

# Theatre and Culture in a Period of Artistic Progress: The Importance of the 1960s for Theatre Institutions

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**Abstract:** In the 1960s an (aesthetic) turn occurred in the field of Slovene theatre. This could be perceived as a rejection of the socialist (or social-realist) view of art. This break started at the end of the 1950s with the establishment of non-institutional theatres (the Experimental Theatre in Ljubljana, Oder 57, and other). This was a period of the emergence of new contemporary theatre practices (small stages, experiments, and theatre as the result of group participation) and the arrival of new genres (theatre of the absurd). The image of Slovene theatre in socialist society began to change with the impact of the neo avant-garde and experimental theatrical practices, and this article will briefly describe their origin. The alterations were expressed through production, performances, and aesthetics. The 1960s were a time when institutional theatres began to use new forms, principles, texts, and (Western European) philosophy in performances.

This article aims to show the coexistence and symbiosis of the artistic and aesthetic development of Slovene theatre in both the institutional and non-institutional spheres. This connection was revealed with an aesthetic-philosophical view on theatre as well as in direction and acting itself (i.e., the practical approach) when one actor was part of both institutional and non-institutional practices. Therefore, the transfer of principles from experimental stages into institutions was essential for visible changes that could be seen in repertoires, casts, critical reception, methods of acting and directing, and the arrival of new generations.

This article was prepared by reviewing repertoires and making comparisons between different theatres. Critics' reviews of certain performances and actors have been evaluated. In particular, the historical time and space that determine the relationships between art and a political model was taken into account. The consideration of the context is inescapable when dealing with theatrical facts. The political and social situation constantly influences the relationships within theatre art and the messages that the authors want to communicate through their artistic work.

**Keywords:** Slovene theatre, 1960s, non-institutional theatre, experimental theatre, SNG Drama Ljubljana

## I

The 1960s were a time of great prosperity for Slovene theatre and are still of great importance for theatre history. This statement can be justified and connected to the political and social situation in that time in the former Yugoslavia. For the first time since the Second World War, people were able to buy foreign currency, the authorities re-opened the borders, shopping trips to other countries (Austria and Italy) became popular, the government started building new apartments, it was possible to get a consumer loan in banks, household standards were rising, and more and more families were able to afford a vacation on the seaside.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, “[p]olitical and economic changes resulted in increased social differences. In 1968 students joined the workers’ protest against the government. A new social class emerged. The middle class slowly began to outgrow the working class and the farmers. These changes also resulted in the rise of individualism”<sup>2</sup>.

It was in the 1960s when Slovene theatre reached one of the biggest aesthetic turns of the second half of the 20th century. The main cause of this was the refusal of all principles of social realism and socialist art in theatre. (Neo) avant-garde and experimental groups also appeared: e.g., OHO, Pupilija, 442–443, and Veternica.

In his book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger emphasized that we must not look at pieces of art as individual objects but rather in connection to society or social status:

“The European avant-garde movements can be defined as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society. What is negated is not an earlier form of art (a style) but art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men.”<sup>3</sup>

By exchanging the word “bourgeois” for “socialist”, we can interpret and use Bürger’s quote to describe the Slovene neo avant-garde movement in the 1960s. One of the most well-known characteristics of the neo avant-garde is

1 NEČAK, D. – REPE, B. *Oris sodobne obče in slovenske zgodovine*. Ljubljana : Filozofska fakulteta, Oddelek za zgodovino, 2003, p. 299.

2 Ibid, p. 300.

3 BÜRGER, P. *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 49.

refusing the status of art in socialist society. Art as an institution is no longer connected with the everyday life of society.

For a wider context, the prominent representatives of (neo) avant-garde movements can be briefly presented. In the Slovene region, the (historical) avant-garde began with Ferdo Delak, Novo Mesto Spring<sup>4</sup>, Marij Kogoj, Avgust Černigoj, and Ivan Mrak. After the Second World War, they continued (as neo-avant-garde and/or experimental practices) with Oder 57, the Ad Hoc Theatre of Draga Ahačič, the Experimental Theatre of Balbina Battelino Baranovič, Študentsko aktualno gledališče (ŠAG)<sup>5</sup>, the OHO Group<sup>6</sup>, the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre<sup>7</sup>, the Glej Theatre, Pekarna, NSK<sup>8</sup>, and Gledališče sester Scipiona Nasice<sup>9</sup>. Individuals and groups shared some crucial similarities: a different use of (theatrical or artistic) language as well as body and text, changing a point of view, and establishing a new and active relationship with the audience.

