

Senzorium (SI)

WINDOWS INTO THE WORLD

I Organization

Senzorium¹ Institute is a pioneer of sensorial theatre in Slovenia. It originated from Teatro de los Sentidos,² founded by Enrique Vargas, a designer of sensorial theatrical language. The elements of the sensorial theatrical language have been evolving in the past two centuries through experiments and manifestos by significant creators at the end of the previous millennium. Sensorial theatre utilizes sensorial language methods with features such as audience interactivity, multisensory perceptions, and internationally and interculturably understandable content. Interactivity does not refer to technological interaction but rather to direct and unmediated communication between the audience and performers, taking place live and establishing mutual connections among all participants. Sensorial communication tools also include smells, tastes, and touches, allowing the audience to experience a deep organic immersion and a holistic experience.

Multisensory communication and artistic and educational content presentation have gained momentum in the 21st century worldwide, including in Europe. Educational and museum programs, in particular, make use of multisensory communication. Recently, Sensorium has been incorporating sensorial immersion tools onto the stage (even in opera), opening up new possibilities for communication in the performing arts. It transfers its knowledge and skills from theatrical practice to intangible cultural heritage, visual arts, museums, and galleries. Sensorium implements these practices both in Slovenia and abroad.



¹ <https://www.senzorium.com/en/home/>

² <https://www.teatrodelosentidos.com/>

II Audience development activities

Senzorium Institute has established itself well in the Slovenian (and international) sphere through the method of multisensory communication. It operates modestly, persistently, and in constant dialogue with its environment. This is also how it engages the audience - by inspiring them step by step with values marginalized in today's neoliberal society and steadily losing the prestige of ideals. In the words of Christopher Lasch, one of the leading American thinkers and social critics: "People today complain that they are unable to feel anything. They pursue more varied experiences, try to animate their languid bodies, and revive a numb soul. They condemn excess and extol the lost life of the senses."

Senzorium involves all people, often including the young, in its processes, thus creating bridges between empathic and entropic forces within people and among them. Through their performances, they do not aim for art as cultural information, but as an experience that moves us and therefore transforms us - even in the smallest possible aspect of life. They respond to various phenomena in society, searching for and recognizing the missing link between us and the resonance of others within us. They transmit knowledge and experiences between generations, languages, cultures, masters and students, and vice versa. Their creation is a game, but a serious game that always touches us.

The first thing that captures one's attention in a theatrical performance, installation, performance, or any artistic experience, in general, is whether it contains deeper insight - transmission or mere virtuosity. The feeling of gratitude that the audience often experiences comes from "it touched me - it transformed me", or it may be a kind of externally cultivated and learned sense of respect that remains.

Mayakovski speaks of the fact that those who take risks can lose, but those who do not take risks lose everything. The risk of opening oneself to another person and experiencing *the other* can be perceived as a loss or as a path to transformation. Therefore, creators in sensorial theatre rely heavily on the art of listening; they question what risk it truly is to listen and hear others and how every beginning of change arises from the resonance of what is heard.³

Senzorium walks this path, touching themselves, colleagues, partners, and visitors, and gradually changing us by involving us in events in the most unusual places.

³ Adapted from Enrique Vargas' reflections on the Generosity Project, available at: <https://www.senzorium.com/en/portfolio-item/2012-2010-between-us-2/>

III Young audience inclusion

In addition to exploring multisensory and sensory approaches in art, Sensorium also conducts various theatrical education programs for youth, including educational workshops on public speaking and communication skills, sensorial language, and other theatrical workshops.⁴

In 2012, Sensorium carried out a European project on generosity, *The Generosity Experience*,⁵ taking more than forty young people from four countries on a forty-day tour of four European cities. RTV Slovenia also produced a documentary film titled *Missing Links (Izgubljene vezi)*, which premiered on TV SLO in 2013.⁶

Barbara Pia Jenič, the director of Sensorium, also served as a drama mentor at the Barica Blenkuš Drama School for sixteen years (1996–2013), introducing over 150 young people to an intensive program for youth aged 15+.

In collaboration with the Career Centre of the University of Ljubljana, Sensorium conducted several training sessions on sensitivity in communication for students at the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. They also held workshops on sensorial language for students at the University of Primorska, a workshop on empty space at the Faculty of Design, and public speaking workshops at the High School of Media Production.

The involvement of young people in Sensorium projects also takes place through collaborations with various institutions and festivals such as Pikin Festival in Velenje, Švicarija MGLC Ljubljana, various youth centres, and more. Jenič applies her extensive pedagogical experience with youth in long and short creative processes in various projects.

