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## From Sensory Experience to the Anthropology of Experience<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

(from visual anthropology's "new" sensations to the sensory perceptions in anthropological research subjects)

Sarah Pink (Pink 2006) says that the majority of visual anthropologists talk about the importance of human sensors, about the importance of sensory perception and understanding things when they are researched, but says that the same ones – the visual anthropologists – have not hitherto dealt with investigations, with analyses of the sensors themselves that accumulate and mediate the so-called sensory experience. In the context of reflections around new sensations, according to Pink, the investigation of human sensors and sensory experience as one of the new and main anthropological research interests should be included. She wants to remind us that visual anthropology turns its primary focus on the research of film and new media, and in researching the latter she also includes the research of sensory perception which deepens the understanding of experiences, the experiences onto which film and new media artifacts are grounded.

According to Victor Turner, the *Anthropology of Experience* is the forerunner of the tendency to research sensory access and the layers of sensory experiences, and this is also mentioned by Pink. The generation of anthropologists which appears with the crucial volume of Turner and Bruner *Anthropology of Experience* (Turner and Bruner, 1986) makes clear the key anthropological insight that, in order to enter into the "Zen" of the subject matter you are dealing with, your own personal experience with/in it is also crucial, as well as the professional anthropological experience, but most of all the mentioning of that personal, inaugural, performative, empirical-participatory experience in the problem, the process, and the research aim. We can freely bring closer the effect of this approach to what Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 2000) calls transcendental objectivity as opposed to, but in touch/in communication with, the anthropologist's subjectivity, in order to perceive the various contextual truths, and with this we here enter the approaches and positions of social and cultural anthropology.

Sensory experience implies inclusion, the operating with/of, the understanding with/of the affects and emotions

raised in the anthropologist in the context and from/around the investigations' context.

Thus, by using experience/involvement, the living in other surrounding (in this case, Slovenia), personal perception, the filter of emotions and affects in combination with intuition, sensory perceptions of the surroundings around us/me, and the mediated/immediate information, I will talk about the attitude towards the body and the acting of the body in everyday life as against the body in theater performances in Slovene context, the body as reality and anthropology of art/anthropology of theater.

Everyday life and body/attitude (Slovenia/Slovene art and anthropological impressions – on the streets, in the bus, in everyday communication and interaction, in the theater)

In Slovenia, an EU member-state, Western-European taste dominates visually in general, everyday life. Let us focus on Ljubljana as Slovenia's main city, as well as being a spatially dominant focus of my anthropological observations, sensing, analyses and understanding of everyday life.

In Ljubljana there are three evidently different groups of permanently and temporarily settled/present inhabitants: Slovenes, southerners, pejoratively referred to as *chefurs* (representatives of the ex-Yugoslavian countries: Bosnians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Albanians, and Macedonians) and foreigners from (Eastern/Western) European countries and the rest of the world, comprising the smallest percent. Racially, the white race dominates; the presence of Asians, people of color and Arabs is still extremely reduced in number. Slovenia

lacks multi-nationality, but they have no interest in it and defend their local national-nationalistic interests with very rigorous legislation designed for the foreigners interested in working or immigrating in/to Slovenia. As a predominantly Catholic country, a country of numerous believers, the domination of Catholicism's character in relation to the manifestations of the human body on the street and in the context of direct everyday life is all too obvious.

Let us elaborate upon this anthropological finding.

In the period 2000-2004, before Slovenia's entry to the EU, Ljubljana/the city, even at the height of its worst traffic jam, was apparently silent due to some salient, perpetual emotionally expressive restraint of the Slovene citizens, the same being extremely obvious also in the body's acting. The Slovenes are educated to show decent public conduct, they are cultivated as a people (cultivation in the style and context of an advanced civilized nation); the harsh financial measures for offences, from the most banal to the heaviest ones, additionally honed the discipline in everyday life, which is in combination with the Slovene's inherent thrift and famous parsimony. Their humbleness and fright, characteristic for continually yoked and despaired provincial people, in combination with their subsequently acquired respect towards the independence of the Slovene state, which for a long time they so much desired, has structured their so typical reticence.

