

Text as Stage or Staged Readings in Light of Performative Economy

BLAŽ LUKAN

1.

“/.../ what it searches for /.../ are the pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language” (Barthes, 1975, 66-67).

“/.../ to fight with language inside language and, inside itself, to lead it astray: not through the message but through wordplay, where it becomes the theatre stage” (Barthes, 2003, 13).

2.

Staged readings are not a new performative genre. In Slovenian theatre, their presence has been noted for a long time¹ and in 2007 an appropriate entry was duly registered in the Slovenian *Theatre Terminology Glossary*. For several years now the *Slovene Theatre Annual*² has been taking note of them as well. In recent years, however, we have seen a proper flourishing of staged readings (which is, admittedly, a rather loose definition; a more precise temporal characterisation, however, is not the aim of this paper). Students of the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television regularly prepare staged readings with the support of their mentor, the dramatist Žanina Mirčevska. Staged readings have also become a regular feature of the Week of Slovenian Drama Festival, specifically the Slavko Grum award for best new Slovenian play, as this is the form of choice for presenting nominated texts at the festival. There also appeared the Vzkrik Festival, now in its fifth iteration, which is dedicated to drama writing and presents staged readings accompanied by presentations of special issues of literary magazines dedicated to drama (e.g. the *Adept magazine*) or other events.

The *Theatre Terminology Glossary* defines staged reading as “a performance in which the performers interpretatively read a dramatic text out loud, usually written by non-established authors, with minimal use of theatrical means of expression” (Sušec Michieli, 2007, 37). This definition, however, no longer suffices for the analysis of contemporary staged readings. The first part of the definition stating that a staged reading is “a performance in which the performers interpretatively read a dramatic text out loud, usually written by non-established authors” may perhaps still hold up, but even this is not completely true. While a contemporary staged reading is indeed still a staging,³ it is no longer necessary to “interpretatively read a dramatic text out loud”, as virtually the entire text can be transposed into the performance, sometimes

- 1 See, for example, the report »Nastop Ivana Mraka. Ivan Mrak: Van Goghov vidov ples« [“Performance by Ivan Mrak. Ivan Mrak: Van Gogh’s St Vitus’ Dance”] (Lukan, 1991, 23–24).
- 2 *The Repertoire of Slovenian Theatres* has only been recording non-institutional productions which represent the largest percentage of staged readings since the 1987/88 season. This work was, however, done rather selectively at the start. A more systematic approach to cataloguing was taken up only after the 1992/93 season. When staged readings were made part of the programme in theatre institutions, they were recorded under the designation that they were promoted with, i.e. “theatre protocol” in the Slovene National Theatre Maribor during Bojan Štih’s tenure (1978–81) or “concert performance”, etc.
- 3 At this point one might be tempted to ask what actually is a staging or, rather, what happens to the text in the process of its staging. Is it not true that any performance essentially cancels out its material? Be it that the written material is transformed into performative signs and becomes part of the signifying system established by the staging or that somehow it still “exists” “somewhere” as a text. In staged readings, the text is, as a rule, still quite the “focal” point, even though it is performed by reading. This only appears to be a paradox.

even without the use of words, i.e. a non-verbal staging, which nevertheless still remains a “reading”. Even the “reading” itself is no longer a precondition of a staged reading, as performers often learn the text by heart or diverge from the text (“book”, manuscript) during the performance. Even the argument that the text is read by “performers” is no longer necessarily true. A fundamental turn has taken place in contemporary staged readings, as spectators themselves can become readers⁴ and thus new “performers”, which fundamentally shifts the relationship between performers and spectators; the text can also be pre-recorded and then broadcast to the audience or projected onto the set;⁵ the text can also not be read at all, as mentioned above, etc. The claim about “non-established authors”, albeit mitigated by the adverb “usually”, is today also only partially true, as in recent years we have had the opportunity to hear/see staged readings of texts by many renowned, even canonical authors.⁶ It is however true that staged readings have become the basic platform for introducing young dramatists, a point that shall be further elaborated on below. The biggest change in contemporary staged readings, however, concerns the “minimal use of theatrical means of expression,” since in some staged readings the reading part becomes fully transposed into theatrical expression. And this fact will be our starting point for further discussion.

3.

