

# The Rise and Fall of Theatre NO99 in Estonia

## - A Case of Political and Discursive Change

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### ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the establishment and closing down of Theatre NO99 (2005-2018), one of the most nationally and internationally acclaimed theatres of Estonia. These events are analysed from two perspectives: (1) the political, because in both cases the Estonian Ministry of Culture made quite radical decisions that had a strong effect for the theatre field in general; (2) the discursive, to understand how NO99 legitimized its beginning and justified the ending. The latter is compared to the discourse of the written media to understand the dialogue between these two discourses. Pierre Bourdieu's field theory is used to show how the external and internal forces influenced the position taking of NO99 in the Estonian theatre field and how paradoxical and even impossible it is for an avant-garde state theatre to balance between autonomous and heteronomous principals of hierarchization.

### KEYWORDS

autonomy, field theory, NO99, discourse analysis, cultural politics

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### Prologue

On the 19th of February 2005 a performance entitled *NO99. Sometimes it feels as if life has gone by without love* was premiered by Theatre NO99 in Tallinn, Estonia. Starting with performance number 99, with every next one (98, 97, 96 etc) the theatre was supposed to move towards zero.

“*Sometimes it feels...*” was the first performance of a renewed state theatre under a brand-new head, already acclaimed, but still very young, 26-year-old Tiit Ojasoo. How many people in the audience expected that this ritualistic performance was a beginning of a performing arts institution that became the most nationally and internationally praised Estonian theatres of its time?

However, the theatre did not manage to end at 0, but at performance number 30, because on the 30th October 2018, Tiit Ojasoo, his main creative collaborator and life partner, set designer Ene-Liis Semper, two dramaturges and nine actors sent out a press release stating “We are going to stop”<sup>1</sup>. With this message the winner of the European Prize of New Theatrical Realities of 2017 shut itself down. Never before had a state theatre in Estonia closed its doors voluntarily. This was a shock to the public as well as to the theatre field.

### Introduction

So far, mostly the aesthetic aspects such as the political theatre of NO99<sup>2</sup>, the textual strategies<sup>3</sup>, the acting<sup>4</sup>, the “poetics of playing” i.e., the ambivalence between presentation and representation, very characteristic to NO99<sup>5</sup>, have been analysed. In addition, the strategies of how NO99 managed to blur the border between aesthetics, public sphere and politics have been described<sup>6</sup>. NO99 renewed and widened the perspective of theatre in Estonia – the theatre was the first to embed a unique visual identity on its posters and website, published three books to explain its’ theatrical language, staged one-time performances with the aim to experiment with acting (for example repeating something to exhaustion or acting drunk) or to make topical comments on current political issues and crises. The closure of NO99 still has some aftermaths (for example theatre critics still long for NO99 and hope some theatre will take over its role), some yet to be seen and analysed.

The article does not follow the aesthetics of theatre NO99, but focuses on two following aspects: (1) on the political context of 2005 and 2018 i.e. the establishing and closing down of the theatre, because in both cases the Estonian Ministry of Culture made quite radical decisions that had a strong effect on the theatre field in general; (2) on the discursive elements that NO99

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1 Teater NO99 lõpetab 2018.

2 Linder 2013, Pesti 2020.

3 Epner, L. 2013.

4 Epner, L. 2014.

5 Saro 2014; Saro 2021.

6 Linder 2019, 76; Oruaas 2018..

used to legitimize its beginning and to justify the ending, and the comparison of the theatre's discourse to the discourse of the public.