Hans Thies Lehmann wrote about the neo avant-garde:

“They constantly sacrifice parts of the dramatic performance. But in the end they keep a crucial connection between the text of the act, theatre procedures, reports, and performance representation directed to them.”<sup>10</sup>

In Slovene institutional and non-institutional theatre, the beginning of the 1960s was essential for artistic, aesthetic, and discursive development. All post-war artistic practices can be described as experimental theatre practice and in some cases as neo-avant-garde theatre practice. Barbara Orel has pointed out the most important performers:

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4 It was started in 1920 by the poets Miran Jarc and Anton Podbevšek, the painter Božidar Jakac, and others.

5 This can be translated as “Student Contemporary Theatre”, led by Dušan Jovanovič.

6 The group was active between 1966 and 1971 and mostly focused on ready-made art.

7 The group was active between 1969 and 1972 and became famous because of their uncompromising approach in practising avant-garde theatre. They combined various forms: pop-culture, collage dramaturgy, video, performance, and happenings.

8 Neue Slowenische Kunst, a political art collective founded in 1984.

9 Scipion Nasice Sister’s Theatre (1983–1987) was part of the NSK project with the groups Laibach and Irwin.

10 LEHMANN, H.-T. *Postdramsko gledališče*. Ljubljana : Maska, 2003, p. 70.

“The happenings in the groups OHO and Nomenklatura, the ritualistic forms of theatre in the group of Tomaž Kralj (Beli krog) and Vetrnica by Vlado Šav. The Pekarna theatre by Lado Kralj, the events by the Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre, the artistic performances of Dalibor Bori Zupančič, Miroslav Slana, and others. All artists and their groups were based on free life principles and the outbreak of hippie culture. They were also based on the ideas of authenticity, spontaneity, genuineness, and directness.”<sup>11</sup>

Deviation from convention began in the 1960s. This led artists away from institutions and the already mentioned bourgeois (or socialist) concept of theatre with *Perspektive* journal, the Oder 57 theatre, and others. It should not be forgotten that the “seed of the neo avant-garde movement in Slovenia emerged from the circle of secondary school students with Marko Pogačnik and Iztok Geister Plamen. In the secondary school newspaper *Plamenica* [A Torch] in 1963, they expressed a tendency to overcome the established forms of reception”<sup>12</sup>.

The artistic/performing space was more intensively developed in the 1970s, which was the result (heritage) of powerful groups and performances from the 1960s, such as from the Pupilija Ferkeverk theatre group with its artistic leader Dušan Jovanović. In the article *Happenings and Slovene Performing Arts*, Barbara Orel wrote:

“Pupilija with its total stage language hit a breaking point in Slovene performing arts. This is when – as Venko Taufer wrote – a decade of different conception of directional concepts, text approaches, the role of actors, and radically different conceptions of the theatre started. In particular in the Eksperimentalno gledališče Glej and Pekarna.”<sup>13</sup>

At the end of the 1960s, the establishment of independent theatres happened. At that time, the youngest generation of artists was strongly engaged in purely theatrical matters. Gašper Troha has pointed out two concepts: the

11 OREL, B. K zgodovini performansa na Slovenskem: eksperimentalne gledališke prakse v obdobju 1966–1986. In SUŠEC MICHIELI, B. – LUKAN, B. – ŠORLI, M. *Dinamika sprememb v slovenskem gledališču 20. stoletja*. Ljubljana : AGRFT ; Maska, 2010, p. 274.

12 JESENKO, P. Potohodec kot ritualni fragment gledališke neoavantgarde na Slovenskem (prvi fragment o gledališču Pekarna). In *Maska*, 2009, Vol. 24, Nos. 123–124, p. 22.

13 OREL, B. Hpeningi in slovenske scenske umetnosti. In *Maska*, 2009, Vol. 24, Nos. 123–124, p. 64.

abolition of the primacy of the text and the restoration of the ritual in theatre.<sup>14</sup> One author pointed out that a significant turning point occurred at the end of the 1960s, when a white hen was killed on 29 October 1969 during the performance of *Pupilija, papa Pupilo pa Pupilčki* (The Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre, director Dušan Jovanovič). The critic Venko Taufer marked this event as the death of a literary and the only aesthetically functional theatre in Slovenia.<sup>15</sup> But as will be presented below, this statement was not entirely true. As a symbol, the white hen was really the most radical expression and had its consequences; however, important changes had begun to happen at least a decade earlier. This statement was also supported in Troha's article, where he presented all of the performance circumstances in the context of the historical background and position of the group in the theatrical system.<sup>16</sup>

## II

The 1960s were a period of accelerated and essential development in the performing arts. It should be pointed out that in this period, institutional theatres slowly began to integrate poetics and incorporate approaches from very powerful non-institutional theatres into their own theatre practice.

