

# BODILY OBSERVATIONS

The body as an instrument – on the lookout for new bodily skills



Aleksandra Czarnecki Plaude

## **A PIECE OF ARTISTIC DEVELOPMENT WORK**

published by Stockholm University of the Arts 2013–2015

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2015 A film from the project is available for download at [www.stdhplay.se/forskning](http://www.stdhplay.se/forskning)

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## Foreword

### **The body as a collective in a process that examines and reflects memory**

I believe this text constitutes an important reminder about what we may be in the process of losing, but also of what it might be possible to awaken and recapture. It concerns core concepts and processes that are essential to our art forms and are under threat in various ways owing to the lack of interest that is all too apparent in modern times.

The body as a collective in a process that examines and reflects memory is clearly a classical way of looking at and creating participation, but also a way of imprinting film, media and performing arts as an immediate witnessing of bodily experiences, thereby communicating memories to us of experiences that we have not lived through ourselves.

These are fundamental processes for telling stories in our art forms and they have existed since theatre and dance took their first tottering steps. It is only when we recognise their meaning that we can progress beyond the lack of collective consciousness of our times. And I am proud that it is Aleksandra Czarnecki Plaude who has shown the commitment to undertake this research and is enabling us to rediscover these connections.

*Claes Peter Hellwig, professor*

## Project Background

*“Through the solitary gate,  
among the yellowing leaves,  
I follow the narrow path.  
The earth is as red as the lips of the children.  
Suddenly  
I am conscious  
of each step  
I take (...)*

*If you see something on the way that you want to devote your attention to – the blue sky, the hills, a tree or a bird – then stop, but continue to breathe attentively in the meantime. Attentive breathing enables you to keep the object of your admiration alive.”<sup>1</sup>*

After several years of working with the interpretation of movement, both as a teacher and theatrical choreographer, specialising in actors’ work with their bodies and dramatic text, I became interested in examining how my experience and practical knowledge of actors’ bodily skills might be “lent out” and “translated” into encounters with several other artistic disciplines, both within the context of the stage and outside it. In recent years, I have started to meet and work with students and colleagues within film and media. Encounters across demarcation lines often involve fascinating and challenging processes that inspire and reflect my own working field, raising questions and recalling the importance of feedback to my own roots. During these collaborations, I have discovered that the body as an instrument and the materialisation of thought are important skills not just for actors, dancers or stage artists. In fact the body is present in all artistic disciplines that relate in some way to the human story. However, thoughts about the body are not the same as bodily thoughts, or the materialisation of thoughts. This differentiation and problematising of bodily skills was the basis of my research during 2013-2015. This text, along with the accompanying film (available for download from [www.stdhplay.se/forskning](http://www.stdhplay.se/forskning)), aims to capture and describe parts of that project with a focus on my teaching practice and the new working methods which I developed during the project.

During the period 2013-2014 I was responsible for an interdisciplinary Masters course at SADA: Chorus Pain (*Körvärk*) – from Troy to Verdun. The student group – “the Chorus” – consisted of professional artists working with performance, film and television; actors, dancers, a dance anthropologist, a screenwriter, a director, an animator, a producer, a publisher and a lighting designer. The students’ actions were not particularly based on their professions. Instead, the collective co-creative process focused on the interdisciplinary encounter. The purpose of the programme was the following: with the body as an instrument and building on historical and mythological events, World War I and the Trojan War, to explore and develop methodologies for the co-creation of a performative Chorus work or installation. The collective working process, interpretation and brainstorming was also captured in the reflections of the students, which are included in this text. The project *The Body as an Instrument – In Artistic Processes for Stage, Film and Media*, is partly based on field studies for the Masters programme *Körvärk – From Troy to Verdun*, in relation to my own teaching and supervision, focused on bodily skills and ensemble performance.

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1 Thich Nhat Hanh: *The Long Road Turns to Joy: A Guide to Walking Meditation*

My work has revolved around three main areas:

- physical encounters (individual, ensemble, places and audience),
- embodying knowledge (how the individual and the ensemble gather knowledge through the body and how brainstorming takes shape), and
- reflected bodily experiences (documentation).

## The Chorus

*No Man is an island  
Entire of itself;  
Every man is a piece of the continent,  
A part of the main (...)<sup>2</sup>*

In the autumn of 2013 I started the Masters course “*Körvärk – from Troy to Verdun*” together with two of my colleagues at SADA, Harald Stjerne, professor of film manuscripts, and Thomas Mirstam, lecturer in lighting design. We shortened the name of the master class to *Körvärk* (Swedish for Chorus Pain or Chorus Pain, with reference to the Swedish word “*Körverk*”, which means Chorus performance or Chorus work).

