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THE MOTIF OF THE POST-APOCALYPTIC CITY IN THE ARTISTIC PRACTICES OF THE DIGITALIZED SOCIETY: ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND AESTHETIC ASPECTS

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Abstract

Eschatological way of perceiving reality remains an important factor in the existence of modern man in a post-industrial society. In recent decades, the idea of the end of the world has been widely exploited in the non-religious sphere, especially in fiction and popular films. The article deals with the study the Biblical motive of the post-apocalyptic city in the artistic practices of post-industrial society; particularly in popular films; identification of the essential features of the urban space of the post-apocalyptic future.

Keywords: post-apocalyptic city, eschatology, man-made disaster, mass popular cinema, digitalized society.

Introduction. The eschatological way of perceiving reality, having been formed at the level of the mythological worldview and having passed through the dogma of developed religious systems, remains an important factor in the existence of modern man in the digital society. Over the past decades, the idea of the end of the world has been widely exploited in the non-religious sphere, primarily in fantastic literature and popular cinema. The eschatological problem of determining the prospects for humanity's existence remains a source of inspiration for writers, publicists, or filmmakers, as it deals with complex and painful issues for people of every era: concerning the meaning and purpose of life, man's awareness of their own mortality and desire for immortality. At the same time, the determinants of the possible end of the world in the minds of people in a digitalized society are realized in a wide range of apocalyptic scenarios: from a man-made disaster, nuclear military conflict, attack by alien civilizations to the extinction of humanity as a result of genetic experiments and pandemics.

In the context of the accelerated digitalization of many dimensions of human existence, the modern media often over-exploit information about disasters, reinforcing a fatalistic perception of reality and provoking permanent tension and anxiety. Apocalyptic motifs in human experience are directly related to the sense of the ontological value of one's own life. But, unlike previous eras, modern man, instead of experiencing the fullness of his own being in the real world of nature and close social communication, increasingly falls into a state of waiting for the future within the virtual digital space, and this future is often perceived in extremely pessimistic terms.

Eschatological scenarios caused formation of a whole cluster of information and entertainment products in the symbolic production of modern digital

society. Significant interest of many contemporaries in it requires a study of the reasons for demand for such products and inexhaustible interest in it over the last century (as the first disaster film is the science fiction film *Verdens Undergang (The End of the World)* directed by *August Bloom* was released in 1916). Researchers from the European Association of Personality Psychology see the roots of such an interest in one's own religious beliefs, their daily negative experiences and global political shifts. These factors together aggravate the eschatological expectations of man [1].

Reflections on the idea that man-made catastrophes may result in the destruction of mankind were found in the studies of philosophers, theologians, and cultural figures, such as Martin Heidegger, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Albert Schweizer, Karl Jaspers, Oswald Spengler, Ernst Mayer, Arnold Toynbee and others. Albert Schweizer states the deep crisis in which modern civilization finds itself, and sees no way out of it, except for human rethinking the principles of their lives in accordance with the idea of 'reverence for life' and the corresponding reformatting of the existence of mankind under the slogan: 'I am life which wills to live, and I exist in the midst of life which wills to live' [2]. Heidegger's ideas are of interest to us primarily in the interpretation of individual eschatological experiences of humanity, escape from the fear of death by immersion in everyday life, the present, without thinking about the future [3, pp.95-115]. After all, otherwise humanity must come to terms with the fact that their being is a being-to-death.

Consequently, in the XXI century, reflections on eschatological issues are widespread, and the very eschatological character of the modern world is getting to be perceived as a permanent state of things, which, however, does not yet show signs of catastrophic global

scale. Such a feature, in our opinion, dissolves the boundaries of understanding eschatology until it acquires the features of a universal concept to denote any radical changes that transform the image of the world known to us in a short time just beyond recognition. At the same time, apocalyptic ideas cultivation in popular films is one of the important means of secularizing eschatology, as many of these scenarios are based on scientific man-made or anthropogenic component as a factor of global eschatological catastrophe. Today we can observe that it is not only religion but also pop culture in particular popular films that participate in eschatological ideas development.