On the buses people are whispering, at the bus stops it is relatively silent, the earnestness and discretion in behavior and clothing is evident. Slovenes are a good people, but they lack temperament, it is suppressed or

rarely visible. They lack the charm of grimacing, the vitality of faces' mimicking which the neighboring Italians have in abundance, apart from the Italian way of perceiving Catholicism. The apparent Slovene bodily reticence is manifested through lighter to more obvious writhing of the body, subtle stiffness of the hands and the neck, the focus and posture of the head is unnaturally and frontally directed, with their eyes discretely perceiving everything attracting their attention, watching apparently in a disinterested and indifferent fashion. Due to the lack of vital mimics, the beautiful faces of some passers-by are easily forgotten since individuality is controlled and restrained.

Most of the older Slovene women love to wear beige clothing, and the same color makes them unattractive, less desired and unidentifiable, insignificant. As a gamut, beige does not reflect any apparent daily emotion at hand in the personality. The younger Slovenes are either sporty, pragmatically clothed, with a casual image and with no aesthetic accent. This reduction of aestheticism does not violate the impression, in combination with their articulate natural beauty (the type dominating is the Slovene-Sub-Alp type, white-faced, with good complexion, light eyes, red lips, blond hair, shapely symmetrical facial features; the Slovenes are generally a people quite tall). Some of the young Slovenes are dressed in line with minimalist trends and with taste, and also Euro-style and trendy. But such street trendsetters in the early stage of my living in Slovenia were very few and far between in comparison with today. Among the youth the dominating colors in clothing are black, white, and grey achromatic hues, all the way to those rarely courageous enough to be seen in green, red, yellow and orange colors.

Slovenes are strained when it comes to tactile communication (hapticism), and it almost does not exist. That is, touching is something which does not exist in everyday life communication, and hence Slovenes compensate much of the communication needs and social expression by way of speech, oral conversation; Slovenes like to speak – to verbally interpret and reveal everything they know of, desire and could do. They have a naturally inherent talent to theorize everyday life.

It often happens when you are travelling on the city bus that if suddenly the driver abruptly applies the brakes, there appears an apparent and deliberate writhing of the passengers, resulting from the fear that bodies would touch, and this writhing becomes obvious in its panic.

The bodily reduction, coolness, reticence, standoffishness in most Slovenes, the writhed bodily language speaks of inhibition of expressions and passions in the context of everyday life. Catholicism further imposes politically its unreal hypocrisy in relation to the suppression of the spontaneity of the libidinal bodily speech. The question among the Slovenes about the frequent suicides pulled the following psychological-social premises: that such unnatural restrain causes nervous “crackdown,” also one in libidinal-emotional tensions, as well as the prohibition not to reveal the smallest sign that something at home does not go well (the same reasons make the psyche fragile), all the way to the system's changes and the massive rise in prices and job cuts (later, with the appearance of recession in Slovenia) which brought about the appearance of needy people among Slovenes themselves, as a strong blow to the nation.<sup>2</sup>

As the Slovenes themselves say,<sup>3</sup> it is partly the system, as well as the location (the famous climate and geographical advantages of the country) in/of the Republic of Slovenia, that provides the Slovenes with a high quality of everyday life on the level of: drinking quality tap water, breathing good/limpid air; Slovenia may be counted as one of the more ecologically conscious countries; Slovenes eat good and genetically non-modified food, Slovenia-produced food is more expensive than the foods imported from other countries (of course, save the international gourmet delicacies). They regularly do sports: they walk and go to the mountains, and are lovers of extreme sports. Traditionally, they spend their weekends outside the cities, in nature, Slovenes are lovers of exotic trips, bearing in mind the living standard and the credit policy most of them are able to afford such luxuries. Before Slovenia's EU entry, the southerners and the *chefurs* were needy. Slovenes themselves sometimes cynically say they need the southerners so that they feel more valuable and successful as a new independent nation in relation to and in the framework of the European Union. Although Slovenes are predominantly nice in everyday life attitude and social conduct/communication, the Slovene's duplicity and their interactive indirectness/lack of openness, along with some symbolic laws, are the qualities that subversively protect and deepen xenophobia. There is a decades-long controversy concerning the permission to build the first mosque in Slovenia (it was only Slovene architects that applied for the tender), and let us not neglect the serious injustice against the Deleted ones who in right-wing circles are said to be themselves guilty that back in 1991, since they did not believe in the facts that the Yugoslavian Federation disintegrated and no longer existed, they did not determine and register themselves within the frames of 24 hours what their state

