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In 2005, on the initiative of playwright Simona Semenič and in close collaboration with performing arts theorist Rok Vevar, a group of playwrights and dramaturgs founded PreGlej within the Glej Theatre in Ljubljana, Slovenia. The group confronted the issues of playwriting and, within a few years, established a platform for the creation, development and international exchange of dramatic writing. Their work was committed to establishing the conditions necessary for creating dramatic texts. To this end, they used the form of staged readings – not only as a public presentation of dramatic plays but as a method for developing drama, bringing drama as a work in progress. The article shows that this kind of playwriting practice on Slovenian stages has its precursors in the experimental theatre practices of the 1960s and 1970s (as applied by the neo-avant-garde groups of poets 441/442/443, Nomenklatura and LKB – Literarni klub Branik, as well as in the performances of writers presenting their literary works at the Pekarna Theatre). Poets and writers staged their works, which were not primarily intended to be performed, creating theatrical forms of writing for the stage, which fit neither the conventions of drama nor the tradition of theatre. The staging of literature and staged readings are discussed in the context of performance writing, which characterises the multiple relationships between writing and performance, focusing on the process of writing as a performative act.

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**Keywords:** literature, poetry, drama, performance, staged reading, performance writing

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**Barbara Orel**, PhD, is a professor of performing arts at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana (UL AGRFT). She is also the head of UL AGRFT's research group. Her main areas of research are experimental theatre, avant-garde movements and performance across disciplines. Her publications include the book *Igra v igri (Play within a Play)* and several edited collections, including *Uprizoritvene umetnosti, migracije, politika (Performing Arts, Migration, Politics)*. She has participated in the research projects of the Theatrical Event working group of the International Federation for Theatre Research. She was also a selector of the Slovenian national theatre festivals Week of Slovenian Drama in 2006-2007 and the Maribor Theatre Festival in 2008-2009.

barbara.orel@agrft.uni-lj.si

# Performing Literature and Staged Readings

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Barbara Orel

Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana

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In 2005,<sup>1</sup> the PreGlej group in Ljubljana, Slovenia, started organising drama workshops, which included staged readings of newly written plays. The staging of readings was conceived as a way of creating drama – not only as its public presentation but as a process in which playwrights have the opportunity to experience how their play functions on the theatre stage, see how the audience experiences it, and then, after the reading, discuss it with the director, actors and audience and, based on their feedback, improve the play. The staged readings in PreGlej Laboratory established the conditions for processual dramatic creativity. The precursors of this kind of playwriting on Slovenian stages can be identified in the experimental theatre practices of the 1960s and 1970s, which explored the dimensions of the word in the medium of theatre and, in the process, developed forms various of performance writing.

## Poetry Performed by Groups of Poets

The presentation of literature on Slovenian stages has taken various forms of performance. In addition to traditional literary evenings (poetry, prose and, less frequently, drama) that regularly supplement the repertoire in institutional theatres, various types of stagings of literature with a tendency towards theatrical experimentation began to appear on experimental stages as early as the 1950s, and especially in the 1960s and 1970s. Their performative qualities, however, were mostly ignored. They include stagings of poetry by the group 441/442/443 (which later transformed into the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre), explorations of the sound image of words by the groups Nomenklatura and LKB – Literarni klub Branik (The Branik Literary Club) and presentations of literary works by Slovenian writers in the Pekarna Theatre. In these presentations, the authors could examine on theatre stages the dimensions of words and literary works that were not primarily intended for performance. They recognised theatre as an attractive and effective medium for direct communication

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with the audience and a place for exploring texts. Stage performances included various actions, acts and situations animated by the authors' creative enthusiasm and inseparably linked to behavioural practices. We will consider them in the context of the so-called performance writing since, as Caroline Bergvall defines it, performance writing needs to "explore the kinds of relationship text-based work entertains when developed in conjunction with other media and other discourses", opening up a space for "investigation of the kinds of formal and ideological strategies which writers and artists develop textually in response or in reaction to their own time and their own fields" ("Keynote"). As Ric Allsopp explains, the label performance writing "attempts to hold in tension both writing and its performance, performance and its writing" and establishes a framework for diverse writing and performance practices that would otherwise remain silenced or ignored in the face of traditional ways of seeing and writing (77). The relationship between writing and performance is constantly changing. Each marks the two extremes between which various practices of performance writing circulate and take form. The notion of performance writing is not temporally defined or tied to a particular style of performance, as it encompasses a multiplicity of diverse relations between writing and/as performance, or performance as writing and focuses on the "transformative play of text as performance" (77).