The aim of the article is to study the motif of the post-apocalyptic city in the artistic practices of the digitalized society on the example of popular cinema; to identify the essential features of the city as an urbanized space of the post-apocalyptic future and the society that has been formed in it.

Main Text. Modern popular culture, including literature, journalism, cinema, is closely related to apocalyptic narrative that is varied from potentially possible to frankly fantastic [4]. The apocalyptic films nowadays are characterized by a paradoxical trend, namely, separation from religion, on the one hand, and on the other – the significant influence of the biblical book of Revelation [5], which, however, is consistent with the general trend of eschatology desacralization.

The motives for the desacralization of the eschatological perception of reality as well as the apocalyptic expectations of modern humankind are largely related to the urban space in which at least 70% of modern people live. In the mind of people of the post-industrial era, different aspects of urban environment reflection are combined. They intertwine both mythological images of ancient cities, biblical cities, city-states of antiquity and the middle Ages, and post-apocalyptic cities of popular modern cinema blockbusters. Thus, the motif of the city reflects the realities of different ontological strata of the urban environment, which fully reflect the ideal and material, conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational.

In world culture, the motif of the city contains a dichotomy of rational and irrational perception of reality. Cities are the embodiment of a standardized, geometrically correct space, with clear boundaries. Cities eventually became invariant, archetypal images of the embodiment of order in the world as opposed to another, uncultured area, where natural elements and chaos prevail. However, cities could not completely get rid of the influence of the irrational elemental natural environment. First, the disruption of the order (space) of the urban environment was possible in the process of violating the city's borders, primarily during armed invasions and conquests. This violation was seen in many cultures as the end of the world, as a violation of the divine order and a return to the reign of chaos over the cosmos. In the Middle Ages, this violation became a temporally normalized period, a period of temporary carnivals, during which a person could legitimately depart from social canons, rules, and norms and reveal his or her own unconscious and spontaneous intentions.

There are also other ancient sources in the mythological tradition, which have pessimistic eschatological connotations about the urban space of human existence. We should turn to the Judeo-Christian narrative, which originates in the biblical texts about Cain as the founder of cities on earth. 'And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, after the name of his son, Enoch' (Gen.4.17) [6]. In this very sense, cities are the creation of the first man on earth who committed the crime of murder and was cursed by God. Consequently, the urban environment emerges as a potential territory for sin and evil. Even the very fact of Cain's creating the city in the biblical tradition is a forced action, because for the murder of his brother, whose blood was shed on the earth, Cain was 'cursed from the earth', and 'it shall not hence force yield unto' him 'her strength' (Gen.4.11-12)[6]. For a tiller of the ground Cain this meant the loss of the very foundations of his existence, an ontological crisis associated with a rethinking of the way of life. Moreover, the creation of urban, detached from the ground environment was the only way out. The creation of the city in the biblical tradition can be regarded as the beginning of a new mode of existence of human society: the departure from the earth, as well as the exit from the Garden of Eden, is due to another fall. So the city from the very beginning is immanently affected by sin, and therefore its final decline is an inevitable prospect.

Eschatological ideas in the context of human existence in the urban environment relate not only to the mythology of Cain, but also to the motif of the Tower of Babel: fratricidal creator and the embodiment of man's attempt to rebel against God are the first biblical symbols of urban space. Besides, in the world cultural tradition the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah have become the embodiment of the habitat of people prone to extreme depravity and debauchery.

The potential sinfulness of any city on earth in the cultural tradition, especially of the Abrahamic religions, correlates with the motif of *the harlot of Babylon*, the source of which is the Revelation of John the Theologian. According to John, an angel approached him and offered to see the judgment 'of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters; With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication... And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication; And upon her forehead was a name written, mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth' (Revel.17.1-5) [6]. The city of Babylon, according to biblical tradition, was to be destroyed by the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel because of its inhabitants' disregard for faith in the Lord Yahweh, the oppression of Israel, and the denial of God's covenant. The cup of God's patience was overflowing because the city of Babylon got 'the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken! How is Babylon become a desolation among the nations! I have laid a snare for

thee... because thou hast striven against the Lord' (Jerem.50.23-24) [6]. The last straw that caused the destruction of Babylon was that Belshazzar, intoxicated, ordered the use of sacred things from the Jerusalem Temple in orgies (Dan.5.1-4) [6]. It is for this reason that the motif of the whore of Babylon, which rebelled against God and against his covenant, became the personification of sinfulness on earth.

