors and participants.

Oratorium adopted the form of a stage performance with a dramatic framework of ancient Greek song. However, the dramatic effect was achieved by their mood and emotional charge rather than their content expressed in words. The choreographic studies created as a supplement to the music were the source of entirely new, contemporary storylines. At the beginning of the performance, there was the huge, empty stage of Klub Wytwórnia in Łódź, surrounded by piles of dry leaves. This image could be interpreted as an autumn street or a town square, as

well as the mythical 'everywhere and nowhere'. The space in front of the stage was occupied by the orchestra and two choruses (fifty singers each): the professional chorus of the Łódź Philharmonic and the chorus of young project participants, placed at opposite sides of the stage. Their combined voices generated the musical power of the performance. After the first sounds of music, the youngest project participants appeared on stage, opening the performance with a call directed at the rest of the performers: 'Come! It has begun! Where are you?' The artists played a game with the audience, creating a sort of auto-thematic spectacle in which performers were the protagonists. Total identification of performers with their characters was limited, for example by costumes, which were a peculiar variation on evening wear or served as an element of an aesthetic play with colour planes on stage and, as such, effectively created a distance negating rules of psychological realism. This technique gave the performance a much wider interpretative range, making it a story about a collective 'anyone'.

It was a story of encounters and slowly developing communication in the varied, mixed-aged group. Themes of individual scenes were drawn from individual participant's stories, transformed by the choreographer into dance studies acquiring a universal dimension. Some were included into the performance as short monologues intertwined with physical activity, where a word phrase and movement phrase followed one another. Young dancers were telling stories of their dancing passion, sometimes stories of loneliness and feeling lost in an indifferent society. Seniors created images of joy stemming from unlimited creativity, like having a good time. Hayden's eclectic choreography combined elements of contemporary dance, concrete movement, hip-hop and extreme actions characteristic of both Choreia's partner company, Earthfall, and the Ultima Vez theatre, where Hayden worked for many years.

The two choruses at opposite sides of the stage created an additional visual and semantic layer. Their role in *Oratorium* was very similar to the function of the ancient Greek chorus. And the contrast between the monumental, static Philharmonic chorus and the dynamic young chorus engaging in on-stage action added a particular meta-level to the stories of creative passion and freedom. Choreography performed by the young chorus while singing, drawing from traditions such as Balkan processions, revealed the fundamental connection between music and body movements in Choreia's method.

As mentioned above, meaning of lyrics in songs was of secondary importance, yet in the finale, the words of one of the earliest-known hymns to the Trinity, the Oxyrhynchus hymn (circa the third century AD)⁷, which in the context of the performance served as a call for solidarity, community and gratefulness rather than a particular religious confession:

Let it be silent
 Let the Luminous stars not shine,
 Let the winds and all the noisy rivers die down;
 And as we hymn to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
 Let all the powers add 'Amen, Amen'

7 A non-professional recording of *Oratorium* excerpts is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fD05T03Yx9s> [accessed: 6 February 2016].

Empire, praise always, and glory to God,
The sole giver of good things, Amen, Amen⁸

This was an incredible experience – Rodowicz declared – to observe how, after overcoming the initial incertitude, people get to know each other better and care about each other. The combination of various age groups resulted in behaviours I would call perhaps not entirely family-like, but tribal. Also, the artistic effect was building and intensifying. The stage power of this huge group of people was extraordinary. The usual dream by the end of exhausting projects is for it to end soon, but here it did not happen. We all invested so much passion in this project that we wanted it to last. There was an immediate reflection on what else can be done with it. The same message came from the audience. The project met with a big response in Łódź and Warsaw, received many awards, including those based on audience choice.

