

Original Research Article

An Investigation of Otto Piene's Works from the Perspective of Globalization

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Abstract

Globalization is a phenomenon referring to the expansion of communication among societies across the world, which has increasingly attracted attention since the twentieth century. In this regard, the present study seeks to examine the characteristics of globalization in the works of Otto Piene. The research aims to achieve a deeper understanding of his artworks in relation to the indicators of globalization. The main question of this study is: In what ways are the components and characteristics of globalization reflected in Otto Piene's works? The research adopted a descriptive-analytical method, and data were collected through library and online sources. Although globalization is not a newly emerged phenomenon, awareness of and attention to it significantly increased during the twentieth century. In this context, factors such as cultural hybridity and the possibility of cosmopolitanism can be noted as elements that have accelerated the process of globalization. The findings indicate that Otto Piene, while remaining committed to his national culture and drawing upon local roots, expands his artistic vision beyond geographical boundaries to engage with universal and human concerns. This approach enables a meaningful reading of his works through the lens of globalization. From various aspects such as presentation methods, choice of materials, and the use of elements like the rainbow, sky, fire, and smoke, Piene's art embodies key components of globalization. Moreover, alongside this global outlook, national identity also plays a significant role in both the form and content of his artworks, reflecting his personal experience of his homeland.

Keywords: *Globalization, Western Art, New Art, Otto Piene.*

Introduction

The concept of globalization has drawn increasing attention since the twentieth century, and particularly from the second half of the 1980s onward. Globalization refers to the intensification of links and interconnections among individuals and societies on a worldwide scale. This phenomenon has been brought about by extensive economic exchanges, financial and human flows, and cultural transfers, through which reciprocal human relations have grown and expanded

globally. Globalization may be regarded as a complex phenomenon possessing diverse and varied dimensions, aspects, and characteristics. Among these characteristics, one may cite instances such as deterritorialization, the blending of and interaction among different cultures, and the emergence of cosmopolitanism. Moreover, the widespread and ever-growing use of mass communication devices and tools is considered one of the most significant factors accelerating and broadening the process of globalization. Although globalization is not a novel phenomenon, the 1980s may be regarded as the

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period in which this concept emerged within the domain of art. With the holding of two exhibitions, “Primitivism in 20th Century Art” in 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and “Magiciens de la Terre” in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou, the examination of relations between Western art and indigenous arts from other parts of the world came into focus. In the 1990s, globalization in the realm of art was pursued with greater intensity, such that a more in-depth inquiry into globalization was conducted at Documenta11. Documenta11, as the first exhibition curated by a non-Western individual, was devoted to the ideas of globalization. Given the reflection of globalization in artistic works, the present study aims to examine and investigate the various manifestations and expressions of this phenomenon in the works of the contemporary German artist Otto Piene. In this regard, after elucidating the principal components, indicators, and characteristics of globalization, an attempt has been made to correlate these components with the works of Otto Piene. Such an approach renders it possible to assess the different dimensions of this artist’s works from the perspective of globalization. It appears that the works of Otto Piene possess characteristics that provide a foundation for evaluating and analyzing them through this lens. Hence, the central research question of the present study is: how have the components and characteristics of globalization been manifested and expressed in the works of Otto Piene? An examination of Otto Piene’s works suggests that in a considerable portion of his oeuvre, he addresses fundamental human and social issues and concerns, and while attending to his national culture and indigenous roots, he has consistently taken into account shared global responsibilities and values and reflected them in his works.

Research Background

As an examination of the existing studies reveals, there are numerous works that address the issue of globalization irrespective of the subject of art. Nevertheless, studies have also been conducted in the field of art and globalization. Askarpour (2014), in an article, examined whether art may be considered to

possess a global character and, should this be accepted, what relationship art exhibits with national identities and individualities. Furthermore, this article, by emphasizing the examination of the formation of a global institution such as UNESCO and addressing the condition of art in the age of globalization, attempts to answer questions of this nature, such as whether global art should be understood as the participation of all nations in artistic creation. Likewise, Rezaei-Nabard (2011), in his article, investigated the extent to which globalization influenced contemporary Western art from the 1960s onward, and studied the impact of globalization broadly in postmodern architecture, the visual arts, music, cinema, new media, and museums. It appears that the majority of existing studies emphasize the relationship between national identity and globalization, or examine a broader domain of artists, whereas the present study seeks, by reflecting upon the works of a single artist -namely Otto Piene- to investigate the manner in which the components of globalization are reflected in his oeuvre.

