

V pričujočem prispevku bomo obravnavali koncept bralnih uprizoritev. Ugotavljali bomo, da gre v polju mlade dramske pisave za prevladujoč uprizoritveni format, ki pa ga ne gre razumeti kot vmesno stopnjo med branjem in uprizarjanjem, temveč kot povsem samostojen in polnokrven umetniški žanr. Mnoge bralne uprizoritve so zato opustile funkcijo »prve informacije« o tekstu in njegovem avtorju ter namesto tega postale čisto prava uprizoritev teksta, s čimer se je odprlo široko polje za gledališki eksperiment. To bomo premišljevali na primeru konkretnih praks, za katere je značilno, da besedilo postane glavno ali celo edino, kar je za gledališki dogodek potrebno, branje (na vse mogoče načine in oblike) pa zato ključno gledališko sredstvo.

Ključne besede: mlada generacija, bralna uprizoritev, eksperiment, generator, uprizarjanje, branje

Varja Hrvatin (1993), **Maša Radi Buh** (1998) in **Jakob Ribič** (1995) kot pisci sodelujemo že od leta 2018. Skupaj smo ustvarjali oddajo *Teritorij teatra* na Radiu Študent, pripravili kolektivno predavanje v okviru *Maskinega* seminarja sodobnih scenskih umetnosti, objavljamo pa tudi v revijah (*Maska*, *Amfiteater*) in gledaliških listih. V študijskem letu 2022/23 smo kot teoretsko-raziskovalni kolektiv postali štipendisti Sklada Jerneja Šugmana (ZDUS). Trenutno raziskujemo vidike nevidenega in kolektivnega dela v uprizoritvenih umetnostih ter ustvarjanje mlade generacije dramskih avtorjev in avtoric.

GENERATOR:: za poljubno število bralnih uprizoritev

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Uvod¹

V zadnjem desetletju so se bralne uprizoritve v polju mlade dramske pisave vzpostavile kot prevladujoč uprizoritveni format, hkrati pa je za večino avtorjev to pogosto postal tudi edini način, da se njihovo besedilo sploh lahko uprizori. Prav zato se je skupaj s tem pojavila potreba, da bralna uprizoritev ne bi bila več le nekakšna vmesna faza v razvoju besedila, preludij k nečemu potencialnemu, kar naj bi še prišlo, kar je torej zgolj odloženo v prihodnost, saj ta za mlade avtorje pogosto ni nič drugega kot le nedoločljiv ali neizvedljiv jutri. Mnoge takšne uprizoritve so zato opustile funkcijo »prve informacije« o tekstu in njegovem avtorju in namesto tega postale čisto prava uprizoritev teksta, s čimer se je odprlo široko polje za gledališki eksperiment.²

Pojem gledališkega eksperimenta je tako širok, da ga na tem mestu skorajda ni mogoče pojasniti drugače kot s pomočjo velikega poenostavljanja, grobega zgoščanja množice divergentnih in razvejanih uprizoritvenih praks oziroma nenatančnega, skorajda že nasilnega poenotenja mnogih singularnosti pod le en skupni imenovalec. Toda kljub tej raznolikosti se zdi, da gledališka eksperimentalnost prejšnjega stoletja, vsaj v svojem prevladujočem delu, kaže na neko splošno naravnanoost, na neko rdečo nit, namreč na poskus detronizacije gledališkega besedila, torej na odvzem primata, ki ga je v odnosu do odra vzdrževala gledališka literatura. Kot je mogoče razumeti Blaža Lukana: zavezniški odnos med tekstom in odrom, ki je pomenil predvsem dominacijo prvega nad drugim, se je, čeprav nikoli ni bil zares zgleden in neproblematičen, v 20. stoletju spremenil v konkurenčni odnos, kar je šlo skupaj s konstitucijo gledališke režije in avtonomizacijo gledaliških sredstev (prim. Lukan, *Gledališka* 185–87). Prav

1 Avtorji članka so v letih 2022/2023 štipendisti Sklada Jerneja Šugmana, ki ga je ustanovilo Združenje dramskih umetnikov Slovenije (ZDUS). Jakob Ribič (šifra 54771) je poleg tega vključen v program »Mladi raziskovalci« in (so) financiran s strani Javne agencije za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije iz državnega proračuna ter v raziskovalni program »Gledališke in medumetniške raziskave« (P6-0376), (so)financiran s strani Javne agencije za raziskovalno dejavnost Republike Slovenije iz državnega proračuna.

2 To seveda ne pomeni, da se bralne uprizoritve niso pojavljale že prej in da niso (bile) prisotne tudi v drugih kulturnih prostorih. Vendar to presega predvideni obseg in okvir naše raziskave, zato se v nadaljevanju namenoma osredotočamo na preučevanje bralnih uprizoritev zgolj v kontekstu dramske pisave mlade generacije.

zato v tem na novo vzpostavljenem odnosu morda ne bi smeli iskati ciljne usmerjenosti gledališke eksperimentalnosti, pač pa prej podlago, osnovo za to, da je lahko oder spregovoril s svojim lastnim jezikom oziroma z vsem, kar temu jeziku lahko pripada. S tem se je seveda odprla brezmejna kopica možnosti za raziskovanje uprizoritvenih potencialov, torej vsega tega, kar gledališče lahko je ali kar je z gledališčem mogoče početi, posledično pa se je temeljno spremenila tudi dramska pisava sama. Nemogoče je tu naštet vse pomembne spremembe, ki so se zgodile, a že če jih omenimo samo nekaj, ena od tendenc postane zelo očitna: dramski avtor je izgubil prevladujočo vlogo, vzpostavilo se je režisersko gledališče, pojavile so se številne nove prakse, mnoge med njimi so razširile pomen gledališča ali pa so se celo pojavile iz, strogo vzeto, negledaliških umetniških sfer, med njimi denimo hepening in performans, konec koncev pa se je spremenilo tudi dramsko pisanje, kar je kmalu terjalo nove terminološke rešitve, kakršni sta bili denimo »ne več drama« ali »postdrama«, ki vsaka na svoj način pričata o domnevnem koncu (klasične) dramske pisave.

Pri plastenju tega, kaj vse je lahko gledališki eksperiment, bomo v nasprotju s pravkar zapisanim na sledi določenemu obratu. To ne pomeni, da bomo ponovno skušali utrditi primat dramskega pisanja in se od uprizoritve vrniti nazaj k tekstualnosti. Ne bo nam šlo za advokaturo gledališkega teksta, ki bi v gledališče ponovno vrnila avtorja in njegovo besedilo ter napravila nekakšen obrat od performativnega obrata. To namreč ne bi bilo nič drugega kot konservativno pozivanje k vrnitvi v domnevno stare dobre čase, ko naj bi bilo vse tako, kot mora biti. Nasprotno od tega nas bodo še vedno zanimali uprizoritveni potenciali odra, le da bomo o teh razmišljali v nekakšnem presenetljivem zglobo med branjem in uprizarjanjem. Na sledi bomo ustvarjalskim praksam, ki ohranjajo zanimanje za uprizoritev, vendar ne na račun dramskega besedila, pač pa prav znotraj njegovega lastnega okvira. Za to pa bo potreben določen premik v osnovni paradigmi. Gledališko besedilo za nas ne bo več samo nosilec ali vir pomena, pač pa polnokrvni in samostojni akter. Bralne uprizoritve bomo zato razumeli kot neke vrste performans gledališkega teksta; performans, ki namesto igralčevega telesa uporablja telo besedila in njegovo materialnost, na tem preseku pa raziskuje, kaj vse je z njim mogoče napraviti ter kakšne vse uprizoritvene potenciale ima lahko preprosto branje.

Eksperiment bomo zato razumeli predvsem kot poskus in tveganje nekaj napraviti drugače. Če se eksperiment vzpostavlja kot odstopanje in alternativa že obstoječemu, predvsem pa tistemu, kar je v danem umetniškem, družbenem in političnem kontekstu prepoznano kot prevladujoče, potem se bomo v nadaljevanju spraševali, ali ni morda estetsko opolnomočenje in refunkcionaliziranje žanra bralnih uprizoritev prav takšno področje eksperimenta. Bralne uprizoritve se namreč kot alternativa obstoječemu stanju uveljavljajo vsaj na treh nivojih: v situaciji, v kateri večina besedil mladih avtorjev ostaja neuprizorjenih, najprej predstavljajo alternativno možnost,

morda celo »zasilni izhod« za uprizoritev teh besedil, hkrati pa so vendarle precej več kot samo »zasilni izhod«, saj z drugačnimi uprizoritvenimi postopki predstavljajo tudi alternativo prevladujočim uprizoritvenim metodam (za bralno uprizoritev namreč kostumi, scenografija, rekviziti, oder ipd. niso več potrebni; zdi se, da sta dovolj že samo tekst in njegovo potencialno občinstvo); dalje, bralne uprizoritve, ki se razumejo na tak način, torej kot polne in celostne *uprizoritve*, nasprotujejo in predstavljajo alternativo prevladujočemu razumevanju tega formata kot nečesa, kar je le vmesna stopnja v razvoju besedila in zato samo nekakšna »poluprizoritvena forma«; navsezadnje pa bralne uprizoritve omogočajo tudi alternativo obstoječim dramaturgijam gledaliških tekstov in možnost drugačne besedilnosti, saj odpirajo vprašanje, kaj tekst vse *lahko je* in na kakšne vse načine nam lahko sporoča. Če je prevladujoč način uprizarjanja besedil takšen, da se tekst poskuša prevesti v odrske znake in s tem razpustiti v »jezik odra«, bralne uprizoritve radikalno vztrajajo pri tem, da je besedilo glavno, bistveno in celo edino, kar je za gledališki dogodek potrebno, branje pa zato ključno gledališko sredstvo. To seveda omogoča razvoj bistveno drugačnih dramskih pisav, saj je s tem dokončno suspendiran do neke mere še vedno prevladujoč, zagotovo pa nadvse omejujoč kriterij uprizorljivosti.

