

While the emergence of new forms of performance writing in the 1960s and 1970s did not eliminate traditional forms of drama, they radically transformed the role of textuality in the theatre. This article argues that when liberated from the rules of dramatic writing and even syntax and grammar, performance writing brings an *illocutionary logic* into textual production. The article concludes with a preliminary consideration of differences between experimental writing strategies and the latest text-generating AI.

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**Keywords:** performance writing, performativity, textual production, ideology, Jean-Luc Baudry, Rastko Močnik, artificial intelligence

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# Performance Writing: On, Around and Off the Page

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## 1. Performance - Text

Among documents related to Youth Day celebrations held at the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, in File 114/II, Folder 21, there is a proposal for the stadium performance *Titova omladina* (*Tito's Youth*), which Rista Mitkovski, a physical education teacher from Macedonia, submitted in the spring of 1972. Mitkovski's libretto brims with conventional images used in these kinds of spectacles, including the Yugoslav flag outlined with the bodies of female gymnasts dressed in red, white and blue. There are some innovations in this proposal, too: Mitkovski's contribution to the repertoire of mass performances could have been a special transition exercise, which he called "The Propeller's Turn". Novelties and clichés notwithstanding, this was a long shot for an unknown mass-performance enthusiast. By the early 1970s, massive Youth Day celebrations had been staged annually for more than a quarter of a century, and the organisation of live spectacles that took place at the Yugoslav army soccer stadium in Belgrade worked like a well-oiled machine. While an open call for proposals was issued every year, a select group of creative teams of writers, composers and choreographers routinely applied for and won these commissions. Mitkovski stood no chance against these professionals.

Barely three years earlier, in the summer of 1969, the second issue of *Rok: časopis za književnost, umetnost i estetičko ispitivanje stvarnosti* (*Rok: The Journal for Literature, Art, and Aesthetic Examination of Reality*) featured another kind of artwork that adopted one of the state symbols as its primary visual material. Slovenian artist Dreja Rotar used the Slovenian variant of the full official name of the Yugoslav state, *Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija*, as a ready-made text of sorts for her pattern poem/conceptual piece. This work opens an entire section of the journal dedicated to the activities of the Slovenian neo-avant-garde group OHO. The OHO block included Marko Pogačnik's comic book, articles by Pogačnik, Rastko Močnik and Franci Zagoričnik,

photographic documentation from OHO's landmark happening *Triglav*, as well as extensive examples of pattern poetry by the members of the group. While the section started with Rotar's two-page piece, it ended with Zagoričnik's series "Tapete" ("Wall Papers"). Like Rotar's, Zagoričnik's pieces were produced on *bankpost papir* [Ed. note: most likely bank paper or bond paper], but unlike her, he used only punctuation marks to create visual patterns. While in his work, Zagoričnik explores the effects of repetition, the first of signs on the page and then of patterns from one page to another, Rotar emphasises movement: on the left-hand side page of the journal, a large circle occupies the centre of the page, leaving remnants of the text in its margins, while on the right-hand side, the circle is filled with text, leaving the margins empty.



Figure 1: Dreja Rotar: *Untitled work, Rok, No. 2* (1969)

Mitkovski's and Rotar's works were produced in Yugoslavia within a short period, and they both deployed graphic strategies that go beyond and defy the discursivity of the text. However, they do that for different purposes and with entirely different outcomes. We can start from the obvious: the first came from the southernmost republic of socialist Yugoslavia, and the second came from the northernmost republic. While this mention of their points of origin could lend itself to a discussion of the uneven economic development and cultural differences between republics in the Yugoslav Federation, it is worth noting that these two texts represent two cultures not defined by geography or ethnicity. The first text belonged to the genre of mass performances, a form that the state favoured and promoted. As such, it received massive support from state institutions and was disseminated through mass and electronic media and the public education system to the largest possible audience: ideally, all citizens of Yugoslavia. The second text was published in a small, completely self-funded literature and art journal initiated by the writer Bora Ćosić, which he edited with a small group

of artists and writers. So, while the first one belonged to the mainstream ideological, cultural production in Yugoslavia, the second one was situated at its fringes, on the fledgling alternative arts scene. Still, we should not neglect the similarities between the two texts, as they can be as important as their differences. For example, both texts came from linguistic communities outside the dominant Serbo-Croatian language.<sup>1</sup> Also, both of them adopted symbols from the state's ideological arsenal. Finally, performance seems to be prominent in both of their works. While the first is a libretto to generate a real live spectacle, the second integrates visual and verbal material to produce performative effects on the page.

