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MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY THEATRE – DEFINITIONS AND BOUNDARIES

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Abstract

In today's theatrical science, the definition and settling of the boundaries of two words – 'modern' and 'contemporary' - is of the greatest importance.

The article discusses periodization of modern and contemporary art, and the determination of the boundaries between transitional epochs. The author makes an attempt to draw the line between modern and contemporary art on the example of Georgian and European theatre periods. In the international world of art, scientists have agreed that the foundations of modern art can be found in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For most scientists, the reference point of 'contemporary theatre' is considered to be 1990. In Georgian theatre studies there is an accepted and prevailing terminology: modern Georgian/contemporary art/theatre. Like in Europe, these terms are sometimes used as synonyms and sometimes for the separation of eras.

Keywords: modern art, contemporary art, theatrical science, periodization

Introduction

In the 21st century, processes and movements in the arts are becoming both chaotic and accelerated. In this multicultural and multidisciplinary era, art has become hybrid, with styles, movements and genres interconnected and intertwined without logic.

In such a reality, even the most experienced art researchers find it difficult to construct boundaries, not only with regard to epochs or movements, but also to genre, as in theatrical art there is a variety of multicultural and multistylistic products. It is not surprising then that the periodization of modern and contemporary art, and the determination of the boundaries between transitional epochs, both represent major issues.

In today's theatrical science, the definition and settling of the boundaries of two words – 'modern' and 'contemporary' – is of the greatest importance.

So, what exactly does 'modern art' or 'contemporary art' mean in terms of the theatre? Where does the modern end and the contemporary begin? Where does the border between them lay? Does it exist at all? These questions have been asked by numerous art researchers and scientists and have proven delicate issues much in need of the attention of the field of modern theatrical science.

Methods

Nowadays, two notions – 'modern' and 'contemporary' – are used to represent the latest art in the international art sciences. In Georgian, both terms are translated as 'modern'. In different manuals, these terms are sometimes used as synonyms; however, they have varied definitions which help in the placing of boundaries between periods in modern art.

Results

First, let us take a look at how the Oxford English Dictionary defines the term 'modern':

1.1. Relating to the present or recent times as opposed to the remote past. Representing the current century; 1.2. Sometimes characterized by or using the most up-to-date ideas; 1.3. Denoting a current or recent style or trend in art, architecture or other cultural activity marked by a significant departure from traditional styles and values. [1]

In the same dictionary, 'contemporary' is explained as: 1.1 belonging to or occurring in the present, its synonyms being modern, present, current; 1.2. The time occurring at present, currently.

According to the definitions, the term 'modern' has a wider concept in comparison to that of 'contemporary'. Despite the fact that these two notions are synonyms, there is a semantic difference between them. The same is seen in the Georgian language, where we also have different meanings for the two words.

In English, both words originate from the Middle Ages; more precisely, in the English language the word "modern" appeared in 1450 from the dialect of the East Midlands (now UK territory), while 'contemporary' was first seen in 1630, emerging from Latin.

The Oxford English Dictionary gives an important explanation for the word 'contemporary': "The modern (the latest) can be said of today's period. In order to avoid uncertainty, it is better to distinguish between these two words: If we talk about Othello and the Elizabethan period, then we should use the term 'modern', while, when talking about today's art, which is happening now, it is better to use the word 'contemporary'; thus, we can avoid inconvenience and uncertainty."

Over time, the notion of 'modern' has become a synonym of 'contemporary', which itself became a term for defining the most recent time. [2]

In the arts, scientists and researchers have long used these two terms as synonyms to construct borders and distinguish epochs and times. Yet, these borders are not generally accepted, since the exact separation of modern and contemporary is impossible. Besides, modern and contemporary art are distinguished differently by various scholars, depending which period, country or theatre is being referred to.

In the international world of art, scientists have agreed that the foundations of modern art can be found in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. To describe the art of this period, the term 'Modernism' prevails in both English and Georgian languages. [3]

Modernism encompasses several movements (isms) in all types of art, each of which has in turn had its own period of development. Since the 1970s, scientists have referred to this movement as 'Postmodernism'. By the end of the 20th century, a new term had emerged: 'Post-postmodernism'.

The term 'Modern Art' (literature, theatre, music, cinema, visual art) has a wide range of uses and is mainly seen in two areas of art studies: 1. as a synonym of modern and contemporary art; 2. as a term to describe an event of the present time.

For most European scientists, the earliest period of modern literature and art is thought to be the 1880-90s. In his work "The Modern Theatre", Robert Cohen, theoretician and professor at the California University, states that the birth of modern theatre occurred in 1875.

"Along with the political revolutions in France and the United States, revolutions

in philosophy, science and religion had no less significance. The works of Darwin and Carl Marx overturned the human mind. The modern era came into the theatre." [4]

It is commonly accepted that Modern Art encompasses art created in the 1860-1970s. Despite polystylism and other concepts, works of this period were created in a complex and diverse era, though they were united by an aspiration towards experiments, where traditions are completely abolished.

