

THE GENEROSITY EXPERIENCE

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Abstract: The performances by Sensorium theatre, Teatro de los sentidos and other partner theatres within the Project of Generosity (POG) are not oriented towards art as cultural information, but art as an experience in which we are touched and transformed; even if this is in merely a minute aspect of our lives.

The Generosity experience (working title) is our answer to the current crisis; it addresses the missing link between us and the resonance of others within us. We exchange knowledge and experience between generations, languages, cultures, masters and pupils and vice versa. Our cooperation is multicultural and multidimensional. We are creating a playground for the public in which everybody can listen, see, feel and truly meet each other. Through the use of artistic games we create bridges between emphatic and entropic forces inside and among us: it is just a game, but it is serious game. It is merely a play, but you will be touched. It is only a piece of art, but you will never forget it.

Key words: *generosity, missing link, experience, resonance, listening*

PROJEKT O VELIKODUŠNOSTI, PLEMENITOSTI (The Generosity Experience): POVZETEK PREDSTAVITVE

Predstave gledališča Sensorium, Teatra de los sentidos in partnerskih gledališč v »The Generosity Experience« ciljajo na umetnost ne kot kulturno informacijo, ampak kot izkušnjo, ki nas gane in zato transformira; tudi v najmanjšem možnem vidiku našega življenja.

»The Generosity Experience« (delovni naslov) je naš odgovor na krizo, zato iščemo in prepoznavamo manjkajoči člen med nami in resonanco drugih znotraj nas. Predajamo znanje in izkušnje med generacijami, jeziki, kulturami, mojstri in učenci in obratno. Naše sodelovanje je multikulturno in večdimenzionalno. V igrivih interaktivnih prizorih ustvarjamo mostove med empatičnimi in entropičnimi silami znotraj nas in med nami. To je le igra, ampak je resna igra Je zgolj igra, a se vas bo dotaknila. Je samo umetniško delo, a ga ne boste nikoli pozabili.

Ključne besede: velikodušnost/plemenitost, manjkajoči člen, izkušnja, resonanca, poslušanje

1. Introduction

We believe that the current global crisis is a consequence of the crises of the individual's spirit and consequently of the nation. *If we extrapolate the most determining feelings from the experiences we encounter in every moment of every day, these could be the feelings that derive from egoism or from generosity. If we reflect on the feelings that characterize a person or a vital path, the conclusion is the same. And we would reach the same conclusion if we examined the social forces that move the world economy and politics. Empathic forces tend to recuperate – generate the necessary energy levels; entropic forces move in the opposite direction. In the spectrum of ranges that are possible under the name of "generosity" we can see two extremes. On one side are the condescending, or "magnanimous", which are deep down still a prisoner of its own "ego"-ism, while on the other side we come across the ones that lead to the negation of the "I" (Vargas).*

2. Working individually is not as powerful as working in a team

The performances by Sensorium theatre, Teatro de los sentidos and other partner theatres within the Project of Generosity (POG) are not oriented towards art as cultural information, but art as an experience in which we are touched and transformed; even if this is in merely a minute aspect of our lives.

In all these years Sensorium also realized a number of performances in which the public was touched by the content, resonance and truth. If we wish to preserve the individual treatment and personal experiences instead of introducing a mass of various information (audio, visual), then sensorial theatre cannot be profitable or work with masses. Its treasure can be found in intimate and personal experiences. Then we started thinking about how we could make the experience bigger and approachable to more people... In 2009 some »ex« actors and pupils of Enrique Vargas and Teatro de los sentidos decided to apply themselves to a common creation and join forces and potentials in the joint project The Generosity experience, which obtained founding through the EU programme EACEA 2007-2013. The project is coordinated by de Warande Belgium, who have a partnership with Turnhout 2012, the Flemish capital culture association. Other partners are the theatre companies Carte Blanche Denmark, Théâtre à l'envers France and De generaal in zijn tuin Belgium.