Bojan Štih<sup>17</sup> was the manager of SNG Drama Ljubljana<sup>18</sup> from 1960 to 1969. He significantly contributed to the new principles of performing contemporary Slovene plays and new Western works on the national stage. The staging of *Rhinocéros* [Rhinceros] by Eugene Ionesco at the end of the 1960/61 season foretold rich repertoires in the following seasons which included plays by Tennessee Williams, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, John Osborne, Max Frisch, Edward Albee, Albert Camus, Dario Fo, Arthur Miller, and oth-

14 TROHA, G. *Ujetniki svobode: slovenska dramatika in družba med letoma 1943 in 1990*. Ljubljana : AGRFT ; Maribor: Aristej, 2015, p. 120.

15 TAUFER, V. Eksperimentalno gledališče v Križankah: Pupilija papa Pupilo pa Pupilčki. In MILOHNIČ, A. – SVETINA, I. *Prišli so Pupilčki*. Ljubljana : Maska ; Slovenski gledališki muzej, 2009, p. 28.

16 TROHA, G. Truplo bele kokoši. In *Filozofski vestnik*, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 127–134.

17 Bojan Štih (1923–1986), a critic, essayist, editor, and manager of SNG Drama Ljubljana in the crucial period of its progress, pro-Western streams, and passage of new principles in institutional theatre.

18 Slovene National Theatre Drama in Ljubljana, traditionally the main Slovene theatre house.

ers.<sup>19</sup> His period in the national theatre is known as the re-Europeanization of Slovene theatre.<sup>20</sup>

The arts management of large theatre institutions had a desire to stage contemporary West European plays. This desire turned into reality because of the drastically changed political and social circumstances and a very powerful production on the off-scene, where groups had created a fresh view of the creation process, new forms in aesthetic and contemporary texts, and philosophical thought in the Slovene cultural space. Here are some of the more prominent examples: (1) John Osborne took over the presentation of social problems in the “English-speaking area”, which had been the main topic of Arthur Miller in the 1950s. Of course, Osborne was not performed to such an extent as he was a young author with no large opus, but he was incorporated in an intense thematic, topical, and contemporary way into the theatrical milieu. Performances included *Look Back in Anger* (1958, SNG Drama Ljubljana; 1966, AGRFT<sup>21</sup>), *Epitaph for George Dillon* (1959, SNG Drama Maribor), *Luther* (1962, SNG Drama Ljubljana), and *Inadmissible Evidence* (1966, MGL). (2) The 1960s also witnessed the work of Edward Albee with performances of *The American Dream* (1963, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1964, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *The Zoo Story* (1966, AGRFT), *A Delicate Balance* (1969, SNG Drama Ljubljana), and *Everything in the Garden* (1969, MGL<sup>22</sup>; 1970, SNG Drama Maribor). (3) Friedrich Dürrenmatt was the most prominent author from the German-speaking area: *Der Besuch der alten Dame* [The Visit] (1958, MGL; 1960, SNG Drama Maribor), *Romulus der Grosse* [Romulus the Great] (1962, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *Die Physiker* [The Physicists] (1963, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *Der Meteor* [The Meteor] (1966, MGL), and *Die Wiedertäufer* [The Anabaptists] (1968, MGL).

Another special phenomenon of the Slovene cultural space was the connection (or fascination) with the French philosophy of existentialism. This was quite evident because of the performances of contemporary French playwrights, which were the main influence on the development of original

19 ANDRES, R. Umetniški kolektivi na Slovenskem in uprizorjanje zahodnoevropske dramatike. In *Tvorivá osobnost a kolektivny charakter divadelnej tvorby: zborník referátov z XIII. medzinárodnej Banskobystrickej teatrologickej konferencie v cykle DNES A TU*. (Ed. Andrej Maťašík). Banská Bystrica : Akadémia umení v Banskej Bystrici, Fakulta dramatických umení, 2016, p. 168.

20 TROHA, G. Truplo bele kokoši. In *Filozofski vestnik*, p. 120.

21 Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film, and Television.