V pričujočem zapisu se bomo posvetili prav bralnim uprizoritvam in to povezali z vprašanjem, kako danes še generirati eksperiment, kdo ga generira in kje se tu nahaja mlada generacija. Preverili bomo, ali so danes generator njenega eksperimenta prav bralne uprizoritve, hkrati pa to navezali na vprašanje siceršnjega statusa in pozicioniranosti dramatike in njenih avtorjev. Tako bomo najprej skušali definirati, kaj sploh razumemo pod pojmom »bralne uprizoritve« in kaj pomeni, če uprizoritve te vrste vzpostavimo kot samostojen uprizoritveni format. V nadaljevanju se bomo spraševali, zakaj se med mladimi avtorji v nekem obdobju pojavi pravi val bralnih uprizoritev, pri tem pa ugotavljali, da je popularizacija tega formata verjetno tesno povezana s sodobnimi prekrasnimi ekonomskimi razmerami, v katerih trenutno delujejo (ne nujno samo) mladi ustvarjalci. Ker so za bralne uprizoritve potrebna kar najmanjša sredstva, so pogosto namreč sploh edina možnost za uprizoritev, ki pa je lahko kljub minimumu produkcijskih pogojev vseeno estetsko polna in zanimiva. To bomo v zadnjem delu skušali prikazati na konkretnih primerih različnih praks mladih dramskih avtoric.

Branje kot uprizarjanje

Pojem »bralne uprizoritve« takoj vzbudi pozornost. Med seboj namreč združuje tisto, kar naj ne bi bilo združljivo. Branje povezuje z uprizarjanjem, a po klasičnem teatrološkem modelu branje ravno ni uprizoritev, je prav radikalno nasprotje uprizoritve – uprizoritev naj bi se domnevno začela šele tam, kjer se konča branje,

torej s prevodom ali prenosom besed, zapisanih na papirju in namenjenih branju, v »jezik odra«, se pravi v mizanscenske premike, v režijo luči, koreografijo gibov in gest, v scenografske in kostumografske rešitve, tudi v glasbo ipd. Gledališke vaje – proces, ko dramsko besedilo svoj status literature zamenja za polnokrvno uprizoritev na odru – so zato običajno strukturirane prav po poti od branja do tistega, kar naj bi bilo pravo uprizarjanje. Tako se navadno začnejo z »branjem za mizo«, čez čas, v kasnejši in domnevno zrelejši fazi, pa »se gre v prostor«, najprej morda tako, da si igralci še pomagajo s tekstom v svojih rokah, nazadnje pa že popolnoma brez njega. Takrat je branja konec, s tem pa naj bi menda nastopil čas za pravi gledališki dogodek.

Zdi se, da je prav s tem razcepom povezan tudi dvojni status dramskega pisanja, razpetega med literaturo in gledališčem. Takšno aporijo precej značilno vzpostavljata dve veliki in vplivni estetski teoriji, Aristotelova in Heglova. Čeprav obe do tako vzpostavljene opozicije pristopata z nasprotnega konca in zagovarjata povsem različni stališči, imata vendarle skupno to, da »uprizarjanje« in »branje« razumeta kot ekskluzivni možnosti, pri čemer je mogoče izbrati le eno ali drugo, ni pa ju mogoče misliti na isti estetski premici, torej prepleteni v medsebojni odnos, *branje kot vrsto uprizoritve*. Aristotel, denimo, zagovarja prepričanje, da je spektakel, *opsis*, najmanj pomemben od šestih elementov tragedije, saj da »lahko tragedija naredi vtis tudi brez gledališke uprizoritve in igralcev« (84), »že ob samem branju spoznamo njeno vrednost« (137);³ Hegel pa po drugi strani poudarja nujnost uprizoritve, češ da »nobene gledališke igre ne bi smeli natisniti, temveč bi moral biti rokopis [...] namenjen le odrskemu repertoarju« (44). Te njegove vrstice je morda treba brati v kontekstu časa, v katerem se je pojavila tako imenovana bralna drama (*Lesedrama* ali *Buchdrama*), ki je s tem, ko ni bila namenjena uprizoritvi, merila zgolj na bralce, ne pa tudi na gledalce. Toda v vsem tem se le ponavlja in utrjuje binarno razmerje med uprizoritvijo in branjem kot *opozicijsko* razmerje oziroma kot razmerje nasprotovanja in celo medsebojnega izključevanja. Čeprav med branjem in uprizarjanjem seveda obstaja razlika – tiho branje v samoti na primer še ne zadostuje za gledališki dogodek – in čeprav drži, da se pri »bralnih uprizoritvah« med njima vzpostavlja *določeno* razmerje, nas bo tu, med Heglom in Aristotelom, branjem in uprizarjanjem, literaturo in odrom zanimal spoj, nekakšna dialektika med obema poloma, poskus eno postaviti v drugo.

Dihotomija med tekstom in odrom se nam v današnjem času namreč zdi presežena, morda celo nesmiselna in zastarela, zato bi jo bilo morda koristno zavrtni. V polju gledališke teorije se je to pravzaprav že zgodilo, in to na obeh koncih, torej tako na strani besedila, ki ga je Gerda Poschmann opredelila s pojmom gledališki tekst in mu pripisala »imanentno performativno, teatralno dimenzijo« (102), kot na strani odra, ki ga je po mnenju Bruna Tackelsa mogoče razumeti kot prazno stran, na katero se režija nanaša

³ Kot poudarja Florence Dupont, že naslov Aristotelovega besedila, *Poetika*, »napeljuje na tehniko pisanja gledališke igre ali epske pesnitve« (17) in ne na ritualni odrski dogodek.

kot »nekakšno pisanje, odrska pisava ali pisava odra (fr. *écriture de plateau*)« (81). Tako kot je torej teatralnost inherentna kvaliteta besedila samega, je tudi režija neke vrste odrska pisava, ki ima »samosvojo slovnico, jezik, besedišče, slog in ritem« (prav tam) in zato predpostavlja obstoj gledalca kot »odrskega bralca« (88). Skratka, namesto da bi še naprej vztrajali v aporiji med tekstom in odrom, je oder sam že mogoče razumeti kot vrsto teksta, hkrati pa tudi tekst obravnavati v njemu imanentni teatralni dimenziji.

Podobno tudi bralnih uprizoritev ne bomo obravnavali kot pojava, razpetega med ti skrajnosti. Kajti če med branjem in uprizarjanjem postavimo zarezo in ju ločimo na nasprotna si pola, potem bralna uprizoritev ne more biti zares ne eno ne drugo, lahko je samo nekaj vmesnega, nekakšna tretja pot, ki *ni več samo* branje (tu so vendar igralci oziroma performerji in njihovo občinstvo, branju pa je pogosto dodana interpretacija in nemalokrat tudi že kakšna režijska intervencija), niti *še ne* prava uprizoritev, saj je to navsezadnje še vedno pač »le« branje besedila. Bralna uprizoritev se tako v procesu od nastanka besedila, ki se običajno piše v samoti avtorjevega delovnega prostora, do njegove javne uprizoritve pred gledališkim občinstvom nahaja nekje na polovici in je tako pač le nekakšna vmesna faza v še nedokončanem delovnem procesu. Avtor svoj tekst sicer res že ponudi javnosti, a še ne tako, da bi šlo za čisto »pravo« uprizoritev, funkcija bralne uprizoritve pa je zato le informativna. Pisec dobi informacijo o svojem tekstu, ki ga preveri tako, da po eni strani svoje besede prvič položi v usta igralcev, po drugi pa tako, da zbere odzive občinstva in morda tudi že njihova kritična mnenja. Hkrati informacijo o tekstu in nemalokrat tudi o njegovem avtorju dobi tudi »zainteresirana« javnost, med njimi seveda predvsem tisti, ki bi tekst potencialno lahko uprizorili oziroma vsaj sprejeli odločitev o njegovi uprizoritvi ali tiskani objavi, torej režiserji, producenti, direktorji gledaliških hiš in uredniki. Bralna uprizoritev tako za avtorja pomeni zgolj razvojno stopnjo v pisanju, saj z njeno pomočjo dobi pomembne in nemalokrat sploh prve povratne odzive o napisanem, na tej podlagi pa lahko svoje besedilo nato dopolni, popravi, izboljša in spremeni, za potencialne »gledališke agente« pa je to prav tako le nekakšna vmesna faza pri odločitvi o uprizoritvi besedila in/ali angažmaju njegovega avtorja. To spomni na podobo gledališkega trga, na katerem avtorji potencialnim strankam ponujajo in prodajajo svoje blago, najsi bo to njihov tekst ali kar oni sami.⁴