The student group, which we called the “*Chorus*”, is composed of nine professional artists working in stage performance, film and television. It is the personal experience and the voice out of the collective process and collective memory that are the focus of the cross-disciplinary encounter. The actions of the students are not particularly a function of their profession. They all meet to work with common collective processes – partly with the body as an instrument and partly taking part in seminars, lectures, writing exercises, workshops in light and space, etc.

*“Ten artists from different fields are brought together with a view to jointly creating a collective memory by studying collective memories. They call the group a Chorus. The result will be any form of choral work in which the artists face an audience together. The Chorus travels to Flanders, to the ruins of what might have been Troy, to collect informative, audio-visual and spatial information. The Chorus meets lecturers, participates in workshops and performs floor work. We are building an archive, which we study in parallel. This leads to discussions about what a thing is, how it is created and passed on, what is documentary and what is fiction, the significance of location, grief, war and pain, as well as who has the right to tell a story (...).  
The boundary between technical and substantive building blocks is really not that sharp. In the interdisciplinary MA programme we collect experiences and expertise from one another, and mix them with knowledge and creativity. We immerse ourselves – and it has a broadening effect. In what we have in common and in what that commonality requires. We build our collective memory.”<sup>3</sup>*

Why do we apply the term Chorus? I have been asked that question many times in the course of the project, both from inside my immediate group, i.e. from the students themselves, from my colleagues, and also externally. These days the word Chorus is associated primarily with polyphonic vocals and an ensemble that rehearses and puts on musical performances under the direction of a conductor. In our case it is a different type of ensemble work. What we have done is to borrow the word Chorus, with its principles from ancient drama and tragedy, in which the Chorus's voices represent a community. The Chorus sees, bears witness, remembers and comments, but cannot intervene. Its function is to comment on the action: sometimes factually, about events that have already happened or are about to unfold in the future, sometimes meditatively or lyrically, just hinting at what is to come, the expectations or fears of something incomprehensible or horrific happening.

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2 John Donne (1572-1631)

3 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Freja Andersson



For me the *Chorus*, borrowed from ancient times, remains an important instrument in both my educational and artistic work. On the one hand I refer to the *Chorus* as the bearer of collective memory and to the responsibility the *Chorus* has to tell the story. On the other hand I am inspired by what relates to form, i.e. the fact that the *Chorus* obviously has access to elevated, poetic language. This I see as a powerful tool in terms of artistic approach and freedom. Access to poetic language provides a tool for a bolder and more complex way of telling a story than the linear narrative technique. It enables the *Chorus* to express itself in a more fragmentary way without losing any of the essence of its testimonies. The *Chorus* can paint strong images for the audience by means of words, the body, the voice, dance, drums, etc. It can give what may seem to be an incoherent performance, making use of abrupt changes and challenging common sense. Poetics and elevated language are powerful tools for narrative technique which, in addition to the story, can highlight the subtle and the unspoken – what can only be read "between the lines". The *Chorus* also connects what is material and real with what is spiritual and emotional. It communicates with human beings in the present, the past and the future. The *Chorus*'s contact with the spiritual and the gods means it is in contact with an "all-seeing eye", and can thus anticipate, predict and anticipate events. By being the bridge between man and fate (the gods), past and future, tradition and intuition, the *Chorus* can leap out and act as a group of both conservative and modern citizens. The *Chorus* can thus comment on tradition and progression, beyond what is politically correct.

The fact that the *Chorus* can express itself in poetic and elevated language, including symbolism, means that it does not bear responsibility for how its words are interpreted. Its message may be interpreted by the audience in many different ways. What the *Chorus* does instead is to use acoustic and visual means to leave impressions and reverberations with the audience. In the end, we can reduce the *Chorus*'s responsibility to a kind of "outer eye" on events: bearing witness to confirm the existence of events and the people who experience them.

*"We are the Chorus travelling back to sieges and wars. Hundreds of thousands are dead. We travel into their lives and into their death; we hear their names, we encounter their souls. We see the fields, the landscapes, the ruins and the amphitheatre. We have collected an archive of memories. We wonder about memory's elusive power, about how memories become common memories and what they are created from. We are the Chorus. We say: what was there then is now in the lives of others, in the bodies of others."*<sup>4</sup>

From a teaching perspective, the *Chorus principle* is also a tool through which we can highlight and challenge individualistic thinking. With the *Chorus principle*, within the framework of the *Körvärk* Masters course we have focused much of the work on studying the relationship between the collective process and the individual, where I believe that a strong ensemble requires strong and independent individuals, which is not the same as individualistic ego mindsets. In order to describe and discuss my thoughts on the *Chorus principle* and the encounter between the artistic and the pedagogical when applying the *Chorus principle* in more detail, I would also like to mention something about my own background.

