



Katarzyna Fazan  
Anna Róża Burzyńska  
Marta Bryś  
(eds.)

# Tadeusz Kantor Today

Metamorphoses of Death,  
Memory and Presence

## Polish Studies - Transdisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by Krzysztof Zajas / Jarosław Fazan



PETER LANG  
EDITION

This book is a compendium of texts by international authors which reflect on Tadeusz Kantor's art in a broad range of contexts. The studies include works of prominent art historians, teatrologists and artists. The present revisiting of Kantor's artistic oeuvre reflects a contemporary historiographic approach. The authors place value on individual memory and consider contemporary art outside the traditional boundaries of particular artistic genres. The studies employ the latest strategies for researching theatrical performance as autonomous statements, without a literary anchor. Thanks to this approach, the eschatological and historical issues, crucial to the sphere of reference of Kantor's Theatre of Death, have acquired a new presence – as art that liberates thinking in the here-and-now.

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Volume 7



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Tadeusz Kantor on the stage in the production *Wielopole, Wielopole*. Parish church in Wielopole Skrzyńskie, 1983. Photo L. Dziedzic

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*In Memory of Anna Halczak*



# Tadeusz Kantor – Yesterday and Today

Katarzyna Fazan  
Jagiellonian University

(...) to create  
IN INFINITY  
something as  
FINITE  
as death  
a work of art.<sup>1</sup>

*Time, space and death* – these are the leitmotifs of Kantor’s art and reflection. Towards the end of his life, the artist wrote:

Time / which is to blame / for hopeless repetition / saves us / from mortal boredom. /  
It’s time that makes / those repetitions / horribly ad infinitum – / come closer / shrink  
/ to zero, and it’s only then, / in that vacuum / as if in another dimension, / that the  
proper forms appear / and actions...<sup>2</sup>

A powerful, unique presence ‘here and now’, testing the appropriate form and sense of existence against the dynamics of time and space as well as their cohesion – all these became the characteristics of Kantor’s art spanning different traditions, places and times. Before the volume that we now place in your hands came into being as a record of the most recent contemporary interpretations of Kantor’s work, an exceptional, *intimate* encounter had taken place, filled with reminiscences about the artist, occasioned by another anniversary of his death. After more than twenty years had passed since Tadeusz Kantor’s death on 8 December 1990, regardless of any manifestation of memory, there also arose a definite need to revisit intellectually his opus and to define our stance towards it. We wanted to reveal a vista of memories as well as present new and original reflections. Such a re-interpretation of Kantor’s art made it imperative that in order to participate in this dialogue with his legacy, we should invite researchers and artists of different

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1 T. Kantor, an excerpt from the poem *O, Seigneur*, originally written in French and translated into Polish by M. Rostworowska, in: T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. by K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, p. 443.

If not otherwise indicated, Tadeusz Kantor’s texts have been translated by Anda MacBride, the translator of the book.

2 T. Kantor, *To wszystko jest prawdą!* in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, Pisma*, vol. III, p. 203.

generations and from all over the world, both those who had experienced Kantor's productions first-hand or, more than that, had participated in their creation, and those who were not in a position to experience the emotional impact of the Theatre of Death because they had been born too late. That approach allowed for a collage of free associations, a compilation of different outlooks and a panorama of divergent but complementary deliberations. The title of the present volume, *Tadeusz Kantor Today* alludes to Kantor's last production, *Today Is My Birthday* (1990), as well as, in a sense, harks back to Dietrich Mahlow's 1965 film *Kantor ist da* (Kantor Is Here, evoked by Uta Schorlemmer in the joint publication *Art Is Crime: Tadeusz Kantor and Germany / Switzerland* in 2007). We succumbed to time having taken its toll by our meeting in the circumstances of the celebration of an anniversary – as if in defiance of the contemporary disinclination for such conventional occasions. In our attempt to achieve the 'impossibility' of resurrecting the presence of Tadeusz Kantor so as to view the true form of his work in the contemporary metamorphoses of interpretation, we followed Kantor's own conviction that there is a point in revisiting and repeating the past. At the same time, we initiated the process of reflection and re-assessment of the theatrical and painterly legacy of the artist. These deliberations have eventually come to fruition in the present articles and essays.

To invoke the exceptional atmosphere of the occasion that gave rise to the present volume of studies, let me record briefly its circumstances. On 8 December 2010, the twentieth anniversary of the death of Tadeusz Kantor was marked, as was the annual custom, by living statues with the participation of Cricot 2 actors Jan Książek as the Eternal Wanderer and Lesław and Waław Janicki as the Two Hasidim with the Plank of Last Resort. In the ceremony and discussion that took place at the Krzysztofory Gallery, the general public met the artists of Cricot 2, including Italian members of the company who had come over especially for the occasion. There were academic presentations and contributions from artists invited to participate in panels as well as from curators debating how best to display Kantor's material heritage; those present also had the opportunity to view the exhibition of objects used in Kantor's productions and the exhibition of his drawings for *Today Is My Birthday*, staged in 1990 – the last production of the Krakow artist. This was an occasion to remind the audience of less well-known films and records related to Kantor's art (such as the 1957 *Attention!... Painting. Tadeusz Kantor Painting and Sacks, Wardrobe and Umbrella* made by Dietrich Mahlow in 1968). There was also the first-ever public screening of Ken McMullen's *Lovelies and Dowdies* – a recording of the production of the same title shown in Edinburgh in 1973.

Thus, the ambiance of the get-together-cum-symposium was far from that of a conventional academic gathering; there was no scope there for presenting already

elaborated theses. One piece of evidence that the order of artistic and research procedures could be blended was brought back to the audience by a screening of a recording made during the conference entitled *Art and Freedom* which had been organised at the Jagiellonian University exactly twenty years earlier, in 1990. At the conference, Kantor had carried out impromptu interventions into findings put forward by academics. This time, the event initiated by Cricoteka and, again, by the Jagiellonian University, was hosted by the Krzysztofory Gallery. One more venue was provided by another co-organiser of the symposium, The Ludwik Solski State Drama School in Krakow, and this was the Classical Stage in the building in Warszawska Street. In the theatre there, Kantor's *Goplana* (the object of Kantor's theatre) was set up, a relic of the remote past; in the audience, there sat Marta Stebnicka – the actress who had played Skierka in the wartime staging of *Balladyna* (1943), based on a drama by Juliusz Słowacki, a Polish Romantic poet. It was there that projects of the future Museum of Tadeusz Kantor were displayed. And so the commemoration of the anniversary of the artist's death, which continued for a number of days, took place in suspension between the past and the future, placing a singular significance on the word 'today'.

This ambiance of the event overflowed into the tone and rhetoric of some of the texts. There were those that had the form of a spontaneous or improvised statement, only later tidied up by being put in writing. Others sounded like manifestos or scripts for a theatrical monodrama. Side by side with reflections deeply steeped in living memory – memory that, according to Kantor, is 'madness if it concerns time lost' – there appeared reflections written with a sense of detachment, which introduced unexpected comparisons and methodologies. Thus, we are dealing here with a continuation of research – the repetition and development of thought processes – of authors who had spent years devoting their time to encounters with Kantor, as well as comments that stemmed from the novelty of the experience of one's own discovery of Kantor the artist from the past, an artist of the last century. For yet other authors who have contributed to the present compilation, the opus of the creator of the Theatre of Death is a cognitive episode that belongs to a broader spectrum of stage and aesthetic phenomena they have been involved with. This is also a chance to hear the voices of the researchers for whom Kantor is an artist from a different cultural sphere, voices that are decidedly revitalising. The volume is deliberately polyphonic – allowing insights from within art as well as statements distanced from it; the details of Kantor's legacy are sometimes scrutinised almost micrographically, whilst some approaches view his opus within the parameters of a broadly conceived culture.

Perhaps it is a coincidence (coincidences being so much appreciated by Kantor himself) that the participants of the get-together were primarily interested in the genesis and history of Kantor's paintings and artistic objects: in the interpretative

landscape, there appeared drawings, the figure of the rhinoceros, the mannequin, the Infanta, Don Quixote, frames, windows, doors, thresholds... (for instance, in the contributions from Lech Stangret, Małgorzata Paluch-Cybulska, Katarzyna Osińska and Amos Fergombe). Another theme that engaged Kantor researchers was that of the 'memory scenes' and repetition in his Theatre of Death – which compelled one to return in various ways, frequently in the original contexts, to *The Dead Class*, perceived not so much as a watershed moment as a time of inhibition and anxiety (in Grzegorz Niziołek's take), to *Wielopole, Wielopole* (through the analysis of a single photograph in the essay by Jean-Pierre Thibaudat *Autour de la photographie de Wielopole*), *The Machine of Love and Death*, in the interpretation of the French author Cécile Coutin (*La Machine de l'Amour et de La Mort de Tadeusz Kantor*), or *I Shall Never Return*, construed as a challenge to Kantor's status as an actor viewed various perspectives, as an artistic work that exists 'in suspension', revolving around the mystery of the borderline/threshold moment of existence. It was perhaps due to the circumstance of the anniversary of Kantor's death, with its mysterious influence of Death, whom he called The Mistress, that the reflection centred overwhelmingly on Kantor's late achievements, on his productions from the time of the Theatre of Death. The very theme of the artist's 'late style' (as Michal Kobialka referred to it, applying a concept of Theodor Adorno and Edward Said) drew the attention of many authors in the volume, contemplating (as for instance Uta Schorlemmer did) death as a work of art. The art, with its complexities in positing eschatological questions, attracts various systems of reference: philosophical, historiosophical and aesthetic. Admittedly, a revival of Kantor's opus has been helped by the renaissance of contemporary historiography, which values individual memory, and by contemporary strategies of exploring the theatre as an autonomous statement – a creative act not anchored in text. It turns out that Kantor used devices such as photography and film, reality and repetition, in a truly trailblazing way in relation to the theoretical and conceptual framework of the existing artistic practice. It often seems that it is only today that, armed with the notions of the postdramatic theatre and the category of postmemory, we can properly access Kantor's intuition eternalised in art. On the other hand, the ephemerality of its stage forms provokes questions, which are frequently apparent in the texts presented here, concerning the validity and use of the analysis of artistic objects or structures without a live stage appearance. To express disquiet occasioned by the transient nature of theatrical art is not, however, synonymous with giving up the desire to reconstruct it.

Side by side with the analysis focused on the anatomy of Kantor's work, there has arisen a host of 'illegal' statements that constitute a 'trespass' (to use the artist's own phraseology) by invading the fortress of Kantor's formidable sense of his own individuality, which he did not tolerate being in any way subjected to



comparisons or juxtapositions. The vista of confronting his art with that of other authors has allowed one to observe it clashing with strong individualities, while at the same time combining the areas of visual art and the theatre, disciplines which – as can be appreciated from the present perspective (something that Kantor intuited very powerfully from early on) – both co-exist and stimulate each other. Kantor's art has been juxtaposed here with that of such authors as Władysław Strzemiński, Joseph Beuys, Jerzy Grotowski, Joseph Chaikin, Dario Fo, Christoph Schlingensiefel, Anselm Kiefer and Jerzy Grzegorzewski. The presented texts investigate similarities but also analyse differences, allowing for the autonomy of a genuine work of art.

It is a pity that only a few texts, mainly by practitioners, touch on the topic of the acting in *Cricot 2*. The artists of 'The Fairground Booth' have provided first-hand accounts of Kantor's method and have staunchly upheld his concept of the actor – a figure who for the creator of the Theatre of Death was, as we recall, a 'naked image of man'. This appears to be an important pointer towards an area of Kantor research, largely neglected until now, that merits new investigation.

The compiled pieces of analyses do thus fill in some gaps but also highlight blank spaces that need to be filled in on the Kantor map. New possibilities of alternative approaches to Kantor's art seem to be accessed by analysis of his texts (by Jan Kłossowicz, for one), using film documentation or employing new strategies of thinking (such as Andrzej Turowski's surprising juxtapositions and comparisons). Also, to a lesser extent, the potential has been unfolded for a radical critical reinterpretation that would controvert Kantor studies to date or even the artist himself. This is certainly evidence of Kantor's powerful charisma still exerting its absolute pull. Rather, a thread of opposition against the prevailing forms of reception of his work appeared in discussions taking up such themes as the need to find a fitting vocabulary for the opus of the creator of *Cricot 2* outside its own sphere of reference and the artist's own terminology, or the need to abandon the proliferation of traditions and ever-repeating contexts, something that Kantor himself pointed out. Nor was it possible to open the interesting topic of the revision of the meanings and classification proposed by Polish painters since the turn of the century in their vigorous, polemic confrontation with Tadeusz Kantor, as evidenced, for one, by the exhibition *The Impossible Theatre* and its catalogue<sup>3</sup> in Warsaw's Zachęta National Gallery of Art. In turn, the directors and

---

3 The exhibition, curated by S. Folie, had been shown earlier in the Kunsthalle in Vienna (2005) and at the Barbican Centre in London (2006). It was accompanied by the catalogue *Teatr Niemożliwy: performatywność w sztuce Pawła Althamera, Tadeusza Kantora, Katarzyny Kozyry, Roberta Kuśmirowskiego i Artura Żmijewskiego – The Impossible Theatre: Performativity in the Works of Pawel Althamer, Tadeusz Kantor, Katarzyna Kozyra, Robert Kuśmirowski and Artur Żmijewski*, Warszawa 2006.

playwrights of the new generation invited to enter the discussion (such as Paweł Passini, Krzysztof Garbaczewski, Michał Borczuch, Marcin Wierzychowski) – the majority of whom had not had the opportunity to get to know Kantor’s art during his lifetime – when debating about Kantor’s ‘impossible tradition’, emphasised its objective significance and their own positive attitude towards it, albeit mostly devoid of any tangible dependency thereon. The panel confirmed the observation made by Renato Palazzi at the opening of the symposium that Tadeusz Kantor’s influence on contemporary artists was oblique; he had pioneered ways of treating painting and theatrical substance as well as directing and working with actors rather than evolved any clear-cut techniques or strategies that would lend themselves to emulation by others. Kantor himself had foreseen this when, in the throes of his drive for the archiving of his own opus (described at the symposium by Anna Halczak), he remarked that the basis of the ‘living archive’ that he had designed for his works was to pass it on to his successors: they would be creating the next stages in the evolution of the theatre and art, probably – as he suspected – in a spirit of opposition.

The symposium was thus very intense; and yet, now that ‘today’ has become ‘yesterday’ and the statements that it has generated are being systematised and presented in no more than a single volume of work, there is a growing sense of incompleteness and of the need for further revisiting and revision of the themes. In this, the effect of Kantor’s great gift is evident: that his art finds its moment to explode with an unexpected contemporary force. As Klaus Dermutz has noted, in Kantor’s (and in Kiefer’s) art, it makes sense to ‘link “today” with Walter Benjamin’s historical and philosophical term “time present” (“Jetzt-Zeit”)’. In his essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, Walter Benjamin describes ‘cessation of happening’<sup>4</sup> as energy exploding outside the fragmented historical continuum burdened with the past. The present can also be found – according to Kantor – in memories of the past that forever haunt the present continuous. The fragile *today* inevitably evolves into *yesterday* and it is only art that can transform *yesterday* into a *liberated realness*.

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4 W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. and with introduction by H. Arendt, trans. by H. Zohn, New York, 1969, p. 263.

**1.**  
**Actors and Witnesses**  
**Make a Grand Entrance**



# Kantor's Greatness: An Inconvenient Heritage

*Renato Palazzi*

We are here to ask ourselves what remains of Kantor in the theatre today. I mean, what remains, beyond what will always be deeply imprinted in the minds and hearts of all who knew him closely, beyond the perception of an inexpressible, absolute genius, of creativity that admitted no limits or boundaries.

It is clear that none of us can imagine our own death without thinking of a twin, our alter ego bowed beside the bed, hat in hand, ready to give us a final farewell. It is clear that none of us can think again of our childhood without a perfect child's handcart appearing before our eyes. And we all are now aware of carrying on our backs a waxwork of what we once were.<sup>1</sup>

But what has really survived of Kantor in the daily practice of the theatre? I think that it is neither justified nor actually right to have high hopes in this matter. Kantor's personality, as we all know, was unique and unforgettable thanks to his history and the artistic results achieved. This uniqueness testifies to his greatness, but it may also be viewed as his misfortune, the reason why he was denied the chance to leave a legacy that one could gather and carry on.

Trying to repeat, or worse, to imitate what Kantor did, would be impossible or even deplorable. I am, therefore, convinced that very little remains now on the stage of Kantor's disruptive innovation. If we think of recovering the high poetry of the Theatre of Death, the secret of Kantor's ability to meld laughter and pain, clowning and tragedy, we must resign ourselves to the fact that all this is gone with him, and that it can never be revived by anyone else, however talented.

If we think we can reconstruct Kantor's dazzling ability to express in a gesture, an object or an image all the contradictions and all the horrors of the century in which he was a participant and of which he was an incomparable witness, a century which he depicted as an unparalleled compendium in his works, we are wrong: this possibility slipped away together with the twentieth century, with its world wars, with its carnage, with its bloody dictatorships.

Now, there are new wars, new bloodshed, new dreadful dictatorships, but they are different, ambiguous and unsettling and they need to be depicted in a more indirect way. The image of trainloads of deportees is painfully lodged in the dark

---

1 References to the characters and objects from Kantor's *Let the Artists Die* (1986) and *The Dead Class* (1975).

memory of our times, but there are other abuses of power and violence that the media show us every day.

Moreover, the company of Cricot 2 themselves, after the death of the master, had a clear perception that their career could not continue, that the impulse – originating in the flesh – to go back to practising, to the creative processes cultivated for decades, had to be suppressed, however ruthlessly, since to follow it without Kantor would result in an inevitable externalisation.

We must beware of apparent similarities, of easy parallels that might be misleading. While asserting the genius of Eimuntas Nekrošius, for example, many have been tempted to find some ‘Kantoresque’ ancestry in his visionary and obsessive use of objects or of timber. But it is important to remember that merely to quote another artist, in a more or less intentional or deliberate way, is not sufficient to be proclaimed the bearer of his heritage. It is quite impossible to compare Kantor’s total freedom on the stage to the qualitatively different, restless world of the Lithuanian director, with its Stanislavskian references.

By the same token, the young French choreographer Gisèle Vienne fills her performances with puppets and eerie life-size wooden dolls, but it would be absurd to confuse these dislocated Lolitas, victims of rapes and brutal murderous fantasies, with the paltry ‘doppelgangers’ that question the identity and self-awareness of the living, whose features they awkwardly reproduce.

There is simply no style, technique or method of directing used by Kantor that can be replicated. The elements of his language are so distinct and full of implications that they must dissuade everyone from trying to imitate them in a banal way. It is, therefore, groundless to think that something of him may have survived in this sense.

But such an explosive experience as Kantor cannot really vanish without leaving a trace.

We may say that something of Kantor’s personality lives in the minds of all those who are engaged in the idea of the avant-garde as an extreme vocation, an absolute faith, beyond the results achieved and the currents in which it appears. We may say that something of Kantor remains in all those who live their role in the theatre as a need, those driven to the extreme, breaking down conventions and ceaselessly violating the rules of their times, regardless of what the rules are and in what way they are violated. If all these people have found somewhat steadier ground on which to move, this is certainly also due to the persistent opening of doors by Kantor and his Cricot 2 actors.

This is, however, a rather general assumption. Perhaps Kantor himself would have found it a bit too rhetorical.

So one wonders whether it is not the way in which we ask the question that is wrong – whether it is not wrong to ask what we can find of Kantor in the theatre

today, instead of asking more concretely and pragmatically what we could and should look for, knowing from the start that what we search for and what we may find will coincide only in part, and that we will, in any case, be able to identify not particular points but rather trends and areas to research.

I believe that we can look for something of Kantor in all those – and there are many of them now – who see the theatre not as the representation of a plot in the full meaning of the word, a chain of events in a text, but as the development of pure action on the stage in its own way: the set of gestures, tics, behaviours more or less pointless, that purposeless form that Kantor would have called the mix of daily reality.

We can look for something of Kantor in all those who practise a theatre (also gaining popularity) not aimed at a mere interpretation of pre-existing characters, conceived by an author, but at bringing to the fore actors from other spheres or disciplines, figures ‘taken from life’, real people, who are ‘found’, rich in artistic truth or existentially deeper.

We can look for something of Kantor in all those who recognise the expressive value of the raw material (of whatever origin); material taken as it comes, not treated or reworked aesthetically. We can look for it in all those who want to treat the stage as a physical and mental place where you do not reproduce defined environments, but where the matter accumulates and expands, giving form and tracing its borders.

We can look for something of Kantor in all those who come to the theatre from the visual arts, painting, design, video art – like most Italian directors of the new generation – and who view the language of the performing art as a space of a non-narrative construction as well as of a dazzling metaphorical synthesis.

We can look for something of Kantor in all those who aspire to act without acting, act in order to empty the content of any introspective and psychological resonance. We can find something of Kantor in all those who draw from the ancestral rites of atavistic religiousness to introduce us to the mystery of life and death.

We can find something of Kantor in all those who may know nothing about him or who know him only from hearsay, but whose work, it is reasonable to assume, Kantor would have understood or appreciated its intentions.

Maybe what we find will be distant from him, but this will be something that, without his example, would have probably never come into being at all. Awareness of the paths Kantor has opened will help us to understand better many of the phenomena happening now. And a better understanding of these phenomena will help us to appreciate Kantor better as a bold and prophetic forerunner.





***Tadeusz Kantor,***  
**Krakow, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1990 – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2010**

*Loriano Della Rocca*

Leaping back twenty years in time, it is hard for me to put together the words to justify picking up the thread of a story (a thread never lost in my mind) that takes me back to Krakow, Poland, to my long experience with Cricot 2 and the day Tadeusz Kantor left us, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1990. It isn't for lack of things to say, mind you, quite the contrary: in fact, much of it is still so clear in my mind that I run the risk of losing myself in a whirl of memories. My problem, now, is the fear that I will be unable to master the wealth of past memories and pick out a logical selection of meaningful recollections to share during this celebration. So I will try to proceed to deliver a clear and concise tribute, focusing on Tadeusz Kantor as an artist and on what I have gained from this long experience, without giving way to banal personal anecdotes from that intense time.

I must admit that I find myself in the grasp of a profound conviction that explains my hesitation in writing: to have spent a great deal of time with Tadeusz, sharing moments of grace but also of weariness, periods of stagnation and, at times, even tedium; to have experienced the amalgam of humanity and driving force of *genius* and *intemperance* that emanated from him, to have intimately shared those instants of tension or euphoria during which something marvellous or something monstrous might take shape – all of this, unfortunately, prevents me from describing in clear and simple terms the alchemy by which, *from the Master's hands*, a sublime masterpiece would spring forth. This is the reason why I hesitate to recount my experience.

Let me put it this way: at the very moment that ART, in general, attains its perfect shape, *shows itself* and reveals its greatness in a tangible form, it also hides within itself, rendering inexpressible the combination of elements that produced it. I was there when the magic took place, I was part of it, and I am deeply convinced that I understood what 'happened'. Yet, no matter how hard I struggle to put the pieces together, I still fail to arrive at a logical, communicable summary of how the *miracle of creation* was achieved. That is, I am unable to grasp the exact formula and offer it to the world so that whoever possesses the necessary talent may reproduce it.

Therefore, in my role as a participant in, and witness to, Tadeusz Kantor's work, I can only offer personal, *simple* snippets of information (theatre scholars

may provide a more *complex* input), with the proviso that the few things that I have to say on the subject are the product of my own perceptions and are by no means objective. I feel better, now that I have explained the cause of my discomfort. Everyone expects to hear ‘how it really was’ from those who were there, but I can only tell you something incomplete, just a part of it, perhaps only half the story. There! I got it off my chest.

So now I can attest that Tadeusz Kantor possessed that mixture of genius and solid experience – or would you prefer *healthy obsession?* – which, alongside an original combination of convictions, worldly wisdom, spirituality, profound knowledge of his times and so much more, made him into what is known as... an extraordinary artist! And I would like to share with you the deep feeling I had at the time, which has been reaffirmed over the past twenty years, that Tadeusz Kantor’s stage directing techniques, aesthetics and poetics were destined to remain a definitive benchmark even after his death. This has proved true for those of his colleagues who continue in the theatre and for a multitude of other actors and artists as well as for all those young people today who choose the stimulating challenges of the theatre as an art form.

As obvious as this may sound, I can’t help saying that those ten years spent with Kantor and Cricot 2 between 1980 and 1990 were among the most important and significant in my life. Let me add, without false modesty, that at the time I even felt *inadequate* to the task. Indeed, this great opportunity initially brought about a complete reversal of my universe: everything I had been was turned upside-down. I had to subject myself to repeated trials that pushed me to the very limit. Fortunately, and despite the hardships involved in meeting the continuous demands of that remarkable artistic adventure and of Tadeusz himself, I understood the fundamental importance of such a challenge. Thus, I accepted it as unique and unquestionable. But in the midst of such an intense experience was the security and protection that Tadeusz Kantor offered all of us actors by bringing us to the best stages all over the world to experience the glamour of the theatre of the time: it was like a daydream. I must admit that the demanding nature and the challenge of working with Tadeusz was also accompanied by considerable repercussions in terms of inner well-being and personal growth.

As I now try to describe, in a modern sense, the ‘thread’ that still binds to Tadeusz Kantor all those who worked with him, I wonder: how can I take advantage of this twentieth anniversary celebration to help restore to the limelight the inspirational force behind his work? I’ll start by describing some intense moments I experienced just a few hours after his death, to help you understand the vital gift he left me, and how intriguing and fascinating it was to observe in Tadeusz the continuous flow between reality and stage invention.

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What I am about to tell you focuses on that day, December the 8<sup>th</sup> 1990, which put to an end my own and the other actors' collaboration with Tadeusz Kantor. It will give you a sense of the place and cultural environment in which Tadeusz Kantor used to work, aspects of his personality, his role as an artist, and the relationship that existed between him and us. Just a few things that may, however, bring you closer to the creative atmosphere we inhabited both on and off the stage.

This atmosphere consisted of a ceaseless to-ing and fro-ing between life's highs and lows, so that, amid the unmasking and reconstruction of a variety of human experiences, in the sounding of their crudest and basest meanderings and the scaling of their highest achievements, the combination of obscurity and sublimity in which we are unawares immersed, could every day be revealed on stage.

To have succumbed to the horrors of history, and then to Death, that Mistress whose presence was accepted inside our troupe's eccentric caravan as a *possible* guest, but only within the game-playing of the theatre – a character to rub shoulders with and yet to keep at arm's length, all within a profoundly cathartic fiction, in a rehearsal of sorts – perhaps, for that greater challenge awaiting both players and the audience: the battle of life!

Here are the facts: on that day, when we heard the news, I, the other Italian actors and the French actress<sup>1</sup> from the company hurried to the hospital mortuary where Tadeusz was (where numerous Polish actors had already arrived). The Master was wheeled before us into a squalid little room inside a dilapidated building; he was laid out on a worn-out, faded white stretcher, already inside that *reality of the lowest rank* dear to him. The way the nurse was pushing the shabby trolley and Tadeusz's own posture and readiness to play his part reminded me for an instant of the Caretaker character in *The Dead Class*. Tadeusz had been placed before us head first, laid out on the trolley and covered by a blanket. So, it was true: Tadeusz was really dead! We were all still incredulous. It was tempting to touch his surprisingly relaxed, waxy white face, all too reminiscent of those of the dummies Tadeusz had obsessively, for so many years, attempted to create: *alive-but-dead, dead-but-alive*. It was tempting to implore him gently: 'That's enough, Tadeusz. Now, stand up.' Instinctively, though I knew it was pointless, I followed the impulse and stretched my hand out to his forelock of hair that, incongruously for the time and place, hung untidily in mid-air over his forehead. After touching it gently, I slid my hand down to stroke his cheek. 'Come on, Tadeusz, stop playing games. Get up – let's get started again.' No. His cheek was too cold. Tadeusz's body was there, but Tadeusz was with us no more.

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1 Marie Vayssière.

We were all terribly sad, but not dispirited. Something inside us wanted to resist the evidence and – as we used to when on the stage – alongside him, once more, for the last time defeat the infamous adversary – Death! So when the visit was over, we left with a sweet sensation: Tadeusz had left us, but – I cannot put it any other way – he would nevertheless stay with us.

And now I come to the funeral, which I remember as magnificent. It was cold, as always. We Italians always feel a perishing cold in Poland, especially when the wind blows from the east – generated by some powerful eastern maelstrom. An icy, unyielding wind that systematically pierces every part of your body that isn't covered with thick layers of clothing, and defeats all attempts to repel its attacks. Then, before you have time to even think how to free yourself from such an annoyance, a *maternal breath* pushes you towards a bar, a church door, or the entrance of a museum, any place you can find relief in the wonderful warmth that welcomed you everywhere in Krakow's public places in those days.

Many people had come to pay homage to the Master and their numbers filled the streets around Cricoteka, the location of the Cricot 2 headquarters and company archives. For years, Tadeusz Kantor had come and gone through these doors at a hurried pace, as if chased by who-knows-what thought or called forth by some unimaginable, pressing purpose. In that last period, an assistant used to follow in his wake, matching his pace and carrying the Master's huge briefcase filled to the brim with stage direction notes and sketches of props and characters from the shows. Tadeusz strode confidently ahead while the other, walking behind, was sure of one thing only: that he must follow unnoticed, grazing the wall. Their comical gait later inspired my performance in Kantor's last play, *Today is My Birthday*, in which I had to follow Tadeusz in the impossible role of his 'shadow' on the stage.

Even more impossible, for me, has been performing that role without him on the opening night and throughout all the other performances in theatres during the two-year tour organised by Tadeusz, in addition to the theatrical revue in his memory at the 1991 Venice Biennale. The last performance of *Today is My Birthday* took place in Szczecin, Poland, in 1992 – the end of the line, everyone back home. The story of Tadeusz Kantor and his Cricot 2 company ended there. No-one could take the place of the Master. That's how it is with great people. That's where the future of his work started, fuelled by the strong memory of his creative will.

There. I have told you everything I felt like sharing of those moments. It's now up to all those who remain fascinated by his work to allow themselves stay under his spell and to keep alive what they consider topical in this artist of genius and his theatre.

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Lastly, I'd like to point out a few aspects of Tadeusz Kantor's creative techniques on the stage and of his relationship with us actors, which I think are worth keeping in mind. For instance, I still feel the very vivid impact produced by his writings – or shall I say his manifestos? Long lists of theories and stage practices through which he announced each day the goal we should aim for. Endless writings, material, and references. In great quantities, old pictures; historical and personal facts; drawings, many drawings; mottos or outlines of artists who had inspired him or whom he considered travelling companions: Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Graig, Diego Velázquez, Veit Stoss, Wsiewolod Meyerhold. These, according to Tadeusz, were the co-ordinates through which the actor could grasp the theoretical frame of the play, and then immerse himself into the creative melting pot. We were all supposed first to learn, and then to 'burn' (only as actors and only within the fiction acted on stage!). We had to be well aware that being an actor is a complex game of presence, lightness, vulnerability, skill, and vigour... like tiptoeing over the ruins of the world, one might say! But careful: don't overdo it. Only 'restraint'. No frills, no inertia.

We played together but from two different shores. From his, Tadeusz dictated the strategy and modes of attack on creation; while we, from ours, tried to understand where he was heading and follow the path he indicated, putting into it as much of ourselves as possible. He didn't want us to be submissive. Deep down he incited us to betray him and present our own ideas. Tadeusz challenged us to a difficult game, in which we were nearly on equal terms with him! He expected the actor to surprise him. All in all, his definition of the 'Theatre of Death' translated on stage into a game of vitality, intelligence, and cunning – so as not to fall into the net of certain (apparent) contradictions; a game that required a wholehearted reaction to stalemate, to emptiness, to the kind of despair that grasps you when you have nothing in your hands – when you can only count on life itself!

And to conclude, let me quote once again Tadeusz's famous line: 'On the stage, you must not be alive, but dead – that is, dead, but alive!' Quite a brain teaser, isn't it? An entire world lies hidden inside, and it can even be fun.



# The Actor in Kantor's Theatre: A Visionary's Questions, a Practitioner's Answers and a Contemporary Post Script

*Krzysztof Miklaszewski*

The run-of-mill stereotype fed to Polish society and reinforced by Polish art critics is as follows: Kantor's Theatre is the Man Himself... and nothing else besides. The 'nothing else' refers to the actor, treated as an object, on a par with all the other cogs in Kantor's machine. That much is clear when browsing through the impressive collection of countless theatrical reviews exhibited to the public by Cricoteka Archives, in enlarged form, following Kantor's own practice. Even if a review does comment on the issue of the actor in Kantor's theatre, this is limited to a description of the character – the visual aspect, entirely subjugated to the omnipotent creator, present on the stage. The real face of the creator, and that is what a Cricot 2 actor was, is almost never allowed to peep out from under the thick layer of make-up that Kantor applied liberally. In my studio TV programme *O kondycji aktora* [About the Condition of the Actor], Kantor confessed:

I revere a good actor. An actor is perhaps the only kind of artist to evoke respect and admiration. (...) I never manifest my love for actors. (...) I don't like the word 'love'. (...) They may even be astonished at this confession of mine. But this is how it is.<sup>1</sup>

I showed no astonishment in that conversation with Tadeusz Kantor. For me, Kantor was a true Artist of the Theatre, who put into practical action the manifestos of his creative faith.

This 'confession of love' directed at his actors, who – as the entire Cricot 2 company (as Kantor emphasised in the conversation quoted here) – worked with 'a colossal risk on their part' and with a 'colossal devotion', usually 'gratis'<sup>2</sup> – was, after all, part and parcel of the anti-commercial structure of his theatre. 'Cricot 2 Theatre incessantly contested (...) the common principles of apparent organisation, and in reality, did not take any notice of the laws of the creative process and imagination' – this is how the artist articulated, loud and clear the 'deeper sense' of such a stance in response to my question. And he added, reading out a couple of sentences from one of his manifestos: 'The structure of the Cricot 2

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- 1 A statement by T. Kantor in a studio TV programme with K. Miklaszewski *O kondycji aktora*, prod. by OTVP Krakow, in two versions: 1978 and 1984. The text: K. Miklaszewski, *Tadeusz Kantor. Między śmietnikiem a wiecznością*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 209–210.
  - 2 *Ibid.*, p. 209.

Theatre assumes that working in the theatre has to be creative. It does away with an artificial, rigorous differentiation between work and its results, rehearsals, and the spectacle proper.<sup>3</sup> This was the means by which Kantor – who practised his craft in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – put into practice the romantic rebellion of the beginning of that century, which expressed a poignant indictment of European civilisation. This is why Kantor chose to write the word ‘actor’ with a capital ‘A’. This is why he paid homage to the Actor in a poignant manifesto. This is why he painted such a striking figure of the Actor in the following statement:

The Actor – a naked image of man, exposed to the public gaze, with his face elastic like rubber.

The Actor – a country-fair showman, a shameless exhibitionist who simulates his laughter and his tears and the functioning of all his human organs, the passions of his heart and mind, the excesses of his stomach and his penis, his body exposed to all possible stimuli and dangers.

The Actor – a semblance of a human being, an artificial model of his anatomy and his mind, one that rejects dignity and prestige, pilloried and exposed to ridicule, close to the dustbin and eternity, living only by his imagination that instils in him both a state of permanent insatiability for all that exists in reality, beyond the world of fiction, and a sense of never-ending nostalgia that drives him on an eternal quest.

The Actor – an Eternal Wanderer – without a home or a place to call his own, seeking in vain a safe haven, one who never parts from his luggage that contains all his hopes and illusions, with all their richness and their fiction, which he guards possessively and with no holds barred against intolerance and indifference.<sup>4</sup>

These words, first uttered in a TV programme which was a resumé of the artist’s path in the mid-80s, took by surprise all those who had pigeon-holed Cricot 2 Theatre in Krakow as a ‘painter’s theatre’ or an ‘artist’s theatre’.

Kantor’s Actor, commonly identified with mannequins and dummies that often appeared by his side, was a pleasing object of many critical studies and interpreted to be a robotic, exploited, devoid of any mind of his own, non-autonomous stage slave. Additionally, a Cricot 2 actor was presented – even by the performers themselves – as a ‘victim’ of an avant-garde executioner. It is enough to recall that the Janicki twins, closely connected with Kantor’s theatre, in their *Dziennik podróży z Kantorem* [Diaries of Travels with Kantor] declared themselves ‘tormented victims of the aggression of that *actor-eater*’. Yet, no-one has highlighted the fact that around Kantor there gathered quite a numerous group of people, and not just anybody, but people with household names, who – in the ‘love clinch’ of artistic collaboration – survived in that lowly status for over

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3 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

4 T. Kantor, *Kondycja aktora*, in: T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 2000, pp. 387–388.



twenty years. Some of them even lasted long enough to notch up their thirtieth anniversary of working with Kantor and to see a modest anniversary celebration.

Similarly, no-one has drawn the correct conclusions from the principle of 'artistic adventures' which prevailed in Cricot 2. After all, in his 'love and hate' stance, Kantor adored his actors to the same extent that he was jealous of them and their artistic success, treating them at the same time as his... property. And not only in artistic sense. Where had the Cricot 2 actors sprung from, anyway? This was a question that cropped up in almost every press conference all over the world. That's why one has to start by answering it so as to be able to get to the core of the condition of Kantor's actor.

The Cricot 2 company had always been composed of 'five human circles', differentiated by profession. The first four had been formed by tradition. A double tradition, to boot: the artistic tradition of the European avant-garde and the practice of Cricot 2's predecessor in particular. Let us not forget that Cricot 2 took its name from the pre-war Cricot. That actors' theatre had been born in Krakow as early as 1933 and functioned until the war.

There, the leading lights were prominent artists: a co-founder of Cricot was Józef Jarema, an outstanding painter and theoretician, and it was his sister Maria Jarema who resurrected the name of the theatre in 1955, with Kantor as a very compliant assistant in her endeavour. And it was there, in the pre-war Cricot, that the blueprint of the personality model of the post-war Cricot company led by Kantor had been shaped. Taking over Cricot 2 after the death of Maria Jarema, Kantor immediately began to shape it artistically according to his own vision; he stuck, however, to the tried and tested methods of artist selection in assembling his own company.

The four circles of Cricot 2 actors were: professional actors, painters and artists representing other fields of visual art, critics and students at diverse faculties. That is how things were before the war, in Cricot, when – next to the theatrical star – Władysław Woźnik, there would appear on the stage Maria Jarema and Henryk Wiciński, while Jacek Puget (who was to become an outstanding sculptor) was aided with futurological recitation set to music by Jarema's right-hand man – a director-cum-Polish-literature-expert, the multilingual Władysław Józef Dobrowolski, surrounded by a throng of female medical students.

Things continued in a similar vein after the war. 'The old pros' from the Sary Theatre (including Jerzy Nowak, Stanisław Gronkowski, Jan Güntner), from Grotteska Theatre (such as Mirosława and Stanisław Rychlicki, Barbara Kober) and Bagatela Theatre (Zofia Kalińska, Maria Górecka), performed side by side with well-known individuals from the world of visual arts (Maria Stangret, Kazimierz Mikulski, Zbigniew Gostomski) as well as those who were only just entering

that world (Wacław and Lesław Janicki, Jacek M. Stokłosa, Andrzej Welmiński, Roman Siwulak).

They were accompanied, on stage and beyond, by art critics who set the tone for galleries and published with Kantor or about Kantor (Mieczysław Porębski, Hanna Ptaszkowska, Wiesław Borowski, and the author of the present text). Finally, alongside high-ranking technical workers who, in time, took on acting tasks, a number of students from Krakow colleges and university also appeared.

In Cricot 2's practice – and this was a new departure – another, fifth category of performers, 'actors/non-actors', appeared: ready-made, off-the-peg, 'available' individuals. Following the principle of using ready-mades, Kantor took on people literally from the street.

Such a human collage provided its creator with incredible potential. First of all, it did away with the 'professional' barriers, sanctioned by tradition, and based on 'protection of the profession'. Even more significantly, however, it built tensions: physical and intellectual. For Kantor, the actor was more than merely a performer, working on the presentation of a particular activity, which he was supposed to render as precisely – thus, as professionally – as possible. Kantor's actor was to be a co-creator of the model of a different, new form of expression that should accompany on each and every occasion the process of the creation of the theatre which would not even for a moment leave the realm of art. And so, in his work with Kantor, the actor was meant not only to comprehend perfectly the transformations that took place in the artist's work, but also stimulate them through his presence and expression. Kantor demanded that the actor be not only gifted and capable, but also aware and pro-active.

Another dimension derived from the human transposition in Kantor's theatre was the clash of the professional, of one sort or another, with a 'rough and ready' individual, a 'natural' shaped by his life, whose presence on the stage was a continuation of his 'being' rather than 'acting'. The tension created by Kantor, who had obliged such diverse personalities also to become actors, provided scope for mutual osmosis. It was the professional's responsibility to pay particular attention to each reaction of the 'ready-made' individual and to tune in his 'acting' accordingly; in turn, the 'off-the-peg' non-professional – so as to be able to make any appearance at all with his 'being' – had to, with time, acquire the basics of the acting craft.

By the end of the 1980s, all four circles of Cricot 2's company (Kantor having worked with those at its core for over twenty years) had become impossible to differentiate one from the other by the audiences in the process of the 'genetic integration' of the company of actors. In this way, the Kantorian Actor had been created, a species intuitively recognised as such, although not to be found in any classifications.

To get to the bottom of what it was that made Kantor's company, one must take into account two more elements, linked to the role of the actor in the structure of the stage setting. The first of these – a mythologised presence of Kantor on stage – was rarely referred to, for, shall we say, tactical reasons; both critics (who were simply banned from Kantor's spectacles) and actors were very much wary of the artist's reactions to them, so they were inclined to interpret Kantor's presence in a one-sided way, sticking to the chapter-and-verse of the director's own manifestos. This presence had been invested with varying significance; crucially, it had been accepted that it had a 'happening' function: Kantor himself needed to be present throughout the spectacle in order to be responsible for it. This is how the director tended to view his own stage persona.

In the TV programme previously referred to, Kantor emphasised this explicitly:

I have to be on the stage. What's the point of my on-stage presence? Well, in the most profound sense, the reason is, so to speak, ultimate. I have to be with them in, as the saying has it, in their hour of need. For me, the spectacle is the final hour of need. The moment preceding expiry, the moment before death. I have to be present, as if before a firing squad. The spectacle – for me – is like an execution. And I simply cannot leave them on their own.<sup>5</sup>

The most interesting interpretations of Kantor's presence, however, brought to the fore by critics, were the perceptions of Kantor as the conductor of the company and Kantor as an actor as well as Kantor as an acting role model for the other actors. It was clear that the company emulated many of the Master's means of expression. The most legible for the audience were those of Kantor's 'tricks' that destroyed the stage illusion: an interruption of the acting, a sudden movement of the body, a change of rhythm, taking up and breaking off contact with the audience, Kantor's interference with the behaviour of individual actors and also – this being quite a striking element – Kantor's mocking of audience participation. All these devices were incorporated both into the structure of the spectacles and into the package of the stock behaviour and physical movement of the Kantorian Actor (figs. 1, 2, 3).

In the last decade of Tadeusz Kantor's work, that is to say, dating from the rehearsals for the spectacle *Wielopole, Wielopole* in Florence, the ambiance of his company of actors became additionally complicated with the arrival of non-Polish native speakers. This created new tensions, with the result that the collaboration was not based on the language, as the Italians and the French actors rarely used speech during spectacles, but on the notion of the meta-linguistic intentions of the collective presence on the stage. For the Poles, Italians and the French, this was a tremendous lesson in partnership – vital in the functioning of the fine-tuned

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5 A statement by T. Kantor in a TV studio programme, see: footnote 1, qtd aft.: K. Miklaszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

mechanism of Cricot performances. What chiefly determined the character of the actor of Cricot 2, however, was the range of tasks imposed on him by specific productions, starting with Witkacy's *The Cuttlefish*, with the premiere of which (on 12 May 1956) the Artists' Theatre in Krakow was inaugurated – as it happens, repeating the repertory of the pre-war Cricot. In this production by Maria Jarema and Kantor, which triggered an avalanche of accusations of the directors having taken disrespectful liberties with Witkacy, its creators referred to the 'actor and his unique qualities' as one of the elements of the performance. These were the qualities: dynamism, the ability to affect high-frequency psychological and emotional switches, reflex responses and responses infinitely nuanced in their expression.

The informal reality, imposed during the production of *The Country House* (1961), proved to be far more demanding. The emotional states that Kantor insisted on were: 'excitement', 'hallucinatory states', 'maniacal states', 'delirious states', 'convulsive states', 'final agony states', 'spasms', 'rapture', 'suffering', 'pain', 'torture' and 'anger'.

As Kantor's manifestos demonstrate, these states were to be accompanied by the following forms of behaviour: 'debauchery', 'lasciviousness', 'lechery', 'lewdness', 'demoralisation', 'sinful practices', 'scandalous actions', 'shameful actions', 'poor actions', 'banal actions', 'mundane actions', 'sadism' and 'cruelty'. The actors, intermingling with inanimate objects, squashed and 'hung' in a less-than-spacious wardrobe, in their utterances could use the following devices: 'jabbering', 'inarticulate speech', 'crying', 'sobbing', 'choking', 'stammering', 'spitting', 'howling', 'cursing', 'hurling insults', 'talking dirty' and 'talking gibberish'. All this aimed at – before succumbing to, and becoming one with, the omnipotent matter – fighting one's way through it so as to let the world know about one's presence in it.

The Informel Theatre had been preceded by the Zero Theatre, exemplified in Kantor's Theatre by *The Madman and the Nun* (1963). In this production, the process leading towards the 'void' and 'ground zero' assumed: a loosening of logical interconnections, growing indifference towards the gravitas of events, their invalidation, elimination of all stimuli and manifestations of any more animated activity, 'cooling down the temperature of expression', 'using monotony and inertia', 'undoing of all budding signs of organisation', 'slowing down the tempo', 'loss of rhythm', acting 'casually, couldn't-care-less', acting 'by stealth', acting by 'non-acting'. These activities, integrally linked to specific actors' tasks, were to be conditioned by specific psychological states of the 'players', such as: apathy, melancholy, exhaustion, memory loss, mental distraction, nervous breakdown, impassiveness, disenchantment and boredom.

Actors, pushed to the side of the stage, which was almost totally taken up with the 'aneantisising machine' (a stack of foldable chairs, tied together and in constant movement), found it difficult to be able to deliver their lines at all. By muffling and overpowering their voices, the machine forced them to behave in three basic ways. Firstly, to be anti-active. A distaste combined with reluctance to act made actors turn an incomprehensible text inside out, and in turn, cause it to fall apart. The act of the decomposition triggered a resignation of the dramatic content and, as a result of the absence of a coherent text, the actor went 'numb'. On the other hand, 'acting by stealth' was another way for the actor to come up for air, because while he had been pushed 'outside' and 'humiliated', he continued to act as if to be 'contrary'. He was doing all he could so as not to succumb to the machine. His decision to 'last the course' caused a 'vegetation', a ridiculous economy of movement, saving his strength and carefully measuring out each reaction.

*The Water Hen* (1967) originated in the experiences of the happening, in which, as we know, the actor was an authentic participant amongst the elements of the surrounding reality. In *The Water Hen*, the performer was very closely connected with the 'ready-made object'. For example, a bath full of hot water became the place where the actress was obliged to take a bath again and again, dozens of times. Attached to their objects as if grown into one with them, the actors justified the boundary-free scope of their acting as well as its real freedom and limitations.

The period of the Impossible Theatre, the theatrical incarnation of which was the *Cloakroom*, an adaptation of Witkacy's *Lovelies and Dowdies* (1973), was aptly indicative of Kantor's own strongly held convictions about the actor's creative act. When setting out to define the actor's tasks in the new phase of research, the director of *Lovelies* stated:

On the one hand, there exists the stage conduct, (...) enclosed in its own cycle, not subject to perception, turned 'towards nowhere', 'impossible'. And, on the other hand, there is the deprivation of the spectator of his condition and reason. The position of the spectator is shaky, questioned, corrected and constantly altered. In the theatre, the actor's playing is identified with the concept of presentation. We say: to act the part. However, the 'acting' is neither a reproduction, not reality itself. It is something in-between reality and illusion.<sup>6</sup>

In the cloakroom, where – rather than in the theatrical hall – the audience was placed, the actors of the 'poor theatre' appeared, who in front of the audience attempted to create the drama of the 'legion of metaphysical snobs' endeavouring to win the favour of the Princess of Abencerrajes. This, however, proved impossible, due to the intimidating activities of the brutal Cloakroom Attendants, acting in

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6 A statement by T. Kantor in a TV studio programme *Kronika*, prod. by OTVP Krakow, broadcast on 30 April 1973.

cahoots with the dim-witted Kitchen Hand. It was thanks to these sadists that the ‘cornered audience’ could empathise with the drama of the actors ‘compressed’ into the machine of theatrical terror. Their condition (such as the ‘Man with a Plank of Wood in His Back’ or the ‘Man with Two Bicycle Wheels Ingrown into His Legs’) obligated the actors to perform novel tasks. As Kantor wrote in his *Manifesto 70*, ‘this new actor’:

(...) embroiled in an adventure with reality, discards his traditional skills. He no longer needs them and, indeed, they are an encumbrance. He must, however, possess the ability of great concentration, of being able to focus for a long time on just one activity, have the ability to ‘close in on’ an object, create an ambiance around it. Actors who only represent themselves do not imitate anything, represent nothing, express anything; they only represent themselves, human scraps.<sup>7</sup>

*The Dead Class* (1975), Kantor’s greatest and most significant spectacle, which for many years filled the vacuum of ‘world-class avant-garde’, completed the process of the shaping of Kantor’s actor in his original model. Fascinated by Kantor’s revolutionary discoveries, I tried to describe the images he evoked, akin to a recurrent nightmare of going back to one’s school days. Here are three of the sequences that I shall never forget of that dramatic performance, and its creators – the actors:

In tiny wooden desks, scraps of dusty textbooks piled on the worktop, there sit, frozen in peculiar poses, immobile, staring at those who enter – old men and women. Their clothes, identically cut, are reminiscent as much of a school uniform as of traditional rural garb for the coffin (...).

From the dark backstage portal, a procession of old people emerges, each carrying a corpse of a child. The procession, in its rising clamour of endless repetition of ‘remembered’ gestures, idiosyncratic for each individual, drives the participants to a ‘crescendo’, followed by complete exhaustion. (...)

The School Caretaker – an archetypal figure in a Galician school – has been endowed with two forms of existence, as it were. Oscillating at the boundary of life, he sometimes turns into an inert mannequin; at other times, he livens up, performing a solo rendition of the national anthem of Austro-Hungarian Empire or telling off his ‘eternal pupils’.<sup>8</sup>

These descriptions of the gathering and individual characters can be usefully complemented with this fragment of a conversation with Kantor, which I managed

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7 T. Kantor, *Nowy aktor*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 2000, p. 552.

8 K. Miklaszewski, *Przejmujący seans*, in: *idem, Spotkania z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, Kraków 1992, pp. 43–44.

to jot down during the rehearsals of *The Dead Class*, a month before the Krakow premiere in Krzysztofory:

K. M. [Krzysztof Miklaszewski]: The dead bodies of the children, which the Old People are equipped with, are mannequins. The Caretaker has also been kitted out with a mannequin. This use of the mannequin is not merely coincidental in your work.

T. K. [Tadeusz Kantor]: No, it's not, even though, to start with, this was a sidetrack in my quest. (...) I used dummies in my production of *The Water Hen* (1967). In *The Shoemakers* which I made in Paris (1972) (...) they were a non-material extension, as it were, a sort of additional organ of the actor who 'owned' it. I used masses of dummies in my production of Słowacki's *Balladyna* (at the Bagatela Theatre in Krakow in 1974) to provide doubles for the live characters. In a way, these mannequins possessed a higher consciousness, achieved after the completion of their 'life'. They carried a clear mark of death.

K. M.: One must recall at this point Bruno Schulz's *Treatise on Tailors' Dummies*. As Schulz puts it, the similarity of human body to a material object through its 'essence of materiality, devoid of any traces of the psyche' inevitably leads to the creation of a mannequin. (...) The Father in *Treatise* says that 'we are simply rapt by it, entranced by the cheapness, the paltriness, the tawdriness of the material.'

T. K.: If I deliberately refer to Schulz, then it is precisely in this sense. (...) The mannequins also have the Zone of Transgression.

K. M.: A zone linked to their birth and evolution.

T. K.: Yes. The existence of these creatures, made in the likeness of human beings, almost 'sacrilegious', illegal, is the result of a heretic activity, a manifestation of the Dark, a rebellious, murky side of human activity. Trespass and the Trace of Death as the sources of cognition. And this is where my own message begins.

K. M.: ... which could be called a New Treatise on Mannequins.

T. K.: There is a vague and inexplicable feeling that through this humanoid so like the living person, but devoid of consciousness and purpose, the dangerous message of Death and Nothingness is transmitted – and this is precisely, and simultaneously, the reason for the transgression, the repulsion and the compulsion. (...) An accusation and a fascination. The appearance of a mannequin goes with my increasingly stronger and stronger conviction (...) that life can only be expressed in art through the absence of life, by evoking death. (...) in my theatre, the mannequin must become a *model* which strongly channels the sensation of death and the condition of the dead.

K. M.: In 1907, Edward Gordon Craig wrote: 'I pray earnestly for the return of the image the Über-Marionette to the Theatre; and when he comes again and is but seen, he will be loved so well that once more will it be possible for the people to return to their ancient joy in ceremonies once more will Creation be celebrated homage rendered to existence and divine and happy intercession made to Death.'

T.K.: I don't think that the marionette can replace a living actor, as Craig proposed, and Kleist insists.<sup>9</sup>

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9 K. Miklaszewski, *Umarła Klasa czyli Nowy Traktat o Manekinach*, conversation in October 1975, in: K. Miklaszewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.

The description from November 1975 and the preceding conversation in October signalled that the problem of juxtaposing the mannequin and a living person, something that fascinated Kantor, was no longer enough for the artist. In this 'dramatic séance', Kantor, working together with the actor, and having completed the production of *Cambriollage*, 'where tangible reality extended into its 'invisible extension'<sup>10</sup>, faced the 'impossible theatre'.

Craig was quite unambiguous:

In its present form, the actor's craft is not a sovereign art. At the same time, he moved the discussion in a more general direction: is theatre an autonomous form of art? He replied in the affirmative: theatre is, or at least can be, autonomous, because it governs its own substance. This cannot be true of the actor's body, subject to random emotions, evading the control of the intellect.<sup>11</sup>

This is why – as the English revolutionary of the theatre maintained – 'The actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure – the Über-Marionette (...). The Über-Marionette will not compete with life rather will it go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh and blood but rather the body in trance'.<sup>12</sup>

Kantor was indeed fascinated by the mannequin as 'some additional organ of the actor who owned it'.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, however, his 'medium prototype' – as Leszek Kolankiewicz perceptively described the actors of Kantor's five-part Theatre of Death – did not allow one to acquiesce in the dominance of the Über-Marionette. Shortly before the first spectacle of *The Dead Class* in Krakow's Krzysztofory, Tadeusz Kantor stated:

In order to prove this, I keep observing the image of the appearance of the Actor, suggestively described by Craig. (...) This is how I describe this false situation. Facing those that remain (...), there stands someone who is deceptively like them to look at, but in spite of that (thanks to some mysterious and inspired operation), infinitely distant, shatteringly alien, as if dead, cut off by an invisible barrier – nonetheless, terrifying and unimaginable, whose real significance and horror only manifest themselves in our dreams. As if suddenly brightly lit by a blinding lightning, they have now seen with great clarity the tragically circus-like image of man, as if they have seen him for the first time ever, as if they have seen themselves. That was certainly a, so to speak, metaphysical shock. That live image of man, emerging from the shadows, as if incessantly moving forwards – was a poignant message about his

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10 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

11 Z. Hübner, *Craig wczoraj i dziś*, in: E. G. Craig, *O sztuce teatru*, Warszawa 1985, p. 17.

12 E. G. Craig, *The Über-Marionette*, in: *idem*, *On the Art and the Theatre*, London 1957, p. 81 and 84–85.

13 K. Miklaszewski, *Umarła Klasa czyli Nowy Traktat o Manekinach*, in: *idem*, *Spotkania z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, *op. cit.*, pp. 39–40.



new, human condition; only human, with its responsibility and its tragic scale of death that measures out his fate, unrelenting and ultimate.<sup>14</sup>

Three years later, in a conversation which I recorded in Adelaide in Australia, which I have only come across again this year, never published previously, and in which Kantor verified the artistic lineage of *The Dead Class*, the artist commented:

Craig's idea of replacing a living actor by a marionette – an artificial and mechanical creature – in the name of preserving the perfect cohesion of a work of art has now become obsolete. Why? Due to the experience that has destroyed the structure of a work of art through a continuous introduction of 'alien' elements in collages and assemblages, through the acceptance of 'ready-made' reality in Dadaism, through a complete acceptance of the role of randomness – that is to say, through all that Craig fought against and all that symbolism negated, and finally, through placing a work of art on the fine dividing line between life and artistic fiction. In this way, the scruples from the beginning of our [20<sup>th</sup>] century have become insignificant.<sup>15</sup>

This is what the equation Actor = Dead signifies in Kantor's theatre, the equation that eradicates the 'futurology of the über-marionette'. In the context of the theatrical past, known to us from archaeological discoveries and anthropological analyses, it is apparent that Kantor was right. Especially so, since both the point of departure and the point of arrival of Kantor's Theatre of Death were supposed to be a two-way ritual: from and to its participant – the spectator.

Kantor is one of only a handful of contemporary artists who have succeeded in translating into the idiom of the theatre the forgotten memory that festers in each one of us like an unhealed wound. And this is perhaps the essence of the cathartic role of Kantor-as-Charon who brings back the dead (...)<sup>16</sup>

as Jan Kott wrote about Kantor, or rather, about Kantor's point of arrival in the process of the beautiful – anthropologically speaking – evolution: from fascination with the dummy to its clash with man. A consequence of such 'wrestling' with humanoid dummies has made it possible to reconnect with dead ancestors who – in the name of continuity – have imposed, and will continue to impose, on the actor the condition of someone dead.

However, in Adelaide in 1978, Kantor explicitly warned against uncritical fascination with 'social and religious rituals', 'communal ceremonies' and 'communal ludic actions' – the fascination which has become part and parcel of the spectacles of such artists as Brook, Grotowski or Wilson. This is why at that time Kantor

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14 K. Miklaszewski, *Umarła Klasa czyli Nowy Traktat o Manekinach*, in: *idem, Spotkania z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, Kraków 1992, p. 40.

15 *Rozmowa o Umarłej klasie z Tadeuszem Kantorem. Rozmawiał Krzysztof Miklaszewski*, Adelaide, February 1978, Kraków 2010, nos. 2–3, p. 73.

16 J. Kott, *Pamięć... ale jaka pamięć?*, in: *idem, Kadysz. Strony o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, Gdańsk 1997, p. 37.

repeatedly stressed that the actor becomes ‘noticeable’ (just as someone dead does once he has died) only because ‘he has taken the risky decision to tear himself away from the cult community, that’s to say – from society.’ Kantor added: ‘This is precisely the function that the actors of *The Dead Class* have.’<sup>17</sup>

This significant statement by Kantor was developed further in a comment by a former dean of the Milan theatre school, who frequently invited Kantor to work with his students. In my latest film about Kantor’s reception in Europe, the outstanding Italian theatre expert and pedagogue Renato Palazzi comments:

Emphatically, Kantor did not love death. Kantor deeply loved life. (...) He always became irritated if anyone mentioned death in his presence. For him, in reality, death was an extraordinary theatrical tool. A tool that served for talking about history and about our time.<sup>18</sup>

## Post Script

The issue of the Actor in Kantor’s Theatre would not be complete without this Post Script. This is one of the high points of my conversation with Kantor in June 1981:

Krzysztof Miklaszewski:

There are two points of access that are particularly important for the world reception of your art: *The Dead Class* (1975) and *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980).

Tadeusz Kantor:

Indeed, they are ‘points of access’ (...) which are so important that, for the first time, I’m beginning to dream about preserving them. It’s because they’ve reached such a *universality* of reception that they should be left as my legacy. (...) I would like them to exist in the future, through the actors’ performance, when I am no more.<sup>19</sup>

It’s a good thing, then, that – taking no notice of the orthodox critics – Kantor’s actors did not allow themselves to be shooed onto the funereal pile, bidding farewell to us alongside their Master. It is just as well that the company completed Kantor’s final production *Today Is My Birthday* (1991), which, after its Paris premiere, added splendour to the Theatrical Encounters in Warsaw and toured many international venues. It was fortuitous that three groups were created: Zofia Kalińska’s Akne Theatre, the Janicki brothers’ Twins Compagnia, which Janusz Jarecki and Bogdan

17 *Rozmowa o Umarłej klasie z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, op. cit., p. 75.

18 R. Palazzi’s comment in K. Miklaszewski’s documentary film *Tadeusz. kantor @ europa. pl*, prod. by Studio Filmowe KALEJDOSKOP, Warszawa 2010.

19 K. Miklaszewski, *O sytuacji, awangardzie, odnowie, szczęściu, prawdzie i sukcesach*, conversation in June 1981, in: *idem, Spotkania z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, Kraków 1992, pp. 90–92.

Renczyński joined, and finally a company assembled by Andrzej Welmiński, some dozen-strong, and that these groups remained active artistically for a number of years. It was a good thing, too, that Stanisław Rychlicki, Mirosława Rychlicka, and Roman Siwulak lent a hand to foreign companies, and that the Italian and French Cricot actors did not abandon the stage. It was also good, that a number of Cricot 2 actors of many years' standing (including the present author) had the courage to run, in Poland and in other countries, workshops in Kantor's method acting. This was all to the good, but, with the hindsight of twenty years, it is now clear that we have not done enough. The younger generation is already asking questions of us: What should we be taking up from Kantor's work with actors? How could we follow in his footsteps, without copying or stealing his ideas? After all, Kantor did teach us that in art, continuity involves praxis, and praxis – work and courage. Have we forgotten this?



# Function and Significance of the Theatre Company in the Development of Cricot 2 Productions

*Andrzej Welmiński*

## 1. The structure and *modus operandi* of the company, or the unique theatrical concept

Tadeusz Kantor's theatre has generally been considered his greatest work of art. Today, after more than two decades that have passed since the artist's death, the question continues to arise whether his theatre was merely ephemeral, now no more than a museum curiosity, a specimen that can be investigated, analysed and interpreted but can no longer function; or whether it is the case that there are some aspects of it that remain topical and inspirational and that could be of use to contemporary artists. What does Cricot 2 represent for the contemporary creative community or what could it become? What has remained of it? To what extent does it continue to be a contemporary concept, or an *impossible* one? What conclusions can we draw today from its achievements?

There still remain many unknown and unexplored aspects and areas in the opus of Tadeusz Kantor. Although books, articles and academic essays about the artist proliferate, the rising tide of academia has also washed up much nonsense, multiplying both futile speculation and commonly held opinions (often repeated by theatre experts who have never seen the performances and, above all, have not witnessed the process of their production). And the more researchers concentrate on theoretical analyses, the more they ignore something much more important: the way that the Cricot 2 Theatre functioned and our artistic heritage.

In order to understand the phenomenon, we need to get to know the unique concept behind it, both in terms of its praxis and the artistic philosophy, investigate in detail how the performances were produced and gain an insight into the secrets of Kantor's *modus operandi* as well as the manifold significance of the relations and interaction between particular artists and between Tadeusz Kantor and his theatrical work.

### 1a. The company of actors and its tradition

When reminiscing about the performances that he had produced in conjunction with other companies (*The Shoemakers* 1972, *Balladyna* 1974), Tadeusz Kantor

wrote that they were not Cricot 2 Theatre performances, because ‘what disqualifies them, in spite of their Cricotesque character, is the fact that they have been produced in professional theatres, in a non-artistic atmosphere, with all the concomitant sins of dumb institutionalism and dumb bureaucracy...’ What, then, was the Cricot 2 company of actors and how did it function? First of all, it was a non-institutional and informal group. Frequently it was dubbed the ‘theatre of painters’ and thus it is in order to introduce its venerable predecessors.

The tradition of the Cricot 2 Theatre is linked to Krakow. Its origins are to be found in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when, in October 1905, the literary cabaret Zielony Balonik [the Green Balloon] – was created by local poets, writers and artists in Apolinary J. Michalik’s café (known as Jama Michalika) and functioned until 1912 (with occasional performances continuing until 1915).

More than a decade after Zielony Balonik had come to an end, Cricot, the Artists’ Theatre, arrived on the scene – a Polish avant-garde theatre which operated in Krakow between 1933 and 1938 and in Warsaw between 1938 and 1939. The theatre was founded by a group of young artists and avant-garde writers led by Józef Jarema, with Maria Jarema, Zbigniew Pronaszko and Henryk Gotlib.

The trademark of the Cricot productions was their departure from the classical apron stage, with the abolition of the barrier between the actors and the audience. There was some improvisation. The early performances harked back to the tradition of artistic cabaret, whereas later ones could be classified as v theatre; in these productions, the visual side such as the stage set, costumes or the use of light were considered means of expression equally important as the spoken word.

Maria Jarema worked together with Tadeusz Kantor and Kazimierz Mikulski to re-activate the Cricot theatre in 1955, now under the name Cricot 2.

## 1b. Cricot 2 and its actors

Cricot is a theatre of actors, painters, musicians,  
liberated imagination and magnified stage intervention.

Tadeusz Kantor

During the entire history of the Cricot 2 Theatre, there passed through it many outstanding artists whose paintings have made art history. Apart from Tadeusz Kantor, who never failed to emphasise the connection between his Cricot 2 activities and his painting, there were others. Here are some of them.

**Kazimierz Mikulski** painted poetic paintings, full of fairy-tale mysteries, pervaded with a lyrical and at times melancholy ambiance which mellowed the subtleties of the erotic undercurrents. His painting could be said to be related to surrealism, and in particular to the art of Paul Delvaux.

**Maria Jarema**, whilst fulfilling her theatrical passions, did not forget her original artistic work. She created a distinct brand of painting. In her own idiosyncratic way, she succeeded in representing spatial movement on the flat surface of her canvas. She created abstract semi-transparent forms, overlapping on various planes, simultaneously light and complex in their strangely organic geometry.

**Andrzej Pawłowski** was a co-founder of the post-war Grupa Krakowska [the Krakow Group]. In the second programme of the Cricot 2 Theatre, he demonstrated his invention: CINEFORMS. From the interior of a small black tin cabin in which he was ensconced, to the rhythm of accompanying jazz music, he magicked colourful constructivist forms of changing sharpness onto the screen, using two condenser lenses and a projection bulb. He achieved this effect with bits of transparent film, cellophane, scraps of cardboard or a few Christmas baubles. Nobody had done anything like this ever before...

**Zbigniew Gostomski**, professor of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, was a co-founder of the Foksal Gallery, together with the critics and artists Henryk Stażewski and Edward Krasiński. He is one of the most important figures in contemporary Polish art. The roots of his art lie in constructivism and unism, making him close to conceptual and minimal art. In Gostomski's works one can find optical objects, fascinating spatial illusion, geometry, gravity, combinatorics, measures, patterns and models as well as systems of interdependence between structure, scale and proportions.

**Druga Grupa** [the Second Group] consisted of three people: Jacek Maria Stokłosa, Lesław Janicki and Waclaw Janicki. Together they created happenings, conceptual art and environment art which proved to be significant for the Polish avant-garde. In 1973, at the 8<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Young Artists in Paris, Druga Grupa showed their installation *Guarantee 25–35*. The artists, transformed into old men by means of make-up, appeared surrounded by stockpiles of basic food products, candles, soap and other essential supplies intended to provide protection against some vague future development. Jacek Maria Stokłosa is a graphic artist and photographer (his collection comprises unique records of the activities of numerous artists).

**Maria Stangret** was Tadeusz Kantor's wife. To start with, she practised informal-inspired painting. In the 1960s, she produced a series entitled *Continental Landscapes* which led her to question the potential of painting. In the 1970s, this resulted in a number of para-conceptual works (*Chess, Blackboards, Hopscotch*). Since the 1980s, painting-cum-sculpture compositions created in homage to major figures in art, literature and history (dedicated, for instance, to Tadeusz Kantor, Sergei Yesenin or Anne Frank) have had a special place in her art. In these, easel paintings with landscape motifs are juxtaposed with characteristic elements such as rolled-up pages of a school exercise book, tree trunks or leaves.

At first, Roman Siwulak and I exhibited our works together as the **Anonymous Artists**. Later, our artistic paths parted and we started to exhibit separately. Happenings were one of the earliest forms of our activity. We produced a number of them: *A Morning Happening or a Yellow Suitcase*, *Rocks Covered in Glue* and *Antimanifestation*. It is hard to assign our subsequent actions and installations to any particular trend. Going against the conceptual convention of the 70s, they generated different versions of reality. Drawing on the wealth of diversity of all cultural heritage, from ‘old-fashioned’ paintings and great historical trends to artistic novelties, they formed their own attitude to art and to reality.

Grupa Krakowska was a natural community focus for the company. It should be remembered that the Krzysztofory Gallery doubled as the rehearsal hall and the scene of premieres and many performances. The famous oak table in the Krzysztofory Café sported at all times a cardboard sign which read: ‘Reserved for Grupa Krakowska and the Cricot 2 Theatre’.

The Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, which was already well-known in the world at that time, was another place that our group frequented. Many leading artists of the international art scene exhibited there: Alain Jacquet, Allan Kaprow, Arnulf Rainer, Christian Boltanski and Anselm Kiefer. A group of Polish artists was permanently linked with the gallery, including Henryk Stażewski, the mentor of the Polish avant-garde, and also Tadeusz Kantor, Zbigniew Gostomski, Edward Krasiński, Krzysztof Wodiczko and Stanisław Dróżdź. The gallery also hosted (much younger) members of Druga Grupa as well as the youngest there (still at secondary school at the time) – me, Andrzej Welmiński and Roman Siwulak; at first, we exhibited anonymously. Moreover, those two places were closely linked with several great researchers and theoreticians of contemporary art: Mieczysław Porębski, Wiesław Borowski, Andrzej Turowski and others.

### 1c. Exhibitions of artists from the Cricot 2 circle

The individual artistic activity of many of us was just as important as our group work in the theatre company. We were always present at *vernissages* and other art manifestations of our colleagues. Frequently, at the same time as the performances, group exhibitions were organised, which emphasised both the distinctiveness and the relatedness of Cricot 2 artists. During our tours with *The Water Hen* in 1972, Richard Demarco organised a great presentation of Polish art, entitled *Atelier 72* in Edinburgh. Many of the invited artists were also actors of the Cricot 2 Theatre. The greatest manifestation of the unity of painting and theatre, however, was the exhibition *Painters from the Cricot 2 Theatre* in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome (later shown again in the Palazzo Reale in Milan).



In 1978, an invitation arrived to take part in the great exhibition of contemporary Polish art *Polish Avant-garde 1910-1978* in Rome. Negotiations, or rather skirmishes, with the organisers and curators began. The Polish contributors were supposed to act under the auspices of the Museum of Art in Łódź. Kantor was not pleased with such a turn of events. It seemed to him that the achievements of his art and of the Cricot 2 Theatre might become marginalised or, in any event, blurred. After much to-ing and fro-ing, the organisers agreed to a separate presentation of the artists linked with Cricot 2. And so, apart from the paintings by Tadeusz Kantor and the theatrical objects, the Palazzo delle Esposizioni opened its rooms to: Maria Jarema, Maria Stangret, Zbigniew Gostomski, Kazimierz Mikulski, Andrzej Wełmiński and Roman Siwulak. Additionally, a special theatrical action, cricotage *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear*, was planned for the opening of the exhibition. It was then that the characters of the Groom and his Bride appeared for the first time. The figures became a permanent fixture in the subsequent productions, re-appearing in numerous wedding scenes.

Of course, it is not my intention to introduce any form of hierarchy by diminishing the role of artists other than painters. After all, amongst them were poets, theoreticians and actors (one might say, everybody was there!) whose participation in the theatre was an indispensable part of their own work. They all formed Cricot 2 and had a tremendous input into all its productions. This included, for instance, Mira and Stanisław Rychlicki, present in the theatre from its inception to its very end with their brilliant actor creations, or Jan Güntner, who together with Andrzej Bursa presented, within Cricot 2 (such situations did also occur), their own performance *The Carbuncle: Theatre of Horrors*.

#### 1d. A peripatetic circus troupe

Cricot 2 was a part of life rather than a running commentary on life. The inter-relations between life and art were one of the guiding principles of Cricot: 'the theatre is the ground where the laws of art jostle with the randomness of life and this is what gives rise to the most powerful conflicts....' Kantor proclaimed. We took part in the theatre with our entire families. Stanisław Rychlicki and his wife Mira often took their son Artur on tour; the Janicki twins came with their wives, and mine was probably the most numerous family: I and my wife Teresa, her brother Andzik and our son Mateusz... The whole set-up was reminiscent of a travelling circus troupe...

## 2. Group work as a method

We were at all times aware of the risk that we took jointly and of our shared artistic responsibility for each performance. From each participant, Kantor expected total commitment, creative contribution, partnership and co-responsibility for the whole of the work, as well as paying attention not only to one's own acting but to acting with partners, to the functioning of objects and machines, to the costumes and the quality of sound; in other words – to the whole and each of its parts.

The actors' individual talents, skills, characteristics, abilities and, above all, their potential became elements of the theatrical image. When formulating the terms of engagement of the actors in the programme of the Cricot 2 Theatre in Florence, Tadeusz Kantor emphasised:

In the art theatre there is no division of labour and responsibility. Each team member shares in the responsibility and work in all the difficult circumstances which our uncompromising art can encounter. We are an artistic group in which each person is responsible for the entire path of the activity of this theatre.

### 2a. Creating the protagonists

In a sense, all our roles were self-portraits. We all, in some way, were enacting ourselves, we *were* ourselves; we merely put on different costumes and adopted different functions. This was one of the principal methods of the Cricot 2 Theatre. It was both a way of expression and a form of self-definition. This is how Kantor put it in the introduction to the catalogue of my exhibition:

You created stage characters. This is how it is described in the language of the theatre. On one occasion you were a legionnaire and my Father, to boot. On another, you were Veit Stoss. But you cared little for historical convention, you looked as if you had just walked out of that famous dive 'The Green Balloon'. In the end, you rented another dive 'on the other side', 'au-delà', and became its owner. But for me, they were not stage characters. They were your self-portraits...<sup>1</sup>

The character created by an actor was identical with its performer; it was a form of self-presentation. Twin characters, doubles, replicas, split personalities, reflections, repetitions, copies, doppelgangers played a major part; a clear-unclear existence became their chief attribute. It was something more than an *alter ego*: it was an *ego alter*: a different me. These forms would probably have never materialised, had it not been for the creative presence of the Janicki twin brothers.

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1 T. Kantor, *Wstęp*, in: *Katalog wystaw prac Andrzeja Welmińskiego*, Galeria Foksal 1990 and Galeria Krzysztofory 1990.

Here is another example of creation: during his work on *Lovelies and Dowdies*, Stanisław Gronkowski sustained an injury to his spine and had to wear a special orthopaedic collar. As a result, that leather collar became an integral part not only of the costume but of the very character of Sir Grant – a man marked with death, because the device conditioned the way that he moved and acted.

Another interesting topic, worthy of separate research, was the matter of actors filling in for others. Each time such a replacement took place, it occasioned a change in the stage situation – the actors taking over were different and had a different effect on their partners and spectators. For this reason, when Staszek Rychlicki and Romek Siwulak replaced the Janicki brothers as the Cloakroom Attendants in *Lovelies and Dowdies* (in the Edinburgh version), the roles took on a completely different aspect, resulting in scenes and episodes which were never to recur. Similarly, when Zbyszek Gostomski playing the Lame Boy Who Repeats the School Year in *The Dead Class* was replaced by Szczepan (Stanisław Szczepański), the character acquired quite a different expression. As it happened, Szczepan suffered from a condition which could be described as motor hyperactivity. In order to restrain this characteristic of his to some extent, Kantor came up with the idea of fastening Szczepan's shoes to a small platform on wheels which one of the other actors was supposed to pull, with the immobilised Boy Who Repeats the School Year in tow. Kantor, however, had failed to take into account the law of physics known as the first law of motion, which caused Szczepan to keep falling over at the least appropriate moments.

We also played characters and people derived from Kantor's own biography. Another vast topic which I can do no more than acknowledge here is the issue of how we were able to transmit the characters of the 'Dear Absent Ones' – Kantor's own departed kith and kin. The crux was Kantor's reconstruction of his own life history. The artist himself referred to this as sleight of hand, a confidence trick of suspect legitimacy. Hired actors from a travelling theatre were to pretend to be the artist's 'Dear Absent Ones'. This was a trick, a circus act performed as part of a spiritual séance which Kantor himself had arranged. We were partly mediums, partly charlatans. On the one hand, we were enacting the roles of fathers, uncles, mother, aunt; on the other hand, we were ourselves. After a fashion, these stories of Kantor's were completed by each one of us. As we know, Tadeusz had a weakness for falsifying his own history, and such a method suited him very well and often pleased him exceedingly. Accordingly, each actor became, in their own singular way, a co-creator of his individual story.

That was the case with Teresa's and mine roles as Mother and Father in *Wielopole, Wielopole*. Here is how Teresa describes the complex multi-layered process of the evolution of the character, which comprises the actor's individual

characteristics, imagination and also the force of coincidence – in other words, quite a tangled hotchpotch of art, memory and reality:

All the roles which I created in the performances were based on my intuition. Tadeusz gave me precious little guidance. On one occasion I asked him to tell me a little bit more about how he imagined the Angel of Death in *Let the Artists Die*. He replied that he would not say a word, as he did not want to frighten off the spirit of the character. So I asked no more questions; moving on the stage, I kept checking the way that Kantor was looking at me and, when I could feel his acceptance, I developed the characters in the direction that my intuition prompted...

The reality of my life with Andrzej was totally intertwined with the reality of Kantor's performances and I used to think in those days that life without being part of Kantor's art was probably impossible. We went to Florence to show *Wielopole, Wielopole*. The Manifesto with which Tadeusz had confronted us obliged us all to treat his performance, his art as the most important. It was a very difficult programme to carry out; it ordered us, for instance, to subordinate our entire imagination, including our dreams, to the stage production.

I started work on the character of Mother Helka (Kantor's mother) and after a couple of months it transpired that I was pregnant. On the one hand, I was exhilarated; on the other, I was conscious that I could lose my job, my role. I wanted to be loyal to Kantor and to let him know straight away so that he could take a view and, if that was what he wanted, replace me with another actress. I asked Andrzej to have a word with Tadeusz before the rehearsal so that he had a chance to say whether he wanted to carry on working with me.

Tadeusz came to the rehearsal, hugged me in a friendly way and said, 'No problem, this is good, the way that things have worked out is for the best. This means that I am now inside you, because you are playing my mother. You'll see, we shall show them all, all those critics! We shall see how they are going to deal with the fact that the Bride is pregnant'. And so, at the premiere in Florence, I acted whilst eight months pregnant, which showed very clearly and looked intriguing. The Bride was a really absorbing character, veiled, at the mercy of the events taking place on the stage. To me, she was a very moving character; perhaps because our own life had also begun to play a part.

The story told here by Teresa had further consequences. Soon after the premiere of *Wielopole, Wielopole*, our son Mateusz was born. Nine years later, in *Let the Artists Die*, Mateusz played (as one of the actors sharing the role) I When I Was 6 – the self-portrait memory of Kantor as a child. Mateusz appeared on the stage on a specially constructed wooden bicycle-cum-handcart, pulling behind him a chain of 'lead generals'.

It isn't possible to talk about the Cricot 2 Theatre performances without mentioning the creative function of the company as a whole. There are still many mythical misconceptions out there about the director 'shaping' the 'human matter' or 'using actors as paint' (now that is a really fatuous idea!), about actors-as-dummies, devoid of individual traits, just milling about on the stage like spinning tops, and other such descriptions.

The reality is that the creation of a performance is a very complex process, reliant on the joint effort of many people. It is collaborative work – a team endeavour, and the creative process never stops. As Mieczysław Porębski noted:

The leading idea was not working *on* the actor, *on* the role – but collaboration *with* the actor, as independent as the author of the performance and being not so much a performer as a subject in their own right, with their own unique personality, their own path, history and the potential yet to discover. As we know, Kantor's actors would arrive in his theatre from various places and by various routes – from the lofty profession of acting but also from amongst his friends, fellow painters, technical co-workers, institutional critics or rank-and-file members of the audience who, having seen a performance once, then again and again, would eventually stay inside it. If not in that particular one, then in another.<sup>2</sup>

## 2b. Co-creating the concept of the production

Performances were born during rehearsals as well as in our meetings and conversations, and Kantor never failed to make use of a good idea in various ways. Many of us had thought of and personally made a host of objects, costumes or, indeed, whole stage sequences. That was the case with the mannequin, for one. The mannequin first appeared in *Cricot 2* in *The Water Hen*. It was brought along by Staszek Rychlicki, who had made a replica of the eponymous protagonist as a life-size dummy. During the performance, he held it passionately, dancing with it the tango *Bal na Gnojnej* [The Ball at Gnojna Street]. While dancing, he stabbed it with kitchen knives a fistful of which he was holding in the other hand. This is a scene that ought to make it into the annals of the history of the Polish theatre, as Krzysztof Miklaszewski is right to insist.

A camera was a part of my role in *The Dead Class* and I had made it myself, as I did many of the other paraphernalia, machines, objects and costumes. It was a different story with the bed in *Wielopole, Wielopole*. Teresa came up with the idea for that theatrical machine during the early stages of talking about the production, in connection with the scene in which the priest, Uncle Józef, dies. Teresa based her idea on an association with the phrase 'to turn over', a Polish euphemism for dying, and that is how she described the machine to Tadeusz: a machine for dying, a bed that would make it possible to 'turn over'. On one side of it, there would be the priest in his death throes but still alive, and on the other side there would be what had remained of him – his corpse (for Kantor, ever since *The Dead Class*, synonymous with a mannequin).

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2 *Maniacy, Tygodnik Powszechny* no. 13, 1994. The text also appeared in Mieczysław Porębski's book *Spotkanie z Ablem*, Kraków 2011, pp. 146–156.

## 2c. The roles, the texts, the music

By and large, the majority of the texts were created by the actors themselves (in the earlier performances, these had been interspersed with the texts of Witkacy's dramas). That is how Siwulak's songs of the Paris *demi-monde* or his erotic dialogue with such alarming, unpronounceable neologisms as 'wgrzdągiel wgrzdrucha' came into existence... In my case, apart from a few sentences that I spoke in *Lovelies and Dowdies* and a few snippets from Witkacy in *The Dead Class*, basically all my lines were thought up by me. They were mostly monologues; the obscene monologue consisting of vulgar squaddie swearing by Father Marian in *Wielopole, Wielopole* went back to the days when I had been a teenager and hadn't yet known Kantor. At that time, to earn some pocket money during the holidays, I got a job with a renovation team whose job it was to build a privy at the dacha of the director of the Krakow radio station. One of the builders swore non-stop and hardly used any other words regardless of the topic, achieving a highly poetic effect. Most of Marian's role was based on quotations from that builder.

I recall how we all brought in children's counting rhymes to be used in the final scene of *The Dead Class*. We collected over a dozen, then chose the 'trumph, trumph...' Artists from outside the company also had input into creating the text. I remember that Jonasz Stern taught me verses in Hebrew from the *Song of Songs*. To start with, the sequence was to be a part of *The Dead Class*, but what ultimately found its way into the performance was a cheder with the alphabet being said out loud and a lyrical lullaby in Yiddish sung by Maria Stangret.

In one of his interviews, Kantor said:

...I haven't written either *The Dead Class* or my last play *Wielopole, Wielopole*. I have made them in the theatre. (...) to start with, I do prepare a written script, but it is a collage. Usually, I record the rehearsals, telling the actors to follow their own conscience. For example, I tell them: have a big family row. Then each actor starts rowing in their own idiosyncratic way, based on their own personal experience. In that way, I get directly at truth, and not at stylisation of truth. I listen to the recordings and I take notes, make corrections, organise them, and so the text that appears belongs to the actors. Each one of them has personally created their own texts and they are true to life. In the play *Wielopole, Wielopole* there is also a family argument. As is often the case, it has been provoked by inheritance – on this occasion, a legacy left by the priest. The fighting is fierce. I recorded masses of material during the rehearsals, and in the end, after much perseverance, the specific 'text' was created. But it wasn't me who wrote the roles for the actors. The roles were determined by the actors' choices...<sup>3</sup>

Many critics and reviewers have frequently emphasised the musical quality of the productions and the interaction between the actors and the sound. The creators of

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3 *Śmierć jako metafora*, Gideon Bachmann Interview with Tadeusz Kantor, in: *Teatr*, no. 1(768) / 4 January 1981.

that sound are seldom praised, however; nor are the long hours of toil mentioned that go into the complex process of the preparation, from the recording to the live sound during the performance. It should be remembered that the tape-recorded sound (and we mostly used a number of reel-to-reel tape recorders) was closer to that produced by an instrument than by mechanical play-back (it might be compared to the effects of the creative input of today's DJs). Krzysztof Dominik, Tomasz Dobrowolski and Marek Adamczyk were true virtuosos in that field. Marek also threw his voice into the mix in *Let the Artists Die*, singing *Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal*.

It must be clear from the few random examples above that Kantor's performances would have turned out quite differently, had the participants been different. And, as is well known, the *scripts* were created after the event, sometimes even a few years after the premiere, serving as a record of the order of the sequences and episodes. Referring to *Let the Artists Die*, Kantor noted:

There is no plot in the performance.  
 No play has been written to beget this performance.  
 The performance is born of itself.  
 Its living matter is the  
 ACTOR...<sup>4</sup>

### 3. What remains from Cricot 2

Stage objects, costumes, texts and scripts, video recordings of the performances. Such a lot, and yet so little. After all, films cannot convey the spirit and the idiosyncratic ambiance of the performances. Video cassettes do not engage one's emotions the way that a live production would. The matter of the theatre is time, space and action; its antithesis is immobility and passive being. A performance shows not only what is apparent to the viewers' eyes, but it can also give a taste of what is happening beyond the framework of actual perception. A theatrical work is a séance that takes place on stage in front of the audience. Each performance is a distinct world of its own, a separate reality. It lasts in time and space, which invests it with action and its antithesis: immobility and passive being – and this is probably the most appealing aspect of theatrical work.

But the Cricot 2 Theatre has created something much more significant than just spectacular shows – it has created a distinct language with its own syntax, phrases, idioms and style. These features make it universal. It is possible to learn

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4 T. Kantor, *Niech szczęzną artyści*, in: T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, p. 10.

this language and use it. And our work gives me the right to say that it is by no means a dead tongue.

Quite a few Polish critics and theoreticians maintain that, basically, Kantor's theatre is sinking into oblivion, that this kind of art has died a death, that it is not up to date, because there are now newer and better possibilities for the theatre. They add that all attempts to continue such theatrical activity, especially those made by members of Cricot 2, have failed – and a good thing, too! The attitude of those critics is quite bizarre! 'Today's young generation resists Kantor and cuts itself off from him. Nobody has deleted him from the history of theatre, but his work and personality have no real impact on topical art' (*sic!*), opines the art critic Anna Ptaszkowska in the weekly *Wprost*. Fortunately, nothing has died a death, nothing has come to an end, contrary to what many of those critics would have liked.

Although after 1991 the Cricot 2 Theatre has ceased to exist (and even now I have no idea why this has had to be so; it is probably a result of individual interests, incomprehensible squabbles, wrangles over positions and remuneration that have combined to bring about this thoughtless destruction), its actors have remained. They are a dwindling group. Those that are still with us, however, convey – in one way or another – to the next generations what their work in Cricot 2 was really about.

Zofia Kalińska has continued her theatrical activity in a consistent manner in the Akne theatre that she founded in the 1980s. This international group has created many performances, touring the world and winning many awards. The Janicki brothers have formed a two-man team and, as the Twins Compagna, they stage the plays of Samuel Beckett.

Stanisław Michno carries out his own theatrical projects within his Foundation – Interpersonal Inspirations from Theatrical Art (MIST).

#### **4. Actors of the Cricot 2 Theatre**

My participation in Cricot 2 was also an integral part of my own creative work. It has been a natural consequence of my artistic stance to continue the theatrical activity and to begin work on my own performances. At the beginning of 1992, a company of actors coalesced and we started rehearsals. The majority of that 13-strong group were former actors of Cricot 2. The very existence of and the rationale for our team were irrevocably tied to Kantor's theatre, its history and tradition.

The stimulus for action that overcame the resistance and alienation of the team as well as the unexpected (and incomprehensible to me to this day) external pressure



aiming to suppress any activity of the actors was the 40-minute performance *Lekcja anatomii wg T. Kantora – DEBATA* [Anatomy Lesson according to T. Kantor – a DEBATE] (1991).

That theatrical action with the participation of several invited critics and part of the Cricot 2 company, homage to Tadeusz Kantor on the first anniversary of his death, was a voice in the debates and discussions which raged incessantly at that time about whether the Cricot 2 Theatre could continue to exist after Kantor's death and whether we had a 'moral right' to act performances from its repertory.

#### 4a. *Manjacy* (1993), Actors of the Cricot 2 Theatre

In May 1993, the premiere of *Manjacy, czyli Their Master's voice* [Maniacs, or Their Master's Voice] took place – the first complete autonomous performance produced after the death of Tadeusz Kantor with the participation of: A. Wełmiński, M. Rychlicka, T. Wełmińska, Z. Bednarczyk, A. Kowalczyk, S. Michno, E. Bakalarz, W. Michno, A. Wójtowicz, K. Dominik and others. The essence and the message of the performance were conveyed in its programme:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am worried that the announced performance may surprise some of you. It is true that this is verging on a mania: following the tremendous achievements of Tadeusz Kantor's theatre, his actors are taking on yet another production so as to venture once more into the Unknown. Regrettably, they are no longer led by their GUIDE. The path before them won't be easy, there will be numerous traps, and they will have to feel their way around, falling back on their own resources. Why do they not want to live by memories alone of the good old days and content themselves with their past fame?

For my part, I think that art is also an outcome of one's inability to accept pointlessness and nothingness; that one creates art to defy one's own limitations, one's own powerlessness and ineffectiveness, one's own fears...

Behind the cardboard walls of the stage, there is the backstage. There, lay in wait characters invisible but indispensable, without whom nothing could take place. They are familiar to us, yet mysterious and inconvenient. They resist all attempts to define, regulate or classify them. Incomprehensible marionettes ruled by their own stories, fearful even of their own thoughts, they hold firmly onto the threads of curiosity and uneasy anticipation. In secrecy, below the surface of facts, they live with their consequences as if mummified but, even so, not annihilated. They are silent (although they still have the ability to produce sound – just like a resonator) and hidden in the shadows (although they still have the ability to produce an image – just like a mirror); they wait – to make their Grand Entrance, for their resolution. What comes next?

Whence are they to draw the force of contrariness so as to postulate their existence in spite of everything? Whence are they to draw the force capable of transforming cold indifferent universal reason into a fleeting fantasy which seduces the senses

with illusion? Whence? One can only put one's ear to the walls and hear in them the indistinct voice of one's desires, fears and premonitions – the voice of one's meanings and destiny... All one needs to do is to put one's ear...'

4b. *Ameryka czyli nie oglądaj się za siebie* (1995), Actors of the Cricot 2 Theatre

*Ameryka czyli nie oglądaj się za siebie* [America or Don't Look Back] was the performance that followed, based on motifs from a novel by Franz Kafka (fig. 4). The protagonist Karl Rosman is sent away from his family home to America (because he has been seduced by his maidservant). He cannot cope with the new ruthless world; he gets lost and wanders around in a labyrinthine system of complex passages, corridors and walkways which keep growing, rhizome-like. He keeps falling into more and more elaborate traps that fate sets for him. He encounters crooks, confidence men and false friends. He is abused, robbed and humiliated...

The stage production was in no way an illustration or interpretation of the novel, or even less so its adaptation. The concept of the performance had quite a new dimension. The most apt commentary and introduction to it was the text by Mieczysław Porębski placed in the programme of the performance:

The times that we live in are such that it is necessary to state that we are all Jews; we are all traded in Sarajevo; we all find ourselves on a stairway hanging in outer space and leading from nowhere to nowhere; that we will never inhabit the proffered global village but will forever remain the travelling theatre which sneaks through the devastated periphery of the world; the theatre which sets up its juggler's rug not in the squares of Paris – as it used to – but on its haunted fringes and crossroads, where anything can still happen...

4c. *'Minęło, minęło i tak przeminą wszystkie historie'* (2007), Actors of the Cricot 2 Theatre, the MIST Theatre

The next performance *'Minęło, minęło i tak przeminą wszystkie historie'* [It Has Been and Gone, and so Will All the Stories] took as its motto C.G. Jung's warning: 'The past is incredibly real and present / It devours all those who cannot redeem themselves...' Art is always in the present; it is its presence that brings the past to life by discovering its different or related forms. In this way, the past ceases to be something that is indifferent to us, because it keeps being brought into the present. It can happen that after many years, a recollection rises before our eyes that is much clearer than it was then... It can arrive without any warning, without being summoned... We are transported into the past, or rather we import the past into the present. We manipulate the reality of our memory, its fragments, relics and traces, and Cricot 2 is the theatre which is both the subject and the object of that memory (fig. 5).

According to the Droste effect, stories take place within stories, tales within tales... Without a clear beginning or any defined direction.

The performance was constructed from the fabric of the actors' memories, little-known facts and documents from the history of the Cricot 2 Theatre. We drew on the very roots of Cricot 2, which are now beginning to be buried in the mist of time: Pawłowski's *Cineforms*, Andrzej Bursa and Jan Güntner's *The Caruncle: Theatre of Horrors* or Kazimierz Mikulski's *Circus: Sentimental Story* ...

These actors of the Cricot 2 Theatre took part in the performance: T. Dobrowolski, J. Güntner, A. Kowalczyk, S. Michno, T. Welmińska, A. Welmiński, M. Welmiński, K. Welmińska, K. Kowalczyk, A. Dzierża and W. Michno.

#### 4d. *Przeciagi* (2009), Actors of the Cricot 2 Theatre

*Przeciagi* [Draughts] was a theatrical action which accompanied the *vernissage* of the exhibition of my works, with the same title, at the Villa Decius in Krakow (figs. 6, 7).

## 5. Performances produced jointly with other companies

Since 1995, we have carried out projects of theatrical activities in conjunction with professional theatre companies. Again, my wife Teresa has accompanied me in my work. I have come to realise the enormous gulf between the praxis and the creative processes evolved by Cricot 2 and the *modus operandi* of the 'professionals': these are separate forms of art. In order to be able to bring the enterprises to a positive conclusion, it was necessary to convince the actors to give up their routine manner of working and their conventional behaviour, *de rigueur* in their own theatres. We had to arrive at a common language.

The experience was very refreshing, vitalising and creative for them. All the actors began to act unconventionally, they were coming up with their own ideas, bringing objects which could be used in the performance, they stopped glancing at their watches and waiting for the rehearsal to end – not only that, but they stayed on longer, getting more and more involved in the performance as a whole. It was remarkable...

#### 5a. *Demon Ruchu* (1996), Teatr Polski, Bydgoszcz

*Demon Ruchu* [Demon of Movement] was a 'railway compartment' performance, inspired by the strange short stories of Stefan Grabiński. We were interested in: the 'dark zone' of the human psyche, the phenomena of madness and insanity,

split personality, somnambulism, catalepsy and the expectation of something uncanny that lurks, ready to pounce, in the silence and darkness. The travellers in their railway compartments, carried into the areas ‘removed from the command of reality’, spun their yarns...

The thread common to the different episodes was the journey, inevitably progressing to disaster... The performance succeeded in achieving an effect similar to that in the Lumière brothers’ film *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* (more commonly known as *Arrival of a Train at a Station*). The chief stage object was a railway track set up during the performance by the stagehands – just as children might set up their train set in their nursery. The track projected beyond the stage and came to an end above the heads of the audience, thus forming the setting for the culminating point of the performance: a catastrophic crash.

#### 5b. *Schmelzpunkt* (1996), Theater Rampe, Stuttgart

The subsequent performance referred to the relatively recent crime of genocide during the war in Bosnia. The counterpoint was provided by the pastoral poetry of Goethe and Schiller – the singing of water nymphs on the banks of a lake transforming itself in time into a sombre and dark tale about the Alder King. On this occasion, paper – a paper landscape – was the theatrical object of choice. During the performance, water dripping from a special installation on the ceiling caused the wet paper to disintegrate, revealing the actors’ bodies and evoking images of the corpses of the genocide victims emerging from beneath thin layers of earth, mud and snow melting in the spring, and of the exhumation of the bodies...

That year, we also produced a performance with the mysterious name *Anagramma* (1996, Romainmotier Switzerland), inspired by the cryptic anagram placed by C.G. Jung at the end of his *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*.

#### 5c. *The Abattoir*, after Mrożek (1997), Teatr Polski, Bydgoszcz

Listening to the radio is the only pastime of the night guard passing the long hours on duty in his office at the city concert hall. Sławomir Mrożek’s play *The Abattoir* is being broadcast. The night guard’s sleepy mind is taken over by images evoked by the radio play. The characters from *The Abattoir* appear on the stage. At one point, they take over and cease to be controlled by consciousness. The respectable cultural institution faces mortal danger; it turns into a municipal abattoir, a slaughter house where the loftiest ideas and ideals must be destroyed. Even the director falls victim to the struggle for cultural values and... there is no hope...

There are cases of fainting fits and traumatic shocks; women and directors are felled in the stampede...

5d. *Da Liegt der Hund begraben – Germania Halluzinationen* (1997), Theater Rampe, Stuttgart

This was yet another performance produced with the Theater Rampe from Stuttgart. Here, the theme is Polish–German relations, the neighbourly relationship of the two countries, the closing off and the crossing of borders, cultural fusion and differences in social mores, Germanic hallucinations and Polish nightmares, from the earliest times of the mythical Nibelungs right up to the present.

In the small mediaeval town of Esslingen near Stuttgart, there is a museum devoted to *J.F. Schreiber* – the pioneer and propagator of lithography. Schreiber produced wonderful children’s books; when the books were opened, their illustrations became three-dimensional or sometimes mobile. Just such a book was the main theatrical device. Each new page opened a new episode...

5e. *Hydromaschinen Prozession* (2005), the WLB Actors

This was a theatrical action in the form of an open-air procession, carried out as part of the Stadt im Fluss festival in Esslingen (fig. 8). Portable apparatus set in motion by water as well as city buildings complete with the cathedral towers as huge procession floats – these novel theatrical solutions appeared in the performance for the first time.

5f. *...and Ravens Have Not Returned to Their Nests*, Tehran (2011)

This thirty-minute performance based on a Persian fairy tale was prepared with fifteen students of the Drama Department at the University of Tehran as part of a symposium on Tadeusz Kantor.

5g. *Traumatikon* (2011), Rose Bruford College, London

The performance was produced with 45 students. The inspiration was provided by T. Kantor’s drawing *Café Europe*, in which the artist wrote the surnames of the greatest artists – they were all to be found there – arranging them in a spiral. On this occasion, however, it was the students who suggested which characters would fill the café, or rather a dingy dive, complete with their beings, histories and episodes. One of the stories grows to an incredible size and devours the reality of the café like an octopus...

## 6. Workshops

It is telling that no drama, acting or art school or any other higher educational institution in Poland (with the single exception of the School of Acting run by Halina and Jan Machulski, who approached me about my conducting a short course with their students) have tried to get in touch with Cricot 2 actors and ask them to share their unique knowledge and experience, whether by workshops or lectures or at the least by meeting and talking to students.

Nevertheless, although at present the Cricot 2 Theatre method is little known in Poland or known only in a distorted version, interest in the Cricot 2 Theatre in the context of post-dramatic theatre or 'devised theatre' has been growing around the world by the year. The innovative influence of Kantor's theatre has been more and more palpable. These days, education has become our chief occupation. The methods that we employ break out of the conventional confines and are often at odds with the academic approach to the art of acting; the acceptance and enthusiasm of the students and participants are proof that we are on the right track.

We usually begin our sessions with elementary stage exercises, aimed at creating the basic language of communication to be used in the work that follows. Interestingly, outlines of future characters and their fortunes start to form already during that introductory phase. Every time, the workshops lead to a different outcome, and the resultant show or performance are unique.

Together with my wife Teresa, I have co-operated for many years with such educational institutions as the University of Washington, Loughborough University, Rose Bruford College in London and other art centres, giving lectures and workshops on the history, theory, philosophy and stage praxis of the Cricot 2 Theatre. Fortunately, the influence and the achievements of that theatre have retained their force to this day and have been gaining vitality, perhaps becoming all the more topical in contrast to the playing to the gallery, choosing the easy option, cheap tricks or simple artistic ineptitude.

I am not in favour of beatifying Kantor or of treating his opus unquestioningly as sacrosanct. The ideas evolved by Kantor and the Cricot 2 Theatre are so capacious and carry such universal content that we can continue to use them creatively both as our cornerstone and as a point of departure. Kantor himself was always insistent that the ideas of the theatre should not be locked in a 'dead library or museum system, but should live on in the minds and imagination of the generations to come', and that his legacy should not become a monument but, instead, a source that we can draw on and develop.

**2.**  
**Paintings and Objects:**  
**Etymologies and Evolutions**





# The Role of Drawing in the Creation of Tadeusz Kantor's Self-mythology

*Lech Stangret*

In Tadeusz Kantor's art we come across every textbook definition of a drawing.<sup>1</sup> Of course, not all follow the alternative formula. The rigorous division into a drawing as an autonomous genre, a pre-figuration of another work or a form of notation is often disposed with. Individual modules are blended together, creating qualitatively new forms.

When analysing Kantor's art by following the trail of drawings, we enter a labyrinth in which questions multiply. The artist is playing with us, whether using dates, forms or themes. He evades and obfuscates, he makes pretend, he provides new significance. Simultaneously, a drawing carries an imprint of his life and artistic search. Sketches which existed at the interface of theatre and painting function as envoys of Kantor's art and his intimate diaries.<sup>2</sup>

When scrutinising Kantor's drawings, we notice that many have been 'doctored', made much later than the dates written on them would lead us to believe. An investigation of the technical means used provides a useful clue in unravelling these manipulations. For example, in many instances the author used a felt tip pen, which he could not have possibly used for his sketches from the 1930s or 40s, as the device had not yet been invented.<sup>3</sup> Under the circumstances, the 'naivety' of the practice is astounding, and begs a number of questions: first of all, what was the point of this dissimulation, secondly, why did the artist embark on the chore of manipulating and 'processing' the drawings, and thirdly, when did he first start doing this?

It is quite easy to answer the last of these questions; on the basis of research into various records and archived material, we can conclude that without any

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1 According to the classical definition, a drawing can constitute both a 'deliberate and finite form of an artistic statement or a preparatory study for a composition in another technique' or it can be the means to 'make a note of the objects observed'. See: *Słownik terminologiczny sztuk pięknych*, ed. S. Kozakiewicz, Warszawa 1969, p. 309.

2 This is how I commented on Tadeusz Kantor's drawings in the catalogue of the exhibition: *Rysunki z lat 1947–1990* [Drawings from 1947–1990], Galeria 86, Łódź 1998.

3 I devoted a chapter of my PhD thesis to the technical means used by Kantor in producing his drawings.

doubt at all Kantor started on the process in the mid-70s and continued throughout the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> However, the first two questions require a wider explanation.

Examining closely Kantor's activity, up to 1976, we won't find – either in his biography or in the records of his work – any retrospective exhibitions that present a résumé of his theatrical and painterly work in any chronological order, nor will we find an exhibition that shows the entirety of his stage and art work.

This fact cannot be explained away by the artist's dislike of all attempts to classify or evaluate his work. It would also be sophistry to claim that the period until 1976 had been a time of artistic search and that the time was not yet ripe for taking stock. In his writings, Kantor did not rank his works, nor did he define points of arrival and departure. On the contrary, at the point when he considered that the potential for the deconstruction of the conventional had been exhausted, it was time to leave that particular area behind, as there was nothing left but a vacuum. With such an approach, each newly finished work became a 'closing of the door'<sup>5</sup> behind him rather than an inspiration for further creative work, or an indispensable stage of artistic development.