Stranski učinek tako razumljenega koncepta »bralnih uprizoritev« je, da ta umetniški žanr postane tako uprizoritveno kot teoretsko precej nezanimiv, saj je zreduciran le na funkcijo in namenjen zgolj temu, da gre besedilo skozi prvo (pre)izkušnjo odra, ki pa je le

4 O tem je sicer obširno pisal že Blaž Lukan, ki v misel priklicuje tudi precej zgovorno podobo trga: »Problematičen je tako lahko, prvič, odnos samih, praviloma še neveljavljenih avtorjev, ki z bralnimi uprizoritvami v resnici skoraj brez sredstev ali z minimalnim materialnim vložkom možnim 'kupcem' ponujajo potencialno 'vrednost', ki jo ta lahko pridobi na estetskem ali realnem trgu. Od nje torej pričakujejo 'profit', ki se lahko udejanji kot možni angažma, 'odkup' ali samo kot prepoznanje estetske vrednosti ponujenega kot naložba v prihodnost, v vsakem primeru pa gre za same negotove (ekonomske) kategorije. Ali pa se, drugič, kot problematičen izkaže odnos naslovnikov ali potencialnih 'kupcev', ki s pomočjo bralnih uprizoritev, ki jih ne pripravljajo sami, na dovolj preprost in lagoden način (torej brez posebnega lastnega vložka in truda, kakršnega denimo predstavljajo poizvedbe, natečaji, štipendije, vlaganja v 'talente') pridejo do razloga in podlage za lastno investicijo (in invencijo), ki jim bo prinesla drugačen 'profit' kot samim ustvarjalcem.« (Lukan, *Gledališka* 176, 177)

eden od korakov na poti h končnemu cilju, torej k objavi ali uprizoritvi besedila. Takšne »poluprizoritve« so lahko zanimive za avtorje in za redko, predvsem pa pragmatično naravnano občinstvo, torej tisto, ki si obeta kakšno novo kvalitetno besedilo ali vsaj potencialno zanimivega gledališkega sodelavca, ter v najboljšem primeru še za nekaj gledaliških entuziastov, ki se iz nepojasnjenih razlogov radi seznanjajo s tekočo in novo produkcijo dramskih besedil. Ker pa so bralne uprizoritve za mnoge (pretežno mlade) avtorje edina možnost, da se njihovo besedilo sploh uprizori, se mnogi med njimi takšnemu funkcionalističnemu načinu razumevanja odreka in namesto tega vzpostavljajo estetsko avtonomijo tega umetniškega žanra. Le tako se namreč lahko izognejo temu, da bi bile bralne uprizoritve samo slaba tolažba, zasilni nadomestek za avtorje, ki težko upajo na tisto, kar naj bi bila domnevno prava dovršitev teksta, to je bodisi njegova uprizoritev na gledališkem odru bodisi njegova objava v kakšni od publikacij ali knjižnih izdaj.

Namesto da bi branje in uprizarjanje postavljali v medsebojno nasprotje in namesto da bi vztrajali pri tem, da se med seboj nujno izključujeta, torej predlagamo, da ju postavimo v isti estetski kontinuum. Morda bi to razmerje najučinkoviteje ponazorila podoba Möbiusovega traku, pri katerem se pri postopnem napredovanju z izhodiščne točke prej ali slej najdemo na nasprotni strani. Na tem traku nas bo zanimalo mesto intersekcije, tisti spoj, pri katerem ena ravnina preide v drugo, ko torej branje postane popolnoma avtonomna uprizoritev.⁵ To bi pomenilo, da bi lahko branje pod določenimi pogoji postalo čisto pravi gledališki dogodek. Ti pogoji so presenetljivo minimalni: Blaž Lukan je denimo že v osemdesetih letih ob javnem branju Ivana Mraka ugotavljal, da se je razkrilo »gledališče v svojem izvirnem pomenu«, čeprav je bilo za to potrebno tako malo, kot so denimo samo »stol in miza, odprta knjiga na njej, skromna razsvetljava ter oddaljena muzika« (Lukan, *Dramaturške* 23). To je v prekarnih razmerah, v katerih delujejo (mladi) dramski pisci, opogumljajoče, saj jim za uprizoritev svojega besedila pogosto ne preostane drugega, kot da delajo v komaj ustreznih produkcijskih pogojih. Honorarji so nizki, zato časa za vaje ni veliko, prav tako je lahko zelo skromen tudi nabor avtorskih sodelavcev. Poleg tega je premalo denarja tudi za razkošne (ali sploh kakršne koli) kostume, scenografijo in rekvizite, pogosto pa ni niti odra, saj si avtorji namesto institucij svoj prostor običajno izborijo le v kakšnih zelo obrobni in alternativnih prostorih, kjer so tudi možnosti osvetlitve borne in minimalne. V takšnih pogojih je lastno besedilo nemogoče uprizoriti na način »velikih« gledaliških produkcij. Ti poskusi se lahko končajo samo zelo klavrno, poleg tega pa so tudi ideološko problematični, saj so v popolnem sozvočju s prevladujočo logiko kapitala, ki si s čim manj vložka želi

⁵ To je mogoče razumeti tudi povsem dobesedno, saj nekatere bralne uprizoritve ne vključujejo več glasnega interpretativnega branja ali pa se poigravajo s tem, kdo bere (prim. Lukan, *Gledališka* 174). Lukan izpostavi nekaj sodobnih primerov bralnih uprizoritev, ki se jim slovarska definicija ne prilega več (prim. 173, 174), kar ne odpira le potrebe po spremenjenem slovarskem geslu, temveč morda tudi vprašanje ustrezne terminologije. Morda bi nekateri primeri sodobnih bralnih uprizoritev, ki presegajo klasično definicijo tega pojma, potrebovali nov terminološki pojem ali pa bi bilo treba obstoječemu vsaj dodati kakšno predpono (npr. postbralna uprizoritev ali ne več bralna uprizoritev). To vprašanje na tem mestu ponujamo samo v premislek.

čim več izkupička, to pa je prav zato tudi kontraproduktivno: če je mogoče s tako malo denarja ustvarjati predstave, potem pač ni potrebe, da bi ga bilo kadar koli več. Če pa v nasprotju s tem predpostavimo, da so lahko bralne uprizoritve popolnoma samostojen in polnovreden umetniški žanr, potem s tem izgubimo tudi potrebo, da se iz njih dela nekaj »več« od tega, kar je mogoče napraviti glede na dane (predvsem finančne) zmožnosti. Tako so lahko uprizoritve te vrste docela iskrene v tem, da nastajajo v prekarinih pogojih, da gre v nekem smislu celo za revno gledališče, a revno le glede produkcijskih pogojev in nikakor ne glede svoje estetske vrednosti. Spet pa je slednjo mogoče ustvariti le pod pogojem, da se bralni uprizoritvi kot umetniškemu žanru najprej sploh prizna, da ima kakršen koli uprizoritveni potencial. Prostor za raziskovanje se namreč odpre šele z opustitvijo ideje o tem, da gre pri bralnih uprizoritvah le za vmesno fazo med branjem in uprizarjanjem. Šele tako se lahko branje dojame kot potencialno zanimivo gledališko sredstvo, ki ga je vredno raziskati in ki obeta stvaritev povsem celostnega gledališkega dogodka.⁶ To torej pomeni, da se je treba vztrajno upirati kakršni koli pretenziji po tem, da bi bralne uprizoritve vzbujale vtis, da nastajajo v dobrih, morda celo institucionaliziranih pogojih dela, hkrati pa se na račun skromnih pogojev tudi ne gre vnaprej resignirano odpovedati kakršnim koli uprizoritvenim ambicijam. Poanta je v tem, da so bralne uprizoritve, prav kolikor so zares *bralne* (in nič več kot to), tudi uprizoritveno zanimiv umetniški format, hkrati pa svojo estetsko dimenzijo podkrepijo tudi s politično, saj s tem, ko ne prikrivajo svojih produkcijskih pogojev nastanka, sporočajo nekaj v smislu: evo, to so pogoji, v katerih trenutno lahko delujemo.

Generatorji eksperimenta

Kot eksperimentalna forma so se bralne uprizoritve pojavljale v različnih obdobjih, v nadaljevanju pa bomo premislili, kdaj se ustvarjalci k takšnemu formatu zatekajo in zakaj.

