

The essay focuses on selected examples of the deconstruction of the opposition between representation and presentation, characteristic of post-mimetic art from the neo-avant-garde to the post-millennium. It discusses the authors who have been deconstructing the concept of drama and inventing new forms of redramatisation and post-dramatic intermediality from the 1960s to the present day. Despite persistently creating disruptions in the fictional textual cosmos, particular authors – such as Peter Handke in *Offending the Audience*, the group Pupilija Ferkeverk in *Pupilija, Papa Pupilo and the Pupilceks*, Dušan Jovanović in *Monument G* and *Play a Tumour in the Head and Air Pollution*, Milan Jesih in *Limits* and *The Bitter Fruits of Justice*, Matjaž Zupančič in *The Corridor* and other plays, Dragan Živadinov and his team in *Supremat* and other farewell rituals, Oliver Frlijić in *Damned be the Traitor of His Homeland*, Simona Semenič in *1981*, and Žiga Divjak and Katarina Morano in various projects – establish a strong process of redramatisation in their theatrical texts and performances. It is as if, alongside the deconstruction of drama, they inject dramatic and theatrical elements into the post-dramatic process of staging and writing. Thus, post-mimetic art coexists with pre-mimetic art, as this “stripping down” of the representativity of drama led to the establishment of fiction.

Keywords: contemporary Slovenian drama and theatre, Dušan Jovanović, Milan Jesih, Matjaž Zupančič, redramatisation, post-mimetic art

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Deconstructions of the Opposition Between Representation and Presentation from the Neo-avant-garde to the Post-millennium: From Pupilija, Jesih and Jovanović to Zupančič, Živadinov, Frljić, Semenič and Divjak

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I. Introduction: Towards the Text-Rhizome

In the paper,¹ we will consider how the desire to tell stories manifested itself in the period from the neo-avant-garde to the post-post-dramatic. We will examine what forms of re-dramatisation, re-figuration and re-characterisation of theatrical machines the contemporary performance paradigm is still producing. We will look at how authors are intensively reflecting on themselves, their texts, contexts and reception. In doing so, as authors-rhapsodists, they engage in a direct dialogue with their readers, spectators and future interpreters.

The authors and author groups we will discuss, who represent different theatre generations, can be considered undisputed carriers of the post-dramatic interplay between media. With their concepts, performances and texts, they prove that Slovenian playwriting and theatre, in the broadest sense of the word, have also ventured to dive into the waters that have been stirred up by moving away from absolute drama and the dramatic and by the fact that the intertext in various cases, from Dušan Jovanović and Milan Jesih to Matjaž Zupančič, Oliver Frljić and his author teams to Simona Semenič, Katarina Morano and Žiga Divjak, and Varja Hrvatin, structures contemporary (no longer) dramatic and theatre writing in a way that is non-hierarchical but at the same time extremely cohesive from an intertextual and intermedial point of view.

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We will examine how absolute drama, in which dialogue is a central construction component, has become merely one possible dramatic discourse in the corpora of performances and concepts and the responses to them. In this way, the traditionally understood physicality of the printed text in the form of a book has been replaced by a rhizomatic structure. Along with this deconstruction of the absolute, textual strategies have emerged within the textual in contemporary theatre that no longer include dialogue as a central principle of expression.

In the 1970s, authors such as Lado Kralj, Vlado Šav, Dušan Jovanović and Tomaž Kralj introduced systems of neo-avant-garde procedures into Slovenian performance practices, which were mainly taken from and developed according to Jerzy Grotowski and Richard Schechner. The above authors insisted on a particular processuality and participants' interaction. Thus, during the performative turn, the post-mimetic coexisted with the pre-mimetic, and this "stripping down" of the representativity of drama led to the establishment of fiction. Suddenly, we, the spectators, became witnesses to deconstructions of the opposition between representation and presentation. Let us recall *Pupilija*, *Spomenik G (Monument G)*, *Igrajte tumor v glavi in onesnaženje zraka (Play a Tumour in the Head and Air Pollution)*, *Limite (Limits)*, *Offending the Audience* and other projects up to Dragan Živadinov's 1990s farewell rituals at the turn from the 20th to the 21st century. The geography of these transformations and phenomena is very varied and rich.

The theatre and performance practices of the most influential artists since the performative turn from the 1960s to the 1970s have to be understood in the context of what Alain Badiou calls the century of riots, especially the second half of the 20th century, which was marked by tectonic shifts, with predictions of a move away from what, in his seminal work *Of Grammatology*, Derrida defined as logocentrism, the dominance of the visual and the ocularcentrism. The favouring of the gaze, which has caused playwriting to lose much of its stability but also to gain many new initiatives, has led not only to a redefinition but also to the end of the crisis of the dramatic author, which Antoine Vitez predicted in his famous statement from the 1970s, [...] o peut faire théâtre de tous" / "We can make theatre out of everything" (qtd. in Autant-Mathieu 13).

II. The Aesthetic Revolutions of Dušan Jovanović

Let us begin with Dušan Jovanović and the group Pupilija Ferkeverk with whom he closely collaborated. Jovanović began his career as a theatre critic for the student magazine *Tribuna* and as a playwright. He was undoubtedly influenced by the first wave of experimental theatre in Slovenia (Eksperimentalno gledališče, Oder 57, Gledališče Ad hoc) but was nevertheless very critical of its artistic tactics. He wanted something different, more radical. His first (and still unperformed) play had the very suggestive title *Predstave ne bo (There Will Be No Performance, 1962)*, suggesting

metatheatricity and political censorship. Furthermore, it took almost a decade to finally perform his second play, *Norci (The Madmen, 1963)*, in 1971. In the meantime, Jovanović concentrated on his theatre work as the director and founder of the newly founded ŠAG – Študentsko aktualno gledališče (Student Current Theatre), which created the first scandals thanks to its aesthetic mini-revolutions.

Despite all the differences, the “critical generation” of the Oder 57 experimental theatre and the new generation of Dusan Jovanović shared one key “victory”: they both removed the fourth wall and created a theatre space in which a strong interaction between the actors on stage and the participating audience happened, in the sense of Max Herrmann’s redefinition of theatre, which always emphasised the third paradigm, i.e., the spectator. When theatre began to understand the spectator as the third creator (e.g., Vsevolod Meyerhold), the one who completes in oneself what the stage merely suggests, it became politically dangerous.

