Lehman text for program

Why this performance

**Who owns the economy?**

The need to create this performance springs out from frustration. There was a desire to understand something extremely complicated and to share this desire for understanding. This complex “thing” is nothing else that what dictates most of our actions, work, free time, family, shopping, holiday, health, even identity that is to say: economy. We were wondering: who owns economy? How is it possible that something so present in our everyday life is something that we have nothing to say about it, that only some experts have the right to decide about it?

The desire to understand this complexity led us to focus on one of the last major financial crisis: the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy which affected worldwide many people and even plunge some nations into deep recessions. And still, even though this crisis affected so many of us, it felt that we were not invited in discussing how to change ´”economy “ and only experts were allowed to have a say on the subject. Who owns economy?

Stefano Massini’s play, Lehman Trilogy seemed the perfect text to engage this discussion. It presents the history of three immigrants, their first business, how they grew, how the bank became a social agent offering capitals to rebuild a country, how they transformed the very notion of investment. It displays the transition to modern capitalism which affects so deeply our everyday life.

**The videos and the timeline**

The text of the play is strong and it would have been already enough simply to utter it. However for this production we decided to take a risk and to add another dimension to the text by creating an extra level inside and around the play. The aim was to use the play’s content as a platform to stimulate a discussion.

We started to interview experts from different fields about the meaning of the word economy; how the 2008 financial crisis had affected Finland, what is the relationship between Finns and economy, and so on. Then we decided to insert in the play these short interviews in order to open up the impact of this financial crisis to our reality nowadays in Finland. These interviews hopefully summon or provoke the audience to provide personal answers to this strange and complex phenomenon that is called “economy”. This is why, in the lobby there are extra videos, examining more deeply some of the issues raised by the play. (for a full view of all the video interviews, please visit the webpage: [www.metamorfoosi.com](http://www.metamorfoosi.com), click: performance, and then Lehman-Trilogia). We hope with this project to bring back the term economy in the public debate.

**Three actors and a musician**

Telling this modern epic fable, which spans from 1844 to 2008, only with three actors and a musician is an impressive tour de force accomplished by them. But there are also two deliberate choices motivating this decision. The first one is to point out how the imagery of the financial world is male dominated. Even though the last Nobel prize for economy has been given to a woman, it seems that women have no say on this matter. In our production, the only female performer is the musician and she is silent. This choice underlines the assumption of finance as a male’s world. The second motivation is to highlight the infernal “machinery” of the financial system: people and situations change, but similar dynamics are repeated. In addition to this aspect, physical theatre techniques have been used in the acting to make more tangible the abstract and repetitive mechanisms of finance. The crisis in 2008 is remarkably similar to the one of 1929 which was followed by the Petrol crisis in 1973 and 1979, by the black Monday in 1987, by the crisis of the Finnish and Swedish banking systems in the ‘90s, by the crash of Asian market in 1997, by the crash in 2001-2002 caused by the internet bubble, and so on. We are waiting for the next crisis.

So with this project, this what we would like to ask you: what is the place of economy in your life? How do you relate to it? What are you ready to change?

**Making the show: finding the money, getting the trust**

The project started in Summer 2016 when I read Massini’s play about the Lehman Brothers Bank for the first time. I spoke about this text to Luc in March 2017.

There was a shared interest in creating a different way to engage the audience, to create a performance that would not be limited to the mere display of a text, and to deal with the critical topic of economy.

We had then to find money to start the project.

We decided to dream big and to plan a European project examining the effect of the 2008 crisis in different European countries.

European projects are very hazardous and to fit all well the requirements of a European project was complex. It requires as well own financial resources. And we had none...

In November 2017 we met the director of a Finnish festival who became extremely interested in promoting a European project. The project was branded as a European collaboration examining the negative aspects of finance.

We met with another person who spoke to us about the use of new technologies in theatre:

“what about a show with telematic technology in which the show would happen simultaneously in different European cities? Different performers would perform together but staying in their own country. And different audience in different countries would see the show at the same time in different cities?” The idea was then to explore the dematerialisation of the work. The director of the festival liked the idea and we were getting his trust.