Eksperimentalne in celo gverilske bralne uprizoritve so se pojavile že v času delovanja skupine PreGlej. Njeni takratni člani (dramski pisci, med katerimi so bili Simona Semenič, Simona Hamer, Peter Rezman idr.) so format bralnih uprizoritev razumeli predvsem kot odziv, komentar ali celo kritično gesto, s katero so problematizirali stanje slovenske sodobne dramatike, njenih piscev ter predvsem načinov in postopkov njihovega uprizarjanja. PreGlejevi ustvarjalci so si zaradi ekonomskih pogojev, še bolj pa zaradi okrnjenosti produkcijskih sredstev prisvojili format bralne uprizoritve, ki

⁶ O tem je Blaž Lukan pisal in govoril na različnih mestih, med drugim tudi na okrogli mizi o neodvisnosti bralne uprizoritve, ki jo je KUD Krik leta 2019 organiziral na Novi pošti: »Bralna uprizoritev išče možnosti uprizoritve znotraj samega besedila in to na več ravneh. Ne samo na ravni interpretacije besedila, ampak tudi na ravni samega nosilca, grafičnega zapisa, načina podajanja besedila, projekcije, vzpostavljanja odnosa do besedila, vključitve občinstva v to nastajanje besedila pred nami. V bistvu smo priča rojstvu gledališča iz duha besedila, ampak prav v tej primarni obliki. Odpira se veliko polje, ki pa zahteva čas. Najhujša oblika bralne uprizoritve so bralke, ki so provizoriji, nadomestki, tolažilne mini predstave. To je degradacija bralke.« (Potočan 21)

je postal njihov zaščitni znak, iz avtorske svobode, ki jo je ponujal, pa so se sčasoma razvili nekateri najprezentnejši sodobni dramski pisci pri nas.

Zdi se, da je z uveljavitvijo omenjenih ustvarjalcev in s pogostejšim uprizarjanjem njihovih besedil v institucijah nastopilo obdobje zatišja, ko se bralne uprizoritve niso pojavljale tako pogosto. To se je spremenilo z vzpostavitvijo revije Adept in festivala dramske pisave Vzkrík, sčasoma pa tudi z drugimi pobudami, s katerimi se je nova generacija piscev uprla prevladujočemu stanju. Med letoma 2017 in 2021 so se v okviru različnih festivalov in projektov bralne uprizoritve ponovno pričele množično pojavljati: prisotne so bile na Novih branjih v SNG Drama Ljubljana ter v drugih podpornih programih institucionalnih gledališč; med koronskim obdobjem so se v produkciji Prešernovega gledališča Kranj pod naslovom *Monologi s kavča* pojavili celo videoprenosi bralnih uprizoritev; tradicionalno so bralne uprizoritve potekale v okviru Tedna slovenske drame, svoje sta organizirala tudi revija Adept in Vzkrík, pojavljale so se platforme, kot je bila denimo *Instant drama* ipd. Kljub temu so bralne uprizoritve pogosto ostajale na nivoju klasičnega interpretativnega branja brez konceptualnih ali performativnih premislekov. Zapolnile so manko v podpornih programih, obenem pa vzbujale občutek, da se stanje sodobne slovenske dramatike in pozicija dramskih piscev bistveno izboljšuje. V resnici so takšne uprizoritve najpogosteje še vedno le nadomeščale domnevno »prave« uprizoritve besedil, zato so bile le nekakšno uprizarjanje v odlogu, samo potencial, ki se še mora zares realizirati. Podobno velja tudi za tekočo gledališko sezono, v kateri je sicer aktivno odprtih več kot pet natečajev za dramska besedila, kar je rekordno veliko, a le redki od njih poleg denarne nagrade omogočajo tudi uprizoritev izbranih besedil. Zdi se torej, da je pojavljanje bralnih uprizoritev povezano predvsem s tem, kako pogosto se besedila avtorjev objavljajo in uprizarjajo oziroma kakšne so sploh možnosti za kaj takega, vsaj deloma pa tudi z osebnimi ambicijami in voljo določenih posameznikov. Morda prav zato z menjavo generacije (Jernej Potočan, Nina Kuclar Stiković, Iza Strehar itn.), predvsem pa z njihovo postopno uveljavitvijo v bolj institucionaliziranih prostorih, potreba po takšnih eksperimentalnih gestah postopoma ponikne.

Pri tem sta posebej zanimiva primera Festival dramske pisave Vzkrík in akademijska revija Adept.⁷ Obe pobudi sta namreč nastali v času, ko se je začelo zanimanje za dramsko pisanje med mladimi avtorji vztrajno povečevati, hkrati pa je vse očitneje postalo, da manjka takšen prostor, kjer bi lahko svoja besedila nato tudi javno predstavili. Na neodvisni sceni avtorsko besedilo namreč skoraj v celoti nastaja tekom ustvarjalnega procesa, v institucionalnih gledališčih pa se avtorski projekti kombinirajo s starejšimi (pogosto kanoniziranimi) besedili ter vnaprej naročenimi teksti praviloma že uveljavljenih avtorjev. Prav zato se je izkazalo, da bi morala takšno platformo, ki bi

⁷ Vzkrík je potekal od leta 2017 do 2021 in imel štiri festivalske edicije, v tem času pa je nastalo kar 28 novih dramskih besedil. Prva številka revije Adept je bila objavljena leta 2014, revija pa izhaja še danes.

skrbela za kontinuirano uprizorjanje besedil, vzpostaviti kar generacija sama. Festival Vztrik je tako vrsto let nastajal pod zgovornim geslom »Če nas ne boste uprizarjali, se bomo pa sami!«, na podoben problem pa sta z naslovom »Ne samo berite, uporabite!« v uredniškem uvodniku inavguracijske številke Adepta opozorila tudi Nina Ramšak in Žan Žveplan. Revija, ki je bila zamišljena tako, da bi bila vsako leto ena od dveh števil namenjena prav objavi dramskih besedil avtorjev mlade generacije, se je že spočetka uprla temu, da bi bila namenjena samo »linearnemu branju od začetka do konca« (Ramšak, Žveplan 3), namesto tega pa je spodbujala branje v razmerju do potencialne uprizoritve. Prav zato je vsaki številki, v kateri so bila objavljena dramska besedila, sledila tudi njihova javna predstavitev v obliki bralnih uprizoritev, te pa so bile že od začetka zamišljene v širšem smislu, torej »ne le kot korak do končnega izdelka, ampak kot samostojn[a] form[a], vredn[a] raziskovanja« (prav tam). Prav to je bilo tudi temeljno izhodišče Vztrika, v sklopu katerega so celo leto pod mentorskim vodstvom uveljavljenih dramskih avtorjev in avtoric potekale delavnice, na katerih so udeleženci pisali in izpopolnjevali svoja besedila, ob zaključku delavnic pa so bila nato tudi bralno uprizorjena. Da te uprizoritve niso bile namenjene le funkciji prve informacije, pač pa da je šlo za pravi in samostojni uprizoritveni dogodek, je bilo nakazano že s samoopredelitvijo projekta kot *festivala* dramske pisave, navsezadnje pa sta to ambicijo potrjevali tudi njegova siceršnja odmevnost in dobra obiskanost.

Geste in vztriki

Takšnim bralnim uprizoritvam je skupno, da si branja niso vzele le kot interpretacije besedil, pač pa kot svoj glavni uprizoritveni koncept, s čimer je besedilo postalo najpomembnejše (ali celo edino) gledališko sredstvo. Takšnih primerov bralnih uprizoritev je seveda še več. Eden od njih je predstava bolgarskega dramatika Alexandra Manuiloffa *Država*, ki je na Novi pošti gostovala leta 2019. Publika je bila v dvorani posedena v krog, na sredi nje pa je bila postavljena škatla s pismi. Gledalci so kot skupnost ali država sami odločali o tempu, dramaturgiji in poteku izvedbe, sami so tudi brali besedilo in ga nazadnje tudi zaključili. Čeprav se je *Država* samoopredeljevala kot celovečerna gledališka predstava, je bilo v njej vseeno mogoče najti tudi glavne elemente tistega, kar sami razumemo pod pojmom eksperimentalne bralne uprizoritve, saj je bil tekst postavljen v ospredje in uporabljen kot edino gledališko orodje, zato sta bila na odru med seboj soočena le tekst in gledalec.

Kar zadeva naš prostor, se eksperimentalnost, sploh v polju mlade dramske pisave, najočitneje pojavlja z vključevanjem avtobiografskih elementov ter vpletanjem avtorjeve prezenze in telesnosti v akt javnega branja. Slednje s tem ni več le branje besedila, temveč tudi branje oziroma razbiranje avtorja in njegovega statusnega konteksta. Takšen je bil denimo bralnouprizoritveni cikel *Ko se žgem* na 57. Festivalu

Borštnikovo srečanje, v okviru katerega so Nina Kuclar Stiković, Urša Majcen, Helena Šukljan in Manca Lipoglavšek predstavile svoje interpretacije in adaptacije znane Andersenove pravljice *Deklica z vžigalicami*, Šukljan in Lipoglavšek pa sta nekaj podobnega napravili tudi pri uprizoritvi njunega teksta *Dramakurbija*. Ker gre v omenjenih primerih predvsem za poskuse, ki so nastajali v študijskem okviru, je morda zanimivo omeniti tudi performativna branja avtorice Anje Novak, ki je že v svojo tiskano pesniško zbirko *Ranerane* na QR-kodah vstavila sočasna tekstovna, vizualna, zvočna, interaktivna in uprizoritvena branja drugih ustvarjalcev njenih pesmi. S tem je nadaljevala tudi v kontekstu javnih predstavitev in branj te zbirke, ko je v vlogi alterega *Anjute* kot nevesta s svojo poezijo intervenirala v javne dogodke in tako v branje ponudila sebe in svojo subjektiviteto. Novak se je zvočnosti in glasbe kot enega od glavnih principov branja besedil – nekakšnih koncertnih bralnih uprizoritev – poslužila tudi v delu *Moje telo, moja kletka*, v katerem je bilo besedilo izčrščeno na nekaj deset besed in stavkov, branje pa je bilo dopolnjeno z ozvočenim pokanjem njenih kosti in uporabo špagetov kot zvočnega orodja, s čimer je ustvarjalka podčrtala svoje notranje stanje anoreksije. Podoben primer koncertnega branja je bila tudi uprizoritev Nine Dragičević, ki je branju dodala spremljavo bas kitare in s tem svoje besedilo *Ljubav reče greva* zasnovala kot partituro ritma in atmosfer.

