

# I am rather inspired by apparitions than places

- I use a mystification similarly to Coetzee. I hide behind the characters from *Koniec*. But obviously there is something more serious hidden behind the mystification. This play is the first premonition of the end - says KRZYSZTOF WARLIKOWSKI before the premiere of *Koniec* in the Nowy Teatr in Warsaw.

Have you already found out that others are not the only ones to die?

- Struggling with various topics in the theatre doesn't leave one pure. In a similar way a writer staying solitarily with his ghosts influences his mentality, fears, anxieties and thinking. An artist feels a universal anxiety.

I am afraid of the play about Universal anxiety if it isn't supported by the personal anxiety of Krzysztof Warlikowski.

- What am I to do with the way I feel? I'm 48 and on the way to escape the world that still keeps me imprisoned in the dreams. (*A*)*pollonia* a heart attack I recovered from and keep on delving further but without an ambition to touch my own end.

Out of fear5?

- No, this production is rather the records of the bad year.

The play *Koniec* will be about you?

- To a certain extent, yes.

You have been talking about yourself In your productions for a while now. Which part of the story are we in now?

- The part that reflects the past. The Middle part of my life, when I became a director and began to raise still lives within me intensely. Now I am experiencing something I call "the first premonition of the end" and simultaneously I am still a person I could have been if I hadn't escaped Szczecin. After (*A*)*pollonia* it was difficult for me to find a new thing I would be willing to work on. I used psychoanalysis on myself and discovered some hidden traits that led me to three texts *Koniec* is based on. The first is a never produced script written by Bernard-Marie Koltes entitled *Nickel Stuff*. Koltes talks about a man who, just like me, was born in a wrong place. Tony, a main character, is my counterpart of my childhood and youth in Szczecin. The boy works in a supermarket and wins dance competitions. That is his contact with art. I recalled when I was a child and my parents dreamt of me becoming a truck driver visiting many countries. They believed it would be a great life. This fate – this unfulfilled threat - still lives within me. The second text is *The Trial* by Franz Kafka and also his short story *The Hunter Gracchus*. These texts correspond with the period of my life when I was becoming a director. We begin our story from backward. The common moment in our

production is a moment of awakening or daydreaming, when Joseph K. is informed of being arrested. Kafka wrote *The Trial* against himself while being hunted by his ever growing guilt. The story show an innocent man who doesn't understand anything people are trying to convince him of. This feeling of being innocent in the face of the degeneracy of the world, to which I am a prey, lived inside of me as well. At the same time I am aware that every situation, every feeling of self-satisfaction deep down is accompanied by the guilt. Kafka realized that tuberculosis was a good way to avoid marriage and getting entangled in life he did not want to be confronted with. He must have been tormented with guilt. It was revolving around his father and women. In *(A)pollonia* I was also delving into a problem of guilt toward women and complicated relationships between men and women. I am still wondering to what extent this complex concerns me. Since something has drawn me toward that text it probably does.

*(A)pollonia* ends with an extract from J.M. Coetzee's novel *Elizabeth Costello*. Are you going to pick up where you left off your last production?

- To a certain extent, yes. *(A)pollonia* is still close from time point of view, all of those realities overlap each other. Elizabeth is a writer i.e. an artist. In this production she raises an issue of the artist's responsibility, anxiety, wandering around the gate which is hiding the invisible. This character demonstrates awareness of the man who became mature thank to the art that in turn liberated him from the fear of reality. For me – similar to the main character from Koltes's – the reality was dreadful, forcing me to escape it into my fictions and my way of talking about it. Coetzee, while ridiculing himself as an author, chooses a woman to become his alter ego. Our venerable, mature artist, the world authority who during his visit in Poland met only with Kapuściński, put on a costume, some lipstick and became Elizabeth Costello. Thanks to this masquerade he dares to create this extreme artistic flourish – a vision of his or anyone's end. He must have assumed that a woman can be exposed to ridicule while men cannot. Coetzee even risked looking beyond the gate. Costello says that the light is merely brilliant but it is not the light Dante saw in Paradise. I promise with this production to stop before the gate. I won't go any further.

Elizabeth Costello and Coetzee all at the same time does something you are afraid of: looks beyond the gate of life – what of it?

- The guard says that many want to pass the gate. For me it is the most essential existential reflection provoked by this production. But the guard stops Costello because she does not believe, she only describes belief. And it is not enough to pass through the gate. It is a warning for an artist against being only an observer.

An esthetical gesture will not be replaced with an ethical one?