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4 From *Körvärk*, encounter with the audience, 19–21 May 2014 (text Åsa Sarachu)

## Körvärk (Chorus pain), the Chorus Body and the collective memory

*Yes to infrastructure – No to feelings*

*You have to be realistic. Dreamers are not.*

*Dreams and feelings are just signals in the brain and nothing more than that. So emotions are pure fantasies. Dreamers and sentimentalists are a wretched breed you should beware of.*

*Emotionally driven people can even be dangerous.*

*People who cannot control the electrical impulses in their brain are a threat to the whole of society. Every single emotion is actually a potential danger to the individual and their environment. Emotions should be tamed like wild animals and pruned like roses in a well-tended garden.*

*What you feel does not matter. Moreover, no one else feels what you feel and broadly speaking your feelings are probably pointless. Therefore, feelings are nothing you should be hanging on to. A feeling may seem important to you 'in the moment' but it is no more than that. Think about that next time you feel excited or sad. Infrastructure, on the other hand, is something that matters in both the long and short term.<sup>5</sup>*

Political satire and black humour are two of many pieces of the puzzle that is my cultural heritage. I was born in 1969 and raised in Poland at a time and in an environment where multiple parallel archives prevailed and lived next to one another as different truths. State propaganda, family stories, school books and the Catholic Church often preached completely different versions of the same historical events. The same people could be patriots and traitors, heroes and enemies, victims and perpetrators, all depending on whose tongue or pen was bearing witness. Even a single family, workplace or any popular parish could be the carriers of different collective memories. As a child and a young person, I thought it was hard to relate to the fact that I always had to take any information with a pinch of salt and that I could not really know whose stories I could trust.

Art and political satire were an oasis. Everyone – myself, my friends and those I did not trust – we could all laugh together. Forget about censorship and fear. We laughed about the unspoken, that which we could read between the lines. Social criticism could not be shouted from the rooftops as the risk of being imprisoned, losing your job or it resulting in major negative consequences for your family and friends, was a constant threat. The artistic instrument for social criticism and the weapon against oppression was linguistic elegance and a visual slide show filled with poetic images that could be interpreted in different ways. Good theatre was often political theatre that used sketches instead of big brushstrokes when criticising the powers that be or the prevailing norms. Music and lighting were other important elements as their emotional language could become a subtext or contradictory voice, going against the text to emphasise the contrast with the spoken word. The same with movement. What could not be expressed with words was sometimes given space by means of a silent movement by one person or carried in unison by an entire ensemble. Interacting with light, the spatial principle was an important team member and player. There was no categorisation in terms of spoken theatre, musical theatre or danced theatre; it was simply theatre, and I loved it.

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5 Erik Ericson: Till vederbörande (To whom it may concern)

What appealed to me, apart from the richness and playfulness that relates to form in design and interpretation, was also the sense of ensemble that I could experience from the audience. Real solidarity, beyond political slogans and broken expectations. By the sense of ensemble I mean musicality and sensitivity between the ensemble members and the audience.

These strong memories that I carry with me from the time when I lived in Poland become a sort of compass in my work as a teacher and artist today. I am trying new ways and developing my own methodologies to strengthen the ensemble and the sense of ensemble. Poetics and elevated language in relation to artistic creation, where mind, body and spirit (subtext) co-exist with space and light, are part of my heritage. They have strongly coloured my artistic taste and play a complementary role in my educational life.

In the *Körvärks* year, the *Chorus Body* (“Körkroppen”) and the “*collective memory*” were two central concepts. The *Chorus Body* was the name I gave parts of the ensemble training for which I was responsible, and which aims to develop the individual's keenness, sensitivity, scenic presence, body pitch and physics in relation to the group feeling, interaction, ensemble sensitivity of musicality with elements such as heartbeat, timing, rhythm, orchestration, etc. In other words, the *Chorus Body* is the *Chorus's* daily ensemble training for later work: on the one hand physical rehearsal and retrieval of materials and on the other before co-creating a process of performative work including design and artistic interpretation. The training includes breathing exercises, voice and movement suggestions, improvisation, composition in space and time, and individual tasks – what is known as *choral conducting*. The ‘*Choral conducting*’ in this context means that an individual prepares, proposes and leads joint ensemble exercises based on their job-specific skills and experience.

