

Bourdieuian Concepts and the Field of Theatre Criticism

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ABSTRACT

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field sociology began their life in humanities, particularly in literature and art studies after publication of his seminal *Les règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire* in 1992. Regrettably, Bourdieu has not left a study dedicated to theatre, possibly due to the long-standing French tradition of considering theatre as another literary genre. Nevertheless, Bourdieusian sociology is abundant with terms, concepts, and ideas that are extremely handy in analyzing and understanding how theatre was produced in the past and is produced in the present. The appropriation of Bourdieu's ideas for theatre studies is a tempting effort, especially considering how closely theatre is intertwined with the phenomena of *habitus*, distinction, and all the forms of capital described by Bourdieu himself.

The aim of my article is to discuss the applicability of selected Bourdieusian notions and concepts for research of a very specific aspect of theatre studies. I argue that the concepts of field (*champs*), *nomos*, *doxa*, *illusio* as well as of symbolic violence are very useful in understanding the nature, functions, and effects of theatre criticism. Dwelling on my own theoretical research, I propose to understand theatre criticism as another field of social practice that is defined by the conflict between the opposing interests of the field of theatre and other external fields (such as market or political power).

KEYWORDS

Pierre Bourdieu, theatre criticism, field of social practice, habitus, symbolic violence, Bourdieusian Concepts and the Field of Theatre Criticism

Bourdieuian Concepts and the Field of Theatre Criticism

Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) began to develop a conceptual and methodological framework for his “field sociology” in the 1960s. From the outset, his sociology envisaged a wide scope of application, and since the appearance of his seminal book *Les Règles de l’art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* in 1992, it has become evident that field sociology is also effective in literary and art studies. Specialized books and publications by Bourdieu himself as well by his numerous followers challenged the situation in the humanities and, moreover, in theatre studies, where, as Maria Shevtsova observes, sociology was understood as “fundamentally about facts, graphs, and, worse still, statistics, and was thus alien to the creativity, artistic motivations, genres, forms, styles.”¹ The variety of the topics of research that relied on Bourdieusian ideas, concepts, and methods seemed of unlimited applicability. Such notions as different forms of capital, for example, became a byword in areas by and large exceeding purely sociological interests. Yet, more importantly, Bourdieusian sociology provided complete and explanatory models for understanding and possibly contending societal phenomena – sociology is “a combat sport”², after all, and Bourdieu’s theory always provided a perspective on its practical implication outside academia.

In the last decades, however, Bourdieusian activism as well as constructivist and determinist assumptions became an object of heated discussion even among his previous followers. For instance, Nathalie Heinich, a specialist in contemporary art and a former Bourdieu disciple herself, has warned about the dogmatization of his legacy on the radical Left where epigones of the great master fail to consult his theories as a whole, and abuse his idea of sociological criticism and continuity between personal opinions and academic research.³ Another interesting insight came from Gérald Bronner and Etienne Géhin, who, in their *Le Danger sociologique* (2017), criticize Bourdieu’s “theory of social determinism”, which leaves very little space for the agent’s freedom, and as such is objectionable

1 Shevtsova 2017

2 “La sociologie est un sport de combat” – title of Pierre Carles documentary film (2001) featuring Bourdieu and his colleagues.

3 Bastié 2017

in the light of contemporary scientific findings: “Progress in neurobiology and cognitive sciences does not allow sociologists to ignore the resources of ‘an organ’ [a human brain], which, being a tool for thought, intelligence, invention, and choice, is somewhat an independent arbiter, anymore.”⁴

In this context, an attempt to define theatre criticism as another possible field of social practice and revisit several key Bourdieusian notions calls for certain justifications. A first motive is related to the contemporary state of theatre where the importance of mediation in terms of advertising, public relations, and audience development rapidly increases. One can take these two very different examples. First, when in preparation for the Creative Europe Programme (2014-2020), the European Expert Network on Culture (EENC) was asked to define types of intervention involved in audience building in Europe, communication and the media were mentioned before other factors, such as research and data, capacity building, resources and funding, et al.⁵ Second: in the 2000s several New York theatres initiated “Bloggers’ Nights” giving out free tickets to authors not associated with traditional printed media.⁶ Thus, larger publicity was anticipated and the importance of communication in social media acknowledged. Bourdieu himself often mentioned communicative acts performed by critics among other intermediaries when discussing the ways fields of artistic production function, arguing that the “production of the value of the work” equals the creation of the “belief in the value of the work.”⁷ Thus, the acceleration of communication in theatre calls for thorough mapping and an understanding of the anatomy of contemporary theatre criticism. A second motive is of an epistemological type. Critics’ words and judgements, as Michael Billington observed in 2007, today are exposed to the blogosphere where “opinions can be countered, corrected, reviled or even, on rare occasions, enthusiastically endorsed.”⁸ The rise of informal criticism creates numerous challenges in terms of analysis and understanding of who mediates theatre and its products in the social space as well as how and why. In my opinion, Bourdieu’s notions of field (*champs*), *nomos*, *doxa*, *illusio* as well as of symbolic violence are very useful in understanding the nature, functions, and effects of expanding the field of theatre criticism.