Work method

As mentioned above, for the Chorea theatre, established in 2004 and termed by Dariusz Kosiński the ‘resonance theatre’ in 2010,⁹ educational activities have always been an element of the artistic programme and a way of creating art. All members were recruited from artists participating in workshops conducted by Rodowicz, Dorota Porowska and Elżbieta Rojek. But the most direct reason for adopting the specific programme combining artistic and often experimental activities with educational activities was the theatre’s method of work.¹⁰ Chorea bases its work on intensive physical training dominated by group and reciprocity exercises based on polyrhythmic structures. All members, dancers and singers alike, undergo this training. This way, in Chorea performances, characteristic ensemble actions such as a dancing chorus (used also in *Oratorium*) can appear. In these actions, initially motivated by the need to master intricate rhythmic structures of ancient Greek texts, the company uses simple dance moves, body percussion and voice. Rhythm is transformed into movement and experienced directly in the body, which is an attractive and efficient method for developing solid rhythmic competency and creativity, and enables a quick learning of complex musical structures.

The process-based creation method applied by Chorea is also oriented to group work. This means that actors, dancers – the team including director, choreographer, lighting director, composer – are actual creators of content and material (including movement) of the performance. Team members other than actors are responsible for animating the process and structuring its results into the consistent composition. This method has its advantages; it gives participants a sense of inclusion in the creative (and not just reproductive) process, of having a meaningful voice, control over content and responsibility. Unfortunately, it also carries the risk of

8 Martin L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford, New York: Clarendon University Press, 1992), p. 325.

9 Dariusz Kosiński, ‘Chorea – teatr oddźwięku’, in *Teatr Chorea, pierwsze sześć lat*, ed. by Małgorzata Jabłońska (Łódź, Stowarzyszenie Teatralne C’horea’, 2010), pp. 13–17.

10 See Małgorzata Jabłońska, ‘Teatr CHOREA: Synchrony in Action’, in John Britton, *Encountering Ensemble*, trans. by Duncan Jamieson (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 185–186.

unpredictable extending of the project over a long period of time, as it is heavily dependent on the so-called human factor. Therefore the process relies strongly on the willingness to cooperate, to undertake creative action by the participants. As such, it may become a tool for eliminating at least some dangers associated with symbolic violence during the creation of theatrical performance, but it can also become a catalyst for abusive behaviours when the need to publicize the results induces the animators to influence the process and impose certain solutions in order to save time. In this system of work, the performance should crown a process that, by its nature, carries added educational value. Since this process is not implemented by an educational institution but by the theatre company, the created aesthetic (artistic) value remains its ultimate value. On the other hand, asked what they value most, participants of the process respond: 'work'. The work itself, the course of the rehearsal process (even pre-rehearsals), is their most valuable experience. 'In this process, the initial idea develops with us, and there are no distortions, there is time for us to absorb all the changes', emphasised Ewa, a young participant in Oratorium and now a regular collaborator with Choreia. 'Then it is real and it has power'.

The Choreia theatre is also steadfast in their flexible rules of responsibility and interaction within the group, which apply to regular members and participants of all workshops and projects alike. They all take equal care of the working space: they clean dressing rooms, wash dishes, clean costumes, help pack decor. The same applies to rehearsal attendance. Those not willing to follow these rules usually quit early. All manifestations of prima-donna-like attitude are treated with irony and sarcasm, so lack of compliance in this area can result in ending the collaboration.

Despite the huge number of participants in Oratorium, the same processual and relational working mode was sustained, though in this particular context it was quite risky but also enabled deeper engagement of participants. Asked about sustaining this working method (supported in Oratorium by all instructors and Robert Hayden), Rodowicz noticed a possible trap faced by all participatory arts, of premature satisfaction. That is, imposing the only appropriate form of implementing the project.

