



This article is a response to the Social Presencing Theater Basic Course held on June 6 & 7 2025, in Bogotá, Colombia, at the Universidad Escuela Colombiana de Ingeniería Julio Garavito, led by Carol Zahner and Maria Ro Montejo with graphic facilitation and support by Margarita Reyes.

A small testimony of an introduction to Social Presencing Theater

By Camilo Vasquez Caro

My first experience with Social Presencing Theater (SPT) was very meaningful and it changed my relationship with myself. A few years ago, a dear friend had invited me to join them before in a basic course and I had not felt a genuine calling. However, this time when I was invited again, I said yes, it simply felt like the right moment to explore something new. I must admit I arrived with no real expectation to the workshop. This can be a two sided situation, perhaps I would be a bad student because I did not do my research and prepare or perhaps it could be something deep and meaningful because I was open to the unknown. In brief it was the second.

For this testimony to make sense I need the reader to know a little bit about me. I am an associate professor, at Universidad Escuela Colombiana de Ingeniería Julio Garavito, a small scientific and technological university in Bogota, Colombia. I have been working here for over 15 years, in the humanities department. My background is history and literature and my graduate work was in history and cultural studies. My academic life has spun around the theoretical, the verse, the word and the interpretation. If I look further back in life I had not always been so theoretical, way back last century in High School I had explored theater arts and music. I say

this because it connects with the recent experience in SPT. There was something on the hard drive of my life, in a forgotten folder that was retrieved.

Having said this I can start mentioning how and why this experience was so meaningful. The workshop pivoted around our capacity to let our bodies speak to us and to let ourselves listen to them. I live in an extremely rational environment and as modern beings we have been formatted to think our mind is above our bodies, our ideas above our doing, reason commands experience. In this sense, the workshop was rebellious and challenged the system I have let become “natural”, which ironically is anything but “natural”. This questioning of the status quo hooked me, again it felt right and I enjoyed listening to the underdog of my own narrative, the voice of my body. This interaction with myself gave me the sensation that I had been given a new sense, which is very funny because our body is the host of all our senses. In a certain sense I had been given the chance to go back to the basics of what it means to life and to be aware of it. Our current world is so bombarded by images and information that could be even fictional and we embrace them as real, living behind or casting aside our physical existence here.

Enough about me. The workshop was also meaningful because it knitted together a small community, built by strangers who found a stage where they were safe to play upon and share their lives. If the embodiment experience changes an individual, it can also change groups and collectives. The energy flow we felt, as group, was true and it was safe enough for all of us to share and build upon. We all listened, observed and interpreted what our bodies were showing and what our actions were hiding. As a theatrical exercise it was very interesting and as a hermeneutical exercise it was even more so.

Perhaps one of the things I felt that what I contributed with were my questions. As a historian I am constantly trying to connect dots and stories, I am well aware there is an endless way to do so and in this reading each connection can give different meanings. Yet, as a historian I had not thought the embodiment in this performance as a source for unraveling and understanding new meanings of the past that connect to our present.

Now I am aware I too am a body and that the senses tell us things and shed light or shadow on decisions and moments. My relationship with myself has changed because now I am aware I speak to myself with different languages and my listening channels have to open and aware. It is undoubtedly a process because I have been submerged in the rational and theoretical experience for far too long and this new discovery- of what has always been there- has just been made

conscious. And so the new is old and I remembered my years in theater arts and music, where we experienced and built through action and pause. The delicate balance between sound and silence was made evident again for me.

Half way through the workshop Carol Zahner gave me a book. We were having a coffee during one of the breaks and she dropped a book. I tried to pick it up and said something like you dropped your book, she smiled and said it's for you. It has been in my book bag since then, keeping me company as I walk through existence. The book found me at the right moment and it has prolonged what I began learning in the workshop. When she gave me the book I saw a quote from Antonio Machado, one of my all time favorite poets and from whose verses I have taken one of my identities years ago, "el caminante" (the walker). For over a quarter of a century I have seen myself as a walker, opening paths and retracing steps of those before me, but in my own way. Thus the destinies of each path are different and dynamic. The pieces fall into place in each of our stories and we need to keep our senses open to them and to their messages so we can connect dots of what was, live the moment and project onto what will come.

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