Field sociology and the notion of field

Before Bourdieu formulated his original conception of the “field” in the Eighties, the notion itself was already known and applied to various theories of social and natural sciences. The sociologist himself points to theoreticians as different as formalist Jury Tynyanov, social psychologist Kurt Lewin, Norbert Elias, and structuralists from Edward Sapir and Roman Jakobson to Georges Dumézil and Claude Lévi-Strauss, for all of whom relational “thinking in field terms” was common. Thus, it is the relations that are the basis of “field sociology”, whereas “field” itself, for Bourdieu, is “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations

4 Bronner & Géhin 2017, 16

5 Bamford & Wimmer 2012, 5

6 Hunka 2016, 48

7 Bourdieu 1995, 229

8 Billington 2007

between positions.”⁹ The positions in mind are those, taken by agents – persons or institutions that occupy the field. The status and capacities that the agent receives from a given position are objectively defined by the present or potential situation of the position, the sorts of power, or capital they are capable of providing as well as their relation to the other positions in terms of domination, subordination, homology, etc. Bourdieu observes that a powerful position is a prerequisite for various forms of “profit”, which is a “prize” of the “game” that agents “play” within the field in their quest for domination.¹⁰ It is important to note, however, that the sociologist emphasizes objective relations that govern the individual will or cautiousness, and not the relations between the agents or the liaisons between the persons: “I could twist Hegel’s famous formula and say that *the real is the relational*: what exists in the social world are relations – not interactions between individuals, but objective relations which exist ‘independently of individual cautiousness and will,’ as Marx said.”¹¹ Bourdieu’s mechanistic argumentation emphasizing objective and determining laws that govern the social world (and the fields – the small universes within) over the years has become an object of heated criticism that has not subsided in recent scholarship as was mentioned in the introduction.

It is also important to stress that the notion of the field in Bourdieusian sociology functions in plural form. The number of fields that constitute the social world or social space (for a sociologist it is the equivalent of national territories) changes depending on the differentiation of the society. For instance, in *Les Règles de l’art* Bourdieu surveys the structural changes within the literary field of France in the nineteenth century, how it emerges and develops under circumstances that are entirely different from the previous century in terms of the relations between cultural producers and men of power (in the eighteenth century artists completed the orders directly placed by the aristocracy).¹² A semi-autonomous field of art emerged in the nineteenth century due to innovation – its “authentic structural subordination” to the market of cultural goods and constant relations with members of “higher” social groups, who could divert the means from the private purse to the artists (or at least to a certain part of them). Thus, the “field sociology” as an analytical tool is most effective for analysing differentiated societies that provide a possibility to establish the relative autonomy of different fields of social practice (politics, religion, economy, etc.).

In order to define theatre criticism as a field of social practice, several other fields have to be taken into consideration. Dwelling on the Bourdieusian model, which depicts a social space as made of various interconnected fields, the field of theatre criticism should be placed in relation with at least three other fields. First is the field of theatre which, as a type of field of artistic production according to Bourdieu, is governed by rejection or inversion of the principle of material gain. The other two fields are the fields of power – political and economic, that function in exactly the opposite way (“business is business” is the only legitimate

9 Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 97

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Bourdieu 1995, 49

objective of the market, for example). The field of theatre criticism is thus located between two antagonistic poles and contrasting tensions define its structure as well as the placements of the positions of its agents – the critics.

Specifics of the field of art

In *Les Règles de l'art*, Bourdieu argues that after a long process of autonomisation, the field of art emerges as a world of reversed economics. Its *nomos*, or the supreme law in Bourdieusian terminology, is the lack of economic value of the art, i. e. the value of an art piece is proportional to its disinterestedness. Works of art can claim their pedigree by rejecting every kind of applicability, and their disinterestedness can also be justified by rejecting traditions. However, as every type of artistic production requires at least some financial resources, the artists are inevitably influenced by economic capital. Due to this structural subordination, the field of art is typically constituted out of two conflicting subfields and of a schism between different positions of the agents. According to Bourdieu, a conflict between the subfields is typical for any field of cultural production as one part of the agents' aim is for limitation, the other part for mass demand.¹³ An art piece that due to reasons such as innovative and / or challenging aesthetic vocabulary, or a long period of production is not fit for mass consumption, belongs to the subfield of small-scale production, in contrast to the pieces that following the requirements of market or political power, belong to the subfield of large-scale production.

Evidently, in the first subfield the value of the art piece and the reputation of the artist are measured by the principle of autonomy from the consumers; financial loss is equal to approbation, whereas profitability discredits it. In the second subfield, strong ties with the market and / or political power are favoured as a heteronomous position grants dominance for its agents at least for some time. Meanwhile, the artists who take an autonomous position can seek vital means at the anti-market. According to Bourdieu, the anti-market functions on the basis of high cultural capital that can be represented by such institutions as small publishing houses, galleries, specialized press, selected theatre and cinema audiences as well as private or corporate patronage. In a historical perspective, an access to financial capital controlled by political power or the market crucial for any kind of artistic production was possible only by assuming a heteronomous position in relation to these fields, external to the field of art. An inevitable conflict between the subfields thus ran alongside the meeting of pre-existing demand and pre-established forms on one side and the production that is entirely turned to the future on the other.¹⁴

It is important to note, however, that due to historical developments and changes, a clear-cut division that is characteristic of the Bourdieusian model should currently be regarded with caution. Metaphorically speaking, the state (especially the European states) as *maecenas* is learning to acknowledge the disinterestedness and high-risk investments of public funds in the anti-market. As Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska, authors of the two hundred

13 Bourdieu 1995, 124

14 Bourdieu 1995, 142-143

page study “Understanding the Value of Arts & Culture” funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the UK conclude: “Conventional discourse, above all when directed to advocacy for purposes of public funding, has often given pride of place to benefits that were thought to resonate with governments, and this may have deflected analytical attention away from dimensions of equal or perhaps even greater overall importance. Thus, when examining the benefits of arts and culture for the economy, we have emphasised the way that innovation is fostered through network, knowledge and talent spillovers from the creative sector to the broader economy.”¹⁵ One might even argue that the field of art is currently at a state of accomplishment: the value of disinterestedness is broadly accepted, or as Ivan Hewett notes rather humorously: “There is now hardly a town in the UK that doesn’t have a swanky museum or arts centre, often built with Lottery funding [i. e. funded from the public purse]. <...> From being a daring idea of a few marginalised ‘community artists’ back in the Seventies, the notion that art has social benefits and should be taken out into the world is a received wisdom – which you question at your peril.”¹⁶