The changes in the theatre field are analysed using the theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Discourse in this article is defined as the written messages produced and distributed publicly by the theatre itself or by the media. The discourse of NO99 is expressed in the following type of texts: interviews with the members of NO99, articles written by members of NO99 in different media channels (daily and weekly newspapers as well as cultural papers), a book the theatre published in 2006. The public texts were written by theatre critics, cultural journalists or general journalist published in daily and weekly newspapers, cultural papers, and on the webpage of Estonian Public Broadcasting.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the texts. In this method, data is presented in words and themes, which makes it possible to draw some interpretation of the results<sup>7</sup>. Inductive approach and manifest analysis are used, meaning "the researcher describes what the informants actually say, stays very close to the text, uses the words themselves, and describes the visible and obvious in the text."<sup>8</sup>

Analysing the "rise" and "fall"<sup>9</sup> of NO99 is important because, in 2018, the Estonian theatre field did not only lose an aesthetically innovative experimental theatre which had been praised, among other things, for its excellent ensemble (reachable only in a repertoire theatre where people work together for years), but because all in all, the Ministry of Culture decided to abruptly shut down the state theatre for good, after, in fact, finding a suitable successor for the theatre through a public competition. With this decision, the Ministry sent a clear message that the state does not want to support a purely experimental state theatre as NO99 had exceptionally been and from now on, aesthetic experiments would be the "responsibility" of private theatres.

#### **"Logic" of the Estonian theatre field**

The establishing and closing down of theatre NO99 is analysed in the concept of field theory by Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu has himself stated that analysing "the logic of the field" has to be done in three steps:

[First,] one must analyse the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power.

[Second,] one must map out the objective structure of the relations between the positions occupied by the agents of institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which the field is a site.

[Third,] one must analyse the habitus of agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a determinate type of social and economic conditions, and which find a definite trajectory within the field under consideration a more or less favourable opportunity to become actualised<sup>10</sup>.

This kind of three level analysis considers, on the one hand, the socio-political aspects – the connection to the field of power – as well as the individual aspects i.e. habitus.<sup>11</sup> In the next sections this three-level analysis is implemented.

Stage one. NO99 and the field of power Bourdieu defines the field as "a space of possibilities" for the agents claiming positions in specified social space<sup>12</sup>. A field is always about the power struggle between the agents (according to Bourdieu either people or institutions) who's "positions (..) are defined in relation to one another through (..) their relations of proximity, vicinity, or

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7 Bengsston, 2016, 11.

8 Ibid.

9 The title of the article "The rise and fall of Theatre NO99" is a reference to the performance of NO99 "The Rise and Fall of Estonia" (2011) that was the last performance of the cycle of performances of political theatre NO99 staged between 2006 to 2011.

10 Bourdieu 1992, 104.

11 Grenfell & Hardy 2003, 6.

12 Bourdieu 1993, 64.

distance, (...) above, below, and between”<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the different agents in the theatre field are always struggling for their position which is to position itself with the agents more similar to you, but at the same time being able to differ from anybody else in the field. The theatre field, as one of the cultural fields, is a “field of cultural production” and, as such, is always dominated by the field of power<sup>14</sup>. The specificity of a cultural field is its claim for higher autonomy, the denial of the dominance of economic capital and the constant opposition between the heteronomous principle and the autonomous principle of hierarchization<sup>15</sup>. The heteronomous principle is favoured by agents who are more dependent on the outer field success which is usually measured in ticket sales, i.e., the monetary income (complying with the general taste)<sup>16</sup>, the autonomous principle is favoured by agents who produce “art for art’s sake” and who identify with a “degree of independence of the economy”<sup>17</sup> valuing more the recognition of the inner field. The structural changes that affect the field as a whole are always a concordance of internal and external changes according to Bourdieu<sup>18</sup>.

