

The Effect of Globalization on Theatre

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ABSTRACT : The article examines the impact of globalization on theatre, highlighting the distinction between globalization, understood as a process of cultural and economic interconnectedness, and globalism, viewed as an ideology that promotes global uniformity. In the field of theatre, globalization has supported the circulation of ideas and artistic mobility, but it has also generated a certain standardization, increasing the appetite for easy entertainment and contributing to the erosion of local identities. Audiences have become less willing to engage with complex performances, preferring shorter and lighter productions, which has influenced the artistic directions of theatres, including those in Romania. Romanian independent theatre has faced—and continues to face—major challenges: lack of financial stability, unpredictable audiences, and the inability to sustain large-scale projects. Globalization has shaped a fluctuating cultural market in which some independent artists can follow their vision without compromise, while others are pushed toward commercial art in order to survive. Despite these effects of globalization, theatre remains a space of resistance, community, and reflection, especially in times of crisis, and examples such as Ariane Mnouchkine show that true artistic meaning can emerge only from a profound purpose.

KEYWORDS : globalism; globalization; independent theatre; entertainment; resistance;

Introduction

Discussion on the current human society must center on globalism and globalisation. Before analysing the impact of globalisation on theatre, is necessary to make a clear distinction between the terms globalisation and globalism, often used confusingly in

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specialty literature. "Globalisation is a political, technological, and cultural phenomenon, as it is an economical one. It can be defined as the intensification of social relations on a global level, which connects remote locations in a way that local events are shaped by distant phenomena and vice versa." (Giddens, 2000, p. 64) Thus, it represents a dynamic process of integration and interconnection across the economic, social, political, and cultural spheres on a global scale. It is characterized by the increasing flow of goods, services, information, technologies, and ideas, as well as by the strengthening of interdependent relationships among states, institutions, and communities. On the other hand, globalism designates an ideology that promotes globalisation as normative model, supporting global interconnectedness as the ideal solution for progress and development. (Steger, 2002, p. 16)

If globalisation describes "what is happening" in the world, globalism expresses "how" the world "should be", harnessing supranational governance, economic integration and the dissemination of values considered universal. This distinction is essential for the analysis of theatre evolution, and, in consequence, of Romanian independent theatre. On one hand, globalisation created the premises of the free circulation of ideas, dramatic texts and artists, facilitating access to diverse aesthetic models and to a wide open cultural market. On the other hand, globalism generated normative pressure, often imposing cultural and artistic standards alligned to the dominant tendencies of Western centres. In this context, Romanian theatre, whether independent or subsidized, was constantly torn between the opportunities offered by international connection and the risk of uniformization, between creative freedom and the constraints imposed by global market logic.

Discussion

Cultural globalisation affects theatre through the rationale imposed at the level of meetings between products, artists and concepts. Examples of this are edifying, if we refer only to the influence of international festivals, transnational funding or digital platforms. Globalisation has impacted theatre, causing profound, yet not exactly beneficial, transformations, in Romania, and in extenso, on a global level. Considering the contemporary social existence and the world of European theatre, the European values crisis, we can recognise the context that fostered it. On one hand, globalisation has favored access to universal, at the expense of national character, local and regional identity. Consumerism, as an effect of globalisation, proliferated a type of theatre without substance, an entertainment-theatre. Therefore, the subjection of the entire cultural world to the laws of globalization gives rise, through the templateization and accessibility, to superficial consumption needs, a kind of favoring of anti-culture.

Globalisation has generated the abandonment of cultural ideals and perspectives based on ideologies. The general public is content with mediocre entertainment, wrapped in the coat of an elitist product. Globalisation has also created the framework of wide changes in the perception and expectations of the public, has decisively contributed to a certain lack of rigor of the spectators and to the replacement of the artistic goal with a commercial one. The depletion of the critical spirit has also meant a decrease in quality. Spectators have „soaked” and no longer have the willingness to attend longer shows with serious themes. At the meeting I had at Théâtre Rive Gauche in Paris¹, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt² told me that, in his opinion, France was the first to respond to this globalisation. At the ticket office, the spectators asked if the show made one laugh or cry. “If it is a theatre of ideas, it is of no interest to us.” At shows that lasted longer than two hours, tickets were the hardest to sell. This determined him, as director and manager, to create shows depending on the audience’s needs, otherwise he couldn’t manage to attract spectators and to collect revenue for the payment of expenses.

