Why and What to perform?

"Why and what to perform" is a question that we find ourselves asking with every new performance afresh. It is as if you are asking it for the first time, even though you have answered it for the umpteenth time. This game needs to be played onto death. And it is precisely in this that the biggest difficulty of performing lies.

The minute you start insisting on a particular answer, defense, conviction, method, concept ..., you are in trouble. You start using the stage as an asylum, a haven in which you allow to play a trick on yourself, in turn playing also a trick on the audience with the performance. There is an audience who enjoys that. Many do indeed come to the theatre as if it was an asylum in which questions what and why don't need to be asked. And therefore there are many such performances. And then there is even more of this type of audience. And so then theatre becomes jaded, old-hat and boring ...

With every performance therefore we keep asking “What and Why” for as long as it takes for us to plumb virtually every meaning: to clear all rational, conceptual and ideological dross getting in the way – until we are left with purely the basic sound of the stage. This is the whole point of creating the performance. It is only when we feel we are getting close to something that can no longer be rationalized and when we no longer have to pretend we understand something we do not that we become real.

But this is not some kind of irrational surfing, aimless improvisation, emotional unshackling or some such thing. On the contrary. If you want to occupy a space behind the seat of reason you must first go through many filters of reasoning. This is a thick web of stereotypes, prejudices, conventions, presuppositions and expectations, references, paradoxes ... We are talking about an astutely rational process here. The stage is the last lens which the gaze travels through. A zoom-in on the question “What and Why”. The stage is a situation of a sharpened focus: we are ready to see what is impossible to show. A silent agreement between us who show, and you who are watching, is: We know that what is between us here is here only so as to open up a space for what is hidden behind us.

The question “What and Why” is constantly hanging over our heads. In fact this is an impossible question about meaning. We all know there is no answer. And we all know that someone has to keep asking it. We all know this is a pointless, but necessary exercise. That is the privilege of the stage, its only purpose.

Via Negativa project emerged out of the need to keep checking the meaning, purpose and reasons for the existence of theatre today. It emerged also out of the conviction that the outcome of artistic endeavor is fundamentally conditioned by its means (method) of production. From the very beginning our prime goal was to develop a procedure that will allow the performer (standing on the stage) to answer the question “What and Why” with his/her own statement, his/her own body and his/her own meaning.

This basic creative field thus becomes the performative “self here and now”: my story, my relationship, my body, my situation, my gesture, my conflict, my anger ... The performer (in her own name and for herself) fights for her right to be on the stage, she assumes the responsibility for everything said and done, the director assumes control
over the coherence of the creative process and the responsibility for its impact, for the context and the structuring of the event … The creative field is strictly bounded: a paring down to basic stage elements (via negativa); theatre as a medium of communication and not aestheticization. We focus on the relationship between the performer and spectator (between what is shown and what is seen – which is the basis of theatre communication) and on the question of the real in this relationship (which is the key characteristic of a live theatre situation).

**BRIEF OVERVIEW**


**2003 – More** (Glej Theatre Ljubljana). “This project offers an absolutely fresh take on the so-called ‘safe’ creative approaches. The hierarchy between theatre as ‘text’ and the perception of ‘theatre as theatre’ is no longer thinkable. Original.” (Primož Jesenko: Lucid madness with a point of view. Delo, Ljubljana, 2. 12. 2003)

**2004 – Incasso** (Glej Theatre Ljubljana). “Incasso has much to do with the changed context of life in relation to capitalist production and labor, communication and performance politics, and, last but not least, with the history of theater and its most political though marginalized core – performance art.” (Marina Gržinić: A rearticulation of the history of the performance. Maska, Ljubljana, XX/92–93, 2005)

**2005 – Would Would Not** (SMEEL Ljubljana). “Would Would Not does not conform to the expectations of the ‘classical’ viewer as it saddles him with the responsibility of executing this carefully structured open piece. At the same time, it extends an exceptional opportunity for the viewer to personally experience the fundamental issue of performing arts.” (Barbara Orel: Faces of lust. Dnevnik, Ljubljana, 27. 12. 2005)

**2006 – Viva Verdi** (Eurokaz Festival & Croatian National Theatre Opera Zagreb). “Via Negativa has entirely justified its performance, and although it has repulsed the audience, it has shown exceptional theatrical verve, energy, innovativeness, imagination, demonstrating without restraint where European theatre is heading.” (Helena Braut: Shocking and controversial. Vjesnik, Zagreb, 3. 7. 2006)


**2008 – Out** (&TD Theatre Zagreb). “Via Negativa has succeeded in opening up a space in contemporary Slovenian theatre for which theatre in Slovenia will never be quite the same again.” (Rok Vevar: Inflate the theatrical event, let it burst! Večer Maribor, 17. 11. 2008)

**2009/2011 – Via Nova**, a project which asks the question “What and Why perform” again and anew. For the material we go back to what we’ve already seen, to the scenes, performers, situations, predicaments … of Via Negativa 2002–2008 and thematize, interpret, and contextualize them afresh, testing various strategies of performance: dance, concert, lecture, video, auction, visual performance, documentary performance … A series of twenty smaller-format performances emerge, which we present either as individual performances or in the form of group presentations.
2009 – Via Nova Museum (City Museum Ljubljana), collective presentation and a museum installation at Ex Ponto Festival, according to the audience the best performance of the festival.

2010 – Via Nova via MSU Zagreb (Museum of contemporary art Zagreb & Eurokaz festival, collective presentation), in the form of a video documentation, thirteen solo performances become part of the art collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb. “More interesting than provocation, is the laying bare of everything they touch – from the mechanisms in theatre, interpersonal relationships, expectations we harbour in relation to each other, the meaning of art … And it is precisely from this skillful exposure, linked closely to self-irony and subtle humor, that every encounter with Via Negativa has been exciting in its own right for a full decade now.” (Iva Grujić, Jutarnji list Zagreb, junij 2010)


2011 – Via Nova via New Territories Glasgow. Following a nine-hour collective presentation at the live art festival New Territories, a prominent critic Mary Brennan (who over the last thirty years had the occasion to follow also Forced Entertainment, Marina Abramović, La Ribot, Franka B etc.), wrote: “Pungent with confrontational insights and touched with humour, poetry and naked integrity, we need to see more of Via Negativa.” (Mary Brennan: Via Negativa. The Herald, Glasgow, 17. 3. 2011).