22 MGL – Mestno gledališče ljubljansko – Ljubljana City Theatre.

Slovene drama and theatrical/performance expression. The works of Primož Kozak<sup>23</sup>, Marjan Rožanc<sup>24</sup>, and others were created under the influence of existentialism. Some great performances of Albert Camus's work were created on Slovene stages in this period: *Caligula* (1963, SNG Drama Ljubljana), *Le Malentendu* [The Misunderstanding] (1960, SLG Celje; 1967, MGL), and *Les Possédés* [The Possessed] (1970, MGL). This period was mostly marked by the plays of Jean Paul Sartre: *Huis-Clos* [No Exit] (1958, 1969) and *Les Mains sales* [Dirty Hands] (1962, 1964, and 1966). Other performances of Sartre's work were *Le Putain respectueuse* [The Respectful Putain] (1954, PK Kranj; 1960, SNG Nova Gorica), *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* [The Condemned in Altona] (1960, MGL), *Les Mouches* [The Flies] (1961, AGRFT), *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* [The Devil and the Good Lord] (1965, SNG Drama Ljubljana), and *Morts sans sépulture* [The Victors] (1969, SLG Celje). To explain the situation, it is necessary to mention that his *Critique de la raison dialectique* [Critique of Critical Reason] was published in *Perspektive* journal four years in a row.

The 1960s were also marked by the arrival of absurd drama. Eugene Ionesco was present on stage with his core works: *La Leçon* [The Lesson] (1958), *La Cantatrice Chauve* [The Bald Soprano] (1958), *Les Chaises* [The Chairs] (1960), *Rhinocéros* [Rhinoceros] (1961), *Le Soif et la faim* [Hunger and Thirst] (1967), and *Roi se meurt* [Exit the King] (1970). There was a little less enthusiasm (which, however, was no less important) about Samuel Beckett's plays. The affection of authors<sup>25</sup> (artists, practitioners, and theatres) for the French cultural space was stronger than for the English-speaking one. However, during this period, some interesting young authors appeared, and Slovene artistic leaders in theatres put their works into repertoires without any difficulty. Especially exposed at the beginning of his journey were Harold Pinter with *The Homecoming* (1967) and *The Caretaker* (1970) and Tom Stoppard in 1969 with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; Peter Shaffer, who began his career as a playwright in the 1950s, appeared in Slovene theatres twice with *The Private Ear* and *The Public Eye*, and once with the *Black Comedy*.

The desire of institutional theatre management for the performance of contemporary Western European drama was possible because of the changed political and social conditions and strong production of non-institutional groups that brought into the Slovene cultural space a fresh look at creation

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23 (1921–1981), playwright, essayist, professor.

24 (1930–1990), playwright, writer, essayist.

25 Such as Draga Ahačič, Jože Javoršek, and others.

processes, new aesthetic norms, and new texts and philosophical thought. All these processes resulted in institutions distancing themselves from the perception of bourgeois theatre. The concept of socialist thought in the theatre was still present as a consolidation of power through propaganda, art, and ideology. This flow in literature and theatre art is called “socialist realism” and began with Gorky and Mayakovsky. Later Matjaž Kmecl coined the term “socially critical realism”.<sup>26</sup>

Various authors (like the theoretician and critic Janko Kos) emphasized that socialist realism, as we had known it from the Soviet Union, was never present in Slovenia. It was just a form of social realism. This was represented in theatre art through the “critique of the past class society and its remnants” and portrayed the new, idealized socialist society in terms of socialist education.<sup>27</sup> Here we must take into account the statement of Jože Šegedin, the president of the theatre council of SNG Drama Ljubljana in the 1958/59 season. During his speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Drama Theatre (6 February 1959), he said:

“I think the main goal of social governance in the theatre is protecting the needs and interests of our socialist society through social governance, and at the same time guaranteeing complete freedom in the development of theatre art.”<sup>28</sup>

On the perspectives and development of theatrical art, he added: “We see in the ZKJ<sup>29</sup> programme that our most advanced social forces will ensure that our theatrical culture develops on the basis of socialist humanism.”<sup>30</sup> We can assume that at the end of the 1950s the authorities had not yet given up their active involvement in the creation of artistic programmes, aesthetics, and the regulation of actual artistic production. This was proven in the 1960s with a series of interference with the freedom of creativity. The most notorious example was certainly the interruption and cancellation of the performance of *Topla greda* [The hot Beam]<sup>31</sup> by Marjan Rožanc (Oder 57, 1964).

26 KMECL, M. *Mali literarni leksikon*. Ljubljana : Univerzum, 1983, p. 73.

27 Ibid, p. 74.

28 ŠEGEDIN, J. Slavnostni nagovor. In *Gledališki list SNG Drama Ljubljana*, 1959, No. 9, p. 258.

