

## Idiochoreography in the Art of Dance Theatre for the Disabled Definition, Method and Field of Interaction

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### SUMMARY

Interdisciplinary research in the field of art and pedagogy of dance culture for disabled people enabled the author, as an independent researcher, to identify the concept of individual movement and rhythm idioms in dancers with different disabilities, which is constantly evolving. In this article an attempt is made to define a new concept of idiochoreography with reference to personal studies with disabled dancers from Teatr Ruchu Umownie Ewidentnego – TRUE (Theatre of Movement Conventionally Evident). The author also deals with the concepts of improvisation and choreography as well as the notion of transmediality in the art of dance theatre. The article also presents an idiosensory machine that the author designed and built at the end of 2023. The device serves to develop a methodology for blind dancers to independently grasp and develop movement and rhythm potential.

**Keywords:** art, dance pedagogy, dance theatre, disability, movement and rhythm idioms, idiochoreography

### Introduction

#### Towards justification

**F**or over five decades, a radical shift towards corporeality has been observed in the dance scene. The new aesthetic was defined by Artur Pełka as a “body turn”<sup>1</sup> – a turn towards corporeality. The creative body became the subject of a social, political and emancipatory

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<sup>1</sup> Artur Pełka, *Subwersja ciała sportowego jako metafory męskości w tekstach teatralnych Elfriede Jelinek* (Subversion of Sports Body in the Context of Masculinity Metaphor in Elfriede Jelinek Theatrical Writings), in: *Kulturowe konteksty dramatu współczesnego*

discourse. This contributed to new theoretical considerations and research being initiated. As a result of the cultural changes in the 1930s, a new theatrical genre emerged – German *Tanztheater*. The phenomenon, which was initially recognised as a style and occasionally as a choreographic tendency, did not have time to fully blossom. It fell silent with the outbreak of the Second World War. It experienced a revival and developed anew at the beginning of the 1970s in the course of the aforementioned body turn in the humanities and the arts. The concepts and spectacles of choreographers such as Gerhard Bohner, Reinhild Hoffmann, Susanne Linke, Johann Kresnik and Pina Bausch directly addressed social life. The choreographies created became a source of commentary on the current political reality with its historical background and its reference to memory. As a result, representations of the body rooted in social contexts came to the fore, while compositional principles and technical skills were relegated to the background. The discursiveness of the surrounding everyday world became an important element. Individual dance techniques gave way to a wealth of gestural means and innovative ways of guiding the body through individualised movement and rhythm. In dance theatre, choreographers denied recognisable dance techniques altogether or concealed them and tended towards gesture in order to reproduce “the here and now” through them. The reality represented by *Tanztheater*, which is a true reflection of society, became a perfect setting for the development of the dance culture of people with disabilities<sup>2</sup>, housing the whole baggage of their personal life experiences, potentials and culture of being. The development of dance art with its performative and transmedia aspects can be described as a future contribution, to repeat the question I posed<sup>3</sup>: “Is it finally time

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(Cultural Contexts of the Modern Drama), Mariusz Bartosiak and Małgorzata Leyko eds., (Cracow: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2008), p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Kultura taneczna osób niepełnosprawnych. Próba zdefiniowania – poszerzenie znaczeń* (Dance Culture of Disabled Persons. An Attempt at Definition – Expansion of Meanings), *Studia Choreologica*, 21 (2020), pp. 48–49.

<sup>3</sup> Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Inny w przestrzeni wychowania do twórczości – tancerz z niepełnosprawnością ruchow* (An Unalike within the Domain of Education for Creativity – a Dancer with Physical/Motoric Disability), in: Sylwia Wrona and Jerzy Rottermund eds., “Interdyscyplinarność w opiece i wsparciu osób niepełnosprawnych. Problemy edukacji, rehabilitacji i socjalizacji osób niepełnosprawnych” (Interdisciplinarity in Guardianship and Assistance for Disabled Persons. On Issues Concerning Education,

to permanently integrate disability into the social norms and rules that are binding in artistic training in the field of dance and in stagecraft development?" For a decade, I have been conducting individual research in the field of arts education and dance based on the thesis that theatre, through the presence of disabled dancers and actors, is precisely the medium that initiates an authentic space for the formation of creativity and art. Theatre is the only malleable medium that opens creative "windows to the world" for the disabled and at the same time enables subjective manifestations and the pursuit of creative autonomy. For almost a decade, British researchers, including disabled people such as Kate March, have been addressing shortcomings and gaps in academic approaches and practical research relating to the work of disabled dancers. However, theoretical considerations are centred on the disabled dancer as a scenic director, individual and performative artist.<sup>4</sup>

We need to go further, to move just one step away from focussing on a single dancer and place him constantly in the spectrum of philosophical considerations about the disabled body. The effort that disabled people make to dance on stage, to purposefully create a complete story, to interact with the audience in and have a say in pressing matters, to involve the spectator kinetically and kinaesthetically, becomes a pedagogical medium, an emancipatory element for everyone involved. Patrice Pavis, a French theatre semiotician, correctly grasped the specificity of *Tanztheater*. In his definition he highlights that *Tanztheater* no longer aims at dance as such, movement or choreography, but at creating a completely theatrical performance and giving preference within its framework to movement that relates to everyday motor skills outside the stage.<sup>5</sup> The expanded concept of movement and rhythm idioms in relation to people with different disabilities offered here creates space for a broader analysis and practise that includes idiochoreography as defined here and the role of the idiochoreographer, with the inclusion

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Rehabilitation and Socialisation of Disabled Persons), (Katowice: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2015), 21, (no. 2), pp. 95–105.

<sup>4</sup> Kate March, *Taking charge – dance, disability and leadership: exploring the shifting role of the disabled dance artist*, (Coventry University, 2016), [online], [accessed: 20 May 2024], <<https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/42066580/Marsh2016.pdf>>.

<sup>5</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, translated into English by Christine Shantz, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 87–88.

of many actors on the dance stage in a participatory model and the endeavour to transform the audience.

### Dance theatre based on different movements and rhythms Towards changing the well-trodden paths

Dance theatre with its idea of opening up sociological and pedagogical discourses through the lens of anthropology of the body points to new areas of identity construction and exposes sites of social control. Using this potential offered by dance theatre, disabled dancers are able to not only observe, hear and experience art through participation, but also co-create it physically and as equals, in a fully-fledged manner. It is important to recognise that copying movement patterns, standards and rules prescribed in art and artistic culture that are only accessible to abled dancers – including any associated dance techniques and attempts to imitate them “correctly” – would always be a reflection of the barriers that restrict disabled dancers.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of idioms of movement and rhythm of disabled dancers seems to be a turning point, opening up the perspective of change.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The creative process is what I am exclusively concerned with here.

