

Popular science summary of the project

The aim of the research project is to recognize how the contemporary Polish theatre (2014-2024) perceives the tragic of the current social situation and what artistic strategies, dramaturgical and directorial, it develops to manifest this tragic on stage. Importantly, the subject of research in the project is theatre searching for new forms of expression, inspired by the post-dramatic turn, that emphasises the independence of theatrical activity from literature and underlines the material nature of theatrical works.

The idea of the tragic is invoked in this project in the terms of the situation of “ontological homelessness” of human being, which seems to be intensifying in recent decades due to the crisis of the Anthropocene (the human era). Therefore, the crisis of the Anthropocene, pointing to the insufficiency or even exhaustion of the Enlightenment paradigm of human technocratic civilization, will constitute the overarching theoretical concept of the project, considered from the perspective of Felix Guattari's ecosophy. The French thinker established a horizon of discussion about the necessary ecological changes intended to be a response to the crisis of the human era, in three registers: environmental, social and mental. These three “existential territories” seem to be an inspiration for artistic reflection in the theatre, which considers them in three basic paths of reflection on the critical, tragic situation of contemporary human being. Composing the global existential crisis, these paths refer to current social situations and are formulated in the contexts of the environmental crisis, the migration crisis and the emancipatory crisis.

Preliminary observations allowed us to establish that these above-mentioned manifestations of the crisis of the human era are the most frequently and creatively discussed subject of artistic reflection in the theatre. Significantly, and what this research project tries to highlight, artists respond to recognized crises through new dramaturgical and directing strategies, somehow being aware that traditional theatre formats have also lost their bearing in relation to newly recognized tragic situations. Therefore, this project aims to examine these innovative creative strategies, which have not yet been comprehensively studied, but seem to be an extremely important element in the development of Polish theatre. Preliminary observations allow the formulation of a list of these strategies, which has been clarifying and strengthening over the last decade, and which constitutes the initially identified research subject of the project: intimate and private discourse, auto-theatre, post-theatre, non-fiction theatre/ documentary theatre, non-violent theatre, rhizomatic dramaturgy, auditory dramaturgy, community choral theatre, performance of law, theatre of new political, dramaturgy of dark ecology. These strategies are often shaped in a post-dramatic approach, in which the medium of stage expression, and therefore the object of study, are mainly the corporeal and material audio-visual elements of theatre relating to time, space, image and soundscape. The textual foundation, if any, is only an inspiration and sketchily directs the stage activities.

The importance of this type of research results from the fact that artists seem to be precursors in noticing and recognizing social crises, and theatre as a laboratory of life in crisis allows for safe practice of possible solutions to considered critical situations or creates a space for working through disappointment with the human era and its tragic condition. Theatre in its tragic dimension can adopt a politically and socially engaged attitude by – as Hans-Thies Lehmann noted – disenchanting the reassuring myths of human mastery and domination. The German researcher pointed out the potential of broadly understood post-dramatic theatre to present the suffering of contemporary human being and the ruin of humanity without any illusions resulting from uncritical faith in human reason. The proposed research project, therefore, aims to identify in detail how theatre in Poland, in its local specificity and in relation to its unique tradition, searches for new strategies of expression for the newly recognized tragic situation of the human era.

As part of an overall approach to formal (how?) and content/contextual (what?) analysis, artistic strategies will be critically examined in the form of case studies of given strategies with exemplary performances. This research will be carried out through theoretical and methodological triangulation, i.e. using methods and theories of qualitative research on performing arts and research in the field of social sciences (ecocriticism, gender/feminism theory, queer theory and migration theory).