That is just the beginning. Speaking from a distance of half a century, I want to suggest that these two texts not only belong to two distinct performance cultures that existed in the former Yugoslavia but that they were engaged in broader historical, artistic and ideological trajectories whose significance today is not purely antiquarian. In their own right, these two texts speak about ambivalences relevant to contemporary culture. These ambivalences concern the relationship between text and performance. Some of the questions they elicit include but are not limited to: How does the production of meaning take place in performance? What constitutes performance text? Most importantly, what are the conditions of textual production of (and in) performance?

## 2. The Cone ...

Mitkovski's 15-page libretto envisions a mass spectacle of 17 units divided into three main exercises, plus the performers' grand entrance and exit, transitions, changes, and an obligatory compilation of folk dances. While the title underneath a vaguely constructivist image on the cover of the booklet is inscribed by hand and in Cyrillic, the rest of the document is produced on a Latin typewriter. In the narrative part of the score, the author mixes different dialects of Serbo-Croatian, misses noun cases, uses incorrect gender forms and mangles verb conjugations. More carefully composed are those sections of the script in which he does not use discursive language and deploys visual typography instead. This writing eschews the conventional nature of the linguistic sign. It foregrounds the visual dimension of the letter, as well as the capacity of the inscription machine – the typewriter – to organise these elements into larger geometrical units. Mitkovski's expertise was not in literature but in physical education. He made up for his relative negligence towards his script's linguistic and literary side with his proficiency in performance notation. That makes *Tito's Youth* an exemplary performance text.

<sup>1</sup> In the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, the language spoken by the majority in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro was referred to as Serbo-Croatian, or alternatively, as Croato-Serbian. With the country's disintegration, each new state declared its dialects as an independent language: Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian.



Figure 2: Tito's Youth, Performance Notation

Initial theoretical considerations of the performance text as a distinct and uniquely theatrical form of writing came from theatre semiology. In *Languages of the Stage*, one of the earliest successful attempts to engage semiotics in a dialogue with methodologies used in theatre history and performance studies, Patrice Pavis brought up the question of a “spectacle text” as a “score where all the scenic systems of performance are articulated in space and time” (18). He suggests that theatre semiology should not limit itself to considerations of dramatic text but should instead engage with the “discourse of staging, with the way in which the performance is marked out by the sequence of events, by the dialogue of visual and musical elements”; in short, he argues that it should take as its object of study “performance text” and “the way in which it is structured and divided” (20). Years later, in the short entry on performance text in his *Dictionary of the Theatre*, Pavis was much less programmatic. He defined it as “the relationship of all *signifying systems* used in performance, whose arrangement and interaction constitute the *mise en scène*” significantly adding that “the notion of performance text is, therefore, an abstract and theoretical one, not an empirical and practical one” (Pavis, *Dictionary* 261). This can be read to mean, on the one hand, that in its diachronicity and time-boundedness, live performance inherently resists

the dependence that semiotic analysis has on the synchronic approach to linguistic structures; on the other hand, it also acknowledges the demotion of the dramatic text as the defining characteristic of contemporary theatre.

The emergence of the performance text, which in some instances led to its surpassing of the conventional dramatic text, did not eliminate the process of signification at the core of traditional theatre. Michael Kirby, the pioneering scholar of Happenings and what he called “new theatre”, referred to the kind of theatre based on the literary script as “referential”. Suggesting that in a “performance built on this model [...] every element is intended to convey meaning or to aid in the process of decoding that meaning”, he proposed a schema in the shape of a triangle or a cone, in which the meaning is located “at the upper vertex. Figuratively, it rises over all the other elements or aspects of the presentation; all the rest are there only to support the meaning” (Kirby, *A Formalist* 33). Here, “all the rest” refers to all of those tangible elements on the stage, from props and coulisses to actors, located at the base of the cone. At the same time, meaning is concentrated in the point, which transcends the materiality of the stage.