<sup>7</sup> I have dealt with the issue of the idioms of movement and rhythm of persons with disabilities from the perspectives of art, cultural animation, anthropological-phenomenological, education, training and methodology in a series of articles, of which I count as the most important: Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Somaestetyczne konteksty tańca współczesnego, czyli o trudnej sztuce tworzenia siebie przez taniec* (Somæsthetic Contexts of Contemporary Dance, i.e., About the Difficult Art of Creating Oneself Through Dance), “Zeszyty Naukowe Forum Młodych Pedagogów przy Komitecie Nauk Pedagogicznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk”, 20 (2016), pp. 126–138; Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Kultura taneczna osób niepełnosprawnych – próba zdefiniowania* (Dance Culture of Persons with Disabilities – an Attempt to Define the Subject), “Rocznik Naukowy Kujawsko-Pomorskiej Szkoły Wyższej w Bydgoszczy. Transdyscyplinarne Studia o Kulturze (i) Edukacji”, 14 (2019); Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Kultura tańca osób niepełnosprawnych...*, op. cit., s. 37–54; Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Kultura taneczna osób z niepełnosprawnością. Metodyka czy animacja?* (Dance Culture of Persons with Disabilities. Methodology or Animation?), “Parecja, Czasopismo Forum Młodych Pedagogów przy Komitecie Nauk Pedagogicznych PAN”, 2 (2020); Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Teatr Ruchu Umownie Ewidentnego – inkluzja i animacja kultury tanecznej osób (nie?)pełnosprawnych. Między kulturą artystyczną a pedagogią tańca* (Inclusion and Animation of Dance Culture of (Dis?)-abled Persons. Between Artistic Culture and Dance Pedagogy), in: *Ważne obszary badawcze w pedagogice*, ed. Katarzyna Jagielska, (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Scriptum, 2022).

The term “idiom” has the linguistic prefix ‘idio-’ which means: own, personal, separate, distinct, different, formed independently, arising from within. According to Władysław Kopaliński: “an idiom is a combination of words – a phrase or expression that is specific to a particular language and cannot be translated word for word into another language”.<sup>8</sup> In my research and my artistic practice with disabled dancers and actors, I have come to the conclusion that they have specific movement idioms and their individual rhythm in connection with a number of personal characteristics. An idiom depends on the specificity of the disability, therefore it refers to certain types classified according to generally recognised medical classifications: motor disability, mental disability, visual impairment and deafblindness, hearing impairment, speech impairment, mental illness, diseases of the genitourinary system, neurological diseases including neurodegenerative diseases and obesity. Idioms have individual and collective creative, educational and training potential. They contribute equally to recognising personal abilities and enable this recognition to be experienced by an interdisciplinary collection of addressees/participants/researchers. Idioms, as an individual/unique and therefore inimitable source of artistic creation, simultaneously become a determinant of new knowledge about dance. Idiom potentials in turn – in rankings and specific movement and rhythm systems – allow us to make distortions in the definition of what we consider recognisable in dance training, learning and creativity. I agree here with conceptual choreographers (with whom I identify in my artistic work) who do not treat dance in performance as an overarching goal. By “turning towards corporeality” and taking a critical look at the body, they raise the question of what dance is. This question clearly has an explorative character in the culture of disabled people, which is why, in my opinion, it is *expressis verbis* an indicator of the need to leave the usual, socially accepted nomenclature.<sup>9</sup> So it is not a question of searching for substitutes, but of discovering, learning and describing completely new concepts and categories. Let us emphasise

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<sup>8</sup> Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych z almanachem* (Dictionary of Foreign Words and Phrases Supplied with an Almanac), (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2000), p. 221.

<sup>9</sup> Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Kultura tańca osób niepełnosprawnych...* (Dance Culture of Disabled Persons ...), op. cit., pp. 55-73.

openly that disability is by nature clearly detached from this nomenclature. This separation concerns both the nature of things (physical and psychological otherness/distinctiveness – i.e., medical aspect) and social marginalisation – more precisely - rejection (stereotype and prejudice). Principles and rules that determine the standards of movement and rhythm of a disabled body, together with this body's aesthetics, in a scientific and research, descriptive and educational, also methodological and learning approach, must cross the boundary of the recognised and approved standards of thinking about and identifying dance. Such a step requires courage and motivation to research and experience in the active, in being with the experience, in sharing this experience and in the intense search for a method to reveal such potentials and to learn how to use this method to detect potentials in oneself and then to redefine the analysed reality in order to change it. Xavier Le Roy, a French conceptual choreographer, refers to the “redefinition of change” formulated in the following way:

The critical practice of the body means questioning our common understanding of corporeality and the way we perceive it [...]. The critical practice of the body strives to overturn every fixed way of perceiving the body [...]. Everything is in your head. You can imagine that the body ends at the skin, and then something that is not the body starts. A body can be defined as a thing that exists only in relation to objects, in movement against them. For example, I can imagine that my body is an extension of the chair I am sitting on, and my feet – are an extension of the floor. In fact, we are never free from physical contact with our surroundings. Therefore, we can practice our bodies critically by consciously placing them in different relationships or vice versa – treating them as unconnected entities. The critical practice means questioning one or another understanding of the body. The critical practice does not intend to impose a single vision of the body.<sup>10</sup>

### **Idiochoreography as a synergy of improvisation and choreography in dance theatre for people with disabilities**

In dance theatre, improvisation and choreography are very flexible and interlocking concepts. This applies in particular to dance theatre that is co-created by dancers and actors with disabilities. This is primarily due to the peculiarity and uniqueness of the idioms of movement and

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<sup>10</sup> *Uprawiać ciało krytycznie. Z Xavierem Le Roy rozmawia Joanna Warszawa* (Practice the Body Critically. Joanna Warszawa Talks to Xavier Le Roy), *Didaskalia*, 12 (2003), p. 131.

rhythm at their disposal, and consequently the engagement of their potentials on the dance theatre stage in juxtapositions, complex structures – idioms. These include improvised idiochoreographies – unconstrained and structured – as well as idiochoreographies that use fixed movement codes, and hybrid and transmedia idiochoreographies, which I will discuss below. Dancers-actors use these idiochoreographies or create them on stage themselves instantly – in the “here-and-now” of the dance theatre performance. Both forms are created using a participatory model of the creative process, it emerges from the relationship between dancer-actor and idiochoreographer. The product of this process takes the form of a procession (performance)<sup>11</sup> understood as idiochoreography.

