

# The Dark Brain of Warlikowski

On one hand *Koniec* is inaccessibly coded, on the other, paradoxically, its power lies in this encrypted form of narration that draws you in with psychedelic rhythm supported by constant musical and sound stream (composed by Paweł Mykietyn, Paweł Bombert and Paweł Stankiewicz) and tension that grows between hallucinatory scenes. Warlikowski seems to believe that a story of Joseph K. taken from the *Trial* by Kafka – that is also one of the sources for this oneiric production – can be understood as allegory of unknown but can also pull you into material form of premonition quite similar to experiencing the bare existence of each human.

Babilon, Tony and Robert are the characters taken from the film script of *Nickel Stuff* by Bernard-Marie Koltes. Their story, split into separate parts in this production, is entwined in situation of Joseph K. (Maciej Stuhr) – in fate of symbolic victim of dark powers conspiracy: harbinger of the 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarianism. This time, unlike in the other productions, Warlikowski does not want to use the great metaphor of threat used for specific social or political circumstances though similarly to earlier productions, he is still interested in issue of executioners and victims. In *Koniec* he presents anxiety, fear, terror without any particular explanation of what is historical or social danger of being an alien i.e. a unit. The production seems to be balancing between the darkened parable of human fate in the modern world and the personal expedition of Warlikowski into regions of his own works.

The original script (adaptation of several texts prepared by Krzysztof Warlikowski and Piotr Gruszczyński) bonds together literature, art and film sources. Voracious imagination of the creator on one hand seeks strange and mysterious connections in existing forms and records, on the other it returns to its own compulsions, individual rite, impossible (but popular) repetitions. How can one find himself in this jumble of stories and motifs, multiplied pictures and labyrinth of corridors, literal scenes and those that are blatantly symbolic? All you can do is to conduct hypothetical rationalization of what cannot be embraced with logic.

The story by Koltes is a tale of in-complementary, entwined in coincidences existence of Tony. The fate of this talented dancer crumbles with each scene. In original version the script is an open passage without the clear beginning or the ending. In Warlikowski's interpretation it becomes even a less coherent form lacking a core story and characters with distinctive psychological profiles. The director leaves only an outline of the story.

The script by Koltes does not only suggest topics and relationships. Being inspired by expression, a type of a time-space design is also important. Koltes was not going after realistic story with fixed plot: his story, as he writes himself in the script, is supposed to be rather “shown” than told. Dynamic of the pictures is more important than a particular event: “an object is sometimes less visible than movement we make to see that object or speed it moves in front of our eyes”. It seems Warlikowski follows this instruction: he does not care about consistent plot but rather uses freedom of montage. The artist plays with anarchy of associations that triggers stream of vision. He is attracted by overlaying of transitions, polyphony of events, brings out soft transitions between singular, fractional sequences. We should not be talking about theatre scenes but rather film related “travelling, motionless camera, focus”.

So a story from the script creating daily life, amorphous and inconsistent, is exalted (by Kafkas' generalizations, theatrically specified internal monologue) to a level of distinct imponderables, slightly pompous discharged at the end with scene taken from *Elisabeth Costello* by Coetzee. Tony is in a certain way becoming more specific with the universal story of K. - a being that was sentenced to experience an incomplete trial. Both entwined stories are merely indicated in the production. The spectator faces scenes that build enigmatic situations – transparent and unclear but powerful with intensity of emotions, turbulence of arguments and sadomasochistic relationships simultaneously. The brutal confrontations of the characters, intertwined with internal monologues, keeps changing like in a kaleidoscope though they are stretched in rhythms and constantly building up tensions.

The enormous stage with movable back wall that encloses deep stage in “an interior of the inside” style has been framed by two glazed corridor-spaces. Due to mobility of stage design done by Małgorzata Szcześniak, that is also “repetition” of sets known from earlier productions, with its walls opening and closing soundlessly creating new forms of simple geometry we get an impression of a labyrinth. It is spacious and claustrophobic world.

We see many backgrounds, portraits in various proportions, legible visions as well as blurred or distorted pictures. This aesthetic device of shaken mimesis heightens our impressions of facing the world in pieces: reality on the stage is like a broken mirror that cannot be put back together. The consequent use of projections showing perspective that cannot be seen from the audience makes the optics even less realistic and pulls a spectator in the created reality.

K. in this production is a being devoid of biography. HE is an experiment carried in order to prove that dying existence does not allow experiencing conscious transition and only a fear of death is part of life but not death itself. The faulty setting of a brain does not allow K. – as he confesses – to see difference between his dreams and reality.

Warlikowski insist on convincing us that life – regardless of our choices – inevitably marks fear and pain, cruelty and a need of forgiveness. Being a human force you to do evil or to accept it. Violence is pre-induced in human relationships of lovers, parents and kids.

Warlikowski transfers a subject of imprisonment – essential for the entire production – also to the ultimate end. The desire for wonderful matrimony with the death, wearing a shroud like a wedding veil, something K. as Gracchus dreams about, cannot be fulfilled. The imprisonment is not being neither alive or dead, is to cruise between a frozen life with its imperfect, earthly form and a premonition of some inaccessible transcendence, is to dream about oneself as a different being – an experience that in turn questions a reality of being.

It is also an experience of an artist, a director, an actor on a stage – this crack between consummate and infinite worlds. It is an extraordinary opportunity, a chance to liberate oneself from this trivial, earthly condition but a trap at the same time. Danger of life, threat of ordinary reality, inner nightmares as everlasting syndrome of lasting appear significantly where existence ceases to be simply mechanical habit and becomes a frantic search for the meaning i.e. exit.

The finale of *Koniec* is an attempt to bring light and air in the claustrophobic area of the theatre prison, labyrinth and trap.

Katarzyna Fazan, *The Dark Brain of Warlikowski*  
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