3. "The Generosity experience", the project with a mission towards greater social responsibility

The generosity experience project has **three phases**. In 2010 four directors from partner theatres held a meeting in Teatro de los sentidos in Barcelona which is under the artistic direction and coaching of Enrique Vargas, the creator and inventor of sensorial theatre. In this meeting we set the aims and concept of the project.

2011 saw the implementation of the **second phase**; we created an international web page <http://generosity.eu/> in five languages: Slovenian, English, French, Danish and Dutch. The page aims to challenge European youngsters to think about acts of generosity in everyday life. The challenges can consist of giving compliments to people or wishing them well, finding a generous person in their vicinity, giving the gift of a story to someone, making an audio recording of something happy, creating and sharing a notebook with friends, giving or leaving a book with artistic drawings in a public place for anyone to find, creating a flash mob in a public space, surprising a friend or enemy with a mysterious deed of generosity, creating a telephone concert, sharing travel tips, sending excellent advice on a postcard to someone who needs it... These small challenges are merely there as an option, but anybody also has the possibility to publish and do whatever he/she desires in the name of generosity. A lot of youngsters applied. In Slovenia we are especially proud of "Mlade face" (Young ones), a group that decided to set a date on which they will perform generous acts all across Slovenia. So, these youngsters helped the elders with their household chores, they took care of their animals, friends... they did things for them and for the community (such as cleaning the city, or painting the houses of the elderly). Mlade face posted numerous photos on the Generosity web page and it was a good job that they did! Hoping to become a part of everyday life and spread generosity, the results within the communities and in their relationships were amazing. Sensorium created challenge number 3, storytelling as a special happening, a project that is still alive and kicking. It is called **Lalabajke** (lullaby). Lalabajke is a truly desired and welcome happening. The purpose of this project is not merely to present a gift of a story to someone, but to find and share stories of inspirational people and big generous acts. Lalabajke have found their roots in the city of Ljubljana and are welcomed by public. At this point we have to mention that the listener receives special treatment, for we follow the sensorial theatre language which means that the public listens to the story in darkness, in a comfortable and tactile environment (big pillows and blankets) and the space is charged with smells chosen on the base of the essence of the story that is being read. The ambiance allows the public to truly enter and travel together with the story, without any other visual or audio information. The large pillows allow them to relax and rest while flowing with the story. Throughout spring and summer we hosted approximately 15 Lalabajke evenings, most of which were read by youngsters. The events started in the Town Library (Mestna knjižnica Oton Župančič), during the summer the stories were read in the town park Tivoli, under the stars and in the winter Lalabajke moved to the town's literature house, Trubarjeva hiša literature. During this second phase Sensorium managed to obtain cooperation from the National TV station, and TV Slovenia will record the process of creating the project in the **Documentary movie** „Table for 100“, which will focus on the Slovenian team and their educational process and rehearsals. The documentary will be directed by Hanka Kastelicova, while the script will be created by the two directors, Hanka and Barbara Pia Jenič, who will follow the organic process of creation. The main protagonist of the documentary is Enrique Vargas, anthropologist and theatre director, the inventor of sensorial language, artistic leader and coach of "The Generosity Experience". Originally from Colombia, he studied myths, plays and rituals, which led him to spend 20 years researching the Amazon shamans, teaching drama arts in the Columbian National University, working in New York's La Mama theatre, and finally settling in Barcelona Spain where he founded the Teatro de los sentidos. In the documentary his role is that of the project's spiritual leader, coach and artistic leader. Barbara Pia Jenič will reflect her mission in the movie on a number of levels: organisational, financial, pedagogic and artistic. The most interesting will be the process of the youngsters, their search for meaning, values, positioning in the world and sharing their interior process (fears, frustrations, doubts and opposites: aims, results, achievements) changing them from an amateur level to a professional one. In the film special attention will be given to the social responsibility of the individual, no matter whether a youngster, adult, employed or unemployed. We will also focus on what can his/her contribution be in order to improve the everyday life and relationships. Art in various forms such as a movie or theatre performance or any other kind of art could be a good mediator between the entropic and emphatic forces within society. Understanding and implementing consciousness is a vital role of art as perceived by the creators of „The Generosity experience“.