NO99 was established thanks to the Ministry of Culture. Before Ojasoo became the head of the theatre, the institution had been working as a comedy theatre called Vanalinnastudio, which had been in a state of bankruptcy for many years in a row and finding a new director was seen as the last attempt for the Ministry to keep the theatre running. In addition to choosing a 26-year-old young man to be the next director, the Ministry made two previously unheard of decisions: (1) it approved Ojasoo’s decision to fire all the existing creative staff and hire new people (so far, the custom of state theatres was that the new creative head continued with the existing staff or made minor changes), (2) the Ministry “deleted” the existing debts (around 2 560 000 Estonian crowns, appr. 164 000 euros) and ensured the same amount of subsidy the theatre had received previously even though Ojasoo had just half of the previous number of people on the payroll<sup>19</sup>. So, the young director was given an advantage by being able to start working with his own people and maintaining more than an adequate state subsidy. This kind of trust from the Ministry was also unprecedented because, since the beginning, NO99 promised to make more alternative performances than the other state theatres, a practice that contained a risk (at least from the perspective of the Ministry) that NO99 would not be targeting wider audiences that would guarantee the box-office income necessary even for state theatres with state subsidy.

However, NO99 quickly “learned” to balance between the two principals of hierarchization. Being a state theatre secured the theatre a subsidy and therefore stability that enabled it to make large-scale productions that, at peak time, in the beginning of the 2010s, made NO99 “popular without losing specific consecration”<sup>20</sup> referring to being liked by both theatre critics as well as the public. Quoting Grenfell and Hardy<sup>21</sup> “(...), there are appeals to art for art sake as legitimation of process, co-existing with a maximum of exposure to other fields in order to accrue forms of capital”.

In fact, for most of its existence, NO99 proved that one can run a state repertoire theatre producing aesthetically innovative, mostly devised, postdramatic performances, that can be interesting for audiences as well. Having 1,1 euros IS THIS 1,1 million euros? of subsidy (around 70% of the budget) allowed them to stage larger productions, risk more, spend money on public

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13 Bourdieu 1998, 6.

14 Of course, the more the cultural field has a higher degree of independence from the power field, the better, but “whatever the degree of independence, it (*the field* – HLT) continues to be affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it, those of economic and political profit” (Bourdieu 1993, 39).

15 Bourdieu 1993, 29-73.

16 op. cit., 38-9.

17 op. cit., 40.

18 The changes in the field of restricted production – the agents doing “art for art’s sake” – are foremost internal, depending on the recognition of agents with similar habitus. When the newcomer clashes with the expectations of similar agents, external changes have to support its actions (Bourdieu 1993, 55.)

19 Ojasoo fired half of the 63 people previously working at the theatre.

20 Karulin 2018b, 202.

21 Grenfell & Hardy 2003, 25.

relations and invest in making NO99 into a unique brand<sup>22</sup>.

However, during the last years, NO99 started having trouble keeping this dual position and lost both outerfield success and innerfield consecration. Since 2016, NO99 had lost half of its audiences (from 46000 visits in 2015 to 19000 in 2018). Due to this decrease, the budget went into minus; on top of that, the theatre critics, who had so far loved almost every performance, became dissatisfied.

One might speculate whether the decrease in audiences was the consequence of the #metoo scandal of Tiit Ojasoo that became public in 2017 – one of the actresses of the theatre accused him of hitting her. The incident was taken to court where it ended in a conciliation procedure. These accusations forced Ojasoo to resign as the head of the theatre<sup>23</sup>, but he continued working there. A public scandal followed, when 104 people signed a public letter asking the president of Estonia to withdraw her decision to have Ojasoo direct the performance to celebrate the 100th jubilee of Estonia in 2018, considering it inappropriate for a man accused of violence against women<sup>24</sup>. The President refused and Ojasoo and his team created the jubilee performance that received a very controversial response from the public and media alike.

On October 30th, NO99 announced they would stop making theatre. The voluntary closure of a whole state theatre was also an unknown situation for the Ministry of Culture<sup>25</sup>. At first, the Ministry announced a public competition to find a new artistic team that had to be (1) aesthetically innovative and (2) had to have international potential<sup>26</sup>. These two requirements indicate that, at first, the Ministry wanted to keep supporting innovative state theatre, similar to what NO99 had been. But just before the winner was announced, the Ministry cut off the competition referring to the lack of money<sup>27</sup> and reported that the subsidy already targeted for NO99 for 2019 would be distributed among the two final contestants<sup>28</sup> and some other private theatres. So, in conclusion, the Ministry decided to close down a state theatre, leaving one less in Estonia. This external decision, once again, changed the structure of the theatre field: while allocating more money to the private theatres, the Ministry enabled some new aesthetic initiatives in the field (for example technological theatre and online platforms for web based theatre that had proved its relevance in 2020 with the COVID-19 crises). However, it emphasized that there was no position for an experimental state theatre with a stable subsidy.