In his book "The Story of Art", E.H. Gombrich refers to the art of the early 20th century as "experimental" and "modern art." He writes: "'Modern art' has completely broken away from the traditions of the past and tries to create something that was once only dreamt about... This new approach has appeared worldwide but has never been so consistent as it is in the United States, where technological progress was less hindered by the inertia of old traditions." [5]

According to British theatre critic and author of numerous monographs Aleks Sierz, 1904 represents a major moment for modern dramaturgy as this was the date when new writing emerged in Britain. In 1904, in the Royal Court Theatre, Harley Granville Barker and Je Vedrenne completely altered the concept and policies of the theatre repertoire. Sierz wrote: "'The new playwright' exhorted the theatre to become modern. Theatre and drama were placed in a historical framework. This 'new' idea gradually became 'original' and therefore 'good'. 'New theatre' became a synonym for 'contemporary theatre.'" [6]

Author of the book "Independent Theatre in Modern Europe", Manfred Brauneck, wrote: "In European performing art, modernization begins with naturalization, when Emil Zola, Henrik Ibsen, Lev Tolstoy, Gerhard Hauptmann

came to the theatre. These authors created a modern theatre in Europe, which, with its experiments, confronted all traditions of olden times. From 1894, political processes in France and Germany greatly contributed to these experiments". While investigating the borders between 'modern' and 'contemporary' theatre, Brauneck relies on the theory of the German playwright and cultural researcher Henning Füllele, who said: "when the crisis of modern art began, thus started the Post-modernism movement, which focused on new forms of theatre. This process, though, ended in 1990." [7]

While working on the periodization of the American theatre, Melissa Gross, Professor at the University of Michigan, considers modern theatre to have existed from the 1900s to the 1960s, and contemporary American theatre from the 1960s to the present.

Discussion

"How is contemporary theatre determined? Where does it begin and where does it end? There are so many things going on at the same time in today's theatre that it's hard to tell where the line is between new and 'the newest' theatres. It might have started in the 1900s, when a new theatre was born, or in the 1960s, when the world saw performances in other dimensions".

Researchers of modern/contemporary art have introduced new terms: "Performing Art", "Live Art", "Event", "Body Art", "Contemporary Dance/Theatre", "Multimedia Performance", "Installation", "Physical Theatre", "Urban Dance", "Street Dance" and many others.

Each is a conditional term, as, in its content and genre, a single contemporary performance might encompass a number of areas for which we use the

abovementioned terms. Consequently, the terms 'modern' and 'contemporary' theatre seem unsustainable.

For most scientists, the reference point of 'contemporary theatre' is considered to be 1990. For example, Aleks Sierz put the latest British drama and theatre borders as 1990, when Chris Lee created a parody of Sarah Kane. Sierz deems the theatrical texts created after 1990 as contemporary drama, and the traditional or innovative performances staged during this time as contemporary theatre. [8]

Caden Manson, the curator of the Network of International Discussion Centre, explains the term 'contemporary performance':

"'Contemporary performance' is used to define a hybrid artistic work, when different theatre spheres (dance, video art, visual art, performing arts, etc.) experimentally travel through each other. Sometimes, it resembles anarchistic chaos; however, it is actually based on a complex, interactive-intellectual system." [9]

On February 9, 2012, the Münchner Kammerspiele Theatre hosted an international conference at which Johann Simons, artistic director of the Münchner Kammerspiele, presented a report: "Less Art - More Substance. New Tendencies in Contemporary Theatre". According to his definition, 'contemporary theatre' is the theatre of the epoch that we are now in. "It might look like modern theatre and might use modernist or postmodern theatrical aesthetics; it can even be related to antique theatrical form; nevertheless, it is still contemporary as it is being created in our time..." he said. [10]

Can we call 'contemporary theatre' 'modern'? Yes! Because what is being created around us is modern. When we use the word modern, we mean our epoch; however, when we want to talk about the

art of the 20th century as a specific period in history, we are unable to use the word modern as it is the latest period of history and in this case, we should use the term 'contemporary' and not 'modern'.

Contemporary Art is an art form that originated at the end of the 20th or beginning of the 21st century. It is eclectic, chaotic, varied, and far from uniform, and specialists are still working to formulate terms to separate and establish boundaries in the transition periods of art.

In Georgian theatre studies (music, arts and film), there is an accepted and prevailing terminology: modern Georgian/contemporary art/theatre. Like in Europe, these terms are sometimes used as synonyms and sometimes for the separation of eras.

In the early 2000s, in Georgian theatrical science (as in other similar sciences), a new periodization of the Georgian theatre history took place according to which the Georgian theatre was divided into four periods: old, new, modern and contemporary. For the division of the Georgian theatre periods, theatre historians used the periodization of the history of Georgian literature, which fully coincided with that of the Georgian theatre.