Before we turn to reading as theatre performance itself and its “performative economy” which we shall critically evaluate below while also proposing several staging possibilities not yet embraced by staged readings or at least not to an adequate degree, let us elaborate some “objective” starting points. The designation *staged reading* itself is descriptive: a “staged reading” encompasses the reading (of the dramatic material) as well as (its) presentation. This combination might seem paradoxical, as in a traditional perspective of theatre studies reading excludes performing. Contemporary performative aesthetics, however, attribute performative potential also to the reading act itself, which in practice means reading as live presentation. In the language of theory, what is essentially at play in a staged reading is a transition

4 This was the case in the staging of the text *xy* by Simona Semenič, where it was the spectators who were reading the play, while the author was silently observing them (Arhar, 2014).

5 This was the case in the staging of Rowan, Strudel, Dance, and More by Simona Semenič directed by Janez Janša, The Mladinsko Theatre and Maska, 2018/19.

6 The cycle of staged readings entitled “New Readings” produced by the Slovene National Theatre Drama Ljubljana since the 2014/15 season included also staged readings of well-known texts by Primož Kozak, Emil Filipčič, etc.

or transformation of dramatic or performative material into a performance, in which the theatre performance or staging does not cancel out this material itself (which is the condition of theatricality according to Roland Barthes' well-known formula; 2002, 122-3), but rather preserves it in one form or another. In practice, a staged reading is a rendering of a dramatic or performative text in the manner of reading it out loud and in public.⁷

The reading of (dramatic) material is part of the staging process, but for a long time now it has also been considered a form of performative or presentational practice in which dramatists as well as performers and other collaborators can present themselves. In post-dramatic times, reading has become a legitimate, perhaps even privileged presentational form or format for presenting novel textual as well as performative strategies and practices. Staged readings demonstrate the relation and closeness of this genre to the epic nature of contemporary post-dramatic writing in which the narrative is established as a mode of presentation, while the text is also the instance that determines the performative framework of the staged reading.

4.

In a functional sense the reading of dramatic or performative material is, first and foremost, gaining information about a text (be it new or forgotten, undiscovered or newly translated, etc.), by which the performance endeavours to give as objective and "neutral" a rendering as possible. This does not, however, exclude the application of given ("minimal") performative means. The information can also be more comprehensive, in certain cases outgrowing its elementary aesthetic frame. Even a "literary soirée" can represent a specific kind of staged reading in which the author presents (reads) their (new) play in some kind of an intimate environment and atmosphere. Such presentations are most common for the genre of poetry, while they are less frequently used for the presentation of dramatic literature, as staged readings often function as a kind of substitute for this form. If the text of the play is actually being read by its author, one could claim that in this case the bare information is upgraded by the possibility of the encounter with—literally—the authoritative voice of the dramatist themselves, proposing a kind of "immanent" interpretation or vision of their text from their own perspective, which might carry some "aesthetic" quality in itself (as was

7 Another term for staged reading is *performance reading*; while the term reading performance, for example, evokes a similar conceptual difference as that between the theatrical and the performative, as noted by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2003, 183).

the case with the above-mentioned staged reading performed by Ivan Mrak). The author's reading and the interpretative process can, however, become part of the "aesthetic" value of some future staging of the text in which the director or dramaturgist or one of the actors gets wind of the possibility of its "application" and then uses its "memory" for their own conceptualisation.

Reading could also represent the (only) form or performative possibility for "staging" so-called closet dramas (*Lesedrama* or *Buchdrama*), a dramaturgic phenomenon originating in (German) Romanticism that was strictly intended for reading only and not for staging. While today this might seem very anachronistic, such texts do represent the ultimate performative material which can be "ideally" performed just by reading.⁸ Contrary to this, a staged reading can also be used for "testing the waters" for the performative potential (of a play or selected excerpt), by which the artists, who might eventually embark on a "proper" staging at some future point, get to check the performative qualities of a play and thus prepare a kind of "pre-performance". They can also present this performative potential to other possible collaborators or propose it to artistic directors and other theatre directors for consideration. This way, a staged reading serves the function of what in the film industry is known as pitching, i.e. an event intended for the authors to propose their ideas, drafts, treatments, scripts or completed projects to producers, as well as actors, directors, etc.