As I have already emphasised, the work of idiochoreographers with dancers-actors with different disabilities is linked to a particular kind of understanding of reality, both in terms of the physiology of the motor system and its rhythm, and in terms of time and space. The initiation of participatory processes, in which the idiochoreographer guides the dancer-actor to reach a state of concentration that allows him to create an independent movement or rhythm creation (improvisation), or alternatively to lead him/her in the direction of defining and then internalising certain motor codes (choreography), reminds me of the description of symmetriads in the novel *Solaris* by Stanisław Lem:

The birth of a symmetriad comes like a sudden eruption. About an hour beforehand, an area of tens of square miles of ocean vitrifies and begins to shine. It remains fluid, and there is no alteration in the rhythm of the waves. Occasionally the phenomenon of vitrification occurs in the neighbourhood of the funnel left by an agilus. The gleaming sheath of the ocean heaves upwards to form a vast ball that reflects sky, sun, clouds and the entire horizon in a medley of changing, variegated images. Diffracted light creates a kaleidoscopic play of color. The effects of light on a symmetriad are especially striking during the blue day and the red sunset. The planet appears to be giving birth to a twin that increases in volume from one moment to the next. The immense flaming globe has scarcely reached its maximum expansion above the ocean when it bursts at the summit and cracks vertically. It is not breaking up; this is the second phase, which goes under the clumsy name of the ‘floral calyx phase’

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<sup>11</sup> All performances created by TRUE dance theatre (Teatr Ruchu Umownie Ewidentnego – Theatre of Movement Conventionally Evident) are called parades. They cannot exist without an audience, because the spectators are involved in the process of creating the performance.

and lasts only a few seconds. The membranous arches soaring into the sky now fold inwards and mergeto produce a thick-set trunk enclosing a scene of teeming activity.<sup>12</sup>

Let us try to analyse the wonder described above and systematise it on the grounds of theoretical implications and selected experiences within TRUE<sup>13</sup> (Teatr Ruchu Umownie Ewidentnego – Theatre of Movement Conventionally Evident) praxis. The parades of TRUE are based on the interaction of three areas of scenic movement: improvisation, choreography and kinaesthetic-kinetic engagement of the spectator, i.e. an interaction/relationship with the spectator through media and technology that are intensely interwoven, complementary and synergistically interdependent.

In discussing the first area, I refer to Wojciech Klimczyk, who outlined the principles of improvisation in dance and emphasised that improvisation is:

[...] a free and spontaneous body that does not reproduce a predefined movement phrase, but determines it at a given moment and in a given space. [...] Improvisation in dance is thus close to improvisation in music. It has a theme and a delimited spatial and temporal framework, but the rest is up to the performer. The idea is that this allows for a maximally personal dance expression and opens the door to randomness and introduces an element of surprise.<sup>14</sup>

The improvisation principles described above were applied to the construction of the first multi-storey scenario of *Korowód w Fado* (Parade in Fado) (2014), and next in *Korowód w blusie* (Parade in Blues) (2021).<sup>15</sup> In the latter performance – and we will concentrate on this until the end of the article – the concept of developing special movement and rhythm idioms for disabled dancers was taken up in a well-established

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<sup>12</sup> Stanisław Lem, *Solaris*, translated from French by Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox, (New York: Harvest Book, 1987), p. 117–118.

<sup>13</sup> TRUE – Teatr Ruchu Umownie Ewidentnego (Theatre of Movement Conventionally Evident), a Polish dance theatre founded by Jerzy N. Grzegorek in 2014, in which the dancers are people with various disabilities (teatrtrue.pl).

<sup>14</sup> Wojciech Klimczyk, *Wizjonerzy ciała. Panorama współczesnego teatru tańca* (Visionaries of the Body. A Panorama of Contemporary Dance Theatre), (Cracow: Korporacja Ha!art, 2010), p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> Video recording of the performance *Korowód w Bluesie. Mandala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala), in: YouTube.com [online], [accessed: 20 May 2024], <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8oZ97gZ-rI>>.

way. These rules resonate with Cynthia J. Novack's classification. The researcher indicates that improvisation can be implemented and conducted for the following purposes:

- a) as private and/or choreographic exploration;
- b) as a teaching method or therapy;
- c) presented as a performance.<sup>16</sup>

This agrees with the stated aims of TRUE's idiochoreographer and dancer-actors. The only area that can be excluded from the division used is therapy. For this has always had and continues to have only subliminal overtones, not intentional. It arises and has arisen from itself, without being the content of either its own or the TRUE dancers' aspirations.<sup>17</sup> The improvisation used in *Korowód w bluesie. Mandala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala) aimed at bringing movement and rhythm idioms to the stage in an autonomous way, detached and specific, i.e., isolated from a broader perspective of the parade content and the form of an overview. This was a consequence of the creative, emancipatory and exploratory approach. In my opinion, it was necessary to take a broader – phenomenological – view of the subject to characterise the potential of the body in movement and rhythm available to dancers-actors with various disabilities. There were three rationales behind this:

1. The perspective of the audience:
  - a) in terms of cognitive and identity growth: individual (cultural) and collective (social);
  - b) recognition of new values by abandoning/rejecting the image of the disabled dancer rejecting the image of the disabled dancer as a person who is capable of nothing but copying chosen art practices and who does it solely in a therapeutic context in favour of a fully-fledged artist and creator based on a specific dance culture.
2. The perspective of the dancer-actor:
  - a) in terms of discovering creative potentials – identity growth: individual and collective;

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<sup>16</sup> Cynthia J. Novack, *Kilka rozważań nad improwizacją w tańcu* (A Few Reflections on Improvisation in Dance), translated into Polish by Weronika Szczawińska, in: *Przyjdźcie, pokażemy Wam, co robimy. O improwizacji tańca* (You Come, We'll Show you What we Do), Sonia Nieśpiałowska-Owczarek and Katarzyna Słoboda eds., (Łódź-Warsaw: Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, Instytut Muzyki i Tańca, 2013), p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> A slogan: "It's not about disability, it's about art" is the TRUE dance theatre's motto.

