

In the first part of the article, the author analyses the appearance of the director and the changes in his position in Slovenian theatre from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. In this context, he is particularly interested in the changes in theatre directing that took place in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of collective theatre. The author methodologically combines historical and comparative analysis, as these processes still take place today, when devised theatre and other forms of theatrical creation are increasingly spoken and written about, moving away from the conventional process by which a playwright writes a dramatic text as a literary work of art and the director then transforms it into a theatrical work of art. There are more and more performances in contemporary Slovenian theatre in which a pre-written dramatic text is not crucial for the final product of the creative process. The two most commonly used terms for this type of performance are *po motivih* (based on the motifs) and *avtorski projekt* (auteur performance). Although the terms are not synonymous, both terms imply a devised type of theatre. The author compares group creation with the devised way of creating and points out that although these are practices that can take place in parallel, they cannot be equated. The author concludes that for collective theatre, the specific relationship between the creative group and the director's position is constitutive. In contrast, for devised theatre, the relationship between the creative group and the playwright's position is crucial. Finally, the author also touches on the connections between postdramatic and post-directors' theatre and the emergence of the creative group as a collective subjectivity.

---

**Keywords:** Slovenian theatre, collective creation, devised theatre, experimental theatre, directors' theatre, post-directors' theatre

---

**Aldo Milohnič, PhD**, is an associate professor of theatre history at the University of Ljubljana, Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television. Since 2013, he is head of the Theatre and Film Studies Centre of the same academy. He is editor and co-author of numerous anthologies and special issues of performing arts journals, author of numerous articles in academic journals and author of the monographs *Theories of Contemporary Theatre and Performance* (2009), *Art in Times of the Rule of Law and Capital* (2016) and *Theatre of Resistance* (2021).

aldo.milohnic@guest.arnes.si

# On Collective and Devised Creation in Slovenian Theatre

---

Aldo Milohnič

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

---

The author analyses the dynamics of the changes related to the emergence of collective theatre and the shift in the position of the director that occurred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These changes can also be observed in contemporary theatre, when concepts such as postdramatic theatre, devised theatre and other forms of theatrical creation are increasingly spoken and written about, moving away from the conventional process by which a playwright writes a dramatic text as a literary work of art and the director then transforms it into a theatrical work of art.

The word “theatre directing” appears as early as 1820. Still, it has only existed as a theatrical concept since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While at first, directors also took care of the theatrical production’s organisation, eventually, with the continued differentiation and specialisation of theatrical professions, they could focus on leading the immediate process of the theatrical production’s creation. The appearance of the director coincides with a change in the traditional relationship between the text and its staging. The director also appeared in Slovenian theatre in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but his position did not really consolidate until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The human, financial and infrastructural capacities of Slovenian theatre at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were very limited. Thus, the main task of the directors of that time was to make theatre performances happen at all because those times did not allow the development of more subtle directing techniques. The more significant consolidation of the director’s position in Slovenian theatre came only after World War I. We can therefore follow the trend of professionalisation and individualisation of the director in Slovenian and European theatre at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, no later than in the 1960s (according to some opinions, even earlier), a parallel flow emerged, characterised by collective creation. Experimenting with group creation in the 1960s and 1970s was associated with a broader social climate that encouraged individual creativity within the group. The Living Theater and The Performance Group are paradigmatic examples of this process. In Slovenia, too, we can find examples of theatre groups that at that time practised similar forms of group creation, among them, Pupilija Ferkeverk Theatre, Experimental Theatre Glej, and the Pekarna Theatre.

In recent times, especially in the last two decades, the term devised theatre has become established, which usually refers to the creation of a performance *ex nihilo*, i.e., without the use of a pre-written dramatic text. Still, some researchers also associate it with a collective way of creating. Hypothetically, both collective and devising approaches may be characteristic of experimental and independent theatre groups of the late 1960s. Still, it is questionable to claim that the performances of these groups were always created *ex nihilo*, as many were derived from already written – modern or classical – dramatic texts. Although the devising approach seems to have intensified in contemporary staging practices, and it has supplemented the horizontal, egalitarian-oriented collective creation from the late 1960s, the two are by no means equivalent phenomena.

Also, in contemporary Slovenian theatre, there is an increasing number of performances in which a pre-written dramatic text is not crucial for the final product of the creative process. The two most frequently used terms indicating those types of performances are *po motivih* (“based on the motifs” of a particular text) and *avtorski projekt* (auteur performance). Performances “based on the motifs” are in principle based on existing plays or other literary genres. Still, they are used only as a starting point for a completely new composition of the performance text. A key feature of auteur performances is that they are developed by either individual or collective inputs within the creative process resulting in a completely new performance text. Some important auteur performances and performances “based on the motifs” were created under the direction of Oliver Frljić, Jernej Lorenci, Tomi Janežič, Žiga Divjak, Janez Janša, Matjaž Berger, among others. Although the terms “based on the motifs” and “auteur performance” are not synonymous and cannot be equated, both terms imply a devised type of theatre. On the other hand, this does not mean that performances developed based on motifs or auteur performances are necessarily also collective creations, as they can also be produced in the way of the traditional division of labour in the creative process with the director as the authoritative leader and primary author of the performance.

The author condenses his reflection on the relationship between the collective and devising mode of production in theatre into the conclusion that, for collective theatre, the specific relationship between the creative group and the director’s position (from the establishment of the director’s function and his professionalisation until today, this relationship fluctuates between authoritarian and democratic, hierarchical and egalitarian, vertical and horizontal) is constitutive. In contrast, for devised theatre, the relationship between the creative group and the playwright’s position (from staging a dramatic text as a relatively autonomous literary work of art to staging a text that emerges as an integral part of rehearsals, acting improvisations, etc.; a playwright may also be included in that process, but not as the sole author of a dramatic text) is crucial. Just as the text is only one of many other staging elements in postdramatic

theatre, in collective theatre, directing is only one of the creative layers of the play. If we are willing to accept this equation, there is no reason for the playwright to maintain a monopoly on the authorship of the text in contemporary, postdramatic theatre and for the director to boast of the authorship of the performance as a whole.

More recently, radical ideas about the “heterarchical director” have emerged, which presupposes a shift from the hierarchical model of the theatre collective with the director as an authoritative guru to a self-organised creative group in which the director is not expected to lead but to encourage and empower all the collaborators involved in the project. If directors’ theatre predominated for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one might ask whether perhaps the strengthening of collective creation at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, coinciding with the emergence of the postdramatic theatre, opens up the possibility of the transition to the so-called post-directors’ theatre?