Vsi navedeni primeri so eksperimentalni po tem, da svojo domnevno primarno funkcijo bralnih vaj in interpretacij opustijo ter namesto tega zapopadejo celostno performativnost besedila. Hkrati pa so lahko bralne uprizoritve eksperimentalne tudi glede na to, kakšne družbene geste producirajo. Tu se njihov eksperiment nanaša predvsem na pozicijo dramskega besedila in njegovega avtorja. Eno od takšnih gest je z nizom participatornih bralnih uprizoritev besedila *Delo in deklia I–V: Drame tlačank* ustvarila Nika Švab. Avtorica se je namreč kot dramaturginja in književnica odločila kandidirati na razpisu Avtorski opus Ministrstva za kulturo, na katerega se sicer s svojimi idejami za celovečerne uprizoritve in performanse praviloma prijavljajo predvsem režiserji in performerji. Švab se je temu uprla tako, da se je prijavila z dramskim besedilom in s konceptom serije bralnih uprizoritev, s čimer se je zoperstavila prevladujočemu pojmovanju razpisnih izvedbenih produkcijskih enot, hkrati pa je s tem bralno uprizoritev vzpostavila tudi kot samostojni uprizoritveni format, ki se na razpisu enakovredno bori z ostalimi performativnimi in gledališkimi dogodki.

Dramaturški strukturi besedila, razdeljenega na pet prizorov, je sledila tudi konceptualna zasnova bralnih uprizoritev. Teh je bilo namreč pet, tako da se je vsak dan med 15. in 19. novembrom 2022 prebral en prizor, vsak od večerov pa je potekal pred novo publiko in drugimi povabljenimi gledališkimi ustvarjalci, ki so, sedeč na tribuni v avditoriju, prebirali besedilo in ga skupaj z avtorico tudi komentirali. Dogodki so bili organizirani na Novi pošti, kjer razen velikega platna, na katerem se je projiciralo besedilo, ni bilo ničesar drugega. Edini gledališki element, ki je ostal na

odru, je bilo tako prav besedilo, ki se ga je prebiral *prima vista*, brez kakršnih koli interpretacij ali študijskih priprav. Potek branja ni bil določen vnaprej, pač pa so se bralci sami odločali, kdaj bodo branje zaustavili s svojimi vprašanji, premisleki in pomisleki o kvaliteti in razumljivosti besedila ter s predlogi o potencialnih načinih njegove uprizoritve. Tako branje kot pogovori, ki so se sprožali ob njem, so bili posneti in nato transkribirani v novo dokumentarno uprizoritveno besedilo z naslovom *Nevarno razmerje dramatike in gledališča*. To je torej nastalo *in medias res*, med bralnim uprizarjanjem in sočasnim analitičnim komentiranjem nekega drugega besedila. Dogodek sam – branje in analiza prebranega – sta tako postala material (in ne le osnova) za nastanek novega gledališkega teksta. Če torej Lukan pravi, da smo pri bralnih uprizoritvah, kadar te potekajo na več ravneh, ne le na ravni interpretacije besedila, »priča rojstvu gledališča iz duha besedila« (Potočan 21), potem smo bili v primeru te bralne uprizoritve priča ne le rojstvu gledališča, pač pa tudi rojstvu povsem novega besedila. Logika je torej tu zaobrnjena: kar naenkrat bralna uprizoritev ni več »zasilni izhod« za tekste, ki so sicer napisani, a neuprizorjeni, pač pa zdaj sama postane tako samostojen gledališki dogodek kot celo generator novega teksta. Ne le torej, da bralna uprizoritev lahko deluje kot polnokrven uprizoritveni format. Kot vse kaže, lahko deluje tudi kot povsem samostojen gledališki tekst.

Sklep

Skratka, očitno je, da se bralna uprizoritev kot mesto eksperimenta (in morda tudi kot gesta upora) vzpostavi takrat, ko se tisto, kar naj bi bilo polarizirano, preseže, a ne tako, da se oba domnevno nasprotujoča si pola opusti, pač pa da se ju radikalno spravi na isto mesto. Tako so najboljše bralne uprizoritve tiste, ki v razmerju med bralnim in uprizorjenim niso nekaj vmesnega, pač pa so hkrati tako eno kot drugo, a spet ne način, da bi preprosto združile en pol z drugim, pač pa tako, da en pol vzpostavi *znotraj* drugega. To smo poskušali ponazoriti s podobo Möbiusovega traku. Ne gre torej za to, da se vključi malo branja in malo uprizarjanja, pač pa da se branje – pod določenimi pogoji, seveda – lahko vzpostavi kot samostojna oblika uprizarjanja in da se eksperiment lahko začne prav tu, pri raziskovanju, kakšne vse oblike uprizoritve branje lahko proizvede. Podobno velja tudi za opozicijo med literarnim in gledališkim, kajti kot smo videli na primeru projekta Nike Švab, je lahko gledališki dogodek – spet seveda pod določenimi pogoji – tudi generator novega literarnega besedila. Ne gre torej za to, da sta si gledališče in literatura povsem nasproti, da je med njima nepremostljivo brezno, pač pa, da se lahko v nekem hipu med seboj pokrijeta in da se nemara prav na tej točki odpira neskončno polje eksperimenta.

Hkrati ima lahko vzpostavljanje bralnih uprizoritev kot povsem samozadostnega gledališkega dogodka tudi pomembne posledice za prekarno situacijo (mladih)

ustvarjalcev. Kajti če bralne uprizoritve niso zgolj nekaj tranzitnega, vmesnega in začasnega, če je z njimi moč generirati eksperiment in če so lahko povsem celovit način uprizarjanja dramskih besedil, potem ne bi smele ostati odvisne le od partikularne volje posameznika, da se takšnega projekta loti, in še manj od žalostnega dejstva, da se besedila mladih avtorjev na »velikih odrih« praviloma ne uprizarjajo. Namesto tega bi morale postati ustrezno finančno podprte in s tem sistemsko spodbujene, saj je očitno, da so lahko generator novih in drugačnih pisav, morda pa tudi njihovih avtorjev. S tem bi se preprečilo, da bi se bralne uprizoritve pojavljale in presihale v bolj ali manj kontingentnih valovih, trajnostno pa bi se vzpostavilo polje za raziskovanje novih oblik dramskega pisanja. Ker pa se je paradoksalno izkazalo, da so bralne uprizoritve lahko pričele eksperimentirati ravno zaradi svoje samozadostnosti, saj ustvarjalci razen nase niso bili vezani na nikogar drugega, sistemska spodbuda, čeprav dobrodošla, nikakor ne bi smela iti na račun njihove avtonomije. Kajti šele v polju, ki lahko deluje avtonomno in neomejeno, se eksperiment zares lahko začne.

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Tackels, Bruno. »Desakralizacija teksta, vendarle.« *Drama, tekst, pisava 2*, ur. Petra Pogorevc in Tomaž Toporišič, Knjižnica MGL, 2021, str. 79–96.

In the paper, the authors discuss the concept of staged readings, arguing that they are the predominant performance format for presentations of young playwriting. However, such presentations should not be understood as an intermediate stage between reading and performing but as a fully-fledged and independent artistic genre. Many staged readings thus lose the function of "first information" about the text and its author. Instead, they have become a proper way of performing a text, thus opening up a wider area for theatrical experimentation. Using concrete examples, the authors will reflect on practices characterised by the text becoming the main or even the only thing necessary for a theatrical event and reading (in all its possible ways and forms) becoming the key theatrical means.

Keywords: young generation, staged reading, experiment, generator, staging, reading

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THE GENERATOR:: for Any Number of Staged Readings

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Introduction¹

During the last decade, staged readings have become the dominant performance format for presenting young playwriting. For most authors, however, this format has become the only way for them to present their texts as a public performance. For this reason, it is necessary to stop considering staged readings as a kind of intermediate stage in the development of a text, a prelude to some potentiality that has yet to be realised, something that is thus postponed into the future since, for young authors, this often means nothing else but an indefinable tomorrow that never comes. Many such productions, therefore, no longer serve as the “first information” about the text and its author. Instead, they have become a true and proper staging of the text, thus opening up the space for theatrical experimentation.²

The notion of the theatre experiment is so broad that it is almost impossible to explain it here without great simplification, roughly condensing a multitude of divergent and branching performative practices or by an imprecise, almost violent unification of numerous singularities under a single common denominator. Nevertheless, despite this diversity, the theatrical experimentation of the last century, at least in its predominant part, seems to point in one general direction, a common thread, namely, the attempt to dethrone the theatre text, that is to say, to deprive it of its primacy preserved by theatre literature in comparison to the stage. Blaž Lukan notes that the alliance between the text and the stage, which primarily involved the domination of the former over the latter – although it was never exemplary or unproblematic – shifted into a competitive

¹ The authors of this article are the 2022/2023 fellows of the Jernej Šugman Fund, established by the Slovenian Association of Dramatic Artists (SADA). Jakob Ribič (54771) is included in the programme “Young researchers”, co-financed by the Slovenian Research Agency from the state budget, as well as in the research programme “Theatre and Interart Studies” (P6-0376), co-financed by the Slovenian Research Agency from the state budget.