It has been several years since the students of the Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film State University, specializing in Directing of Drama, first began studying the history of the Georgian Theatre in four semesters. Each semester is focused on one particular period of the history of Georgian theatre. According to the syllabus, the periodization of the Georgian theatre is as follows: 1. Old Georgian Theatre (from ancient times until 1910), 2. New Georgian Theatre (1910-1935); 3. Modern Georgian Theatre (1935 - 1990); 4. Contemporary Georgian Theatre (1991 to present). [11]

In The Georgian Theatre Modernism started in early XX. In Georgian Theatre Modernism started from naturalism, which was changed with Symbolism. In 1905-1906 The direction of the Georgian theatre was changed by Georgian Director Valerian Gunia and actor Lado Meskhishvili. They were creating latest dramaturgy, which became the reason to revert from traditions. This process was logical and natural. In 1909 Valerian Shalikashvili created his first performance, but as a first modern performance we have to consider "Berdo zmania" (1920) written by Sandro Shanshiashvili and made on stage by Sandro Akhmeteli., which was full of innovations with its content and shape. At the beginning of XX the professor Mikheil Kalandarishvili has studied modern Georgian theatre and published book "Modernism in Georgian theatre." [12]

There is no disagreement among scholars regarding said divisions of periods of Georgian theatre history; however, according to scientists A. Amaglobeli, G. Megrelidze, M. Vasadze, M. Kalandarishvili, I. Ghoghoberidze, and G. Tskitishvili, the premiere day of Kote Marjanishvili's play "Sheep Well" (author -Lope de Vega) staged in 1922, is considered to be the starting point of the modern era in Georgian theatre. In their articles, Marjanishvili's play is not only considered a modern performance for the era, but also as a special example of the modern Georgian theatre. That is why I believe that in theatre studies, the periodization of Georgian theatre history needs to be reviewed.

Conclusion

It is indisputable that in 1991 a new period in history began for Georgia, with the country declaring its independence. As in its political-economic and social life, in

its art and theatre a new period of life also began. That is why when dividing periods of Georgian theatre history, the boundary between the Georgian contemporary and modern theatre should be underlined from the point of '1991'. That said, in her dissertation work, theatre historian/critic Tea Kakhiani refers to contemporary theatre as the "modern theatre". In this case, the term 'modern' has been used as a notion of the present time and not as a reference to a period in the history of Georgian theatre. This is a modern and widespread term used not only to define

19-20th century art, but also to show the current process of what is happening now.

To conclude, while referring to a periodization of time, we can use the term 'modern' to refer to 20th century theatre (though the exact boundaries might fluctuate from the 1880-90s to the end of the 20th century), while the contemporary theatre would be the period from 1990 to the present (unfinished) time.

'Modern' is the notion of a broad meaning and use, and 'contemporary' is the synonym of 'modern' for a more concrete definition than simply 'modern'.

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Л. Чхартишвили

Грузия мемлекеттік театр және кино университеті Қазіргі грузин театрының зерттеу орталығы Илья мемлекеттік университеті және Кавказ университеті (Тбилиси, Грузия)

ЗАМАНАУИ ТЕАТР ҚАЙ КЕЗЕҢДЕ АЯҚТАЛАДЫ ЖӘНЕ ЖАҢА ТЕАТР ҚАШАН БАСТАЛАДЫ?

Аңдатпа

Қазіргі заманғы театр ғылымындағы «заманауи» және «жаңа» деген екі сөздің арасындағы шекараны анықтау және орнату үлкен мәнге ие. Мақалада заманауи және жаңа өнердің кезеңге бөлінуі, сондай-ақ өтпелі кезеңдер арасындағы шекараларды анықтау қарастырылады. Автор грузин және еуропалық театр кезеңдерінің мысалында заманауи және жаңа өнер арасында шекара жүргізуге әрекет жасайды. Халықаралық өнер әлемінде ғалымдар заманауи театр 19 ғасырдың соңы мен 20 ғасырдың басындағы кезеңге сай келеді деген пікірге келеді. Көптеген ғалымдар үшін «жаңа театр» бастау алған уақыт 1990 жыл болып саналады. Грузин театр зерттеулерінде жалпы қабылданған және басым терминология бар: заманауи/жаңа өнер/театр. Еуропадағы сияқты, бұл терминдер кейде синонимдер ретінде, кейде дәуірлерді бөлу үшін пайдаланылады.

Тірек сөздер: заманауи өнер, жаңа өнер, театр ғылымы, кезеңдерге бөлу.

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ГДЕ ЗАКАНЧИВАЕТСЯ СОВРЕМЕННЫЙ ТЕАТР И НАЧИНАЕТСЯ ТЕАТР НОВЕЙШИЙ?

Аннотация

В современной театральной науке определение и установление границ между двумя словами – «современный» и «новейший» – имеет огромное значение.

В статье рассматривается периодизация современного и новейшего искусства, а также определение границ между переходными эпохами. Автор делает попытку провести черту между современным и новейшим искусством на примере грузинского и европейского театральных периодов. В международном мире искусства ученые сошлись во мнении, что истоки современного искусства находятся в конце XIX и начале XX веков. Для большинства ученых точкой отсчета «новейшего театра» считается 1990 год. В грузинских театральных исследованиях существует общепринятая и преобладающая терминология: современное/новейшее искусство/театр. Как и в Европе, эти термины иногда используются как синонимы, а иногда – для разделения эпох.

Ключевые слова: современное искусство, новейшее искусство, театральная наука, периодизация.

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