

Fusing the Fictional and the Real in the Contemporary Performing Arts: Projects by the via Negativa Group

Barbara Orel

ABSTRACT

The exploration of the relationship between the fictional and the real in projects by Via Negativa, a performance group from Slovenia, is based on the presumption that the recognition of what we experience as fictional or real is decisively influenced by the perceptual activity of the spectator. The article argues that the exchange between the elements of fiction and reality takes place in two different concepts of representation: theatricality and absorption. These are two opposing notions used for defining the relationship between the image represented and the spectator. Theatricality is the effect of the address that the image makes to the spectators and thus makes them conscious of their own act of perceiving. Absorption, in turn, describes the context in which the image is put to view as a closed, self-sufficient sign-system establishing such conditions of perception that make the spectator focus completely upon the object represented; the audience is so overcome by the presented image that they experience this as if they were absorbed into the staged world. These two concepts are elaborated on the basis of Denis Diderot's essays on theatre and fine art. The essays prove useful for the argumentation of the thesis since they testify that theatricality and absorption, each in their own way, include the spectator's personal investment into what comes across as fictional or real. A detailed analysis of selected performances by Via Negativa shows that the real as such (i.e. the authenticity of the real that is confirmed in the identity with its own self) is impossible to achieve. Under the gaze of the spectator, the real is always compelled to reveal itself through some kind of representation. As also found by Alain Badiou, the authenticity of the real can only be presented through the role of semblance, mask or fiction.

Keywords: fictional, real, theatricality, absorption, Via Negativa performance group, Denis Diderot, perception.

BIOGRAPHY

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Projects by the Via Negativa Group

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The article deals with the relationship between the fictional and the real in projects by Via Negativa, a performance group from Slovenia. Their theatrical events take place at the intersection of theatre and performance art. The group uses the means of both genres in order to establish the social situation as a space of collaboration between the actors and the audience. This offers the spectator the experience of responsibility for shaping the worlds of fiction and reality.¹ The recognition of that which we experience as fictional or real depends on the perceptual activity of the spectator. It is decisively influenced by the conditions under which the perception takes place. On the one hand, elements of the real are constituents in the creation of fiction; on the other hand, traits of the fictional enter reality as well. This article attempts to show that this exchange between the fictional and the real in Via Negativa's projects takes place in two entirely different concepts of representation: theatricality and absorption.

These are two opposite notions used for defining the relationship between the image represented and the spectator. In this article, theatricality and absorption will be elaborated on using the basis of Denis Diderot's essays on theatre and fine art. Diderot used the term 'the theatrical' to denote that which expresses the awareness of being observed. Theatricality is the effect of the address that the image makes to the spectators and thus makes them conscious of their spectating position. The image expresses the awareness that it has been created in order to be observed and the observers recognize this intention. They feel personally addressed and make

conscious their role of spectators. This includes accepting responsibility for the explanation of what the spectator recognizes in the image. "Theatricality is not likely to be present when a performance is so absorbing that the audience forgets that it is spectating."² *Absorption*, in turn, denotes the absence of the relationship between the artwork and the spectator. It describes the context in which the image is put to view as a closed, self-sufficient sign system, one that does not display consciousness of the presence of the spectator. The aim is to elicit an emotional response from the spectator, one resulting in the experience of being absorbed into the staged world. Absorption denotes a situation in which the mediation between the image represented and the spectator is unnoticed. In other words, the spectators are not aware of their own investment into what they see and do not experience themselves as part of the representation. Diderot's essays on theatricality and absorption will prove useful for exploring the intertwinement of fiction and reality since they testify that theatricality and absorption, each in their own way, include the spectator's personal investment into what comes across as fictional and real.³