History knows many examples when catastrophic events within the urban space actualized the apocalyptic moods of the population and even the eschatological expectations of humankind. It is difficult to underestimate the role of the media and cinema in these processes. Thus, the events of 9/11 in 2001 are regarded as making '*the Pessimistic Turn of Post-9/11 Apocalyptic Cinema*' [7]. In fact, the events of 9/11 affected all popular culture, starting with newspaper headlines: 'Is this the end of the world?', 'Doomsday America' and simply 'Apocalypse' [7, p. 53]. After the terrorist attack, the number of eschatology-oriented TV shows and movies increased so much that it gave reasons to claim that '*films and television shows seem locked into a perpetual and ever-more-frenzied Dance of Death*' [8, p. 23].

However, despite the eschatological perception of urban space formed in the Christian cultural tradition, in some samples of modern popular cinema the motif of a post-apocalyptic city as the last refuge in which salvation is possible even when such a possibility remains nowhere else is cultivated. The unconditional relationship between saving one's own life and the functioning of the post-apocalyptic community of people in the latter city derives from self-preservation instinct, while survival of a single individual in such conditions is considered impossible. The post-apocalyptic world loses the benefits of civilization, which significantly reduces the chances of survival of an individual. Comprehension of the city as a center of civilization and hence a chance for salvation, correlates with the concept of post-apocalyptic resurrection of humanity in the Christian tradition. This concept is substantiated in the prophecy of John the Theologian, where there are indications of the revival of the New Jerusalem: '*And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*' (Revel. 21.2-3) [6]. '*And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there*' (Revel. 21.25) [6]. The key indication of the construction of brand new world for humankind after the end of the world is the idea of city limits destruction and the absence of darkness itself.

In the film '*Dark City*' (Proyas, Alex, USA-Australia, 1998), the very color symbolism of the dark city points to deep biblical motifs. Darkness, opaque in various mythological and religious traditions has always correlated with the forces of evil, chaos and destruction. In the text of the Bible, darkness is mentioned about two hundred times. According to the

Bible, darkness is the state of the world before light appeared; it is the state of the world as an abyss, the deep ('*darkness was upon the face of the deep*') (Gen.1.2.) [6]. In this meaning, the transition from darkness to light is the embodiment of victory over the forces of evil and chaos, the victory of the being over non-being. When light overcomes darkness, humanity gets a chance to life and resurrection, because the world and the light have already been created.

Darkness is the realm of sleep as an anabiosis in which people are before their birth and existence in the real world. We can trace the eschatological theme of darkness as '*anthropological space*', darkness as '*the realm of the underworld*', which is stated, in particular, in Psalms 88 and 139. Thus, in *Dark City*, the darkness of night (the period when people fall asleep after 12 o'clock strikes) is the darkness that is nothingness, non-being, and the darkness, which is oblivion, when people lose memory, self-awareness and self-identification. And this very comprehension of darkness correlates with the theme of darkness in Psalm 88, as the one praying it, being in darkness, considers himself dead [9, p. 566].