However, after 1975, we find quite a number of exhibitions, whose very titles clearly reflect attempts at some systematisation of the artist's achievement. Chronologically, the series opens with *From Ithaca to The Dead Class*, organised in June 1976 in the Zapiecek Gallery in Warsaw as well as *Live Documentation: Twenty Years of the Development of the Cricot 2 Theatre* in the Krzysztofory Gallery in Krakow, followed by some more exhibitions the following year: 2 December – a presentation of drawings from 1947 to 1977 in Johanna Ricard's Gallery in Nuremberg and on 10 December, the exhibition *22 Years in the Activities of the Cricot 2 Theatre and the Underground Theatre 1942–1944* in the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw.<sup>6</sup>

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4 I provided the argumentation to support this thesis in my PhD thesis on the drawings of Tadeusz Kantor, in the chapter on the development of his drawing style and form in his sketches.

5 This is how Kantor referred to his work in an interview with Jerzy Pawlas, in: *Od malarstwa informel do teatru śmierci*, *Tygodnik Kulturalny*, No. 5, Warszawa 1977, qtd fr.: *Tadeusz Kantor. Malarstwo i rzeźba* (exhibition catalogue), the National Museum in Krakow, Kraków 1991.

6 Without a doubt, Kantor's interest in the archiving and documentation of his achievement was partly due to the activities and the programme of the Foksal Gallery, which, in the catalogue of its inaugural exhibition, proclaimed: 'In the exhibitions organised by the Gallery, we would like to draw attention to two issues in particular. Firstly – that [we intend] not so much to present "works of art" in their "finite" form as to reveal the conditions and situations that played a part in their creation. Secondly, [we intend] to treat these conditions and situations as organic elements of the artistic display.' With this programme, the founders of Foksal faced the problem of the preservation and

It is not coincidental that the artist's sudden interest in his own past achievements is linked to the period 1975–1976. This chronological censorship is in an obvious way linked to the premiere and first performances of *The Dead Class*. The world success achieved by the production, acclaimed as a masterpiece by many critics and reviewers, made Kantor realise that he *had* produced a **masterpiece** and by the same token found himself in a new reality, in a situation parallel to that which Andrzej Stoff had described in reference to literature:

It is the masterpiece itself that creates its author, recalling not the circumstances of its genesis, but axiological factors. The value of the masterpiece is transferred onto the author. From then on, he has become someone else – the author of a masterpiece, thus, in a sense, the absolute author, someone upon whom no further accolade (...) could be bestowed. That is not all, however, since the value of the authorship of a masterpiece is transferred onto an individual with a tangible biography and personality and it permeates places, events, objects and people related to it in a form of cult. In a relationship structured in this manner, neither the work itself, nor its author, nor the circumstance of the creation of the work are explained to any greater degree. In the case of a masterpiece, with time, the creative act acquires a frankly mythical dimension; likewise, the creator himself becomes a more mysterious figure as someone who has brought into existence something so exceptional that it cannot be fully rationalised.<sup>7</sup>

In Kantor's case, that transfer of the 'value of the authorship of a masterpiece onto the subject of a specific biography' exploded with the energy of the documentation, description and creation of the synopsis of the achievement. The artist at that point took up the challenge of re-writing his biography; he redacted his earlier theoretical texts, and, where missing, re-wrote them from scratch.<sup>8</sup> In the second part of the 1970s, the idea of creating an archive of his work had

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documentation, in institutional conditions, of ephemeral works and actions. In the early 1970s, Wiesław Borowski and Andrzej Turowski postulated the creation of a 'Live Archive and Documentation', in an attempt to determine the *modus operandi* of the Gallery, with its intention of 'capturing' works of art 'in between their projection and reception'. This principally concerned artists linked to the Foksal, or their work in the framework of the Gallery, rather than the whole of their artistic activities. Indubitably, the discourse embarked on the early 70s must in due course have affected Kantor's ideas for the organisation of the Centre for the Cricot 2 Theatre, but it was not the main impulse for its creation.

7 A. Stoff, *Arcydziela w systemie wartości i koniunktur kultury*, in: *Sztuka wobec Prawdy. Nałęczowskie Dni Filozoficzne*, ed. G. Sowiński, Nałęczów 1995, p. 58.

8 The *Nota edytorska*, pp. 623-647, of volume of Tadeusz Kantor's writings, published in 2000, editor K. Pleśniarowicz, clearly alludes to the fact that many texts were edited or re-written in the 1970s and 80s; for this reason, it is subtitled: *Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, in: Tadeusz Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 2000.

been ripening. Unlike those theatrical directors that dream about having their own theatre and creating a school to instill their acting method in new acolytes, Kantor rejected all proposals to take over any stage whatsoever, or to appropriate a venue for the Cricot 2 Theatre. This was not merely about any limitations that might arise from the fact of the existence of the theatre in institutionalised conditions. It was, simply, that Kantor was conscious of being the author of a masterpiece which was closely related to him and what interested him more than the existence of a theatre was the creation of a centre that would both preserve and propagate his theatrical ideas as well as develop and nurture the cult and the mythology of his own person.

Unquestionably, he did not contemplate creating a version of his biography that would silently ignore facts, but, as Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz was right to observe, ‘the manifestos and auto-commentaries that Tadeusz Kantor kept writing all his life were motivated by the drive to create and recreate again and again his own biography. To correct everything, to fill in and improve everything.’<sup>9</sup>

In his 1987 essay *On Painting*, Kantor wrote, ‘We lived in a *ménage à trois*: me, painting and the theatre.’<sup>10</sup> This evocative metaphor served the author well to convey the nature of his activities. What is pertinent to the present dissertation, is that in this statement (which – and this is significant – was written with hindsight), the author attempted to represent all his art consolidated into one indivisible system. Since he himself pointed out the triangular nature of this system, one is justified in applying the same notion in examining the source of the creative process of auto-mythology.

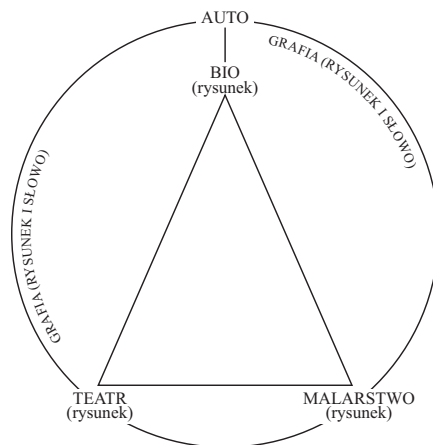
One must then assume that, in setting out the three points of Kantor’s triangular relationship of mutual relations, the *I* does not mean the subject – the principal point of reference of the relationship, but it is also the object of the auto-description. For the purposes of graphic representation, one could employ the split concept of **auto – bio – graphy**,<sup>11</sup> as used by Mieczysław Porębski.

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9 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy...*, p. 5.

10 T. Kantor, *O malarstwie, 24 XII, 1987*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor: Malarstwo i rzeźba* (exhibition catalogue), the National Museum in Krakow, Kraków 1991, pp. 3–4.

11 M. Porębski, *Deska. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, Warszawa 1997, p. 150.



There, AUTO (Greek: *aut*, derived fr. *autos* – self), would perform the function of the subject commentator, remaining above the structure. The three vertices of the triangle would then be BIO (Greek: *bio* – life), the THEATRE and PAINTING. As regards GRAPHY (Greek: *graphein* – draw, etch, scratch, write), this would serve as the tool, the medium for the description of the whole relationship-cum-system.

If we are to transpose the *graphy* into the verbal sphere, this is how Kantor explained the use of the word: it is used in order to talk about the creative act as it takes place in reality, in ‘home’ conditions, in the ‘inner dialogue’ of the creator himself.<sup>12</sup> Kantor also acknowledges that:

At times, these are just ordinary notes, such as one makes so as not to forget something; at other times, it is a kind of commentary, as if I wanted to reassure myself about the correctness of something that is intangible, translate it into some different ‘tongue’, as if I were searching for the ‘etymology’ of the image. At yet other times, the idea seems to me simultaneously so impossible and important, that a manifesto becomes necessary. Sometimes, I write almost a ‘script’ of a painting.<sup>13</sup>

Kantor does not hide the fact that ‘all this (...) dialogue about that time is being conducted with hindsight, after a considerable time has passed’,<sup>14</sup> while protesting that he does not wish to ‘take advantage of this fact and make amendments from the vantage point of being all the wiser with the added experience of those dozen or more years’.<sup>15</sup> The artist explains that he is doing this, because ‘many of the

12 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy...*, p. 7.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

intentions at that time, which had acted in my subconscious and usually were repressed in one way or another by the conventions of the time, today reveal [to me] their significance more poignantly.<sup>16</sup>

In describing his triangle of references graphically, Kantor does not confine himself to verbal comments. He frequently uses drawing and, on this occasion, its significance is clear-cut and unambiguous. For Kantor-the-painter, drawing was a natural means of notation, but the artist invested it with a much deeper sense. Referring to his sketches from the period of his metaphorical painting (1948–1955), he wrote:

That was an imagination issue. Not concerning the painting, or a work of art, but that sphere where a particular sensitivity is shaped, where it develops and transforms; where there are born ideas, objects, characters, situations...

And I also believed, and that's what perhaps matters the most, that this sphere of imagination is capable of independent existence, without realising itself in an art object. I made tons of drawings. And I still do, anyway.

A drawing functioned as a quick, and thus more apt, form of note-taking (...). It was an 'exercise' for my imagination. It was not a form of materialisation of the imagination, but rather its development. Because of the lower rank accorded to it, it provided the invisible sphere of imagination with a completely utopian autonomy.<sup>17</sup>

If a drawing was 'closer to that mysterious matter that we call creativity',<sup>18</sup> then Kantor had to use it in order to 'talk about creativity in the way that it comes into being.'

At the same time, however, we will find yet another confession amongst his comments:

I feel a compulsion to write about what I am doing, painting, drawing. Sometimes, it even seems to me that what I write can better express the thought, the idea, the content (...). One thing is certain: the act of painting or drawing is for me a necessity, as much as life itself is a necessity.<sup>19</sup>

In this context, by referring to drawing alongside painting, by the same token Kantor invested it with the characteristics of an object capable of being described. The artist's take was that drawing acted as a commentary; it defined the phenomena and the polarities in his work and itself functioned as an autonomous representation of those polarities, becoming subject to verbal description. If we also note that both these functions did not necessarily appear at different times, this does, up to a point, throw some light on the matter of the dating of the sketches, and also on other manipulations.

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16 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

18 W. Borowski, *Tadeusz Kantor*, Warszawa 1982, p. 40.

19 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy...*, p. 8.

By ascribing to drawing an ontological meaning different from that of drawing itself, the artist treated sketches as acts of communication with the world of imagination, to which nobody else, apart from him, had access. Thanks to that, the drawing could, without any interference, penetrate, convey, present, explain, record and draw conclusions. As an artefact of 'lower rank', it did not have to observe any discipline reserved for works of art. It was thus ideally suited to the creation of auto-mythology.

Here, I should explain that I am deliberately using the term 'auto-mythology' rather than 'autobiography', as this seems to me more apt, both in reference to Kantor's verbal comments, and to his drawings. Kantor never did try to write an autobiography. In the writings he redacted, he never revealed any intimate details of his personal life. His texts about particular periods of his life do not have that diary-like character where the author reveals the exhibitionist backstage of his life and details of his interpersonal contacts, or describes other people and justifies or condemns his life choices. Nor do Kantor's final spectacles, which he dubbed 'personal confessions' bring us any closer to the intimate sphere of the artist's life. They do no more than send certain signals, 'deformed' by the universal language of art. However, it would be too easy to explain things away, as did Mariusz Hermansdorfer, by writing that everything that Kantor did, he 'turned into art, into a play, a spectacle. He lived *for* art, he lived *art*; he identified life with art, art with life. (...) In his art and in his life, everything was connected with everything else, tangled.'<sup>20</sup> That entanglement of life with art, which did exist, by and large, could have accounted for Kantor's inability to write a bibliography, but, from time to time, the artist made notes and drawings in which he presented very intimate thoughts and experiences or noted events he had witnessed or in which he had participated. However, he was not keen to make those public. He did not pass on to Cricoteka his personal diary notes as he thought that they would be of no value to researchers into his art. He was of the opinion that it is impossible to interpret the mystery of a work of art literally, through delving into links with the artist's personal life.<sup>21</sup> Talking about his 'biography', he wanted to draw attention to those factors in it that, to his mind, made his discoveries significant. He wrote frankly:

I want to find in that time, in that prehistory of mine,  
Those symptoms which, like signposts, pointed the direction  
Of the beginning of the ROAD and the JOURNEY.<sup>22</sup>

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20 T. Kantor, *Zwierzyniec ludzki*, Warszawa 1996, p. 4.

21 Fragments of Kantor's journal notes made during his journey to Spain were published in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Motywy hiszpańskie*, Warszawa 1999; and in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Wędrówka*, Kraków 2000.

22 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy...*, p. 12.

With hindsight, the ‘intuitively’ created works acquired an ‘awareness’ of their own purpose and value. As a result, the author constructed myths about them. Every autobiography, by its very nature, is infected with subjectivism, and subject to being mythologised; however, in Kantor’s case, we are dealing with a collection of myths that entwine life with art. Written by their protagonist himself, they are then auto-mythology rather than autobiography. If we also acknowledge the thesis that the artist was creating his mythology in the context of the masterpiece that *The Dead Class* was, one can understand that Kantor wanted to set this work firmly in the context of his prior achievements. On the verbal level, he did this not in a demonstrative mode, through exposing the way of interpreting the earlier works, but rather in a contemplative way, highlighting the importance of intuition and erudition.

By using drawing, Kantor increased the potential scope for his myth creation. By allocating to the drawing the role of representative of his achievements and at the same time of a carrier commenting on that achievement, he could use sketches as a means of expression more universal than words. Situated ‘closer to art’ but without usurping the right to the transparency of imagination, a ‘disinterested’ drawing could assume the role of an autonomous medium, one not subject to the notion of the time and chronology of its creation. In terms of the method of creation, in Kantor’s heritage drawings, four kinds of sketches can be differentiated:

1. Drawings that were created in the period to which they refer and that were not modified later.
2. Sketches produced during the 1970s and 80s, dated with an earlier date or not dated at all, but evidently referring to earlier events.
3. Drawings based on the originals, but later ‘improved’ in various ways. Often, there appeared on them written comments and new signatures.
4. Items made to appear ‘timeworn’, drawn on old, yellowing paper or cardboard or purposefully ‘distressed’ so as to appear aged.

Some examples which preserved their original form, and falling into the first, most numerous category, are the drawings of nudes made during Kantor’s studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow or illustrations for notes and the series of sketches from 1942–1944 for Jean Cocteau’s *The Death of Orpheus*, which can be found in the National Museum in Poznań, as well as all those works in the form of drawings in which the form, the material used for the background and the range of the technical means used are of the time in which they were created and the phenomena that they referred to. In this group, there are also the numerous works from the 1960s, 70s and 80s, but only those that refer to contemporaneous works and phenomena, for example the series of drawings for theatrical productions such as: *The Water Hen* (1967), *The Shoemakers* (1972), *Lovelies and Dowdies* (1973), *Balladyna* (1974), *The Dead Class* (1975), *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980), *Let the*



*Artists Die* (1985), *I Shall Never Return* (1988), *Today Is My Birthday* (1990) and cricotages, including: *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear* (1978), *The Machine of Love and Death* (1987) and *A Very Short Lesson* (1988). If there appeared in the sketches from the 70s and 80s any 'corrections' or amplifications, such as touching-up of the painting, these were not auto-mythological in character, as they did not affect Kantor's already established form and the way of presenting the human silhouette.

The second kind of works, which both in respect of the background material used (the type of paper or cardboard from the 70s or 80s) or the range of technical means (felt tip, acrylic), writing style or maturity of line and method of drawing that we can identify with a much later period, is representative of the many drawings related to Kantor's first theatrical experiments, for instance: sketches for Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tintagiles* (1938), and from the time of the underground Independent Theatre (1942–1944) e.g.: *Balladyna* by Juliusz Słowacki (1943) and *The Return of Odysseus* by Stanisław Wyspiański (1944). Many of the drawings comprised in the so-called 'A' Collection, that the author intended to exemplify his creative path, were produced during the 1980s, when Kantor implemented this idea. Interestingly, in that category we can find drawings which are almost copied – in a new, more mature form – from earlier works, such as sketches for *The Cuttlefish* by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (1956). A juxtaposition of these two works demonstrates clearly, that their style differs so much that they could not have possibly been produced at the same time.

A much more sophisticated kind of drawing manipulation is to be found in the third category of the proposed classification system. Here, the artist 'perfects' the earlier sketches in a formal way. At times, this might just be a few lines added here and there, or a splash of colour, as is the case with three drawings from the metaphorical stage (1947–1955). At other times, however, to achieve a better effect, Kantor uses a whole range of tactics: he paints over, attaches elements onto parts of the existing drawing and draws additional details or even large fragments, as is the case with *Landscape*, dated 1941 or the drawings illustrating the notes for the wartime performances of *Balladyna* (1943) and *The Return of Odysseus* (1944).

The smallest group, without a doubt, are the sketches 'doctored' to look old; these endeavour to suggest that they were created at the time coinciding with the events to which they relate. They are produced on old background materials or 'aged' through deliberate part-destruction (tearing or scrunching). One example of such works is a drawing from the series *Metamorphoses* with the date '1954' placed on it, as well as some sketches illustrating pre-war stage activities.

All these instances of the categories of Tadeusz Kantor's drawings can provide evidence of his desire to auto-mythologise his past discoveries. However, we cannot explain this obfuscation of chronology and covering of tracks which occur

in Kantor's work on the level of drawings without looking at the artist's attitude to his own past.

Anna Baranowa, in her essay entitled *A System of Mirrors*,<sup>23</sup> written for the catalogue of Kantor's *Anything at All*, an exhibition presented at Cricoteka during a *Tadeusz Kantor Festival* as part of *Festival Krakow 2000 – European Capital of Culture*, juxtaposed Pablo Picasso's historicism with Tadeusz Kantor's anti-historicism. Picasso's historicism, which relied on a precise recording and dating of all his works, sketches and notes (since, as the artist maintained, the 'creative act can only be traced effectively through a series of its different transformations'<sup>24</sup>), had its opposite pole in the anti-historical treatment of history by Tadeusz Kantor.

Although Kantor was also in the grip of a mania for compiling everything that he had ever created, jotted down or stored, the artist did not invest his collection with the status of a document, but rather, treated it as living matter – material that could be remoulded and transformed. Certainly, in the case of the exhibition – which Kantor had planned, but never carried out during his lifetime – of his notes and sketches, this is a very poignant comment.

Kantor postulated that, for the purposes of the planned exhibition, it is necessary:

to collect all remnants of the past, (...)  
those weathered papers which, once, had been closely linked  
to important endeavours and adventures, but today are condemned to/be thrown away  
(...)<sup>25</sup>

and he insisted that one ought to:

divest those scraps of paper of their originality, all that  
which constitutes their souvenir value or makes them a book lover's document  
not originals but mere copies –  
enlarged  
the blow-up blurs the significance and subjectivity tipping  
the scales towards formal value  
those bits of old rubbish become abstractions  
also due to the passing of time,  
which flows and annihilates  
everything (...)<sup>26</sup>

Anna Baranowa points out that even earlier, in 1963, during his *Anti-Exhibition*, organised in the Krzysztofory Gallery, Kantor thought in a similar vein, referring to the 'inventory' that was being created for the purposes of classifying works as

23 A. Baranowa, *System luster*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Wędrówka*, Kraków 2000, p. 242–243.

24 Qtd aft.: A. Baranowa, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

25 *Tadeusz Kantor. Z archiwum Galerii Foksal*, Warszawa 1998, p. 413.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 413–414.

something 'devoid of chronology, hierarchy or localisation'.<sup>27</sup> He used it at the time to create a situation of 'blurring the boundary between a completed work and the creative process'.<sup>28</sup> In his 1976 essay *Work of Art and the Process*, in reference to the *Popular Exhibition – Anti-Exhibition*, Kantor wrote:

It was my own, personal, discovery to acknowledge as art entire zones of the 'attic' of our consciousness, memory stores; the ennoblement of what one can call the rubbish tip of our conscious activity. The fact that my own 'official works' provided the pretext for that dark and somewhat illicit procedure was almost intimate. To put it more bluntly – let's say that in the reception of art, paradoxically, the most inspiring, spiritual moment, that great mystery of creation, had been eliminated.<sup>29</sup>

Quoting these comments, Baranowa concludes that 'the discovery of the mysteries of creativity was ambiguous: Kantor set in motion an elemental force in order to allow it to sweep away, as if in a deluge, all that was past, used up and exhausted – and start anew'.<sup>30</sup> Looking for similarities between the *Popular Exhibition* and the exhibition *Anything at All*, the author of *A System of Mirrors* finds them in the manner in which the secrets of the artist's craft are revealed in each presentation. In her opinion, Kantor did this 'so as to show what matters in creating a work of art'.<sup>31</sup>

Even though one may agree entirely with Baranowa's points above, it is necessary – when analysing Kantor's attitude to the past – to note a few differences and other relationships between the two exhibition ideas. At the *Anti-Exhibition*, which constituted a form of *environment*, the viewers found themselves in the eye of the storm, in the very centre of the hell of creation. On all sides, they were surrounded by all kinds of objects (costumes, reviews, photographs, notes, sketches, manifestos and the like), while in the exhibition *Anything at All*, only photocopies of rough notebooks were supposed to be exhibited (only of hand-written or typewritten notes and drawings). Although for both exhibitions, it was the 'official works' that were their *raison d'être*, in the case of *Anything at All*, the author did not 'ennoble the rubbish tip of aware artistic activity' but rather – copies of that 'rubbish'. And that's not all! Those copies were additionally processed, by the means of enlargement. Simultaneously, in his notes prepared for the presentation, Kantor explicitly admitted that he had 'doctored'<sup>32</sup> some of the

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27 A. Baranowa, *System luster*, p. 242.

28 *Op. cit.*, p. 243.

29 T. Kantor, *Dzielo i proces, 1976*, in: T. Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kraków–Wrocław 1984, pp. 16–17.

30 A. Baranowa, *System luster*, p. 243.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 243.

32 The notes can be found in the artist's private archive, Flat No. 6 at 11 Spokojna Street in Krakow.

old manuscripts that were meant to be mere copier fodder. It is also significant that he systematised the ‘remnant’ material, arranging it into ‘constellations’ so that the past would not appear chaotic. The comprehensive theoretical text *Work of Art and the Process*, quoted earlier, and notes referring to the exhibition *Anything at All* were made and edited contemporaneously (circa 1976). For that reason, they complement each other, even though, on the face of it, they seem to have been occasioned by different factors and have a different theoretical content. In his theoretical essay, Kantor set out to explain and define as precisely as possible the artistic motives behind his 1963 *environment*. Editing the final version of the text, he was obliged to draw on his past notes, photographs and manifestos. When working on the preparation of the exhibition of his rough notebooks, he also availed himself of his notes and drawings from an earlier time, using them as his basic material to work with. When grappling with the project *Anything at All*, Kantor wrote:

Remnants have an incredibly powerful emotional = artistic aura!

That is especially true about one’s own remnants. The traces of the past. It seems to me that only in the past can we touch upon the concept of time – which casts such a hypnotic spell over us. TIME!<sup>33</sup>

Once we amplify this statement with his note on the imperative of giving equal weight to the ‘official work of art’ and the creative process (only then being able to arrive at the mystery of creation), it becomes clear that Kantor had discovered a new potential for the construction of a trap. The touching of the concept of time, or indeed transgressing its boundaries, could only take place against the background of leftover, remnants and rough notebooks that came into being as a by-product of ‘official works’ such as: paintings, happenings, actionism and theatrical productions, exposed to the predatory gaze of critics, researchers and spectators.

Let us note that the artist continued to be most scrupulous and precise in dating his pictures and spectacles or photographs that were records of his happenings. If he made any change, correction or addition to the work – the final product, he pedantically dated the operation. This explains why, for instance, *The Infanta according to Velázquez* in the Museum of Art in Łódź bears two dates: 1966/1970. In this practice, Kantor was akin to Picasso with his historicism, but only in his approach to the finished works.<sup>34</sup> This was because he did not hold with the idea that, sometimes, painting created intuitively will provide the full picture of the author’s artistic exploration when juxtaposed only with its contemporaneous notes and comments – without any retrospective intervention by the artist.

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33 Qtd aft.: L. Stangret, *Wystawa Byle Czego*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor; Wędrówka...*, pp. 237–238.

34 If any discrepancies did appear in regard to the date or the month in which a happening or the premiere of a spectacle took place, these were due to the fallibility of human memory and they did not materially affect the possible interpretation of the events.

Kantor did not create the legend of his art through the manipulation and preparation of final, 'official' (to employ his own label) works not because of limited means at his disposal but because they represented a closure of a particular process. They emerged out of the chaos of the past, from the indulging in 'dark and somewhat prohibited practices'. It was precisely those 'practices' that Kantor found far more appealing. With hindsight, he was able to re-interpret them, put them in order and elucidate them. He did not, however, try to create any coherent system or classification. He likened the past to a labyrinth, to 'memory frames' that only expose in our imagination fragments and leftovers. He considered the very process of bringing to life characters, events and phenomena a suspect activity. Every reproduction was, for him, infected with subjectivity. Just as with postmodernists, for Kantor there did not exist any one objective narrative, but only a collection of individual stories and everybody had the right to tell his own version – which, true enough for its narrator, at times appeared mythical to the audience. The Krakow artist wrote his 'biography' constructing narratives about his achievement around the works-as-products.

It was the drawing that was allocated an essential role in the process of creating art legends from one's 'own remnants'. The drawing, devoid of any time barrier, reserved for 'official' works, became a means more universal than the word. It created a myth and itself became a myth.

The portrait of Kantor's attitude to the past would not be complete, however, if one failed to emphasise that from this interest in his own biography, complete with recreating history and creating myths (which originated in the artist's awareness that in *The Dead Class* he had created a masterpiece), he derived the substance, inspiration and subject matter for his new theatrical productions. It was from such contemplation that *I Shall Never Return*, *Let the Artists Die* and *Today Is My Birthday* grew. In *Wielopole, Wielopole* we have 'memory frames' from the artist's past; in *Let the Artists Die* the artist himself appears as the character I – at the Age of 6, and in *I Shall Never Return* the stage is invaded by a crowd of characters from Cricot 2's past productions, together with their demiurge, while in *Today Is My Birthday* Kantor's painting becomes one of the themes. Each of these productions was acclaimed as a great event, strengthening the artist's position in the world of the theatre. During the 1980s, Kantor's cult grew. He received multiple awards (including the *Légion d'honneur* in France, the Order of Merit of Germany and the Pirandello award); there were international conferences and symposia devoted to his theatrical activities (including in Bari and Antwerp in 1986, in Paris in 1989 and in the Jagiellonian University in Krakow in 1990). The artist was continually invited to lecture or conduct workshops with students (in such locations as Milan, Palermo or Charleville-Mézières). At the same time, he kept drawing intensively and continuing with rehearsals for new spectacles.

Kantor presented his art at numerous individual exhibitions (for example, in the second half of the 1980s, he had exhibitions in the Salle de Théologie au Palais des Papes in Avignon, in the Galleria Bonomo in Bari, the Gallerie Eva Poll in Berlin in 1989, the Galerie de France in Paris and in the Galleria Spicchi dell'Est in Rome in 1990) and group shows (including the *Présences Polonaises* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris). It is significant that almost all the exhibitions of his painting were accompanied by objects and sculptures, which had originated in Kantor's theatrical activities. The artist displayed his creativity on various levels, without subdividing it into disciplines. In a sense, he had again constructed a trap for the viewers who could not limit themselves to any one field if they hoped to fathom the secrets of Kantor's art.

The drawing was ubiquitous in those presentations. Kantor did not give any clues, however, as to which sketch was the 'representative proper' of a given period of his work or which one was a latter-date comment on the creative process. Paradoxically, it is the later drawings of the Krakow master that have the most merit artistically. On the face of it, it would seem that the system of mystification and ensnaring the viewers, constructed by means of drawings, would be easy to decipher for a perceptive critic and researcher, and yet as it turns out, many organisers of Kantor's posthumous exhibitions fell into his trap.

Let us note that at the very first larger, retrospective exhibition in 1991 in the National Museum in Krakow, there could be found sketches clearly produced later, uncritically dated by the author. There is not a word of explanation by the curator or the organisers in the exhibition catalogue. The structure of the exhibition had reflected the 'stages set out [by Kantor]',<sup>35</sup> as Zofia Gołubiew, who was in charge of the exhibition, put it. However, although she proceeded to explain that:

(...) parts of the exhibition will not follow slavishly a chronological progression. Motives, themes and even formal devices will intermingle chronologically – appearing, disappearing, re-appearing. Kantor's first production, his – as the artist himself called it – 'pre-history', that is to say, *The Death of Tintagiles* staged in 1938, will be echoed in 1987 in his *The Machine of Love and Death*. We shall revisit *The Infanta according to Velázquez* again in the early 1960s and in the artist's final spectacle *Today Is My Birthday* in 1990.<sup>36</sup>

In this osmosis between the past and contemporaneity, Gołubiew made no attempt to search for a deliberate trap which would constitute an artistic principle.<sup>37</sup>

35 Z. Gołubiew, *O wystawie*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Malarstwo i rzeźba*, Kraków 1991, p. 7.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

37 Both in the author's commentary and in the inventory of the works and objects, the drawings are dated according to the author's own suggestions, without any doubts raised. One can wonder, though, why it is that, for example, one of the drawings for M. Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tintagiles*, which Kantor dated 1939 carries an exclamation mark: (!), thus,

The avant-garde – in the name of the principle that art is whatever is acknowledged as art – rejected the idea of the masterpiece. Nevertheless, paradoxically, the outstanding proponents of avant-garde had created cultural facts and works of art that had become important markers in the history of art and had subsequently found their way into museum halls. Today, they are perceived precisely as masterpieces, thereby validating the thesis that it not in the gift of the author to bestow upon his own work the status of masterpiece. In his various actions (such as *Multipart*) that questioned and deconstructed the concept of a work of art, Kantor continued the legacy of Duchamp and the Dadaists. He did realise, however, that it was in museums and world-renowned galleries that he himself had acquainted himself with the works of Duchamp, Tzara, Arp, Picabia, Man Ray and many other similar artists. He thoroughly appreciated that it was museums that would be the suitable future destination for his own art – and for this reason, he set out to institute one himself, in Cricoteka.

When, in our analysis of the evolution of Kantor's sketches, we distinguish their function as commentary and their descriptive role from their representative function, we do not disturb Kantor's mythology, since the artist invested it with a singular significance. This mythology became the canvas for new works, whose origin we cannot unravel without its help; without the artist's auto-mythology we are thus unable able to describe the whole of his *oeuvre*. Without a doubt, an analysis of Kantor's artistic devices including this particular tool should prove useful in throwing more light on the semantic content of his works.<sup>38</sup>

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presumably, questioning the date as being out of step with the other drawings, while the dating of the sketches clearly produced at a later date, such as *Odysseus and the Taphian – a Spy*, dated 1944, did not raise any eyebrows. Many curators and commissars of Kantor's exhibitions took a similar approach.

38 Władysław Stróżewski presented the issues related to of the strata of meaning in a work of painting in, *i.a.*: *Wykłady z estetyki* (manuscript), Kraków 1986.





# Tadeusz Kantor's Mannequin and Edward G. Craig's Über-Marionette: An Outline of an Idea

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Kantor gave souls even to packages and dummies.<sup>1</sup>

Jan Kott

In the collection of the National Museum in Poznań there are two drawings by Tadeusz Kantor which show the set designs for his, never realised, staging of *Peace* by Aristophanes. Both are entitled *Über-Marionette*; one is dated 1949<sup>2</sup> and the other 1957 (figs. 9, 10).<sup>3</sup> In spite of the time lapse, these two compositions have much in common. They show an object built on a platform which can be moved on two wheels. The construction which rises on it has the outline of a human figure. At the height of where the ribs would be, there are metal rings reminiscent of a ribcage. In the older drawing, one can still discern the contour of the face and an arm; the later version lacks exact anatomic detail. The title of the work clearly makes a reference to the theory of Edward Gordon Craig, although one could associate the whole thing more with the constructivist sketches of Alexandra Exeter or the futuristic visions of Enrico Prampolini.

The author of the monotypes seemingly treated them as a marginal aspect of his creative work. He never went back to the concept of the strange mobile sculpture. No similar figure appeared in any of the performances of Cricot 2. This is somewhat surprising, as one must note that an immament characteristic of Kantor's artistic path was his extraordinary ability to incessantly redefine his achievements. In the repetitions of machines and transformations of figures one can find a progression of thinking about art which undergoes transformation and keeps evolving.

The idea of the *Über-Marionette* had only seemingly been abandoned. It resurfaced, but not as a form realised in the theatrical space. It came back as

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1 J. Kott, *Kadysz. Strony o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, Gdańsk 1997, p. 46.

2 *Nad-marioneta*, a stage design, 1949, monotype, paper glued onto cardboard, 44.2 x 29.5 cm, dated and signed, 1949, T. Kantor; National Museum in Poznań, MNP Gr 26518, purchased from the author, 1971.

3 [*Nad-marioneta*], a stage design, 1957, monotype, paper glued onto cardboard, 30 x 42 cm, dated and signed, Kantor 1957; National Museum in Warsaw, Gr W. 1875, purchased from the author, 1963.

a theoretical reference in the manifesto of the Theatre of Death, dated 1975. According to the interpretation by the director, a consequence of the idea existing in the literary dimension was the presence of mannequins in the Cricot 2 performances. In the manifesto, Kantor sought their origin in *The Water Hen* (1967); *The Shoemakers* (1972) and *Balladyna* (1974), the last one produced at the Bagatela Theatre in Krakow. I think that the artist was not altogether right. The existence of his dummies was not based solely on utopian theories from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was a result of an in-depth analysis of the artistic tradition from which the artist's work had grown.

Andrzej Turowski thinks that at the beginning of his artistic path, Kantor found an art model, though often remote, in the 'modernist figure of the Marionette, that rational construct of artificial reality and, at the same time, the object of increasing ridicule, ever more intense mockery and merciless criticism.'<sup>4</sup> The art historian perceives the opus of the creator of Cricot 2 in terms of stages which are not clearly distinguished chronologically. And so, in the second period, coming directly after 'the time of the marionette', Turowski places the mannequin. It becomes a figure of the new phase of art, because it is a:

(...) dummy, a double, a surrogate for reality and life. The appearance of the figure of a mannequin in Kantor's artistic and theatrical opus begins the period of the deconstruction of the marionette; in other words – of the slow and, in fact, never finished process of extricating himself from modernist encumbrances by the author of *Everything Is Hanging by a Thread*.<sup>5</sup>

According to Turowski, the place of the mannequin was later taken by the figure of Death: 'Just as the dummy had done away with the marionette, so now Death – as the ultimate authority on reality – destroyed illusion.'<sup>6</sup> It is hard to disagree. However, one small doubt arises. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century theories of the marionette or, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theory of the über-marionette, were associated with death. Death was the starting point for creating within the theatrical space a form which could challenge death or even be its equal. This was, on the one hand, a Platonic search for the idea of the perfect theatrical being and, on the other hand, man's response to the annihilation dealt out by death.

It seems to me that into that sphere Kantor wanted to introduce the mannequin which would be both his invention and an artistic response to the problems of the end of life. Death became an important figure in Cricot 2, a constant which the director, through his actions, tamed and at times even ridiculed. It grew – as pointed out by Turowski – out of the modernist fascination with destruction and

4 A. Turowski '...już dawno pana wyeliminowałem, pan też wisi na włosku...', in: T. Kantor, *Z archiwum Galerii Foksal*, Warszawa 1998, p. 471.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 471.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 471.

annihilation. Kantor never erased its 19<sup>th</sup>-century identity; however, through his own art, he managed to transport it into the reality of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Towards the end of his life, he wrote in his *My Art, My Journey*:

I can no longer see the shape of man. His external shape  
which has always been identified with life.  
Life itself becomes suspect, its essence too  
simplified until now and brought down to the level of a banal image.  
I sense the taste of Death, the Beautiful Lady, as Gordon Craig calls her.  
Is it not She, perchance, who reigns in art...<sup>7</sup>

What is interesting is that both Kantor and Craig were fascinated by the work of Maurice Maeterlinck. The future director of *The Dead Class* began his theatrical career with Maeterlinck's drama for a marionette theatre, *The Death of Tintagiles*. Craig included the same text of the Belgian playwright in the repertoire planned for the International Theatre of the Über-Marionette.<sup>8</sup> Let's note that for each, his admiration for Maeterlinck's dramas had a slightly different flavour.

The reformer of the theatre at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw in Maeterlinck, above all, the author of the concept of replacing a living actor with a wax figure, the idea announced in 1890. The theory not only found its reflection in the dramatic structure, but it also concerned theatrical practice. The symbolist searched for an apt means of translating his ideas into the idiom of the stage, although he thought that 'the stage is the place where masterpieces die, because to stage a masterpiece using random and human (*accidentels et humains*) elements is something antinomical in itself.'<sup>9</sup> Maeterlinck decided that, in the reality of the theatre, the actor was the most annoying factor. He proposed to introduce figures which, on the one hand, would be outside time due to their material form, and on the other hand, would not have a personality which could overwhelm that of the protagonist. However, being outside life, they had to have sufficient expressiveness to embody the illusion of existence in the context of the theatre. That is why Maeterlinck proposed replacing a living actor with a wax figure. He ascribed a supernatural power to it and expected the figure to be able to render all the essential problems of his dramas: transitoriness, death, time. He noticed the

7 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 2000, p. 16.

8 The International Theatre of the Über-Marionette was the project which Craig prepared for the 3rd Exhibition of German Handicraft in Dresden in 1906. For financial reasons, it was not carried out. Cf. I. Eynat-Confino, *Beyond the Mask. Gordon Craig, Movement, and the Actor*, Southern Illinois Press, 1987.

9 M. Maeterlinck, *Menus Propos. Le théâtre, La Jeune Belgique*, 1890 no. 9, qtd. after *idem*, *Wybór pism dramatycznych*, trans. Z. Przesmycki (Miriam), Warszawa 1894, p. 59.

fears which inanimate matter evokes; however, for him, the superior aim was the absence of man in the reality of the theatre. Maeterlinck asked:

Does the fear provoked by those creatures – so alike to us but marked by the spirit of death – results from the fact that they are absolutely devoid of mystery? That they are not surrounded by immortality? (...) Would we be terrified by those gestures and those words which, by some monstrous coincidence, do not resound and do not offer the choice of an immortality? Is this because they cannot die? – I don't know; but I consider the absence of man indispensable.<sup>10</sup>

Paradoxically, in the manifesto of the Theatre of Death, Kantor appears to have defined further the details of Maeterlinck's statement: 'It is necessary to bring back the primal force of the shock of the moment when man (the spectator) was confronted for the first time with man (the actor), deceptively similar to us and yet infinitely alien, beyond an insurmountable barrier.'<sup>11</sup> Kantor turned the modernist feeling of fear in the face of the unrecognisable power of death into the force of shock when faced with an 'insurmountable barrier'. However, the name of the Belgian playwright does not appear in the 1975 text. Kantor erroneously attributed the idea of introducing a wax figure onto the stage to the romantic theory of Heinrich von Kleist. Indeed, in 1811, von Kleist published *On the Marionette Theatre*, where he postulated giving the stage over to a wooden effigy which would be endowed with the element of perfection and, as such, could be equal to God.

Kantor became interested in Maeterlinck's theory when he was still a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. The future author of the Theatre of Death was not attracted by the mannequin or the marionette. Perhaps he only wanted to find a text which could be staged in the constructivist manner. Kantor committed then his first transgression against the work of the Belgian Nobel. In 1937 or the beginning of 1938, he directed *The Death of Tintagiles* in the Ephemeric and Mechanic Theatre. The premiere took place in the hall of the Student Club, commonly referred to as 'Bratniak', in the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts at the Matejko Square.<sup>12</sup> This was an important moment, since this was the artist's first fully independent stage production.<sup>13</sup> Fifty years later, Kantor was to come back to

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10 M. Maeterlinck, *Menus Propos. Le théâtre, La Jeune Belgique*, vol. IX, Brussels 1890, p. 334; qtd. after A. Skiba-Lickel, *Aktor według Kantora*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1995, p. 16. Cf. also: *id.*, *Un théâtre d'androïde*, in: *Annales de la Fondation de Maurice Maeterlinck*, vol. XXIII, 1977.

11 T. Kantor, *Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975-1984*, Pisma, vol. II, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2004, p. 20.

12 Two somewhat divergent dates exist. The calendar in *T. Kantor. Wędrówka*, quotes 1937 while in his *Metamorphoses* Kantor clearly states 1938.

13 K. Święcicki also draws attention to this, in: *Historia w teatrze Tadeusza Kantora*, Poznań 2007.

the symbolist drama in his cricotage *The Machine of Love and Death*, which had its premiere on 13 June 1987 during Documenta 8 in Kassel. Both performances are interesting because of the mechanical figures introduced into them.

*The Death of Tintagiles* belongs to Maeterlinck's early works, but one can say with confidence that it contains all the elements with which his work is associated.<sup>14</sup> The drama includes the figure of a mythical Queen – menacing, unorthodox figure of Death, who lurks in wait for the small boy Tintagiles. The Three Servants who arrive under the cover of darkness are her emissaries. The course of events is governed by undefined fate which drives the characters towards inevitable annihilation. The dominant element of the stage, in the author's concept, is the door which separates the two worlds and simultaneously separates the sphere of life from that of death. It is a very potent detail of the stage design. The history of the theatre has invested it with many surprising associations, and Kantor made the door an active causative element of the whole dramatic sequence. This became particularly apparent in his cricotage from the 1980s.<sup>15</sup>

The performance shown before the war in the hall of 'Bratniak' was certainly a marionette theatre. Its form harked back to the idea of constructivism in the spirit of the Bauhaus, an object of fascination for Kantor at that time.<sup>16</sup> A spectator, Maciej Makarewicz, recalls some details of the stage design:

(...) the drama of a child kidnap was taking place in an almost abstract setting. The marionette characters were reduced almost to symbols – the queen, the nanny, the knight, the infant Tintagiles; the simplified geometric forms of triangles and rhomboids, mostly in black and grey; wealth and rank represented by golden loops on clothes.<sup>17</sup>

Different tones of voice were used: each character had a distinct timbre. For Kantor, as the chief producer and stage designer, two elements mattered most: the servant women and the moon.

Because there, the THREE SERVANT WOMEN from Maeterlinck's dark castle have turned into three soulless automatons, bringing DEATH. Behind the iron door,

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14 Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tintagiles* was published in 1894 as part of the series *Three Little Dramas for Marionettes*. Cf. M. Maeterlinck, *Dramaty wybrane*, ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 1994.

15 Cf. D. Łarionow, *Pułapka na iluzję, czyli po co w teatrze były, są oraz będą drzwi?*, in: *Przestrzenie we współczesnym teatrze i dramacie*, ed. V. Sajkiewicz and E. Wąchocka, Katowice 2009, pp. 164–174.

16 The participants were: Erna Rosenstein, Krystyna Zwolińska, Jadwiga Maziarska, Tadeusz Brzozowski, Sergiusz Muchow, Jerzy Zitzman. Cf. K. Pleśniarowicz, *Kantor. Artysta końca wieku*, Wrocław 1997.

17 M. Makarewicz, *O Tadeuszu Kantorze*, in: *W kręgu lat czterdziestych. Część III*, ed. J. Chrobak, Kraków 1991, pp. 20–21.

there cries the little Tintagiles, beyond salvation. The moon is MADE OF TIN AND NAILED to the frame of the stage set.<sup>18</sup>

Several stage designs dated 1938 have survived.<sup>19</sup> In the present context, two of them are significant. The first shows the Servant Women.<sup>20</sup> These are indeed figures reminiscent of mechanical constructions, with legs made from metal springs, with red bodies; each of them has one huge pincer-like arm. Their heads are triangular and cut out of metal. The raised arms imply the ability to perform synchronised movements. The second design shows the costume of Tintagiles (fig. 11). The body is triangular; the head is marked out with a luminous halo and a pointed yellow arch.

Of course, the bridge which the artist built between symbolism and the Bauhaus was a natural consequence of the development of art. This affinity was only noticed by humanists towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and since then the modernist sources of contemporary art have frequently been considered. An interesting opinion can be found in a French monograph on the Russian constructivist theatre. Its author, Christine Hamon-Siréjols, traces the roots of the fascination with modernity characteristic of the Bauhaus in the practice of the *Art Nouveau*, a trend which introduced admiration for technical and formal novelties.<sup>21</sup> As we know, it was Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro who attempted to put the opus of Stanisław Wyspiański into circulation as part of Polish constructivism. Kantor discovered in Maeterlinck the same attribute which Strzemiński, the creator of unism, enthused about in Wyspiański's *Warszawianka*.<sup>22</sup> As an artist, Wyspiański

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18 T. Kantor, *Między świętą abstrakcją a ekskomunikowanym symbolizmem*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, Kraków 2000, p. 50.

19 The dating of Kantor's drawings does not always reflect the actual date of the production of the work. Some signatures must, therefore, be treated as conventional. In the case of *The Death of Tintagiles*, it is safer to define the projects as an intentional representation of how the director imagined the costume. This is because it is difficult to establish the actual time of the production of the works from today's perspective.

20 *Kolekcja 'A'* has been deposited in the archives of the National Museum in Krakow. It is a collection of 289 drawings which were produced, compiled and sorted in the mid-1980s by Tadeusz Kantor personally. According to the artist's intentions, they were to serve as something of a guide to his creative work and its main principles. The collection contains drawings for *The Death of Tintagiles*. There are a number of versions of the marionettes of the Servant Women, which are dated 1938. In the present article, one of them has been described, the catalogue no. MNK ND 8966. It seemed the most relevant in the context in question, all the more so since the form of the mechanical figures of the Three Servant Women used again in the cricotage *The Machine of Love and Death* would refer to this project.

21 Ch. Hamon-Siréjols, *Le constructivisme au théâtre*, CNRS Eds, Paris 2004.

22 Let's note that Kantor was critical of Strzemiński's work. He was especially opposed to his theory of perception, considering it scholastic in relation to surrealism and tachism.

seduced the avant-garde with his distinct coloristic divisions in which colour dovetailed with mood to create the meaning of the intended symbol.<sup>23</sup> Maeterlinck also introduced schematism; this could be seen in the way he divided the theatrical space: as the action progressed, the space shrank as if compressed, locking the characters in a cage – a cage with a door but without an exit. There was no deep psychologism in his dramas; rather, a quite simple dichotomy of black and white characters was suggested.

Almost forty years later Kantor committed a similar transgression against Craig's work. He did this both in the literary field and in the sphere of the theatrical space. Firstly, the manifesto of the Theatre of Death can be considered an extended polemic against the vision of the Über-Marionette; however, its goal was not to create a new theoretical value but to appropriate Craig's idea and to transfer its crucial elements into art theory of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, Kantor's activity made him decidedly different from all his predecessors (in particular Kleist, Maeterlinck and Craig), who, in the realm of theory, had attempted to take on the challenge of the puppet, variously understood. Kantor was practically the only one who had the courage to implement the idea of the mannequin in the space of his own theatre.

Kantor's manifestos are complex and thus require careful reading.<sup>24</sup> The difficulty with their suitable reception arises partly from the time in which they were created and partly from the literary narrative chosen by their author. One must bear in mind that the manifestos were generally written after the relevant artistic events. The time intervals may be measured in months but most often in whole years. This accounts for the more or less deliberate manipulation of the meaning of some actions. The author wrote in blank verse and only occasionally in prose. He used capital letters to emphasise the elements that mattered to him most, be it parts of the text or significant words. Production of artistic manifestos was

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He thought that, when continued by its enthusiasts, the theory could act as a deterrent and backward influence on the development of art. In spite of his harsh criticism, Kantor acknowledged the exceptional quality of Strzemiński, due to his attitude to art, which Kantor considered extremely consistent, uncompromising and radical. Cf. T. Kantor, *O Władysławie Strzemińskim*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, p. 374.

23 Cf. D. Łarionow, *Władysława Strzemińskiego i Szymona Syrkusa zmagania z Wyspiańskim*, in: *Stanisław Wyspiański w labiryncie świata, myśli i sztuki*, Kraków 2009.

24 Katarzyna Fazan carried out a detailed analysis of the literary legacy of Tadeusz Kantor. She noted that for the artist, text becomes an 'invitation to participate in the play of imagination liberated in art and captured in the net of a discourse which is not to be altogether trusted but which reveals its seductive and fertile force.' Cf. *ead. Kantorowska scena pisma*, in: K. Fazan, *Projekty intymnego teatru śmierci. Wyspiański–Leśmian–Kantor*, Kraków 2009, p. 254.

a stock tactic of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-gardes; the director of Cricot 2 made the texts almost a bible of his art.<sup>25</sup> What is admirable in the literary part of Kantor's opus is not only his artistic awareness – clearly an expression of his inner freedom – but also the precision with which he was able to define his works, creating their meaning both in the personal and the artistic contexts.

*The Theatre of Death* is probably the best known of Kantor's writings. The text has carefully been divided into ten parts. Nine of those are in the form of concise statements preceded by mottoes consisting of a few sentences. The last one, with the separate title *Recapitulation*, is written in blank verse. In Kantor's lifetime, the manifesto was translated into twelve languages. It is exceptional not only in its popularity; the style adopted by the author is also striking, because Kantor enters here into a precisely-worded discourse with relation to, amongst others, the ideas of Edward Gordon Craig.

In 1907 Craig published the article *The Actor and the Über-Marionette*, in which he took on board the achievements of 19<sup>th</sup>-century realistic acting and predicted that a new form would arrive. He started his discourse with the words of Eleonora Duse, who was believed to have remarked, 'To save the theatre, the theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They make art impossible.'<sup>26</sup> Craig took the pronouncement of the Italian star further and conducted an analysis of the actor's on-stage presence and the method of character building typical of the theatre till his times. Craig structured his convincing analysis partly as a treatise written from four points of view representing different professions: a painter, a musician, an actor and an author of texts, and he concluded that previous methods of working had not succeeded. That was why it was necessary for a new character to appear on the stage: the Über-Marionette, which would contribute to a revival of the theatre. From his drift, it was not clear what such a marionette would look like. Craig's ideas unleashed a veritable storm of criticism in the theatrical world. The consensus held that – as an actor – Craig had not achieved the great success that might have been expected of him as a son of Ellen Terry, a great star of the British theatre. His ideas were interpreted as his

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25 Throughout his active life, Kantor wrote manifestos and various texts which were his commentary on his work. And although the main part of his opus belongs to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the writings of the creator of Cricot 2 echo, in their poetics, the statements of the leading artists connected with the avant-garde movements of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They are characterised by individual stylistic tone; they frequently use chanted mottoes; they aim to impose an interpretation on the reader, and they are often extraordinarily expressive. Cf. the entry *Manifest literacki* by G. Gazda. in: *Slownik literatury polskiej XX wieku*, Wrocław 1992; cf. also P. Czapliński, *Poetyka manifestu literackiego 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1997.

26 Qtd. after E. G. Craig, E. G. Craig quoting E. Duse, in: *The Theatre – Advancing*, Boston, 1919, p. 223.



revenge on the actor's craft. With the hindsight of a hundred years, however, we can say that such an interpretation was wrong. Craig sensed the need to change the methods of acting, even though he was vague in pointing out the way. Only the suggestions remain, which have been partially developed by theatre practitioners of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Craig was a utopian who thought about his work in a context somewhat reminiscent of totalitarian systems. A theatrical work must, in his view, be subjugated to one person: the director. Although we may argue about the extent to which absolute power works on the stage, this does not alter the fact that in the majority of cases the history of the theatre of the past century is a narrative about grand auctorial performances or troupes led by an authoritarian visionary.

A utopian vision of the world is often linked to metaphysics, which, in a way, justifies its existence. Such was the case here. Craig's spirituality concerned the protagonist of his treatise: the Über-Marionette. His basic premise was that it was the actor who was the most controversial element of the theatrical vision. It is the actor who faces the audience from the stage. It is the actor who is the conduit of the human element, capable of triggering unforeseeable emotions, man's entire nature strives for freedom; man carries in himself the proof that his own person cannot be useful as theatrical material. In the modern theatre, due to using bodies as material, all that we see on the stage is random. The physical actions of the actor, the expression on his face, the tone of his voice – all this is at the mercy of emotions, depending on which way the wind is blowing.<sup>27</sup>

According to this theory, randomness may disturb the ideal form of the theatrical work composed by the director. This is why the performer, subject to randomness, should be replaced with the super-marionette – as we might call it today. What Craig meant, however, was not a puppet moved by means of wires controlled by a human. Such a relationship of dependence was of no interest to him. What mattered to the reformer was a different aspect of the humanoid inanimate object. His story of the marionette which hailed from the utopian family line of Images and lived somewhere on the banks of the Ganges so as to dazzle spectators with its allure and give them divine inspiration, involved the aspect of being in touch with the sacred, which Craig found very attractive. He elaborated on this thought not only with relation to Oriental fairy tales; he also referred to the effigies present in ancient temples and viewed by their contemporaries as having a specific, direct, contact with the deity. For Craig, their presence was linked to the concept of 'noble artificiality' as an equivalent of divine inspiration, related to the Platonic ideal of Beauty, that is to say, of the perfect being which, however, exists beyond human perception. The mysterious, other-worldly element of the puppet also appears in the

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27 See: E. G. Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre*, London 1957.

Romantic theories mentioned earlier which the author of *On the Art of the Theatre* found fascinating.

There seems to be contrariness in Craig's thinking. On the one hand, the sacred must inhere in the element which takes a lifeless form; on the other hand, it should contribute to the revival of the art of the *living* actor. Although Craig talks frequently about death and even writes it with a capital 'D', the envisaged Über-marionette is supposed to have consciousness; thus, it should be some sort of being. It will not be a rival to life; rather, it will rise above it. Its ideal will not be body and blood, but, as it were, a body in a trance; it will aim to envelop itself in mortal beauty, at the same time radiating the living spirit.<sup>28</sup>

Olga Taxidou,<sup>29</sup> a researcher of Craig, notes that his vision of the Über-Marionette was closely related to the admiration which the reformer of the theatre felt for *commedia dell'arte*. He felt that the genre provided a medium for the actor to achieve perfect fulfilment on the stage. In *commedia dell'arte*, the concept of acting is based on the art of improvisation which is, however, constrained by the strictly defined traits of the characters. That is to say, the creative freedom of the actor is limited in some way. However, there was something else that Craig found important: the actors had to possess physical agility; in order to fulfil their acting briefs, they had to master their bodies. The masterly spectacle of the Italian comedy depends on the ideal rhythm formed by actions of the characters and the use of props and stage sets. To achieve the required results, the actors must be compliant with instructions of the director. In her Polish monograph on the artist, Agnieszka Jelewska is right to remind us that the rhythmisation of the performance was related to Craig's notion of the dancer as the father of the theatre.<sup>30</sup> For Craig, dance was a primaevial form which had been born out of rituals performed to worship deities.

Of course, one can see at a glance that many 20<sup>th</sup>-century theories of the theatre were related to Craig's utopian vision in a more or less deliberate way. This is particularly significant, for instance, in the last series of works by Jerzy Grotowski, realised in Pontedera, the vague outline of which he showed to the public in his performance *Actions* during his last stay in Poland in 1997. In the series, he concentrated on possible modulations of the human voice developed by means of bodily resonators and on their emission correlated with the dancing body. The body has become a visual artistic element over which the dancer/performer has gained mastery through painstaking exercise. Of course, this is

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28 *Ibid.*

29 Cf. O. Taxidou, *The Mask: A Periodical Performance by Edward Gordon Craig*, London 1998.

30 A. Jelewska, *Übermarionette, czyli mit aktora idealnego*, in: *ead., Craig. Mit sztuki teatru*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 150–179.

not the only practice which can clearly be derived from the visions of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century reformer. Straight away, the discrepancies between Kantor and Craig become apparent as well. Physical fitness of the actor mattered to the author of *The Dead Class*, but it did so in terms of the structure of the performance, not in terms of exercises which prepared the actor for acting.

In the vision of the Über-Marionette, one can clearly see a state between life and death, or rather between the lifelessness of an object introduced into the realm of the theatre and the vital element. It has been customary to treat Craig's theory as an enigmatic discourse which has failed to provide an unequivocal answer as to how such a figure is to function in the reality of the theatrical stage. In the 1980s, Irene Eynat-Confino<sup>31</sup> analysed Craig's documentation deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Therein she found quite detailed descriptions of the Über-Marionette which were earlier than the text referred to previously. It seems that Craig worked on his idea from about 1903 (or even earlier). An architectural design was created for the theatre in Dresden, an amphitheatre with modern forms of lighting, and detailed instructions were given about theatre company, repertory etc. In her monograph on the artist, published in 2000, Hana Ribi concentrated on his 1905 sketch, pertinent to the issue at hand. Craig drew a dancer wearing a robe made of voluminous swathes of draped material. The dancer's face is completely covered and in front of it, he is holding a mask which he appears to manipulate in the forward direction. The mask is not a stand-alone element. From underneath it, the robe falls down in a shape reminiscent of the shape of the human body, and the material is joined to the dancer's robe. In the author's intention, the dancer and the mask are one. In the distance, a reversed relationship can be seen. The mask is turned towards its manipulator, who leans over it in a gesture suggestive of being in conversation with it. Ribi interpreted this as indicative of partnership, in contrast to the oneness visible in the foreground. On the basis of the sketch, the researcher concluded:

Both are the Über-Marionette: the perfectly trained living actor and the inanimate object – a mask endowed with a shape. In the case described, the mask has been elevated to an independent figure; it has changed from an object to an autonomous dramatic subject. The living actor/dancer fulfils the function of both an actor and a manipulator. The actor in a mask becomes a multiplied subject who, after the separation, plays two equivalent subjects: a dancer and a personified mask, that is to say, the actor and the character. [Translation from Polish translation by E. Przywara]<sup>32</sup>

31 I. Eynat-Confino, *Beyond the Mask. Gordon Craig, Movement, and the Actor*, Illinois 1987.

32 'Die <ÜberMarions> sind beides: sowohl der körperlich hervorragend trainierte, lebendige Darsteller als auch das gestaltere, nicht lebendige Objekt, die Maske. In dem beschriebenen Fall wandelt sich die zur eigenständigen Figur avancierte Maske vom Objekt zum selbständig auftretenden dramatischen Subjekt. Der lebendige Schauspieler-Tänzer

To my mind, Craig's project as described above found its stage realisation over half a century later in, among others, the mannequins in *The Dead Class*. Kantor introduced a puppet unified with the actor's costume onto the stage, achieving, in his most significant performance, that split which Ribi noticed in the vision presented by the English theatre artist. Because the characters such as The Old Man with His Childhood on His Back or The Old Man with a Bicycle cannot really be viewed in any other way. The 1905 dancer has been replaced with an actor; the mannequin has changed from an object, or perhaps an attribute of a stage character, into an independent subject. Andrzej Turowski observed a similar principle not just in Kantor's theatrical productions but especially in his bio-objects:

In contrast to the marionette, the mannequin, similar to a wax figure, was not capable of an independent existence from the very start: something had dragged behind him, something had oozed out of him. As an empty form, it was glued, *for no apparent reason*, to the twin form of its owner. As a maimed object, it found support in the canvas of the painting. Its baggy physicality had something of the carnality of a hump carried by the man; its non-materiality, set rigid, evoked the memory of the character whose death mask it had adopted. It grew parasitically on the man: a bio-object which makes no meaning; one which replicates, cuts off and deforms the form.<sup>33</sup>

For Craig, this union of the actor and the mask was intended to have a ritualistic, metaphysical nature. It seems to me that Kantor, perhaps contrary to the English artist, perceived in that relationship a parasitic aggressiveness of the object towards the animate body.

The vision of the specific co-relation of the actor and the object became the reason why the manifesto of Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death referred to the famous essay almost seventy years after *The Actor and the Über-Marionette* had been published. After all, aesthetic categories and the understanding of the role and function of the actor in a performance had changed since then. It might seem that many issues had become clear and obvious, and an experienced artist did not need to explain his actions by quoting remote theories – unless he wanted in some way to appropriate the mannequin for the purposes of his own art. One could say that the 'annexation' of the idea took place lawfully, since the creator of Cricot 2

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bewegt sich, zwischen der Funktion eines Manipulators und derjenigen eines Darstellers. Als maskierter Darsteller wird er, vom Rezipienten aus gesehen, zum multiplizierbaren Subjekt, das nach einer Spaltung zwei gleichwertige Subjekte, Tänzer und personifizierte Maske, simuliert, d.h. sowohl Darsteller als auch Figur.' H. Ribi, *Edward Gordon Craig – Figur und Abstraktion*, Basel 2000, p. 56.

33 A. Turowski, *Ambaláže, atrapy, manekiny*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Interior imaginacji*, academic eds. J. Suchan and M. Świca, Warszawa–Kraków 2005, p. 114.

explained the nuances and differences in his own definition of the mannequin and carried out a radical revision of the semantic structure of its significance.

In order to present a consistent argument, Kantor started where Craig had left off, or – one might say – on the banks of the Ganges; he provided a detailed synopsis of the English artist's narrative, placing it firmly in symbolism as its natural ideological background. Kantor compared Craig's ideas to those of other writers who had dealt with similar issues within literature: Heinrich Kleist, Ernest Theodor Amadeus Hoffman and Edgar Allan Poe. By the same token, the sense of the Über-Marionette was moved back in time. In the configuration set out, it became a continuation of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century theories based, on the one hand, on Romanticism and, on the other, on the Gothic novel, which employed the category of the uncanny. Almost all those writers favoured the idea of introducing a bogus human being into art. Kantor treated such a gesture as part of the science fiction genre of that time. He associated it with a 'loss of confidence in NATURE and in that region of human activity which was closely connected with nature.'<sup>34</sup> The introduction of creatures other than human, so-called freaks, into literature has probably been known since antiquity. Originally, it was more likely to be linked to the notion of divine quality, in a way practised by ancient writers who brought the inhabitants of Olympus to the earth.

On the other hand, creatures of the supernatural world with a pagan pedigree found a place for themselves in the Christian tradition. These were all sorts of apparitions, ghosts, fairy-tale and fantastic creatures, whose presence near man changed the course of events or introduced a peripety related to the uncanny and the dreadful.

Karel Čapek, the Czech writer of science fiction, introduced a purely mechanical robot, both as a concept and a functional object, into 20<sup>th</sup>-century culture in his drama *R.U.R (Rossum's Universal Robots)* in 1921, thus at a certain chronological distance from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century creations. The majority of the authors quoted by Kantor introduced their puppets on the assumption that they had a mysterious link with supernatural forces (the sacred, the idea of perfection). It was Edgar Allan Poe, though, who was the precursor of the science fiction genre. I think that Poe was mentioned by Kantor not just as the author of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), a book which had inspired many writers such as Jules Verne or H.G. Wells. I suspect that the creator of the manifesto of the Theatre of Death saw in Poe an artist for whom death and destruction had a peculiar creative character.

Kantor's cogitations seem at times vague and exceedingly subjective. He interpreted the crisis of confidence in nature as the departure of the artist's vision

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34 T. Kantor, *Teatr Śmierci*, in: *idem, Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975–1984, op. cit.*, p. 14.

towards the abstract, leading to the explosion of new genres: constructivism, functionalism, the notion of the objectless world and purist visualism. However, his reasoning has been contradicted, for one, by Kazimierz Malewicz's idea of suprematism. Art that employed the abstract was supposed to be an answer to nature created by God. In no way was it its negation; rather, an opportunity for a metaphysical discourse. The theory of perception proposed by Władysław Strzemiński, who sought the sources of modern art in the remote baroque, may be given as another counter-argument. Nobody mentioned going away from nature; rather, the debate concerned a different way of perceiving nature within art and culture.

However, Kantor was after something quite different. He sought a justification for the annexation of reality into the sphere of artistic activities. This was to take place as an escape from an artificial world towards reality, in order to provide greater credibility for the work of art. At this point, Kantor quoted Dadaism, which, thanks to Marcel Duchamp, introduced the concept of 'ready-made' reality. This led the author to conclude, 'Craig's notion of replacing the actor with the mannequin, an artificial and mechanical creature – for the sake of preserving perfect cohesion of the work of art – has today become obsolete.'<sup>35</sup> And even though the creator of *The Dead Class* noticed that the great reformer of the theatre had been concerned with the homogeneity (cohesion) of the work of art, he made another simplification in his analysis. After all, as we know, nowhere in *The Actor and the Über-Marionette* did the suggestion appear that the puppet should be a machine. It was meant to be an animate creature whose on-stage activity would be exceptional in its almost divine quality and wholly predictable. Almost a century later, the aspect of perfection was simply overlooked; thereby, the concept of the marionette was severed from all Platonic and metaphysical associations. Due to such an interpretation of Craig's idea, Kantor succeeded in splitting the previous theories of theatre into two groups:

If in its moments of weakness the theatre succumbed to the living organism of man and its laws – it automatically and consistently acquiesced in a form of imitating life, of its depiction and re-enaction. In the opposite system, when the theatre was sufficiently strong and independent to afford to free itself from the pressure of life and man, it created artificial equivalents of life which turned out to be more alive, because they lent themselves easily to the abstraction of space and time and were capable of achieving absolute cohesion.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the artist introduces, within history, the division into naturalism, or bourgeois theatre, and abstraction. These do not coexist on the same plane; rather, they interchange their dominance. This leads Kantor to conclude ruthlessly, from the

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35 T. Kantor, *Teatr Śmierci*, in: *idem, Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975–1984*, p. 14.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

perspective he held at the time, that 'both these options have lost their rationale and their alternativeness',<sup>37</sup> because new systems have appeared in art. The author of the Theatre of Death can see clearly that the development of Dadaism and related trends has made it possible to annex reality for the purposes of the work of art. In this way, the oneness postulated at the beginning of the previous century has been broken by the introduction of the concepts of ready-made reality and by the Dada movement entering the areas of everyday life.

Kantor paid particular attention to collages, a technique which incorporated random elements of reality into works of art. But we learn from the further drift of his discourse that the activity soon proved insufficient. And together with the appearance of happenings, events and environment art, the artist created with his gesture the ritual of the annexation of entire areas of reality. That activity became more interesting than the construction of artificial reality proposed e.g. by Surrealism, a trend which, for Kantor, used the old notion of 'miraculousness'. After a time, every manifestation becomes a convention. 'The material, physical PRESENCE of the object and the PRESENT TENSE, the only one in which action and activity can be set, have proved to be too much of a burden; they have reached their limits.'<sup>38</sup> During the borderline phase, the *Chair* appeared, placed by Kantor by the side of a motorway near Oslo in 1970. Kantor found the sculpture – a functional object – to be 'empty, devoid of *expression, relations, references*, signs of artistic communication, of any *message*; turned towards nowhere, it has changed into a dummy.'<sup>39</sup>

In the semantic landscape thus delineated, the mannequin appears as a model for the actor. In the ninth part, Kantor refers to Craig again. He demonstrates how his own reasoning differs from that of the English reformer, since he does not intend to throw actors out of the theatre. This is because the 'moment when the Actor appears in front of the audience for the first time (to use today's terms), seems to me the opposite: revolutionary and avant-garde.'<sup>40</sup> But it is not communion with a living person that is at issue; rather, it is the 'discovery of an IMAGE OF MAN'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the mannequin which is not a mask or an abstract humanoid form is entitled to stand before the audience. Its dumbness and lifelessness should, according to the director, result in an almost classical catharsis, which takes place in contact with art. This is particularly significant since Kantor emphasises that he does not concentrate merely on the theatre; his statement refers to all spheres of creative

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37 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

40 T. Kantor, *Teatr Śmierci. Pisma z lat 1974–1984*, op. cit., p. 19.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

activity. This was to be the case. Mannequins were to appear not only in Cricot 2 performances but also in Kantor's installations.

In Kantor's representation of the mannequin, there is also a fundamental divergence from Craig's idea. 'The marionette is just a puppet', the English theatre artist wrote to his mother in 1905, explaining the distinct character of his figures. The point of his theory was to make an animate but abstract creation. And the reformer was not interested in showing a mobile sculpture on the stage, as the Bauhaus was later to postulate. The Über-Marionette was to have a supra-human and non-mundane nature. As we know, Kantor fashioned the mannequins so as to achieve great verisimilitude. With their pale faces and grey clothes, they merged with the actors, becoming together with them the matter of the extraordinary theatre that Cricot 2 was.

The dialogue with Craig which Kantor initiated has contributed in fact to defining the marionette in a somewhat different spirit. The concept was deprived of its Platonic element of beauty. Instead, the marionette became incorporated in art which, as the creator of Cricot 2 concluded, came into being after the times that had resounded with the 'Big Bertha' German howitzers. In the post-war world, the mannequin began to function as a being neither beautiful nor noble, but more human, even though ugly – an object and a subject of the 'lowest rank.'



# Returns of the Rhinoceros

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## 1. The Rhinoceros leaves Lisbon

The most recent and spectacular return of the Lisbon rhinoceros took place in 2008, when it became the protagonist of a huge (the animal was depicted life-size) painting *Loss of the Lisbon Rhinoceros*<sup>1</sup> by Walton Ford, a contemporary American painter, who in his works, stylised as colonial illustrations, focuses on the relations between people and animals. Or, rather, he portrays the individual reflected in an animalistic Other.

Ford's painting shows a ship sinking in a storm; a terrified rhinoceros, his legs bound, tries in vain to escape from the wave-swept deck. The moment of the animal's death will at the same time be the instant of its rebirth as a myth, a symbol, a work of art. The end and the beginning of an endless journey.

The nameless rhinoceros, portrayed by Ford, had been a gift, in 1515, of the Sultan of Khambhat to the Portuguese Governor of Goa, in turn to be sent to Lisbon. King Emmanuel I, enchanted with the unusual gift – the first rhinoceros to be seen in Europe since Roman days – arranged for it to have a gladiator fight with a young elephant from his menagerie, in order to find out whether Pliny had been correct in writing that the elephant and the rhinoceros were mortal enemies (the elephant scarpered; the fight did not take place), and subsequently decided to offer the animal in homage to Pope Leon X. The news that the exotic creature would be on public display in Rome enthused natural philosophers and artists, amongst them Albrecht Dürer, who decided to set off for Rome (on foot, as the story has it). However, the rhinoceros never reached Rome: the ship which was carrying it sank during a storm. Paolo Giovio<sup>2</sup>, a papal historian, wrote, 'the animal famous for its outstanding ferocity, which would have been able to confront even an elephant in a fight in the amphitheatre, was abducted by the envy of Italian Neptune', emphasising additionally that the heavy chains which bound the legs of the animal so adept at swimming made its survival impossible, and that the needless death

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1 W. Ford, *Loss of the Lisbon Rhinoceros*, 2008 – watercolour; gouache, lead pencil and ink on paper; property of the author and the Paul Kasmin Gallery.

2 P. Giovio, *Elogia virorum litteris illustrium*, 1548, cf.: <http://www.elfinspell.com/PaoloStartStyle.html>, (date accessed: 4 October 2010).

caused great pain and sorrow in those who witnessed it. It appears that its body, cast onto a shore, was found and its indestructible carapace-like hide stuffed; however, the subsequent fate of the specimen is unknown.

Nevertheless, during the rhinoceros' stay in Lisbon, two testimonies, which would later be used by Dürer in his reconstruction, had been produced. The first was a sketch and a description (in part based on Pliny's one) by a merchant, Valentim Fernandes, which have not survived to the present day. Even so, a fragment of the text had remained, since it found its way into Dürer's<sup>3</sup> woodcut:

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, Anno Domini 1513 (sic) from India to Lisbon a live example of an animal known as a rhinoceros was sent to Emmanuel I, the mighty king of Portugal. It is depicted here in its entirety. Its colour is akin to that of the Leopard tortoise and it is very thoroughly armoured with thick plates. In dimensions it is similar to the elephant, but its legs are shorter. It is magnificently equipped for combat. It has a sharp strong horn at the tip of its nose, which it sharpens on stones. This is a victorious animal, a mortal enemy of the elephant. The elephant has a morbid dread of it, because if it were to approach a rhinoceros, that animal would thrust itself in the elephant's direction with its head between its front legs and would rip its guts from below, killing it, from which the elephant would not be able to defend itself. This is because the rhinoceros is so splendidly armed that the elephant would be powerless against it. It is said that the rhinoceros is a swift, good-natured, and even joyful animal. [trans. from Polish translation by A.R.B.]

What is particularly striking in the preserved fragment is the antinomy between the image of the rhinoceros – a perfect armoured vehicle constructed by nature – and its disposition. Thus, the rhinoceros turns out to be a strange hybrid creature, consisting, as it were, of two incompatible parts: the fear-inducing externality – the armour, the costume, the packaging – and its proper 'I', with its sunny and joyful temper. But it is precisely the threatening and ugly 'armour' that determines the way in which the creature is perceived. A kin of the 'gentle savage', a brother to Caliban; forever nameless – referred to as the 'Pope's rhinoceros', 'the Lisbon rhinoceros' or, later, usually simply 'Dürer's rhinoceros' (the telling anachronism

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3 'Nach Christiegeburt, 1513. Jar Adi 1. May hat man dem grossmechtigsten König Emanuel von Portugal, gen Lysabona aus India pracht, ain solch lebendig Thier. das nennen sie Rhinocerus, Das ist hie mit all seiner gestalt Abconterfect. Es hat ein farb wie ein gepreckelte [sic] schildkrot, vnd ist von dicken schalen vberleget sehr fest, vnd ist in der gröss als der Heilffand, aber niderichter von baynen vnd sehr wehrhafftig es hat ein scharffstarck Horn vorn auff der Nassen, das begundt es zu werzen wo es bey staynen ist, das da ein Sieg Thir ist, des Heilffandten Todtfeyndt. Der Heilffand fürchts fast vbel, den wo es Ihn ankompf, so laufft Ihm das Thir mit dem kopff zwischen die fordern bayn, vnd reist den Heilffanten vnten am bauch auff, vnd er würget ihn, des mag er sich nicht erwehren. dann das Thier ist also gewapnet, das ihm der Jeilffand [sic] nichts Thun kan, Sie sagen auch, das der Rhinocerus, Schnell, fraytig, vnd auch Lustig, sey.'

being one of the most poignant symptoms of the reversal of the relation between a real-life designate and an artistic sign, which will be the case with this particular phenomenon).

The second document which Dürer used as a model was a sort of advertising leaflet in which the Florentine physician Giovanni Giacomo Penni<sup>4</sup> described the virtues of the never-to-have-been gift to the Pope. The leaflet has survived. It has the telling headline, ‘The shape, nature and customs of the rhinoceros, brought to Portugal by the captain of the royal fleet, alike the many other beautiful things which originate in the newly-discovered isles.’ Below the headline, there is an engraving which shows the rhinoceros – a disarmingly bumbling effort by an inept hand and, at the same time, probably the only real portrait of the legendary beast, a study from nature. What draws our attention in the picture are the folds of hide, reminiscent of armour; it is presumably not a coincidence that they are very like the equestrian armour of the period (it may well be that the rhinoceros had, indeed, been equipped with similar armour before its anticipated combat with the elephant). It is difficult to believe that we are dealing with a creation of nature. The rhinoceros appears as an astounding fusion of a live creature and something dead; a *sui generis* bio-object. Nevertheless, one is surprised by the huge amount of compassion in the physician’s depiction of the animal. His rhinoceros does not daze with its might; on the contrary – its head is hung low in an abject manner, its back is hunched and its bent legs are bound with shackles. This is not a terror-inducing beast, a proud gladiator, a killing machine, but merely a compassion-evoking aberration, an unfathomable whim of nature, a creature emanating sadness, loneliness and melancholy.

In producing his famous work, Dürer – deprived of the opportunity to see a real-life rhinoceros and compelled to employ Penni’s drawing (fig. 12), the sketch by Fernandes, no longer available to us, and the descriptions left by Pliny (and, perhaps, also Roman coins) – had to demonstrate his vast anatomical and zoological knowledge and imagination. His two drawings and the famous woodcut are surprisingly accurate in comparison to Penni’s drawing. It was probably from his reading of Pliny that one of his errors must have arisen: the German artist placed on the back of the animal’s neck a second horn, which the ‘Pope’s rhinoceros’ did not have, but which had been mentioned by the Roman chronicler. In addition, Dürer endowed it with a slender, spiral shape, reminiscent of the horn with which artists would adorn the head of the mythical unicorn. Incidentally, the unicorn may pass both for a close relative of the rhinoceros (due to its similar hybrid quality and the antinomy resulting from the combination of such features as: power and

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4 Giovanni Giacomo Penni, *Forma e natura e costumi de lo rinocerote*, 1515. Cf.: [http://www.uhu.es/programa\\_calidad\\_literatura\\_amatoria/etiopicas/num\\_2/serani.pdf](http://www.uhu.es/programa_calidad_literatura_amatoria/etiopicas/num_2/serani.pdf), (date accessed: 27 September 2010).

peace, ferocity and gentleness, the masculine and the feminine elements) and for its opposite (if one were to compare the creatures in terms of ugly/beautiful).

However, the most significant mistake that Dürer made (and the one most laden with consequence) was his armouring of the rhinoceros (fig. 13). Instead of folds of thick hide, in his woodcut we can see scales and plates of the carapace which could be mistaken for armour made of plates of varied texture and pattern, riveted together. In the central part of the animal's back, it forms a shape akin to a saddle – a clear indication that the artist must have been inspired by the equestrian armour of the period. The detailed quality of the depiction notwithstanding, we are faced with a portrait which is, in a sense, imaginary – an allegorical representation. And very influential it was, too, as can be attested by the fact that for the following couple of centuries – until a travelling wonder, a female rhinoceros by the name of Clara (1738–1758) was to arrive in Europe – Dürer's representation was the reference point in art (as can be seen in numerous paintings, tapestries or book illustrations) and science, appearing in zoological atlases (often with a fanciful use of colour). Dürer's 'clothed' or, rather, 'armoured' rhinoceros turns out to be more suggestive and inspiring than the real thing; consciously or not, hundreds, if not thousands, of artists have replicated the error of the German artist or else entered into an open dialogue with his vision (one of the more interesting 20th-century instances of such a dialogue being Salvador Dalí's 1956 sculpture *Rhinoceros Dressed in Lace*).

Indeed, Dürer's rhinoceros is a paradoxical being. In a sense, the sudden and dramatic death of its prototype had been indispensable, so that an immortal symbol could be born; an ideal image, an autonomous artistic being, living an extraordinarily intense and fertile life. In a sense, the German artist created the rhinoceros anew; he put it together using conjured up images and ideas (Walton Ford emphasises that Dürer's rhinoceros, in its carapace, is reminiscent of a crab – thus, as it were, its watery demise has invested it with the status of an amphibian creature; in turn, the scales on its legs bring to mind a dragon or a giant lizard). An imaginary portrait has pushed the real portrait out of the consciousness of the viewers – and not by chance. In his *Theory of Semiotics*, Umberto Eco maintains that Dürer was not mistaken, but that he deliberately constructed an iconic representation, a sign evocative of the idea of the rhinoceros:

Dürer portrayed a rhinoceros covered with scales and imbricated plates; as a result this image of the rhinoceros remained constant for at least two centuries and reappeared in the books of explorers and zoologists; and although these latter had seen actual rhinos and knew that they do not have imbricated plates, they were unable to portray the roughness of their skin except by imbricated plates, because they knew that only these conventionalized graphic signs could denote 'rhinoceros' to the person interpreting the iconic sign. (...) Thus one could say that Dürer's rhinoceros is more successful in portraying, if not actual rhinoceroses, at best our cultural conception of a rhinoceros.

Maybe it does not portray our visual experience, but it certainly does portray our semantic knowledge or at any rate that shared by its addressees.<sup>5</sup>

The case of the rhinoceros and its portrayal eternalised by Dürer exposes the tension between the real and the symbolic, which is not so much intense, as ambiguous: the real dies in order to become the symbolic, to grow into a myth. The rhinoceros functions as a sign, an idea, a singular concept, and, as such – now easily recognisable and strongly marked semantically – it can enter into meaningful relationships with other elements of reality, for example with man. Clara, the 18th-century successor of the hapless ‘Pope’s rhinoceros’, appears, for instance, in a contemporaneous anatomic atlas: a print from the book<sup>6</sup> shows fragments of the muscle and bone structure of a man, ‘undressed’ of clothes and skin, in an expressive pose (which raises a question about his ontological status), accompanied in the background by a strikingly complete and indubitably alive female rhinoceros (fig. 14), peaceable, gentle and contented (she is eating grass, her horn trimmed). In a sense, a role reversal has occurred: here, the animal, immortalised with a quite un-scientific dose of sympathy (a ‘star’ in the court of king Louis XV and the protagonist of numerous works of poetry and paintings), becomes a major player, a mirror held up to man in which to see his own reflection – and to draw conclusions from any similarities and differences observed.

Another portrait of Clara, a painterly one this time, was made in 1751 in Venice. The painter Pietro Longhi commemorated the animal as the attraction of the carnival. On the canvas we can see the creature, eating hay on the ground floor of a building which without a doubt is used for entertaining: from three raised boxes, as if in an amphitheatre, characters, masked and dressed in finery suitable for special occasions, are looking at the animal. Longhi’s well-known painting strongly thematises the tensions between the material and the metaphorical, the natural and the cultural, the occluded and the revealed; placing the rhinoceros in the very centre of the play-off between that which is real and that which is symbolic, a play-off inherent in the most profound idea of the theatre.

## 2. The rhinoceros in Krakow

This kind of tension which Longhi managed to capture so successfully can also be found in Eugene Ionesco’s play *Rhinoceros*. The text,<sup>7</sup> written in 1959, has been read in various ways, from a burlesque through a ‘pure’ absurd drama to

5 U. Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington, London 1996, p. 205.

6 *Clara the Rhinoceros*, 1742, a print by Jan Wandelaar from the atlas by Bernhard Siegfried Albinus *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani*, published by Johannes and Heinrich Verbeek, Leyden 1747.

7 The Polish translation appeared in: E. Ionesco, *Teatr*, vol. 2, trans. A. Tarn, Warszawa 1967.

a historical allegory,<sup>8</sup> where the epidemic of turning into a rhinoceros is taken to symbolise the spreading fascination with fascism. It is, however, worthwhile to note the often overlooked fact that, in Ionesco's drama, from one act to the next, the rhinoceroses become more and more beautiful (although also more and more brutal), while the ugliness of the people becomes all the more apparent. What we have here is reversed evolution. Essentially, people do not so much grow the thick skin of a rhino, as shed their human guise to reveal the bestiality, savagery and evil that lurk beneath, under the clothes and under the skin. One could say that we are dealing with the opposite of Dürer's 'good-natured, and even joyful' rhinoceros whose armour makes it a war machine; with Ionesco, humans are animals whom clothes and manners render human.

In 1961, Tadeusz Kantor was invited by the director Piotr Pawłowski to work on *Rhinoceros* in Krakow's Stary Theatre. From the manifesto texts written at the time (partly included in the programme of the performance) a clear picture emerges of the changing paradigm of the stage design. Kantor writes that he is not interested in the anecdotal layer of the play, in replicating the café and the street:

The theatre to which I am referring has long erased the concept of the 'stage set' which functions as illustration of the play. This embodies the worst theatrical tradition. The stage set does not have to, or indeed should not, only function as a location, regardless of its form: constructivist, surrealist, expressionist, symbolic, naturalist or poetic. It has far more important and alluring functions: to localise emotions, conflicts and the dynamics of the action. It can be entirely nonexistent, absorbed by the expression and movement of the actor, replaced by lighting or works of art, the painting or sculpture, which have the qualities of authenticity, in the same way that until now it has usually been a result of applying authentic values for the use of the theatre, a stylisation of dubious value.<sup>9</sup>

Elsewhere, he revises the notion of the costume:

If we assume that the body of an actor, as is the case with any man, is, in terms of its proportions, build and order shaped in accordance with specific practical functions, related to life – the concept of altering these variables and order becomes very tempting; it presents great possibilities, precisely for the actor, of conveying content which extends beyond that life practice which invades from all sides, insistently. I am not certain whether the body of the actor is so sacred – an idea inherited from antiquity and equipped with all possible academic seals – that it should be impossible to shape it more freely. If we agree that historical costume, so frequently used in the theatre, has been deforming the human body in quite a radical way for specific, entirely down-to-earth reasons, that this in itself is what accounts for the contemporary costume (because, as a matter of fact, whatever one puts onto the human body, it becomes deformed to

8 Cf. J.L. Styan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice*, New York, Cambridge, 1981.

9 T. Kantor, *Moja Idea Teatru*, a text which appeared in the programme of E. Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, at the Stary [Old] Theatre, Kraków 1961, pp. 17–22.

a greater or lesser degree) – then I see no obstacles to treating the character of the actor more freely (the costume shaping the actor) for artistic reasons and to endowing it with a greater ‘reach’, a magnified spatiality, mobility, changeability, specifically directed tensions, positions which are free yet purposeful in terms of the play. Within such a conception, the individuality of the actor, until now contained only in the facial expressions, the movements, the reactions of the nervous system, stemming from conventional life experiences, should be performing a role much more complicated, but much more pronounced in its expression. It must pervade and invigorate this new organism, which is and ought to be the closest possible fusion of the live matter of human flesh and the shaped stage form.<sup>10</sup>

The last sentence seems particularly interesting here. In a sense, it is already a foreteller of bio-objects – the fusion of live bodily matter and the stage form, the formation of hybrids on the borderline of the two worlds. In his costumes for *Rhinoceros*, Kantor fulfils these suggestions; what is more, he creatively develops Ionesco’s ideas. Nudity appears in the performance, and it is a costume – nudity worn as an armour over the body of an actor dressed in a dark leotard; as if the characters were skinned alive – and then put into their skins again, while the skin, removed and returned, becomes a foreign body, a costume that does not fit.<sup>11</sup> This is a singular kind of gesture of artistic creation: the creation of a new entity, a hybrid of an actor and a role, of the body and a costume, a biological being and an object (fig. 15). It is as if the rhinoceros had prompted the artist that the relationship between the exterior and the interior is frequently much more complex than would appear, and that it is the ‘packaging’ that often makes the ‘content’. Elsewhere, Kantor wrote:

1961. The staging of Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*.  
 I am creating a new concept: THE REVERSED SPACE.  
 This is a continuation of a search for a mental space.  
 The name itself is perverse, because it does not contain  
 any reference or points of comparison  
 to space.  
 The ‘REVERSED’ space evokes the world, objects,  
 characters – not in their ‘positive view’,  
 intended for presentation, but in a way that  
 a glove or a pocket turned inside out might,  
 where the exposed stitches, the hanging threads and bits,  
 the meagre, low-quality ‘anatomy’,

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10 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 2000, p. 235.

11 The war context is also essential in the interpretation of Kantor’s costumes for the performance. Kantor was shattered to find out that the Nazis had used human skin as material for making clothes; this found reflection in his works and deliberations about costumes. Grzegorz Niziołek writes more about this in his paper in this volume.

in no way bring to mind the laws that we know  
 apply outside, which shape  
 the forms that are rational and made familiar.  
 This is a genre of reality which – it has to be emphasised –  
 has nothing in common with the oneirism of surrealism,  
 nor with Freud's subconscious.  
 I am writing an essay called *An Encounter with Dürer's Rhinoceros*,  
 the starting point of my search for reality,  
 which a little later on I call the Reality of the Lowest  
 Rank.<sup>12</sup>

Is Dürer's rhinoceros, with its visible 'rivets' which fasten the plates covering its body – as well as the Clara of the anatomy atlas, proudly presenting her hard, practically indestructible 'carapace' from behind the back of a skinned man – not precisely such an 'inside-out' creature? Perhaps this also explains Kantor's fascination with the ribbing of umbrellas, crinolines, metal frames and the corsets of *Infantas* – those external skeletons, the armour covering the body; as if invented to mock nature.

It is not by chance that soon thereafter (in 1962), a new concept entered Kantor's vocabulary: *emballage*. The *emballage* provokes: it so very intensely draws attention to the external, it so much absolutises it that this awakes an overwhelming need to penetrate the other side, that which is hidden, inaccessible, which constitutes the mystery and the essence of the matter. On the occasion of such projects as *The Wardrobe* or *The Anatomy Lesson*, Kantor identified the consecutive layers of clothes and lining with the skin and tissues, questioning the boundary between that which still is and that which no longer is a human being. Such reasoning totally negated the validity of employing ugliness as a normative criterion; a criterion against which the artist had proclaimed a crusade. 'Ugly' frames and packages would endure, like the hide of the drowned rhinoceros, whereas the body would meanwhile fall into dust.

### 3. The rhinoceros in Nuremberg

The rhinoceros – 'not Who but What', the *emballage par excellence*, because impossible to penetrate or unpack – would become the object of Kantor's 'perverse liking'. The opportunity to meet the creature eye to eye arose in 1968. The artist, invited by Dietrich Mahlow to take part in making the documentary film *Kantor ist da* wrote:

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12 T. Kantor, *Rozwój moich idei scenicznych. Określenia; cf. T. Kantor, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, p. 240.



On the 28<sup>th</sup>, the making of a 45-minute film about my painting, happenings etc will start. – I have prepared a script – here are some scenes: (...) we keep on running, a conversation with a rhinoceros in the zoo. A monstrous fat man is sitting at a table in a bistro, totally encased and with a huge rucksack on his back – he can be seen only from behind – my conversation with this something is based on asking questions without receiving any answers...<sup>13</sup>

It is not a coincidence that the rhinoceros encountered in Nuremberg is reminiscent of the Wandering People – one of the permanent devices in Kantor's theatre; in *The Water Hen*, produced in 1967, the Father (Edgar Wałpor), who carried on his back a monstrous rucksack with countless pockets and flaps, looked a bit like a tortoise or a snail, which has grown bound together with its 'home', a bit like an armoured rhinoceros. The artist was fascinated with Krakow and Paris tramps, who 'in an endless wandering, without a destination or a home, shaped by their follies and the passion for *packing* their bodies in coats, blankets, immersed in a complex *anatomy of clothes*, in the secrets of *packages, bundles, bags*, straps, strings, hiding their bodies deep in there from the sun, rain and cold...' <sup>14</sup> turned of their own will – just like the characters in the Ionesco play, who have grown the armour of the rhinoceros' hide – into peculiar hybrids, bio-objects, 'human emballages'. Thus, in the figure of a rhinoceros-outsider and an exile, Kantor's various *topoi met* (this includes 'art as a journey') (fig. 16).

This is how Kantor described a scene recorded in the film:

I am sitting at the table, in black as always, black scarf and so on.  
Coffee, cigarettes, I have no inkling.  
Suddenly, someone comes in, or, rather, 'something' (like the war-time Ulysses).  
A dirty individual, grey, all wrapped up in rags, some coats,  
as a shapeless bundle,  
nothing like a man.  
The creature carries a monstrous rucksack, almost a part of his – its? body.  
The brute sits down without even a by-your-leave at my table, of course.  
And me, in black, so elegant, black patent shoes, scarf, a wide-brimmed  
hat and all that which some ascribe to me:  
a buffoon-artist.  
But this is all exceptionally necessary here.  
I order a huge outlet and whatever else.  
'The rhinoceros' throws himself upon it,  
devouring it as is a rhinoceros's wont.  
I wait, then I ask my guest a number of discreet questions:  
where has he travelled from,  
how long did it take,

13 T. Kantor, *List do Anny Ptaszkowskiej*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Z Archiwum Galerii Foksal*, Warszawa 1998, p. 28.

14 T. Kantor, *Rezerwat ludzki*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, p. 360.

is he tired,  
 what is he doing here.  
 Through the piles of devoured flesh, the rhinoceros replies with grunting  
 and with a stifled roar.  
 From courtesy questions, I move on to more essential matters:  
 life style?  
 loner?  
 philosopher?  
 perhaps an artist?  
 The rhinoceros has finished his meal,  
 to the last question he only splutters one word  
 ‘merde’!  
 he gets up, knocking over everything around, that mass of know-not-what  
 is moving towards the exit.<sup>15</sup>

The artist deconstructs his interlocutor, asking him, first, conventional questions, then, in Witkacy’s parlance, penetrating ones, trying to delineate the boundaries of humanity, while the creature responds with slurping and animal noises. The companion at the table is a rhinoceros – but at the same time it will be the creature that Kantor will address when reading out his 1962 text, a manifesto describing an encounter with Dürer’s rhinoceros. In that manifesto he wrote about the incredible oneness of the rhinoceros and its ‘costume’ which may appear to be an autonomous creature parasitic on its carrier, only finally to outgrow it, to dominate it and, as it were, eliminate it – as the Shadow does, in Andersen’s well-known fairy tale. This is a kind of further stage in the emancipation of the costume in relation to what Kantor had written on the occasion of working on Ionesco’s play, where he had emphasised that the costume deforms the actor:

It is hard to talk here about a skin. All that armature or some hideous casing – as if oblivious of the live mechanism slowly throbbing inside – has shot out in explosions of abundant imagination, strange whims, audacious ideas, a multiplicity of ornamental details, gnarly protuberances, scales, refined ‘embroidery’, braidings, varied nuances.

That almost autonomous creation, inexplicable bizarreness and the pompous pretentiousness of nature place the rhinoceros as an ‘objet d’art’.<sup>16</sup>

The rhinoceros is work of art created by the hand of nature; the Dürer rhinoceros being, as it were, a work of art to the nth degree. The encounter between Kantor, the dandy artist armoured in his avant-garde form (hat, scarf), and the rhinoceros, ‘a shapeless bundle’, a ‘mass of know-not-what’, must bring disappointment. Disappointment from which the artist develops the thesis that he has been dealing with a swindler of a costume, parasitic on the human body, which has nothing

15 T. Kantor, *Komentarze intymne 1986–88*, typescript from the Cricoteka Archives, pp. 30–32.

16 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, p. 324.

in common with its biological matter, and pretends to be a man. Therefore, he attempts to rumble the ‘pseudo-anatomy’ of the rhinoceros:

As if some parts of the body tried to save themselves,  
 break out of that prison.  
 Let themselves be known.  
 I have decided it is a good opportunity to show anew the character  
 of man,  
 in his fate which civilisation has dealt him for centuries.  
 The theatre of course has come to my aid.  
 A great place to show off.  
 What a lot of pretence,  
 fawning,  
 posing as someone else,  
 a perfect fraud  
 and...  
 void,  
 the territory which I in fact adore.<sup>17</sup>

The ‘someone, or, rather, something’ swaddled in rags, the ‘shapeless bundle’, ‘nothing like a man’, mannerless and tongue-tied (apart from the single crude expletive) – this is a human being in a humiliating state, in his formlessness approaching ground zero, void. It is not coincidental that 1962, when Kantor writes his text about Dürer’s rhinoceros, is for him a time of crisis: disappointment with art informel and the Zero Theatre; a time of *The Madman and the Nun* (1963), a performance in which a continuous playing with the void is taking place – but also, a time in which the artist becomes interested in another outsider who hides against reality inside an archaic armour – Don Quixote (in that year, Kantor directs, jointly with Jan Biczyski, Jules Massenet’s opera *Don Quixote* at the Krakow Opera).

However, the vulgar and at the same time confused rhinoceros-the-outsider has the upper hand over the dandy artist: it is much closer to the reality which (to Kantor’s irritation) for centuries has been deprived by convention of the right to participate in art; the real rhinoceros dies, the accurate representations of the anatomy of the animal are lost, while Dürer’s vision endures and multiplies *ad infinitum*. Thus, the rhinoceros-the-Nuremburg-Ulysses comes back to demand its rights. That is the reality banished from the world of art, for ever taking its revenge on art. It leads astray and confounds the viewers who are unable (or, rather, unwilling) to perceive the reality for what it is, but are, instead, for ever trying to dress it up in costumes, armour and lace.

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17 T. Kantor, *Komentarze intymne 1986–88*, typescript from the Cricoteka Archives, pp. 30–32.

The rhinoceros cannot be rendered naked; an anatomy lesson cannot be performed on it, and the essence of the secret it conceals cannot be reached and made visible to all those who are interested. It is, therefore, a creature which is as bizarre as it is ideal. Its interior and exterior are both counterpoints (if not an antinomy) and inseparable. A perfect dualism – yet, so very different from the natural/cultural dualism of the human being.

It is striking how the relationship between the rhinoceros-wanderer and man evolves. The first descriptions are puzzled to discover, under the layer of the war machine, a disposition and contrasting emotions. Later, the rhinoceros is juxtaposed with fragile man. Ionesco and Kantor discover rhinocerosity in a human being. Talking to the rhinoceros-man in Nuremberg, Kantor leaves open the question of what is more human: his own art, his patent shoes and polite conversation – or the rags, the slurping and the ‘merde’ of the creature. Both one and the other guise turn out to be no more than emballage, a packaging, a chrysalis which enables the survival of that which is the most essential. In that sense, the encounter with the rhinoceros is already a precursor of the Theatre of Death – playing with the void and facing the void; the desperate spinning of cocoons. Kantor returns to the theatre, the place in which the tension between the symbolic and the real is most poignantly visible. The rhinoceros which falls into the sea dies in order to never die again, and so as to become immortal, due to Dürer’s ‘perfect fraud’. The dead function in Kantor’s theatre along similar lines. Immortal – which, however, does not signify heavenly peace, but getting drawn into the vicious circle of return and repetitions. And into the never-ending battle between that which is real and that which is symbolic.

## Don Quixote according to Kantor: Between Reality and Fiction

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In his last two productions he legalised his role and ‘played himself’ as a real character. He found himself, so to speak, in a role similar to that of Cervantes’s Don Quixote.

Wiesław Borowski, *Tadeusz Kantor – dzieło moje, dzieło ostatnie*  
[Tadeusz Kantor – My Work, My Final Work]<sup>1</sup>

Don Quixote from the novel by Cervantes seems a character simply made for Kantor and his theatre; ‘spare, gaunt-featured,’ his legs long and hairy; wearing old armour, blackened and eaten by rust; crowned by a pasteboard morion tied with green ribbons. With his shield, lance and makeshift helmet, he is reminiscent of Kantor’s bio-objects. Particularly at the beginning of the first volume, when Don Quixote transforms himself into a knight, his dependence on the attributes of knighthood makes him a hybrid of flesh and inanimate objects; this, as it happens, becomes the source of comical effects (or a testimony – at least according to Nabokov – to the cruelty of those times which laughed mercilessly at any individual diverging from the norm<sup>2</sup>):

(...) a laughable sight it was to see him eating, for having his helmet on and the beaver up, he could not with his own hands put anything into his mouth unless someone else placed it there, (...) But to give him anything to drink was impossible, or would have been so had not the landlord bored a reed, and putting one end in his mouth poured the wine into him through the other; all which he bore with patience rather than sever the ribbons of his helmet.<sup>3</sup>

The Spanish hidalgo from La Mancha, ‘one of those gentlemen that keep a lance in the lance-rack, an old buckler, a lean hack, and a greyhound for coursing.

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1 W. Borowski, *Tadeusz Kantor – dzieło moje, dzieło ostatnie*, in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora / Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 16–22.

2 Cf. V. Nabokov, *Lectures on Don Quixote*, San Diego 1984.

3 M. de Cervantes Saavedra, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, trans. John Ormsby, [http://www.online-literature.com/cervantes/don\\_quixote/](http://www.online-literature.com/cervantes/don_quixote/); vol. 1, chapt. I.

An olla [in the original, *olla podrida* – literally ‘a rotten pot’] of rather more beef than mutton, a salad on most nights, scraps on Saturdays,<sup>4</sup> is never far from poverty and decay. The pitiful ‘scraps’ – in the original, *duelos y quebrantos*, ‘wounds and shreds’ – are the name given to meat of sheep that have been torn to pieces by wolves or have fallen off the cliff. Don Quixote is one of those knights who have to ‘smear the cracks in their shoes and to have the buttons of their coats, one silk, another hair, and another glass,’ whose ‘ruffs be always crinkled like endive leaves’; one in whose appearance one can ‘perceive a league off the patch on his shoe, the sweat-stains on his hat, the shabbiness of his cloak.’<sup>5</sup> The matter which surrounds the knight and his squire bears all the hallmarks of the reality of the ‘lower rank.’ marked – let’s remind ourselves – not only by

objects which are the threshold of becoming matter:  
RAGS, TATERS, GARBAGE, REFUSE, MASTY BOOKS,  
MOLDERED PLANKS, WASTE. The emotional states which  
correspond to matter are: EXCITEMENT,  
FEVERISHNESS, HALLUCINATION, CONVULSIONS,  
AGONY, MADNESS.<sup>6</sup>

Don Quixote is thus a living emballage (an ‘*emballage* with a living human interior’<sup>7</sup>), while at the same time being one of the eternal Wanderers about whom Kantor wrote in his self-commentaries:

1963... I have encountered an unusual model: *people – wanderers*, who roam outside society, on a never-ending journey, without a purpose or a home, shaped by their madness and a passion for *wrapping* their bodies in coats, blankets, sheets; immersed in a complicated anatomy of clothing, in the secrets of packets, bags, bundles, strings, straps; who hide their bodies deep [beneath it all] from the sun, rain, cold...<sup>8</sup>

Cervantes’s novel has as its theme the wanderings of the knight-errant and his squire Sancho Panza on the roads and in the wilderness of Spain, and simultaneously the journey through life. It is wandering *per se* that is the central motif of the novel, one which marks it as a chivalric epic (which Cervantes both emulates and parodies) and a picaresque novel.

The uncertain, borderline status of the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance is made more complex by his being poised between reality and fantasy (a state which was of great interest to Tadeusz Kantor) as well as by the difficulty in

4 *Ibid.*

5 M. de Cervantes, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, chapt. XLIV.

6 T. Kantor, *Reality of the Lowest Rank*, in: M. Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis, London 2009, p. 116.

7 T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic. Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, *Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, p. 317.

8 T. Kantor, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

establishing where his existence as a literary character – one from the ‘inside’ of the novel – ends and where he escapes ‘outside’ the narrative. Let’s recall that Don Quixote becomes famous in the second volume, due not to the adventures internalised in the novel but to the events which are, after a fashion, derived from outside literary fiction – he meets people who refer to him as the hero of adventures described in novels which function in the real world: both the first volume of the novel by Cervantes himself (the volume being a well-known literary fact at the time of the writing of the second part) and the counterfeit sequel by Avellaneda. Thus, Cervantes’s novel, particularly its second volume, is not a mere illusionary structure. We are brought close to the point of concluding that the reality of a work of art ‘is reality of the same rank as the reality of life’<sup>9</sup> – Kantor’s *idée fixe*.

Finally, Don Quixote is a knight on a horse, and it is the horse, or rather its skeleton, which appears in the revue *Let the Artists Die* (1985). However, a skeletal horse, its gauntness alluding to Rocinante and, without a doubt, to another famous Spanish horse, that in Picasso’s *Guernica*,<sup>10</sup> becomes one of characteristic elements already in the first (and the only completed) opera staged by Kantor as a director. The premiere of Jules Massenet’s *Don Quixote* took place at the Municipal Music Theatre (in the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre building) on 17 October 1962 (fig. 17), that is to say, at the time to which most of Tadeusz Kantor’s texts quoted here are related. That was the period in which he was interested in art informel; when his search in the ‘zero zone’ began; the time of the Impossible Theatre; the time of producing emballages. In the text *Development of My Stage Ideas: Definitions* (published in 1968<sup>11</sup>), when discussing the year 1962, Kantor does not mention *Don Quixote*, but he refers to another production staged at a professional theatre – to Alfred de Musset’s *The Chandelier* (the National Old Theatre in Krakow; the premiere on 14 October 1962), for which Kantor designed the stage sets and costumes, using ‘found objects’ to create a ‘new reality on the principle of making use of “chance”’. At the same time, he incorporated the ‘principles of art informel’ at the Cricot 2 Theatre:

I realise in practice my idea of REALITY  
OF THE LOWEST RANK, I use the method of  
DESTRUCTION,

9 T. Kantor, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 427.

10 It is Anna Halczak who has drawn my attention to this – now so self-evident to me – source of inspiration. I remain grateful to her for having encouraged me to take up the theme of Spanish inspirations in the work of Tadeusz Kantor.

11 The editor’s note to the first volume of T. Kantor’s *Pisma* includes the information that this text has come out in English in the joint publication *Art and the Stage in the 20th Century: Painters and Sculptors’ Work for the Theater* and also in the German version of the same publication – cf. T. Kantor, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 581.

the method of CHANCE (to the full),  
I employ my definition of a POOR OBJECT  
and a POOR PLACE.<sup>12</sup>

It could thus seem that this production of *Don Quixote*, often passed over by the artist himself and prepared not only for an ‘official theatre’ but for an opera stage to boot, was not of tremendous importance for his creative work. And yet, with the hindsight which now enables us to view Tadeusz Kantor’s work as an integral whole, without dividing it artificially into painting and theatrical art or, within the theatre itself, into truly autonomous art produced in Cricot 2 and the supposedly less important ‘services’ (the artist himself being partly responsible for instilling the latter division), the opera, hitherto marginalised, acquires significance. First of all, documentation of the performance shows that it became an artistic event thanks to Kantor’s production and stage design concepts. Moreover, some of the ideas and solutions which he implemented in *Don Quixote* turned out to be precursors of those used later in Cricot 2 productions. The staging also reveals another aspect of the context of Tadeusz Kantor’s work, an aspect related to Spanish culture, which indubitably fascinated him. And there is one more reason why it is worthwhile to return to the old reviews, photographs, interviews and descriptions: Cervantes’s novel and its protagonist harmonise surprisingly with Tadeusz Kantor’s imagination and, in particular, with his concept of the theatre and the actor.