All things considered, even today staged readings remain a testing ground for young, non-established artists, as was implied in the above-mentioned dictionary entry. Perhaps this is even more true today. It would even appear that this has become the primary form for presenting young, new (post-)dramatic writing that is—not exclusively, of course—critical of traditions/conventions and for one reason or another cannot break through onto more established stages or into the repertoires of theatre institutions. Staged readings have thus become an eminent festival format, while a "staged reading festival" or "festival of new dramatic writing" has become the prototype of an event promoting non-established authors and their still untested and unscrutinised plays, thus holding a twofold status in this respect: on the one hand, it serves to promote authors, while on the other it enables the "inner" consolidation of new writing which in fact does not need any additional confirmation, as it is an event-in-itself.

8 Two of the alleged prime representatives of closet drama, Goethe's *Faust* and Schiller's *The Robbers*, "became" legitimate performative material long before the advent of the post-dramatic era.

5.

While our above-mentioned inaugural definition might appear to be quite objective, following the “you have to start somewhere” adage, under critical scrutiny it turns out to be rather problematic, as staged readings are becoming the “ideal” format for our precarious times. The first problem thus lies in the attitude adopted by the mostly unestablished authors themselves, as staged readings with zero budget or minimal material investment allow them to offer their potential “value” to strong “buyers” who might purchase it in the aesthetic or real market. This means that the authors expect to turn a “profit” which can materialise in the form of potential employment, “commission” or even mere recognition of the aesthetic value of the offered item as an investment into the future. In any case, we are talking about precarious (economic) categories. The second problem is the attitude of the addresses, i.e. the potential “buyers” or “commissioners,” as staged readings (unless they organise them themselves) enable them to easily find potential candidates (with no particular investment or effort on their side, i.e. inquiries, competitions, grants or investment into “talent”) for their own investments (and invention), which to them can bring a completely different kind of “profit” than to the authors.

With all of the above we are moving into the area of the theatre market, or rather, the domain of performative economy, which we will attempt to overcome in the follow-up, before once again returning to it. With the help of some good examples of successfully overcoming the above-mentioned framework, we endeavour to conceptualise staged readings as an autonomous genre, i.e. a legitimate format inside the domain of contemporary performative practices, one that is in no way “limited” or “downgraded” or “incomplete”. On the contrary, it is our firm belief that this format is perfectly able to achieve “complete” (self-)realisation within the framework of its genre. Thus we do not consider staged readings to be some kind of a “promotional”, “provisional” or “consolatory” performative form for presenting dramatic writing, or rather, dramatic or theatrical material, but rather a performative form in its own right. As such it calls for maximal production, organisation and creative engagement if it is not to remain merely an “approximation” of something bigger or “real” or, in a word, “something else,” even though from the perspective of realistic, “practical” economics this is not realistic or viable more often than not. There is, however, another possibility, as we shall see below.

Due to their marginalised position and placement at some kind of a starting point or edge (creatively and production-wise) that is considered to be still “uncontaminated” or “unstigmatised,” staged readings

entail a certain subversive element. This means that their marginalised position enables them to speak out about the predominant production, aesthetics or politics with a certain measure of authority. As a rule, the production of staged readings—except when they are produced as a kind of bypass that needs no additional evaluation, a complementary activity of big institutional theatres—manifests the necessity for activating alternative modes of production along the entire production line. Already the very act of writing itself can be conceived in this way: from the very point of conceptualisation which already presupposes a staged reading or the activation of alternative means of performing, completely different from the ones required for an institutional staging, to the entire system and methodology of rehearsals, and all the way to the (opening) night and all the following nights. This approach positions staged readings closer to performance art than to theatre. How so? Due to the specific nature of work and conceptualisation of such projects which from the very start anticipate a short running time. While this might appear to be due to the material scarcity of their production, staged readings, in fact, become fully realised precisely in their uniqueness and “unrepeatability”. Finally, even the different promotional strategies could be perceived as alternative and subversive, which renders staged readings to appear as authentic places for testing out fringe, anti-mainstream engagement of the critical potential of performative practices.

6.