Undoubtedly, this new perception of the performance as something that is not “a representation or expression of something which already exists elsewhere – like the text of a play – but as something which is brought forth by the actions, perceptions, responses of both actors and spectators alike” (Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre* 23) was a significant achievement of the first experimental theatres, particularly Oder 57, which had a profound influence on Dušan Jovanović and his generation when, in the 1970s, they instigated a new “aesthetic revolution”, namely, the performative turn in Slovenian theatre and performing arts.

Dušan Jovanović (along with Lado Kralj) was probably the most influential and central figure of the Slovenian neo-avant-garde theatre movement in the period of the late 1960s and 1970s when the theatre was dominated by a generation that broke cultural taboos. They understood politics in terms of the sexual revolution, but at the same time, crossed the strict boundaries of theatre and came close to the experience of happening and performance. This radical return of theatre to theatre in the vein of Antonin Artaud and his theatre of cruelty was a new aesthetic revolution, a political act that provoked a tumultuous response from audiences and critics alike.

Jovanović and his generation (Lado Kralj, Zvone Šedlbauer, Ivo Svetina, Milan Jesih, Iztok Tory ...) deliberately challenged the audience. The generation perceived the audience’s response and participation in the theatre as a political act in which the audience was to liberate itself together with the actors. It was only during this period of student movements and student theatres that the emphasis really shifted from the field of repertoire and text to the theatre medium itself, to its process of liberation, which (like the theatre of Schechner, Grotowski, Barba and others) opened up to the field of other artistic media and areas.

In 1968, Jovanović and the Pupiliya Ferkeverk Theatre broke the hegemonic language of drama theatre in order to “touch life” (Artaud 13) in their performance *Pupiliya, papa Pupilo pa Pupilčki* (*Pupiliya, Papa Pupilo and the Pupilceks*). Together with *Monument G* (1972), this extraordinary performance embodied a radical quest for theatre based on the awareness that the stage is a physical and real space that demands to be filled and allowed to speak the true authentic language of semiotic and phenomenal bodies in space and time. Or, to once again paraphrase Artaud in combination with Erika Fischer-Lichte’s terminology: Jovanović tried to invent the grammar of this new language that creates a unique “autopoietic feedback loop” (Fischer-Lichte) between performers and audience.

The 1970s led to a redefinition of the roles of the text and the audience and performers in experimental theatre with Jovanović’s play *Play a Tumour in the Head and Air Pollution* (1972), performed by the Celje City Theatre and directed by Ljubiša Ristić. According to Lado Kralj: “The subject of this script is the theatre itself in which the theatre’s organisation, creativity and, finally, its very essence comes into crisis” (“Slovenia” 772). In other words, Jovanović’s play focuses on the failure of the basic premises of the avant-garde theatre of the 1960s: the emphasis on process rather than result, the strong interaction between performers and audience in what Fischer-Lichte, in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance*, calls the autopoietic feedback loop, mystical catharsis, collective ecstasy, expanded consciousness and the replacement of textual language with body language and melodic, onomatopoeic sounds.

According to Dragan Klaić, *Play a Tumour* “shows with an anticipatory imagination the development of the avant-garde theatre of the sixties, the *cul-de-sac* of the utopian quest for togetherness, closeness, oneness” (“Utopianism” 127). This self-criticism can be interpreted as a radical, meta-literary, meta-theatrical and meta-artistic discourse, a self-criticism in relation to the fundamental premises of a liberated, neo-avant-garde, Artaudian and Schechnerian theatre, which Jovanović himself advocated and realised in *Pupiliya* and *Monument G*.

Jovanović had already dived into the waters of engaged drama and theatre, which rejected all traditionalism and even ideology, in the 1960s with his *The Madmen*. A decade later, he took up this idea and combined it with the (self-)critique and (self-)irony of the performative turn of happenings and neo-avant-garde performance in his work *Play a Tumour*. He created “a dramatic postscript to the 1960s and to their characteristic brand of theatre, written before the era was in fact truly over or before we could notice that it was over and with what kind of an outcome” (Klaić, “Utopianism” 128). In doing so, he underlined the seriousness of the crisis of representation and the dramatist on the one hand and the dynamics of the ups and downs of radical theatrical practices of the second half of the 20th century, which were directly linked to and correlated with these crises, on the other.

According to his contemporary and colleague, theorist and art historian Lado Kralj, Jovanović “writes from an explicitly theatrical perspective” (“Slovenia” 772), “many of his plays oscillate between the grotesque irony of the theatre of the absurd and Brechtian docu-drama” (“Goli otok literature” 253), starting with his blasphemous second play, *The Madmen*.

The history of what was later called the political theatre of the 1980s, however, continued and reached a new peak in 1975 when the two generations joined forces: Dominik Smole, a representative of the critical generation of Oder 57, and Dušan Jovanović, a representative of the performative revolution of Pupilia Ferkeverk. The two came together to create *Žrtve mode bum-bum* (*Victims of the Bang-Bang Fashion*), a performance that became a turning point for the Mladinsko Theatre and Slovenian contemporary theatre in general. After Jovanović’s necessary directorial accents in the Glej Theatre, especially *Monument G*, and the simultaneous post-dramatic accents in the Pekarna Theatre’s productions (Dane Zajc’s *Potohodec* (*The Pathwalker*) directed by Lado Kralj; Svetina’s *Gilgamesh*; Ristič’s *Tako, tako* (*So, so*)), a completely new principle of work was established with the *Victims*, also within the “repertory” theatre: Jovanović’s text was used as a script, the performance was constructed in a non-literary way. It was Dominik Smole who gave the initiative.



Dušan Jovanović, *Victims of the Bang-Bang Fashion*, 1975, the Mladinsko Theatre, photo by Tone Stojko, SMG archive, in the photo: Milena Grm, Milojka Šuklje, Vladimir Jurc, Jože Mraz, Sandi Pavlin

Victims of the Bang-Bang Fashion was a proper aesthetic and ethical shock, an aesthetic revolution that transformed politicised art and politicised theatre into an explosive body that built a new form of engaged theatre in the context of self-managed socialism, which still believed that the essential effects of the classical forms of political theatre of Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht and the Russian avant-garde, could be achieved (albeit in a way different from that of the previous generation, namely, Oder 57).