THEATRICALITY

The relationship between the fictional and the real is part of the research on theatricality carried out by Via Negativa since 2002. This was also the primary aim of the group's founding: to research theatricality in terms of its patterns, triggers, properties and place. The notion of theatricality has been defined

in various ways, ranging from an all-inclusive definition as, “the semiotic codes of theatrical representation” to a rather exclusive definition as, “a specific type of performance style”.⁴ For Via Negativa, theatricality is the *differentia specifica* of theatre and performance art. Via Negativa seeks traits of theatricality in the relationship between the actor and the spectator. Willmar Sauter approaches theatricality from the same viewpoint: “As a concept, theatricality is meant to represent the essential or possible characteristics of theatre as an art form and as a cultural phenomenon.”⁵ He describes theatre as the communicative intersection between the performer’s actions and the spectator’s reactions and traces theatricality in the theatrical processes taking place in the interplay between them. According to Sauter, scholars define theatricality either as part of the performance on stage or as a mode of perception; only Josette Féral, however, underlines “the necessity of the physical presence of both performer and spectator as a prerequisite of theatricality”.⁶

Féral notes that theatricality does not derive from the nature of its object (the actor, the space, or the event), but primarily from “a *process* that has to do with gaze that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other”. This space is the result of a conscious action that comes either from the performer herself/himself (in the widest sense of the word: actor, director, set designer, architect) or the spectator, whose gaze creates a gap in space.⁷ As Féral finds, theatricality is not the sum of the properties that could simply be enumerated, but essentially a cognitive operation: it is the performative act of the observer and the doer, which creates the space of the other – the transitional experience discussed by Winnicott; *limen* as discussed by Turner; the concept of the frame as developed by Goffman.⁸ Via Negativa approaches theatricality precisely in this way: as a “result of perceptive dynamics, of the gaze that links the observed (subject or object) to the observer”.⁹ In doing so, they open the space of in-between positions (i.e. between diverse instances of discourse, genres, media). It is not about a passive gaze that would note the entirety of the theatre objects, but about “the dynamic as the result of action. Undoubtedly, action is a privileged belonging of the one who creates theatre; to

the same extent, however, it can also belong to the one who possesses it by means of their gaze, i.e. the spectator”.¹⁰ Bojan Jablanovec, founder and director of Via Negativa, explores theatricality primarily in terms of the relationship between the stage (as the entirety of all sign systems) and the real.

“We want to be real in front of you and we insist that you are real in front of us as well. [...] This is a game, and the first rule is: never forget that we are playing a game. If we are to play out the real, then both sides need to play: you shall play the spectators and we shall play the actors.”¹¹ This is the manifesto statement by means of which Via Negativa has been addressing the audiences at all its theatrical events since 2002. Its work can be categorized as post-dramatic theatre, tending towards the aesthetic of the real and using the real as the material and subject of theatre-making¹² (e.g. Rimini Protocol, Forced Entertainment, Jan Fabre, Romeo Castellucci). The actors draw on the materials from their biographies, staging events that have truly happened to them and using objects they have actually possessed. Rather than at theatre halls of established institutions, Via Negativa performances take place at experimental art venues, galleries and museums. However, the real objects and persons placed into the representational framework (be it the traditional theatre stage or the experimental theatrical venue) always function as signs subjected to the process of fictionalization.¹³ The real enters the horizon of fiction when it is put on display and captured by the gaze of the audience. The dynamic contrasts between the tendency towards the real and the inevitable fictionalization resulting from the traditional stage frame are particularly evident in the introductory scene of the *Viva Verdi* project (2006).

The premiere of *Viva Verdi*, uncharacteristically, took place on the stage of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb (in the scope of the 20th Eurokaz International Festival of New Theatre in the capital of Croatia). Upon the initiative of the organizers, Via Negativa, in collaboration with the Croatian Opera ensemble, attempted to fuse two entirely different artistic genres, performance art and opera, and invent a new (hybrid) genre at their meeting points. The premiere, however, started with the provocative statement by the director, Bojan Jablanovec,



Viva Verdi (2006), *Via Negativa*. Photo: Marcandrea.