² Of course, this statement does not imply that staged readings have not been present before and do not appear in other cultural spaces. However, this goes beyond the intended scope and context of our research. That is why we deliberately focus below on the research of staged readings only in the context of the dramatic writing of the young generation.

relationship in the 20th century. This shift coincided with the emergence of theatre direction and the autonomisation of theatrical approaches (*Gledališka* 185–87). For this very reason, we perhaps should not look for the goal orientation of theatrical experimentalism in this newly established relationship but rather for a foundation, a basis for the stage to be able to speak through its own language or through everything that can be part of this language. This new relationship, of course, opened up an infinite number of possibilities for exploring the potential of performance, that is, of everything that theatre can be or do. As a consequence, dramatic writing itself was fundamentally changed. It is impossible to list all the significant changes that have taken place. To mention but a few, one trend becomes particularly obvious: as the director's theatre has become more established, the playwright has lost their dominant role, and numerous new practices have emerged, many of them expanding the meaning of theatre or even emerging from strictly speaking, non-theatrical artistic spheres, for example, happenings and performance art. Ultimately, however, playwriting itself also changed, which soon called for new terminological designations, such as “no longer dramatic texts” or “postdramatic texts”, each of which in its own way testifies to the supposed end of (classical) playwriting.

In contrast to what has just been written, we will follow a particular turn in exploring the layers of what a theatrical experiment can be. This approach does not mean that we will try to reassert the primacy of playwriting and return from performance back to textuality. We are not trying to advocate for a theatre text that would bring the author and their text back into the theatre and make a turn away from the performative turn. Doing so would be nothing but a conservative appeal for a return to the alleged good old days when everything was just like it should be. On the contrary, we are still interested in the performative potentials of the stage. However, we intend to consider them in a surprising conjunction between reading and staging. We will follow the creative practices that preserve the interest in the staging, not at the expense of the dramatic text but precisely within its own framework. This calls for a specific shift in the underlying paradigm. Thus, the theatre text for us no longer merely represents a vehicle or source of meaning but a full-blooded and independent agency. We thus understand staged readings as a performance of a theatre text, a performance that uses the body of the text and its materiality instead of the actor's body, exploring all that can be done with it at this intersection and what are all the performative potentials that a simple reading can have.

We, therefore, see experimentation primarily as an attempt and risk to do something differently. If experimentation is established as a deviation from and an alternative to the already existing and, above all, to what is recognised as dominant in a given artistic, social and political context, then we question whether the aesthetic empowerment and re-functionalisation of the genre of staged readings is not precisely one such area of experimentation. Staged readings are becoming an alternative to the status quo on at

least three levels: Firstly, in a situation where the majority of texts by young authors are never actually performed, they represent an alternative option, perhaps even an “escape route” for performing such texts. At the same time, however, they are much more than merely an “escape route” since they also represent an alternative to the prevailing performative methods (a staged reading, namely, no longer requires costumes, a set design, props, a stage, etc.; all that is necessary seems to be the text itself and its potential audience). Furthermore, when understood in this way, that is, as full and complete *performances*, staged readings contradict and present an alternative to the prevailing understanding of this format as merely an intermediate stage in the development of a text and, therefore, only a kind of a “semi-performative form”. Finally, staged readings also allow for an alternative to the existing dramaturgies of theatre texts and the possibility of a different textuality since they raise the question of what a text *can be* and how it can communicate with us. While the dominant way of staging texts is to try to translate them into stage signs and thus dissolve them into the “language of the stage”, staged readings radically insist that the text is the principal, essential and even the only thing necessary for a theatrical event and that reading is, therefore, a key theatrical means. This understanding, of course, allows for the development of fundamentally different dramatic scripts, as it finally suspends the criterion of performability that is to some extent still dominant to this day and is undoubtedly also very limiting.

In the paper, we focus on staged readings and relate this issue to the questions of how to still generate experiments today, who can generate them, and what is the young generation’s position in such experiments. We examine whether it is the case that it is precisely staged readings that generate the theatre experiment today and, at the same time, relate this to the question of the status and positioning of drama and its authors. Thus, we first try to define “staged readings” and what it means to establish this type of performance as an independent performative format. We will then ask where this surge of staged readings emerging among young authors in a certain period comes from, noting that the popularisation of this format is most probably closely linked to today’s precarious economic situation in which (primarily but not exclusively) young artists are currently working. Since staged readings require minimal resources, they often represent the only chance for staging a given text, which, despite minimal production conditions, can still be aesthetically fulfilling and worthwhile. In the last part of the paper, we attempt to show this through concrete examples of different practices of young women playwrights.

Reading as Performance

The notion of “staged reading” immediately arouses interest. It meshes together what is supposed to be incompatible. It associates reading with staging, even though reading is precisely the radical opposite of staging, according to the classical

theatre model. Staging supposedly begins only where reading ends, that is, with the translation or transposition of the words written on paper and intended for reading into “stage language”, for example, stage movements, light design, the choreography of movements and gestures, set and costume design, music, etc. Theatre rehearsals – the process by which a dramatic text transforms from its literary status into a full-blooded stage performance – are usually structured along the path from reading to what is supposedly a real performance. Thus, the rehearsals usually start with “reading at the table”. After a while, in a later and presumably more mature phase, they “move into the space”, at first perhaps with the actors still holding the text in their hands as an aid, and finally without it altogether. At that point, the reading is over, and this is supposedly when the time is ripe for the real theatrical event.

It seems that the dual status of playwriting, torn between literature and theatre, is also linked to this split. This aporia is typically established by two great and influential aesthetic theories: Aristotle’s and Hegel’s. Although they approach the opposition thus established from opposite ends and advocate completely different positions, they nevertheless share the understanding of “performing” and “reading” as two mutually exclusive possibilities, of which only one or the other can be chosen. However, it is impossible to consider them along the same aesthetic line, that is, intertwined in a reciprocal relationship, into *reading as a type of performance*. Aristotle, for example, argues that the spectacle, the so-called *opsis*, is the least important of the six elements of tragedy since “the tragic effect is quite possible without a public performance and actors” (2321) and that “from the mere reading of a play its quality may be seen” (2340).³

Hegel, on the other hand, emphasises the necessity of performance, stating that “no play should really be printed but should remain [...] in manuscript for the theatre’s repertory” (1184). These words should perhaps be read in the context of Hegel’s time in which the so-called closet drama (*Lesedrama* or *Buchdrama*) emerged, aimed only at readers, not spectators, as it was not intended to be made into a performance. All of this, however, merely reiterates and reinforces the notion of a binary relationship between performance and reading as an *oppositional* relation, that is, a relation of opposition and even mutual exclusion. Nevertheless, although there is, of course, clearly a difference between reading and staging – silent reading in solitude, for example, is not yet sufficient for a theatrical event – and although it is true that in “staged readings”, a *particular* relationship is established between reading and staging, we are here principally interested in conjunction, a kind of dialectic between the two poles, Hegel and Aristotle, reading and staging, literature and the stage, that is, an attempt to position one within the other.

Today it seems that we have overcome the dichotomy between text and stage, per-

³ As Florence Dupont points out, the very title of Aristotle’s text, *Poetics*, “indicates a technique of writing a play or epic poem” (17), rather than a ritual stage event.

haps it even appears meaningless and outdated, and thus it might be useful to reject it. In the field of theatre theory, this has, in fact, already happened from both sides, that is, on the side of the text, which Gerda Poschmann defined by the notion of the theatre text and attributed to it “an immanent performative, theatrical dimension” (102), and on the side of the stage, which, according to Bruno Tackels, can be understood as a blank page to which directing is applied as “a kind of writing, a stage writing or a writing of the stage (Fr. *écriture de plateau*)” (81). Thus, just as theatricality is an intrinsic quality of the text itself, so too is directing a kind of stage writing, which contains “a grammar, language, vocabulary, style and rhythm of its own” (Tackels 81), and therefore presupposes the existence of the spectator as a “stage reader” (88). In short, instead of continuing to insist on the aporia between the text and the stage, the stage itself can already be understood as a kind of text. At the same time, the text can be considered in its inherent theatrical dimension.