Jovanović's theatre in the second half of the 1970s, a period that begins precisely with *Victims*, emerged after the aesthetic revolutions of performance art in the 1960s and 1970s. Already in its very textual conception, which originated as the work of a Barthesian scriptor, it combined literature and spectacle, political engagement and theatrical experiment, a revolution of thought and form. It recorded and staged incursions of the real, the points at which the movement of art as the production of its own truth takes place. Staged as the opening performance of the new season, *Victims* had the impact of an aesthetic and ideological bomb.

Jovanović's engaged theatre used and exploited the political and the revolutionary in the best possible meaning. This theatrically compelling spectacle combined the grotesque, irony and tragic seriousness with the purest poetry. It used and exploited political and revolutionary ideology, establishing various paratactic relations, which had a cathartic effect on the audience. It deliberately engaged in the play of truth and appearance, fiction and reality, of actors, protagonists, spectators, of everyone and everybody, in the very creative process of work on the performance and in the unrepeatable acts of reception of each performance. His writing and performance emerged from the emancipated ideological context of the 1960s but in a more sober version, creating a distance from it while retaining the dynamism and desire for change that the student movements brought. They also framed it in the eternal repetition of wars and the omnipresence of the military apparatus in the modern world.

It is thus hardly surprising that not everyone was enthusiastic about the performance since it was too controversial, both aesthetically and ideologically, for the "orthodox" adherents of drama theatre and socialist self-management. However, despite the stir it caused in Slovenian politics, the play was also successful abroad, for example, at the famous Theatre of Nations festival in Nancy, France, receiving great praise from international critics. The performance reached its theatrical and thematic climax when, during a fascist march, amid silent flashes of gunshots and barbed wire, women holding children in their arms were falling while shouting out slogans of liberation; and in the following scene, when women, the people searching for their fallen loved ones, bring not uniforms this time but parts of their own clothes and dress their children, the people's army, in the partisan folk clothes – which grew into a powerful symbol of the resurrection of the people's eternal heroes – and when these people speak in the

verses of Prešeren's "Zdravljica" ("A Toast") in a substantial, non-declamatory way. Both the text and the performance featuring excellent actors were an exceptional theatre event, a highly professional perfection of the actors' mental and physical efforts.

Following the aesthetic revolutions in the areas of performance and (no longer) dramatic texts, Jovanović played a key role in Yugoslav political theatre with his plays *Osvoboditev Skopja* (*The Liberation of Skopje*, 1978) and *Karamazovi* (*The Karamazovs*, 1980), which broke socialist taboos and opened up dramatic procedures to an unusual mix of realism and metafiction. In the first piece, all the events of World War II and the family tragedy are depicted through the eyes of a six-year-old boy, which opens up a highly subjective and non-ideological interpretation of political events. *The Karamazovs*, on the other hand, opened up the taboo subject of the Yugoslav communist concentration camp on an Adriatic island – a feature of Tito's break with Stalin and the Soviet Union in 1948 – where many Soviet-educated communists were murdered under the cover of a strict system of re-education. In order to open up this topic, he enters into a dialogue with Dostoyevsky and his famous novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, which allows for a dramatic portrayal of the generation gap between a father and his three sons.

He further developed his post-Brechtian technique in the plays he wrote during and shortly after the war in former Yugoslavia. In 1993, he wrote a very personal version of *Antigone*, influenced by the war in Yugoslavia, which was still going on at the time of writing. If he consciously entered into a dialogue with Dostoevsky in order to write about "dark" and paradoxical events in Yugoslavia's history, he chose the Greek myth in order to distance himself from the actual banality of war, or rather, to show how the mythical structure of Greek tragedy had also become something completely banal and predictable at the end of the 20th century. As Dragan Klaić explains:

The hatred was transformed into a blind, almost visceral passion with no evident cause and purpose. In Jovanović's *Thebes* the violence had become so pervasive that it had imposed its own construction of the reality, which was in turn internalised by all those affected. It had become transgenerational and only some intervention from outside the system could break the spell. That should be the role of the deities but in Jovanović's play they remain in the background as a source of evil, refusing to assume the role of either arbiter or rescuer. [...] even *Antigone's* space for resistance becomes extremely narrowed, almost non-existent ("The Crisis of Theatre" 151).

In his second play dedicated to the violence in former Yugoslavia, Jovanović began a metatheatrical dialogue with Brecht and his play *Mother Courage and Her Children*. In *Uganka Korajže* (*The Puzzle of Courage*, 1994), Jovanović also consciously confronted Brecht's system of epic theatre and its specific no longer dramatic procedures regarding stage space. He transformed the convention of epic theatre space in an original

way based on the *play of the landscape*, in which the psychological states of the protagonists and their tiny micro-stories are echoed.

During the war in Yugoslavia, he also wrote the third part of his Balkan trilogy, *Kdo to poje Sizifa* (*Who's Singing Sisyphus*), using what he described as a dialogue with dramatic form dealing with archetypal situations. He consciously chose to deconstruct and reconstruct classical ancient and modern plays and myths: Antigone, Sisyphus and Mother Courage.

His last major play, *Razodetja* (*Revelation*, 2009), is also a genre hybrid of tightly and densely interwoven thoughts, self-quotes from *The Karamazovs* and some of his other plays, contaminated with today's jargon of authenticity (in the Adornian sense). Jovanović's plays written in the 21st century are the result of his revolt against the world of Neoliberalism, against the telecracy of a globalised world in which writing can no longer produce its own difference. This is why these works often bring to mind the dramatic and theoretical universes of Peter Handke, Heiner Müller or Richard Foreman. Each of his new plays brings a new, alternative attempt to think about theatre and art. Jovanović was convinced that after Shakespeare, we could no longer speak of any new, specific authorial forms, that there are only two great dramatic forms: Noh theatre and Greek tragedy. He sees the contemporary author as a ploughwright (using the term introduced by his Macedonian colleague Goran Stefanovski): "I don't write, I build plays" (Jovanović, "Muke z vojno" 4).