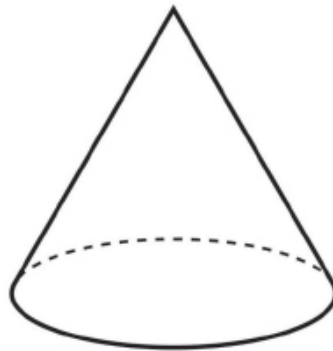


Figure 3: Cone Diagram

The paradox of referential theatre is that it invites the spectator to see through the material elements of theatrical representation to glimpse an immaterial and purely symbolic instance. Kirby implies that in the theatre, the cone is flipped on its side: “[W]e might say that the spectator looks through the base of the triangle, through all the material that is the performance, and behind it all is the meaning, which is the most important” (33). Theatre and performance studies scholarship of the second half of the twentieth century proclaimed the removal of the dramatic text from the apex of the representational cone as a dehierarchisation of theatre. One influential text after another praised the avant-garde for this overturn. A couple of examples will suffice.

Stateside, in his essay “Drama, Script, Theater, and Performance” (first published in 1973), one of the foundational scholarly essays of the new academic field of Performance Studies, theatre director and scholar Richard Schechner proposed a redefinition of the basic terms of the theatre, all of which pertain to different forms of inscription. He made a distinction between “drama” as literary text and “script” as “something that preexists any given enactment” (Schechner, *Performance* 70). Here, the script relies on a non-textual kind of writing: it is the “basic code of the events”, which, unlike drama, is not transmitted through the medium of writing (and reading) but “person to person” (72). On the other side of the ocean, mostly in Germany, where state subsidies provided conditions for the flourishing of an adventurous and dynamic theatre scene, scholars saw in the challenge that the new theatre presented to the hegemony of dramatic text an expansion of expressive possibilities of the stage. Most famously, Hans-Thies Lehmann argued that “postdramatic theatre is *not simply a new kind of text or staging* – and even less a new type of theatre text, but rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that *turns both of these levels of theatre upside down* through the structurally changed quality of the performance text” (*Postdramatic* 85, second emphasis added). What this narrative of the upending of drama prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic neglects to mention is that it did not bring an overturn of the hierarchy of meaning-production but its renegotiation.

In “Drama, Script, Theater, and Performance” and many other texts from the 1970s and 1980s, Schechner argues that the playwright, the author of the “drama”, is no longer at the apex of Kirby’s imaginary cone but rather the director, the author of the “script”. In his meticulous elaboration of the strategies and techniques of postdramatic theatre, Lehmann expands the author position from directors to choreographers, designers, visual artists and performance collectives. In the thematic block of *Postdramatic Theatre* dedicated to the expressive means of new theatre practices, he places the text side by side with other fundamentals of performance, such as space, time, the body and the media. To do that, the “text” had to be reduced to spoken language or the stage utterance and the absence thereof.

This approach leaves out two important details. First, postdramatic theatre is not post-textual. The dethroning of the literary text in the theatre did not result in the elimination of the text from performance but liberated it from the constraints imposed upon dramatic writing in the West, at least since Aristotle’s *Poetics*. In the traditional theatre, literary text not only carries the meaning but is also the container of tradition, which it brings to bear on the production of meaning. Second, deposing the literary text from that “vertex” of referential theatre’s cone does not remove writing from performance but unleashes it in hitherto unexpected ways. If postdramatic theatre abolishes anything, it is the uni-directional relationship between writing and performance. In new forms of live art, such as happenings and performance art, writing goes in all directions, including directly