The third phase will consist of creating a performance in each of the involved countries. Each director will have to develop and create a local module of the play. The creation process will include numerous Skype meetings which will deal with the production and artistic approaches, and during which we will be able to observe the differences in opinions and stances. This will provide an excellent starting point for enriching each other's world, knowledge and experiences. The different approaches, ways of working and opinions present a challenge to the entire group and sharing them is the essence and core of the project. In the third phase we also need to obtain finances in each individual country. This will prove to be an exceptionally hard process in Slovenia, especially with the current situation. An important question for the project leader B.P. Jenič will be how to find the right partners who will in this hard economic crisis be brave enough to listen and invest. We have to remember that we are not talking about the material profits of the play, but about its spiritual and artistic value in increasing social responsibility awareness in general. The most important partner in Slovenia is Maribor 2012, the European Capital of Culture that follows the same aim, „turn the human in yourself“ in its promotional campaign.

4. Tools of sensorial theatre language as the missing link?

Through the many years that I have worked with sensorial theatre language, we noticed that it had a huge impact on the public. In most cases people write their comments at the end of the play and most of them talk about how it changed their life direction, how they found sense and a path to follow, found themselves again. So, what is so miraculous about this theatrical approach and tool? The first and greatest added value of sensorial language is that it creates a playground for the public as well as for the actors. It offers the game as a pitch between them and creates an experience for the public. It does not offer art or poetic experience as a piece of information, but as an experience, which transforms the individual, as already mentioned; maybe this takes place in the smallest aspects of his/her life, but it is important that it takes place. The second great difference is that we aim to treat the public individually and personally. The third specific is that the scenes are interactive and are suggested as light games, in which the public can play. The games are simple, light, but they have a serious meaning and metaphor behind them. There is plenty to see and read in it for those who enter with open eyes. The short scenes, etudes are charged with meaning, potential and content. There is no empty line. The fourth specific is that we talk only when words are more important than silence. The fifth specific focuses on the language's basic tools and questions them as a tool to be researched. **Silence:** It is hard to achieve silence within a person. However, we can try and try again. The silence tells us everything. It is the silences between the words that tell the story. *Silence is the angel of supreme truth, the messenger that brings the tidings of the unknown to heart, it is the moment when we can listen to and hear another soul...* wrote Maurice Maeterlinck in "The Treasure of the Humble". When presenting the story, we should not only concentrate on the sounds of words, we should also pay attention to the silences that give them life. When we say that a good story is created by its silences, we are saying that in reality what allows us to "understand" it or to "enter the story" are not the words, but the silences between them. *As gold and silver are weighed in pure water, so does the soul test its weight in silence, and the words that we let fall have no meaning apart from the silence that wraps them round (M. Maeterlinck).* **Awareness:** is the openness of the senses and the presence in time and space. To be aware is to be awake in the moment and space. To have your mindset focused on the here and now. Nowadays it is hard to reach awareness and people pay a lot of money to find a few moments of pure focus and awareness in everyday life. However, we can create a situation in which there is no other option than to be aware and awake. In the past we usually achieved this with the use of labyrinths, suits made from cloth, darkness and smells. In the dark people became extremely awake, aware and attentive. Their senses work fully and openly. **Significance:** it is necessary to give the object, person and scene, the significance they deserve. When we make an object significant, we can use it as a dramaturgical thread or a tool with which we create a story ... how can we use significant objects/situations to enrich the poetics? How can we create a situation, in which everything becomes significant... **Experience:** is the knowledge that is felt, lived ... it is the knowledge of the body and soul. It is not an abstraction, but a real situation. Experience vs. instant knowledge... the only thing we can trust is experience. **Emphatic/entropic** forces which rule the world and us ... how can we use them? **Resonance:** how to resonate with the other? **Synchronicity** (Jung): how can it be used as a poetic tool in theatre and in life? **Space:** how can we create a playground for the public + actors, in which the public feel free to research, discover, co-create... The same space is a necessary tool in relationships. We need empty spaces between us. **Imagination:** What is invisible to the naked eye is much more important than the visible. How can we establish strong imagination of the public and let them integrate it into our context - enough empty space? ... People need to use their imagination, if everything is served on a silver platter, if everything is drawn and explained, we are robbed of the numerous possibilities... **The Missing link** serves as a common thread of dramaturgy in the play: how can we use it without saying it...how can we convince people to search for it and share their experiences? **Story telling:** it is important to collect cultural idiosyncrasies through stories, dances, music and pay attention to cultural roots we have.