*Stage two. The structure and relationships of the agents in the Estonian theatre field.* One may ask whether theatre, as a collective and expensive live artform that is meant to be performed to a public audience and is therefore by default dependent on audiences, can ever acclaim any autonomy from the field of power? If one follows the idea that “theatre is autonomous to the extent that it pursues its own values”<sup>29</sup>, a concept also favoured by Bourdieu<sup>30</sup>, the relationship between the theatre field and the field of power, between the autonomous and heteronomous principle of hierarchization, becomes more complex than the rather black and white opposition presented by Bourdieu. What is valuable for the field is defined by the agents who struggle for the dominant principal of hierarchization. The main struggle in the Estonian theatre field is and has been over state subsidies<sup>31</sup>, therefore I argue that allocations from the state are of most value for the agents because it is perceived as enabling aesthetic autonomy. This idea is

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22 NO99 was the first among Estonian theatres whose visual identity was recognizable (black and white posters, leaflets, books, webpage) and stayed the same for the whole time of their existence.

23 But after some time and due to public pressure.

24 Reisenbuk 2018.

25 Previously, when a creative head decided to leave the theatre, the other members of the creative staff stayed.

26 Kompus, 2019. The author of the article was also on the committee to find the new artistic team.

27 Kultuuritoimetus, 2019.

28 As the author of this article was part of the committee, it is possible to say that both of these groups would have followed the line of experimental theatre not valued by wider audiences.

29 Edelman et al 2017,27. Value is “something that is recognized to be of worth and therefore worth pursuing” (Edelman et el 2017, 30).

30 Bourdieu 1993, 40-1.

31 Rahastamine webpage 10.1.2021.

also supported by Estonian theatre researcher Ott Karulin<sup>32</sup>, who also claims that state subsidy increases the economic capital of the agent, but does not equal commercial success, however, it guarantees the necessary resources (venue, people etc).

The subsidy system of Estonian performing arts institutions has, for the last 25 years, been based (1) on equality - all the theatres despite their juridical statues (being a state theatre with a venue and permanent troupe or a private theatre without neither) can apply for the same type of state funding<sup>33</sup> and (2) on total artistic freedom – the subsidized institutions can stage whatever they want<sup>34</sup>. However, this kind of democratic financing system has in real life created a situation where the state theatres have reached a “natural monopoly”<sup>35</sup>: the national opera and eight bigger state theatres receive on average about 95% of all the allocations leaving 5% to the independent theatres. The private theatres constantly fight for bigger subsidies, justifying this claim by stating to be aesthetically more innovative than the state theatres, getting 26% of all the theatre visits and being nominated for 40% of the national theatre awards.<sup>36</sup> Private theatres perceive the current situation as unequal and the confrontation between state and private theatres is an ongoing struggle. Right now, there is no mechanism for private theatres to become state theatres that would guarantee them a bigger subsidy and with this also autonomy. According to Bourdieu, the position of the agent in the theatre field is dependent on the “properties which allow it to be situated in the relation to all others”<sup>37</sup> - therefore, it is clear that Tiit Ojasoo and NO99 had an advantage by creating basically a brand-new theatre with a decent amount of state subsidy, that guaranteed the artistic autonomy, unachievable for other newcomers.