29 ZKJ – Zveza komunistov Jugoslavije – League of Communists of Yugoslavia.

30 ŠEGEDIN, J. Slavnostni nagovor. In *Gledališki list SNG Drama Ljubljana*, p. 260.

31 A partially translated title is “Hotbed”.

Regardless of political pressure and attempts to actively influence the theatre community (there is no difference between the institutional and non-institutional ones), the modernization of theatre was progressing more rapidly and intensively than before. Taras Kermauner described this vividness:

“Due to the analogue demonstration of young critical artists at the performance of *Povečevalno steklo* [The Magnifying Glass] by Jože Javoršek in 1956, and even more so because of the demonstrations at the performance of *Topla greda* in 1964 by Oder 57, it is clear that the possibility of transforming professional theatre into theatre as a direct action still exists. This potential attempts to undermine the theatre as a box, which has become mostly a culture as a special movement dividing bourgeois society into many segments. The military abolishes this division and re-establishes direct participation by which the whole world should be transformed into the theatre and the theatre into war.”<sup>32</sup>

All these processes resulted in a distancing of institutions from the perception of bourgeois theatre and from socialist thought in theatre. This had been understood as a tool for consolidating the authority of the Party and the government and the use of ideological propaganda in the performing arts. In the 1960s, socialist approaches which were significant for the period after the Second World War and the 1950s slowly began to disappear. The most obvious proof of the situation can be seen in the staging of plays from Western Europe firstly on non-institutional stages and then on institutional ones. A few examples of this shift are given in the following: *Huis-Clos* by Jean Paul Sartre was first staged in the Ad Hoc Theatre in 1958, and in 1960 another two performances of his texts took place. Sartre’s most popular play of the period was *Les Mains Sales* which was also staged in the Ad Hoc Theatre by Draga Ahačič in 1962. After that it was staged in institutions in 1964 and 1966. In 1958 the members of Oder 57 staged two plays by Eugene Ionesco: *La Leçon* and *La Cantatrice Chauve*. After that, *Les Chaises* were staged in 1960 (SSG Trst) and *Rhinocéros* was staged in 1961 (SNG Drama Ljubljana), both of them in institutional theatres. This pattern could be seen in a large number of plays (from Western European and domestic authors). This situation can be interpreted as the self-censorship of institutions. It seems that they first checked the efficiency, the value, and most importantly the reac-

32 KERMAUNER, T. Slovenska dramatika in gledališče. In SVETINA, I. *Vidiki slovenske gledališke zgodovine*. Ljubljana : Slovenski gledališki muzej, Vol. 39, No. 79, 2003, p. 31.

tion of the authorities and public before they accepted such a text (or author) into their repertoire.

This transition was particularly intense after *Perspektive* journal was abolished in 1964. At that time the alternative stage principles moved to the institutions. This was possible because of more efficient control under the cultural policy determined by the Communist Party.

### III

In the first half of the 1960s, the Ad Hoc Theatre (founder Draga Ahačič) was still performing. With their different approaches to production, they brought important Western authors (Jean Paul Sartre, Jean Giraudoux, George Michel, and others) into the Slovene cultural space. In 1960 Draga Ahačič wrote a polemical article for the journal *Naša sodobnost*. Its main theme was a performance by the French group of Madeleine Renaud and Jean Louis Barrault in Ljubljana. In the article she advocated contemporary French theatrical practice, particularly “total theatre”, and the primary role of the text; this was also the main poetic of Draga Ahačič as a director. She defined two main poles of the dramatic and theatre creativity in the late 1950s and early 1960s:

“Contemporary theatre production is caught between two extremes. The first: outdated, literary, psychological, and bourgeois theatre; the second: avant-garde, anti-literary, squeaky clean, and total theatre.”<sup>33</sup>

The first of these, of course, was the production of politically approved, accepted, and encouraged drama (performance). The second group referred to the activities (poetics) of her own interest (from her own Ad Hoc Theatre) and the activities of other experimental groups (off-scene). Regarding the theatre of Jean-L. Barrault, she wrote that it distanced itself from the formalism of clean or total theatre as seen by those who do not seek “the art in themselves, but themselves in the art”. She added: “Because of their own inner emptiness, they don’t have the understanding or the need for deeper human content. They hold on to various formalist dogmas, and without a thought leave themselves to new waves.”<sup>34</sup>

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33 AHAČIČ, D. Gledališče za človeka. In *Naša sodobnost*, 1960, Vol. 8, Nos. 8/9, p. 828.