reversing the conventional order between writing and performance: performance flows back into writing and, in doing so, changes the very structure and purpose of textual production. Even if the sudden proliferation of new forms of performance writing did not permanently change how plays are written and produced, it introduced a radical change in the understanding of textuality in theatre. Namely, from being a literary work and a privileged container of meaning, the text has been reduced to its function as a structuring device. A truly de-hierarchised theatre does not replace “drama” with “script”, or with any other privileged text, and one kind of author (playwright) for another (director, producer, etc.). Instead, it proclaims that anything can be used as a text: an object of everyday use is no less a text than a play, and so can be a piece of recorded music, an item of clothing, a novel, or the bodies of performers gathered in a space, where it is not their skills that are decisive in the process of making of the performance, but their experiences, behaviours, relationships and desires. One of the most significant outcomes of the expansion of the idea of writing in performance was not a new hierarchy in theatre but the challenge that the process of devising presented to the “authorial” theatre and the hierarchised regimes of staging in general.

### 3. ... and the Surface

The upsurge of performance writing that came with the proliferation of performance forms that challenged referential theatre is evidenced in anthologies such as the 700-page *Scenarios: Scripts to be Performed* (1980), edited by Richard Kostelanetz, who drew mainly on the American neo-avant-garde, and Blaž Lukan's *Generator:: za proizvodnjo poljubnega števila dramskih kompleksov* (*The Generator:: for Manufacturing Any Number of Drama Complexes*, 2021). Indeed, this kind of writing exceeds any individual culture or language, and many other similar anthologies of performance texts could (and should!) see the light of day. Even a cursory inspection of the existing collections suggests that performance writing is not a style and does not follow any prescribed set of rules. Quite the opposite, these texts seem evidence of a feverish exploration of the innumerable ways of departing from conventional drama. A performance text could be a visual, a musical notation, a score for a happening, an experimental play, a comic book (as in Lee Breuer's *Red Horse Animation*), or any combination of material that went into the making of the performance and its documentation. Taking the broadest take possible, in his short entry in *Dictionary of the Theatre*, Pavis suggests that the performance text “considers performance as a scale *model* in which the production of meaning may be observed” (261). That much can be said about any text geared towards performance, from IKEA assembly instructions to plans for manoeuvres in military theatres of operations. What distinguishes the textual production we are looking at is the relation between writing and performance.



It is not entirely surprising that in his essential and rarely discussed article “Writing, Fiction, Ideology”, which preceded his influential texts on the cinematic apparatus, Jean-Louis Baudry uses the same geometrical figure as Kirby to depict a “metaphysical model of knowledge” (21). Here, we again find the figure that “would be similar to a cone whose base, being a limited surface, is the only visible part. All points of the base are linked to a single, invisible dot, the summit, located at infinity. Infinity is exterior to the surface, beyond it. Each point of the limited surface is the projection of the vertex onto this base” (21, translations by author). So to know, which is to say, to discern the meaning or to read, “will be to try to traverse the lines which connect the vertex to the point of the base” (21). The apex of the cone marks the position of the “author” and the “work” that is not only culturally but also legally reinforced. The production of meaning becomes inseparable from economic production through the categories such as the author and the work. Therefore, the question of meaning production, reflected in theatre’s regime of referentiality, is not limited to the aesthetics of representation but also to its politics—and in a significant way. Unlike Kirby (who was most likely unaware of “Writing, Fiction, Ideology” when he wrote *A Formalist Theatre*) and other critics of literary or “dramatic” theatre, Baudry nominates the *surface* as an alternative to the hierarchical model of meaning production.

In this model, the infinity that touches the cone’s vertex is displaced into the limitlessness of an unbounded plane, which contains a multiplicity of statements. According to this schema, the meaning is not produced through the passage from the infinite, or transcendental, point to the visible and tangible base (we can say with Gilles Deleuze, the plane of immanence) but through the interaction between texts. At the surface, proximity and contiguity replace distance and transfer. Here, “everything is stated, every text, being understood by the relations it maintains with other statements, with other texts, and thus appearing as an extension of the surface” is therefore “responsible for all statements it crosses path with” (Baudry 22). On this “limitless surface” that has “no axis nor centre”, writing no longer represents “a field of reality outside of it” but is instead an “active part of the text that is written incessantly” (22). One of the main consequences of this re-orientation of the production of meaning is the disappearance of “the subject, the cause of writing” (22). This disappearance radically transforms the very idea of writing. It is no longer the “creation of an isolated individual; it can no longer be considered as the property of that individual. On the contrary, [...] it appears as one of a particular manifestation of general writing” (22). Baudry’s notion of *general writing*, that, on the one hand, is authorless and, on the other, engages directly with other texts and other forms of textuality, is of singular importance for performance writing. So, what happens on the surface? How does this textual and performance production operate?