- My encounters with the other side are always crippled. They are always struggling with something. I always weaselled out of it using some kind of mystification. It happened in *Angels in America* and *Hamlet*. With each production I search for the light Costello saw, I am trying to get there but I never show it. My job is constant hammering on the door. Circling around the gate in this production is the most autobiographical. Similarly to the Kafka's main

character I have been living on the edge of the real world and dreams ever since I entered the theatre. I spend most of my active life in the theatre. Fiction and reality intersperse. There appears willingness to pass to the other side of life by a man, an artist. It is also the first time I allow a story about an artist. It's seemed to me too egocentric until now. Now I came to a conclusion that I cannot let escape my attention the perspective that my reflections were born here, during rehearsals and performances. It must have its origins in some kind of inability to live outside. Let's come back to the three texts. It was Kafka who pushed toward somebody whose understanding of reality is saturated with existential anxieties. These anxieties create a different reality. Perhaps this reality is only mine or perhaps it really exists and I am entering it now?

It really exists. We all enter it at various moments of our lives. Czesław Miłosz used to call artists secretaries of the invisible. Do you feel like the secretary? Have written down any answers?

- I don't know who gives the answer and where it can be found because the ending of our production is very perverse. There are two women: Costello played by Ewa Dałkowska and someone, who looks like a Polish cleaning lady, called a trusty and played by Stanisława Celińska. One of them is a writer and the second is a artist of life. They meet in a dormitory located near the gate. They are both waiting for a chance to pass. There are various possibilities of the answer hidden in attitudes of those women, those actresses, those parts they play. This makes me want to be like Coetzee, to put on a woman's suit and be one of those women who are allowed to claim knowing in an unaware manner.

But knowing what? Knowing what's on the other side? Coetzee is an agnostic. He uses such words as disgrace, guilt, punishment, or other religious terms that he treats as moral guidance devoid of religion context. Is this also your metaphysics?

- I am not sure about his metaphysics. Let's take a book *Age of Iron* about dying of a mother. A heroine informs her daughter about her suffering in a letter which will be send after her death by a black stranger she took in. She does not want to involve her daughter in her death. The story takes place in South Africa during the beginnings of the apartheid, times when noble caste of white people disappears, the new ones hasn't been born yet and black people begin to fight for their freedom. In an act of despair the dying women decides to burn her body in front of the President's Palace hoping to achieve something. She drives to the Palace and withdraws at the last moment and goes back home. Her life remains useless till the very end. Without any sacrifice, anything noble she begins to die in a cold sheet accompanied by the swollen, alcohol stinking stranger who hugs her only in a moment of death.

Only? Perhaps it's the only metaphysics we can experience?

- For Coetzee the possibility of writing about something, recording is an equivalent of Paradise. While he is imprisoned by his old age he bears reflections about the end. Recently there has been published a book by Tiziano Terzani, who is an Italian counterpart of Kapuściński, entitled *The end is my beginning*. Terzani got ill with cancer when he was 66 and asked his son to record his thoughts. He admits that his whole life had one purpose: not to

regret anything in moment of the end and move to the next chapter while feeling relief. Terzani is a Buddhist which makes everything easier.

- Definitely. He believes in reincarnation, eastern way of thinking and is ready to pass. He doesn't even regret parting with his only true love, his wife, lover and friend. She asked him once: if somebody gave you a pill that would extend your life by 10 years, would you take it? He answered: No, I have spent with you what I meant to.

And if you were in a similar situation and someone offered you a pill of life, would you take it?

- I haven't thought of it yet. Not on such personal level. I use a mystification like Coetzee. I hide behind characters from *Koniec*. But there is certainly something more serious underneath this mystification.

Is it too early?

- I hope so. This production is the first premonition of the end as I've already mentioned.

Do you believe in something?

- The fact that I am circling around the metaphorical gate, assuming a necessity of passing is a declaration of belief. I think that belief is rather fighting for belief in life. Perhaps there are people who have this gift, they have it inscribed. I am among those who were given willingness to fight for it rather than having it easy way. Where can you talk about it in a serious way since religion including metaphysics has evaporated from our life?

- The Church is involved in politics and power. In ancient Greece temples were never source of conscience because gods were tools in hands of authority. The Church has never been a priest of conscience. It was opium for conscience. An artistic expression is not a reality. It is fiction in which we stumble around in the dark. But those darkest and most stumbled intuitions create us. They are what we are really made of. An irritating question appears: is life a waste since we know we are going to die?

Is it?

- I fight for belief giving my description of reality.

So life isn't a waste for you. Are the theatre, the art and its illusion the only real possibility to escape the cage of life?

- It's nothing new. I only talk about inevitability of this reflection. Who have we awarded with the Noble Prize in the XX century - the writers who described vanishing worlds. The world of Jews vanished – we gave the Noble Prize to Singer. The world of white people who taught Latin and Greek in Africa vanished - we awarded Coetzee who recorded this world. Many worlds vanished and that's probably the most important inheritance from the XX century.