Although the conflict between the agents of the autonomous and heteronomous subfields nowadays runs along less clear-cut lines, the Bourdieusian model of the field of art nevertheless provides a fine analytical tool for inquiring into the anatomy of the production of art, the consumption of its products, and, even more so, of its communication. In terms of justification of choice of one product or one artist over another, private individuals as well as representatives of the state, to a greater or lesser degree, are in need of expert advice and support. Herein, the function of criticism becomes important. Acknowledgement of an art piece as worthy of investment either from private or public funds can be based on opinion, which, in its turn, can be informed by the professional opinion makers, i. e. the critics, who in their turn can choose to voice the artists, the state, and society, or the market.

In this respect, I propose to understand the structure of the field of theatre criticism as homologous to the structure of the social space. The critics first as representatives of different fractions of society, second as representatives of the artists, the state, or the market, interpret and judge any given production alongside the interests of the group that he or she shares and feels affinity to. As Bourdieu notes, “The structural and functional homology between the space of authors and the space of consumers (and of critics) and the correspondence between the social structure of spaces of production and the mental structures which authors, critics and consumers apply to products (themselves organized according to these structures) is at the root of the *coincidence* that is established between the different categories of works offered and the expectations of the different categories of the public.”¹⁷

Dwelling on the theory of field I argue that the field of theatre criticism can be located in between the fields of theatre production and consumption (political power and / or market). As the outreach of, for instance, the daily newspaper is

15 Crossick & Kaszynska 2016, 153

16 Hewett 2016

17 Bourdieu 1995, 162.

much greater than the number of theatregoers that can observe the production live, it is the mediated image of the show that creates bigger reverberations in the social space. Therefore, the field of theatre criticism functions as an intermediary between the makers of the theatrical product and the fields of power that control and attribute various forms of capital. Hence, in the case of commercial theatre, criticism can act as a vehicle for positive or negative public relations that influence the fiscal success of the production. In the case of theatre that relies on public support, criticism can influence the channelling of subsidies as well as make cases for official legitimation in terms of pointing to the artists worthy of awards, medals, titles, etc. In this the power of criticism is especially evident: the critics that support autonomous theatre can facilitate the accepting of new rules of the consumption of the theatrical product, foster new aesthetic sensitivities, and, above all, initiate and sustain the acknowledgement of disinterested artistic creation in the social space. Thus, the field of theatre criticism and its cultural dispositions that are homologous to the social space can be regarded as a system of possibilities that enables theatre artists to realize their chosen creative ethos.

Habitus, “popular” and “pure” aesthetics

In the discussion of the specifics of the field of art, several important notions of “field sociology” were mentioned and they deserve more attention as they help to understand the anatomy of theatre criticism. Bourdieu argues that every agent’s position in any field of social practice is defined by a combination of the rules, specific to the field, of capital in the agent’s possession (Bourdieu famously discriminates between social, economic and cultural capital alongside the derivative and encompassing symbolic capital¹⁸), and of *habitus* characteristic to the agent. Semantically, the notion of habitus (Latin *habitus*, German *Habitualitaet*) indicates a certain system of specific features, yet, according to Bourdieu, it should not be understood simply as a “habit”, as habitus indicates a totality of dispositions (long-lasting cultural competences) that are typical to every agent. The agent acquires his/her habitus via inheritance from the immediate environment. For instance, the capital in his/her family’s possession. However, habitus is not a stable entity: cultural competences can develop and change as the agent socializes, imitates his peers as well as undergoes formal education. Therefore, the agent’s habitus is a sum of dispositions that grounds his/her worldview and directs his/her trajectory within the chosen field of social practice. It is important to note that in the case of art criticism, the critic’s habitus needs to be in accord with that of his readership. Bourdieu argues that “a critic can only “influence” his readers insofar as they grant him this power because they are structurally attuned to him in their view of the social world, their tastes and their whole habitus.”¹⁹

Among the many scholars who investigated the applicability of the notion of habitus for art studies, Žilvinė Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė surveyed the genesis of the concept and reached the important conclusion that Bourdieu articulated the

18 Bourdieu 1986, 241–258

19 Bourdieu 1996, 240

notion of habitus by combining his insights on moral dispositions – systems of values (ethos) with research on linguistic competences and aesthetic dispositions (aisthesis). According to this scholar, Bourdieu thus proved that the comprehension of art is not only a sensual or emotional experience – simple aisthesis, but it is closely linked to such parameters as education, professional affinities and the cultural background of the beholder: all this paved the way for the amalgamation of ethos and aisthesis into the notion of habitus.²⁰ In other words, the theory of habitus helps to overthrow the erroneous truism of *de gustibus...*: to understand the dispositions that guide and form consumers' (and, indeed, critics) personal choices in cultural products is possible only by going back to their habitus – the initial system of dispositions that encompasses various objective parameters of capital(s), education, cultural experience, ethical attitudes, etc. It moreover helps to understand and to define the positions of the critics within the field of criticism as well as to draw its overall structural pattern.