Let us first look at the groups of poets who have performed their poetry on theatre stages. The neo-avant-garde group of poets called 441/442/443 (the group changed the final number in its name with each successive performance of poetry and later renamed itself the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre) understood poetry "in its 'usefulness' for public performance in the form of a theatrical event" (Svetina, "Gledališče Pupilije Ferkeverk" 92). In the quest to make poetry more communicative, the poets sought "an appropriate space for their public 'performance'" and identified the theatre as a medium in which "poetic words can take on a completely new dimension" (92). According to Ivo Svetina, they were also inspired by Allen Ginsberg's public readings of his poetry and the famous Moscow evenings of Yevgeny Yevtushenko. Particularly interesting for our discussion are the literary presentations entitled *V počastitev tisočletja nosečnosti in stoletja prve pomoči* (*In Celebration of the Millennium of Pregnancy and the Century of First Aid*), when the actor Jurij Souček helped the poets with their stage realisation, and *Žlahtna plesen Pupilije Ferkeverk* (*The Noble Mould of Pupilija Ferkeverk*), directed by Dušan Jovanović. They took place on the Small Stage of the Slovenian National Theatre Drama Ljubljana in May 1968 and 1969, respectively. In both, the authors appeared in the roles of poets performing their own poetry.

The importance of the transposition of poetry to the medium of theatre in group 441 is illustrated by Ivo Svetina. His account clearly shows how the process of "translating" poetry into the language of theatre, as he puts it, i.e., the transfer and transcription of the linguistic sign into the sign systems of the stage, took place. Traces of Bar-

thes's semiology can be discerned in this. As Svetina says, in the "theatricalisation" of poetry in *In Celebration of the Millennium of Pregnancy*:

It happened that increasingly "gesture" also became a language. The authors of poems became "actors" who, despite not "inhabiting" the characters or heroes of a play, a dramatic text but who, precisely by their presence on the stage, locked in the magic circle of the illuminated cube, brought their words, verses, poems to life. This animation took us along the path of "play", improvisation and the enjoyment of language, which expanded the space of the stage and, in an instant, placed before the audience a whole world caught in the network of poetic language. At a particular moment, poetry, its literary-aesthetic function, receded into the background, and what came to the fore was the body, voice, gesture, sound ... ("Prispevek" 88)

The live presence of the poet on the stage became more important than the poem itself. This was further aided by music, which "dismantled the poetic fabric, hindered or encouraged its interpretation, and at the same time, with this 'dismantling' of poetry", the image of the "aristocratic poet" faded, and the listeners "were becoming more and more like spectators". Svetina emphasises that it was "not so much about interpreting the poem but rather about creating" (Svetina, "Prispevek" 88).

In *The Noble Mould of Pupilija Ferkeverk*, the poets were joined by new members who were not literary artists. Poems were no longer interpreted or embodied only by their authors but also by other performers. As Svetina points out, it was no longer "just a matter of an authorial interpretation of a poem by a particular author but a process in which all the performers became actors, actors of a new type, who no longer based themselves on 'inhabiting' individual dramatic characters, but who, with their individual energy and presence, with movement and words, gave a new image to both the poems and their authors" ("Prispevek" 91). In Svetina's words, in the process of the collective creation of the performance, "a 'democratisation' of the poetic act happened since the poetic act is not only an act of creation but also an act of 'passing' a poem, it is about the contact between the poet and the 'citizen'" ("Prispevek" 91). The life of poetry as a theatre performance meant "renouncing the claim of the poem as an absolute organism of language" ("Prispevek" 91). In their next performance, *Pupilija, papa Pupilo pa Pupilčki* (*Pupilija, Papa Pupilo and the Pupilceks*), the poets surrendered themselves to Dušan Jovanović's vision, and their poetry functioned only as part of the textual material of the performance; set in the context of other artistic and diverse non-artistic texts.<sup>2</sup> For the occasion, they renamed themselves 443, or Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre. They defined themselves as the "443 Movement", namely as a movement "working in the field of theatre, literature, film, visual arts and everywhere else" (Svetina, "Prispevek" 96).