- b) creative participation (creative courage) in the participatory model of the collective flow of ideas (dancer-actor – dancers-actors – idiochoreographer);
  - c) the struggle for the recognition of becoming/being an able-bodied and fully-fledged participant of a particular dance culture in a perspective of having at one's disposal unique movement and rhythm potentials.
3. The perspective of the creator and researcher:
- a) participatory and creative – implementation of the participatory model – idiochoreographies;
  - b) exploratory (testing the effectiveness of participatory model using idioms, idiomatic forms and idiochoreographies).

Improvisations in the parade *Korowód w bluesie. Mandala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala) were the result of the implementation of the participatory model, i.e., the introduction of close co-operation between the dancer – with his/her movement and rhythm potential – and the idiochoreographer. With traditional choreography, a source for producing fixed movement codes that the choreographer proposes or creates is needed. In the case of improvisation, the choreographer is no longer the originator of the codes. Consequently, the dancer cannot rely on the choreographer's repertoire as a "toolbox" of resources or a dictionary of steps. Giving the creative initiative to the dancer is – as Annie Kloppenberg confirmed – a very creative solution for many authors and at the same time a very effective one.<sup>18</sup> However, it should be emphasised that an able-bodied dancer has a "toolbox" in the form of his own movement and rhythm resources together with rules for using them and can therefore produce complex "step" structures. The able-bodied dancer has acquired and consolidated these resources as a result of (self) training, based on the rules and classification norms of artistic culture.<sup>19</sup> Since the disabled dancer has no access to those (medical barriers – inability to cope; social barriers – denied access to education), he is forced

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<sup>18</sup> Annie Kloppenberg, *Improvisation in process. „Post-control” choreography*, *Dance Chronicle*, 33, 2 (2010), p. 186.

<sup>19</sup> More information on this aspect in: Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Inny w przestrzeni wychowania do twórczości...* (An Unalike within Education Domain for Creativity...), op. cit., pp. 95–105; Jerzy N. Grzegorek, *Kultura tańca osób niepełnosprawnych...* (Dance Culture of Disabled Persons ...), op. cit., pp. 37–54.

to construct his own advantages. The [disabled] dancer can achieve this by renouncing the spheres of reproduction and imitation and referring to his specific dance culture and the concept of movement and rhythm idioms. As a result, he [the disabled dancer] can construct complex structures of “steps” in the form of idioms/idiomatic constructs. This enables the disabled dancer to create both the unrestricted and the fixed/structural improvisations in a similar way to a non-disabled dancer.

The participatory model applied in the artistic activity of TRUE theatre is based on a philosophical dialogue with the inclusion of external impulses/catalysts (music, sounds, human voice) and internal impulses (use of personal voice by the dancer). The model represents an extension of meaning together with the construction of a wider and creative understanding between the idiochoreographer and the dancer-actors, in the sense of a collective flow of ideas. An example of the application of this model was the dancer-actor and idiochoreographer’s search for connections between the lyrics of a blues song *Miss Celie’s Blues (Sister)*<sup>20</sup> and blues music and her own life experiences and emancipatory aspirations, which occurred during the work on staging the parade *Korowód w bluesie. Mandala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala).

Sister, you’ve been on my mind  
 Sister, we’re two of a kind  
 So sister, I’m keepin’ my eyes on you  
 I betcha think I don’t know nothin’  
 But singin’ the blues  
 Oh sister, have I got news for you  
 I’m somethin’  
 I hope you think that you’re somethin’ too  
 Oh, Scufflin’, I been up that lonesome road  
 And I seen a lot of suns goin’ down  
 Oh, but trust me  
 No low life’s gonna run me around  
 So let me tell you somethin’ sister  
 Remember your name  
 No twister,  
 gonna steal your stuff away  
 My sister

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<sup>20</sup> *Miss Celie’s Blues (Sister)*, from the film *The Color Purple*, in Steven Spielberg direction from 1985; film soundtrack *The Color Purple*® 1986 Qwest Records, Inc. under exclusive licence to UMG Recordings, Inc. Producer/composer: Quincy Jones, lyricists: Lionel B. Jr. Richi, Quincy Jones, Rod Temperon.

We sho' ain't got a whole lot of time  
 So shake your shimmy, Sister  
 'Cause honey the 'shug  
 is feelin' fine.

In this case, a structural improvisation was sought. The concept of combining song lyrics and blues music with emancipatory colouring on several levels with the film content and the life experience of a then 67-year-old dancer, mother of four grown-up sons, and her personal emancipatory aspirations through participation in dance theatre, the personal characteristics and the idiomatic form created directly in front of the audience “here and now”, led to the creation of a specific improvisational idiochoreography. On the stage made of sand mandala (sand as a source of free expression), the dancers of TRUE dance theatre danced a message to all women: you have a right to happiness, love, creation and self-realisation, regardless of the circumstances. The conscious decision by the author of the parade (performance) to give the dancer the floor but retain overall responsibility for the performance led to a synergy of events, which Klimczyk describes as follows:

Improvised dance, its proponents say, is much more fascinating than planned choreography because it is much closer to life, riskier and more spontaneous. [...] Really intense improvisation requires maximum concentration of the senses, because it is a process of choice.<sup>21</sup>

Although the participatory model raises the question of who is ultimately the creator of the improvisational idiochoreography, it is the idiochoreographer who remains responsible for the meaning of the performance, its form, composition and intelligibility – for the parade-logos. In other words, taking on the role of the idiochoreographer means having the ability to reduce the distance that arises between improvisation and choreography. It is the capacity for (self-)criticism that enables the idiochoreographer (like the choreographer) to identify valuable elements in the development of improvisation in a collective flow of thought and, as Larry and Jennifer Predock-Linnell would put it, to embed them appropriately in the overall composition.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Wojciech Klimczyk, op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>22</sup> Larry Lavender Predock-Linnell, Jennifer Predock-Linnell, *From Improvisation to Choreography. The critical bridge, Research in Dance Education*, vol. 2, 2 (2001), p. 206.