Kantor directed the Krakow production of the Massenet opera together with Jan Biczyski; on the poster of the show, he was also named as the production manager and the designer of the stage sets and costumes (fig. 17). Kazimierz Kord oversaw the music score and acted as the conductor. He had just taken up the post of the director of the Municipal Music Theatre and planned *Don Quixote* as the performance with which to inaugurate the new season. It was Kord who had talked Kantor into that collaboration. In spite of his misgivings about the opera as a genre, Kantor took up the gauntlet and created – as attested by many – an outstanding work. Kazimierz Kord said later that during the premiere, a ‘storm of applause’ had greeted not only particular production devices, the music or the excellent acting of Tadeusz Podsiadło as the protagonist, but also the stage design ideas (figs. 18, 19). ‘With his suggestive feel for the ambiance of the adapted opera [Kord was to frequently recall the scene of Don Quixote’s death, as he was always moved when conducting it – K.O.], Kantor abandoned a realistic rendition of the libretto in favour of elements characteristic of his Cricot 2 Theatre.’<sup>13</sup>

12 T. Kantor, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 221–222.

13 A statement by K. Kord, qtd fr.: *Opera krakowska*, eds. E. Bąkowska, K. Rytysa-Bańbuła, Kraków 2010, p. 20; see also: *...a w Krakowie jest opera*, ed. E. Tosza, Kraków 2008.



At least six reviews of the performance appeared, almost all of them enthusiastic. Their authors considered the Polish premiere of *Don Quixote* to be an event of national importance;<sup>14</sup> they emphasised that with this production, Krakow had abandoned ‘outdated operatic conventions.’<sup>15</sup> And so – unexpectedly – we discover yet another side of Tadeusz Kantor: a director who influenced a transformation in the tradition of operatic stage production. ‘What Tadeusz Kantor has demonstrated in *Don Quixote* merits (...) a separate study, a dissertation, and it deserves to be recorded’<sup>16</sup> wrote one of the reviewers. Others echoed his words:

If *Don Quixote* had been performed in the convention of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it would have been a mawkish melodrama with a tedious score. However, *Don Quixote* in a very innovative – not to say experimental – modern guise has become a spectacularly interesting performance, taking the viewer by surprise with its stage and sound effects and directorial choices. (...) The audience was dazzled by the play of light, the excellent choreography, the discreet colour scheme of the costumes, the evocative characterisation.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the reviewers emphasised the innovative approach of both directors, Kantor and Biczyski, to the acting in the opera:

Here we can also spot a valid directorial concept: if operatic acting is to be good, if it is to be an element which really integrates the performance, it cannot merely be the kind of acting typical of the ‘spoken’ theatre. It is necessary to make a break with naturalism and psychologism. (...) For instance, the directors have found interesting (albeit not entirely consistent) solutions for the gesture, liberating it partly from a slavish dependence on the text and the psychological states suggested thereby, and subjugating it instead more closely to the rhythm imposed by the musical score. That has led to a more economic gesture, making it more ‘functional’, while at the same time more poetic (...). It is an interesting and sound idea to immobilise the chorus, thus in practice exempting it from poor quality ‘acting’. The effect is exceedingly positive: enhanced musical expression.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the reviewers reached a consensus: an exceptional work had been created, innovative in terms of its stage form; one that employed a contemporary artistic and acting idiom. Skilfully abridged and with its ‘interpretation of the text contrary

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14 Cf.: M. Radost, *Krakowski Don Kichot*, *Kurier Polski*, Warszawa, 24 October 1962, no. 253, p. 4; J. Parzyński, *Don Kichot w Krakowie*, *Echo Krakowa*, Kraków, 22 October 1962, no. 249, pp. 3-4; B. Rutkowski, *Dla opery – tor wolny!*, in: *Dziennik Polski*, Kraków, 18 October 1962, no. 248, p. 4; J. S. [Jerzy Susuł?], *Nowy Don Kichot*, in: *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Kraków, 4 November 1962, no. 44, p. 10; M. Wallek-Walewski, *Don Kichot redivivus*, *Gazeta Krakowska*, Kraków, 22 October 1962, no. 251, p. 3.

15 J. Parzyński, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

16 B. Rutkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

18 J. S. [Jerzy Susuł?], *op. cit.*, p. 10.

to the intuition of the libretto writer', *Don Quixote* was a philosophical tale with profound moral value and a theatrical work without equal.<sup>19</sup>

Józef Kański, the author of one of the reviews and a well-regarded opera critic, remained sceptical about some of Kantor's ideas, saying that the artist had failed to create the 'Spanish ambiance' and that he had dressed Dulcinea's suitors in 'shabby patched coats made of coarse cloth normally used for making sacks.'<sup>20</sup> His review, initially negative (in the course of writing, the author clearly changed his opinion and finished by expressing admiration for the performance) provides quite a good idea of the stage design and the devices employed. 'The almost empty stage is closed up with a tall iron grille beyond which there can be seen a crowd of what appear to be clay dummies.' And, further on:

Dulcinea mounting (...) a wooden podium which from then on symbolises the balcony of her house; a horse and a donkey descending on ropes from somewhere high up as if from the sky; finally, actual steam billowing from the cauldron in which the highwaymen are cooking their meal (...) – these are tricks from three quite distinct theatrical conventions.

Commented Kański, emphasising that none of them was in keeping with Massenet's romantic and lyrical opera. The critic went on to describe the highwaymen in top hats and the steed Rocinante, which 'has so much extraordinary expression that it alone can be an eloquent testimony to Kantor's talent.' The critic considered the scene with the windmills very interesting ('a stupendous play of shadows!') and he admitted that the final scene (figs. 18, 19, 20), 'with the protagonist dying on a scrapheap of objects which he had used and which had served to stimulate his imagination, makes a truly staggering impression.'<sup>21</sup>

There was a critical consensus as to the final scene being very evocative and as to the presentation of the chorus as singing dummies (the reviewer from *Tygodnik Powszechny* wrote, 'Immobilising the chorus, Kantor has made it a crucial element of his artistic vision [brilliant face masks],'<sup>22</sup> and the play of shadows in the windmill scene being remarkable. Marian Wallek-Walewski described the stage design most extensively:

All elements are in ideal sync and perfectly purposeful. The interpretation of the libretto is simply fascinating. Kantor has rejected the superficial plot-based layer of the text. In his rendering, *Don Quixote* is not, as the libretto might suggest, a series of adventures of the last knight-errant but the tragedy of a man full of lofty ideals, left at the mercy of the uncomprehending mob. This premise determines the form

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19 M. Wallek-Walewski, *op. cit.*, p. 3; the reviewer added, 'Apart from *Borys Godunov* in Warsaw [1960, directed by A. Bardini], this is the best opera in recent years.'

20 J. Kański, *Krakowski Don Kichot*, in: *Ruch Muzyczny*, Warszawa, 1961, no. 1, pp. 8–9.

21 *Ibid.*

22 J. S. [Jerzy Susuł?], *op. cit.*, p. 10.

of the performance. The action takes place, as it were, in the arena of a travelling circus or theatre. Don Quixote is a conceptual transposition of the harlequin; Dulcinea – a columbine from the commedia dell'arte. The chorus from the first and fourth acts, interpreted by Kantor as the audience, consists of dumb insensitive dummies, their mouths hanging agape. But it is not only for them that the tragi-farce of Don Quixote is played out; it is not only to them that the gestures and the apostrophes are addressed. In the remaining three acts, there are no spectators-dummies on the stage. In the auditorium, the real spectators are seated, row upon row. This is a morality play addressed directly to the viewers – aimed at their insensitivity. For Kantor and Biczyski, the grotesque, when presented in this way, is constructive. Thanks to the grotesque, parts of the text which are not treated as a parody reverberate with unusual power and veracity. This is the case in Act V, when Don Quixote dies on a pile of rubbish and broken props.<sup>23</sup>

A comparison of various descriptions of the performance with what Kantor himself had to say about it confirms that indeed – as the writer of the above review emphasised – the stage designer founded the performance not on the libretto but on the novel by Cervantes. One has to bear in mind that Henri Cain's libretto of the opera does not have much in common with the novel (the librettist did not adapt Cervantes's text but Jacques Le Lorrain's play *La Chevalier à longue figure*, based on the novel).<sup>24</sup> But one of the main stage set concepts of the performance seems to have been derived from the forty-sixth and forty-seventh chapters in the first volume of the novel, which describe Don Quixote's imprisonment in a cage: 'Don Quixote was seated in the cage, with his hands tied and his feet stretched out, leaning against the bars as silent and as patient as if he were a stone statue and not a man of flesh.'<sup>25</sup> The imprisonment, being locked in a cage and exposed to the derision from the mob, has been transposed into the key module of the stage design: the grilles which separate the stage from the chorus and the audience. Kantor himself, in a short interview given to Krystyna Zbijewska on the eve of the premiere and published in *Dziennik Polski*, referred to the action of the first scene outside Dulcinea's house as the scene which 'would have nothing to do with genre adaptation', because it would be taking place 'as if in a cage, as if in the circus arena' and he added, 'Don Quixote trapped by the mob – something truly out of Goya.'<sup>26</sup>

In turn, the scene of tilting at windmills was, according to Kantor, 'conducted in the manner of a fight in the ring, where the fighting is not so much against

23 M. Wallek-Walewski, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

24 For a more in-depth treatment of this topic see: P. Kamiński, *Tysiąc i jedna opera*, Kraków 2008, pp. 901–903.

25 M. de Cervantes Saavedra, *op. cit.*, vol. I, chapt. XLVII.

26 KR. ZB. [Krystyna Zbijewska], *10 minut z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, in: *Dziennik Polski*, Kraków, 16 October 1962, no. 246, p. 3.

windmills, with which the hero has no contact, as against his own fantasies.<sup>27</sup> This is how the artist commented on the finale of the performance: ‘The death of Don Quixote is the death of a clown, a sage on the ruins of his own dreams, on a pile of sails, windmills, broken mediaeval armour, remnants of the symbols of the feudal splendour. It’s akin to a pilot dying on the wrecked fuselage of his plane.’<sup>28</sup> Incidentally, this last comment points to the artist’s intention to superimpose wartime frames onto the stage set, which underlines the link between the final scene and Picasso’s *Guernica* even more. In this way, the French lyrical opera in Kantor’s staging becomes a dramatic work, full of Spanish tracks derived not only from Cervantes’s novel but also from 20<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish history and art. This most certainly is not – as Józef Kański correctly noted – the Spanish ‘flavour’ reliant on the stereotypical associations common in the history of opera productions constructed with Spanish motifs.

This is hardly surprising; even in his work for ‘official’ theatres, Tadeusz Kantor remained a creative and original artist. We would look in vain for historical accuracy or stylisation in Kantor’s stage and costume designs for his earlier performances with ‘Spanish motifs’, such as *The Mayor of Zalamea* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca (directed and staged by Władysław Krzemiński at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Krakow in 1951) or for those which he staged himself, such as two versions of *The Shoemaker’s Prodigious Wife* by Federico Garcia Lorca (in the 1955 version staged at the Stanisław Wyspiański Theatre of Silesia in Katowice, Kantor was the producer, stage and costume designer; in the 1957 version performed at the National Stary [Old] Theatre in Krakow, he was also a co-director, with Marian Słojkowski).

Already in the 1950s, Kantor ‘rarely employed persiflage, old conventions’, in the words of Zenobiusz Strzelecki.<sup>29</sup> In his stage designs from that period, one can clearly notice the influence of avant-garde artistic trends. Thus, the design drawings for *The Mayor of Zalamea* betray cubist influence.<sup>30</sup> In the first version of *The Shoemaker’s Prodigious Wife*, known from the costume designs and the photographic documentation (materials for the second version, staged at the National Old Theatre, have not been published yet), Kantor makes references to Surrealism, and the photographs<sup>31</sup> bring to mind associations with the art of Kazimierz Mikulski. Tadeusz Kantor’s forgotten 1962 statement indicates one more important issue which undermines the prevalent view that his work for

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 Z. Strzelecki, *Polska plastyka teatralna*, Warszawa 1963, p. 505.

30 This is pointed out by M. Pałuch-Cybulska, *Wprowadzenie*, in: *T. Kantor, Scenografie dla teatrów oficjalnych. Katalog prac*, Kraków 2006, p. 14.

31 Cf.: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora*, op. cit., pp. 158–161.

the ‘official theatre’, not to mention the opera, was for him an occupation of lesser rank, a mere ‘service’, and that research into Kantor’s stage designs for professional theatres requires studying them ‘on their own terms, as distinct from [Kantor’s] autonomous creative work.’<sup>32</sup> Not only that; as a side-product of the work, Kantor formulated ideas that he included or was going to include (which is all the more interesting) into his work in the entirely autonomous field – in *Cricot 2*. Most importantly, the artist talked about the need to organise emotions in the theatre: ‘What matters to me is that the audience should laugh and cry’ (the words were uttered thirteen years before *The Dead Class*, in Kantor’s ‘avant-garde phase’). And he added emphatically, ‘I would like this production to be as radical in its impact as *Cricot 2*.’ Yet again, we have confirmation that Tadeusz Kantor’s art is an integral reality, with its various aspects complementing one another.

The documents which I have received from Anna Halczak make it possible to partly re-create Tadeusz Kantor’s second adventure with Massenet’s opera, this time without a stage conclusion. It transpires clearly both from a letter signed by Julio Álvarez, a theatre director, and from a note by the artist himself (both sources from the spring of 1984) that Kantor wanted very much to stage the opera again, also in co-operation with Kazimierz Kord, and that he planned to accomplish that task initially at the Verdi Theatre in Pisa and subsequently at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in Madrid. In his note referring to the plans of working in Madrid,<sup>33</sup> Kantor put forward his terms, mainly concerning his co-operation with Kord and the possibility of hiring (on Kord’s initiative) the Bulgarian singer Nicola Gyuzelev for the title role. The performance was intended to be a re-run of the Kraków production. In the introduction to an interview with the artist published in the daily *El Publico* under the title *Don Quijote encadenado* – ‘Don Quixote in chains’ – and signed with the initials M. P. C. (Moisés Pérez Coterillo), the following piece of information can be found:

Tadeusz Kantor, one of the great reformers of the theatre of our century, may be about to repeat his version of Massenet’s *Don Quixote*, which he staged in Poland at the beginning of the 60s, at the Teatro de la Zarzuela. However, the dates and international engagements would have to fit into his timetable. Kantor has taken the opera on board, acting on his own premises and within his own theatrical *universum*.<sup>34</sup>

We also read that Kantor had been interested in Cervantes’s novel since his youth:

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32 Cf.: M. Paluch-Cybulska, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

33 One type-written sheet, with hand-written notes, signed: T. Kantor.

34 *Tadeusz Kantor. Don Quijote encadenado*, M. P. C. [Moisés Pérez Coterillo] talking with T. Kantor, in: *El Publico*, Madrid, June 1984, pp. 14–15 (my thanks to Katarzyna Kacprzak for her help in translating the text).

Don Quixote (and its myth) has long been one of the spirits haunting the great artist. He says that he still has in his archives his sketches for a big fresco from his time at the Academy of Fine Arts, a fresco which he painted in a student workshop. It was a very expressionist fresco on the theme of Don Quixote.<sup>35</sup>

In his interview with *El Publico*, Tadeusz Kantor reaffirmed his statement from twenty-two years earlier, and in doing so, he implied that *Don Quixote* produced for the Krakow opera was a watershed event in his own theatrical activity:

When famous singers perform in an opera, the audience applauds and calls them back again and again, the curtain rising and falling. But at my performance, the audience cried. Until then, I had been an artist of the form, abstraction, perfection and rigid aesthetic values. I had just given the first Cricot 2 performance, Witkiewicz's *The Cuttlefish*,<sup>36</sup> which was an example of abstraction, but in *Don Quixote* I wanted to achieve quite the opposite effect; I was convinced that it was necessary to evoke the strongest emotions in the audience, not just aesthetic admiration, but emotions which would end in tears. That was a totally anti-avant-garde activity. Many of my avant-garde colleagues from Krakow held that against me. I had always repeated that I was a child of dada. Dadaists made people laugh. But, suddenly, I wanted to be a dadaist who moves people to tears, perhaps in order to prove that sometimes there is no borderline between laughing and crying. I have already said that humour is indispensable, that everything which is too serious demonstrates a lack of intelligence, and that laughter is a splendid proof of scepticism.<sup>37</sup>

In the same interview, when discussing the premises of staging the planned opera premiere, Kantor talked about *Let the Artists Die*, the performance on which he was working in Cricot 2 at that time. Also on this occasion, the artist did not in any way distinguish between his work on a production for the 'official' scene and his work in his own theatre. Referring to the issue of looking for models for his actors, Kantor emphasised that in the revue *Let the Artists Die*, the models would be prisoners:

Death is something biological, to be a soldier is a social affair, because war is a social phenomenon, but prison concerns human existence. It is the fault of the society, of the civilisation which from the start had created the concept of *prison*. The state of imprisonment cannot exist without the notion of freedom, and freedom is conditioned by the notion of prison. I am not taking on board the theme of prison in the way that an opponent of the institution would when wanting to bring it down. I don't think that this is an issue for art. And Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* in prison. I see Don Quixote as a prisoner of the mentality of his times, and I would like to propose Don Quixote

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35 *Ibid.*

36 The performance was given in 1956; Kantor fails to mention the two subsequent productions at Cricot 2 which preceded his work on *Don Quixote: The Circus* (1957) and *The Country House* (1961).

37 *Tadeusz Kantor: Don Quijote encadenado, op. cit.*, p. 15.

as an artist enslaved by the contemporary civilisation, locked in a cage, together with Sancho Panza. On the other side of the cage, the audience looks, as if in the mirror, at the madness of that strange idiot. What I am interested in is showing what I have been showing until now – the philosophical problem of the human condition, because Don Quixote represents the man of the future, of the impossible, of a utopia. And, of course, the hero dies, in accordance with my theatrical custom and my tendency towards catastrophism.<sup>38</sup>

Tadeusz Kantor crystallised his own vision of Don Quixote:

Probably, such a mentality is close to me. I don't want to say that I am a Don Quixote myself, but in my country people who do quite impossible things (one period of my theatre is called precisely that, the 'Impossible Theatre') are referred to as 'quixotic.' Anyway, Don Quixote's behaviour resembles my own to some extent, both in life and in art. Don Quixote never separates life from art, that is to say, from imagination. This mixing together of life and art also lies in my own character.

We can see that the artist 'annexes' Cervantes's novel in a way, subjugating it to his own vision; he selects from it the elements which are close to him:

On the other hand, *Don Quixote* contains both tragedy and humour. Sancho's mockery keeps destroying the tragedy of Don Quixote. It is not true that the spirit of tragedy is a sign of intelligence. Art without a sense of humour is nothing. That's why I hate people who call themselves avant-garde but who are terribly serious...<sup>39</sup>

This is an artistic declaration: 'Art without a sense of humour is nothing!' Kantor continues:

But we also have the windmills, that is to say, machines, Those useless artefacts have almost acquired the characteristics of a work of art, because their existence is unjustified to such a large extent. For me, the windmills in the production of *Don Quixote* are very important, just as much as the actors are. They are not mere props or a painted curtain; they are a mass in motion, they are the shadows of characters who wave their arms about, move about...<sup>40</sup>

In the interpretation of the Polish artist, the windmills as literary artefacts lose their customary connotations and symbolism – they usually function either as proof of the madness of Don Quixote (who is incapable of distinguishing the sails of a windmill from the arms of a giant) or as a synonym of daydreaming, of being unable to assess the situation, or else, as an expression of the unattainability of the ideal which the knight-errant pursues. The Polish artist, however, perceives the windmills as objects, machines which fascinate him with their movement – a repetitive movement ('mass in motion') at that. Depriving the windmills of the significance and function ascribed to them makes them ambiguous and causes

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38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 *Ibid.*

them to acquire a life of their own. That is what it all looks like to Kantor from the 1984 perspective, over twenty years after the premiere.

The Krakow production of Massenet's opera – let's remind ourselves yet again – was prepared in a transitional period between art informel and the Zero Theatre, a year before the premiere of *The Madman and the Nun*, based on a play by Witkacy (1963), considered by Kantor as the manifesto of his Zero Theatre. Not only did windmills from the opera *Don Quixote* find their representation outside the performance, in a painting produced in that period, but they were also a forerunner of the 'Aneantisising Machine' from *The Madman and the Nun* (1963), a contraption made from old foldable chairs moved by an engine. At that time, Kantor was particularly inspired by automatism and repetitive activity. Worn-out ready-made objects, set in motion, gained a new life in his art, independently of functions assigned to them. Describing the 'Aneantisising Machine,' Kantor noted:

I used an object  
whose exceptional  
utilitarian quality,  
provides it with realness  
which is nagging  
and brutal,  
whose motion  
and function,  
absurd in itself,  
allowed me to transfer it  
to the sphere of multiple meanings -  
poetry.<sup>41</sup>

The windmills from the Krakow production of Massenet's opera find their place in the context of Kantor's artistic experiments conducted in the 1960s; the entire production with its accompanying theme of the 'organisation of the viewer's emotions' is indubitably a forerunner of the Theatre of Love and Death. The same opera viewed from the perspective of 1984 appears to anticipate the revue *Let the Artists Die*. This is due both to the afore-mentioned cliché of prison, which provides the backdrop for *Let the Artists Die*, and to the setting of the final scene of the opera. Returning to the former production on account of his planning the Madrid premiere of *Don Quixote*, Kantor transfers the concept of the final scene from the opera to his new theatrical performance. On the previous occasion, in 1962, in a technical note describing the scene, which bore the working title 'The Barricade,' Kantor listed the objects which should combine to form a 'pile of objects and things':

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41 T. Kantor, *The Autonomous Theatre*, in: M. Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, pp. 364–365.



old chairs  
 a dilapidated cupboard  
 a cart wheel  
 old trunks  
 old tin wash-hand basins  
 pots, pans  
 old tins  
 old boxes  
 [an illegible word]  
 wooden posts from a fence  
 a plaster bust  
 old armour.<sup>42</sup>

This catalogue of objects referring us to the ‘material’ landscape of Cervantes’s novel serves to build up the situation which returns in the final scene of *Let the Artists Die* – as a barricade (‘the final work of the master Veit Stoß’).

However, what appears to be the most significant situation ‘found’ by Kantor in Cervantes’s novel is the uncertain, indefinite status of its hero, the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance, who carries around (literally) remnants of the illustrious, though imagined, past. Don Quixote, suspended between the interior and the exterior of the novel’s narrative (as discussed above), embroiled in complex intertextual games, a character who, as it were, invents himself, an actor in adventures which he himself directs, is a model for Kantor’s perception of the theatre as a borderland between reality and fiction. Such a reading of *Don Quixote*, viewed from the theatrical perspective, with its protagonist interpreted as an actor who shapes reality according to his whim or as a participant in a play imposed (directed) by other powers (such as the Duke and the Duchess in the second volume or the Enchanters) is one with a long tradition behind it. Researchers have pointed out references to the theatre, theatrical situations and metaphors present in the text. In one of the most recent publications which take up the topic of *Don Quixote* as a novel reflecting the ‘World-as-Theatre,’ the author Svetlana Batrakova gives a number of instances which indicate both transference of the mechanisms of the ‘theatrical play’ into the epic fabric of the novel and the knight-errant’s weakness for all things theatrical, dressing up, masquerades (‘from a child I was fond of the play, and in my youth a keen lover of the actor’s art,’ says Don Quixote in chapter XI of the second volume of the

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42 A technical sketch for the opera *Don Quixote*, 1962 – cf. Kantor. *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora*. Exhibition at the National Museum in Krakow (produced in collaboration with the Cervantes Institute in Warsaw). The exhibition catalogue, Kraków 1999, p. 10.

novel; this is but one of many examples).<sup>43</sup> However, one of the first artists to note the ‘theatrical’ potential of *Don Quixote* was Nikolai Evreinov, a Russian director, visionary, theoretician and historian of the theatre, the inventor of the concept of monodrama and a proponent of ‘the directing of life’. In Cervantes’s novel, he isolated the element which he defined as the ‘will of the theatre’: ‘the “theatre for its own sake” which Don Quixote braves, turns out to be a finite, totally logical, uncompromisingly consistent apogee of the “will of the theatre”,’ he wrote in his book *Tieatr dla siebia* [The Theatre for Oneself] in 1915–1917.<sup>44</sup> Today, we would call the situation described by Evreinov ‘performativity’, which is something ‘more than the theatre’, and Don Quixote himself a performer who, dressing up as a knight, imposes on his behaviour and actions the shape determined by his idea of chivalry and the adventures which, being a knight, he expects to come his way. This situation of ‘make believe’ and, simultaneously, of ‘being oneself’ is characteristic of Kantor’s theatre both on the level of the general concept and of the acting.

Finally, the metatextuality of the novel (where events from outside the narration are transferred into the literary fiction), referred to above, and especially the singular condition of the author himself being present in the novel are close to Kantor’s perception of the theatre as well. Cervantes was a precursor of the device of placing the author, complete with his biography, inside the literary work, even before he wrote *Don Quixote*: one of the protagonists of his comedy *The Treaty of Algiers*, called Saavedra, serves as an *alter ego* of Cervantes himself and the comedy contains facts from Cervantes’s life.<sup>45</sup> In *Don Quixote*, the author appears as the creator of the tale, either as the narrator who conceals his identity ‘disguised’ as an Arab, Sidi Hamid Ben Engeli, or as the author of the first volume of the novel, referred to in the second volume. In his work, Cervantes created an incoherent reality. This is fiction full of crevices through which reality itself seeps in, including the reality of the author and his biography, as well as other fictions (other works). The same may be said about Tadeusz Kantor’s theatre or, more broadly, about his entire art.

Tadeusz Kantor – as aptly pointed out by another theatre artist, the Spaniard Francisco Nieva – was a gigantic memory screen on which his entire life (also, or perhaps above all, his experiences connected with his Polish personal and aesthetic roots) was being projected,

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43 S. P. Batrakova, *Tyeatr – Mir i Mir – Tyeatr. Tvorcheski myetod hudozhnika XX vyeaka. Drama o dramye, Pamyatniki istoricheskoi mysli*, Moskva 2010.

44 N. Evreinov, *Dyemon tyeatralnosti*, Letni sad, Moskva–Petersburg 2002, p. 166.

45 A. Trapiello draws attention to this point in the writer’s biography: *Las vidas de Miguel de Cervantes*, trans. P. Fornelski, Warszawa 2012, p. 114.

turned into a memory object, an image, a performance. This screen represents the layers from which living and dead scraps of the past emerge, the deposits of revived shrouds. A certain type of Spanish cruelty and Goya – these were influences which Kantor never denied.<sup>46</sup>

He only admitted to his *Don Quixote* on a rare occasion, but there is much evidence to conclude that the knight-errant with his *idée fixe* and the author of the novel belonged to ‘the kaleidoscopic world of his constantly smouldering memory’<sup>47</sup>.

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46 F. Nieva, *Rozbity teatr Kantora*, in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

47 *Ibid.*



**Tadeusz Kantor:**  
**... Velázquez's *Infantas* as Sacred Relics or Madonnas**

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*Las Meninas*<sup>1</sup> by Diego Velázquez is a painting which has been subject to intensive scrutiny and ceaseless discussion almost from the moment that it was painted in 1656. The apparently realistic composition with a clear message – depicting the infant princess Margarita Teresa surrounded by her maids of honour, with the painter himself standing at his easel; with the royal couple reflected in the mirror – has an ambiguous structure, leaving the viewer with multiple possibilities of interpretation which are not mutually exclusive (fig. 21). The abundant critical literature devoted to the painting since the 17<sup>th</sup> century ‘fails to link knowledge to understanding’, as Joel Snyder, one of the researchers, observes.<sup>2</sup> The body of criticism has selectively been presented in Polish in *Tajemnica Las Meninas: Antologia tekstów* [Mystery of *Las Meninas*: Critical Anthology],<sup>3</sup> compiled by Andrzej Witko.

The painting has not only provided inspiration for researchers, but also, as a construction carrying iconographic potential, it has prompted many artists to re-interpret the image, using very varied means of expression. These have been classic painters such as Francisco Goya, Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso, but also, significantly, some decidedly less familiar conceptual or performative artists such as Philippe Comar, Soledad Sevilla or Joel-Peter Witkin. In their works, the relationship with the original composition is frequently hard to spot, from the formal point of view. The painting has also inspired sculptors, for instance Manolo Valdés in his Oviedo installation, as well as video artists. One could also indicate as relevant the project *89 seconds in Alcázar* by Eve Sussman and the Rufus Corporation from 2004, or the experimental 2008 film of the Ukrainian director Ihor Podolchac, entitled *Las Meninas*.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, oil on canvas, 318 x 276 cm, 1656, the Prado, Madrid.
  - 2 J. Snyder, *Las Meninas and the Mirror of the Prince, Critical Inquiry*, vol. 11, no. 4, The University of Chicago Press 1985, p. 539.
  - 3 *Tajemnica Las Meninas. Antologia tekstów*, comp. and ed. A. Witko, Kraków 2006.
  - 4 The references to the composition of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* in visual arts are far-reaching. The instances quoted here aim merely to illustrate the popularity of the framework. One publication which analyses in detail the influence of this painting by Velázquez on the

Tadeusz Kantor became one of the artists to re-interpret the work by Velázquez. According to my research, between the mid-60s and 1990 he produced nine paintings and at least six drawings inspired by the composition of *Las Meninas*, as well as probably by other portraits of the infant princess Margarita by Diego Velázquez. The character of the Infanta in Cricot 2's last production *Today Is My Birthday* (1991) also reveals a Velázquez pedigree.

It is impossible to pin down with complete accuracy the first time that Kantor directly encountered the work of the Spanish master. He visited Spain a number of times between 1981 and 1989 when touring with the Cricot 2 Theatre. Earlier, in the 1950s, he had had contact with Spanish culture<sup>5</sup> as a stage designer, working for repertory theatres on stage sets for Pedro Calderón's *The Mayor of Zalamea* (1951), Federico Garcia Lorca's *The Shoemaker's Prodigious Wife* (1955, 1957) or Jules Massenet's *Don Quixote* (1962). The 1945 stage set for Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid*, where the character of Infanta appears, is particularly significant,<sup>6</sup>; here, the daughter of Don Fernando, played by Celina Niedźwiecka. As Mieczysław Porębski noted, this was the 'first version of his Infantas'.<sup>7</sup> In the interview that Maria Stangret-Kantor gave for *Gazeta Wyborcza* in 1999 in connection with

art of Pablo Picasso, and also other artists, is the catalogue of the exhibition presented in the Picasso Museum in Barcelona from 15 May to 28 September 2008: *Oblidant Velázquez: Las Meninas*, Barcelona Culture Institute, the Picasso Museum, Barcelona 2008. See the analysis therein and substantial bibliography on the topic.

- 5 The influence of Spanish culture on the work of T. Kantor was analysed in 1999 on the occasion of the exhibition *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora* [Spanish Motifs in Tadeusz Kantor's Oeuvre] at the National Museum in Krakow (curated by Zofia Gołubiew). This event was accompanied by two publications which were an attempt to compile Kantor's works inspired by Spain and provide a general analysis of such themes: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora / Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor*, Warszawa 1999; *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora. Wystawa w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie / Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor. Exposición del Museo Nacional de Cracovia / Spanish Motifs in Tadeusz Kantor's Oeuvre. The Exhibition at the National Museum in Krakow*, the publishing concept by Zofia Gołubiew, Kraków 1999.
- 6 P. Corneille, *Le Cid*, trans. S. Wyspiański, dir. and produced: Jerzy Ronard Bujański, stage set and costumes: Tadeusz Kantor, premiere 25 July 1945 (in the courtyard of the old Jagiellonian Library, ul. Św. Anny 6, Krakow), the Stary [Old] Theatre Small Stage, Krakow.
- 7 M. Porębski, in conversation with Tadeusz Kantor on 5 December 1989, admitted, 'Tadeusz Kantor made splendid costumes for *Le Cid*; the first version of his Infantas. This was more than wealth; this was – when you also take into account the courtyard, the ancient galleries and stairways – splendour itself.' In: M. Porębski, *Deska. Tadeusz Kantor. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, Warszawa 1997, p. 103. Photographs from the performance, showing Kantor's costumes and the stage set, from the Cricoteka Archives.

the exhibition *Spanish Motifs in the Work of Tadeusz Kantor* at the National Museum in Krakow, the artist's wife remarked she and Kantor had mainly come across paintings by Velázquez and Goya during their private stay in Madrid at the beginning of the 1960s. This is how she described their visit to the Prado, 'Tadeusz stood there for a long time and just looked.'<sup>8</sup> Kantor himself, talking to Mieczysław Porębski on 31 January 1990, admitted, 'I did like Velázquez a lot; at the Prado I would always go back to Velázquez and Goya, the rest was indifferent to me.'<sup>9</sup> Earlier, the artist might have seen other portraits of the Infanta Margarita by Velázquez, exhibited at the Museum of Art History in Vienna, or at the Louvre in Paris, during his travels abroad in the 1940s and the 1950s.<sup>10</sup> Anyhow, in the conversation with Mieczysław Porębski, Kantor indicated the source of his inspiration in the plural: 'Velázquez's Infantas'.

Of course, Kantor could have had access to books with reproductions of these works. For one, this may be concluded from the inventory of the books available at the Kunstgewerbeschule, as mentioned by Ewa Krakowska in her publication *Szkice z pamięci* [Sketches from Memory].<sup>11</sup> According to the January 1943 listing, it contained a publication by Carl Justi on Diego Velázquez. The book, published in 1933, showed dozens of black-and-white reproductions of the painter's works, including all his Infantas, complete with *Las Meninas*.<sup>12</sup>

The moment that Kantor took an interest in *Las Meninas* coincided with the general rise of interest in the painting at the end of the 50s and beginning of the 60s. This had most likely been triggered by the series of fifty eight paintings, inspired by *Las Meninas*, painted by Pablo Picasso in his villa near Cannes between August and December 1957.<sup>13</sup> The series re-ignited interest in the work of Velázquez and spurred many artists to re-interpret the painting. Next, at the Prado in Madrid in 1960, a great Velázquez retrospective took place. Another stimulus for the putting the work of the Spanish master in the spotlight was Michel Foucault's book *The*

8 *Tadeusza Kantora dialog z Hiszpanią*, Beata Matkowska-Święś talking to Maria Stangret, in: *Wysokie obcasy* (Gazeta Wyborcza supplement), no. 124, Warszawa 29–30 May 1999, pp. 38–39.

9 M. Porębski, *Deska. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, op. cit., p. 133.

10 1947 – Paris, academic grant; 1956 – Vienna; touring with the Stry [Old] Theatre, performances of *Summer at Nohant* in the Burgtheater, Vienna. Qtd fr.: *Tadeusz Kantor. Wędrownia*, eds. J. Chrobak, L. Stangret, M. Świca, Kraków 2000, p. 41, 50.

11 E. Krakowska, *Szkice z pamięci*, Kraków 2009.

12 C. Justi, *Diego Velázquez und sein Jahrhundert*, Zurich 1933.

13 For Kantor, Picasso's work had always been an important point of reference. There is no record to confirm that Kantor had viewed the paintings of Picasso's in the artist's Museum, opened in 1963 in Barcelona, where the whole series had been placed. Some of Kantor's own paintings indicate that he knew them, if only from reproductions, and that they could have influenced his work on this motif to some extent.

*Order of Things*.<sup>14</sup> Published in France in 1966, it contained an interpretation of *Las Meninas*, extremely innovative for that time, indeed, a watershed, which took on board the topic of modes of representation and the ambiguity of perception.

If we were to be guided by the artist's own dating of works, probably Kantor's first painting with the image of the Infanta was the 1965 *Monsieur Prado II. The Infanta*,<sup>15</sup> which inaugurated the series of works presenting the Infanta Margarita, picked out from the source composition. The minimalist and expressive representation is quite a free interpretation of Velázquez's work, boiling down the multi-aspect portrait to an image of just the face and a canvas bag, with the letter *M* superimposed on it<sup>16</sup> as the most tangible allusion to *Las Meninas*. This representation seems to me to be extremely significant for the subsequent works repeating the composition blueprint, and not only because it had preceded the others. I have in mind the five paintings created from the mid-60s until the beginning of the 70s and, in one case, the beginning of the 80s.<sup>17</sup> Without for a moment prejudicing the analysis of those representations, which from the formal point of view have quite a different quality, I would like to underline their fundamental difference in relation to the *Monsieur Prado II*; the painting recording, after a fashion, the stylistic breakthrough which was taking place in Kantor's work

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14 M. Foucault, *Les Mots et les Choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, 1966; M. Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, New York 1994, pp. 3–17.

15 *Mr Prado II, Infantka*, 1965, mixed technique on canvas, 162 x 100 cm, the National Museum in Krakow.

16 S. Parlagreco draws attention to this detail, describing Kantor's *Infantas* in general terms in *Notatka*, in: L. Passega, *Kantor. Wielopole, Wielopole. Dossier*, Cricoteka, Kraków 2007, p. 202.

17 In chronological order: *The Infanta after Velázquez*, 1965, oil and collage on canvas [private property, Switzerland], (data from: *La mia opera. Il mio viaggio. Commento intimo*, Milan 1991 / *Ma création, Mon voyage. Commentaires intimes*, Paris 1991, no. cat. 151); *The Infanta after Velázquez*, 1966–1970, acrylic, wood, metal on canvas, 170 x 115 cm, Art Museum in Łódź; *The Infanta after Velázquez*, 1981, oil and collage on canvas, 180 x 125 cm, owner unknown; in the 1980s in the Galerie de France, Paris (data from: *La mia opera. Il mio viaggio, op. cit.*, no. cat. 153). In 1975 there existed yet another similar painting, shown at the exhibition *Emballages*, Art Museum in Łódź (May/June 1975). In the still available photographic documentation of the exhibition, a painting can be seen, not in evidence in any other record, which is a close compositional match for the remaining works by Kantor. It is significant that at the later exhibition, *Kantor: Emballages 1960–76*, Main and Small Galleries, London, September–October 1976, this work was replaced by another, the version already familiar from the Art Museum in Łódź. We can guess that the paintings had become scattered. A formal analysis of both works prompts us to reject the assumption that the painting recorded by the photograph from the 1975 exhibition may have been repainted by the artist.



during that period. On the one hand, this is an attempt to get beyond informel (the face of the Infanta being partly scattered in the formlessness of the paint),<sup>18</sup> and at the same time moving on towards the next stage – emballages, present in Kantor's work from the mid-60s (with the canvas bag as packaging; a singular synonym for the human shape). In relation to the motif of the Infanta, this work is also a watershed, because it appears to reveal the impulse which triggered the particular form, rather than any other, of the work. If one takes a close look at the face of the figure, it demonstrates Kantor's fascination not so much with *Las Meninas* itself as, rather, with its repeated paraphrases made by Picasso in 1957. In Kantor's work we not only find the asymmetrical positioning of the non-realistically shaped eyes and the distorted proportions, both characteristic of Picasso's cubist compositions and consistently employed throughout the series, but also other Picassoesque methods, such as the use of colour and the ensuing consequences thereof. Without a doubt, in the *Monsieur Prado II* Kantor did not shy away from using contrast and a distinctive coloristic juxtaposition. The combination of deep pink with purple seems, in comparison to Kantor's other works, almost absurd; certainly, exceptional. Picasso's entire series was permeated with intense colour. The colour of the hair of Kantor's Infanta, quite suspect in the overall context of Kantor's colour usage, was one of the favourite shades of the Spanish artist, often juxtaposed in his works with a whole range of other, equally strong colours. This point becomes particularly significant in the analysis of Kantor's works if one scrutinises the basis of Picasso's colour composition, where elements filled with a distinct splash of colour combine, like a mosaic, into the outline of a figure, an object or some internal space of the painting. With Picasso, this outline (I am referring not only to the outline of the entire figure, but also of its particular components) is often traced in black, thus emphasising the shape. In those of Picasso's works which show the whole of the Infanta's<sup>19</sup> figure, its outline boils down to the oval of the head, the elongated rectangle of the body and the large rectangle or square of the skirt. This outline was taken over by Kantor and filled in a different fashion.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Similarly, J. Suchan, when analysing iconographic borrowings in Kantor's art, notes in reference to the painting: '(...) the face has been replaced with swirls of paint, eyes and the mouth barely outlined – a sort of self-quotation from the informel stylistics practised earlier.' J. Suchan, *Kantor z obrazami. Przytoczenia w twórczości malarzkiej Tadeusza Kantora*, in: *Modus. Prace z historii sztuki*, Instytut Historii Sztuki, no. 1, Kraków 2000 [1999].

19 Picasso paraphrased not only the entire composition of *Las Meninas*, but also individual figures from the painting, and produced compositions inspired by elements of the painting. Cf. footnote 4.

20 Kantor's likely inspiration by the series of Picasso's work concerns, to my mind, concrete formal solutions, or the means of expression employed therein. However, Kantor's series

In his text *Envelopes Packages*, Kantor wrote about his subsequent paintings entitled, in most cases, *The Infanta after Velázquez*, ‘I am making a series of “packaging” of well-known museum characters. I am wrapping Velázquez’s Infanta from the bottom in a huge leather bag, once used by postmen.’<sup>21</sup> He named these works *Museum Persiflages*. Along with the Infantas, there was also the 1970 emballage of Francisco Goya’s *The Third of May 1808* and the 1975 emballage of yet another work; in Kantor’s *Intimate Comments* from 1987–88, we read, ‘I dared to make the emballage of a “sacred national relic”, *The Prussian Homage* / by Matejko. With despair, fear and piety, I “packaged” / the proud figures of the royals, knights and bishops – / for eternity.’<sup>22</sup>

Let us go back to the Velázquez painting. One of the threads of the discussion about the work is the endeavour to answer the question of what this work is about. Certainly, this is a portrait of the Infanta; however, this does not explain the composition of the whole and the presence of the other elements. As one of the researchers notes, there is no doubt that this is something more than merely a portrait of her external appearance.<sup>23</sup> There is no scope here to cover all the issues related to the painting;<sup>24</sup> suffice it to mention that, apart from the portrait aspect, the following points remain unexplained: the presence of the painter himself, the content of the painting on the easel, which the viewer cannot see, the reflection of the royal couple in the mirror, and, above all, the positioning and the inclusion of the viewer in the composition of the painting in such a way that, while being an observer, the viewer becomes a participant, one of the characters in the painting; the gaze of most of the people depicted on the canvas, including the royal couple reflected in the mirror, is focused on the point occupied by us, the viewers. Thus, it cannot be established for certain, whether, as Leo Steinberg puts it, ‘whether these courtly characters have just joined us, or whether we’ve just walked in to interrupt them.’<sup>25</sup> The same researcher has worked out that, apart from the complex subject of the painting, ‘If you address the width of the canvas, taking its measure from side to side, you discover the median in the little Infanta

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as such does not replicate Picasso’s series – it has quite a different character and it was produced in a different mode.

- 21 T. Kantor, *Koperty pakunki*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974*, Pisma, vol. I, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków, 2005, p. 310.
- 22 T. Kantor, *Komentarze intymne*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- 23 J. Snyder, *Las Meninas and the Mirror of the Prince*, ‘Critical Inquiry’, vol. 11, no. 4, 1985, p. 542.
- 24 Cf. footnote 3 and the fragment of text to which it refers.
- 25 L. Steinberg, *Velázquez’ Las Meninas*, ‘October’, vol. 19, 1981, pp. 48–50. The researcher stresses that it is the painter who enables us to decide ‘what’ it is that the viewer contemplating the painting is a ‘part of’.

– at her left eye, precisely.<sup>26</sup> She stands there, posed, as if nobody else were being portrayed; her silhouette ‘reflects’ the tensions resultant from the movements and gestures of her companions. It is her portrait that Kantor has selected from the whole composition, at the same time putting paid to the endless speculation about the remaining elements of the painting. What we are dealing here with is double reduction. In relation to *Las Meninas*, these works are merely portraits of the Infanta, and in principle, all that has been ‘quoted’ is her face (fig. 23). Apart from her, only the piece of wood fixed down with a couple of screws directly above her head could perhaps be taken as some sort of allusion to the prototype. Under the circumstances, we could abandon making any references at all to the Velázquez composition, if not for the fact that, as we shall see in a moment, in spite of its intensified selectivity, in Kantor’s image of the Infanta the relations are continued with the composition which does not exist here any more, and the Infanta is still the focal reference point.

The artist himself provides a sketchy description:

... no effort has been made even to cover the canvas with colours,  
which have the ability to produce the illusions required...

(...)

... the portrait itself has been made in a hurry in two parts,  
later joined with metal hinges.

The painting can be folded like a suitcase.

(...)

Evidently nobody cared that the Infanta looks as

... if broken in half.

(...) the Infanta’s famous skirt like a liturgical vestment

stretched on hoops of whalebone

has been replaced with a postman’s old, worn-out bag

and considered an apt imitation.

The remnants of the bag’s straps which stick out upwards

replicate the movement of the Infanta’s hands spread out

above the wings of the dress...

... the little bits of wood, sea-salt eaten flotsam thrown ashore

are the only scant allusion to the internal skeleton...<sup>27</sup>

For Kantor, Velázquez’s *Infantas*, ‘like sacred relics or madonnas’,<sup>28</sup> are also a sort of emballages – packaged in their dresses, splendour, hidden beneath the insisted layer of solemnity, immobilised by convention, and due to all that – indifferent, sterile and empty. They carry on in their courtly packaging, devoid of personality

26 *Ibid.*, p.51.

27 T. Kantor, *Infantki*, in: *idem, Pisma. Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974, op. cit.*, pp. 320–321.

28 T. Kantor, *Komentarze intymne, op. cit.*, p. 34, and: T. Kantor, *Infantki, op. cit.*, p. 320.

traits, without identity, without any signs of life; ‘death’s dummies enclosed in cardboard boxes’, as Kantor calls them.<sup>29</sup> In 1990 he emphasised, ‘they remain defenceless, so something has to be done with this defencelessness.’<sup>30</sup> So, in his works, Kantor initiated the opposite situation: he replaced the decorative, pompous packaging of the Infanta with something completely different – poverty and austerity (fig. 22).<sup>31</sup> He removed the dispensable ballast of the packaging, from the whole intricate construction leaving only the little girl’s face: she would appear to be the same as before – soulless and indifferent, but through the device of selection she has acquired a totally new dimension. Here, nothing distracts our attention; neither the Infanta’s decorative quality,<sup>32</sup> nor the restless, multi-layered composition of *Las Meninas*. We no longer feel ourselves gazed at by the figures in the painting – with one exception: Kantor’s Infanta’s sideways glance; we are no longer saddled with the Foucault’s revealing gaze, in which – with Velázquez – we participated, whether we wanted to, or not.<sup>33</sup> With Kantor, only the infanta

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29 *Op. cit.*, p. 320.

30 M. Porębski, *Deska. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, M. Porębski in conversation with T. Kantor on 31 January 1990, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

31 J. Suchan also draws attention to this reversal of the elements used by Velázquez in his composition, in: *Kantor z obrazami*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

32 W. Borowski commented on Velázquez’s work as follows, ‘It is well-known that Velázquez was more excited by painting the Infantas’ clothes than their faces.’ In: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora*, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.

33 *Las Meninas* by Velázquez is a work so pronouncedly enconced in formal and spatial complications, both inside the structure of the painting and at the point where it touches the external reality, that it is very persuasive in inspiring researchers to place Kantor’s paintings within this discourse. It is from this angle that Andrzej Turowski writes about Kantor’s *Infantas after Velázquez*: ‘Kantor’s canvas, painted after Velázquez, is iconoclastic. It is an attempt to invade the strongly guarded territory of the convention which objectivises meanings in the autonomous timespace of the frame. It aims to destroy the construction, in *Las Meninas* focused on the gaze of the Infanta; the perspectivist and notional centre of the composition. Kantor aims to disempower the figure of the princess, which symbolises the ‘pure visibility’ of form. He wants to ridicule the abstract existence of the courtly marionette with the real subject of the work by Velázquez – the royal couple – absent; and the creative subject, that is to say the actual artist composing the painting (Velázquez himself) – likewise absent: ‘... już dawno pana wyeliminowałem, pan też wisi na włosku’, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Z Archiwum Galerii Foksal*, eds. M. Jurkiewicz, J. Mytkowska, A. Przywara, Warszawa 1998, p. 484.

It seems to me that it is groundless to make Kantor’s paintings dependent on the mechanism of the perception of the original legitimised by Foucault, and to find it necessary to justify such a dependence of Kantor or, rather, an absence thereof. Through pushing reduction to the limit, Kantor has removed not only the play of the gaze, but also any dialogue with it. This is so, because in his works the structure has been destroyed in which all the elements, mutually indispensable and carefully distributed spatially, played a significant

looks, her gaze reaching out somewhere far away; bodiless, without any additional attributes – and yet, her gaze is extremely powerful, electrifying, commanding attention. How is it that these portraits make such a strong impression?

On the one hand, on these canvases we find the most poetic faces that Kantor had ever painted (not counting the late, fully figurative phase of his work), extremely realistic, softly sketched, with great attention to detail, in three cases – modelled with *chiaroscuro* effect, nostalgic, simply beautiful. On the other hand, they have been painted using a technique which gives an illusion of being realistic and 3D, which makes them, as Kantor puts it, emerge ‘like an apparition from the void of the canvas...’<sup>34</sup> In two of the sketches, the artist placed the infanta in a package from which, through a hole, only her face shows; the rest is dispersed in the dark.<sup>35</sup> The outlining of the face against the background is especially noticeable in the next painting in the series, probably also painted in the 60s, entitled *The Infanta in Mourning*.<sup>36</sup> The emballage is presented in a somewhat different, apparently more dignified, guise: the skirt of the Infanta is constructed not from the postman’s bag, but from a black canvas sack; white strings have replaced her hands and two pieces

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role. For this reason, to my mind, the practice is also groundless, wide-spread as it is, of investing the piece of wood above the Infanta’s head with the attributes of the mirror which in Velázquez’s composition reflects the royal couple and constitutes a significant element in the construction of placing the viewer in the space of the painting. This is, for instance, Turowski’s take: ‘In the upper part we find the head of the Infanta, left over from Velázquez’s ‘erased’ painting, and above it, in the place of the dominant gaze, the ‘transcendental’ mirror with the royal couple, there is a mundane piece of wood, held down with a couple of nails.’ *op. cit.*, p. 483; and also S. Parlagreco’s: ‘(...) on the head, a piece of wood, a metaphorical reflection of the parents as was the case in the symbolic painting by Velázquez’, in: *Notatka, op. cit.*, p. 202. There is no doubt that Kantor’s *Persiflages* bear traces of the original structure; however, I am inclined to allow them autonomous value, the capacity for self-determination. For this reason, I’d rather view the piece of wood installed by Kantor as a condensed trace of all that which was present in the original composition and which he had not decided to use in his own work, and of the said discourse. There is some possible evidence for the trace of the latter: in two works, the pieces of wood had been covered in splodges of colour, reminiscent of colour compositions in Picasso’s series referred to earlier.

- 34 T. Kantor, *Infantki*, in: *idem, Pisma. Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974, op. cit.*, p. 321.
- 35 T. Kantor, *Untitled*, a sketch for a painting, [the latter part of the 80s, pastel, felt tip, paper, no dimensions available], dated 1969, owner unknown, sold at an auction of drawings in Tokyo in 1990; and *Untitled*, 1970 [no add. info., owner unknown], the drawing reprod. in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Metamorphoses*, Chêne/Hachette, Galerie de France 1982 as *Infantes (les esquisses)*, p. 76.
- 36 *The Infanta / [The Infanta in Mourning]*, 1966, mixed technique on canvas, 170 x 115 cm, owned by Dr Christian Karl Schmidt, on deposit in the Neues Museum, Nuremberg.

of wood nailed together represent her bone frame. This selection process taken to the extreme, by picking out only the face, hands and the outline of her skirt is explained in one of Kantor's texts, in which the artist elucidates his use of similar means of expression in *The Dead Class*, 'When you look at Velázquez's painting, there is only the blackness there as well as the whiteness of the Infantas' faces and the whiteness of the Infantas' hands, and perhaps just a bit of rose clipped onto the hair, and nothing else. I am certain that greatness relies on the limitation of the means.'<sup>37</sup> Talking to Mieczysław Porębski, the artist expands on his observations, 'This is about his operating within a very narrowed-down colour scheme; there are really in there only some brownish greys of varying depths, deeper, shallower, a touch of pink somewhere or a bit of a light-blueish tint.'<sup>38</sup> This remark has a tangible connection to the monochromatic character of these works, which, apart from *The Infanta in Mourning*, are kept by Kantor within a homogenous, sepia range of colour.

As an aside, it is in order to mention that such a tendency is prevalent in the 17th-century baroque painting. In the Prado there are at least three portraits by Diego Velázquez from the 1630s and 50s, which Kantor may have been able to view there, with the light-coloured patch of the face contrasted in them with a dark background the details of which only come together from their diffusion in a close-up. *The Infanta in Mourning* may have been inspired by the *Infanta Margarita Teresa in a Blue Dress* from 1659, to be found in the Museum of Art History in Vienna. Pointing to that possibility are the colour scheme, the turning of the head to the right, and the absence of the piece of wood above the head – which, in the other four paintings of the series, is a reference to the composition of *Las Meninas*. It may well be that, during his wanderings around the Prado, Kantor happened upon *The Empress Doña Margarita de Austria in Mourning Dress* (1666) by Juan Bautista del Mazo, a painter from the Velázquez school.<sup>39</sup> In particular the shape and texture of the skirt seem related to the mourning sack, narrowing towards its upper part, in Kantor's own painting.

Let us stay for a moment with the reduction of the means of expression, so characteristic of these particular works by Kantor. As I said earlier, the figure of the Infanta, reduced to the canvas bag and a couple of pieces of wood, remains in a specific relationship to the series by Picasso which re-interprets Velázquez's composition, defined by me as one of the areas from which Kantor might have drawn inspiration. Picasso's paintings are constructed with geometrical figures

37 T. Kantor, *Moja droga do teatru śmierci*, in: *idem, Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975–1984, Pisma*, vol. II, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2004, p. 465.

38 M. Porębski, *Deska, op. cit.*, p. 133.

39 Under Velázquez's supervision, Mazo copied some of his paintings. The authorship of some of them has been disputed to this day.

which remain in a constant relationship with one another. The space, human figures and objects have been written as a geometric code closely filling up the canvases. Whence Kantor took the geometry and sent it through the filter of synthetic vision, arriving at a pure – indeed, minimalist – composition, in which into the Picassoesque rectangle of the skirt he put the postman's bag. With Picasso, the whole composition has been undermined and destabilised, including his references to Velázquez. This requires the viewer to keep making it whole anew; to that end there are present both the dialogue emanating from the figure of Margarita and the signature, quite insistent, idiom of Picasso's narration. In contrast to the French master's quivering, Kantor's choices (the reduction of the means and the selective use made of Velázquez's composition) aim to achieve a unity of all the elements, enhancing the very poetics. This is even more tangible in the conceptual emballage *Relic No. 2* (probably from the early 70s),<sup>40</sup> where the Infanta has been reduced to a crunched up paper bag and a perfunctory sketch of the face/the head attached to a piece of extremely distressed, shabby plank, which bears insistent connotations of Kantor's 'reality of the lowest rank'. Indeed, if not for the caption THE INFANTA, we might have problems identifying this portrait, which is so closely related to the matter of the object that it begins to be perceived exclusively in its terms.<sup>41</sup>

Going back to Kantor's *Infantas after Velázquez*: their faces detached from all the rest, aspiring to comparisons with reality, and yet artificial, give the impression of marionettes' faces; as researchers have observed, with those faces irrevocably inviting associations with mannequins, which are always present in Kantor's work.<sup>42</sup> The freezing of the *Infantas*' faces has quite a different character here to

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40 *Relic No. 2*, [from the early 1970s], [paper bag, drawing on paper, screws, wood], 35 x 50 x 7 cm, owner unknown; in 1976 the work was in the possession of the artist (acc. to: the exhibition catalogue *Tadeusz Kantor. Emballages 1960–76*, Main and Small Galleries, London 22 September – 31 October 1976, p. 11).

41 A. Skalska covers briefly the equalisation of the figure of the Infanta with an object through 'approximation on physical and metaphorical levels, through the artist's gesture, through an identical function and through an equivalent position on the canvas', mostly in reference to Kantor's *Museum Persiflages*. According to the author, as a result of these activities, the figure of the Infanta becomes 'appropriated by Kantor more than by Velázquez.' A. Skalska, *Przedmiot i człowiek w sztuce Tadeusza Kantora*, in: *Metamorfozy. Piękni, dwudziestoletni, Eli. Materiały z sesji popularnonaukowej i spotkań autorskich. Sanok 13–20 czerwca 1993*, Sanok [1993].

42 The comparison of the face of the Infanta to a mannequin's head is common amongst researchers. Andrzej Turowski has covered this point most fully, analysing the appearance of a dummy, mannequin and the figure of death in Kantor's work as well as their gradual deconstruction. In relation to Kantor's paintings which we are interested in here, he writes, i.a., '(...) embarking on a tour of the world's galleries, they ironically don someone

that in the *Monsieur Prado II*, where the face, frozen in a scream, is reminiscent of Edvard Munch's expressionist 1893 painting, saturated with emotion. Here, the face, emerging 'like an apparition',<sup>43</sup> accumulates the centrifugal tendencies; it acts in conjunction with the other elements of the painting, which, stuck onto the canvas, seem to explode its two-dimensional surface and enter the 3D space of reality. The Infanta's face appears at the end, emerging from the diffusion, half a pace behind the crude skirt. Thus, here it is also the case, just as in *Las Meninas*, although thanks to the employment of totally different means, that the surface of the painting does not separate us from its content. Here also the painterly vision created by the artist is consistently directed outwards; it begins to belong to the viewer's own space.<sup>44</sup> Finally, in this painting, as is the case in the other, the focus of the tension is outside the work itself – at the boundary of 'that which' is still a part of the painting and 'that which' already exists in a dimension independent of the painting. In that sense, we can define the analogy with Velázquez's work as quite a loose parallel. In the work of the Spanish artist, the construction of the work immobilises the viewer; binds him to a concrete place, in relation to which the entire action of the composition is set and in relation to which the narration initiated by the painter begins to acquire sense.

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else's style, under the form of Museum Persiflages masking explicit mockery.' *Ambalaże, atrapy, manekiny*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Interior imaginacji*, Warszawa–Kraków 2005, p. 118. Elsewhere, he writes, 'In the gaze of the Infanta Margarita, excluded from the play of glances, we can perceive the face of a marionette, full of mysterious grace and artificial elegance. It is reflected in the somewhat monstrous cover of the mannequin: the huge rucksack with its fake pockets, the closed eyes of the dummy'; '... już dawno pana wyeliminowałem, pan też wisi na włosku', *op. cit.*, p. 483.

43 T. Kantor, *Infantki*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974*, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

44 The thus-conceived paintings are set firmly in the process of the changes in Kantor's painting. In 1964, following his informal period, the artist embarked on the phase of lifting objects and the human figure from the dense matter of the canvas. The first industrial sacks appeared, joined to the canvas with metal screws. The next year, Kantor would attach to his canvases bags, parcels, envelopes or umbrellas, frequently constituting the main element of the work, as in, for instance, *Emballage urgens* (1965, MSL) – at times, accompanied by the image of a face, or, later, other bodily parts, as in *Marmosz Siget* (1965, MSL). In 1967, figures broken in half appeared, variously divided, or else presented in a fragmented manner. This type of representation continued until the early 70s in works such as *Emballages, objets, personnages no 2* (1967, MNK). As a consequence, starting at the end of the 60s, and continuing until the early 80s, Kantor painted a series of emballed figures, with pieces of wood instead of limbs or ties. It was not until 1983 that, when working on the series *The Dead Class*, he began to paint realistic human shapes, involved in manifold spatial conflicts. During 1987–90, in the last series of fully figurative paintings, the issue of opening the work to space and the relationships stemming therefrom became Kantor's leitmotif.



The mobility of Kantor's paintings, with their inherent premise that the museum space may 'step into' our reality, corresponds to the division of the canvas into two parts, with the possibility of folding them suggested by the artist by means of metal hinges.<sup>45</sup> Andrzej Turowski – one of the few researchers to have devoted more attention to Kantor's *Infantas* – compares the canvas to a 'mobile diptych, the devotional altar of a pilgrim, the "travelling architecture of the actor" from Schlemmer's theatre.'<sup>46</sup> The division of the paintings seems also to delimit two distinct areas of meaning. The bottom part – a bag or a sack – inevitably evokes the association of moving about and travelling. After all, Kantor himself emphasised that he had been marked with the leitmotif of the journey; elements such as bags, envelopes, rucksacks, bundles, handcarts kept appearing in his paintings, theatre and happenings. Andrzej Turowski describes that part as the 'despised territory of the nomad, the mark of space.'<sup>47</sup> According to him, the 'upper part of the painting is the sphere of the history which no longer exists; a trace of time.'<sup>48</sup> For me, this is the sphere of memory. The image of the *Infanta* is an image recorded in the memory space of the artist. And memory must not be viewed here as the opposite of invention, but as a creative building block. This is because memories can only function as traces which, on the one hand, are reflections of past reality, but on the other hand, are unified here and now and so they again spring to life in an – inevitably – new form, summoned from the past by a creative act, thus projecting new meanings through the 'here and now'. That which was – and is – and that which will become, or may become, overlap with

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45 Such a division had already been introduced in the *Infanta* from the National Museum in Krakow. In the subsequent works, two parts of the canvas were united into a whole by means of hinges. Let's emphasise that many of Kantor's works, created in various periods, not related to the series in question, consist of two or more parts – due to technical considerations and the necessity to join canvases together in order to arrive at a surface to paint on of larger dimensions. In the case in question, thanks to the employment of hinges and the presence of Kantor's sketches (see Footnote 35), which explain their usage (the work, broken in half, should fold up like a suitcase), the device has acquired artistic status. This is how Mieczysław Porębski commented on this phenomenon, when talking to Kantor on 31 January 1990: '(...) it folds up, it can be packed away, together with all its internal space, and you can take this space with you as your private luggage, take it with you on a journey, and then you are outside, but at the same time also inside, in the space of the painting which you have made. As if you were conducting a dialogue with yourself.' In: M. Porębski, *Deska*, *op. cit.*, p. 133. This being both inside and outside, the crossing of boundaries related to a work of art, but also to the presence and absence of the artist, is characteristic of Kantor's late painting activity from 1987–90, as well as of the last two performances of the Cricot 2 Theatre, and it requires a separate analysis.

46 A. Turowski, '... już dawno pana wyeliminowałem, pan też wisi na włosku', *op. cit.*, p. 483.

47 *Ibid.*

48 A. Turowski, *Ambaláže, atrapy, manekiny*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

one another. With one exception, the gaze of the *Infantas* does not meet ours; if it did, the time flowing multi-directionally would probably focus on that which *was* (reminiscing) and that which *is*; in other words – on the relationship between the protagonist and the concrete viewer. Not looking at us, the *Infanta* has in front of her eyes the ‘indefinite all’, but also ‘nothing’.<sup>49</sup>

Introducing the *Infanta* into his paintings, Kantor exploits that which from the beginning of his work on this theme has appeared to interest him the most – the unapproachability of his protagonist, her elevated status, her position on the boundary between life and death and also the specific pulsation between being ‘here’ and ‘somewhere else’ simultaneously (in Velázquez’s painting, the *Infanta* is firmly set in the composition itself, and at the same time, through her dialogue with the viewer, she is the centre of the centrifugal tendencies). Kantor builds his *Museum Persiflages* not so much around the condition of the *Infanta* as around her being at the boundary; being both in the painting and beyond it, being both living and dead; thus, he is more interested in touching the boundary, in provoking it, than in the state on the either side of it. As Mieczysław Porębski maintains, ‘in the plays, his problem is not death that ends it all. The problem is death which does not end anything, which brings everything to the beginning, to start all over again.’<sup>50</sup> Perhaps for those reasons, Velázquez’s *Infantas*, as many other characters – apparitions, invoked by the artist from the space of his memory, exist conditionally; they are ephemeral and not really allocated to anywhere, which makes them circle restlessly. Turowski answers his own question about what has remained in Kantor’s persiflage from the painting of the Spanish artist, thus, ‘the fleeting dimension of memory, the “void of non-existence”, the spectre of death.’<sup>51</sup> It is important to emphasise that the balancing between life and death, the moving of the boundaries related to reality and illusion are some of the main markers of the final stage in Kantor’s work in the second part of the 1980s, and are also apparent in two painterly representations of *Margarita* which the artist produced towards the end of his life. There, the figure of the *Infanta* ceases to be an emballage of a museum work and it begins to connote clearer references to the original.

The first of those is a work from the series *Further on, Nothing*, in which Velázquez’s *Infanta* comes into the artist’s room.<sup>52</sup> In that series, as is the case

49 A. Turowski, ‘... już dawno pana wyeliminowałem, pan też wisi na włosku’, *op. cit.*, p. 489.

50 M. Porębski, *Deska*, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

51 A. Turowski, *Ambaláže, atrapy, manekiny*, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

52 *One Night Velázquez’s Infanta Came into My Room*, from the series *Further on, Nothing*, February 1988, acrylic on canvas (originally, a metal construction), 136 x 180 cm; on the reverse sign. and date: ‘Kantor 1988’ and numbered by the author: 6, owner: Grażyna Kulczyk, the Kulczyk Foundation, Poznań. There exists a sketch of the painting, *Untitled*, [1988], pastel, felt tip, paper, dimensions unknown, sign. ‘T. Kantor’, private property, Italy.

with the majority of Kantor's final paintings, it is the artist himself who is the subject of his work; his self-portraits are often accompanied by other characters from, in the words of Wiesław Borowski, the borderline of 'art's dreamlife'.<sup>53</sup> Here, the Infanta replicates the figure from the painting *Las Meninas*; she is posed in the same way and she looks directly at us. She does not react to the artist's hand extended to her, just as in Velázquez's painting she did not respond to the container of water offered to her.<sup>54</sup> Apart from her face and hands, both accentuated, she is transparent. Just as in the *Museum Persiflages*, she has been placed against a smooth, austere background and, just as in that work, the background is the matter from which she has been woven, and into which she dissolves. Her presence here is again symbolic and irrational, and it cannot be otherwise: she is a photographic plate of Kantor's memory, and indeed, called up here for a new role, she is also a mark of his imagination; really, the artist himself functions here in the same way as she does.

They are both situated in quite specific, oneiric open space, in which anything could happen really; in which time flows multi-directionally. No wonder; after all, the action is located in the author's 'poor room of imagination', where the past can be imposed on the future, the imagination is entitled to be fused with life, and reality with fiction. The artist falls in the direction of the little church in Wielopole Skrzyńskie, outlined on the horizon, selected from the landscape of the village where he was born and brought up. He falls in a similar fashion also in other paintings created between 1986 and 1990, such as *The Return Home* or *I Am Falling Down Like Hell!*. Placing himself in such a relationship with the family landscape, Kantor in a way marks out the vectors of his personal retrospection, and the form of the church becomes an icon of his mental journey.<sup>55</sup> The artist contemplates here the imperative of the return to the motherland, the place from which he 'had entered the world' and to which he must return intellectually before he dies in order to achieve fulfilment. In a text written for the performance *I Shall Never Return* we read:

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53 W. Borowski, 'Dalej już nic' – *wystawa nowych obrazów*, in: *Teatr Cricot 2 Informator 1987–1988*, comp. and ed. A. Halczak, Kraków, 1989, p. 208.

54 Zofia Gołubiew, in her text '*nie umiem rysować byków*', draws attention to the fact that Kantor pleadingly puts his hand out to the Infanta, who is 'indifferent and unmoved', in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora. Wystawa w Muzeum Narodowym w Krakowie*, *op. cit.*, p. 15. A similar interpretation in: *Mam Wam coś do powiedzenia. Tadeusz Kantor – autoportrety*, exhibition catalogue, the National Museum in Krakow, Kraków 2000, pp. 26–29. Also K. Świącicki similarly interprets the relationship between the figures: *Historia w teatrze Tadeusza Kantora*, Poznań 2007, pp. 305–307.

55 For Turowski, the landscape towards which Kantor is falling is a 'time signature'. A. Turowski, '*... już dawno pana wyeliminowałem, pan też wisi na włosku*', *op. cit.*, p. 489.

Finally the moment has arrived in the phase of my work which I am beginning to consider my résumé, a moment – I would say – final, when one examines one's conscience. (...) I have felt that this is the fulfilment of my stubborn thought about going back to the time of my youth, the time of the boy. (...) There was my real home.<sup>56</sup>

Why, then, does he offer his outstretched hand to the Infanta? After all, it cannot be – considering the above remarks – because he fears a fall. In *I Shall Never Return*, where the messages initiated in the painting are present in a way, the *Last Will Monologue* delivered by him on the stage contains the following words:

And I, so as to create something, create this world in which you will solidly scale your way upwards, to applause – I must fall down. And I am falling down. Falling down like hell! (...) Be with me for a moment at the bottom. The artist must always be at the bottom, because it is only from the bottom that one can shout so as to be heard.<sup>57</sup>

Kantor clearly positions himself at the boundary – between the awareness of the inevitable end and the possibility of embarking on an act of creation in spite of everything. This awareness of the end and of catastrophe seems for him to be something very stimulating, something which invigorates his creative act and enables him to test himself as an artist. Perhaps this need for confrontation is also contained in this painting. Both figures are juxtaposed along a diagonal; at the junction the tension is palpable. This is how Turowski describes it: 'The Artist and the Infanta reflect each other in the reverse symmetry of the mirror, like the king and queen in a pack of cards, duplicated in their fields; like 'thanatos' in the history of life; like the interplay of the 'ego' and 'libido' in the theatre of love and death.'<sup>58</sup> The Infanta gives the impression of moving away from the extended hand, just as the Infanta in *Las Meninas* is detached from interaction with the external world. She is independent and inaccessible; even her skirt avoids the touch of Kantor's hand. Let us note two more canvases, from 1988 and 1990, in which the figure of the artist is juxtaposed with another figure taken from a museum work – a brutish Napoleonic soldier from Goya's painting *The Third of May 1808 in Madrid: the Executions on Principe Pio Hill*, painted around 1814 (exhibited in the Prado). The construction of that work juxtaposes the figure of the artist and the figure of the soldier in a similar way – along a diagonal. The tension here is distributed over three points – at the point of the touching of the feet, the hands and the gaze. Both figures are strongly confronted; they are in a critical, dramatic situation. Let us consider what are these figures are with whom Kantor enters into a dialogue: they are icons of art, transposed from museum masterpieces, which for Kantor

56 T. Kantor, *Ja realny*, in: the programme of the performance, 1990, pp. 18–19, in: Cricoteka Archives.

57 Recording of a performance of *I Shall Never Return*, prod. A. Sapija, TVP 1990.

58 A. Turowski, '... już dawno pana wyeliminowałem, pan też wisi na włosku', *op. cit.*, p. 489.

are emblems functioning outside the canon and outside time, unsurpassed and supreme. By placing himself opposite them, the artist faces a challenge. Is he threatened with a fall in the situation with the Infanta or with being shot in the situation with the soldier? To cut a long story short, he is not – he is saved by his individualism, as he wrote in his text *To Save from Oblivion*: ‘the Small, Poor, Defenceless, but glorious History of the individual human life.’<sup>59</sup> He will emerge from these situations triumphant, just as he does in *I Shall Never Return*, in the scene in which the apparitions of the Cricot 2 Theatre summoned by him perform a sort of execution on him – pointing at him the machine gun from the production *Wielopole, Wielopole*. The gun rakes the artist, seated at the table, with a series of bullets. In vain. Kantor gets up and, smoking a cigarette, adjusts his hat and scarf, then turns the apparitions out from the stage. In the face of these assaults on his individuality and his individual continuation on the stage, and also here, in the painting, he remains unaffected.

The action of one of Kantor’s final paintings also takes place in his ‘Poor Room of Imagination’. The idea of the ‘room’ was made more precise in *Today Is My Birthday*, where it was validated on the stage.<sup>60</sup> Let us stress that the painting was produced in April 1990, during work on the production, the rehearsals of which had started a few months earlier, and it remains in a direct relationship with it. It exists under two signature titles: *One Night Velázquez's Infanta Came into My Room (for a Second Time)* (fig. 24) and *Velázquez's Infanta Came into My Room for a Second Time, Now Clearly Irritated*.<sup>61</sup> This canvas is, iconographically, probably the closest to *Las Meninas* of all Kantor’s paintings, although it only contains three elements copied from the source work: the painter, the Infanta and the easel for the painting (or, here, the drawing). Instead of a detailed replica of the Royal Alcázar in Madrid, here we have a black, homogenous room interior, with a sketchy outline of its shape. Just as with Velázquez, who – as researchers emphasise – appears in his painting as a ‘man in his prime, without any signs of old age’, even though he was almost sixty at the time that he made the painting,<sup>62</sup> Kantor also paints an image which does not bring to mind the seventy-five year

59 T. Kantor, *Ocalić przed zapomnieniem*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków, 2005, p. 126.

60 The ‘Poor Room of Imagination’ already appeared in *Let the Artists Die* (1985). The idea was first introduced in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, where Kantor had reconstructed his childhood bedroom on the stage.

61 *One Night Velázquez's Infanta Came into My Room (for a Second Time), / Velázquez's Infanta Came into My Room for a Second Time, Now Clearly Irritated*, April 1990, acrylic on canvas, 146 x 128 cm, signed in felt tip on an oval piece of paper stuck onto the stretcher: *Tadeusz Kantor / 'One Night Velázquez's Infanta Came into My Room (for a Second Time),' / April 1990 – / Cracovie*, private property, Łódź, on deposit in the National Museum in Krakow.

62 A. Witko, *Wprowadzenie*, in: *Tajemnica Las Meninas. Antologia tekstów, op. cit.*, p. 13.

old man that he was at the time. This is a figure that is difficult to pin down to any particular age. Just like the painter in *Las Meninas*, the artist is deep in thought, in direct proximity to the easel, minimised here, the central point of the composition. The artist and the Infanta no longer look meaningfully at the viewer; each of them gazes at a different point; however, the tension continues to accumulate around the same element of the painting. The Infanta is looking at Kantor's face, he is looking at the easel, towards which the Infanta's hand is also extended. Her attention is focused simultaneously on the artist and on the canvas. We have an inescapable sensation that the Infanta demands something concrete from the artist; her pose is very eloquent; after all, she had arrived 'clearly impatient'. It is on the easel that the protagonists' activity is centred; it is the easel that cumulates the psychological tension of the work. What is more, both the artist and the Infanta are irrevocably bound to the easel, and – thus – to each other. Analysing the formal elements of the painting, one can even be tempted to state that the protagonists are immobilised, imprisoned inside the painting. The horizontal line of the room cuts across each figure – first, the artist, at the height of his heart, next, the square of the easel, and finally, the Infanta, across her waist; they all appear to be strung onto it. The sensation is magnified by the positioning of the figures' hands: the hand of the artist is immobilised at the easel at the point where the vertical and the horizontal lines cross, exactly in the corner of the room. Both protagonists are faced with the superior rationale of the necessity to endure.

There is one more detail in the work that deserves to be unravelled. I refer to the white area on the surface of the painting on the easel; it is in clear contrast to the greyness of the rest of the canvas. The fingers of the Infanta are touching its edge. The whiteness clearly corresponds to the whiteness of the whole figure of the Infanta. It is as if, under the influence of her touch, meanings identified with the Infanta are slowly seeping into the painting. We find the resolution for the situation in the stage production. In *Today Is My Birthday* the Infanta is placed in the frame of a painting (fig. 25). The demand of the Infanta from Kantor's canvas has been fulfilled.<sup>63</sup> And here, just as in there, a small stool has been placed on the stage next to her painting, where the artist planned to sit.

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63 Also Zofia Gołubiew, when analysing the painting, points out that the Infanta would soon appear on the stage, [in: *Mam Wam coś do powiedzenia*, p. 48]. However, Gołubiew does not perceive the appearance of the Infanta in a stage production as a consequence of the painting; rather, she links it to another of Kantor's paintings from the series *One Does not Peep Through the Window with Impunity* (with the author painting a figure): 'We can see such a portrait in an earlier painting from the series *One Does not Peep Through the Window...*, in which the Artist is painting his love, and she is looking at him through the window', in: *'nie umiem rysować byków'*, *op. cit.*, p. 17. In the texts quoted, Gołubiew also points out that both paintings of the Infanta from the second half of the 80s are

Let us focus for a moment on the character of the Infanta in the stage performance. The INFANTA FROM THE PAINTING BY VELÁZQUEZ, played by Teresa Welmińska, probably appeared for the first time at the rehearsals in Toulouse, in October 1990, which is to say, over a year into Kantor's work on the play. Initially, an oblong frame had been prepared for her, in which she was posed in a way reminiscent of Francisco Goya's *Maja*.<sup>64</sup> The character was dressed in a simple, black dress made from plain, slightly shiny material, which later was replaced with a leotard and a lace skirt worn over a simple hoop structure. Her definitive costume was only made after Kantor's death.<sup>65</sup> A number of his designs for the costume have survived.<sup>66</sup>

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an 'image of Kantor's last love'. I disagree in both cases. The analysis of the painting with the Infanta pointing towards the easel as a consequence of the painting in which she has already been sketched, must be undermined by the chronological order, which has been reversed here. It is logical that the Infanta first points to the easel and then appears in it (in the stage production). It is also difficult to agree with the thesis that the figure is watching the artist from behind the window pane, since in the work she is unreal; all we find is a non-material image reflected in the glass; she is like an apparition brought forth from memory or dreams, an element of non-existence. As far as the identity of the infanta is concerned, on an iconographic basis she cannot be identified with the female figure from the cycle *One Does not Peep through the Window with Impunity* or in the painting *She: What an Interesting Picture!* from the series *Further on, Nothing*, as Gołubiew would have it. To start with, the *Infantas* painted by the artist towards the end of the 80s consistently replicate the pattern employed by Kantor since the mid-60s; their faces are stylised on those painted in the *Museum Persiflages*.

64 *The Nude Maja* and *The Clothed Maja*, 1800–1803, El Prado, Madrid. Photographic documentation of the rehearsals of the production, Cricoteka Archives.

65 Andrzej Welmiński, alongside the reproduction of the sketch for the Infanta's costume, notes, 'We made the entire costume after Tadeusz's death. The complicated mechanism of the crinoline with whalebone hoops was reminiscent of the umbrella – one of the most characteristic objects in Kantor's works.' In: *Tadeusz Kantor. Rysunki z kolekcji Teresy i Andrzeja Welmińskich*, exhibition catalogue, Kraków 2007, p. 16. The stages of the creation of the costume and the evolution of the figure of the Infanta in the stage production can be seen in the film documentation of the rehearsals in the Cricoteka Archives.

*The Painting of the Infanta* is a theatrical prop in the Cricoteka Collection (costume, wooden frame and podium, canvas background), 366 x 130 x 125 cm.

66 T. Kantor, *Menine Teresa*, drawing of the figure *The Infanta from Velázquez's Painting* for the stage production *Today Is My Birthday* (1991), 1989–90, felt tip, pastel, acrylic on paper, sign.: TK, 25 x 17.5 cm., owner unknown, until 2006 deposited at Cricoteka by the Heirs of the Artist; T. Kantor, *Untitled*, a sketch of the figure *The Infanta from Velázquez's Painting* for the production *Today Is My Birthday* (1991), [1989–90], felt tip on the reverse of a paper envelope, 29.5 x 22 cm, property of Cricoteka. Andrzej Welmiński in the catalogue of the exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor. Rysunki z kolekcji Teresy i Andrzeja Welmińskich* mentions 'several sketches for the costume of the Infanta' in his own collection, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

In his notes on the production, Kantor repeatedly stresses that the Infanta on the stage is the Infanta from his painting. At one point, he specifies from which painting: 'THE INFANTA / leaves the interior of the painting, / she turns towards my table, / she sits down opposite to me / (just as in my painting).'<sup>67</sup> Let's get back to the painting, then. As mentioned earlier, it was being produced in parallel to the play. Not only has the idea of placing the Infanta in the frame percolated from the painting to the stage play; both works share also the spatial division. On the canvas, the lines which outline the shape of the room demarcate certain zones, analogous to those produced by the frames in the play: in one, the artist's self-portrait has been placed,<sup>68</sup> in another, the Infanta; the third zone in the painting, the easel, comparable with the central frame through which actors enter the stage, appears to be performing the same function here – of, as it were, bringing forth new meanings from the borderland of memory and imagination (fig. 25). In the performance, the frames – associated with limitation, complete definition and closing in, in formal terms, of all that which they contain inside – have the opposite task: they provide the space that beckons meanings and brings them to the surface. One could compare the frames of the paintings, in terms of their function on the stage and interaction with other structural elements of the performance, to the school benches in *The Dead Class*. This is how Kantor analyses their role:

The desks enclosed the living, natural, human organism (which always tends to 'utilise' space in a chaotic way) in rigorous order. They were a sort of placenta (*matrice*) from which something new was born; something unexpected; something which for a time attempted to go out beyond the desks, into the black and empty space, and which, each time, drew back and withdrew into them, as if into its childhood home...<sup>69</sup>

In some ways, the manner in which the Infanta behaves inside the frame on the stage is similar to her interaction in the painting. On the canvas she stands away from the easel, although intentionally within reach. These 'away from' and 'within' are markers of the rhythm of her functioning in the performance. Enclosed in the frame, now standing, now seated, she – as Kantor puts it – 'poses in the painting, presenting / all her charms,'<sup>70</sup> or else, for various reasons, she moves outside the frame – she is thrown out of it, she falls out, or she leaves. The Infanta's presence in the painting is based on her rhythmical leaving the frame and returning to it.

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67 T. Kantor, [*Notatki do spektaklu*] *Dziś są moje urodziny*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, op. cit., p. 289.

68 The character called SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE OWNER OF THE POOR ROOM OF IMAGINATION, played by Andrzej Welmiński.

69 T. Kantor, *Miejsce teatralne (Ławki w Umarłej klasie)*, in: *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kraków–Wrocław 1984, pp. 138–139.

70 T. Kantor, [*Notatki do spektaklu*] *Dziś są moje urodziny*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, op. cit., p. 285.



Although she is no longer visually reminiscent of the Velázquez prototype (and her image here is the most idiosyncratic of all of Kantor's representations of the Infanta), subliminally she still cumulates a relationship with it. The figure of the Infanta is here solemnly imprisoned, vacant. Her costume: a dress made of black lace, brings to mind the funeral ceremony. Karol Smużniak, when analysing the 'poetics of sorrow' in Kantor's theatre, concludes, 'this is pure aesthetics, devoid of the colour of Life, this is a photographic negative of life'.<sup>71</sup> The Infanta moves rigidly, in a forced, ornamental way; we note, as the artist puts it, 'her ROYALTY and BEAUTY...'<sup>72</sup> Her role is confined almost solely to visual impact. If one frame-freezes the performance, she appears to be an image inside an image. Her character remains in a tangible relationship with the character of the author, just as it does in the last two canvases. In the painting they are both immobile, connected via the easel, assigned to the poor room, which becomes their shared space. In the performance the emotional bond between them never stops. The SELF-PORTRAIT springs to life, when she enters; he leads her into the frame, after she has been thrown out of it by the POOR GIRL.<sup>73</sup> The play also demonstrates the union of the Infanta's image with the mental space of the artist; the frame of the painting on the right is not only filled by the great work of Velázquez, but also by Kantor's work – let me stress: his own work – one that has been present in him for years, and has become fused with him. This is how the SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE OWNER OF THE POOR ROOM OF IMAGINATION comments on the image of the Infanta in the performance: 'Masterpiece. A splendid masterpiece of my genius, great and central European. My Velázquez's Infanta! Mine!'<sup>74</sup> While the first part of this statement may be interpreted in a variety of ways, and shows the artist's sense of humour,<sup>75</sup> the second clearly points to a powerful emotional

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71 K. Smużniak, *Poetyka smutku w teatrze Kantora* (Dziś są moje urodziny), in: *Litteraria. Teoria literatury – Metodologia – Kultura – Humanistyka. Prace Wrocławskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego*, series A, no. 27, Wrocław 1993, p. 187.

72 T. Kantor, [Notatki do spektaklu] Dziś są moje urodziny, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, op. cit.*, p. 285.

73 In the notes on the performance, and also in the rehearsals, the threads of the *Self-portrait* and the artist himself are intertwined. Tadeusz Kantor died after one of the rehearsals, on 8 December 1990, leaving behind his work in the middle of the creative process. The interaction between the characters which had been arrived at during the preceding rehearsals was altered after the artist's death.

74 Recording of the production *Today Is My Birthday*, prod. S. Zajączkowski, TVP, 1991. In Kantor's notes on the performance we find a shorter version of this statement: *My Velázquez's Infanta... Mine!*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, op. cit.*, p. 288.

75 This sense of humour is continued in the scene of the lecture by Maria Jarema, who describes the *Painting of the Infanta* as 'banal and trivial, a waste of space'. Recording of the performance *Today Is My Birthday*, prod. S. Zajączkowski, TVP, 1991.

dependence. The character of the Infanta, which Kantor has invoked for years, is connected – even more powerfully so than is the case in the two paintings discussed last – with the artist’s intimate space, which he shares with her in the same way that he does with his ‘Dear Absent Ones’, apparitions of memory, objects of projection. It is significant that her character functions here in a similar way to the SELF-PORTRAIT, who similarly leaves the frames of his painting, penetrating into the performance, or else, freezes in the painting as if he had been painted in it. He, too, finds himself in a borderline situation: he is brought to life and freezes rhythmically, while all the time the status of his identity is undermined: this is neither a self-portrait of the artist nor – and even less so – the artist, although he aspires to be him. His character is in a way replicated by the SHADOW.<sup>76</sup>

The existence of the Infanta and the Self-portrait is intriguing, as is that of the remaining characters of the performance, taking into account the frames of the paintings, which, since the series of the paintings *Further on, Nothing* (1987–88), Kantor has employed in discussion about the transcendence of certain areas.<sup>77</sup> In those paintings in the series in which dummy arms and legs have been attached to the painted figures, there is a crucial dichotomy which gives rise to a doubt as to whether the figure still remains in the painting or whether it is already outside it, as well as a doubt regarding what the ‘outside’ and what the ‘in’ really means – where the boundary of the painting lies and whether it exists at all. As a consequence, this remaining in the painting versus leaving the painting is also reflected in the construction: imprisonment vs liberation. In the series in question, the dialogue with the painting and the musings about the possibility of leaving the painting (literally so), and thus liberating oneself from its yoke, are another attempt to transgress the life-death boundary; after all, the painting is a trap, because that which is recorded on its surface is imprisoned in it.<sup>78</sup> In the production *Let the Artists Die* Kantor compares the condition of creativity to the condition of the prison.<sup>79</sup> He is entirely aware of the limited power of the artist over the painting,

76 The character the SHADOW OF THE OWNER OF THE POOR ROOM OF IMAGINATION, played by Lorianò Della Rocca.

77 The construction of the frames which includes wheels in the production also points to their origin as part of a painting: the wheels helped them move around on the stage. The wheels attached to the paintings from the series *Further on, Nothing* were to intensify the direction of those compositions outwards; towards their real surroundings and the audience. Objects on wheels first appeared in the production *Let the Artists Die* (1985).

78 I.a.: E. Kuryluk, *Od śmierci będącej sztuką do sztuki śmierci. Refleksje o śmierci i sztuce*, in: *Śmierć – przestrzeń – czas – tożsamość w Europie Środkowej około 1900. Materiały międzynarodowej konferencji zorganizowanej w dniach 8–10 grudnia 1996*, eds. K. Grodziska, J. Purchla, Kraków 2002, pp. 73–81.

79 At a meeting with young people in Milan on 14 April 1988 (tape recording, Cricoteka Archives), Kantor says, ‘I have made my sculptor’s studio. I consider it an inspired

but because – as he has frequently admitted himself – he is a catastrophist, he is interested in approaching the boundaries of the impossible. In the same way that a return to the time of one's youth is impossible, as we have seen in the painting from 1988, so are both leaving the painting and remaining in it impossible; just as much as escaping death is not likely. In the series *Further on, Nothing* the painting is subjected to a test, but also the artist himself as his status is threatened. In the production *Today Is My Birthday* the frames of the paintings compound the state of threat. While in his last paintings, and also in the performance *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor begins to treat himself as a raw material,<sup>80</sup> through manipulation of his own image, in *Today Is My Birthday* it is also death that becomes a raw material, death which, after a fashion, serves to build the structure of the production and – by placing all its elements in a borderline situation, as if suspended, in a state of non-being, simultaneously deconstructs it.

'So as to approximate the visualisation of death (...) it was necessary to destroy the order of representation, to abandon the illusion of being able to capture the actual designation in a mere reflection. To deny the painting, to deny seeing. To enter personally into the circle of darkness, to place oneself at the border'.<sup>81</sup>

Concluding my explorations, I would like to follow on from the artist's statement and to focus briefly on the mechanism of quotations used by Kantor in the case of Velázquez's work or works. This mechanism could in fact be analysed on the basis of any of Kantor's borrowings that we encounter in his work, be they from Goya, Delacroix, Gericault, Rembrandt, or else from Veit Stoß, Matejko, Malczewski or Wojtkiewicz. Apart from the specific interdependencies described earlier, Kantor's stance can be explained by his attitude to tradition:

I don't go back to tradition in order to cultivate or glorify it. If I use its elements, I do so in such a way that they appear openly, or even manifestly as elements of the past, as methods that obtained, and were proved to work, in the past. However, as such, they belong to total reality and I see no reason why I shouldn't be using them for some of my current manipulations.<sup>82</sup>

At the same time, for him, realness in art is linked with retrieving reality and with the presence of *ready-made objects*, the characteristics of which percolate into the

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discovery. I have turned it into prison, a prison cell. That is to say, the death row cell. And then the idea has come to me that creativity, the condition of being a creator, is the condition of the prisoner; that a creator who acts from necessity, under the pressure of necessity; is imprisoned in that necessity. He cannot leave. It is impossible to leave, there and then, the cell. One is jailed.' In: typescript, Cricoteka Archives (inv. no. CRC IV/004176), p. 5.

80 This is the description that Jarosław Suchan has used in reference to Kantor's art informel. Cf. J. Suchan, *Kantor jako twórca i jako tworzywo*, in: *Interior imaginacji*, pp. 52–63.

81 A. Turowski, '... już dawno pana wyeliminowałem, pan też wisi na włosku', *op. cit.*, p. 491.

82 *Rozmowa z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, in: W. Borowski, *Kantor*, Warszawa 1982, p. 104.

structure of the works, whether painterly or theatrical, and co-create their structure, combine to be it.<sup>83</sup> According to Kantor, the paintings used in his art are also such *ready-mades*, which he is entitled to employ.<sup>84</sup> He comments, ‘I attempt to boil it down to what I call the “reality of the lowest rank”’.<sup>85</sup> What is more – as we have seen in Kantor’s late paintings and in his final stage production, he attaches the same status to the museum pieces quoted as he does to his autobiographical thread or any other elements derived from his own memory. ‘The past for me is... these are real facts. (...) I have an advantage over them, indeed. Because I can manipulate them. (...) represent. Us... superimpose one thing on another... (...)’<sup>86</sup> This activity places Kantor in the discourse begun by Marcel Duchamp, the author of the iconoclastic reinterpretation of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, in which he painted a moustache on the *Gioconda*. This juxtaposition of his work with Kantor’s images of the Infanta is not coincidental. Jarosław Suchan, when analysing the reasons for Kantor’s borrowings from the composition of *Las Meninas* in his *Museum Persiflages*, concludes:

The Velázquez painting may have been chosen for reasons similar to those that had inspired Duchamp to select the da Vinci painting. Both artists were looking for a work of art which had fallen victim to becoming a sanctified museum piece (and which thus had to be sufficiently prestigious) leading to obscuring the real work of art by its mass produced ‘icon’. The attack of both artists in those works is aimed not at the originals which they are using, but at the pauperised form of their reception. The crude bag would thus not serve merely to ridicule the work but also – in accordance with its designation – to preserve a great cultural relic from devaluation.<sup>87</sup>

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83 Cf. J. Suchan, *Kantor z obrazami*, p. 77.

84 Interview with Kantor by G. Scarpetta *Kantor – grzech, śmietnik, wieczność*, ART Press, no. 71, 1983, trans. M. Gawron, in: catalogue of the exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor, malarstwo, rzeźba*, Kraków 1991, p. 74.

85 *Ibid.*

86 Tadeusz Kantor, tape recording of the artist’s meeting with the audience, West Berlin, May 1988, typescript, Cricoteka Archives (inv. no. CRC IV/004683), p. 2.

87 J. Suchan, *Kantor z obrazami*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

# Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Emotions: Apropos the Spanish Reception of the Artist

Josep Maria de Sagarra Àngel

*I Shall Never Return* was the first, and only, production by Tadeusz Kantor that I had a chance to see live, at its world premiere in Berlin's Akademie der Künste. It was in May 1988. I can recall perfectly Kantor's protagonists, the characteristic music of Kantor's productions, Kantor himself on the stage, issuing prompts, or, rather, corrections, to the actors of the Cricot 2 Theatre. What I remember above all is the finale of the performance, when the cast stood at the front of the stage in an almost military formation (Kantor was fond of likening his actors to a military unit<sup>1</sup>). With deadpan faces, their gaze lost somewhere in the distance, the Polish actors received the ovation of the critics and the German audience. At a signal from Kantor, the chief-in-command, the Cricot 2 actors marched out, never to reappear on stage. However, the audience continued applauding for quite a long time. I thought that perhaps that was a homage being paid by a conquered aggressor to representatives of a nation invaded – a reconciliation of sorts after an inauspicious history.

I was wrong! In the summer of that year, I arrived in Krakow for the first time in order to learn Polish in the summer school of the Jagiellonian University. As part of the academic programme, I had the opportunity to become acquainted with the splendid film versions of *The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole*; I visited the city's cafés, museums, innumerable churches, synagogues and the venue of the Cricot 2 Theatre, and I was soon to realise that Kantor had been telling his own history, employing images which reflected its artistic and literary tradition, easy to

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1 Cf. T. Kantor, *Ocalić od zapomnienia*, in: T. Kantor, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990 Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, pp. 125–130.

'(...)

Mine command and army  
is a Poor Travelling Troupe  
of Actors.

Splendid actors.  
Together we fight.

I meant to say:

Create.

'(...).'

trace in the city. I came to understand that Kantor's theatre was profoundly Polish and unique, which could not be explained away by any other interpretative device.

It is recognised, however, that any stage creation is inevitably affected by the change of space and the passage of time: there will be as many different stage interpretations as the theatres; as many different receptions as the audiences. What is especially striking with the Cricot 2 Theatre is the extent to which Kantor's stage creation, so irrevocably bound with the Polish context and culture, has been accepted by diverse audiences all over the world. To my mind, the reception of Tadeusz Kantor's creative work has a singular character in the case of Spain. And Kantor's attitude to Spain and Spanish culture is equally out of ordinary.

Both during his lifetime and after his death, until 1997, Kantor had been known, and appreciated, in Spain above all as a man of the theatre. The productions of the Cricot 2 Theatre had been shown regularly on Spanish stages, to the same loud acclaim of both the critics and the public as elsewhere. However, during that time, reviews of Kantor's paintings were extremely rare.<sup>2</sup> It was only in 1997, thanks to the exhibition *Kantor: The Memory Stage*,<sup>3</sup> presented by the curator Tom Skipp and co-organised by the Arte y Tecnología de Telefónica Foundation, the Caixa de Catalunya Foundation and Cricoteka that the audiences of Madrid and Barcelona could for the first time acquaint themselves with Kantor paintings in a broader scope.<sup>4</sup>

At the time, I was appointed the editor of the exhibition catalogue by the Caixa de Catalunya Foundation. What immediately caught my attention amongst the works which reached Madrid and Barcelona was the presence – which was neither coincidental nor sporadic – of Spanish motives in the body of work of Kantor's paintings. It transpired that Velázquez and Goya had made a significant impression on some of the series of the artist's works; Gaudi and Dalí, together with some aspects of Spanish art and architecture, also had a place in the consciousness of the Polish artist.

In 1998, as part of the programme of events at the Cervantes Institute in Warsaw, I co-ordinated a research project into Tadeusz Kantor's relationship with

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2 Cf. O. Caballero, *Tadeusz Kantor, la pintura de un creador escénico, La Vanguardia*, Barcelona 17 September 1989, on the subject of the exhibition of Kantor's art at the Galerie de France in Paris.

3 *Tadeusz Kantor. La escena de la memoria / Tadeusz Kantor. Scena pamięci*, exhibition catalogue, Madrid–Barcelona, May 1997. Also see: <http://www.fundacion.telefonica.com/at/kantor.html>.

4 Cf. F. Nieva, *El teatro roto de Kantor*, in: *ABC Cultural*, Madrid, January 1997, also in a Polish translation entitled *Rozbity teatr Kantora* in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora / Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 218–219; J. M. de Sagarra Àngel, *Vendaval Kantor, Avui*, Barcelona 13 March 1997.

Spain, noted previously in the Madrid and Barcelona exhibitions. With the aid and advice of those in charge of the Polish institutions supporting the project,<sup>5</sup> to my mind, I managed to combine in one volume in a fairly extensive way, the Spanish motives in the creative work of Tadeusz Kantor.<sup>6</sup> The work was later used as the basis of the exhibition *Spanish Motives in Tadeusz Kantor's Art*, first shown at the National Museum in Krakow,<sup>7</sup> and a little later at the Studio Theatre – the Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz Art Centre in Warsaw. Later still, subsequent editions of the exhibition, organised by the National Museum in Krakow and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, visited various Spanish towns during the Poland Year in Spain in 2002.<sup>8</sup>

The Spanish motives in Kantor's work relate above all to two series of paintings: *The Infantas* based on a painting by Velázquez<sup>9</sup> and *Soldiers* based on Goya's painting *The Third of May 1808*.<sup>10</sup> Next, one ought to mention *The Journey Diary* and *Notes from the Journey*, consisting of a collection of notebooks, in which Kantor drew or wrote down his impressions during the Cricot 2 Theatre's various tours abroad. There is also a series of nine watercolours which show the Gothic cathedral in Barcelona, and some pre-Cricot 2 stage design projects, such as *The Shoemaker's Wonderful Wife* by Garcia Lorca, Calderón's *The Mayor of Zalamea* and *Don Quixote* after Jules Massenet.

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- 5 Let us also acknowledge here the director of Tadeusz Kantor Foundation, Lech Stangret; Jerzy Pleśniarowicz, the director of Cricoteka at the time; Maria Stangret-Kantor – the artist's widow; Anna Halczak – Cricoteka's archivist; the director of the National Museum in Kraków Zofia Gołubiew; the deputy director of the Museum at the time; Marek Mróz and Wiesław Borowski, the director of Galeria Foksal.
  - 6 *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora / Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor* (contents: W. Borowski, *Tadeusz Kantor – dzieło moje, dzieło ostatnie*; F. Nieva, *Rozbity teatr Kantora*; M. Ordóñez, *Ogród opuszczony przez ptaki*; J. de Sagarra, *Dziecko z umarłej klasy (Na śmierć Tadeusza Kantora)*; *Hiszpańska bibliografia Tadeusza Kantora*; *Kronika wizyt Teatru Cricot 2 w Hiszpanii*; *Wystawy dzieł Tadeusza Kantora w Hiszpanii*; *Światowa bibliografia Tadeusza Kantora*), Warszawa 1999.
  - 7 *Kantor. Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora / Kantor. Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor / Kantor. Spanish Motifs in Tadeusz Kantor's Oeuvre* (exhibition catalogue), Kraków 1999, p.32.
  - 8 *Kantor. Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor*. Exposición del Museo Nacional de Cracovia / *Kantor. Spanish Motifs in Tadeusz Kantor's Oeuvre*. The Exhibition in the National Museum in Krakow; Museo de Zaragoza; Fundación Antonio Pérez – Diputación de Cuenca; Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo, Torrente – Valencia (exhibition catalogue), 2001. p. 32.
  - 9 D. Velázquez, *Panny dworskie / Las Meninas* or *La familia de Felipe IV* (1656), El Prado Museum, Madrid.
  - 10 F. de Goya y Lucientes, *Los fusilamientos del 3 de mayo en la montaña del Príncipe Pío de Madrid / The Third of May 1808* (1814), El Prado Museum, Madrid.

As mentioned earlier, from 1981 (the premiere of *Wielopole, Wielopole* at the María Guerrero Theatre in Madrid) until 1991 (the premiere of the posthumous *Today Is My Birthday* at the Albéniz Theatre in Madrid), the cast of the Cricot 2 Theatre regularly reappeared on Spanish stages.<sup>11</sup> Anyway, Kantor enjoyed visiting Spain. For its climate, for one: a tour of the Iberian Peninsula in the early autumn or late in the winter was to soothe the severity of the long Polish winter. But, above all, Kantor succumbed – as have so many other Poles and the inhabitants of central and northern Europe – to the fascination of Spain; its art, architecture and its ‘exotic’ character, both tragic and aloof, referred to as the Spanish ‘pride’.

During Cricot 2’s sojourns in Madrid, Kantor passed many hours in the Prado Museum or the San Fernando Academy; he studied the works of Goya, Velázquez, El Greco. During his travels in Catalonia, the artist visited Gaudi buildings, the Dalí Museum in Figueres and the foundations and museums of modern and contemporary art in Barcelona, not forgetting the Roman and Gothic art. ‘In Spain everything is made from old stone: there is nothing that is not at least five hundred years old,’ he once said to me.

*Notes from the Journey* thus consist of a series of notebooks with information about the places visited. Often, there are anecdotes. At times, however, a comment may become an interesting critical comment, as for instance, this one from 1983, written following a visit to the Sagrada Família, the cathedral designed by Antoni Gaudí, recently consecrated by Benedict XVI:

Gaudi

A longer trip to Gaudí’s cathedral. This colossal building never finished by Gaudí – makes a great impression – towers like cobs of corn, sculptures of trees, plants, some vegetable construction, around walls without a roof – it seems that he intends to finish

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11 *Wielopole, Wielopole*: Madrid, Teatro María Guerrero (October 1981); Vitoria (as part of the International Theatre Festival), Teatro Vitoria Gasteiz (October 1981), Valencia; Teatro Principal (March 1981); Palma de Mallorca, Teatre Auditòrium (March 1983); Barcelona, Mercat de les Flors – Teatre Municipal de Barcelona (March 1983); Santander, Parque de la Marga (June 1987).

*The Dead Class*: Barcelona, Teatre Poliorama (March 1983); Murcia, Teatro Romea (March 1984); Las Palmas, Teatro Pérez Galdós (March – April 1984); Sevilla, Sala Municipal de Cultura (April 1984); Madrid, Teatro María Guerrero (April 1984); Pamplona, Teatro Gayarre (April 1991); Zaragoza, Teatro Principal (April 1984).

*Let the Artists Die*: Madrid, Sala Olímpica (March 1986); Barcelona, Mercat de les Flors – Teatre Municipal de Barcelona (March 1986); Bilbao, Teatro Ayala (March 1986).

*I Shall Never Return*: Palma de Mallorca, Teatre Auditòrium (October 1988); Barcelona, Mercat de les Flors – Teatre Municipal de Barcelona (March 1989); Madrid, Teatro Albéniz (April 1986).

*Today Is My Birthday*: Madrid, Teatro Albéniz (October 1991).

Source: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...*, Warszawa 1999, p. 199.



this building – a lot of stonemason workshops – thousands of the ‘multiple’ units from which Gaudi had made this massive assemblage – we go up one of the ‘cobs of corn’ by lift. We visit the museum.

This superhumanly hard-working sculptor rather than architect – had wealthy doting patrons – who had the extraordinary ambition to support this maniac.

The whole 19th century was a century of maniacs and odd characters.<sup>12</sup>

During a visit to Bilbao in 1987 three self-portraits were produced. One of them is note-worthy; in it, the artist in an everyday T-shirt is reflected in the mirror of the hotel room, holding yet another self-portrait in his hand (fig. 26).<sup>13</sup> I think that it is not controversial to state that such play of mirrors and doppelgangers is directly related to the inner construction of Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, a painting that the artist was ceaselessly contemplating and on which he kept working during that time.