The combination of ethos and aisthesis (as well as their possible conflict) is especially evident in the Bourdieusian interpretation of “popular” and “pure” aesthetics.²¹ To discriminate between the two types, Bourdieu uses criteria taken from ethics. He argues that popular aesthetics operates “in itself”, yet not “for itself”, and postulates that the continuity of life in art, subordinates form to function and, as such, is an absolute antipode to the Kantian idea of beauty. If the specifics of aesthetic judgement for Immanuel Kant meant a special disinterested gratification that cannot be utilitarian in any sense, popular aesthetics at their core have the requirement for art to fulfil a function (at least of sign pointing to reality beyond the art piece). Moreover, popular aesthetics, in their judgement, openly dwell on moral norms or the norms of pleasure. Therefore, the consumer of popular art is guided and his/her choices are governed by ethical (in contrast to aesthetical) principles.²² Curiously enough, in 1979 (the year of the first publication of *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*), Bourdieu noted that this consistency out of all forms of art is especially visible in theatre “where the working-class audience refuses any sort of formal experimentation and all the effects which, by introducing a distance from the accepted conventions (as regards scenery, plot etc.), tend to distance the spectator, preventing him from getting involved and fully identifying with the characters (I am thinking of Brechtian “alienation”).”²³

As to the competences required for the appreciation of “pure” aesthetics, Bourdieu begins with a critique of the model of the sensual perception of art. Dwelling on the classification proposed by Erwin Panofsky, where the sensual level of an artwork is merely a starting point for aesthetic experience and not its end, the sociologist argues that the sensual experience of art corresponds to a specific anti-intellectual stance. In his opinion, the lack of specific knowledge that enables one to perceive the work of art (or refusal to employ an intellectual

20 Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė 2005, 136

21 For a quick reference on the development of pure aesthetics see Bourdieu's article “The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic” published in “The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism” in 1987.

22 Bourdieu 1996, 5

23 Bourdieu 1996, 4

approach for that matter), leaves the beholder at the sensual level of perception since, for further travel from the initial layer of meanings, a background of specific knowledge and vocabulary of terms is required, as only in this way is it possible to define the stylistic features of the piece.²⁴ Therefore, the encountering of an art work is not at all “love at first sight”: aesthetic contemplation should not be disengaged from intellectual procedures of enquiry and decoding.²⁵ This all encompasses the practical application of received knowledge and cultural competences and, according to Bourdieu, this type of intellectual theory of perception entirely disqualifies the sensual or physically pleasurable perception of art which is characteristic of the typical “art lover”. Therefore, the “pure” gaze for Bourdieu is (a) an aesthetical disposition that is reproduced by academic institutions and (b) an ability to perceive art “for itself”, in its form, and not in its function.²⁶ The “pure” gaze in its turn is directly connected to the emergence of an autonomous field of artistic production, one that is capable of implicating its own rules for the production and consumption of art.

The distinction that Bourdieu makes between two models of perception corresponds to two different types of consumption of art. “Popular” aesthetics accommodates the rational criterion of functionality where an art piece is understood as a part of everyday life. In contrast to that, consumption which is based on “pure” gaze implies an intellectual distance and arsenal of specialized knowledge. In terms of homology, these two models can be regarded as corresponding to the divisions within the social space, where groups of consumers are differentiated by unequal amounts of cultural capital in their possession and consequent ability to acknowledge the value of disinterested art.

In this perspective, a theatre critic, as someone presumably in possession of the greatest amount of cultural capital and specialized knowledge, should stand as an advocate of “purity” of aesthetics and supremacy of form. In reality however, positions that critics occupy and represent in their field are much more nuanced. The field of theatre criticism of late 1970s France that Bourdieu frequently evokes in *La Distinction* is structured along both sides of the Seine that functions both as a real and symbolic line dividing Right-bank from Left-bank critics, ones that favor either “technical skill, joie de vivre, clarity, ease, lightness, optimism”, and others that prefer “tedium, gloom, obscurity, pretentiousness, heaviness and pessimism.”²⁷ Moreover, these are the times when “each fraction of the dominant class has its own artists and philosophers, newspapers and critics, just as it has its hairdresser, interior decorator or tailor.”²⁸ In the course of the four decades that followed after the publication of *La Distinction*, oppositional divisions evidently became somewhat less clear-cut as was the case with conflict between the agents of the autonomous and heteronomous subfields in the field of art. Or, to be more precise, the hierarchies of values that critics rest their judgements on possibly run along different criteria. Nevertheless, the Bourdieusian interpretation

24 Bourdieu 1996, 2-3

25 Ibid.

26 Bourdieu 1996, 41-44

27 Bourdieu 1996, 235

28 Bourdieu 1996, 231

of “popular” and “pure” aesthetics, if regarded not as polar opposition but rather as a continuum or a sliding scale, can be an illuminating tool for understanding the anatomy of contemporary theatre criticism.

Nomos, doxa and illusio

For Bourdieu, any field of social practice is relatively autonomous – its autonomy resting on a particular *nomos* that is unique to every field and defines it as such. For instance, the field of art is defined by its *nomos* “art is art”.²⁹ Such a “law” separates the field of art from the field of, say, economics, with its mercantile and fiscal objectives and motivations for action enshrined by the *nomos* “business is business”. In *Les règles de l’art*, Bourdieu notes that the definition of the “real” artist (writer, scholar, etc.) as well as “real” art (literature, science, etc.) is established as a result of a long chain of exclusions and excommunications, which aim to disqualify those artists (writers, scholars, etc.), who disobey or violate rules implied by the *nomos* of a particular field. In the case of the field of art, such profanation is traditionally connected with commercial art aimed at profit as well as with politically engaged art aimed at social effect, since, in both cases, creation is motivated by rules external to the field of art proper.³⁰ It is herein that the field of criticism becomes essential as a part of the institutionalized system of “gatekeeping” that is invested with capabilities to accept or exclude artists and artworks from a canon of “real” or worthy art.