III. Milan Jesih: The Untold Subversive on the Trail of New Writing for the Theatre of the New Age

Parallel to Jovanović's aesthetic revolutions in the field of drama and theatre were the no less radical attempts by Milan Jesih, with whom he collaborated in Pupilija, even though later, their theatre paths led them in different directions. It was Jesih who, while building his early plays, was also building a new theatre. Thus, Jesih's significance and role in the deconstruction of playwriting, and even more so his role in the deconstruction of the so-called literary or drama theatre and the realisation of the performative turn at the break from the 1960s to the 1970s, have remained virtually unexplored to this day. This statement may seem paradoxical, but after a short reflection, we will see it is plausible. Jesih's "no longer dramatic writing" (a term coined by Gerda Poschmann, the German theorist of performance practices, which seems very appropriate here) has remained completely in the background, virtually unused, during the last few decades of the so-called post-dramatic theatre boom, which is unusual, given its proximity to the post-dramatic practices of the time.

We have almost forgotten how his early texts enact the non-dramatic weavings of dialogical flows at different levels. These re-appropriated and deconstructed dialogic forms of drama produce a polyphonic discourse of language surfaces, which – like in the case of Heiner Müller, Peter Handke or Elfriede Jelinek – is characterised by a Bakhtinian dialogism. The emerging polylogical form results from quotations that form extreme and sometimes even undecipherable collages. These collages, however – unlike the hermetic German parallels we mentioned above – do not construct an intellectualist labyrinth but a labyrinth of everyday life in all the ridiculousness of its psychopathologies and linguistic forms and automatisms.

Like Handke, Jesih peels away meaning from language to underline the present-day forms of linguistic alienation. People who are alienated from their language and speech are also alienated from the world:

D: What else would a human being lack?

J: Nothing in the world.

D: Nothing.

J: Nothing.

D: Nothing.

J: Nothing?

D: Nothing, I said.

J: What d'you mean: nothing?

D: Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!

J: You say nothing, sweetheart?

D: Leave me alone!

(Jesih, *Grenki* 24)

Jesih's texts undermine the basic absolutes of drama: dialogue, characters and dramatic structure. At first glance, these blocks of rapidly alternating quasi-dialogues seem to emerge as *text-reactors* that produce themselves, while the writer or (rather) the Barthesian sriptor merely observes them (Jelinek, *In den Alpen* 254). There is no plot, no action, no logic in the unfolding of events and dialogues, no side-text, merely an extreme multiplication of persons and a tornado of sets of words. *The Bitter Fruits of Justice* systematically undermines all dramaturgical categories. Andrej Inkret wrote about the play that it “‘nonchalantly’, as it were ‘in one fell swoop’, turns away from everything that we have hitherto imagined under the category of drama; nevertheless (or is it precisely because of this?) they have proved to be theatrically extremely effective [...]” (Inkret, “Igra z jezikom” 8).

This theatricality, however, does not manifest itself through plot, action and dialogue but emerges from the specific juxtaposition of words. Veno Taufer draws attention to the fact that Jesih hypertrophies and multiplies the rules of classical dramatic structure:

Instead of unity of space, time and action, we are dealing with 33 different scenes in which 140 speaking figures appear in situations that, in a breakneck rhythm of daring collages and transitions between different spaces and times, between different genders of the speakers, draw out a range of scenes “in the most varied motivic combinations of normative values ranging from beauty to death, to betrayal, to love, to longing, to love of one’s homeland [...]”. (Taufer, *Odrom ob rob* 166)

Jesih also plays around with the concept of the *dramatis personae*, which he disperses into 140 roles, to which he dedicates the one and only stage direction in the play: “The gender and case of the actors are not determined, but it is to be desired that their souls be broad and bright slopes, for the sun is the patron of life and its watchful shepherd” (Jesih, *Grenki* 6).



Milan Jesih: *The Bitter Fruits of Justice*, directed by Zvone Šedlbauer, EG Glej, 1974, SLOGI Iconotheque, in the photo: Božo Šprajc, Ivo Ban, Marko Simčič, Metoda Zorčič

In *The Bitter Fruits*, Jesih is on the trail of new writing for the theatre of the new age, combining innovation in form and political engagement in content. He dismantles and subverts the concept of dramatic representation and constructs an autonomy

of language where language is no longer subject to dramatic form. While in his play *The Pathwalker*, Dane Zajc radically dissected contemporary ethics in a Beckettian manner and, at the same time, almost completely dismantled the remnants of classical dramatic structure, without undermining the power of the language of poetry, in *The Bitter Fruits of Justice*, Milan Jesih – as Lado Kralj points out – really radically and definitively adopted the absurdist principle of the disintegration of language and reinterpreted it into a total play of language, which, with its non-commitment, already exceeds the horizon of metaphysical nihilism (Kralj, “Sodobna” 107).

The characters in his play (similar to those of Jelinek, but much more artistic and musical) also appear to be oversized linguistic machines. They are constantly talking and talking about everything, continuously blurting out realities that a psychologically correct figure could never utter. Jesih’s theatrical texts choose different ways of bypassing established dramatic forms. Thus, it becomes very problematic to use classical notions of drama theory, e.g., *dramatis personae*, dialogue, monologue, primary text and secondary text, to analyse such texts. At the same time, what we are dealing with here is implicit theatricality rather than explicit. Thus (for example, in the case of the drama of the absurd, early Handke, Heiner Müller, etc.), we witness a *theatre of voices* that replaces the *dramatis personae*: “Language battles against its content, which is being put on like a garment (and not the other way round!), a content that is part of fashion” (Jelinek, “Brecht aus der Mode”).

Thus Venko Taufer in a critical note on the première of Jesih’s second play, *The Bitter Fruits of Justice*, to which the poet mischievously (and politically provocatively, since it was during the “lead” 1970s when the system would not allow for any interpellations in the sense of multi-party democracy, but at the same time paratactically) attached the genre subtitle “An Interpellation in One Nonchalant Swoop”, draws attention to the fact that in his theatrical piece the author “has made a good and convincing enough claim of the part of modern literature which is discovering that language has a life of its own, that it presupposes its own autonomous reality and expresses itself as its own content” (Taufer, *Odrom* 166).