Research Method

The research method of the present study is descriptive-analytical. In order to address the research topic, globalization was examined, and subsequently, through the selection of samples from the works of Otto Piene, an attempt was made to investigate and study the idea of globalization in this artist’s oeuvre. The criteria for the selection of works included innovation in artistic expression, as well as the provision of a foundation for examining the components of globalization. Furthermore, the research data were collected through library and internet-based research and organized to answer the research question.

Theoretical Foundations

• Globalization and its accelerating factors

Although the roots of globalization may be traced back to past eras, general awareness of this phenomenon dates back to the second half of the 1980s. Globalization is employed to signify the expansion of mutual interdependencies across economic, social,

technological, cultural, political, and environmental dimensions, such that the people of the world become increasingly interconnected (Ramin et al., 2010, 756). Globalization may be regarded as a series of effects associated with greater reciprocal connections throughout the world via the increasing volume of global trade and cultural exchanges. In Robertson's (1992/2006, 12) view, globalization consists of "the compression of the world and its transformation into a single place". It must also be noted that globalization has engendered differing positions. On one side, a group has welcomed this phenomenon and considers it a sign of entering a new phase of history. On the opposing side lies the rejection of this idea, based on the premise that no fundamentally new transformation is actually taking place and that, despite the changes, many phenomena remain rooted in the past. In this regard, Anthony Giddens (1982/2005, 86) sets forth three distinct intellectual tendencies: the first category comprises the sceptics, who believe that the discussion surrounding globalization is fruitless verbiage about a phenomenon that is not novel. The second group consists of the radicals, who emphasize extreme aspects and hold that globalization may be regarded as a real phenomenon whose effects and consequences are visible in nearly all parts of the world. In this group's view, globalization should be considered a process that leads to the creation of a new world order and arises from international flows of trade and production. The third category consists of those who have adopted an intermediate position and consider globalization the principal force shaping a series of changes in modern societies. This group believes that the world order is currently undergoing transformation and reshaping, yet old patterns still remain in many behavioral and social domains. In general, various characteristics may be posited for globalization, each of which in some manner serves to accelerate it.

Instances such as the use of mass communication devices, deterritorialization, cultural hybridity, the possibility of cosmopolitanism, and migration are among the components that accelerate globalization. As noted, the pervasiveness of the use of mass communication

devices renders the process of globalization more rapid. Individuals residing on two different sides of the globe are not only capable of communicating through conversation, but also possess the ability to send documents and images through the aid of modern technologies. In Tomlinson's (1999/2002, 163) words, "the use of technology and mass communication devices causes the compression of time and space". It must always be borne in mind that mass communication devices are culturally significant from various aspects, such as the transmission of messages and the shaping of the experience of time and space. Moreover, deterritorialization may be considered among the characteristics of globalization. One of the facets of deterritorialization consists of being uprooted from local ground, within which domain an imaginary intertextuality occurs. In this relation, one may refer to the habitual consumption of images of distant places and their normalization within the individual's lifeworld. Deterritorialization has various aspects. One of its distinct facets is the dissolution of the connection between the culture of everyday life and locality. Nevertheless, this phenomenon should not be regarded as mere cultural alienation; rather, deterritorialization is experienced as a complex and ambivalent experience, being a mixture of access to a world outside, along with its penetration into the private world of individuals (ibid., 178). Deterritorialization may constitute an ambiguous condition. Consequently, globalization can render the ordinary experience of local identity difficult, because individuals' experience of everyday life becomes ever more subject to the influence of experiences from distant places. Cultural hybridity constitutes another characteristic of globalization. Cultural hybridity involves the combination of two or more elements from different cultures or parts of the world and emphasizes the increase of diversity. Ritzer (1938/2016, 784 & 785) notes that from the fusion of global processes and local cultures, new hybrid forms come into being that bespeak ongoing heterogeneity rather than homogenization. Hybridization may be regarded as a creative process that generates a new culture, and this culture is indicative

of heterogeneity. In effect, hybridization refers to the blending of cultures as a result of globalization and the emergence of a unique, new hybrid culture born of the fusion of global and local culture, one that is reducible neither to local nor to global culture. The possibility of cosmopolitanism constitutes another component of globalization, which denotes the concept of the global citizen. Tomlinson (1999/2002, 252) states that this concept refers to a person who acknowledges global responsibilities and integrates these interests with their everyday life. Furthermore, although migration is not a new phenomenon, it seems that it may be viewed as part of the process of globalization. Giddens (1982/2005, 383) notes that this phenomenon refers to the exodus and dispersion of populations. In effect, migration as an age-old phenomenon is examined as part of the process of globalization.