Coetzee is becoming more and more important writer for you. Is he replacing Hanna Krall? It seems to me he manages to present elusive dread of the present.

- Hanna Krall is a secretary of the Invisible. Coetzee on the other hand does not believe in a secretary but wants to believe at the same time. He is trying to put on the Invisible costume because hasn't got it. Perhaps it's because the world of white people in South Africa needn't tears. The world described by Hanna Krall must be grieved for. The world created by Coetzee could also be grieved for.

- The colonial world of houses hiding Tucznydes's books under the sun of Africa?

Why not? There are all sorts of crying: crying out of despair, crying out of longing for something that has gone forever...

- If you want to cry, you may. I was led to Coetzee by the Hanna Krall's books. I was sensitized by Krall, by Holocaust, by being Polish, by being confronted with the tragedy of Jews. It made me see for the first time the colonial context and the Apartheid context in "Age of Iron". South Africa still hasn't got over this tragedy. You asked me why Coetzee is becoming important to me. He lives on the Southern end of the world, on the edge of the globe. He looks at the world from down there. He looks upward. For us, the Europeans looking from the place where the world ends is interesting. As I said many worlds have gone: the Baltic Germans, the Lithuanian Poland, the Polish Ukraine, the Volga Germans. Suddenly I realized that the present map coincides with ethnic map from the X century. How many human beings had to be sacrificed to go back to where we were a thousand years ago?

Before *(A)pollonia* you were afraid how would your audience receive a play composed of various texts. It worked out and made you continue going into puzzles made by Warlikowski? Have you found an approach?

- *Dybuk* was something like that too. I'm not sure whether it is some kind of approach. I just can't express myself in narrations created from the beginning to the end by somebody else. Theatrical literature doesn't inspire me. I am sensitive to clumsy texts, the texts that don't give the answer, just like the Koltes's text or visions like Kafka's ones in *The Trial*, which can be read however you wish and still you won't read the whole thing. Kafka wanted to burn his most inspiring works like *The Trial*, *The Castle* or *America* – these books are like strange mantras. He considered them unintelligible.

Perhaps even he didn't understand then what he had written?

- Probably. His esoteric stories are still touching, for instance *Josephine the Singer*. The mouse nation has its own singer – an oracle, which squeaks quite different than the others. Her concert was avant-garde. The nation wasn't equal to it. But at the times of threat it would focus and listen to squeaks of its singer. Along with Kafka came the uneasiness of the unknown. In the present we can find similar uneasiness in David Lynch's films.

When Krum, a main character from one of your productions enters the shadow he believes that life is somewhere else. Do you know where your life is?

- If you mean finding a place in life it's not that bad. One could say I succeeded. I don't know whether this place is easy or difficult, glorious or not. But it exists. We are all born with a plan we deserve. I believe I live according to my plan.

Since we've begun talking about the place let's get down to Earth. What about your theatre building? The date of its construction defers. It might be constructed within next 4-5 years. Will you manage to keep your team alive during this period of homelessness? Won't they grow tired of rehearsals in the outskirts?

- Every time I begin a new thing I wonder whether I'll manage to gather people this time. The more distinctively I describe it and closer I am to reality, the better chance they will respond. I am also less susceptible to moods of an artist, a director, a visionary, an egocentric – to all those afflictions I want to escape as a man. The Nowy Teatr is not going to be mine or our place. It's going to be a place for Warsaw. We will be coming back there to work on productions but I won't treat it as my theatre. It is going to be the place for encounters of various arts, some kind of a video library, a theatre, a film library or even something like a left luggage office where people can just spend time. I am not looking for a permanent place – it's simply dangerous. I am rather inspired by apparitions than places

Do you feel responsible for your actors? Are you more for them than just their director?

- We're partners. They are litmus for me. It's through them – or thanks to them – I run my visions through reality. I am a wandering artist. We are trying to come up with some rules, to call something the institutional theatres put in their statutes but it's all dissatisfactory to me. I think it may last as long as I keep finding another important matter worth of giving up everything else. A production gives them a chance to distance themselves from their lives and their places in society as it does to me.

Are you afraid they won't be there one day?

- These kinds of projects are always accompanied by anxieties. There are plenty of them – my anxieties, a man's anxieties or an artist's anxieties. The anxiety disappears when something "becomes clear". Before that happens I act upon my intuition, suspicions, attempts to understand where I am and where they are, where Polish reality is and where the world's reality is - I read, I bring my books, they bring theirs, they share experiences from life. I only enter life from time to time and usually escape to the theatre. I think there is more theatre in my life than reality looking from ratio point of view. My life actually was in the years when I didn't have theatre since I was 29 when I began studying directing. After that there was mainly theatre.

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