The phenomenon of “gatekeeping” is discussed in *Les règles de l’art* in the context of symbolic value that various intermediaries (publishers, gallerists, and indeed critics among others) add (or deny) to the artistic products: “The producer of the *value of the work of art* is not the artists but the field of production as a universe of belief which produces the value of work of art as a *fetish* by producing the belief in the creative power of an artist. Given that the work of art does not exist as a symbolic object endowed with special value unless it is known and recognized – that is to say, socially instituted as a work of art by spectators endowed with the aesthetic disposition and competence necessary to know it and recognize as such. <...> It must therefore take into account not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artist, writer, etc.), but also the ensemble of agents and institutions which participate in production of the work via the production of the belief.”³¹ Contributions that critics make towards the production of the value of the work of art are by no means arbitrary as they are deeply informed and influenced by the *nomos* of the field which, in its turn, depends on *doxa* or the phenomenon of unquestionable assumptions, i. e. set of beliefs that are self-evident for a given society.

Bourdieu defined his notion of *doxa* (ancient Greek for “to appear”, “to seem”, “to think” and “to accept”) in his 1972 book *Esquisse d’une théorie de la pratique*: “Because the subjective necessity and self-evidence of the commonsense world are validated by the objective consensus on the sense of the world, that is essential *goes without saying because it comes without saying*: the tradition is silent, not

29 Bourdieu 1995, 223

30 Ibid.

31 Bourdieu 1995, 229

least about itself as a tradition; customary law is content to enumerate specific applications of principles, which remain implicit and unformulated, because unquestioned; <...> and nothing is further from the correlative notion of the *majority* than the *unanimity* of *doxa*, the aggregate of “choices” whose subject is everyone and no one because the questions they answer cannot be explicitly asked.”³² For the aim of this article the notion of *doxa* is important as it serves as one of the parameters that help to understand differences among the art makers, critics, and consumers. In *La Distinction* Bourdieu observes that one’s initial experience of the social world is in fact an experience of the *doxa*, i. e. an agreement to comply with an order which, as a compulsory element for understanding the world, is accepted without asking.³³ The shape of the society is perceived gradually, and the perception is facilitated by various forms of distinction and distinction-making that spring out and indicate different conditions of existence. Social differences are being established by acceptance and rejection, by relational strategies determined by the social structure (marriages, romances, contracts, etc.) as well as a plethora of hierarchies and classifications that are reflected in objects (especially cultural products), institutions (system of education, for instance), or – simply – in the form of one’s language. The perception and sustainability of the social structure is thus assured by most of the judgements and verdicts as well as acts of the redressing of the symbolic order that happen in private (in family) or at institutional levels (e.g., in the system of education). That is how social differentiation becomes a principle for differentiation, which generates further images of the social world: objective lines of division become a sense of division – the practical instinct of objective limits, i. e. sense of one’s place, which encourages the agent to reject everything (goods, persons, places, etc.) that he/she was separated from.³⁴ Hence, it is the *doxa* that is behind the patterns of the agents’ movements in the social space as well as at the bottom of their choices.

The analysis of the Bourdieusian notion of *doxa* leads to another concept – *illusio*. As the *doxa* requires the practical implementation of its rules and principles, Bourdieu introduces the term of *illusio* – a fulfilment of *doxa* via game according to the rules (Latin *in + ludo* = to play). The term was developed in his “Méditations pascaliennes” and “La Domination masculine”, where it is defined as “investment in social games”.³⁵ According to the sociologist, every field of social practice creates its’ own specific form of *illusio* – a system that mobilizes and motivates agents of the field and fuels their competitiveness (for instance, *illusio* in the field of economics is utilitarian interest, an aim to maximize financial gain). On the other hand, *illusio* is also an illusory and relative phenomenon: in spite of the *nomos* of the field of art (“art is art”), it would be naïve to exclude the element of financial profit from its *illusio*. Thus, Bourdieu argues, that *illusio* is a game that the agent of the field of social practice is interested in, as *illusio* represents a combination of the agents’ habitus and the specifics of the field itself.³⁶

32 Bourdieu 1995’, 167–168

33 Bourdieu 1996, 471

34 Bourdieu 1996, 470-471

35 Bourdieu 2000, 208 and Bourdieu 2001, 48

36 Bourdieu 1995, 230-231

Theatre criticism and symbolic violence

The last important notion that has to be mentioned is symbolic violence. For Bourdieu symbolic violence is primarily associated with systems of education.³⁷ However, press and art, in terms of institutions that function as facilitators for social agents to internalize (or to reject) the system of domination as their seemingly natural position in the social space, are also extremely influential. In this article I propose to regard theatre criticism as one of the channels for symbolic violence. To do so a little summation could be helpful: the characteristics of the main notions of “field sociology” explain and support the idea of symbolic violence as a tool for sustaining the legitimate *status quo* within the social space.

To begin with, “field sociology” argues that symbolic social space is constructed out of relatively autonomous fields of social practice (politics, economy, art, religion, etc.). The number of fields is proportional to the level of differentiation and complexity of the division of labour in a given society. According to Bourdieu, the autonomy of every field is defined by its characteristic *nomos*, or “the law”, that is necessarily different from the *nomoi* of the other fields. *Nomoi*, however, are closely related to the *doxa* that is typical to a given society at a given time, i. e. the unquestionable image of the world and its order that functions as essentially an artificial factor supporting the structure of society at a pre-reflexive level of the agents. Consequently, *doxa*, as both a symbolic backbone and a set of rules of the society, has to be realized in practice: such an implication Bourdieu terms *illusio* – a game according to the rules, set by *doxa* of every social space. Every field of social practice creates a form of *illusio* of its own, and it functions as a mobilizing and motivating force for its agents.