In addition, it appears necessary to examine issues such as national identity and globalization, the challenges of local identity, as well as contemporaneity. National identity may be defined as a sense of belonging to a group of human beings based on shared cultural elements. This identity depends upon the sustained reproduction and reinterpretation of values, symbols, and traditions, and plays a significant role in the differentiation of each nation. Another issue is globalization and the challenges to local identity. Globalization can affect ordinary experiences of local identity. This phenomenon alters everyday life in such a manner that individuals become increasingly influenced by the cultural and social experiences of distant regions. Moreover, these influences can pose challenges regarding the preservation and strengthening of local identities. In this domain, it is also essential to address contemporaneity. If contemporaneity is regarded as a historical concept, every work is considered contemporary in its own time; however, contemporaneity also encompasses another meaning. According to Giorgio Agamben (2006/2010, 53), the one who is truly contemporary is he who neither fully coincides with his time nor adjusts himself to its demands. It is through this disjunction with time that certain individuals are more

capable than others of grasping their own time. A part of being contemporary is the relationship with one's own time, in the sense that the individual, despite a close connection, maintains a distance from it.

• Globalization and contemporary art

In the 1980s, two important exhibitions addressed the relationship between modern Western art and the visual arts of other parts of the world. The first exhibition, entitled "Primitivism in 20th Century Art," was held in 1984 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The second exhibition, "Magiciens de la Terre," held in 1989 at the Centre Pompidou, sought to transfer the art of non-Western peoples into the context of Western art. Attention to the globalization of art intensified considerably in the 1990s, such that the Documenta 10 exhibition in 1997 portrayed the critical nature of contemporary art in the age of globalization. Documenta 11, held in Kassel in 2002, was the first exhibition whose curator was a non-Western individual named Okwui Enwezor. This exhibition was devoted to an ever-deeper examination of the concept of globalization (Ratnam, 2004/2015, 5–6).

• Introduction of the artist

Otto Piene is a contemporary German artist. He completed his artistic education at the Academy of Munich and the Düsseldorf Academy between 1950 and 1953, and thereafter studied philosophy at the University of Cologne. Otto Piene then taught as a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, and from 1974 to 1994 served as director of the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. In 1962, he created his first works entitled Smoke and Fire Paintings, and subsequently produced kinetic objects and environmental works using light ballets. In the late 1960s, the artist also undertook Sky Art projects (Pakbaz, 2016, 436–437). Otto Piene is among the artists who, together with Heinz Mack and Gunther Uecker, founded the Zero Group. The group's activities continued for eight years, and its artists vehemently rejected any connection with the tradition of painting on canvas, such as figurative and abstract painting, and emphasized that visual art must begin from point zero.

This movement encompassed new experiments with an emphasis on the use of light, movement in space, and the employment of natural elements such as fire, water, and air. The Zero Group, as the first artistic group after the Second World War, held a positive attitude toward civilization and future progress and endeavored to reduce the distance between people and art (*ibid.*, 794). Components of Globalization in the Works of Otto Piene Creativity in art is crystallized through a reliance upon the conscious connection between form and meaning. Furthermore, although visual elements and technical skill may be regarded as part of the creative vision in the formation of artistic works, it appears that creativity in meaning and concept may also be considered the basis for the formation of an artwork as a universal communication. In this regard, it may be noted that in encountering the works of Otto Piene, the audience is faced with a creative thought that emphasizes a universal meaning. Otto Piene's art may be considered a continuation of the Western tradition, which, by raising fundamental human issues and concerns, posits a global outlook in his works, and thus affects audiences who encounter his works for the first time. It appears that one may consistently observe the components of globalization, such as deterritorialization, cultural hybridity, and the possibility of cosmopolitanism, alongside national identity in his works.

