

Summary

In this dissertation, I analyse the influence of means of expressions, images and themes related to post-apocalypse on the theatre discourse. I attempt to examine how post-apocalyptic images are created in theatre and what their purpose is. The visualisation of post-apocalypse in theatre is a pretext for in-depth reflection on the future and contemporary times. At the aesthetic level, it provides wide possibilities to demonstrate vital transformations of our epoch - changes to our values, the development or crisis of ethics, or scientific and technological progress.

In the dissertation a distinction is made between three basic images of post-apocalyptic reality, which were created depending on the factor contributing to a given disaster. I describe symbolic images of a battlefield, deserted post-industrial buildings and landfills which represent the world following the end of certain eras, stages of civilisation. They become a dividing line which marks a new order of existence differing from the previous one, as in post-apocalyptic art, which forecasts and describes a new world built on ashes, the end is at the same time the beginning. The structure of the dissertation is arranged around three „source images” (a term coined for the purpose of this paper with a view to metaphorically describe the visual interpretations of the post-apocalypse theme in theatre), which set two directions of the narrative, by the source of the disaster, and according to chronological order.

In the first chapter, „Post-War Landscape. In the Shadow of Post-History” I analyse the stage images of military conflicts, ingrained in the experience of the 20th century being the outcome of two world wars and the cold war. They are symbolic visions of the past which are still vivid thanks to the intergenerational transfer of traumatic experience. War damage in stage design assumes multiple forms, from the realistic reproduction of trenches, underground shelters or charred ruins, to metaphorical collages inspired by historic events, symbolic art (for example, Malczewski’s paintings), as well as by contemporary, socially engaged or feminist art. The discussed theatre performances were directed by people representing various generations and circles, hence the diverging approaches to the theme

of war. The authors reach for various literary texts, starting from Greek myths, through reportage, to original scripts which refer to pop culture texts, e.g. comic books or films.

The subject of the second chapter entitled „Post-Industrial Deserted Buildings“ include performances which, through visual references, discuss the topic of social and system transformations. This post-industrial, non-theatre, and austere space, as a visual leitmotif, constitutes the sign of contemporary times and is the outcome of both state system changes, and the exhaustion of the utopian social constructs of the industrial era. Post-industrial deserted buildings, once an example of sophistication and technological advancement, today form a peculiar post-apocalyptic landscape. Deserted halls, hangars, cultural centres are the heritage of state system transformations. The creation of performances in this type of places is a story of contemporary times and democracy which emerged on the ruins of communism. By placing their performances in post-industrial reality, the directors used both classic dramas by Shakespeare, and contemporary works by young playwrights who directly refer to their own experience or to the stories they have heard. They also include references to pop culture. The cooperating stage designers emphasised the specific nature of these non-theatre locations, referring to their former functions and intended use, and highlighting their unique atmosphere. Selected performances demonstrate the notion of contemporary reality which is unable to break away from the past. Contemporary times are seen as a world full of devastated places, symbolising the great ideas of the past.

The third chapter, entitled „Utopian Landfill and Post-Humanist Reality“, includes a discussion of the last „source image“ which constitutes the visualisation of the future devoid of humans. The aesthetic key here is junk and kitsch, accompanied by the accumulation of various objects referring to the past of humanity, oscillating around diverse orders and not matching one another. The sight of a landfill is confronted with clear, white laboratory space in which the people of the future function. Most of the performances discussed in this chapter are based on contemporary popular literature and the works of writers keen on science fiction aesthetics, Stephen King, Ray Bradbury, Stanisław Lem, and Michel Houellebecq. At the same time, the directors supplement their futurist narratives with classic texts (for example, tales by Hans Christian Andersen), and also refer to opera and ballet music and librettos. The dystopian visions they create are the expression of

concerns for the future. The artists see the cause of the approaching disaster in destructive human activities which might lead to the need to search for an alternative planet to live on.

In the initial stage of research on the realization of post-apocalyptic ideas in the newest Polish theater, I assumed that they had their origins in the distant past or fantasy-futuristic visions. However, the experience of a real fear of the virus, war and nuclear annihilation updated the topics I discussed, which does not prove that theater makers have the ability to predict the future, but it clearly shows how theater (sometimes at the level of an artistic sign rather than a verbal message) shows fears and anxieties about the future carried subcutaneously by our society during the last two decades.

Barbara Jajma