belonging is; hence it is said that their stubbornness and inertia are the reasons for their inexistence and exclusion from all civil rights.<sup>4</sup>

*Chefurs* or Balkan/ex-Yugoslavian southerners have always, until today, been considered a lower class and lower human rank in Slovenia, excluding the second and third generation of southerners born in Slovenia; but as long as they perfectly master the Slovene language that they have equal chances with the "pure" Slovenes to find better jobs, and to ascend to the upper layers of society. When it comes to body language, the *chefurs* dominate nervous and noisy (allegedly uneducated) children, often visible on the buses (a place of close anthropological contact) where they speak loudly – very often one can hear purposely raised vulgar subjects that intentionally provoke the rest of the refined Slovenes with their provocative explicitness. On the buses the manifested generations are those of the older *chefurs* who settled in the 1990s or those who settled during the time of the Yugoslavian Federation with their origins from Bosnia, Serbia, more rarely from Croatia, and being mostly working class people that still speak silently since it is a public secret, one that has continued since the 90s (and some say even much earlier), that everyone who speaks poor Slovene language or speaks only Croatian and Serbian languages (without knowing/speaking Slovene) is desirable to speak silently, and should not dominate. Visually, times have changed, but older generations have the old fears deeply ingrained. It is the young *chefurs* that oppose Slovene aesthetics and protest against the fears and limitations of their grandmothers, grandfathers and parents.

The Deleted ones continue to un/consciously rebel also through their youthfulness. They listen to turbo-folk

music, they fight because of passion and Eros, they speak and accentuate on the hard version of the letter “č” [ch], which linguistically differentiates them from Slovenes’ softer “c.” Their clothing taste is less refined and less contemporary and trendy, the girls wear cheap jewelry, they wear aggressively styled make-up on their faces and dress with expressly sexy clothes during working hours which bravely emphasizes their forms (it is a “public secret,” or a colloquial understanding, among the citizens of Slovenia that they would always marry a Slovene girl, but their manliness and inarticulate libido could be provoked only by the attractive, free and seductive *chefur*/southern girl). The younger *chefur* boys reveal an interest in golden chains and rings, training suits, tight t-shirts which emphasize their bodies, and thus their libido is boldly open and evidently manifests their bodily desires as if in a stubbornness against the restrained catholic and discretely fascist layer of Slovene society.

Let us not neglect the successfully assimilated southerners that we can imagine and situate about and in whichever contemporary European state. They, however, have lived in terms with the pro-European tastes and needs for a long time.

During the period 2004 – 2010, more precisely since May 2004 when Slovenia entered the EU not in a quite cheerful way, rapid and evident changes took place. The sudden arrival of foreigners – tourists from Western and Eastern (EU) European countries, contributed to and about the dynamizations and liberations of the attitude, dynamics and rhythm of life of/in Ljubljana’s everyday life. The changes brought about visual diversity, and with this, new generations of young Slovenes developed who, under the newly arrived European influence, began