The setting for the execution of Piene's works is the sky, and he prefers the sky to the museum or gallery. The choice of the sky as the platform for the execution of the work displays a borderless geography that is indicative of a deterritorializing approach in his works. Moreover, the selection of materials is also noteworthy in the works of this artist. As Archer notes, in these years, a greater freedom regarding materials, media, and artistic techniques has become available in the works of artists. However, it must be borne in mind that the connotations carried by the choice of materials are of greater significance (Archer, 1997/2013, 230). Piene uses elements such as light, fire, smoke, and air that are accessible throughout the world. Indeed, it appears that

in Otto Piene's works, deterritorialization is observable at the material level and in the use of materials, as well as at the spatial level, that is, the choice of the sky as the ground for the execution of the work. In addition to the themes raised in this artist's works, some of his works display the deterritorializing approach in another manner. Tomlinson (1999/2002, 163) points out that deterritorialization signifies the opening of the doors of the world and the broadening of cultural horizons through mass media, which can create an ambiguous condition for the human being. Deterritorialization may be regarded, in a sense, as liberation from spatial constraints, with the public consumption of images of distant regions and the universalization of those images within the lifeworld of human beings being taken into consideration. The installation "The Inner Light of Isfahan" by Otto Piene, created in 2014 with dimensions of 200 × 90 × 90 centimeters, was designed and constructed, and glass volumes and light were used in its fabrication process. This work may be regarded as an instance of the presentation of and influence from images of distant regions in Otto Piene's works. Although this image (*the Imam Mosque of Isfahan*) is not presented directly, it appears to display the deterritorializing approach in Otto Piene's oeuvre. In his installation entitled "The Inner Light of Isfahan," Otto Piene posits light as the principal element (Fig. 1).

Furthermore, in addition to deterritorialization, the component of cultural hybridity may also be traced in the installation "The Inner Light of Isfahan." In the aforementioned work, diversity is effectively emphasized, and the combination of different elements from different cultures is displayed. Moreover, it appears that Otto Piene, through a creative process, has produced a work that is not confined to local culture and, as it were, presents a work associated with a new culture. An examination of this artist's works suggests that he has sought to build a bridge between different cultures. With regard to the use of the rainbow in his works, he also states that the reason for choosing the rainbow was its symbolic quality, which holds great significance

throughout the world (Otto Piene: *Rainbow*, 2015, 49). Hall (1994/2001, 207) notes that the rainbow may be regarded as a link between the earth and the sky. The symbol of the rainbow is a familiar phenomenon across the entire world and is understood in every land. In other words, despite the fact that the rainbow holds different meanings in every civilization, it may be considered a unifying element in the works of Otto Piene, since it gathers all audiences, with any culture and mentality, around a single element -namely, the rainbow (Fig. 2).

Since the works of Otto Piene also display global and fundamental concerns, they may therefore be considered a platform for presenting the possibility of cosmopolitanism. In some of his works, such as *Rainbow*, he presents a colorful and hope-filled world before the audience, and the need for a shared language impels the audience to view life through the lens of the artist's gaze. Piene held a particular fondness for the rainbow, for the rainbow is seen identically in every part of the globe. In this manner, the rainbow may be regarded as a symbol of the unity of the world in his works. Otto Piene notes that the rainbow, with all its colorful manifestations and its curved form, connects two geographical points (Otto Piene: *Rainbow*, 2015, 53). In general, Piene is also known for his sky art. He chose the space of the sky as a platform for creating his artistic works. This type of outlook in Otto Piene may be considered the manifestation of the possibility of cosmopolitanism in his oeuvre. Ritzer (1938/2016, 770) points out that cosmopolitanism generally entails transcending local limitations. Accordingly, human beings in the age of globalization are no longer rooted in a particular land, but rather have simultaneously taken root in different cities, regions, and ethnicities. In this condition, human beings take global responsibility into consideration. Furthermore, Otto Piene's global vision is also manifested in the elements used in his works. Earth, fire, and wind are elements that in a sense belong to the collective unconscious of humankind. In this experience, race and nationality are not particularly at issue; rather, Otto Piene displays the fundamental concerns of human

beings throughout the world in his works. Moreover, light and space are experienced in any place in Otto Piene's works, and since they are not dependent upon a specific culture, they are indicative of a global approach in his oeuvre. The possibility of cosmopolitanism in Otto Piene's works arises from the artist's particular view of art and his connection with the world. In effect, by employing elements such as the sky and the rainbow, he crosses geographical boundaries and creates works



Fig. 1. The Inner Light of Isfahan, Otto Piene, 2014, 200 × 90 × 90 cm. Source: Otto Piene: *Rainbow*, 2015, 101.