'Dance United worked that way', Rodowicz explained. 'They would come to participants with a prepared choreography, but for me it was cold. For us, music was the starting point, from which we set out into the void. That's why our work was valuable – because it was accomplished with them, based on their individual histories'. Robert Hayden left much space for individual expression. He proposed topics for them to develop. When Dara Weinberg asked him what his performance and choreography was about, he replied:

It's about these kids, but we don't want to do a show that says 'It's about these kids'. It's more... how can we work with this material in such a way that it provides images, or creates images, that give people the sense of creating their own story, creating their own journey through it – through the performance. [...] Somewhere, there had to be a red thread, but this is important for us – not for the audience. Their red thread can be different from ours.¹¹

Summarizing his work with the ODP group and formulating conclusions for the future, Rodowicz stated:

11 'Oratorium Dance Project', *Biweeklly.pl* 2011, 32, [accessed: 31 June 2015].

These so-called difficult environments are much more authentic in their work than privileged ones, because there is no calculation: what do I get from that? is it worth my time? In the case of people from underprivileged environments, lack of meaning is a common situation, so if they get the clear signal that we are in this together, that nobody is doing anybody a favour, that they are given the opportunity to do something meaningful and treat them as partners, without patronizing them, they engage deeply in the work and they become much more determined.

Oratorium became the team's test of abilities. This method worked. Prejudice, assumption and preliminary theories were reduced to what actually works and what can be developed during work. All team members unanimously indicate several most important lessons they have learned during their work on the project. The best attitude towards people you work with is 'openness', which is to say most of all sincerity, and the best motivator is treating them as partners – you have to expect from them as much as you expect from yourself. You have to abandon acting, like a mentor who gives them some presents you have to offer opportunities and propositions. This brings another conclusion: one-time projects don't make sense. You have to create opportunities to continue and the sense of something more permanent, because keeping in touch and common actions would create a support model of commitment, after which they could take up their own activities. The work should be continued in small groups, because despite the engagement of hundreds of people, real change would occur only in the lives of those few who feel the need for change; they would probably stay longer. These projects can only provide a framework, show methods of work and create opportunities, but they will not help people who wait passively for something to change in their lives.

After the Oratorium Dance Project, the National Centre for Culture Poland, the state institution launching and supporting the development of culture, brought forward a proposition for the theatre to organize experience and knowledge about working with demanding environments in the form of a ministerial training programme for culture animators and educators called Social Education through Art, supervised by Majka Justyna. Paradoxically, the method of work based on process, 'openness' and authentic interaction became the main obstacle, because it was difficult to build a repeatable model of work and patent a method based on such experience. The issue is still open and implemented in small steps such as workshops for educators in smaller towns. Their results would provide the idea of possibilities for a systemic practice.

Organized freedom

The specificity in the recent years of Chorea's activities as an organization could be characterized as controlled chaos or, to use Dominika Krzyżanowska's expression, 'an organized freedom'. The company, rooted in a tradition of strong team spirit, implements more projects going beyond the framework of performance art and supervised by individual members of the group. Admittedly, it is difficult to predict what should be expected from a new Chorea performance, since the diversity of subjects, instruments, media and aesthetic approaches used by artists gathered under its name can really make the spectator's head

spin (especially a theatre historian). Not supervised by a single director, the company includes an 'non-calculable number of members' (one ODP effect) participating in many company projects, moving smoothly from one to another. Chorea's actors and musicians work for other companies or invite people from other companies to participate in their projects. The outside observer would find it difficult to indicate the common elements of various projects, other than people's paths crossing. This is the form in which freedom and openness, understood as the opposite of insularity, manifest themselves. On the other hand, all activities are 'organized'. Each project is discussed in detail and worked through by the team. As for the method, the reference point for evaluation of ideas is the underlying principle of the company, *chorea*, that is, combining in a developed communication means of expression belonging to an actor (movement, music and dance) and the resulting interest in art phenomena challenging fixed genre divisions. In terms of the essential meaning of the work, the common ground is constituted by social engagement: art that provokes change, influences, radiates.

The source of Chorea's 'organized freedom' is lack of heavy-handed management. Tomasz Rodowicz ensures the artistic quality of projects, but at the same time he lets these processes develop spontaneously. 'I try not to impose subjects or control the direction of effort', he acknowledged in an interview.