Compared to a dramatic performance, a staged reading has more potential for engaging the audience in different ways. This is conditioned by the very spaces in which it is usually presented and are, as a rule, alternative, marginal spaces. If staged readings are presented in an institution, they are usually placed onto chamber stages, rehearsal stages, clubs, or even theatre foyers. According to their staging or mise-en-scene concept, staged readings assume a more chamber-like setting allowing for the display of more intimate, engaged, marginal and subversive topics and writing. The close contact with the text allows for close contact with the audience as well, and for articulating the sense of bonding and community, which increases their capacity for expressing critical opinions and the emancipatory potential of the text and its subversive charge, as well as (self-)critical evaluation of the text itself, the possibility of “improving” or “perfecting” it through staged readings, perhaps even with the help of the spectators themselves, and ultimately self-criticism of one’s own performative, aesthetic or “moral” position.

A staged reading enables the spectator to take the attitude they prefer: they can either be “just” a listener or they can be a “spectator” as well or an active participant or even a co-creator. Participation sometimes even proves to be necessary—be it merely in the form of the possibility of constant choice, i.e. the continual possibility of accepting or refusing to participate, or as highlighting the connection or separation between the text and the reader. Reading can turn out to be either an enjoyable experience or a very painful and intimate one or as the awareness of the (im)potency of the fundamental entering or intrusion into the text, i.e. also as the (im)potency of its disclosure or exhaustion. A staged reading probes the performative limits of reading and performing, all the way to the very edge of internalised experience that defies all things performative and to the ultimate “goal” that is to be found in the “realisation” or identification of the subject ...

Besides performers and spectators, a staged reading can also put in focus the specific position of the author of the text, be it in the attested form of a “literary soirée” or by taking up a new, performatively more or less exposed function, in which the author might feature as a performer, simultaneous listener, remote addressee of just as a mediator of the dramatic “material.” The dialogue with the author may be established from both sides: the side of performers and the side of the audience. There is also the most radical, albeit still a perfectly immanent option: the possibility of simultaneous production of the text in real-time, i.e. live writing in which the spectator may participate as well (deciding about different variants, collecting suggestions, associations, etc.). The staging itself may include simultaneous or post-festum analysis of its production and reception.

7.

All of the above implies that it is actually necessary to further establish staged readings in their genre autonomy. Here we proceed from the conviction that a staged reading is not just a makeshift, temporary, provisional form, nor merely a means or a way for establishing oneself in the predominantly established performative norm, but rather a legitimate and viable option for researching and developing original genre specificity or diversity in relation to performative conventions.⁹ A necessary condition to achieve this is to start reflecting on the genre or format of the staged reading in its relationship to the text, which might appear self-evident. A staged reading, as it is blatantly obvious,

⁹ In Slovene theatre such practices have been introduced by directors such as Ivica Buljan, Jernej Lorenci, Tomi Janežič, Žiga Divjak, etc.

always establishes a relationship to the text, even when it detaches itself from it a priori and positions itself in the area of autonomous performative events where the text can feature merely as a provocation, trace or “memory” of a concrete textual starting-point. Such radical approaches of course raise the question of the limits of the genre of staged readings, which is by no means irrelevant and indeed ought to be raised repeatedly. It is a fact, however, that in this case the informative and presentational functions of the staged reading become lost, which is again relevant to the definition of the intention (or interest) of both the performers and producers.

Maintaining the relation to the text does not imply a potential “return to the text”, which, following the “performative turn” and “death of literary theatre,” has become virtually impossible anyway. To put it more precisely, 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 a performative area that does not require anything but its own “textuality” for its staging. This conceptual turn, of course, does not renounce the activation of theatrical and spectacular elements in its staging; rather, it concerns a clear definition of anchoring its basic performative decision. In other words: a staged reading should take a stronger ideological position in the text itself and start extracting its performative derivations from it. To borrow, and slightly adapt, an idea introduced by Althusser, we could say that the ideology of a staged reading should interpellate the bare individuality of dramatic or performative material, in other words, its pre-textuality, into the subject, i.e. into the performative content and its meaning (Althusser, 1980, 76). Reading should thus become both the content and the meaning of the staged reading and not merely its form, and therefore also its original performative ideology. This goes particularly for staged readings of contemporary post-dramatic texts which staged readings often take as a starting point. In this case, the theory would argue that what we are dealing with here is a case of “self-staging”, as such texts no longer require a concrete theatre staging due to their specific dramatic—performative—approach in writing.