In 1987, at the invitation of the Barcelona Mercat de les Flors Theatre, the cast of *Cricot 2* visited the Colón Hotel, situated opposite a Gothic cathedral. Following the visit, he produced the pleasing collage *A Turtledove Flew into the Room... Hotel Colón. Barcelona*, dated 1987.<sup>14</sup> We can use it as an introduction to one of Kantor's most interesting series, *Barcelona Cathedrals – Almost Objects* (fig. 27).<sup>15</sup> During his stay at the Colón, Kantor painted nine cathedrals from the balcony of his room (the series of watercolours in question). As he commented himself, they were:

drawn and painted from the hotel window,  
not at different times  
of day, as had been done before,  
but at times of different  
mood.  
My mood.<sup>16</sup>

I think that those watercolours, those ‘portraits’ of the cathedrals, ‘almost objects’, painted according to the mood of Kantor himself, and not to the ambiance of the

12 From the series: *Notes from the Journey*, 1983, in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...* Warszawa 1999, pp. 94–95.

13 [*Self-portrait, Bilbao*], 1987. From the series: *Diary of the Journey*, private collection, Kraków, and *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...* Warszawa 1999, p. 103.

14 *A Turtledove Flew into the Room... Hotel Colón. Barcelona. Barcelona*, 1987, ink and collage on paper. From the series: *Diary of the Journey*, private collection, Kraków, in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...* Warszawa 1999, p. 89.

15 *Barcelona Cathedrals – Almost Objects*, mixed technique: felt tip, pastel and *frottage* on paper. The series is private property, deposited in the National Museum in Kraków; in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...* Warszawa 1999, p. 118–143.

16 *Barcelona Cathedrals*, from the series: *Notes from the Journey*, 1987, in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...* Warszawa 1999, p. 118.

time of day, ‘as had been done before’,<sup>17</sup> anticipate the influence of the interaction between the artist and the artistic object. In the years that followed, this process would be developed in the final paintings of the series *The Infantas* and *Soldiers*.

The series *The Infantas* starts with a 1965 painting the ‘URGENT’ *Emballage*,<sup>18</sup> oil and collage on canvas, which shows a postman’s sack against a blue background. Later that year, in the work *Mr V. Prado II, The Infanta*,<sup>19</sup> the work was transformed into a foldable diptych, in the upper part of which there also appeared the head of a figure (fig. 28). From that time onwards, Kantor would paint various versions of that painting; the most striking of them – the realistic portrait of *The Infanta* against a black background, painted in 1966.<sup>20</sup>

In reference to the figure on Velázquez’s painting, Kantor wrote in the 60s:

... Velázquez’s Infantas  
 like relics  
 or madonnas  
 with the artificial heads of the dead,  
 and human hair,  
 draped in real, expensive coats...  
 ... their thick layers and swathes  
 akin to the horny skin  
 of an extinct species –  
 the proud Infantas  
 slide out their poor, lymphatic little bodies...  
 the cerebral canopies of courtly crinolines  
 have been stretched over their rachitic little legs...  
 ... in those solemn clothes  
 with their learnt gestures  
 and sepulchral emptiness in their eyes  
 they endure defenceless,  
 humiliated,  
 shamelessly displaying to the audience  
 their total indifference.  
 Decoys of death  
 enclosed in cardboard boxes...<sup>21</sup>

17 This is a reference to Claude Monet’s series *Rouen Cathedral* (1892–94), as noted by Z. Gołubiew in: *Kantor. Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora / Kantor. Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor / Kantor. Spanish Motifs in Tadeusz Kantor’s Oeuvre* (exhibition catalogue), Kraków 1999, p. 29.

18 ‘URGENT’ *Emballage*, 1965, Art Museum in Łódź.

19 *Mr V. Prado II, The Infanta*, 1965. The National Museum in Kraków.

20 *The Infanta*. From the series: ‘*Museum Persiflages*’, 1966. Dr. Karl Gerhard Schmidt, Nuremberg.

21 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974, Pisma*, vol. I, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, p. 320.

And, elsewhere, he added:

... no effort was even made to cover the canvas in paints,  
 which are capable of evoking the desired illusions...  
 ...the grey, crude peasant cloth had been allowed to remain,  
 Probably out of laziness...  
 ... the portrait itself has been made in a hurry in two parts,  
 later joined with metal hinges.  
 The painting can be folded like a suitcase.  
 (...)  
 ... the Infanta's famous skirt  
 Stretched on a hoop of whalebone  
 like a lithurgical vestment  
 has been replaced with a postman's old, worn-out sack  
 and considered an apt imitation.  
 The remnants of the bag's straps which stick out upwards  
 Replicate the movements of the Infanta's hands spread out  
 Above the wings of the dress...  
 ... the little bits of wood, sea-salt eaten flotsam thrown ashore  
 are the only scant allusion to the internal skeleton...  
 ... the head painted using the *trompe-l'oeil* method  
 (it alone) emerges like an apparition  
 from the void of the canvas...<sup>22</sup>

In 1962, at an exhibition in the Zachęta National Gallery in Warsaw, Kantor 'found' Dürer's 1515 etching of the rhinoceros, a beast given as a present to the Portugal monarch Manuel I by the sultan Muzaffar of Gujarat.<sup>23</sup> It is in order to recall what Kantor wrote in the same year in his short essay entitled *An Encounter with Dürer's Rhinoceros*:

I have found Dürer's drawings depicting rhinoceroses. Only with difficulty can I discern any mobile parts, testimony to any vital functions. They are hidden inside, in the joints of the huge, shapeless mass. In fact, one could create a new section of costumology: natural costumes.

One can hardly call this a hide. All this armature or a monstrous cover – as if oblivious of the alive organism, pulsating slowly inside – has grown rampant in explosions of exuberant imagination, eccentric caprices, daring ideas, multiplying ornamental details, knobs, scales, sophisticated 'embroidery', lining, little touches. This almost autonomous creation, the inexplicable peculiarity and pomposity of nature place the rhinoceros in the category 'objet d'art'.<sup>24</sup>

22 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 320–321.

23 A. Dürer, *Rhinoceros*, (woodcutting), 1515. PD 1895-1-22-714 (B.136). Ref.: B. 136, 3rd edition. Meder, 273; 6th edition. Haag, ca. 1620. Stamp of K.E. von Liphart. Watermark Eagle. 2096; Meder, 224.

24 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy*, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

There is a remarkable similarity between the layers of the heavy and complex costume of the Infanta, ‘akin to the horny skin of an extinct species’, and the rhinoceros hide, described by Kantor; under both – ‘the alive organism, pulsating slowly inside’, barely capable of sliding out of its armour, thus simply staying hidden inside.

A similar phenomenon appears in the series *Soldiers*, based on Goya’s *The Third of May 1808*: in the 1970 painting *Emballage* of a painting by Goya *The Third of May 1808*<sup>25</sup> we find an emballage of the firing squad of Goya’s Napoleonic soldiers, made out of pieces of wood or cardboard and joined together with cord or hinges (fig. 29). And in another painting, *Execution after Goya*, also painted in 1970,<sup>26</sup> we again find an emballage of the firing squad, this time made out of sacks and boxes, as well as a group of the condemned men, represented by no more than their clothes.

These works as well as *The Infantas* from the 1960s and the essay about Dürer’s rhinoceros directly relate to the concept of ‘emballage’ which Kantor had been developing during that period: emballage as a method of protecting a work of art, keeping it safe so as to prevent it from being treated sacrilegiously. This is a notion which relates to the principle of gradual and unceasing ‘artistic perversion’ proclaimed by Witkacy – for Kantor, an important predecessor – as part of his Theory of Pure Form. According to that principle, the method of protecting of the works of old masters proposed by Kantor would rely precisely on their emballage.

In the last two paintings from the series *The Infantas* – *One Night Velázquez’s Infanta Came into My Room*<sup>27</sup> and *One Night Velázquez’s Infanta Came into My Room (for a Second Time)*<sup>28</sup> – painted in 1988 and 1990, Kantor introduces a new, important element: in both paintings the figure of the Infanta really does appear in the artist’s ‘Room of Imagination’ (fig. 30). Meanwhile, Kantor has been working on his final production *Today Is My Birthday*, where we also find the character of the Infanta, *Menina Teresa*,<sup>29</sup> visited the artist in his Krakow studio.

Something similar occurs in the series with soldiers: in 1988 and 1990, Kantor paints two versions of the same painting, *Once upon a Time a Napoleonic Soldier*

25 *Emballiertes bild von Goya*. Neues Museum. Staatliches Museum für Kunst und Desing in Nürnberg. Leihgabe der Stadt Nürnberg, Nuremberg.

26 *Execution after Goya*, 1970. Galerie de France, Paris.

27 *One Night Velázquez’s Infanta Came into My Room*. From the series: *Further on, Nothing*, 1988. Galerie de France, Paris.

28 *One Night Velázquez’s Infanta Came into My Room (for a Second Time)*, 1990. Annie Piga’s collection, Rome.

29 *Menine Teresa*, 1990. Property of the artist’s family. On deposit at Cricoteka in Krakow.

*from a Painting by Goya Invaded My Room of Imagination*<sup>30</sup> and *Once Again a Napoleonic Soldier from a Painting by Goya Crossed My Path* (fig. 31).<sup>31</sup> In those paintings we find Kantor himself, smoking a cigarette in front of the soldier, who is threateningly taking aim at him. However, the artist's body language is arrogant; he makes a gesture as if – to echo Zofia Gołubiew's apt comment<sup>32</sup> – to ask his attacker for a light.

What is striking in the last works of both these series, produced by Kantor shortly before his death, is the mutual interaction between the artist and the artistic object. The character from the painting comes in, or invades, sometimes capriciously, as is the case with *The Infanta*, and sometimes menacingly and aggressively, as does the Soldier, into the artist's 'Room of Imagination', into his 'inner world'. The Infanta seems to personify the voice of Kantor's own conscience, his internal dialogue, his questioning about the sense of art, the destiny of the artist; whilst the Soldier represents the external factors, which threaten to trivialise and spoil artistic creation, factors which Kantor has to face daily.

Amongst the stage designs which Kantor produced in the 1950s and 60s for various theatres, we must note the 1962 stage set for *Don Quixote* after Massenet, commissioned by the Krakow Opera and Operetta. One is especially struck by the skeleton of Rocinante,<sup>33</sup> which we find again in the Cricot 2 Theatre's production *Let the Artists Die* (1985). This is an example of Kantor openly retrieving and recycling works produced earlier for other purposes.

There was another Spanish artist that Kantor admired – Salvador Dalí, about whom Kantor said in 1989, having visited the Dalí Theatre-Museum in Figueres:

Salvador Dalí had imagination which went beyond logic and sought that which is impossible. For him, matter was something elastic. Dalí rejected the earth to soar to heaven; however, he always kept one foot on the ground. His obsessive desire to elevate himself above his surroundings led him to be convinced that he was God. That was exactly what I found fascinating about him. (...)

I believe in Salvador Dalí religion and I believe that he was right to consider himself God. He is my God; from nothing, he created the world, his own artistic world.<sup>34</sup>

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30 *Once upon a Time a Napoleonic Soldier from a Painting by Goya Invaded My Room of Imagination*, 1988. Galerie de France, Paris.

31 *Once Again a Napoleonic Soldier from a Painting by Goya Crossed My Path*, 1990, the Spicchi dell'Est collection, Rome.

32 Kantor. *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora / Kantor. Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor / Kantor. Spanish Motifs in Tadeusz Kantor's Oeuvre* (exhibition catalogue), Kraków 1999, p. 20.

33 Cf. *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora*, op. cit., p. 166 and 179.

34 T. Kantor. *El Punt*, Girona 25 February 1989. See also: J. Antón, *Kantor: Dalí ha sido el mayor revolucionario del arte*, *El País* (Barcelona edition), 24 February 1989.

To my mind, this idea of Kantor's makes a connection with the concept of 'unfulfilment', in which Witkiewicz, mentioned earlier, defines 'the feeling of fear which each human being experiences in relation to the direct experience of the Mystery of Being,'; in the case of an artist, this manifests as the 'inability to express the sensation of strangeness before the world surrounding him.' To build one's own artistic world and alternative order – this is the only way to 'break the limitations constraining the artist.'<sup>35</sup> And again, Witkacy springs to mind. In his play *The Cuttlefish*, one of the protagonists says that he belongs to those 'who, if they cannot walk through the wall, leave on it the bloody stamp of their crushed skull.'<sup>36</sup> 'The artist must have the wall against which to hit his head,' Kantor maintained.<sup>37</sup>

As part of the events prepared for the 2000 Krakow – European City of Culture programme there were prepared many exhibitions devoted to Kantor. The Tadeusz Kantor Foundation decided to invite two artists renowned in the world to exhibit their works in Krakow alongside the artist. On account of creative similarities of their work with the Kantor heritage, Bob Wilson and Antoni Tàpies were invited to participate. The project had the backing of the Tadeusz Kantor Foundation, Cricoteka, the Antoni Tàpies Foundation in Barcelona, the Cervantes Institute in Warsaw and the National Museum in Krakow, which hosted the Kantor – Tàpies exhibition. For the joint exhibition, the Antoni Tàpies Foundation chose the artist's 1991 series *The Certainties Experienced*, and Tàpies himself added the work entitled *Painting – the Stretched Canvas* from 1962,<sup>38</sup> as his personal homage to Tadeusz Kantor.<sup>39</sup>

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35 J. I. García Garzón, *Tadeusz Kantor: Hago teatro en legítima defensa para superar la realidad*, in: *ABC*, Madrid, 1 March 1989.

36 S. I. Witkiewicz, *Dziela wybrane*, vol. V, Warszawa 1985, p. 151. S. I. Witkiewicz, *The Cuttlefish*, trans. D. Gerould, in: *A Treasury of the Theatre*, ed. J. Gassner and B. Dukore, New York 1970. The play *The Cuttlefish* was staged by the Cricot 2 company in 1956, directed by T. Kantor, with stage sets and costumes by M. Jarema.

37 Cf. J. Antón, *Tadeusz Kantor: El artista debe tener un muro contra el que golpearse la cabeza*, *El País* (Barcelona edition), 18/3/1987; F. Rotges, *Tadeusz Kantor: La política es mala para el arte*, in: *Diario 16*, Madrid, 18 October 1988; *La dictadura es útil en el arte*, in: *El Periódico de Cataluña*, Barcelona 22 October 1988; S. Fondevila, *Me opongo a cualquier noción de poder*, in: *La Vanguardia*, Barcelona 22 February 1989.

38 *Painting – the Stretched Canvas*, 1962. Mixed technique on the reverse of a stretched canvas. From the Antoni Tàpies collection, Barcelona.

39 Antoni Tàpies, *The Certainties Experienced / Certezas sentidas / Certeses sentides* (exhibition catalogue), Warszawa 2000, p.132. The Catalan artist wrote in the catalogue of his exhibition in the National Museum in Krakow:

'It was with great satisfaction that I accepted the proposal of the Tadeusz Kantor Foundation (...) that I should exhibit my works in Krakow side by side with the

Thus, there is a sense of continuity: from the exhibition of Kantor's paintings in 1997 in Madrid and Barcelona – to the joint Kantor – Tàpies exhibition in 2000 in the National Museum in Krakow, which was Tàpies's first individual exhibition in Poland. In the meantime, in 1998, an exhibition entitled *Spanish Motives in the Work of Tadeusz Kantor* took place in Krakow and Warsaw, subsequently shown in various Spanish towns in the year 2002. Spanish motives in Kantor's work continue to draw interest from researchers; I have in mind the publications by Violetta Sajkiewicz and Małgorzata Liszewska, who have dealt with this topic in the recent years.<sup>40</sup>

During the preparations for the 1998 exhibition, something that was frequently emphasised in conversations with the representatives of the Polish cultural institutions involved in the project was the fact that there was no other country and culture with which Kantor's relationship was as prominent as that with Spain.

This phenomenon is all the more interesting, because it was on the basis of a close and durable relationship with Italy and France that Kantor had developed a considerable chunk of his theoretical and conceptual work, well documented in his own writings (amongst others, in his well-known *The Milano Lessons*).

From Spanish art and culture, Kantor derived inspiration and associations which enabled him to develop a large part of his interpretative work on the oeuvre of old and modern masters. On the other hand, the reception in Spain of the productions of the Cricot 2 Theatre, both on part of the audiences and the critics,<sup>41</sup>

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works of a Polish artist whom I admire greatly and side by side with the works of Bob Wilson, whom I also like very much.

I am convinced that the trio Kantor – Tàpies – Wilson is a splendid idea. Yet again this proves that it is possible for artists who are apart in time and space and do not know one another personally to share deep involvement in the problems of their time. Nevertheless, I have been fortunate in having had the opportunity of meeting Kantor and Wilson in Barcelona, where their work is known and admired. For this reason I feel honoured by the Foundation's initiative and I hope that these words will compensate for my absence in Krakow, in "Kantor's land" (...); in the city which I carry always in my heart, as I do all of Poland.' A. Tàpies, *The Certainties Experienced...*, 'op. cit.', p. 7.

40 Cf.: V. Sajkiewicz, *Malarstwo w teatrze. Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora i Jana Polewki*, in: *Dawne i współczesne oblicze kultury europejskiej – Jedność w różnorodności*; ed. H. Rusek; from the series: *Studia Etnologiczne i Antropologiczne*, vol. 6, Katowice 2002. M. Liszewska, *Hiszpania – estetyczne inspiracje Tadeusza Kantora*, in: *Zmyśli hiszpańskiej i iberoamerykańskiej. Filozofia – literatura – mistyka*, eds. M. Jagłowski and D. Sepczyńska, Olsztyn 2006.

41 Cf.: M. Ordóñez, *Ogród opuszczony przez ptaki*, in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...*, Warszawa 1999, pp. 187–189; J. de Sagarra, *Ecce Homo*, from the programme of the theatre Mercat de les Flors – Teatre Municipal de Barcelona, on the occasion of the performance of *I Shall Never Return*, Barcelona 2 January 1989; F. Nieva,

focused on the experience of pure emotions, without delving into their subject matter.

I think that this dual approach of looking for something ‘more to do with meaning’ versus ‘more to do with emotions’ can be perceived as an on-going phenomenon in the relations between the two Europes: the northern-central – more rational and speculative, and the southern – given more to experience and passion. For this reason, in Spain, the repertory of the Cricot 2 Theatre had at one stage been defined – and so it remains to this day – Tadeusz Kantor’s ‘theatre of emotions’.

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*El Apocalipsis según Kantor*, in: *El País*, Madrid, 9 December 1990; J. de Sagarra, *En la muerte de Tadeusz Kantor: el niño de la clase muerta*, in: *El País*, Barcelona 10 December 1990; also in Polish translation: *Dziecko z umarłej klasy (Na śmierć Tadeusza Kantora)*, in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...* Warszawa 1999, pp. 190–191. Cf. also the extended Spanish bibliography on Tadeusz Kantor in: *Motywy hiszpańskie w twórczości Tadeusza Kantora...* Warszawa 1999, p. 193.



# The Door, Frame or Transcendental Threshold in the Work of Tadeusz Kantor

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FURTHER ON, NOTHING!  
I screamed.  
I cursed  
the PAINTING  
I had been faithful to for a long time.  
I made a mad decision  
to leave its space.  
Never to return.  
It was not an escape,  
rather a dignified  
withdrawal from  
a privileged site;  
an acknowledgement of my  
failure.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Real place

I would like to focus on the function of the door and picture frame in the works of Tadeusz Kantor so as to try to identify the horizon of representation included in the spatial and pictorial performance. I will examine how attempting to escape the liability inherent in any theatrical context, Tadeusz Kantor called into question the very notion of 'backstage' or wings:

The actors want to enter the stage from the wings.  
BUT THERE AREN'T ANY!  
THERE IS NO PLACE FROM WHICH ONE CAN ENTER  
SAFELY AND WHERE DRAMA'S ILLUSION AND A FIGURE  
OF THE AUTHOR CAN FIND A COMFORTABLE HIDING  
PLACE.  
THERE IS NO RETREAT FROM THE STAGE.  
[THE ACTORS] CAN ONLY GO FORWARD IN THE DIRECTION

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1 T. Kantor, *My Work – My Journey*, in: M. Kobialka, *Further on Nothing: Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre*, Minneapolis, London 2009, p. 25.

OF THE AUDITORIUM,  
INTO REALITY!<sup>2</sup>

How did this over-representation of mirages, illusions and *facticity* open the door to a reality shaped by material defined as ‘poor’? The framework in which creation is set is precise:

real *place*.  
A theatrical place;  
however, not the official place  
reserved for the presentation of a drama,  
but a place wrenched from the reality of life,  
a place which belonged to life’s practice  
and to the everyday.<sup>3</sup>

A close look at the ‘heartbeat’ of space revealed in art which is neither ‘reproduction’ nor ‘simulation’ of the visible world should reveal whether removing ‘situations, characters, objects, actions and their causes and consequences in life’<sup>4</sup>, emptiness and the ‘disintegration of illusion itself’<sup>5</sup> can result in the conjuring up of that elusive space – ‘the other world’.<sup>6</sup>

Whether it is implemented in places of creation and representation (the Krzysztofory Gallery, the Church of Santa Maria in Florence or the Alte Giesserei Schafhof-Nürnberg), the door opens onto the inaugural room in Kantor’s *The Return of Odysseus*; in *Wielopole Wielopole*, it does ‘catch your eye’,<sup>7</sup> whereas in both *Wielopole, Wielopole* and in the earlier production *The Country House*, the door is associated with a wardrobe. Elsewhere, the door opens onto a vestibule, or an antechamber which ‘exhales a vacuum’,<sup>8</sup> where forgotten objects are piled up. In *The Dead Class*, the old-children spectra arise from the ‘depths’<sup>9</sup> through the only door arranged as a place of transgression and place of childhood memory:

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2 T. Kantor, *The Milano Lessons: Lesson 7*, in: *A Journey Through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, ed. and *With a Critical Study of Tadeusz Kantor’s Theatre by Michal Kobialka*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1993, p. 237.

3 T. Kantor, *A Painting* in: M. Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing. Tadeusz Kantor’s Theatre*, Minneapolis, London, 2009, p. 492.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 495.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 496.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 492.

7 *Kantor in Wielopole, Wielopole*, ed. B. Eruli, *Tadeusz Kantor I Les voies de la création théâtrale*, CNRS, Paris 1983.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

9 T. Kantor says: ‘L’artiste doit être toujours dans les tréfonds car pour être entendu on ne peut crier que des tréfonds’. T. Kantor, *Je ne reviendrai jamais, Guide*, in *Tadeusz Kantor 2 Les Voies de la création théâtrale*, CNRS, Paris 1993.

‘Suddenly the door opens. Enter the DEAD. Silence falls. Someone shouts: Ah, finally, they have come ... we can begin.’<sup>10</sup>

In *The Dead Class*, it is a window that conceals the face of a man dressed as a woman who ‘sees’, ‘scans’, ‘comments on events’. The window becomes the place where the device of the frame is repeated, where a door is enhanced by a human figure whose silhouette it throws into relief. The window is described by the artist as an ‘extraordinary object that separates us from the world on “the other side”, from “the unknown”, from death ...’<sup>11</sup> In *The Dead Class*, the window, for Brunella Eruli, is a shifted pictorial quotation. In *Wielopole, Wielopole*, it functions as an allusion to the absence of wall; metaphorically, it highlights its conceptual presence as it does in Shakespeare.<sup>12</sup> But sometimes the context expands to become part of the door: to the cemetery storeroom, to Infernum in *Let the Artists Die*, or to a tacky dive in *I Will Never Return*. Ultimately, in *Today is My Birthday*, the frame becomes multiple empty frames which enclose living characters (Meyerhold, the Infanta, the Self-Portrait of the Artist, or the Poor Girl) or else it turns into circus cages.

Constructing a space conducive to a genuine transcendence of the body requires going through a ‘gate’, ‘a lower place, less subject to daily actions’.<sup>13</sup> Here, a new configuration of power and scale occurs:

SPACE:

This UR-MATTER is *space*!

I can feel its pulsating rhythm.

Space,

which does not have an exit, or a boundary;

[space] which is receding, disappearing,

or approaching omni-directionally with changing velocity;

it is dispersed in all directions: to the sides, to the middle;

it ascends, caves in,

spins on the vertical, horizontal, diagonal axis. . . .

It is not afraid to burst into an enclosed shape,

defuse it with its sudden jerking movement,

deform its shape. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Two years before his death, Kantor painted a self-portrait, a body lying on its back, its mis-shapen hands crossed. The picture is divided into two parts; one consists

10 T. Kantor, *Carnet de notes*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor 2*, p. 133.

11 T. Kantor, *Tadeusz Kantor 1*, p. 73.

12 B. Eruli, *Wielopole, Wielopole* in: *Tadeusz Kantor 1*, p. 230.

13 T. Kantor, *Café Europe* in: *Tadeusz Kantor 2*, p. 136.

14 T. Kantor, *The Milano Lessons: Lesson 3* in: *A Journey Through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, ed. and *With a Critical Study of Tadeusz Kantor’s Theatre by Michal Kobialka*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1993, p. 217.

of a platform reminiscent of the coffin, of salvation; the other, darker, shows a lit candle. The title given by the artist was premonitory: *In This Painting, I Shall Always Remain* (1988). The year 1988 was also the year in which *I Shall Never Return* was first staged. This work, moreover, was the final illustration chosen for the catalogue *My Work, My Journey*. The catalogue also presents other pictures: *I am Holding a Painting in Which I am Painted Holding a Painting*, 1988, *She: What an Interesting Picture*, 1988, *A Soldier is Holding a Painting in Which He Is Painted Holding a Painting with His Dead Comrades*, 1988 and *I Have Had Enough. I Am Leaving This Painting*, 1988.

Venturing beyond the theatre – a zone rendered indifferent and neutralised by secular practices, the artist finds the Poor Room of Imagination, which he called ‘My Home’:

Every one of my pictures was  
my home.  
I did not have any other.  
They burned down one by one.  
Only a chimney left each time.  
A chimney from my picture.  
This is a chimney from my  
home.  
This is my home.  
Here, on this stage.<sup>15</sup>

The emptiness of the house reflects a poor reality, the deformations of a face, projected by real people who ‘come out of their graves’<sup>16</sup> via the vertical door and its frame as a ‘rear window’.<sup>17</sup> Between the horror and the grotesque, the characters are swallowed up in this house, this veritable ‘court of miracles’ that exposes the scaffolding boards of its inner structure, bearing all the roles that are to be performed. As a principal character, Kantor is always on stage, having absolute power over his art. By refusing illusion, he is gradually convinced that his presence on stage during the performance, amongst many other things, is meant to control the limits of illusion.

If I see that actors begin to ‘act out’, that is, that they leave the plane of concrete reality (and it is not possible to do this for long), I allow them to do so for some time, because it is fascinating to observe, but, at a certain point, I go and stand near them. That is enough, because I am a spectator and not an actor. If they are intelligent enough to speak to me (there were a few times that, indeed, the actors became furious at me, called me names and told me not to interfere with their work), the results

15 T. Kantor, *Silent Night (Cricotage)* in: *Further on, Nothing*, op. cit., p. 441.

16 T. Kantor, *Ô douce nuit, les Classes d'Avignon*, Actes Sud-Papiers, Paris 1991, p.83.

17 Kantor again refers to the title of A. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* in *Silent Night*, p. 69.

are better still. Those were the best moments, when the actors themselves broke the illusion while playing.<sup>18</sup>

Kantor's first pictures already stood as milestones of the representation of Death:

Figures in layers of increasingly sparse paint took the shape of papier-mâché models. The colour turned to ashes. There was no air, but dried and hardened material, such as clods of earth scorched by the sun.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. A reality transfigured

The artist adopted a distance towards pictorial illusion very early on; this allowed him to interact with the 'material form and the surface of the picture' to rediscover the essence and necessity revealed in the representation of the human face. This human presence was 'important and necessary'. Kantor noted: 'Without any doubt, I had a glimpse behind the reality, which was close to my heart, and for which there was no abstract rendering available.'<sup>20</sup>

The transgression of the picture and its recession are at the heart of Kantor's artistic practice, marked by its insistence on reality. Just like the protagonist of his *The Return of Odysseus*, conceived during the Second World War, the human face 'really has to come back!', and in a concrete way. It was unthinkable that Odysseus should just be an 'image', devoid of what Benjamin referred to as the 'aura', 'the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be'.<sup>21</sup> 'One had,' says Kantor, 'to consider the matter seriously',<sup>22</sup> by creating another profile of the human face placed in the space of representation.

At a time marked by the obliteration of human beings and a drive to annihilate life, art – according to Kantor – should leave its 'lofty mansions and illusions' for a 'real life situation', which, paradoxically, gives it a 'subordinate role'.

Powerless had become image (ONLY!) of reality,  
the *work of art*,  
product of operations of sublimation and of practices considered  
as artistic.<sup>23</sup>

18 T. Kantor, *Moja droga do Teatru Śmierci* [My Journey Towards the Theatre of Death], in *idem, Teatr Śmierci, Teksty z lat 1975–1984*, Pisma, vol. II, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2004, p. 462.

19 T. Kantor, *Początki mojego malarstwa*, in : *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974* Pisma, vol. I, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, p.84.

20 *Ibid.*

21 W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. by H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn, New York 1969, p. 5.

22 T. Kantor, 1944: *Ulysses in* : *idem, Metamorfozy, Teksty o latach 1934–1974*, Pisma, vol. I, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, p. 13.

23 *Ibid.*

Whilst rejecting the painting, often defined as the place for the manifestation of the illusion, Kantor presents simultaneously two objects, two realities that will feed his creation: a 'cart-wheel smeared with mud and a rotten fence board'.<sup>24</sup> One can read this appropriation of the object as a 'violation of the sacred laws of creation that emphatically insist on a tangible intervention of the artist'.<sup>25</sup> The cart-wheel and the board constitute a challenge:

REFUSING ART AND A WORK OF ART THEIR SACRED  
(AND USED TO EXCESS)  
RIGHT TO AN EXCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION OF REALITY.  
This terse statement in fact boils down  
To meaning nothing other than  
DENYING ART ITS RAISON D'ETRE.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1940s, Kantor examined practices venturing beyond the surface of the painting, a medium which, for him, had become 'too "orthodox" to contain the thought that goes beyond the rules of the structure of a painting'.<sup>27</sup>

The field of imagination began to translate for me not as material to construct and implement in a painting, but as place where the objects from my own past are piled up, in the form of wrecks and dummies, and also other objects that are not mine, alien, banal, schematic, the incidental mixed with the important, valuable and insignificant facts together.  
People, letters, prescriptions, addresses, traces, dates, encounters.<sup>28</sup>

Defining the margin, the threshold, was necessary, because the margin is still 'an open field where art conducts its battle'.<sup>29</sup> And it is also on the sidelines that one can easily initiate a series of deflections, 'a fascinating and ambiguous setting, where the costume would be derived from the matter of the human body; that matter would replicate the forms of the body or create new ones on new constructions and new ideas, new situations'.<sup>30</sup>

Exiting the theatre, Kantor encounters objects from the poor reality. 'Daily life shapes art.' Everyday, mundane life takes on a new dimension. The actor is no

24 T. Kantor, *Emballages* in: *Tadeusz Kantor Ma création, mon voyage*, Plume, Paris 1991, p. 114.

25 *Ibid.*

26 T. Kantor, 1944: *Ulysses* in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974 op. cit.*, p. 18.

27 T. Kantor, *Tadeusz Kantor, Ma création, mon voyage, ibid.*, p.19.

28 T. Kantor, *Okolice zera*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974 op. cit.*, p.225

29 T. Kantor, *Struktura i zespół teatru Crictot 2, ibid.*, p. 160.

30 T. Kantor, *Spotkanie z nosorożcem Dürera, ibid.*, p. 296.

longer content to be the interpreter of a role. In this series of deflections, packages appear, ‘vast horizons’<sup>31</sup> and ‘new territories of reality’ emerge.<sup>32</sup>

For Kantor, the surface of the painting is often too orthodox to hold the thought that goes beyond the rules of the structure of the painting. Its function must be to ‘shed new light on man, on the fate that civilization has for centuries prepared for him.’<sup>33</sup> The disappearance or abandonment of all forms of illusion and picture leads to a vacuum; the void of the context freed of facticity enables the emergence of the real, transfigured by tragedy and cruelty. The frame becomes the image that references death. Fictional characters are no longer replayed, rather they become ‘living containers’, abandoned on the floor.

### 3. And above the man, the cross

In 1990, Tadeusz Kantor created his ultimate work, *Today is My Birthday*. The artist invited characters familiar from the Cricot 2 Theatre, founded in 1955 in Krakow, to reappear in this production. The present anniversary has provided an opportunity for art and memories to meet. The family portrait stands on a table. A memory element, an old rotten board, heralds a great scene of family reunion organised by the artist in the space of a picture.

The Last Supper, created by Kantor, brings together ‘disciples’, those who have walked with him, some since the 1940s – the time of the creation of *The Return of Odysseus*, artists who had influenced him: Meyerhold, Goya, Jonas Stern, and finally, figures from paintings by Velázquez. They have all been invited to meet again, here and now.

The ceremony takes place in the room of the imagination which the artist has never left behind, in which he has always displayed his objects. The set was conceived as a dialogue between two places, a city and a small town, between Krakow and Wielopole.

*Today is My Birthday* will finally enable the artist to bridge the ‘threshold between the world of illusion and the world of our reality’.<sup>34</sup> Frames contain the works threatened by the authorities, officials and the NKVD soldiers who destroy the room, the Kantorian ‘brittle materials’.

Kantor’s spatial design generates a constant tension, and the actors’ playing frequently needs to adjust itself to this. If the scene is ‘contracted’ or if it ‘expands’,

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31 T. Kantor, *Manifest ambalaży*, *ibid.*, p. 302.

32 T. Kantor, *Ubranie-ambalaż*, *ibid.*, p. 315

33 T. Kantor, *Moja twórczość, moja podróż*, *ibid.*, p. 33

34 T. Kantor, *Wielka dygresja teoretyczna*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, p. 243.

it also creates a visual metaphor, a different reading of space, a real object of creation, which takes the form of a ‘network of relationships and tensions between objects’. And because ‘the tension is the key player in space a hyperspace’, ‘the public is forced to abandon logical analysis and rational thought for a memory that opens the door to the imagination’.<sup>35</sup>

The frame of the painting preserves the status of illusion in a space reserved for representation, the exposure of reality and the ego (Kantor’s own). The giving up of the frame marks the last transition from illusion to reality. It is the space of the ‘stage revelation’, in which the Kantorian characters that are locked within come onto the stage, such as the Self-Portrait that emerges from the picture frame (and the world of illusion) in order to reach the real world:

My Self-Portrait  
 in a growing madness  
 of Imitation,  
 struggles in the narrow  
 inside of the picture, screaming. Finally  
 not bearing to  
 confine itself there  
 It jumps out.<sup>36</sup>

In his attempt to resemble the author and to become him, taking the risk of becoming Kantor himself, the Self Portrait

casts his eyes on me  
 tries to imitate faithfully  
 my movements,  
 only my gesture  
 of storing my text files  
 in my pocket is inverted:  
 he takes out of his pocket  
 sheets with a similar text  
 (obviously mine).<sup>37</sup>

The act of repetition is performed for the Self-Portrait in the present – even if the failure is obvious. This failure will force him to return to his place within the array as if staying in the real world could turn the character into a real ‘I’, endowing him with the identity of the author. We also discover that we ‘can not leave the picture

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35 M. Kobialka, *La mémoire de Tadeusz Kantor: création dans l'espace virtuel*, in: *Kantor, l'artiste à la fin du XX ème siècle*, Paris 1990, p. 84.

36 T. Kantor, *Dziś są moje urodziny* [Notes on the production], in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, op. cit.*, p. 260.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 261.



with impunity<sup>38</sup> without incurring ridicule. The act of crossing the threshold does not illuminate the character, it does not elevate him; instead, it mocks and ridicules him. The frame now includes the real and the rest of the scene of illusion.

In *Today is My Birthday*, the three empty frames become thresholds, passageways between fiction and reality. They set limits to be determined by the actors. The frame identifies, and defines Velázquez's Infanta who becomes a real object, a real figure. This therefore prevents exhibitionism and, above all, any imitation or identification with the work of the Spanish master.

The Poor Girl (just like the Self-Portrait), who continually crosses the boundary of the space frame to try to identify with the character of the Infanta, introduced by the artist in this part of the foreground, cannot achieve her ends. She fails in her attempt just as the Self-Portrait does. The actor who leaves the closed part for the 'outside must, as Kantor, the owner of the place advises, him, falter before getting out of the frame.'<sup>39</sup> All the memories, covered in dust, also appear in this last work as an ultimate revelation of creation.

In the same situation (in *Today is My Birthday*), the three NKVD soldiers behave as if a tragedy were being staged. The left frame, vertical, contains the Self-Portrait. It is a refuge for the threatened artist. Here he is, 'safe, untouched'. But at the same time this narrow space, 'stuffy, unbearable', confronts the 'blank space above.'<sup>40</sup> During rehearsals Kantor instructs Andrzej Welmiński, who plays the role of the Self-Portrait:

You must hit your whole body against  
the wall, against the other one . . .  
You're so cramped in this picture  
you gush out of it. . .  
You can not find enough room in this space.<sup>41</sup>

We can see the space of the picture taking shape to show the characters in the reality of action. Swapping places with Meyerhold, the Self-Portrait will be extracted with 'cruelty and brutality' by the NKVD soldiers<sup>42</sup> to be thrown on the stage.

The second vertical frame, on the right of the first one, is for Velázquez's Infanta, for the work of art and the artist's success. This is an area coveted by the Poor Girl who tries to access it in order to achieve a kind of consecration or ennoblement in art. Unfortunately the desired identification does not take place,

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38 *Ibid.*, p. 262.

39 T. Kantor, *Le dernier mois des répétitions*, *Tadeusz Kantor 2*, ed. M.-T. Vido-Rzewuska, p. 146.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*

42 NKVD was the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs in the former USSR. In 1934 it became part of the political police that succeeded the Tcheka and the OGPU.

because – upon entering into this space of the frame – she finds only mockery and shame.

Between the two vertical frames, still containing Kantor's Self-Portrait and a private part of his memories, a third frame appears, horizontal and mobile. Empty at the start of the performance, its space is constantly occupied or traversed by many characters. This device establishes a separation and a demarcation line between reality and illusion, between the Servant and the Author, but also between the real people on the stage and the Author's family – ministering spirits. The space of the central frame can be not only peaceful and safe but also designated for the representation of death.

The way that Kantor addresses his actors appears to clarify the metamorphoses of space: 'When you're in the picture you are quite safe, out of danger',<sup>43</sup> away from any external threat. But the space is transformed into a place of torture, a 'death cell' for the character of Meyerhold, beaten mercilessly by the NKVD soldiers. This is how Kantor described Act V where the character of the Self-Portrait appears, in the programmes distributed to the public:

enter the three NKVD soldiers.  
 Slowly, deliberately, they head  
 For the picture in which  
 My Self-Portrait sits on a chair.  
 They pounce on him,  
 drag him out of the frame,  
 carry him to the central picture (...).  
 Now, a traditional Russian folk song can be heard,  
 as savage as the three thugs.  
 They strip off his clothes (...)  
 From within the terrible picture, on each side,  
 MARIA JAREMA  
 and  
 JONASZ STERN  
 appear,  
 as if they wanted to be present  
 at the death of the victim.  
 They take hold of the frame of the picture,  
 They carry it,  
 closer and closer, (...)  
 The picture gets closer,  
 Together with its content.  
 Now it is close to the audience (...)

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43 T. Kantor, *Le dernier mois des répétitions*, *Tadeusz Kantor 2*, ed. M.-T. Vido-Rzewuska, p. 147.

The three NKVD soldiers  
perform the act of murder.<sup>44</sup>

To complete the transformation of the fulfilled space and especially in order to preserve the memory of the event in the viewer's mind, Kantor transforms the frames and their content. Kantor told the two actors, Ewa Janicka and Zbyszek Gostomski responsible for this movement:

You go out! And you start to push so that the intention of bringing the frame close should not emanate from the NKVD soldiers (because they have a different function) but from you! [Push it towards] the audience to see the scene in front of you, because it is a crazy decision, a complete new development.<sup>45</sup>

Through such transformations of the frame, Kantor shatters our accustomed ways of interpreting events on the stage; he demands a redefinition of perceptual codes. Thus, space is no longer frozen, reduced to its frame. It is built by its metamorphoses and a constant energy that it radiates onto both players and spectators. Representations finally reveal new horizons of the creative act, that place 'where the laws of art meet the accidental nature of life',<sup>46</sup> a real transcendence that gives access to a 'reality of the lowest rank', wherein the true face of humanity can be found.

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44 T. Kantor, *Dziś są moje urodziny* [Notes on the production], in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, pp. 294–295.

45 T. Kantor, in: *Le dernier mois des répétitions, Tadeusz Kantor 2*, ed. M.-T. Vido-Rzewuska, p. 147.

46 T. Kantor, *Cicha noc*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, p. 187.



**3.**  
**Revisiting Scenes from the Theatre:  
Between Life and History**



# **Anthropology of History and Memory in the Theatrical Work of Tadeusz Kantor**

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## **1. The Experience of Memory in the Theatre Space**

In 2004, in Holstebro, Denmark, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Odin Teatret was being celebrated. At the beginning of the meeting, Eugenio Barba presented to the assembled guests a sizeable fresco, made with 650 kg of sand, collected on a nearby beach. The fresco represented Odin, fighting on horseback. It was after the Nordic god that Barba had named his theatre. Many ambivalent characteristics had been attributed to Odin. On the one hand, he was the god of war and warriors, the ruler of Valhalla – the land of the dead. On the other hand, however, he was capable of bestowing poetic inspiration, having stolen the ecstasy-inducing mead from the giant Suttungr. He also passed on to people the sacred runes. Odin pointed back to the ancient roots of the European culture. He thus became a memory sign referring to that which had been, to the Past Perfect. He was instrumental in providing the ambiance for the anniversary event. Yet the Odin of sand was marked by an inner dichotomy. The figure of the Norse god was associated with the attributes of might, bravery and prowess. The will of might was juxtaposed with the fragility of the material from which the sculpture had been made. That was a deliberate stratagem on Barba's part. It was meant to set out the determinants of the anniversary session. At the same time it denoted the inner contradiction inherent in the nature of the theatre. The cathartic power of the impact of a drama played out in autonomous space, distinct from the reality of the historic world, had been combined with the fragility of impressions – a lingering memory. Barba emphasised the synonymy of the fragility of existence and the ephemeral nature of art with an action which marked the beginning of the session proper: the theatrical festivity. After introducing to the gathered participants the two Brazilian workers who had taken considerable trouble to make the sand Odin, the artist then set in motion an hour-glass which released onto the ground the grains of sand. Thus began the process of the deconstruction of a work of art which could only continue its existence in the memory of the participants. At the end of the festival, each of them was given a small bottle full of the sand which only three days before appeared to have been

the rock from which the statue of Odin had been shaped. This experience of meeting the past set in motion the following chain of memories for Georges Banu:

In the theatre, actors die, but gestures and characters do not; they will always defend themselves from destruction. Sadness overcomes everybody (...). I try to follow the rhythm of nostalgic music; the fact of experiencing anew the experience of many years ago makes me think about the theatre. Here, you act, so as to begin to act all over again. This is exactly what I am doing, after a thirty-year-long break: this is both a challenge and a pleasure. Then, in the elation of the moment, I 'quote' Kantor, directing the sea and the orchestra, as he did in his famous happening. 'Life imitates art' – this cliché proved to be true on the North Sea coast. But happiness relies precisely on improvisation, out of the conviction that there is no next time. (...) The journey nears its end, the sand which has spilled out of the bottle testifies to that... the hour-glass is completely emptied!<sup>1</sup>

The performance described shows, in a symbolic way, the effect of a certain cultural transformation, dating back to the 1970s. Its approach to the past is marked by the movement from a methodologically ordered domination, whether objectivised, or inter-subjective, historical analysis, removed from individual experiences, to individual narrations about the past, of equal status to academic despatch. In the event described, Odin represents the world of history; faith in the causative power of historical processes, faced with which the fate of an individual – through generalisation – merges with so-called common history. During the three-day anniversary celebrations, reminiscing about past events from the forty years of the history of Eugenio Barba's theatre, the Nordic god of might dissolves into grains – frames of individual memory.

## 2. From the Paradigm of Linear Development to the Time of Return

Twenty nine years before the anniversary of the Odin Teatret, in the cellars of the Krzysztofory Palace in Krakow, the premiere of *The Dead Class* had taken place. The theatrical event of the 15 November 1975 – which launched Kantor's Theatre of Death – can be considered a watershed not only in terms of the history of the Cricot 2 Theatre. The form and the date of the spectacle are linked to the censorship which marked the decline of the theatrical avant-garde.

Alongside *The Dead Class*, a reassessment of the value system took place in Kantor's work, including the very concept of the art practised (figs. 32, 33). Even before the war, at the time when Kantor placed his artistic search in an area which, years later, he was to describe as situated 'between holy abstraction and

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1 G. Banu, *Czterdzieści lat Odin i przypowieść o piasku*, in: *Didaskalia* 2005, nos. 67–68, p. 84.



excommunicated symbolism', the artist had stepped onto the path laid out by the investigations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde.<sup>2</sup> One of its paradigms was the imperative of incessant development, venturing beyond formal barriers, continuing to break further cultural taboos. With regard to world history, this meant becoming – to a smaller or larger degree – part of the paradigm of the modernist utopia of the reconstruction of the world. Many avant-gardists shared the faith in the possibility of the creation of a new social and cultural world order. This faith was also shared by the Polish modernists of the two decades between the wars, including those from the circles of the second Grupa Krakowska [Krakow Group].<sup>3</sup> In the case of Kantor, to whom political involvement was alien, it boiled down to the area of art. If he did entertain the thought of transforming historical reality, it could have only taken place through an act of artistic creation.

Tadeusz Kantor's access to avant-garde circles and the acceptance of the imperative of incessant development affected the concept of time adopted by the artist. It was linear; it took for granted the need for a ceaseless formal search, which in turn implied the inevitability of artistic re-evaluations. This is why the subsequent spectacles marked the phases of the artistic search. The period of the Underground Independent Theatre was a transition from the abstract form in *Balladyna* (1943) to the ready-made in the *The Return of Odysseus* (1944). The artist divided the period of 'playing with Witkacy'<sup>4</sup> into particular phases. *The Cuttlefish* (1956) marked the beginning of Cricot 2. In the history of Cricot 2, the second part of the 1950s was a time which could be described as a phase of a quest stretching from references to the pre-war Cricot and the aspiration to acquire an independent, individual artistic slant. The following spectacles were symptomatic of that period: the pantomime *The Well, or the Depth of Thought*, directed by Kazimierz Mikulski (1956), the turpist *The Carbuncle – the Theatre of the Hideous* (1956) by Andrzej Bursa and Jan Güntner, *A Circus* (1957) – the first theatre emballage, and the presentation of such films belonging in the asemantic category as Andrzej Pawłowski's *Cineform* (1957). The ejection of the cast from its previous location in the Artists' Centre and the move to the cellars of the Krzysztofory, adapted for the needs of the re-born Grupa Krakowska, marked a return in Kantor's theatrical activity to productions based on plays by Witkacy. At the same time, from then on – until 1973 – the dramas by the Polish creator of the concept of Pure Form in art would be markers of the progressive stages of Tadeusz Kantor's artistic quest. Thus, the

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2 T. Kantor, *Między świętą abstrakcją a ekskomunikowanym symbolizmem. Przed wojną. Moja prehistoria*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1975. Pisma*, vol. I, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, pp. 46–47.

3 Cf. on this topic: A. Turowski, *Budowniczości świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu w sztuce polskiej*, Kraków 2000.

4 Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Polish artist and playwright, often referred to as 'Witkacy'.

spectacle *The Country House* (1961) is a stage implementation of the idea of the Informel Theatre; *The Madman and the Nun* (1963) is the Zero Theatre; while the artist himself described the form of the stage presentation as the Theatre of Happening – the Theatre of the Journey. In the Theatre of Happening, Kantor decoded the linear concept of time, characteristic of modernism, which assumes the necessity for incessant development and the venturing beyond boundaries, mentioned earlier as well as the breaking of cultural taboos and the expansion of the human field of knowledge. In the Western post-Enlightenment tradition, the concept of the development paradigm implies the inevitability of the expansion of the horizons of human cognition, directing civilisational development on the chronological conveyor belt from unknown beginnings to full cognition, by means of the framework of the appropriate scientific methodologies. This is of profound cultural significance: because the present is relegated to the function of an interval within the past, capable of being cognised by the means of historical sciences, and the future, discoverable by the means of progress. Daniel Halžvy calls this phenomenon the ‘acceleration of history’. In respect of the analysis of the processes taking place in late modernity, Halžvy’s theory acknowledges the inadequacy of Brandel’s concept of ‘long duration’, which posits the analysis of civilisational transformations taking place with a longer-duration perspective. It is in *The Water Hen* that the negation of being in the present – the here-and-now – may be observed. The idea of a journey, which accompanies the performance, causes the actors to be perpetually rushing somewhere, every few minutes leaving the acting space. In fact, they are treating the area of Krakow’s Krzysztofory in as a railway-station waiting room. To put it metaphorically, they treat the present as a waiting room between the past – already gone, and not worked-through in the existential, individual experience – and the future – unknown, but nevertheless full of the promise of new sensations and experiences. In fact, due to the velocity of the events unfolding, the actors are unable to perform the roles from Witkacy’s drama. Kantor developed the idea of the journey in his happenings, produced for the purpose of the film made by Saarbrücken TV in Bled, in Slovenia. The participants in the undertaking – a ‘group of travelling players’ – produced each scene in a different, real-life location. The text had been taken from Witkacy’s drama *The Country House*, to which autonomous stage action was added. The speed of changing events and the constant transfer of the action to yet another location made the development of any more permanent relationship between the text of the drama and the performance seemingly impossible. No dialogue could develop between these two elements due to temporal limitations. On the linear time axis, the present had shrunk to such an extent that the dialogue relationships which establish meanings would turn out to be practically impossible. *Lovelies and Dowdies* (1973), which the artist described as The Impossible Theatre, was the culmination of the *playing with Witkacy*.

### 3. Turning to the Culture of Memory

On a November night in 1975, in the Krzysztofory cellars, there took place in the work of Tadeusz Kantor a change of direction towards memory. From that time onwards, the past would become dominant in the subsequent performances of the Theatre of Death. Both in *The Dead Class*, and in each performance that followed, the stage projection of the past would occur through the frames of memory. It was through the frames of memory that the artist would call back those who had been close to him – ‘the Dear Absent Ones’, as he himself had called them – friends and members of his family, who from the stage were to give testimony of their time, the 20<sup>th</sup> century – an epoch full of anxieties and re-evaluations. An epoch in which personal individuality, until then one of the most important Western values, became threatened with the totalitarianism of ideology and the – no less dangerous, according to the artist – totalitarianism of the technocratic perception of reality and the consumerism of mass society. Eleven years after the premiere of *The Dead Class*, the artist presented his evaluation of the century coming to an end in *The Milano Lessons* – a manifesto for the end of the century.<sup>5</sup> From that moment, history would be present in Kantor’s spectacles through individual memory.

Together with *The Dead Class*, in the theatre of Tadeusz Kantor, the cyclical began to dominate. The time of the performances became the time of returns. In the space of the Theatre of Death the presence of memory became marked. As a result, the need arose for a change in the concept of time, which, from then on, would become one of the fundamental determining factors of that theatre, since it is the case that the attempt to recall past events in the human memory does not have the characteristic of a linear sequence which runs from the beginning of the individual’s life (that is to say, from the earliest memories that can be recalled) until the present. Memory does not preserve an orderly sequence of events; it retains only fragments of the past. These fragments, to which the human consciousness and subconscious cling, frequently change their previous significance and, under the influence of imagination, acquire new meanings. Inside the individual, a constant process of the reinterpretation of the past takes place. From those individual images – the frames of the memory – Tadeusz Kantor had constructed his Theatre of Death. In the manifesto of that theatre the artist wrote,

In our memory ‘store’, there exist ‘files’  
of the frames registered by our senses.  
Mostly details which don’t mean anything; poor, remnants, some scraps...  
IMMOBILE!  
And, what’s more important: TRANSPARENT. As are the negatives  
in the camera.

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5 Polish edition: T. Kantor, *Lekcje mediolańskie. 1986*, Kraków 1991.

Each one can do no more than slide onto another.  
That is why one should not be surprised that, e.g., events long passed  
combine with the present ones,  
characters get mixed up (...).<sup>6</sup>

The performance of *The Dead Class* which took place in the 1970s, based on the frames of the memory, becomes part of the process of re-evaluation in dealing with the past. Ever since the Renaissance, Western civilisation has inherited the cult of knowledge. It resulted in the development of sciences, which enhanced – according to their research areas – the cognitive horizons of humanity. In this approach, from being an annual and a chronicle recording past events, history was promoted to a scientific discipline. From then on, historiography, in accordance with the premises of modernism, was supposed to consist of objectivised narratives about the past. In these narratives, individuality was lost in commonality, in the historical processes, while efforts were made to explain its rules. As methodological knowledge had increased, it had become clear that, in the historical sciences, it was not possible to maintain the paradigm of objectivity. The crisis of modernist concepts brought with it the awareness that the historian's control over the narrative of the past was becoming increasingly illusory. This was so since the store of knowledge about the past, incessantly increasing – thanks to the historical sciences, was at times used in a utilitarian fashion by the ideologies and institutions of the modern state. In this way, the historiography of the preceding two centuries had contributed to the shaping of the unitary national consciousness, understood as the commonality of the language, culture, tradition and, indeed, history. All individual traits concerning the past – for instance, particular regions – were being treated as of secondary importance, and tolerated only to the extent that they did not affect the centralised foundations of the state. The individual memory was considered to be an unreliable message about the past, which had to be verified by juxtaposition with other sources, best of all, written ones. The French historian Pierre Nora draws attention to this, noting:

All history transformed, however, into a discipline with scientific ambitions had been, until now, constructed on the foundation of the memory, but counter to the memory considered individual, psychological, fallible, only of use as testimony. History was the collective domain; memory – the private one. There was only one history, while memory, by definition, was multiple, because, by its nature, individual. (...) Individuals had memory; societies had history. The idea that it is societies that have memory assumes a profound transformation of the place of individuals in society and their relationships with society: herein lies the secret of that second, mysterious

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6 T. Kantor, *Teatr Śmierci*, Kraków 1975, p. 4.

coming, which must be explained a little: the coming of identity, without which it is impossible to understand the upsurge of memory.<sup>7</sup>

This turning towards the culture of the memory came for Tadeusz Kantor precisely at the time which Pierre Nora considered a watershed in the approach to the past. Analysing the intellectual situation in France around 1975, he noted three phenomena that altered the attitude to the past. The first was the decline of the Hegelian paradigm of faith in the possibility of the processes of historical development. According to Nora, in France – but probably not only there – it found its expression in the intellectual failure of Marxism. This was combined with the end of the orientation of historic time towards the future. From that time on, the future could be decoded as an attempt to restore the past, a variety of progress, or a revolution. These phenomena led towards a return to tradition. The decay in the declining modernist society of traditional communities entailed the deconstruction of the message of Assmann's 'cultural memory'. It implied a breaking down of the inter-generational continuity of the narrative about the past.<sup>8</sup> It also obscures the symbolic space, around which the creation of the group identity is created. Nora's return to tradition is thus not a redirection towards a 'tradition of which we should be heirs and perpetuators, but a tradition from which we would be forever separated and which would thereby become precious and mysterious, endowed with obscure meaning, making it our duty to restore it.'<sup>9</sup> We can consider Tadeusz Kantor's post-1975 work as an attempt to restore specific cultural traditions in the sphere of the theatre. The artist himself referred to the process as **impossible**.

#### 4. The Theatre of Death as a 'Memory Place'

In the mid-1970s, there took place in the historical sciences a re-evaluation of the scientific discourse related to memory. This was to a large extent due to French intellectuals: the hermeneutics philosopher Paul Ricoeur, the structuralist sociologist Roland Barthes, and two historians, Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora. The civilisational transformations of late modernity had led to the earlier mentioned end of the 'communality of memory'.<sup>10</sup> The continuity of traditional

7 P. Nora, *Czas pamięci*, in: *Res Publica Nova*, no. 7 (154) 2001, pp. 37–43.

8 In relation to 'cultural memory' cf.: J. Assmann, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*, trans. J. Czaplicka, *New German Critique* no. 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring–Summer, 1995), pp. 125–133.

9 P. Nora, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

10 Cf. on this topic: F. Pazderski, *Czemu przeszłość się pamięta – wokół dyskursu na temat kształtowania się pamięci zbiorowej*, in: [www.druml.org.pl/index.php?show=nasze\\_projekty&id=czytelnia](http://www.druml.org.pl/index.php?show=nasze_projekty&id=czytelnia) (date accessed: 4 December 2010), pp. 11–15.

lore had been broken. In France, Nora associated the phenomenon with the disappearance of traditional rural communities. This had been accompanied by a re-evaluation of the approach to the Republican heritage, which constituted the French national consciousness. The establishment of the constitutional basis of the Fifth Republic during the presidency of Charles de Gaulle restored the balance between the revolutionary and the monarchist tradition. At the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 70s, the cultural changes in French society, unified around the idea of Republicanism, led to a discourse about heritage. This included uncomfortable subjects, until then marginalised in the general debate. Of these, the most significant were the questions about colonial imperialism, the genocide committed by French soldiers during the wars in Vietnam and Algeria, anti-Semitism, and the French acquiescence in Pétain's governments during World War II. These uncomfortable topics caused a crisis of confidence in the official version of national history as shaped by the policies of the state. As a result, minority identity groups spoke out: political, local, ethnic, religious, cultural and sexual. Each group had shaped its identity on the basis of its own discrete experience of the past. Such pluralism of memory has led to the redirection of the French from a 'historic self-consciousness to the memorial consciousness'.<sup>11</sup>

Starting in the mid-1970s, other European societies have undergone a similar process of establishing their own **memorial consciousness**, and it seems that – after 9/11 – American society has also had this formative experience. Nora's **memory places** can differ in character. He set out to describe and analyse them in a monumental, seven-volume opus, entitled precisely that, *Les lieux de la mémoire* [Memory Places].<sup>12</sup> Andrzej Szpociński describes these as places:

in which certain collective formations – whatever they happen to be – such as the nation, family, ethnic group or party guard their souvenirs or consider them an indispensable part of their identity: topographic places, such as archives, libraries or museums; monument sites – monuments, cemeteries, architecture; symbolic places: anniversaries, pilgrimages, remembrance celebrations; functional places: associations and autobiographies.<sup>13</sup>

The work of Tadeusz Kantor demonstrates that art can also be such a place. In the Theatre of Death there occurs the process of recapturing memory. Memory interrupted, lost as a result of various circumstances. Analysing the personality and work of the artist, we can differentiate three fundamental causes of the rupture of the continuity between the past and the present. The first is related to the events of common history. The fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire brought the end of the Habsburg reign in Galicia. That was the end of the orderly, though

11 P. Nora, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

12 P. Nora [ed.], *Les lieux de la mémoire*, vols. 1–7, Paris 1984–1992.

13 A. Szpociński, *Miejsca pamięci*, in: *Borussia* 2003 no. 29, p. 21.

anachronistic, regime of the dual monarchy, which had attempted to combine the parliamentary representational system with the feudal concept of the divine right of kings, ruling over the peoples with a mandate from God. The image of the Danube monarchy has been preserved in the myth of the benevolent Emperor Franz Josef. An independent Polish state brought with it a new social and political order; originally, as a parliamentary-democratic republic which, after 1926, tended increasingly towards authoritarianism. The 2<sup>nd</sup> People's Republic built its identity on the basis of both its pre-partition history and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century traditions of the struggle for independence. Its historical politics were thus shaped with the help of a value system which enhanced patriotism, and which expected, at the very least, loyalty from ethnic minorities. World War II put paid to the only recently reborn state. The Shoah and the Gulag raised questions about the validity of the entire axiological system that had shaped European consciousness, having been constructed on the traditional, Judaeo-Christian and humanist traditions. The period of the post-war dominance of communist ideology was the time of the creation of 'blank spaces', of the erasure of entire regions of national and state tradition from the historical social consciousness. It was simultaneously accompanied by the ideological attempt to shape a new identity, in which the input of national and common history was meant to be subjected to the principles of Marxist historical dialecticism. Fortunately, the latter ideology turned out to be a failure.

The second cause of the rupture of the continuity of tradition in the case of Tadeusz Kantor can be linked to his avant-garde access. The avant-garde, with its programme paradigm of incessant development, was suspicious of the past, breaking with, or negating, entire chunks thereof. One has to admit, however, that in the case of the Krakow artist, such a rupture had never been complete. This can be seen from, for one, the productions of the Underground Independent Theatre, where Kantor tried to combine modernity in art with tradition: the romanticism (in *Balladyna*) as well as the classicism and the Young Poland trend (in *The Return of Odysseus*). Finally, the third reason for breaking the chain of tradition is biographic in character, and linked to his leaving behind the local communities – Wielopole Skrzyńskie and Tarnów – in which he had grown up.

In Tadeusz Kantor's work, the premiere of *The Dead Class* signifies a return to memory. The Theatre of Death, constructed with the frames of memory, became an attempt to save the past from the perspective of an individual. In his theoretical texts, the artist takes up a reflection on the relationship between history and memory. He treats with suspicion the approach to the past from the point of view of great global historical processes. To these, he provides the counterpoint of the small, humble, defenceless history of the 'individual human life'.<sup>14</sup> The past,

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14 T. Kantor, *Klische pamięci. Postacie ludzi*, manuscript, Cricoteka, Inv. No. 000 048 I/1/48.

recorded in the frames of memory, is present through the evocation, on the stage, of micro-historic scenes. At the same time, it has an anthropological dimension. In the 1975 performance, one of the main strands of the plot concerns the destiny of the pupils of the dead class, whereas, in *Wielopole, Wielopole* – the ‘Dear Absent Ones’, that is, the members of the artist’s own family. The anthropological perspective and the micro-histories narrated delineate the levels of the presence of the past in the subsequent productions. Especially in the Theatre of Death one can trace autobiographical as well as biographical strands from the artist’s circles of family and friendship. This could be defined as intimate (family) history, territorially and socially marked out by the artist’s closest environment. It takes place in a domesticated, tamed space. The geographical orientation points on this map of the recall of memories will be Kantor’s little motherlands: Krakow, and the towns in Galicia – Wielopole Skrzyńskie and Tarnów. A religious tradition is directly connected with the family micro-history. The *historia sacra* refers to two religious faiths: Christianity and Judaism. The religious strands find their most poignant expression in *Wielopole, Wielopole* (figs. 34, 35). They have a folklore character and manifest themselves in the custom, prayer, and fragments of the chanted songs and psalms. They constitute the family identity to such an extent that its stage narrative has been presented in the form of a passion play. In this spectacle Jewishness is represented by the Rabbi. His character encapsulates two Hassidic myths: the joyous expectation of the coming of the Messiah and the motif of the Jew as the Eternal Wanderer and the insecurity of the Jewish fate, which rests with the Almighty. The latter of these myths is a counterpoint to soteriological optimism. In *Wielopole, Wielopole*, the Rabbi is repeatedly executed by being shot by a platoon of soldiers. The scene can be interpreted as a cliché of the pogroms of the Jewish diaspora which had repeatedly taken place throughout Europe. The reminiscences of the pogroms are a recollection of the Jewish memory of the rejection by the majority representing other religions and cultures; of the experience of being a stranger amongst the peoples who have combined to create European identity. Yet, in Kantor’s production, suffering is meted out to all. Hence, the motif of the Way of the Cross, celebrated by the whole protagonist family. The scene in which the Rabbi sits down next to the Catholic priest is an allegory of the equality in the traumatic experience. To both, suffering shall befall them when they become trapped in the turning cogs of great history. In *Wielopole, Wielopole* this history is symbolised by the platoon of soldiers, which repeatedly marches on the stage across the childhood bedroom.

In Kantor’s historiosophic concept, the great events of common history have their external source; they have been shaped outside the local community, outside the space domesticated by everyday life. At all times they constitute a thread to the integrity of daily life. They blow up the interpersonal and intercultural



bonds created in the course of social interaction (for instance, in Christian-Jewish relations). They break up, and cause the dispersal of, a community, which thereby atomises and loses its sense of identity, of its being rooted in its there-and-then, which is to say – in the world of the tradition which had taken a great time to be established and become respected by the community that had evolved it. Kantor visualised such a rupture of cultural continuity in *The Dead Class*, in the scenes: *Solomon Lesson*, *Historical Ravings*, *Phonetic Blobs*, and *Prometheus Lesson*. It is also embodied in the characters of the Old Men, affected by amnesia and aphasia, who are only capable of uttering disconnected fragments of quotations learnt by heart and their prior statements, now no longer connected into a logical whole. Their stage activities are also unfinished and often only loosely connected with one another.

The experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have demonstrated that memory can prove to be the salvation of historically formed collective entities, in view of their impermanence. Memory is the rudimentary element of the Theatre of Death (fig. 36). Exploiting non-continuity as an immanent feature of recalling the past through the frames of memory, Kantor conducts the deconstruction of the world of history (understood as that which has been, and which cannot be repeated in a linear fashion). That was the essence of Kantor's – not altogether deliberate – post-modern change of direction. From the shattered pieces of the mirror of history, the artist constructs his stage reality. The Theatre of Death turns out to be Nora's 'memory place', an attempt to reminisce about decomposed or, indeed, abandoned, identities and to preserve them as a cultural heritage.



# Anxiety and What Next...

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## 1.

It is not easy to imagine the first impulses, emotions, associations and ideas which accompanied the creation of *The Dead Class*, and later, the first reception of its performances at Krakow's Krzysztofory Gallery in the autumn of 1975. It is hard to grasp the sensation, eluding but recurring, of being shocked, taken aback by the 'first ever', and the image of the original audience – astounded, silent, transfixed; thus, an audience which was a mirror image of the motionless figures at the school desks. Tadeusz Kantor freely admitted that he had not expected such feedback. The performance soon became a legend, causing spectators to arrive with the anticipation of being shocked and shattered, reactions already confirmed by critics and the audience alike. Thus, it was difficult to separate the emotion anticipated and projected from the real emotion experienced. However, the 'first time' emotion would recur, in the experience of individual viewers, many times later, even years after the premiere.

In time, both Kantor himself and critics ascribed *The Dead Class* to the expanded structure of the Theatre of Death. The production came to be named at all times as the first in the series of Tadeusz Kantor's 'great spectacles'. And yet it was precisely between *The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole* that the most radical transformation in Kantor's theatre occurred.<sup>1</sup> This was the change of his artistic idiom, theatrical strategies, position in social space – accompanied by his thorough re-thinking of his status as an artist. That transformation was much more profound than the change which had taken place between the series of Witkacy's plays staged by Cricot 2 during 1956–1972 and *The Dead Class*.

One may risk the assertion that, as an artistic project, *The Dead Class* closed more issues in Kantor's theatre than it opened. After the premiere of *The Dead Class*, Kantor was aware that the performance had brought many of his artistic ideas to an extreme, definitive stage, thereby exhausting and concluding them.

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<sup>1</sup> The premiere of *The Dead Class* took place on 15 November 1975 in Krakow; the premiere of the next production, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, five years later, on 23 June 1980, in Florence. In January 1979 Kantor presented the short cricotage *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear* at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome.

The artist himself referred to the period following *The Dead Class* as a difficult and bitter time for him.<sup>2</sup>

It was in relation to the premiere of that production that many exhibitions and meetings with the artist took place during which Kantor summed up – for the first time in such a thorough manner – his theatrical work to date. The most spectacular of those events was the discussion, continued over a number of days, entitled *Live Documentation: 20 Years of the Development of the Cricot 2 Theatre*, which took place at the Krzysztofory Gallery from 16 to 23 October 1976; an event which gathered together many of Kantor's collaborators, including those from the time of the German occupation.<sup>3</sup> There can be no doubt that the fresh and powerful emotions related to *The Dead Class* affected the shape of those reminiscences, in which the wartime stagings of Juliusz Słowacki's *Balladyna* and Stanisław Wyspiański's *The Return of Odysseus* came back as distinct, though forgotten, prefigurations of *The Dead Class*. When reminiscing about the wartime *The Return of Odysseus* in his conversation with Tadeusz Borowski, the actor who played Odysseus, Kantor reconstructed the anxiety syndrome inherent in the performance. Here are a few direct quotations: 'You were also bullied and you were also put in a corner'; 'there is no way out'; 'there may be a hole'; 'at that time you could only get into a hole if it was there'. Finally, Kantor poignantly stated that he had wanted to 'create a situation in which the actor is cornered and victimised'.<sup>4</sup>

*The Return of Odysseus* and *The Dead Class* both have at their root the same underlying nightmare about being victimised, driven into a corner, searching for a hole to hide in. The wartime memories invest the enigmatic and traumatic images in *The Dead Class* with concrete historical designates.

## 2.

Perhaps I am stating the obvious, because Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz wrote many years ago that, '*Wielopole, Wielopole* is both a repetition and a negation of the

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2 T. Kantor, *Trafić do światowego muzeum*, notes by K. Pleśniarowicz, *Kultura* 1978, no. 30; reprinted in: K. Pleśniarowicz, *Teatr Śmierci Tadeusza Kantora*, Chotomów 1990, pp. 144–148.

3 One can also list such events as the exhibitions: *Rezerwat ludzki*, the Zapiecek Gallery, Warszawa; the *Desa* Gallery, Kraków 1976; *Od Itaki do Umarłej klasy*, the Zapiecek Gallery, Warszawa 1976; *22 Years of the Activity of the Cricot 2 Theatre and the Underground Theatre 1942–44*, the Foksal Gallery, Warszawa 1977.

4 Quotations from an unauthorised recording of the meeting *Live Documentation: 20 Years of the Development of the Cricot 2 Theatre*, the Krzysztofory Gallery, Kraków 1976, folder 2, p. 14.

experience of the Theatre of Death'.<sup>5</sup> However, I would like to elaborate on his thesis, and place it in a different perspective.

Let me ask this question: did *The Dead Class* initiate the concept of the Theatre of Death or conclude it, opening the doors to a reformulation bordering on a denial? Kantor had been producing the Theatre of Death for a long time, certainly since the staging of Witkacy's *The Country House* at Cricot 2 in 1961. It was then that he had 'remembered something' for the first time, referring in that production to the 'forgotten' experience linked to the *The Return of Odysseus*.<sup>6</sup> In the performances preceding *The Dead Class*, death was a silent force which interfered with the mechanics of the theatre, stage representation, human presence; it often arrived in scandalously inappropriate images, full of sadism and cynical exploitation of depictions of man humbled, victimised, threatened with the possibility of sudden annihilation. One such scene was the shooing of Princess Kremlńska into the henhouse in *Lovelies and Dowdies*; in the recorded fragment of a rehearsal<sup>7</sup> we can observe how Kantor – in a state of extreme agitation – provokes the actors to ensure that the situation is given the most realistic and drastic character possible.

From the Informel Theatre to *The Dead Class*, Kantor had been testing in practice the validity of the psychoanalytical credo that memory belongs to the unconscious.<sup>8</sup> According to that concept, each strong memory trace is linked to the shock of breaking through the safety barrier of the perception system, to the moment of catching our psyche in the state of helplessness. This is the source of repetition based on anxiety – a belated attempt to compensate for the state of helplessness which precedes the moment of the imprinting of the unconscious memory trace.

Between *The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole*, there takes place the most profound revision of Kantor's stage practice. The idea of repetition, the key device in Kantor's theatre, changes its sense entirely. His later productions no longer employ uncompromisingly the mechanism of post-traumatic anxiety which wanders in vain around the time gap, the site of the loss of experience, a post-event void. The structure of repetition inheres in the experience of anxiety going back to something intangible which eludes consciousness and experience. At the point at which the object of anxiety acquires a symbolic representation, the

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5 K. Pleśniarowicz, *Teatr Śmierci Tadeusza Kantora*, Chotomów 1990, pp. 99–100.

6 In 1973 Kantor commented on *The Return of Odysseus*: 'Formally, I only reached that point in 1961 when I was doing *The Country House*'. Cf.: T. Kantor, *Teatr: autonomiczny, informel, zerowy...*, talking to Z. Taranienko, *Argumenty* 1973, no. 14.

7 The fragment was recorded in W. Gawroński and K. Miklaszewski's film *Szatnia*, TVP Kraków 1973.

8 Sigmund Freud posits this thesis, i.a., in: *The Interpretation of Dreams* and his treatise *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

repetition changes its purpose: from that moment onwards, it serves to rebuild symbolic ties, it counteracts disintegration, it affirms a covenant between memory and consciousness, it prevents forgetting. From that moment, repetition has a different sense; it transforms itself into the ability to recombine not so much the memory traces, which are by definition unconscious, as the memory symbols which represent them in the consciousness.

With this transformation in the concept of repetition, a radical relocation of the position of the artist takes place in Kantor's art. Time for another hypothesis. Kantor's artistic stance had long been determined by the repressed identification with the figure of the villainous father, a father that is real, threatening, merciless, sadistic – that is to say, with the figure of the returning Odysseus, who, having committed war crimes in Troy, repeats them in his homeland of Ithaca. By consigning his theatre to the idea of 'aneantisising' repetition, Kantor broke the pact between memory and consciousness; he played out the traumatic past as the here-and-now of his own artistic gesture. Repetition was not a victim's gesture, based on resentment and serving to bewail the oppression suffered (as was the case with Józef Szajna's theatre), but rather a means to identify with the source of oppression. The condition on which the success of such a strategy pivoted was the maintenance of communal amnesia.<sup>9</sup> Within it, Kantor cynically exploited the affectivity of the anxiety nightmare, while putting himself in the role of the tormentor, the ruthless experimenter. *The Dead Class* continued to be based on that sadistic anxiety mechanism: here, people had been herded into a corner in the cellar; placed in a mortifying and demeaning situation, they searched for a 'hole'. But it was only in the original version of the performance<sup>10</sup> that the actors' expression contained the elemental panic, anxiety and terror going beyond the comedy of school reminiscences. In the second version, Kantor significantly altered the tone of the performance, bringing it closer to slapstick comedy, tacky clowning about; he exaggerated the comical automatism of repetition and blurred the anxiety impulse which had had such a powerful impact on the audience of *The Dead Class* 'Mark One'.

9 I have written in greater detail about the strategies of Tadeusz Kantor's playing with collective oblivion in the articles: *Publiczność zgnieciona. Kantor i kres dramatu społecznego*, *Dialog* 2009, no. 4; *Zakaz. Fragment o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, in: *Antrepreneur. Księga ofiarowana profesorowi Janowi Michalikowi*, ed. J. Popiel, Kraków 2009; *Kantor i żydzi*, *Didaskalia* 2010, no. 96.

10 The story of the various versions of *The Dead Class* is still awaiting exhaustive documentation. By the 'Mark One' version, I mean the version of the premiere, with the cast recorded on film by A. Wajda in June 1976. One of the variants of the 'Mark Two' version was recorded by J. Bablet and D. Bablet during the Cricot 2 performance in Paris in 1980. The dividing line between the two versions was Kantor's decision to remove all actors engaged at Krakow's Bagatela Theatre from the cast of *The Dead Class* in mid-1977.

In *Wielopole, Wielopole* the sinister identification with the figure of the villainous father was openly abandoned. In his new production, Kantor became someone who fostered the noisy liveliness of the dead; he neither tormented nor tortured. Not only did he summon them to receive another lease of life, but he also protected them. Kantor's productions following *The Dead Class* softened the original idea of the Theatre of Death; they aimed to move rather than shock. Here, death entered the territory of symbolic negotiations and mediations; the recurrent images were those of crucifixions, funerals, family reminiscences and mementos.

### 3.

To my mind, the in-depth transformation of Kantor's theatre did not take place as part of the author's autonomous decisions. Kantor had not thought up the transformation – he had experienced it.

The audience reaction to *The Dead Class* – strong and, literally, eloquent – was for Kantor a new situation to be in. As if against Kantor's wishes, the viewer named the images in *The Dead Class* and fitted them into the historical and symbolic order – in a word, localised them. Krzysztof Pleśnarowicz perceptively commented on all those 'incorrect' reactions to Kantor's performance, reactions which boiled down to almost a single pattern: where Kantor had erased the potential for meaning, the audience inserted their own reading, often very concrete and set in history.<sup>11</sup> The anxiety-based, sense-annihilating structure of repetition in the play was decoded by the audience as a structure of symbolic recombination. Amongst these 'incorrect' interpretations, a prominent role must be assigned to an essay by Zygmunt Greń, who dared – as the first of the Polish critics – to name the source of the experience from which the traumatic images of Kantor's theatre originated (even though they had been the basis of Kantor's two previous productions, *The Water Hen* and *Lovelies and Dowdies*, and they played a part in *The Country House* as well as in a large portion of the happenings). Greń noticed that when it came to *The Dead Class*, even the most astute critics encountered 'some uncrossable boundary'. And then he formulated his own view in an admirably direct way:

In the lesson of *The Dead Class*, Kantor has encompassed the tragic fate of the Jewish nation which took place on Polish soil during the last war. Dropping one's trousers is not a joke; this is a reminder of the SS men, of the policemen, of the blackmailers lurking behind the door. The mannequins thrown onto a pile stand for the annihilation of a people. The metal ball rattles rhythmically in a crib, which should be resounding with a baby's cry.<sup>12</sup>

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11 K. Pleśnarowicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–99.

12 Z. Greń, *Nie pogrzebani*, *Życie Literackie* 1977, no. 26.

Such an interpretation may seem unduly simplified, but does not claim the privilege of being the final word on the subject; Greń's paper has the character of an addendum to other pieces of criticism on *The Dead Class*. Greń broke Kantor's sophisticated aesthetic codes which aimed to secure the mechanisms of unconscious memory traces. He correctly identified the 'uncrossable boundary' of forgetting and repression which had – until then – enabled Kantor to manipulate drastic images without having to indicate their historic provenance.

In *The Dead Class*, too, Kantor probably counted on the boundary of mass amnesia continuing to be uncrossable. That could be a conclusion drawn from a review by Wiesław Borowski, according to whom, in *The Dead Class*, Kantor 'draws on the past in its manifold, "non-historic" cross sections; the past which has been forgotten or discredited both in life and in art'.<sup>13</sup> Greń, similarly to many other viewers of *The Dead Class*, restored the historic aspect to those 'non-historic cross sections', those discredited remnants. *The Dead Class* released a wave of memories; it triggered a profusion of metaphorical and metonymic memory associations, which concerned not only the Holocaust. Kantor must have realised clearly that he could no longer count on the mechanism of oblivion; that he could no longer play his tried-and-tested game with it.

Greń correctly described Kantor's stance in the staging of *The Dead Class*: 'At his command, the annihilation of a nation takes place. At his command, a magnificent, lofty homage is played out, a great mass for the souls and bodies of those who have not been buried according to social customs. This is the motif of Antigone. The Polish artist resurrects the memory of the genocide and its victims; he erects a monument to them in the spiritual culture of his nation'.<sup>14</sup> Greń captured the duality of Kantor's stance. On the one hand, Kantor is the one who celebrates the mass, builds the monument, thus acting in the symbolic space; on the other hand, he is someone who holds sway over the act of destruction: 'He personally brings them to life and condemns them to an inhuman death'. The first of those positions was imposed on Kantor by the audience, its reactions, comments, the communal memory activity. The second resulted from the immanent rules of the work itself.

As an aside to his self-reflection, Kantor indicated an analogy between a criminal and an artist, between art strategies and terror mechanisms. That risky identification had been the basis of his artistic practice for a long time. Moreover, the point here was not the symbolic universal figure of a criminal, but its specific historical embodiment: the Nazi war criminal engaged in the Final Solution. Kantor built gas chambers in *Lovelies and Dowdies* and in the happening *The Laundry*, and he drove the audience into them. He organised a grand scheme of resettlement in *The Water Hen*, which ended in mass annihilation. In Nuremberg, the site of the

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13 W. Borowski, *Umarła klasa*, *Literatura* 1976, no. 17.

14 Z. Greń, *op. cit.*



infamous Nazi rallies, he produced a happening that involved public humiliation of a man-rhinoceros, a creature frightened and alienated from the community. During a meeting with students from the Drama Directing Department at The Ludwik Solski State Drama School in Krakow in 1980 he made a shockingly direct confession that he owed the idea of costumes for the staging of *Rhinoceros* at Krakow's Stary [Old] Theatre – costumes based on the image of a second skin put onto the actors – to Nazi murderers who had been the 'first to treat human skin as material, as something totally independent and autonomous'.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4.

In *Wielopole, Wielopole* Kantor completely redefines his position. He supervises the war machine of annihilation and mass transportations of people, but at the same time he takes care of its victims. In the scene of the repeated execution by shooting of the Rabbi by Polish legionaries, each time he helps up the actress who has fallen to the floor.

All this explains why I maintain that including *The Dead Class* in the series of the later performances of the Theatre of Death happened at the price of a certain amount of forgetting, repression. The reality of the theatrical event that *The Dead Class* 'Mark One' represented was replaced by its symbolic matrix. That is why *The Dead Class* ought to be distinguished from the series of those 'great performances' so as to preserve the trace of what the performance was before it entered the symbolic circulation of Polish and European culture. And before it found itself in a 'global museum'. First, one must imagine the initial momentary paralysis, silence, complete suspension. Only after that can we try to understand the process which had been set in motion at that time. Because that 'first time', that experience of being taken by surprise, shocked and shattered, could not be repeated; the performance began to function as a repetition, simulacrum, a matrix of itself. A similar thing happened with the audience: its reactions were placed in the order of repetition. From then on, not only the actors, but also the audience made sure that a shock would take place. The viewers were ready to invest Kantor's work with the past known to them from experience, from family stories, history lessons or from reading the samizdat books which had just become available in Poland. The traumatic phenomenon of the 'first time', that shock of the astounded

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15 Tadeusz Kantor's meeting with the students from the Drama Directing Department at The Ludwik Solski State Drama School in Krakow as remembered by Krystyna Czerni in her article *Ambalaz Hołdu pruskiego jako portret metaforyczny artysty*, in: *Sztuka polska po 1945 roku. Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Warszawa, listopad 1984*, Warszawa 1987.

audience, carried by the legend of *The Dead Class*, was becoming enmeshed in subtle and only semi-verbalised instructions for the reception of the performance.

Kantor had always been playing with clichés of the past; he had introduced them into his stagings of Witkacy's plays in abundance, but had made them indecipherable by setting into motion very effective mechanisms of self-erasure of meaning. With Kantor, the real had watched over the paralysis of symbolic capacity. *The Dead Class* had been conceived along similar lines, but on that occasion the actual reception of the performance proved stronger than the author's 'aneantisising' tendencies. The performance which had been designed by Kantor as an anti-object, the place of the disintegration of the symbolic order, the emanation of pure anxiety, was transferred – due to the audience – into the sphere of the symbolic space. Kantor was quick to grasp that and he took on board the new mechanism of the reception of his theatre, which *The Dead Class* had set into motion.

The mechanism of 'the first time' as 'already a repetition' was analysed by Jacques Derrida, who turned the Freudian concept of the unconscious memory trace into the basis of the scene of writing, where it is only the difference that can be recorded, and never the presence.<sup>16</sup> There is no 'first time', because the memory trace is recorded outside the consciousness, and when it begins the staging of its own presence, it has to set into motion the mechanism of repetition; it has to, as it were, admit its own nonexistence. Without a doubt, this kind of conceptualisation of the idea of repetition had been close to Kantor during his entire avant-garde work at the end of the 60s and at the beginning of the 70s, as well as during his work on *The Dead Class*.

However, it is not that kind of repetition which I have in mind when attempting to explain the story of the symbolic theft to which Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class* was subjected. A theft which was legitimised by the author himself, who no doubt had watched attentively all reactions to his work. The repetition about which Derrida wrote operated around a void, an absence, a difference. The repetition performed by the audience of *The Dead Class* rendered the four humble school desks, which Kantor called a 'wreck', the scene of all the repressed, forgotten events of 20th-century history which kept recurring in the collective memory. Today, such a vision of Kantor's performance has also become a cliché of our view on *The Dead Class* as a 'poor' scene of the 'great' history. But the process which had led to the creation of this cliché had not been an obvious, but a complex one, and it abounded in various episodes, meanderings, hushings-up and repressions. As for Kantor, he was both the subject and the object, as well as an alert observer, of the process.

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16 J. Derrida, J. Mehlman, *Freud and the Scene of Writing*, *Yale French Studies* 48, New Haven 1972, pp. 74–117.

That first shock and silence of the audience, that spasm of anxiety which Krzysztof Miklaszewski<sup>17</sup> described in his review, are still part of the legend of *The Dead Class*, but both levels of the reception have become superimposed on each other and merged. It is worthwhile to separate them anew, since they belong to contradictory aesthetic, cultural and psychological orders. There is an impassable rift between them. However, some traces of the original experience have survived. After many years, the actors were able to bring back memories of Kantor's original intentions. Andrzej Wełmiński recalled the rehearsals of *The Dead Class*, which had involved conversations about the dead human body, about the cadaver; conversations the purpose of which was to stimulate the actors' imagination and sensitivity and take them to the extremes of human and actor's condition: 'The transformation of the living into a corpse and putrefaction. The corpse is something which wrecks the cultural, social, existential order'.<sup>18</sup> The subsequent fate of *The Dead Class* demonstrates to what extent Kantor was to distance himself from that original impulse, to what extent – in that idiosyncratic way of his – he was to forget it. Maria Stangret remembered her and other actors' presence in *The Dead Class* as screaming, an eruption of inarticulate sounds, operating with scraps of speech and objects which had been tossed onto the rubbish heap: 'Krzysztofory full of people, the stuffy cellar, and suddenly there erupts the yelling of the actors, all on a single note'.<sup>19</sup> In her recollection, *The Dead Class* appears to belong more to the Zero Theatre period than to the series of Kantor's 'great performances'. What is interesting is that in both instances the actors' accounts were a reaction to visual recordings of the first version of *The Dead Class*.<sup>20</sup> Both date back to 2007. Both seem symptomatically linked to the mechanism of rerun of a forgotten experience.

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17 'When the antique wrought-iron grill, resistant to the onslaught of the advancing crowd, finally opens, something quite unexpected happens: the lucky ones at the front, instead of pressing their advantage by rushing forth to get the best seats they have fought so hard to secure, stop dead in their tracks. The din of the advancing people, magnified by the barrel vault of the Krzysztofory Gallery, dies down. In the semi-darkness of the cellar, before the crowd tightly packed into the passage between the rows of chairs and desks, an image appears fit only for a nightmare which returns one to one's school experiences. Here, at tiny school desks covered with scraps of dusty text books, are seated – frozen in peculiar poses; their gaze fixed on those arriving – old men and women. Their identically cut black clothes are as reminiscent of a school uniform as they are of rural funeral garb. This is how Tadeusz Kantor's performance begins.' K. Miklaszewski, *Przejmujący seans Tadeusza Kantora, Teatr 1976*, no. 9.

18 A. Wełmiński, *Początki Umarłej klasy*, in: *Wojtek Sperl. Fotografie z seansu Tadeusza Kantora Umarła klasa*, ed. J. Chrobak, Cricoteka, Kraków 2007.

19 M. Stangret-Kantor's words from a meeting at the Zachęta National Gallery; *Umarła klasa Tadeusza Kantora w filmie Andrzeja Wajdy i Kadysz Jana Kotta, Konteksty 2008*, no. 2, p. 52.

20 Both W. Sperl's photographs and A. Wajda's film recorded T. Kantor's performance in its original version and with the original cast.

The various definitions of anxiety have one thing in common: their object is unknown. Or – as Freud has it – it is in fact non-existent. Or else it does not lend itself to a symbolic representation – according to Lacan’s amendment to Freud’s view. Anxiety never deceives, because it points to what is real. It reminds us that there is a void, a place of erasure, an experience of loss, a situation of total helplessness in which living individuals can find themselves at any moment; the state in which they were immediately after having been born. Anxiety is an isolating experience, one which breaks communal bonds; one which is powerfully experienced, but impossible to verbalise with clarity. Anxiety is not related to any object or symbol. It does not belong to a chain of signifiers – at all times, it points to something which is, or seems to be, unknown; which is experienced as a deficiency, an absence, a void. It manifests itself as a repetition which knows not its beginning (it has no recollection of its own ‘first time’) nor its ending (death is the only release from anxiety). This is why the aneantisising machine became the ideal anti-anxiety object in Kantor’s work: it did not represent anything, but it drowned out, broke up the flow of speech, interfered and annihilated. The desks of *The Dead Class*, from which only ‘screaming’ could be heard, had been construed precisely according to the matrix of the aneantisising machine. However, they soon gained another – symbolic – existence. By the same token, the idea of repetition acquired a reparative function: a symbolic restoration of ruins and meanings.

## 5.

We are no longer able to reconstruct the social space of the reception which arose around *The Dead Class*. Many records prove that it was very animated, dense and varied. One of the records – perhaps one that was also significant for Kantor himself – is the conversation between Konstancy Puzyna, Tadeusz Różewicz and Andrzej Wajda.<sup>21</sup> This is a unique document, considering the authority of the participants. In their conversation, *The Dead Class* becomes the object of negotiations, rather than the object of analysis, and each participant takes a distinct stance. Różewicz defends the modernist view in a doctrinal way; for him, the power of Kantor’s spectacle lies solely in the effect of the form – a form which is closed, ruthless and infallible: ‘one remembers that form... it has become the one and only, the primary one, it has in fact turned into the content’.<sup>22</sup> He refuses to consider the ‘content’ of *The Dead Class*; he is surprised and protests when Puzyna wants to direct the conversation to the Jewish threads that run through the performance, as when he refers to the Cheder. In his arguments, Różewicz is

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21 K. Puzyna, T. Różewicz, A. Wajda, *O Umarłej klasie*, *Dialog* 1977, no. 2.

22 *Ibid.*

close to the position typical of Kantor before *The Dead Class* – the position of an avant-gardist who avails himself of the privileges granted to him by the collective oblivion. However, Puzyna is moved above all by the powerful reminiscences of the dead world, the memories of the annihilated Jews, the painfully accurate recollection of something repressed, wiped from memory. As it turns out, all it takes is ‘just a bowler hat, a cloth cap, a peculiar kind of din, some crowded desks’<sup>23</sup> to bring that lost world back from its non-existence. In this conversation, Puzyna becomes an advocate of recollection and re-examination with which, in his opinion, Polish society has been faced. Indeed, he writes about this explicitly in his review. In turn, Wajda concentrates on the figure of Kantor himself – on his strong, paternalistic presence: ‘this is a great individuality to which I would like to subordinate myself’.<sup>24</sup> He notes that *The Dead Class* has significantly increased Kantor’s audience. Wajda thinks primarily in terms of the community; in *The Dead Class* he sees a liberating, cathartic potential: ‘It is so hard to breathe, there is nothing to breathe. Suddenly, I go down to the cellar, to Krzysztofory, and there, I feel free, liberated, everything is possible. As always when encountering a great work of art, the world suddenly gets back to normal. I get my mind round it with astonishment, I accept it and I understand it’.<sup>25</sup> This is why, in his film adaptation of *The Dead Class*, Wajda persuaded Kantor to shoot some scenes outside, away from the Krzysztofory Gallery, in the Jewish district Kazimierz or on the Krakus Mound. By doing this, he imposed a new idiom of placing Kantor’s work in the Polish historical and cultural space. According to Małgorzata Dziewulska, Wajda suggested to Kantor his own strategy of a ‘symbolic action in the open air’.<sup>26</sup> Even though, with the passing of time, Kantor seemed to become more and more critical of Wajda’s film, indubitably he had considered Wajda’s hint very well and used it in his own way – all the more so because in the second part of the 1970s, a great wave of national memory and ostentatious return to Christian religious symbolism arose in Poland. The process of transformation that was taking place in Kantor’s theatre was tightly connected with that wave. Reorganising his own stances, altering the rules of the artistic idiom, Kantor decided to play a bravado game with Polish sentimentalism: to rehabilitate it artistically by moving it into the poverty zone, which he idolised. It was there that he placed national songs, carols, religious symbols. After their long absence in open social life and denuded of nationalist pomp and circumstance, they offered new possibilities of emotion after their long absence in open social life. Probably due to his experience with the

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23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 M. Dziewulska’s words from a meeting at the Zachęta Gallery; Umarła klasa *Tadeusza Kantora w filmie Andrzeja Wajdy i Kadysz Jana Kotta*, *Konteksty* 2008, no. 2, p. 57.

*Emballage of the Prussian Homage*, made in the same year as *The Dead Class*, Kantor discovered that the avant-garde strategies of his art were well prepared for such confrontations with the national tradition.<sup>27</sup> He began to create the elements of his symbolic language from memory traces. We can all remember the scene from *Wielopole, Wielopole* in which the Rabi and the Priest walk off together, holding hands. Behind this modest image, Kantor hid the lost-forever Romantic dream of the fatherland of the two nations. Thus, it can be seen that he had taken up Wajda's suggestion to take on board the process of the mournful organisation of the Polish symbolic space.

The premiere of *Wielopole, Wielopole* took place in the deconsecrated church of Santa Maria di Firenze, but the first attempt to confront Kantor's production with a sacral space had been the performance of *The Dead Class* in the interior of the Gothic Bernardine church in Wrocław in 1977. Konstanty Puzyna remembered this occasion as exceptionally moving. Behind the backs of the audience, there was the high, empty nave of the church:

You could feel this void not merely behind your back; you could feel this void reverberating with the waltz *François*, now rising mightily, now dying down, now coming so very close, now floating away. The magnificent acoustics of the church enabled Kantor to build around us – with the music – a space huge and pulsating, in which the surreptitious ruin of *The Dead Class* became all the more pitiful, lonely, futile.<sup>28</sup>

During subsequent years, in the orbit of *The Dead Class*, object-sculptures were created which showed a boy on a school desk. Over time, these objects underwent a significant transformation. The first ones, from 1978, show a boy sitting alone in a black school uniform and in funereal, black patent-leather shoes. In 1980, the year of the premiere of *Wielopole, Wielopole*, quite a different new version appeared. Now the boy wears a light-coloured linen suit, his feet bare like a shepherd's, and next to him, on the desk, there is a simple, wooden, rustic cross.<sup>29</sup> The disturbing and uncanny connotations of the previous version of the object have dissolved in the melancholy emotion which accompanies the discovery and recognition of things close and familiar...

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27 K. Czerni provides a perceptive analysis of the *Emballage of the Prussian Homage* and Kantor's strategy towards popular Polish works of art with national and historical themes in the previously quoted article *Ambalaz Hołdu pruskiego jako portret metaforyczny artysty*.

28 K. Puzyna, *My, umarli*, in: *idem, Półmrok*, Warszawa 1982, pp. 107–108.

29 The first version of the object in this form was produced as late as 1980, which means that Kantor's often-published drawing of the boy at the desk represented in such a manner, and dated 1976, was probably ante-dated by the artist himself.

# The Theatre of Dreams in The Theatre of Death

Wojciech Owczarski

In his *The Milano Lessons* Tadeusz Kantor confessed:

I DON'T REALLY BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF DREAMS / where, according to the surrealists, imagination is born. / I am certain that INTENSIFIED PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES, / THE INTENSITY OF THINKING, RESULT IN FREEDOM / OF IMAGINATION, CONNOTATIONS, / THEY CAUSE US TO ABANDON / RATIONAL CONNECTIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS, AND THE UTILITARIAN RATIONALE / OF LINKING REAL ELEMENTS. (III, 94)<sup>1</sup>

Four years later, just before he died, the artist was to affirm his previous stance:

Although I come from Surrealism (...), I have denied imagination born out of dreams. I have maintained that I do not dream, that my Poor Room of Imagination is a black hole into which various objects fall in from outside... (III, 397)

This professed mistrust of dreaming is flagrantly at odds with the artist's evident fascination with the world of dreams, which Kantor demonstrated on many occasions, especially in his writings. Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz has long since pointed out that soon after the war, in 1945, Kantor staged *The Worthy and the Unworthy One*, a drama by Józef Czechowicz, at the Academic Theatre in Krakow, and that the oneiric themes present in the drama were close to Kantor's own imagination, as can be seen in *The Dead Class*.<sup>2</sup> Let's add that references to dreaming appeared in Kantor's writings almost from the very beginning, but it was in the period of the Theatre of Death that his interest in that motif decidedly increased, to reach its apogee in the late 1980s. Thus, since Kantor pronounced towards the end of his life that he had 'maintained' that he did not 'dream', the matter clearly merits closer attention.

Oneiric metaphors in the scripts of Kantor's performances are certainly the most interesting issue. Starting with *The Dead Class*, the scripts are inundated with

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- 1 I quote Tadeusz Kantor's writings from the following editions: T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 2000 (I refer to this volume by the Roman numeral 'I'); T. Kantor, *Pisma*, vol. II, *Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975–1984*, ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2004 (indicated by the Roman numeral 'II'); T. Kantor, *Pisma*, vol. III: *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005 (indicated by the Roman numeral 'III'). In brackets, I refer to page numbers.
  - 2 K. Pleśniarowicz, *Czechowicz w teatrze Kantora*, in: *Dialog* 1978, no. 7, pp. 117–123.

such expressions as ‘immersing in a dream’ (II, 37), ‘as if dreaming’ (II, 66), ‘the aura of a tragic dream’ (II, 71), ‘everything has vanished suddenly like a dream’ (II, 85), ‘we are already on the side of dreams and hallucination’ (II, 161), ‘it all has to have the hallmarks of a dream’ (II, 172). However, in the performances themselves, the presence of dreaming appears problematic and not as obvious as might seem at first glance. One cannot, of course, deny that the performances of the Theatre of Death – just as much as the earlier productions of *Cricot 2* – are kept in the ‘oneiric idiom’; that they are governed by the dream logic and that all that is eerie about them can be explained precisely by the logic of dreams. But to say this is to say practically nothing at all, since a similar formula could be applied to countless works from all times and continents. One would like to enquire in what way the statements contained in the scripts refer to the places in the performances which they concern directly. In other words: in Kantor’s universe, does a link exist between a literary oneiric metaphor and the stage image? The answer is unambiguous: there is no such link. At least, I have not been able to find it.

In Kantor’s productions (by which I mean, of course, their film recordings), I have looked for the sequences described in the scripts by references to dreaming. All in vain. In the programme of *The Dead Class* (both the first and the second versions), amongst the listed contents, we read: ‘falling into dreaming’ (in the first part, just before the ‘historical nightmarish ravings’). At that point, the script reads as follows: ‘the words learnt by heart, (...) like lonely cold monuments (...) loom huge in that dream, / stunning us with fear, / become monstrous / the questions learnt by heart.’ (II, 69) The metaphoric character of these phrases does not allow one to expect their literal stage rendering. And indeed, in the performance, the transition from the insults hurled by the Woman behind the Window to the ‘historic nightmarish ravings’ is instantaneous and imperceptible. The pupils of the dead class do not seem to be ‘immersing themselves in a dream’ in that particular moment any more than they do in any other. It is the same with *Wielopole Wielopole*. Kantor describes sequence 8, Act 3, entitled *Cemetery Games*, when ‘Helka-the-Mother and Adaś play with the cross snatched from a grave’, a ‘macabre game of “hide-and-peek”, as if in a nightmare.’ (II, 244–245) In the performance, however, the sequence takes place simultaneously with sequence 9 (*Sudden arrival of the FATHER-FROM-VACATION*) and sequence 3 (*The ABC of getting dressed*). None of these scenes is more ‘dream-like’ or ‘nightmarish’ than any other.

Such a state of affairs might be explained most easily by the well-known fact that Kantor used to write down his scripts retrospectively, often years after the premiere. He is also known to have been in the habit of presenting his earlier achievements in terms that were of the greatest interest to him at that particular time, for example suggesting that the idea of the Theatre of Death had preoccupied



him almost since the day he was born. Thus, it can be supposed that, when encrusting his scripts with the oneiric terminology, Kantor was re-interpreting his performances from a new perspective, or indeed was re-creating them, aware of the futility of any attempt at making a record.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst the re-creative function of Kantor's scripts seems indubitable, it does not explain fully the artist's complex attitude to dreams. This can be seen from the chronology of events, for one. The script of *Wielopole Wielopole*, for example, was published already in 1981, yet in the subsequent performances of Cricot 2, dreaming remained unrepresented. Could it be simply the case that Kantor was unable to find theatrical means of expression for the oneiric phantasms which fascinated him more and more?

The matter seems more complex. Above all, one must bear in mind the reluctance of the avant-garde Kantor towards traditional psychologism, rummaging around in one's entrails or flaunting one's 'depth'. He must have been prevented from direct evocation of the matter of dreaming in the theatre by the imperative to maintain control over imagination and to avoid the illustrative. In his 'director's notebook' which he kept in 1974 during his work on *The Dead Class* (and which he partly included in the script of the production), he wrote:

In our dreams, we encounter people who have been the closest to us and who suddenly, for unknown reasons, behave as if they do not know us at all, as if they have become STRANGERS. THE ACUTENESS of estrangement is overwhelming. That is how dead people usually behave in a dream. (...) However, such situations have been, for me, too narrative and psychologising. Rather, I have preferred to remain in the field of *the real*, in the dimensions of things and space. (II, 48)

This statement shows the tension between what attracted and fascinated Kantor and what he considered correct and effective in terms of artistic activity. Dreaming seems here to have presented to him the opposite of 'reality'; thus, it probably belonged with the 'illusion' or 'fiction', with which Kantor still contended fiercely at that time.

Already in 1962, in one of his notes, he set himself the following task: 'to find the relationships between / *reality*, / matter, / time, / action / and dreams. Dreaming contains, enclosed in it, tomorrow's adventure / and those elements of the past / that we can find and / repossess.' (I, 185) It is clear that the link between dreaming and 'reality' had long preoccupied Kantor. The imperative 'to find the relationships' can probably be taken to signify the desire to include dreaming

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3 Pleśniarowicz quotes Kantor: 'I find it extremely hard to write the script of *The Dead Class* (...) I think that one could write a poem about it, a literary essay, or a short story, but it is impossible really to represent it as a notation. (...) *The Dead Class* cannot be recorded in literary language; it cannot be recorded in cinematic language; it cannot be recorded in any language. It only exists in the structure and the code of the performance itself.' (II, 480)

in the sphere of theatrical activities, although they were reserved exclusively for 'reality'. However, as long as Kantor perceived 'reality' as the opposite of imagination, subjectivism or intimacy, the 'repossession' of dreams must have seemed unattainable to him. It was only when he accepted the presence of 'illusion' on the stage as inevitable, and when he included the realness of a phantasm in the range of the 'real', that the situation could change.

In the 1988 manifesto *To Save from Oblivion*, we read: 'I am... on the stage. / This will not be acting. / Poor scraps of my / personal life / become / a *ready-made object*'. (III, 130) This is a testimony to a profound transformation of Kantor's artistic awareness. Now the category of 'ready-made objects' included not only urinals, chairs or umbrellas but also – or perhaps above all – 'scraps of personal life'. And, if so, then it was also the case that dreaming, with its remnants of remote memories and snippets of one's private biography (what Freud referred to as the 'remains of the day') could become a 'ready-made object' and be allowed to enter the higher-status sphere of 'realness'. On the other hand, the concept of 'illusion', held by Kantor in contempt earlier, was also elevated to a higher position. Bearing this in mind, it is worthwhile scrutinising for a moment a fragment from the guide to *I Shall Never Return*: 'The machine gun, straight out of my *Wielopole Wielopole*, / keeps firing series of bullets, / to no avail. / This is what always happens / in illusion and in a dream.' (III, 113) This putting of illusion on a par with dreaming does not signify depreciation of the latter, but – on the contrary – it appears to confirm that, towards the end of his life, Kantor more and more seriously considered dreaming as a crucial aspect of his work. In his commentary on *Silent Night*, he included a passage entitled *Dreaming*. When working on *Today Is My Birthday*, he wrote a few pages long sketch *Meditations, Illusions – Dreaming*. In one of his last texts, *From the Beginning, in My Credo...*, he concluded, 'creation akin to / the act of a demiurge / or a dream, is, I believe, / the main *goal* / in art.' (III, 212) In spite of that, he did not acquiesce in granting dreaming an autonomous role in his theatre until the very end. In his notes to *Today Is My Birthday*, he referred to the scene in which the 'power apparatus' ransacked the Poor Room of Imagination as 'an onslaught out of a nightmare'. (III, 293) In the performance, however, the scene did not have any specific oneiric hallmarks. The gap between the literary vision and the staging had not diminished a jot in relation to *The Dead Class*, staged fifteen years earlier. It follows that Kantor's mistrust of presenting dreams on the stage must have had causes other than the purely artistic.