The walls of a fortified city, which primarily meant to protect the inhabitants from enemies' attacks, can be at the same time its weakest points. The four city walls, oriented according to cardinal directions, not only protect the cosmological order of the city as a place of communion with God and preserve the wealth and well-being of its inhabitants. City walls due to 'open gates' can also become the embodiment of 'maximum openness, weakness... as the walls which turn into solid gates' [10, p.128]. In such a comprehension, the walls become illusory and they let cities open to the influence of the sinfulness of the *broad* world. In this context, borders, walls and ramparts are the defining symbols of the city as a secure space. The walls save the representatives of the tribe, ethnic group, people, and others from the potential dangers of the disordered, non-urbanized space. In this regard, the motif of a woman defender of the city walls (for example, the image of Oranta in the Byzantine and Kyivan Rus' traditions) is repeatedly observed in world culture. In the city of the Eloi ('*The Time Machine*' (Wells, Simon, USA, 2002)) there are no walls. Vertical structure of the city protects its inhabitants: the Eloi live on the sides of cliffs, trying to return to their homes before dark. However, it does not save them. At the same time, the safety of the underground city of the Morlocks is guaranteed by its very location – underground, as well as physical strength of the population and the technologies they use. As a result, they do not consider Alexander Hartdegen a serious threat to their way of life. Similar motives for the presence of walls as the basis of urban security are inherent in the film '*Dark City*' (Proyas, Alex, USA-Australia, 1998). The city itself remains organized in its own way until the moment of the walls destruction by the main character of the film Murdoch.

The *Dark City*, however, leaves room for the biblical motif of the search for knowledge, truth. An analogue of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the film is the hermeneutic circle as a symbol

of the city from which there is no way out, city in which there is no end, and no one knows the way to any destination far from it.

Post-apocalyptic cities in artistic practices in contemporary cinema often have metaphysical, unrealistic boundaries. This can be manifested in the use of a significant number of metallic, mirrored surfaces, in which there is a play of light and darkness, which only enhances the sense of illusion of such cities. The emphasis on irrationality, unreality of the perception of the world using the latest mirror-like man-made designs in cinematic images of the cities of the future is also reinforced by the fact that since ancient times, humanity has perceived the mirror as a boundary between worlds, between order and chaos, between the cognitive and transcendental worlds. In particular, in a dark city, the boundary of urbanized space is destroyed because of the battle between Murdoch's hero and the alien gods. Moreover, it turns out that there is nothing beyond the city wall but the boundless expanse of space. The whole world of the dark city is just the territory of a ship in the middle of endless space. In addition, the entire reality of the city is reduced to consciousness, a set of memories of people transferred to a colony spaceship.

The city as a limited space of safe human existence in the paradigm of modern perception of post-apocalyptic scenarios of the world development is reflected in the already mentioned concept of the last human shelter in the world, which is collapsing or already destroyed. Such a shelter can be represented by a city itself (*'I Am Legend'* (Lawrence, Francis, USA, 2007)), as well as local centers of non-urban environment. The concept of the last shelter is closely linked to the ideas of the potential sinfulness of the first city, as Cain and his descendants created it. Cities in such comprehension are interpreted as centers of concentration of sinfulness and corruption, where man is potentially ready to accept the power of the antichrist.

In contrast to the city as the last refuge, the concept of the last refuge, tied to non-urbanized, rural space, functions in the minds of people in a digitalized society through personal experience and feelings. In this sense, countryside is considered the safe area in which a person can significantly minimize the destructive effects of natural and social troubles and disasters. In this way a kind of 'sacred geography' or 'geography of salvation' is formed. It is based on the belief that there are spaces on earth where it is possible to minimize the manifestations of doomsday cataclysms – climate, technological and geopolitical disasters. The key condition for salvation of a person is the necessity to be at the right time in a sacred place – a temporary space of relative well-being in the sea of eschatological cataclysms. In the film *'Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines'* (Mostow, Jonathan, USA, 2003), John Connor accidentally finds himself in the veterinary clinic of Kate Brewster, who he studied at school with, at the time of the Terminator T-X's attack. And it is this circumstance that brings together the Terminator-Defender T-101, Kate and John, which further allows them to realize the need to protect Kate's father, General Brewster, who in his turn sends them to the

most safe and secure haven for top officials of the state. This makes it possible for the hero-savior to stay alive and lead the resistance against the uprising of the machines. Similar ideas are manifested at the level of public consciousness in the myths about *the country of the blessed* (Eldorado, Shambhala) or in the utopian projects of the *'City of the Sun'* by Tommaso Campanella.