to loudly and bravely articulate their impressions and expressions. The cultural mixtures in regards to taste, colors, forms and appearances, fashion, restaurants and food, the new spontaneous cultural appearances and influences, as well as the choice of goods in the enormous city malls in Ljubljana’s downtown contributed to help the changes become evident. A lot of the young Slovenes began to frequently travel to Berlin, Tenerife, London, and other locations for tourist or educational reasons or due to the opening of a more open cultural cooperation which was suggested by the EU entry. The comments to be heard were that Slovenia is on its way to become open, and especially within cultural circles, so that local creativity and art become refreshed and as such improve. Ever since then there appeared the crises during the government of Janez Janša (2004 - 2008) which escalated with the arrival of the world recession in the beginning of Borut Pahor’s new government. The motions and changes, the hyper-circulation among the Slovenes themselves in and out of the country, the discontents and the crises on the one hand troubled that visible stereotipization about the getting together, the behavior and the body language, which was until then so typical for the Slovenes.

Macedonians in Slovenia are not always considered under the rank of the so-called typical *chefurs*; in some silent way we pass for those southerners who are more welcome. Macedonians learn Slovene language quickly and are able to use it without an accent. They assimilate rapidly into the contemporary Slovenes’ way of life, they quickly meld and many of them become bigger Slovenes than the Slovenes themselves, which is itself a symptomatic and very common phenomenon for foreigners living in a host country. Slovenes regard Macedonians as people of meek nature, and they perceive us to be a musical

nation. In communicating with Macedonians who have lived and worked in Slovenia for some time, there is a communicative difference to those Macedonians who have just arrived. The former are more relaxed and spontaneous in communication (most of them have found their place in Slovenia), the latter are more tense and more restrained due to the new surroundings and its influences and the suppressed tests they have to pass. The tiny group of Macedonian elite in Slovenia is a closed and barely accessible circle.

Albanians in Slovenia are considered to be very industrious and untroublesome inhabitants. They mostly run businesses with burek and doner kebab food. As for clothing, they are for the most part assimilated and up-to-date, and traditionally clothed Albanians are rarely to be seen in Ljubljana. When being in contact with them they are real traders, always obliging, efficacious, smiling and communicative. Their bodies are always set to work and to deal with the engagements, they are in constant movement and passing from one engagement to the other. They manifest a natural capacity to maintain a standard of quality and constancy in the business attitude.

Today, Slovenia is marked as an interesting destination and a young country accessible to leisurely, varied and entertaining international student life, but also it is a state with a liberated gay population where gay couples still do not hold hands in public. This newly obtained image of Slovenia is at the level of tourist representation, while as a whole Slovenes further remain a closed and cautious nation with a serious fear of giant bankruptcy.

## Theater and Body/Attitude

(Slovenia – the period 2004/2010)

Within theater circles, for a long time there reigned the dictum that the southerners are the ones who are always welcomed, all this with the aim to renew and re-glorify the theatrical life and art in Slovenia with their alleged southerner-creative temperament. The southerner (in the theatrical context: the talented *chefur*) was considered to be the one who once allegedly brought Eros and rhythm into Slovene theatrical creativity, and this resulted in stimulating the entire crew. It is said that southern artists are less creatively inhibited than Slovenes; today, the Slovene is deprived of Eros in art, the Slovene artist falls into too much of the intellectualization and theoretization of art and the theater process, for example, Slovene directors quickly “jump on the bandwagon” and forget that actors need sincere art stimulation, artistic Eros and a creative challenge on the level of a guiding/moving energy. Most of the directors lose themselves in too much of research and too less practical risk and experiment in theater, abandoning intuition, which is so necessary for the work with actors and a surprise in arts. With the excessive politicization of Slovene theater, reduced to a theatrical occupation equal to that of a family business, productivity was reduced to a boring hyper-production of a not-so-cheap drama performance. A few renowned directors make five performances a year, while the remainder, especially those from the younger generations of directors, hardly make it to the stage. Theater circles are the most closed ones, and they operate with the highest budgets, and these facts from reality secured a handful of theater personalities with a relatively comfortable life and a decent amount