*”A whole year consisting of a lengthy, almost dizzying, artistic process filled with common travels, intensive project weeks at the school and long empty periods in between (...)*

*The Chorus and the Chorus Body. I have thought about and tried to experience the Chorus Body as one single big physical and energetic collection of matter that is composed of several individual, physical bodies. A body that is dependent on all its parts, on all the Chorus members, to work to the full. A body that is affected by each individual's emotions and experiences. A body where the collective memories – both physical and mental – are stored (...)*  
*The Chorus leader week (Körledarveckan). According to Aleksandra, Chorus Leading means that an individual prepares, proposes and leads a joint ensemble exercise based on their job-specific skills and experience. Thomas processes difficult experiences from the journey by introducing comedy. Filling us with joyful memories and emotions for our emotional reservoirs, individually as well as collectively, gives us better means to get to know our painful memories and emotions as well. I want to explore past and present with a focus on the transition in between. We slowly start creating collective memories in the Chorus by jointly processing individual experiences from our common experiences of the journey.”<sup>6</sup>*

The words “*Chorus*” and “*Chorus leader*” do not refer to the musical significance Chorus = response (refrain, song). Instead these refer once again to ancient drama where the Chorus members function as carriers of knowledge and witnesses of events, with the ability to look

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6 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Erika Nykvist

backwards and forwards. The Chorus is wise, scared and somewhat opportune<sup>7</sup>, for it is given responsibility to tell a story with the collective memory as a common denominator for all individuals in the Chorus.

The *Chorus Body (Körkroppen)* is the vehicle for the collective work to expose the view of individualistic thinking, which is strongly present in today's society and also, therefore, in our education programmes. At SADA there is a kind of mass production of artistic training with hard individualistic thinking built into the system. The programmes are based on ensemble work and teamwork, but when it comes to aims and objectives the programmes and courses are run with a focus on the specific student or individual and their development. This has triggered in me a need to develop a Masters programme focusing on the *Chorus* where a large part of the training is devoted to work with democratic processes and challenging traditional roles that exist within the framework of stage and film production. We have discussed and problematised the concept of the *Chorus* aimed at reflecting individuals through collective work.

When hierarchies fall apart there is chaos. Chaos – and especially creative chaos – which in itself is a common companion to the creative process, represents the unknown and unfamiliar. Chaos is an unpredictable universe; it has its own order; it puts our proven skills to the test and challenges our ingrained strategies. We face our fears and put what is artistic – but also what constitutes human courage – to the test.

*“There were discussions about appointing an artistic director, someone taking the role of director, someone being the screen-writer, and so on. These ideas were later rejected on the grounds that we should not work as though we were in a normal production process. This course gives us the opportunity to work with collective decisions – as an experiment. The idea of the collective, with the Chorus and the joint approach, is also to reach common decisions (...)*

*Where am I? What do I want? I want it to be simple (that is what I want now – when the course started, I had unrealistic ambitions and visions). Sum up the year; find the essence of it. We are a Chorus that can make use of the Chorus to express and tell a story. During the year we have acquired bodily tools that help us to be a listening and coherent Chorus. We have written texts and we have experienced two journeys together tracing two wars. Now we would be able to keep it simple but make it beautiful, poignant and effective. Tell the story about Troy, about the First World War, its pain, the suffering and death. Advance it into a now; history repeating itself, memories that are preserved, stories that are told, who has the power to decide a story. The oral tradition, which was transformed into writing. About what we remember and what we forget. About what we are able to bear.”<sup>8</sup>*

In our work with *Körvärk*, and with the focus on collective creativity, there were no established procedures in the form of clear professional roles that usually take care of and lead the different elements of artistic processes – in our case, the writing of the script, design and construction of the stage, lighting, sound, directing, performance, public liability, etc. During the entire process, from joint research, through processing to interpretation, the *Chorus* has often worked within the framework of the unknown, with chaos as an educational framework. This is in order to spot new opportunities and potential

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7 Quote, Tomas Mirstam

8 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Åsa Sarachu

for this particular Chorus, both as an ensemble and for all the artistically strong individuals in it. The collective work process we chose in *Körvärk* has given the ensemble members the opportunity to work both within their usual professional and craftsmanlike practices and outside them. This approach puts to the test questions about the individual's artistic desires and courage. It uncovers and sheds light on both vulnerability and strengths, and perhaps above all provides the opportunity to reflect on issues like: Who am I as an artist? What is my core? Where do I put my energy? What gives my artistry energy and what drains and consumes it? What part of my potential and my desire to create am I using today as part of my professional role and activities? What do I need to hold on to and evolve in order to continue to develop as an artist? Is there anything I need to let go of in order to further develop my artistry? What comes to life when I work in a way that challenges my usual role, and can I bring this experience back to my everyday professional life?

Bodily skills are powerful tools as a means of daring to face yourself. The *Chorus Body* enables every individual to see themselves reflected in someone else. Studies of breathing, seeing and presence enable me to encounter someone else and thereby to encounter myself again, experiencing recognition and seeing differences, comfortable and uncomfortable situations, the familiar and the unfamiliar. The *Chorus* is a kind of platform for each individual or ensemble member to have the opportunity to be reflected in greater diversity. This makes the physical encounter extend to more encounters with others than myself, and thereby with more sides of myself – as a person and artist. You can say, therefore, that the collective co-creation, including the chaotic reality that occurs within the structure, becomes a platform to distil your own important issues and insights into your professional capacity and artistry, both in the context of the profession and outside it.