The mythologeme of the last sacred refuge is a component of modern eschatological mythology. It points to the idea that it is possible to avoid and minimize the negative consequences of the end of the world in the post-apocalyptic future within the newest city of refuge. Thus, to a large extent, this mythology is one of the components of the soteriological perception of reality, a kind of extrapolation of the idea of human survival in a (post)apocalyptic reality.

The desacralization and demythologization of eschatology by contemporary cinema, however, does not exclude the symbiosis of the traditionally eschatological and the innovative. On the one hand, cinema actively uses the motif of the New Jerusalem, the city of salvation. On the other hand, all the post-apocalyptic cities that are the centers of the civilization of the saved (the Dark City, the Eloi Village, Wayward Pines) cannot protect the lives of their citizens within their borders, even if they are walled or placed in rock caves. Even when locked at night, they are dangerous to humans. Whereas in the biblical New Jerusalem there will be no night and no need for any closed gates.

Conclusions. If the eschatological doom of humanity in the religious and mythological tradition is mainly due to two factors: the end of the time limits allotted by higher forces for human life on earth (for example, the Mayan calendar) and the punishment of man for an inadequate lifestyle (the fall and degradation of human nature as its consequence in the discourse of Abrahamic religions), the cinematic practice of modern digitalized society focuses mainly on the moral aspects of apocalyptic events. According to the scenarios of popular cinema in recent decades, humanity is losing the world and the possibility of a decent life in it because of the destructive activities of man himself. It is no longer God or gods who appear as a punishing force, but the anthropogenic factor that causes the apocalyptic threat. In post-apocalyptic scenarios of the future, the death of a human being, literally or metaphorically, in a world destroyed by it, looks horrifying but a natural consequence of the development of a digitalized society. The latest technologies (genetic engineering, digitalization, and robotization) allow humans to survive the apocalypse, but only so that humanity has a chance to realize its role in the destruction of the world and to go into oblivion with it, giving way to new civilizations. Thus, the exploitation of a person's immanent fear not only of his or her own death, but also of the threat of the destruction of the entire human world, has become one of the key themes in popular cinema of the digitalized present.

The actualization of the idea of the "end of the world" in cinema in recent decades has influenced the production of a sense of disruption in the normal course

of everyday life, its instability and excessive variability in public opinion and human experience in the digital age. These tendencies are reinforced by the fact that in contemporary cinema the post-apocalyptic motif changes the temporal attachment. The end of the world no longer represents the end of the era of the ordered existence of the human world. In most urban disaster films, we see a post-apocalyptic society that has already experienced the "end of the world" to varying degrees. The apocalypse has happened and the next stage of the world's cyclical existence has already begun.

Motif of post-apocalyptic city as the last refuge of humanity in popular films of post-industrial digital era is interpreted as the last center of order and civilization, a New Jerusalem of post modernity. This is a place where a person can find salvation when there is no salvation anywhere else. The walls or boundaries of the city, both, physical or digital, protect people at the end of times from threats of disappearance or dissolution in non-being. In a broad sense, the post-apocalyptic city is a kind of ark that gives humanity hope for salvation. The key condition of salvation is the ability of the main character to be in the sacred place at the right time, in space of wellbeing among a sea of eschatological cataclysms. However, the walls of the new city not only save but also make humankind of post-apocalyptic era obey new social and natural laws.

Although influence of popular cinema cannot form a holistic eschatological outlook in the minds of modern people, we conclude in the study that excessive exploitation of the idea of the end of the world in post-industrial society enhances anxiety and uncertainty about the future of a significant number of people. The motive of human survival in (post)-apocalyptic city (new civilization) is a call for rethinking the principles of human existence mode in the modern world, as the very idea of the end of the world and extermination of majority of mankind contains hope for contemporary humankind. In a society of mass consumption, many people perceive eschatological threats with hope, as they are extremely dissatisfied with their lives and seek to finish this stage of their existence in the 'unjust' world. They are willing to finish their miserable existence in the world where they have no chance to preserve dignity, so that to get another chance to start a new life in a post-apocalyptic world as if from scratch.

However, in accordance with eschatological cinematic practice, hope for the revival of humanity is possible not so much due to human nature but Divine will.

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