Amongst the writings left by the founder of Cricot 2, there are two (at any rate, that is as many as I am aware of) records of a dream. One of those is entitled *A genuine record of a dream, made directly after waking in the morning*. It was published in 1988, but we do not know the date it was made. The other

record, also undated, entitled *A dream about E. G. Craig*, has only recently been submitted for publication by Paweł Stangret, who thinks that the text could have been written during the rehearsals of *Wielopole Wielopole*. I discussed the first of these dreams – which, to make things easier, I will call the ‘genuine dream’ (in no way making thereby a judgement about its authenticity) – quite extensively elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> so here I will just repeat the essential points. The dream consists of several images. It starts with Kantor and his wife seeking to obtain their passports in the ministry; next, they forget all about the documents and ‘sink into a vacuum’, only to ‘surface in some different place’ which turns out to be on a sleeper train. Because ‘Marysia [his wife] is lying there feeling lazy,’ Kantor, who still nervously pursues the possibility of travelling abroad, jumps out onto the track. The train, instead of getting further away, begins to move backwards. Kantor runs towards the front of the train with the conviction that ‘everything has now been exhausted’. (I, 613–615) The frantic chase is the leitmotif of the dream. The sleeper finds himself in a state of ceaseless tension; he is irritated by the obtuseness of the clerks, the ill will of the minister, the lackadaisical attitude of his wife. He feels responsible for all around. ‘Oh, poor me!’, he complains, ‘everything falls on me, I have to see to everything personally, keep on top of everything, keep checking, save the world from falling apart altogether.’ It is easy to notice here the familiar aspects of Kantor’s character, connected with his perfectionism, the need for total self-control and being in control of others, the desire to bring order to the world which is sinking into chaos. Dreaming, however, tempts the dreamer with the possibility of taking a break, being liberated from his constant vigilance. The happy-go-lucky wife, the decision to jump out of the train, the shoe coming undone, the boys who suggest that Kantor ‘has fallen asleep on the track’ – all these are images suggestive of taking a back seat, relaxing, taking oneself less seriously. The particularly beneficial effect of dreaming is linked to the sensation of the subject’s lack of continuity. The experience of ‘sinking into a vacuum’ and ‘surfacing in some different place’, although dangerous, being a brush with death, provides the sleeper with the precious opportunity of ‘nuancing the ontology’ (to employ the idiom of Bachelard) and re-formulating one’s own *cogito*. Kantor clearly needed such a re-formulation. The fragmentation of the subjective monolith, finding the way to reconstruct his identity – this was the dream which he tried to realise through art, splintering his ‘I’ into the multiple characters of his doppelgängers and putting ‘shady deals with a vacuum’ into practice. The sensation that ‘everything has now been exhausted’, with which the dream ends, is thus as terrifying as it is inspirational for the hope of internal rebirth.

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4 Cf. W. Owczarski, *Miejsca wspólne, miejsca własne. O wyobraźni Leśmiana, Schulza i Kantora*, Gdańsk 2006, pp. 162–167.

The dream about Craig is quite different. One can wonder, to a much greater extent than in the case of the ‘genuine’ dream, whether this is a dream at all. It looks a bit like a jokey manifesto, a credo, a tantrum – not something unusual with Kantor. What happens in this dream is that Craig visits Kantor and explains to him that people are ungrateful. The most important part of his message is:

Young man – / I can call you that, because of the age that I am / some hundred and twenty – / remember that what counts and remains is only what we spread / around the world / and what will be unfathomable / for... / be wary of institutions / and people who will want you to ... / but I could not quite catch / what followed – what would those people / want from me, what would they want / to do with me?<sup>5</sup>

Quite apart from whether Kantor really dreamt about this appeal of the embittered reformer, it certainly did seem to him as dream-like, and that alone is enough to treat it as an important testimony.

There is no doubt that Craig is Kantor’s doppelgänger here. He utters Kantor’s opinions, he shares his worries, he has a similar sense of humour. We could say that we are dealing with a case of ‘personating’ the ‘Dear Absent Ones’, only that, unlike on the stage, the one making the personation is Kantor himself. The question of what psychological need this identification with Craig, of all people, may have satisfied for Kantor must be left for another time. Let it suffice to say that the artist fantasised about identity swaps and that he associated such fantasies with the sphere of dreaming.

Although the dream about Craig, in contrast to the ‘genuine’ dream, is homogenous and, in fact, contains just a single image, one can notice in it a similar strategy of fragmenting the *cogito*. The very merging of one subject with another serves precisely this purpose. The protagonist of the dream, Craig-Kantor, is a compromise figure with a fuzzy ontological status. What is more interesting, he appears to be chaotic, unorganised: he loses track of his thoughts, he does not finish his sentences, he gets lost in digressing. Thus, the dream creates a digressive personality which is both close to, and distant from, real Kantor. It is close to him through the choleric temperament; it is distant, since it runs counter to Kantor’s need for prudence and self-control. Demonstrating his reluctance towards ‘institutions’, Craig expresses both Kantor’s conscious convictions in the field of art and his desire, probably less than entirely conscious, to loosen up the inner constraints. And, for this very reason, he acts inconsistently. First, Kantor records, ‘this was incredible/ he expressed no passion at all’; at the end, he notes, ‘he was moving rapidly away, choking with irritation.’ So, dispassionate – or irritable? The subject of the dream spans the two extremes.

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5 T. Kantor, *Sen o E. G. Craigu*, submitted for publication by P. Stangret, in: *Teatr* 2006, no. 10, p. 3.

Let us now get back to Kantor's scripts. The references to dreaming that they contain are also part and parcel of the issue of establishing the subjectivity. Here is the image of the army in *Wielopole, Wielopole*:

THE ARMY

Two characteristics rooted the most deeply in its condition have mirrored those which have branded the actor for centuries:

One is – some IRREVOCABLE AND TERMINAL DIFFERENTIATION (like in the dead), DIFFERENTIATION from us CIVILIANS-VIEWERS, to the extent that the resulting barrier causes the sensation of the IMPOSSIBILITY of crossing it, which can only be experienced in a nightmare.

The second is the terrifying awareness, also experienced in a dream, that this DIFFERENTIATION concerns individuals of the same species as us, that is to say, OURSELVES,

that it is we who are the OTHER, the DEAD,

that this is our image, with which we have to CONNECT. (II, 217)

It is necessary to realise that the paradoxical sensation of otherness and sameness, of rejection and identification, the sensation on which the mechanism of the Theatre of Death is based, can – according to Kantor – ‘only be experienced in a nightmare’. One may, therefore, risk the verdict that the essence of Kantor's experience and notion of dreaming is the strong temptation and even stronger fear which appear in dreams: the temptation to cross the barrier between the ‘I’ and the ‘not-I’ and the fear of doing so.

Kantor's entire oeuvre seems to demonstrate his fascination with, and terror of, such crossing. The most radical questioning of the *principium individuationis* occurs probably in his bio-objects, but they are always the lot of others – of stage characters, actors. He merely launches them and monitors them from the sidelines. If in his last performances he does bring into existence his own doppelgangers; they are unmistakably modelled on himself, Tadeusz Kantor, the prototype impossible to confuse with anybody or anything in the world of his theatre. Generally speaking, Kantor's presence on the stage, about which volumes have been written, is, above all, the manifestation of a strong subject; an expression of the fear of being diluted in the parades of the characters arriving from the ‘Poor Room of Imagination’. This is how, in his 1988 essay *The True I*, Kantor depicts this lack of identification with the characters from his *imaginarium*:

When I was to be a child, / someone else was the child, / not the true I / (*that*, you could justify after a fashion). / When I was to die, / someone else was dying. / He ‘played’ me dying. / And this ‘acting’, / which I had outlawed. / functioned perfectly. / When obstinately, longingly, / ceaselessly / I let my thoughts revert / to the School Class, / it was not I, it was others (actors) / who went back to the school desks, / went back, ‘played’ / and ‘pretended’. (III, 132–133)

Kantor writes this in the context of his battling with illusion, but it seems that the inability to identify with himself-as-Other is for him something more than an artistic problem. It would appear that the creator of the Theatre of Death is too attached to his own image of himself to dare to experiment with transgressing his own condition.

Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz asks, ‘Was Tadeusz Kantor a post-modernist?’ and immediately answers:

No, because he never resigned the exceptional status of the artist, never invalidated art nor acknowledged it to be a ‘non-serious’ game, a make-believe play – without cognitive or personal risk... He remained a modernist – an ‘eternal avant-gardist’, under the spell of the tradition of Polish symbolism, someone who believed in the cognitive (rather than merely therapeutic) functions of art. (III 454)

To Pleśniarowicz’s arguments, one could also add this one: Kantor remained a modernist, because he had not decided to abandon the modernist vision of identity, with its cult of individualism, with its idea of ‘unity in multiplicity’. He did not dare – even though he was sorely tempted – to deconstruct his own ‘I’.

In the last years of his life, Kantor realised more and more clearly the extent to which his Theatre of Death was connected with the area of dreams. In the guide to *Let the Artists Die*, we read: ‘The happy LITTLE SOLDIER / is followed by his entourage and his dreams, / THE THEATRE OF DEATH.’ (III, 33) In the guide to *I Shall Never Return*, the motif of ‘my Dream about the Wedding’ (III, 118–122) recurs several times; even though the wedding ceremony has previously appeared in Kantor’s theatre in various guises, it is only now that it has been called a dream. In *Silent Night*, we find this striking image: ‘somewhere deeper down, / as if emerging from the depth of hell – / characters long dead, / the memories of events, / have started to appear / as if in a dream, (...) The most important thing is to admit to them. / And then, not to be afraid to discover / their image as more and more / simple.’ (III, 181) Kantor did not want to ‘be afraid’ of the characters from his dreams. He wanted to ‘admit to them’, allow them to penetrate the boundaries of his own personality. But, until the end, that was precisely what he prohibited them from doing.

In his last, unfinished, production, Kantor embarked on the most dramatic attempt to incarnate a dream: he allowed the Poor Girl on the stage (figs. 37, 38, 39). Leszek Kolankiewicz has no doubt that it was a dream apparition, and that Kantor’s account of his encounter with her is an account of a dream – nothing more nor less than that. However, Kantor emphasised that the meeting had been while awake. He started by saying, ‘I shall tell you, Ladies and Gentlemen, / about a recent experience / that I have had’, and within the account itself he repeated, / THIS WAS NOT A DREAM... / THIS REALLY DID HAPPEN...’ (III, 252–253) One could thus conclude that Kolankiewicz has got carried away – if not for the

fact that he has his reasons. Browsing through the rehearsals recorded by Andrzej Sapija, he has discovered these words of Kantor's: 'It was dark (...) because, of course, we have no light, there are no light bulbs in a dream, naturally.'<sup>6</sup> Then, according to what Kolankiewicz has made out, Kantor had the actors stating, 'He has had such a nice dream.' However, Kolankiewicz may have misheard this, since he himself admits, 'Kantor's voice can be so low at that point that going through the video, I had to stop and rewind the cassette a number of times in order to be able to catch each word.'<sup>7</sup> Could it, then, be the case that the Jungian anthropologist heard what he wanted to hear? I have not checked, because, being a dream catcher myself, I would probably hear the same. Marek Pieniążek, on the other hand, who has painstakingly explored Kantor's unpublished notes, consistently treats the artist's meeting with the Poor Girl as a real-life event.<sup>8</sup> And this is hardly surprising, since he is interested in mimetic aspects and representation. My point is not that we tend to find what we are looking for. What matters is that the status of the episode with the Poor Girl is ambiguous. After all, a third possibility exists: Kantor may have simply invented his dream-or-not-a-dream. Kolankiewicz is right, though, when he writes:

Even if Kantor had made up the dream, his tale would have been amazing, or even shocking. Because the dream turned out to be true. (...) He dreamt that he had lost his soul. He wanted to call it back – and he started making theatre. But he called up the dead, who came to take him away. In search of life he ventured to the place of no return.<sup>9</sup>

Kolankiewicz's interpretation seems indisputable. (A while ago, Bartosz Frąckowiak tried to do better – unsuccessfully, in my opinion, and, incidentally, without expressing any doubt whatsoever about the oneiric character of the phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>) I am of the opinion that Kantor did dream about the Poor Girl and that, creating *Today Is My Birthday*, he desperately fought his dream. What is the most interesting is that his fight consisted in negation. Kantor related (or, rather, intended to relate) his dream on the stage; he made it the key point of his performance; he created the incarnation of its female protagonist and allocated an important role to her; and simultaneously, he negated the existence of the dream, stating – also on the stage – that 'this was not a dream... This really did happen...' Why did he not want to take on the challenge of the dream in his theatre? Why

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6 L. Kolankiewicz, *Ostatnia taśma Kantora*, in: *idem, Wielki mały wóz*, Gdańsk 2001, p. 240.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 239–240.

8 Cf. M. Pieniążek, *Akt twórczy jako mimesis*. Dziś są moje urodziny – ostatni spektakl *Tadeusza Kantora*, Kraków 2005.

9 L. Kolankiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 242; p. 248.

10 Cf. B. Frąckowiak, *Tadeusz Kantor: od nieobecności do powtórzenia*, in: *Dialog* 2008, no. 1, pp.156–165.

did he prefer to deny its oneiric provenance until the end? Presumably because only in that way was he able to retain control over the dream and over himself. If he were to admit that he was making a theatrical performance out of his own dream, he would have felt dominated and mortally threatened, just as – probably – he frequently felt in his dreams. He would have no longer been able to resist the dream's temptations, the oneiric attempts to violate the boundaries of his own 'I'. He would have had to allow the Poor Girl, when sitting on the doorstep crying – to cry on *his* behalf. And that was something that he did not want to allow for anything in the world, even though he sensed that this was precisely what could save him. 'ONE MUST NOT ASK WHY ONE IS CRYING...' (III, 253) – were the words of his warning to himself.

One can suspect that Kantor's deepening interest in dreams may have resulted – as a natural consequence – in another watershed on his artistic path. There is much to indicate that, after the Theatre of Death, the time was becoming ripe for the Theatre of Dreams. Kantor was aware of that. But he was afraid. And he did all in his power to prevent it.



# ***La Machine de l'Amour et de la Mort*** **de Tadeusz Kantor**

*Cécile Coutin*

Tadeusz Kantor, artiste peintre et sculpteur, auteur dramatique et metteur en scène polonais, s'est toujours démarqué des modes et courants artistiques de son temps.

À l'Académie des Beaux-Arts de Cracovie, il a été l'élève du grand scénographe Karol Frycz, ami d'Edward Gordon Craig. Plus tard, en 1947-1950, Kantor devient à son tour professeur dans cette même école<sup>1</sup>, mais il est rapidement révoqué.

Dès les années 1930, il pratique un théâtre de rue dans lequel il crée des situations surprenantes, en associant divers éléments d'une manière inattendue : il utilise des moyens d'expression acérés, irritants, offensants et contestataires, des maquillages outranciers, des formes d'expression rappelant celles du cirque, des associations aberrantes, une prononciation artificielle. Par ces moyens déroutants, Kantor crée des situations contraires à la logique de la vie et donne à ses spectacles une logique autonome. Dès cette époque, donc, l'essentiel de sa conception de la mise en scène est déjà en place. Kantor n'hésite pas à séparer le texte de la pièce et les actions scéniques. Les acteurs se bousculent sur une scène encombrée d'objets manufacturés ou fabriqués souvent par Kantor lui-même, objets qui sont généralement sans rapport apparent avec le sujet de la pièce. Les acteurs disent leur texte sans le représenter et sans l'interpréter : ils le commentent, le discutent, l'interrompent, le reprennent. Leurs gestes perdent tout caractère utilitaire et deviennent autonomes.

En 1955, Kantor fonde son célèbre théâtre Cricot 2 – en référence au théâtre de peintres d'avant-garde Cricot des années 30 – qui fera connaître dans le monde entier ses créations théâtrales composées de scènes avec personnages, objets et machines, où se mélangent et s'opposent des concepts d'illusion et de réalité.

Pendant cinquante ans, ses spectacles ont été dominés par des obsessions et des motifs très personnels : ils sont composés, selon l'excellente définition de Jan Kłossowicz, d'un

(...) stupéfiant tressage de problèmes esthétiques, d'enchevêtrements et d'enchaînements historiques, politiques et autobiographiques qu'est l'enfer déchaîné sur la scène par Kantor. [Ils constituent] une émanation de son psychisme et l'image

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1 Wyższa Szkoła Sztuk Plastycznych à Cracovie, liée à l'Académie des Beaux Arts depuis 1950.

de sa propre voie, à travers le monde, à travers le temps, jusqu'à la frontière, à la mort où il a situé son théâtre<sup>2</sup>.

En 1937, Kantor avait mis en scène, avec des marionnettes fabriquées par lui, le petit drame lyrique en cinq actes écrit en 1894 par Maurice Maeterlinck : *La Mort de Tintagiles*<sup>3</sup>. C'était sa première réalisation théâtrale. Cinquante ans plus tard, en 1987, il re-propose cette œuvre en associant pour la première fois le thème de la Mort – qu'il a traité au fil des années dans bien d'autres pièces – à celui de l'Amour, et reprend des éléments de sa réalisation théâtrale de 1937. Ce nouveau spectacle en deux parties est intitulé *La Machine de l'amour et de la mort*, et suit exactement l'argument de Maeterlinck. On remarquera que ce titre comporte trois termes : machine, amour, mort, symboliques des préoccupations qui dominent l'ensemble de la création théâtrale de Tadeusz Kantor.

L'argument du drame de Maeterlinck, dont l'action se situe hors du temps, dans une sorte de Moyen Âge mythique, comme dans *Pelléas et Mélisande*, est le suivant : deux jeunes filles, Ygraine et Bellengère, vivent, avec leur petit frère Tintagiles et un vieux et fidèle serviteur, Agloval, sur une île dominée par un château sombre, dans lequel vit la Reine, que personne ne peut voir, qui est énorme et qu'on dit folle. Cette Reine est la grand-mère maternelle des trois enfants ; elle est soupçonneuse, jalouse, et veut régner seule. On ne sait pas sur quoi repose sa puissance. Mais, chaque fois qu'elle fait venir un homme auprès d'elle, il ne réapparaît jamais. Ainsi ont disparu le père et les deux frères aînés de Tintagiles et de ses sœurs. Par précaution, on avait éloigné Tintagiles de l'autre côté de la mer. Mais la Reine a exigé qu'il revienne sur l'île. Fatigué par le voyage, Tintagiles s'endort sur le lit de ses sœurs et fait un cauchemar prémonitoire : il entend le bruit d'une foule derrière la porte qui commence à s'ouvrir sans qu'on voie personne apparaître. Lorsque Tintagiles revient à lui, la porte se referme, mais l'enfant souffre dans tout son corps et ne peut plus marcher. Ses deux sœurs le rassurent, et les trois enfants s'endorment, étroitement enlacés. Les trois servantes envoyées par la Reine s'introduisent dans la chambre et parviennent à enlever Tintagiles. Ses sœurs se réveillent : trop tard ! Ygraine communique avec Tintagiles à travers une porte qui n'a aucun système d'ouverture ; seul un rai de lumière passe à travers.

Ygraine encourage son petit frère à tenir bon, mais la voix de Tintagiles s'affaiblit, puis se tait pour toujours. On comprend alors que la Reine insatiable

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2 J. Kłossowicz, « Nul ne revient vivant au pays de sa jeunesse », *Alternatives théâtrales* n°37, 1991, p. 55–57.

3 M. Maeterlinck, *La Mort de Tintagiles*. Petit drame lyrique en cinq actes. Musique de Jean Nouguès. Bruxelles, P. Lacomblez, 1905. La pièce est créée le 28 décembre 1905 au théâtre des Mathurins à Paris, dans une mise en scène de Georgette Leblanc et les décors d'Emile Bertin.

l'a dévoré, comme elle a dévoré le père et les deux frères. La Reine est en fait la Mort, et ses trois servantes peuvent être assimilées aux trois Parques de la mythologie grecque.

Coproduite par le Musée international des marionnettes de Palerme<sup>4</sup> et le Centre de Recherches théâtrales de Milan, *La Machine de l'amour et de la mort* est présentée pour la première fois au festival théâtral Spiel Räume, dans le cadre de l'exposition Dokumenta 8 de Kassel, en 1987, avant de faire une tournée en Italie et en Finlande.

Dans la première partie du spectacle, qui reprend la mise en scène de 1937, quatre marionnettes filiformes, aussi grandes que des êtres humains, jouent le rôle des personnages de Maeterlinck : les trois enfants et le vieux serviteur. Les marionnettes sont apportées sur la scène par des hommes en noir, les Serviteurs, qui agissent comme des marionnettistes : ils disposent les marionnettes sur des chaises munies de roulettes et animent leurs mains avec des baguettes longues et fines munies de crochets. Ils commencent par présenter au public les différents personnages qu'elles symbolisent, puis ils les déplacent avec agitation, à l'aide de leurs perches.

Le texte de la pièce (traduit en italien spécialement pour Kantor)<sup>5</sup>, diffusé par un enregistrement, semble être la voix de Dieu. Les hommes en noir reprennent certains éléments du texte, d'abord sur un ton larmoyant, comme des pleureuses, puis en riant ; ils y ajoutent des commentaires. Le brouhaha de leurs paroles est ponctué par une musique très régulière de percussions, sur un rythme à quatre temps, due au compositeur Saro Cosentino. Au centre du dispositif scénique circulaire formé d'un anneau légèrement surélevé par rapport au niveau de la scène, se trouvent deux portes en fer qui s'écartent et se referment entre chaque acte, laissant entrevoir trois automates menaçants, alignés de profil sur une sorte de rail, et faisant ensemble les mêmes mouvements : ils symbolisent les trois Servantes de la Reine. Celles-ci finissent par abattre et disperser les marionnettes. La Reine apparaît alors<sup>6</sup> : le rôle est tenu par un homme habillé en blanc, coiffé d'un chapeau blanc et portant une valise blanche. Son entrée est annoncée par une

4 Lire les articles à propos de cette collaboration : *Oggetti e macchine del teatro di Tadeusz Kantor*. A cura di Vittorio Fagone. Presentazione di Antonio Pasqualino. Contributo di Philippe du Vignal. Scelta di scritti di Tadeusz Kantor. Redazione, schedatura delle opere e cronologia di Ludmila Ryba. Palermo, Museo internazionale delle Marionette. Associazione per la conservazione delle tradizioni popolari, 1987, et : A. Pasqualino, « Machine de l'amour et de la mort. Objets et mannequins de Tadeusz Kantor », in *Au bout du fil. De i pupi siciliani à Tadeusz Kantor*. Catalogue de l'exposition, Paris, Institut Culturel Italien, 1993.

5 L'auteur de cette traduction est Giovanni Raboni.

6 Ici, Kantor s'écarte du texte de Maeterlinck qui évoque sans cesse la Reine, mais ce personnage n'apparaît pas en scène.

musique répétitive. La Reine circule dans le chaos des chaises et des marionnettes renversées, elle met dans la valise la marionnette représentant Tintagiles, et l'emporte. Un meneur de jeu, le Type suspect (le rôle est interprété par le comédien du Cricot 2 Stanisław Rychlicki) présent depuis le début du spectacle, vient remettre de l'ordre sur la scène.

Pour annoncer la seconde partie – composée par Kantor en 1987 et qui ne comporte aucun texte, mais seulement un accompagnement musical –, deux hommes en noir, vêtus comme des croque-morts de corbillard, les Fossoyeurs, entrouvrent les portes derrière lesquelles gît l'enfant Tintagiles inanimé. Il s'agit d'un enfant véritable, habillé en berger. Ils le déposent sur le devant de la scène. On apporte un cheval à roulettes sur lequel on installe Tintagiles, affalé sur l'encolure. Le cheval est constitué d'un siège en tubes sur lequel est fixée une tête de cheval. Tout en chantonnant, les deux hommes en noir le poussent en décrivant un cercle, de droite à gauche. Plus à l'extérieur, trois Mégères-Sorcières évoquant les trois servantes de la Reine, tirent en sens inverse, de gauche à droite, et en chantant elles aussi, un petit lit à roulettes sur lequel repose une fillette que Tintagiles aime, et à laquelle il est fiancé. Quand ils se croisent dans ce carrousel funèbre, les deux enfants s'animent et se saluent.

Sur l'anneau surélevé dont il a été question plus haut, et qui tourne lui aussi, sont placés le mannequin du Beau Jeune Homme en habit de cérémonie, et un Squelette. Une Mannequin inconnue (jouée par Dalila Sena), en chair et en os, assise sur une chaise, observe la scène tantôt avec intérêt, tantôt d'un air détaché. Dans une autre version du spectacle (Kantor a introduit plusieurs modifications après la première), tout à coup, on annonce qu'il faut libérer la scène. Tout le monde s'en va. Seuls le mannequin du Beau Jeune Homme et le squelette continuent de tourner sur l'anneau. Deux hommes apportent un paquet allongé, emballé dans un tissu noir, qu'ils déposent sur le devant de la scène. Déballé, le paquet révèle le corps d'une jeune fille inanimée que les deux hommes placent entre deux cierges allumés. Kantor vient éteindre les cierges. L'anneau s'arrête de tourner : c'est le Squelette qui reste debout au centre, derrière la jeune fille. Le spectacle se termine sur cette vision.

Dans l'art théâtral du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les théoriciens – et notamment Edward Gordon Craig – ont accordé une grande importance à l'utilisation et au rôle des marionnettes. Mieux que l'acteur, la marionnette peut constituer un symbole général d'humanité et « représenter une forme essentielle de la figure humaine, sans traits individuels ou contingents »<sup>7</sup>. Mais, à l'inverse de Craig, Kantor ne pense pas que la marionnette puisse se substituer à l'acteur en chair et en os.

7 A. Pasqualino, « Machine de l'amour et de la mort. Objets et mannequins de Tadeusz Kantor », in *Au bout du fil. De i pupi siciliani à Tadeusz Kantor*. Catalogue de l'exposition, Paris, Institut Culturel Italien, 1993, p. 27–44.

Pour lui, l'apparition d'un mannequin ou d'une marionnette coïncide avec sa conviction toujours plus profonde que la vie ne peut être exprimée dans l'art qu'à travers « l'absence de vie, à travers le recours à la mort, à travers les apparences, le vide et l'absence de communication »<sup>8</sup>.

Antonio Pasqualino remarque :

Dans *La Machine de l'amour et de la mort*, on peut se demander en quoi les petits hommes en noir de la première partie, les enfants, les croque-morts et les sorcières de la deuxième, sont moins abstraits que les mannequins filiformes et les automates, supermarionnettes de la première partie. Le mélange de ces différents niveaux de stylisation, avec les mannequins non abstraits – le jeune homme et le squelette qui constituent un degré intermédiaire, montre que, de la vie à la figuration la plus abstraite, on dispose d'un large éventail de représentations...<sup>9</sup>

Pour Kantor, les mannequins de *La Machine de l'amour et de la mort* sont surtout destinés à représenter le passé : le jeune homme est celui qu'il a été lui-même, mais aussi l'avenir : le squelette qu'il sera bientôt. Lorsqu'il conçoit ce spectacle, Kantor explique qu'il se représente lui-même, en précisant qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une narration de sa vie, mais de son état personnel à ce moment précis : il est alors âgé de soixante-douze ans ; l'amour est passé, et la mort s'approche...

Dans l'un de ses spectacles les plus célèbres et les plus spectaculaires, *La Classe morte*, créée en 1975, Kantor fait sentir clairement que les mannequins non abstraits portés par les acteurs sont les images de leur « moi » enfant ou adolescent, fardeaux lourds à porter mais impossibles à abandonner : au moyen de cette créature semblable à l'être humain vivant, dépourvue de conscience et de destinée, nous parvient le message de la Mort et du Néant. Dans *La Classe morte*, la représentation commence par un tableau figé qui semble sorti d'un cauchemar : sur des bancs scolaires en bois sont assis des petites vieilles et des petits vieux aux visages livides, cadavériques, dans des poses étranges, immobilisés comme des figures de cire, vêtus de costumes identiques d'enterrement. C'est une classe morte. Les « élèves éternels » regardent le public avec des yeux abrutis. Ils lèvent la main pour être interrogés. Comme personne ne les interroge, ils sortent, puis reviennent avec chacun une poupée cadavérique représentant un enfant, mannequin de soi-même, d'une enfance morte. Avec le temps, les « élèves » désignés tour à tour par le professeur disparaissent de la scène, de la vie. Il ne reste sur les bancs que les mannequins morts. Apparaît la Balayeuse, personnage énigmatique aux traits d'hermaphrodite, avec un balai en forme de faux : on aura reconnu la Mort. Elle se met à nettoyer les objets, accomplit ses fonctions avec une précision automatique. Puis, elle passe au nettoyage des gens, au lavage des corps, ce qui

8 T. Kantor, « Le Théâtre de la mort » in *Le Théâtre de la mort*. Textes réunis et présentés par Denis Bablet, Lausanne, L'Âge d'Homme, 1977, p. 221.

9 A. Pasqualino, « Machine de l'amour et de la mort », *op. cit.*, p. 27–44.

revêt le caractère du rite de la toilette des cadavres. « Il y a, dans cette séance dramatique sur le flétrissement du corps humain, sur ces épaves irrémédiables du passé, sur la vie et la mort, une horreur et un humour de cirque, du sublime et de l'avalissement, du ridicule et une méditation sur le monde »<sup>10</sup>.

Kantor raconte :

Un jour, j'ai écrit un essai sur le thème : Est-ce que ça existe, l'imagination des morts ? Et je me suis dit que si l'imagination des morts existait, ça ne serait pas comme l'éternité dont parlent la Bible ou les Évangiles, ça serait quelque chose de rigoureusement insupportable pour les vivants. Par exemple, si je prends des personnages, des situations, des circonstances du passé, et que je les mène jusqu'à aujourd'hui, alors je ne peux pas conduire une action théâtrale traditionnelle. Il faut imaginer une situation où les morts commencent à agir, à parler. Ils sont maladroits, ils bredouillent. Ce sont les restes des actions qui, de leur vivant, étaient raisonnables, mais ces restes ne signifient rien. Ce sont des traces. Les traces, pour moi, sont plus importantes que la réalité. Des restes de costumes, d'actions, de dialogues, mais sans commencement ni fin, dont on ne sait pas où ils mènent. *La Classe morte*, c'est cela. Je ne reviens pas en arrière, c'est le passé qui revient vers moi<sup>11</sup>.

Quant au cheval à roulettes de *La Machine de l'amour et de la mort* qui est presque un jouet, il a la même valeur ambiguë que le cheval squelettique et énorme d'une autre pièce de Kantor : *Qu'ils crèvent les artistes* (1985), qui porte en selle le Maréchal Józef Piłsudski comme si c'était un cheval encore vivant. Pour Kantor, les chevaux sont à la fois symboles de libération et de mort.

Le théâtre de Kantor, où les défunts reviennent, traversant ses spectacles comme s'il s'agissait du fleuve Léthé de la mythologie, est dominé par la Mort. Kantor s'y est affronté dans toutes ses œuvres, comme s'il voulait en faire le testament de sa pratique théâtrale. Et cependant, il déclarait, deux mois avant sa propre mort : « le vrai testament, le seul que j'accepte, n'est pas pour la postérité, il est pour l'amour, pour dire l'amour. Créer pour la postérité est une imbécillité. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est le testament de l'amour »<sup>12</sup>.

10 A. Grodzicki, *Reżyserzy polskiego teatru*, Warszawa 1979, p. 124.

11 T. Kantor, « Conversation ». Interview par Guy Scarpetta, in *Le Théâtre, art du passé, art du présent*. Paris, Art Press, n° spécial, 1989, p. 86–89.

12 T. Kantor, « Testament et amour ». Entretien. *Alternatives théâtrales* n°37, 1991, p. 58.

**What Can Tadeusz Słobodzianek's *Our Class*  
Tell Us about *The Dead Class*?  
The Political Dimension of Memory  
in the Work of Tadeusz Kantor**

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**1.**

Contemporary perception of memory clearly indicates the political dimension of the phenomenon. Memory is viewed not only in relation to historiography but also in terms of individual and collective memory. Tension between the two structures of the past reveals the whole web of dependencies that memory is part of. These are clearly political in character, since history is always written for the precisely determined purposes of a specific society. The individual memories of its members, therefore, must undergo certain modification so as to combine into a congruous historic narrative. By the same token, the phenomenon of memory, which fascinates Tadeusz Kantor, merits analysis as to the extent to which the memories of the artist, transposed to the stage, can affect Polish society and its vision of the past. In order to consider the problem, one must first take a closer look at the processes which occur at the junction of the individual and the collective, the private and the official.

The problem of the complex relationships between the individual and the collective memories has a prominent position in Paul Ricoeur's thinking. In his book *Memory, History, Forgetting*, taking the phenomenological description of memory as his starting point, the philosopher demonstrates the mechanism of the transition from *memory* to *history*. Ricoeur differentiates three phases of the historiographical operation: Testimony, Archive and Recorded Proof. As he explains: 'With testimony opens an epistemological process that departs from declared memory, passes through the archive and documents and finds its fulfilment in documentary proof.'<sup>1</sup> What matters, however, is that this process is not chronological, since the phases usually take place simultaneously. A historian must take into account all these elements so that history is as accurate as possible and also as convincing as possible.

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1 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago 2009, p. 161.

For Ricoeur, this is especially important in the first phase of the historiographical process. Testimony, after all, is an oral reminiscence of participants or observers, verifying past events. This kind of memory provokes questions about the reliability of individual accounts. Their truthfulness can never be taken for granted, since testimony is suspended between trust and suspicion.<sup>2</sup> Historians, like arbiters, decide whose testimony should be looked upon favourably and whose should be ignored. As Ricoeur notes, this puts the witness on the defensive: ‘the witness asks to be believed.’<sup>3</sup> In this way, the social dimension of memory is revealed, construed as it always is with reference to a concrete community. Memory *per se* is not proof of the past reality; it must be validated by a historian, through examination. However, here a specific rule is observed, that of the assumed credibility of the testimony. We are inclined to believe witnesses because it makes getting at the truth easier. At the same time, trust in other people’s words is one of the most fundamental values in the life of a community and is an important element on which the durability of social bonds relies.

Testimony, safeguarded by such *caveats*, now enters the written stage. From this moment onwards, the historiographical operation acquires literary characteristics. The historians-cum-archivists must sift through the testimonies that they have collected and place them in a suitable narrative structure. At this stage, one could say history is a *sui generis* work of literature or, more broadly, of art, and its language is just as important as the content which it transmits. The Archive phase thus touches upon formal issues similar to those of literary criticism. At the same time, Ricoeur’s perception is close to Hayden White’s discussion on the various ways of constructing the historical narrative.<sup>4</sup> As far as credibility is concerned, the form becomes just as important as the traditional criterion of adherence to the accurate representation of reality. Having been placed in a literary construct, memory becomes more tangible and can continue to participate in the historiographical operation. In this way, oral submission is archived as a durable sign testifying to the past. Ricoeur emphasises the profound significance of this conversion: ‘In a historical culture the archive assumed over those who consult it.’<sup>5</sup> A literary text may also be such an Archive, created on the basis of a Testimony. This perception makes it possible to interpret every literary text or, more broadly, every system of cultural signs, as a trace of the past which is archived in societal history.

Having been shaped thus, the historic narration enters the phase of documentary Proof, where it is subjected to the critical analysis of the historian with a view to

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2 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 164.

4 Cf. H. White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, London 1973.

5 P. Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 169.



what he has set out to prove. By the same token, he construes historical facts on the basis of the material gathered. Ricoeur points out, however, the danger lurking in the act of critical reading: 'A fact is not the same as an event, which begins to live a life of its own in the consciousness of the witness, but rather, it is the content of the testimony which is meant to represent it.'<sup>6</sup> This precludes any discussion about events which remain in the realm of Testimony, and creates scope for manipulation, while demonstrating yet again that history is at all times written with a certain intention. A historian writer composes his work to suit his goal. Therefore, the operation has a great political potential, since memory undergoes interpretation and in that form enters the official historical discourse. It is easy, by employing facts which have been construed differently, to question the existing paradigm of thinking about past events. In such a context, it is interesting to consider the consequences of this revolutionary process for the category of memory. If official history is treated as an important element of the collective memory, one can see what an ephemeral creation it is and how easy it is to undermine its content.

Paul Ricoeur's observations allow one to employ the above analysis also with strictly literary works that are based on an individual's memory. Let's examine Tadeusz Słobodzianek's *Our Class*, an important drama when considering the impact that Tadeusz Kantor has had on contemporary art. It is an apt example to which to apply Ricoeur's historiosophical model complete with all the controversies that it might generate. Additionally, the drama has strong political potential, which has manifested itself through an animated debate about the vision of history that it presents. Słobodzianek takes up the issue of the 1941 pogrom of the local Jewish population in Jedwabne – an awkward topic for Polish public opinion. The drama opts for generalisation and abbreviation rather than factual accuracy, thereby distorting the relationship between what happened in Jedwabne and what historians, commentators and journalists have to say about the tragedy. The merging of the real and the fictitious raises questions about historical veracity of the drama but also re-opens the debate about the place of Jedwabne in Polish art. An artistic statement becomes thus a voice in the societal and political discussion about the Polish memory of World War II.

## 2.

To construct his text, Tadeusz Słobodzianek draws on reminiscences of Jews who had avoided the pogrom. Testimony is not based directly on the oral statements of Jedwabne residents but on reportage, films and other historical documents. In his author's comments, Słobodzianek mentions such sources as Jan T. Gross's *Sąsiedzi*

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6 *Ibid.*, p. 237.

[Neighbours], Anna Bikont's *My z Jedwabnego* [We from Jedwabne] and Marian Marzyński's *Shtetl*.<sup>7</sup> These works bolster the credibility of Testimony, which enables Słobodzianek to base the individual experiences of the witnesses on the authority of historians and document makers. In this respect, *Our Class* resembles the vision of the documentary theatre, which, with the use of theatrical means, presents history through individuals who function within it.<sup>8</sup> This idea organises the collected historical material within the drama. In the Archive phase, the author shapes the language in which the characters express their memories, making it simple and ascetic. He also employs the device of flashback, frequently used in Polish drama: the protagonists return to past events so as to tell about them once again. In this way, Słobodzianek moves away from the realism of the presented world in favour of a commentary on the events summoned onto the stage. From the formal point of view, the playwright has replaced the division of the text into scenes with division into lessons. This device both evokes the reality of the school, reconstructed by the author, and underlines the institutional dimension of the work of the archivist, whose narrative is always didactic in character. Słobodzianek's text has, therefore, the characteristics of a documentary record. This is how the artist himself sets out to define the objective of the reasoning in the drama:

I prefer to tell made-up stories – even though based on real events – and within them construct relationships between invented characters. In other words, I prefer to create fiction which has the appearance of verisimilitude but no aspiration itself to the status of reality, although it aspires to search for the truth.<sup>9</sup>

In order to explain how this objective is being realised in the drama, let us take a closer look at the text. The tension between memory and history is at its most noticeable in Lesson 10 of *Our Class*. The wedding of Władek and Rachel becomes an opportunity for an encounter of the living with the dead. The marriage ceremony of a Polish man and a Jewish woman, who adopts the Polish name Marianna, becomes a ritual in which history is interlaced with contemporary reflection. The guests at the wedding include those who had been killed in the pogrom (Menachem, Dora, Jakub Kac), as well as others who had left before the genocide took place (Abram): Their voices are a key element in exposing the tragic dimension of the scene and, metonymically, of the whole reality marked by the tragedy in Jedwabne. The script of *Our Class* reads:

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7 T. Słobodzianek, *Nasza klasa. Historia w XIV lekcjach*, Gdańsk 2009, p. 98.

8 In Polish theatre, this kind of production is represented by such productions as Grażyna Kania's *Nordost* (2007). The stage script is based on reminiscences of three women who were present at the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow during the 2002 hostage crisis.

9 [http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75475,8403192,Fikcja\\_ktora\\_szuka\\_prawdy.html?as=2&startsz=x](http://www.wyborcza.pl/1,75475,8403192,Fikcja_ktora_szuka_prawdy.html?as=2&startsz=x) - (date accessed: 26 March 2011).

**Zygmunt**

And now, the married couple, here comes  
the present. A candelabra! Silver!

Do you like it?

**Jakub Kac**

Whose is it?

**Dora**

Mine!

**Abram**

Oh God!

**Menachem**

Shit!

**Wladek**

Thank you.

**Marianna**

Beautiful!

**Heniek**

From me, a tray. Silver!

**Dora**

Whose?

**Abram**

Mine.

**Jakub Kac**

God!

**Menachem**

Shit!

**Wladek**

Thank you.

**Marianna**

Beautiful.<sup>10</sup>

This excerpt recalls the dramatic accounts of the Jews who had escaped from Jedwabne and, having come back to their homes after the war, saw Poles using their personal belongings. Słobodzianek has set up a clash between these accounts and the customs prevailing amongst the Polish participants of these events. The language of the scene is pivoted on a similar counterpoint. Using sparse expression, mainly two-syllable words, the author juxtaposes the world of the dead with that of the living. Spirituality is put side by side with vulgarity, social convention – with the brutal reality which the Jews from Jedwabne had experienced. The condensed form intensifies the emotional impact of the scene. The gesture of recognition acquires a tragic dimension lent by the trauma, the horror of the war and the injustice suffered by the Jews. Słobodzianek employs the monotonous rhythm to highlight the interpersonal relationships based chiefly on the drive to obtain

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10 T. Słobodzianek, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–56.

a financial benefit. The scene thus becomes a metaphor for the actual Polish–Jewish relations, marked by unexpiated guilt. Such a picture instantly raises questions about the sort of reasoning with which the author is attempting to document facts from the past. In the context of the historical debate surrounding Jedwabne, he is emphatically against the official version of the events that took place there. In the communiqué issued by the Institute of National Remembrance on 30 June 2003, concerning the decision to close the investigation in the Jedwabne case, we read:

This crime has been classified on the basis of Section 1 of the PKWN decree of 31 August 1944 on sanctions against fascist Hitlerite criminals guilty of murder and torture of the civilian population and of war prisoners, which classification means that the crime is deemed to have been carried out at the behest of the authorities of the German state.<sup>11</sup>

The Institute has thereby excluded any other motivation for the crime than a German-inspired one. *Słobodzianek*, however, demonstrates that the causes of the pogrom lay in the greed of the Poles who, after their neighbours had been murdered, took over their possessions. Thus, the text of the drama reveals its critical potential by taking up the issue of the changed perception of the 1941 crime within Polish society. Through its powerful theatrical potential, *Słobodzianek*'s text can influence the collective Polish memory, as Polish viewers, when empathising with the protagonists of *Our Class*, begin to accept or internalise the guilt of the inhabitants of Jedwabne. Such a conclusion, in view of the absence of a full accounting for the pogrom, has met with strong objection of the society. *Słobodzianek* has been accused of manipulating the facts and of presenting a one-sided vision of history. In spite of all the doubts, one has to conclude that in this case, a work of art has entered the realm of politics, in which it can function on equal terms with official communiqués of the authorities and with statements of historians.

One could ask a provocative question: does *Słobodzianek*'s drama, placed in the context of those interpretations and controversy, provide an opportunity to look at the memory mechanisms which matter in the work of Tadeusz Kantor? Assuming that we have, on the one hand, a dramatic text and, on the other, a thoroughly theatrical work perpetuated by Kantor in his score, to what extent can we talk about similarities and what differences are there in the artistic concept of the past?

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11 The communiqué concerning the decision to close the investigation of the murder of Polish citizens of Jewish nationality in Jedwabne on 10 July 1941., <http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal.php?serwis=pl&dzial=365&id=4643> (date accessed: 26 March 2011).

For the purposes of the present argument, we can treat the production and the drama as two examples of artistic text<sup>12</sup> with a characteristic stage structure. Both texts can throw some light on each other, opening new ways of reading Kantor's work from the perspective of memory in its historic and political dimension, as suggested by Ricoeur.

### 3.

In Tadeusz Kantor's theatrical work, *The Dead Class* is certainly a turning point. It opens the phase of Kantor's creative wrestling with art, death and, above all, memory. According to his notes, this is how the artist embarked on this production: 'At the last, forgotten, outpost of *our memory*, squeezed into a corner somewhere, stand a few rows of shoddy SCHOOL DESKS...' <sup>13</sup> His statement shows that, in this case, the path from a reminiscence to a vision of history is quite complicated. If we try to analyse the artistic production employing the terms provided by Paul Ricoeur, we run into difficulties, because first we have to establish whose testimony becomes the basis on which to construct the reality of the production. On the one hand, the phrase 'our memory' may refer to a particular community; on the other, it may refer to the generic phenomenon of memory which all human beings have in common. One of the very first sequences in the production supports the latter interpretation: old people enter the stage with mannequins of children on their backs. This image can be placed in the series of conceptualisations of memory starting with Plato's wax tablet. Here, memory is an encumbrance, an 'excrescence'<sup>14</sup>, in Kantor's own words. Hence, a return to childhood is not an innocent gesture as it directly involves death. The act of remembering leads to something dead which, in a residual form, remains in the human being. The image of memory is, however, multilayered. *The Dead Class* also contains testimony of each of the characters. Kantor's old people evoke their literary past. This is the underlying principle of how Witkacy's drama *Tumor Brainiowicz*, a relic of the past, functions here, continually replayed and re-worked by the characters.

The artist enters the Archive phase, collecting various linguistic manifestations of childhood, such as counting rhymes or fragments of typical situational school vignettes or themes. However, Kantor carries out linguistic de-construction in order

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12 According to the definition proposed by J. Łotman in the article *Problem znaczenia w tekście artystycznym*, in: *Teorie Literatury XX wieku*, eds. A. Burzyńska, M. P. Markowski, Kraków 2007, pp. 285–303.

13 T. Kantor, *Klasa szkolna*, in: *idem, Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975–1984*, Pisma, vol. II, comp. ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, p. 30.

14 T. Kantor, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

to lay bare the alien quality of what has been remembered. For instance, there are only traces left of the typical language invented by children which appears here as ‘phonetic blots’<sup>15</sup> – meaningless clusters of sounds repeated compulsively by the characters of *The Dead Class*. The same is true about infantile rhymes which, deformed, keep returning as a grotesque refrain, no longer bringing associations with a carefree childhood. These formal devices bring to mind one of the ways of talking about history presented by Hayden White. The American historian posits that contemporary thinking about history is based on irony. Irony presupposes taking reality with a large pinch of salt, since it has ceased to function as the ultimate criterion of what is or what isn’t true. As Ewa Domańska comments on this issue, ‘irony tends to turn into word play, to become language about language, to conceive the world as trapped within a prison made of language.’<sup>16</sup> This is because the ironic take on history aims both to reveal the mechanism that governs history and to reflect meta-historically on the events presented. In this way, the Archive phase which employs ironic form contains certain documentary proof. In the notes to *The Dead Class*, this is expressed explicitly as the intention: ‘It is necessary to place this world, believed to be mature and responsible, in contrast to the ur-reality, not yet deformed by life’s practices, to this “MATIÈRE PREMIÈRE,” “RAW MATERIAL” of life.’<sup>17</sup>

The former world includes historical facts related to national martyrdom, war and all kinds of ideologies; the latter comprises childhood memories, which, often disregarded and passed over in silence, deserve to be returned to the official discourse. This clash of the official and the private is aptly illustrated by the scene in which the Teacher tests the Old People’s knowledge of history. The actors’ body language effectively conveys the oppressive nature of this questioning. Thus, the return to the past proves to be an intrusion into a very intimate zone of individual memory, from which the Teacher attempts to drag out facts. The scene soon turns into a cruel spectacle, with the Old People as victims and the Teacher as their merciless tormentor. The mechanically delivered questions are in stark contrast to the hesitant replies of the pupils. The invasive nature of the Teacher’s interrogation rips through the living tissue of their memories. Finally, the atmosphere of terror gives way to a recitation of childish rhymes. Unable to recall, the Old People clutch at the nearest memory available. The coarse counting rhyme ‘M’TATA/M’TATA/ZESRAŁ SIĘ TWÓJ TATA [ ‘KA TA YA/ CHAA LAMA NA/, YOUR DAD’S GOT A SHITTY BUM’]<sup>18</sup> makes the Teacher lose his

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15 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

16 E. Domańska, *Beyond Irony*, in: *History and Theory*, vol. 37, no. 2, p. 178.

17 T. Kantor, *The World of Immaturity*, in: M. Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis, London 2009, p. 264.

18 T. Kantor, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

composure. His efforts to regain control over the class fail, the recitation fluidly evolving into a sing-song wail composed of the sounds of the Hebrew alphabet. This trance-like *grande finale* to the scene demonstrates how a scrap of individual memory overwhelms and dominates the theatrical reality. The institution of the school is depicted as helpless in the face of the re-designed experience. Through hyperbolisation, Kantor highlights the *gravitas* of memory and brings out its poetic character. Nevertheless, it is still difficult to state unequivocally whose testimony has served as the basis for this theatrical vision.

But the next production of the Theatre of Death – *Wielopole, Wielopole* – seems to prove that Kantor's art is based on his own memory. This is revealed both in Kantor's active presence on the stage and in direct reference to events, characters and themes from the artist's biography. However, interpretation cannot stop at the level of autobiographism. Kantor imbues his recollections with the characteristics of artefactual memory, that is to say, memory contained in particular objects. These objects function both as elements of the stage set and as autonomous works of art. Thus, they are subject to creative manipulation and philosophical reflection. The best instance of such an artefact is a photograph, which holds a special place in contemporary reflection on memory.<sup>19</sup> It is tangible proof that a past event was real. In *Wielopole, Wielopole* we have photographs coming back to life so as to enable the artist to re-set the world of his childhood anew. Even so, the artist himself points out that 'recalling memories is a dubious and not entirely clean practice.'<sup>20</sup>

Tadeusz Kantor realises that memory has a life of its own within the production because it presents a vision of the past fundamentally different than that which real events did. The record of the memory is then a result of Kantor's personal taking stock of his own past and his authorial stance towards his narrative.

This phenomenon is seen at its most emphatic in the scene in which the Photographer snaps a group of soldiers. When the barrel of a gun slides out of the camera box, it becomes clear that recording the past carries dangers. Just as it does in Ricoeur's model, remembering entails fragmenting and selectivity. Thus, the individual character of the memory is killed off in favour of the image which, through its generic quality, is to replace reality. The artist demonstrates this by reducing the gesture of the soldiers to a single grimace. They become no more than a collective signifier which will undergo constant manipulation. This does matter, especially as one of the soldier characters is Kantor's father. What comes to the fore is what the artist has remembered of his father, Marian Kantor. Their complicated personal relationship, caused by the father's continuous absence,

19 Cf. D. Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*, Cambridge 2000; R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York 1981.

20 T. Kantor, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

begins to take over the stage scene. What remains of the childhood memories is the sound of footsteps which the artist associates with his father. Moreover, the character called the Holidaying Father in the score is presented as a pathetic creature talking gibberish. His stage presence has been reduced to the delivery of coarse phrases and to an obsessively repeated action: automated marching. Kantor consistently confronts here the paternal figure, prevalent in Polish literature, e.g. in Wyspiański's *Powrót Odysa* [The Return of Odysseus], with the raw reality of war. As Małgorzata Dziewulska comments in her book *Inna obecność* [A Different Presence]: 'Kantor perceived the meeting of Odysseus with Telemachus as a pathetic attempt at communication between strangers, because all that a father coming back from the war can offer to his son is his cynicism and his emptiness.'<sup>21</sup> And so the artist weaves his production from the shreds of his most intimate memories, thus constructing a bitter image of a soldier, father and man. However, the overall effect occasions reflection on how Kantor's individual memory is placed *vis à vis* the collective memory of Poles.

The image of the soldier in *Wielopole, Wielopole* is in flagrant contrast to the cult image of the heroic army perpetuated in Polish culture. Kantor's soldiers 'move in an uncoordinated way, commit brutal acts, attack and kill'.<sup>22</sup> Thus, a re-interpretation of the heroic Polish vision of history takes place: *Wielopole, Wielopole* foregrounds the ignoble deeds of Polish soldiers. The artist discredits the positive myth in the scene of the rape committed on Helka, the stage character representing Kantor's mother. The soldiers toss about a dummy which looks just like her, brutally forcing her legs apart. In this scene, the Holidaying Father also appears but, busy marching, doesn't take any notice of the dishonourable acts of the other soldiers. This intense image clashes with the soundtrack of the traditional Polish army march *Szara piechota* [The Grey Infantry]. Juxtaposing the lowest instincts with the highest patriotic elation, Kantor does not allow the spectator any respite from the presented events. Such an uncompromising structure of the scene can certainly cause controversy. It reveals the political character of Kantor's work, based on debunking the official and deeply ingrained notions of Polish history.

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It would appear that applying Paul Ricoeur's theory to the analysis of artistic texts demonstrates that artists' use of memories, whether their own or someone else's, can carry significant political potential; the texts enter the public debate

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21 M. Dziewulska, *Inna Obecność*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 111–112.

22 T. Kantor, *op. cit.*, p. 284.



revolving around the socially prevalent historical narrative. From this perspective, the avant-garde voice of Tadeusz Kantor, which provokes critical thinking, is especially valuable. Both *Wielopole, Wielopole* and *The Dead Class* expose the specifically Polish relationship between memory and history. Małgorzata Dziewulska perceives this as a singular value of Kantor's work, namely 'that the strictly individual and the absolutely distinct should acquire superhuman powers – in the sense of the superhuman powers of art – and serve as a counterpoint to the dead convention.'<sup>23</sup> From the vantage point of the contemporary debate about so-called historical politics, the voice of the artist who consistently builds his vision of history on the basis of his own memory is a valuable contribution. Tadeusz Słobodzianek's controversial text, with its critical attitude to the sensitive threads of Polish history, may inspire researchers to return to the complex relationship with the past in the theatre of the creator of *The Dead Class*. The process of moving from the individual memory to the vision of history in the productions of the Cricot 2 still has many unexplained areas. My present comments can serve as no more than an introduction to a renewed reflection on that aspect of the work of Tadeusz Kantor.

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23 M. Dziewulska, *op. cit.*, p. 119.



# Kantor – Reactivating One’s Own Reality: Late Productions by Cricot 2

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## 1. The Intimate I, the Political I, the Real I

In the circumstances in which the humanities are saturated with theses about the inexpressibility of experience, about the access to reality being linguistic and trope-based in character; in which contemporary teatrology and dramatology inspire yet more treatises that continue to develop the constructivist thesis about the viewer being the centre of cognitive activities, at the same time indicating that it is the theatrical or literary creation which contains the most reality – it is difficult to talk about such theatre and such literature that provide direct access to the world and allow to take root in it in an absolute way. It is particularly difficult to talk about the theatre of Tadeusz Kantor without succumbing to the temptation of interpreting it as one which refers the viewers to the inexpressible; as a theatre of aesthetic aporia, dissemination, post-dramatic ritual; of the performative staging of self, repetitions, psychoanalytical interpretation of biographies, dramatic séances, rituals, the representation of the unrepresentable;<sup>1</sup> a theatre of eternal longing for the true coming back,<sup>2</sup> a post-political vision of the collectivity of memory, and so on. In any event, when searching for a theoretical rationalisation for the phenomena which I had noticed in Kantor’s opus, I seized on the traumatic realism of Hal Foster and Jacques Lacan.<sup>3</sup>

However, now I think that there was something more fundamental behind Kantor’s tracking of his own reality; something which goes beyond the aesthetic canons and idiom of contemporary anthropology (including the, fundamentally Plessner-like, concepts of performativity of Erika Fischer-Lichte).<sup>4</sup> That something,

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1 Cf. K. Fazan, *Projekty intymnego teatru śmierci. Wyspiański–Leśmian–Kantor*, Kraków 2009, p. 359.

2 Cf. W. Owczarski, *Miejsca wspólne, miejsca własne. O wyobraźni Leśmiana, Schulza i Kantora*, Gdańsk 2006, p. 240.

3 Cf. M. Pieniżek, *Akt twórczy jako mimesis. Dziś są moje urodziny – ostatni spektakl Tadeusza Kantora*, Kraków 2005.

4 Cf. E. Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Frankfurt am Main 2004. Cf. H. Plessner, *Die Frage nach der Conditio humana*, Frankfurt am Main 1976.

the fundamental substance of his work, appears to be liberated desire, combined with the desire to probe; a desire practised theatrically, in a manner which not so much rejects, as ignores metaphysics, conceptuality, representation, common forms and practices, recollections or even what's known as non-representative visualisation. Kantor's final performances may be described as a reactivation of the romantic dream about entering the realm of primary reality, as a continual reactivation thereof in the paradigm of that characteristic of Polish culture – the leaning outside death, towards the salvation of the close encounter with a fulfilled desire, with transcendence, or else with its avatar manifesting itself – as Martin Jay puts it, when commenting on an artistic **event**.<sup>5</sup>

In order to sketch briefly the course of this process, let us start by mentioning a few simple facts that will serve as a reminder that Kantor's biographical trajectory was inseparably connected with his opus. This was revealed the most poignantly in the reception of Kantor's last, unfinished work *Today Is My Birthday*, which had its premiere in Toulouse, about a month after the artist's death. It was clear to many critics that, without the participation of the creator of *Cricot 2*, the production was not a work of art in Kantor's sense. Apart from that, in Poland, *Today Is My Birthday* was shown for the first time only in 1992, so, more than a year and a half after the final rehearsal. The play was staged after a political watershed had taken place, in a Poland different from that pre-1989 Poland in which Kantor had embarked on working on his final production. The Poles got to see a work that was, in a sense, historical: firstly, due to the absence of the artist himself, which used to provide a continuous pointer to the past; secondly, due to an increasing distancing from the now-non-existent People's Republic of Poland and the USSR, and their oppressive influence.

But *Today Is My Birthday*, a production with its roots still in the preceding epoch, made it impossible to forget that era entirely. After all, in his on-stage 'room for imagination', Kantor presented also the people of politics and power, putting on a trial of the 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian systems. One of the key protagonists, Vsevolod Meyerhold, was depicted as a victim of the communist régime – a contemporary martyr who had given his life for art. The presence of the Russian avant-gardist in *Cricot 2*'s most private and final spectacle indicated that Kantor

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5 M. Jay, following French postmodernists, considers a literary/artistic *event* in the sense of Heidegger's *Ereignis*, which in turn allows him to treat it as a biblical fulfillment of *kairos* time (as opposed to *chronos* time), as well as following its Sanskrit etymology, it allows to view such a moment in terms of the category of a god's *avatar* (incidentally, *Kairos* is an ancient Greek god of an opportune moment). Qtd from: M. Jay, *Fotografia jako wydarzenie* (lecture), WP UJ, Kraków ul. Grodzka 64. Cf. A. Bielik-Robson, *Duch powierzchni. Rewizja romantyczna i filozofia*, Kraków 2004, pp. 353–354. Cf. D. Kosiński, *Teatra polskie. Historie*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 204–205.

identified with the fate of the artist who had been destroyed by the political powers. In *Let the Artists Die*, the sculptor Veit Stoß was a pre-figuration of such identification. What is interesting is that it was only in his last production, created in 1989–1990, that Kantor emphasised a strong identification with a victim of the communist regime. It probably had something to do with that time of great political upheaval; the Round Table political negotiations and the fall of the Berlin Wall had caused politics to percolate into the private life of every Pole. It is thus striking to observe that Kantor – a thoroughly individualistic artist who shunned political involvement – proved with his final production, yet again, that his art had grown out of confrontation with reality, even if that reality was an ideologised and politicised social life, subjected to history.

Kantor’s final spectacle can thus be perceived as the artist’s confrontation with all forms of reality: with what was private and his own, but also that which was common, cultural, historic and political, and which in many respects turned out to be an ‘ideology for the masses’. This was both the final manifestation of the artist’s independent ‘I’, endeavouring to maintain its creative autonomy in the currents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history, and a departure of that ‘I’ beyond the sphere of bad memories, beyond the discourse and practices which had served to maintain the European post-World-War-II order – an order which later turned out to be provisional. The events of 1989 put paid to the post-Yalta status quo, that is to say, to the processes which both were occurring at the time when *Today Is My Birthday* was being created and which were reflected in the production.<sup>6</sup> It is not by chance that one of the scenes was entitled the ‘creation of the world’.<sup>7</sup>

In the play, Kantor was supposed to inhabit the stage almost literally, to live there in his private reality, independent of the dominant reality, prevailing by means of a political, economic or aesthetic mandate. The concept could be called a privatisation of the avant-garde gestures practised for decades in Cricot 2, when Kantor had been producing reality in his happenings or in the Zero Theatre, gradually depleting the mechanism of representation of the material for reproduction. Whether in the cellars of Krakow’s Krzysztofory or on the beach, he turned the gathering of the happening participants into a community which was, after a fashion, made real; which acquired communality, and moved as one with the topos, in the latter case, with the rising and falling of the sea. What Kantor did was – by various means, theatrically and performatively – to test the dimensions

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6 Cf. G. Niziołek, *Ruiny Europy*, in: *20-lecie. Teatr polski po 1989*, eds. D. Jarząbek, M. Kościelniak, G. Niziołek, Kraków 2010, pp. 38–39.

7 T. Kantor, *Dziś są moje urodziny. Rękopisy wszystkie*, ed. M. Pieniążek, CD at: the Cricoteka Archives, Cricoteka 2003, folder: *Dziś... Relikty nieaktualne / Stwarzanie Świata, Klinika Dr Kleina*, p. 3.

of reality; even though, until recently, we would have been more likely to refer to such an undertaking as yet another avant-garde idea.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. The Enhancement of the Stage Presence of the Artist

Kantor's entire opus is, in one way or another, about man's entanglement in reality. It is hard to find in it a single work or creative phase which would not thematise the idea of reality, in which the contemporary 'I' lives, creates, thinks, reminisces, repeats itself, touches its own boundaries, transcends itself into the past or the future and in this way traces out its imaginary or intimate spaces.<sup>9</sup> As early as 1944, in *The Return of Odysseus*, this problem is indicated at the interface of aesthetics, experience and history. Later, Kantor would explore it in depth in the happenings of the 60s, and the productions of the Zero Theatre, the Theatre of Journey and the essays in the *Milan Lessons*. In turn, the artist's 1980s performances (*Wielopole*, *Wielopole* or *Let the Artists Die*) present the aspects of realness and historicity the most poignantly and fully. There, the issue of artistic innovation becomes secondary, Kantor having long left behind the 'common insurgency of the avant-garde'. In those performances, new aesthetic values are born spontaneously, on the basis of the artist's aesthetic choices, where the drama of the revelation of one's own experience becomes of primary importance. In his last productions, Kantor himself appears on the stage of the laboratory in which the forces of time and history have been recreated, searching amongst the symbolic ruins for the remnants of time and emotion and using them to rebuilt identity. He has created the stage as a machine for the recovery, practice and production of identity,<sup>10</sup> which in his treatment is never a structural and symbolic abstract, but always reveals itself in relation to the reality concealed beneath the surface of signs.

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8 Cf. K. Pleśniarowicz, *Teatr śmierci Tadeusza Kantora*, Chotomów 1990.

9 In the programme of *I Shall Never Return*, the artist recapitulated his stance in relation to the problem of reality: 'At the stage of my creative work which I am beginning to consider / a 'resumé' / as it were – an ultimate moment, when one reconciles one's conscience / How was it really with that reality / Have I really done all I could for it?' Cf. T. Kantor, *Ja Realny* in: *Nigdy tu już nie powrócę*, the programme of the performance, ed. R. Tansini, Kraków 1988, pp. 18–19.

10 J. Grotowski elaborated a similar mechanism in his *Actions*, almost in parallel; (similar not so much in terms of aesthetics, as in the scope of revealing the sources of identity). It was at that time that his Gardzienice Theatre productions were created, ecstatic and saturated with Slavonic sensitivity. These parallels between Grotowski and Kantor are awkward to draw, but nevertheless valid. D. Kosiński refers to them; earlier, Z. Osiński carefully analysed the common and disparate traits of Kantor and Grotowski. Cf. D. Kosiński, *Realność Grotowskiego*, in: *Oblicza realizmu*, eds. M. Borowski, M. Sugiera, Kraków 2008.

During Kantor’s lifetime, an appropriately sensitive appreciation of these themes was hard to come by in Polish criticism. Stephen-Greenblatt-style historicism, postmodern problems with identity, Hal Foster’s texts about traumatic realism, or the Lacanian reality principle have only gained acceptance in the last few years. The until-recently dominant, modernist idiom and the humanist discourse, the textualism and structuralism and the historic-aesthetic take on avant-gardism did not allow for an in-depth analysis of the problem of reality. However, Kantor grew out of the modernist idiom much faster than Polish humanism had done. One could say that he exhausted its efficacy as early as with *The Dead Class* (1975), which in terms of the organisation of the experience absorbed by a work can be compared to the highest achievements of European modernism – to Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.<sup>11</sup> In the mid-80s, Kantor was no longer an artist nervously fussing around the traces of unattainable meaning or sparks of the uncertain light of the mind and transcendence. The sixty-year old artist was no longer concerned with semiotic aporia; he no longer tried to be the conductor of his theatrical script or a modern organiser of an identity narration, which unifies, or at least glues together, historic and social experience from individual perspectives. In *I Shall Never Return* (1988), he became someone who was a component in the reality of the performance; he created the action for himself from particles of his own memory, allowing the audience to look at themselves and their own reality. Moreover, the stage space was for him more real than the audience or that which was external to the theatre. The real – specifically, repeated events – was taking place on the stage, ignoring the entire para-theatrical rest almost as a prop store, or a historic backdrop. Kantor’s production was an exceptional attempt to repeat the author’s creative path by making it as real and abbreviated as possible.<sup>12</sup>

These attempts to create a theatrical metaphor for his own subjectivity were dramatically combined with the artist’s comments in his last work, which Kantor had explicitly referred to as his final work. The artist described *I Shall Never Return* as a ‘last venture into boyhood’. About *Today Is My Birthday* he remarked that it would be the play which he would leave to the actors in his will; a play that they would perform without him. In his last works, significant changes took

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11 However, in regard to Cricot 2’s final productions, it would be very worthwhile to compare, in philosophical and aesthetic terms, the theatralised subjectivity of Kantor with Beckett’s concept of the subject taking place at the boundary of language and semiotic vacuum. Cf. J. Momro, *Literatura świadomości. Samuel Beckett – podmiot – negatywność*, Kraków 2010.

12 ‘I am... on the stage / This will not be acting / Poor scraps of my / personal life / become / a ‘ready-made object’. / Each evening / the RITUAL / AND SACRIFICE will be taking place. / And all this so / as to overcome.’ T. Kantor, *Ocalić przed zapomnieniem*, in: T. Kantor, *Nigdy tu już nie powrócę*, from the programme of the production, Kraków–Mediolan 1988, p. 15.

place in the stage role of Kantor himself. Above all, the real presence of the artist in the space of the production greatly intensified. Let's note that in *Let the Artists Die* (1985), Kantor constructed the stage version of his 'I' (represented by the boy and the two characters who were dying) in such a way that they did not enter into a dialogical relationship with the artist himself – the Artist, the real creator of the whole spectacle, still visible at the edge of the stage. But already in the 1988 *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor called himself the 'I myself'. Seated at the front of the stage, at one of the tables placed there, Kantor watched the flow of events. In spite of not intervening in the action directly, he was the main subject of the stage activity, thanks to his artistic testament being projected by loudspeakers. In that production, Kantor had ordered the camera, doubling up in its role as a machine gun, to be pointed at him. Killing himself theatrically, he finalised his stage reminiscences and from his own 'ground zero', the very centre of his own myth, he observed his own reactions. The mannequin of the dying Father, tied to a torture machine, or the artist's wedding represented by the means of mannequins both expressed the intention that this spectacle, conceived of as the 'last journey in this life'<sup>13</sup> into boyhood, made it possible to enter the space of a myth created from the reactivation of specific, traumatic events.

### 3. So that the Past May Remain 'Mine'

The production provided an on-stage forum for making both a personal and ritualistic sacrifice of the experiences which had been the most fundamental for the artist's identity. Finding the sources of his identity, he could gain a 'victory' over the various faces of symbolic oppression (whether by history, economy or politics). To employ the idiom of Catherine Gallagher,<sup>14</sup> the journey into the past aimed to re-colonise it, so as to change it after the artist's own fashion and map out a path to his own identity, an alternative to the historic one. Kantor referred to that process in the programme of the production, albeit in a more lyrical and romantic language, declaring it a victory over the world. Thus the reasons for Kantor's stage presence in *I Shall Never Return* were profoundly anthropological; the artist had questioned the status quo model of historicity, his stance made progressively more resolute by the intensification of the social and cultural changes in European reality. This is why Kantor kept immersing himself more and more deeply in the space of his repeated narratives, more than he had done in his previous plays, which

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13 T. Kantor, *Ja realny*, in: *Nigdy tu już nie powrócę*, from the programme of the production, Kraków–Mediolan 1988, p. 19.

14 C. Gallagher, *Why We Tell It Like It Wasn't: Alternate History Narratives*, lecture at the WP UJ, Kraków 19 November 2010, 4.30 pm.



had been created in the ideologically stabilised reality of communist Poland.<sup>15</sup> He intended to provide his reminiscences with a theatrical distance, so that his past should remain his own, rather than becoming completely colonised by the found or newly arising political discourses.<sup>16</sup>

In *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor for the first time adopted the role of a stage character (figs. 40, 41). He sat down at a table in an impromptu bar and as the – as he calls himself – ‘Mastermind of all this’ entered the interior of the world of his theatre. In spite of implementing his postulate of ‘non-acting’, he was continuously present on the stage as the most important protagonist, around whom the events of the performance unfolded.<sup>17</sup> In the descriptions of the play, the critics usually focused on the wealth of the artist’s self-commentaries and self-quotations from Cricot 2’s previous productions. These were inserted liberally into the play, and in the programme of the production Kantor provided a detailed author’s guide to them. Thus, there is no need to reproduce here those self-commentaries of the artist. One could even remark that, with such a detailed recording of self-quotations, an important aspect of Kantor’s play was lost – that of the incredible privacy of the stage, which for the artist had become the identity lab, the place where to manifest and observe the dimensions of his own subjectivity.

This is why a more productive exegesis of the relationship artist-stage in *I Shall Never Return* seems to be a scrutiny of the process of the creation of a theatrical production. Putting the rehearsals under the microscope opens a specific path of interpretation, revealing the code of the author’s intentions, which had been obscured in the creative process. The initial creative stage provides the insight that the majority of the scenes in *I Shall Never Return* has been derived from very personal experiences, realised as a result of the artist’s specific intentions, focused on evoking just a single moment of reality, required by him at that particular point, and necessary for him to familiarise himself with the realm of his subjectivity.

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15 However, it is worth observing that an interpretation of the circumstances of the Cricot 2 visit to Stocznia Gdańska in 1980 with its *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* provided a more subtle perspective on the links between the Theatre of Death and history. Cf. M. Pieniążek, *Akt twórczy jako mimesis*. Dziś są moje urodziny – ostatni spektakl Tadeusza Kantora, Kraków 2005, pp. 156–157.

16 As Jan Kłossowicz notes, ‘the most important thing in the production seems to be the matter of the function of the creator himself; his decision to cross the boundary which he had previously set for himself by entering into the performance and giving up his prior position which had allowed him the ‘author’s’ interference. Now, the interference is to be replaced by his personal presence as a ‘ready-made object’. Instead of acting out and ‘make-believe’, instead of illusion – there is now full self-presentation.’ J. Kłossowicz, *Tadeusz Kantor. Teatr*, Warszawa 1991, p. 96.

17 I wrote extensively about this topic in my monograph about T. Kantor’s last production. Cf. M. Pieniążek, *Akt twórczy jako mimesis*, *op. cit.*

With this comment I am drawing attention to a matter hitherto overlooked in the analysis of Kantor's art, namely the long-drawn and laborious creative process, in which the most significant scenes of the performance would undergo repeated metamorphosis *en route* to the final version to reveal to the public. Naturally, the final shape of a play cannot be appraised through its creative process. But when it comes to those spectacles about which the artist himself wrote that they were his personal confessions, it does seem worthwhile to delve below the surface of the apparently universalised, aesthetic images, into the preparatory phase, in order to see directly that about which Kantor wrote in his manifestos and which we would not necessarily be able to see when viewing the detail-perfect final product of the production. Indirectly, we should thus reach the answer to the question: why is it unlikely that any other recognised theatrical artist was unlikely to have been able, as Kantor did, to show publicly, next to himself on the stage, in a dramatic lowering of rank, the lofty ceremony of his own wedding with the participation of his own dummy?<sup>18</sup> Kantor's stage wedding has been lowered to the rank of a vulgar, saloon-bar level, where the waiter's napkin replaces the priest's stole. In that difficult-to-negotiate scene, Kantor had persevered – gradually and with precision, from one rehearsal to the next – to create a specific pathos which would intensify the experience.<sup>19</sup> He had achieved this also via the examination of his own emotions, triggered by the reactivation of memory reflexes during rehearsals.

Many days of corrections and suggestions, explanations and irritable moments had gone into producing the short scene. But it is worth noting how much uncompromised courage and resolution Kantor must have put into the episode which, in its initial stage, when it was still being acted out with little practice and without a music sound track, did not move the viewer but, rather came over as artistically inept and inappropriate.

Let's quote the recording of the rehearsal from 1 March 1987. At that point, it was still a year before *I Shall Never Return* would have its premiere:

*[The wedding ceremony of the dummy and the embassage is taking place, with the participation of the Priest. Kantor is correcting the actor's annunciation.]*

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- 18 Similar, though very over-aestheticised, gesture only began to appear in Polish theatre on the wave of the reception of J. Grotowski's later projects and the aesthetics of performativity which were being born in the West. Earlier, these had probably only been accessible to body artists (although, if one were to treat a poetic record as a record of experience, then, for instance, Wyspiański's *Requiem* could be interpreted as a self-presentation project, which placed the poet or performer at the boundary of fiction and a meta-aesthetic, lowered-rank reality). Cf. A. Krajewska, *Dramatyczna teoria literatury*, Poznań 2009.
- 19 Pathos in a sense close to the ancient Greek meaning: *pathologia* – 'investigation of passion' and *pathētikós* – 'sensitive'; from: *pátho* – 'experience, emotion, passion, suffering', from *páschein* – 'to experience, to suffer'.

No, no, no.

But no, don't stop: 'I take this...'

No, not like that. You have to act this out.

This is something that... but loud, loud and solemnly. If you don't, we won't do it at all!

More solemnly...: 'Do you take him as your lawful husband?'

No, don't speak like that, not so gently, why are you talking so gently?

Can't you make yourself talk a little more harshly?

'I take thee...' – don't rush it like that! 'I take thee as my lawful...'

'until Death us do part...'

Let's note the following remark, 'If you don't, we won't do it at all!' Kantor said this at a particular moment during the rehearsal. He was producing a deeply personal scene, which, in the saloon bar set-up, was difficult to carry off with the required solemnity. The cast was unable to implement fully Kantor's idea, thus ruining the intended solemnity, based on Kantor's familiar technique of bringing that which is close to the *sacrum* to the reality of the lowest rank. Kantor had included in the structure of the performance elements which could only exist in it if they were vested with an effect of solemnity, in spite of their apparent degradation. What was it all about, the attempt to achieve this specific artistic expression? It seems that this was about something more than mere aesthetics; this was about the protection of the subjective vision from an alien symbolic code, the protection of the artist's own past; a play undertaken in order to lead out onto the path of the creation of a precisely individualised identity, an independent narration about the self, independent also of dominant historic and cultural practices.

It was with ever more intense emotion that Kantor composed into the spectacle a scene which resembled the murder of his own Father in the Auschwitz concentration camp. It is interesting that Kantor had spent a long time working out the intonation of the lines spoken in that sequence, which, incredibly moved, he would also deliver personally. All this while Kantor's theatre is, in general, hardly associated with excessive care about language and the art of employing the spoken word.

Again, let's recall a moment from a rehearsal,<sup>20</sup> where Kantor's particular concern for respect for the status of the theme undertaken shows clearly:

*[The actor repeatedly, in German, delivers the announcement about the death of Kantor's Father. Kantor corrects his intonation.]*

'On 24 January, at night, in the year of 42, I died...'

*[The artist proposes:]*

Maybe we can play it so that everybody stands up, so that there is some reaction.

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20 A rehearsal of the 7 February 1987. A VHS recording, cassette no. IV/ 001542. The quotation that follows is also derived from the same tape.

Let's add that in the rehearsals that followed, the characters stood up when these words were spoken. This meant that the artist had incorporated into the performance the missing element that lent more solemnity to the scene of death – a scene which was, after all, being acted out in a saloon-bar environment, in the company of less-than-wholesome characters. To prove Kantor's continuous vigilance in not letting the pathos, so important here, be lost, let's quote one more extract from a rehearsal, this time from the 13 February 1987. Here, what comes over clearly is Kantor's disappointment with the meagre theatrical effect – a result of the failure to perfect sufficiently the prop on the technical level. But what should matter to us just as much is the bitterness, experienced by the artist, participating – even though unwittingly – in a deprecation of the memory of his Father.

*[The dummy of the Father is noisily wheeled onto the centre of the stage.]*

But, the fact that it has not even occurred to anybody that it would be a good idea to make them out of rubber, so they are noiseless... [a reference to the wheels of the stand on which the dummy is brought in.]

And that is the whole point, that nobody cares about making sure that we actually follow what we are talking about here... from the smallest detail to things precisely like this. And I can't cope any more.

*[Kantor, resigned, leans forward, putting his face in his hands; he throws his hat onto the table. A moment of silence follows.]*

That momentary resignation of the artist's is a testimony to the burden of the effort required to achieve the intended solemnity of the scene, which Kantor did not allow either to be trivialised aesthetically or to have its tone lowered. The artist continued to insist on on-stage solemnity of the kind that, following Jean-François Lyotard, one could call postmodern, not referenced by unattainable transcendence. That solemnity would be connected with prompting the repetition of suffering which, in turn, according to G. Vattimo, has to be borne, since there is no other metaphysical remedy for dealing with the pain, guilt and effects of a trauma. It seems that Kantor uses the theatre to deal very courageously with the recognition of his biographical experience, but he does it without employing the tools of modernist humanities. His final productions are by no means lofty assistance for a theatrical blurring of the sources of his own subjectivity; they do not leave the artist's and the viewer's gaze hanging in a semantic vacuum, at the boundary of language and representability of experience. On the contrary: Kantor's final spectacles are an important testimony to the existence of, hitherto un-medialised, sources of experience. Perhaps the artist had instinctively discovered that, as Keith Jenkins has it, we live in times similar to the 'pre-Socratean';<sup>21</sup> that, after the failure of the Renaissance project, it is

21 Cf. K. Jenkins, *Życ w czasie, lecz poza historią; życie w moralności, lecz poza etyką*, in: *Pamięć, etyka i historia*, ed. E. Domańska, Poznań, 2002.

necessary to look for contact with time, history, memory and the world beyond the contemporary range of doubts and certainties and beyond the modernist aesthetics.

#### 4. To End Modernity – to Blind the Modernist Mind

Pursuing new forms of self-awareness, Kantor, as both witness to, and victim of, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century ideologies, himself, as it were, annihilates his own cognitive mind so as not to see the world nor view it the way a modernist man would, confident in the validity of ideas, symbols and the objective supremacy of the meta-narrative. Kantor appears to revise the theory of modernist communicative rationality and the public domain. Clearly, he doubts the regulatory power of the domain of the public consensus, indicated by Habermas.<sup>22</sup> Instead of an extensive sphere of social community, he proposes an intimate dialogue about reality and memory through the presentation of everyday experiences. He accomplishes this, taking into account a theatralised relationship with his nearest and dearest, exposing the sphere of the dialogue with his own experience and the emotional communality of the audience (creating the ‘theatre of contracted emotions’).

Let’s recall that in his penultimate production, Kantor sat close to the stage, at his table, and marked out the boundaries of movement for the *imaginarium* of the past by traversing the stage. No longer was he – as he had been, for instance, in *The Dead Class* – merely a director, busying himself amongst the characters; a conductor; a demiurge. He was someone who had become veritably integrated into the performance; someone for whom the entire action had been created. By the same token, he created the scene for the presentation and exchange of the modes of recollection; as if, in a café, at a table, in a sociable atmosphere,<sup>23</sup> he were conducting a conversation about how he had remembered his world. Thus, Kantor demonstrates his praxis of recollection through his gestures, the choice of venue, time and himself *vis à vis* the past event. One could say that he is thus a precursor of the research discipline which analyses mnemonic practice, expanded in recent years by the likes of Jeffrey K. Olick.<sup>24</sup> He is a guardian of the creation of reality and stands guard over its connotations, providing his own person as the context; he stabilises reality into a *sui generis* myth, since he places himself, as

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22 Cf. M. E. Gardiner, *Wild publics and grotesque symposiums: Habermas and Bakhtin on dialogue, everyday life and the public sphere*, in: *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, eds. by N. Crossley and J. M. Roberts, Oxford 2004, p. 36.

23 T. Kantor wrote about this style of acting, which apparently dominated the rehearsals of the production, in one of the preserved manuscripts of the script for *Today Is My Birthday*.

24 Cf. J. K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*, New York–London 2007.

the superstructure of the language of transmission, in the space of the signifier. Myth (in the Barthesian sense) becomes visualised reality and, simultaneously, the place of the ritual, which enables entry into the myth and the experience of a sacred time; Eliadian, in a community, which confirms it by its participation.<sup>25</sup> Then the artist, as someone who, via an act of power and a creative renovation of the world creates it anew and becomes akin to a mythical god figure, participates in a world in which time does not flow, since it is a manufactured repetition.<sup>26</sup> The artist locates himself in the Khora space, which, as Plato indicated,<sup>27</sup> exists beyond time; it provides access to revelation and fulfilment created in a human way.

Kantor's final, unfinished performance, can be perceived – in accordance with its title – as the artist's attempt to create the space of his own holy day, and even more than that, a controlled repletion of his own *Genesis*.<sup>28</sup> In October 1989, during rehearsals for *Today Is My Birthday*, Kantor began to confront a replica of himself and the characters from his past in the most active way yet – by doing so dialogically (figs. 42, 43). *Today Is My Birthday* turned out to be the next-generation 'love-and-death machine', previously used to manufacture similar experiences in *I Shall Never Return*. The manner of placing the 'I' in the production/model/machine reactivating reality in 1988 seemed to lead directly to the devices which, in 1990, would enable Kantor to create on the stage the 'poor room of imagination', subjective/source reality which he wanted to inhabit and in which he wanted to die on the stage.

Anna Halczak points out that since 1988 the idea of a 'return' had had a progressively intense impact on the organisation of the artist's imagination. Inspired by the idea, after the premiere of *I Shall Never Return* Kantor created the cricotage *Silent Night*. There, he utilised the text written during his work on the very personal *Wielopole, Wielopole* (such as *The Child's Memory*, 1980). This, in turn, affects his last, unfinished work *Today Is My Birthday*. One proof of that is that *Today Is My Birthday* was supposed to have started with a reading by Kantor, similar to that with which *Silent Night* began:

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25 Cf. M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia. Wybór esejów*, comp. M. Czerwiński, trans. A. Tatarkiewicz, Warszawa 1974, pp. 86–113.

26 'My final journey in this life / which – just as I did my art – I perceived as a never-ending journey, / beyond time / – beyond all laws...', wrote Kantor. Cf. *ibid.*, *Nigdy tu już nie powrócę*, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–19.

27 Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. H. Lee, Penguin, 1965, pp. 48–53. Cf. works of Julia Kristeva on pre-symbolic modality which, according to the researcher, reveals itself in the Khora space. Cf. also J. Derrida, *Khôra*, in: T. Dutoit, *On the Name*, Stanford 1995.

28 In the production *Today Is My Birthday* there was a scene of a 'new creation of the world'; there also appeared, albeit in a somewhat Christianised and culturally grotesque guise, the figure of God – Jehovah.

First of all let's agree that this is not a performance. Next, that this is not the stage and that you are not the audience, that there are no props, that the chimney here is a chimney from my painting, so that this is my house.<sup>29</sup>

During the rehearsals of *Today Is My Birthday* Kantor frequently referred to the boundary between reality and fiction which ran across his stage and he kept dreaming about 'bringing illusion to the status of the real':

And again, I am on the stage. Against the regulations. I shall probably never explain fully and clearly this habit of mine. Not to myself, nor to you, ladies and gentlemen. But in fact, I am not on the stage, but at the boundary. In front of me is the audience, that is to say, you, ladies and gentlemen, or, to use a word from my own vocabulary, reality. Behind me is the so-called stage, in my vocabulary replaced with such words as: illusion, fiction. I don't step over the boundary either in one direction, or the other. All that I do, and what people colloquially call the theatre, takes place at the boundary.<sup>30</sup>

With such an opening reading, of which only a fragment is quoted here, Kantor wanted to introduce personally the spectators of *Today Is My Birthday* into the space of his stage home, that is to say, into the theatre turned into a peculiar 'reality' with which he would enter into the relationship of a dialogical repetition. That is where he would encounter his Family, arriving from the darkness of a huge, central painting; that is where he talked to his Servant; there he called in from the past his dead friends (figs. 44, 45).

## 5. To make REALITY, to live in the made

The artist used the stage for the repetition of his own past. Every succeeding entrance of the returning family or friends was a sudden manifestation of a memory particle, serving together to build the artist's identity. I wrote about this issue, employing the terminology of Charles Taylor<sup>31</sup> as 'repeat epiphanies'. As can be concluded from the present analysis, such an interpretation can be probed further, demonstrating that a return to a memory place may be a particular way of recovering one's identity, which relies on the subject entering the 'ultimate pathos of wondrousness'.<sup>32</sup> As Harold Bloom points out, such a mechanism can be

29 T. Kantor, a fragment of the speech made before the cricotage *Silent Night* in: ed. A. Halczyk, *Tadeusz Kantor. Ostatnie spektakle Teatru Cricot 2*, Cricoteka, Kraków 2001, pp. 6–7.

30 T. Kantor, *Dziś są moje urodziny. Zapis prób*, ed. M. Pieniążek (CD in: The Cricoteka Archives), Cricoteka 2002, p. 118.

31 Cf. M. Pieniążek, *op. cit.*

32 In the manuscripts for the production *Today Is My Birthday* one can find Kantor's notes, in which the artist talks about the 'miracle of poetry'; this gives the impression of entering the space of created reality.

seen in the poetry of John Keats and William Wordsworth. It enables the artist to escape the confines of previously experienced cultural influence and enables him to 'enchant the world anew'. Having come the full biographical circle, arriving back at the place where once upon a time, without any 'metaphysical backdrop', the world had taken place provides the poet with a sense of a clear horizon for naming the place where reality had manifested itself for the first time ever.<sup>33</sup> As a poet of his place and reality, Kantor was an artist of the return, who created himself from the matter of desire, image, writing, statement and performance. Almost literally coming out of his drawings onto the stage and being stage set by the Cricot 2 company, Kantor was ever ready to accept his old self, his returning self; thereby giving us an adventure romantic through and through, one which revealed the paths leading to the source of experience.

In Kantor's decision to enter 'live' inside his own epiphany we would appear to be dealing with an exploration of a new reality, reproducing and producing reality. Such a singular *mimesis* can be only partially described by means of the previously-mentioned Lacanian theory of representation of traumatic experiences. The reason is that, as we know, according to Jacques Lacan, we have no access to the Real; each attempt to get in touch with it is marked by a lack; we cannot see the Real in any other way than in the form of the effect of a trauma, a belated (*nachträglich*) reality effect.<sup>34</sup>

In the context of Lacan, it will be thus productive to consider another theory, sketched out by Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. It enables us to view Kantor as a 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-Oedipus who, having carried out modernist attacks on the secret of life and having made attempts to get to the other side of the modernist discourse, a place known as reality, subsequently abandoned a dualising epistemic model. He came to doubt the semiotic world, which is at the same time the world of constructivists and postmodernists. Having got to know, in *The Dead Class*, the false maps of language and all symbolism, when coming close to the Wall of Death, he put into motion the machine of desire, love and death. Using theatrical means, he achieved something that Michel Foucault had noticed in the divagations of F. Guattari and G. Deleuze: he negated both the Lacanian vision of the loss of the Real and Freud's theory; he decided to open up the possibility of searching, in single takes, for his dispersed self, the nomadic self. With the gesture of repetition, he stepped beyond the structural necessity of mediating the Real,

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33 Cf. A. Bielik-Robson, *op. cit.*, p. 350, pp. 352–355.

34 In Lacan's approach 'the Real', overshadowed by the 'objet petit a', appears only as a function of desire. 'The Real' is an absence, a void around which a symbolic order is constructed. Cf. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XI*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A. Sheridan, London–New York, 1998.



because, evoking the return of the Real,<sup>35</sup> he would evoke it in three dimensions, and not in a trope-based discourse. At the same time, he connected perfectly with his past self through self-empathy. He turned the performance into a machine of desire but, rather than an analogue, continual or narrative one – a machine pulsating with violent effect, which keeps venturing out towards new fulfilments, instantly realised in emotion, vision, dialogue, repetition.<sup>36</sup> The stage designed in such a manner uses desire in real space.<sup>37</sup>

A factual denial of the structural ideology of absence leads to the renewal of the relationship of the ‘I’ with the desired.<sup>38</sup> Leaving the prison of language provides a chance to reject the model of modern subjectivity in favour of existing in the continuum of a multiplicity of repetitions.<sup>39</sup>

Let me add, however, that above such repetitions of the ‘I’, a higher perspective had been built already, a unifying perspective which contained no drama or relationships with the Other. It provided a direct co-existence with the object of desire; it offered the knowledge that there is nothing apart from desire, which not so much becomes fulfilled as a result of having achieved the desired, but, rather goes back to its sources and only in those does it find reality; the place which William Wordsworth described in his *Ode to Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*; for John Keats, the place of revelation of being.

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35 In such a stance Hal Foster finds no more than the ‘nostalgia for being rooted in experience’. He also remarks that the revelation of the Real in the incredible objects of the performance can descend into surrealism. However – as Foster writes – while modernists tried to ‘venture beyond the principles of referencing’, and early postmodernists ‘loved a pure painting’, the followers of postmodern artists want to ‘possess that which is Real’ (also via abjectal games with reality). Cf. H. Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1996.

36 Cf. G. Deleuze, F. Guattari: *L’Anti-Oedip*, Paris 1972. Cf. M. Gusin, *Dwie koncepcje pragnienia: Lacan, Deleuze, Guattari*, in: <http://unus.psychologia.uni.wroc.pl/teksty/art/pragnienie1.html> (date accessed: 8 January 2011).

37 ‘And it was only much, much later that I brought that ‘invisibility’ into the real world. But that was / my play.’ T. Kantor, *Silent Night*, in: *Teatr Cricot 2. Informator 1989–90*, ed. A. Halczak, Kraków 2005, p. 122.

38 Kantor explicitly said that, as an artist, he operated in a place between ecstasy and death, in a place of happiness which is not perceived at the moment of experiencing it. It is a time and place stolen from the gods, as he put it in one of the interviews. That was the singular energy that he had discovered, borne within a man who had ‘sunk to the bottom’; that energy was a ‘charge’ which was to propel him through his final creative phase. Cf. *Powrót Odysa Tadeusza Kantora. Notatki z prób*, dir.: A. Sapija, a documentary, Cricoteka 2006 (DVD).

39 This opens new avenues for drama, which can take place side by side with capitalist and ideological games and their variously constructed realities. Cf. M. Foucault, *Preface to Anti-Oedipus*, Minneapolis 1983.

The poet reaches his fulfilment at the moment of the mysterious chemical reaction which binds his words to the surrounding space. Kantor reached fulfilment facing his self-emerging from the real/symbolic matrix.<sup>40</sup> It is therefore possible to say that Kantor's opus was a cluster of *events* in the sense in which Martin Jay uses the term, when he refers to an *event* as an eruption of libidinous energy<sup>41</sup> which language finds impossible to absorb (also in the sense of Heidegger's *Ereignis*).<sup>42</sup> Kantor's final productions were clusters of EVENTS (which is to say, in the sequence of concepts: Lyotard's clusters of sudden interventions of freedom, Deleuze's individual differences, Foucault's unexpected knots of phenomena) which no narrative could have previously expressed, because at that time none of the available symbolic systems which in Polish and European culture regulated and distributed human energy<sup>43</sup> would have been able to accept them. This is why Kantor, when entering the space of his EVENT, would simultaneously enter the space of a secular revelation.<sup>44</sup> Because, cutting off the horrific Hydra-like head of modern history, he left the spectators with a raw insight into the experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Among others, this is a reason why adequate commentaries on Kantor's almost god-like gesture could only take place *nachträglich*.

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40 W. Staniewski referred to a similar creation of a 'purified' experience. Cf. A. Duda, *Teatr realności. O iluzji i realności w teatrze współczesnym*, Gdańsk 2006, pp. 357–359.

41 Cf. G. Bataille, *Erotism*, trans. M. Dalwood, London–New York 1962.

42 M. Jay, *Fotografia jako wydarzenie* (lecture), IP UJ, Kraków ul. Grodzka 64.

See: M. Jay, *Songs of Experience: Contemporary American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 2006.

43 Suffice it to point out the issue of forms of memory about Auschwitz or the artist's positioning vs. totalitarianism. These issues play a significant part in Kantor's art.

44 See: K. K. Kozak, *Tragedia pauperum, czyli wyzwolenie dramatu synkretycznego*, in: *Kulturowe konteksty dramatu współczesnego*, eds. M. Bartosiak, M. Leyko, Kraków 2008, pp. 146–148.

# Epilogue. Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Personal Confessions: Notes on Late Style

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In March 1988, two and a half years before his death, while working on *I Shall Never Return* Tadeusz Kantor wrote:

Personal confession...  
a rather awkward and inconvenient technique. (...)  
There is something ultimate about it,  
something that is manifested only when one is faced with  
the E N D.<sup>1</sup>

This is not the first time that Kantor is talking about “the END” or his meetings with death. *My Meetings with Death*, his essay written a year earlier, presents the reader with a poetic incantation describing Kantor's encounters with death and her various symbolic, metaphoric, or allegorical representations from the time he was six years old, through World War II and the period of his theatre experiments, to that moment when

The performance has ended.  
The auditorium is empty.  
I am alone.  
SHE is standing  
backstage.

This immanent presence of death, I would argue, prompted Kantor to create a performance praxis that was not an enactment of an Aristotelian or Platonic reconciliation between subject and object, but a praxis best defined by the collapse and fragmentation of the structures folded into the known, visible, and sayable. Kantor offered us that something which ripped across a representational field of the culture industry: an *anamnesis* which elaborates an initial forgetting induced by the languages of intelligibility; *heterotopia*, a counter-site to the real site, in which the rules of the real site are recognized, contested, and reversed; and a *catachresis* which wrestles objects from their pre-assigned use value and

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1 T. Kantor, *To Save From Oblivion*, in: M. Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 389.

allows them to reveal their “objectness” and state of unrest in their relation to other objects/people in space. At the same time, Kantor’s doubling of “personal confessions” and the immanent presence of death bring to mind the conflicts and complexities lodged in the idea of late style as it was defined by Theodor Adorno in his 1937 essay on Beethoven and reworked by Edward Said shortly before his death in September 2003.<sup>2</sup>

Both of these thinkers pause over the late works of art crowning a lifetime of aesthetic endeavor. For Adorno, it will be Beethoven’s last five piano sonatas, the Ninth Symphony, and the *Missa Solemnis*; for Said, Jean Genet’s *Screens*, Luchino Visconti’s *The Leopard*, and Glen Gould’s late *Goldberg Variations* performances.

Adorno opens his essay with a pronouncement that sets up the tone for his investigation:

The maturity of the late works of significant artists does not resemble the kind one finds in fruit. They are, for the most part, not round, but furrowed, even ravaged. Devoid of sweetness, bitter and spiny, they do not surrender themselves to mere delectation.

These compositions lack, as he avers, all the harmony that traditional aesthetics demands from a work of art. The usual view explains this lack of harmony by suggesting that such works are products of uninhibited subjectivity transforming the expected harmony into dissonance caused by the suffering and the rage of immanent death. Late works of that kind are relegated “to the outer reaches of art, in the vicinity of document” (564) as a narrative record of one’s life or a reference to one’s biography. More important, they are investigated not in terms of what they accomplish but in terms of biography and fate. Thus, “it is as if, confronted with the dignity of human death, the theory of art were to divest itself of its rights and abdicate in favor of reality” (564).

Against this traditional backdrop, Adorno proposes a revision of the dominant view on late style. While commenting on Beethoven’s late fragments, Adorno points to the possibility that these fragments — not round, but furrowed, even ravaged — exist as if outside the convention, privileging an act of interpretation grounded in the principles of harmony and attempting to minimize dissonance between the pieces. This is Adorno’s way of extricating an understanding of greatness in art from the bourgeois conception of linear progress and the positivity of completeness. Moreover, these late fragments demonstrate Beethoven’s indifference to appearances. To be more precise, if, according to Adorno, the

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2 See T. Adorno, “Late Style in Beethoven” in *Essays on Music*, selected, with intro, commentary, and notes by R. Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); E. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006). All page numbers are references to page numbers in these essays.

content of art is traditionally understood as being always mediated (or reified) by a convention — thus, it is always only an appearance — Beethoven's late works, which often give the impression of being unfinished, expose the aporia between the artistic convention and the subjectivity itself which does not align itself with the formal law from which the content of the works of art emerges.

This formal law is revealed in the thought of death:

If, in the face of death's reality, art's rights lose their force, then the former will certainly not be able to be absorbed directly into the work in the guise of its "subject."

Death is imposed only on created beings, not on works of art, and thus it has appeared in art only in a refracted mode, as allegory. (566)

If, in the face of death's reality, art's rights lose their force, then the power of subjectivity in the late works of art is the irascible gesture that breaks the bond with formal law not in order to express itself, but in order to expressionlessly cast off the appearance of art. In the works themselves, this power is found in fractures and fissures, in fragments scattered around which no longer can be gathered into a coherent landscape or an image, rendered as timeless, but which transform the space into a dynamic site of unregulated relationships:

Objective is the fractured landscape, subjective the light in which—alone—it glows into life. He [Beethoven] does not bring about their harmonious synthesis. As the power of dissociation, he tears them apart, in order, perhaps, to preserve them for the eternal. (567)

In the history of art, continues Adorno, late works, containing in themselves the riddle of humanity as a dialectical image, are the catastrophes which are like an emergence of another world inside a narrative, performative or sonorous landscape...

Elaborating on Adorno's insights, Said shows how this type of lateness can make its way into essays, poems, novels, films, and operas of literary and musical artists and critics. In his own critical work, Said often deals with the issue of beginnings and continuity. However, prior to his death in 2003, he adds one more subject: "the last or late period of life, the decay of the body, the onset of ill health [in order to] focus on great artists and how near the end of their lives their work and thought acquires a new idiom, what I shall be calling a late style" (6).

For him, this new idiom is the idea of artistic lateness, "not as harmony and resolution but as intransigence, difficulty and unresolved contradiction", as a factor of style that involves "a nonharmonious, nonserene tension, and above all, a sort of unproductive productiveness going *against*..." (7).

Said's text is a reading par excellence of Adorno's essay as well as a critique of Adorno's treatment of Beethoven's late style. Said's commentary does not necessarily lead to sublation in the Hegelian sense, but, on the contrary, it builds on Adorno's idea of late style, meanders through his thought, folds back upon itself

in order to disclose a continuous process of change, the object's state of unrest, thus drawing attention to its mediality rather than its place in the continuum of artistic development. Consequently, Said notes, Beethoven's last works constitute "an event in the history of modern culture: a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order to which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it" (8).

What Adorno has to say about late Beethoven is clearly a philosophical construction. What Said has to say about poems, novels, films, plays, and operas by such artists as Euripides, Beethoven, Mozart, Lampedusa, Visconti, Cavafy, and Mann is how their works reject the existing order to reveal the history caught in the act of inventing forms of presentation of the events. This does not mean that historical materialism has been abandoned. On the contrary, lateness and late style signify for Adorno and Said the moment when the artist, fully conscious of the established social order, chooses to go beyond the "ordinary" realm to reveal the workings of this particular order and its mnemotechnics. Adorno and Said, like Beethoven, have become the figures of lateness itself and, "untimely, scandalous, even catastrophic commentators on the present" (14). "It is part of morality not to be at home at one's home," says Adorno in his autobiographical *Minima Moralia*.<sup>3</sup> "In the performance of unreconciled individual critical thinking there is 'force of protest'" (15), echoes Said. Lateness, therefore, is a kind of self-imposed exile from what is generally acceptable or consensual. Lateness is fragmented landscapes, indifference to appearances, intransigence, and unresolved contradictions. Fixated on fighting the ornament, illusion, reconciliation, communication, humanism, and success, art becomes a cascading series of fragments escaping the confines of the formal law to accentuate all the more glaring the illusionary character of traditional works of art and to regain the shattering force of the new.

Adorno's indifference to appearances, his fractured landscapes, the notion of late works as catastrophes, and Said's idea of lateness as an unresolved contradiction, of the artist's alienated relationship with the established social order, of late style being *in* the present or *in* reality but *apart from* them or *not of* them, bring to mind yet another figure of lateness: Tadeusz Kantor, and his theatre of personal confessions.

My productions  
*The Dead Class*,  
*Wielopole, Wielopole*,  
*Let the Artists Die*,  
 and this last one,

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3 T. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 39.

*I Shall Never Return*,  
 all of them  
 are personal confessions.<sup>4</sup>

What are these personal confessions? In *The Dead Class* (1975), these were Kantor's obsessions: World War I, World War II, Nazi power, his own memories of the past. In *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980), the inhabitants of his room of memory allowed Kantor to explore his thoughts about life and death, about his family and historical events, and about Christianity and Judaism. *Let the Artists Die* (1985) presented the condition of an artist in contemporary society. Kantor's private life, history, and art diverged, converged or coalesced to reveal the active terrain on which Kantor staged his battle against "official History."<sup>5</sup> His individual human life was to be set against the "consumerism of the world," even at the price of "pain, suffering, despair, and then shame, humiliation, derision."<sup>6</sup>

In *I Shall Never Return* (1988), a new maneuver was to take place to ensure that Kantor's memories would be taken literally as a gesture recounting death, destruction, humiliation, torture, massacres, and piles of corpses:

I am... onstage.  
 I will not be a performer.  
 Instead, poor fragments of my  
 own life  
 will become  
 "ready-made objects."<sup>7</sup>

What does it mean for one's life to become a ready-made object? Kantor wrestled with this question in "The Real 'I,'" while he was working on *I Shall Never Return*:

Everything I have done in art so far,  
 has been the reflection of my attitude  
 towards the events  
 that surrounded me,  
 towards the situation  
 in which I have lived;  
 of my fears . . . ;  
 of my skepticism;  
 my hope.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, the Autonomous Theatre, the Informel Theatre, the Zero Theatre, the Theatre-Happening, the Impossible Theatre, and the Theatre of Intimate

4 T. Kantor, *To Save From Oblivion*, [in:] *Further on, Nothing*, p. 389.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 390.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 393.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

8 T. Kantor, *The Real 'I'*, [in:] *Further on, Nothing*, p. 394.

Commentaries not only marked a new phase in the history of the Cricot 2 but, more important, introduced new techniques to radically reposition both Kantor and the functioning of his theatre in the changing historical and cultural milieu. Kantor revealed these changes by annexing the officially sanctioned reality and challenging its cultural weapon, theatrical illusion, in places of the lowest rank: a bombed room, a café, a wardrobe, a poorhouse, a cloakroom, which were recognized as traditional theatre spaces—in order to explore degraded objects, matter, marginalized objects-actors, everyday life, and self-enclosed actions.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike in his previous productions, where Kantor had organized his room of memory onstage while the audience entered the performance space, the performance space in *I Shall Never Return*, the inn in which Kantor found himself, was a site where Kantor's universe and the poor fragments of his life — his artistic ready-made objects — converged. At the end of *I Shall Never Return*, in the intimate epilogue after his self-examination, Kantor entered the “empty night.” Nothing separated him from his “ready-made objects.” Nothing separated him from “their voices.” Nothing protected his consciousness from doubt. “It is like the emergence of another world” – in exile from what is generally accepted as normative and representational.<sup>10</sup>

In *Today is My Birthday* (1990), this “another world,” delimited by four picture frames placed on stage, was filled with objects and people that kept emerging, disappearing, and re-emerging in different shapes in which they had performed their functions in the life of Kantor as a visual artist:

The existence of the P A I N T I N G and its interior  
in this production creates the illusion of the SECOND DEGREE,  
in the presence of which my Poor Room  
onstage  
(which could be seen as illusion)  
becomes r e a l i t y.<sup>11</sup>

The four frames, therefore, accentuate the illusionary character of the traditional work of art in order to regain the shattering force of the act seen “as if we saw it for the first time.”<sup>12</sup>

The first frame is placed between the auditorium and the performance space organized by a fixed place assigned to Kantor himself. Had he been alive, he would have walked around or sat on a chair, as he used to, and would have assumed the function of the holder of the discourse, projecting invisible traces of his memories onto the performance space and participating in the events unfolding there. Now

9 See Chapter 1, “Topography of Representation,” [in:] *Further on, Nothing*.

10 G. Deleuze, *Minor Languages and Nomad Art*, [in:] *Deleuze Reader*, p. 194.

11 T. Kantor, *A Painting*, [in:] *Further on, Nothing*, p. 496.

12 T. Kantor, *Silent Night (Cricotage)*, [in:] *Further on, Nothing*, p. 437.



only his ghost/memory hovers within the frame, while the audience is made aware of its limits by Kantor's voice coming from a loudspeaker: "Again, I am on the stage. ... To be precise, I am not on the stage, but at the threshold."