To borrow the words of Walter Benjamin: a (post-dramatic) text is theatrical (or performative) enough by itself and does not require to be (forcibly) theatricalised.¹⁰

What we are dealing with here is thus a return to reading. The (marginal) act of reading itself can be subversive enough, since, as a precarious performative practice, it represents a negation of externalised

10 Benjamin here actually refers to *Hamlet* (quoted in Tackels, 2015, 26).

spectacular neoliberal logic. Let us consider quiet, invisible reading, where performativity equals zero but is at the same time at its most radical. As such it can function as an intervention into the established economic relations of performance, as it abolishes the object of economic exchange: there is simply no product that could be marketed, no profit, just silent, invisible work. While it is true that just like in the case of invisible work in capitalism there is probably no one who would be prepared to pay for this, it can, however, offer creative pleasure by itself—and perhaps this might apply also to its reception. A staged reading ought to reach further, it ought to enact and make visible the bonds that bind the text to its verbal interpretation. It should make use of the performative power of the word in stage volume, the word in both dimensions of the performer’s verbal performance. Performed at the margin of staged readings, speech can appear louder and more piercing than when emitted in a theatre environment. The shortcomings of staged readings ought to be used to their advantage, according to the (rhetorical) question: How to attain maximal effects with minimal means? Awareness about their fringe position allows staged readings to rearticulate and critically evaluate all creative and production relations.

8.

The performative possibilities of reading appear to be infinite. Let us enumerate but a few:

- Reading as a “secret” and intimate experience (taking into account the unease that accompanies it, as articulated by Barthes; 2013, 123), as opposed to reading as a public experience emphasising rhetorical signs;
- Reading-in-progress, with all its clumsiness, rawness, slips, inconsistencies, stuttering, errors, unconscious lapses, and reading-in-regress, deconstruction of “meaning”, reading not as the weaving of the text but rather as its “undoing”, as abolishing speech, rather than encouraging it;
- Separating speech from writing, as speech is bound to the throat, while writing is bound to the hand;
- Playing around with the text in its material form, its medium: books, manuscripts, paper, ebook readers, tablets, smartphones; tearing it, smashing it, erasing it, rewriting it;
- Inhabiting the text and moving out of it; blindly following what is written and digressing from it; escaping what is written and inventing new texts based on the old one; abolishing the (modernist) commandment of fidelity to the text

and establishing conditions for a new (postmodern) erotic relationship with it;

- Performing the processuality, the levers of transition, the becoming of both the text and the reading—and the reader—itsself, the relation between reading and interpretation (e.g. of a dramatic role);
- Projecting the text onto a background, playing with its graphic, visual value;
- Articulating new relationships between readers and spectators, performers and listeners, group reading, exchanging roles, articulating the connection, community-in-reading;
- Using the text as the domain of performative interventions: repeating what has been read, going back to what has already been said, exposing the problems with understanding and articulation, cases of elimination, ellipsis of the unnecessary or unpleasant text, adding new text, up to its abrupt ironisation and destruction;
- A dialogue with the (living, present?) author, the reader's spontaneous commentary, criticism and polemics, self-criticism, metacriticism;
- Seducing the reader, the possibility of establishing unconventional relationships with them, involving the spectator in the production, co-authorship in the making of the text and performance, the pains and gains of the text;
- Testing the possibility of the birth of *mise-en-scène* out of the spirit of the text...
- There are even more new possibilities to be found in the connection between the text and the body-in-reading (Lehman, 2003, 183), say when a performer's body experiences physical pain when reading or saying the text or, vice versa when reading causes it extreme pleasure; this relationship might be taken to another level by making the reading into a performance of struggling with the text which leads into a painful split—or perhaps a union reached with difficulty; and the effects of forced reading or even reading torture which may lead to unforeseen and extreme consequences.

9.

