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What if?

Performance for teenagers at the National Kaunas Drama Theatre

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Most of us have heard the biblical story of the mythical Tower of Babel that reaches the sky. Sadly, such stories usually remain just as stories without greater reflection on them or made conclusions. However, in the international project Tower of Babel: Planet Earth/Game Over/Reset, the opening performance of which took place on 19, 20, and 26 of August at the Parketinė Hall of the National Kaunas Drama Theatre, the legend of Babel has taken shape.

The target audience of this project is 13–16 year-old teenagers. Commonly, a stance that theatre is not appealing to teenagers is maintained; nevertheless, the creative team of Tower of Babel went out of its way to impress even the greatest young art sceptics. This experience reminds us of a video game and immerses us in itself through the realistic stage design (stage designer: Signe Gerda Landfald), open communication of actors with participants, and a uniting goal: to save or destroy the world. The director of the performance Hilde Brinchmann gives teenagers a chance to tackle relevant climate change issues as they will be the generation having to make moral and ethical decisions regarding the continuity of the planet Earth and people as a biological species.

In Tower of Babel, a truly convincing image of an apocalyptic world in which the last residents of the Earth live is created. The moment they enter the hall, the participants find themselves in the entryway to 'hell'. An old woman that has been reclined next to a piano, straightens herself up and starts telling a legend about the Tower of Babel. While her voice booms in the gloomy lit room (she looks like a former artist of a theatre), one item after the other appears in her surroundings: the place is similar to the prop premises of a theatre or the make-up room of the old actress. All the teams of the participants are divided and brought to different entrances leading to the main space of the performance. The mysterious eccentric lady is as if a bridge connecting the bygone days with the awful scenario of the future world.

When the green light turns on, the game begins. Each team appears in the dwellings of the last people trying to survive in different conditions. The performance is created in an extremely convincing manner: having indulged in this fantasy and proposed rules of the game, it is easy to imagine that this model of the world could exist after global warming. As sweat is dripping down our bodies (an additional heating system is installed to create a more realistic

heat expected after the climate change catastrophe), through an opening in the clear plastic floor, some locals appear. They are fishing plastic water bottles, looking for some water in them, and storing it in a reservoir. Their only food comes from the sea but most of the sea creatures no longer have nutrients as they are full of microplastics. By employing a grotesque narrative, it is explained that life in the 'new' version of the Earth has no meaning or hope.

After a shocking introduction, each team visits other three premises: a nuclear bunker, a cave of overflowed oil, and a desert. Quite soon the barriers separating people that have survived global warming fall down. At that moment, the 'leaders' of each team realise that there are others who also managed to survive the apocalypse. They try to communicate but the people that had to fight for food and water every day became wild, alienated, and lost the ability of elementary communication with others. All the teams have to choose: either to save the last humans but leave them in the postapocalyptic environment or sentence them to death but revive nature on the planet Earth? This dilemma is definitely not childish but it is still put on the slim shoulders of the youngsters. However, the performance is not didactic: no matter what teenagers choose, no one is trying to convince them otherwise. It is just the opposite: the performance is trying to show that people cannot exist without nature, while nature, the guardian of all living forms, can survive without people.

One of the reasons, why teenagers do not like theatre is the tradition to moralise the audience in the performances intended for young people. In *Tower of Babel*, teenagers receive the freedom to voice their opinions but also are reminded of the great responsibility to stay behind their decision when it is the question of life and death. In this performance, nothing is hidden from the teenagers; this is a significant sign of the creative team's trust in them and a peculiar initiation of the youngsters into a world of adults, in which every decision has real-life consequences.

In 2018, in Sweden, Greta Thunberg initiated the Fridays for Future movement that was extremely limited during the quarantine in Lithuania; however, now it is being slowly revived. The performance *Tower of Babel: Planet Earth/Game Over/Reset* encourages the consciousness of teenagers and works as an educational tool that maintains the pulse of such movements.