*Stage three. The habitus of NO99.* Habitus according to Bourdieu is the sum of dispositions that defines the agent and also differentiates it from other agents in the field. To enter the field, the habitus has to correlate with the rules of the field, that are accepted by the field in general. Habitus consists mostly of economic and cultural capital, with a preference to the second in a cultural field.<sup>38</sup> Thanks to the Ministry of Culture, NO99 had enough economic capital, Tiit Ojasoo and Ene-Liis Semper were acclaimed artists with considerable cultural and social capital, so it was the new NO99 as an institution which had to position itself in the field, following the rules, but also opposing them to differentiate.

Particularly around the beginning of the 21st century, the state theatres were considered aesthetically too traditional and old-fashioned in Estonia, so NO99, who was placed among the state theatres by the Ministry’s decision, needed to distance itself from them or stand out. To do this, NO99 used the following discourses: (1) positioning itself among experimental private theatres; (2) placing itself in a European context; (3) using people outside of the theatre field as spokespersons; (4) creating a dialogue with its potential audiences through the media; (5) claiming to do (and actually doing) something aesthetically new.

Since its beginning, NO99 opposed art to money therefore emphasizing the autonomous principle of hierarchization. In one of the first interviews as theatre director, Ojasoo said: “The aim of the state theatre cannot be profit, but the promotion of national theatre. If you want to remain a nation of culture, you have to invest in culture.”<sup>39</sup> NO99 grouped itself among most innovative private theatres and other contemporary art organisations by publishing a newspaper with them<sup>40</sup>. NO99 questioned publicly whether proportionally too much money is allocated to state theatres compared to the private theatres that produce artistic novelty that should be the

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32 Karulin 2013, 27.

33 Rahastamine webpage 10.1.2021.

34 Saro 2009, 56. Saro refers to the fact that compared to other Western countries where the aims and outcomes of cultural policy are more clearly expressed, it is not the case in Estonia.

35 Karulin 2018a.

36 Pesti, Reidolv 2018, 39.

37 Bourdieu 1996, 231.

38 Bourdieu 1998, 20-2.

39 Kängsepp, 2005.

40 Newspaper „Tsoon“ was published by the independent theatre Von Krahl, independent performing arts center Kanuti Gildi SAAL, a new music orchestra NYJD Ensemble, art house cinema Sõprus and Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia.

aim of subsidising performing arts<sup>41</sup>. In addition, NO99 especially linked itself to contemporary German theatre by publishing reports of the current situation in German speaking countries<sup>42</sup> or conducting interviews with German directors<sup>43</sup>. Referring to the wider European context enabled NO99 to oppose the rooted idea that theatre is *per se* local and national and put Estonian theatre as among equals on the European theatre map.

All through its existence, NO99 stood out with regard to communication and marketing – in 2004 in Estonia, creating a loyal relationship with its audiences and also a wider public was an innovative communication strategy for a performing arts institution<sup>44</sup>. Especially at the beginning, NO99 used mainly people from other art fields (visual arts, literature) as “consecrating agents” to, first of all, confirm the need for new aesthetics (a famous writer saying “I have never been interested in the theatre, but I would visit theatre NO99”<sup>45</sup>) and secondly, to point out their different expectations for theatre compared to the established theatre critics of the time. The dialogue with the public was initiated through publishing its own book and joint newspapers<sup>46</sup>, addressing publicly<sup>47</sup> the received criticism<sup>48</sup>, printing critical articles of itself<sup>49</sup>, and letting the dramaturge of the theatre write articles about the upcoming performances to explain beforehand the idea and concept. With these actions as well as staging many provocative political theatre performances<sup>50</sup>, NO99 activated the public sphere<sup>51</sup>. All these steps described so far were not part of the usual working mechanism of state theatres and quickly enabled NO99 to establish itself in the field as a theatre to be aware of.

All the previously mentioned means to position itself in the theatre field, and balance between the autonomous and heteronomous principle of hierarchization, should not overshadow the aesthetical discourse of NO99. These previously mentioned discursive means were used to draw attention to the most important, the innovative aesthetics – the physicality, emphasizing the actors’ presence, mixing theatre and performance art<sup>52</sup>, pop culture, multimedia, installations and visual images<sup>53</sup>. NO99 really emphasized “the here and now”, the temporality and fragility of an actual theatrical act, but also the strength of the theatre to create a community and share its message.