The memory of Kantor's presence onstage emphasizes the shock of his physical absence now. Instead of the body, there are his statements about Life, Death, Memory, Room of Imagination, and his Theatre. They remind us that the person who generated our creative energy is no longer with us. Even though Kantor and we belong to different universes, his words about his artistic endeavors create a site, or an illusion of a site, where there exists a possibility for all of us to function "as if past and future have ceased to exist. ... Everything is intertwined; one could say, everything exists simultaneously."<sup>13</sup> Kantor, who even when alive, hovered like a ghost around the stage, allows us to see ourselves in his exteriority and to reexamine our own thoughts about Life, Death, Memory, History, and Theatre.

By so doing, Kantor makes us realize the validity of Michel de Certeau's argument in *The Writing of History*: "[a] fact that has been recorded and is today assumed to be historically valid is shaped from conflicting imaginations, at once past and present."<sup>14</sup> De Certeau never disputes certain events may have occurred – or, I may add, that certain people existed. Rather, he emphasizes the ephemerality of events or existence and shows how various uncertainties are transformed into permanent texts belonging to the dominant representational and normalizing structures. In order to avoid these and similar appropriations, de Certeau argues for the process of writing history in which the focus would be on how events or people are described, how they are considered meaningful or important, and how they become worthy of record or notice. Accordingly, the function of the historian is "to question that order, to marvel that it exists, to wonder what made it possible, to seek, in passing over its landscape, traces of the movement that formed it, to discover in these histories supposedly laid to rest 'how and to what extent it would be possible to think otherwise'."<sup>15</sup>

One consequence of this process is the realization that, while destabilizing the representation of an event or a person, we disturb the language of intelligibility that delineates what will be remembered, what will be understood, and what must be forgotten. At the same time, as de Certeau reminds us, the language of intelligibility promotes a selection between what can be understood, accepted, and aesthetically palpable, and what must be forgotten so that we may obtain the representation of the event. However, "whatever this new understanding of

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13 T. Kantor, *Notes to a Film Script, Powrót Odysa* (unpublished ms., 1990), p. 5.

14 M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. T. Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 15.

15 M. de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 194.

the past holds to be irrelevant — shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explanation — comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies: ‘resistances,’ ‘survivals,’ or delays discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of ‘progress’ or a system of interpretation.”<sup>16</sup>

This resistance to representational effects brings to mind Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*, Joseph Beuys’ object-reminders of World War II, Francis Bacon’s *A Study of Velázquez’s Portrait of Innocent X*, Robert Wilson’s installation *Memory/Loss*, Meredith Monk’s *Volcano Songs*, Peter Handke’s *Die Stunde da wir nichts voneinander wußten*, and Daniel Libeskind’s architectural designs for the Jewish Museum in Berlin, all of which are stark examples of representational practices that challenge traditional representation by exposing fissures in its surface permanence and the crisis of all its referential systems in the late twentieth century. Beckett, Beuys, Bacon, Wilson, Monk, Handke, and Libeskind produce knowledge and representational practices that are governed not by the totality of their effects but by their inherent structure. “They are knowledge as nonconceptual objects. This is the source of their greatness. It is not something of which they have to persuade men, because it should be given to them.”<sup>17</sup> As nonconceptual objects, these works of art destabilize the constancy of distance between our points of reference, show “nothing” that screams in the presence of the invisible, turn against our instincts, and force us to renounce our experience. As nonconceptual objects, these works create a nomadic art of close vision in which all orientations, landmarks, and linkages are in continuous variation.<sup>18</sup> “No line separates earth from sky, which are of the same substance; there is neither horizon nor background nor perspective nor limit nor outline or form nor center; there is no intermediary distance, or all distance is intermediary.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the events unfolding within the space of the first frame and Kantor’s recorded voice commenting upon them remind us of the nonconceptual quality of objects and people on stage.

The second, third, and fourth frames are concrete and visible. Stage right, there is a frame containing the Self-Portrait; up centre, a frame with the “Doors of Death,” from behind which different characters will emerge; and stage left, a frame with the Infanta.

Always present onstage during the productions, the Self-Portrait is a singular mirror in which Kantor’s image, like the image of Philip IV in Velázquez’s *Las*

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16 *The Writing of History*, p. 4.

17 T. Adorno, *Commitment, The Essential Frankfurt Reader*, eds. A. Arato and E. Gebhart (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), p. 317.

18 See *The Deleuze Reader*, ed. and with an intro. by C.V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), ch. 19, for definitions of nomad art and haptic space.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 167.

*Meninas*, usurps the position of the privileged subject of representation by erasing the objects positioned within the performance space. It was only by so doing that Kantor could restore what was lacking in the formation of the stage image. For the audience, he justified the reasons why they could not find their own reflection in the character onstage or why they were not invited to participate in the formation of that representation. For the actors, he made this practice intelligible by explaining it in terms of the condition of death:

TAKING PLACE AT THE MOMENT WHEN, OPPOSITE A HUMAN (A SPECTATOR), THERE STOOD FOR THE FIRST TIME A HUMAN (AN ACTOR), DECEPTIVELY SIMILAR TO US, YET AT THE SAME TIME INFINITELY FOREIGN, BEYOND THE IMPASSABLE BARRIER.<sup>20</sup>

Reflections and doubles mutter an almost inaudible question: "Who is there?"

The frame with the "Doors of Death" (or, to be more precise, the gap between the frame and the door) is a place where the exchange between the Self and the Others has been taking place since *The Dead Class*:

In front of us,  
in this poor and dusky room,  
behind the doors,  
a storm and an inferno rage,  
and the waters of the flood raise.  
The weak walls of our ROOM;  
of our everyday or  
linear time  
will not save us...  
Important events stand behind the doors,  
it is enough to open them...<sup>21</sup>

Once the doors open, Kantor's Room of Imagination fills with objects and people that keep emerging, disappearing, and re-emerging in the diverse shapes in which they performed their functions in the life of Kantor as a visual artist: a moldy book from *The Dead Class*, an oven with a chimney from *Silent Night*, a series of Kantor's paintings from different stages of his artistic journey, a family photograph and a family portrait from *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, his recent paintings: *I am Leaving this Painting* and *Infanta Margarita Came to my Room that Night*, the Cleaning Woman from *The Dead Class*, *Let the Artists Die*, and *I Shall Never Return*, a human Emballage, the janitor, Pedel, from *The Dead Class*, Doctor Klein, the soldiers, generals, politicians, and dignitaries as well as their monuments and machines of power from *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, *Let the Artists Die*, and *I Shall Never Return*, the grave diggers and their crosses from

20 T. Kantor, *The Theatre of Death*, [in:] *Further on, Nothing*, p. 237.

21 T. Kantor, *The Room. Maybe a New Phase*, [in:] *Further on, Nothing*, p. 369.

*Wielopole, Wielopole, Let the Artists Die, and I Shall Never Return*, and, finally, the family table from *Wielopole, Wielopole*.

The frame with “The Infanta” in her black lace dress covering a construction made of whalebone is a visual representation of Kantor’s 1962 essay about two versions of his painting *Infanta Margarita*.<sup>22</sup> In *Today is my Birthday*, both Infantas existed in the space of the room/found reality. The Infanta in version I represented a work of art which, for Kantor, was a “closed system” positioned within its own reality and historicity (the time of Velázquez). The Infanta in version II was Kantor’s own creation. The two Infantas revealed their characteristics by displaying the tensions between them, between their incompatible systems of representation, and between them and other characters who tried to resolve the conflict.

As the events onstage indicate, however, the frames are not stable or enclosed in themselves. Neither do they produce their own representations and histories. Rather, they can be seen as openings into a discourse which exists as an open field positioned outside and beyond the stage history, an autonomous theatre, or Kantor’s autobiography, as illustrated, for example, by the moments when the Self-Portrait can no longer contain himself within his frame and falls into the performance space, or when the Infanta, ridiculed by the Poor Girl and Maria Jarema, leaves her frame and participates in the actions onstage, or when “people who had died a long time ago, memories of events which, as if in a dream, had no explanation,” force their way onstage from behind the “Doors of Death.” Once the characters and the events emerge in the space of this “other” discourse,

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22 . . . Velázquez’s Infantas

like relics [...]

are dressed in real and ornate coats. . . .

. . . wearing these stately garments [...]

[they] shamelessly exhibit their complete indifference to the public.

The facades of death

enclosed in paper boxes. . . .

second version

[...] a grey, second-rate canvas

. . . the portrait itself consists of two separate parts which were later joined together with iron hinges.

The painting can be folded like a suitcase.

It seems that nobody cared that the Infanta looks as if broken into two halves.

. . . Maybe, it was done for practical reasons in order to make easier the transport and the showing of the Infanta, a curiosity of the Wandering Panopticum. . . .

An old postman’s mail-bag was a substitute for the Infanta’s famous dress which, like a chasuble, was spread over the frame made of whalebones.

It was believed to be an adequate imitation.

T. Kantor, “Infantka Margarita” (unpublished, ms., 1962)

the frames, though still present, stand empty. With the temporary erasure of the content of the frames, the narratives represented by them cease to be binding and, consequently, the “characters” can engage in exchanges which are not determined by the traces of their past representations. More importantly, the explanation of “illusion” is being offered to you in the present, in the sense of the “illusion” thus reflected; and it is always a partial explanation that must forever be started anew, prolonged, tied together; its importance arises more from the pressures it exerts on the general text than from any “truth” it is supposed to reveal, its conveying of information or deformation.<sup>23</sup>

The Self-Portrait, the Infanta, and the people/memories do not simply tell their individual stories, nor is there “any truth [they are] supposed to reveal;” rather, they disclose and map out the topography of this “other” discourse.

This “other” discourse in Kantor’s theatre is a space of representation which, unlike Artaud’s nontheological space, produces itself and its own commentary without ever sublimating its form and shape, as the opening exchange between Kantor’s recorded voice and the Self-Portrait evidence. The “other” discourse is similar to Plato’s definition of spaces involved in the construction of an object.<sup>24</sup> This “other” discourse — the Platonic *khora* — is neither the space of the holder of the discourse nor the space of sensible/physical representation, that is, it belongs neither to Kantor nor to the objects of his creation (the framed narratives). At the same time, it “contains it all,” and it makes the formation of representation possible. It does not act as an intermediary between dialectical oppositions. It is

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23 J. Derrida, *The Apparatus or Frame, Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 299.

24 “[I]t must be agreed that there exists, first, the unchanging form, uncreated and indestructible, admitting no modification and entering no combination, imperceptible to sight or the other senses, the object of thought: second, that which bears the same name as the form it resembles it, but is sensible, has come into existence, is in constant motion, comes into existence and vanishes from a particular place, and is apprehended with the aid of sensation: third, space which is eternal and indestructible, which provides a position for everything that comes to be, and which is apprehended without the senses by a sort of spurious reasoning and so is hard to believe in—we look at it indeed in a kind of a dream and say that everything that exists must be somewhere and occupy some space, and that what is nowhere in heaven or earth is nothing at all. And because of this dream state we are not awake to the distinctions we have drawn and others akin to them, and fail to state the truth about the true and unsleeping reality: namely, that whereas an image, the terms of whose existence are outside its control in that it is always a moving shadow of something else, needs to come into existence in something else if its to claim some degree of reality, or else be nothing at all, an exact and true account of what is ultimately real supports the view that so long as two things are different neither will come to be in the other and so become at once both one and two. See Plato, *Timaeus and Critias* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 70–71.

not a passive receptacle into which Kantor could throw forms and objects, nor is it a spatial interior molded by its objects.

In Kantor's *Today is my Birthday*, the space between the four frames records the four faces or frames of representation. Being neither a place nor a non-place, it creates and produces nothing, not even an event, since an act would establish an order, consolidate a form, or make a promise. Rather, an order, a form, or a promise can only be introduced, shaped, or made within the boundaries of the "frames."

Thus, in *Today is my Birthday*, the space between the frames becomes the focal point of the discourse where diverse traces of representation are gathered together before they are dispersed back into their frames to prevent the temporal articulation of an operation that could be appropriated by the eye. Every time this happens, an image, suddenly existing outside and beyond the control of the "framed" representation, comes to life to claim some degree of reality, as does the Self-Portrait in the opening scene, when he can no longer contain himself within the picture frame and falls out into the space of *khora*, the space of unregulated relationships. So do the other characters in the closing scene. The space between the frames fills with the objects and characters from Kantor's past productions. All intermingled, they repeat the words and phrases from those other pieces. The irrepressible chaos is beyond becoming a "framed" narrative.

Kantor's double move of wrenching and hollowing out of objects or spaces from everyday reality and history of the twentieth century as well as of separating them from the appropriating gaze of the audience, dissolves the traditional notion of representation. Rather than speaking of representation, Kantor speaks within representation. To speak within representation is to acknowledge that it is neither a process of transfer (Aristotle) nor of doubling (Plato), but a practice of forming an object which, as it emerges within a particular index of reality and as it is coded into practices, is assigned a certain status. This status legitimizes its movement into various other networks and fields of use. Once the locus is established, the identity of representation can be maintained, disseminated, or challenged. Such a practice can lead to the establishment or replacement of the boundaries, to the evaluation or reevaluation of agent and agency, and to the establishment or reestablishment of the mode of functioning of the subject. Kantor dealt with representation not by opposing it but by operating within it, by providing strategies and tactics to articulate the practices that altered the mode of functioning and the topography of representation. In his artistic work, Kantor drew attention to strategies and maneuvers which problematized the postulate of reality by transgressing the boundary between the world of illusion and the world of reality; he revealed the particularity of the subject position by showing its heterogeneous moments, and, ultimately, he demonstrated the tactic of a nomadic thought that, while

traveling through the landscape of representation, recorded erosions in the idea of permanence in representational performance and visual arts.

Today, two decades after Kantor's death, the historian, the spectator, and the art critic faced with his *oeuvre* defined by the phantoms are confronted with unstable eclectic historical and intellectual records that are quickly becoming nostalgic traces of his presence onstage. What is left out however, is the specificity and singularity of Kantor's practice that always reflected his attitude toward the events and the situation in which he worked. His theatre was, as he so forcefully contended, not a representation of but an answer to reality.<sup>25</sup> This answer was shaped by the objects of the reality of the lowest rank which disrupted a utopian dream by exploring fissures and cracks in the national mnemotechnics. *Today is My Birthday* presents us with the unsettling substance of Kantor, who no matter how hard we try, can never be reduced to a representational image finding its (dead) reflection on a smooth surface. To think about Kantor's theatre practice is to think about the "shattering force of the new," about a radical theatre practice interrogating the ontology of a theatre that takes exception to the normative order of things and tries to think "otherwise." Kantor never cut himself off from the world but he staged a battle for life and death in his poor room of imagination:

Against  
half-human creatures  
stands  
a h u m a n b e i n g ...  
It is only in  
this "individual human life" that  
TRUTH  
DIVINITY and  
GRANDEUR  
were preserved.  
They should be saved  
from destruction and oblivion;  
saved from all  
"powers" of the world;  
despite the awareness  
of impending failure.<sup>26</sup>

Maybe this last thought — a call for action "despite the awareness of impending failure" — is a radical gesture in Kantor's theatre of personal confessions addressing the riddle of humanity as a dialectical image. Kantor's personal confessions visualize on stage an *anamnesis* that elaborates initial forgetting, a *heterotopia* that reveals a landscape as well as traces of the movement of thought

25 T. Kantor, *From the Beginning in my Credo Was...*, [in:] *Further on, Nothing*, p.497.

26 T. Kantor, *To Save From Oblivion*, [in:] *Further on, Nothing*, pp. 390–391.

that has formed it, and a *catathresis* that shows hollowed-out objects staging a protest by exposing history and politics caught in the act of inventing forms of presentation. His notes on late style, as a way to think about aesthetic forms, embed the consciousness of their own historicity.

These material forms, a series of cascading fragments or personal confessions, articulated and rearticulated by Kantor, did not surrender themselves to mere delectation nor bring about a harmonious synthesis. Kantor's cascading fragments and personal confessions were a determined negation resulting not only from the critical attitude toward the past tradition but also from the lack of synchronicity between the object and those aspects of the object which reality or convention glosses over to be able to assign to it a cultural use-value. Kantor's cascading fragments and personal confessions revealed the object's state of unrest, the resistance it put up against being appropriated as an object of knowledge, and the "consciousness of the present which explodes the continuum of [official] history."<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, in the history of art/performance, Kantor's late works are the catastrophes...

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27 The phrase is Walter Benjamin's. See Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian," [in:] *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, p. 227.



**4.**  
**Writings, Recordings, Clichés**  
**and the Living Archive**



## The Anatomy Lesson: Kantor's Plots

*Jan Klossowicz*

Let me start by pointing out that what I will be talking about contains broad general reflections stemming from the topic itself and, to a great extent, has a personal character.

The paper which I delivered at the 1995 symposium occasioned by the fifth anniversary of Tadeusz Kantor's death started with my reminiscences of the conference *Tadeusz Kantor. Artiste a la fin du XX-e siècle* held at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Today I would like again to recall the climate of those days: it is 11 June 1989, the second day of the conference, with over twenty participants from a number of countries, including Peter Brook, Jan Kott, Denis Bablet, Bernard Dort, Pierre Restany, Franco Quadri... There are a few hundred people in the audience. The atmosphere is solemn and yet charged, as if during a storm. Kantor comments on every contribution; he takes endless questions from the auditorium; he throws off his jacket and keeps pacing around the table, gesticulating and snapping his braces, as he would during a rehearsal in the Krzysztofory Gallery. As always, he delivers his trademark one-man show, more exciting than the whole conference, actually... But the audience is waiting for something more: for an indispensable row. Yesterday, there was one. Now comes my turn. In the last part of the conference, concerned with the current and future influence of Kantor's theatre on other artists, I present a paper with the provocative title *Le Théâtre de la Mort doit-il mourir?* Too provocative a title. As soon as I finish, there comes a roar. Kantor jumps out of his chair, waving his arms about and shouting in French, with his very Polish accent and pronouncing his 'r's very hard, *Mon théâtre ne mourra pas! Mon théâtre est immortel! Immorrrrtel!*

My main theme then was Kantor's paradoxical attitude to his own performances. What I had in mind was the choice that he had made by taking up the theatre apart from painting, when aside from his 'immortal' works he began to create theatrical performances 'condemned to death'. On the other hand, right from the start he demonstrated his opposition to the fate of the theatre, the fate as cruel as that of man himself. This manifested itself in his constant documentary efforts aimed at recording and preserving that very ephemeral field of art. However, even the most modern and sophisticated forms of visual documentation, such as film or video recordings and compilations, remain just that – documentation, and not the work itself. They are its flat, often false or even caricatural reflections. The memory of

a theatrical work recorded in documents and reminiscences can be no more than an inspiration for others. I also said that one could imagine that at some point in the future, young directors might take one of Kantor's scripts and, treating it as a drama text, stage it in their own way.

Peter Brook was the next speaker. He recalled a meeting with young English directors on the subject of what it was that they learnt from other (older) theatre artists.

The first to speak was a young female director', Brook told us, 'who said that she would like to mention Kantor because his work had helped her very much. And that was the way,' continued Brook, 'in which Kantor had arrived in England, that is to say, the country which is the most closed and isolated from continental Europe. This young person had found in Kantor's performances concrete and precise experiences which she was able to internalise and reprocess in her own work.

Then, while eventually comparing Kantor's oeuvre to a beacon which would continue to illuminate and show the way rather than get buried in the archives, he did partly agree with me.

The light of that beacon can be seen frequently, and many outstanding artists have admitted that they are inspired by Kantor's theatre; there have even been some attempts (unfortunately, not very successful) at staging productions based on Kantor's scripts. I have happened upon some of these reflections myself, sometimes in the most unexpected places. In 1994, I was invited to join the jury of the Festival of Experimental Theatre in... Cairo. In fact, I owed the invitation to Kantor because the organiser, a graduate of the Theatre Academy in Warsaw, had translated into Arabic and published my book about Kantor's theatre. One of the most interesting events at the Festival was a production from Bahrain which received an award, and rightly so. Its director, a bearded individual with a big belly, kept conducting the performance throughout, running about amongst the audience and the actors. An English colleague sitting next to me leaned across and whispered into my ear, 'a Kantor from Bahrain...'

At the Krakow session that I am referring to I admitted that Kantor had been right to shout at me, because his theatre did still exist – only that it existed in works of other artists. It existed as a concept of a performance, as its general idea and as a vast set of signs, instructions and warnings which Kantor had left to his successors. And if the essential features of the theatrical style and structure of Kantor's performances can be found in the works of contemporary directors, then it may be said that Kantor's ideas have become part of the 'genetic code' of the theatre. And this is the main task for us; by 'us' I mean theatre critics.

To my mind, this task has not yet been accomplished. Of course, we can keep going back to Kantor's theatrical opus, looking for its aspects which have not been written about and described; we can rediscover the lost tracks and straighten

out the erroneous interpretative trails mapped out on the hoof; we can make comparisons and résumés, we can synthesise. But such activities are not part of direct interpretative and evaluative criticism; rather, they fall within the scope of theatre history, which – in contrast to art history or the history of literature – sets out to describe and evaluate performances which are no more...

Thus unlike art or literary historians, who analyse organisms which remain alive, we find ourselves today in a situation similar to that of forensic detectives, familiar figures from TV crime series, who carry out post-mortems. When looking for the genes of Kantor's theatre in the productions of his successors, on the other hand, we can conduct research on living organisms – contemporary performances which we view and analyse. And Kantor's theatre keeps influencing directors or even playwrights, not only superficially, as in the case of the director from Bahrain or recently Tadeusz Słobdzianek's *Nasza klasa* [Our Class], but in a significant way. However, going back to Kantor's works, we can research and analyse merely their material remnants. Such investigation is only too reminiscent of the autopsy which Kantor presented caustically in his happening *The Anatomy Lesson after Rembrandt*. I remember how we all crowded around Kantor as Professor Tulp's students in the cramped space of the Foksal Gallery in 1969, watching him carrying out his dissection of clothes, a post-mortem which he later described as follows:

It is enough just to take the first step, / to dare to separate one thing from another, / to be able to discover a new internal world. (...) the top layer! / I cut away / the middle layer, / here comes the bottom layer! (...) Pockets!/Lots of pockets! / We stick everything into them / or almost everything! / chewed-on pencils / toothbrushes / remnants of rolling tobacco / matches / balls of bread (...) This is the interesting matter / and content / of these intimate hidey-holes (...) **pockets!** / funny organs / of the human instinct / to store relics / and to remember!

I am mentioning all this because I feel distrustful and ambivalent towards any *ex post* exegesis of Kantor's texts. Dealing mainly with current theatre criticism as I do, I would now probably also prefer to carry out a search for 'Kantor's genes' in the work of contemporary directors, but since I have not written any reviews for over ten years, I simply would not be in a position to take on such a task. Let me also add that I wrote what mattered to me most about Kantor when he was still alive. When he died while working on his next production, my book about his theatre had already gone to print. Now, however, I have crossed over to the other side, so to speak. I stand next to a post-mortem table on which there lies – just as the clothes did in *The Anatomy Lesson* – what is left of Kantor's works. There are very many layers and pockets there. The documentation of Kantor's theatre is an impressive collection, exceptionally varied and unusually rich – from material objects and audio-visual recordings, through all sorts of records and descriptions,

to self-recordings, self-commentaries and manifestos of the artist himself. The ample library collection of books which have been written about Kantor is yet another matter.

I have taken quite a hazardous, or perhaps naïve, decision in attempting this autopsy. The point is that since the 1950s, the work of theatre artists – with Grotowski and Kantor being the most prominent amongst them – and later also of theatre critics has been dominated by the concept of the theatre as an autonomous or almost autonomous field of art. For this reason, Konstanty Puzyna called his 1960 collection of essays *To, co teatralne* [That Which Is Theatre]. Of course, all that happened at the expense of dramaturgy, treated merely as material for the performance, or else completely overlooked. But after many years of engaging in criticism under the banner of ‘that which is theatre’, I would like now to present an opposite approach. I propose to view Kantor’s stage productions – with the remnants of Cricot 2 performances on the table before us – as dramas.

This is a concept which is intentional in character, based on assumptions, and not a thesis posited to be proved. This is a suggestion which contains questions but not answers. It is not my purpose to prove that Cricot 2 productions are dramas which have not been written down to the very last detail. I simply want to consider whether it is possible to ‘revive’ them in such a form, and also to find out whether such an attempt might bring anything new to the exegesis of Kantor’s work.

However, in order to ‘revive’ the productions and to ‘see’ them as ‘dramas’, one needs to use the unprocessed documented material which I have already referred to, rather than invoke its analyses and syntheses which already exist.

The whole idea is not only weird but certainly contrary to Kantor himself, who battled for so long against literary fiction as well as illusion which is the basis of the traditional naïve perception of drama on the stage. I can imagine what Kantor would shout at this moment if he were to return here, after all...

Before I embark on a detailed description of this procedure, however, I would like to define its scope. I need to stress straight away that the experiment might be carried out only on the performances from the period that Kantor called the Theatre of Death. The artist’s earlier productions (*Balladyna* and *The Return of Odysseus*) are poorly documented, whereas the Cricot 2 performances based on the texts of Witkiewicz’s plays would be better used to analyse the ‘games with Witkiewicz’ – to juxtapose the action line of the performances with the plots of the dramas on which they were based, something that, in any event, Kantor himself did explicitly. Of course, it could prove very interesting to trace again and define what Kantor created in his performances despite the author of *The Water Hen*, or perhaps even against him. However, such games with Witkacy is something quite different from creating one’s own dramatic structures, where potential borrowings of a plot or a motif are a common practice, familiar in Shakespeare, for one.

Therefore, it seems to me that it will be useful to compare Witkacy's and Kantor's stances on the times in which they lived. Kantor made such a comparison himself on one occasion, in the texts from the collection entitled *Mówić o sobie w trzeciej osobie* [Talking about Oneself in the Third Person]. He writes:

The reality of Witkiewicz belonged to that happy interwar period. (...) the reality of the promiscuous imagination taking no notice of the bourgeois life logic; bohemian coffee-house reality, shocking and protesting. The protest had been born of the World War I. (...) The war had been quickly forgotten. But what was left was: mockery, sneering, the spirit of protest, a suicidal sense of humour. (...) There were more relics of that old deliberate PROTEST there, there was more posing and 'playing a part' than a PREMONITION of a new war.<sup>1</sup>

However, as he notes later:

Kantor's reality belonged to the world where Death conducted its gruesome wedding ceremony. (...) In that war in which Kantor found himself, there was nothing but DEATH. Death was so omnipresent and omnipotent that it became the embodiment of FATE; so that the notion of a protest in relation to Death's pathetic slavish lackeys was absurd. What became important was one's attitude to death. (...) In his theatre, Kantor defined that attitude. It was a GAME. A game with DEATH.<sup>2</sup>

What matters to me here is not that Kantor turns out to be unjust towards Witkiewicz, whose plays do, after all, generally end with a harbinger of total destruction, but that he derives the genealogy of his primary and fundamental topic – which Death has been ever since *The Dead Class* – from history. What matters is that in juxtaposing the artistic stance of Witkiewicz with his own, Kantor maintains that their roots lie in their different historic experiences, which he calls realities.

One must also note that, when writing about his essential topic and the causative factor of his entire theatre, Kantor rejects the 'purely biological meaning' of protest against death, investing it instead with a quasi-ontological meaning (hence, perhaps, Kott's term 'the theatre of essence'), although it also derives, as I have already stated, from historic experience.

Let me dwell a little on the useful comparisons with Witkiewicz. As we know, the concept of the Mystery of Existence constituted the basis of his philosophical system; this was one of the reasons why his views were compared with existentialism. At the same time, Witkiewicz closely linked this fundamental philosophical notion not only with aesthetics but also with artistic creativity. And, to put it simply, his concept of the creation of works of art, including dramas of course, relied on the pursuit of the ideal of Pure Form, while the goal of the work itself was to evoke the crucial 'experience of the Mystery of Existence' in

1 T. Kantor, *Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975–1984, Pisma*, vol. II, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2004, p. 433.

2 *Op. cit.*, p. 435.

the audience. This led to the well-known and numerous devices he employed to rid the drama of any 'life content', devices such as the breaking of the plot, the negation of the time sequence and the logic of action, the substitution of the grotesque for tragedy and comedy and so on... Nevertheless, as Witkacy himself acknowledged, the form of his dramas kept getting 'polluted' with historic, social, political, psychological and, above all, philosophical content, because time and again he would use his characters to expound his own doctrine. That is why he classified even his own plays on the basis of how close they were to Pure Form. These days, we take no notice of his classification and, what's more, the plays that we appreciate the most – precisely because of their content and of what Witkiewicz tells us through them – are his most 'polluted' dramas.

Although Kantor never formulated his philosophical ideas explicitly, and his aesthetics never took a defined shape, he fought illusion as much as Witkiewicz did, opposing the popular reception of performances that was centred on their meaning and based on following the plot with empathy. Like Witkiewicz, Kantor discredited 'life content' when it spoke to the audience too powerfully, although he did it by direct intervention during the performances themselves. He did this because his aesthetics was based on the fundamental conviction that the theatre was the only place where one could cast away fear, terror and trembling and embark on a game with death – and the performances were meant to draw the viewer into the game. Kantor did not claim to be trying to create an ideal performance based on a 'pure' game with death, nor, even less so, did he classify his productions in those terms; however, the performances, as we remember them, certainly coerced us into entering the game. Today, when trying to read them afresh as 'storylines', we should, no doubt, define their historical context and historical content. Actually, this is something that Klaudiusz Świącicki has done, with great precision and in minute detail, in his book *Historia w teatrze Tadeusza Kantora* [History in Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre]. However, in order to go further so as to look for factors other than historical ones, we would have to engage in an analysis of all the threads, motifs and characters in those performances, which would be synonymous with traditionally understood dissection of the plot.

Kantor's productions have been analysed on the level of their plots. These analyses are very detailed and exhaustive. However, they mostly concern the internal structure, whereas I would like to consider the possibility of conducting an analysis of particular threads, motifs and characters from the semantic angle, focusing on their significance, which may be secondary or parallel to the main theme.

One would also need to be aware of Kantor's inspired artistic principle or device to which he referred in French as the *constructivisme d'émotions*, the constructing of emotion, with almost architectural implications. Since we know



that this method depends on the deliberate creation and introduction of elements intended to evoke certain premeditated emotional responses in the viewers, it would make sense to consider what could have triggered a particular reaction in the audience, which experiences of the viewers Kantor wanted to appeal to, and what means – scenes, motifs or characters – he employed to achieve the required emotional reception in particular instances. Moreover, one would need to ask whether this emotion-forming operation concerned only certain elements of the performance or the performance as a whole; whether the very game with death was not a game with the viewers' emotions as well.

However, in order to prove the above hypotheses, it would be necessary to perform at least a working reconstruction of the plots of Kantor's productions, not in terms of their construction but through an analysis of the presented events and characters. Due to its subjective nature, such a technique could be called deconstruction, but I prefer to use the traditional tools and stick to the old-fashioned methods and terms.

Far be it from me to be advocating such hypothetical reconstructions, because I try to present Kantor as the author of some sort of would-be dramas so that they could then be staged. That would be a misunderstanding. The reconstruction would be required solely to aid in a semantic analysis of the artificially 'reanimated' productions.

Thus, the basic question which one should now ask concerns the 'unprocessed' materials to be used in performing the hypothetical reconstruction. As mentioned earlier, these are very varied documents, from audiovisual recordings, preserved material objects, on-the-spot descriptions or notes to, above all, Kantor's own scripts – that is to say, the scripts of particular performances, published retrospectively, complete with the author's notes and explanations. I have recovered them in the preliminary description of the 'post-mortem'; now I would like to describe an attempt at analysing them in detail, classifying them and assessing their efficacy.

The first layer consists of material remnants of the performances. They seem extremely important, because those 'objects', 'machines', 'mannequins' and costumes (labels never used by Kantor himself) have not turned into a collection of clothes left by the dead, as it happens with the collections of costumes in various theatre museums, but they continue to 'live' as visible signs of what their creator wanted to convey through them and the emotions which he wanted to stimulate. However, this impression may be deceptive, because all those objects, although created for the purposes of particular productions, continue to 'live' indeed, but they live more and more a life of their own as separate works, and not works of the theatre but works of art. Art historians can, indeed, take away that part of our 'property' from us... And, more importantly, they can also, in a sense, take away some important ingredients of Kantor's theatre from him to the benefit of his

visual art. They will be viewing all those Death Beds, Aneantisising Machines, Rat Traps, the figures of Uncle Priest or the School Keeper in a completely different way. They will see in them not mannequins or characters from the performances, stage set elements or props (again, Kantor himself used none of these terms), but sculptures, emballages or installations. And they will write something quite new. Perhaps something that would have never occurred to us.

The next layer consists of audio-visual documents. Here again we have an incredible abundance, and many films and other records of Kantor's performances are veritable achievements in that field. Some of them enable us to follow the entire course of the performances and are essential in the reconstruction of the plots. Even so, they must not be taken at face value or assumed to be an equivalent of watching the performances live.

The film, video or digital recording and reproduction of theatrical performances have a long history. When those methods of documentation were first used, they seemed a wonderful means of finally making the theatre 'immortal'. However, the euphoria related to the first tape recordings of performances has long evaporated. We now understand not only that it is very difficult to film the theatre, but also that even the use of the most mobile camera with an adaptive-focus lens or the simultaneous use of several cameras will not replace the viewer's eyes that can take in the entire performance or select its fragments without the need to perform close-ups or parallel recording – something that a film producer has to do in order to edit particular frames, which results in a film divided into distinct sequences interspersed with editing cuts. It is also almost impossible to convey by those means the atmosphere created by the audience. The most significant aspect, however, is that film recording transforms a theatrical performance into another artistic genre, with different aesthetics, and subject to different rules of perception. As a result, we are watching a film and not the theatre. We are watching the theatre as if we were watching a film... Thus, yet another layer proves to be less than ideal material for reconstruction. And, just as the previous one, it escapes into another artistic genre...

Now let's examine the layer of written documents. These include reviews written just after Polish or foreign premieres, when the performances were still fresh in the viewers' minds. Like the majority of Kantor researchers, I have little confidence in them, because they contain only haphazard descriptions and rather superficial analyses and comparisons; only sometimes one can find there judgements or pronouncements which are really significant. As a matter of fact, I myself made a written record of *The Dead Class* in 1975, instead of writing its review.

Let's now take the most important part of this layer, Kantor's own scripts, which are crucial for the entire experiment. The relevant texts here are *The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole*, since *Let the Artists Die* and *I Shall Never Return*

have not been scripted and the *Guides* included in their programmes cannot perform that function.

Since we do have the scripts, or at least their synopses, then perhaps attempts at reconstructing the plots are simply superfluous? After all, one could conduct the entire analysis on the basis of the scripts and possibly the guides, and simply reject the other material.

Let me start with some questions. What do the scripts include, and what do they leave out? Do they define the topic or the main topics of the productions? Do they indicate the specific elements designed to evoke or evoking concrete emotional reactions in such a way that this function of theirs is made clear? In both scripts, the course of the performances, divided into sequences, has been presented consistently. The traits of the characters, descriptions of the objects and the symbols which appear in particular scenes are included. The descriptions of the characters' actions and the functioning of the objects are so detailed that this often lends them the air of the author's poetic commentary. From both scripts, one can derive the complex (particularly so in the case of *The Dead Class*) multi-level plot structure of both performances. However, in the script of *The Dead Class*, the juxtaposition of fragments of the plot of *Tumor Brainowicz* with the description of the action in *The Dead Class* looks like an illustration of the game with Witkiewicz rather than a record of the whole. It also seems that we won't find there any answer to the question as to why Witkiewicz's plot had been reshaped in just such a way and what purpose this served. But crucially, the script is missing Kantor himself. It is missing a record of the frequently described, truly original function which Kantor had assigned to himself and which he fulfilled during the productions. This function, which served a wider purpose than just to disperse illusion, has evaded all comparisons (including, first and foremost, the comparison with 'conducting'), and it constitutes one of the most important elements of what we call Kantor's Theatre. Anyhow, we know that Kantor's interventions during the productions – such as correcting the actors' play, altering the pace of the action or the rhythm, introducing pauses, adjusting the volume of the music, and especially his presence amongst the players, 'illegal' in terms of traditional poetics – all served more purposes than that of 'destroying illusion' in the spectator and, in a very significant way, affected the course of the performance, the meaning of the individual scenes or the interaction between the actors, thus determining the final shape of the entire work. It is well-known that the very presence of the originator of all this, 'the prime mover', his personal presence, transported the performance into another dimension and invested it with its original character.

In the script of *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor for the first time revealed his presence on the stage and quoted the text of 'his character', in which he defined the autobiographical nature of the performance; the text, however – as he emphasised

– had never been delivered. Throughout *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor's activity was the same as that in *The Dead Class*, and his presence on the stage remained, in his own words, 'illegal'... and was overlooked in the script.

The situation was quite different in *Let the Artists Die* and in *I Shall Never Return*, where, as we know, Kantor abandoned his peculiar on-stage status and decided to forego the resultant extraordinary and original poetics of his performances; instead, he appeared on the stage as an entirely 'legal' character, in the traditional understanding. In *Let the Artists Die*, we are dealing with 'I. A real character, 'the prime mover'; in *I Shall Never Return*, with 'I – MYSELF'; hence, in both instances, Kantor's presence is based on a 'normally accepted' principle, different from that adopted earlier. Unfortunately, the brief *Guides* do not describe this aspect of the performances sufficiently.

If we want to continue discussing what else is missing in the published scripts as regards the plot structure of the productions, we probably need to mention detailed description of the characters together with their significance. In vain shall we look for any comments on such an important aspect of Kantor's productions as the atmosphere created by the choice of lighting. Nor has the prominent role of music been brought to our attention in an appropriate manner. Yet it is music that influences the purely emotional responses of the theatre audience most powerfully, and – bearing in mind the 'constructivism of emotion' or the 'architecture' of emotional impact' – in Kantor's theatre music acquires an exceptional position. On the basis of the scripts and, even less so, the guides, we cannot form any idea at all about the emotive or semantic impact of the waltz *François* or the Jewish lullaby used in *The Dead Class*; of the military march *Szara piechota* [The Grey Infantry], Psalm 110 and the carol *Lulajże, Jezuniu* [Sleep, Baby Jesus] in *Wielopole, Wielopole*; *Szara piechota* again and the hymn *Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal* in *Let the Artists Die*; or the tango *Tiempos viejos, Lulajże, Jezuniu* again, the Hebrew song *Ani maamin*, the antiphon *Salve Regina* and *The Rákóczi March* in *I Shall Never Return*... The same applies to the many rattling sounds and other assorted noises which constitute an equally important musical element of these productions.

Coming to the close of my stock-taking of the 'post-mortem' material, I must refer to my own records of Kantor's productions. Starting with *The Dead Class* right to *I Shall Never Return*, I made tape recordings directly while watching the performances. I did not analyse the intentions of the author nor seek to make any generalisations. When making a transcript and editing the recording of *The Dead Class*, I juxtaposed it with the working version of the script which Kantor let me have and, in consequence, I added some fragments of the dialogues and monologues. In the case of *Wielopole, Wielopole*, I availed myself of the script which had appeared in print. My records of *Let the Artists Die* and *I Shall Never*

*Return* are based on tape recordings only, with that of *Let the Artists Die* being briefer and more descriptive, since I have watched the performance once.

The records are superficial, because I have avoided making any comments or interpretations. They are subjective, because, inevitably, they express what I have been most struck with, what has triggered my emotions and imagination and influenced the literary shape of my notation. And that, indeed, has been my intention: to make a record from the spectator's point of view as an 'eyewitness account' rather than as a carefully planned and edited representation. In that sense, as I have mentioned, these records function as reviews, since – even though they are not appraising – they draw attention to what their author has found the most significant, attractive and revolutionary in the performances. Besides, they record some other important elements, such as Kantor's actions during the performances or reactions of the audience, which are of course absent from the scripts, or which have not been given sufficient emphasis in the films.

All in all, the most important sources of reference for my purpose are existing scripts and, to a smaller extent, the guides, and in parallel, the audiovisual recordings; the latter being somewhat precarious to rely on, due to their 'film poetics'. Written notes are a backup for those sources. These are aided in turn by first-hand memory of what one has witnessed; this, however, becomes less reliable as time goes on...

As I stated at the outset, my aim has been to present here the idea of a different way of viewing Kantor's performances and to consider the sources that could be used in reconstruction, or re-interpretation, of their plots. The next stage could be their reconstruction, followed by an attempt to arrive at a synthesis. Let me observe that the very notion of treating these performances as dramas already suggests certain hypotheses and allows verification or legitimisation of the comparisons made earlier. For example, one could say that from the formal point of view, Kantor's dramas – sorry, his performances – which are a projection of his own personality, are close to the expressionist *Ich Drama*. And, since expressionism leads directly to the Middle Ages, they are indubitably reminiscent of morality or mystery plays, both in their complex plot structure and in the allegorical nature of the characters that appear in them. Considering their content and the reflections therein as well as the general image they give of their times, one could also juxtapose them with works of the playwrights who – in spite of Nathalie Sarraute's statement, in her once famous post-war essay *The Age of Suspicion*, that the era of genocide goes beyond artistic imagination and cannot be a theme for literature – did, nevertheless, set out to take up the challenge.

It is in order to refer back to the anecdote I recalled at the beginning and to the 'dispute' with Kantor about the 'immortality' of his theatre. Whilst, initially, taking his side in the argument, I have now attempted to present a proposal to

demonstrate this 'immortal' quality by altering the poetics of his productions – by venturing to turn them into dramas. I have concluded that, should such a conversion be possible, it would be possible in turn to analyse the Cricot 2 performances from a different angle and in a wider context. This would open up new vistas especially for those researchers who are too young to have seen them live and who must, of necessity, rely on value judgements and syntheses of their predecessors as well as on 'post-mortems' of the performances left by the dead. As a result, they would then have at their disposal the same living substance of Kantor's oeuvre as has been available to their predecessors, and their situation would resemble, for instance, that of art historians who deal with Witkiewicz's works.

Crucially, however, while ruminating about the proposition to reconstruct the Cricot 2 productions, I have presented my thesis and listed and analysed the potential sources of reference mainly in order to find the answer to this basic question: is such a reconstruction, or 'revival', possible at all?

The hypothetical reconstruction of Kantor's productions in the form of their plots, that is, texts which would contain their almost complete record, would entail a fundamental alteration of their poetics – turning a spectacle into a quasi-drama. The point here is not to 'create' or 'recreate' the dramas in order to put them on the stage, but to arrive at a subject of further research. As I have emphasised, such an idea is not without considerable risks. First and foremost, the performances recorded by means of text, in however satisfactory detail, would be extremely impoverished in comparison with Kantor's stage versions. We would have at our disposal a precisely mapped out storyline, a record of the plot, a clearly defined theme complete with the separate strands of action and a detailed description of each character, including the 'originator of this all'; we would have a description of the set or the scenery (the visual aspect of the performance), including all the stage objects and costumes, as well as a description of the music employed. The problem is, all this would be dead.

Crucially, the reception of a performance and the reception of a text are governed by different laws. In the old phenomenological terms, a literary text is concretised in the imagination of the reader, whereas a theatrical performance is a concrete phenomenon received directly. Essentially, even with a 'literary' reconstruction at our disposal, we will still not be able to respond to the performance as a whole, with all the wealth of the means it employs. Nor will we be able to experience its emotional aspect – which matters especially in the context of Kantor's 'constructivism of emotion' or the 'architecture' of the emotional impact. What we will have in front of us will not be the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, but its skeleton.

And so, getting back to the down-to-earth metaphor of *The Anatomy Lesson*, we have found ourselves again not even in the dissecting room but in the mortuary.

Abandoning the metaphors, one must state clearly that the inability to create or recreate the performances has far-reaching consequences. This is related to perhaps the most important issue set out at the outset, concerning theatre history and its field of study. Of course, I am not trying to rediscover here the commonly known basic differences between the materials which are the subject of study of theatre historians and the materials dealt with by literature historians (including drama historians) as well as by art or film historians. However, it seems to me that, on this occasion of another meeting with Kantor, it has been entirely in order to conduct an imaginary experiment in 'resuscitating' his theatrical performances, an experiment doomed to failure from the start. Such an endeavour should be viewed as a manifestation of a longing for what 'shall never return' and an expression of sorrow and guilt which stem from the fact that, perhaps, we have failed to describe and analyse his performances sufficiently or well enough. Trying to make up for those failures, we are now in the same hopeless situation as researchers from the younger generation. We can do no more than return to what we ourselves and others wrote about Kantor in his lifetime, or rummage around in the relics. Or we can opt for something that seems far more creative and intriguing: for a quest for 'Kantor genes' in the currently made performances and dramas. However, this is the task for our successors and for many future generations of Kantor scholars.





# Reading Tadeusz Kantor

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Tadeusz Kantor's own comment, one of many, about his texts is a fit start for a reflection on the issues raised by his writing:

This dialogue/monologue is being conducted in an incomprehensible language, in abbreviations, outbursts, with swearing and with passion – I would like to translate it to some extent into commonly used language.<sup>1</sup>

Because Tadeusz Kantor is read more and more frequently, it is worthwhile to consider the significance of the present renaissance of the artist's writings. Studies of his texts, a collective edition of his writings, as well as performances based on them – for instance, *They Perished* by Paweł Passini – are all testimony to the fact that the written word plays an important part in the modern reception of Kantor's works. The description and analysis of his texts thus do matter, because it is through the most durable element – his published texts – that we access the opus of the author of *Wielopole, Wielopole*. I would like to draw attention to an obvious fact: the material endurance of the texts, much greater than that of the theatre, as well as to the attempts, made by Kantor himself, to save them from becoming a thing of the past, from experiencing that superannuation that is the fate of a work of art firmly set in time.

When reading Kantor's statements, we superimpose our interpretation of his writings onto his artistic and theatrical work. What is more, a natural, and thus chronologically later, reception of Kantor's texts not only leads to the reconstruction of his stance and his legend, but also has a significant influence on the re-interpretation of the achievements of the author of *The Dead Class*.

How should these texts be treated? It is clear at a glance that Tadeusz Kantor was a prolific author of diverse writings. There is no scope here to try to systematise the artist's works in terms of their genology. It is, however, worth noting that typology plays an important part in pursuing the theme of Tadeusz Kantor's place in contemporary culture. Kantor's *oeuvre* contains manifestos, sketches, essays, notes, theatrical scripts, critical opinions, memoirs, letters and poetic letters. What do these texts have in common? Above all, they are marked by the specific form

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1 T. Kantor, *Od autora*, in: *idem, Pisma*, vol. I, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974*, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, p. 7.

and function ascribed to them by the artist. It seems that a geneological description of their function may now be helpful in reading these texts not only within contemporary Kantor studies but also in a broader cultural context.

What, then, can we glean from Tadeusz Kantor's texts? First of all, according to the artist's intentions, we may note amongst them manifestos which create an artistic discourse in keeping with the conventions of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century avant-garde. In them, Kantor explains his work and the line of its development, but – more importantly – he shows the significance of a given convention and its artistic and cultural antecedents. One should also note that Kantor stylised his writings as notes or informal scribbling. Thus, they may be considered as drafts in which he recorded his ideas and concepts used in other fields of his artistic activity. The texts also provide a basis for treating them as essays about art (indeed, many are explicitly so defined). Moreover, frequent references to Kantor's own creative work suggest that the texts should be regarded as self-commentaries, an opportunity to elucidate his own artistic and theatrical work. There are also reasons to interpret these texts as instances of the diary convention, allowing them to be treated as memoirs, an autobiographical account, albeit fictionalised to a large extent but open to interpretation in the context of concrete events.

These various interpretations are fully justified and can be proven without taking any gross liberties. However, they do not provide answers to all the questions we ask with reference to those texts, which, although fulfilling each of the above-mentioned models to a certain extent, are not merely a textbook implementation of any given genre. Such a one-sided approach could lead to undue interpretative simplification. There would be the added risk of shifting the emphasis and subjugating the texts to Kantor's artistic and theatrical work. In doing so, we would deprive them of their autonomy as literary material, which the author himself was keen to grant them.

Kantor's texts function as stand-alone literary works. Thus, many interpretative issues arise which need to be considered in analysis of such notations. Writing was *one field of Kantor's art*, in which his other activities were reflected. As I have mentioned earlier, Kantor wrote prolifically and in various circumstances. This means that each phase of his creative work, all his paintings and theatrical productions 'found their right places' within the texts; each of his projects was connected with a large number of notes, publications or manifestos. Moreover, Kantor did not merely write statements to be published, aimed at an audience, such as his comments printed in exhibition catalogues or programmes of performances. A large portion of what he wrote came in the shape of notes, sketches or drafts growing around his ideas and presenting new versions, familiar from previous or texts publications. Additionally, the discursive format afforded by the written word created favourable conditions for expressing reflections of a general nature.

This is one reason why Kantor's literary pieces cannot be treated merely as a record of or testimony to a particular artistic idea or an artistic phase. In this respect, there is a visible inconsistency in Kantor's writings. On the one hand, they constitute a document of sorts; on the other, the reflections that they contain are more universal and independent.

One can posit that the documentary character of Kantor's texts is a result of stylisation understood in literary terms; that it is a deliberate aesthetic device which also serves non-literary purposes.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that most of the statements were written with hindsight, after certain artistic ideas, practices and methods as well as works of art had acquired the context of having been received in a particular way. Naturally, this goes against the status of the texts as documents. Writing after the event, going back to artistic projects from the past involves continuous self-reflection and interpretation. Those records show how various ideas, practices or concepts affected Tadeusz Kantor's work. Moreover, the disturbed chronology meant that the author was in a position to impose his post-dated point of view on events which had taken place earlier. Of course, he did not focus exclusively on his own work. His texts also touched upon phenomena in art history and presented views of a more theoretical nature, enabling us to see which ideas Kantor regarded as important to 20th-century culture.

The discursive form of the texts allowed Kantor to comment on the functioning of various concepts in art or on the methods of using and transforming them in subsequent artistic practices. He often delved deeper, reflecting on his own changing stance and the reasons thereof as seen from the perspective of the transformations in 20th-century art. He also referred to artists who had introduced new trends or new artistic concepts.

The function of instilling order in one's own achievements is important; what also matters, however, is that the author of *The Dead Class* has imposed that role of his writings on researchers studying his texts. This 'rewriting' of his earlier statements was an artistic device intended to demonstrate the value of problems discussed in his works. Of course, not all his texts were a 'manipulation', as Kantor used to describe them. It should be noted once again, though, that they were edited years after the event, that most of them had different versions and that the author quoted or rewrote them in various contexts. It is not my intention to verify that process. What matters to me is the very fact that such a mode of thinking existed at all. This is significant as a reflection of Kantor's artistic self-awareness, which permitted *sui generis* mystification.

Kantor frequently used self quotation, as well, which was a direct outcome of his returning to his earlier texts. He delineated the development of his art in detail

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2 T. Kostkiewiczowa, *Stylizacja*, in: *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. J. Sławiński, Wrocław 2000.

and he interwove it into the artistic changes of the past century. That is why he kept coming back to his own texts and editing them anew, revising, correcting, adding (or crossing out) various threads, so as to capture, define and ‘explain rationally’<sup>3</sup> his conduct and the changes taking place in his art. To that end, he often used self-quotes because, through referring to his own words and investing them with extra authority, he made his writing and his art homogenous. In this way, he created – although a better word would be ‘explained’ – the consistency of his activities.

It is worth noting that for the artist, the written word was a means of rational elucidation of his artistic choices – particularly in painting. Through such a use of his writing, Kantor’s artistic achievements acquired homogeneity; he demonstrated that all his projects complemented one another. By the same token, the cohesion of his creative work, demarcated and ‘explained’ in his texts, meant that the texts had become part of his artistic activity. In this context, Kantor’s texts were an important element of his art. The term ‘rational’ played a major role in Kantor’s formula for the annotative function of the texts. After all, the art of words is by its very nature discursive. It is literature that provides the best means to analyse and probe into arguments of one’s opponents, the better to demolish them or to prove one’s own point. The art of words makes ‘rational explanation’ possible. This mattered greatly to Tadeusz Kantor, an avant-garde painter of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who, while accepting discursiveness in literature, rejected it in visual art. However, this was one of the important strands in art of the past century. Kantor defined his activities as a painter, whilst reserving theoretical discourse for the text. The theoretical aspect is clearly visible in Kantor’s abundant written references to contemporaneous artistic movements and transformations not only in art but also in broadly understood culture.

Kantor employs (frequently, but not exclusively) discursive genres such as a manifesto, an essay or a treatise. By these means he is able to argue in a rhetorical manner: to elucidate, find proof, demolish counter-arguments, provide examples and so forth. Of course, the reason for such practices is again the discursive character of the texts and the theoretical function assigned to them by their author. Thus, their rhetorical stylisation is mainly due to their function. The texts are mostly manifestos or essays which aim to posit and prove a thesis. Kantor uses varied poetical devices; he is aware of the genological markers and he employs them according to the function which he wants a particular form to fulfil. This is precisely the case with his manifestos. They are implementation of the genre *par excellence*. However, Kantor introduces certain modifications; in most cases, his manifestos lack an ‘adversary’, a clearly defined and brutally attacked opponent.

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3 T. Kantor talking to Mieczysław Porębski on 5 December 1989, in: M. Porębski, *Deska. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, Warszawa 1997, p. 96.

This is partly due to their function and the circumstances in which they are used, related to a work of art – a painting or a performance. However, the implementation of the genre can be observed in the very shaping of the text, independently of the context of visual arts.

Kantor's facility with synopsis means that in his role as the author, he can provide a concise, synthetic cultural diagnosis of various phenomena. This sentence from *An Attempt at My Biography* is a good example:

(...) As if by stealth, I had a great longing for quite the opposite world-view: (...) for the Polish romanticists, mainly the legendary Wyspiański (...) and, finally, Witkiewicz with his theory of destruction, total negation and insatiability.<sup>4</sup>

The description of Stanisław Wyspiański as a romanticist is at odds with his usual historical and literary classification. Kantor, however, pinpoints the characteristic features of Wyspiański's work. What is more, he invokes the popular reception of his legacy. In turn, when writing about Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz and the transformations in modern art, Kantor links him with artistic automatism and psychedelic art and calls his *Portrait-Painting Firm* a typical anti-art activity. Of course, these terms do not correspond with the classification accepted as a norm in cultural history. Nevertheless, the tendencies spotted and labels provided by Kantor hit the nail on the head, demonstrating those characteristics of his predecessors which are important to contemporary art and emphasising the significance of those artists for culture in the future.

The first person singular is a characteristic mode of expression in Kantor's texts. They are all personal. This means that when discussing problems related to art and culture, Kantor always speaks personally – as the specific 'I'. He views the phenomena which he writes about through his own artistic activity. Thus, the texts can be treated as manifestos, as his own contribution to the issue in question. At the same time, the term 'manifesto' should be put in inverted commas, since the genre is typically used to make statements on behalf of a group, while Kantor always talks on his own behalf, as an individual.

The artist frequently presents his interpretations as objective descriptions, as statements of facts, and he quotes examples. At the same time, as a practitioner, he is fully aware how art should be pursued. This is why he so often draws on the tradition of the manifesto, a genre which has retained its rhetorical structure in modern literature. Even those texts which he does not specifically call manifestos propose a blueprint for art; writing them, Kantor reinforces his belief in himself as an artist and he justifies his art to the reader. This reinforcement, this 'fighting his own corner', are significant if one considers Kantor's avant-garde approach. The innovative character of his art necessitates such annotations, which demonstrate

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4 T. Kantor, *Próba mojej biografii*, manuscript from the private archive of the artist's family.

to the readers the reasons for and the complexity of his artistic choices. At the same time, Kantor evokes the changes in 20th-century art, employing the rhetorical device of exemplification. In this way, he places himself in the context of the cultural transformations which took place in the past century.

In most cases, the 1<sup>st</sup>-person-singular – or, in Kantor's perception, 'poor' – style of narration gives his texts the nature of reminiscences. Recalling his earlier works or ideas, Kantor writes about them as certain stages in his development. The same refers to people who used to matter to him: he mainly describes his personal and artistic closeness to them. This is the tone of his reminiscences about Maria Jarema or Andrzej Pronaszko. In writing the text *Talking about Myself in the Third Person*, Kantor demonstrates a modification in the conventional construction of the narrator in a literary text. At the same time, he admits that his texts are characterised by the presence of the first-person speaking subject. One should note here the variety of Tadeusz Kantor's literary stances.

Kantor's texts are created as manifestos, to accompany his paintings, happenings, exhibitions and performances. In his work, however, there is no instance of both codes totally dissolving in each other. Painting is not literature translated into the language of the image. As I have pointed out, Kantor reserves discursiveness for literature, for the text, and by the same token he imposes the status of visual activity on the painting. This is his response to the trends prevalent in the 20th-century avant-garde – conceptualism and anti-art in particular. Kantor dissociates himself from those 'radical', as he calls them, concepts. In spite of using and merging many different art forms within one work, he clearly emphasises their autonomy. He uses various methods of artistic communication with full respect for their individual codes. This has a number of different aspects and consequences. The first one concerns the autonomy of the work of art. The author of *The Dead Class* never crosses the boundary of the work of art; he does not 'open' it to the values of anti-art. His artistic statements are contained within the code of visual communication. The combination of a work of art with a text complicates meanings; it means that the resultant artefact evades definition and that it may be interpreted in a number of ways. On the other hand, this also results in a coherent message which can be read according to the rules of two different semantic and communication systems. Additionally, Kantor directs the attention of the recipient to his artistic work, which is a consistent whole.

What does Kantor write about? He comments on the avant-garde of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; he talks about the precursors of contemporary art of the 1980s, the time of the waning of the avant-garde. Kantor needs a general vision of the artistic phenomena in order to create a wider story, to discuss not only contemporary art but also culture. Teresa Pękala noted:

Debates about the heritage of the avant-garde and the assessment of its role in art history come sharply into focus when we place them against the background of art of the whole modern era, thus presenting the issue in a manner slightly different from that required in historical distinctions.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the comments were made in the 1980s, towards the end of the century and Tadeusz Kantor's life, is reflected in the way in which the artist sums up his creative journey. For example, by making *cricotage* in the constructivist and the surrealist idioms, Kantor points to the traditions not just of his own theatre (and painting) but also of all contemporary art and theatre. This is his voice in the discussion about the meaning of the avant-garde viewed after several decades. Thus, Kantor presents the poetics and styles of Constructivism and Surrealism again to demonstrate their vitality and their important place in 20<sup>th</sup>-century art, even though they have already been treated as canonical, which is to say, historical.

I don't want to put together some kind of compendium here, one big bag into which to chuck any old idea. Nevertheless, it seems to me that today's art, including the theatre, is permeated with the past which is alive and well and without which contemporary art and culture could not, in fact, exist. This is perhaps a symptom of the end of the century; culture is trying to round off the century with a retrospective of all that has taken place within it, of all we are equipped with on the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (...) the moment comes when it is incumbent on the artist to produce a *résumé*. And it is quite possible that here, in this school, I will begin to make such a *résumé*.<sup>6</sup>

Kantor – here, in his capacity as an artist – demonstrates that the concepts are not past history, that certain poetic conventions recur and can be of great significance for contemporary art.

Referring to the *résumé* which he wrote at the end of his series of lectures on constructivism, Kantor concludes that all contemporary art has been marked by constructivism:

(...) today, I have written a *résumé* of our work on Constructivism. When writing it, I noticed that, as a matter of fact, the principles of Constructivism are still binding, and they apply also to this performance, surrealism. That means that these are, in a sense, moral principles as far as the spirit of the avant-garde is concerned.<sup>7</sup>

Kantor obviously evokes here the ethos of the artists of the past. He shows that the genuinely rebellious artistic spirit cannot be commercial and officially sanctioned. One of the reasons for his bringing up the topic of the historical avant-garde is his

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5 T. Pękala, *Estetyka ariergardy*, in: *Wiek awangardy*, ed. L. Bieszczad, Kraków 2006, p. 31.

6 Audio recording of Milan lectures, disc 1. Archives of Scuola d'Arte Drammatica in Milan. Since June 2008, also in the Cricoteka Archives in Krakow. Tadeusz Kantor lectured in Polish, with simultaneous translation by Ludmiła Ryba. Twenty discs with the recording of 1986 lectures have survived.

7 *Ibid.*, disc 17b.

desire to demonstrate that the contemporary avant-garde departs, in reality, from the principles and ideas developed within Constructivism and Surrealism.

Neither Dadaism nor Surrealism, nor probably any other avant-garde style have determined in any way the dominant ways of understanding the present. When judged as views on art based on 'creative freedom', however, they have resulted in works which are surprisingly homogenous in their style.<sup>8</sup>

Kantor interprets the transformations which have taken place in art since the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. According to Peter Bürger, the avant-garde has created the blueprint for new art that sets itself up in total opposition to the art of the past<sup>9</sup>. It is precisely due to its use of wide-ranging terms that modern art has been destined to be analysed synthetically, viewed in its entirety, without being subdivided into particular 'isms'. Of course, Kantor does not offer a 'bag of ideas' since, as he points out, precise terminology is very important. In that sense, he takes a stand against the concept of 'new art' or modern art, because he thinks that in the 1980s, those labels lost their meaning. This is yet another reason why Kantor takes great care with stylistic details of his performances, why he spends so much time on differentiating between various avant-garde trends. In writing his résumé, Kantor sums up, in a sense, the entire 20th century. He treats the art of the past century as an aesthetic and cultural monolith.

Under the circumstances, another question worth asking is: what is the relationship between the theoretical foundation of Kantor's writings and the contemporary range of their interpretation? Reality matters to Kantor; this is why he takes interest in social reality – he opposes mass culture, he indicts the 'omnipotent consumption' and the 'omnipotent communication'. In the course of analysing his own artistic activity, Kantor strengthens his conviction that he has been right in his choices and that he should continue to follow those principles.

In *The Milano Lessons*, Kantor reveals himself as a critic and an artistic and social commentator. On the basis of his analysis of the main artistic movements, he defines the significance of the avant-garde to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and thereby formulates his view on contemporary art. According to him, his own conduct as an artist should be universal in art. In Kantor's perception, essential elements of modern art include the autonomy of individual fields of art, the self-referential nature of the aesthetic message and the drive for a synthetic work.

Kantor uses his literary texts in two ways. The text acquires full autonomy thanks to the distinctive character of the artistic material from which it has been shaped; simultaneously, it is correlated with Kantor's visual art or performances.

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8 J. Orska, *Przełom awangardowy w dwudziestowiecznym modernizmie w Polsce*, Kraków 2004, pp. 111–112.

9 P. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Manchester UP 1984.



It does not have the secondary function of interpreting or advertising the new art. Kantor's manifestos are an integral part of his activity. Reading them out in public is often an organic part of his happenings, exhibitions or other artistic events. Frequently, the manifestos hang on the wall amongst the paintings. Such an approach demonstrates that their role is parallel to that of visual art or theatre. At the same time, it makes the texts autonomous, since they become an element of the whole artistic project.

For Kantor, the discursive aspect is not a criterion of artistic activity. It is precisely for this reason that he emphasises the distinct character of self-commentary. That is why he turns a mere note into an aesthetically organised text. On the one hand, he brings together both forms of expression (visual art and literature); on the other, he firmly keeps them apart, exposing their distinctness. Kantor makes no attempt to convey the visual quality by literary means; instead, he shows that these elements complement each other. In texts about works of art, what matters is equalisation of methods and issues pertaining to the fields involved. This enables Kantor to arrive at a homogenous work created from a variety of elements. Consequently, his projects may be interpreted in their respective codes. The audience that has been expecting a visual work of art is forced to read, entering quite a different channel of communication; this device highlights the discursive character of the work. Thus, the text dominates. However, this overriding role is illusive. Kantor juxtaposes two materials and two methods of communication. Due to their different nature and structural incompatibility, the resultant work is not finite. Neither field of art is allowed to have the upper hand, and the work is open to each of them. The significance of the texts is contextualised through the visual artistic qualities, whilst the whole visual impact is overshadowed by the literary significance of the text. Both types of art retain their structure and identity. The juxtaposition of those diverging elements is a testimony to openness, transcending both conventions – the literary one by artistic means and the artistic one through literature. The very use of the two-code message underlines the 'artificiality', the deliberate construction of the work. Kantor employs conventions. He exhibits literature on canvas, appealing to the traditional visual reception by the audience. In turn, the canvas covered in paint is, in reality, a text which must be interpreted according to the rules of the art of language.

It is thanks to Kantor's collected texts that it is possible today to interpret his works in a contemporary manner. We may enter into dialogue with the artist, who died over twenty years ago and who explicated the significance of avant-garde art. The two artistic codes he used enable us to decipher his message whilst being aware of the convention within which he produced his visual art and theatrical performances. Tadeusz Kantor's writings have created a bridge between the conventions he juggled and the contemporary reception of his works.



## **‘Non omnis moriar’ of the Theatre Artist**

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When Tadeusz Kantor stood by the side of the stage, watched by the audience, he was an inseparable part of his productions. Sometimes, viewers – Anselm Kiefer, for one – would come solely for Kantor’s own little theatre of expression, not even in order to observe an artist deeply absorbed in his creation or a director working closely with his actors, directing the sound man, keeping an eye on the rhythm and flow – but to see someone full of charisma. Was Kantor able to transform that distinct ‘role’? Was he able, while remaining present on the stage, even for a moment to stop being Kantor the conductor-cum-director? Analysing the recorded rehearsals of *I Shall Never Return* (1988), it is possible to try to demonstrate that, in that performance, Kantor intended to create – by different means – a new character, that of Kantor-the-theatre-artist. Immersing oneself in such a role is qualitatively different from putting oneself on show alongside the performance or directing it.

Until that moment, Kantor’s very presence had evoked the character already familiar to the audience, one which continued from one premiere to the next. Regardless of the prevailing conditions of a particular production, Kantor was able either to theatricalise his behaviour and mingle with the actors or choose to stay out of the limelight. Nevertheless, even if he were to affect inauthentic emotions, he still represented no-one but himself at that time: the director of the Cricot 2 Theatre, surrounded by his actors, at one with his company in action. In *I Shall Never Return*, however, he tried to create a presence reflecting the effort – no longer apparent in the end product – that is required to create art. Thus, he was mindful of his body, of his image which he had formed over the years, of the creative effort, his private emotions and relationships with the members of Cricot 2. He pondered how to reveal a personal side that had not come out in his previous productions. How would he let the public see his work at the rehearsals, to which he invited visitors and which he allowed to be filmed? Should he display the solitary creative process of working in his studio, which he described in his texts? His proclamation to the actors in *I Shall Never Return* became the statement that verbalised these threads.

Kantor’s role in the 1988 production differed, then, from the previous one, if only because it required the artist to present himself synthetically, as a sign. And,

since Kantor had to play that role himself, he had to think it through. Before he embarked on the rehearsals, he had partly worked out his acting devices and his role in particular episodes. It is clear that – at least at the beginning – he tried to change the way that he behaved himself on the stage. Gradually, however, he reduced all those ideas until he appeared as a silent figure, more passive than ever before. The filmed rehearsals provide a perfect record of his withdrawing from the role.

In the post-premiere version,<sup>1</sup> we find the artist in an empty bar, with the priest, the cleaner and the restaurant owner sitting at the tables. In a moment, there will arrive visitors – actors or, in fact, characters from the past productions of the Cricot 2 Theatre. All that Kantor has to say to his actors has already been recorded on tape, as good as written on a piece of paper. It's as if Kantor is expecting the actors to attack him in unison in response to the proclamation, but they will not be able to shout down the loudly resounding voice. He is alone, up against the aggressive group that finally executes him. When the shot from the machine gun rings out, Kantor gets up and leaves, only to return to the stage moments later; after all, the shooting has been theatrical, fictitious – symbolic. He seems to find support not in the actors but in the characters that they play, such as the girl who moves like an automaton, whom Kantor leads onto the stage and helps sit down on a stool next to his table, on which he places her hands. This is his Bride from his old dream about the wedding. They sit facing each other. She is no longer a specific woman; she is a character from his imagination, just like Odysseus, who will arrive soon thereafter from the same war period. He will also sit down at Kantor's table. And Kantor will adjust his posture and costume, too. The director will also go up to the mannequin of his father to pick up a copy of *The Return of Odysseus* by Stanisław Wyspiański, only to take it back to his table and read out fragments of Act 3. Finally, he will offer his arm to the Bride and lead her backstage, closing the door behind him.

In a number of ways, Kantor juxtaposes himself with what is taking place on the stage. 'Personally' present in the performance, he reads out fragments of Wyspiański's drama, but his words to the actors have been recorded beforehand

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1 My references to *I Shall Never Return* concern the version recorded by Andrzej Sapija for Teatr Telewizji [Polish TV Theatre] from 22 to 24 February 1990, during the Cricot 2 performance at the Stodoła Student Club in Warsaw. The dress rehearsal took place on 23 April 1988 at the Piccolo Teatro Studio in Milan; its film recording (by Marek Stefański, who filmed Tadeusz Kantor's rehearsals of *I Shall Never Return* on the request of Cricoteka) can be found in the Cricoteka Archives. These two performances differ in a number of details. The most important one is replacing the black coffin (which e.g. accompanied Kantor's dummy in the wedding scene) with the character called She, played by Marie Vayssière. This decision provoked further changes in Kantor's acting, and the evolution of his role is the topic of the present text.

and, just as the audience does, he listens to them played on a tape. His activity is minimal. Kantor sits with his arms resting on the table and observes the actors. He concentrates, finalising with precision his slow elegant gestures; he acts with considerably more restraint than he did in his earlier productions, when the reactions of the artist conducting the performance showed his temperament and emotions. It is those reactions, which reveal the confrontation between the director's sensitivity and the production, that he now tries to hide. This is as if in *I Shall Never Return* he subjected himself to the self-allocated role.

Kantor has planned to participate most actively in the scenes in which he has verbal skirmishes with the actors of *Cricot 2*. In the briefcases brimming with notes and drawings which he has brought to the first rehearsal,<sup>2</sup> there are already all the texts, written down on paper, that will resound in his own voice in the performance, even though this voice – as mentioned earlier – will be broadcast from tape. Somewhat confrontational towards his actors, Kantor talks about his creative effort that they do not appreciate and about their mutual tense relationship; in the written text, however, later used pragmatically in the performance, it is difficult to discern a confession, and more difficult still to take its dramatic impact to heart. The manner of the proclamation is similar to the signature format of Kantor's other commentaries and manifestos.

What if one were to take note of what the director is saying and assume that we are not dealing with self-invention but with the real McCoy, personal agony? It is at the rehearsals that things come to a head: in his performance, Kantor wants to say that real art can only be born out of suffering and that the artist is misunderstood, scorned and treated with derision even by his own actors who, as he puts it, 'climb up his suffering' all the way to fame. This is the situation that he stage-manages, but also, whether unconsciously or deliberately, he makes it possible to film his relations with the actors in the context of the rehearsals. The image that emerges from the many hours of filming is one of the solitary artist during the process of creation, his solitude inevitable. However, it is also clear from the record that the

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2 In the Cricoteka Archives, there is a 55-DVD recording of the rehearsals of *I Shall Never Return* (I have been using the DVDs, on to which the original VHS tapes have been copied). The first of these contains a montage of the rehearsals annotated as 'preceding 7 February 1987'; the fifth is dated 1 March 1987; later, the work on the performance was suspended during the tour, which is why the sixth disc is a recording of the rehearsal that took place in Krakow on 6 October 1987. Another gap occurred between 4 December 1987 (disc no. 30) and 5 April 1988 (disc no. 32), when the Milan rehearsals started. Disc no. 49 records the Milan opening on 24 April 1988, and the final discs – the performances in Berlin. Today, it is no longer possible to establish whether all Kantor's rehearsals were recorded; however, for practical reasons, I use the number of the disc consistently when referring to the number of the rehearsal (to avoid confusion, I also include the disc with the montage of the Krakow rehearsals).

actors ignore their director at times, since they forget his instructions from the previous day, and Kantor has to monitor the course of the scenes, their order and even individual actors' lines, which he brings in, written down off the tape. The camera records more than the rehearsal itself; it is a testimony to genuine struggle which itself is the theme of the performance being created.

Perhaps delivering the text which sounded like a proclamation seemed false to Kantor and that's why, before he recorded it, he often simulated his lines while practising the scene. For example, he would replace his lines with gibberish ('I will be saying blah blah blah...' – the fourth rehearsal on 13 February 1987), or state, 'I will be gabbling' – when he could not find the piece of paper in his pile of notes (the fourth rehearsal), or even say, 'I will leave myself out' (the third rehearsal on 12 February 1987) and then carry on with the next bit. This is surprising because, when reading out the text publicly for the first time – and there is no doubt that he had already practised its delivery at home – he modulated his voice in a way very similar to that in the version adopted on the recording, which he used since the seventh rehearsal (which, however, only took place on 7 October 1987, after a few months' interval. Moreover, even the day before, on 6 October 1987, the tape recording was not used<sup>3</sup>).

By pre-recording the proclamation, Kantor freed himself from having to deliver it on the stage. It appears that one reason why he opted for this solution was the context of team acting, something that he found problematic. Before making the recording, he would tell his actors, who were unused to his new role: 'talk, so that I am not on my own' (the third rehearsal). And, during the rehearsal of the scene in which the actors were leaving while he was still talking to them, he said, 'Do this again; I need this, because I can't talk to ghosts' (the fourth rehearsal), or 'You must take some notice of me, because some individual ghost has appeared here...' (the fourth rehearsal), and 'Let's have two more people staying on till the very end' (the fourth rehearsal).

Kantor's comments and responses prove that he was not so much afraid of delivering the text in front of the public (although, of course, that would have demanded of him, for example, maintaining a similar state of tension in each performance, the correct voice projection and so on) as afraid that he would not be able to get a rapport going with the group (as an actor, therefore one of them) and, helpless, he would have to finish saying his lines, after all. That was not a role in which Kantor had ever before found himself on the stage: in a dialogue with the other characters. One can suspect that he felt unsure of himself and perhaps that's

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3 Although as early as the fourth rehearsal, on 13 February 1987, he was determined to record the proclamation. He said to Tomasz Dobrowolski, 'I'll record this message, so that we've got it, or else we won't get anywhere...'

why, gradually but consistently, he eliminated those situations in which he was dependent on the acting of others.

The playing of the tape-recorded proclamation has greatly changed Kantor's behaviour. It's quite clear that he feels liberated and he begins to act out using his voice, which resounds through the air, and in this way he plays around with the meaning of the text. Tomasz Dobrowolski pauses the recording so as to enable the actors to voice violent protests and aggressively display their disapproval of the director. What happens in reality, then, is that the sound man uses Kantor's voice to play games with the actors, whilst Kantor himself chooses to mime, lip-synching to the recording of his own lines with appropriate facial expressions and gestures, or rather responding to it. First, he repeats the text almost parallel with the recording; later, he keeps losing the words, so that, before long, he only delivers a few selected ones<sup>4</sup>. At times, this stems from simulated acting, mere going through the motions.

Sometimes, however, he behaves quite differently. A good contrasting example is the film from 8 October 1987, where the second cameraman can be seen in the frame (this always stimulated Kantor and raised the temperature of his reaction). During the eighth rehearsal, Kantor practises the scene a number of times. First, he carefully listens to the recording and, with a second-long delay, repeats some words; he looks around, lighting up a cigarette. The scene is re-run: now, Kantor modulates his voice, trying to lip-synch to the tape. He articulates the word 'toast' very emphatically, almost shouting it out; he raises a glass of cognac. When the scene is repeated yet again, he smashes the glass on the floor. Andrzej Welmiński – the Inn Keeper – clears up the broken glass without any pause in the rehearsal; the taped voice drones monotonously on: 'You, actors, must maintain a hygienic lifestyle. (...)'. Kantor delivers some phrases ('fall down', 'bloody might' or the names of great actors) with much greater emphasis than that on the recording. He does this with a changing tempo, at variance with the recording or in step with it. He does not appear to be looking for the right interpretation which he would later stick to.

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4 There are many instances of this, especially at the beginning of the work on the performance, when Kantor was still struggling with the concept of his character. For example, at the seventh rehearsal, on 7 October 1987, he uttered somewhat random words, smoked a cigarette, looked around. However, at the ninth rehearsal, on 9 October 1987, he endeavoured to achieve the best possible sync with the recorded voice; he practised this, seated at a table, and he also tried to act out the repetition but, displeased with the results, he shook his head: 'I have to get a mirror at home. I don't have one, I really don't, but after all, one makes faces at the mirror. You don't know what face you are making, do you?' (This question was directed to one of the actors, who replied that, indeed, he did not.)

It is also difficult to believe that any of the gestures described above might be incorporated into the performance as a lasting feature. At first, this is what Kantor seems to intend; later, he only practises in order to build up a scene, testing what it will sound like, but he structures the performance in such a way as to give himself some leeway. This tendency towards withdrawing from the role also marks the choreography, which, to start with, is meant to illustrate clearly the director's clash with his company. The artist explains to the actors:

I will be speechifying like a show-off, a drunk at the bar, and you have to overcome me somehow or rather, to start with, you'll move up to me, say, from a third in, here [he points to the place, because, at the beginning, they are seated at a long table, just like in *Wielopole, Wielopole*], to get the better of me, and I will keep on talking, you will be butting in, here I have some bits of your butting in [fumbling amongst previously made notes]. You [to the Speaker] will be speaking, music will be playing, so that in the end, by the time that I am finished, I am totally, so to speak, beaten down and squashed. That is the whole point. (the first rehearsal)

Kantor imagines this squashing as a pendulum movement (the oppressive quality enhanced by the music and by the Market-place Speaker speech, drowning out Kantor's words). At the first rehearsal, Kantor gets up asking two people to push him back and forth between them like a pendulum. Next, he gets on top of the table together with the emballage (later replaced by a black coffin and, after the premiere, by the Bride); when the shot rings out, he theatrically lies down on the table top, and his 'corpse' together with the dummy are transferred to a cart and taken off backstage. Finally, though, Kantor sits at a table in the bar; the group of actors surrounds him, advancing on him from all sides, but without touching him – although in Milan, at the 20 April 1988 rehearsal (just before the opening, which took place on 23 April), Kantor unexpectedly tries out physical contact once again: 'Wrong. There has to be fury, spite, some sort of impetus. A will to destroy me. To rub me into the ground, shove me into the grave. But you have to have this inside you. (...) When you are crowding around in the centre, I will be here, squeezed in the middle and – you push me!'

Accordingly, the actors jostle with him and push him around. At the next rehearsal (the forty-fifth), Kantor stands aside, watching the scene – only to abandon the unexpectedly revived device. On a number of occasions, he wants to assess the rhythm and construction of the frame that he is in, so he either leaves his spot vacant or asks another actor to take his place.

He escapes the confines of the actor's role again as he himself can decide which gestures he can make and which ones he cannot. Kantor complains that he cannot repeat a facial expression and act in the same way twice running; one, however, one gets the impression that he refuses to accept the standard requirement of the actor's craft that the script be delivered identically on each occasion, making the



actor predictable. He, therefore, liberates himself from such verbal and physical interactions, making room for the kind of spontaneity that he has had in his previous productions as the director, someone standing apart. He takes up acting tasks<sup>5</sup>, even joins in rehearsing them with the others, but soon abandons them.

Gradually, he gives up on expansive gestures and does no more than comment on the taped voice with a careless, almost dismissive, movement of his hand and arm (this as early as during the twelfth rehearsal on 14 October 1987). Before, he was standing; now, he is seated, his elbow resting on the table (at this rehearsal, he still wants to 'act' something; he emphasises the word 'toast' by raising a lighter with a flickering flame, but this seems intended as no more than a joke rather than as a serious proposition). And he takes no notice of the shot fired; he leaves slowly, a little hunched, and shuts the door after him.

In Milan, during the second phase of the rehearsals, Kantor once more records the proclamation. Listening to the sound of his own voice, he now partly unfolds the scarf which he has always wrapped himself in before the scene, and in response to the shot fired at him from the machine gun, he tips his hat and takes a bow (rehearsal 39).<sup>6</sup> The idea of tipping his hat survives a few repetitions. Soon thereafter, however, Kantor almost stops responding. This is how he describes this stage in his notes:

There is a community, there is a group, and there is a stranger who was once some sort of Kapo. The group has abandoned him. He comes back with recriminations. All our Slavic weaknesses come out. There is no dramatic explanation. They start insulting me. The feelings are nuanced – from pity to indifference. They establish their attitudes. Exaggerated. Finally, the insults result in an execution. I am as if in a dream. I don't respond at all and leave (rehearsal 42).

The concept of the role itself will change somewhat yet again, but Kantor will remain seated, listening to the text, and at the firing of the shot, he will get up and leave unmoved. At the beginning, then, his gestures are theatrical, they serve to illustrate and enhance the verbal message, as is the case when he shouts 'toast';

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- 5 I have in mind here actions that Kantor would have had to act out, just as any other actor would; e.g., at the first rehearsal, Kantor climbed on to the table, carrying the emballage, then reeled, dying from having been shot by a machine gun, and finally he was transferred by the actors into a cart and wheeled off the stage. It is worth noting that whilst instructing the actors how to act, Kantor used expansive gestures and an emphatic tone; with his own role, he often went merely through the motions, leaving it 'for later'. Then, three rehearsals to the opening, he said: 'So, we have just three rehearsals left. And I hope that during those rehearsals I will learn how to act.' (rehearsal 43)
  - 6 In Milan, Kantor first focused on the second part of the performance, on the scenes where Italian actors and Ludmila Ryba were also present: the marching of the Armed Violinists, the part revolving around *The Return of Odysseus*, and the Great Emballage of the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

later, he no longer throws his scarf round his neck or raises his hat, but only seems to listen to the words that float in from somewhere. This transformation of his reactions, thus, the elimination of his comical and flamboyant gestures, as Kantor describes them at first ('I will be speechifying like a show-off'), results in his expressing a different attitude to the proclamation. In the final performance, the viewer will see Kantor listening to himself, serious and engrossed.

I have concentrated on only one of the episodes recorded on the tapes of the rehearsals, but this tendency is visible in all the scenes.<sup>7</sup> One can then ask the question: why did Kantor keep withdrawing further and further away? What conclusions can be drawn from the changes taking place in the course of the rehearsals? First of all, it seems that Kantor wanted to act alongside his actors, but he understood more and more clearly, and expressed it through his role, that he continued to have a different status from that of the other characters. He was a figure who only partly existed on the stage, so he could not communicate in the same way as the other characters did with one another. Secondly, by limiting his active involvement, Kantor deliberately enhanced his power of expression, by the same token as the inertia and passivity of the Bride and Odysseus were a counterpoint to the expressiveness of the rest of the Cricot 2 company. From the start, Kantor set himself against the whole group, but when, at the beginning, he acted alongside them, as the first versions of the scenes show, he disappeared amongst the actors. At the premiere, however, everything that takes place revolves around him, whereas he is both at the centre and remains apart. As a result, we can see the Tadeusz Kantor whom the director himself has created in his previous productions (and not only there) and who is a recognisable entity.

Kantor limits his activity, eliminating more and more elements of his acting; he erases himself until he resembles the figure that we recall from some of the photographs showing the personal tension between the creator and his theatre, or the person standing between the stage and the audience in the earlier showings. Only apparently is the development of that discrete role during the rehearsals its slow degradation. Because what counts is the building up of the relationship between the artist and what takes place on the stage. In *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor indicates in various ways taken from the actor's repertoire (and, at the rehearsal stage, being 'too clever by half' at times) that he is the creator of his theatre.

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7 Kantor's actions were also more interesting in that part of the performance where Odysseus arrives: carefully, theatrically, Kantor scrutinised the costume, brought to him by the cleaner, took Odysseus' coat and hat, began to leave, only to turn back when nearly at the door and sit down again at the table (e.g., rehearsal 37). In this way, Kantor conveyed that Odysseus' costume evoked memories of 1944, the year in which *The Return of Odysseus* was staged in the Underground Theatre. This event was linked to the date of Marian Kantor's death in the Auschwitz concentration camp, combining into an artistic whole.

Earlier on, Kantor provokes the question whether he is inside his production – or not yet. In *I Shall Never Return*, the matter is resolved beyond any doubt. On the basis of the rehearsals, however, it is impossible to say whether, during the performance, Kantor is within his 'part' or outside it when he signals to his actors on the stage.

Only by scrutinising Kantor's facial expression and barely perceptible movements of his hands can we see that, as in his previous productions, they continue to convey genuine emotions, that is to say, those that are born as a result of being emotionally affected by the performance, rather than emotions pre-planned as stage material. And they serve more as a discreet, private way of communicating with the actors, especially with the sound man, than as a means of disclosing anything to the audience. And yet – judging by the recordings of the rehearsals – at the start it was all supposed to be quite different...

Working on *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor frequently reminded the actors that he was 'also acting' there, and so he would be in no position to prompt anyone on the stage. However, in the recording of the performance one can see that, with small spontaneous or previously agreed signs, he often does precisely that: prompts, behaving exactly as he did during the rehearsals when, practising his part, he often stepped outside it so as to make comments as the director. It is difficult to determine whether this was an element of his role or whether Kantor was incapable of restraining his emotions whenever his theatre was involved.

Since in *I Shall Never Return* he was becoming less and less an actor and more and more himself, that is to say, a different but 'traditional' Kantor role, there was room in his acting for conducting the performance. At the rehearsals, he often got annoyed that he had to show the others how to do things; for instance, at the moment when the music was supposed to come on, he said: 'I can't conduct. You have to learn [how to do it], because I'm acting. I can't be signalling to you, if I'm supposed to express a certain psychological situation here (...)'. There were a few rehearsals when he struggled with the actors' dependency on him; he wanted to get out of the situation to which they had become accustomed and to teach them to be independent. He reminded them that he was also acting, but, moments later, he showed them again when to commence their assault. Of course, those were theatrical rehearsals, but in the final analysis, certain signals were established, discreet and possible in the on-stage situation. In *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor tried to balance between those two positions, just as, at the rehearsals, he was incapable of concentrating only on himself and his own acting, even in those scenes in which he really had to get into the interaction actor-to-actor. Perhaps, he finally came to acknowledge that add-on as of intrinsic value and expressive of some truth about him.

He wanted, after all, not only to construct a part but also provide a narrative about a theatre artist – the theatre being an ephemeral art which does not immortalise its creator. In numerous photographs and in filmed performances, one can see well what Kantor considered the relevant features of the role that he had assigned to himself. In *I Shall Never Return*, as in his other productions, Tadeusz Kantor's role had its own costume, a staged voice and typical Kantor gestures. He used the hat and the scarf (as well as a jacket and a coat that he put on especially for the scenes) each time that he started to rehearse, and he found them indispensable for entering into his part. In *Cricot 2*, all the rehearsals were dress rehearsals – literally so, and Kantor never tried to rehearse without his stage costume, either. He put it on, did up his coat, wrapped the scarf round his neck, sometimes asked for his hat to be fetched, and patiently waited until someone found it and handed it to him.

This time, however, much more was at stake than the image that Kantor had formed of himself. An intimate performance was being created, moulded in a painstaking process, and the recorded rehearsals of *I Shall Never Return* became, in the context of the finished product, a moving testimony to the 'truth about a theatre artist'. During one of the rehearsals, Kantor complained, 'Here I sit late at night, writing things down, and there is no-one to listen to me.' Apart from giving another premiere, Kantor wanted to find a situation in which he would have an opportunity to share his reflections: about the condition of the artist in the world, but also about his own relationship with the world and with the actors, about how he created his performances, how art was born and from whence it sprang. In his final production, he partially achieved his goals. It was not, however, a coincidence that, especially at the rehearsals at which cameramen other than Marek Stefański were present (for example, Andrzej Sapija's film crew, making the well-known documentary *The Return of Odysseus: Tadeusz Kantor's Notes from Rehearsals*), Kantor almost always took the opportunity to read out his notes and manifestos to the actors. This was characteristic of him and proved not only that he tried to record a certain model of working with actors, but also that imparting his ideas mattered to him a lot. Recordings of the rehearsals have preserved the reflections of the theatre artist.

To my mind, Tadeusz Kantor believed that recording his rehearsals was the best way to preserve the truth about him as a theatre artist. Filming his work on *I Shall Never Return* was not only another auto-mythology promoting technique, but it arose from a genuine need to record that part of the creative effort which went beyond the finished performance. It seems that Kantor, mindful of the ephemeral nature of the theatre, suspected that a performance recorded in its rehearsal phase would survive longer. Perhaps he also believed that, in time, such a document would reveal more about *Cricot 2* than a video recording of the final stage production would.

## Autour de la photographie de Wielopole

*Jean-Pierre Thibaudat*

C'est une photographie qui représente la vue d'un village. Une photo prise un peu à l'écart sans doute au bord d'une route ou un chemin. Le village apparaît au détour d'une courbe derrière les champs et les arbres. Le photographe s'arrête, déploie son appareil et prend la photo. Plus tard, la photographie prendra probablement place dans un album. Plus tard encore, une main, celle de Tadeusz Kantor la saisira, et la choisira.

Cette photographie occupe une place centrale dans l'affiche du spectacle *Wielopole, Wielopole* et le programme proposé aux spectateurs lors de sa création et de ses tournées (ill. 46). Si je ne regarde pas le reste de l'affiche ou la première page du programme, si je me concentre sur la photographie, si je ne vois qu'elle, si je ne vois donc que la photographie d'un village sans nom, ce village, je le reconnais, c'est le mien. Le village d'un enfant né en Europe au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le cliché, au premier abord, a été pris à une date indéterminée, dans un lieu non défini, mais à coup sûr, quelque part en Europe. L'Europe étant ici une notion claire et vague à la fois, sujette à discussions, mais une notion précise car identitaire : je suis européen.

Ce village, c'est donc le mien. Je me l'annexe. Même si je n'y suis jamais allé, il me semble y avoir été. Les signes émis par la photographie me sont familiers. Comme je suis né en France ce village c'est mon Combray emprunté à Proust, c'est ce village du centre de la France où Alain Fournier fait arrivée un soir le Grand Meaulnes, c'est le village normand de Flaubert. Je reconnais tout : les maisons, les bosquets, les arbres, l'école, le clocher. Le clocher c'est le signal, le point de ralliement visuel de tout village. Proust : « On reconnaissait le clocher de Saint-Hilaire de bien loin, inscrivant sa figure inoubliable à l'horizon où Combray n'apparaissait pas encore »<sup>1</sup>.

La phrase de Proust vaut pour n'importe quel village toscan ou polonais. Il y a dans cette photographie tout ce qui fait un village d'Europe : quelques arbres hauts et d'autres plus modestes, un début de champ, une palissade, un clocher qui domine le village et des maisons serrées autour, parmi lesquelles, on le devine, celle de l'école. Cette photographie a des allures de carte postale ou de passe-partout. C'est un paysage neutre, le degré zéro du village européen.

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1 M. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu. Du côté de chez Swann*, Paris, Gallimard, 1954, p. 79.

Bien sûr, ce village porte un nom, il se dresse sur l'affiche et sur le programme au dessus de la photographie, Wielopole, le village natal de Tadeusz Kantor. Et ce nom redoublé en *Wielopole, Wielopole* donne son nom au spectacle. Alors, revenons à elle, entrons dans la photo.

Que voit-on ? Personne. Le champ au premier plan n'est pas abandonné, il n'est pas en friche, les maisons comme celle dont on voit les fenêtres à droite de l'image semblent bien habitées. Ce n'est pas un monde abandonné, c'est un monde déserté. Comme si à l'approche du photographe comme à l'approche du diable le village, tout le village de ce coin de la Pologne – enfants, adultes, vieillards, animaux, curé et rabbin – avait fui.

Un village déserté, soit, mais depuis quand ? D'ailleurs de quand date cette photographie ? Le tirage est ancien, le grain de la photo n'est pas de première jeunesse, un coin écorné en bas à gauche fait penser que la photo a été extraite d'un album. Probablement d'une album de famille, mais où sont les autres photos de l'album, où est la famille ? C'est une photo qui nous revient de loin, qui photographie l'instantané d'un temps à jamais disparu.

La photo semble avoir été prise en 1910 (nous dit Józef Chrobak dans un ouvrage sur Wielopole publié par la Cricoteka<sup>2</sup>), mais est-ce bien sûr ? Dès lors que la photo est prise, le temps se déprend d'elle, il flotte, il devient incertain, la photographie renvoie au « temps d'avant » de celui qui la tient entre les mains. À quel temps songeait Kantor en choisissant cette photo ?

Regardons à nouveau cette photo qui semblait si simple et qui, plus on la regarde de près, multiplie les questions. Au premier plan, sur le côté gauche du champ, un tas. Des branchages, sans aucun doute. Et cette tache blanche ? Un reste de neige, peut-être. Mais tout de même, on est intrigué, on y regarde à deux fois. Ce tas de bois, que fait-il là ? Et d'ailleurs, est-ce là un simple tas ? Ne cache-t-on pas quelque chose sous les branchages ? Quelque chose qu'on ne veut pas voir ou montrer, qu'on veut oublier, ou qu'on aurait aimé oublier mais qui s'obstine ? Un cadavre décomposé peut-être ou une poupée de chiffon. Un remords ou bien une perte irrémédiable.

Je veux personnellement y voir la cache d'un trésor, celui de l'enfance qui traverse *Wielopole, Wielopole*. Cette vue s'impose à moi car la photo est suffisamment imprécise pour autoriser bien des divagations exactement comme dans *Wielopole, Wielopole* les soldats morts sont de toutes les guerres du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ce paysage de Wielopole est un capteur de métaphores. L'anodine carte postale d'un village apparaît comme le secret, le miroir secret même, du spectacle futur.

Le spectacle *Wielopole, Wielopole* est-il né de cette image que l'on pourrait alors désigner comme primitive voire comme scène primitive ? Peut-être mais

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2 J. Chrobak, *Wielopole Skrzyńskie di Tadeusz Kantor*, Cricoteka, Kraków, 2005, p. 41.

inconsciemment, Kantor ne mentionne pas cette photo. En revanche, il parle d'un autre cliché. Une photo d'une douzaine de soldats posant en uniforme devant le photographe et disposés sur trois rangs. Cette photo, Kantor l'avait toujours sur lui pendant les longs mois de répétition à Florence où *Wielopole, Wielopole* a été créé. Denis Bablet raconte que Kantor, la regardait régulièrement longuement, avant de la remettre dans sa poche. C'est à cette photo que Kantor fait référence lorsqu'il évoque « une fulguration subite à la vue d'une photo-souvenir d'appelés, probablement peu avant leur départ pour le front, images grises, douloureuse, immobilisés face à la mort, préfigurée par un terrifiant uniforme »<sup>3</sup>.

Ce lien de la photographie à la mort est constant chez Kantor depuis *La Classe morte* qui marque le tournant biographique de son théâtre (encore du Witkacy, déjà du Wielopole) conjointement à l'apparition d'appareils photographiques dans ses spectacles. Dans un autre texte en marge de *Wielopole, Wielopole*, évoquant toujours des photos d'appelés, Kantor insiste : « photos d'appelés – souvenirs des morts, choisis et marqués par la mort, contaminés par le bacille de la mort, inconnu et foudroyant »<sup>4</sup>.

*Wielopole, Wielopole* a été créé en 1980 à Florence et la même année Roland Barthes faisait paraître son ouvrage sur la photographie *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*. Barthes avait cessé d'écrire sur le théâtre en 1965. Or là, quinze ans après, il y revient en établissant un étonnant rapport entre la photo, la mort et le théâtre :

Si la Photo me paraît plus proche du Théâtre, c'est à travers un relais singulier (peut-être suis-je le seul à le voir) : la Mort. On connaît le rapport originel du théâtre et du culte des Morts : les premiers acteurs se détachaient de la communauté en jouant le rôle des Morts : se grimer, c'était se désigner comme un corps à la fois vivant et mort : buste blanchi du théâtre totémique, homme au visage peint du théâtre chinois, maquillage à base de riz du Katha Kali indien, masque de Nô japonais. Or c'est ce même rapport que je trouve dans la photo ; si vivante qu'on s'efforce de la concevoir (et cette rage à « faire vivant » ne peut être que la dénégation mythique d'un malaise de mort), la Photo est comme un théâtre primitif, comme un Tableau Vivant, la figuration de la face immobile et fardée sous laquelle, nous voyons les morts<sup>5</sup>.

Barthes se demandait s'il était le seul à faire ce lien entre le théâtre, la photographie et la mort, non il n'était pas le seul. Kantor, au même moment, par une toute autre approche, disait la même chose. Au point que ces lignes de Barthes semblent avoir été écrites au sortir d'une représentation de *Wielopole, Wielopole*, spectacle que

3 T. Kantor, *L'armée. Les Soldats – l'Individu Militaire* in *Wielopole, Wielopole* de T. Kantor [programme théâtral], ed. S. Balewicz, Ośrodek Teatru Cricot 2, Kraków, 1982.

4 *Ibid.*

5 R. Barthes, *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*, co-édition Chahiers du Cinéma/Gallimard/Seuil, Paris 1980, p. 56.

Barthes, n'a probablement pas vu. Il m'est arrivé de rêver au texte qu'il aurait pu écrire à cette occasion.

Barthes revient sur ce lien de la photographie et de la mort vers la fin de son ouvrage, écrivant que la Photographie ne dit pas (forcément) « ce qui n'est plus »<sup>6</sup>, mais seulement et à coup sûr, « ce qui a été »<sup>7</sup>, si bien que photographie s'avère une « prophétie à l'envers »<sup>8</sup>, qu'elle est le « le théâtre mort de la mort »<sup>9</sup>.

Dit autrement par Kantor, c'est-à-dire scéniquement, cela se traduira dans *Wielopole, Wielopole* par l'appareil photographique mitrailleuse de la veuve du photographe local, accomplissement du « daguerréotype historique » de *La Classe morte*. Une machine de mort. Avec une logique toute kantorigène : ce ne sont pas des « encore vivants » qui prennent la pose « pour l'éternité » devant l'objectif du photographe mais des « déjà-morts ».

Revenons à la photo qui nous occupe. Il n'y a personne dans le champ du premier plan, ni à l'horizon, donc pas de chair à canon apparente, mais il y a tout de même un mort, présent en creux, présent par son absence : le photographe. La personne qui a pris le cliché du village il y a longtemps (en 1910 soi-disant) est morte, à l'égal de ceux qui habitaient le village à cette époque.

Le seul être vivant c'est celui qui, la prenant entre ses mains, regarde la photo. Kantor lui-même, spectateur de cette photo, exactement ce qu'il dira en marge de *Wielopole, Wielopole* : « les seuls êtres réellement vivants dans le théâtre ce sont les spectateurs »<sup>10</sup>.

La photo des appelés n'apparaît pas comme telle dans *Wielopole, Wielopole*. Mais Kantor dit cependant qu'elle est « quelque part dans un coin de la chambre derrière l'armoire »<sup>11</sup>. Elle est présente mais absente, elle est là, mais cachée. Dans son ultime spectacle *Aujourd'hui c'est mon anniversaire*, une photo où l'on voit son père, sa mère et son oncle réunis autour d'une table avec une nappe blanche, sera bel et bien présente sur le plateau tout le temps de la représentation.

Alors quel statut, quelle importance accorder à la photo du paysage au fond duquel apparaît Wielopole ?

Pour le spectacle *Wielopole, Wielopole* cette photographie tient lieu de porte d'entrée dans le spectacle puisqu'elle figure sur la couverture du programme et sur l'affiche. Elle n'apparaît pas dans le spectacle, elle se tient à côté de lui,

6 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 133

8 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

10 T. Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole (Les Séquences)*, in *Kantor 1*, textes de Tadeusz Kantor, études de Denis Bablet et Brunella Eruli, réunis et présentés par Denis Bablet, CNRS Éditions, Paris, 2005, p. 197.

11 T. Kantor, *L'armée. Les Soldats – l'Individu Militaire* in *Wielopole, Wielopole de T. Kantor*.



exactement comme Kantor se tenait au bord de ses spectacles. La photographie regarde le spectacle autant que le spectacle la regarde.

Ce n'est pas tout. Si la photo de Wielopole est absente du spectacle, le photographe, celui qui a pris la photo, entre dans le spectacle avec son appareil. Mais plus encore, il y a une parenté directe entre la chambre « obscure » de l'enfance dont parle Kantor et la chambre noire du photographe. Une parenté entre ce que décrit Kantor – « Une chambre morte », « une chambre des morts » – et la chambre noire du labo des photographes et ses éclairages de veillée funèbre. Deux lieux de révélation.

Allons plus loin. Dans l'espace du jeu, les deux portes en bois au fond de la scène de *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* jouent un rôle crucial. Par leur mouvement latéral, elles ouvrent et ferment les séquences du spectacle. Ces portes fonctionnent exactement comme l'iris d'un appareil photographique qui s'ouvre au moment du déclenchement pour se refermer vite. Les deux palissades mobiles en bois s'ouvrent et se referment exactement comme les volets de l'appareil photographique derrière l'objectif.

Les corps s'agitent, les soldats morts ont des rictus, mais tout le monde, morts en tête, se retrouve devant l'appareil photographique monté sur roulettes présent dans le spectacle ou bien disparaissent (ou apparaissent) au fond derrière l'objectif photographique archaïque des deux palissades de bois coulissantes. Mais c'est tout le spectacle qui est conçu sur le modèle de la prise de cliché photographique, c'est ce qu'induit la photo du programme et de l'affiche. Une succession de photographies, autant d'instantanés de la mémoire y compris dans leur répétition décalée (exactement comme le photographe prend plusieurs fois le même sujet sous des angles différents) et le tout sans la moindre narration effective. Les albums photos ne racontent pas une histoire mais une famille, ils collectionnent les morts.

Rien de plus logique à ce que pour le programme et l'affiche qui précèdent le spectacle, Kantor choisisse une photo où aucun être humain n'apparaît. Un paysage neutre, en attente où chacun peut projeter (au sens cinématographique) les flashes de sa mémoire. Un capteur de moments de mémoire.

Interviewé par Andrzej Matynia, Kantor va jusqu'à dire que « la mémoire est un fichier de clichés ». Et il ajoute : « Nous ne nous souvenons jamais d'actions (...). Ce dont nous nous souvenons ce sont des visages statiques qui ont cependant leur mouvement particulier : elles s'évanouissent et reviennent. J'ai appelé cela 'la pulsation'. La pulsation d'un cliché. Cela a abouti à ma méthode de la répétition. La répétition de mêmes mouvements et de mêmes situations jusqu'à ce qu'ils se dispersent dans l'espace »<sup>12</sup>.

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12 A. Matynia, *O fotografii z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, « Projekt », n° 3, Warszawa 1987, cité par D. Bablet: *Tadeusz Kantor et la photographie* in *T. Kantor 2*, CNRS Éditions, Paris, 1993, p. 267.

Des « visages statiques », figés, comme photographiés, « statique » comme l'est la photo qui nous occupe. Faisons un détour doublement biographique.

Quelques années après la création de *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, je retrouve Kantor à son bureau à la Cricoteka. Je lui fais part de mon envie d'aller à Wielopole, de voir le village, ce qu'il est devenu. L'idée semble ne pas lui déplaire. Sur une feuille de mon bloc il me dessine l'itinéraire en précisant les villes traversées, le kilométrage portion par portion. Puis sur une autre feuille il me dessine un plan précis de la maison de son enfance, celle de son oncle le curé, juste à côté le jardin du rabbin, et plus loin l'emplacement de l'église. Enfin sur une troisième feuille il dessine la rue l'emplacement de l'école, du cimetière et de la maison de l'Oncle Olek. Sa mémoire des lieux est précise.

Or si Kantor quitte Wielopole pour aller à Cracovie, s'il y retourne passer des vacances chez l'oncle Olek et s'il s'y réfugie parfois pendant la guerre, Kantor n'est plus jamais revenu à Wielopole après la guerre. Pourquoi ? Je lui pose la question. Il répond à sa manière :

Avant la guerre, me dit-il, Wielopole était un village de juifs. Mon grand oncle, le frère de ma grand-mère y était curé. Le jardin du rabbin était à côté. Et souvent le, curé et le rabbin se promenaient ensemble. Ces promenades étaient tout de suite rapportées à l'évêque de Tarnów.