Similarly, we will not consider staged reading as a phenomenon split between these two extremes. For if we put a notch between reading and performing and separate them into opposite poles, a staged reading cannot really be one or the other; it can only be something in between, a kind of third way that is *no longer just a reading* (since actors or performers are involved and an audience is present, the reading is often supplemented by interpretation and often also by some kind of directorial intervention). However, it is *not yet a real performance* since it is still “just” a reading of the text, after all. The staged reading is thus considered to reside somewhere in the middle of the process, from the creation of the text – usually written in the solitude of the author’s workspace – to its public performance in front of a theatre audience. It is thus only a kind of intermediate stage in a work-in-progress. While the author already offers his text to the public, this is not yet done in a way that would constitute a “proper” performance; the function of the staged reading is only informative. This way, the playwright can receive information about their text, which they verify by, on the one hand, putting their words in the actors’ mouths for the first time and, on the other hand, by collecting the reactions of the audience and perhaps also their critical opinions. At the same time, the audience also receives information about the text and often about its author as well, particularly the “interested” public, among them, of course, primarily those who could potentially perform the text or at least decide to perform it or publish it in printed form, for example, directors, producers, theatre company directors and editors. For the author, the staged reading thus represents only a developmental stage in the writing process; it gives them valuable and often even the first feedback on what they had written, based on which they can complete, correct, improve and modify their text. To the potential “theatre agents”, the staged reading also represents only an intermediate step in deciding to stage a text and/or engage its author. This point brings to mind the image of a theatrical

marketplace where authors offer and sell their wares to potential clients, whether their text or themselves.⁴

A side effect of the concept of “staged readings”, understood in this way, is that this artistic genre becomes rather uninteresting, both performatively and theoretically, because it is reduced to a mere function and is intended only as a way for the text to pass the first test or experience of the stage, which is only the first step on the path to the final goal: the publication or performance of the text. Such “semi-performances” may be of interest to the authors and to a rare, but first and foremost pragmatically oriented, audience, that is, people who are hoping to find a new quality text or at least a potentially interesting theatre collaborator, and in the best case scenario, also to a few theatre enthusiasts who, for some unexplained reason, like to stay informed about the current production of dramatic texts. However, since staged readings are virtually the only possibility for many (mainly young) playwrights to have their text performed at all, many of them renounce this functionalist understanding and instead attempt to establish the aesthetic autonomy of this artistic genre. Such reframing is the only way for them to be able to consider staged readings as anything else but a poor consolation prize, a makeshift substitute for authors who can hardly hope for what is supposedly a proper fulfilment of a text, which is either its performance on a theatre stage or its publication in a journal or book.

Rather than juxtaposing reading and staging as opposed to each other and insisting that they are necessarily mutually exclusive, we propose to position them both on an aesthetic continuum. Perhaps the most effective way to illustrate this relationship is the metaphor of the Möbius strip, where, as one gradually progresses from the starting point, one sooner or later finds oneself on the opposite side. On this (s)trip, we will be most interested in the point of intersection, the junction at which one plane passes into another, and reading itself thus becomes a fully autonomous performance.⁵

4 Blaž Lukan has written extensively on this subject, which also brings to mind a rather telling image of a marketplace: “The first problem thus lies in the attitude adopted by the mostly unestablished authors themselves, as staged readings with zero budget or minimal material investment allow them to offer their potential ‘value’ to strong ‘buyers’ who might purchase it in the aesthetic or real market. This means that the authors expect to turn a ‘profit’ which can materialise in the form of potential employment, ‘commission’ or even mere recognition of the aesthetic value of the offered item as an investment into the future. In any case, we are talking about precarious (economic) categories. The second problem is the attitude of the addresses, i.e., the potential ‘buyers’ or ‘commissioners’, as staged readings (unless they organise them themselves) enable them to easily find potential candidates (with no particular investment or effort on their side, i.e., inquiries, competitions, grants or investment into ‘talent’) for their own investments (and invention), which to them can bring a completely different kind of ‘profit’ than to the authors” (*Gledališka* 176, 177).

5 This can also be taken quite literally, as some staged readings no longer involve interpretive reading aloud or play with who is reading (Lukan, *Gledališka* 174). Lukan points out some contemporary examples of staged readings that no longer fit the dictionary definition (173, 174), which not only raises the need for a revised dictionary entry but perhaps also the question of appropriate terminology. Perhaps some examples of contemporary staged readings that go beyond the classical definition of the phenomenon would need a new terminological term or at least a prefix to be added to the existing one (such as post-reading performance or no longer reading performance). This question is only offered for consideration at this point.

This idea would mean that, under certain conditions, a reading could become a very real theatrical event. These conditions are surprisingly minimal. As early as the 1980s, for example, Blaž Lukan noted at a public reading of Ivan Mrak's work that it revealed "theatre in its original sense", even though it required as little as, say, "a chair and a table, an open book on it, modest lighting and distant music" (*Dramaturške* 23). This confirmation is particularly encouraging for (young) playwrights operating in today's precarious conditions, as they often have no choice but to work in barely adequate production to stage their texts. Fees are low, so there is little time for rehearsals, and the pool of potential co-workers can also be very shallow. There is also little money to invest into lavish costumes, sets and props (if any), and often no stage since authors usually find space only in marginal and alternative venues, where lighting options are also poor and minimal, rather than in proper institutions. In such conditions, it is impossible to stage one's text as a "spectacular" theatre production. Any such attempt could only fail miserably. It would also be ideologically somewhat problematic since it would be in perfect harmony with the prevailing logic of capital, which wants to make as much profit with as little input as possible. This is precisely why such an approach would be counterproductive: if it proved possible to produce performances with so little investment, there would be no need to invest more than that into performances. If, by contrast, we assume that staged readings can be a completely independent and fully-fledged artistic genre, then there is no need to make them into something "more" than what is possible, given the (mainly financial) limitations. Thus, this type of production can be quite honest about the fact that it is produced under precarious conditions, that this is a kind of poor theatre, in a sense, albeit poor only in terms of the conditions of production and certainly not in terms of their aesthetic value. Again, the latter can only be achieved if we first acknowledge staged readings as an artistic genre or as having any performance potential. The space for exploration only opens up by abandoning the idea that staged readings are merely an intermediate stage between reading and staging. Only in this way can reading be perceived as a potentially interesting theatrical means worth exploring and promising to create a fully integrated theatrical event.⁶ Thus, we should ultimately resist any ambition to make it appear that staged readings are being produced in good, perhaps even institutionalised, working conditions. However, we should not resignedly abandon all performative ambitions in advance on account of the modest conditions. The point is that staged readings, insofar

6 Blaž Lukan has written and spoken about this on various occasions, including at the round table on the independence of staged reading, organised by the KUD Krik association at Nova pošta (The New Post Office) in 2019: "A staged reading looks for the possibilities of staging within the text itself, on many different levels. Not only at the level of interpretation of the text but also at the level of the medium itself, the graphic notation, the way of presenting the text, its projection, the establishment of a relationship with the text, the involvement of the audience in the creation of the text live in front of us. In fact, what we see here is the birth of theatre out of the spirit of the text precisely in this primary form. This opens up a vast field of possibilities, but it also takes time. The worst form of staged reading is that which is considered to be merely provisional, substitutes, consolation mini-performances. This marks a degradation of the staged reading" (qtd. in Potočan 21).

as they truly remain *readings* (and no more than that), are also a performatively attractive artistic format while at the same time reinforcing their aesthetic dimension with a political one, since, by pointing out rather than concealing the conditions of their production, they communicate something along the lines of “Hey, these are the conditions in which we can work at the moment”.

Generators of Experimentation

As an experimental form, staged readings have emerged in different periods. Below we consider when artists have turned to this format and why.

Experimental and even guerrilla-style staged readings appeared during the time of the PreGlej group. Its members at the time (playwrights including Simona Semenič, Simona Hamer, Peter Rezman et al.) understood the format of staged readings primarily as a response, a commentary or even a critical gesture to problematise the state of contemporary Slovenian drama, its writers and, above all, the methods and procedures of their performance. Due to economic conditions, and even more so due to the scarcity of production resources, PreGlej’s authors appropriated the format of the staged reading, which became their hallmark format, and the creative freedom offered by this approach eventually gave rise to some of the most prominent contemporary playwrights in Slovenia.

It would seem that the establishment of these artists and more frequent stagings of their texts in institutions marked a quieter period when staged readings were not so frequently presented. This situation changed with the founding of the journal *Adept* and the Vzkrik Festival of Dramatic Writing – with other initiatives eventually following – by a new generation of writers to challenge the status quo. Between 2017 and 2021, staged readings again started to appear in larger numbers in the context of various festivals and projects: for example, the New Readings programme at the Slovenian National Theatre Drama Ljubljana and other supporting programmes in institutional theatres; during the COVID-19 lockdowns, even video streamings of staged readings appeared in the production of the Prešeren Theatre Kranj under the title *Couch Monologues*; staged readings were traditionally organised by the Week of Slovenian Drama Festival, the *Adept* journal and the Vzkrik Festival; and platforms such as *Instant Drama* appeared, etc. Nevertheless, staged readings often remained at the level of classical interpretive readings without further conceptual or performative considerations. They filled a gap in supportive programmes while at the same time giving the impression that the state of contemporary Slovenian drama and the position of playwrights was improving significantly. In reality, such productions were often mere substitutions for supposedly “proper” performances of texts, making them

a kind of staging in deferment. This potential had yet to be fully and truly realised. The same goes for this year's 2022/23 theatre season, in which more than five competitions for plays are actively open, a record number. Just a few, however, also offer the staging of selected texts in addition to the prize money. Therefore, the frequency of staged readings seems to directly correlate to the frequency of publishing and staging the authors' texts, or even to the possibilities for this happening at all, and at least partly to specific individuals' personal ambitions and enthusiasm. Perhaps this is why the need for such experimental gestures is gradually disappearing when the generation changes (Jernej Potočan, Nina Kuclar Stiković, Iza Strehar, etc.), and even more with the gradual establishment of the authors in more institutionalised spaces.