34 Ibid, p. 829.

In the article, Draga Ahačič also highlighted some other problems connected to the reception of new and contemporary theoretical or performance streams of the period. Her vision of the theatre can be seen by analysing the repertoires.<sup>35</sup> This vision in general was one of a centrally placed human (individual or subject) that she proved with the selection and staging of plays from Western Europe (especially France).<sup>36</sup> Let us look at another example from the beginning of the 1960s. At that time, Oder 57 staged a great deal of contemporary Slovene drama (mostly from the circle of *Perspektive* journal). After its closure (or rather revocation) in 1964, a major part of the non-institutional mission and practices were directly transferred to institutional theatres. Bojan Štih (the manager of SNG Drama) established Mala drama (Little Drama), a new stage in the building of the national theatre. This new space was intended for “national and foreign radical theatrical attempts and experiments”<sup>37</sup>.

All searches, poetics, and philosophies from the off-scene were transferred directly to national institutions. Before that, new approaches transitioned along with actors who played on experimental stages and at the same time worked in the institutions. Young theatre directors played a major role. Their generation started working outside institutions, but in 1960s they slowly make it to the forefront. The establishment of Mala drama was the peak of artistic development in the period. It was an experiment incorporated into the practice and work of an institutional theatre. The attitude of the pro-

35 Such research has been done in the article: ANDRES, R. Umetniški kolektivi na Slovenskem in uprizarjanje zahodnoevropske dramatike. In *Tvorivá osobnosť a kolektívny charakter divadelnej tvorby: zborník referátov z XIII. medzinárodnej Banskobystrickej teatrologickej konferencie v cykle DNES A TU*, pp. 161–172.

36 “The Madeleine Renaud and Jean-Barrault Group is an artistically alive, healthy, and mature theatrical body. Despite the recognition and success which the group has experienced in the largest cities of the world, it did not stagnate, absorbed in its own size; it rather embarked on a journey to the most demanding and eternally unattainable goal – perfection with deep and sincere commitment in search of new ideas and initiatives. Precisely because of this artistic responsibility, which grows from a desire to bring the author to the audience, Barrault’s theatre, ‘born out of love for man’, deserves the title of theatre for humanity. As Barrault himself says: ‘Whatever we do in the future, we must never forget that for all, for the author and for those who serve him, theatre is primarily a human being.’” See AHAČIČ, D. Gledališče za človeka. In *Naša sodobnost*, p. 833.

37 PONIŽ, D. Prolegomena k raziskavi vloge in pomena slovenske dramatike in gledališča pri prehodu iz totalitarnega v demokratični sistem od leta 1960 do 1990. In SUŠEC MICHIELI, B. – LUKAN, B. – ŠORLI, M. *Dinamika sprememb v slovenskem gledališču 20. stoletja*. Ljubljana : AGRFT ; Maska, 2010, p. 257.

fessional public to the production of experimental principles in the institutions can be seen in a review by the critic Pogačnik of the performance of the *Plešasta pevka* [The Bald Soprano] by Eugene Ionesco (8. 4. 1958, Oder 57): “When the avant-garde has a roof over its head, it is less ‘avant-gardy’, and a bald soprano would be much less bald on the big stage”, and “it is not bad for Ljubljana to have a Huchette, besides Comedie, Marigny, and Ronde.”<sup>38</sup>

#### IV

An important aspect of the modernization of the Slovene theatrical space is the practice that permanently employed and ensemble actors would move from institutional to non-institutional theatres and back again. Beside the regular work in the institutions, they played in non-institutional theatres and gained additional experience on stages of experimental practice and small stages. Above all, they were able to work with modern texts and directing approaches (aesthetics).

Three elements contributed to modernization within the theatrical practice: dramatic texts, directing, and acting. This article has already outlined the arrival of the dramatic texts of contemporary European and American authors. As already mentioned, the 1960s were marked by the arrival of a younger generation of directors who were the first theatre professionals educated after the war. This was a generation that was reticent to the traditions arising from the social revolution or even reluctant about them.<sup>39</sup>

One of the most prominent examples is the director Mile Korun, who is now considered one of the greatest directors of post-war Slovene theatre. After a series of directed plays in the institutions, he established himself at the beginning of the 1960s with Eugene Ionesco’s *La Leçon* (1963, AGRFT), Brendan Behan’s *The Hostage* and Dario Fo’s *Gli Archangeli non giocano al flipper* [Archangels Don’t Play Pinball] (both 1963), Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1964), and many others. Mile Korun never engaged in experimental stages, but he was one of the generation of directors with a strong engagement in the non-institutional scene. From his debut, he therefore developed innovation within the institutions. Franci Križaj was a director at