that the performance was cancelled. He came to the stage and made the following announcement: “The idea of the festival selector, Branko Brezovec, and the artistic director of the festival, Gordana Vnuk, to fuse opera with performance art, is a pretentious festival concept that has nothing to do with the artistic goals of the *Via Negativa* group. Everything you have read in the press materials or found out through the media releases is nothing but fabrication. *Via Negativa* is a research project on theatricality and by no means intends to criticize existing theatre forms, be they contemporary or traditional. We refuse to collaborate in conceptual poppycock used by producers to justify their existence and enforce the quasi-artistic status of their festivals.”¹⁴ Jablanovec stated that he and the group’s producer, Špela Trošt, had decided that there would be no performance that particular evening, and proclaimed in a manifestative manner: “This is not a performance. This is a protest.”¹⁵ The statement was followed by the actors presenting their own opinions and shedding light upon their various professional, personal and intimate views of the situation.¹⁶

For example, the director’s stance was provocatively challenged by the actress Katarina Stegnar, who focused upon the director’s inability to implement the selected concept: “Bojan Jablanovec and his vision of *Via Negativa*, where are they now? His vision is in nothing but ambition! First, he accepts the offer by the Eurokaz festival to fuse opera and performance art, forces his team into it and then, upon failing to create a performance, protests against the concept, the festival and himself!”¹⁷ The actress boasted that she had never received a bad review and stated quite firmly that that particular night was no exception. Did she really mean what she said or was all that just fiction, a role well played? The statements by the other actors additionally strengthened the audience’s disbelief and thoroughly shattered the border between fiction and reality. The actors each presented their viewpoint on the situation and – like in Luigi Pirandello’s plays – disclosed the manifold faces of the action represented.

The performance did not offer a unified viewpoint from which the spectators would be able to form a standpoint towards the ‘universal truth’,

but confronted them with a multitude of different points of view. The connections between these views enabled various interpretations, but none of them could be perceived as being more convincing and real than the others. As the performance continued, the stage was filled with performers, each presenting their own action of the real, while the eye of the spectator wandered freely around the stage deciding on the truthfulness of the individual statements represented.

The concept of representation which establishes this kind of theatrical relationship between the spectator and the artwork can be defined by means of Diderot's pastoral conception of the art of painting. His *Salons* (1759–81) and other painting-related writings feature two concepts in the creation of paintings: the dramatic conception and pastoral conception of the art of painting. Their co-existence in Diderot's essays was recognized by Michael Fried in his study *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980). The dramatic conception establishes "a unified compositional structure, thereby giving the painting as a whole the character of a closed and self-sufficient system".¹⁸ This system offers the spectators a unified point of view so that they experience the painting as if they were absorbed into the world represented. The dramatic conception is also known as the concept of absorption and will be dealt with in more detail later on. In contrast to the dramatic conception, however, the pastoral conception of a painting encompasses "numerous points of view, each of which competes with all others for the beholder's attention [...] which makes it virtually impossible for the beholder to grasp the scene as a single instantaneously apprehensible whole and by so doing tends further to call into question [...] the imaginary fixity of his position in front of the canvas."¹⁹ The composition, which forms a network of relations among multiple disparate centres of interest, strives to attract the gaze of the spectator and enter into a theatrical relationship with him or her. In the case of pastoral conception, the spectator wanders through the image as if through a landscape. This was experienced by Diderot when looking at a painting by Claude-Joseph Vernet: "my eyes wandered without fixing themselves on any object."²⁰ This kind of ex-

perience is characteristic for post-dramatic theatre²¹ and is also offered by the performance *Viva Verdi*.