I prefer this unpredictability and artistic risk. I control the organizational side of things to some extent, because I don't want conflicts among my colleagues. I am committed to an iron rule that every project carried out by Chorea is equally important. Therefore, I emphasize the importance of cooperation, mutual influence and inspirations between projects. One of my current responsibilities in Chorea is to advise and clear the field for my colleagues.

It seems that the multi-threaded activities of recent years resulted from the co-occurrence of several phenomena. The human and institutional energy generated by ODP demanded further development. All people involved in the project shared the feeling that this work cannot end just like that. Fortunately, participant enthusiasm coincided with the needs of Chorea members, as in the case of Janusz Biedrzycki instructing dancers during Oratorium:

I had been working with these young people for over a year. I got to know them and I knew that they would feel exploited if there was nothing else after Oratorium. They felt a strong need to keep working. They often asked whether there would be another Oratorium performance, some workshops or new projects. I was observing them during that year and I saw how this work changed them and I saw myself in them. I remembered my own beginnings. I had been standing with one foot in a pathological environment and I don't know what would happen to me if we did not start working with Chorea. For me it was a compulsion – someone helped me, now I can and want to help someone. The third reason was the need for doing something of my own and proving myself. I saw an opportunity to come back to regular training, which I had been missing at the time. All I had to contribute was my will and time.

After ten years of company activities, after this grand and exhausting common effort in which individual members of Chorea proved themselves as leaders, they felt the need to start a new chapter in their career, to create a more individualized projects, take over management functions, profile their activities.

‘We were lucky’, confirmed Tomasz Krzyżanowski.

The ten-year anniversary is a difficult moment for a theatre company and many groups fall apart. I think that individual projects were a safety valve or perhaps rather ventilation. I know that it was hard for Wojtek Rodowicz, but he gave us the freedom and it worked, because everyone had the feeling that they can find some perspective, catch their breath, sometimes make some additional money.

These needs resulted in individual projects. They continued ODP, first because they had the common feature of social influence, and secondly in the sense that each of the instructors went back to the group they were working with for the previous year and even though there were open calls for new projects, the core was composed of people from the Oratorium groups.

Biedrzycki started working with his dancers on *The Ugly*, a performance on the border of physical theatre and happening, focused on the issue of social norms governing the ideas of beauty and ugliness. The people engaged in the project still work with it. In another project – a performance created on the basis of workshops with the visually impaired – Biedrzycki entrusted them with responsible instruction tasks. While preparing *Vidomi*, a performance based on the tango figure and a critical commentary on social stereotypes concerning disabilities and looking as an element of social contact, the cast worked with visually impaired younger people. One of Biedrzycki’s assistants was Damian Kukiałka, who had come to ODP as a thirteen-year-old from a youth-care centre:

I am proud and grateful for the opportunity to work in *Vidomi*. I had the sense of doing something important not only for me, but also for someone else, and it was not just about being nice or helping someone on the stairs. Working with me (with us) resulted in somebody’s improved quality of living. Participants admitted that. I think that this is the way a company should work. I am an example of someone who benefited from theatre and such work. Honestly, I am thinking about education through art. I would like to work with kids from such places and change something, but in relation with this place. It has really given me a lot. I think about them as my family.

A similar path can be traced in ODP’s musical work. Krzyżanowski created the Great Chorus of Young Chorea, because people from his group wanted to continue their meetings and to sing. In the framework of “Warning...” he proposed workshops for children in children’s homes, *Lullabies*, a theatrical concert including lullabies and musical stories with texts created partly during workshops. Kids participating in the project performed in the concert concluding the project, and were given significant vocal parts. Visualizations, an integral part of the performance, were created by Elektro Moon Vision and at the final stage of working

on the musical material, the famous singer Natalia Przybysz joined the project.¹² Following his experience with Chorea, Krzyżanowski also included into the workshops people from 'his' group. 'I am not good with small children. I think you have to have a special talent for that. There are girls in my chorus who obviously have such talent, so I eagerly used their help during workshops'.

