

THE RECEPTION OF TRANSGRESSIVE PERFORMANCES. THE CASE OF NO99

The presentation will look into the perception and reception of transgressive performances. I will analyse the case of the Theatre NO99. Theatre NO99 (2005–2018) was an Estonian contemporary theatre that was founded by the director Tiit Ojasoo, the director and scenographer Ene-Liis Semper and the dramaturg Eero Epner. The theatre created performances that crossed both aesthetic and thematic boundaries compared to traditional theatre. NO99 became a frequent visitor at theatres and theatre festivals across Europe. The presentation focuses on two productions that represent transgressive political theatre and that created most controversy and debate in the European media.

The first example is the production “NO88 GEP. Hot Estonian Guys” (2007) that tackles the problem of Estonian demography: Estonians are dying out, there are not enough children. The situation in the play is as follows: a group of young Estonian men decide to start making babies to Estonian women. Their action is morally unacceptable and ethically dubious, but raises discussions. The devised production won several international awards and travelled to many countries: Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Finland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

Another debated production I will focus on, is “NO69 Three Kingdoms” (2011), an international collaboration between the Theatre NO99, Münchner Kammerspiele (Germany) and Lyric Hammersmith (UK). Directed by Sebastian Nübling, one of the most innovative and intuitive directors in contemporary Germany, „Three Kingdoms“ was a crime thriller whose plot followed an investigation that goes from England to Estonia, from Western Europe to Eastern Europe. This long mystical journey across the continent was written by the British playwright Simon Stephens especially for this director and these actors. It dealt with what it means to be European. It brought together actors and artists from across Europe – from Estonia, Germany and United Kingdom. It brought together and merged three distinct acting traditions and the result was fascinating for the different audiences around Europe (it was played in Tallinn, London, Munich, Berlin, Hamburg and Vienna). In London it caused something one might call "revolution" as younger generation of theatre makers greeted it

with exultation, but part of the reception denied that kind of theatre completely. In Germany it was highlighted as one of the most remarkable international co-productions in German theatre history.

Biography

Madli Pesti (b. 1980) holds a PhD in theatre research from Tartu University, Estonia (*Political Theatre and its Strategies in the Estonian and Western Cultures*, 2016). She is currently working as a senior researcher in the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, where she runs the practice-as-research PhD programme. Her research areas are performance analysis and theory, political and applied theatre, and contemporary theatre. In 2018 she published the book *100 Years of Estonian Theatre*. She has also been writing theatre reviews since 2002, winning the award as best theatre critic at the Estonian Annual Theatre Awards in 2019. She was head of the Estonian Theatre Researchers' and Critics' Association (2015) and curated the programme of the new performing arts centre Open Space (Vaba Lava) in Tallinn between 2015 and 2017.