Puis il raconte les obsèques de ce grand oncle curé tombé accidentellement dans un escalier :

Beaucoup de curés de la région étaient venus à l'enterrement. Et d'un seul coup, non loin du cimetière, ils se sont tous enfuis à travers champs comme dans un film de Buñuel. Nous sommes restés seuls, ma mère, ma sœur, moi, l'oncle Olek et le cercueil. Ma mère m'a dit : regarde. Et j'ai vu : tout le conseil juif de Wielopole était là qui venait à notre rencontre, portant les tables de la loi, c'était magnifique. Et c'est en les voyant que les curés avaient fui.

L'événement a dû fortement marquer le petit Tadeusz puisqu'il a raconté cette histoire presque mot pour mot à Maître Rappoport, son avocat français, et à bien d'autres personnes.

Kantor ce jour-là me raconte encore d'autres souvenirs d'enfance comme ces samedis de Pâques où les garçons catholiques et les garçons juifs se réunissaient.

Ils attrapaient un vieux juif à chapeau et bouclettes (c'est toujours un juif qui jouait le rôle de Judas) il l'obligeaient à monter dans une carriole et la poussaient jusqu'au cœur de l'église, ce qui était évidemment interdit puis ils repartaient. Je ne participais pas à ces jeux – ajoute Kantor. J'avais peur, j'étais timide. Je me tenais près de la porte et le regardais.

Près de la porte, en lisière du spectacle, dehors et dedans, exactement la position que Tadeusz Kantor adoptera dans ses spectacles.

Quel impact, conscient et inconscient, a eu cette tragédie des juifs de Wielopole dans l'oeuvre de Kantor ? La photographie qui date d'avant y ferait-elle implicitement référence ?

Je suis donc allé à Wielopole par un jour froid de l'année 1989. J'ai rencontré le curé qui avait alors quatre-vingts ans. Le curé de l'enfance de Tadeusz. Il était revenu en 1942 à Wielopole. Il n'a jamais revu Kantor. Sauf une fois, très brièvement, en 1983 lorsque le spectacle *Wielopole, Wielopole* a été joué à Wielopole.

« J'y suis allé le soir pour le spectacle, je suis reparti tôt le matin – m'a raconté Kantor. Je ne sais pas si l'école est encore là. Je ne voulais pas voir. Pendant la guerre la partie juive a été détruite, y compris la synagogue ».

Les juifs de Wielopole ne sont plus. Par leur absence, leurs maisons, toutes rasées, donnent au village une allure bancale. Comme un corps auquel il manque un membre. En marge de *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor a fait un dessin on l'on voit des maisons d'un seul côté de la route. L'autre côté n'existe plus.

Je suis rentré dans le cimetière catholique mais j'ai eu du mal à trouver le cimetière juif. Il n'en reste presque rien, quelques fragments de dalle mangés par les herbes et la terre, seul un banc semble vouloir dire : c'est là.

En quittant Wielopole pour revenir à Cracovie, je me suis arrêté peu après la sortie du village. Et je me suis retourné. J'ai vu le paysage. Celui de la photo du programme. Ou bien j'ai cru le voir. Il n'y avait plus de taches blanches, plus de branchages. Le mystère ne se tenait pas cachée dans mes hypothèses farfelues.

Le village de Wielopole qui figure sur l'affiche et le programme n'existe plus. Kantor ne pouvait physiquement pas y retourner. Seul un spectacle restituant sa mémoire d'enfant pouvait y revenir, faire écho, lui donner vie à travers la mort. Alors j'ai compris la photographie, le choix de cette photographie.

Cette vue qui embrasse Wielopole est double. Elle est celle, espéré, du père revenant de la guerre et retrouvant la vue familière de son village. Et cette vue est, tout autant, celle, désespérée, des juifs de Wielopole partant pour Auschwitz et jetant un dernier regard sur leur village qu'ils ne reverront jamais, un dernier regard pour qu'il ne meure pas.

Le père de Kantor parti à la guerre, bien qu'y ayant survécu, n'est jamais revenu à Wielopole et Kantor n'a jamais revu les juifs du village, partis à jamais. Ce sont là les deux Wielopole du spectacle que la photographie, par son apparence anodine, englobe et associe. Kantor n'a jamais voulu revenir à Wielopole, les trois sœurs de Tchekhov voulaient, elles, revenir à Moscou mais n'y reviendront jamais. « À Moscou, à Moscou » disent-elle.

« *Wielopole Wielopole* » dit Kantor. Mais lui est le maître du jeu. Le spectacle *Wielopole, Wielopole* réconcilie ses deux Wielopole dans une inoubliable fête des morts.



# CRICOTEKA – ‘The Necessity of Transmission’

*Anna Halczak*

On 19 January 1980, the Cricot 2 Theatre Centre opened at 5 Kanonicza Street. The Cricot 2 Theatre had never formally existed. For the first time ever, Tadeusz Kantor had allowed an institution devoted to his art to come into being. During the official opening, he voiced the still vague vision of how the new centre might function:

What am I going to be doing here? What are we going to be doing here, the theatre company, these people who most certainly will want to work. I would not like it to be a gallery, after all, nor a museum...<sup>1</sup>

The phase connected with the Krzysztofory Gallery was coming to an end. In a film interview, the artist confessed,

It is a shock (...) to me to be leaving Krzysztofory. I have left Krzysztofory – I’m talking not just about the place but also in a personal sense.<sup>2</sup>

From 1981, Kantor began to visit Kanonicza every day (apart from the times when he was touring abroad with his performances) to manage the Centre. Initially, the resources of Cricoteka consisted of theatrical objects and costumes passed on from the Krzysztofory Gallery by Grupa Krakowska [the Krakow Group] as well as effects of Kantor himself: programmes, posters and typewritten scripts, photocopied and placed in black canvas boxes (similar to those that the artist had at home), photographs to be reproduced and reviews brought from trips abroad and treated by Kantor almost as proof of the existence of the Cricot 2 Theatre. They were duplicated, enlarged to A3, placed in transparent plastic sleeves and exhibited in the Archives during press conferences organised in Cricoteka after each tour. Under the artist’s watchful eye, the Cricot 2’s theatrical objects were photographed and subsequent exhibitions arranged. In June, *Exhibition – Reading the Script of The Dead Class* opened. In November, *Exhibition – Reading the Scripts of Tadeusz Kantor’s Performances: The Cuttlefish, The Circus, The Country House, The Water Hen, The Dead Class and Wielopole*, *Wielopole* was organised. Amongst the theatrical props, photographs and reviews, the scripts of

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- 1 A video recording copied from an untitled film recording. TVP Krakow, 19 January 1980, video cassette, inv. no. IV/001553.
  - 2 *Wszystko o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, prod. K. Miklaszewski, 1980 TVP Krakow, typescript of the soundtrack, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. IV/003886.

the performances, photocopied and bound in black canvas, had been laid out to read on four tables designed by the artist. In his letter to the Cricoteka Office, under the heading *Cricoteka Instructions*, Kantor wrote:

The present exhibition/reading is an introduction to the proposed structure of the “exhibition-cum-reading room environment” (...) it seems to me that in EXHIBITION/READING we have captured a new (as well as correct) (and living) form of museum and archival communication! The whole effort of the management, the whole initiative must be directed towards the AUDIENCE!!! Absolutely all works and functions MUST HAVE ONE AIM, THE MOST IMPORTANT AIM: PROVIDING ACCESS TO INFORMATION ABOUT THE CRICOT 2 THEATRE TO A WIDE AUDIENCE.<sup>3</sup>

In 1981, work also started on the conservation and reconstruction of the objects of the Cricot 2 Theatre. Under Tadeusz Kantor’s supervision, costumes were placed as exhibits on stands designed by the artist; objects from the 1960s were completed and reconstructed as well.

Under the guidance of Tadeusz Kantor, exhibitions were organised in Cricoteka which documented the artist’s work and accompanied the tours of the Cricot 2 Theatre. They consisted of still frames from the performances, shots of objects, sketches bound in plastic, stuck onto aluminium sheets or made on canvas. The most important ideas and the titles of the stage productions were written on small pieces of wood (similar to those which the artist often attached to his paintings) and elucidated by means of selected fragments of theoretical texts, enlarged and stuck on cardboard and translated into different languages. They were always exhibited in front of the room where the performance was to take place, so that the audience had the opportunity to become acquainted with the art of its creator before going in.

Tadeusz Kantor worked on the renovation of the objects (Aneantisising Machine, Mannequin Hung in the Wardrobe) and reconstructed Goplana, an abstract form from Juliusz Słowacki’s *Balladyna* staged in the Underground Theatre in 1943. Going on tour was often preceded by the renovation of the objects needed for the performances. Due to the complications which had arisen out of the attempts at terminating the contract with the Teatro Regionale Toscano, owner of the props and costumes for *Wielopole, Wielopole*, a replica set began to be prepared in 1982, with the artist personally supervising the craftsmen.

Tadeusz Kantor devoted a lot of time to working on the Archives collections, the way that they were stored and exhibited. For instance, he designed a large wardrobe in which photographs from *The Dead Class* were placed. Over one hundred photographs arranged in the chronological order of the scenes were stuck onto plywood painted black, annotated with the titles of the sequences they

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3 T. Kantor, Letter dated 22 June 1981, the author’s typescript, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. I/000580.

recorded, and placed in the filing slots in drawer compartments for easy access to the documentation of the performance. The artist designed glass cabinets on stands to facilitate the display of prints related to his work. He instructed workers to stick theatrical posters onto canvas and strengthen them with wooden slats, in a way reminiscent of school maps.

The Cricot 2 Theatre appeared in Kanonicza Street for the first time before going on tour to Paris in 1983. This is where the rehearsals of *The Dead Class* were taking place, due to the necessity of swapping an actor. Towards the end of that year, the rehearsals of the new performance began in the room where the Archives was housed. They were filmed by Denis Bablet of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Using the opportunity of his visit to Krakow, a meeting with the audience was organised, during which the French guest presented documentation of his Centre’s research into Tadeusz Kantor’s work. During the theatre’s stay in Spain in 1984, a video recorder and a camera were bought for the use of Cricoteka. A video recording of the ‘ceremony’ of this very special purchase is the first multimedia presentation in the Cricoteka Archives. The Centre employed a photographer and a cameraman who began to document the activities of Cricoteka, with Kantor little by little taking ownership of the place.

During a meeting with the audience in the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw at a time when an attempt was being made to move the gallery to another location, the artist commented:

There does exist genius in art – to a greater or lesser extent, but genius nevertheless; apart from it, there also exists ‘genius loci’, (...) There was ‘genius loci’ in the Krzysztofory Gallery, and I am presently doing everything in my power to ensure that it also exists at Kanonicza, where the splendid Archives of the Cricot 2 Theatre are. When, in a bout of magnanimity, minister Żygulski offered me five million zloty for a new production, I said, ‘But, Minister, what am I going to do with this? I am not used to so much money...,’ and he replied, ‘Why, you can do anything you like with it; what matters the most is that you have a theatre.’ And I said, ‘I will never leave Kanonicza’. (...) I won’t leave the place, I cannot – because ‘genius loci’ resides there. There is an ambience there which we have taken over, annexed with our work, with the risks we have taken and with our adventures. This annexation of the place continues all the time, and it is very important in art.<sup>4</sup>

For the constantly growing and painstakingly catalogued collection of reviews, Tadeusz Kantor designed cabinets and later also bookcases and a shelving system for posters. To his designs, Cricoteka published posters and *History of the Cricot 2 Theatre* as well as programmes in various language versions, in which the artist included information about Cricoteka. In 1984, rehearsals of *Let the Artists Die* as

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4 Tadeusz Kantor. *Z Archiwum Galerii Foksal*, eds. M. Jurkiewicz, J. Mytkowska, A. Przywara, Warszawa 1998.

well as work on the costumes and objects for the performance were in progress. Appointing a new team of technicians-cum-artists to produce the items, Kantor formulated and explained his requirements:

In the Cricot 2 Theatre, there does not exist an overview of the whole work before the work on a performance begins. Projects come into being during rehearsals, they have to be put into practice immediately, tried out during the rehearsals, corrected or rejected if they don't work. They have to be works of art and not decoration thrown away after use.<sup>5</sup>

Worried that, in time, the objects would be treated as theatrical props and perhaps destroyed, Tadeusz Kantor appointed the Commission for Evaluation and Pricing in order to protect the objects and have them acknowledged as works of art. In his Declaration of regulating the status of the objects stored in the Centre of the Cricot 2 Theatre, Kantor wrote:

These works have not arisen from an *ad hoc* transient need of a particular performance. They are closely related to the ideas which define my art. They belong to the series of works with a specific theme. They contain a sufficient amount of inner tension and independent meaning so as to be autonomous works of art. (...)  
The idea of a 'living Archives' has governed all my efforts and the work that I have put into the organisation and functioning of the Centre for the Documentation of the Cricot 2 Theatre.  
The role of the 'living Archives' is and in the future should be:  
to keep alive the idea of this historically important institution, because these ideas will become (they ought to become) part of the basis on which the future theatre and those that follow in our footsteps will be creating the next stages of development. Probably doing so by completely opposing the ideas.  
But it is exactly in such cases that full knowledge of the predecessors is necessary. (fig. 48)<sup>6</sup>

In 1985, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's birth, the opening of the exhibition *Witkacy and the Cricot 2 Theatre* took place in Cricoteka (fig. 47). As always, Tadeusz Kantor had personally planned every detail and oversaw both the preparations and the exhibition itself. Next to

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5 T. Kantor, *List do Biura Ośrodka Teatru Cricot 2* [Letter to the Office of the Centre for the Cricot 2 Theatre], the author's typescript, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. I/000581.

6 T. Kantor, *Oświadczenie* [Declaration], the author's typescript, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. I/000604.



a portrait of Witkacy he placed still frames from all the Cricot 2 performances since *The Dead Class*, which had been, as he put it, ‘a game with Witkacy’.

The scripts of the performances and the theoretical writings by Tadeusz Kantor were translated into English. Next, they were bound in smart black covers and placed at the disposal of those using the Archives. The National Publishing Agency undertook to publish an album of paintings by Tadeusz Kantor, and the Centre embarked on seeking out his works in museums and private collections. In the same year, the artist began work on the plan of the Cricot 2 Theatre Museum. He designed wooden platforms on which theatrical objects were to be placed. First, however, after inspecting the items thoroughly, he prepared a detailed plan of the additional work which they required. Finally, it became possible to dissolve the contract with the Teatro Regionale Toscano and, as a result, the theatrical objects made in Florence for *Wielopole, Wielopole* could enrich the collection of the Krakow Centre. Towards the end of the year, Tadeusz Kantor wrote the Centre’s action plan for the following year.<sup>7</sup>

He started by detailing its functions, putting as number one priority the activities of the Theatre and the organisation of the tours with *Let the Artists Die* (keeping the objects and costumes in storage in Milan turned out to be very handy, as it removed the need to keep packing and transporting the stage sets quite so frequently). From 1986, the Archives became the main part of the Centre. Its objective was to continue the collecting of audio and video recordings of the Cricot 2 Theatre and Kantor’s activities, their cataloguing and editing. Another important function of the Archives was to compile and translate the reviews, ‘which must be combined so as to form certain wholes, copied and made into albums’, to render them easily available to the audience. The third significant area of the ongoing work of the Archives was the collection of Tadeusz Kantor’s writings about painting and the theatre, starting from 1940. Further tasks of Cricoteka involved the continued renovation and reconstruction of the objects (props).

This is how Kantor phrased his plans for the Centre:

Turning the objects and remaining elements of the past performances into works of art / artistic works with museum value. (...) These works ought to constitute a permanent exhibition of the Cricot 2 Theatre Centre.<sup>8</sup>

The Polish premiere of *Let the Artists Die* took place in Warsaw and Krakow in 1986. An exhibition documenting the performance was prepared in Kanonicza, which included films about *Let the Artists Die*, preceded by comments by their

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7 T. Kantor, *Plan pracy Ośrodka Teatru Cricot 2 na grudzień i 1986*. [The December and 1986 Work Schedule of the Cricot 2 Theatre Centre], the author’s typescript, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. I/000236.

8 *Ibid.*

makers. Moreover, Cricoteka organised its first symposium, which took place in Katowice and was entitled *The Art of Tadeusz Kantor*, also accompanied by film screenings.

In 1987, Tadeusz Kantor began to consider bringing his creative work to an end and he spent more and more time on Cricoteka, to which he wanted to entrust the role of looking after his oeuvre. In the most spacious of the Cricoteka's cellars he embarked on the rehearsals of his new and – as he announced – final spectacle *I Shall Never Return*. That summer, objects and costumes were created in Cricoteka's courtyard. A press conference about the cricotage *The Machine of Love and Death* took place. A considerable part of that session was, however, devoted to the problems of Cricoteka:

Down there, in the cellars, there is a new dose of dynamite. Very powerful. Very powerful. Only we have no room for rehearsals. I requested photographs to be taken, called 'Poverty. Suffering...' The poverty of the technical workshops of the Cricot 2 Theatre. Very beautiful pictures.<sup>9</sup>

In his letter to the Mayor of the City of Kraków, Tadeusz Kantor summarised his artistic plans, informing him about his work on the album of paintings and about collecting and editing his own texts for the National Publishing Institute.

Apart from all that, for many years I have given special attention to the systematic work on the Documentation of my painting and theatrical activity. I have in mind the Cricot 2 Theatre CENTRE, founded by the authorities of the City of Kraków. (...) Of course, the functioning of this place depends on its creativity and dynamism. But often its activity seems more important to me. Because what is at stake here is the continuity of cultural tradition and the education of the next generation that comes after us; what is at stake is transmission.<sup>10</sup>

Kantor designed the interior of the Office and the tables for the Archives. Since the number of cabinets housing the documentation increased, they were concealed behind theatrical black partitions so as to create separate space for exhibitions. Attempts were made to introduce changes into the statute of Cricoteka in order to give the institution more personal character.

On 5 March 1988, with the opening of the exhibition of his most recent paintings from the series *Further on, Nothing*, Tadeusz Kantor inaugurated the Cricot 2 Theatre Museum, without waiting for formal administrative decisions. In the cellars of Cricoteka, amongst objects from his theatre displayed on wooden platforms, he placed his paintings, like stage props, on metal structures with wheels. The arrangement looked like an actual artist's studio. During the

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9 A typescript of the soundtrack, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. IV/003872.

10 T. Kantor, *List do Prezydenta Miasta Krakowa* [Letter to the Mayor of the City of Krakow], Krakow, 30 April 1987, Cricoteka Archives, KWZ 32/2009.

*vernissage* Kantor read out fragments of his texts and talked about his paintings and objects:

My last wish is to preserve the memory of the theatre and to transmit it to the next generation... I don't have the assurance that this is going to be preserved... To me, all those Props, which I call objects of art, are more important. The paintings will look after themselves.<sup>11</sup>

In the spring of 1988, the theatre company together with some of the Cricoteka staff, not to mention a considerable amount of luggage – objects and costumes – left for Milan. On 24 April, the premiere of *I Shall Never Return* took place. All the rehearsals were recorded on video. After his return to Kraków, Kantor said in a press conference:

My productions *The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole, Let the Artists Die* and *I Shall Never Return* are personal confessions. (...) Today, I want to find the reason for my fanatic passion for this genre. I feel that it is important. The theatre is managing fine. It will be all right. (...) What I am worried about is the Centre here, the Archives. I am worried about what is going to be left as a legacy to (...) those who will come after us. (...) At present, I care more about the documentation than about the production itself, because it is the documentation that will be left behind. After all, the theatre is transient. The documentation must remain. (...) Because I am not going to allow the Archives not to be passed on to the next generation.<sup>12</sup>

For Kantor, Cricoteka became a tangible realisation of his Memory Concept. This concept had been present in his art ever since *The Dead Class*. The artist worked out in minute detail how his objects should be exhibited as he was determined to achieve the effect of the ‘trace of life’ which they had emanated on stage. This involved the notion that every object, placed on a wooden platform, should be accompanied by a theoretical explanation of the role that it had played in the performance – a number of the artist’s own explanations were recorded – as well as by designs, still frames from the performance and the sound track. Kantor even ordered brass posts with red velvet cords to emphasise the museum-like character of the works presented.

In 1989, Tadeusz Kantor wrote to the Mayor of the City of Krakow to request changing the name of the ‘Cricot 2 Theatre Centre’ to ‘Cricoteka’. As a result, such a change was made by decision of the Mayor, and a new paragraph was added to the statute of the institution to reflect this change:

The Cricoteka team has formed over many years (...). Working with an unchanged structure and composition, the team has maintained the tradition and the ideas of the Cricot 2 Theatre. The essence of Cricoteka is a living Archives of the Cricot 2 Theatre,

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11 A video recording, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. IV/001591.

12 A typescript of the sound track, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. IV/003911.

which embodies the unbreakable unity of the theatre and art in the creative work of Tadeusz Kantor.<sup>13</sup>

At the end of May and the beginning of June, Cricot 2 Theatre Festival took place in Paris. Tadeusz Kantor called it *Return. Theatre of Love and Death*. In the programme, he wrote:

Before, I never thought about documentation nor  
about the necessity of transmission (...)  
(then) The time of documentation began.  
Piles of plans, maps,  
projects, ideas have been growing higher and higher.  
Enormous Archives.  
The house bears the name: Cricot,  
inherited from its fathers.  
The Archives downstairs and in the cellar  
I have called Cricoteka.  
When the HOUSE falls down eventually  
The CRICOTEKA ARCHIVES  
MUST REMAIN. (...) <sup>14</sup>

In the Galerie de France, amongst the objects of the Cricot 2 Theatre, Kantor exhibited paintings from the series *Further on, Nothing*. There was also an academic symposium on Kantor's art. The artist himself spoke at the end of the session. He talked about his Cricoteka and he invited the participants to join the Association of the Friends of Cricoteka.

In the autumn of 1989, he invited Polish intellectuals to a meeting in Cricoteka and he told them:

I would like this to go on record. The plan is to open the Association of the Friends of Cricoteka to Polish intellectuals. The aim of the Association is to protect the status of Cricoteka – not that of the Cricot 2 Theatre, because the theatre can look after itself, but that of Cricoteka. The aim of the Association will be the preservation of the ideas of the Cricot 2 Theatre, guaranteed by the prestige and authority of the members of the Association. And, above all, the preservation of Cricoteka, its Archives as the only future transmitter of the ideas of the Cricot 2 Theatre to the next generations. Its preservation against the destructive intervention of political and bureaucratic set-ups. (...) I would like the idea of Cricoteka to live on for some fifty years. It has the right to live on and it has a duty to live on. (...) What matters the most to me is not the

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13 T. Kantor, *Projekt pisma do Prezydenta Miasta Krakowa* [Rough version of a letter to the Mayor of the City of Kraków], 14 May 1989, manuscript, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. I/0002277.

14 T. Kantor, *Créateur: La nécessité de la transmission*, in: *Pisma*, vol. III, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, pp. 327–328.

performance that we are about to create, but this place here. Masses of people visit us here, organised groups, we have tons of video cassettes played non-stop. Piles of documentary material, that is to say, books, theoretical texts, reviews, photographs. All that helps the young people who visit this place – not to study anything but to feel the ambiance. (...) Luckily, there is still a small grant from the City to pay for all this... It is now impossible to make this space any bigger. It is small, but one has to accept it, because it is close to the Wawel Castle, in Kanonicza Street. This place has already been put on the map; everybody knows about it all over the world, all those who come here. (...) For the time being, this is our home.<sup>15</sup>

Kantor put in writing his decisions regarding his studio on Sienna Street:

Tadeusz Kantor’s Studio is an ‘annexe’ of Cricoteka. This is the site of his creative work. The author wishes for this place to be preserved as the only genuine testimony to the conditions in which the concepts of the final performance as well as numerous paintings and the final writings were born (...). Only an *idiosyncratic* place, rather than a museum, is capable of providing the full truth about the artist’s work.<sup>16</sup>

Inspired by the ‘non-monumental’ monument to the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa on the terrace of a café in Lisbon, Tadeusz Kantor designed his own monument, depicting himself as a Wanderer and he selected the prospective location for it in front of the Cricoteka door, in Kanonicza Street (fig. 49).

At the beginning of 1990, during a meeting with the audience following the Polish premiere of *I Shall Never Return* and during rehearsals of *Today Is My Birthday*, Kantor took up the issue of Cricoteka again:

My time is now tightly squeezed. (...) Because the [Cricot 2 Theatre’s] activity is about to come to an end, the Archives are what matters the most to me. (...) Cricoteka’s continued existence and work, its young team. (...) Cricoteka is a legacy to the young generation (...), to posterity, as they say. I ask all of you to help this Cricoteka, this institution, which will transmit the memory of all these things.<sup>17</sup>

And the future of Cricoteka was indeed under threat. The building at Kanonicza belongs to the Metropolitan Curia, which had given Cricoteka notice to quit. Trying to save it, Kantor approached the Ministry of Culture and Art. In April, a symposium on Tadeusz Kantor was organised at the Jagiellonian University by Cricoteka and the Académie Expérimentale des Théâtres. On 15 September, Kantor took his ‘Fair Booth’ on tour to Toulouse. There, on the same stage on which the premiere was to take place, he spent the month continuing his work on the performance *Today Is My Birthday*. Then the Theatre returned to Krakow to start intensive rehearsals in a hall in Grunwaldzka Street made available by the

15 A typescript of the sound track, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. IV/003874.

16 *Teatr Cricot 2. Informator 1989–1990*, comp. and ed. A. Halczak, Cricoteka, Kraków 2003.

17 A typescript of the sound track, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. IV/003879.

Municipal Council. Kantor introduced his Museum into the theatre. There, he talked about an incident which he had experienced ‘a short while’ before:

IT WAS ON SATURDAY, A SATURDAY. I WAS WALKING DOWN THE STEPS TO THE CELLAR WHERE MY MUSEUM WAS; IN THE CELLAR, (...) AND ON THE THRESHOLD, THERE SAT A GIRL, POOR, GREY WITH POVERTY, CURLED UP, AND SHE WAS CRYING. (...) I AM STANDING BEFORE YOU AND I HAVE NOTHING TO SHOW YOU BUT THIS GIRL... WHO DOES NOT EXIST AND WHO WILL NOW TELL YOU NOTHING ABOUT HER TEARS. I MYSELF KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THEM...<sup>18</sup>

And the sad Poor Girl appeared on the stage, introducing the characters of the performance...

Tadeusz Kantor died on 8 December. On 14 December, he left Cricoteka – his home – for his final journey (fig. 50).

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Since the death of Tadeusz Kantor, for twenty years Cricoteka has endeavoured to realise his message. It's worth recapitulating the important stages of its activity. In 1994, the name was changed to the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor and the statute was modified, broadening the scope of the institution's activities. That same year Cricoteka acquired additional space, the Krzysztofory Gallery with the office space at 2 Szczepańska Street, and in 1995, the artist's Studio at 7 Sienna Street, with a small gallery designed by the artist himself. Dozens of exhibition catalogues have been issued. Since 2000, Cricoteka has been publishing monographs. The most significant of these are *Pisma Tadeusza Kantora* [Tadeusz Kantor: Writings] in three volumes, published in 2004/2005 jointly with the Ossolineum, and the catalogues of the artist's works: *Zbiory publiczne* [Public Collection] (his paintings and drawings in Polish museums), *Kolekcja "A"* [The 'A' Collection], *Projekty scenograficzne dla teatrów repert uarowych* [Stage Designs for Official Theatres] and *Obiekty/Przedmioty w zbiorach Cricoteki* [Objects:Cricoteka Collection]. A whole series of DVDs with documentaries and recordings of the performances has been released. The collections of the Archives have kept growing systematically, especially the photograph collection. Almost all the records have been digitised. A web page has been set up in three languages. The collections have been open to the public. In the year 2010 alone, forty people used the Archives for academic research; currently, two PhD theses on Kantor are being prepared. Cricoteka has organised and co-organised numerous exhibitions – over a hundred on its own premises and another hundred and twenty elsewhere.

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18 T. Kantor, *Poor / Girl / notebook*, manuscript, Cricoteka Archives, inv. no. I/000145.

In 2006, work started on Cricoteka’s new seat – the Tadeusz Kantor Museum, now close to completion.

Several projects have not been carried out yet. The album designed by the artist himself and published in Italian and French after his death<sup>19</sup> has not come out in Polish. It has not been possible to put up the monument of the Wanderer in front of the entrance to the Museum. Soon, the place which mattered so much to the artist, the original Cricoteka at 5 Kanonicza Street, will itself disappear.

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19 Cf. T. Kantor, *La Mia opera, il Mio viaggio. Comento infimo*, Milan 1991; also the French version *Ma création, mon voyage. Commentaires intimes*, Paris 1991.





**5.**  
**Associations and Confrontations:**  
**Shared Topoi and Division Lines**



## Kantor, Schulz, Malczewski, Wyspiański: Some Paradoxes

Marie-Thérèse Vido-Rzewuska

It is not my intention to make any new discoveries; I would like, however, to delve more deeply into the relationships between Kantor and the works of Stanisław Wyspiański, Jacek Malczewski and Bruno Schulz, relationships that the artist himself acknowledged. I would like to analyse the manner in which he appropriated and refashioned certain works, as well as attempting an elucidation of why he avoided, or obscured, their characteristic vibrancy, dwelling, instead, in his own theatrical and artistic creativity on the death element. Let me start with Bruno Schulz and the concept of ‘reality of the lowest rank’. Kantor’s borrowings from Schulz bring to mind that author’s *Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies* and the desire which appears there, expressed through the character of the Father ‘to create man a second time – in the shape and semblance of a tailors’ dummy’.<sup>1</sup> When one hears the words ‘shoddy, poor quality, rubbish’, and when watching the Theatre of Death and its players, one can easily see the links between the worlds of Schulz’s and Kantor’s productions, which have been very amply discussed by numerous researchers. When, however, one gets closer to the description of objects and the environment of the famed reality of the lowest rank, profound differences between the two artists are revealed.

For Schulz, the newly-created reality ‘in its own, lower rank’ is ‘creations resembling, in appearance only, living creatures such as crustaceans, vertebrates, cephalopods.’<sup>2</sup> This is an image ‘of that *generatio aequivoca* which he had dreamed up, a species of beings only half-organic, and kind of pseudofauna and pseudoflora, the result of a fantastic fermentation of matter.’<sup>3</sup> And the forgotten room, to which the Father returns after months of absence, looks like this:

From all the crevices in the floor, from all the moldings, from every recess, there grew slim shoots filling the gray air with a scintillating filigree lace of leaves: a hothouse jungle, full of whispers and flickering lights – a false and blissful spring. Around the bed, under the lamp, along the wardrobes, grew clumps of delicate trees which, high above, spread their luminous crowns and fountains of lacy leaves, spraying chlorophyll, and thrusting up to the painted heaven of the ceiling. (...) enormous white and pink

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1 B. Schulz, *Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies*, in: *The Street of Crocodiles*, trans. C. Wieniewska, London 2008, p. 33.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

flowers opened among the leaves, bursting from bud under your very eyes, displaying their pink pulp and spilling over to shed their petals and fall apart in quick decay.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to find here any similarities with the ‘little room of imagination’ to which Kantor keeps returning, whether we consider his childhood bedroom in *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980) or the studio in *Today Is My Birthday* (1990). Kantor’s reality of the lowest rank does not coincide with Schultz’s reality; each artist relates to a different concept of reality. Schultz addresses himself directly to the primaevial element, to the matter given ‘inexhaustible vitality’,<sup>5</sup> the matter created by the Demiurge and put aside, unutilised, the matter which keeps multiplying of its own accord, without any limitations. The Father declares that the ‘Demiurge has no monopoly of creation’ and that ‘creation is the privilege of all spirits’.<sup>6</sup> Man, full of pride and ambition, thus insists on being able to create life from this matter; he attempts to employ it according to his imagination. He tries to replicate divine matter, but limits his endeavour to a single attempt: ‘we shall not insist either on durability or solidity of workmanship; our creations will be temporary, to serve for a single occasion.’<sup>7</sup> But the creatures that he has made, rigid or limp, are tawdry and represent no more than reality of the lowest rank, because they lack a spirit – which only a real God can breathe into them.

Thus one of the fundamental characteristics of the reality created by Schultz, apart from its shoddiness, is its ability to multiply, to proliferate in the space that it delineates, inundates and conquers before the eyes of helpless, but enchanted, man. Man’s defeat is obvious here; not only does the element relentlessly force its way into all the cracks and crevices; it also keeps transforming its shape and appearance, because no-one can quite master it, in spite of the Father’s efforts and tales.

With Kantor, even if repetition is considered to be accepting the risk of the gods’ jealousy and revenge,<sup>8</sup> putting himself in competition with the Demiurge is not the main goal of the artist, since his objects of the lowest rank have been taken directly from the reality already created exclusively by man. Kantor reaches out for the remnants, the leftovers of the poor, human reality, the objects which have been pushed aside, held in contempt, forgotten, thrown out onto the rubbish tip, in order to exploit their content on the stage. The elements he uses are of poor quality; they are often crude, damaged, colourless and dirty; they seem far away from elemental nature and they do not evoke associations of either nature or fighting God. This is a carefully marked out, closed stage space, in which the everyday reality, those poor, second-hand and worn out, lifeless objects or tools

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4 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

8 T. Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kraków 1984, p. 13.

with a complicated structure are testimony to a simple, hard and often horrific human existence.

When, during World War II, the *Odysseus* in Kantor's production inspired by Stanisław Wyspiański's drama comes back to Ithaca, what awaits him is not a fantastic, Greek world of dreams, but the grey and dangerous mundane reality experienced by those who took on the risk of entering the underground Independent Theatre. When many years later, Kantor was building his room from his family home in Wielopole, the wardrobe, the table or chairs would be testimony to the simple furnishings of the rectory; the school desk from *The Dead Class* (1975) reminiscent of all the simple desks at which generations of pupils used to sit. Kantor's mannequins, dummies and bio-objects had not been created merely for a single use; they endured and reappeared in various spectacles, each time superimposed with a new layer of meanings that the artist had prepared with great deliberation. Kantor compared them a number of times to characters from *commedia dell'arte*.

In Kantor's art, degraded reality is meant to serve not so much as a challenge to enter into rivalry or mythological strife with God, but to regain mastery of the external reality constructed by man; one which can be dangerous to him – because in Kantor's productions, the characters are surrounded not only by passive objects but also by implements of torture, oppression and destruction, all proof of the barbaric and murderous tendencies of humankind. In the early spectacles of *Cricot 2*, these objects serve to delineate the space; they push man away or crush him. Amongst them can be found the aneantisising machine from *The Madman and the Nun*, the wardrobe from *The Country House* and a rat-trap from *Lovelies and Dowdies*. These objects remind us of the ubiquity of the machine in today's reality, the machine celebrated by the pre-war avant-garde, which turned out to be deeply linked to the process, then prevalent in Europe, of the mass destruction of individuality – a source of anxiety and fear for Kantor and post-war artists.

Once Kantor accepted and internalised the proximity of death, the proportions between man and object changed. Starting with *The Dead Class*, it is man who determines the size of space in relation to his own; it is through his gaze that the stage set is constructed; it is he who moves the objects. The desks are regulation-size school desks; they permit the old the opportunity to gather scraps of memory and re-create for a few moments the carefree time of their youth. The re-creation of the room in the house in Wielopole, complete with the prevarication of, and errors made by, the uncles who are reconstructing it, demonstrates that it is the individual himself who decides on the spatial designation of each object according to his fantasy or memory. It is he who conducts the creation of the space in which he is to function. The wardrobe is no longer a confined space, a crushing object that haunts us. It is an ordinary, run-of-the-mill, passive appliance, which contains within it secrets and, occasionally, pleasant memories (Kantor's comment under

the drawing shows that this is an ‘Important Interior of the Imagination’<sup>9</sup>). A fragmented object, snatched from reality, becomes a memory aid, a past-evoking tool, the metonymy of the lost world. It is a link and an anchor for the reality being built on the stage rather than dominating it.

Nevertheless, even though the destructive objects shrink in size, they still fail to disappear from Kantor’s stage. The camera and the tools of individual torture which move around in *Let the Artists Die* – such as the deadly violin, the tanks or the cages in the final scenes – ensure that suffering, fear and oppression continue to exist on the stage. Unlike, however, the aneantisising machine in *The Madman and the Nun*, which appeared to function by itself, all the implements of torture have not only been scaled down, but they are also ostentatiously set in motion by the actors, visible on the stage. These lifeless objects – parodies of the real thing – rape, destroy and torture, because man has invested them with life and mobility that they do not possess of themselves. The dimension of destruction is a human dimension; this is no Apocalypse caused by a Demiurge. Mankind itself brings destruction. And so the embracement of a poor object which belongs to the ‘reality of the lowest rank’ – the lowest common denominator, as it were – makes it possible for everyone to appropriate it, to imbue it with one’s own experiences.

However, this object that hails from the common heritage, familiar to everybody, nevertheless speaks to each individual about his own private history (whereas in the traditional theatre, an object that has been perfectly worked out and characterised down to the last detail excludes an entire range of interpretations, belonging as it does exclusively to the director and the actor: the spectator can but accept or reject its content).

The object of the ‘lowest rank’ created by Schulz, rich and unstable in form and colour, stimulates the readers’ senses and sends them to their own world of imagination, whereas the object created by Kantor – with its simple form, faded colour and made of crude material – evokes the individual and collective memories of the spectators and unites them in a shared experience of emotion.

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Let us in turn consider Malczewski. Kantor praises his ability to create protagonists without added psychological depth, whom he choreographs in compositions saturated with symbols. In Kantor’s theatre, the spatial dimension and the construction of every single character are also chiselled with great care. Similar characters appear in the opus of both artists: a wanderer, a Siberian exile, the Eternal Wanderer. Kantor replicates the processions familiar from *Melancholia* or *Vicious Circle*. When one listens to

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9 T. Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kraków 1984, illustration no. 72.

recordings of Kantor talking or reads his fine poems which deal with each phase of his own creativity, one can ascertain that the sensitivities of the two artists have many traits in common. The direct presence of each in his own works is also significant: Kantor's – on the stage, and Malczewski's – in his numerous self-portraits. Yet, when we pause to consider the shared favourite theme of each artist – nostalgia for the haunts of his childhood – we notice considerable differences. With Malczewski, Wielgie, the famous country house, is the ideal location to which the artist keeps returning and painting it anew in various colours and guises. Let's take just one of such paintings: *Childhood – Jacek by the Pond in Wielgie*. Jacek is seated on the side of a boat, reading, all around him beautiful, spring-time nature in mellow colours – flowers, the grass, bushes, the delicately drawn trees, all that can be associated with a happy childhood. What about Kantor? Here, you won't find any reminiscences about walking in the meadows or woods, playing with friends or climbing trees or hills. The only memories concern the streets, the cemeteries, the main square of Wielopole, where, by moonlight, Jewish wedding ceremonies took place, and a colourful market by day. If we are to take Kantor's word for it, his childhood was spent in solitude, in his room at the rectory, where the weak, unwell child played with boxes, imitating trains and listening to arguments between his maternal relatives, agitated by the flight of his father. Only a cart that appears on the stage seems to break up the monotony of those lonely pursuits, and what emerges from the memories are mainly religious ceremonies, metaphysical questions and incomprehensible experiences, connected with the rare appearances put in by the Father. In the artist's final series entitled *I Am Falling down like Hell* (fig. 54), the only indication of the village is the church in the background. There is no trace of nature, as if it did not exist. And in the sketch which constitutes a reply to Malczewski's painting *Return* there is barely a trace of a tree, whereas poor silhouettes, one almost naked, the other wrapped in old rags, greet each other, with the country house in the background, and this is accompanied by the confession, 'I did not return' (figs. 51, 52).

One may form the impression that this is neither a genuine memory nor sincere nostalgia for time past. That this is not a reality enclosed in the artist's recollections that slowly and with difficulty seep out on the stage, but rather a conscious reconstruction of the past on the basis of black-and-white photographs. That this reconstruction of the room in Wielopole is the only one possible, when it is Death holding the camera. Because it was Death that arbitrarily recorded fragments of reality and time past, and it is Death that suddenly revives them, bringing onto the stage those closest to the artist – the 'Dear Absent Ones'.

But it is precisely the character of the all-important Mistress – the one who consoles the artist and waits for him backstage, 'helping' him to create his spectacles, and about whom Kantor talks with adoration – that is also very different from the characters that Malczewski paints. It is enough to glance at one of those

ravishing women on the canvases of the Young Poland painter who combine Eros and Thanatos, to feel somewhat disappointed with Kantor's depiction of the character. Death, to which Kantor devoted many beautiful texts,<sup>10</sup> frequently appears on the stage as a horrible, frightening hag. She is a photographer with an intolerable cackle or a cleaner without any respect for the artist's relatives. Only the Angel of Death from *Let the Artists Die* (1985) can rival the beauty of the apparitions in Jacek Malczewski's works...

The childhood reconstructed on the stage in the production of *Wielopole, Wielopole*, located beyond everyday reality, is deeply rooted in religion, in the Old and the New Testament, as can be fathomed from the presence of the Priest and the Rabbi. 'In my childhood the awareness of the great similarities between the Jewish and Catholic religions was strongly instilled in me,'<sup>11</sup> noted Kantor. In this early and profound grafting of religion one can probably find the first traces and the influence of the fundamental process of the transformation of reality, characteristic of Kantor's theatre. Let's pause for a moment to consider these fragments of Polish carols:

In a meagre stable born.  
For a cradle, in a crib, He lay.  
What was there around Him?  
Cattle, shepherds and hay.<sup>12</sup>

The Lord of great glory on high has come to reside low.<sup>13</sup>  
Jesus, who'd given up his godliness for poorness.<sup>14</sup>  
Jesus, God incarnated, in the crib emaciated.<sup>15</sup>

And also:

We stood astounded that God so lowered himself to his creatures...  
So as to make us Angels' equals, you have debased Yourself amongst us.<sup>16</sup>

These words, so much at the heart of Polish tradition, make one realise that Christ's birth is the first step towards His humbling. The God of the Old Testament –

10 Cf. e.g.: 'She led me along her steep paths, Her face beautiful, stone and silent like eternity, she stood backstage tranquil and sure of her charms...', T. Kantor, *Spotkanie ze śmiercią*, in idem: *Dalej już nic...Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, *Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, p. 223.

11 Talking to B. Sawa in New York in 1988, Kantor remarked that 'religion is a part of human condition. Man has invented religion so as to be able to exist at all.' *Polityka* no. 39 (1638), 24 September 1988.

12 *Bóg się rodzi*

13 *Anioł pasterzom mówił*

14 *Przystąpmy do szopy*

15 *Op. cit.*

16 *Pójdźmy wszyscy do stajenki*



a severe, ireful God, referred himself to one chosen nation, of which he demanded obedience and a strict adherence to orders. Here, in the New Testament, the threatening and somewhat 'private' God of the Old Testament first becomes a small child. Poor and homeless, akin to all poor human babies, He needs care and love. What could be more poignant than a lullaby hummed to a newborn baby (especially when made popular by Chopin in his famous Scherzo, which Kantor employed in *Wielopole, Wielopole*)? And the modesty of the stable in Bethlehem is found moving all over the world: each one of us can appropriate it and build our own crib according to our own imagination, because an object of the lowest rank belongs to everyone.

God's horrible and ignominious death on the cross – this is the last act of debasement, with universal reverberations. 'Now as then. At Golgotha, where the CROSS, today sacred, was to be the tool of ignomy...' Tadeusz Kantor reminds us. The cross becomes the symbol not of death and ignomy, as it was in reality, but of love and rising from the dead in a new reality.<sup>17</sup> Through death, Christ conquered the Satanic forces and achieved eternal glory. Entering a pact with death on the stage in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor enacts his artistic Gospel – from the carol to the crucifixion. The process of humbling, humiliation and ignomy conducted through death transforms reality into a work of art which speaks to spectators all over the world. But Kantor's protagonists walk a narrow, risky and dangerous path between humility and contempt. Temporarily degraded, they must preserve inside them greatness and dignity so as to evoke sympathy rather than contempt. Rigid human silhouettes, with their mechanical movements, wear the pale masks of tragedy – because it is only the dead that are accorded a staged comeback. In Kantor's final production, *Today Is My Birthday*, these will be the artist's family members, and also the artists Jonasz Stern, Maria Jarema and Meyerhold. The seal of death is indispensable in order to come into being as a work of art.

One can then say that for this reason, Kantor's own presence on the stage is, as it were, 'illegitimate' – it emphasises its own 'borderline'<sup>18</sup> status – because the artist is still in the world of the living, even though preparing himself to depart through the degradation experienced when the actors in *I Shall Never Return* insult him and almost spit in his face,<sup>19</sup> just as soldiers mocked Christ, the King of the Jews, during the Way of the Cross. When the moment arrives of wedding the Bride, whom, after all, he has brought to the stage himself, the artist must move aside and be replaced by a mannequin. Only in *Today Is My Birthday*, his ultimate spectacle, did Kantor fully acquire the right to enter the stage freely and become a work of art. Yet his chair remained empty...

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17 T. Kantor, *Spotkanie ze śmiercią*, op. cit., p. 224.

18 Cf. *Notatki do spektaklu*, in: T. Kantor, *Pisma*, op. cit., p. 251.

19 Cf. the script for *I Shall Never Return*, op. cit.

Malczewski's beautiful Lady Death consoles the tired old man and promises him eternal rest in a fairy-tale paradise of dazzling colour; Kantor's horrific Death wakes up the dead from the black-and-white frames and promises them an eternity of existence through art (figs. 53, 54).

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In reference to the first instance of the application of the 'reality of the lowest rank' in the theatre, Kantor evokes Wyspiański, because 'who, before Wyspiański, would have set the loftiest issues of national, social, philosophical consciousness in a peasant's hut, well – who would have done that?! Nobody. They all used castles or cathedrals.'<sup>20</sup> In turn, in his design for the altar of Casimir the Great, Wyspiański showed – according to Kantor – that greatness is achieved through humiliation: 'Casimir the Great – the highest elevation of Polish might – was shown by Wyspiański as a skeleton, with remnants of splendour: his crown, sceptre and mound. This is a brilliant idea. A stroke of genius!'<sup>21</sup> This homage to Wyspiański<sup>22</sup> is the culmination of Kantor's admiration for the artist. Kantor had already demonstrated his regard for Wyspiański during World War II when he staged his *The Return of Odysseus* – and not just through his choice of play and a similar take on the presentation of the murderous protagonist and the manner in which he carried out the third, and final, version of his production (having rejected the first two). In that production, Kantor was very close to the vision proposed by Wyspiański in another drama – *Wyzwolenie* [Liberation]. What both artists had in common was their expression through a theatrical work of their doubts and reservations about the place and role of reality and illusion in the theatre.<sup>23</sup> Wyspiański exerted a particularly great influence not only on the concept of the function of art as a force to ask questions of, or challenge, contemporary society but also on the manner of the construction of the spectacle as an entity, as a synthesis of pan-art, in which each element, space, sound, movement and colour matches another on equal terms, in the same or the opposite tone and rhythm.<sup>24</sup>

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20 From the recording of the encounter with the audience at Cricoteka in 1987.

21 *Ibid.*

22 'Really, I wanted to start off in a sort of religious way: here I stand before you, Sir Stanisław Wyspiański, before your majesty, with great fear that you may reject me with your familiar, very intelligent laughter.' From the recording of the encounter with the audience at Cricoteka in 1987.

23 T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1938–1974*, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 2000, p. 75.

24 M.-T. Vido-Rzewuska, *Wyspiański et la synthèse des arts*, in: *L'œuvre d'art totale*, Paris 1995, pp. 79–88.

Henryk Opieński, a friend of Wyspiański's, made a very interesting comment: that Wyspiański always divined perfectly what kind of music would express what he was thinking. The poet first sent to Opieński the librettos of his works with sketches attached of the ballet, costumes and instructions for the music, asking the artist to produce the composition that he dreamt about.<sup>25</sup> His requirements were too difficult, however. Opieński added:

In spite of his total liberation from the framework of the concepts of the librettos, in Wyspiański's works music continued to be a dominant phenomenon, and in many cases their indispensable component. (...) on the one hand the very rhythm of a poem, the rhythm of words, which even in his prose had a certain melody, all became music; on the other hand, during the creation of the dramas at a certain point music would become a crucial complement. At that point, the artist liked to produce the music himself; he did not especially care whether it was original – all he cared about was that it convey the mood of the moment.' At such a time, Wyspiański would reach for anything, 'from a street ditty or a cabaret song to masterpieces of symphony and in particular opera music. (...) He hummed semi-original tunes, full of remembered sequences, which, however, were just what the moment required. (...) Thus, Wyspiański's later drama, evoked – as some researches claim – by his painterly visions, is fused with music – to a no lesser degree than it is with painting.<sup>26</sup>

Anyone who witnessed the rehearsals of *Cricot 2* knows how inspiring Kantor found the atmosphere created by music, which he would choose with great care;<sup>27</sup> how long he took to prepare the rhythm of each gesture and movement, which he required to be repeated as many times as necessary; what an important part all those pauses and processions had, which served to speed up or slow down the tempo of the whole. He compared sequences with the carefully worked out reverberation of certain words to Kurt Schwitters's *Ursonate*.<sup>28</sup> And the numerous drawings and the taking of cutting scissors to the work on stage, all the adjustments made by the artist only emphasised his concern for selecting the appropriate costume to create the right kind of harmony or tension. Kantor maintained that when constructing his own spectacles he always had in mind Wyspiański's *Wesele* [The Wedding]. When we listen to or read the stage directions for *The Wedding*, which introduce the first Act, taking place in Bronowice, we get an inkling of what it is that connects the two great artists:

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25 H. Opieński, *Młodość Wyspiańskiego i jego muzyka*, in: *Wyspiański w oczach współczesnych*, Kraków 1971, p. 164.

26 H. Opieński, *Znaczenie muzyki w dramatach Wyspiańskiego*, in: *Wyspiański w oczach współczesnych*, Kraków 1971, pp. 157–192.

27 T. Dobrowolski, *Le témoignage de l'ingénieur du son*, in: *T. Kantor, Les voies de la création théâtrale*, Paris 1993, pp. 257–262.

28 K. Schwitters, *Ursonate*, Paris 1990.

A whitewashed humble peasant room, almost blue, that with a single greyish blue semi-shade encompasses both objects and people who move across it. Through an open door to the side, towards the corridor, a boisterous wedding can be heard, the hum of the double-bass, the squeal of the fiddle, the wayward clarinet, the hooting of the farmers and lasses...

And further:

In the dim light of the kitchen lamp, a dance of colour, of bright ribbons, peacocks' feathers, colourful peasant coats and caftans; our peasant Poland of today.

You could say that, ever since *The Dead Class*, death has swept everything away and made all equal. In the 'reality of the lowest rank', it turned the legendary Bronowice peasant dwelling into a meagre, black-and-grey, shabby, suspicious dive from *I Shall Never Return*. The presence of death has affected the colours, music, words and movements. Yet, these are all indispensable parts of the whole. The Servant, a degraded copy of Rachela, summons from the Afterworld the poor visitors: the Bride in her rags – a poor approximation of a wedding dress, does show some signs of life, but the Groom is a mere mannequin. The dance music is the interrupted music of the Army Orchestra that accompanies the massacre of the Jews, and is conducted by the terrified Rabbi Szmul. In *Today Is My Birthday*, it is the Poor Girl leading the dead, the 'Dear Absent Ones', not outstanding individuals from the past but simple, terrified people, holding onto their Plank of Last Resort, until in turn the artists appear, crushed by the barbarity of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – all of them merging with the final procession of tanks, circus cages, monstrous monuments of recent communist rulers.

Tadeusz Kantor insisted:

It is not possible to talk about my theatre without portraying that inhuman era. A world war, murderous gods, death camps, slavery, genocide as a leading political idea, followed by half a century of the rule of people with the tenure of party first secretaries, totally primitive in the exercise of their authority; this in full view of the entire civilised world, completely indifferent to all of it. This was the reality in which I created my theatre, my painting, my artistic ideas. (...)

Art is a response to reality.<sup>29</sup>

In a typical Polish village, Wyspiański posed his contemporary fellow Poles questions about their attitude to reality, to their motherland's enslavement and to compromise – but it was only his compatriots that were moved by his great and rich work. In a shabby, anonymous dive Tadeusz Kantor poses his contemporaries questions 'beyond the borders and the fate of native countries'<sup>30</sup> about their attitude to the tragedy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

29 M. Porębski, *Deska. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, Warszawa 1997, p. 130.

30 T. Kantor, *Od początku w moim Credo*, in: T. Kantor, *Pisma*, vol. III, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

# Dazzling Afterimages

*Andrzej Turowski*

Strzemiński is an exceptional figure in the history of our painting, due to his extraordinary consistency, his intransigence and radicalism. One has to be incredibly courageous in order to arrive – in one's artistic activity, capricious and unpredictable, through all the stages of devilish logic – at the last, ultimate statement, even if it were to appear absurd. Personally, I am opposed to his theory of perception...

*Tadeusz Kantor, O Władysławie Strzemińskim*

The reflections that I would like to present are a fragment of my wider analysis of the role of after-images in the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which in turn goes together with the concept of the eye and perception in avant-garde circles. On the one hand, I refer to certain ideologies of perception according to which the concept of a spectacle is crucial, on the other, to technologies of perception, at that time determined by the use of the stereoscope and photographic camera. And it is in this light that I would like to enact a, probably daring, confrontation between Strzemiński and Kantor.

I would like to introduce a key concept in my ruminations – that of a 'spectacle', (as distinct from a theatrical performance). The term implies an intensity of visual perception and physical engagement and it is commonly employed in the context of mass and popular entertainment. A spectacle takes place in public space and tends to be a significant event that breaks up mundane monotony. A spectacle combines high and low culture, individual expression and social activity. In a spectacle, one is both a spectator and a participant, an observer and someone being observed. Here, ludic irony and laughter encounter a sense of drama and dread. A spectacle can entertain with its eccentricity, whilst also satisfying the need to get to know 'otherness'.

Another key notion that I would like to use as a point of reference is the invention and popularisation of the stereoscope, the younger sibling of the photographic camera and the source of today's 3D images. Just as the spectacle has, so has this optical apparatus altered the relationship between the viewer and the object of perception. The *modus operandi* of the stereoscope assumed the absence of any mediation between the eye and the image. In the stereoscopic technique, there was no room for perspective. Mass and space took concrete shape as a result of the physiological process of the superimposition of two images in binocular perception. The eye of

the onlooker abandoned the abstract schemata of monocular vision and situated itself in the mobile, physiologically and psychologically individualised body. That fact had various implications in the area of scientific discoveries, as well as making an impact on visual sensitivity. From then onwards, the increasingly numerous mass audiences of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century stereoscopic performance not only related to the action observed, but also to what might be called the very visibility effect, obtained thanks to the optical apparatus. In other words – to after-images. Both issues mentioned here apply both to Strzemiński's and Kantor's work.

Władysław Strzemiński, the predecessor of the Polish avant-garde, was interested in stereoscopic vision and he was no stranger to the spectacle provided by the photoplasticon. In Strzemiński's take, the physiology of the eye had its historical sources in the modern concept of eyesight. The departure from the static perspective view based on Euclidean geometry in favour of dual-eye, mobile observation of the environment marked the watershed. The change was more than a mere technicality. According to Strzemiński, it stemmed from the observer's new positioning in the world and the introduction of the eye into the body. In the artist's take, instead of 'external' subjects, presenting or contemplating the world, in the contemporary age we are dealing with a certain subjective-objective union of the eye and the body in the world of homogenous matter. 'If we assume,' wrote Strzemiński, 'that we are bodies, we must base our awareness of vision on all the observable facts of the material process of seeing.' An internal, material and human point of view causes the world, which is undifferentiated from it, 'to co-exist in rhythmical pulses',<sup>1</sup> to be mouldable, and the passive role of the subject of fitting shapes into a geometric grid is replaced by the mobile eye which guarantees constructive activity on the part of the artist. This was the vision based on the spectacle.

We can look for the consequences of these notions by the author of the theory of vision on two levels: in a modernist, borderline-solipsistic utopia of the subject that constructs the world (unism), or in the very concept of the eye and the structure of after-images visions realised by the artist. This latter tendency came to the fore in Strzemiński's *Pejzażach morskich* [Seascapes], which have a marked relationship to stereoscopic vision. The perspective, which Strzemiński rejected in unism, replacing it with the dynamics of empirical, dual-eye seeing, now determined the new structuralisation of works, based on the principle of repetition and superimposition of contour lines and patches of colour. A partial shift and a partial overlap of parts of the images seen by the left and the right eye in the stereoscope and seascapes caused the phenomenon of almost sensual materialisation of form. It was not incidental that the artist chose to realise this art concept not in the abstract, intended as a formal experiment, but within landscape

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1 W. Strzemiński, *Teoria widzenia*, Kraków 1958, p. 168.

painting, with its broad-scope spatial planes spanning towards the horizon, which he called 'visualisations of reality', related to panoramas. Tracing paper, in use from the 1940s, was to become especially important.

To understand the process and its repercussions, let's return to the origin of the modernist eye, and in particular to the landscape and solar painting of William Turner, which, probably for the first time ever, expressed the awareness of the inadequacy of conventional means, that is to say the linear perspective, for the depiction of hallucinatory landscapes, stemming from the new visual experience (of the observer).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the problem of direct seeing appeared; a harbinger, in art, of the optical structure of the stereoscope. In the modern sense, Turner embarked on painting-as-a-spectacle. When Friedrich was still busy painting the spectacle of nature, Turner, with his painting, was a participant in the spectacle. In search of dramatic events, he was the precursor of the contemporary agency photographer, who tries to attract the viewer's attention by the extraordinary images of his photo-reportage. Into the space of his paintings, Turner introduced other participants in the events, together with whom, fascinated, he watched the spectacle taking place around them. One such spectacular object of observation was the sun. Although the solar myth had always played a significant part in Western culture, in the first decades of the 19th century interest in the sun focused on the fascination with the optical phenomena caused by its light, heat, and glare. What all social classes had in common was staring at the sun, so as to succumb, in bewitchment, to the experience of the strangeness of nature, or to join in the inquisitive pursuit of the science of optics and colour. The observation of the sun, the perception of its light was as much an attraction to the general public as the object of experiment by scientists and artists. All those who indulged in staring at the sun would lose their sight, which in no way detracted from their rapture. The construction of the solar spectacle was based on the phenomenon of *éblouissement*, which requires some elucidation. The dictionary definition of *éblouissement* relates the concept to light; it means both being dazzled and being blinded. It concerns the perception of light, the source of which both fascinates with its dazzling, vibrant, intense glare and at the same time causes physical discomfort and aches in the eye and the body, a psychological revulsion; it is intolerable. As an inexpressible phenomenon it evokes magnificence; by blinding, it leads to darkness. The spectacle of the sun dovetailed with the of the night; solarist painting corresponded to the nocturnal.

In Turner's work, the perceptual process of *éblouissement* became the object of study. Staring at the sun blinded; there was nothing to see in it apart from seeing itself, and seeing itself is a serial blinding by post-vision, blinding illuminations.

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2 J. Crary, *Techniques of the Observer. On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, London 1990.

A spectacle of pure visibility in blinding darkness. The idea of after-images returned almost a century later in the work of Strzemiński. Its fullest expression could be found in a series of canvases referred to as solarist, which implemented the radical utopia of the modernist vision of light. In Strzemiński's paradoxical art, just as in Turner's, gazing at the sun represented the desire to get at the absolute of seeing, at the expense of going beyond visibility, in blinding the eye with light. And it was here that, in Strzemiński's art, the fundamental difference was to be found, which made it impossible for him to continue with the solar spectacle. Because it has to be emphasised that the artist culminated the idea of after-images not in his solarist paintings, but in his dark series of montages entitled *Moim przyjaciółom Żydom* [To My Jewish Friends]. These were memory frames, recurrent with one's eyes open, seen directly, because derived from the artist's own wartime drawings and photographic documents of the Holocaust.

As the matrix for the series, Strzemiński used his own wartime drawings, traced using tracing paper, but now slightly displaced, situated somewhat differently in the field of vision; onto these the artist attached cut-out silhouettes of Jews or the rectangles of photographs from the ghetto and death camps. The technique of double montage – or repetition – used by Strzemiński, who had taken his images from press photographs and from his own work, was an attempt to express the entity of the artist's war experience linked to the Holocaust. Furthermore, the device introduced the dimension of memory into the structure of composition, thus making memory the metaphorical axis of narration. The concepts of trace, void, reflection and absence, familiar from Strzemiński's work, became components of a new image, in which they gained photographic concretisation and, at the same time, the mnemonic space in which the Holocaust had to be thought about.

Strzemiński's series *To My Jewish Friends* can be said to be an 'image in spite of everything', or, more precisely: it is an image-as-the-missing-piece, which is simultaneously an-image-as-a-trace and an-image-as-disappearance. There remains something in it which 'is not a given thing (reality), but an impossible to represent scrap of its likeness' (an after-image). It is not very much, merely a memory frame that had survived the process of annihilation. Thus, this something does not show the annihilation but is testimony to it, simultaneously resisting it, since it represents the possibility of preserving memory about it. This is neither full presence, nor absolute absence. This is neither resurrection, nor death without leaving a trace. This is a death that *does* leave a trace, as Didi-Huberman might have put it. This is a world full of missing pieces, single images that, when combined, evoke a legible image, the effect of knowledge similar to the one that Warburg referred to as 'Mnemosyne', Benjamin – 'Passages', Bataille – 'Documents'...<sup>3</sup> And Kantor – a 'dummy'.

3 G. Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. S. B. Lillis, Chicago, London 2003.



Warburg's reading of Strzemiński's series (something I will only remark on in passing here, as I am writing about it in more detail elsewhere) turns out to be very fruitful. On the one hand, what this is about is a collage; on the other – memory and preservation. Just as Benjamin, who wanted to construct his work from quotations, or as Warburg who constructed his mnemonic atlas as a mosaic of images, so Strzemiński based his postwar series of collages entirely on after-images. He made the 'memory of his own paintings' clash with the social memory recorded in the documents in circulation (photographs). The double quotation combined into his archive of the Holocaust, compelling the traces and fragments collected therein to fit into the shared space of a collage image. Using tracing paper, the author made permanent traces of memory; by cutting photographs, he emphasised the fragmentary nature of what we remember. The negativity of collages (negativity – as trace will have no relation to the whole; a fragment will remain but a fragment) was a radical departure from the positivity of avant-garde montages (in which a trace signified the form; a fragment referred to the structure-as-a-whole). This was because in relation to the Holocaust, Strzemiński was interested neither in withholding expression nor in its aesthetic representation, but rather in suspending these functions, making the image testimony to what cannot be shown, placing it in the centre of that rupture that the surviving witness represents (that is to say, the post-vision). These were the dramatic nocturnes of the painter of the sun. *Éblouissement* turned into darkness – a constructivist's nocturne.

A nocturne is a spectacle of night and darkness; it is art being played out at the boundary of visibility; it is an attempt to cast a transgressive glance into a space where it is impossible to see. Or, another way to look at this: a nocturne is a negative way to experience light that blinds – a scientific physiology of seeing contained within itself; the ultimate form of the primaeval absolute of light as well as a gnostic ontology of darkness, which expresses the truth about the world in which light has become subjugated by darkness. The kingdom of the night. At the same time, the world of romantics and symbolists, expressionists and surrealists.

However, it was earlier that a problem arose, alongside Goethe's theory of colours (1810) and Turner's painting of night as well as the sun (1828, 1837). Goethe's contestation of Newton's optical theory based on the prismatic bending of rays and colour synthesis of white enabled the poet to recognise precisely blackness and darkness, side by side with whiteness and light, as an indispensable pole of the construction of visible light. From now on, a mysterious invisibility became a constituent element of visibility. Inspired by Goethe's ideas, Turner, in painting *Regulus*, whose eyelids had been cut off so as to force him to look directly at the sun, was depicting the destruction of sight and the mystery of bedazzlement; he was painting the story of blinding, the narrative of the ultimate darkness.

The physiology of after-images, an image seen with the eyes closed, thus the colour of memory and darkness, tied in with the mystery of the night ambiance, the phenomenology of dream and reverie, the intangibility of the concepts that precede form. Romantic in its origin, the nocturne, in which forms were blurred and objects merged with the background, was the decomposition of a painting, a protest against the order of seeing and therefore also against form. Painting of the night, which began with Turner's blinding by the sun, the night experienced in the nocturnes of Friedrich, Whistler and van Gogh, was pushed to the wire with the *Black Square* by Kazimierz Malewicz, and perhaps also with Ad Reinhardt's black monochrome. The infinity of the white and the darkness of the black of non-objectified light was a symbolic equivalent of silence, of formlessness, of the inexpressibility of the discourse and simultaneously of a conceptual wholeness, where ideas don't need words, and the language of emotions communicated directly is uprooted from its material base. Another language resounds in the silence of the night: one that touches the primaevial void and formlessness. It is thus a paradox to talk, in broad daylight, about the thought, whose roots spring from bottomless darkness, thought arising out of inner experience, which by reaching the limits of what is possible 'combined the object with the subject, being, as the subject – non-knowledge, and, as the object – the unknown'. The theory of the unknown, according to Georges Bataille, belongs to the night; in *Thomas the Obscure*, it is articulated by Maurice Blanchot:

The night soon appeared to him to be darker, more terrible than any other night whatsoever, as it had really emerged from a wound of thought which could no longer think itself, of thought captured ironically as object by something other than thought. This was night itself. Images which created its darkness flooded into him, and his body transformed into a demoniacal mind sought to represent them to himself. He saw nothing and, far from being overcome, he made out of this absence of visions the culmination point of his glance. His eye, useless for sight, took on extraordinary proportions, began to develop in an inordinate fashion and, dwelling on the horizon, allowed night to penetrate into its centre in order to create for itself an iris. Through this void, therefore, it was his glance and the object of his glance which became mingled. This eye, which saw nothing, did not simply grasp the source of its vision. It saw as would an object, which meant that it did not see. His own glance entered into him in the form of an image at the tragic moment when this glance was regarded as the death of all image.<sup>4</sup>

The spectacle of darkness – now we are in a position to say – is the spectacle of death. At least, that's how it was in Tadeusz Kantor's art.

The Theatre of Death began, as the artist used to say, the 'most risky and desperate manoeuvre in my life.' A process the 'victim of which I myself [would]

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4 Qtd aft.: G. Bataille, *Inner Experience*, New York 1988, pp. 101–102.

become,' the process of the rebuilding of the symbolic foundation of light and darkness, of the reversibility of life and death, the play of reality with illusion, the absence – with the void. Kantor began this process with the ritual of repetition, a *sui generis* after-image, which coincided with the act of double initiation. Kantor wrote:

REPETITION is the metaphysical side of illusion, which has so far escaped attention. It is almost a ritual. An atavistic gesture of man who, standing on the threshold of his history, wanted to reaffirm himself. To do something again, in an artificial way, *on his own account* – his human account; to repeat something that had been created earlier – by the gods, exposing himself to their jealousy and revenge, to take up the risk, to go forth to meet the failure that awaits, knowing full well that these will be futile tasks, without any prospects for the future, that these will be 'one-offs', DUMMIES, devoid of that splendid, vital sense and real-life efficacy. Rituals, as it were, on the other side of life, implicated in relations with death.<sup>5</sup>

In Kantor's imagination, just as with Strzemiński, the historical experience of death was initially concretised with the images of the War and the Holocaust. Death, separated from life by the reality of non-existing time. The situation underwent a transformation, however, alongside the change of time, together with the appearance in Kantor's art of the 'past perfect tense', which introduced into the discourse the artist's contemporaneity. Now, death emerging from non-existence circled the 'objects of the lowest rank', borderline-real, barely in confrontation with reality. At the beginning, it was an apparition arriving from the other side, a mannequin – an imitation of life, the Stranger. Then it came closer to the author, who recognised it in his shadow, in his blurred reflection, his *alter ego*. Finally, while remaining the 'pulse of memory', death took over life, becoming At One with the Artist. In Kantor's tear-jerking performance, the cheap, country-fair figure of death kept appearing more and more frequently. As the artist put it, Death, that tragic figure:

(...) elevated her pathetic remnants to the heights of pathos. Mocking, buffoonish, with her clownish laughter, she<sup>6</sup> swept away all that was mediocre and base. Slowly, death became my collaborator. She led me along its path. With her beautiful face, stony and serene like eternity, she stood there, backstage. Calm and assured of her seductive power. I watched, entranced, her action on the stage of life, as, in some crazed, perplexing and magnificent destruction of her daily life, shamelessly, she revealed her hidden truth that lay at the bottom. That was Her truth. Unbearably great. Through sobbing, the tears of despair and elation, and through laughter.<sup>7</sup>

5 T. Kantor, *Iluzja i powtarzanie*, in: *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kraków 1984, p. 13.

6 In Polish, the gender of Death is feminine.

7 T. Kantor, *Moje spotkanie ze śmiercią*, in: *Grupa Krakowska (dokumenty i materiały)* part 11, ed. J. Chrobak, Kraków 1993, p. 138.

In Kantor's spectacle, as once with Bataille, the void is excess, darkness – grim, sunshine – melancholy; death – an after-image of life (form). The eye, accustomed to gazing high, upwards, towards the sun, is directed downwards – towards that which has been abandoned, forgotten, repulsive, hideous; towards unformed objects of the lowest rank; from the blueness of the sky – to the blackness of the earth. Rotten wood, dung, mud, clay, and feet. Nothing more. A complete lack of form. Sliding 'lower than', towards the formlessness of the *informel*.

'That was a phenomenon', in Kantor's words, 'of suspect provenance, evading the intellect, one that arose 'without a cause', always getting lost... that 'bastard child' mocked and jeered the cultivated and contrived dignity of a work of art, exposing some elemental, biological moment of combat with the materiality of the world.'<sup>8</sup>

I would put it like this: here, formlessness was being born in Kantor's art, that is to say, an after-image of form, at all times confronting the void of the no longer existent image. This is about the non-representable, in other words, the phenomenon of the after-images – and it does not matter whether manifested in the eye annihilated by the sun, or in the lack of form in the darkness. What matters with Kantor, is the figure of death, the after-images of life. Georges Bataille wrote about death as – paradoxically – the only expression of life in the repetitive rituals of death. The sacrificial offering is a death substitute – a transposition from the sphere of things to the sphere of concepts; a non-material reversal of reality, a conversation, and not death itself. It is a conversation that was never finished, never materialised – because, when the objective aspect of man dies, he himself dies. Death exposes the duplicity of death, not because the absence of being reminds us about the lie of existence, but rather, because it affirms life at a time when it is no more. The same is true about the image and its after-image repetition.

'The author', to quote Kantor's description of the theatrical spectacle, 'in anticipation of the difficult moment of all this circus-like, theatrical mystification culminating in death, realises that this is the right time to conduct a REHEARSAL OF DYING, as the theatrical custom would have it. He carries it out together with the OWNER OF THE CEMETERY WAREHOUSE. The rehearsal does not go very well, because the stage character is clearly fed up with being directed so much and begins to act of its own accord. He gets up – which puts the author and the warehouse owner in a state of dismay'.

This is not all, however:

Moments earlier, as is customary when in a cemetery, they took their hats off in the presence of death; now, they quickly put them back on. The stage character drops off onto his pillow and dies – the hats are again put in motion – and, in this way, this

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8 W. Borowski, *Tadeusz Kantor*, Warszawa 1982, p. 41.

circus-like game played by death can stretch out into infinity. The author must have reached the conclusion that his continuing intervention was pointless; he sits down on the chair, as if he wanted to say: now, you can carry on acting on your own. He becomes no more than an attentive observer. The character, left to his own devices, begins to act of his own accord.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the autonomisation of the after-images discourse has taken place. The author, as a participant of the funereal ritual, is carefully watching himself, recognising his own image in the post-vision (after-image). The figure of death, reflected in a reflection, is forever replaying death. The after-image has been realised. As I said earlier, in order to come closer to capturing the image of death it was necessary to destroy the order of representation, to abandon the illusion of having captured, in the after-image image, the original, but no longer present image. It was necessary to negate the image, to negate seeing itself – it was necessary to enter, in person, the circle of darkness and to place oneself at its edge.

Let's evoke Oedipus here: does not his blindness – this consequence of cognition – cut both ways: being a praise of darkness, it leads us towards a metaphysical experience of death, that glimmer of light; and, as the flip side, it discovers the absence of knowledge, the ultimate silence, death itself, multiplied. Saturation and the void, the physics and the metaphysics – such is the discourse of the after-images, where everything is possible, where everything, ironically, turns against itself.

Kantor circled in the orbit of the problem, as formulated by Bataille, of the object and the illusion, the reality and the limit, the victim and death: man's metaphysics. An ambiguous metaphysics, because throwing doubt over the metaphysics contained in itself (Kantor's metaphysics is a void, and so it signifies the ultimate absence of metaphysics). Let us note that in Kantor's art the increasing metaphysical tension, the desire of death as an absolute, was accompanied by a seemingly opposite process, based on the archaeology of memories, on the entering into the darkness of seeing, on the penetration of meanings towards the void, the physics of formlessness.

With Bataille, the sacrifice usually represents a fragile equilibrium of affirmation and negation, of revelation and mockery. On the one hand, it is the state of suspense between a celebratory transgression (a symbolic birth) and the objective reduction (the death of the 'animal part' of the human being); on the other hand, it is the ambiguity of the act of identification with the victim, the animal being killed, or the fact of observing one's own death inflicted on oneself. This is not, as Bataille has it, tautology, but comedy. The victim is a mockery of himself, the comedy of death. And, I would add, it is the comedy of the after-

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9 T. Kantor, *Niech szczerzą artyści. Rewia*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, p. 24.

images. The figure of death, in Kantor's art, mocks everything and everybody. Nothing is out of bounds for her ridicule. In a scene in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, the Widow of the photographer of the local Ricordo photographic business, that Vile Servant from the church mortuary, the Grim Agent of Death – as Kantor refers to her in the stage score – unceremoniously pushes in with her cart, a hut with the camera. She goes through the motions of taking photographs in an off-hand manner, with a characteristic couldn't-care-less attitude. Kantor emphasises that there is a continuing sound of a church choir chanting a psalm, now rising, now dying out. The Grim Photographer puts his cart in the middle of the room. For a moment, he takes in with satisfaction the situation, which is indispensable for his carrying out his professional task. Carelessly, he checks over his camera and directs himself towards the BED. Clearly, it is only now that he is embarking on his job proper, his grim ritual. The BED is a mechanical contraption. The machine of death. The mechanism rotates. The bed is a flat surface made with plain wooden slats; it has a shaft ending in cogs and a handle. The surface is two-faced, both sides flipping over to take it in turns to be the top side and the underside. For a moment, on top of the surface there can be seen a priest – a wax figure – bare-footed and in his shroud. The Widow-Photographer carefully cleans the mechanism of the bed with a wet cloth. Then she begins to turn the handle. With piety. Almost as if performing a REQUIEM. The sound of the psalm intensifies. The surface of the bed slowly turns over. The dead priest in his simple shroud disappears. From underneath, the same Priest reappears. He is now dressed in ceremonial garb: his shiny cassock, his biretta, wet-look leather shoes. Clothes fit to go into the coffin. The hands are piously clasped together. The photographer quickly lifts the Priest's body and brutally turns the head towards the camera. A snap...<sup>10</sup>

In Kantor's art, Strzemiński's stereotype has been replaced by the photographic camera, but with both artists, the after-images remained the dark frame of death. Bedazzlement came from the same source. Strzemiński's and Kantor's spectacles remained borderline visible. They had in common their need to define, through the physiology and the metaphysics of sight, the essence of the world. It was in that sense that avant-garde artists, making use of 'modernist' optical apparatus, wanted to create visions,<sup>11</sup> although, in fact, what they did produce was after-images, which annihilated images. For a modernist, the death of an image was the only image possible.

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10 See: T. Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole [partytura]*, in: *idem, Teatr Śmierci. Teksty z lat 1975–1984*, vol. II, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz. Kraków–Wrocław 2004, p. 216.

11 S. Themerson, *O potrzebie tworzenia widzeń*. Gaberbocchus/ CSW Zamek Ujazdowski. Warszawa, Amsterdam, Warszawa 1937/1983/2008.

# Kantor and Beuys: Parallel Processes?

Jaromir Jedliński

I have spoken of both Beuys and Kantor. I have organised exhibitions of both artists, until now – separately. I also came up with the idea of the exhibition *Beuys/Kantor: Remembering*, shown in mid-2012 at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> Beuys could well have been the Odysseus in Kantor’s Independent Theatre in the occupied Poland, who, in the words of Stanisław Wyspiański, the author of the drama *The Return of Odysseus*, proclaimed, ‘From Troy I have returned’.

The Jerusalem exhibition of the artist from Poland *vis-à-vis* the artist from Germany covered the stations of the biography of Beuys, born in 1921, and of the biography of Kantor, six years his senior, similarities and differences in their achievements and the remembering instilled in their respective opuses as well as our remembrance thereof. I also draw on my memory of working with both artists. I interpret the memory of a creative achievement as a continuing challenge. Indeed, we have been left with the wreck of both artists’ endeavour and the ruins of our own history: ‘the function of the wreck’, according to Kantor, ‘can only gain substance in memory’<sup>2</sup>: first of all, in the artist’s own memory, and later – in the memory of all of us who remain.

Memory and death illuminate the entire thinking and work of both artists. We now traverse this expanse in our own minds. By means of our own memory – thoroughly and critically – we must deal with their opus. Not oblivious of the

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1 My comments are related to the exhibition which I have been preparing (as a guest curator) *Beuys/Kantor: Remembering*, to be shown between May and October 2012 at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The subtitle of my article alludes to the exhibition *Joseph Beuys. Parallelprozesse*, taking place at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (in K20, and also in the Schmela Haus) in Düsseldorf, 2010/2011.

2 I quote Tadeusz Kantor from various sources, although I will only occasionally give a footnote reference. The majority of Polish-language citations come from the three volumes of his *Pisma* [Writings], which contain texts from 1934–1990, selected and edited by K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 2004–2005; also: W. Borowski, *Tadeusz Kantor*, Warszawa 1982; and: T. Kantor, *Mówić wtenczas o śmierci było nietaktem. Sztuka jest bliska śmierci*, in: *Konteksty* 2005 no. 1 (268), pp. 84–87; in German, including *Tadeusz Kantor: Theater des Todes. Die tote Klasse. Wielopole, Wielopole*, Nuremberg 1983; *Tadeusz Kantor: Ein Reisender – seine Texte und Manifeste*, Nuremberg 1988; in English: *A Journey through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, ed. and trans. by M. Kobialka, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1993; in French: *Tadeusz Kantor. Entretien*, ed. B. Eruli, Paris 1996.

gift and lesson bestowed by them, we would like to ask questions concerning the present.

The exhibition of Beuys and Kantor today is part of – archaeology. Jerusalem provided a singular context. Beuys never got there, although in the 70s there were plans to exhibit his work there. Kantor's 1985 presentation of *The Dead Class* in Jaffa has been vividly remembered in Israel to this day. The exhibition of Beuys' and Kantor's works was linked to the extraordinary collection of the Israel Museum, with reference to its archaeological section and especially art. The exhibition was linked directly to the Museum's collection by *Angelus Novus* (1920), a drawing by Paul Klee which can be found in the collection and which has a significant history; it was originally the property of Walter Benjamin and later of Gershom Scholem. This drawing was placed in the entrance hall through which we entered the exhibition *Beuys/Kantor: Remembering*.

Both Beuys and Kantor created *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Beuys referred to art as a vehicle of mental energy. He searched for an incarnation of anthropological art, which was yet to be born. He celebrated shamanic rituals. Kantor kept going back to archetypes and clichés. He was an archaeologist of remembrance. Sorrow, loss, sadness and laughter inspired his work: Dantesque scenes in a peripatetic theatre in which even the door was homeless. Kantor wrote, 'This remembrance of things past, not [by] the respectable protagonists of PROUST but OLD PEOPLE HAVING ONE FOOT IN THE GRAVE, dressed in shabby coffin clothes.' The work both artists created was secret: 'a personal confession' (Kantor); inducement to 'showing [one's] wound' (Beuys).<sup>3</sup> Jan Kott talked about forgotten memory which exists in each of us as a badly healed wound.<sup>4</sup>

Kantor's Theatre of Memory negated the passage of time; it revealed glimpses of it. He called his Fair Booth a *Theatrum Mortis et Gloriam* (taking his cue from Blok and Meyerhold). He cancelled death, starting with the shock, incomprehensible to him at first, of *The Dead Class*. 'We the dead', Konstanty Puzyna referred to the work, faultlessly verbalising the anatomy of remembrance conducted in the stage production which constituted Kantor's 'found time'.

Beuys kept switching between the Pluperfect Tense, the Past Tense, Present and Future Tenses, the Perfect Tense and the Tense about to occur. That which

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3 In 1976 Beuys produced an environment entitled *Zeige deine Wunde / Show your wound* in the metro station Maximilienstraße/Altstadtring in Munich, co-organised by the Galerie Schellman & Klüsser in Munich; cf. L. Glozer's *Joseph Beuys Zeige deine Wunde - Raum mit Doppelobjekten*, Munich 1976; cf. also of importance in relation to the theme of curative aspirations and properties in Beuys's art: A. H. Murken, *Joseph Beuys und die Medizin / Joseph Beuys and medicine*, Münster 1979.

4 J. Kott, *Pamięć ... ale jaka pamięć?*, in: *idem, Kadysz. Strony o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, Gdańsk 1997, p. 37.



obtained today was meant to blur into what was yet to come. Beuys tended towards the designing and modelling of that which was desirable.

Unlike Kantor, for whom painting and the theatre were Number One, Beuys declared: sculpture is Number One, 'everything is a sculpture!' The artist himself became a living sculpture, his own auto-creation and trademark. Kantor, according to Kott, 'was his own, incomparable, theatre'.<sup>5</sup>

Both artists were strategists of their own ventures. Their activity and the fruit it bore, all that junk store, scrap, together with the archives of their action and production – instilling an order in the world by means of remembrance – constituted a *cosa mentale*. Their objects were no more than reflections or projections of thought and relics of emotion; their running in parallel, possibly also to one another: the anatomy lesson during Kantor's happening; the exhumation of the dead in his Theatre of Memory; the death make-up he employed, right up to the obsessive vision of a 'corpse on the stage'; Beuys's sculpture *Grauballe Man* together with his idea of the magnetic energy field – a transmission between what has been and what is coming, between the teacher and the pupil, between the dead and the living. For Kantor, eschatology was a natural destination. For Beuys, the characteristics of a man had to include, first of all, political potential.<sup>6</sup> He looked for a 'new style' not in art but in politics. Kantor evaded such purposefulness; he perceived his artistic predicament as that of a 'victim of SOCIAL MOTIVATION.' Beuys regarded his actions as transformers of socially significant ideas. Kantor understood the happening as a means to 'master the object', as an 'attempt to catch it *in flagranti*'. His 1965 happening *Cricotage/Linia podziatu* [Cricotage/The Division Line] in Warsaw and Krakow was, in the same year, paralleled by Beuys's first solo action *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* in Alfred Schmela's gallery in Düsseldorf.

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5 J. Kott, *Tadeusz Kantor – 1915–1990*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

6 Cf. J. Beuys, *Aufruf zur Alternative*, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 23 December 1978, no. 288, p. II; the Polish translation (by Helena Cieślińska) of this manifesto by Beuys appeared in print as *An Appeal for an Alternative* in issue 4 of the bi-monthly *Sztuka* in 1981, although almost the entire edition of the magazine was destroyed due to the imposition of Martial Law in Poland in December 1981. A large part of the issue had been devoted to Beuys, which coincided with his visit to Poland and his action-donation *Polentransport 1981* at the Museum of Art in Łódź. The most notable text in the issue was *Kolekcja Beuysa w Darmstadt* by Wojciech Sztaba, who was probably the first art historian in Poland to discuss the artist thoroughly. Sztaba was also the first individual from outside the Museum of Art in Łódź who had wanted to familiarise himself with the collection *Polentransport* at the time when I was only just processing it myself (together with Eleonora Jedlińska) at the Museum in Łódź in the autumn of 1981. However, the development of the situation in Poland towards the end of that year, soon followed by Wojciech Sztaba's departure for Africa and then emigration to Germany unfortunately meant that this perceptive art commentator ceased to influence the Polish art scene.

Kantor's irony and melancholy can be juxtaposed with Beuys's pathos and concern for the community. Kantor's sense of humour: laughter through tears, sarcasm in the face of the inevitable, was different from Beuys's grimaces, sarcasm intended to alter the *status quo*. As a matter of fact, Kantor had little interest in matters concerning the social contract which so absorbed Beuys. The German artist had a pragmatic take even on mythologies, whereas Kantor used myths as naturally as he would the calendar. Both artists dragged around their props, the baggage of their experience and trauma: Kantor's playing with shame, laughing, drawling out of his words, saying that he still needed a 'third Corpse' (Meyerhold) apart from those already secured – Maria Jarema and Jonasz Stern – for his parody of mourning, the cemetery fiesta in his final production *Today Is My Birthday*; comedy in a room full of crosses on little mounds of sand; the tragic farce of giving birth vs dealing death: the 'family machine' as an instrument of torture, the 'mechanical cradle', the revolving bed-bier – the eschatological object of ironmongery from *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, the 'Circus of Death'; or the portable door-cum-threshold as a metaphor and the apparatus for the rites of passing. Beuys used to say that humour was not treated sufficiently seriously by people encased in their cocoons. But it was Kantor's laughter that vibrated with emotion. Beuys's humour was cold. He used it as an argument in his disagreement with the world, in which he somewhat resembled the 'Lead Generals' from *Let the Artists Die* or the 'Armoured Violinists' from *I Shall Never Return*. The artists differed in how they saw the role of the jester, as evidenced in the Stańczyk from Jan Matejko's painting *The Prussian Homage* and Kantor's Stańczyk from *The Emballage of the Prussian Homage after Jan Matejko*<sup>7</sup> against Beuys as trickster, Till Eulenspiegel of Brunswick (Owlglass), although Beuys was also associated with Yorick's Skull.<sup>8</sup>

Kantor's art was defined by the mystery of his own history – 'a work of art is closed, unavailable', he used to say – by his emotions and, according to Gillo

7 Kantor produced this realisation on the occasion of the AICA Congress in Kraków in 1975, and he exhibited it among other works of contemporary Polish artists which had been ordered by Mieczysław Porębski, the then curator of contemporary art at the National Museum, opposite 19th-century Polish paintings at the Sukiennice branch of the Museum in Krakow's Main Square. In relation to this work, Kantor commented, 'I dared to emballage this sacred national object, Matejko's *Hold pruski* [Prussian Homage]. With desperation, fear and piety, I wrapped the proud figures of royals, knights and bishops – for eternity. I only left alive the great Royal Jester – Stańczyk'. *The Artist as a Jester*.

8 I owe this last reference to my conversation with the New York critic Peter Schjeldahl. Cf. also: P. Schjeldahl, *The Germans' Martial Arts*, in: *Village Voice* New York, 3 August, 1982, p. 66; Cf. id.: Documenta 7, in: id.: *The Hydrogen Jukebox. Selected Writings 1978–1990*, ed. by: M. Wilson, introduction by R. Storr, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford 1991, pp. 141–145.

Dorfles, the ‘extraordinary eclecticism’. That ‘eclecticism’ determined what inspired the artist from Wielopole, from Tarnów, from Krakow. ‘Because I am looking for my forefathers’, Kantor explained. However, his respect for the Dead was subversive.

Beuys’s keystone idea was ‘use your intuition instead of a cookery book.’ Syncretism was the prominent characteristics of the artist from the Lower Rhine valley, from Krefeld, Kleve, Kranenburg, Düsseldorf. The main principle of Beuys’s behaviour was therapeutic intent, and that was also the aim that he expected art to have. Diagnosis, treatment, homeopathy (*similia similibus curantur*), the occult, gnosis, theosophy, shamanism – Beuys looked for alternatives to everything that had been determined. He idealised man, refusing him the privilege of being ordinary, generously allocated to people by Kantor.

Poor small towns shaped them both: Kantor grew up in Wielopole, with the double shadow cast over him by its church and synagogue; Beuys lived surrounded by the folk mysticism of the Catholic Lower Rhine region of Germany. Those hinterlands shared multi-cultural osmosis in religion, in everyday life, and faced the louder and louder call of history. In Germany, teenage Beuys salvaged the tome *Systema naturae* by Linnaeus from a flaming pile. Next came the Hitlerjugend.

Symbolism, which Beuys encountered through the work of the sculptor Achilles Moortgat from Kleve, Romanticism, fairy tales, Goethe, and also Maurice Maeterlinck (important to both artists):<sup>9</sup> the Ephemeral (and Mechanical) Puppet Theatre, the Bauhaus, a peripatetic circus which the young man from Kleve joined, the emigration of part of his family to Chicago; then – Witkacy’s suicide; the botanical studies in Poznań, soon given up, followed by Beuys’s service in the Luftwaffe, the Eastern Front, his Junkers shot down over the Crimea; the Tartars and their legend; wounds and the prisoner-of-war camp. At the same time, Kantor was busy creating the Independent Theatre in German-occupied Krakow; he discovered REALITY; Bruno Schulz was murdered by a Gestapo officer; then, the Jewish Holocaust; Beuys discovered the mission of art in a reproduction of

9 Kantor was interested in Maeterlinck as a symbolist already before WWII.; Beuys referred to him during the post-war period, especially in the social dimension; that was how he interpreted Maeterlinck’s *The Life of the Bee*, which in conjunction with Rudolf Steiner’s *Bees* had provided the foundation of Beuys’s rich iconography and allegories, together with his use of honey, beeswax, honeycomb, the queen bee etc, starting in the 50s. This interest found its most striking expression in Beuys’s environment *The Honey Pump* during Documenta 6 in Kassel in 1977; the work later became part of the collection of the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebaek in Denmark. Pumping through of two tons of honey in that apparatus was for Beuys an embodiment of the principles of the Free International University (FIU), which he founded in 1972 together with Heinrich Böll. Cf.: *Joseph Beuys*, ed. C. Tisdall, (exhibition catalogue), the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Thames and Hudson, London, New York 1979, pp. 254–259, 278–282.

Wilhelm Lehmbruck's sculpture; Jonasz Stern miraculously survived his own execution, crawling out from under a pile of dead bodies in the camp at Janowska Street in Lvov; the terror of reality; the stunned Europe, the deportations, the burning of people. *Zivilisationsbruch* – a term coined by the Jewish German historian Dan Diner. Such was the store of random memory explored by both: exposed and aggravated by Kantor, soothed by Beuys.

The ruin, the tears of things – *sunt lacrimae rerum*. The Time of Reality against abstraction, of reflection on the Great Reform of Art, of the ancient *art of memory* invoking remembrance about itself through the Renaissance Theatre of Memory. The sublimation of 'subordinate reality'. The quiet discovery of POVERTY by Kantor. The feeding on leftover scraps as a castaway or a captive would, an impulse of someone buried alive, in Beuys, who doggedly rebuilt his personal integrity, previously drawing on the store of Christian iconography, which – after his graduation from the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf under Ewald Mataré, a sculptor with mystical provenance – soon seemed to him exhausted in the ruined world. How can one articulate anything at all, when faced with the falling apart of the very description of the world-as-conflagration? After all, many revolutionary utopias and postulates of the reformers of art had been implemented in Kantor's and Beuys' lifetime so effectively, with murderous consistency, under the banners of the 'world to be constructed' and the 'revolution of nihilism'. Both Beuys and Kantor – although in different ways – experienced the powerlessness of the traditional humanist culture. At the same time, both refused to acquiesce in the impotence of humanism. Art comes first – they proclaimed – and so does the *avant-garde*, as the most endangered advance guard. Beuys's 'Everyone is an artist' side by side with Kantor's mocking rendition of the words uttered by a bourgeois woman who had to live next door to an art gallery: '*Qu'ils crèvent, les artistes!*'<sup>10</sup> in the title of his Nuremberg revue *Let the Artists Die*, were ironic slogans of these artists – demiurges, to be sure, but demiurges of the makeshift in the world of dross and gratuitous cruelty.

Memory = a photographic plate = a scene = *Arbeitsplatz* – such was the equation in the forms of the art of memory under consideration. The happening, the action, the

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10 I heard this from Catherine Thieck of the Galerie de France in Paris when, in the mid-90s, we were working on the return of a considerable part of Kantor's drawings and paintings which had been kept in the gallery to Poland. Cf. also: *Qu'ils crèvent, les artistes!*, convers. P. du Vignal, in: *Art Press*, September 1985. As regards Kantor's works kept in the Galerie de France, finally in 1995 we transported to Poland 35 paintings and 175 drawings. We presented them at the Museum of Art soon thereafter, with particular help from Marek Rostworowski; cf.: *Ze spuścizny twórczej Tadeusza Kantora. Depozyt Marii Stangret-Kantor i Doroty Krakowskiej*, (exhibition catalogue), eds.: J. Janik, J. Ładnowska, A. Saciuk-Gąsowska, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź 1995.

theatrical space, emballage, showcases, repetitions, multiplications. The memory wrapped, bundles-as-souvenirs and the bundles of memory dragged round the world. Mail, *The Letter*, envelopes, *Postcards*, herbariums, display cabinets from a museum of natural history, portable objects, portable doors, windows, notice boards, crosses, even graves; human remnants, unburied. Drawing on sand. 'The Impossible Monuments'<sup>11</sup> to banality: chairs unfit to sit on; Kantor's *Chairs* were monstrous (*Cambriolage* in the Foksal Gallery, the chair from Oslo etc.), and Beuys's *Fettstuhl* was full of lard.

The myths: of Orpheus, of Odysseus/Ulysses, of Charon; the Judaeo-Christian tradition; the peculiar roles – of the artist-as-witness, the survivor and the renovator – marked out the route that the wanderers themselves mapped out and travelled from station to station, defined by them as phases of their work, as rest stops, as watersheds or as clearances. The essence of their work relied on co-operation. In the evoked facts, and especially in the situations installed, there was something of manoeuvres or masquerades, of further transgressions, right up to the very final ones, such as Beuys's *Palazzo Regale*, realised in the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples and later placed by Armin Zweite in the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf<sup>12</sup> (and also displayed at the exhibition *Beuys/Kantor: Remembering* in Jerusalem); right up to Kantor's final paintings from the series *Further on, Nothing*, painted in the 80s, and his *dernière répétition: Today Is My Birthday*.<sup>13</sup>

'Kantor ist da,' proclaimed the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, when the artist came onto the art stage in Germany and Switzerland. 'Beuys ist hier,' announced a leaflet which was part of the collection of the artist's works *Polentransport 1981*, deposited in the Museum of Art in Łódź. At the time, in Łódź, Beuys said:

Aesthetics explains that your *things*, the products of your skills can be integrated in the name of humanity. Everyone is an artist. Of course, this does not mean that everyone is a painter or a sculptor.<sup>14</sup>

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11 Cf. *Tadeusz Kantor. Niemożliwe / Impossible*, ed. J. Suchan, Kraków 2000.

12 *Joseph Beuys. Natur. Materie. Form*, hrsg. und Texten von A. Zweite, (exhibition catalogue), Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 1991, Munich, Paris, London 1991.

13 Cf. *Tadeusz Kantor. Plus Loin, Rien!*, (exhibition catalogue), Galerie de France, Paris 1989; *Tadeusz Kantor. Ma Création, Mon Voyage*, preface by G. Scarpetta, Paris 1991; *Kantor, homme de théâtre, Alternatives théâtrales* no. 50, Bruxelles 1995; *Tadeusz Kantor 1915-1990. Leben im Werk*, (exhibition catalogue), Konzept und hrsg. von J. Jedliński, Kunsthalle Nürnberg 1996, Nuremberg 1996.

14 *Begegnung mit Joseph Beuys (Auszug)*, in: *Der Riss im Raum*, (exhibition catalogue), the edited annex to the exhibition: *Joseph Beuys Polentransport 1981, Idee und hrsg.:* J. Jedliński, Berlin 1994–1995, p. 222.

‘Kantor is here,’ they announced in Germany. ‘Beuys is here,’ we announced in Poland. This seemingly banal coincidence of the announcements has significant consequences for us.

Beuys and Kantor worked parallel to each other in Edinburgh in 1973. Beuys had arrived in Scotland soon after, in early 1970, he took his leave of Richard Demarco in his studio with the now legendary words, ‘See you in the land of Macbeth.’<sup>15</sup> According to Beuys, Scotland was the ‘last European wilderness’, the ‘Celtic world’. The impressions of his journey there found their expression in his programme *Strategy: Get Arts*. Beuys’s *Scottish Symphony* harked back to the musical themes of Felix Mendelssohn inspired by the composer’s travels in Scotland. Now it was Beuys who undertook such voyages, which had arisen out of the spirit of Romanticism. In Scotland, he discovered similarities to his homeland in Kleve, described as a ‘Celtic and Catholic enclave in a German and Protestant country; a region where borders simply do not matter.’ Beuys’s inclination to discover old legends as well as to create some of his own dovetailed with the enthusiasm and exaltation of Demarco, an exuberant Scot with Italian roots, and with the warmth and overexcitement of Caroline Tisdall – ‘Celtic Compatriots’, as Beuys called them.

Tadeusz Kantor arrived in Edinburgh in 1972, invited by Demarco, with his *Cricot 2* and *The Water Hen*, a mature work produced during the phase of what he called the Happening Theatre (the Theatre of Ready-made Events), arisen out of the happening. A year later, Kantor brought to Edinburgh another production based on Witkacy, *Lovelies and Dowdies* of the Impossible Theatre, which had its premiere a few months earlier in the Krzysztofory Gallery. The performances took place at the Poorhouse in Forest Hill, comparable to the Krzysztofory cellars. At the time when Kantor was showing his *Lovelies and Dowdies* in Edinburgh, which Beuys saw and in which he almost took part, nearly taking the role of one of the Forty Mandelbaums, Beuys himself made a twelve-hour appearance in Melville College; he presented the ideas of Anacharsis Cloots, who hailed from Rindern. Kantor and Beuys were intrigued by each other, perhaps even admired each other. Beuys was impressed by *Lovelies and Dowdies*, although he opined – he, who had given a twelve-hour presentation – that Kantor’s performance should have been ‘twenty minutes shorter’. Then, the idea arose of presenting Beuys’s work in Poland, at the Foksal Gallery. However, it took the emergence of

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15 In this part of my text, I have relied on information provided by: first of all, Beuys and Kantor, and also Caroline Tisdall, Richard Demarco, Jasia Reichardt, Sandy Nairne, Marina Vaizey, David Gothard, Nicholas Serota, Wiesław Borowski, Ryszard Stanisławski and Maria Stangret-Kantor. The points related to Beuys’s and Kantor’s ‘Scottish’ phase in the 1970s can be found in Sean Rainbird’s book *Joseph Beuys and the Celtic World*, London 2005.

the political movement Solidarity for Beuys to visit Łódź, where he brought his collection *Polentransport 1981* dedicated to the Museum of Art there. In 1981, Beuys removed the doors of the Poorhouse building in Forest Hill, covered with posters of such performances as Cricot 2's *Lovelies and Dowdies* or actions such as his own *I Like America and America Likes Me*, and he transformed them into an artistic object entitled *Poor House Door – A New Beginning Is in the Offing*, which subsequently found its way to the Abteiberg Museum in Mönchengladbach.

Loss, deprivation, absence? Our thoughts and steps are again confused in the disarray which Kantor and Beuys had denied within our memory. 'What matters most is the situation which I am constructing,' Kantor kept saying. 'In such a situation, the actors must save themselves.' The participants in the games that Kantor and Beuys played remained children in their school benches; obediently, even though at times mindlessly, they watched the lessons full of mysterious chalk marks on the blackboard. Left to their own devices, the pupils, the children orphaned by their mentors, had felt that loss so acutely that they descended into squabbling or froze, reminiscent of the dummies of children-as-old-people, corpses-as-clowns, as if they had suffered from progeria, a rare genetic condition that rapidly turns children into old people so that the age of maturity bypasses them, and the years which would enable them to achieve the wisdom of maturity, arrived at through working on their own lives, are lost to them. One does not enter such a school unpunished. One does not escape unscathed from a situation where everyone has to look to their own salvation. Kantor's umbrella and Beuys's pastoral staff kept their symbolic meaning, but they lost their respective ability to protect and to point the way forward.

Soon before his death, in January 1986, Beuys made a speech in Duisburg on the occasion of having been awarded the Lehmbbruck Prize. He said that when he had come into contact with Lehmbbruck's art, he intuited that he himself could get somewhere with art. He confessed that it was as if he'd heard the call, 'Protect this flame' and 'Everything is a sculpture.' For Kantor, coming into contact with the Bauhaus was similarly significant, especially with the achievements of Oskar Schlemmer and László Moholy-Nagy. Beuys was also inspired by Rudolf Steiner's vision. He came to believe in the power of trans-mission through the work left behind by a dead artist. Here, he discovered the imperative of the will to create *Social Sculpture*, creative thinking which led towards a life based on co-operation and will. Beuys kept proclaiming healing objectives. Kantor used to say, 'the *therapeutic* role of the theatre is not something that I fancy much.' Beuys wanted to identify creation with everyday life. Kantor did not share such faith. He fought against illusion. In fact, it was Kantor who was anarchic and – free. Beuys could not do without a system, a doctrine, dreaming. He tried to return to the regions of reality that Kantor had never left.

Both Kantor's and Beuys's work was full of passion. Neither had ever lost his faith in love. They knew that devotion was their only ally. The death of each had the form of a girl's shadow. Kantor favoured a belief in dreams, whereas Beuys believed in day-dreaming. They were not embarrassed to talk about this. They were fascinated by death. They talked about it without fear. Death was the one thing that did not fail them. *The Grand Emballage of the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* from *I Shall Never Return*,<sup>16</sup> the paintings/objects from Kantor's series *Further on, Nothing*; Beuys's group of sculptures *The End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* – they all, in spite of their conclusive titles, were meant to open something. They are eloquent testimonies to the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, records of journeys to the end of the world and returns so as to give others an account of one's own Odyssey.<sup>17</sup> The influence of the Absent Ones may intensify further.<sup>18</sup> As we are setting up the situation of confronting their work, and doing so in a new context – especially in Jerusalem and in its museum like no other, the Israel Museum – we can expect an electrifying encounter of timelessly important meanings and revelatory content.

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- 16 This was a stage set from *I Shall Never Return*, which Kantor and Cricot 2 presented in Milan, with its premiere there in 1988. Everything in it sounded decisive: in the guide to the performance, after the words proclaiming: *The Grand Emballage of the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Kantor added, 'No comments!!!' It was in that performance that the 'Bare-footed Servant Girl' sang *Ani maanim*, 'The Song of those GOING TO THE GAS CHAMBER.' Further on, Kantor wrote about this character, 'The Servant of the Great Chronos / the Singer of the 'Promised Land' / digs out **the splendour of our century** / its "Pompeii".'
- 17 In reference to this motif as executed by Tadeusz Kantor, the artist who, in his own words, 'in vain searched for a haven', cf. J. Jedliński, *Odysea Kantora*, in: *Tadeusz Kantor. Wędrówka*, op. cit., pp. 11–19; a somewhat altered English-language version: *Tadeusz Kantor's Odysseys*, in: *Visual Arts and Culture. An International Journal of Contemporary Art*, Sydney, Vol. 2, Part 1 (2000), pp. 128–135. In Beuys's work, a similar motif was employed in the exhibition at the Watari-Um Museum in Tokyo and in the texts which accompanied it; cf. *Joseph Beuys. Beyond the Border to Eurasia*, op. cit.
- 18 Cf. *Joseph Beuys. Parallel Processes* (exhibition catalogue), ed. by: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, curated by: M. Ackermann and I. Malz, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 2010.



# Heritage and Identity in Tadeusz Kantor's Oeuvre and Postmodernism

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It is clear from numerous anecdotes how preoccupied Tadeusz Kantor was with himself. His status as a theatre producer is equally obvious: Kantor mastered the concept of an omnipotent director who totally dominates all the elements of the theatrical work.

What was, however, the identity of the artist as revealed by the analysis of his art perceived in its particular aspects? And what was the role of heritage – all Tadeusz Kantor had been endowed with as an individual entangled in his corporeity and psyche, in the world and culture? What was the role of all he kept receiving as an attentive and perceptive son, man and, above all, a creative and thoughtful artist? Did that progressive *endowment* signify transformations of his personality, or rather its strengthening through his experiences?

Are there contemporary artists who treat their endowment in a manner similar to Kantor's and who think as he did? Finally, can one observe generational watersheds not only in the transformations of genres and styles but above all of individual philosophies of life?