Returning to the Romanian private theatre, we can affirm with conviction that here too the public is an unknown, a trap for any private theatre, and attracting spectators and selling tickets is one of the greatest challenges. It takes years of constant cultural practice so that, at the moment you decide, for example, a change of artistic direction, you’re able to maintain an audience and make it loyal in this new form. For this, For this you do not always have time or sustainability and financing methods available.

On another note, there are examples of independent theatre companies with constant state support, as I previously mentioned the case of Schaubühne and Thomas Ostermeier:

“I do not know how Schaubühne would have succeeded completely independent from the state, I do not think it would have lasted.” (Ostermeier, 2020) In his

¹ Théâtre Rive Gauche (The Theatre on the left Bank) opened in 1994 in a former cabaret club converted for a while in a cinema. In 2010, 50 private theatre in Paris, among which also Théâtre Rive Gauche, formed Association pour le Soutien du Théâtre Privé (ASTP) and Syndicat National des Directeurs et Tourneurs du Théâtre Privé (SNDTP) and decided to launch a new group: Theatres Parisiens Associés. In January 2012, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt became director of Théâtre Rive Gauche, in association with producer and comedy actor Bruno Metzger, and in 2013 they were joined by actor and director Steve Suissa; <https://lagaiterivegauche.com/le-theatre/>; date of access: 20.03.2025

² Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt is a Franco-belgian actor, theatre director, playwright, prose writer and film director, the director of Théâtre Rive Gauche in Paris. His plays have been represented in over 50 countries allover the world. In Romania his books are translated by Humanitas publishing house, and in 2023 the author also became a founder of „Grivița 53” theatre in Bucharest.

reflections on the creative process, Thomas Ostermeier argues that a theatrical production should not be shaped by budgetary constraints but by the demands of the artistic vision. He maintains that financial compromises inevitably risk diminishing the expressive potential of a performance and emphasizes that funding should serve to support the artistic concept rather than determine it. For this reason, Ostermeier values the framework provided by publicly funded theatre, where the possibility of securing resources according to the needs of a production allows for a degree of artistic freedom that, in his view, cannot be achieved within the private theatre sector.

Theatre cannot miraculously change the world, it cannot modify politics or ideologies of any kind. Whether it is state or private, theatre will generate changes in the minds of those who frequent it over time. Theatre means, first of all, observation, point of view, clear manifesto, live emotion. Globalisation does not take into account what people experience today individually, the way they are, what they want and the prospects of living in a unifying society. In this sense, theatre even succeeds to even oppose globalism and globalisation through specific instruments.

In his reflections on the social function of theatre, Thomas Ostermeier adopts a lucid and deliberately non-idealized position, challenging the belief that theatrical art is, in itself, capable of bringing about major political or social transformations. He argues that although theatrical performances can stimulate debate, encourage critical reflection, and contribute to the development of civic awareness, they cannot substitute for direct political action, nor can they serve as the driving force behind decisive historical change. From this perspective, Ostermeier calls for a more realistic reassessment of the artist's role in contemporary society, maintaining that theatre today occupies a relatively marginal position in relation to the mechanisms that effectively shape political and social reality. He further contends that genuine civic engagement requires direct participation and concrete action, a conviction rooted in his own biography, which includes involvement in the anti-fascist movement and radical left-wing activism during his youth. In his view, theatre can accompany, interpret, and critically comment on reality, but it cannot replace effective political intervention. Consequently, he argues that theatre practitioners should adopt a more modest understanding of the social impact of their artistic work. (Ostermeier, 2020)

In the context of accelerated globalisation, independent theatre has the opportunity to be an art theatre, a theatre of attitude, one that creates uncomfortable experiences, like a voice that screams, like a manifesto. Independent theatre can sow in the public consciousness a spirit of responsibility, it can have an educational role, not just a cultural one. Unfortunately, the spaces of independent theatre- living rooms, basements, attics and so on- are, rather, locations that conceal outlets, not ones that express artistic beliefs. The majority of the productions created in these spaces do not replace art theatre, attitude theatre and weren't necessarily born out

of an artistic obsession, a burning desire, out of an ideologic necessity. I do not know any exclusively independent artist that conducts all kinds of experiments and receives moral and financial validation. Independent artists, at least in Romania, end up practicing their art with desperation and threatened by the prospect of default, maybe even tomorrow. The majority just try to exist somehow. Globalisation brought them too few advantages and a lot of disadvantages.

In a free, capitalist market, where competition makes the law, where the inflation of artists is one of the results that redefine art as an industry, where the spectators' discernment does not necessarily coincide with artistic rigour, there are and were creators whose beliefs were above trends. Being good means nothing. You also need to have courage. Even if the courage to follow your own path, when you are on your own, can mean suicide.