You are the path.  
That's why it is never going to  
tire of waiting.  
Whether it is covered in red dust,  
autumn leaves  
or icy snow,  
come back to the path.  
You become like a thread of life.  
Your leaves, your stem, your branches  
and your soul's flowers  
will be healthy and beautiful,  
when you begin the exercise  
touching the earth <sup>9</sup>

Thematically the research sections of the *Körvärk* Masters course from Troy to Verdun revolved around two themes: war (the Trojan War and World War I), with death as the second theme. I would suggest that all of us – teachers and students – also use the concepts of war and death as a metaphor for our inner wars. It is bewildering to meet yourself as a professional artist in a new context where the collective process challenges and sometimes calls into question what I apply and know, while showing me something new about myself that I did not know about or did not want to remember. Not wanting to remember is like letting something die. We are reminded of the issue of responsibility for keeping alive parts of one's oeuvre, which does not come to life within one's own profession.

*“Thursday, 27 March 27 2014. Seven weeks to the presentation of our Körvärk. At last we are gathered together. We are on an airplane travelling from Stockholm to Istanbul for onward transport to the city of Canakkale in the Dardanelles. We are going to study and work in the Troy archaeological area and visit the First World War front on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Are we going to feel the same pain on this journey as we did on the last trip? Fear of death and feelings of being assaulted? What will I feel? What will the Chorus feel as a collective? As individuals? (...)*

*There are a whole lot of methodologies for reaching the tabula rasa the actor needs, but what I have experienced now is something else. It is the uncontrolled, chaotic and horrific fall into the void. And the salvation provided by the stage and art to many of us who fall. How many artists do not feel safe except in art? How much art has not emerged out of the abyss? (...) It hurts to be human, but that pain is also the breathtaking presence that is life itself. Maybe that is what Körvärk is ...”<sup>10</sup>*

As the artistic collective work – from the ensemble training, brainstorming by means of physical and intellectual research, to the performance and encounter with the audience – was expected from the outset to become a potentially painful work process, we teachers christened the Masters Programme “*Körvärk*” (Chorus Pain).

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10 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Britta Olsson

## BODILY READING

*Week 35 Introduction and collection phase, Monday, 26 August, 2 p.m. to 3.30 pm in the studio*

*A circle in the middle of the floor. We start with something simple. Scan the body, breathe, meet the gaze, movement of the arms following the breathing motion. Then two and two. Easy – breathing, meeting, the principle of the hand, listen, touch along the spine, three exhalations – three movements. Pelvis, navel-point, chest-heart centre, wings. Whole breathing area. Directs energy to abdomen/stomach, down to the feet. Silence, tones. Walking, breathing. Meeting, eye contact, parting and meeting. We talk about “tuning the instrument” i.e. the individual body. Then to connect to someone else, eventually to everyone in the room, like one sound in an orchestra. We are looking for the big Chorus Body. “Walks”, find the common pulse. Different perceptions of what the pulse is. Different body perceptions. After an hour we are making a joint effort in the direction of finding a common language. The individual “colours”, i.e. fluctuations and variations in muscle tone, posture, eye direction, energy inwards and outwards, the common form of expression. With the principle of the hand we mirror each other’s shape, allow for small changes, seeking common agreement on the form we are striving for. The Chorus Body searches for a shape. There is much to be done on the issue of sensitivity and bodily perception.<sup>11</sup>*

As I wrote previously, my work during *Körvärk* revolved around three main areas: physical encounters – the *Chorus Body* (individual, ensemble, places and audience), embodied knowledge – *Bodily reading* (how the individual and the ensemble gather knowledge with their bodies and materialise work with ideas) and reflected bodily experiences (documentation).

Each of these focuses in turn contains a preparatory phase, an implementation phase and a reflection phase. In the context of this work, I have partly used my earlier proven experience and practices in order to lead the *Chorus*, with all its nine members from different artistic fields, to develop the common *Chorus Body*, i.e. bodily skills are all about stage presence, responsiveness, collaboration, ensemble-esteem, bodily perception, communication and physical representation, etc. By introducing the concept of a *Chorus Body*, I want to create a sort of image of a physical connectedness in an ensemble.

In relation to *Körvärk* I wanted rather to help this ensemble to build up knowledge about common listening, coherence and interaction, and processes based on these building foundations and strategies for co-creation rather than proposing bodily ideals. My background as a former musician and pianist leads me to be happy to borrow the image of an orchestra. Different types of instruments can form an ensemble and interact. Even the soloist relates to the ensemble by using various musical elements: basic pulse, tempo, timing and pause, phrasing, articulation and dynamics influenced by bodily listening.