What we are witnessing here is the emergence of extremely dense language surfaces which, like geysers, spew forth a mass of sound material in which it is no longer clear for which signifieds all these chains of signifiers are intended. Jesih’s textual practice in *The Bitter Fruits* thus represents a liberation from the model Brecht designated as Aristotelian theatre. In turn, it represents a basis for devising new models of theatre beyond drama, close to what Brecht called the non-Aristotelian Theatre, or Artaud’s theatre of cruelty. The means of liberation here is language. His tactic in *The Bitter Fruits* as well as, for example, in his *Limits* (1973), *Brucka ali obdobje prilaganja* (*The Fresher or the Adjustment Period*, 1976) or *Triko* (*Leotard*, 1985), is to play on the

triviality of language. Dramatic figures in crisis, whom Jesih the scriptor labels with post-Beckettian names like Jemavec, Dajavec, Grbavec, Gobavec (Taker, Giver, Humpback, Leper), move in a breakneck fashion across different space-times in a chain of miniature scenes based on parody and wordplay. In Jesih's case, the play's text is thus not created with the intention of embodying mimesis. The pace is fast, the action is mechanised, and representation is constantly undermined by ironic commentary and defamiliarisation. Like in Ionesco's work, Jesih's language is worn out, irremediably contaminated with triviality.

Jesih thus constructs a no longer dramatic theatre text that dismantles all tradition and metaphysics while at the same time reifying language as a series of signifiers without signifieds. In this, he applies the tactic of pastiche and quotative appropriation and, at the same time, an ironic refurbishing of mainly linguistic corpora and modalities from the tradition, e.g., the storytelling of the first half of the 19th century, the creation of an artificial palimpsestic antique language mixed up with everyday speech, with pub and street slang, political and philosophical jargon, etc.:

LEPER: Give me of your meal, good shepherd, for I am hungry and thirsty!

HUNCHBACK: My father, Telefunken of Massachusetts, has given the food I have with me for me alone. And what's mine will remain mine, remember that, you vagabond stranger.

LEPER: And how should I reward you for that?

HUNCHBACK: I deserve that my cattle die in a terrible plague, to have my noble name taken away by my father in Massachusetts, to be cursed by my mother in Finland, and to be left alone and outcast, loathed even by the wretched winds of the mountains.

TAKER: Give me of your meal, golden-hearted shepherd!

HUNCHBACK: I will not. What is mine is mine, and is of no concern to you. What I have brought to the mountain, I will eat.

TAKER: And what reward do you get for that?

HUNCHBACK: It would be just if my cattle died, if I went blind, and if my pregnant wife down in the valley gave birth to a goat.

GIVER: Give me of your little ration, shepherd!

HUNCHBACK: Sit down! And I will pour thee wine, which I keep for guests, and sometimes for a feast. The meal is meagre, but tasty: see me, how healthy I am with it!

(Jesih, *Grenki* 28–29)

In *The Bitter Fruits of Justice*, Jesih introduces a special, no longer dramatic tactic of dramaturgy of quick transitions between scenes. The persons, marked with abstract labels, not attached to any dramatic characters, function as a substitute for dramatic characters, passing almost imperceptibly from one speaking position to another. The changes of position are arbitrary and associative, just like the changes of location of the (no longer) dramatic action are arbitrary and associative. By making language the

“protagonist” of his drama, Jesih (like his French colleague Valère Novarina) abolishes any duality between text and performance. It is the word itself that becomes the spectacle; it creates the structure of the text and the performance. Thus, with *The Bitter Fruits*, (no longer) drama in its Slovenian version reaches its extreme, the point from which only a return to the elements of the dramatic or post-dramatic is possible.

IV. Plough-Wright Matjaž Zupančič

One of the best descriptions of Matjaž Zupančič’s theatre work could be summed up in the two-word phrase coined by Stefanovski: *plough-wright*. The theatre director and playwright, who studied theatre directing and dramaturgy in Ljubljana and London, became director of the Glej Experimental Theatre in the 1980s and continued his career as a playwright, theatre director and professor at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana. As the author of more than 50 theatre productions, he began writing (no longer) dramatic plays in the late 1980s and soon became one of the key contemporary Slovenian playwrights, winning several Slavko Grum Awards for the best new Slovenian drama and becoming the most performed Slovenian playwright in Europe and beyond. He has received numerous awards for his plays which are now close to twenty in number.

In his plays, he establishes a dialogue with Lacanian psychoanalysis, revealing games of sliding signifiers and new versions of the desire of the Other, signifying a radical otherness, an otherness that transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary. In his early plays, written in the 1990s, he uses and appropriates the nature of various genres, including the underground culture of thrillers, which is suggested in the very titles of his plays: *Izganjalci hudiča* (*The Exorcists*, 1991), *Slastni mrlič* (*The Delicious Corpse*, 1992), *Nemir* (*Restlessness*, 1998) or *Ubijalci muh* (*The Fly Killers*, 2000). Matjaž Zupančič’s plays take place in in-between spaces, in reception areas and corridors, where people are constantly moving, coming and going in a mysterious chain of events.

Zupančič likes to play with different dramatic techniques and styles, from hyperrealism to mystery and thriller, from the direct depiction of reality to the absurd and the strangely poetic. In his black comedy *Bolje tič v roki kot tat na strehi* (*A Dick in the Hand is Worth Two Thieves in the Bush*) (2004), in a style in which Monty Python meets Harold Pinter, the characters act like robots, producing a series of repetitions that end in a strange sense of black comedy, using the vocabulary of psychiatry and neurology. In his play *Padec Evrope* (*The Fall of Europe*, 2011), he comments on and reveals the background of contemporary society after the turn of the millennium. In a small local hotel on the outskirts, significantly named Europe, they are having a private party where the local jet set is telling dirty jokes and making business deals.

However, when the rather drunken party company begins to break up, a proper global revolt takes place outside, with demonstrations and riots. The police close off all the entrances to the city, all roads are blocked, and cars are burning. In this desperate situation, the mendacity of the local elite is revealed. With his sarcastic black humour, Zupančič reveals the grotesque reality of the modern world and the crisis of ethics in today's society, be it in Europe or anywhere else.