<sup>2</sup> The text consisted of: a poem by Tomaž Kralj, the folk song "Lepa Anka kolo vodi" ("Pretty Anka Leads the Kolo"), a poem by Jovan Vesel Koseski and Mayakovsky, the text of a photo novel in Italian, a riddle, communication in sign language, the text of an advertisement for the Alpsko Mleko brand of milk, a text in Latin and a text from the "Confidential" section of a yellow press magazine. The entire text of Pupilija is published in the monograph *Prišli so Pupilčki*.

In the 441/442/443 group, the process of shifting poetry into the medium of the theatre is clearly discernible. In the case of the Nomenklatura group, this process is joined by a theoretical reflection on the sound image of the poetic word on stage. Nomenklatura's theatrical experiments are based on investigating the relationship between literature and music, treating words and sounds as equal partners. Boris A. Novak was responsible for the conceptual starting points in the field of literature, while Bor Turel took over the music. Particularly interesting for the present discussion are the beginnings of their work when they were working as a literary group and – like the 441/442/443 group – were driven by the desire to communicate with the audience.

The group playfully explored the relationship between the meanings and sounds of words at musical-literary events where they performed their poetry.<sup>3</sup> In 1973, Boris A. Novak, Igor Likar, Milan Kleč and Jure Perovšek presented their poetry at the 3rd Cultural Marathon at the Faculty of Arts, conceived as a manifestation of student (sub)culture and other student activities. The group performance was carried out by stretching ropes around the venue and creating a kind of poetry ring in the form of a boxing ring. The poets interpreted their poems simultaneously by passing lines of their poems to each other and exchanging them – like punches in boxing – in a “verse for verse” manner. In this way, the sound image of the poems came to full expression while the meaning of the poem itself was deconstructed.

Following Boris A. Novak's poetic maxim that “the sound of the word means and the meaning of the word sounds!”,<sup>4</sup> Nomenklatura was devoted to exploring the relationship between the sound of the word and its meaning. This relationship is essentially Ferdinand de Saussure's question of the relationship between the signifier (the acoustic and visual image of the word) and the signified (the meaning of the word), to which they theoretically referred. They focused on investigating the acoustic level of language. This investigation is well illustrated by the concept for their happening *Zvok, ne jezi se* (*Sound, Don't Get Angry*, 1974). The happening was modelled on the cross and circle board game known in the Slovenian language as *Človek, ne jezi se* (*Man, Don't Get Angry*).<sup>5</sup> In the Festivalna dvorana (Ljubljana Festival Hall), where it was performed, they marked out the fields in which the participants moved. Their movement was determined by the roll of a die by a member of the Nomenklatura group. The fields contained instructions for the performance of various tasks or “sound actions”, ranging “from the conception of basic sound actions, through the incorporation

3 Even later, as a theatre group or Laboratorij za alkimijo umetnosti (Laboratory for the Alchemy of Art), they would occasionally organise musical-poetry evenings (as they called them), including *Ogledalo tišine* (*Mirror of Silence*) in October 1974, an experiment in total improvisation *Uho trenutka* (*The Ear of the Moment*) in December 1974, *Zven, ki vene* (*The Sound that Withers*) in February 1976, etc. I have written in more detail about the experiments of Nomenklatura in the essay “Raziskave besede in zvoka v skupini Nomenklatura”.

4 This quotation comes from the essay “Poezija jezika”, published by Boris A. Novak on the occasion of the publication of his poetic debut *Stihožitje* in *Ljubljanski dnevnik* on 31 December 1977.

5 Editor's note: The Slovenian game takes its name from the German cross and circle game, *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht*. English variations of this game are known as *Sorry!*, *Parcheesi* or *Aggravation*.

of semantically still unformed voices, to the musical mediation of poems, the highest sonic form of semantically articulated speech" (Nomenklatura, "Koncept" 189). The so-called "sound actions with the body" (such as clapping the hands; clapping with straight palms, with rounded palms, slapping the top of the wrist; clapping the palms against other parts of the body, the floor, etc.) intensified in complexity all the way to "reading the text" (exploring exaggerated reading, reading at different speed, intensity, pitch, singing of text) (195). It was about performing the acoustic body of the word, communicating its vocal value. The exposition of the phonic signifier in relation to the signified content opened the way to so-called acoustic writing.