Another essential feature of social space and fields of social practice is their hierarchical structure, where the dominant position is related to the disposition of capital (economic, social, cultural or symbolic). The field of biggest resources occupies the dominant position in the social space, whereas its characteristic values, the understanding of the world order (*doxa*) and the derivative rules of the game (*illusio*) are legitimated (i. e. applicable to all) in order to sustain the *status quo*. The biggest resources of symbolic capital are likely to be found in the field of political power that preserves its dominant position as long as its agents accept its symbolic power. The preservation of this concord is supported by a system of the reproduction of legitimate *doxa* that functions on an institutional level (family, education) or is realized voluntarily when an agent accepts legitimated *illusio*. Bourdieu calls this system of reproduction a symbolic violence: a particular type of violence that affects an agent in his/her own complicity.³⁸ According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is so effective precisely because it is based on an agent’s pre-reflexive assumptions.³⁹ These founding experiences are further solidified by the system of education directly related to the field of political power, and by *illusio* after the agent joins the field of social practice of his/her choice. Conformity to or rejection of a particular *illusio* is fundamentally influential to the agent’s further

37 For more on this subject, see Bourdieu, Pierre & Passeron, Jean-Claude. 1970. *La Reproduction: éléments d’une théorie du système d’enseignement*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit.

38 Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 167-168

39 Ibid.

trajectory within the field in terms of upward or downward mobility on the scale of social hierarchy.

As established before, the field of theatre criticism can be located in-between the field of theatre and the fields of power (economic or political) in its capacity to mediate between the theatre and various forms of capital. This mediation, however, is reciprocal: the production “happens” in the public space and become social via critical texts. By the same token however, the texts symbolically represent and express the reaction to the production as it occurs in different sections of social space. Hence, the field of theatre criticism can be regarded as a meeting place for different systems of values represented by various fields of social practice and their different *nomoi*. The subsequent combination of different *nomoi* can also be regarded as its characteristic feature, granting relative autonomy of the field. The field of theatre criticism is thus not identical or overlapping with that of theatre, or with those of economic or political power.

The relativity of autonomy here is an essential parameter as it influences the intensity of a possible conflict or “miscommunication” between the theatre and the market or political power. The conflict that critical texts express explicitly springs out of a collision between the *nomos* of reversed economics and pursuits of utilitarian interests, characteristic to fields that the field of theatre is primarily connected with. These ties act like an external system of limitations and requirements that can be communicated via the critics’ texts. The critics in their turn follow the principle of either external or internal hierarchization: the former, according to Bourdieu, is imposed by a subfield that, in a given time, is dominant in the field of political (or economic) power and designates the criteria for success (such as commercial efficiency, popular or official acknowledgement, etc.)⁴⁰ According to this principle, the most successful artists are those that either are favoured by a mass audience, or contribute to the reproduction of societal *doxa* and hence are worthy to be included into a canon of official culture. In contrast, the internal principle of hierarchization favours those artists who (at least in their early career) are known and appreciated by their fellow artists and selected connoisseurs only, and who sustain the prestige of their work by renouncing the demands of “popular” aesthetics or political conformism.

Accordingly, theatre critics, mediating between two (or more) fields, can channel principles of either internal or external hierarchization. The field of theatre criticism can function as a tool for the implication of an external *nomos* into the field of theatre, or *vice versa*, it can serve as a bridge for a system of values specific to the field of theatre into the social space. Here, one can remind oneself of the different types of positions the critics assume that Albert Thibaudet called “the simple men” (members of the audience, journalists), “the professionals” (academics) and “the artists”.⁴¹ These positions, corresponding to values, interests, and rules of different fields of social practice, create the structure of the field of theatre criticism and reveal the channels of symbolic violence. Dwelling on values common for fields of power, part of the critics in their verdicts indicate the guidelines for artists who, by following them, can

40 Bourdieu 1995, 217

41 Ferenczi 2003, 13-14

expect external acknowledgement (popularity, financial success or symbolic consecration). Another part of the critics siding with and defending the *nomos* of disinterested art, not only propagate the principle of internal hierarchization, but also expose the *doxa* that underpins the structure of social space and its possible inconsistencies.

It is worth stopping for a moment at the political aspect of the dynamics that are created by the agents of the fields of art. In his analysis of logic behind structural changes within the field of artistic production, Bourdieu notes that the consequences of the inner transformations of the fields are also observable in the social space that envelops them.⁴² According to the sociologist, artists who dominated the field *before* the change occurred consistently maintained their position by establishing their names in the market and becoming more and more recognizable and acknowledgeable (as it was noted before, official acknowledgement might indicate that the artists' work was recognized as beneficial for the reproduction of the *doxa*). A new artist appearing and establishing him/herself might, in fact, downgrade the already established art, its makers and consumers as well as the system of tastes in the past. Such a situation is especially evident in times when the field of artistic production increases its autonomy, and its agents begin to supply innovative products that require a new system of taste. Therefore, Bourdieu argues, the dynamics of change within the field of artistic production define more than a change in aesthetic taste (i. e. within the system of preferences that guide consumer choices). If dominant or subordinate positions within the field of artistic production are homologous to the hierarchies of aesthetic preferences in societies, then the general transformation within the field initiates the same within the system of taste, but this time as a hierarchized system of distinction between societal groups.⁴³ That is why it seems natural that when a change within the field of artistic production is significant enough to transcend its boundaries, it provokes a reaction in a society: favourable, in the case of the fraction that aims to dominate, and antagonistic in the case of the already dominant one that instinctively seeks to sustain its *status quo* even in terms of its aesthetic preferences. This model can be traceable when surveying reconfigurations within the field of theatre criticism where major changes in the field of theatre were greeted (or damned) as almost a political *coup d'état*.