In *Viva Verdi*, the eyes and minds of the spectators wander through the simultaneously performed scenes in which the actors carry out actions of the real upon a joint theme: sloth. *Viva Verdi* is a part of the performance art series reflecting on the seven deadly sins (2002–2008). The performers are driven by the "passion for the real", as Alain Badiou would put it.²² Their scenes centre around intimate confessions proclaimed in a public space. In their efforts to approach the real, they are also not modest in terms of exhibitionist displays of the body and its excrements, flirting with the delicate, the obscene and the forbidden. The actors carry out actions characteristic of *Via Negativa* pieces in general, striving to attract the attention of the audience with the sincerity that is to convince us of the truthfulness of their confessions.²³ They thus juxtaposed the radicalism of performance art with the classic beauty of Verdi's arias (sung by the opera singers of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb) and – as also found by the critic Jasen Boko – created one of their most entertaining projects. The intertwining of the different instances of discourse (i.e. the various points of view held by the actors), codified genres (performance art as a field of the real and opera as a field of stage illusion), and the location of the event (the traditional theatre stage), gives rise to in-between spaces, inviting the spectators to invest themselves into the image represented. The reality effect of performance art was further strengthened by the juxtaposition with opera as a genre of fiction staged in the realm of illusion. Nevertheless, *Viva Verdi* took place at the stage of the Croatian National Theatre. This framed the event into the traditional communication model, which inevitably implies that everything has been invented.

This brings up the following question: How to enact the real on stage so that the audience would experience the real 'as such'? Hans-Thies Lehmann argues that: "Aesthetically and conceptually the real in theatre has always been excluded but it inevitably adheres to theatre."²⁴ On the other hand, real objects and persons on stage always function as "a sign of a sign".²⁵ The aesthetic of the real can only be achieved "by 'treading the borderline', by perma-

nently switching, not between form and content, but between 'real' contiguity (connection with reality) and 'staged' construct".²⁶

The principle that leads to the aesthetic of the real is the strategy of the retreat of signification. The key question in relation to this is, "how to grant theatre signs the possibility that they can work precisely through the *retreat* of signification".²⁷ This means to erase the intentionality of the sign and lose the representational character of theatre play. The representation and recognition of the real as the real is enabled by the so-called law of the exclusion of the irreversible. This is the term used by Josette Féral for one of the basic prohibitions that set the borders of theatre as a medium: "According to this law, the stage is imposed with the reversibility of time and events, which opposes any kind of mutilation or execution of the subject."²⁸ It forbids any interventions into the body as they demolish the silent agreement with the spectator: "To witness the act of representation, inscribed into a temporality that is different from the temporality of daily life, where the time appears to be still and practically reversible

because it imposes upon the actor the ever possible return to the outgoing moment (cf. Diderot's *The Paradox of Acting*). However, if the actor attacks his or her own body (or the body of a slaughtered animal), the conditions of theatricality are demolished. The actor ceases to be in the otherness of theatre."²⁹

The law of the exclusion of the irreversible is a strategy that leads towards the aesthetic of the real and is characteristic of radical performance art. Via Negativa intriguingly implemented it in *Not Like Me* (2007). This performance was inspired by *Rhythm 10*, in which Marina Abramović carried out a knife game. *Not Like Me* is justifiably characterized as "a performance about a self-destructive performance".³⁰ It was first performed on 16 August 2007 at St. Dominic's Church in Zadar, Croatia. This was a production or result of the workshop carried out by Via Negativa on the theme of envy at the Zadar Snova international festival of contemporary theatre and performing arts. In *Not Like Me*, a recording of a knife game in Zadar is used as documentary material, displayed on the screen at the back of the stage. In the breaks between their



Not Like Me (2007), Via Negativa. Photo: Marcandrea.

actions, the performers read excerpts from reviews that testified to the breaking of the law of the exclusion of the irreversible. Ivica Neveščanin writes in a sensationalist manner: "While the Croat Boris and the Serb Kristian cut at each other's fingers, the spectators shouted 'enough' and fell unconscious. [...] One unconscious person, a decilitre of human blood, four surgical stitches and several dozens shocked spectators, this is the resume of the *Not Like Me* performance."³¹ As evident from the close-up footage, the two performers indeed suffered cuts to their hands. At the end of the piece, they were both hospitalized. Kristian Al Droubi was given first aid immediately afterwards while Boris Kadin went to hospital a day after. After the end of the documentary footage, the performers carry out the knife game live. The game is over when Špela Trošt, the group's producer (seated in the auditorium), stops it by shouting: "The end!"