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11 Aleksandra Czarnecki Plaupe: from Field diary, 2013-2014 academic year



The common orchestra body is audible; breathing and different approaches also enable you to visually see the interaction. The *Chorus Body* has two different functions. One is preparation, a sort of performing readiness for the encounter with the audience. The second function is to develop the physical tools to archive the collective memory, i.e. collecting and storing both in and through the body of the *Chorus* common experiences that become material for the performance, the encounter with the audience.

In this paper, I have not described in detail the sections of the work that are based on previously proven techniques and methodologies. Instead I have chosen to concentrate on trying to describe the new methodology that I have developed in conjunction with *Körvärk*, which I have given the name ***Bodily Reading***. I am continuing to work on this methodology in other contexts and with new student groups, including writers and filmmakers, and can see that it has potential for further development – I intend to continue to work on this.

*Bodily reading* is a kind of bodily studying of locations based on physical observations and actions in an existing environment. The approach is based on the body as an instrument for retrieving external and internal impulses and converting them into physical actions in relation to the energy and architecture of the room or location, including light, sound and all living matter. Observation and a physical realisation resembling an improvisation of movement are achieved in silence, with the help of conscious breathing and physical elements such as tempo, topography, architecture, spatial distance, etc. The purpose of bodily reading is not performative expression, but rather to use the body as an instrument for studying and exploring a place and "storing in memory" physical observations, mental observations, sensations and emotional impressions. The focus is to physically and mentally collect, archive and later administer individual physical and emotional sensations in a later artistic work. The method can be used individually and in groups. In connection with *Körvärk*, as the work referred to the relationship between the individual and the collective experience, *Bodily Reading* has been a source to activate and archive in the collective memory. For the *Chorus* it has worked as a technique to physically examine the locations and materials that will be the basis for subsequent encounters with an audience. The emergence of Bodily Reading is partly inspired by the Viewpoints technique.<sup>12</sup>

*"It was our first joint bodily reading at the Central Station. I was sceptical and I also had a cold. When we were asked to begin, I still went off because it felt even more ridiculous to stay put. And bit by bit new things appeared. Through deep breathing, I had a constant connection with the other Chorus members, and when I rehearsed with one of them I saw for the first time that the floor was covered with a grid, a pattern that kept the world in place – with a rail that leads you on. I noticed how long the large waiting area is, as a springboard into something else. Everything was permeated with secret connections: if you start from the central iron ring, with its clumsy stylised ethno figures, and keep going in each direction until it stops, you see that the whole building is in fact a statement of values."<sup>13</sup>*

*"Memories of bodies in motion and at rest: I draw a new card from the memory bank and am now looking over fields from a shaded war cemetery where row upon row of tombstones*

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12 In brief, Viewpoints can be described as an improvisational technique for examining the actor's work based on two main elements: time and space. These two elements are in turn divided into smaller units, known as Viewpoints. For further information see Bogart, Anne and Landau, Tina (2005) *The Viewpoints Book*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

13 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Alexander Skanze

lie close to the ground. There is grass around the stones of the kind that may be natural or may come from those rolls of turf they use to lay lawns for new houses. The grass is quite smooth and suppresses any attempt at loud speaking or sudden movements. I sense the mood as I walk barefoot along the rows of gravestones.

I crouch down, watch and breathe. I cast around for my travel companions who, like me, are wandering around aimlessly, taking in the feel of the place. We may imitate one another if we want to, provided it is with movements and not with our voices. So we can talk to one another without words, and at a distance. Someone is making sweeping motions with his arms in a corner of the cemetery. Another is making the same movements in another corner of the cemetery, so the movements belong together.

(...) Everyone belonging to the group knows that this is what they are saying to one another. Maybe we will record it and then do something completely different, which will also help us to remember the cemetery in a very special way. We are doing a "bodily reading" of the place. Simply stated, the idea is to seek to absorb information through sensory impressions and convert it into a feeling that can quickly be retrieved later. With this bodily memory, we can give what is often rather dry factual knowledge a refill with fresh water and give it new life.<sup>14</sup>

*"I close one eye and listen with my ear to the ground. Is that not a rumble I hear?  
I no longer know whether it comes from outside of me or is inside me."<sup>15</sup>*

*"A bodily memory of Bruges and Ypres:*

*I ended up among the soldiers*

*I ended up in their lives*

*in their death*

*I ran following their footsteps across the fields,*

*ended up among the graves, in their mud, in their pain*

*I met their souls*

*I saw their lives*

*oh, how they talked about the pain,*

*about the longing, about distress, about their death,*

*fell and got up, fell again, numb, dozed, turned up towards a blue sky, longed to get away*

*and go home, just as they did,*

*just as they did*

*what is now, was then, in the lives of others, in the bodies of others*

*plenty of it*

*walking quietly through the countryside, through the rooms where the war was played out,*

