

Christopher B. Balme, Berenika Szymanski-Düll, *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 350 p.

1945 — the end of the Second World War. Two years later, in 1947 — the beginning of the Cold War. The birth of two groups of states, with different ideologies and political systems: the USSR with its allies, on one side, and the USA with its allies, on the other. A permanent conflict between two antagonistic poles of power: at an ideological and political level, the confrontation between the capitalist and the communist systems; from a political and military point of view, the European encounter between two international alliances: the NATO and the Warsaw Pact. A period characterized by tensions, confrontation, but also reconfiguration, and cultural development.

The development of the Cold War was performed in a seemingly positive key, which also facilitated the shifting of the confrontation to an apparently remote area of war — the cultural space. The conflict between the two great powers took place both on the battlefield of military confrontations, where heavy weapons such as bombs, tanks and missiles proved their effectiveness, and also on an ideologically battlefield, where the main aim was to change mentalities and paradigms of thinking. Nowadays, the unraveling of the Cold War is a process still underway, due to the possibility of accessing and interpreting archive documents, which have long been inaccessible.

The two blocks were self-defined in positive terms (the states of the Western bloc represented the “free world” and the states of the Eastern bloc represented “the anti-imperialist world” or “the popular democracies”), while in reality constantly developing action schemes for achieving international supremacy: diplomatic and economic pressure, spying, cultural and sports rivalry, propaganda campaigns.

With the picture of an absent Warm War in mind, since the actual military confrontation between the two superpowers was blocked by mutual endowment with nuclear weapons, the cultural space became prolific for the dissemination of the most advanced strategies of thought and means of propaganda. Achieving a cultural supremacy was considered one step forward towards achieving an international political one. On this new battlefield, the most diverse cultural products were propelled like „guided missiles”, as Ira Wolfert noted in *The Nation*, 1956 (quoted in Charlotte M. Canning, 2017, 39): theatrical productions, folk dance productions, military song and dance ensembles, ballet or opera performances etc.

One comprehensive collection of texts dealing with the complexity of the “cultural front”, *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), is a collective volume coordinated by Christopher B. Balme and Berenika Szymanski-Düll, art researchers at LMU (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München), Centre for Global Theatre History. Their main research projects focus on theatrical studies, such as the legacy of modernism in the

globalization of the arts (Christopher B. Balme), or the internationalization of communism in and through theatre (Berenika Szymanski-DÜLL). This volume is structured in four parts and eighteen chapters, and it brings together the individual research of nineteen authors on the role of theatrical culture in the conflict between the two superpowers during the Cold War. This perspective offers both the possibility of a re-conceptualization of the theatrical movement, and a broader analysis of the Cold War, which goes beyond the standard interpretation of one of the largest geopolitical paradigm and transforms it into an arena of rivalries and disputes of cultural supremacy.

Regarding this book, there are some important details which must be emphasized: *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War* brings an important contribution to the historiography of the Cold War, as this wide and varied analysis of the Cold War artistic phenomena contributes to the development of a new discipline - Cold War Studies. This discipline represents an interdisciplinary incursion into the Cold War theme, covering both the field of political science and diplomacy, as well as the cultural and artistic field. The importance of this volume stems from the fact that it represents the outcome of research work in the archives, as access to archives on both sides of the former Iron Curtain has improved.

Since the volume analyses the artistic movements during the Cold War and especially the theatrical productions, I think I would not take a great deal away from the paradigm of interpretation if I were to try to identify the main characters. If the the reader's interest were to stop only at artistic products, he would involuntarily be able to have a picture of what the global conflict between the US and the USSR meant. On the other hand, if the reading only aimed at identifying the general trajectory of the conflict, it will lead us just as well at learning about the cultural landscape of the period. If we try to establish a „main character” of this volume, in my opinion, it would probably be the Cold War. It definitely was the phenomenon that influenced the development of the artistic and theatrical domain, as well as the biography of different artists during that period, as they became representative of a country, an ideology, or a lifestyle: Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Bertolt Brecht, Konstantin Stanislasvki, Paul Robeson etc. The secondary character can be considered the Theater itself, to the extent that it was a powerful political instrument, through its iconic power that was recognized at the highest level, perhaps for the last time in cultural history.

Another significant particularity of the volume refers to some advantages of these different contributions from several countries: for the research in the field of global theatre history it reveals a new perspective on the interpretation of already known theatrical and performative phenomena, shedding light on cultural products as pawns in the US-USSR conflict; for the research on the geopolitical dimension of the Cold War, it outlines the artistic specificity of the states part of this global conflict. Therefore, it proposes clarifications on

how certain cultural products were developed with the specific purpose of serving as weapons in the cultural warfare (The Mazowsze State Folk and Dance Ensemble, The Military Song and Dance Ensembles, etc); or in the cases where, using the popularity already acquired, they were “borrowed” by the ideology of one party i.e.: The Berliner Ensemble case, which became representative of the link with the Socialist Unity Party from East Germany, especially because of Brecht’s political convictions; Paul Robeson music, as a way for the USSR to respond to the American message about the repression of individual freedom in the Soviet bloc, as he was an African-American musician, established in the United States, who during the USSR tournaments became an exponent of its equal rights policy, particularly concerning the rights of African Americans. In this context, one of the coordinators’ goals was to identify the limit to which broad geopolitical trends intervened in theater and performing arts, and to provide a starting point for the further development of methodologies to interpret this artistic phenomenon.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that the general perspective is a transnational one, as it examines the cultural exchange between different nations and the change undergone by the cultural specificity of some nations in contact with other entities, such as training schools for acting, ballet schools, folk and dance ensembles, political parties, international theatre festivals or international theatre platforms (such as the International Theatre Institute or the International Association of Theatre Critics). Sharing ideas about what people thought of themselves, their regimes, how they related to the living conditions their regime offered was crucial in that period. That’s the reason why the tours of various artistic productions were a perfect way of spreading ideas, since cultural exchanges played an important role. At the same time, the book clarifies the way in which the competition between the West and the East during the Cold War led to the development of a cultural policy whereby theaters and art companies were subsidised by the state: the fact that Eastern states had a wide network of state-funded theaters, determined also the expansion of the public theater network in the West, for example in France, Italy and even in the UK, known as the home of commercial theatre. There were established two public theatres - Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre (Christopher B. Balme, Berenika Szymanski-Düll, 2017, 24).