## 4. From Illocutionary to Illocutionary Writing

One of the signal moments in the process of subverting the power traditionally assigned to the author was John Cage's introduction of aleatory procedures into the process of musical composition. While Cage questioned the primacy of a commanding mind in creating musical scores, so did Merce Cunningham in dance, Jackson Mac Low in poetry, and George Brecht in visual arts. In this vein, Iztok Geister, Marko Pogačnik and Rastko Močnik, the editors of the "Programmed Art" section of the journal *Problemi* published in January of 1970, used the physical weight of texts accepted for publication to determine their order in this issue. "We were literally weighing the contributions (the papers, photos, pictures) with a kitchen balance, one of the old type, not electronic. We organised these materials from the heaviest to the lightest" ("Breaking Point" 23). In adopting chance and other procedures that eliminate or curtail authorial decisions, the emphasis was not on anonymising the authorial agency that shapes the work of art but on subverting the conventional line of causation in its production.

This principle is observable in Močnik's contribution to this issue, a piece entitled *Drama*. In a single-sentence preamble, he declares that "every dramatic text constitutes the programme" (Lukan 101). Indeed, dramatic writing's pragmatic orientation towards live presentation sets it apart from other forms of literature. If all writing anticipates a certain kind of reading, then performance writing addresses itself to a deciphering mechanism called theatre, which consists of trained bodies, architectural structures, complex machinery and highly specialised objects. Močnik does not question this fundamental property of the performance text but pursues it to its final consequence. He recognises space, body, gesture, voice and movement as elementary performance properties and then establishes basic rules of their combinations and ordering into syntagmatic chains. True to Cagean principles of composition and performance, he indicates that the "programme" of his drama should be "as rigid as possible" while preserving the randomness at the heart of each performance (101). The most obvious example of this approach is the famous composition *4'33"* in which Cage determined the duration of each performance segment through chance procedures. However, this renunciation of agency comes together with the demand that the composition produced this way should be performed with an unwavering exactness and fidelity to the score. While it has been suggested that *4'33"* does not require an actual performance and that these durations can be "performed" with the help of a stopwatch by anyone, anywhere, Cage insisted that this composition requires the trappings of a traditional piano concert: the instrument, an appropriate space, a musician and an audience. Only under these conditions does *4'33"* fully meet the demands of Cage's credo about silence as any sound not intended. In other words, even if the field of reference is wide open, *4'33"* is still referential. Even if the score can be seen as an autonomous work of art – for example, a visual piece – in performance,

it retains all of the properties of musical notation that are transferred from one medium (discursive, notational, visual) to another (performance). It is at this point that Močnik departs from Cagean aesthetics.

*Drama* and *A Generator* are a constellation of performance texts that use repetition and variation as their main organising principles. As a more radical departure in the de-aestheticisation of the performance text than *Drama*, *A Generator* bears formal resemblances with several post-Cagean and Fluxus works that employed new forms of notation and, almost without exception, were geared towards performance. A further radicalisation of the relation between notation and performance came with the transformation of the position of the text in Conceptual art practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s. If, as Sol Le Wit argued, “words” and “sentences” can replace art objects, they certainly can do the same with performances. To put it succinctly, the difference between Dick Higgins’s Fluxus piece *To Everything Its Season* (1958) and Vito Acconci’s Conceptual artwork *Twelve Minutes* (1967) is that the former still has a live performance as its ultimate reference, even if it never gets a formal staging.