New people joined new projects. Sometimes they were friends of singers from the chorus or their family members. This is the way a community is built and developed around the project, and it is encouraged by the artists. Cast members' children often join the kids dancing on stage during *Lullabies* concerts. It should be noted that singers from the chorus offered musical support to dancers in *The Ugly*. Biedrzycki's and Krzyżanowski's groups established themselves (as much as it is possible in this company) and they constitute the latest generation of Chorea, participating in performances directed by Rodowicz and guest directors. They also help the team in organizational tasks. They join the ranks of festival volunteers and supervise workshop groups. In return, they can use theatre space to train and prepare their own activities.¹³

Oratorium Dance Project was awarded the Energy of Culture Prize [Energia Kultury] – it was recognized as the most important cultural event of 2011 in Łódź. It coincided with a crop of ideas to continue work in groups formed during preparation of Oratorium. Rodowicz wanted to turn this success into resources necessary for further activities, so he gathered these germinating initiatives and individual social projects of team members into a year-long project, 'WARNING Human! City Voltage', implemented by Art Factory in 2013. The city of Łódź engaged in this project. Modules of the project included preparation of *The Ugly* by Biedrzycki's group and the *Lullabies* workshop. Additionally, Paweł Korbus and Dorota Porowska worked with seniors and homeless people on installations, exhibitions and happenings. In 'WARNING Human!', each group worked separately: dancers, chorus, seniors, the homeless, but exchange was an important element. Groups meeting for rehearsals watched each other's performances.

'The entire programme was specifically infused by *Wszędodomni* – the *Home-everywhere* project [addressed to residents of homeless shelters]' Dominika Krzyżanowska said.

They attended every event, helping with technical operation and organizational tasks. Paweł Korbus asked them to collaborate when he was creating an installation with seniors (again, mostly those who had joined ODP) based on the dance workshop 'Memory of Body / Memory of Place / Memory of Emptiness, and later for his exhibition 'House / Avatar / Translocation'. There is a related anecdote. One woman from *Home-everywhere* arranged a job raking leaves in the park for Paweł, who was undergoing financial difficulties at the time. Taking into account our financial situation, we often cannot say who is in *Home-everywhere* and who is the artist.

Chorea Theatre members have always had strong bonds of friendship. It would be difficult to decide whether the primary experience has been

¹² In late 2015, the studio record of *Lullabies* was released, financed by crowd-funding on Polak Potrafi.

¹³ The festival Retro / Per / Spectives.

friendship or common work, but the fact is that newcomers are treated with the same openness and that harmony in their work is apparent in social relations, such as spending time together after rehearsals, surprise birthday parties, many conversations. While reflecting upon the ways in which Chorea builds a community around their activities, it is also worth asking whether artists penetrate participants' lives or perhaps they also equally share their lives with them. Another module of the 'WARNING Human!' project, Abramka Fest, is a good illustration of this reciprocal relation. All Chorea groups participated in the workshop and festival at Abramowskiego Street, close the theatre and regarded as one of the most dangerous streets in Łódź, inhabited by a so-called 'pathological element'. The idea came from actors who lived there: Małgorzata Lipczyńska and Julia Jakubowska. They wanted to familiarize themselves with this place and its people, and stop being afraid of their neighbours.

Such unification of social and professional life has its disadvantages, of course. The level of emotion is always high and conflicts arise with redoubled strength. Usually we manage to solve them thanks to deep-seated respect for our common work, but the team has faced several split-ups and some grievances shared sotto voce. Personal issues – who stays in the team, who leaves, who fits and who doesn't – always stir up strong emotions.

'These things demand courage on both sides', admitted Krzyżanowska: because such conversation is always related to self-esteem. Unfortunately, we operate in an area in which all you can offer is yourself, besides your ability to write a project, issue an invoice or weld together some metal elements. In such moments the 'self' becomes really important. Not everyone has enough courage to evaluate it and confront the result, which is, after all, subjective.