Zupančič distils a particular condensation of metatheatrical commentary and hyperrealism of the Debordian society of the spectacle in an unusual and radical drama-essay on the contemporary mediated civilisation of reality shows and simulacra, his most (post-)dramatically or mediated play, *Hodnik (The Corridor, 2003)*. Zupančič deliberately chooses live performance, namely theatre, as a medium to comment on and deconstruct a currently highly exposed form of media, namely reality television. Guillermo Gómez-Peña's statement could illustrate Zupančič's starting point: "And each metier, language, genre and/or format demands a different set of strategies and methodologies" (73). Here he uses "pure theatre" as the appropriate medium, deliberately avoiding the intermedial means of today's theatre and staging a corridor of the ubiquity of reality television images, the very space of media violence in the age of humanitarian impotence.

This way, he reveals the problem of a subject with fictitious freedom that is presented as an illusion of interactivity, openness for collaboration and dialogue, which is reinforced by the electronic media of television. Zupančič stages a reality that he interprets as an image of Auslander's universe of television, which "enabled television to colonize liveness, the one aspect of the theatrical presentation that film could not replicate" (Auslander 13). The playwright is fully aware of the problematic fact that theatre has evolved into an imitation of media discourses and that the taste of today's public is being shaped by television, which has become the model and telos of theatre. Capital is no longer interested in the economy of the representation of live performance. Instead, it is intensely focused on the economy of media representation, which presents itself as a representation of reality in the here and now.

Matjaž Zupančič also derives from the fact that (as Auslander points out) "what we are seeing in many cases is not so much the incursion of media-derived 'technics' and techniques into the context of live performance but, rather, live performance's absorption of a media derived epistemology" (37). Despite that, Zupančič opts for a live performance, more specifically theatre, which "in the economy of repetition, live performance is little more than a vestigial remnant of the previous historical order of representation, a hold-over that can claim little in the way of cultural presence or power" (46). Being conscious of the fact that our concept of proximity and intimacy is rooted in the horizon of television, he uses this concept and the symbolic power

of television as a medium that enjoys a greater cultural presence and prestige than theatre in order to intrigue viewers and to put them in a state of awareness about the television's manipulateness and its "electronic noise", which presents itself as a reality more real than that of the live performance.

The question posed by *The Corridor*, and to a large extent by most of Zupančič's plays, is, therefore, the key question that Auslander is continually repeating and answering in his excellent book *Liveness*: Does a performance have its own ontology that is more honest than television re-enactments? The answer to this question is no. Moreover, Zupančič's play and the performance, which he also directed by himself, raise the crucial question of the possibility of subverting reality television in live performance.

Thus, while talking about Big Brother, *The Corridor* uses exclusively theatrical media to open up a picture of the deterritorialised ethics of the postmodern world and its cybernetic models of organising reality, of the real that is electronically produced out of matrices and memory banks, collapsing into a black hole produced by the media. In this way, he shows that (as Debord would say), even in theatre, the spectacle is today "both the result and the project of the present mode of production", it is "the heart of this real society's unreality" (6).

V. Živadinov and the Farewell Ritual to the NSK Supremat

The story of the deconstructions of the opposition between representation and presentation, characteristic of the post-mimetic, can also be detected in Dragan Živadinov's farewell rituals in his post-post-retro-garde phase. The object of our research will be *Supremat*, subtitled *The Farewell Ritual to Neue Slowenische Kunst and NSK* (produced by Živadinov in collaboration with the creative team of the costume designer Dunja Zupančič, dramaturg Jana Pavlič and choreographer Marko Mlačnik), which premièred in November 2002 at the Mladinsko Theatre. The performance was part of the complex preparatory procedure of his great utopian project *1:1*, which started in 1995. The title obviously refers to Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism, while the subtitle refers to the Slovenian retro- or trans-avant-garde movement of the 1980s and 1990s, to which Živadinov belonged. *Supremat* was conceived as a new personalised farewell ritual of the director from both the Russian historical avant-garde and the Slovenian neo-avant-garde. The performance uses the technique of pastiche and recycling of themes and styles in a new context.

Inspired by the 1986 play *Futurists* by the English author Dusty Hughes, *Supremat* focuses on the first poet to become a victim of post-revolutionary Russia, Nikolai Gumilev, a pioneer of the so-called Acmeist movement. By reintegrating the historical moments

from 1921 Saint Petersburg, the performance captures the very moment of the essential conflict between the avant-garde art and the political avant-garde and the very beginning of the process of exterminating the former in the development of the latter in the aftermath of the (Soviet) Revolution. The script of the performance, characterised by palimpsest, pastiche and appropriation techniques, can be read as a post-dramatic *opera aperta*, interweaving and combining fragments and paraphrases of Russian poetry of the time (Mayakovsky, Akhmatova, Gumilev, Blok ...) with the memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam, transformed by deconstructive interventions.



Dragan Živadinov: *Supremat*, the Mladinsko Theatre, 2002, photo by Miha Fras, in the photo: Romana Šalehar (Ana Andrejevna Akhmatova) and Olga Kacjan (Ana Andrejevna Akhmatova)

Supremat is also characterised by highly personalised and individualised appropriations of particular avant-garde and neo-avant-garde works, concepts and thoughts. First and foremost, there is the quotation of the FLUXUS table tennis and its rackets with a hole in the middle. It is an appropriation and a retro-citation of the famous neo-avant-garde “Fluxfest” sports. Specifically, the games played at Douglass College in New Jersey in February 1970. *Supremat* uses table tennis rackets with holes as the central visual symbol, coupled with the appropriation of Meyerhold’s biomechanical movements performed by the protagonists of the performers, all portraying the representatives of Russian art in 1921.

In *Supremat*, Živadinov emphasises the use of specific “ingredients”, so characteristic of his art, even more pointedly than in other performances. This time it is the PRIL dishwashing liquid, which is, of course, a reference to Joseph Beuys and his use of honey, felt and fat in the 1960s. The phrase “Art is only a temporary religion!” from the performance recalls and paraphrases Duchamp’s famous statement about art: “I don’t believe in it with all the mystical trimmings. As a drug, it’s probably very useful for many people, very sedative, but as a religion, it’s not even as good as God”.