In the idiochoreographic practices of TRUE dance theatre, or more precisely, – in the practices that generate dance, the spectator often takes on the role of the dancer. The kinaesthetic-kinetic event that makes them a full participant in the episodes occurring in the parade takes place in their bodies. It is assumed that the spectator of a parade created by TRUE dance theatre should empathise, participate and recognise values, as well as incorporate new elements themselves and thus turn the parade (the performance) into a performative phenomenon. A parade makes up the whole spectacle and is also a leitmotif (which is usually repeated several times). In the parade *Korowód w bluesie. Mandala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala), the processional idiochoreography, the leitmotif of the performance, had the character of a structural composition, i.e., a fixed idiomatic form that could be repeated by each dancer-actor of the TRUE troupe. It consisted of a [procession] of dancers-actors who followed each other rhythmically and moved in a rhythm that corresponded to the tempo of the music. It must be clearly emphasised that the movements and their rhythms corresponded to the idiom of each TRUE dancer and each TRUE dancer-actor, taking into account their individual possibilities. Traditionally defined choreography is based on synchronised and/or asynchronous movement embedded in a stable composition. In the case of dance theatre, in which dancers-actors with different disabilities perform, the pursuit of such a staging is not only futile, but also represents a deviation both methodologically and aesthetically [Figure 1].

The structural composition, i.e., the composition of the idiochoreography, accommodates the search for stabilisation of the compositional structure because it contains specific, i.e., individualised, personal and unique movement and rhythm idioms of a disabled dancer-actor. This is why, the performance cannot be repeated one-to-one. Idiochoreographies will always be different, unique, characteristic, not so much in terms of personal characteristics and dance technique (after all, every dancer – whether abled or disabled – is specific), which dancers have, but above all taking into account individual characteristics of the respective disability, including their unconventional stage design. The idiochoreography of the leading procession/parade is complemented by something else. For it is the spectator who becomes the addressee of the movement impulses and rhythm. The repetitiveness of the gestures becomes



Figure 1. *Korowód w bluesie. Mandala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala). Leitmotif – procession/parade. Photo: [pieknezdjecie.pl](http://pieknezdjecie.pl)

recognisable and comprehensible. The spectator is involuntarily led to follow the movement and its rhythm. The result is a comprehensive idiochoreography as a synergy of traditionally defined choreography and improvisation. The spectator follows the movements and rhythm of the dancer of his choice in a cascade, personally and collectively, in a peculiar movement improvisation that seems to appeal to most of his/her senses. The spectator begins to focus on kinaesthetic sensations and the constant negotiation of the immersion of the idiochoreographic environment. The spectator who takes up the movement and its rhythm suddenly become a catalyst in relation to another, neighbouring spectator who already begins to participate in the procession.

Idiochoreography is a synergy of choreography and improvisation resulting from the methodical use of the movement and rhythm potential of disabled dancers by an idiochoreographer, as a specific capacity of signs and symbols in the creative process based on a participatory model of individual and collective subject manifestations in the dance scene.

Over time, the effect of the idiochoreographer's work in the participatory model becomes a sign of his characteristic creative language. This also includes an extension of the stage personality of a dancer-actor through stage manifestations created on the basis of specific idioms and idiochoreographies. Through the configuration of the experience, the idiochoreographer takes on exclusively and equally as much risk based on the unconventionality of the disabled dancer-actors. He must immerse himself in this unconventionality, experience it directly, understand it and imagine what is unforeseeable for other people: he becomes, as it were, a member of the troupe. Based on the words of Colleen Thomas – the idiochoreographer “listens to the voice of the performance”.<sup>23</sup>

### **Idiochoreographies versus trans-mediality of dance theatre art**

Dance theatre, which relies primarily on human movement and its cognitive-perceptual potential, also makes intensive use of new media and technologies, including images, sounds, performative styles and installations. The presence of new media and new technologies in dance theatre is currently becoming a perfect tool to establish a hybrid communication and performative relationship with the spectator. This hybridity of the show, which is dance-technological in nature and often also comes from scientific directions to create installations, leads to a dematerialisation of dance as the main source of focusing attention. The audience then concentrates on the technologised setting in a post-humanist creation of dance art. Tomasz Załuski pointed out that this becomes a transmedia process.<sup>24</sup>

TRUE dance theatre applies hybridity understood in this way in its idiochoreographic work and expands it considerably. Owing to the innovative use of technology in terms of choreographic and improvisational components that form a transmedia idiochoreography, the spectator becomes not only a critical observer of dance art, but also a direct participant with scientific and exploratory susceptibility; for example, when observing the unconventionally visualised movement and rhythm of

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<sup>23</sup> Cit. per Annie Kloppenberg, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>24</sup> Tomasz Załuski, *Transmedialność? (Trans-mediality?)*, in: *Sztuki w przestrzeni transmedialnej (Art in Transmedia Space)*, Tomasz Załuski ed., (Łódź: Akademia Sztuk Pięknych im. W. Strzemińskiego w Łodzi, 2010), pp. 10–11.



Figure 2. *Korowód w bluesie. Mandala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala). Image from the camera filming from above. Trans-medial idiochoreography. Photo: [pieknezdjecie.pl](http://pieknezdjecie.pl)

a disabled dancer-actor who is inaccessible in the traditional stage perspective. He is no longer on the sidelines, but at the centre of the action. However, it is always movement and rhythm that bind this hybridity, both by drawing on specific idioms of disabled dancers and by initiating a reciprocity of this movement in connection with the audience. Richard Povall describes such scenic hybridity as follows: “Only when the body moves in it does the milieu come alive; without movement it remains deaf, dark and useless”.<sup>25</sup> [Figure 2]

TRUE dance theatre uses the media-technological-scientific hybridity to initiate the invention of kinaesthetic-kinetic body episodes. We find the justification for this construct in Wojciech Klimczyk’s thesis, who points out that:

Only when confronted with an audience does dance become theatre, and therefore communication. Only then does the body gain its fullness. No matter how hermetic the message, the body always wants to share it with another body.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Povall, *Z technologią należy uważać...* (A Little Technology is a Dangerous Thing...), translation into Polish – Michał Jankowski, in: *Świadomość ruchu. Teksty o tańcu współczesnym* (Movement Awareness. Hints on Contemporary Dance), Jadwiga Majewska ed., (Cracow: Korporacja Ha!art, 2013), p. 216.

<sup>26</sup> Wojciech Klimczyk, op. cit., p. 214.

This kind of interdisciplinary creativity leads to improvisation and dance choreographies developed with the use of materials other than the dancer's body. Images and sounds are examples that can take on such a performative presence. The above solutions do not exclude the (co-)presence of the human body in choreographic means, especially when the choreographic creation contains interactive assumptions and the spectators become (co-) performers by triggering interactive mechanisms that activate these works.<sup>27</sup> The interconnectivity of this type leads to hybrid idiochoreographies in the dance theatre of people with disabilities.