The whole concept was branded as dematerialization of work, as the consequence of the global neoliberal market. The idea was to mix languages and actors from different places and to give space for the ones who are left into the darkness by economy.

Then in March 2018 we met the director of a city theatre who asked us; what is the essence of your project?

We answered: Dematerialization of work.

Yes, and then what?

We suggested then: Invasion of finance in the everyday life?

We all know that.

A dream becoming a monster?

That is a banality.

The loss of identity?

Mmhh….

We needed a stronger brand for our project. And other sources of financing.

The play speaks about banks, would be banks ready to finance it?

In August 2018, we went to meet the representatives of a Finnish bank and we branded the show as a platform for discussion on the notion of economy. The theme was: How to give a human face to economy? Artists and specialist of finance engaging a debate.

We needed still a lot of money. We got a grant but it was not enough. And we were getting no concrete support from other institutions.

In September 2018, we decided to change strategy and we went to meet representatives of a cultural foundation and we branded the show as a platform for discussion. The project is not meant only to display a show about finance but to use the play for engaging a dialogue about economy. The idea to bring back the word economy in the public debate was invented.

How?

By making interviews and create an interactive theatre installation.

You? Was asking the representative of the cultural foundation.

Yes, us. Just trust us. Let us show you what we could do.

In October 2018 we made a demo at Espoo city theatre, and it worked. We started to get the trust. After the demo, two theatres were on our side: Espoo City theatre and TTT.

But to have two directors of theatre liking your project, it is not enough. What counts, is the money. How much money is the theatre willing to put in the production?

We decided to drop the European collaboration and to focus on a domestic level: this play, even though it is about an American Bank, must talk to the Finnish audience. It must examine the repercussion of the financial crisis in Finland. The show was now branded as a project aiming to explore the word economy: it would explore the mechanism of modern capitalism, its effect on nowadays Finnish reality, it would give a human face to the abstract concept of “economy”.

The next step was to make the budget of the full production. That was not easy. What kind of budget? The dream version of this production or rather a smaller-so called realistic-version of it?

In the finance, the biggest risk is that investors are suddenly afraid and wants to pull off. What causes the crash is when investors don’t trust anymore the bank or the trader and want their money back. When this happen, usually the bank does not have the cash and everything collapses. So a lot of the economy is based on virtual money and in the trust that this “virtual” money will make more money. When you propose a theatre project, there is something similar. You need to have the trust of the investor: the theatre. When we met again the director of the city theatre, he wanted to know how we can make this happen, and how we can guarantee the quality of this show. How can he be sure that theatre will sell the tickets. We needed to assure him, we needed to have his trust.

At that point Luc and I realized that we were behaving like the Lehman brothers: we were entrepreneur and we needed the trust to get enough capital to concretize our vision.

The next day, we met the artistic team of this production (actors and set, costume, light, video designer and composer, and Luc said: “Performing art is a very risky business, and we will probably only know at the very last minutes what our complete resources are. I have experience in working on such production and I am sure we can manage to create this performance. The most important is that we have the trust of our co-producers and that they understand what we are doing and how we try to achieve it. So our task is mainly to keep on the high artistic quality of our work to maintain this trust. The show does not yet exist, it is virtual and we need to have trust of the theatre directors.”

We went to visit another private cultural foundation. We explained the situation, what we need. The representative of the foundation pointed out that private cultural foundations were deeply affected by the 2008 crisis. In one day their funds basically dropped of 50%. And it took for them almost 10 year to go back to the financial situation in which they were before the crisis. People don’t realize where the money for the cultural projects come from. Private cultural foundations do not use money coming from the taxes. Every year they give millions of euros. But this money must come from somewhere and it comes from profits, profits made with funds, investments, all things what usually artists hate. As the representative was saying: “we are the bad capitalist making money so that we can give it to cultural projects”.

Lehman-Trilogia was born.