Reflections of Enrique Vargas on listening and empty space:

The art of listening: *"The question on the art of listening is the question on how to feel the other's living experience – the other's experience, the other's inhabitation. In order to listen to the feeling of the other, we have to experience it as a subject – instead of seeing it as an object, by objectivating it we deny the possibility of feeling him, of inhabiting it. How to succumb the barrier that makes us believe that the best way to get to know someone is to separate us from the other. In fact, we often believe we are building a relationship when we are merely manipulating. The "objectivisation" leaves us enclosed in the Cartesian object-subject relation, that not only separates us from the environment and from ourselves but also closes us to any possibility of change. "Objectivising" the other leads us to deny ourselves the richness we would feel if we were to taste the experience of this "other". Hope depends on our otherness. Destruction depends on its negation. This is not only the history of individuals, but also of peoples. (Vargas)*

The empty space: *Concerning their application to the work of the inhabitant (actor) and the use of space, the dramaturgical criteria relate to the concept of "emptiness". Therefore it is principally a matter of understanding all our work as an exercise in "listening" – because it is only if we start from "listening" that we could work more consciously on the unseen and unheard, and thus focus on the importance of the empty space. It is about*

reversing the terms: Instead of concentrating only on the sounds of the words, we should pay attention to the silences that give them life. When we say that a good story is created by its silences, we are saying that in reality what allows us to “understand” it or to “enter the story” are not the words, but the silences between them. Instead of concentrating on the objects that “fill” the space, we should also direct our attention towards the space that gives them sense. Tao Te Ching stated: “The vase is made of clay, but its meaning is given by the emptiness inside.” The same goes for the house, when we see its walls and roof it appears to be full, but inside there is an emptiness which offers a myriad of possibilities that we cannot see. When we ask ourselves how to “charge silence” or how to “charge space” or when we valorise “fragility” as a source of «power», we are actually talking about ways of approaching “emptiness”. Darkness as the silence of light. Silence as the darkness of sound. Emptiness as a common origin. Emptiness as a bridge between oneself and the outside world. Emptiness as a bridge between oneself and death. Emptiness that would allow us to intuit the difference between “the dying” or the pain of departure, and death, or the space that makes life possible – the fullness of emptiness. (Vargas)