In the parade *Korowód w Bluesie. Madala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala), in which I played the role of idiochoreographer, I used three main sources to initiate kinaesthetic-kinetic episodes that triggered direct interactive communication with the spectator. The first was the leitmotif – an inclusive idiochoreography (procession/parade); the second was a trans-media idiochoreography of movement and rhythm in a traditional formula representing an inaccessible perspective of viewing reality; and the third – a hybrid idiochoreography. A good example of the latter type is the use of a device – a gramophone. In the parade *Korowód w Bluesie. Madala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala) blind danseuses-actresses switched on the gramophone. They placed the record on the turntable and positioned the needle of the gramophone on a specific track. This hybrid idiochoreography was based on a performative event that presupposed a flowing sequence of the performance. The gramophone was switched on several times during the parade and it was unpredictable how much time a blind dancer would need to place the needle of the gramophone on a certain track and start the music. It is worth quoting Sophia Lycouris here, who explained that “from a choreographic point of view, fluid environments have the advantage that they have great potential to stimulate corporeal reactions in the spectator.”<sup>28</sup> In this case, the hybrid idiochoreography represented a combination of the idiom of the blind dancer in conjugation with a device that produces sound and distance, which

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<sup>27</sup> Sophia Lycouris, *Choreograficzne otoczenie. Nowe technologie i działania artystyczne oparte na ruchu* (Choreographic Environments. New Technologies and Movement-related Artistic Work), translated into Polish by Michał Jankowski, in: *Świadomość ruchu...* (Movement Awareness...), op. cit., p. 205

<sup>28</sup> Sophia Lycouris, op. cit., p. 214.



Figure 3. *Korowód w bluesie. Mandala* (Parade in Blues. Mandala). Switching on the gramophone record by the blind dancer from TRUE dance theatre. Hybrid idiochoreography. Photo: [pieknezdjecie.pl](http://pieknezdjecie.pl)

contributed to the creation of a compositional meta-system. The gramophone, a device that [normally] requires the sense of sight to switch it on, was transformed into a specific “non-human” subject of the action. It significantly influenced the perception and modelling of the audience’s cognitive processes, involving them in the action, resulting in a series of kinaesthetic sensations. The audience reacted with muscular tension, which they referred to as “cheering” in backstage statements. This tension stimulated the viewers into kinetic explorations of the surface: they performed body movements as if they were the ones who were supposed to put the needle in the right place [Figure 3].

### **Idiosensory machine – introduction**

In my scientific research on disabled people’s dance theatre, I focused not only on the artistic aspect but also on its pedagogical complexity, especially the educational and learning aspects. During the research, the need arose to adopt a completely new nomenclature, including creative

and innovative methodological areas, together with a proposal for a new conceptual apparatus. This proved necessary in order to define the principles arising from the discovery of the movement and rhythm idioms of disabled dancers and their potential for art and pedagogy. They are far removed from qualification rules and standards because they are too flexible and therefore inconceivable to be clearly categorised. The way in which a disabled dancer discovers his/her movement and rhythm idiom is one of the fields that need continuous analysis and exploration, including: the search for practice means/methods, the expansion of idioms that are not known or can only be achieved through the gradual emergence of assets; creative engagement and finally the pursuit of autonomy in the acquisition of these multi-layered structures by the disabled dancer him/herself.

When staging our first full-length parade *Korowód w Fado* (Parade in Fado) (2014)<sup>29</sup> with disabled dancers-actors, I asked a dancer, blind from birth, if she had ever dreamt of falling? Most of us have had such a dream at least once. It is a truly kinaesthetic-kinetic bodily experience through the characteristic twitching that is triggered by the fear of the dream, namely by its triggering. We are standing on the edge of a tower block and suddenly we start to slide because something or someone pushes us: we fall into the abyss. And even if we do not actually fall down, our body involuntarily experiences convulsive movements, known in technical jargon as a “myoclonic spurt”. The body senses in reality what was only a projection of an image – a dream. The blind dancer replied that she had never experienced such a dream. Later, a psychologist explained to me that such dreams only occur in people who have previously experienced spatial dimensions through their sense of sight. Blind dancers experience and understand space differently. They do not take body movement and rhythm into account like sighted people.

When working on the movement and rhythm idioms of blind people and realising their potential in the creative process – the idiochoreographies of the TRUE dance theatre – the designer of the idiosensory machine

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<sup>29</sup> Scientific review: Oxana Kozlova, *Świat korowodu w spektaklu Jerzego N. Grzegorka Korowód w Fado i w jego możliwym zasięgu* (Procession/Parade World in Jerzy Grzegorek’s Performance “Parade in Fado” and within its Possible Range), *Pedagogika Szkoły Wyższej*, 2 (18), (2015), [online], [accessed: 20 May 2024], <<https://wnus.usz.edu.pl/psw/pl/issue/394/article/8143/>>.

made sure that a dancer with a visual impairment did not perform in a partnership with another dancer-actor. The aim was to create an optimal space for self-education, which initiates exercises for experiencing and developing movement and its rhythm, for expanding awareness of one's own body, for spatial perception, for overcoming resistance and understanding rules, for entering into a body relationship with other dancers-actors and for interactive communication with the idiochoreographer. Self-realisation of the potential available to the body of the dancer with visual impairment through the accessible senses, while at the same time striving for specific sensory-motor integration. Jerzy N. Grzegorek began building the idiosensory machine in October 2023. The first tests of the machine took place at the end of November 2023.

### **Idiosensory machine – construction**

The idiosensory machine is built on a solid frame with elastic ropes – resistance bands – in the shape of the letter X attached to the sides. They can be adjusted to provide more or less resistance during training by adjusting the tension. Inside the letter X is a rotating shaft that turns along the axis: front – back.

The machine appeared in two versions. In the first variant, the frame system consists of a square without a base and with ropes/rubber stretched at four points to form the letter X. A rotating shaft is installed in the centre of the letter X, which has the following dimensions: Length – 90 cm, diameter – 10 cm. The shaft rotates along the axis: front – back. In addition, a second rotating shaft is installed at a height of 30 cm above the floor on flexible ropes/rubber parallel to the first shaft. The second shaft has the following dimensions: Length – 50 cm, diameter – 15 cm. This makes it possible to follow the movement and rhythm with the legs at the same time [Figure 4 and 5].

