

DOI <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-546-4-14>

**ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL PHENOMENON:  
HUMAN, NATURE, AND SOCIETY IN CONTEMPORARY  
GERMAN-SPEAKING THEATRE**

**Yuhan N. L.**

*Doctor of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,  
Acting Head of Department, Professor at the Department  
of Romance and Germanic Philology,  
Professor at the Department of Literary Studies,  
Eastern Philology and Translation  
Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University  
Poltava, Ukraine*

The ecological crisis – which includes climate change, loss of biodiversity, and environmental pollution – has today become a global phenomenon that not only threatens life on the planet but also alters sociocultural practices and moral values. It raises questions about how humans should exist on Earth and interact with nature.

Ecocide induces a sense of crisis in people, manifesting in various forms of psychological stress, such as eco-anxiety, as well as social tension arising from conflicting views on how to resolve these issues. Eco-theatre becomes an important space for reflecting on and rethinking these challenges, highlighting not only individual psychological reactions to the ecological crisis but also the social consequences of collective inaction.

Contemporary theatre, especially within the German-speaking realm, functions not merely as a form of entertainment but also as a platform for in-depth analysis of global social issues [1, 3–5]. Productions with an ecological theme not only inform about the catastrophic consequences of human activity but also actively engage audiences in reflecting on their own role in addressing these problems. The performative technologies used in theatrical productions enable the creation of more than just passive images of nature; they involve the public in the active experience of ecological issues. This allows for a deeper awareness of the scale of the threats and their impact on both individuals and the collective. Through visual, auditory, and dramaturgical means, theatre compels viewers to appreciate the intellectual and emotional importance of the ecological problem, creating an atmosphere that immerses them in a sense of catastrophe, loss, and the necessity for action.

Modern ecological theatrical productions typically employ an interdisciplinary approach that combines scientific data (for example, from

ecology and climatology) with artistic expression (such as the German platforms “Das Anthropozän-Projekt”, Rimini Protokoll, “Theater des Anthropozäns”). This approach allows for the creation of plausible and striking images based on real threats. Interactive projects that merge science and art may include elements of theatrical performances, scientific lectures, and technological demonstrations, which not only help inform the audience but also directly involve them in the process of developing ecological scenarios. For instance, shows that incorporate video art, augmented reality technologies, or interactive installations enable the viewer to feel like a part of the catastrophe or the process of change, thereby fostering an emotional responsibility for the future of the planet.

The environmental-themed productions not only highlight the issues of the natural environment but also the social consequences of ecological catastrophes: how changes in the natural environment affect social structures, as well as economic and political systems. In addressing the issue of climate change, they also raise concerns about social inequality, since ecological disasters often impact the poorest segments of the population more severely, who have less influence on political and economic decisions. Through emotional expression and dramaturgy, theatre creates an opportunity for the audience to envision a future where these catastrophes have already become a reality and, by means of such images, stimulates the search for solutions to social and ecological problems.

Contemporary theatre that addresses ecological issues becomes a form of cultural resistance against global ecological threats, offering new ways of thinking and behaving in times of disaster. Theatre is capable not only of reflecting problems but also of actively influencing public opinion, motivating change through emotional impact. During such productions, the audience not only observes the performance but begins to realize its own responsibility for the future of the Earth. As a form of cultural protest, theatre also allows for the discovery of new paths for social change, contributing to the development of a global ecological consciousness.

Thomas Köck, a renowned Austrian dramatist, actively raises the issue of the ecological crisis by portraying it not only as a global problem but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon that affects personal, social, and cultural processes. In his so-called “Climate Trilogy” plays, such as *Paradies fluten*, *Paradies hungern*, and *Paradies spielen* [2], he demonstrates the interconnection between ecological catastrophes and social and psychological transformations. For instance, in Köck’s play *Paradies fluten*, the ecological catastrophe becomes not only the physical destruction of the world but also a psychological trauma for the characters. The loss of connection with the natural environment triggers an existential crisis, where people can no longer find their place in the new world.