Urban art / Art of place

Socially engaged artistic projects of Chorea are distinguished by the attitude of the team towards people who collaborate with them. Sharing the space of living and working, as well as existential conditions (as their accounts suggest), is of primary importance. The situation after the project's conclusion artists pack their bags and go home, leaving the community and those initiated processes to themselves, does not happen in this case. For Chorea artists, their activities in Łódź are a life project and demand responsibility. Such an attitude does not, however, result from the fashionable current political trend of engagement and participation, but is rather a consistent continuation of the idea of theatre ecology initiated by counterculture movements in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s, in which both Tomasz Rodowicz (collaborating with Jerzy Grotowski during his paratheatrical period) and Dorota Porowska participated.

'In my opinion, social action is the interpenetration of different environments', Krzyżanowska summarized. 'It is not just about a problem in one environment, helping, influencing looking for a solution, but about coming into contact, relation, cooperation. It is about really wanting to know these people and widen the network of contacts, touching the increasing number of potential partners'. Majka Justyna has similar views:

I am sickened by the necessity to write in applications about all these pathologies. If you want to do a project with a community, you have to drag in all these dirty courtyards, neglected children, alcoholism and poverty, and I have a feeling that it only prolongs the stigma. We should begin with changing the

language and abandon talking about exclusion and disfavourisation and rather talk about participation, integration, community, etc.

It is no longer a matter of the disfavoured and difficult environments. The artists see that artistic cooperation is a social action to the same extent. Fortunately, Łódź is special in this regard.

'I can compare it with Kraków, where I also worked for several years in the cultural sector and I met organizations operating there,' Justyna continued. 'I remember that when I went back to Łódź, I realized how much people here care about this town every day. There are a lot of grassroots initiatives, a whole network of NGOs, urban movements and cultural institutions that somehow cooperate with each other'. It seems that in artistic and creative milieus of Łódź, people are open to collaboration and they are not afraid of it. Oratorium sent the city a strong signal that cooperation is not only possible but also beneficial for everyone. The Chorea team won the support of this community. Many common initiatives are accomplished, for instance, during Touch the Theatre, the annual celebration of World Theatre Day. For a week, engaged companies present their work, lending their spaces to each other or going out to the streets together. The flow of people involved with developing these events is vivid, and it is possible to say that it is now the way this environment functions. The increasing integration of artistic circles in Łódź is a side effect of ODP that everyone silently counted on. Of course, the companies with similar ways of functioning and beliefs collaborate more often and more efficiently. This integration did not manage to include the entire artistic environment, but more frequent participation by the repertory company Pinokio in Chorea's projects and its cooperation with the Łódź Film School raises hope for opening less obvious opportunities for cooperation between state-operated teams and NGOs.

To conclude, I ask the question I should have begun with: What reasons do artists have to get involved with social actions? Tomasz Rodowicz and Dorota Porowska – a Chorea founder, Porowska was responsible for the Home-everywhere module of 'WARNING Human!') responded.

Contemporary art contributing universal values cannot just play with form, decomposition, artistic provocation – Rodowicz explained – I think that this form of communication has worn out and has no meaning. The social context is essential for art. I mean real contact with people, looking for phenomena originating from a certain environment and engage it directly into action, which are the expression of dissent, a cry for help and an attempt to answer some particular pressing existential questions. It is totally different from rebelling for eight hours a day for a national-average wage and social-security benefits, with all due respect to my professional colleagues. It is not about being Hamlet one day and a guy from the block the next day.

Now the problems are swelling – said Porowska – and the European Union as well as local governments have to take them into account. For example, immigrant communities in France or the growing number of people in Poland excluded from social and cultural life because of poverty. I refer here to my experiences with the Expeditions project, which was a Polish-French-Spanish cooperation.¹⁴ In Spain and France, we worked with immigrants, while in

¹⁴ More about the project: <http://expedition-s.eu/en/>, [accessed: 6 February 2016].