In the second variant – cubic – there are frames/structures in the form of a cube with flexible ropes/rubbers stretched in 8 points (four at the top and four at the bottom), and these form a double letter X. A rotating shaft with a length of 90 cm and a diameter of 15 cm is installed in the centre of the letter X; the shaft rotates along the axis: front – back [Figure 6 and 7].



Figure 4 and 5. The first variant of the idiosensory machine – frame with double rotating shaft, design and construction – Jerzy N. Grzegorek. Photo: Ewelina Grzegorek (November 2023)



Figure 6 and 7. The second variant of the idiosensory machine – cubic, design and construction – Jerzy N. Grzegorek. Photo: Ewelina Grzegorek (November 2023)



## Idiosensory machine – operation

To start the exercise, the dancer-actor stands in front of the rotating shaft [Figure 8].



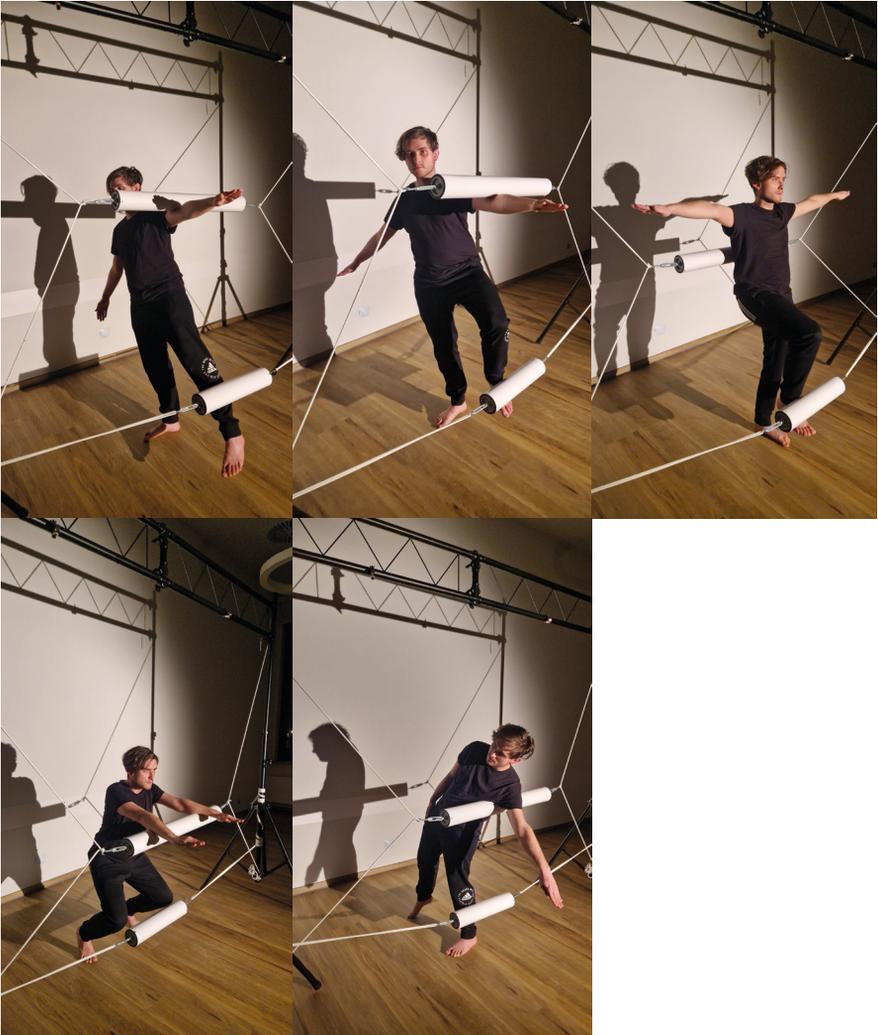
Figure 8. Starting position – regulatory, in the first variant – frame with double rotating shaft. In the photo – blind dancer-actor from TRUE dance theatre – Kacper Kozłowski. Photo: Ewelina Grzegorek (November 2023)

The rotating shaft is adjusted to the height of the dancer-actor’s breast-bone [Figure 9].

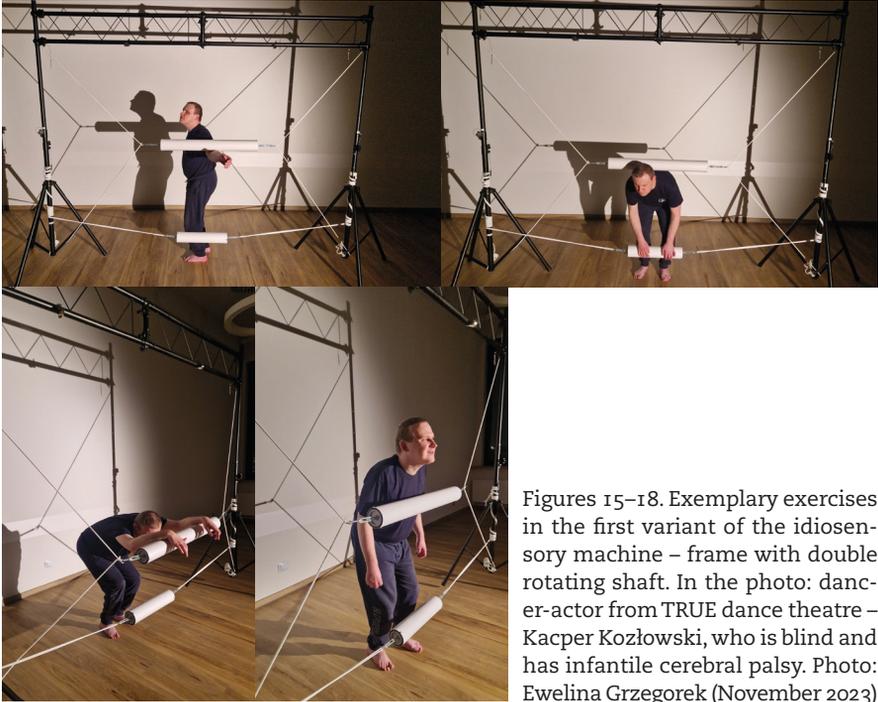


Figure 9. Regulation of the rotating shaft. In the photo: author with the deaf-mute dancer-actor Karol Pabich from TRUE dance theatre. Photo: Ewelina Grzegorek (November 2023)

The idiosensory machine enables movement along the axes: front – rear, right – left and up – down, as well as in planes: door plane, table plane and transverse plane [Figures 10–27].