A similar observation could be made about the LKB group – Literarni klub Branik (The Branik Literary Club) (their name was a parody of the popular Branik Sports Club from Maribor), founded in 1965 in Maribor by Miroslav Slana to provide young artists with opportunities for public appearance. In the third year of their activity, on 19 September 1968, Miroslav Slana, Andrej Brvar, Tone Partljič, Drago Jančar and Franček Hedl presented their literary products (as they called them themselves) on the Small Stage of the Slovenian National Theatre Maribor. They presented them in the style of advertisements (in Andrej Brvar's case) or as syllabic articulations of phrases taken from the telephone directory (in Miroslav Slana's case).

## Presentations of Literary Works at the Pekarna Theatre

Pekarna Theatre was "an attempt at an intermediate medium between theatre and other artistic expressions", which demonstrated a tendency towards "total theatre", as Ivo Svetina quotes Lado Kralj in his monography (*Gledališče Pekarna* 415). Here, the so-called literary evenings of contemporary Slovenian writers held a special place. They are presented in more detail in the monograph's chapter entitled "Gledališče in literatura" ("Theatre and Literature") (415–420). These were theatrical events in which the creators wanted to present the works of living writers differently and were mainly not subject to theatrical criticism.<sup>6</sup> As Kralj explains, these were "not traditional literary evenings, but a kind of happenings", except that they did not use this label (qtd. in Svetina, *Gledališče Pekarna* 416). Let us focus on the events which featured the authors themselves.

<sup>6</sup> They carried out the following events: *Večer Lojzeta Kovačiča* (*Lojze Kovačič's Evening*), 1972; *Večer Daneta Zajca* (*Dane Zajc's Evening*), 1972, directed by Ivo Svetina; *Večer Marka Švabiča ali "Predavanje o slovenski paranoji"* (*Marko Švabič's Evening or 'A Lecture on Slovenian Paranoia'*), 1973, directed by Lado Kralj; Matjaž Kocbek's literary evening entitled *Smrt po smrti po bogu. (Literarno doživetje s toplim bifejem, žonglerjem, pesmicami, drobovino in zelnatimi glavami)* (*Death after Death after God. (A literary experience with a warm buffet, juggler, poems, tripe and cabbage heads)*), also in 1973; *Happening Iva Svetine ali "Tiskovna konferenca"* (*Ivo Svetina's Happening or "Press Conference"*), 1973, directed by the author alongside the publication of his book *Heliks in Tibija* (*Heliks and Tibija*); *Ferdinand Miklavc's Evening* (*Večer Ferdinanda Miklavca*), 1973; *Vaša partijska ljubezen, očetje! Herojska smrt življenja ...* (*Your Party Love, Fathers! The Heroic Death of Life ...*), 1976, directed by Ivo Svetina, alongside the publication of his book of the same title). In two cases, *The Repertoire of Slovenian Theatres 1972–1977* does not note the directors.

In 1976, on the occasion of the publication of Ivo Svetina's poetry collection *Vaša partijska ljubezen, očetje! Herojska smrt življenja ...* (*Your Party Love, Fathers! The Heroic Death of Life ...*), the author staged an event that took the form of a theatre performance. According to Svetina's testimony, the event attracted considerable attention, probably due to the provocative content and the very conception of the collection, which simultaneously celebrated and ironized the October Revolution. For this reason, the collection was not published by the Maribor publishing house Obzorja (in 1972) but rather as a self-published edition (in 1976). In the Pekarna Theatre, Svetina directed scenes which featured Aleš Valič (as Lenin), Jerca Mrzel (as Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaja) and himself. He decided to do this after a performance he had seen a few years earlier at the Teatro Laboratorio in Rome. There, he had seen a recital of Vladimir Mayakovsky's poems performed by the well-known Italian actor Carmelo Bene, who recited the poems with a great deal of pathos and irony, accompanied by music, which impressed Ivo Svetina so much that he decided for a similar approach at the Pekarna Theatre. The stage was "decorated with red flags, a large photograph of Lenin lying in a deckchair, and slides with Mossfilm's logo showing a typical statue of two people fighting for a better future, for a paradise on Earth, a man and a woman in typical socialist realist iconography, bare-chested and holding a hammer and sickle, with a red star on one of the Kremlin's belfries in the background" (Svetina, *Gledališče Pekarna* 419). The dramatic nature of the event was indicated by "a giant fan that occasionally made (revolutionary) winds, unfurled the red flags and announced the coming of new times" (419).