Oskaras Koršunovas' rise to consecrated avant-garde

Oskaras Koršunovas, one of the most prominent Lithuanian directors, debuted in 1990 while still a student of the Lithuanian State Conservatoire.⁴⁴ In terms of his initial place in the field of theatre, the dominant positions at the time were held by the directors Rimas Tuminas, Jonas Vaitkus, and Eimuntas Nekrošius. The triad together with their lesser known colleagues represented the typical tendencies of Lithuanian theatre developed in the late Soviet period: *auteur*

42 Bourdieu 1995, 251-252

43 Ibid.

44 Koršunovas belongs to the first generation of Lithuanian theatre directors who have not undergone compulsory studies in Russia, which was a standard practice during the Soviet occupation (1940–1990). The same practice was implemented in the case of theatre scholars.

theatre, metaphorical, and highly visual communication, a strong bedrock in the Stanislavskian method of physical actions,⁴⁵ and a romantic understanding of the mission that the theatre has towards people in general and Lithuanian society in particular. In contrast, one of the most important features of Koršunovas' creative trajectory was (and still is) visibility and aesthetic relevance to the international milieu. The director debuted internationally in the same year as nationally, and his very first production, *Ten būti čia* ("There To Be Here"), was awarded The Scotsman Fringe First Award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in the same year, 1990. Thus, atypically for a beginner, Koršunovas began his career with a relatively high degree of consecration specific to the *nomos* of the field of theatre.

The Lithuanian critics in their reviews of Koršunovas' first and subsequent productions on the second stage of a major institution – the Lithuanian Academic Drama Theatre (*Senė* ("The Old Woman", 1992), *Labas Sonia Nauji Metai* ("Hello Sonia New Year", 1994), *Senė 2* ("The Old Woman 2", 1994) helped build his status as a "young and promising" director further. Some went as far as calling the director (still in his twenties) "a virtuoso",⁴⁶ the "first in line of the Lithuanian avant-garde".⁴⁷ But the common denominator in the reviews, especially those written by the critics in their forties and younger, was the insight that Koršunovas' work was somehow very different from the main currents in Lithuanian theatre.⁴⁸

The first major move that could be regarded as Koršunovas' attempt to secure a dominant position in the field of theatre occurred in 1997 with the opening of his *P.S. byla O.K.* ("P.S. Case O.K.") – a devised production in cooperation with the writer and playwright Sigitas Parulskis. Unlike his previous works, *P.S. byla O.K.* was created for the main stage of the Academic Drama Theatre (renamed the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre from 1998) and was challenging on many levels – aesthetic, ideological, organizational, and even physical as it ran for several hours and had no coherent plot, nor conventional characters. The critical reception of *P.S. byla O.K.* reveals a pattern of the symbolic struggle for the re-definition of legitimate art that involved agents of different habitus and positions within the field of criticism, whereby the pages of the cultural weekly *Literatūra ir menas* ("Literature and Art") were turned into a major battlefield.

Considering such parameters as age, schooling as well as cultural and political context of their entry into the field, the critics that were active in the field of Lithuanian theatre criticism in the Nineties represented three groups or generations.⁴⁹ The first debuted in the Fifties and the Sixties (some even in the Thirties and Forties), the second group of the forty and fifty somethings debuted in the Seventies and the Eighties, and the third group began their careers in the late Eighties to early Nineties.⁵⁰ *Literatūra ir menas* in its coverage of *P.S. byla O.K.* initially published an interview with a representative of the first group, who decidedly denounced the production as amoral and unprofessional, mentioning

45 Marcinkevičiūtė 2009, 535-536

46 Vanagaitė 2009, 66

47 Vasiliauskas 2009, 52

48 For a rich collection of largely favourable reviews, see *OKT: būti čia*. 2009. Vilnius: OKT / Vilniaus miesto teatras.

49 Drobyšaitė 2000, 14

50 Ibid.

the need for a body that would control the work of young artists.⁵¹ The second publication was written by a representative of the third group who diagnosed a generational clash between the critics in terms of understanding what theatre is, what it has to look like, and what it has to do.⁵² In the third publication of the series, another representative of the first group declared her refusal to evaluate the production on the grounds that it was not comprehensible.⁵³ In an interesting twist the editors of the weekly then published a short collection of generally favourable reflections by three students, who read theatre criticism at the Lithuanian Academy of Music,⁵⁴ after which the previous critic revisited the production and in a new review declared it worthwhile.⁵⁵ In a sort of *audiatur et altera pars* Koršunovas himself was then given a voice and produced an interview tellingly called “Postmodernism means having no other choice”.⁵⁶ As a curious coda to this symbolic consecration, another collection of favourable reflections was published. This time it was written by Russian and Ukrainian critics representing major Russian publications.⁵⁷ The theses by Vladas Vasiliauskas, the critic of the middle generation, could be used to sum it all up: 1. Koršunovas has no company, premises, nor works under institutional support, yet, he makes internationally acclaimed productions that attract a “different” audience than the regulars at the Academic Drama Theatre; 2. *P.S. byla O.K.* avoids the emotional impact of lecturing on existential issues, as well as national sentimentality – everything that is usually dear to Lithuanian theatre makers; 3. Koršunovas is the only Lithuanian director that tries to employ the logic and idioms of contemporary art; 4. *P.S. byla O.K.* makes him “the fourth” director alongside Tuminas, Vaitkus, and Nekrošius.⁵⁸