⁴ <https://www.sensorium.com/en/education/>

⁵ <https://www.sensorium.com/en/portfolio-item/2012-2010-between-us-2/>

⁶ <https://365.rtv slo.si/arhiv/dokumentarci-kulturno-umetniski/158469858>

IV Sensorial events

In the last decade, the occurrence of **sensory events** has expanded. These events involve all the senses, mostly encompassing audio-visual experiences, intermedia, and VR exhibitions, where the immersion is heightened. Multisensory experiences often involve the touch of textures or objects and sometimes even smells. Sensory events have also gained recognition due to their increased accessibility for individuals with sensory impairments. When it comes to approaches for individuals with sensory impairments or the incorporation of touch or smell, we refer to them as sensory (not sensorial) events.

Sensorial events also establish multisensory atmospheres, but the method is more complex. It involves sensorial dramaturgy and sensorial interaction with the audience. This interaction is poetic, inclusive, and supported by various methods of storytelling, and object animation, and incorporates elements of emptiness, silence, and darkness, which are crucial for internalizing the experiences. We are talking about experiences, not audio-visual information or presentations. Narrative tools include the meanings of symbols, rituals, customs, myths, and archetypes. The cultural context in which the event develops and takes place is significant. Psychological and anthropological findings are often used as a source of inspiration. Sometimes we also draw on the methods of synchronicity and the collective unconscious according to C. G. Jung, which involve a philosophical rather than scientific approach, allowing freedom of interpretation in the field of art. Storytelling is an essential tool of sensorial language, which can be conveyed through sensory, verbal, or physical levels.

Play and **the act of playing** are the foundation of the sensorial approach, creating a sanctuary for performers and the audience, a safe space where we can live in a parallel reality. The most important tool of sensorial language is the relationship with the audience, leading them as followers but preferably following the principle of *wu wei*,⁷ active non-activity. The aim is to awaken curiosity in the audience, which is stronger than fear. The trust of the audience is based on active listening, full presence, and sensitivity in communication. The audience is empowered to follow their curiosity despite unknown circumstances and surrender to the flow of events.

The safety of the audience, the process, and the performers is the fundamental basis of every project and is more important than the story itself, the artistic impression, or the interpretation. The scenes seek poetry and lightness in all contexts, even ironic and dark ones. The poetics of smell, touch, and sound are addressed more frequently than visual imagery, helping one to turn

⁷ Maja Milčinski, *Mali slovar azijskih filozofij*. Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, str. 98.
Dostopno na: <https://fi2.zrc-sazu.si/sites/default/files/9616358839.pdf>

inward and establish a connection with oneself. Sensorial language in theatre turns inward, granting visitors more freedom to create their own imagery (rather than being imposed by the director or concept), while actors become inhabitants of their scenes and companions in the creation of the visitor's inner theatre.⁸



⁸ The chapter is taken from: <https://www.senzorium.com/en/about-2/>

V *In Search for Meaning*

The time of epidemics and war conditions worldwide has brought forth many hardships. Wherever we turn, people are exhausted, tired, unable to keep up with the pace, and many who have burned out have no moment to themselves. Crises exist in both business and personal spheres. However, such periods of crisis have occurred throughout history. Following the example of Viktor Frankl and his works, such as *Man's Search for Meaning*, creators have designed an event that allows visitors to confront questions of meaning within the framework of various regimes and/or situations of the last century.

The event *In Search for Meaning*⁹ places the spectator in the role of a seeker and tester of selected approaches to making sense out of absurdities. It is an immersive, multisensory narrative composed of fragments of documentary insights into possible meanings of existence. The performance is intended for young people and adults, for anyone who occasionally ponders the meanings and absurdities of existence, being, action, interpersonal and business relationships, and societal order. The audience physically moves from scene to scene, where they can engage with young individuals, gaze into the night, eat and drink, listen to music, and express their opinions, questions, doubts, and viewpoints.

During the creative process, collaboration took place with the Oton Youth centre from Novo mesto,¹⁰ which provided rehearsal spaces for the project and supported the education of young people. While developing the content, young individuals wrote short essays on topics such as meaning, war, migration, and friendship, reflecting on their own experiences. The responses of the young people are captured in the performance, while the reactions of both young and adult visitors to the event are recorded in the audience's comments on the project's website.



⁹ <https://www.sensorium.com/en/portfolio-item/2022-in-search-for-meaning/>

¹⁰ https://mladina.znm.si/home/document/docid/6419?back=/home/p_622/5

VI An activity suggestion: Read, Watch, Listen

Film recommendations:

- *Hannah Arendt* (2012), a biographical drama, directed by Margarethe von Trotta.
- *The Shock Doctrine* (2009), a documentary film, directed by Mat Whitecross and Michael Winterbottom.
- *The Last Days* (1998), a documentary film, directed by James Moll.
- *Schindler's List* (1993), a historical film, directed by Steven Spielberg.

Book recommendations:

- Viktor E. Frankl: *Man's Search for Meaning*, *The Will to Meaning*, and others.
- Naomi Klein: *The Shock Doctrine*.
- Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

After watching the films and reading the books, engage in discussions about topics such as violence, war, the Holocaust, and capitalism, and connect them to contemporary social phenomena, relationships, and challenges. Pay attention to these phenomena – always and everywhere.