The performance combines decontextualisation and recontextualisation of great, utopian inquiries into art. It fragments, deconstructs and appropriates them for its own use within the global world of post-dramatic and post-theatrical exchange. The de-hierarchised use of signs deliberately applies the concepts of simultaneity, plays with the density of signs, musicalisation, the specificity of visual dramaturgy and the intrusion of the real. In this way, it undermines the core of theatre as imitation (mimesis) but also the notion of logocentrism, which can be understood as the basic legacy of the concept of drama theatre.

VI. Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Representation: Divjak/Morano – Frljić – Semenič

In the end, let us take the liberty of jumping to the present. After the many transformations brought about by the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, the performance practices of the new millennium appear to be returning to some of the postulates of experimental theatre and its deconstructions of representation, but also to the desire for different, collaborative and documentary approaches to the material.

Take, for example, Žiga Divjak and Katarina Morano. The duo could be considered to belong to the group of authors who use various forms of theatrical tactics in order to achieve desired effects on the spectator or reader, including directors such as Oliver Frljić, Nina Rajič Kranjac, Borut Šeparović, Janez Janša, Simona Semenič, Sebastijan Horvat, Jernej Lorenci ... Divjak and Morano question the structure of today’s society and the role of the individual in it. In their projects, they construct their own version of verbatim theatre, drawing, among other things, from the projects by Janez Janša (especially his performance *Slovensko narodno gledališče (Slovene National Theatre)*) and Oliver Frljić (especially his performance *25.671* about the erased citizens of Slovenia). In this, they apply the procedures of verbatim theatre but also draw on Brecht’s learning plays and Augusto Boal’s principles of the Theatre of the Oppressed.

The genres of documentary performance and verbatim theatre were also consistently and radically explored by Oliver Frljić in his performance about the erased entitled *25.671*

(Prešeren Theatre Kranj, 2013), based on real-life events and documents, which he intertwined with fiction and, in a way, even with quasi-documentary material and meta-theatrical essay for good measure. In this way, the performance radically questioned the status of the privileged witness that documentary and verbatim theatre sometimes too easily take on. In the Slovenian context, Oliver Frlić is the director who was never content with the basic form of verbatim theatre but has continually combined it with other genres, most notably the theatrical essay.

In their performance entitled *6*, Divjak and Morano also applied the classic procedures from this type of theatre, transcribing interviews, collaging them and composing the text of the performance. The editing is done by reducing large amounts of collected material and transforming it into the authorial outline of a theatre text. The working template of the text is created through rehearsals and is always subject to change. Divjak and Morano maintain the roles of actor, director, writer and other creators in the process but make them fluid, interchangeable and flexible. Creation is both individual and collective at the same time; the writer or Barthesian scriptor is not separated from other creators. They are not singular but rather part of the process. However, they participate in it primarily as the editor of the text, not so much as a playwright.

Divjak and Morano produce their texts in different ways. The post-dramatic documentary treatment of Cankar's *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* (*The Bailiff Jernej and His Rights*) was the result of research into the true stories of workers devoid of rights. The performance follows contemporary real-life Jernejs as the creators found them in the field through visits to companies, associations, the coastal trade union confederation KS 90 and the Workers' Advice Centre. Through documentary material, we learn about the testimonies of workers at the Port of Koper, cleaners from cleaning services, construction workers, truck and van drivers, nurses and precarious architecture students in architectural firms. This results in deliberately rough material, interpreted and narrated by actors in the rhythm of working behind a conveyor belt. There is nothing spectacular about the editing or the staging tactics; the performance draws the spectators on the principle of less is more. Without noticing, they become witnesses and, at the same time, give testimony to the precariousness.

The project *6* was conceived by the dramaturg-director team in collaboration with the actors (Iztok Drabik Jug, Alja Kapun, Katarina Stegnar, Vito Weis and Gregor Zorc) and collaboratively explored the lack of tolerances in real-life events that occurred at the Kranj Student Residence in February 2016. The story was that the headmaster of the hostel decided to take in six unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors in an empty and unused wing of the student section of the hostel. The creative team was interested in the conflict between a part of the staff at the boarding school, "who basically support the idea that a fellow person should be helped, that children should be accommo-

dated in this hostel as, ultimately, this hostel was built to host minors who are being educated outside their place of [...] birth. And then, because of the pressure of the surroundings, they begin to question somewhat [...] this basic belief that they have to help” (Pograjc). The team collaborated with the investigative journalist Maja Ava Žiberna and the headmaster of the hostel Judita Nahtigal and produced documentary material based on research. The research, which lasted about four months, was part of a creative process in which they tried to get in touch with these minors in the field, widening the scope of their inquiry to include student hostels in Nova Gorica and Postojna. During the process, documentary materials began to be combined with fictional ones, based on authentic documents but derived from the actors’ imagination and improvisations. The result was a script and a performance in which acting and non-acting are constantly interchanged.



Žiga Divjak: 6, the Mladinsko Theatre, 2018, photo Matej Povše, SMG Archive

From the above, it should be clear that, in their performance 6, Divjak and Morano do not establish a pure form of verbatim theatre (similarly to Oliver Frljić in his performances 25.671 about the erased or *Our Violence and Your Violence*). It is a case of typical collaborative theatre with certain elements or features of the procedures from the Theatre of the Oppressed. Thus, their theatre structures a particular, no longer dramatic, matrix, with bold interweavings of documentary and fiction that at times make the latter more convincing than reality and the former more surreal than fiction. In do-

ing so, again, just like Frljić, they use the metatheatrical discourse that they weave into their performance-essays to comment on the social positioning of their performance, the conditions of its production and its possible political effects. At the same time, they consistently embody the basic definition of documentary theatre, as proposed by Peter Weiss in his paper “Notizen zum dokumentarischen Theater”: “Documentary theatre avoids any invention, it uses authentic materials, which are then – in a slightly reworked form, but unchanged in content – shown again on stage” (293–94).