5. Revolution on an individual level leads to a revolution on a social level

When times are tough, we humans tend to forget about generosity. We are tempted to consider merely our basic personal needs and those of our closest family and human beings. If we follow the priorities as established in the Maslow pyramid we can see that culture comes in last. But is this truly so? What really moves the world towards progress? When we have full stomachs and we live in luxury, do we consider changing anything? Isn't the crisis the best situation for changes? And the crisis appears when all of the possible alternatives have failed. Thus, we have to find new tools and new approaches, new lines of thought. This is the role of art and innovations. Through them consciousness is raised to a higher level and in new ways. The world consists of constant changes. In the same way as nature has its changing cycles, people continue to change throughout our lives, because we learn and grow. When certain behavioural patterns and lines of thought stop serving development, it is time to change them. This is how civilisation is developed. Change is the only constant thing in life. The one who saves one person, saves the world. Thus, changing oneself towards more innovative ways of thinking and acting is a socially responsible act, an act of highly ethical and ultimate environmental activism. Ecology begins with each and every individual: with our thoughts, emotions and actions we influence other people around us. Social responsibility begins in each one of us, individually. Only then it does have enough space, time and conditions to grow. As they say, one generous act leads to another. It is contagious, just like laughing. If we step from personal to business relationships we have the same law at work. Business is a relationship between people and their ideas in which they try to find a new common ground, synergistic effects of cooperation. A personal relationship is the base to all business. If we dare to be idealistic we can follow Osho's quote talking about comparison which brings inferiority and superiority: *“Who ever told you that the bamboo is more beautiful than the oak, or the oak more valuable than the bamboo? Do you think the oak wishes it had a hollow trunk like this bamboo? Does the bamboo feel jealous of the oak because it is bigger and its leaves change colour in the fall? The very idea of the two trees comparing themselves to each other seems ridiculous, but we humans seem to find this habit very hard to break. Let's face it, there is always going to be somebody who is more beautiful, more talented, stronger, more intelligent, or apparently happier than you are. And conversely, there will always be those who are less than you in all these ways. The way to find out who you are is not by comparing yourself with others, but by looking to see whether you are fulfilling your own potential in the best way you know how.”*

6. The man who learns the art of sharing is the richest man in the world. He may be poor, but his inner being has a quality of richness that even emperors may feel jealous of (Osho)

Generosity derives from the Latin word “genere”, which leads us to the idea of generating, providing, creating – and of the resonances of “transforming”, which is present in the nature of every poetic experience. The outline of the project is “care to share”. The process of the project itself is already full of sharing: We share the knowledge and experiences between the older generation (Enrique Vargas), adult directors (four directors from each country), and youngsters in each country. Finally, we will choose 10 youngsters in each country, 40 in total, who will perform with 8 adult professional actors and directors. The four directors share the knowledge and experiences between the countries. The youngsters share their ideas on generosity, their vision of life and how they see their purpose and position in the future. We will help them express their characters and roles in the play and provide them with the tools that will help them find their mission in the project. Within the nine month long educational process that will take place in Slovenia, the youngsters will learn the basics of performing and expressing themselves as well as gain confidence and trust in their undiscovered potential. We will nurture and water their creative potential, and this will help them find their mission and meaning in life. In his book *Search for a meaning* Victor Frankl wrote that most of the youngsters in America (70%; similar can be said for the EU) are searching for a meaning and purpose in life. We started creating this project as a result of listening to youngsters. Their voice is finally heard. And in the creative process it is developed into theatrical images. In the process of education, training, performing and travelling the youngsters will gain the skills of teambuilding and team bonding; they will also build the psychophysical condition necessary to sustain the professional pressure and responsibility to the project, the team and the public. Later on in life they will be able

to reflect their experience on their everyday and professional life, whether it will be artistic or of any other branch.

We will begin the tour in Tournhout, Belgium, the Flemish capital of culture. We will start by joining all local partnership theatres into a common, united play with all its synergistic impacts. In Belgium the play will see 5 repetitions in 5 days. Each time we will move to another country we will only have 2 days of rest, partly on the tour bus and partly in hotels. Following Belgium we will move to France where we will have 4 performances in 5 days, then to Denmark with 5 performances in 5 days and finally we will arrive in Maribor, Slovenia, where the play will be staged as a part of the Maribor 2012 European Capital of Culture program. Maribor will see 3 repetitions, between 6th and 8th August 2012. We will finish the tour in Ljubljana with the performance in the centre of the old part of the city on 10th August. The Mayor of Ljubljana will be our guest of honour and will host us with a reception in the Town Hall.

7. Conclusion

The spiritual culture of a nation is its driving force. The days when money and material goods represented the only wealth are coming to an end. We are on the threshold of a period in which the importance of social responsibility and spiritual culture is on the increase, when social capital and information capital are becoming increasingly important. Behind the social capital we can find the spiritual strength of the individuals and the society. If we want to improve our society, we have to begin with social responsibility towards oneself as well as the other person, company, society, nation and environment. Each one in his own field, in accordance to his potentials and possibilities. Here and now.

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