Fig. 2. Otto Piene, *Rainbow*, 1972. Source: www.tinguely.ch.

It must, of course, be borne in mind that despite the existence of a global approach in Otto Piene’s works, traces of the influence of the artist’s homeland are also discernible in his oeuvre. Otto Piene’s attention to light was influenced by his wartime experience. During this period, the streets and houses of Germany were kept dark for protection, and it was after the war that light returned to life. In the catalog “Otto Piene: Rainbow”, it is noted that this impactful experience inspired the artist, and on this basis, light became the principal subject of Otto Piene’s works. In addition to the use of light and its connection to the artist’s experience, which demonstrates the presentation of a local experience in a universal manner, effects of the artist’s homeland may also be observed in the form of Otto Piene’s works. In the catalog “Rainbow – Otto Piene” (2015, 55), it is recalled that one may consistently trace influences of German Expressionist cinema, exaggeration in presentation, precision in detail, emphasis on symmetry, contrast in technique, and the avoidance of narrative expression in the overall body of his works within the formal execution of his oeuvre, which indicates the artist’s attentiveness to his homeland. It must, however, be acknowledged that Otto Piene follows a different approach from the naturalist tradition of Western pictorial art, and instead of merely recording light, he seeks out aesthetic forms and thereby depicts the fundamental concepts of light and fire (Table 1).

Conclusion

This study examines the manner in which the components

of globalization are crystallized in the works of Otto Piene. It appears that this artist, while attending to his national culture, has transcended it and engaged with global responsibilities. As becomes evident from the examination of Otto Piene’s works, in creating his oeuvre, the artist has addressed the fundamental concerns of humankind in the form of new art and has, in a sense, confronted audiences with essential questions. The components of globalization—such as deterritorialization, cultural hybridity, and the possibility of cosmopolitanism—may consistently be traced in the works of Otto Piene. Deterritorialization manifests in Otto Piene’s works on two levels: the material and the spatial. The material aspect of deterritorialization in the works arises from the materials used by the artist, such as smoke and fire, while the spatial dimension refers to the sky, which Otto Piene has preferred to the gallery and the museum. Furthermore, in some works, the use of images of distant regions is observable. A number of Otto Piene’s works are based on other cultures and, in a sense, display cultural hybridity. Moreover, elements such as the rainbow—irrespective of the meaning it holds among the peoples of each land—have been employed as a unifying and global element in his works. By virtue of raising global responsibilities, the works of Otto Piene provide a platform for the emergence of the possibility of cosmopolitanism, and the constituent elements of his works have been employed universally, without regard to any borders. In addition to the global approach, national identity is also of significance at the level of form and content in Otto Piene’s works, and it recalls the artist’s experience in his homeland, including

Table 1. An examination of the components of globalization in the works of Otto Piene. Sourc: Author.

Components of Globalization	Manifestations of Globalization in the Works of Otto Piene
Deterritorialization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sky as the platform for the execution of the work - The use of materials such as smoke and fire - The use of distant images in works such as The Inner Light of Isfahan
Cultural Hybridity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attention to the art of other lands - The rainbow as a unifying element
Possibility of Cosmopolitanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The rainbow as a symbol of the unity of the world - The sky as the platform for the presentation of the work - The use of elements belonging to the unconscious, such as smoke and fire - The use of light irrespective of nationality and race
Projection of National Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Content: the entry of light mediated by the wartime experience - Form: reminiscent of German Expressionism

attention to subjects such as war, which led to the entry of light into his works, and the form of the works, which is reminiscent of German Expressionism. It must always be noted that certain elements in his works display a multiple approach and reveal various aspects of globalization. For example, the sky and elements such as smoke and fire advance a deterritorializing and cosmopolitan approach, while the rainbow is indicative of both cultural hybridity and the possibility of cosmopolitanism.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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