A clash of different habitus is evident at the core of this symbolic struggle to define what is legitimate art. The bewilderment as well as enthusiasm of the critics confronted with a postmodern aesthetic vocabulary on the stage of a national institution was itself fuelled by a schism that occurred in Lithuanian societal *doxa* after 1990. The traditional image of national identity with its stable, i.e. ethnic markers after the country regained its sovereignty, gradually bifurcated into parallel yet interconnected conceptions of national and transnational identity, and the decisive role in the process of identification of Lithuanianness was taken by the markers of an emotional and moral dimension.⁵⁹ Therefore, the representatives of the older generation, still preserving symbolic capital and

51 “Ir mane durną...” 1997, 10

52 Jauniškis 1997, 10. Directly below the review the editors placed the information on publication of the first issue of *Teatras* (The Theatre), a first specialized magazine on theatre of the Nineties, mentioning that several articles there are dedicated to “P.S. Case O. K.”

53 Girdzijauskaitė 1997, 10

54 “Atsiliepiant į Sigito Parulskio ir Oskaro Koršunovo spektaklį“ 1997, 12

55 Girdzijauskaitė, 1997’ 10. The critic mentioned that after her first review was published a famous artist wondered if she had joined “the demented”

56 Koršunovas 1997, 10

57 ““P.S. byla O.K.”: nauji paradymai” 1997, 11

58 Vasiliauskas 1997, 8. After the success of *P.S. byla O.K.* and meeting with actor and manager Martynas Budraitis and stage designer Jūratė Paulėkaitė, Koršunovas began to contemplate establishing his own company.

59 Kuznecovienė 2006, 107

authority, discredited *P.S. byla O.K.* in an instinctive defence of traditional cultural dispositions and the *nomos* that in the mid-Nineties was already becoming alien to the field of theatre. The advocates of the new *nomos* in their turn used all the methods and techniques available to legitimise and reproduce their habitus, even convincing some of their adversaries to change their mind by inducing a fear of losing credibility and relevance.

To my mind, Koršunovas' rise to the consecrated avant-garde was symbolically completed in 2010 when Arūnas Gelūnas, the Minister of Culture at the time, stated, "In our opinion, Martynas Budraitis, who won the competition [to become general manager of the Lithuanian National Drama Theatre] and is mostly associated with Oskaras Koršunovas <...> can successfully run the Theatre in accordance with the expectations and conception of the national theatre that is prevalent in the cultural *milieu* and the entire society."⁶⁰

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to propose an understanding of theatre criticism as a field of social practice – as a semi-autonomous space defined by a tension between conflicting interests of theatre on the one hand, and of fields external to it (market and / or political power), on the other. The internal structure of the field of theatre criticism is formed out of a changeable balance between critics who occupy a position heteronomous to the fields of political and / or economic power, and critics, who sustain the *nomos* characteristic to the field of theatre. Hence, the dynamics of the field of theatre criticism, the mechanisms that hierarchize and motivate its agents as well as patterns of its internal change are homologous to those occurring in the fields of artistic production and political and / or economic power.

The Bourdieusian idea of symbolic violence, if applied to theatre criticism, underpins the reconstruction of the matrix of hierarchized positions that critics assume in a given time and place. The practice performed by critics – the agents of the field of theatre criticism – can be considered as acts of symbolic violence in a fight over the authority and legitimate right to decide which art is worthy of acknowledgement, thus reinforcing or inhibiting theatre that supports the *doxa* of the social structure. Thus, some of the critics, the ones that are in possession of the greatest symbolic capital, most effectively support or deny the value of theatre that is considered legitimate. In this respect the changes that occur within the field of theatre and of power are directly interconnected with re-hierarchizations within the field of theatre criticism. In terms of the capacity for official consecration, the critics that represent the dominant societal fraction in the fields of theatre and of power sit at the top of the hierarchy. The ones that represent subordinate fractions can function as intermediaries for alternative consecration, spreading the alternative understanding of values in art. It is possible to imagine autonomous critics, dwelling on the ethos and aesthetic criteria of the "pure" gaze, performing specific consecration. Thus, the critical discourse becomes a continuum where opposing conceptions of art sit at opposite ends. In a given field of criticism, the constellation of the positions along the continuum reveal the unique combination

60 "M. Budraitis pradeda vadovauti Nacionaliniam dramos teatrui", 2010

of the possibilities for specific consecration to turn into the official one.

In the same way as Bourdieusian ideas cannot be detached from their political implications, theatre criticism as a form of social practice is also underpinned by the political effects it creates. For instance, the principle of disinterested art as well as the struggle for its acknowledgement can be regarded as a political stance, a way of questioning social *doxa*. However, cultural dispositions demonstrated by the critics of the greatest symbolic capital can be taken as homologous to those of the dominant fractions of society. The temporal dimension and reconfigurations of the positions within the field of theatre criticism cannot be separated from general changes that occur in the overlapping social space, and in fact should be regarded as mutually interrelated.

Finally, it could be argued that from a contemporary perspective Bourdieusian notions and ideas are too rigid, the models that they propose are too normative and determinist, whereas their transplantation into the theory of theatre criticism might resemble a return to the dated schemes of class warfare. After all, art itself has grown suspicious of some of its most revered values (such as beauty and authenticity, for example) and political power is more willing to accept disinterested art than ever. Nevertheless, in times when theatre criticism has become a part of the technologically expanded public sphere, where, as Rónán McDonald notes, discussion on culture is atomized and “everybody’s interests are catered for, nobody’s challenged”⁶¹, Bourdieusian formulas might prove very helpful for ordering, classifying, and ultimately understanding patterns and motives behind theatre making, its consumption, and communication.

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61 McDonald 2007, 16

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