Although they deploy the same permutational logic and have a similar appearance on the page, these two works represent two fundamentally different forms of understanding the relationship between text and performance. Like some other conceptual artists, such as Dan Graham, Acconci sets up a “self-generating structure” independent of any material staging (Kotz 135). Unlike Higgins, whose performance texts, regardless of their formal differences – mini-plays, verse dramas, scenarios for happenings, event scores – were aimed at performance, Acconci approached his performances from the early 1970s as a continuation of his work on poetry, which directly preceded them. He did not conceive of his performance art pieces as live presentations of his poems but as an extension of the conceptual practice he first developed on the page. He spoke of using the inscription on the page “as the start of an event that keeps going, off the page” (Acconci qtd. in Kotz 165). In referential theatre, any form of notation, from literary drama to visual score, presumes the process of transposition from one medium to another. That transfer enacts an inherently metaphorical relation between the text and performance. In the practice of Acconci and many other conceptual and performance artists, the text is contiguous with performance, and their relation is performative. Here, the text is performative not because it takes over some performance properties but because it does not refer to an object outside of itself but instead always returns to itself. In doing so, the text adopts one of the most challenging conditions of performance art, which demands that the artist simultaneously adopt the position of the creator and the art object. The opposite of the referential is not a non-referential but a self-referential performance. More in line with Acconci’s poems than with Higgins’s happening librettos or George Brecht’s event scores, Močnik’s *A Generator* is one of those texts in which the event starts on

the page to depart from it and, in doing so, obliterates the gap between the text and performance. In doing so, it textualises the things and events it crosses paths with and, conversely, subjects itself to the condition of the (art) object and performance (art). While there is no method to this exchange between the text and the non-textual, *A Generator* seems to provide an observable instance of the performance text that pushes against the margins of the representational field (the page, in this case).

Močnik is not an artist or a playwright but a philosopher and sociologist (and in that respect, he is not exceptional: the rejection of referential theatre opened performance writing to non-theatre professionals: painters, sculptors, musicians, philosophers, critics, etc.). When asked in a recent interview with Sezgin Boynik about his ties with OHO and his early work on the “Programmed Art” issue of *Problemi*, Močnik made a connection between these activities and his subsequent work on philosophy and the sociology of literature. Here, of particular interest, is his engagement with the work of French-Lithuanian semiologist Algirdas Greimas, whose work on semiotics Močnik used in his sociological analysis of France Prešeren’s poetry. In essays such as “Umetnostno v literaturi” (1983) and “K sociologiji slovenske književnosti: Prešeren v nizu ideoloških menjav” (1983), Močnik’s propensity for diagramatisation, which was evident in *Drama* and *A Generator*, adopts a specific form of Greimas’s elaboration of the Klein Group, which the linguist used in his exploration of complex semiotic relations that resist the basic structure of the sign:

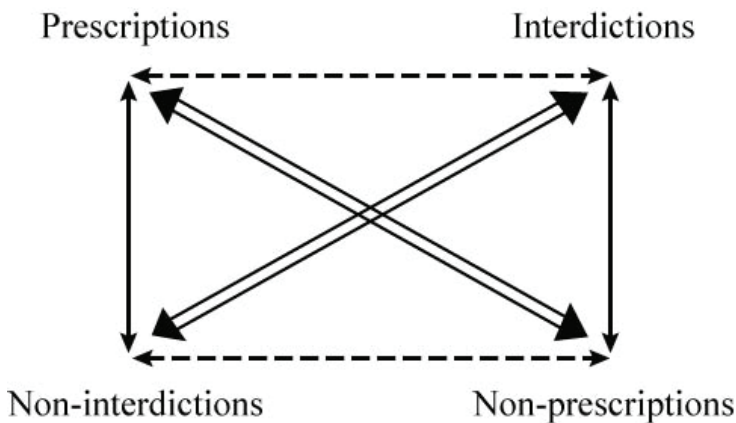


Figure 4: Algirdas Greimas: The Elementary Structure of Meaning

Whereas the signifier-signified relation is based on the opposition, the Klein group offers the possibility of establishing a multiplicity of relations in the process of signification. In Greimas’s adaptation of the Klein group into the elementary structure of meaning, the upper couple consists of prescriptions (positive injunctions) and interdictions (negative injunctions). The lower designates a set of their inversions:

non-interdictions and non-prescriptions. The dynamics within this “elementary structure of meaning” are organised around two types of disjunction: that of contraries (indicated by the dotted line) and of contradictories (indicated by the full line). The Klein group offers an alternative to the binary opposition as the key property of the linguistic sign. Greimas illustrates this with simple semiotics of traffic lights: if the green light signifies prescription and the red light interdiction, the yellow light can be either a non-description or non-interdiction, depending on the order in which it appears (Greimas 92). Whereas binary signs engage in signifying chains, the Klein group, as reimagined by Greimas, can establish signification fields. In that sense, it offers an elaboration of the processes of meaning production that takes place on the surface, that is to say, in the model Baudry offers as the alternative to the cone. What is significant here is that in the Klein group, as in Acconci’s poetry, the pressure is on the edges of the square. If Acconci’s performance is a continuation (and not a transposition) of textual practice that begins on the page, the Klein group allows, as Rosalind Krauss has demonstrated in her essay “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”, establishing relations that extend beyond the limits of the initial graph.

In his reading of Prešeren’s poetry, Močnik goes in the opposite direction from scholars who have used the Klein diagram as a general interpretational schema (including, but not limited to, Krauss and Greimas himself). Instead of following the trajectories that extend from the cardinal points and proliferate in networks of signification, he, conversely, seems to focus on the remnants of the binary sign in this schema located at the point of intersection between diagonal lines at the centre of the graph. This focus helps Močnik recognise and elaborate a specific structure of Prešeren’s poem, which is, according to him, characterised by an empty zone at its core. He suggests that this missing element “is the signifier that would be efficient”:

So the signifier of the poem is proclaimed as non-efficient, as aesthetic, which means that nothing performative [is] able to perform there; there is no illocutionary force, the discourse is “etiolated,” as Austin would say, it only has this aesthetic, blocked signifying action. My theory at the time was that the whole poem rotates around that signifying element, something that does not declare itself [...]. (Močnik, “Breaking Point” 25)

Močnik’s *Drama* and, to even a greater degree, *A Generator* can be seen as a complete inversion of the structure of the aesthetic signifier that he uncovered in Prešeren’s romantic poetry. Here, the illocutionary force is replaced by a certain *illocutionary* logic, the logic of permutation and multiplication that sets up performance as an extension and continuation of the text (and, *always*, vice versa).

Permutational operations are key elements in two examples of performance writing from the beginning of this article. Still, each of these texts assumes a different, if not completely opposite, performance status. In Mitkovski’s libretto, the spectacle

culminates with an exercise of writing, in which abstract figures formed by gymnasts' bodies on a soccer field turn into recognisable shapes and words. The image of the flag formed by female gymnasts' bodies is followed by the name of the President of the Republic spelt out with the bodies of male performers: "The men form the word TITO" (Mitkovski 8). The use of performing bodies to produce texts was a well-established convention in socialist mass performances, from their birthplace in the USSR to Yugoslavia and beyond. This stunning literalisation of performance writing received relatively little attention from performance scholars. In one of the rare attempts to position it in relation to broader aesthetic phenomena, in his Fluxus-inflected 1970 book *Mixed Media*, which was, like *Rok*, an independent author's publication, Bora Ćosić described it as "bodywriting" (7). The bodies organised discursively are the bodies that are not writing or reading but are being written and given to be read. They conflate the text and performance, thus creating a vortex that resists the logic of the signifier while forming a particularly striking embodiment of writing. That does not mean that Rotar's and other similar works are invested in the disembodiment of writing.