Poland with the community of Warsaw's Praga district, where problems were much more grave and typical forms of communication involved swearing, spitting and aggression. Later, I realized that the typical Praga family has five children. Most of my friends have no more than two. Simple calculation. This is our objective: to be interested in the part of society that is in fact outside of circulation of culture. They live on the margin, which is getting increasingly radical, if only in terms of taste. We had workshops with children from the community centre. We could only hear disco-polo music during breaks.¹⁵ They listen to this kind of music and there are no alternatives [...].

After a moment, she added:

I believe that cooperation with the community is very attractive to artists, because it disturbs our common ways of thinking about other people and about art. If you don't want to lower the artistic value, you have to keep looking for new forms which would be appropriate for this particular situation.

Finally, it should be emphasized that Chorea theatre activity is not limited to social projects. The artists involved do not abandon strictly artistic projects, creating works of sublime form (for example, Tomasz Krzyżanowski's *Rhythm of Language* consisted of compositions based on language games). Owing to the social or perhaps more sociable influence on the environment in which they create, their audience has confidence in their more ambitious projects and is ready to continue the culture-forming dialogue. The third edition of the Chorea festival Retro / Per / Spectives in 2014 took up the topic 'Art Radiates'. This radiation is the apparently invisible impact that changes the tissue deep within, and effects are sometimes visible only long time after the radiation. Understood thus, the impact of art is best actualized by an opportunity for direct practical experience. I believe that this expression aptly describes the practice of Chorea Theatre, therefore, since its impact is like fallout carrying its particles and its impact far into space and time from the epicentre of radiation.

Translated by Monika Bokiniec

¹⁵ Disco polo is a genre of Polish popular music originating from music played during weddings and dance parties, with simple melody and bawdy lyrics. It was created in the 1980s and the 1990s were the peak of its popularity. Since 2007 it is coming back. Disco polo is criticised for a low quality of performance and lack of originality, but this does not affect its popularity in Poland.

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ABSTRACT

Małgorzata Jabłońska

Irradiated with Art

The paper presents the Oratorium Dance Project and its impact on the activities of the CHOREA Theatre after 2011. In 2010-2011, the Chorea Theatre carried out the groundbreaking project for its biography: the Oratorium Dance Project. It was inspired by the project of Simon Rattle, the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, and Royston Maldoom, choreographer, who attempted to popularise classical music by engaging 250 people from local community into performing it. The Chorea Theatre responded to a similar challenge. A group of one hundred participants, led by an American choreographer Robert Hayden, Earthfall Dance group and Chorea Theatre artists, featuring the Orchestra and Choir of the Łódź Philharmonic Orchestra, created a dance and music performance. Maciej Maciaszek and Tomasz Krzyżanowski composed a musical piece Oratorium Antyk/Trans/Orchestra especially for this project. It was based on the arrangements of music from ancient Greece. This project's purposes were primarily educational. It was addressed to young people aged 13-24, children and seniors (50+) from Łódź and the Łódź region. The group of young participants included people from disadvantaged environments and at risk of social exclusion. Implementing Oratorium Dance Project required from the artists a risky undertaking of going "into the city", many months of engagement with workshops and difficult stories of people's lives, as well as a test of their own maturity, that this team had not experienced before.

This project and its results determined new directions of development for CHOREA and new scales to measure its success and failure. For the Chorea team, the existential and social resonance of the project became the fundamental validation for art they wanted to create and promote. The Theatre's activities after Oratorium were essentially a consequence of experiences resulting from Oratorium. They determined the programme of two consecutive editions of the *Retro/Per/Spectives* festival and its smaller special editions, *Perspectives*, the only festival in Poland which, in 2015, was entirely devoted to presenting so called engaged theatre, working for and in the communities at risk of social exclusion and raising the issues of defavourisation. Currently, the CHOREA theatre is composed of three groups born out of experiences from the workshops preceding Oratorium.