It is important to note that NO99 stayed true to the aforementioned strategies until the end. However, it might be argued that the field itself had changed during these thirteen years and there were other performing arts institutions using the same strategies. Theatre NO99 “lost its uniqueness”<sup>54</sup>.

### **Relationship with the wider public**

*The beginning.* Theatre by definition (from Brook to Fischer-Lichte) needs audiences. Therefore, it is important to analyse how the wider public reacted to the opening and closure of theatre NO99. It should not be a surprise that the public discourse was supportive on the one hand and sceptical on the other. The latter found Tiit Ojasoo too young and inexperienced to run a state theatre. It was hard for the older generation of critics to understand the aesthetics of NO99, the promised “novelty” was questioned and the “new acting” was considered “so sloppy, that it has

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41 Interview with the Ministry of Culture, Raivo Palmaru (2006); Conversation with Peeter Jalakas (2006). Compared to 2020, in 2005 it could be said that the private theatres were producing aesthetically different performances. In 2020, there are many private theatres who are aesthetically similar to the state theatres, so the opposition between state and private theatres has become more complex.

42 Weekly report Germany, Austria, Switzerland 2006.

43 Epner, E. 2005; Epner, E. 2006.

44 Põllu 2006.

45 Sauter 2006.

46 Teater NO99 ajaleht 2005, 2006.

47 Teater NO99 vastulause 2005.

48 Laasik 2005.

49 Allik 2006.

50 For more, see Linder 2013.

51 Linder 2019, 17.

52 Epner & Epner 2020.

53 Linder 2013, 87.

54 Luik 2018.

to be some kind of endeavour”<sup>55</sup>.

On the supportive side, it was precisely the new aesthetics that was valued - the new ways of acting, the presence of the actors and the blurring of fiction and reality<sup>56</sup>, all aspects that would be used to describe NO99 in the upcoming years. The first performance, *Sometimes it feels...* was perceived as “a performance for which I previously had to go to Europe”<sup>57</sup>. There was definitely a need or a demand for the new theatre, the belief that NO99 might have some international perspective was already sensed. Therefore, some of the discourse of NO99 itself echoed already in the public discourse. NO99 successfully positioned itself as innovative and avant-garde (making “art for art’s sake”), with international and national potential, aesthetically closer to the private theatres of that time than the more conservative and “old” state theatres with whom it juridically was grouped. On the other hand, the theatre started to build a relationship with the wider public to prove its role and function as a state theatre in the theatre field.

*The end.* In 2018, theatre NO99 announced via a press release that it would stop its activities overnight<sup>58</sup>. This was different from 2005 when NO99 had a very clear discourse in positioning itself in the theatre field: in 2018, however, the theatre was quite reluctant to give anymore comments. Based on the press release and on a few interviews with the members of NO99, three main aspects can be detected that explain the end. First of all, NO99 valued equality in decision making and stopping one’s activities had been a mutual decision<sup>59</sup>. This idea was mirrored in the activities of NO99, who had imposed collectivism since its beginning. It was visible in its aesthetics (devised performances etc.), but also in the way the performers always applauded the backstage light and sound technicians, emphasising their importance for making a performance work.

Secondly, NO99 had always been about taking aesthetic risks and the risk of stopping at any moment had been there since the beginning<sup>60</sup>. Therefore, NO99 argued that the lack of audiences and financial problems that the theatre had been facing for the previous three years, did not influencing this decision. However, in the press release, the theatre also explained that if it couldn’t work in the same way it had up until now, then it was better to stop.<sup>61</sup> This can be interpreted as a refusal to follow the more heteronomous principle of creating performances that would assure a bigger box-office income.