Not Like Me transposes the issue about the relationship between the fictional and the real in terms of authenticity. The footage of the knife game brings

images of the real which not only provide the documentation on what actually took place in Zadar, but are also used to intensify authenticity. By means of the close-ups, that which cannot be perceived by the naked eye of the spectator in the hall is brought into the field of vision. The mediatization of the real event comes across as even more authentic than the knife game carried out live on stage.

Can the performer on stage be real and authentic at all? This is the question set by Kristian Al Droubi in the performance *Interview with an Artist* (2009). He states that, in the seven years of uncompromisingly approaching the real and his (exhibitionist) exposure, he has realized that this is not possible. Under the gaze of the spectator, it is impossible to reach the real: at the moment when the performer grasps it, the real eludes him. Al Droubi turns the question toward the auditorium: he wonders whether the audience can be authentic.



Tonight I Celebrate (2009), Via Negativa. Photo: Marcandrea.

ABSORPTION

The question of authenticity will be dealt with on the basis of the performance *Tonight I Celebrate* (2009). The piece was created with the strategy of absorption, based on Diderot's aforementioned dramatic conception of representation (which is the opposite of the pastoral conception).

Absorption is the concept of perception in which the spectators are so overcome by the absoluteness of the presented image that they experience this as if they were absorbed into the image. The staged world is organised around a unified point of view that makes the spectator focus completely upon the object represented, so that the image observed reveals itself to the spectator in all of its persuasiveness and truthfulness – as if it was real. This was termed 'absorption' by Michael Fried (in *Absorption and Theatricality*). This concept of representation veils the awareness that it is intended for someone to observe and treats the spectator as if they were not there. "Although the dramatic work is created in order to be performed, it is essential for the author and the actor to forget about the spectator," Diderot states in his 'Discours de la poésie dramatique'.³² The paradox between the fact that the image has been created with the purpose of being observed and the tendency to deny the audience, is solved by Diderot by thinking of the spectator's physical presence in front of the painting in the manner of absence. To put it in another way, the spectators are supposed to mentally transcend into the image although their physical bodies remain in front of it. This is how the artwork can testify to its authenticity and truthfulness: if it has been presented in such a way that the spectators are able to focus all of their attention into the object of representation and forget about everything else, including themselves and their act of perceiving. "What is called for," Fried states, "is at one and the same time the creation of a new sort of object [...] and the constitution of a new sort of beholder – a new 'subject' – whose innermost nature would consist precisely in the conviction of his absence from the scene of representation."³³ These conditions need to be met in order for the audience to be convinced of what Diderot terms truthfulness of representation. The concept of absorption rests on the paradox that the image has been created with

the aim of being observed, but veils the awareness that it is intended for that purpose. "Absorption describes the context in which the seer takes up the position or point of view presented to him or her, and does so without giving it a second thought. The effect achieved is in a way similar to 'taking up' the position of a character represented on stage or empathizing with a performer convincingly presenting him- or her- 'self'. The result is a sense of directness, closeness and immediacy."³⁴

In *Tonight I Celebrate* (2009), the actor Uroš Kaurin makes contact with the audience as if he and they were in a love relationship. At the beginning, he tells the audience that he will only be able to carry out the performance in collaboration with them: "I was directed by Bojan Jablanovec, taught how to sing by Nada Žgur and Jadranka Juras, dressed by Ana Dolinar, produced by Via Negativa as represented by Špela Trošt, and financed by the Ministry of Culture and the City Municipality of Ljubljana. But it will only be possible for me to bring the thing to the end in collaboration with you." In eight moves, i.e. eight songs, accompanied by the double bass player Tomaž Grom, Kaurin tries to seduce the spectators. In the sung scenes, Kaurin takes up the roles of various types of (both male and female) seducers. He performs them in the realm of stage illusion, established within the traditional theatre communication model: located between the illuminated stage and the dark auditorium is the seeming fourth wall, separating the performer from the audience. Such conditions of perceiving enable the absorption effect. The purpose behind the sung scenes is the same: to enable the experience of the audience to be absorbed in the world of fiction. The stage illusion, however, is broken during the intervals: the auditorium is illuminated, with Kaurin directly addressing the audience and attempting to make them part of the spectacle. The intervals between the songs are open to the reactions of the audience. The spectator's heightened mode of absorptive perception, achieved in the sung scenes, is now interrupted. Via Negativa attempts to convey the experience of being absorbed and bring it to the 'here and now' – the time of the spectators who came to the theatre, the time of their biographies as well as the time of Uroš Kaurin as the Actor. At