In reflecting on the genre and aesthetic conditions of staged readings, it is impossible to avoid an analysis of the conditions of production and the consequences of the “revolution” of reading in staged readings. Concerning production, the phenomenon of staged readings—here we are thinking primarily of the ones taking place in institutions, which, due to various interests, the institutions promote as an integral, albeit marginal part of their programme, be it in order to engage younger collaborators, test out certain plays as potential material for later stagings in the “main” programme, appeal to the segment of the audience that relates more to literature than to theatre, etc.—demonstrates a clash of two different interests or aspects: the interest of the creators and the interest of the theatre as an institution. If institutions perceive the specific format of staged readings as the proper space and means for establishing younger theatre artists or perhaps even an entire generation, this is on the one hand quite an appropriate gesture, while on the other institutions, as a rule, usually fail to clearly articulate this interest. This lack of definition is not an assumption; rather, it is quite concretely reflected in the modest and precarious conditions of production specific to this type of production: a minimal number of rehearsals, minimal budget for equipment, modest fees if any at all, and few dates. What the institution can offer, which is by no means negligible, is rehearsal space, dates for performances, a professional cast if necessary, and well-versed promotion. There is, however, a certain gap between the interest of the institution for such production and its investment; a gap that could only be bridged by a clear definition of its intention that should result in a re-articulation of the conditions of production.

The artists themselves often perceive a staged reading as a performance ‘in a nutshell,’—a chamber performance, an opportunity that they need to seize and make the most of. And this is the point where minimal production value clashes with maximal creative desire. Namely, most staged readings are (too) eager to dismiss the act of reading itself and transition into a performance mode, the exploration of space, mise-en-scene, stage and costume design, props, and music, without having proper material support for such a shift. This often results in makeshift, improvised, and ill-elaborated solutions with no real preliminary dramaturgical and performative analysis of what the stage reading format actually is on the one hand, and what kind of a text is being staged on the other. As mentioned above, it is only the intention that is clearly expressed. Thus, in staged readings, we only too often see merely the approximations of “proper” theatre productions, a kind of pre- or prototypical form of theatre which is supposedly on the way to once

becoming full-blown Theatre (which sometimes, albeit rarely, actually happens). We see not-yet-theatre that is actually no-longer-theatre, as the apparent expansion of creativity accompanying the immense desire for establishing oneself combined with material scarcity actually represents an insurmountable obstacle.

All of the above implies two major problems, but also two possible solutions. The first problem, besides a clear definition of intention, is also a clear definition of the space in which a staged reading takes place, i.e. the theatre institution itself. As mentioned above, due to their primordial and initiative character—as an opportunity for establishing new generations, but also for a fundamental reflection on the “birth of theatre” or invention of the genre—staged readings are charged with critical potential or even the possibility of subversion, especially taking into account the poorly defined intention of the institution itself and its provision of modest production conditions. To pose a question: Is it not the case that integrating a staged reading into what appears to be a concrete and aesthetic but is in reality a cultural-political and ideological context opens up the possibility of exposing this context for what it is? To paraphrase a well-known formula by Althusser, namely that critical practice, which is itself a form of ideology, when clashing with another ideology makes this ideology visible. A staged reading can achieve this by exploiting precisely its not-yet-ideological potential and its ideological “innocence”, vulnerability and “naivety” in order to expose in its process the ideological clutter that gets piled up in an institution (Althusser, 1980, 169). This “clutter” consists of poorly articulated programme decisions which more often than not are merely a result of apparently self-evident and common-sense traditions, which, as we know, are full of unreflected sediments like the economic relations that the theatre production is subject to.

A staged reading is thus in a unique position to expose the performative economy down to its foundations. By creating “something” (the aesthetic maximum, i.e. the aesthetic and symbolic, as well as market value) virtually “from nothing”, so to speak, or rather, from a minimum of investment into the production, and by integrating into the system of commodity exchange, it makes the above-mentioned procedures visible. Sometimes it does not even have to take a definite position apropos these procedures, it can suffice just to present them through its own phenomenon, through its own process, i.e. it is enough to present itself as a process. This way it can realise a crucial element of the theory of performative economy which states that economy actually creates the very phenomenon that it is describing, or rather, that economic models, as well as economic “performances,” actually transform

the society in which they appear (Callon, 2006, 23). A staged reading could thus offer an original, epochal and concrete example of the adaptation of the institutional theatre production practice to the model of staged readings. A staged reading cannot and does not have any ambition to replace regular theatre production, of course. It could, however, penetrate it as its “conscience,” its original creative possibility and harbinger of necessary changes in the perception of theatre production as art on the one hand and as an emancipatory social force on the other. The other production possibility is even more tightly connected to the reflection of the genre or format of staged readings itself. This brings us closer to the function or, rather, the position of staged readings in non-institutional production, where the conditions are admittedly different. The “poorness” of such productions is often the result and/or reflection of the “poorness” of the non-institution itself. In this context, a staged reading represents a very adequate—i.e. precarious—genre or format, as it offers a way to fulfil the programme demands of financial backers with minimal investment. One could say that in a non-institutional context staged readings perform the role of exposing production and economic mechanisms by default, as its format fits non-institutional conditions so well. Thus it does not even have to give it any explicit thought, but rather functions as “the thing-in-itself”.