In interviews given a little later, however, a certain disappointment in the Estonian audiences was noticeable. The creative heads of the theatre admitted that there were more people at their guest performances in Europe than at home<sup>62</sup>, so at least giving a hint that it started to cause problems for NO99. One of the actors also pointed out that local audiences started mixing the quality of the performances and the reputation of the theatre (referring probably to the #metoo scandal), the latter being beyond the control of the theatre<sup>63</sup>.

In 2018, the public discourse could also be divided into two. The theatre critics were shocked by the theatre’s decision, and already at this stage, the discourse of nostalgia for NO99, which is still going on now some four years later, was created. Journalists outside of the culture field were more critical emphasizing that closing a state organisation also meant people losing their jobs and legal problems to be solved. It seemed that NO99 refused to take responsibility in a tough economic situation. As NO99 refused to give extra comments in addition to the press release, the media did not support the theatre as it had done in previous years when the theatre was always open for comment and ready to explain their performances, theatrical style, and visits to foreign festivals.

In addition, the whole public discourse had become more critical towards the theatre in 2018 and this could be connected to the rise of right-wing populism in society during the 2010s. For

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55 Laasik 2005.

56 Pesti 2005.

57 Noormets 2005.

58 The suddenness of this decision is also confirmed by the fact that in three weeks, the theatre was supposed to have a premiere with performance number 29.

59 Teater NO99 lõpetab, 2018.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Sibrits 2018.

63 Loog 2018.



example, in 2017, the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) proposed that one fourth of the subsidies for NO99 should be withdrawn because the theatre is "creating radical leftist propaganda that is not aesthetically or financially acceptable to the Estonian tax-payer"<sup>64</sup>. After the parliamentary elections of 2019, EKRE was one of the parties to form the coalition.

Even though NO99 denied the influence of decreased audience numbers, it is possible to argue that the subsidized state theatre still had to think of it. This dependency on audiences becomes even more clear when analysing the activities of the Ministry of Culture who decided to shut down the theatre as an institution, after choosing a successor who would have continued in the same line of theatre making i.e., focusing more on creating something new than for the wider public.

It is also clear that the relationship with critics and audiences had changed during the last years. Theatre critics had become more critical. One might argue that the #metoo scandal of Tiit Ojasoo influenced some of the audience members, especially the young and hip who had formed the majority of the visitors, not to choose to go to NO99 anymore. NO99 had lost some of its cultural, social, and economic capital that are relevant in order to "achieve successively more powerful field positions."<sup>65</sup>

### **Conclusion and epilogue**

The creation of theatre NO99 was heavily influenced by the field of power i.e. by the Ministry of Culture. The stable state subsidy, permanent venue, possibility to hire technical, administrative and creative staff according to the wishes of the young director, Tiit Ojasoo, gave an advantage impossible for other newcomers who usually were not able to position themselves among the subsidized performing arts institutions just after entering the performing arts field.

Referring to Grenfell and Hardy, who claim that "the autonomy of the field can only be relative"<sup>66</sup>, it is possible to say that the state subsidy – that could be, following Bourdieu, interpreted as an example of the heteronomous principal of hierarchization, the dependence on the field of power – is actually felt by agents as guaranteeing aesthetic autonomy. So, the highly valued state subsidy enabled NO99 to stay autonomous and follow its artistic ideas all through its existence. However, the dependence of the state subsidy enabled the Ministry of Culture to shut this particular performing arts institution down for good.

Bourdieu states that especially in the field of restricted production, the disposition i.e., the distinction from other agents becomes crucial, because the possibility of change is guided by the newcomers<sup>67</sup>. NO99 used different discourses to embed itself in the field successfully and stand out. However, the public discourse changed during these years and became more ambivalent towards NO99. This is the case with public artforms like theatre that cannot exist without audiences and maintaining a relationship with them is still relevant.

#### **AUTHOR**

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64 Koorits 2017.

65 Grenfell & Hardy 2003, 29.

66 Grenfell & Hardy 2003, 27.

67 Bourdieu 1993, 60.

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