the moment when the lights go up in the auditorium, however, it is expected from the spectators that they return to the actual space and time. However, they are exposed to the gaze of the Other (Kaurin's as well as the other spectators'); they are no longer part of the anonymous audience, but acquire the role of the Spectator. The response expected of them by Kaurin is not entirely authentic; rather, it would be better to denote it as a representation which is enacted to a certain extent. The spectators return Kaurin's affection in the form of songs while being aware that they are being observed. In the exchange of the gaze that absorbs the spectator into the scene and the gaze that takes place in the spectator's own field of vision, it turns out that the real as such (i.e. the real that is confirmed in the identity with its own self) is impossible to achieve. As Badiou finds, the real is always compelled to reveal itself through some kind of representation.³⁵

The question whether it is possible to satisfy the intimate desire revealed and displayed in a public space is actually whether it is possible for one to open under the gaze of the Other. The spectators of *Tonight I Celebrate* are unable to reach the real without taking up the role of the subject of desire. In doing so, they settle in a kind of "third body". Blaž Lukan uses this term to more accurately define the role of the actor. That third body "is neither the performer themselves nor their role, but a being that is imbued in its own self and the stage existence in the contact with the audience, which is sometimes more and sometimes also less than both itself and its role."³⁶ Just like the performers, the spectators also establish a kind of "third body". Residing within it is a being that feels itself as visible, which is why it is unable to get hold of reality 'as such'. As Badiou finds, the rawness, i.e. the authenticity of the real, can be presented only through the role of semblance (mask, fiction). In the field of the spectator's perception, the real opens through the representation of fiction.

CONCLUSION

After several years of persistent and uncompromising research on the real, Via Negativa arrived at the conclusion that the real can be displayed through

the difference to fiction. As found by Badiou, the real is always compelled to open through a representation but: "Nothing can attest that the real is the real, nothing but the system of fictions wherein it plays the role of the real."³⁷

This kind of approach to the research of the real has been exposed in the series *Via Nova* (since 2009). It is essentially about "recycled" performances from the previous period (2002–2008), in which the scenes of the real are placed into a fictional frame and contextualized anew. In this, *Via Negativa* also attempts to find new forms of their presentation in-between various artistic fields, genres and forms.³⁸