*seeing the fields, now partly filled with corn, with poppies,*

*oaks everywhere*

*inside, outside, backwards and forwards, imaginary walls now, our footsteps clatter in the*

*streets, sweeping gowns, modern boots treading on the cobbles, convent garden filled with*

*goodies, picturesque town, desolate dead?*

*Death is in me. My head is pounding*

*– there is no calm in my head, I cannot stand the sound of guns –"<sup>16</sup>*

*"A bodily memory – a green ocean of grief*

*From a distance the grass seems fantastically well-mown and soft, green and*

*shimmering sunspots, an inviting carpet. But when I start my walk, there are*

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14 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Tommy Håkansson

15 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Nicklas Fischer

16 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Åsa Sarachu

*stunted acorns on the ground everywhere, hurting my feet. Like lead bullets. Like dead, dried hearts. The grieving man of stone. Straight, rigid. The grieving woman of stone. Crouching down, bowed, and at the same time strangely comfortable, a position she can hold forever. The grass receives me. I seek the dead, lie motionless as they do. But the sun caressing my face and drawing me towards it pulls me up. The sun is life, something the fallen will never feel again. The green heat and the soft carpet separate me from them down there. I can never understand who they are, what death is: I can only portray it, represent it.”<sup>17</sup>*

*“Students tell us that they bear witness to their own traumatic encounters with the places we have visited precisely because we have worked ‘bodily’ and not just read about the war and the battles we studied. We have been there, on the spot. In silence, with the help of conscious breathing, worked physically, together with a common technique, which I proposed to the Chorus. There might be various reactions, ranging from strange dreams, the taste of blood in the mouth, feelings of loneliness, vulnerability. The work has brought out the different colours of fear. It is about each individual’s own encounter with war.”<sup>18</sup>*

*“This bodily reading is required regardless of whether you are an actor or a writer because you will get an additional source to draw from when you sit down to do something creative later.”<sup>19</sup>*

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17 Student quote, *Körvärk*, Alexander Skanze

18 Aleksandra Czarnecki Plaude, from the interview/the film section of the documentation, available at [www.stdhplay.se/forskning](http://www.stdhplay.se/forskning)

19 Olof Halldin, from the interview/the film section of the documentation, available at [www.stdhplay.se/forskning](http://www.stdhplay.se/forskning)

## Authors in an encounter with bodily reading

*Aleksandra: Körvärk involves different types of artists and arts that come together on the stage and go through one and the same process. I'm really curious to hear how it is for each of you to work with, for example, my 'bodily reading' methodology. What does an author think?*

*Tommy: These exercises are, of course, very different. I would have to say that I would never have done them if I had not been instructed to do them. They would never have crossed my mind. Bodily reading, I mean. To even think of a room as a physical place where we can relate to one another with the thought that the next step should become something more, a portrayal. I see this as useful experience for becoming better at writing, with everything that you write, an act, a stage direction ... Sounds good in your head but how does it feel to do it? How does it look from the outside?*

*Something harmonious can sometimes arise, right here and now – it's great and feels precious. But just as quickly, this feeling can be lost, as you become very conscious that you yourself are doing something. I'm not a theatre person, I'm no actor, so this feeling that you can sometimes achieve, when you feel the harmony, it's as if you are in tune with one another, and it's really easy to become absorbed in it. But it's hard to keep that harmony alive, and I guess that's what actors struggle with.*

*Aleksandra: I think about that when doing the preparation and then also in terms of what writers do. Working alone as opposed to working with a cast and the acting principles, i.e. to be present in someone else. Is that something you thought about, Alexander?*

*Alexander: Er, yes, for me it's as though the body takes in and thoughts give out. Input and output. And I can say that I absolutely do see that exploring the body has great value on both sides. I can feel that for filming the body as an instrument is very important, but it is not really my area. It's even like it's a no-no: don't even think of writing in the screenplay what people are to do with their body. It is not your job as a screenwriter. (...) If you want to generalise, maybe it's an important aspect for an author. Mostly it is not the extroverts who sit down and write. The authors are perhaps those most in need of an agreement to go out and integrate with other people. (...)*

*I think I'm working to find stories in the room. Stories are working with tempo and finding escalations arise – conflicts. I'm trying to find conflicts in the room. Slow to fast etc. Thesis and antithesis.<sup>20</sup>*

*"Bodily reading has given me a new method of processing ideas and working with writing. Help in getting into a receptive state and via "viewpoints" find a location, tempo, repetitions and other characteristics, processing them into stories. I believe that the fact that it comes from the body gives it grounding in the material – it becomes not just "a good idea" or an elegant expression, but rather something that you have really experienced, which remains in your body, giving it more significance, making it more sound. It is a good way of connecting writing and imagination to physical reality."<sup>21</sup>*