The body is not inherently resistant to the power of the linguistic sign, and bodywriting is there to prove it. This textualisation of the body amounts to an empty form of performance writing. Its final outcome is not textuality generated by the bodies but precisely the opposite: a submission of performing bodies to signifying structures that are alien to them. It is a demonstration of the aestheticisation of the bodies that results in a "missing element", an empty space at the centre of the signifying structure that is identical to the one that Močnik identified in romantic poetry (and here, the close ties between the Romantic movement and a certain kind of mass performance is of utmost performance). Rotar's piece reverses this process by literalising and making visible that missing element at the centre of ideological representation. If bodywriting engages in a false performance writing, Rotar's text, deprived of the live presence of bodies, stages a performance of meaning through a dis-location of the ideological text. The *illocutionary* force of this movement constitutes its performance. Insofar as in it, the text performs independently of any potential of and the need for transmediation, Rotar's nameless text is an exemplary case of performance writing.

## 5. Postscript: On the New Generation of Generators

Little did I know that in early October of 2022, at the time when I presented an early version of this article at the *Amfiteater* symposium occasioned by the publication of Blaž Lukan's anthology *The Generator*, a whole new industry based on the idea of the generation of linguistic, visual, audio and code content was in the offing. The early signs were already there. That August, the news broke out that a game designer won a competition at the Colorado State Fair Fine Arts Competition for the work *Théâtre*

*D'opéra Spatial* produced with the help of AI image generator DALL-E. A few weeks after the Ljubljana symposium, OpenAI, the same startup that produced DALL-E, launched ChatGPT, a language generator of unprecedented power and efficiency. Far exceeding similar chatbots such as Siri and Alexa, ChatGPT demonstrated the capacity to produce undergraduate-level scholarly papers, poems, basic coding and even musical compositions. In the months after, the media was abuzz with reports from the AI frontiers. Like many other institutions of higher education, my university scrambled to come up with new policies that would prevent or even curtail cheating on final papers and exams (here, the irony being that the university where I work was instrumental in initiating and sustaining the digital industry known as Silicon Valley). The academic paper, as we know it, seems to be out the window. Unsurprisingly, I frequently thought of Močnik's *Generator* and new text-generating programmes in the past couple of months. Are we entering a structuralist utopia of self-generated, endlessly produced, authorless text? Is this how Baudry's *general writing* operates?

We are only in the first months of machine-generated textuality, and it is too early to offer definitive answers to these and many other questions. Still, some things are already discernable. Textual, image, video and sound-generating AI differs from *A Generator* and other conceptual art practices insofar as it works on the principle of surveying and sorting enormous amounts of data and not on the principle of permutation of a limited number of information units. Whereas the AI limits and excludes randomness, the goal of art practices I have examined here is to increase combinational range by foregrounding chance (yes, ChatGPT can write a poem in the style of Dada, but it does not know its purpose). Importantly, AI generators are mimetic machines: they excel in Alan Turing's "imitation game" but do not understand what animates anti-mimetic practices. Further, and no less important, is the fact that AI latches onto our need for meaning production: even content which is in itself nonsensical begins to emanate meaning in its encounter with the reader. The purpose of conceptual art and textual practices was to question this kind of automatism in meaning production. In that sense, AI is centripetal, which is to say, it gathers dispersed information into a single focal point of meaning, while, as we have seen, the aim of *A Generator* was to push against the conceptual boundaries of the text and, in doing so, de-centre meaning. It is centrifugal. AI does not do away with the idea of authorship; instead, it actualises the idea of the author-function to an unprecedented degree.

Being mimetic, AI generators are, as their early users observed, "people pleasers". They excel in answering questions by summarising the received ideas stored in gigabytes of online data they are canvassing. When it comes to critical inquiry, they are just clunky machines. In other words, they execute, but they do not perform. These new AI programmes appear as that empty, purely aesthetic centre of Greimas's diagram but expanded to unprecedented proportions. They are, essentially, ideological

machines. As such, they are closer to the lineage of those stadium spectacles than to the textual and artistic practices with which they bear only formal resemblance (think of Mitkovski's libretto and Rotar's visual poem/performance). One thing is for sure: at the moment of this writing, in March 2023, the question of "generating" any content (textual, visual, audio, video, etc.) is far more complex than it was when I began working on this article.



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