of prosperity. The art directors of Slovene theaters, which are at once art directors and managing directors, apply their wrong policy of seeing to their personal interests and cooperation only with steadily renowned (predominantly local) directors, which means working with the “checked” players and making impossible the influx of new artists in the new theatrical visions. Also, art directors do not take risks when it comes to the repertoire, and the only novelty in it is the tendency to adapt and stage famous screenplays from the movie world (*Some Like it Hot* by Billy Wilder, *Crime and Punishment* by Andrzej Wajda, *The Damned* by Luchino Visconti, *When I was Dead* by Ernst Lubitsch, *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick, and others), and these are staged superficially and sensationally. In such surroundings, the southerners are not that welcome, at least not in occupations such as stage design, costume design, graphic design, visual dramaturgy and the like. When it comes to the de-mystification of occupations, the closed circles and the tolerated plagiarists, for whom there is no one to criticize openly, bravely and with arguments, there are several Slovene designers who selfishly control the stage with the justification that they are now in the phase called “visual citations.” Generations back-up one another, hence the reticence and inaccessibility of such professional circles.

What is, then, the attitude towards the body in Slovene theater in such roughly drawn lines and working conditions in Slovene theater stages? Every local theater has its own policy when it comes to taste, posture, and quality. The new trend towards commercialization and an emphasized sensationalization of theater performances leads the theater artist to rush into love affairs with much younger colleagues with the hope that such experience will refresh them both as humans and artists. It is in this

way that they also provide food for the Slovene yellow papers, and this should bring-in a larger audience, and a diverse audience at that, including those who normally do not go to the theater but read the yellow papers.

The stage is dominated by young and attractive actors who overshadow their female colleagues both in stage appearance, attractiveness and talent and in content. There is a braver parading with nakedness of the young attractive male bodies on stage, but this aesthetic and symbolic exhibitionism of the actor does not suffice since the director’s mise-en-scène is not fundamentally rationalized, and this is why the banalization of Eros in performances happens extremely quickly. As we have already mentioned, a lot of theater directors make it blunt not knowing how to dynamize, in an articulated way, the actors’ bodies on the stage. The Eros because of Eros and the fetish of youthfulness do not suffice *per se*, since it does not communicate in content without constructive and inspiring/inspired theater directing.

Dialogical dramatic theater does not imply only speaking. Speaking and interpreting the dialogues cannot bring the viewer in the performance and its life. In order for eroticism to function also in a commercial, superficially seductive context and aim, I believe we do not have to forget the physics and metaphysics of the art and craft of theater.

Few Slovene directors master this, since a lot of the new ones do not have almost any life experience but do have had an abundance of relationships, while older directors, in a surrounding without critical mass, quickly fell into “secure” conformism making predictable and boring performances and with this, spend their energy in posing with quasi-genius and half-justified seniority.

The Slovene actor/actress is the best of contemporary Slovene theater, and they truly deserve the director's challenges which would know how to uncompromisingly spend and renew the talent, *élan* and all the capacities of their acting bodies.

Translated from Macedonian by Stanimir Panayotov

#### Notes:

1. The author of this text lived, studied and worked in Ljubljana, Slovenia throughout the period 2001 – 2010. In 2004 – 2009 she worked as part-time stage and costume designer and assistant in Slovene theaters (Slovensko Mladinsko gledališče/Slovene Youth's Theater, Mestno gledališče Ljubljana/City Theater Ljubljana, Lutkovno gledališče Ljubljana/Puppetry Theater Ljubljana, SNG Drama/National Theatre Ljubljana and Glej/Skuc Theater, also in Ljubljana). Her anthropological research and findings are based on several years of living, working, self-promotion and project cooperation in Slovene spaces and theaters.
2. Main references: from conversations and analyses/findings with/ of friends and colleagues from Ljubljana on the everyday life in Slovenia to systematically following the paper *Sobotna priloga* (the Saturday supplement of the daily *Delo* [www.delo.si] which features famous Slovene columnists and their articles on intellectual subjects and opinions on actual local and international topics) in the period 2001–2010.
3. Main references: from *Delo* (2001/2010).
4. Conversations with the anthropologist P.N., employed at the Slovenian Ministry of Agriculture, 2009.

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