Via Negativa places the spectator into the source of the co-ordinates of perception in which the spectators recognize themselves as part of the intersubjective network of relationships, become aware of their personal and social place and come to understand the mechanisms of their own perception. The spectators recognise themselves as co-creators of the world of fiction and of the one called reality. They realize and feel on their own skin that fiction(s) are an integral part of the real, which (according to Pierre Ouellet) is organized around the point of observation that we might call "I-here-now";³⁹ these points are endless in number and none of them can become the absolute criterion for reality. In Siegfried J. Schmidt's terms: "It is consensus and intersubjectivity that provide what we experience as objects or facts, not the ontological correspondence of our perceptions and experiences with the real entities."⁴⁰ The question of the relationship between the fictional and the real is therefore placed upon the level of the social criteria for establishing consensual agreements and intersubjective connections.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 In European epistemology, (“objective”, “actual”) reality was inseparably connected with truth and placed in categorical opposition to fiction. The bridge between them was built by postmodern theory, which showed that reality and fiction are not two strictly separate realms. In the 1960s, binary logic was reconstructed by interdisciplinary theories of possible worlds (cf. Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne 1994) as well as reception aesthetics theories. Wolfgang Iser, for example, refuses the fiction-reality dichotomy and suggests replacing it with the triad of the fictive, the real and the imaginary (in *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1993, pp. 2-4.) Various theories that attempt to transcend the tradition of Western thought share the conviction that the relationship between fiction and reality is not binary, but compound and plural. In this article, the term ‘reality’ is used as a synonym for the actual world – i.e. the world we live in, and can also be denoted as actuality. Fiction, however, is an umbrella term for all products of the imagination, be it artworks or worlds generated in the process of making things up in one’s daily life (including dreams, daydreaming or mental images in the sphere of the imaginary). In their attempt to define these phenomena, Edmund Husserl and Eugen Fink used the term ‘*ficta*’. It comes from the Latin word ‘*fingere*’, which has a double meaning: to mould and to sculpt as well as to invent, to imagine, and to feign. Ouellet points out that “[t]here, behind all the fiction, is the first and proper meaning of ‘*ficta*’, namely, ‘acts of mental perception’”. (Pierre Ouellet, “The Perception of Fictional Worlds” in *Fiction Updated: Theories of Fictionality, Narratology, and Poetics*, Calin-Andrei Mihalescu and Walid Hamerneh, eds., University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo 1996, p. 83.)
- 2 Tracy C. Davis, “Theatricality and civil society” in *Theatricality*, Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 128.
- 3 The fact that theatricality and absorption “can alert us to elements of subjective ‘investment’ in what appears to us as convincing (re)presentations”, is pointed out by Maaïke Bleeker. Maaïke Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre. The Locus of Looking*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008, p. 38.
- 4 Thomas Postlewait and Tracy C. Davis, “Theatricality: an introduction” in *Theatricality*, Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 1. The collection of essays brings an overview of various approaches to theatricality and its connotations in the performing arts and everyday life.
- 5 Willmar Sauter, *The Theatrical Event*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City 2000, p. 50.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 7 Josette Féral, “Teatralnost” [Theatricality] in *Prisotnost, predstavlanje, teatralnost* [Presence, Representation, Theatricality], Emil Hrvatinić, ed., Maska, Ljubljana 1996, p. 7. The text draws on the lecture given in 1987 at the Theatre Department of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Buenos Aires, published as “Théâtralité” in *Poétique* 75, September 1988, Seuil, Paris, pp. 347-61.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 11 It is also featured on the group’s official website: <http://vntheatre.com/o-vii-negativ/> (accessed 15 February 2014). The relationship between the actors and spectators in the projects by Via Negativa is discussed by Tomaž Krpič, “Spectator’s Performing Body: the Case of the Via Negativa Theatre Project” in *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2011, pp. 167-75.
- 12 The intrusion of the aesthetic of the real is one of the characteristics pointed out by Hans-Thies Lehmann in the defining traits of postdramatic theatre. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, London and New York 2006, pp. 99-103.
- 13 As stated by Ruth Ronen: “Any manipulation of facts (narrativization, selection, expansion and condensation of materials) [...] introduces the fictional into a text.” These fictional aspects might also appear in journalism, history and science. Ronen, op. cit., p. 76.
- 14 *Ne, Via Negativa 2002–2008*, Marin Blažević, ed., Ljubljana, Maska, 2010, p. 72.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 16 The performance artist Kristijan Al Droubi was outraged by the fact that he had spent half a year commuting between Ljubljana (where the rehearsals had taken place) and his home city, Belgrade, 600 km away, with the performance cancelled after he’d put six months of effort into it. The actor Dylan Tighe from Dublin stated that he had always had the feeling of wasting the audience’s time, but had never felt as “ridiculous and stupid” as in that particular instant. Petra Govc kept a professional