38 POGAČNIK, J. Plešasta pevka. In *Slovenski poročevalec*, 1958, Vol. 19, No. 89, p. 4, (15. 4. 1958).

39 Directors such as Slavko Jan, Bratko Kreft, Branko Gavella, Viktor Molka, and others.

Oder 57. From 1966 he was an internal director at SLG Celje<sup>40</sup>, where he directed modern texts by national and foreign authors as well as the classics. His first direction at Oder 57 was *Escorial* by Michel Ghelderode (1 September 1959). We can say that this was a direct transfer of non-institutional principles to institutions.

Dušan Jovanović had a significant impact on Slovene drama and theatre in the second half of the 20th century. He began his artistic path with experiments and in experimental groups. With his ground-breaking directing poetics, he entered Slovene social and theatrical creativity with criticalness and even excesses. We can compare this to the already mentioned killing of the white hen on stage, which caused real newspaper and political hysteria. In the 1960s there was still a strong presence of the older generation of directors who had mostly emerged from the pre-war era or for whom the social revolution was both life and an artistic ideal. Young theatre directors, such as Miran Herzog and Žarko Peta, who were not attached to an experimental or non-institutional theatre established themselves within institutions. However, this period was marked by artists who came from the experimental field and made great careers in the institutional theatres as mentioned above. There were also those such as Draga Ahačič, who found a true artistic milieu in experimental theatre despite previous work in institutions. Actors and actresses present a special example. They were the central messengers of the text and directional approaches and appeared in various casts inside and outside their home theatre companies. Specific examples of the transition from experimental stages to national institutions were certainly the staging of *Antigona* [Antigone] by Dominik Smole and *Afera* [The Affair] by Primož Kozak. Both dramas were firstly staged at Oder 57 and shortly after on the stage of SNG Drama Ljubljana. The similarities were not just in the same text but also in some other peculiarities.

The performances of dramas were a special turning point due to their expressive power. The plays were staged in the following order: *Afera* was firstly performed at Oder 57, premiering on 20 March 1961, and soon afterwards was performed at the national theatre, premiering on 12 December 1961. *Antigona* premiered on 8 April 1960 and later in SNG Maribor on 5 November 1960 before being performed at SNG Drama Ljubljana on 25 December 1960.

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40 Slovensko ljudsko gledališče Celje – The Slovene People's Theatre Celje.

Special attention must be paid to actors that, in addition to their work in non-institutional theatres, created great roles for the important texts of contemporary Western European authors. Most of these actors later enjoyed significant acting careers with many awards and grand historical roles. The cast of *Antigona* in Ljubljana in 1960 is particularly interesting. Actor Jurij Souček performed at both Oder 57 and SNG Drama as Kreon, and Branko Miklavc did so as Teirezijas.<sup>41</sup> Dušan Škedl performed on the stage of Oder 57 as a Guard, while in SNG Drama he played the Messenger. A similar situation appeared in the production of *Afera*, where Jurij Souček performed the role of Commissioner Jeremija in both performances. In both performances, Lojze Rozman played the role of Simon. It may also be important to note that in spite of the different directors (at Oder 57 Franci Križaj, at SNG Drama France Jamnik), the costume designer, Anja Dolenc, remained the same. Despite the fact that the performances were different in their aesthetic and directing approaches, the transmission of acting principles certainly took place. The progressive methods of the new Slovene text and the performance methods of the non-institutional scene influenced the modernization of SNG Drama Ljubljana.

The critical reception of *Antigona* in SNG Drama was ideologically schematic, rejecting both the concept and the performance of Smole's drama; the critic Marjan Brezovar dedicated his writing to the ideology of the text and sought his weak derivations in expression. Therefore, the positive attitude towards acting creations came as a surprise. This was especially the case with Jurij Souček, who "rescued the schematic character of Kreon", "gave the character a new dimension", and surprised with the conciseness of the performance.<sup>42</sup> All the facts about the actor's performance represented a breath of fresh air in expression, which definitely appeared due to the loosening (and permeability) of the classical (bourgeois, also socialist) view of theatre and acting practices outside the institutions.