The four parts that structure the volume are also the four main perspectives that provide the analytic framework for the artistic phenomenon during the Cold War. *Part I, Shifting Borders: Tours and Touring* presents the paradoxical situation in Europe: while the Iron Curtain was drawn, the Berlin Wall built and restrictive visa policies introduced, the artistic field experienced the development of a strong tour policy. There were tours of some of the most important theater companies, intended to disseminate ideas and practices throughout a Europe where mobility was almost an exceptional fact. The tours of performances of Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble highlight the company’s involvement in international politics and its

relationship with the Socialist Unity Party, the East German ruling party. The Socialist Unity Party covered a significant part of the international touring costs, which secured the opportunity to promote itself by assuming the glory of successful tours. Also, the product Brecht delivered with Berliner Ensemble was completely different from what the cultural market offered at the time: a combination of innovation in institutional management, artistic practice, but also political partisanship outlined by his desire to initiate social change through his performances. At some point, this increase in reputation, also at an international level, gave Berliner Ensemble more power and independency. The success of the Eastern Europe tour of Peter Brook production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (a Royal Shakespeare Company performance), reveals the fact that the Cold War was characterized by a certain level of communication about similar values, while being also about divisions (Zoltan Imre, 2017, 117). Despite the fact that it was a Western production, the performance enjoyed a successful reception on both sides. Brook's universal language was a perfect metaphor in a rhetorically, politically and physically divided world.

*Part II, Institutional Imbrications and Epistemic Communities*, comprises an analysis on the contribution of different entities, institutions, foundations or even secret services (CIA and MI5), to the expansion of public funding policy for the arts. At the same time, it examines the activity of the International Theatre Institute, founded in Prague in 1948, with a precise role of being an international organization, which supported cooperation in the field of performing arts. Its main objective was to transcend ideological differences through the "common language" of theatrical art, but it was proven that it was not immune to political influence. The Eighth Congress of the ITI organized in Helsinki in 1959, with members from both camps, ended with a heated debate. In the opening, the playwright Eugene Ionesco spoke about avant-garde in contemporary theatre, outlining the importance of freedom, in opposition to propaganda theatre, where ideology was dominant. The reactions replicated the political division along the front line of the Cold War.

Last, but not least, *Part III, Acting, Artists and Art between the Battlefronts*, refers to the situation of certain artists integrated into cultural policies by certain states, so as to strengthen a certain political position. The translations of Brecht's play in Greece in the early 1970s were a method used by the Greek Communist youth to demonstrate the superiority of the Eastern bloc over the 'West'. Another case was that of the 1969 tour of the Bulandra Theatre from Bucharest to the Paris festival of the Theatre of Nations, a way for the communist regime to project an image of Romania as a nation independent from the Soviet Union. Also, the two main methods of actor training, the Brechtian and Stanislavski actor training programs, were taken over by West or East German ideology to serve their own interests during the Cold War. In 1947, the Soviet Military Administration of Thuringia commanded the establishment of the Deutsches Theaterinstitut, thus making it

clear that it was a political decision. The experts and professors who taught at the Institute were trained in Moscow, bringing with them the Stanislavski's acting method. The Stanislavskian method view the actor as a conscious vehicle of progress. Meanwhile, Western theater experts complained that actors trained in the realist socialist way played on their scenes.

In my opinion, probably one of the most interesting parts of the volume, considering the novelty of the information, is *Part IV, Postcolonial perspectives*. The articles contained in this last part of the volume present the theatrical productions from certain countries in Asia, or from the African continent, countries that were indirectly influenced and instrumentalized in the conflict between USA and USSR. In those countries, overcoming the cultural gap had been achieved through funding coming especially from either East or West, or even both. The theatrical activity had a blooming period supported by direct funding through foundations like Ford or Rockefeller, but also via international organizations such as UNESCO. But there is also the case of the Eritrean drama, which provided a means to transcend the fixed dichotomies of the Cold War, "East" and "West", "communist" and "capitalist", "aligned" and "non-aligned" countries, using a mix of Eastern, Western and African theatre traditions and talking about the relative international isolation of Eritrea at that time. In Eritrea, a former Italian colony, administered afterwards by the British Military Administration, annexed to Ethiopia in 1962 and with an active Eritrean Liberation Front fighting for independence until 1991, the theatrical activity was intense, perceived especially as an indispensable tool for the construction of the nation.

The field of theatrical and artistic movements during the Cold War is wide. Apart from the great benefit of presenting the two main positions of the USA and the Soviet Union governments regarding the funding of theatrical activity, this volume is also important for documenting certain artistic movements from different regions, enabling a transnational approach for looking at a world that was officially separated into two impermeable spheres. Although there are still many aspects to be elucidated, this volume serves as a point of departure for future research, especially since theatre research has often avoided the direct engagement with the issues outlined here: the theatrical productions as weapons in the cultural war, theatrical tours as a way of cultural exchange, but also of circulation of ideas from East to West, artists and theatrical theories promoted for ideological purposes.

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