To conclude, let us mention Simona Semenič as an example of experimental writing for the theatre at this time. She is interested in radical inversions of the dramatic and the post-dramatic in her plays-scripts. In Semenič’s work, we are exposed to the deconstruction of the opposition between representation and presentation, typical of the post-mimetic. Even though the author persistently creates disruptions in the fictional textual cosmos, the play nevertheless establishes a powerful process of re-dramatisation, creating intense plots and denouements. It is as if, at the same time, as deconstructing the dramatic, the drama and the dramatic are injected into the post-dramatic fabric of her plays. The post-mimetic thus coexists with the pre-mimetic; the “stripping down” of drama leads to the establishment of fiction.

In her plays, e.g., *tisočdevetsto enainosemdeset* (1981), Semenič problematises her own medium and the status of the author, the work and the reader or spectator, creating the hypertrophy of the process of creation itself. The thematisation and simultaneous self-reflexivity and self-irony of the status of the author produce a parallel problematisation of the ontological status of art and, at the same time, of reality itself. She is interested in what lies behind appearances and appearances of appearances. Her deconstruction of the dramatic and the fictional produces a specific post-Brechtian critique of the real. She reworks the dialogic form in conjunction with a variety of diverse textual strategies: from stage directions to descriptions closer to novels and fiction, narrative, essayistic, theoretical and other techniques that remind the audience that what they are reading or watching is no longer a real dialogue. However, in doing so, it produces distinctly dramatic effects, which Birgit Haas would probably call “dramatic drama” (Haas 45).

VII. Conclusion: Traces of the Experiments and Tectonic Shifts of the 1970s and 1980s

Based on past and contemporary examples, we have drawn a map of the practices of authorial theatre that Badiou *In Praise of Theatre* calls general oscillations. The spectator has to decide whether to surrender to this void and participate in an endless process. One is not called upon to enjoy but rather to think. The examples and

tactics we have touched upon show how performance practices in the 20th century, alongside other live arts and literature, were subjected to the consequences of what Mladen Dolar designates as “a century of gradual and catastrophically increasing mediatisation, when the media virtually covered and virtualised the very notion of reality, clothed it in images and completely veiled it so that the crisis of representation has never been greater” (“Gledališče ideje” 118). Thus, in the 21st century, we find ourselves in the midst of a period that Badiou, in a remarkably precise conversation with Nicolas Truong in his book *In Praise of Theatre*, defines with the syntagm “particularly confused times”, when the feeling of being completely devoid of ideas seems to have prevailed. “This contemporary confusion is that of a profound nihilism, which not only declares that ideas have disappeared, but adds that one can very well make do with this absence by living in a pure present, which doesn’t at all raise the problem of a reconciliation between immanence and transcendence” (Badiou, *In Praise of Theatre* 64). And according to Badiou, one of the essential tasks of theatre in this period of confusion is to “show the confusion as *confusion*” (64).

Thus today, we can undoubtedly detect traces of the experiments and tectonic shifts of the 1970s and 1980s. Performance and text are being re-situated and questioned by different types of post-dramatic theatricality. Theatre is moving away from the notion of the dramatic while society is becoming increasingly dramatised. In the last ten years or so, two major trends have emerged on European stages, which can be seen as a legacy of post-dramatic theatre. The first type is “stage writing”, as defined by the philosopher and theatre critic Bruno Tackels and embodied, for example, by Simona Semenič, Milena Marković and Anja Hilling. This stage writing (which is not exclusively of the textual type) repositions the text as the central focus of the creative process. The second type, embodied by Frlić, Divjak, Milo Rau and others, uses writings as matrices, which can be either visual, choreographic or transdisciplinary. The function of writing, as well as potential narration, is here either taken over by directing in the broader sense of the word, with all the means used in a performance, or it becomes a devising or collaborative creation that abolishes the hierarchical and guild-like divisions between acting, directing, playwriting and other segments of creation.

Regardless of the tentative division sketched above, all the forms that emerge from the post-dramatic, very radically question representation, the spectator’s belief in the existence of a parallel world outside our own and the notion of mimesis itself. This questioning of the conventional contract between actor and audience is often translated into the question: who is the actor, me or someone in the audience?

We have traced the story of deconstructions of the opposition between representation and presentation, typical of the post-mimetic, from the neo-avant-garde to the post-millennium. The neo-avant-garde of the performative turn with its textual and

theatrical acts, both with Jesih and Jovanović, marked the transition from a textual to a performative culture, characterised precisely by the performative nature of *bodily co-presence*. Both Jesih, with his *Limits* and *The Bitter Fruits of Justice*, and Jovanović, with the ritual slaughter of a chicken in the Križanke Hall (similar to Handke's *Offending the Audience*) and consistent translating of the textual into the ritual-bodily in Jožica Avbelj's *Memorial G*, conclusively enact the turn from theatre as a work of art and a fixed artefact, to the performative bodily co-presence of co-subjects (the actors and the spectators) in the event/happening.

Both the performance of Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre and the performative orientation of Jesih's and Handke's drama of the absurd can be interpreted within the concept of contemporary performance and theatre after the performative turn in the 1960s: as different iterations of post-dramatic (Lehmann) or energetic (Lyotard) artistic corpora or acts that, according to Fischer-Lichte, "did not seek to be understood but experienced. They cannot be incorporated into the paradigm of hermeneutic aesthetics" (*The Transformative Power* 158). For this reason – as Peter Božič testified after experiencing *Monument G* – "they abolish the mediator between the actor's body and his acting, which we call the intellect or ratio" ("Razvoj" 37).

The textual, performative and conceptual innovations of the authors under discussion can thus be understood as part of the specificity of the last 50 years, marked by restlessness and a Badiou-like inability to decide between the end of the old and the beginning of the new. We have witnessed a series of aesthetic revolutions that shook the configuration of drama and theatre. We might say that the authors we have discussed in this paper are thinking about drama, theatre and society in a (post)dramatic form due to the need to tell new and fresh stories about the post-millennial crisis of ethics and society conditioned by neoliberal and post-socialist society. The geography of their literary and theatrical procedures shows us that Slovenian writing for theatre has ventured deep into the waters marked by both the post-dramatic and the performative turn. The artists and groups in question move away from the local (Slovenia) towards the global (anywhere in the world), from the dramatic to the post-dramatic, from the realistic to the absurd, from the physical to the metaphysical, from the theatrical to the metatheatrical, in order to capture the remnants of the fractured and fragmented meanings produced by sliding signifiers that only occasionally and temporarily encounter their signified.

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