In 1973, *Večer Marka Švabiča ali »Predavanje o slovenski paranoji«* (*Marko Švabič's Evening, or 'A Lecture on Slovenian Paranoia'*) was performed as a lecture (today, it would be described as a lecture performance). The writer presented himself to the audience as a lecturer "standing 'in an ascetic stance' behind a lectern with a microphone and a glass of water, lecturing on 'Slovenian paranoia'" (Svetina, *Gledališče Pekarna* 416). This lecture turned out to be "'on the paranoia of Marko Švabič', or rather the revealing of his writing process to the public" (416). It had a striking effect on the audience, as the author spoke "about his most intimate experiences, dreams, nightmares, obsessions" and then went on to answer a few further questions posed by a journalist. As Svetina notes, "the 'performance' staged by Švabič was something completely different from the boring reading that almost as a rule takes place at ordinary literary evenings" and describes it as a form of total theatre (417).

Matjaž Kocbek's performance *Smrt, po smrti, po bogu* (*Death After Death After God*) was "a real happening", as the event's label eloquently testifies: *A literary experience with a warm buffet, juggler, poems, tripe and cabbage heads* (1973). Amid the richly decorated action, "adorned" with considerable amounts of meat, Kocbek interpreted his own poems and related the performance to the "shameless exhibitions" in the performance

*Pupilija, Papa Pupilo and the Pupilceks*, performed by the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre, in which he had also appeared a couple of years earlier (Svetina, *Gledališče Pekarna* 417).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, poets and writers, in performances of their literary works, playfully investigated the life of language on the theatre stage, the acoustic and visual image of the word, and the effect it had on the audience. How to turn poetry and prose into theatre? This was the central question they addressed: how to transpose and transform the linguistic sign into the sign systems of the stage.

Three decades later, a group of playwrights and dramaturgs in PreGlej addressed the problem of creating dramatic texts. If the writers of the neo-avant-garde groups were interested in theatre as a space for exploring new dimensions of the literary word and as a medium that (unlike the book form) allowed direct communication with the audience, for the PreGlej authors, the theatre was the primary medium in which they realised their ideas. In PreGlej, they addressed the question: How to write a play? They focused on the question of how to transfer the logic of the stage into a dramatic text and on the strategies for transferring the sign systems of the stage into the linguistic sign.

## Staged Readings in PreGlej

In 2005, a group of playwrights and dramaturgs of the younger generation gathered around Simona Semenič and founded the PreGlej group. In collaboration with the theorist Rok Vevar, in a couple of years, they managed to establish a platform for the creation, development and international exchange of playwriting within the Glej Theatre. PreGlej was born out of a desire to acquire knowledge and skills in playwriting and as a critique of the existing situation in theatre education and the evaluation of dramatic works. At that time, it was possible to learn about playwriting skills in Slovenia at workshops organised by the Week of Slovenian Drama in Kranj but not at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, University of Ljubljana.<sup>7</sup> The need for developing dramatic texts led to organising a series of activities to encourage and ensure continuous and systematic work on dramatic texts.

The PreGlejceks (PreGlejčki) (as Maja Šorli, herself an active member of PreGlej, calls them, in analogy with the Pupilceks) thought of dramatic text as a potential performance. On the second Saturday of every month, they worked on new or emerging drama texts in the so-called PreGlej Laboratory, discussing and improving them. Lectures were organised to encourage theoretical reflection on playwriting. In addition, they introduced staged readings as a learning process of playwriting, allowing for

<sup>7</sup> The course of Drama Writing was introduced at the UL AGRFT with the implementation of the Bologna Reform at the University of Ljubljana in the academic year 2009/10.



processual playwriting and presenting the developing drama as a work in progress. They used the stage as a medium of communication with the audience – the first readers, listeners or spectators. The staged readings were conceived to be a continuation of the drama workshop, in which the playwright could learn how their dramatic text functions on the stage and get the opportunity to discuss their work with the director, the actors and the audience. The readings were prepared in collaboration with directors and actors of the generation. After the staged reading as the first public presentation of a new play, a discussion took place in which all attendees were invited to exchange their opinions. In this way, the PreGlejceks tried to involve the audience in the process of the play's creation.

From a staging perspective, these were blocking rehearsals that advocated not only, as Simona Semenič puts it, the simplicity of reading and staging approaches (qtd. in Jesenko 27) but also the unrefined nature of the performances. Or, as Blaž Lukan defines staged readings, “It does mean a return to the text, although this does not imply a revitalisation of some anachronistic dramatic theatre paradigm but rather a methodological legitimisation of the text as the area of performance that does not require anything but its own ‘textuality’ for its staging” (*Text as Stage* 211).