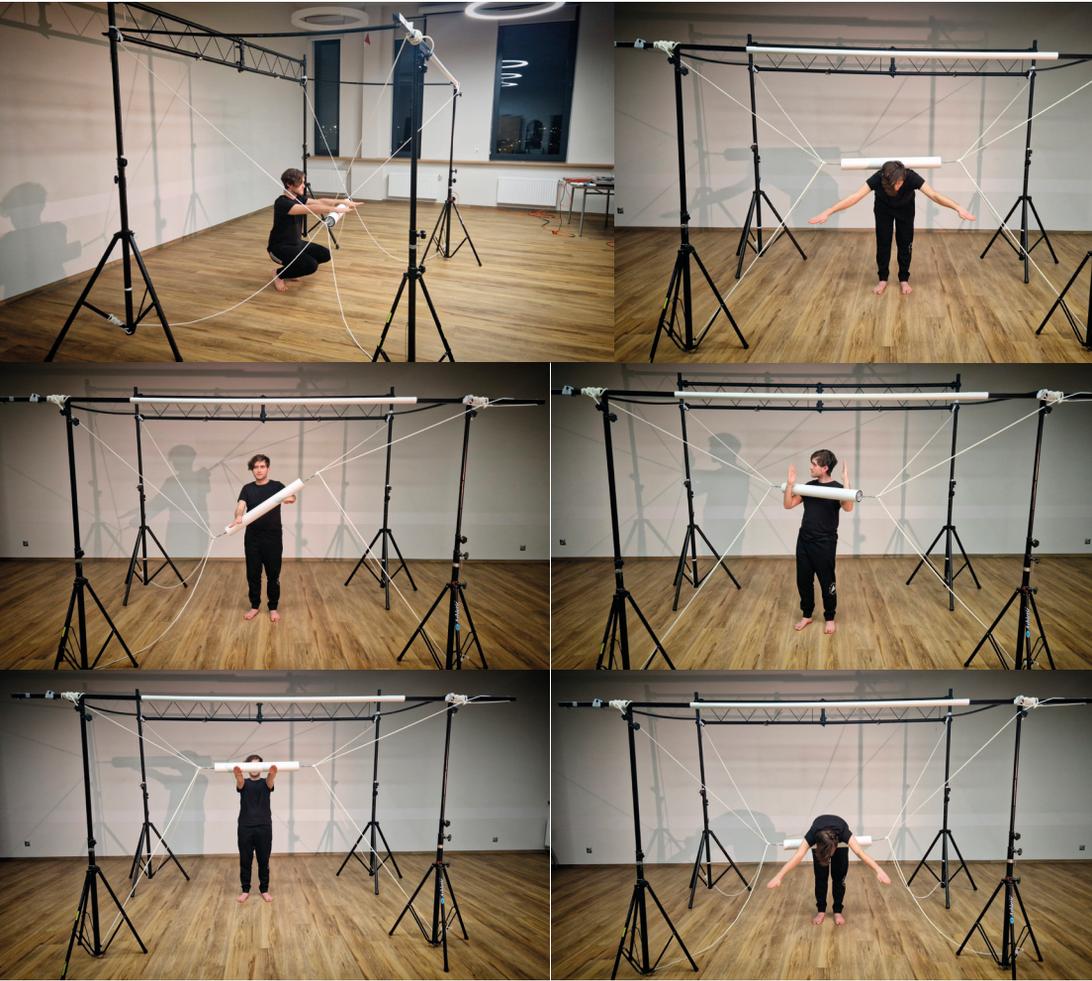


Figures 10–14. Exemplary exercises in the first variant of the idiosensory machine – frame with double rotating shaft. In the photo: the deaf-mute dancer-actor Karol Pabich from TRUE dance theatre. Photo: Ewelina Grzegorek (November 2023)



Figures 15–18. Exemplary exercises in the first variant of the idiosensory machine – frame with double rotating shaft. In the photo: dancer-actor from TRUE dance theatre – Kacper Kozłowski, who is blind and has infantile cerebral palsy. Photo: Ewelina Grzegorek (November 2023)





Figures 19–27. Exemplary exercises in the second – cubic – variant of the idiosensory machine. In the photo: the deaf-mute dancer-actor Karol Pabich from TRUE dance theatre. Photo: Ewelina Grzegorek (November 2023)

### The idiosensory machine and the scope of its impact – towards synergy

The idiosensory machine enables movement and rhythm exercises that initiate the process of discovering a specific movement and rhythm language in a dancer with visual impairment. This is also the beginning of self-education through the discovery and improvement of idioms in later stages and with the subsequent creation of complex combinations, movement and rhythm structures – idiomatic forms.

The exercises performed with the idiosensory machine trigger cognitive activity and trust in the dancer-actor's own body and, in particular, initiate the demand to explore the principle of its [the dancer's body] mechanics, including the ranges of movement and rhythm, the exploration of space and movement aesthetics. The exercises focus attention on the mobilised quality of movement and its rhythm. By regulating the flexible ropes, we deal with different resistances. This helps to develop the ability to relate to the technique of contact improvisation, "unrestricted" improvisation and "structural" improvisation and to create idiomatic structures: Combinations, movement and rhythm structures based on the dancer's specific idiom. The idiosensory machine enables creative communication between the dancer and the idiochoreographer in a participatory model involving external impulses/catalysts (music, sounds, human voice) and internal impulses (the use of one's own voice).<sup>30</sup>

The idiosensory machine arose from the idea of discovering and improving the potential of movement and rhythm idioms of blind dancers. Only blind people? It must be clearly emphasised: no. Motor skills and rhythm exercises with idiosensory machine can be performed by both disabled and abled dancers.

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<sup>30</sup> Observation from personal research: a dancer/actor from TRUE dance theatre, blind from birth, was confronted by the idiochoreographer during exercises with the idiosensory machine with the task of creating a role with the text in the performance we were working on. After we started the exercises with the idiosensory machine, we observed a change in the dynamics of the text, the phrasing changed, drama and tension appeared, which were related to the flow of body movement and rhythmic interpretation events and were expressed in the articulation, which took into account all the processes that took place in the individual words and at their boundaries.