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20 Thoughts about bodily reading from interview with film scriptwriters/Körvärk students Tommy Håkansson and Alexander Skanze, 21 October 2013, documented by Therese Dahlberg

21 Student quote, Location seeks script, single-subject course Autumn Term 2014, Tomas Stark

*“My experience is that bodily reading produced a tranquillity in me, making me trust that what will happen is something I myself want to happen. In the past my stories came to me in more uncontrolled fashion. Bodily reading has shown that I control the story. The meditation exercises allow me to let go, avoiding the stress that often freezes up my writing. Exercises such as repetition, gesture, shape disconnect demands that later end up in images for me. The playfulness in exercises like tempo and gates makes me smile – it gives me courage.”<sup>22</sup>*



*“I’ve had an enormous amount of inspiration from bodily reading. A place or location is often a common source of inspiration but bodily reading has taken it to another level. By doing meditation exercises first, I’ve really become present in a completely different way (whereas I normally go around really isolated in my own world and shut out reality). This has been really different for me – sometimes exhausting, even. I disconnected myself, my own thoughts and my critical thinking faculties. Instead a place somewhere inside me was able to create feelings and impressions. Looking at things I was used to seeing, but with these different viewpoints, enabled me to find feelings and thoughts that I wouldn’t normally have found.”<sup>23</sup>*

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22 Student quote, Location seeks script, single-subject course Autumn Term 2014, Urban Eriksson  
23 Student quote, Location seeks script, single-subject course Autumn Term 2014, Agnes Jeppsson

## One step at a time

*THEY SAY THE SOURCE OF  
FEELINGS IS IN THE FEET.  
WHAT A WONDERFUL THOUGHT ...  
THAT WE WALK OUR FEELINGS  
... AND THAT THE BODY CARRIES A MEMORY OF  
THE AMAZING FEELING WE MUST HAVE HAD  
WHEN WE TOOK OUR FIRST TOTTERING STEPS  
WHAT JOY  
INTOXICATING MEMORIES THAT NEVER LEAVE US  
AND  
THE BODY'S LONGING TO BELONG TOGETHER WITH  
ITSELF  
COINCIDE CLEARLY  
TIME AFTER TIME  
WHEN WE WALK<sup>24</sup>*

At the time of writing, I find myself in a new phase in my work. At the same time as I am rounding off this project, doors to new collaborations are opening, which in turn will provide new opportunities for further development of bodily skills.

I am continuing with my work and developing my method, Bodily Reading, using the principles of ensemble, of Chorus and of collective co-creation in new encounters. The latest being with authors. My compass in this work is trust – in the body as a source of knowledge. I am continuing to leap into something where I cannot really know beforehand what the outcome will be. I am taking one step at a time, going forward, working, investigating, stopping, wondering, being amazed, remembering, thinking ahead and storing new experiences in my body.

## Collaborators in the project

Matilda Ebenstål Almeida, film maker, documentation 2014  
Therese Dahlberg, actor, documentation autumn 2013

## Thanks

to my colleagues at Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts, who have been indispensable to this work:

Harald Stjerne  
Tomas Mirstam  
Alexander Skanze  
Claes Peter Hellwig  
Olof Halldin  
Barbro Smeds, supervisor

## Thanks

to Rüstem Aslan, archaeologist and professor at Canakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi, Turkey  
to Birgitta Prejborn for writing support

## Thanks

to the students of the MA class *From Troy to Verdun – Chorus Pain* and the single-subject course *Location seeks script*.

### Chorus pain students

Freja Andersson  
Niklas Fischer  
Tommy Håkansson  
Britta Olsson  
Kalle Möller  
Thomas Nygaard  
Erika Nykvist  
Åsa Sarachu  
Alexander Skanze

### Location seeks script

Ruth Alice  
Urban Eriksson  
Agnes Jeppsson  
Britta Olsson  
Suzanne Schönström  
Tomas Stark  
Elsa Sylvan

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Aleksandra Czarnecki Plaude, *Fältdagbok (Field diary)*

MA essays, *Från Troja till Verdun – Körvärk (From Troy to Verdun – Chorus Pain)*, MA class  
2013/2014, Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts

Student assessments, *Plats söker manus (Location seeks Script 2014)*, Stockholm  
Academy of Dramatic Arts

## Film

The film from the project is available for download at [www.stdhplay.se/forskning](http://www.stdhplay.se/forskning)





I have worked with the interpretation of movement for many years, both as a teacher and theatre choreographer, with a focus on actors' bodily work in their encounter with dramatic text. I wanted to investigate how the principles I had worked with – my experience and my practical knowledge about bodily skills – could be tested and found to apply to other groups besides actors as well. My research question in this artistic development project is:

*Can the actor's bodily skills "be lent out" and "translated" in the encounter between several artistic disciplines, both in the context of the stage and outside it?*

Aleksandra Czarnecki Plaude  
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