PreGlej's staged readings demonstrate an understanding of playwriting as performance writing that conceives of drama as always already transposed into the medium of theatre and transcribed into the language of the stage. This view of playwriting was also evident in the performance of *Devet lahkih komadov* (*Nine Easy Pieces*, 2007), conceived as a provocative political gesture and a critique of the evaluation of dramatic texts in Slovenia. According to Rok Vevar, one of the central problems in Slovenia was that “the theatre elite ‘knows exactly what good drama is’” (“PreGlej” 19). In his opinion, what was most appreciated in Slovenia at the time was “‘dramatic realism’, fluent dialogue, language in the function of circumstances, situations and intentions, and neither too complex nor complicated structures. In short: something that can be adapted to the methodological clichés of psychological realism” (19). In the study and theoretical reflection on drama as a literary genre and a performance event, the drama workshops at PreGlej Laboratory explored what else drama could be. According to the analogy with Duchamp's urinal, Vevar gave the participants the task of exploring what Ready Made could mean in drama. The result was a collection of texts – *Nine Easy Pieces* taken from various contexts of everyday life (such as washing machine instructions, popular science texts, medical texts, transcripts of a professional debate, a chat, a forum, etc.), which the workshop participants then authorially reworked.<sup>8</sup> Their performance took the hybrid form of a staged reading and performance, which was carried out on 1 April 2007, the day on which the closing

<sup>8</sup> The processes of authorial reworking of the “ready-made” texts are presented by Maja Šorli (“Dva primera” 76). The authors were Zalka Grabnar Kogoj, Iztok Ilc, Jerneja Kušar, Miha Marek, Janko Oven, Peter Rezman, Simona Semenič, Maja Šorli and Rok Vevar.

ceremony of the Week of Slovenian Drama took place in Kranj and the Slavko Grum Award for the best new Slovenian play was awarded.<sup>9</sup> *Nine Easy Pieces* was conceived as an “action” which “attempted to disrupt the order that dictates the criteria for Slovenian playwriting” (Šorli, “Političnost” 18). Besides this, it also meant a thorough questioning of no longer dramatic theatrical texts. Maja Šorli compares PreGlejceks with the Pupilceks, who also used diverse artistic and non-artistic texts taken from other media and their contexts in their performance *Pupiliija, Papa Pupilo and the Pupilceks* in 1969. Their transfer to the stage, however, was not controversial. In fact, the text for *Pupiliija* and its composition did not receive any attention at all. The shocking bit was the final scene, in which a chicken was ritually slaughtered, which, as interpreted by Veno Taufer, signified “the death of literary, merely aesthetically functional theatre in Slovenia” (42). Four decades later, the performance of the so-called ready-made texts in PreGlej further inflamed the then-heated debates about what constituted drama. These discussions focused on the questions of what is original drama and what is original Slovenian drama.<sup>10</sup> It was a time of crisis in drama writing and a lack of new plays, while repertory theatres were increasingly staging dramatisations of prose works (which have been a constant feature on Slovenian stages). At the same time, the increase in devised theatre productions brought forth many so-called no longer dramatic theatre texts.

The PreGlej group also popularised the form of staged readings with the first festival of drama writing in Slovenia called PreGlej na glas! (PreGlej Out Loud!) (2006), which grew into an international festival. During the eight years of its existence, it has successfully promoted the exchange of dramatic texts (Ljubljana – New York, Ljubljana – cities in the former Yugoslavia, etc.) and accelerated the staging of new plays in Slovenian theatres. PreGlej, with its enthusiastic cultural-artistic guerrilla, as Rok Vevar puts it (“Za dramsko pisavo” 3), started a proper trend of staged readings, establishing it as a form of public presentation of drama at the Slovenian Drama Week festival where every year the nominees for the Slavko Grum Award for best new Slovenian play are presented in the form of staged reading; and at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, where they are continuously put on by students (either under the supervision of Žanina Mirčevska or independently). Playwrights and dramaturgs of the younger generation have also established a new platform for dramatic creativity, founding the Vzkrík! Festival of Dramatic Writing (in 2017).

