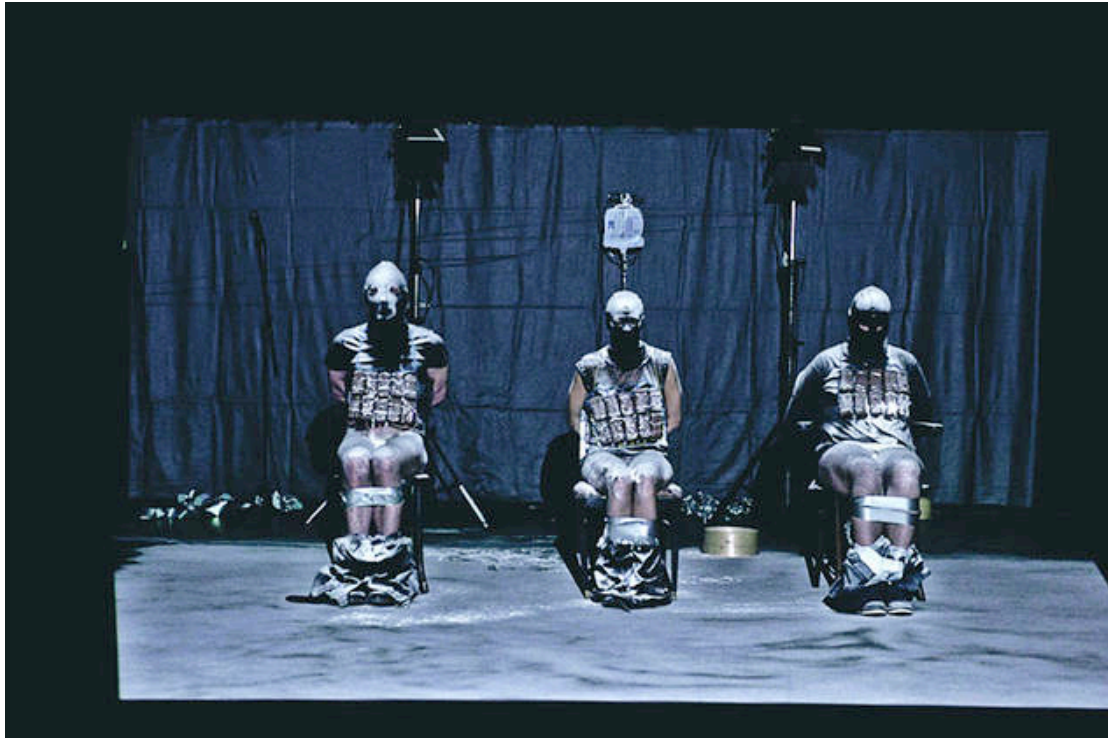


## Art terrorists and their enemy – culture!



It is not often the case that the press conference prior to the performance is in itself an artistic event. Generation's Last Rehearsal in the series of Via Negativa productions of director Bojan Jablanovec, which is going to be premiered tonight on the small stage of the Slovene National Theater (SNG Drama), received precisely such a robust, manifestative and enigmatic overture.

Namely, the actors of the show, Matija Rozman, Veronika Drolc and Boris Mihalj, awaited the press on the stage, tied and gagged, their heads drooping. In the performance Generation's Last Rehearsal, these "hostages" are there to enact their theatre colleagues: Grega Zorc, Katarina Stegnar and Marko Mandić, who turned up for the press conference as their kidnappers only to seal the doors of the hall and in the manner of terrorist extremists read out their statement of protest. (The director was absent at the presentation as well as unavailable for statements.)

The manifestative performance of the art "terrorists" was directed primarily against the way in which the Ministry of Culture is carving up the so-called "Slovene cultural space". The kidnappers object to the concept of culture that "Slovene cultural politics has been wrapping in its worn-out ideological diapers. Today it has become a stinky concept of mediocrity, consumerism, free market, cultural industry, social justice, Enlightenment rationality, national pride and moralistic custodianship of public interest," they also added.

In this context Generation's Last Rehearsal enacts a confrontation between the non-government, experimental performing arts and the grand theatre institution, with their common enemy – culture. "Generation's Last Rehearsal is a confrontation with the future we do not want and finally with the generation that has been putting up with this for too long – and to which we too belong!" they said.

## **Towards Via Negativa**

Generation's Last Rehearsal belongs to the conceptual origins of Via Negativa that Bojan Jablanovec founded in 2002 together with the dramaturge Nana Milčinski. After the first series of productions in which the performers used their own bodies to address the questions of the seven sins, Jablanovec continued with several other related projects: Via Nova and Irresolvable, to mention the main ones.

Approximately fifty events, in which over eighty performers from Slovenia and the wider international region have taken part over the last decade and more, are joined, roughly speaking, in their exploration of a given concept, which the performer tests out on his or her own body. The directorial concept thus intersects with the actors' interpretation of it on themselves. Furthermore: in this project Jablanovec acts as a facilitator to the actors, helping them extract from a theme or a motif all performative consequences.

Via Negativa's excessive, provocative scenes were therefore never in the service of mere sensationalism or shock tactics, but rather boldly followed the project's artistic demands, yielding intriguing results in the process. On the one hand they endowed the already established concepts (such as seven sins) with concrete artistic materiality, and on the other, with their specific method of performance, they addressed the most fundamental question of theatre art, ranging from the relationship between the actor and his or her role, the place of the director, the significance of the concept in the performance to the position of the spectator in the performance.

### **For a brutal confrontation**

Generation's Last Rehearsal, at least judging by the press conference, marks a change in the overall accent of Via Negativa. On the stage there are no longer performers/actors, who would, on the bases of a given directorial concept, primarily use their own selves and their bodies as the material for the performance, but actors playing their performing colleagues. And if it seems that Via Negativa, by entering the great institution of Drama, has become hostage to the demands of the institutional classical theatrical model, the press conference suggests otherwise; the attempt being made here is on the part of a specific performing practice to hijack the traditional theatrical institution and subject it to its own performative laws.

These laws are in fact the laws of art, which is always testing and questioning its own boundaries, presuppositions (in this case boundaries of the traditional stage, the relationship spectator-actor, etc.), thereby addressing constantly its own social reality and specific cultural context. In this sense, the highly engaged, aggressive style of the "terrorists" or rather the "original" creators of Via Negativa, Grega Zorc, Katarina Stegnar and Marko Mandić at the press conference does not surprise. Their ambition, they told us, was for a break-through of an idea, and that can only ever be achieved by a brutal barbaric fight: "Not cultural dialogue, not national consciousness, not Slovenianness, not public good, not democratic values. The only thing that can yank us out of this romantic mud is more barbarism and less culture!"

This puts Via Negativa, for which a direct political engagement is unusual, into a new gear: it is now also testing its power and influence in relation to concrete social reality. With this rehearsal in Mala Drama, it appears that a specific generation of artists is determined to continue with its artistic calling, stand by its artistic stance, and refuse domestication from within the existing cultural and wider political system.