Köck presents the ecological crisis as a catastrophe that affects not only nature but also social structures. In his plays, a collective sense of hopelessness, apathy, and even depression is often depicted as spreading among people due to their inability to adapt to new conditions. In the work *Paradies hungern*, the Austrian dramatist highlights the social consequences of climate change and ecological disasters. People find themselves in situations where they can no longer influence global processes, leading to social and psychological degradation.

In Köck's work, nature is portrayed not merely as a backdrop for events, but as a living, often aggressive force with which humanity struggles to contend. His plays frequently reveal moral dilemmas related to human responsibility for the future of the planet, thereby fostering the emergence of new socio-cultural phenomena. In plays such as *Opera Opera Opera! Revenants & Revolutions*, Köck examines catastrophes as a result of social irresponsibility. Despite the magnitude of the problem, people are unwilling to change their behavioral patterns, which ultimately leads to social disorganization.

Köck also explores the psychological consequences for the individual in conditions of ecological crisis. The ecological trauma experienced by his characters forms the basis for a sense of loss not only of physical, but also of social identity. This feeling of apathy and powerlessness characterizes their attitude toward reality, which is an integral part of socio-cultural transformation. In *Abfall der Welt*, the heroes find themselves in a situation where they are unable to change their fate in a crumbling world. Their condition becomes an expression of global depression, a sense of hopelessness, and social isolation, which are typical signs of ecological trauma.

Köck vividly demonstrates how ecological catastrophes lead to the disintegration of social structures. His plays depict worlds where society is incapable of coping with the consequences of global ecological crises, and where social bonds become weakened or are completely destroyed. In the play *Strotter*, Köck portrays a post-apocalyptic world in which the heroes struggle to find themselves amid the collapse of civilization. Social structures are shown to be broken, and the heroes remain isolated, experiencing an existential crisis.

Köck's work raises issues not only of environmental but also of social responsibility for the state of nature. It is viewed as a common challenge for all members of society, where each of us bears a share of responsibility for what happens to nature and our world as a whole. In plays such as *Forecast: Ödipus*, Köck poses questions of moral responsibility. The characters are forced to face the consequences of their actions, and this social responsibility becomes the basis for understanding the global ecological catastrophe.

The work of the famous Austrian dramatist Thomas Köck provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of how the ecological crisis influences socio-cultural processes, shaping new types of identities and attitudes toward the world. His works demonstrate the complex interaction between human, nature, and society under conditions of ecological disasters, where ecological trauma becomes a social, psychological, and cultural problem for all of humanity.

### References:

1. Bergmann F. Die Möglichkeit, dass alles auch ganz anders sein könnte: Geschlechterverfremdungen in zeitgenössischen Theatertexten. Würzburg : Königshausen & Neumann, 2015. 347 s.
2. Köck T. Klimatrilogie: paradies fluten/paradies hungern/paradies spielen Paperback. Suhrkamp Verlag AG, 2017. 314 p.
3. Yuhan N. Berliner Intermediales «Theater des Anthropozäns»: Ökologische Herausforderungen und psychologische Dimensionen szenischer Interpretationen. *Вчені записки ТНУ ім. В. І. Вернадського. Серія : Філологія. Журналістика*. 2025. Т. 36 (75). № 1. С. 198–219.
4. Yuhan N. Ecocide as an Existential Crisis of Humanity in Contemporary German-Speaking and Ukrainian Drama. *Матеріали Міжрегіонального науково-методичного online-семінару викладачів та здобувачів вищої освіти «Лінгводидактичні та філологічні студії в умовах викликів сьогодення»*. Житомир : ПНУ, 2025. С. 33–38.
5. Yuhan N. Die Intermedialität des deutschen experimentellen Theaters Rimini Protokoll als Antwort auf sie Existenziellen Herausforderungen der Gegenwart. *Лінгволітературознавчі студії : збірник матеріалів наукової конференції*. Львів : ЛНУ ім. Івана Франка, 2024.