9 The text of *Nine Easy Pieces* also competed for the Slavko Grum Award. Interestingly, three years later, Janez Janša’s “ready-made” text *Slovenian National Theatre* was nominated for the Slavko Grum Award. The production (in the form of the so-called verbatim theatre) had already won the 2008 Borštnik Award for theatre innovation and aesthetic breakthrough. It was one of the five plays nominated for the 2010 Slavko Grum Award. Three equivalent awards were bestowed to Ivo Prijatelj for his play *Totenbirt*, Simona Semenič for *24ur (24HRS)* and Ivo Svetina for his play *Grobница za Pekarno (A Tomb for Pekarna Theatre)*.

10 These issues are comprehensively analysed in the thematic section “Literatura in teater” (“Literature and Theatre”) in the *Literatura* journal (January/February 2006, Vol. 18, No. 175–176, pp. 67–190).

The playwright and PreGlej initiator Simona Semenič has used staged readings as a procedure in the creation of plays also outside PreGlej, for example, when writing the text for the production *še ni naslova* (*no title yet*) directed by Tomi Janežič and performed by the Mladinsko Theatre (2018). She wrote the text on the fly when rehearsals were already underway, and it was possible to check its stage dimension in collaboration with the actors and to harmonise or, better, develop it in dialogue with the director and the concept of the performance. Although this kind of playwriting can rarely be seen in repertory theatre, it has been a common practice throughout the history of theatre. As Rok Vevar points out, “classical drama was produced on the fly, that is to say: together with practice”, that is to say, with ongoing “staged readings” that suggested further revisions (“PreGlej” 20). He points to Shakespeare’s dramatic work as an example.

In Slovenian theatre, for example, Emil Filipčič’s texts for the productions directed by Vito Taufer were created in this way: *Altamira* (SNT Drama Ljubljana, 1984), *Atlantida* (*Atlantis*, Mladinsko Theatre, 1988) and *Božanska tragedija* (*The Divine Tragedy*, Prešeren Theatre, Kranj, 1989). Tomaž Toporišič notes that Filipčič acted as a writer-in-residence and compares the role of Filipčič in the process of creating a production to Barthes’s modern scriptor (129). He also notes that Milan Jesih had taken on this role even earlier when preparing the text for *Limite* (*Limits*, 1973), directed by Zvone Šedlbauer at the Glej Experimental Theatre and that, in the 1990s, Andrej Rozman took it on when writing the text for *Tartif* (*Tartuffe*) directed by Vito Taufer at the Mladinsko Theatre in 1993 (129–130). This is also how Dušan Jovanović’s *Žrtve mode bum-bum* (*Victims of the Bang-Bang Fashion*) was created at the Mladinsko Theatre in 1975. The production of dramatic texts as performance writing has also become established in devised theatre practices.

## Conclusion

Neo-avant-garde theatre practices and PreGlej shared an interest in how their (poetic, prose and dramatic) works affect the audience. What was common to them was the question of the nature of the stage sign. During the 1960s and 1970s, poets and writers addressed this question regarding the transposition of the linguistic sign into the sign systems of the stage. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, playwrights and dramaturgs in PreGlej approached the question from the opposite perspective: how to inhabit the logic of the sign systems of the stage in the linguistic sign? Or, to put it another way: how to think of drama as if it had already been staged and to write a dramatic text?

The poets and writers who presented their literary works to the audience embodied writing itself while allowing it to transcend them and grow into other sign systems

of the stage. In doing so, they created diverse forms of performance writing that gave rise to early examples of no longer dramatic theatre texts on Slovenian stages, and this way shaped the stage aesthetics in the outline of post-dramatic theatre. Three decades later, the PreGlej participants used the form of staged readings as a method for processual playwrighting creation. In the staged readings, they were testing how their plays functioned on stage in dialogue with the performers and the audience in order to master the techniques of playwriting and to establish drama as a performance. Through playwriting, they shared the function of the playwright with the staging's creators and the audience. Committed to the exploration of drama as a genre and in search of innovative approaches to the creation of no longer dramatic theatre texts, they linked the practice of playwriting to the theory of drama and theatre. Through the totality of their activities (the organisation of the first Slovenian playwriting festival PreGlej na glas!, constructive criticism of the systems of evaluation of dramatic texts and the popularisation of staged readings), they aroused interest in playwriting as a trendy activity among the younger generation of theatre artists. They significantly contributed to revitalising the field of dramatic creativity in Slovenia. Despite the diverse artistic interests of the neo-avant-garde groups and the PreGlej group, their authors reached beyond the conventions of writing or producing theatre texts and paved the way for new approaches and aesthetics of performance through performance writing.

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