- stance: “With Via Negativa, I have always had the feeling of doing the right thing at the right time.” (*Ne, Via Negativa 2002–2008*, op. cit., pp. 72-3.)
- 17 Ibid., p. 73.
- 18 Fried, op. cit., p. 132.
- 19 Ibid., p. 134.
- 20 Diderot quoted in Fried, op. cit., p. 125. Interestingly, Chantal Pontbriand defines the relationship between the spectator and performance art by means of the same terms: “it can be said that performance is a work in which ‘the eye finds no fixed point on which to rest’.” (Chantal Pontbriand, “The eye finds no fixed point on which to rest” in *Modern Drama*, vol. XXV, no. 1, 1982, p. 159.) In this, Pontbriand draws on Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, connecting the eye of the spectator with the eye of the camera. In the introduction to this article, Pontbriand contests Michael Fried’s statement that “theatre and theatricality are at war”, defining theatricality as a specificity of theatre.
- 21 “Lehmann introduces the term *textual landscapes* to describe profound changes in aesthetic logic resulting from the transition from dramatic to post-dramatic theatre. On the post-dramatic stage, the perspective once provided by the dramatic frame is deconstructed, perverted or completely absent. As a result, the audience is granted more freedom to wander around and ‘see for themselves’.” Maaik Bleeker, op. cit., p. 36.
- 22 In *The Century*, Alain Badiou introduces a special chapter to analyse “The passion for the real and the montage of semblance” (Polity Press, Cambridge 2008, pp. 48-57).
- 23 The actress Katarina Stegnar takes a critical stance towards the scenes of the real, based on the following pattern: “The actor comes to the stage and introduces themselves [...] The actor enters a repetitive action of the real. [...] This action is supposed to truly exhaust the body – the performance art principle. [...] Then, there follows a gruesome interference with the body: shitting, pissing, bleeding, sweating [...] This is supposed to shock us and demonstrate the urgency of the message that the performance intends to convey. However, it is [...] turning into a style.” *Ne, Via Negativa 2002–2008*, op. cit., p. 74.
- 24 Lehmann, op. cit., p. 101.
- 25 Lehmann refers to Erika Fischer-Lichte, who points out that the theatrical sign is always “a sign of a sign”. Lehmann, op. cit., p. 102.
- 26 Lehmann, op. cit., p. 103.
- 27 Ibid., p. 82.
- 28 Féral, op. cit., p. 16.
- 29 Ibid., p. 16
- 30 *Ne, Via Negativa 2002–2008*, op. cit., p. 85.
- 31 Ibid., p. 89.
- 32 Diderot quoted in Michael Fried, op. cit., p. 94.
- 33 Fried, op. cit., p. 104. Diderot proposed the *tableau* as the ideal and most suitable example of the new kind of object. He rejected the artificiality of French stage conventions since they did not meet one of the basic classicist requirements – that of verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*) – consistency with reality. Thus *coup de théâtre* should be abolished in order to reinvent the *tableau* – a visually convincing, ‘silent’ portrayal on stage, in which the persons are positioned in a seemingly accidental, natural and true-to-life manner.
- 34 Bleeker, op. cit., p. 33.
- 35 Badiou, op. cit., pp. 48-57.
- 36 Blaž Lukan, *Tihožinja in grimase* [*Still Lives and Grimaces*], Aristej, Maribor 2007, p. 46.
- 37 Alain Badiou, *The Century*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2008, p. 52.
- 38 For example: lecture performance (*Erasing the Audience*, 2009); hybrid forms between performance art and video (*No One Should Have Seen This*, 2009); performance art and auction (*Buyer with an Eye*, 2009); dance, performance art and still life (*Still Life*, 2010); concert and performance art (*Meeting of Truth*, 2011; *Tonight I Celebrate*, 2009).
- 39 Ouellet, op. cit., pp. 81-2.
- 40 Siegfried J. Schmidt, “Beyond Reality and Fiction? The Fate of Dualism in the Age of (Mass) Media” in *Fiction Updated: Theories of Fictionality, Narratology, and Poetics*, Calin-Andrei Mihailescu and Walid Hamerneh, eds., University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo 1996, p. 94.