Something similar happened in the critique by Josip Vidmar of Kozak's *Afera* (also in SNG Drama Ljubljana), where the whole plot of the play was emphasized and analysed (also as a European trend!) The critic dedicated almost the same amount of text to the actors as to the content itself. He described them as "five young lions of the theatre" and continued that "the director had at his disposal players who devoted themselves to their roles

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41 In SNG Drama the alternative actor was Stane Sever.

42 BREZOVAR, M. *Antigona*. In *Delo*, 1960, Vol. 2, No. 357, p. 6, (31. 12. 1960).

with a rare eagerness and ability”.<sup>43</sup> The critic concluded with the evaluation: “A rare performance in our Drama theatre that is full of flying, creative will, and real abilities.”<sup>44</sup>

The role of actors in transferring the aesthetics of the non-institutional scene into the institutions is of great importance in the present research. The number of directors linked to both poles was not so big. Actors were a much more powerful connection. As mentioned before, important actors were involved in both spheres. Jurij Souček, for example, was also active as the director of an absurd drama by Fernando Arrabal entitled *L'architecte et l'empereur d'Assyrie* [The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria]. He directed it at Mala drama in the 1968/69 season (the premiere was on 20 December 1968) and played in it alongside Janez Hočevar.

An important connection between the two forms of theatrical practice were those actors who already had long careers in the institutions: Lojze Rozman, Polde Bibič, Danilo Benedičič, Iva Zupančič, Rudi Kosmač, Vida Juvan, Duša Počkaj, Branko Miklavc, Brane Ivanc, and many others. Most of these actors and actresses were the bearers of the repertoire in their theatres (mostly Drama SNG Ljubljana) in the selected period. Through their participation outside their regular work, they introduced modern acting principles into the institutions, developed experimental theatre, and created their artistic expressions with a symbiosis between the two poles of performing arts practices.

In his memoirs on this period, Polde Bibič states:

“Although he was an actor in an institution, we admired Lojze Rozman. He was the bearer of the mood of our time. We admired Jurij Souček for his talent, musical ear, and feeling for modern, new things, which he could only develop later at Oder 57. In the City Theatre (MGL) we admired the simple, fine, unpredictable acting of Janez Albreht. We were inspired by the glowing comic force of Janez Škof from Celje. We rushed to Kranj, where they performed the first Sartre in Slovenia.”<sup>45</sup>

43 VIDMAR, J. Afera. In *Delo* 1961, Vol. 3, No. 344, p. 7, (17. 12. 1961).

44 Ibid.

45 BIBIČ, P. Kako sem doživljal Oder 57. In PETAN, Ž. – PARTLJIČ, T. *Oder 57*. Ljubljana : Knjižnica Mestnega gledališča ljubljanskega, 1988, p. 67.

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Some might think that too much significance has been given to this period. In such a case, it is worthwhile adding a quote by the Slovene critic and historian Janko Kos from 1972:

“Since the theatres in Ljubljana returned to more traditional directions, the performances of the avant-garde groups are recently the only modern Slovene theatre. They warned the general public about some problems of contemporary Slovene theatre and culture in general.”<sup>46</sup>

He added that performances from the beginning of the 1960s and the whole decade modernized the existing traditional theatre.

If we conducted a comparative study and followed the history of Slovene theatre up to the 1970s, we would recognize that the next decade was more politically rigid and strict. Institutional theatres returned to a position of no social and political criticism, and they stopped researching new aesthetic and expressional possibilities. Therefore, the new experimental groups which re-emerged were based on the heritage of groups from the beginning of the 1960s. Just as the coexistence of institutional and non-institutional theatre in the 1960s was of crucial importance for the development of the performing arts, with influence occurring in both directions, it is also essential in modern times that we are aware of the mutual enrichment of both fields of theatrical practice.

*Translated by the author*

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46 KOS, J. Slovensko avantgardno gledališče – kam? In *Sodobnost*, 1972, Vol. 20, No. 5, p. 542.

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**Rok Andres** is a dramaturge and screenwriter. He graduated in dramaturgy from the Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film and Television (University of Ljubljana) and has worked on various projects, including practical theatre work, writing for film projects, moderating debates about drama and theatre, directing events, and leading workshops for young theatre enthusiasts. As a dramaturge and assistant, he has worked in Slovene theatres (the National Theatre Drama Ljubljana, the National Theatre Drama Maribor, the Ljubljana City Theatre, the Prešeren Theatre Kranj, and others). He writes articles on theatre productions and has published in various scholarly publications on drama and theatre. Currently he is employed as an assistant lecturer (junior researcher) at the University of Nova Gorica.

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