Are all these effects of globalisation? We think so. On one hand, the emptying of the essence and soul of the theatre, the solidarity-free theatre, built on fast forward, based on recipes for success, aligns this art to the idea of shopping, of consumerism. The theatrical world has become a market in which only how much you sell matters, and not what traces you leave in the audience. Franchising, serial production, replaying the same performances by a director in different theatres, so the so called recipes, put theatrical art on the industry's conveyor. Imitation and plagiarism are popular, at the expense of the original creation. The path of an artist who has the courage to make his own independent company is totally different from that of a director who walks from theatre to theatre, mounts with different actors and welds temporary teams. Your own troupe turns an „accident“ into an authentic endeavor. Ariane Mnouchkine turned her theatre in the space she lived in, ate together with her team- this endeavour created a symbiosis between creators, they met not only on the stage, but also in daily life, they lived together, discovered each other, and from this energy the artistic product was born. “Theatre is not a shop, nor an office, or factory. It is a workshop of encounters, of sharing. A temple of meditation, of knowledge and sensibility. A house where we must feel well, with fresh water if you are thirsty, and something to eat if you are hungry. Meyerhold said that a theatre must be a true ‘palace of wonders’.” (Mnouchkine, 2023)

In her reflections on the relationship between theatre and the spectator, Ariane Mnouchkine shifts the focus from the exclusively artistic dimension of performance to the human experience of the encounter between the stage and the audience. She argues that attending a theatrical performance requires both effort and commitment on the part of the spectator, who should therefore be welcomed with respect, gratitude, and genuine care. From this perspective, theatre does not begin when the curtain rises but from the moment the audience enters the theatrical space, where every detail of the reception becomes an integral part of the aesthetic

experience. Her criticism of impersonal and institutionalized theatre architecture reflects a broader rejection of the notion of theatre as merely a venue for cultural consumption, stripped of warmth and human connection. For Mnouchkine, a performance should foster, from the very outset, the feeling of a temporary community in which the spectator is not an anonymous recipient but an essential participant in the artistic event. At the same time, she continually reminds her actors that, for some members of the audience, a given performance may represent their very first encounter with theatre, while for others it may be their last. Such awareness transforms every performance into an act of both artistic and ethical responsibility, compelling theatre practitioners to approach each presentation with the same intensity and seriousness, regardless of how many times the production has already been performed.

Beyond the practical aspects of theatrical production, Mnouchkine's reflections articulate a profoundly humanistic conception of theatre. She shifts the centre of gravity from the artistic product itself to the relationships established among people. In her view, theatre is not defined solely by the quality of performance or the complexity of its scenic language, but also by its ability to create a space of hospitality, dialogue, and shared experience. The spectator is no longer perceived as a passive consumer of culture but as an indispensable partner in the theatrical event, deserving the same degree of attention and care devoted to the creative process itself. From this perspective, every performance becomes unique not only because of what unfolds on stage, but also because of the singularity of those who experience it.

Within the context of contemporary society, marked by the acceleration of cultural consumption and the predominance of technologically mediated interactions, perspectives such as Mnouchkine's acquire renewed significance. They reaffirm the value of theatrical experience as a direct, unrepeatable, and profoundly human encounter, resisting the tendency to reduce culture to a standardized product designed for rapid consumption. In this sense, the attention devoted to the spectator transcends the logic of audience development or retention strategies and becomes an expression of an ethics of hospitality and artistic responsibility, through which theatre once again reasserts its distinctive role in a world increasingly dominated by digital communication and the technological reproduction of cultural experiences.

Conclusions

In light of the famous theatre director and animator Ariane Mnouchkine's statements, it can be affirmed that arts and culture experience the dynamic of major global changes in a special way, while theatre, as an art of presence and of direct relationship with the audience, reflects the transformations generated by globalization.

Independent art needs a purpose. Artists who managed to define this purpose open wide the perspective of fulfillment for each of the actors of the independent phenomenon. A purpose or lack thereof can be observed if we look at a successful model. How many independent theatre performances answer Ariane Mnouchkine's question "Where there is very little air left to breathe, is theatre very important?" For independent theatre to add value to the context in which it manifests, it must act as an instrument of evolution. And, as Tairov, Brecht, Grotowski, Mnouchkine, Boal, and many others have shown over the years, theatre's essential role is best observed in crisis situations. In those moments, theatre becomes more than an aesthetic act: it is a form of symbolic survival, an instrument of resistance and a space of community.

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