Particularly interesting are the cases of the Vzkrik Festival of Dramatic Writing and the journal *Adept* of the University of Ljubljana, Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television.⁷ Both initiatives were launched at a time when interest in playwriting among younger authors was surging, while it was also becoming increasingly clear that there was a lack of space in which they could present their texts publicly. In the independent scene, the text is usually created during the creative process. In contrast, in institutional theatres, devised projects are usually combined with older (often canonic) texts and commissioned texts, usually by established authors. This is why it became clear that the young generation had to establish its own platform for continuously staging new texts. It is also why the Vzkrik Festival ran for several years with the eloquent slogan, "If you refuse to stage us, we will stage ourselves!" Nina Ramšak and Žan Žveplan pointed out a similar problem in the editorial "Don't just read it, use it!" of the inaugural issue of *Adept*. The journal was conceived to dedicate one of its two annual issues to the publication of plays by authors of the young generation. From the outset, it resisted the idea that it would be intended merely for "linear reading from beginning to end" (Ramšak and Žveplan 3). Instead, it encouraged reading in relation to a potential staging. For this reason, each issue in which the plays were published was followed by a public presentation in the form of staged readings, which were conceived from the very outset in a broader sense, that is, "not merely as a step on the way to the final product, but rather as an autonomous form worthy of exploration" (3). This was also the fundamental starting point of the Vzkrik Festival, which organised workshops under the mentorship of established playwrights throughout the year, where participants wrote and refined their texts. When the workshops ended, these texts were also presented as staged readings. These stagings were not conceived to serve only the function of presenting the first information about the text, however, but rather as a proper and independent performative event, which was indicated already by the initial definition of the project as a *festival of dramatic writing*, and this ambition was ultimately confirmed by good attendance and media coverage.

⁷ The Vzkrik (Eng. shout) Festival ran from 2017 to 2021 and had four festival editions, during which 28 new plays were produced. The first issue of *Adept* journal was published in 2014, and the journal is still being published to this day.

Gestures and Shouts⁸

What these staged readings have in common is that they do not consider reading only as an interpretation of texts but rather as their main staging concept, making the text the most important (if not the only) theatrical element. There are, of course, many similar cases of staged readings. One is also the performance by the Bulgarian playwright Alexander Manuiloff, *The State*, presented at Nova pošta (The New Post Office) in 2019. The audience was seated in a circle in the auditorium, with a box of letters placed in the middle of the circle. The audience determined the performance's pace, dramaturgy and course, like as a community or a state. They also read the text by themselves and finally finished it. Although *The State* was labelled as a full-length theatre performance, it was still possible to discern the main elements of what we ourselves understand by the notion of an experimental staged reading, as the text was placed in the foreground and used as the only theatrical tool, which meant that it was only the text and the spectator who were confronted with each other on stage.

As far as our theatre space is concerned, experimentation, especially in young playwriting, is most evident in the inclusion of autobiographical elements and the involvement of the author's presence and corporeality in the act of public reading. The latter is thus no longer merely a reading of a text but also a reading or decyphering of the author and their status context. Such was the case, for example, with the staged reading cycle *Ko se žgem* [*When I Burn (Myself)*] at the 57th Maribor Theatre Festival, in which Nina Kuclar Stiković, Urša Majcen, Helena Šukljan and Manca Lipoglavšek presented their interpretations and adaptations of Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy tale *The Little Match Girl*. Šukljan and Lipoglavšek did something similar in staging their text *Dramakurbija* (*Dramawhoring*). Since the abovementioned cases are mainly experiments created in the context of study courses, it is perhaps interesting to mention also the staged readings of the author Anja Novak, who inserted simultaneous textual, visual, audio, interactive and staged readings of her poems by other artists on QR codes in her book of poetry entitled *Rane rane* (*Wounds Wounds*). She also continued this practice in the context of public presentations and readings of her poetry, intervening in public events with her poetry in the role of her alter ego Anjuta, a bride, offering herself and her subjectivity to be read. Novak used sonority and music as one of the main principles for reading her texts – a kind of concert staged readings – also in her work *My Body, My Cage*, in which the text was reduced to a few dozen words and sentences. The reading was supplemented with the sound of her bones cracking and the use of spaghetti as a sound source, thus underlining her inner state of anorexia. A similar example of a concert reading was also Nina Dragičević's performance, which supplemented the reading with bass guitar accompaniment, thus conceptualising her text *ljubav reče greva* (*Love Says Let's Go*) as a score of rhythm and atmospheres.

⁸ Cp. the footnote no. 7.

All of the examples mentioned above are experimental in that they abandon their supposedly primary function of reading rehearsals and interpretations and instead engage with the overall performativity of the text. At the same time, staged readings can also be experimental regarding the social gestures they produce. Here, their experimentation refers primarily to the position of the dramatic text and its author. Nika Švab created one such gesture in a series of participatory staged readings of the text *Delo in deklica I–V: Drame tlačank* (*Work and the Girl I–V: Drama of the Oppressed*). As a dramaturg and writer, the author applied for funding at the Ministry of Culture's Authors' Opus call for proposals, usually intended for directors and performers with their ideas for full-length productions and performances. Švab resisted this by applying a dramatic text and a concept for a series of staged readings, thus challenging the prevailing notion of performance production units while at the same time establishing staged readings as an autonomous performative format, competing on an equal footing with other performative and theatrical events in the call for proposals.

The dramaturgical structure of the text, divided into five scenes, was followed by the conceptual design of the staged readings. There were five of them, so each day between 15 and 19 November 2022, one scene was read, and each evening a new audience and other invited theatre-makers, seated on a grandstand in the auditorium, read the text and commented on it with the author herself. The events were organised at The New Post Office, with no additional elements but a large screen on which the text was projected. The only theatrical element on stage was thus the text itself, which was read *prima vista* without any interpretation or preparation. The course of the reading was not predetermined; the readers themselves decided when they wanted to stop it with their questions, reflections and doubts about the quality and intelligibility of the text, and with suggestions for potential approaches to staging it. The reading and the conversations it sparked were recorded and later transcribed into a new documentary performance text entitled *Nevarno razmerje dramatike in gledališča* (*The Dangerous Liason between Drama and Theatre*). This text was created in medias res during the staged reading and the accompanying analytical commentary on another text. The event itself – the reading and the analysis of what was read – thus became the material (and not just the basis) for creating a new theatre text. Lukan says that when staged readings take place on several levels, not merely on the level of interpretation of the text, “what we see here is the birth of theatre out of the spirit of the text” (qtd. in Potočan 21). In the case of this particular staged reading, however, we saw not only the birth of theatre but also the birth of an entirely new text. The logic was thus reversed: suddenly, the staged reading was no longer an “escape route” for texts that, while written, are not performed but rather become a theatrical event in their own right and even the generator of new texts. Not only can a staged reading function as a full-fledged performative format, but it can also even function, so it seems, as a fully autonomous theatre text.

Conclusion

To summarise, it is obvious that the staged reading is established as a space of experimentation (and perhaps also a gesture of resistance) when that which is supposed to be polarised is overcome, not by abandoning the two supposedly opposing poles, but by radically reconciling them in the same place. Thus, the best cases of staged readings are those that do not appear as something in-between in the relationship between reading and staging but instead function both as the one and the other at the same time, however, not in a way that simply merges one pole with the other, but so that it establishes one pole *within the* other. We have tried to illustrate this concept with the metaphor of the Möbius strip. It does not mean including both a little bit of reading and a little bit of staging, but rather that reading – under certain conditions, of course – can be established as an autonomous form of performance, and this is where the experimentation can start: in exploring all the potential forms of performance that can be produced by reading. Something similar could be argued about the opposition between the literary and the theatrical, as seen in the case of Nika Švab's project. A theatrical event can – again, of course, under certain conditions – also be the generator of a new literary text. It is not the case that theatre and literature are completely opposed to each other, that there is an unsurmountable gap between them; at some point, they can overlap, and perhaps it is precisely at this point that an infinite space for experimentation opens up.

At the same time, establishing staged readings as fully autonomous theatre events can also have substantial consequences for the precarious situation of (young) authors. If staged readings were no longer perceived merely as something transitory, intermediate and temporary, if they could generate experimentation, and if they could be acknowledged as a comprehensive way of staging dramatic texts, then it should not be left to the particular will of individuals to undertake such a project, let alone depend on the sad fact that texts by young authors usually do not get to be presented on “big theatre stages”. Instead, staged readings should be adequately funded and thus systematically encouraged, as it is obvious that they can be a generator of new and different writings and perhaps even new authors. Adequate funding and systemic support would prevent staged readings from emerging and disappearing in more or less contingent waves and create a sustainable space for exploring new forms of playwriting. Paradoxically, however, it turned out that staged readings could begin to experiment precisely because of their self-sufficiency, as their creators were not bound to anyone else except themselves. Although systemic support is welcome, it should not come at the expense of artistic autonomy. True experimentation can only begin in a field that operates autonomously and without limitations.

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