In non-institutions staged readings sometimes rely more on the audience, with which they often a priori create a community of solidarity and tolerance, rather than on any aesthetic or performative format. In such interactions, the means of expression are relegated to a secondary role, while the goal that takes primary focus can be defined in the constitution of the afore-mentioned community and its collective ideology (or belonging) that is no longer merely aesthetic, of course, as it surpasses the space of happening and reaches out into the wider society.

10.

To conclude, let us define some of the dangers that might beset a staged reading and lie hidden in the genre as well as creative or production processes. It is dangerous to pretend that a staged reading is merely one of the various forms of dramatic performance (be it in the traditional or the modernist sense), as this turns it into a “reduced” performance, a not-yet-Performance (with a capital P) that will once “undoubtedly” turn into one. If an institution organises a staged reading based on this assumption, it takes away all of its subversive potentials. However, if the creators themselves are taken in by this line of thinking,

they betray its original aesthetics. We have to be aware that the modest creative and production investment into staged readings is an advantage rather than a shortcoming, as this way the staging can come closer to the very “essence” of theatre, the “empty space” that allows for a realisation of its “essence”. On the other hand, it could be equally dangerous to hold on to the illusion that it is possible to achieve an even bigger spectacular effect in a staged reading than in a regular production, despite its reduced production funding: a staged reading subordinates its spectacular function to the staging of the text; it can happen, as has probably become clear by now, that it is precisely here where the “spectacle of reading” can find its ideal scene. And, last but not least: acceptance of these precarious creative conditions and the neoliberal logic of production (“working for one’s own pleasure”) by the creators needs to be put into focus, the process of staging itself needs to be integrated into the process of critical reflection, or rather, it is necessary to embed certain emancipatory mechanisms into it that will be capable of producing new models of resistance, organisation, and community. The “less is more” adage does not apply in post-dramatic times, as it is becoming more and more obvious that less, alas, is always just less, and more always needs to be won in a struggle.

REFERENCES

- Althusser, L.** (1980): »Ideologija in ideološki aparati države«. Translated by Z. Skušek-Močnik. V: L. Althusser, E. Balibar, P. Macherey, M. Pêcheaux: *Ideologija in estetski učinek*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba. Zbirka Marksistična teorija kulture in umetnosti, 37–99.
- Arhar, N.** (2014): »Ocenjujemo: Simona Semenič: drugič«. *Delo*, 28. okt. 2014. Accessed at: <https://old.delo.si/kultura/oder/ocenjujemo-simona-semenic-drugic.html> (11.2.2021).
- Barthes, R.** (1975): *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by R. Miller. New York: Hill and Wang
- Barthes, R.** (2002): *Écrits sur le theatre*. Pariz: Éditions du Seuil.
- Barthes, R.** (2003): *Učna ura*. Translated by B. Pogačnik. Ljubljana: Društvo Apokalipsa. Zbirka Fraktal, 1.
- Barthes, R.** (2013): *Užitek v tekstu. Variacije o pisavi*. Prev. Š. Žakelj. Ljubljana: Beletrina. Knjižna zbirka Koda.
- Callon, M.** (2006): "What does it mean to say that economics is performative?" V: *HAL-archives ouvertes*. Accessed at: <https://hal-shs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00091596/document> (11.2.2021).
- Lehmann, H.-T.** (2003): *Postdramsko gledališče*. Translated by K. J. Kozak. Ljubljana: Maska. Zbirka Transformacije, 12.
- Lukan, B.** (1991): *Dramaturške replike*. Ljubljana: Mestno gledališče ljubljansko, 1991. Knjižnica MGL, 112.
- Sušec Michieli, B.** et al. (2007): *Gledališki terminološki slovar*. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC. Zbirka Slovarji.
- Tackels, B.** (2015): *Les Écritures de plateau. État des lieux*. Besançon: Les Solitaires Intempestifs.