## Matter and Variation

Kantor drew rapaciously on new artistic trends, which he had come to know first through his studies and later through his foreign trips, made possible for him e.g. by his patron Theodor Ahrenberg. Hence, succumbing to inspiration was characteristic of his personality. The first trend that he drew on was symbolism; next came the Bauhaus, after that Roberto Matta's surrealism, *taschism* and matter painting; then installation, which he emballaged with Fluxus-like irony or turned into an impossible monument; finally, amongst all those themes connected with modern trends, the happening arrived. The Witkacy period in Kantor's theatrical work contains chapters with meaningful subtitles pointing to the inspirations of that period: *dell'arte in abstracto*, *informel*, *happening*, the Zero Theatre (a minimalist-conceptual idea).

However, if one were to analyse works picked from different phases of the artist's creativity, which followed one another, one would be likely to discover conspicuously individualistic elements, linked to the artist's constant focusing on self-exploitation and self-discovery.

The artist himself described his own *taschist* informel – which was expressive, colourful and textured, violently and 'sloppily' executed, using mixed techniques – as a 'discharge from the artist's guts,' his 'infernium'.<sup>1</sup> This turn of phrase points to the exposure of the inner psychological turbulence and its use as a material; turbulence which was terrible, full of anger, impulsive and – in some respects – ugly.

And it is precisely the 'I' as a material that appears in Kantor's own – 'not very nice' – residues in his emballages. In *Infernium*, under the plastic sheet of the window left in the haphazardly put together *passe-partout*, one can see individual human hairs, including those taken from intimate parts.

However, the material perceived in one's own interior also covers knowledge; for instance, knowledge of history and art history. I do not mean just the external forces which determined Kantor's style but also what he experienced as historical heritage and retained in his memory as a component of his own identity. All this matters precisely because it was part of the artistic and cultural heritage which contributed to Tadeusz Kantor's consciousness, fundamentally and in a wide historical and aesthetic perspective (and not only through elements of contemporary ideas, frequently contested and modified by the artist's own imagination).

Heritage perceived and remembered is often reduced to the notion of the 'lowest rank'. Again, such material is not very nice, so to speak. However, the artist has imposed the degraded shape on the material to allow one to stop and scrutinise it with surprise, looking first for its ambivalence and then for its new essence. In the happening *The Anatomy Lesson Based on Rembrandt*, there is an action which instils new life into the boldness of the historic painting in contemporary reality. In the *Emballage of the Prussian Homage after Jan Matejko*, an academic 'machine' with Veronese-like colours has been turned into a similar but smaller and monochromatic composition where the figures have been characteristically 'wrapped' in painted sacks and cardboard. Stańczyk, the royal court jester prominently placed in the red foreground, has Kantor's own features; the artist – just like the prophet and the clown – exists outside society and possesses superior knowledge, remaining unappreciated and ridiculous. The second part of the cricotage *The Machine of Love and Death*, in its 'lowest rank' refinement, harks back nostalgically to the artist's fascination with the works of Witold Wojtkiewicz. The large heavy and austere coloured paintings placed on

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1 Cf. T. Kantor, *Infernium*, published on Cricoteka's web page: <http://www.cricoteka.com.pl/pl/main.php?d=plastyka&kat=20>, (date accessed: 19 March 2007; the author has a printout thereof).

racks (in the last series, entitled *Further on, Nothing*, inspired by the art of Jacek Malczewski) are peopled with figures from paintings e.g. by Goya and Velázquez, whose Infanta also appears in a scene intended for *Today Is My Birthday*. Whole series of Kantor's works have been inspired by Gaudi's Sagrada Familia and the cathedral in Barcelona.

Should the continuously changing inspirations accompanied by loose quotations that follow one another in the independent treatment of the artist's emotionality, physicality and memory be seen as a never-ending sequence of transformations and 'trying-on' of different identities? This is perhaps how Wolfgang Welsch would be inclined to view it; for him, a constantly changing artist is the best example of the 'convergence through temporariness' typical of the forever transforming postmodern personality in which the individual not so much *is* as *becomes* oneself.<sup>2</sup>

However, Kantor did not transform himself in that way; he probably did not even change his 'costumes' or put on Gombrowicz-style faces (which Gombrowicz called 'mugs'). Rather, he journeyed through art, transforming the material and styles known to various artists in his own way, marked by his idiosyncratic expression and his tendency to symbolism and nervous reflection. Kantor's oeuvre consists in paintings which provide an enduring iconic narrative about himself and death, and this narrative could only be affected artistically by such masters as Rembrandt, Velázquez or Goya. Kantor's quoting from the masters is not so much an indication that he has been influenced by them as an indication that he belongs to the world of masters who depart – and yet, thanks to their greatness, remain in human memory.

## Paintings and Memory

Photographs are employed by Kantor in his work to evoke the images that have stayed in his memory and which carry a particular emotional charge. They are used as elements of installations. For instance, in the *Portrait of My Mother*, six photographs on bags of earth in a 'farmhouse-style' box-tomb illustrate the aging process of a person close to the artist from her youth to her old age. The *Self-portrait* consists of black podiums and boxes with photos of Kantor in various periods of his life stuck onto them. The photographic prints, relegated to the level of the 'lowest rank' by the appearance of the installation and the material used, were judged 'profaned'. Kantor had to refute accusations by explaining that his

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2 Cf., [www.uni-jena.de/welsch](http://www.uni-jena.de/welsch)

exploitation of his own life and memory and his venturing beyond the customary practices helped to show truth, including universal truth.<sup>3</sup>

The scene of the Colonial Robinsonade in *The Dead Class* was inspired by a genuine 'historic daguerreotype'. A photograph of army recruits, with the artist's father amongst them, was the blueprint for the positioning of the soldiers in *Wielopole, Wielopole*. *The Dead Class*, with the pupils sitting at their desks, is reminiscent of school photographs; the soldiers in numerous scenes from *Wielopole, Wielopole* (for example, the scene at the door of the railway carriage) also evoke familiar snaps, while the motionless individuals from the artist's family (cf. the wedding scene or *Uncle Staś – Exile*) are reminiscent of people posing for photographs.

While the historical and artistic heritage, co-existing with the emotional 'discharge' and the individualistic stance, forms the matter of Kantor's paintings, the private 'memory frames', too, show historic characters known from popular depictions. These include the School Caretaker in *The Dead Class*, who evokes the Austro-Hungarian institutional and political reality, and, even more so, the Polish generals who appear – to the sound of *Marsz Pierwszej Brygady* [March of the First Brigade] – in the scene from *Let the Artists Die* composed on the basis of a photograph taken during the funeral of Marshal Piłsudski and published in the *As* magazine. The stiff grey-and-silver officers are, however, recalled from memory or perhaps from the Katyń graves, and the horse is just a skeleton – again, 'profaned' and brought to the level of the 'lowest rank'.

One can juxtapose the transformation of the scenes inspired by photographs or the metamorphoses of the characters with the paradoxical transformations of ordinary things of the 'lowest rank' and the 'profaned' people into hyperbolised grotesque objects, or with the spilling of the discharges into compositions impressive in their vibrant sophistication. At all times, the matter is subjugated to Kantor's power, will and imagination. The goal is to investigate the essence and meaning of the stuff of the scenes, figures and events.

This is all the more so since – amidst exhibitionist manifestations of what springs from the artist's ego and affects the world perceived by him and the images evoked from his memory – yet another source of inspiration for the artistic material appears, discovered inside the artist but perhaps reaching beyond him and the reality observed. These are symbols which belong to the cultural community, signs related to the sacred: crosses, references to Golgotha and the Last Supper in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, or to death: candles, crosses again, and the very act of taking photographs which itself deals death but also suspends some of its aspects.

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3 *O fotografii z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, A. Matynia talks with Tadeusz Kantor, *Projekt* 1987, no. 3, p. 18.

As Hans Belting noted, the act of photographing enables the viewer to confront death in an almost 'ritualistic' way.<sup>4</sup>

Such treatment of oneself and the world is symptomatic of the assumption of various identities and does not stem from external factors. Rather, this is a journey – not merely a journey of the theatre touring the world, but also Kantor's own journey into himself and his observation of his own corporeity, delving deeper into his thinking, recalling places, memories and relics, also those shared by the community, forming part of culture and history. The will of the artist – Tadeusz Kantor – imposes the final shape onto the evoked images shifting within the structure of his self-awareness and hews them into a coherent vision. An important context for this stance can be found in the philosophical reflections of Paul Ricoeur or Barbara Skarga.<sup>5</sup>

## The Body and the Other

Kantor combined relentless power with a delicate touch in exploiting his own emotionality and (often intimate) memory, highly regarded art, and also corporeity, sort of... indecent at times. He approached other people in the same way. His sparse drawing of the Picassoesque *Women Ironing* in the 'enhanced realism' from the 1940s is significant, as is his synthesising of the human shape, his idiosyncratic retention of no more than the very essence of what is revealed to us through the sense of sight, in the *People Eaten by Sand* from the 60s and 70s.

Meanwhile, the human shape has been transformed into inside-out surreal 'bone structures', akin to the praying mantis, or else it has completely disappeared in abstraction. But perhaps even then the individual is present not so much through representation as through images which replace human interior, an area resistant to being represented or even to being understood at all. For this reason, the psychological, and almost physiological, 'discharges' of the taschist 'inferno', displayed with almost exhibitionist perseverance in the 'sacrificial offering of the artist's shame' induce the viewers to engage their empathy. Emotional recollection of one's own discomfiting memories tells us something about the human condition; it makes it possible to inquire into what constitutes the essence of humanity. And this is how Kantor treats his own memory and the revealing manipulation of its fragments.

The artist took it for granted that all the others who contributed to his art in their own way would demonstrate similar readiness for self-sacrifice and acquiescence

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4 Cf. i.a., H. Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton 2011.

5 Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago 2009; B. Skarga, *W drodze, in: Tożsamość i różnica*, Kraków 1997, pp. 228–229.

in being treated ruthlessly, especially as regards their own corporeity. A number of familiar experiences: emballages, where people and objects were wrapped up; the attention paid to the props of the lowest rank (a plank, a bicycle wheel...); continuous consideration given to the concept of the actors an Über-Marionette, derived from the texts by Edward Gordon Craig or inspired by Bruno Schulz's *Treatise on Tailors' Dummies* and practised by Oskar Schlemmer in his *Triadic Ballet* – these were all linked to the dimension and role of the individual on Kantor's stage.

The figure represented with simple strokes in the drawings seems to lose its external form in the theatre. The man fuses with objects into 'bio-objects'. This deforms and complicates the movements of the actor, who becomes an Über-Marionette, a mannequin, reduced again to an object of the lowest rank, totally obedient, ultimately dead and only temporarily brought back to life by the will of the artist. The way Kantor treated his rehearsing actors, which was totalitarian, severe, neurotic and ruthless, akin almost to dog-training, has become quite legendary. Kantor loved the actors in an idiosyncratic, dangerous way. Perhaps this was how the essence of the apparently 'debased' humanity manifested itself in relationships with the 'other'.

## The Subject

In his controversial love, Kantor remained a powerful personality with an unambiguously formed artistic identity and a formidable will. He aggressively annexed stylistic inspirations and ruthlessly dominated the matter (the actors included). He froze his characters in memory frames like a photographer or death, stripping them of colour and then colouring them anew in a refined way; he introduced them into a new *status quo*, defined them through objects or replaced them with mannequins without further ado.

At the same time, the 'living' director was present amongst the characters. He set the performance in motion. Occasionally, he adjusted a prop or a pose, or helped an actor. Most frequently, he just sat there, gazing in a way that spoke volumes. Now and then he made a gesture. But crucially, he was always there, conspicuously present, both physically and mentally. He mastered and subordinated it all to his artistically consistent will, which also honed his own monolithic identity.

Such a vital and vibrant presence amongst the dead triggers a thought-provoking dissonance yet again. Kantor watches what he has summoned from within himself and in which he exists. At the same time, he is present there as a modern man; he makes decisions; in a sense, he complements the matter. He indicates the intimate character of remembering, based not only on the sense of

sight and on the recollection itself but indeed on corporeity (due to the artist's physical presence). He also points to the role of personal emotions, which he reveals through referring to those 'Absent' as 'Dear', or through showing himself at various stages of his own history (in *Let the Artists Die*, he is simultaneously a small boy riding his handcart and the director who controls the performance). These devices throw into sharp relief the significance of will which wants to expose itself and let the imagination, or even the subconscious, speak... but only in order to express an important truth not just about the artist but about man in general. It is not only the will and the ego that play a part in the condition of the artist; so does his need to face himself, to perceive the Other in himself; for instance, the Other from the past, with whom, however, he must continue engaging in a dialogue.

At the same time, after *The Dead Class* Kantor seems to have finally come to realise that, when faced with death, it was not enough to watch the external world or one's own inner space. This can be gathered from the fact that his series *Further on, Nothing* shows figures (often with features of the artist himself) coming out of the frames of the paintings. Perhaps this was a process of the artist's freeing himself from the limitations from which even art, held by him in such great esteem, had not been able to free him. Here, the creative liberating oneself from the unambiguous shape of one's 'I' differed from the earlier searching for new styles and matter. However, the process did not give freedom any more than the previous search had done. For, in the final analysis, freedom is not something that art has the power to bestow.

Perhaps the road to seeing 'beyond the world and one's inner space' led through the symbols, clearly present in the installations and deeply-rooted in Kantor's theatre, which came back in the paintings of the artist's final period. It was then that the frames, mentioned above, appeared, dark colours predominated on the canvas and pictures showed figures known from history or works of art, as well as people with whom the artist had intimate relationships at that time. (Emotional experiences were also hinted at in the 1987 cricotage *The Machine of Love and Death*).

The viewer's attention is drawn to a lonely building or its detail, to a candle, a cross, or an empty space with a solitary figure... Tracks discovered on the way, during the journey, turn out to be not only concrete trails but also sign posts pointing to the metaphysical goal in relation with which one's identity can fulfil itself. For it is only in facing the challenges of metaphysics, indicated also by symbols, that one may acquire the fullness of one's identity. Perhaps that is the message of the painting *I Have Something to Tell You...*

Perhaps the message concerns the 'I' that formed itself through various human and artistic experiences, while continuing to participate – with his mind and body, resolutely and in a state of self-reconciliation – in life, the world, art, love and death.

## Kantor and Contemporary Art

Today there are still many artists who are happy to admit to artistic kinship with Kantor or who quote from his art with deference. One instance is Christian Boltanski's characteristic gathering of documents and remnants (including packaging), using old photographs of the dead (most often of Holocaust victims), an examination of memory which fades and dies. Significantly, the artist uses photographs of a little boy who has lost his childhood or life in the drama of war, a boy with whom Boltanski often identifies.<sup>6</sup> As the raw material of his art, the artist uses materials similar to those which mattered to Kantor. However, in Boltanski's work, the sense of loss of the heritage which the artist desperately tries to salvage so as to also save his own identity is more palpable. Kantor placed the emphasis differently, not so much demonstrating his despair in the face of annihilation and death as trying to conquer them.

In his installation *Memory/Loss*, Robert Wilson has juxtaposed the plank of wood from Kantor's *The Return of Odysseus*, raised on chains, with the character of Mankurta, a Mongolian slave cruelly deprived of long-term memory.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on Kantor tradition, Wilson embarks on an allegorical discussion about the role of memory as the foundation of one's identity that consistently follows its path. He introduces the theme of Odysseus who carries his memories and goes back to them in spite of everything; who fights fate to retain his identity which stems from the force of memory and will. Wilson follows in the footsteps of Wyspiański, who exposed the same thread in his symbolist drama, and of Kantor, who completed the philosophical/anthropological process on the stage. Simultaneously, by metonymically evoking Kantor's entire oeuvre and making it the subject of allegory, not only does Wilson prove his empathy with it, but he also pays homage to the artist.

Many active and currently appreciated artists relate closely to the motif of considering oneself as a subject identical with oneself, yet shaped in relation with those whom one remembers and with the things one receives 'on the way', when one's consciousness is being formed in a constant dialogue with the Other within oneself and outside oneself. This can be seen in Anselm Kiefer's textured painting with themes of national and cultural heritage, in David Hockney's photographs and drawings of his mother, and also in the sophisticated video installations of

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6 Cf. *i.a.*, <http://www.tate.org.uk/magazine/issue2/boltanski.htm>; (date accessed: 15 December 2010).

7 Cf. Robert Wilson, *Memory/Loss*, exhibition catalogue, Tadeusz Kantor Foundation, Kraków 2000.



Bill Viola, who, sensing around him the continuing presence of his parents, who have passed away, employs his paintings to refer to metaphysical permanence.<sup>8</sup>

It seems, however, that the more time goes by and the younger the artists are, the more difficult it becomes to come across manifestations of how they view the problem of one's identity based e.g. on memory. And it becomes more difficult to spot affinities with Kantor, not merely in terms of style, although one could point to the reality of the 'lowest rank' in the works of Mirosław Bałka and Paweł Althamer, but also in terms of 'apprenticeship' with the master. After all, Igor Mitoraj, so different from Kantor, has been his direct pupil. It is also impossible to find affinities related to Kantor's gravity of metaphorical and symbolic thinking. There have been few attempts at visual expression based on the iconic use of oneself, consisting in a sort of exhibitionism which is essentially delicate and refined.

In Poland, it is probably Mirosław Bałka, who – albeit using different genres and means of expression – is the most similar to Kantor in his synthesis of 'ordinary', often 'poor' matter and content. Bałka's artistic expression pertains to identity, heritage and memory, and the synthesis, enclosed in a poetic metaphor, symbol or tale, leads to metaphysical experience. His *Souvenir of the First Communion* (1985)<sup>9</sup> is a concrete sculpture of a boy wearing a suit and leaning against a table which bears a memorial photograph of the child. The photograph, the positioning of the figure, and especially the faded colours of the rigid boy in his First Communion suit may not be obvious quotations from Kantor, but they mark similar sensitivity and a similar way of thinking and remembering. Examiners evaluating Bałka's graduation work stuck pins into the heart of the figure, a red pincushion attached to the boy's chest. The examination took place in a shabby house on the outskirts of the city, and finding one's way to it had become a journey in its own right. On another level, the work was both an allegory of a rite of passage, an expression of humility in the face of painful memories of the past petrified into a concrete monolith, and an embodiment of the fragile existence which necessitates an effort to invest the initiation ritual, rooted in memory and directing one toward metaphysical experiences, with an appropriate meaning.

In his other installations, Bałka has employed the co-ordinates and a model of his family house in Otwock, terrazzo tombstones with the titles of his exhibitions carved by his father, and a Perspex tombstone with a cross, erected upside down

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8 Cf. [http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue15\\_pdfs/GRACE\\_death%20as%20presence.pdf](http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue15_pdfs/GRACE_death%20as%20presence.pdf); (date accessed: 24 July 2010).

9 Cf. E. Gorzałdek, *Mirosław Bałka*, September 2004, updated in June 2009 [http://www.kulture.pl/pl/culture/artykuly/os\\_balka\\_miroslaw](http://www.kulture.pl/pl/culture/artykuly/os_balka_miroslaw) (19. 12. 09); *Każdy chłopiec boi się inaczej*, Bożena Czubak talks with Mirosław Bałka, *Magazyn Sztuki* 1998, no. 3 (19), pp. 16–31.

on the ceiling and lit from underneath, with a plastic frog placed on it. Perhaps the frog is intended to symbolise thoughts from childhood, evoked elsewhere by an ashtray in the shape of a little black boy, taken from the artist's childhood home. Memory has filled the 'living space' and borne fruit in a metaphorical composition of life experiences, the meanings of which are symbolised by the materials used: the concrete – durable but brittle; Perspex – artificial but transparent and illuminated; terrazzo – despised but, paradoxically, boasting a respectable Italian origin.

However, Balka does not belong to the youngest generation of artists. Perhaps, then, it is indeed the case that the generational watershed has changed the artists' attitude not only to their identity and heritage but also to Kantor himself. The present time is not the time of strong artistic subjects who, like Kantor, ruthlessly control their material, who discover and exploit themselves in their work and strengthen their own 'I' in the world. who face the hardships of the 'journey' in order to discover its meaning. Or perhaps the potential for a metaphysical experience, also in art, is conditional not only on the artist's sensitivity but also on their being ready to make the decision to embark on the journey, adversity notwithstanding. The question suggests itself whether the deconstruction of one's identity and heritage is a testimony to the artist's willpower, an act which leads to a new, more genuine personality, or whether it signifies deliberate cultivation of immaturity as a creative force. In our time – the time of postmodernist 'convergence', as Wolfgang Iser or Zygmunt Bauman would put it – such artists as Orlan, Matthew Barney or Katarzyna Kozyra move fluidly from one identity to another, including physical and gender transformations, and in contesting themselves, they abandon their own 'I' for a mere transitory role.

# Tadeusz Kantor – Jerzy Grotowski: Two Concepts of Theatre and Art\*

Zbigniew Osiński

When, in March 1996, at the symposium *The Contexts of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor*, at the Centre of Studies on Jerzy Grotowski's Work and of the Cultural and Theatrical Research in Wrocław, I first spoke about *Kantor and Grotowski: Two Theatres, Two Visions*, the literature on this topic consisted of just a few anecdotes. It is peculiar that within both the Polish and foreign critical assessment of these artists no Kantor researcher had seen fit to take on board Grotowski's work in depth, and vice versa,<sup>1</sup> in spite of the fact that in the 1960s these two names tended to be linked as examples of outstanding avant-garde artists (frequently, Józef Szajna<sup>2</sup> would have also been named as a third). It is only fair to mention that, during the symposium, Jan Kłossowicz gave a lecture on *The 'Poor Theatre' and the 'Sparse Theatre'*.<sup>3</sup>

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\* This text is a revised version of my talk during the conference *Today Tadeusz Kantor: the 20th Anniversary of Tadeusz Kantor's Death*, organised by Cricoteka, the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor at the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University, the Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Kraków, 8–10 December 2010.

- 1 Cf. Z. Osiński, *Kantor i Grotowski: Dwa teatry, dwie wizje*, in: *ibid.*, *Jerzy Grotowski. Źródła, inspiracje, konteksty*, Gdańsk 1998, pp. 279–332. Rev. and ampl. version in: *op. cit.*, Gdańsk 2009, vol. 1: second, rev. ed., pp. 297–353 and 408–415. The previous version first appeared in: *Dialog* 1996, no. 12, pp. 144–159 and *Errata, Dialog* 1997, no. 1, pp. 197–198. Rev. and ampl. ed.: *Przegląd Artystyczno-Literacki* 1998, nos. 1–2, pp. 60–75 and no. 3, pp. 33–51. Hungarian edition: *Tadeusz Kantor; Jerzy Grotowski – Ket színház, ket vizio*, trans. I. Fejer, *Vilagszínház*, Budapest 1998, pp. 68–109. Russian editions: *Kantor i Grotowski: dva vzglyada na teatry*, trans. N. Kazmina, in: *Tyeatralnaya zhizn*, Moscow 2001, no. 7, pp. 4–7 and no. 8, pp. 49–53. Ed. version in: *Voprosy Tyeatra. Proscenium*, Moscow 2008, nos. 1–2, pp. 317–351. Bulgarian edition: *Кантор и Гротовски: два театъра, две представи, превод и бележки Богдан Глишев (Kantor i Grotovski: dva teatrya, dyvie predstavii)*, trans. and comments B. Gliszew, *Гестус. Театрален алманах/ Gestus. Teatralen almanach*, Sofia 2009, pp. 302–358.
- 2 Z. Strzelecki, *Polska plastyka teatralna*, Warszawa 1963, vols. I–III; *ibid.*, *Kierunki scenografii współczesnej*, Warszawa 1970; D. Bablet, *Les révolutions scéniques du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1975.
- 3 Cf. *Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych 1990–1999. The Centre for Study on Jerzy Grotowski's Work and of the Cultural and*

In recent years, this has changed somewhat and public events do now occur, such as the one in the Gallery of Contemporary Art in Opole in January 2008, entitled *The Laboratory of Masters*,<sup>4</sup> where the first day was devoted to Kantor, and the second – to Grotowski. They were still being treated separately, rather than comparatively.

Krystian Lupa<sup>5</sup> and Jacek Stokłosa,<sup>6</sup> independently of each other, had already pointed out the need to compare these two artists. Why is it, then, that the first attempt at such juxtaposition only took place in the 1990s, thus six years after Kantor's death and in the final years of Grotowski's life?

*Kantor and Grotowski: Two Theatres, Two Visions* – that was the topic of the seminar for M.A. students which I had run in 1993–1995, and later during 2003–2005, in the Faculty of Polish Studies at the University of Warsaw. I published an article of the same title in the monthly *Dialog* of December 1996.

One must note that the artists' relationship had undergone various stages, evolving in the process: from Grotowski's interest in Kantor (particularly during the days of the Independent Theatre), via negation and an almost ostentatious lack of interest, to acknowledgement and admiration (for instance, of Kantor by Grotowski after *The Dead Class*) and finally – the acceptance of each other's otherness (for instance, of Grotowski by Kantor: 'Perhaps he is the only one, after Witkacy, to have his own idea of the theatre, his own idea of art').

The culmination and turning point in the research on the relationship in question has to be the international conference *Grotowski and Kantor* at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University on 4 May 2009 – part of the *Year of Grotowski in New York* celebration, with the participation of Daniel Gerould, Michał Kobiałka, Richard Schechner (the initiator and the host of the event), as well as the author of the present paper.<sup>7</sup>

*Theatrical Research*. Content ed./ed. Z. Osiński. Elaboration M. Hepel, Wrocław 2000, pp. 57, 94.

- 4 Cf. D. Nowicka, *Laboratorium mistrzów*, *Nowa Trybuna Opolska*, 10 January 2008, no. 8; R. Kaczkowski, *O Kantorze i Grotowskim w GSW. Ocalić od zapomnienia*, *Gazeta Wyborcza – Opole*, 11 January 2008, no. 9; JAN, *Dni wielkich mistrzów*, *Nowa Trybuna Opolska*, 15 January 2008, no. 12; M. Szubryt, *Laboratorium mistrzów w Opolu. Wspominali Tadeusza Kantora*, *Gazeta Wyborcza – Opole*, 16 January 2008, no. 13.
- 5 K. Lupa, *Postać rytualna w teatrze Kantora*, in: *Sztuka jest przestępstwem. Tadeusz Kantor a Niemcy i Szwajcaria. Wspomnienia – dokumenty – eseje – filmy na DVD*, ed. U. Schorlemmer, Kraków 2007, p. 406.
- 6 J. Stokłosa, *Cel uświęca środki*, in: 'Zostawiam światło, bo zaraz wrócę'. *Tadeusz Kantor we wspomnieniach swoich aktorów*, ed. J. Kunowska, Kraków 2005, pp. 247–248.
- 7 My lecture during the New York conference appeared in Chinese: Z. Osiński, *Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. S. Manlin, *Theatre Arts. Academic Journal*, Shanghai 2009, no. 5, pp. 26–33. Contents of the magazine listed in Chinese and English.

Even though an artist's drive towards uniqueness and autonomy is understandable, it has become the case that in the majority of accounts of the Polish theatre of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the two names 'Kantor/Grotowski' or 'Grotowski/Kantor' are mentioned in one breath, as if they have blurred into one. It would appear that it is these two artists who have left the most profound mark on the art of theatre of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this is becoming more and more pronounced as time goes on.

Against quite prevalent opinion to the contrary, I think that one of Grotowski's most important artistic partners was his great antagonist in art – Tadeusz Kantor.

One of the most important changes which I have introduced into the second, revised, edition of the first volume of my monograph *Jerzy Grotowski: Sources, Inspirations, Contexts* is the *Self-commentary after Twelve Years*, dated 12 October 2008.<sup>8</sup>

The opening of the exhibition *Witkacy and the Cricot 2 Theatre* took place on 26 February 1985 at the Cricot 2 Theatre Centre at 5, Kanonicza Street in Krakow.<sup>9</sup> According to Anna Halczak, Tadeusz Kantor had personally planned every detail of the exhibition.<sup>10</sup> In the session, conducted by Krzysztof Miklaszewski and recorded by Krakow TV, there took part members of Witkacy's family as well as Professor Jan Leszczyński, a friend of Witkacy's and an editor of philosophical writings. Tadeusz Kantor was the last to speak. He stated that Witkacy 'had his own idea of the theatre,' adding that 'to be worthy of Witkacy, one has to oppose him.' And he continued,

Perhaps Grotowski had such an idea. Even though he is my... not exactly my adversary... but I don't like him, that's true. But he had his idea of the theatre. Who else [is there]? I don't see anyone else. All the rest are professional directors, who operate, manipulate theatrical pseudo-knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

I happened upon this confession of the artist by chance, really, when browsing in the Cricoteka Archives through the cassettes of the recordings of Tadeusz Kantor's public meetings. It had never been published. Significantly, the statement quoted

8 Z. Osiński, *Jerzy Grotowski. Źródła, inspiracje, konteksty*, Gdańsk 2009, vol. 1, p. 353.

9 K. Miklaszewski, a documentary, recorded to order by Cricoteka: the Cricoteka Archives. [The opening of the exhibition *Witkacy and the Cricot 2 Theatre*], DVD: KWZ 284/2003/7; Magnetic tape no. IV 101768.

10 A. Halczak, *Cricoteka – konieczność przekazywania*, at the conference *Today Tadeusz Kantor / 20th Anniversary of Tadeusz Kantor's Death*, Kraków, 9 December 2010. See this volume p. 299.

11 *Ibid.*, appraised by A. Halczak, for which I am grateful. Cf. (j. r.) [J. Rubiś], *Tadeusz Kantor: nie grać Witkacego!*, in: *Echo Krakowa*, 28 February 1985, no. 42, pp. 1–2; *Był absolutnym heretykiem... O Stanisławie Ignacym Witkiewiczu mówi Tadeusz Kantor*, talking to J. Kłossowicz, in: *Literatura*, August 1985, no. 8, pp. 12–15.

continued, ‘Chwistek was the one that [Witkacy] could not stand. What does this mean: ”could not stand”? He had to have him.’<sup>12</sup>

I would postulate that, by analogy, Kantor put himself in a role similar to that of Witkacy, and he allocated to Grotowski a role similar to that of Leon Chwistek.<sup>13</sup>

It seems highly likely that the creator of Cricot 2 craved an antagonist that he deserved; in a sense, he found an artistic rival indispensable. And for Tadeusz Kantor, Grotowski ticked all the boxes to set him up as just such an artistic rival, particularly in the field of the art of the theatre. He was well-known all over the world and he enjoyed a high status as an artist. It was after I had written the text in question that I happened upon the following observation by Anka Ptaszkowska, an art historian and critic, a co-founder of the Foksal Gallery and the author of many works about Tadeusz Kantor, ‘Kantor used to say that the most important thing is to find your enemy.’<sup>14</sup>

That is it, in a nutshell: to find your enemy. And here is one more quotation, with Kantor talking about Witkacy:

The Cricot 2 Theatre discovered Witkiewicz for Poland and the world, starting with *The Cuttlefish*, throughout the series of productions: *The Country House* (1962), *The Water Hen* (1967), shown almost all over Europe; then there also came *The Shoemakers* in Paris (1970), *Lovelies and Dowdies* (1972) and fragments of *Tumor Brainowicz*, which became part of *The Dead Class* (1975). (...)

We spent twenty years working not on Witkiewicz, but on ourselves. His dramas are very special, they do not require acting, so what one does is not act *Witkiewicz*, but *with* Wikiewicz. It is our ambition to move culture a step further, as an answer given to Witkacy.<sup>15</sup>

One of the things that Tadeusz Kantor and Grotowski had in common was their fascination with the work of Witold Gombrowicz. And the notion of greatness: ‘Greatness. One has to be great – nothing for it!’ as Kantor used to say. However, is it possible for two greats to co-exist side by side, what’s more, in the same field and in the same country?

Kantor frequently raised the theme of the lack of ideas in the theatre that was contemporary to him. For instance, on 5 March 1988, during the opening of an exhibition of his paintings entitled *Further on, Nothing* at Cricoteka he had this to say,

12 Qtd fr.: a documentary by K. Miklaszewski.

13 Cf. Z. Osiński, *Leon Chwistek jako teoretyk awangardowego teatru*, *Miesięcznik Literacki* 1970, no. 6, pp. 33–42.

14 *Może powinnam być aktorką*, P. Rypson talking to A. Ptaszkowska, *Nowe Książki* 2011, no. 2, pp. 4–9, qtd fr. p. 6. Cf. also: A. Manicka, *Wolność jest najważniejsza*, *Nowe Książki* 2011, no. 2, pp. 9–11.

15 Qtd fr.: (j. r.) [J. Rubiś], *op. cit.*

Theatres have no ideas. Give me one idea of the conventional, official theatre. (...) As far as the truth is concerned, you cannot treat it like the Holy Gospel, or... You have to consider it in terms of knowledge. In terms of knowledge. That is to say, first of all, you have to know an awful lot and you have to be aware of an awful lot, so as later... maybe not so much to reject it, because it is not possible to reject it, but ... to *not* flaunt it! (...) I have recently been incredibly open. I say the most awful things about myself. For example, if you take Zofia Golubiew, who is working on a large album of my painting... I give her my, so to speak, private, intimate commentaries on my painting. That is – after forty years, I comment on my own painting. But not so as to beautify it, not at all. I drag out a lot of things that are private. And I am very excited about this.

Life has dealt me failures and disasters. I have hidden in the corners of my Little Room of Imagination, shouting, ‘Further on, nothing!’ And then, in my desperation, I made a decision. It concerned my paintings. To leave the painting. Definitely, to come out of the painting. Indeed. And that was not an escape or capitulation. After a few operations of that kind, I tried to explain to myself the sense of that step. Perhaps it is an abandonment of the place and territory which – as I had thought – I was the master of, and which had turned out to be a prison. Or maybe that was a strategic manoeuvre... It is only in order to trick life that I make out that I don’t care about the painting, that I am abandoning it, but in fact I move My Poor Little Room of Imagination into it. I rescue it, and... you will see this, ladies and gentlemen, it’s just that you cannot see it at this very moment – I throw away, with nonchalance and contempt, the remnants of life outside the paintings... That’s to say, all those... trousers, legs, all the what-not... Real and ridiculous, yes. Here, I am very pleased with myself. And I say – this: certainly, this is an excellent manoeuvre. And so as to finalise it all suitably, I paint a painting called *In This Painting I Really Do Have to Stay*. Which means, I am lying there as if dead. Because the painting must win. In spite of my wanting to come out of it. And My Poor Little Room of Imagination also must win. (...)

My final wish... want... need... is to preserve the memory of this theatre. What does this mean: to preserve the memory? To cede it to the next generation. That is why only young people work here. Indeed, it’s me who is the old man who keeps getting cantankerous. He keeps kicking up a fuss all the time, because almost all of them know that... I love them very much.

I would like the memory to remain. Why? Not just so that – yes, there used to be such a theatre, and that it was all so... You have seen, ladies and gentlemen, the [compilation] of the tours of the Cricot 2 Theatre and how many tours we have been on. Over a hundred, in fact. I had never dreamt about going on a tour with a theatre. I wanted to paint, to have a studio and to show my work in some decent galleries. (...) If it matters to me that the memory of this should be preserved, it is not because of the fame, but because of these few ideas. Because I (...) never make a performance for its own sake. I don’t implement the repertory. That would be rubbish! I make a performance when I have such an idea, such a result of my musings that I have to show it! (...)

It’s that it has just so happened, the circumstances have worked out so, that everybody considers me a great theatre expert. This is not true. I am only an expert on myself. (...) And every artist should be an expert on himself. And because I maintain – my apologies to all theatre directors – that Polish theatres have no ideas at the moment. (...) They

simply have literary ideas; propagating this or that repertory. Maybe [they have] some formal tricks, which they have stolen, anyway. Quite brazenly so! From the Cricot Theatre! And then this is called that they have an idea. That is not an idea! The idea that we have is a sort of idea that I would be able to die for, here and at any time! You show me a director who would be able to do that. Meyerhold was such a director, Vakhtangov was such a director, Tairov was such a director, Schiller was such a director, and maybe also a few Germans: Piscator, Oskar Schlemmer, were they not? They were able to die for their ideas. Meyerhold could die for his idea! And in a terrible way he did, didn't he? I can also die for my idea. And that is why we have all those ideas.

Because perhaps you think, ladies and gentlemen, that this, here, is just my exaltation... No. It's all up there, in the Archives. All the theoretical texts, all the voices of world opinion, world opinion about ideas, not about success, about the ideas. Books, indeed. It's all there. You can check. And that is why I get so irritated... That's why, I'm sorry – I don't feel reassured that all this will be preserved. No, unfortunately I don't... I am generally a pessimist, anyway. (...) I don't know how this is done. Because you cannot do it by a legal decree, can you? What I want is that when I am no longer here... Because this is very important, when one gets towards the end of one's life and begins to think... And that is all, really.

Forty years, one has done so many things. Because, when I leaf through all those books, reviews, photographs... Two thousand reviews abroad, five hundred reviews in Poland, a few thousand photographs. And not just photographs of the actors, as is normally done in the theatre, and of the stage sets, costumes. But photographs which express the idea of the theatre, don't they? I have done an awful lot, I have worked awfully hard in my life. An awful lot! I don't even feel that, because usually when I create, that is not any work at all – that is life. That is life itself, is it not?<sup>16</sup>

I have written a number of times about the similarities, at times amazing, and also the differences between the two artists, first in my sketch *Kantor and Grotowski: Two Theatres, Two Visions*,<sup>17</sup> then in the study *Tadeusz Kantor and Jerzy Grotowski vis-à-vis Romanticism*,<sup>18</sup> and recently, in the two chapters of the second volume of Grotowski's monograph *The Meyerhold Tradition in Poland (after 1945): Jerzy Grotowski, Jerzy Jarocki and Tadeusz Kantor*<sup>19</sup> and *Tadeusz Kantor and Jerzy Grotowski vis-à-vis Stanisław Wyspiański*.<sup>20</sup> These works reveal a much greater

16 *The Exhibition of Tadeusz Kantor's Latest Paintings* Further On, Nothing, Cricoteka, 5–12 March 1988, video tape no. inv.: IV/001591, type-written document no. inv.: IV/004689 IV/26/33. At my request A. Halczak compared the type-written document with the tape recording; both documents in the Cricoteka Archives.

17 Cf. Z. Osiński, *Jerzy Grotowski. Źródła, inspiracje, konteksty*, Gdańsk 2009, vol. 1, ed. II, revised, pp. 297–353 and 408–415. Qtd fr. p. 353.

18 Cf. *Tradycja romantyczna w teatrze polskim*, ed. D. Kosiński, Kraków 2007, pp. 157–185.

19 Z. Osiński, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 109–155 and 412–420.

20 First printed (abbr. version): *Dialog* 2008, no. 1, pp. 174–185; 2<sup>nd</sup> version in: *Stanisław Wyspiański. W labiryncie świata, myśli i sztuki*, ed. A. Czabanowska-Wróbel, Kraków 2009, pp. 527–547; 3<sup>rd</sup> version in: Z. Osiński, *Jerzy Grotowski... op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 335–366



degree of complication in the relationship in question than current opinion would have it, an opinion which I had once been inclined to share myself, before I had sourced much important material.

Apart from these five studies, which refer directly to the relationship of the two artists, I have also published two sizeable papers about the tradition in Tadeusz Kantor's theatre, which make it possible – indirectly – to broaden the scope of the reflection related to the comparison of that tradition with the tradition in Jerzy Grotowski's theatre: *Tadeusz Kantor versus Leon Schiller and Andrzej Pronaszko: Is There a 'Schiller School' in Polish Culture?*<sup>21</sup> and *Tadeusz Kantor and Tradition: Annotated Fragments of Kantor's Texts*.<sup>22</sup> I based the latter paper on my talk *Tadeusz Kantor and Polish Tradition*, given during the Tadeusz Kantor Days in Moscow (12–15 October 2005), organised jointly by the Vsevolod Meyerhold Centre in Moscow and the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Krakow. The papers broaden the scope of reflection.

Without a doubt, the Tadeusz Kantor – Jerzy Grotowski relationship was strongly ambivalent, and it is precisely the singular capacity for ambivalence (and the sensitivity to ambivalence) – a pronounced characteristic of both artists – that often marks out a great artist. And the point is not a capacity for conceptual paradoxes, but a certain personality predisposition, ambivalence-oriented. This complexity and ambivalence are demonstrated for instance in the recordings of Tadeusz Kantor's public appearances, which are now part of the Cricoteka collection. This material has not, so far, been sufficiently investigated or put to good use by researchers.

There still remains to be written a comparative study of both artists which would describe, analyse and interpret their respective creative paths. For example,

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and 447–455. French edition: *Id.*, *Tadeusz Kantor et Jerzy Grotowski face à Stanisław Wyspiański*, trans. J. Pawelczyk, in: *L'Âge d'or du théâtre polonais de Mickiewicz à Wyspiański, Grotowski, Kantor, Lupa, Warlikowski...*, eds. A. Grudzińska and M. Masłowski, Paris 2009, pp. 197–227. Italian edition: *Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski e Stanisław Wyspiański*, trans. M. Fabbri, in: *Pensare per immagini. Stanisław Wyspiański, drammaturgo e pittore. Convegno internazionale nel centenario dalla morte dell'artista, 19–20 dicembre 2007*, eds. A. Ceccherelli, E. Jastrzębowska, M. Piacentini, A. M. Raffo, Accademia Polacca delle Scienze. Biblioteca e Centro di Studi a Roma. Conferenze 124, Roma 2008, pp. 117–144, incl. on pp. 143–144 *Streszczenie* [Synopsis] in Polish.

21 *Pamiętnik Teatralny* 2005, no. 1–2, pp. 25–71. English (abbr.) edition: Z. Osiński, *Schiller; Kantor and the Present, Le Théâtre en Pologne – The Theatre in Poland*, 2004, nos. 1–2, pp. 60–62. French (abbr.) edition: *Id.*, *Schiller; Kantor et l'état actuel, Le Théâtre en Pologne – The Theatre in Poland* 2004, nos. 1–2, pp. 56–59.

22 In a compil. edition: *Od tematu do tematu. Przechadzki z Balcerzanem*, (Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu. Series: Filologia Polska no. 101). Eds. T. Mizerkiewicz, A. Stankowska, Poznań 2007, pp. 423–440.

Tadeusz Kantor's 'daytime man' stance; his daily embarking on his artistic duties and his duties towards himself, if these can at all be separated, at five o'clock in the morning; and, on the other hand, Grotowski's being a typical example of a 'night owl'. Let me thus echo Karl Jaspers who described and analysed the antinomy between the Law of the Day and the Passion of the Night in the third, and final, volume of his *Philosophy* (1932).<sup>23</sup>

Let us juxtapose Wielopole Skrzyńskie and the world/universe of Tadeusz Kantor with Nienadówka and the world/universe of Jerzy Grotowski. It is significant that they both returned to those places during their creative watersheds: Kantor, together with his company, on 15 December 1983, eight years after the premiere of *The Dead Class*, so as to put on a performance of *Wielopole, Wielopole* at the local parish church, and Grotowski in 1980, after the final performances of the *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* and having put a definitive end to the 'performance theatre', during the Theatre of Sources period, less than a couple of years before his decision to emigrate. In a documentary *Nienadówka, 1980*, produced by an American team (with the concept and production by Mercedes Gregory, for The Manhattan Project/Atlas Theatre CO, INC, directed and edited by Jill Goodmilow), this is how Grotowski described the significance of that small rural settlement, situated 20 km from Rzeszów, where he had found himself, as an eight-year-old boy, during the war and where he spent four years:

I came here together with my mother and brother, with nothing, empty-handed, with no money, in great poverty. But also it was here that in a way I was born again. All significant motives in my life started from here.<sup>24</sup>

In the same film, Peter Brook succinctly summed up the aim of the endeavours of the creator of the Laboratory Theatre:

For Grotowski, the theatre is not a matter of art. It is not a matter of playing, of staging, of performance. It is something else. The theatre is a very ancient, fundamental tool which helps us to find the way to the source of our existence.<sup>25</sup>

This was very different for Tadeusz Kantor, for whom – one might say – the theatre and art were almost all that mattered in his life. This difference can be observed and analysed in the treatment of the actor, space, text and so on. The clearer the similarities appear, the more the differences come into sharp relief.

A characteristic that Kantor and Grotowski had in common was their unrelenting consistency and loyalty to their own respective artistic stance. Kantor himself said in 1974, 'The concept of tension has become crucial for me. In the

23 Cf. *Antynomia dnia i nocy*, in: G. Picon, *Panorama myśli współczesnej*, Paris 1967, pp. 93–97.

24 From the sound track of the film *Nienadówka 1980*, pp. 1–2.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

multi-space it has replaced the old perspective.<sup>26</sup> In Grotowski's performances, the basis was the actor's play; there was 'actor music' and 'actor visual art'.

In Tadeusz Kantor's artistic outlook, the notion '**the artist's stance**' was one of the most important. In his relationship with Grotowski, it referred only to the period which is known as the 'performance theatre' (1957–1969). What came later, that is to say the 'participation theatre' or the 'para-theatre' (1969–1978), then the Theatre of Sources (1976–1982), right up to Art as a vehicle (1986–) was of no interest to the creator of the Cricot 2 Theatre. In Kantor's opinion, the post-theatrical activities of Grotowski and his company had no relation to art, and the founder of the Laboratory Theatre ceased to interest him as an artist.

Tadeusz Kantor considered himself the heir to the great avant-garde artists of the 1920s and 1930s. In a lively dialogue with that tradition, as well as with himself and his own creative work, he endeavoured to remain loyal to it, finally to become the last authentic avant-garde artist. However, we forget that he also succeeded in achieving something which at the time appeared impossible, linking together two traditions which – as was thought – were totally incompatible: Constructivist avant-garde ('that Constructivist almost-religion'<sup>27</sup>) and Symbolism. Kantor even emphasised and, in his own idiosyncratic way, removed the contradiction, treating Mickiewicz, Slowacki and Wyspiański as avant-garde artists. For him, they represented **the avant-garde stance**, or that which he valued the most in art:

I consider Romanticism avant-garde, one of the greatest avant-gardes, (...), much greater than Surrealism or Dada. When it appeared, it destroyed the entire shell of the previous culture. Mickiewicz was one of those who had greatly contributed to that – with his *Forefathers' Eve*.<sup>28</sup>

The art of Tadeusz Kantor articulates the poignant experience of the individual engaged in an incessant searching. The reality of death, its physical and physiological reality – that is his theme. When touching upon such a delicate sphere of human existence, it is best to let the artist himself speak:

This is a matter of religion which, as far as I am concerned, is quite a complicated, intimate matter, one I do not like to broadcast. (...) Perhaps only starting with *The Dead Class*, I have begun to refer to this as **spiritualism**. Spiritualism is a contradiction

26 *Rozmowa z Tadeuszem Kantorem*, in: W. Borowski, *Kantor*, Warszawa 1982, p. 35.

27 Cf. *Kalendarium*, ed. J. Chrobak, in: *Powrót Odysa i Podziemny Teatr Niezależny Tadeusza Kantora w latach 1942–1944*, pt. I, eds.: J. Chrobak, E. Kulka, T. Tomaszewski, Kraków 2004, p. 62.

28 *O powinnościach artysty. Rozmowa Krzysztofa Miklaszewskiego z Tadeuszem Kantorem (1986)*, in: K. Miklaszewski, *Tadeusz Kantor: Między śmietnikiem a wiecznością*, Warszawa 2007, p. 32. Since there are slight, but to my mind, significant, differences between the version in Miklaszewski's book and the version on the sound track, in places I revert to the version on the sound track.

of form. For a long time or, to be precise, since about 1960 (...) I have been making a stand **against the concept of form**, which is reputedly the sole means of expression of one's artistic individuality, but even though the material form is absent, the spirit does exist. It's just that I was not talking about spiritualism at the time. **I started to refer to that process as spiritual in about the mid-70s.** [the author's bolding] Spirituality is what connects me to Symbolism, to Maeterlinck and Wyspiański, as far as the stance is concerned. It is not fashionable nowadays, but in reality all artists are spiritualists.

With Grotowski, it is quite different: in his art and reflection, man appears in relation to what is vertical. 'Art as a vehicle' dominates; while – something that he had always paid attention to, and something that many commentators of his art, and especially of its last phase cannot, or will not, understand – there can be no real verticality without horizontal references. That is why the image of 'Jacob's ladder' was so close to his heart. That is why he was so interested in the 'archetypal man', the 'archetype of man'. Grotowski had clear leanings towards studying religion, while Kantor was above all interested in reality, and especially in the juxtaposition and clash of two realities.

Grotowski always emphasised that he was a man of the West and that his fundamental cultural experiences had their roots above all in that culture. However, simultaneously he tried to reach what had preceded the cultural differentiation: 'Perhaps in the matter of sources it is good to say this: the human being exists first, before differences appear'<sup>29</sup> – as he wrote in one of his texts from the 80s.

His orientation was far from any Eurocentrism. As early as at the beginning of the 1970s, the well-known Japanese theatrical director Tadashi Suzuki expressed the following opinion:

Grotowski has frequently spoken about the conquering of cultural barriers (...). He is deeply preoccupied with whether it would be possible for one human being to communicate with another via theatrical activities.<sup>30</sup>

And this is how the founder of the Laboratory Theatre described his own position:

An encounter with the East, no longer in the theatrical, but in a broader, human sense seems to me essential. (...) I do see a certain danger here: Europeans often travel to the East to become 'Orientals'. This is senseless and destined to failure. It's as if a man saw a girl and wanted to become that girl. We are drawn to what is different. Thanks to another's being different – we see ourselves differently, and better. And in the end we find ourselves.<sup>31</sup>

And in the text *Theatre of Sources* we find the following paragraph:

29 J. Grotowski, *Teatr Źródła*, in: *Zeszyty Literackie*, Paris, summer 1987, no. 19, p. 108. Text from 1981, ed. L. Kolankiewicz.

30 Qtd fr.: hl [H. Lipszyc], *Japończyk o Grotowskim*, in: *Dialog* 1974, no. 11, p. 168.

31 *Spotkanie z Grotowskim*, submitted for print by L. Flaszen, in: *Teatr* 1972, no. 5, p. 20.

It is possible to say that sources – something very basic – are given to every man. Given by whom? That is the question. The answer depends on semantic preferences. If someone has theological preferences, he will say that this is about a ‘seed of light’ which comes from God. If someone has biological preferences, he will say that the matter concerns the ‘record in the genetic code’ of our species. One way or another, sources are something given at the beginning. One could say that human nature is identical everywhere in spite of cultural differentiation between people. To a sociologist the hypothesis of human nature might appear backward, but its total rejection would to me appear racist.<sup>32</sup>

It’s quite different with Tadeusz Kantor. We will not find this kind of reflection in his statements. The creator of *The Dead Class* thought that he belonged to the culture of the West in a way that was quite obvious.

Some European critics, such as Georges Banu,<sup>33</sup> but also the Japanese,<sup>34</sup> point out connections and parallels between the *nō* theatre and the performances of Tadeusz Kantor. However, the artist himself was of a different opinion. This is how he expressed his position during a meeting at the Kraków office of the Association of Psychological Hygiene in December 1988:

I don’t like the culture of the East. No, unfortunately, I don’t. I witnessed this beginning in the USA, then in France, then in Poland. This has nothing to do with this (what I am talking about, the movement inwards). Naturally, there may be some influence, opinions about this differ, but this is my opinion. There are people who get involved with that philosophy, but it seems to me that European culture is so strong, where its character is concerned, directed mainly by the Enlightenment, which was an epoch of colossal power.

If we succumb to the influence of the Orient, then that is incredibly artificial and pathetic in its consequences. (...) Because that culture has a huge tradition. That cannot be taken over. Sources are grown deep there... Anyway, that has been a fashion which is now passing.

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32 J. Grotowski, *Teatr Źródła*, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

33 Georges Banu, a French theatre critic of Romanian origin, a professor at the New Sorbonne University, author and editor of books about Peter Brook, with whom he had worked. Author of a book and papers about Oriental theatres, in particular Japanese (classical and contemporary). Cf. G. Banu, *L’acteur qui ne revient pas. Journées du théâtre au Japon. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée*. Afterword by J.-J. Tschudin, Paris 1993. 1<sup>st</sup> edition: Éditions Aubier, 1986. Cf. G. Banu, *Narrator i waki*, trans. O. Hedemann, *Teatr* 1990, no. 7, pp. 18–19; *Id.*, *Człowiek stojący na uboczu i jego fantomy*, trans. O. Hedemann, in: *Hommage à Tadeusz Kantor*. Ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków 1999, pp. 197–204.

34 *Teatr Cricot 2. Informator 1989–1990*, comp. and ed. A. Halczak, Kraków [2000], pp. 81–89; pp. 81–85. K. Satō, *Polski koryfeusz czy awangardzista*, trans. Y. Matsuzaki, *Marie Claire*, April 1990 [an interview with Tadeusz Kantor]; pp. 86–89. S. Ōta, *Przestrzeń sceniczna posiadająca w sobie wiele założeń* and Hidenaga Ōtori’s interview with Tadeusz Kantor. Trans. Y. Matsuzaki, *Asahi Graph* 6 April 1990; p. 89. *Bibliography*.

And as regards the ‘inwards’ movement, I am not at all a mystic. I am extremely realistic when I create a work. And that precisely is the European culture, that for me the matter and reality are extremely important. (...) Because, according to the European tradition, you cannot do anything in art if the matter of the work is non-existent. For me, all objects that we use in daily life are such matter, plus the actor, who is linked to that object to such a degree that he cannot live without that object, and that object without the actor has no meaning. I call this a ‘bio-object’.

And that ‘direction inwards’? It is difficult for me to say where that takes place, but it seems to me that it is a direction towards my interior. Witkacy would have called this ‘entrailness’.

[A voice from the audience:] And would you like this to become prevalent in the theatre?

[T. K.:] No, absolutely not. Something that is directed towards my personal interior cannot become prevalent.<sup>35</sup>

In an interview for *Odra* magazine in May 1989, Tadeusz Kantor said:

I am neither a redeemer of the theatre nor a reformer of the world, or anything. I simply do my work, my job and my art. The method that I invent is for my own use, my personal use, and not for the use of society.<sup>36</sup>

Some Orientalists and theatrical specialists had noted that the thought and creative praxis of Grotowski were profoundly linked to the cultures of the East. And the links do not only relate to the general, but also to the specific. The Indologist Maria Krzysztof Byrski was probably the first to point out such parallels, in his 1969 paper *Grotowski and the Indian Tradition*, which has lost none of its relevance to this day.<sup>37</sup> Sufi researchers emphasise the parallels between Grotowski and Sufism, and experts on Zen Buddhism – with Zen Buddhism.

Kantor’s and Grotowski’s creative paths were individual and personal, as the paths of the greatest artists always are. Experience proves that these two paths can for some be complementary and mutually enriching. This probably depends on one’s temperament and disposition. Though I am not aware of anyone practising both successfully in their work as an actor.

However, it is different when it comes to being inspired by these two artists. This is possible in various fields and in very different ways. There are plenty of examples to demonstrate this.

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35 Tadeusz Kantor meeting the Association of Psychological Hygiene. Cricoteka. Signatures IV. 001910 and 001911. Typewritten document pp. 18–19. Reconciliation of the sound track of the film and recording by A. Halczak.

36 *Sukces jest zawsze podejrzany. Z Tadeuszem Kantorem rozmawia Robert Różycki, Odra* 1989, no. 5, p. 63.

37 M. K. Byrski, *Grotowski a tradycja indyjska, Dialog* 1969, no. 8, pp. 86–91.

## Minor Notes on a Borderline Artist

*Ruggero Bianchi*

Whenever I try to write about Kantor, and whatever efforts I make to analyze the manifold aspects of his oeuvre, he always seems to me a perfect model of the total artist at work. His way of dealing with and relating to his actors and himself live on stage, of *directing himself* not only as a *performer* but also as a *director*, appears to me remarkable, if not unique. In my experience, his impressive presence and role in *The Dead Class* are unmatched, even when I compare him with other foremost figures of the avant-garde theatre of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I am thinking here of Julian Beck, for example, whose physical and emotional impact was primary and irreplaceable, even when, in acting or performing, he did not have a leading role. The Living Theatre in its early years was a close-knit ensemble, though anomalous at the time, a vocal and gestural chorus *within* which Beck happened sometimes to play the part of the coryphaeus, especially when directly addressing his audience and/or conveying his radical, anarchist and pacifist messages to them. Basically, however, even in his happenings or improvised actions, Julian was just one among the others, never a secret witness (like Jerzy Grotowski), an inner eye (like Elizabeth LeCompte) or an invisible, active observer/controller (like Eugenio Barba). Above all, he was never an artist/a director on stage, as Kantor was. If his presence appeared to be stronger and more impressive than his colleagues', it was only because of his extraordinary charisma. Even when interacting with his audience, he was not the only one to relate to and talk with them, to ask them questions or to try in various ways to involve them in his collective rituals and ceremonies, actions and events.

A similar attitude could be found in Joseph Chaikin's experiments and productions with The Open Theatre, The Other Theatre and The Winter Project, though, especially in his work with The Other Theatre, he seemed to head in original or less explored directions. In *Re-arrangements*, for example, the theatre space was shared by two groups of performers, one staying in the dark, operating the spotlights and asking questions, the other answering them from the stage, neatly separated by the lights, so that the spectators could only see the silhouettes of the first group of performers (positioned midway between the audience and the stage), who might be perceived as actors playing in real time the part their director had played during rehearsals. The concept is somewhat reminiscent of the

division of the theatre space often adopted by Richard Foreman, when interfering in the live performance or interacting with his performers during the play.

When compared with Beck's, Chaikin's or even Foreman's choices, Kantor's presence and position on stage seem radically different. He was not so much a *link* between the stage and the audience as an *integral part* of the performance, even when he looked at or pointed to the *outside space* where his technicians, sound and lighting engineers, etc., were working unseen.

Perhaps only in Chaikin's late works can we find a few elements reminiscent of the founder of Cricot 2. In *Tongues* and *Savage/Love*, for instance, co-written with Sam Shepard, Chaikin's relationship with the composers/musicians Skip LaPlante and Harry Mann had a distinctly dynamic quality that brought to mind the conniving, knowing glances exchanged in *The Dead Class* between Kantor and Stanislaw Rychlicki. Another hidden connection between Kantor and Chaikin might be found in *The War in Heaven: Angel's Monologue* (also co-written with Shepard), where Chaikin overtly battled against his physical handicap and speech difficulties due to his strokes. His on-stage struggle against aphasia, as well as his frustrating attempts to transform his stuttering speech into an extreme (or a supreme) form of 'poetic diction', had something in common with Kantor's awareness, sometimes intense and very painful, of being unable to create and show on stage the subtlest shades of his inner world and private memories. These are two clear, though totally different, examples of the tension between what the artist wants to say or perform and the fragments he succeeds in showing on stage; of the physical, psychological and emotional contest between the artist's highest aims and the objective impossibility of making his own voice and body (and those of his colleagues) say and do exactly what he has in his mind and his heart.

Generally speaking, Kantor's position here seems closer to Chaikin's than to Beck's and Judith Malina's. In The Living Theatre's hierarchy of values, as Judith has often been asserting even in recent years, political and social activity has always been more important than the theatre (e.g. when, during the May 1968 events in Paris, the group decided to disband). Anarchist or pacifist ideals have always come first. What Chaikin really cared for and aimed at, on the other hand, was not so much a social and political change (revolution) as an inner change (transformation). That is why, according to him, in order to be effective, the theatre cannot address the general public but must relate to individuals. His keywords were 'presence', 'empathy' and 'communion'. His target was not to convey messages but to ask questions, highlight problems and arouse doubts. That is one reason why he liked working in small, usually dark spaces with a very limited number of spectators.

The analogies between Chaikin and Kantor are, however, more emotional than real. In fact, Kantor did not care so much about shared rituals, focused as he



was on his (and his country's) secret history. If there was anything ceremonial in his works, it could only be the ceremony of (his) memory. On the other hand, what Chaikin wanted to emphasize was the *presence of the actor* in all his physicality, usually in the centre stage, while Kantor aimed at stressing the *presence of the artist* with his (found) objects and his actors/mannequins on the proscenium. (*The Dead Class*, for example, needed a way in and a way out for the actors; and *Wielopole, Wielopole* required an offstage area for all their entrances and exits, and *coups de théâtre*.) In this respect, Kantor's idea and use of the theatre space seem at least partially closer to those of Richard Foreman and Robert Wilson, two directors who, like him, think of the theatre in terms of art.

As for the supremacy of politics or of art in the theatre, this is certainly a central question for many companies and directors of the so-called new avant-garde. In Italy, for instance, Dario Fo, a Marxist, and Franca Rame may be seen, on the one hand, as perfect ideological opposites of the anarchists Julian Beck and Judith Malina; on the other hand, in such performances as *Mistero Buffo*, Dario Fo appears to be mostly focused on his presence as an actor, directing himself on stage and simultaneously telling his audience, scene by scene, what he is going to do and how, and why: a real lesson in the theatre like the ones Julian, with Judith, offered in his workshops and discussed in such texts as *The Life of the Theatre*.

Basically, Fo's and Rame's way of relating to their company (technical staff included) and their audience is, therefore, the same as Beck's and Malina's, though with at least an original variation. Both as an actor and as a director, Fo (at times with Rame) plays a specific leading role on stage only *before* and *after* the formal show, never *during* it. When acting or performing, he is just one among the others; he, too, is supposed to embody and 'represent' a specific character. But outside the *commedia*, in the happenings that take place before and after it, he acts as a matchless anchorman, giving voice to his political commitment, so much that the real play looks like an episode in a greater and more exciting performance.

If all this seems partially similar to The Living Theatre (cf. *Down with the Barricades*, Beck's introductory note in the published script of *The Brig*, a rigorously structured piece of theatre), it certainly differs from the method of Kantor, whose leading role *within* his productions was so central that, at times, he was alone on stage, as if it were up to him to decide *there and then* which fragments of his memories to evoke and which to wipe out in a sort of suspended action or frozen moment that had the flavour of a work in progress in real time. Only in a few marginal situations requiring open interaction between the director and the cast or technicians do there appear to be minor correspondences between Kantor and Fo. But whenever Fo interferes in his performance, it is for practical, technical or organizational reasons; for example, when an unexpected accident compels him to act as a stage manager, a 'role' he really enjoys like – though in

a radically different way – Carlo Quartucci (who in fact always thinks of himself and all his colleagues as actors: actor/director, actor/actor, actor/narrator, actor/musician, actor/technician, etc.) in his Camion theatre, or as a *capocomico*, like Eduardo De Filippo. In other words, Fo's or Eduardo's intrusion into their plays is not an artistic choice but a technical necessity. Both of them, though referring to and modernizing the old tradition of the *commedia* and the popular theatre, work in fact on solid well-structured scripts to be regularly rehearsed and staged, interpreted and represented. The real *plays* (comedies, dramas, farces) used by them, even when (on specific social or political occasions like squatting, strikes or sit-ins) the audience is admitted before the creative process being fully finished, are to be seen not as works in progress but as traditional open rehearsals, different in this respect even from Charles Ludlam's long runs of previews with his Ridiculous Theatrical Company, whose creative process required the presence and sometimes the participation of the audience in order to work out the final script; or from Leo de Berardinis' and Perla Peragallo's performances with the Teatro di Marigliano, aiming at an original, inimitable mixture of Shakespeare's dramas and the Neapolitan tradition of the *sceneggiata* (cf. *La faticosa messinscena dell' 'Amleto' di William Shakespeare, Sir and Lady Macbeth, King Lacreme Lear Napulitane*, etc.) – highly experimental enterprises in which the two 'highbrow' avant-garde actors/directors worked side by side with simple uneducated people who had formerly played only in amateur companies.

In Leo and Perla, however, there was something mysterious and extreme that somehow reminded me of Kantor. During their performances, for example, Leo frequently interrupted a scene or an action in order to correct or scold his bungling colleagues (he even slapped one of them a couple of times), asking them to try again according to his instructions; or in order to interact with individual spectators or critics, or with their groups, who, in his view, misunderstood or did not react properly to what was happening on stage; or simply because a new idea or a new image had suddenly come to him and he wanted to test it immediately. These were unexpected, exciting *coups de théâtre* that had the flavour of impromptu happenings, where the amateur actors were used by him in the same creative way in which Richard Foreman loves to work with his actors/artists during his rehearsals. Leo, in other words, wanted his actors to do exactly what they were supposed to do, and his spectators to understand and feel (no matter if they liked it or not) what he expected them to. The action on stage had to correspond exactly to what he had in mind. It was better, in his opinion, to stop the performance and transform it into a workshop, an improvisation or a rehearsal, than to keep it going in a wrong way. What really mattered to him was the artistic quality of his work. Wasn't it so with Kantor?

Of course, there are great differences between Kantor and Leo. On stage, Kantor always played/was in his role as an actor/a director, while Leo 'abandoned' his being an actor to 'transform' himself into a director, thus alternating two separate and independent roles in himself. Of the two, only Kantor was truly the 'supreme artist', who always kept himself under strict and absolute control as an actor *and* as a director. For him, the basic polarity was between memory and action, while for Leo, it was between acting and directing, between his idea and his practice of the theatre. If the *now* of the performances resulted for Leo from the *then* of his rehearsing process, for Kantor it resulted from the *then* of his memories.

Within this context, a reference to Richard Foreman's creative process with his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre seems proper. In staging a new work, Foreman, who prefers to choose artists rather than professional actors, tends not only to use them as a dynamic *trait d'union* between the selected physical space and the notes he employs as the basis for his final script, but also to place himself in his rehearsals and performances as a *visual and aural link* between his actors and his audience. On stage, however, his control board acts as a sort of icon, a symbolic fourth wall, a living and transparent curtain or barrier that separates the space of action from the space of vision, while including the audience within the performance space. To use an image that frequently returns in his sketches and notes, the *in-between-director* is like an arrow shot and guided by the eye (the spectator) toward the target (the performance). Foreman's work is focused on vision and perception (cf. his analysis of peripheral vision), which he tries to stimulate and control in his audience by filling the stage with moveable walls, tightened wires, screens of different sizes, etc., aiming at creating frames, close-ups, long-shots, etc., like in the movies. On some occasions, Foreman may even act as a conductor, checking the correct orchestration and performance of his score, and improving, when needed, its technical and artistic quality. This is, in a way, what Kantor himself did when looking at or pointing to some invisible people (his technicians) situated usually at the back of the audience, and giving them instructions with his fingers and glances. The basic difference is that Foreman plays neither a performative nor a leading role in his works, while Kantor had a double part as the director on stage and as a (flexible) character in his recollection/narration. (I cannot help thinking here of the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*). Foreman and Leo may sometimes resemble Kantor in their creative processes, but never in his unique way, and his idea, of performing.

In fact, the only theatre artist of the late 20th century who can reasonably be compared with Kantor is, in my opinion, Carmelo Bene. He spent his whole life fighting against all forms of the representational theatre and trying to *perform* the impossibility and the non-existence of the theatre as we still conceive it, i.e. as something implying a confrontation and/or communication between the stage and

the audience, between the actors and the spectators, as long as the theatre insisted on ‘representing’, ‘narrating’ or ‘telling’, that is, on ‘talking about something *outside* itself’. The point for him was that the theatre can only *tell itself to itself*. Real communication can, therefore, exist only *within* the actor/artist, in the passage of the sound/voice from his *mouth* to his *ear*. In front of the audience, the actor is like Epictetus ‘talking to himself in a crowded marketplace’. The theatre is an epiphany of the suspended sound (*phonè*) between the actor’s lips and ears – that is, the actor’s epiphany to himself. To paraphrase Jacques Lacan, the actor *is spoken* by the sound of his own voice.

This is, in a way, the essence of Kantor’s presence on stage, of his being simultaneously the painter and the canvas, in the performances that were perfectly accomplished works of art, and yet insisted on being works in progress, created or re-created in front of the audience that could only witness, without fully understanding, what his mind and his memory were saying to his lips, his eyes and his fingers.

**‘The Horror of War and/of The World,  
with the Circus Mixed.’<sup>1</sup>**  
**Reflections by Anselm Kiefer on Tadeusz Kantor’s theatre**

*Klaus Dermutz*

To mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Tadeusz Kantor and for the purpose of the international symposium *Tadeusz Kantor Today* in Krakow, it seems apt to discuss the impact of the artist’s theatre. I would like to focus on the ways in which Kantor’s art has left an impression on the mind of the painter Anselm Kiefer, who remarked that Kantor’s productions have provided him with some of the ‘most wonderful moments’<sup>2</sup> of his life. In one of our conversations, which was recently published in the book *Die Kunst geht knapp nicht unter*<sup>3</sup> [Art Is Barely Keeping Its Head above Water], Kiefer observed, ‘Kantor’s theatre is the greatest of all time.’ ‘Today’ is as tied to the past through the traces of memory as it is connected with Kantor’s ‘Clichés of the future’<sup>4</sup>:

*1947, immediately after the war*

In Warsaw, I saw a metal bridge in pieces, shattered by a bomb.  
I was struck by the inconceivable wreckage.  
A devastating sensation of the force that had wrought this.  
The impression was of an ‘artistic’ nature,  
since it was devoid of any actual, risky emotions occasioned  
by the explosion itself, just as when looking at the natural ‘casts’  
of the victims of Pompeii.  
It occurred to me  
that if someone with a sense of humour were to place that pile of metal  
in a city square – as a monument,  
if its contorted shape future historians would be able  
to decipher the forces that ruled our epoch.

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- 1 T. Kantor, *Today Is My Birthday*, Berlin 1991, Programmheft, p. 10.
  - 2 A. Kiefer, *Noch ist Polen nicht verloren*, in: U. Schorlemmer, Hg., *Kunst ist ein Verbrechen*, T. Kantor, *Deutschland und die Schweiz, Erinnerungen – Dokumente – Essays, Filme auf DVD*, Nürnberg, Krakau: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2007, pp. 418–419.
  - 3 A. Kiefer, *Die Kunst geht knapp nicht unter, Anselm Kiefer im Gespräch mit Klaus Dermutz*, Berlin 2010.
  - 4 T. Kantor, 1935...1955, *Von den Anfängen meiner Malerei bis zu den Klischees der Zukunft*, in: *idem, Ein Reisender – seine Texte und Manifeste*, Verlag für moderne Kunst, Nuremberg 1988, pp. 15–22.

And I also reflected that these incredibly compressed forms could presage the canon of post-war aesthetics.<sup>5</sup>

From the very beginning of his artistic creation, Anselm Kiefer was preoccupied with the ruins of World War II. Kiefer who was born on 8 March, 1945, in Donaueschingen, grew up playing in a landscape of ruins during the post-war period:

Ruins represent the future. Because everything that exists, vanishes. There is this wonderful chapter in the Book of Isaiah, where it is written: ‘Over your cities grass will grow.’ This quotation, with its poetic image, has always fascinated me, even in my childhood. Isaiah is a prophet, who, from a higher plane, sees things everything at once. He sees the town and above, the grass, and above that plane, a city again, and so on.<sup>6</sup>

The principles of postwar aesthetics, which Kantor saw in the crushed form of a destroyed bridge, led Kiefer to an ‘aesthetics of the remains’.<sup>7</sup> The prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah presage that, from the remains of catastrophic military conflicts, new life will form. The remains, one could argue with Kantor, are located in ‘the reality of the lowest rank’; the remains will guarantee the continuation of life and show that the absolute end has not yet occurred. In Act II of Kantor’s posthumously staged play *Today Is My Birthday*, Jehovah (played by Mira Rychlicka) appeared and listened with a stethoscope to the heartbeats of the Emballaged People swathed in white. The Emballaged People formed a group around Jehovah, whilst listening to Jewish folk music. This is how Kantor commented on this sequence: ‘After the catastrophe / Comes the biblical celebration of dancing joy / Triumph of life over / DEATH / Perhaps a solemn act of / consecration / of the too “secular” / Emballaged People<sup>8</sup> circling Jehovah’.

In Kantor’s work – and also in that of Kiefer – it makes sense to relate the concept of ‘Today’ to the historic-philosophical term of the ‘here-and-now’ (‘Jetzt-Zeit’) of Walter Benjamin. We have come to Krakow, to speak – twenty years after Kantor’s death – about the marks that his art has left on us and the memories and images that his art evokes in us today. Walter Benjamin described the moments

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5 *Ibid*, p. 21 [German translation]; see: T. Kantor, *Klisze przyszłości*, in: *idem, Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974*, Pisma, vol. I, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, p. 97.

6 A. Kiefer, *Die Kunst geht knapp nicht unter, Anselm Kiefer im Gespräch mit Klaus Dermutz*, Berlin 2010, pp. 13–14.

7 *Ibid*, *Ästhetik des Restes*, p. 150.

8 T. Kantor, *Heute ist mein Geburtstag*, Programmheft, Berlin 1991, p. 8 [German translation]; see: T. Kantor, *Dziś są moje urodziny*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic...*, *Teksty z lat 1985–1990*, Pisma, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, p. 282.

in which ‘time stops and comes to a halt’,<sup>9</sup> as energy that explodes outside the historical continuum burdened with its past. I find such moments in Kantor’s ‘Theatre of Love and Death’, where the old men return to their classroom to the resounding waltz *François*, carrying on their backs mannequins which bring back images of their childhood selves and also in the scene of the rabbi’s execution, and resurrection – aided by the catholic priest. Scenes of execution and resurrection recur: in *Let the Artists Die*, God-Rest-His-Soul (played by Bogdan Renczynski) prepares Kantor himself for his last journey.

In *I Shall Never Return*, the armed violinists in their shimmering, metallic uniforms march past the deathly pale rabbi, waving their bows over their grey violins. It is we who went to school in Kantor’s *The Dead Class* and it is we who experienced tragedy in his Theatre of Love and Death. In the words of the philosopher Christoph Menke, this is the experience in which ‘tragedy is present for us’<sup>10</sup> and in which ‘our presence is one of tragedies’.<sup>11</sup> For us, as modern individuals, the ‘violence of ironic tragedy’<sup>12</sup> continues.

During the rehearsals for the 1985 Nuremberg premiere of the production *Let the Artists Die*, Kantor was obsessed by the idea that an artwork could be closed – in the same way that one could close the altar in St Mary’s Basilica in Krakow. Master Veit Stoß’s triptych altar inspired Kantor to remark that a ‘piece of art is not something open, which leads to glory, but something that can be closed according to the reality of the lowest rank.’<sup>9</sup> The basis of Kantor’s concept of the emballage lay in his conviction that it is possible to cover up that which matters the most. In the 1968 emballage action at the Nazi Party rally grounds in Nuremberg, which was broadcast in Dietrich Mahlow’s film *Kantor ist da*<sup>13</sup> [Kantor Is Here], it is the individual human being who is wrapped by Kantor and seemingly, a posteriori, protected from the horrors of World War II. From the *Emballage Manifesto* of 1964:

Emballage –  
 when we want to send something important,  
 something significant,  
 and something private.  
 Emballage –  
 when we want to shelter

9 W. Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in: *idem, Illuminations*, ed. and with introduction by H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn, New York, 1969, p. 263.

10 C. Menke, *Die Gegenwart der Tragödie, Versuch über Spiel und Urteil*, Suhrkamp Verlag 7: *daß die Tragödie uns gegenwärtig ist*, Frankfurt am Main, 2005.

11 *Ibid.*, *daß unsere Gegenwart eine von Tragödien ist*, p. 7.

12 *Ibid.*, *die Gewalt tragischer Ironie*, p. 7.

13 D. Mahlow, *Kantor is da. Der polnische Regisseur, Maler und Verpackungskünstler*, Saarländischer Rundfunk, Saarbrücken 1968, 40 min.

and protect,  
 to preserve,  
 to escape the passage of time.  
 Emballage –  
 when we want to  
 hide something  
 out of sight.  
 EMBALLAGE  
 must be isolated  
 protected from trespass,  
 ignorance / and vulgarity.  
 Emballage.  
 Emballage.  
 Emballage.<sup>14</sup>

In a conversation with the poet, film director and sociologist Alexander Kluge, published in the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* on 24 October 2010, Kiefer mentioned that, as a child, he would dig holes, a sort of tunnel, in his garden, into which he would put what he had written. He would then close off the tunnel by placing a glass plate in front of it.<sup>15</sup> Kiefer continued this first installation on the land of the estate where his studio was located, in the small village of Barjac, 90 km west of Avignon in the south of France, in the period 1993 –2008: ‘he excavated miles-long tunnels, in which – inspired by Isaac Luria’s cosmogony – he placed broken pieces of glass and stones, whereas a lead water chamber was hidden. In Barjac Kiefer built 48 pavilions, in which one could find one or several art works. In some pavilions the art works could be closed:

It is important, that images can be closed off whenever one feels like it: that they get a chance to take a little rest every now and then; or can re-establish their secrets; or modify themselves in seclusion, because much can change in obscurity. For instance, the prophets left everything behind and walked off into the desert. Going into the desert one can understand as the closing of a door. One shuts oneself off from everything and walks into the desert, where apparently nothing exists. Yet, the desert is extremely fertile. One goes into the desert to get a new perspective.<sup>16</sup>

According to Tadeusz Kantor, an artist needs to be on the boundary: behind the artist there is theatre, in front of him there is life. I asked Kiefer if he – as a painter – agreed with Kantor’s statement. Indeed; for Kiefer, an artist should walk along

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14 T. Kantor, *Emballages 1957–65*, in: M. Kobińska, *A Journey Through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990, With a critical study of Tadeusz Kantor’s Theater*, ed. and trans. M. Kobińska, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1993, pp. 77–83.

15 A. Kiefer, A. Kluge, *Europa – eine Kuh mit Sternenhimmel im Bauch*, Ein Gespräch, *Welt am Sonntag*, 24.10.2010, pp. 58–59.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 27.



the boundary, a boundary that constantly shifts, constantly becoming something new.

You are continuously trying to move the parameters of art further. And trying to do that – that is exactly what art is. This is a borderline situation, but also a boundary of the unknown. One wants to create something surprising, and not keep doing the same thing. For this reason one can also argue: this is a transgression of the boundary, or an attempt to look beyond the boundary, or a desire to jump over the line. Or, this is about walking along the borderline, to go here and there, always changing the boundary.<sup>17</sup>

Kantor’s theatre is situated at the border between tragedy and comedy, a border that can shift easily in one or the other direction. If Kantor had gone just one step further, his tragi-comedy would have turned into mere comedy. Kantor would have crashed.

In my opinion Kantor’s theatre is the greatest theatre ever. Kantor’s theatre walks the borderline, the fine line of complete ridiculousness. His theatre is an incredible feat of tightrope walking. At any moment he could lose his footing and step into the void. This is what you could describe as tragi-comical theatre. Tragedy alone simply cannot express that. Tragi-comedy is able to describe absurdity and the meaninglessness of the world. For me, Kantor’s art is the greatest example of tragi-comedy. He’s done more in the theatre than Pina Bausch does and everybody else. (...) Many artists have been inspired by Kantor, that much is obvious, but nobody has ever succeeded in equalling Kantor. (...) In a sense, Kantor’s productions are obscene. I am thinking of the cleaning woman scrubbing the floor in *Wielopole, Wielopole* – this scene has a Bataille-like obscenity.<sup>18</sup>

‘The Horror of War and/of The World, with the Circus Mixed’ this is how Kantor describes the sixth act of *Today Is My Birthday*: the horror of war and the horror of the partitions of Poland. In Kantor’s painting *September Defeat* (1990) one can see the stricken Kantor in a soldier’s uniform, lying down with his head thrown back, pointing to the borders of ravished Poland, while he himself bleeds profusely. Kiefer also took up the topic of the partitions of Poland. On one occasion, he created a palette which he then smashed up. He inscribed the fragments with the dates of the three partitions of Poland. When Kiefer stayed in Poland in the early 1980s, he filmed ice floes floating down the Vistula. The drifting floes represented for him ‘an allegory of Poland’,<sup>19</sup> in particular that ‘everything is in motion, that parts of Poland are in motion.’<sup>20</sup> The horrors of war have led Kantor and Kiefer to

17 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

18 A. Kiefer, A. Kluge, *Europa – eine Kuh mit Sternenhimmel im Bauch*, Ein Gespräch, *Welt am Sonntag*, 2010, pp. 52–53. [This is a reference to the *Widow of a Local Photographer*, played by Mira Rychlicka – ed.]

19 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

view history as determined by repeating cycles. For Kiefer there is no such thing as tele-ology or eschatology with a happy ending, while Kantor, commenting on his *Emballages*, says that he has identified an ‘exceptional human model’<sup>21</sup>: ‘human wanderers, who are circling outside society, in endless wanderings, without destination and without a home.’<sup>22</sup> I should also mention a drawing by Kantor which is imprinted in my memory: it shows the back of a boy who walks alone through an empty landscape – at his tender age, already a wanderer without a destination or a home, a silent wanderer in solitude.

In his acceptance speech of the 1978 Rembrandt Award made by the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe Foundation in Basel, Kantor argued that it was not true that:

MODERN man possesses a mind that has prevailed over anxiety. Do not believe that! Fear does exist. Fear of the world, fear of fate, fear of death, of the unknown, of nothingness, of emptiness. It is not true that the artist is a hero and a fearless conqueror as the conventional myth has it. Believe me, he is a hapless human being – defencelessness is his fate, because he has chosen his place facing fear.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of November 2009, during a conversation with Anselm Kiefer I read him a passage from *Le petit manifeste* [The Little Manifesto]. I asked where he had chosen to place himself as an artist. He responded:

I guess I have chosen nothing. I have been caught in a net, but not as the unfortunate Agamemnon was, but rather in a net woven at the beginning of the universe. You are talking about Kantor. He is the greatest. I have seen all his productions. Each time, I flew especially from Odenwald to Paris. After the performance, we would be sitting in a small hotel room, drinking the night away, and at dawn I would stroll through the streets with one of the actors who spoke German, and Zbigniew Gostomski, a Pole, a victim, would sing German songs from the 1930s, the songs of the cruel oppressors: ‘We will continue to march, / Even if everything shatters; / Because today Germany hears us, / And tomorrow, the whole world.’ Just imagine the scene: it is dawn, and these songs are resounding in the empty Paris streets... Although I was drunk, a shiver ran down my spine. I thought everyone would shortly open their windows, for we were not any longer in the theatre, this was no longer art; this was life. Here, everything was confused: the temporal and definitive borderline between *occupation* and *liberation*, between the perpetrator and the victim seemed to be suspended. When you are suspending boundaries – and all boundaries are illusions in order to survive at all – then you are referring to Kantor’s defencelessness.<sup>24</sup>

21 T. Kantor, *Tadeusz Kantor; Ein Reisender – seine Texte und Manifeste*, Verlag für moderne Kunst, Nuremberg 1988, p. 99 [German translation], see: T. Kantor, *Rezerwat ludzki. Wystawa. Kraków 1974*, in: idem, *Metamorfozy...*, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 273, see: T. Kantor, *Łęk i sława*, in: idem, *Dalej już nic... Teksty z lat 1985–1990, Pisma*, vol. III, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Wrocław–Kraków 2005, p. 405.

24 A. Kiefer, A. Kluge, *Europa – eine Kuh mit Sternenhimmel im Bauch*, Ein Gespräch, *Welt am Sonntag*, 2010, pp. 252–253.

Finally, I would like to recall an important idea of Tadeusz Kantor's, expressed as his commitment to naked, bare human beings. It was articulated in Kantor's place of residence, his 'Poor Room of Imagination'.

Facing  
these 'powers'  
there stands  
the *Small*,  
*Poor*,  
*Defenceless*  
But heroic  
The Story  
of the *individual*  
*human*  
*life*.  
Facing  
The hominoid creatures,  
There stands *man*,  
centuries earlier encapsulated in two words:  
'Ecce homo.'  
An area of spiritual life  
of the most precious and sublime substance.  
Only in this 'individual human life'/  
are preserved today:  
TRUTH,  
SANCTITY and  
GREATNESS.<sup>25</sup>

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25 T. Kantor, Programmheft, West Berlin 1998, p. 13; see: T. Kantor, *Ocalić przed zapomnieniem*, in: *idem, Dalej już nic...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 126 – 127.



# Shadows of the Polish Odysseus: Wyspiański – Kantor – Grzegorzewski

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## 1.

Homer's Odysseus is not only a figure of one who returns, but also a recurrent figure. In the Polish theatrical tradition, the hero came into existence in the mind and imagination of Stanisław Wyspiański *Powrót Odysa*, 1907 [The Return of Odysseus] and, under the influence of his powerful vision, recurred twice in the field of imagination of Tadeusz Kantor: in 1944, in *The Return of Odysseus*, and in 1988, in *I Shall Never Return*. Finally, it was Odysseus who – again indirectly, via Wyspiański and also Kantor – crowned the *oeuvre* of Jerzy Grzegorzewski in 2005, shortly before his death, in the stage production of *On. Drugi powrót Odysa* [He. The Second Return of Odysseus] in the National Theatre in Warsaw.

Wyspiański's drama, which both Kantor and Grzegorzewski treated quite arbitrarily, embodies extraordinary imagination. For a long time, artists and researchers have been particularly preoccupied with the last act of this 1907 play, which is focused on Odysseus's ego, taken over by de-crystallising hallucinations. In the third act of *The Return of Odysseus*, the wanderer in a rocky wilderness represents the human interior in the state of dissolution. Kantor wrote about this final part of Wyspiański's drama:

The final part / in the pure convention of Symbolism / unfurls the impressive panorama of a landscape. The ragged / sea shore, the wild rocks, cemeteries, skeletons, / skulls, the roaring billowing waves, the wind, / the voices in the air constitute / a night scenery, full of / cold symbols of mythology – / sirens, harpies, Calypso, Charon's Boat, / the Spirits of the Dead. In the feverish ravings of / Odysseus, in this inner landscape, there unfolds a film / of his childhood, / of youth, of heroic deeds, crime – inevitably and / towards the Unknown...<sup>1</sup>

The end of Odysseus's life after his return to Ithaca is the moment of summoning apparitions from the past, including those from the island of the Sirens; it is a confrontation with the souls remaining in the realm of Hades. All this carries

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1 An extract from the score prepared for Denis Bablet; the type-written original is kept in the Cricoteka Archives, see: T. Kantor, *Metamorfozy. Teksty o latach 1934–1974, Pisma*, vol. I, comp. and ed. K. Pleśniarowicz, Kraków–Wrocław 2005, pp. 92–93.

an imprint of eternity, with the outline of Charon's boat looming in the distance. Odysseus's past: the war and his wanderings, merges with his end; the unredeemed human guilt of the hero who has put others to death merges with the mystery of his own death. Wyspiański created the drama towards the end of his life, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, before World War I.

It has been noted that the myth of Odysseus returned frequently in the art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and became exceptionally prominent both in drama and in the theatre after World War II. According to Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Odysseus is the prototype of modern man who demystifies the world, with his mind conquering the powers of nature, of history and culture. In the myth of Odysseus – according to the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – the 'element which shapes and organises individuality internally, time, is still so weak' that 'the spatial changes of scene' are required.<sup>2</sup> One might add that Odysseus as the figure of a modern inventor, thus also of an artist, rejects the realm of archaic images (eternal images of art), which are mere illusion; they can last only in the form of imagination processed by his own thought. Odysseus takes an unusual risk: 'But where danger threatens / That which saves from it also grows,' write Adorno and Horkheimer, quoting Hölderlin. Knowledge, on which the identity of Odysseus rests, invests him with an existential dynamic; it derives its substance from the experience of diversity, change, diffusion: '(...) the knowing survivor is also the man who exposes himself most daringly to the threat of death, thus gaining the hardness and strength to live.'<sup>3</sup>

Odysseus arrives in Ithaca as a conqueror of the images of the world; however, in his inner reality, what he has mastered returns in a new guise, tinged both with his strength and his guilt. In such a perception, Odysseus is the prototype of the ego which demystifies the world, but does so at its own expense – sacrificing itself. The efficacy of his actions grants him momentary personal coherence, but at a price: he himself must recognise his achievement before it expires; he himself must take up the challenge of the final reckoning.

Kantor's *I Shall Never Return* and Grzegorzewski's *He. The Second Return of Odysseus* may provide a visionary commentary on this philosophical thesis. Both productions, with the allusions to Wyspiański's drama at their core, have been woven almost in their entirety from flashbacks, repetitions, renewal, from past images haunting the artists in the state of a singularly understood crisis and finality. However, the potential reversibility of Eliot's 'In my beginning is my end' means that where there is death, there is a source of creation; where there is danger, there is salvation and redemption; where there is human guilt, there is artistic fulfilment.

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2 M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford 2002, p. 39.

3 *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

Mieczysław Porębski provided an interesting comment on Kantor's experiencing his own death in *I Shall Never Return*, saying that it was reminiscent of an on-stage suicide, akin to Gustav's desperate action in Act IV of Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [Forefathers' Eve]. Similarly, Grzegorzewski incorporated the theme of an expiring life into the auto-thematic dimension of the spectacle, in which Odysseus is He – the chief protagonist introduced into *The Second Return of Odysseus*. This unusual revocation of Kantor's and his underground Independent Theatre's wartime production became a primary gesture for both these ageing artists, who, though sensing the ebbing away of their life force, indefatigably kept searching for art forms as a condition of their own survival. Paradoxically, the fragmentary and incomplete memory of that wartime production fertilised their impotence. The return to Tadeusz Kantor's wartime Odysseus, a performance with the famous pronouncement 'You do not enter the theatre with impunity' as its motto, made it possible – it seems to me – to take up a singular artistic challenge: to face one's creative impotence manifesting itself in the form of the obsessive recurrence of elements of one's own opus, evidencing, as it were, that where there is danger, the disaster of repetition and copying and the threat of death, there is redemption, which can be provided by the renewal of the pure act of creation. The artists' decision to re-enact the wartime staging is a cue to follow.

## 2.

Kantor's first performance based on *The Return of Odysseus* in Nazi-occupied Krakow was a production which the artist frequently referred to and mythologised. Besides the forms that the production took in Kantor's memory, enriched (or obscured) by his subsequent awareness, a series of photographs also survives. As Mieczysław Porębski wrote, 'the salvaged photographic documentation of the performance itself now consists of nothing but **shadows**, and how suggestive they are in their amateurish understatement, their borderline reality'<sup>4</sup> [emphasis: K.F.]. Photographic images manifest the presence of the absent. This collection is a good representation of the staging: even if it does not fully render the reality of the production, it conveys Kantor's concept of the main protagonist of the drama, whose entrance (apparently barely noticeable) opened the performance. In the reconstruction score written for Denis Bablet many years later, in 1975, already after *The Dead Class*, Kantor was to observe: 'from the door, slowly, with a very heavy step, in a muddy soldier's greatcoat, in a steel helmet falling over his eyes, Odysseus enters, **like a shadow**'<sup>5</sup> [emphasis: K.F.]. Image is a shadow of reality,

4 M. Porębski, *Deska. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, Warszawa 1997, p. 27.

5 The type-written original from the Cricoteka Archives.

as the Platonic metaphor has it, and this has been taken into account in calling the hero into being. (As an aside, it is worth noting that in Wyspiański's drama, Odysseus is also a shadow and an idol; he himself cannot determine whether he is alive or dead<sup>6</sup>.) In the memory of Kantor's wartime performance, a *sui generis* reconciliation occurs between the realness and its shadow, between the reality and its image. The photograph of Tadeusz Brzozowski playing Odysseus provides the prototype for the actor renditions in Kantor's subsequent productions: 'Odysseus, his back turned, covered in dust, presents a silent formless immobile block, merging with other objects.'<sup>7</sup> He is the soldier about whom, when later working on his *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor would write that this is the model of an actor: a stranger, separated from us by the boundary of death.

Kantor recaptured these images, sketching out the scene of the action: 'This was not a stage with props where the action takes place, but a room, specially adapted, wrecked, arranged in an appropriate way; and that was the work. And both the actors and the spectators were inside.'<sup>8</sup> Mieczysław Porębski did not entirely concur with Kantor's conviction that the wartime *The Return of Odysseus* was a step towards decidedly aesthetic asceticism, claiming that this 'poverty' represented, in fact, a wealth of forms and stage concepts. However, Kantor counterclaimed that 'What matters most for art is poverty, and not riches. Even if images are rich, they are very poor on the inside.'<sup>9</sup> In photographs, frames of the space are preserved, images of its cramped emptiness, of groups of characters, individual actors. There are no spectators there; all that remains is the homogenised monochrome black-and-white image. If this series of photographs is to be the documentation of the extraordinary discovery of Kantor's bare, poor reality, it is its black-and-white shadow, which, however, does not degrade it since, as Man Ray has it, the shadow is just as important as the real object.

A hollowing-out, an inner void – this is, as it were, the first step towards **removing the spell**, which is also de-symbolisation. Kantor's wartime production dictated that both *art nouveau* and constructivist parameters of stage design be abandoned (the first sketches for *Odysseus* were executed in the spirit of Constructivism and the Bauhaus). It was also an act of wiping out the metaphorical sediment of Wyspiański's poetic imagination. Moreover, the production became a clash of remnants of the old theatre, which used the classical style (as demonstrated e.g. by the kouros-like masks of the suitors), with a foretaste of the contemporary aesthetics of 'poor reality', represented by the dirty soldier's greatcoat and the

6 I discuss this in *Odys i jego sobowtór*, cf. K. Fazan, *Projekty intymnego teatru śmierci. Wyspiański–Leśmian–Kantor*, Kraków 2009.

7 M. Porębski, *Deska. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 62–63.

8 *op. cit.*, p. 96.

9 *op. cit.*, p. 104.



Wehrmacht helmet, pulled low over the eyes of the hero threatened by war. The production linked to the concrete drama set in the mythological past subjected the work to considerable processing. We cannot be sure what exactly had been left of the text. It has not been possible to reproduce the dialogue layer; at the same time, the memory of the images, those photograph shadows of the performance, have proved stronger than the memory of its sounds.

It is possible to notice, however, that the images in the wartime staging were linear in character and even if they had been created out of a ruin of a much reduced text, it was a performance which consisted of sequences combining into a coherent story line. It was only in the final part of the play that the logical, cause-and-effect action was suspended. In the final images, a characteristic ‘suction’ of the last act of *The Return of Odysseus* took place, resulting in a psychological, inner moment. This is how Kantor reconstructed it:

The actor playing Odysseus  
is left on his own, trapped by  
spectators on all sides,  
in the abandoned places  
of the action **settling**  
his final  
**Scores.**

In this record, the last act of Wyspiański’s play, turned into the uniform image, has been deprived of the decorative quality of the poetic vision. In the original drama, Odysseus can see salvation in the vague outline of the boat of the dead, which is sailing into ‘the other world’, into ‘oblivion’: he ‘runs to the sea’. ‘With Kantor, there is nowhere to run to. Odysseus stays put. He presses his back against the wall, in the very corner, like a cornered rat.’<sup>10</sup> This transformation perfectly mirrored the wartime feeling of menace, the final impotence in the face of death.

During the war, Kantor discovered the theatrical effectiveness of the method of eradicating a dramatic text. In his later recollection of the 1944 production, there occurred an even greater eradication of the poetic and dramatic construction of the last act, which was replaced in the memory by the shadow of Odysseus – by his idol image contemplating, in the face of finality, spiritual truths which developed like an ‘internal film’.

### 3.

Kantor’s return to the Underground Theatre production on the occasion of *I Shall Never Return* has been researched many times. However, it is worthwhile taking

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10 M. Porebski, *Deska. Świadectwa–Rozmowy–Komentarze*, Warszawa 1997, p. 157.

another look at it in the context of Jerzy Grzegorzewski's production in order to highlight, in the artistic affiliation of both works, the outline of a similar creative process which, nevertheless, resulted in individual solutions.

This comparison of Kantor's and Grzegorzewski's productions can be embarked on, paradoxically, by recalling the parallels in the reception of each. After its first Polish performances, *I Shall Never Return* became embroiled in a discussion about its ostentatious lack of originality. As a result of this production, Kantor exposed himself to unusually harsh accusations of repetitiveness and exploitation of previously employed techniques of stage and image creation. The artist was criticised for flaunting the destruction of the structures of art and culture and castigated for being stuck inside the chalk circle of an ossified repertory of reiteration and self-quotation.<sup>11</sup>

Even the staunchest defenders of Grzegorzewski's greatness noted that his final production was guilty of sketchiness. The artist was posthumously denounced for not having completed the production, for reducing it aesthetically, for stuffing it full of self-quotation and for introducing the impotence of stage creation into its auto-thematic dimension. There were references to its seams, dissonance, disintegration and fragmented structure. The performance was said to have been 'embarrassing', because the script written by Antonina Grzegorzewska (the director's daughter) exploited intimacy; it expressively introduced the theme of the artist's human foibles, his alcoholism.

Both productions did, however, have their fans. Jan Kłossowicz concluded that *I Shall Never Return* showed a remarkable, though non-obvious, innovative quality, built through the re-use of previously exploited items and scenes.<sup>12</sup> The critic supposed that both the undoubted paradox of Kantor's production and its great *forte* lay in its articulation of realistic references to the resources of his own opus. The technique of quotation, which turns out to be concrete materialised situational re-runs, re-evocations of stage characters and art objects, creates an ambiance of almost documentary truth. Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz later dubbed this technique 'autoreply'.<sup>13</sup>

The theatre photographer Wojciech Plewiński, referring to the images in Grzegorzewski's final production, commented, 'there have been complaints that they are not coherent, but they did have a meaning, a message of their own, showing this fragmented world as if to bid it farewell...' Ewa Bułhak, contesting the verdict

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11 I discuss this reception in *Autokreacja czy autoplagiat*, see: K. Fazan, *Projekty intymnego teatru śmierci. Wyspiański–Leśmian–Kantor*, Kraków 2009.

12 J. Kłossowicz, *Tadeusz Kantor. Teatr*, Warszawa 1991, p. 177.

13 K. Pleśniarowicz, *Wyspiański w teatrze Kantora. O dwóch wersjach powrotu Odysa z 1988 i 1944 roku*, in: *Stanisław Wyspiański – studium artysty*, ed. E. Miodońska-Brookes, Kraków 1994.

that Grzegorzewski's last production was incomplete, came up with an intriguing blueprint for Grzegorzewski's 'working thought process'. It contained both the method of repetition drawing on the author's own past in the form of memories, and 'borrowings' from his own works. 'Stubbornly, Grzegorzewski kept coming back (...) to the rudimentary themes: war, the salon in which the rehearsal of *The Return of Odysseus* was taking place, his Father and the bakery in which paintings were burning, the Island of the Dead (from Stanisław Wyspiański') and Bluebeard's Castle.'<sup>14</sup> The production, however, included a radical departure from that strategy: Antonina Grzegorzewska's text, which finally took the form of an extended monologue structure, delivered by Jerzy Radziwiłowicz as He. This transition from *The Second Return of Odysseus* to *He. The Second Return of Odysseus* is a U-turn, comparable in a sense to Kantor's gambit of, firstly, placing himself centre-stage and, secondly, providing himself with a voice by introducing a recorded monologue in *I Shall Never Return*. Kantor is literally present and has a voice. Grzegorzewski identifies with 'variants' of his own persona; he permeates the character rendered by the actor Jerzy Radziwiłowicz (He) and the shadow of Odysseus played by Wojciech Malajkat, as an artist-cum-director, a character loosely fitted into the narrative of the production. Grzegorzewski used to say, as if commenting directly on the war photographs from Kantor's wartime production, that Odysseus was a silent companion of the artist, a 'forgotten photograph of a bygone era'. Both artists' decisions are testimony to the fact that they incorporated subjective constructs and signals into their productions; by the same token, Odysseus becomes a symbol of profoundly personal themes: their own psychological and artistic tangles.

There seems to be another similarity between both artists' creative processes; Kantor's we can access through recordings of his rehearsals, and Grzegorzewski's via accounts and reminiscences of those who worked with him. From the start, Kantor wanted to introduce Odysseus (as a protagonist and as Wyspiański's text) in the form of his own memory stream gradually crystallising during the rehearsals. The appearance of Odysseus was to be guaranteed by the process of reminiscence, seminally stimulated by new ideas and aided by actors' improvisations. Kantor rejected many elements such as scenes, situations and solutions straight away, replacing them by different ones. Others still he developed in various directions, initially unexpected. Grzegorzewski had a similar technique. He would erase his initial projects, filling the void left, the afterimage spaces, with new matter. One must, of course, remember that both theatre artists also worked as painters, up to a point – they treated their studies as a meaningful path to the final product; they repeatedly repainted the 'painterly' surfaces of the staging; they introduced layers, extending the tectonic structure of their productions, added diverse glazes.

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14 E. Bułhak, *Drugi powrót Odysa*, in: *Notatnik Teatralny* 2006, no. 42.

Moreover, they created individual records, using rapidly expanding rhizome-like sketches and notes during the rehearsals.

Both Kantor and Grzegorzewski abandoned the narrative axis of the drama. The myth of Odysseus as a tale about the return to Ithaca is but a faint outline; the last act has been retained but largely erased, and on its palimpsestic structure both artists develop their autonomous game of *settling accounts*. Its main theme becomes taking stock of one's own artistic and existential past, combined with a vague image of death, a hallucinatory premonition of the end. Images take over and replace the reality of the word. It is they that become the primary medium of the message, even though in both productions the verbal and poetic layer, with its unusual cadences combined with masterly acting, is strikingly eloquent.

In both cases, the act of directing becomes a rhapsodic gesture which brings together different forms of memory. Vital memories and visions; personal and theatrical situations as well as stage characters and dramatic nodes, going back to the artist's theatrical past and to previous performances, have all been introduced, on peculiar terms, into these new productions, into a structure with a new and distinct ontology, with quite a different foundation. It is primarily set in the context of the feeling that one has reached one's human and artistic destiny; this creates uncertainty and multiplies doubts stemming from lack of fulfilment and the premonition of death. Both Kantor's and Grzegorzewski's productions use the device of a play within a play. This helps construct an inner framework; it replicates shadows and reflections, resulting in Chinese-box structures.

In Kantor's production, the appearance of Odysseus has been heralded by other 'returns'. An entire parade of Cricot characters returns into the All Souls' Day structure drawn from Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [Forefathers' Eve] and Wyspiański's *Wesele* [The Wedding]. The protagonists of the past productions based on Witkacy (such as the Water Hen with the bath, the Kremlin Princess, the Apache, the two Hasidic Jews with the Plank of Last Resort, and the Gymnast) arrive, in search of their author, at a lowly inn, rigorously managed by the law-and-order upholding innkeeper and his servant. There also appear pseudo-citations of situations and forms of communication from previous performances, such as the repetitive counting out of names from *The Dead Class*, the dance of the bishops from *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear* or the marriage ceremony as a situational allusion to *Wielopole, Wielopole*. The strategy of device replay is not mechanical repetition. In this universe, Ulysses (or rather his name) keeps circulating amongst the ever-transforming beings, fusing with their lot. Ulysses can become a mannequin of the Kantor's father, a military uniform stretched out on a frame in the shape of a cross, the role combined with the costume, into which the innkeeper will forcibly be thrust. Ulysses becomes also a self-definition of Tadeusz Kantor the artist, who remains on stage with an aura of ultimate solitude.

In Kantor's production, Odysseus' presence is linked to the soldier's greatcoat, which becomes the uniform of identification with the character of Ulysses. There is also an attempt to dramatise fragmentary relations from Wyspiański's drama. In Grzegorzewski's production, apart from the image signals, there are also the texts – scraps of the monologue of Wyspiański's Odysseus, passed on from person to person. Whoever utters the words falls under the curse that befell the Greek hero, whom Wyspiański, after Dante, placed in Hell, and both 20th-century directors – in the hell of their own consciousness.

His inner theatre enables Grzegorzewski to combine free associations which merge images from Łódź of his childhood, his own memory of the war, with images from the books he has read and snippets of his past productions. These are too numerous to mention. There, Wyspiański's Odysseus fuses with Joyce's Ulysses; Bloomusalem merges with the artist's favourite *topoi*: Venice and Amsterdam; collages appear of the ruined theatre on the island (from Wyspiański's *Noc listopadowa*; [November Night]), and dustbins from Beckett's *Endgame*. Odysseus, as He, is also the Consul from *Powolne ciemnienie malowideł* [The Slow Darkening of Paintings], based on *Under the Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry, and the Wyspiański from *Studium o Hamlecie* [A Study of Hamlet].

Additionally, Grzegorzewski's production evokes the persona of Kantor-as-director (played by Jan Englert) in a situation which is, as it were, a grotesque replica of the Underground Theatre staging of Wyspiański's play. Simultaneously, Kantor is Bluebeard, and – as we have been reminded – Grzegorzewski was particularly fascinated by Béla Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, staged at the Warsaw Opera in 1963, with stage sets by Tadeusz Kantor...<sup>15</sup>

The emballage-like construction of the images in these performances is compelling – bringing to mind Kantor's pronouncement: even though the image is rich, it's empty inside. Stage visions become potential images: they depend on the spectator's state of mind and memory, the ability to recall past performances and to decipher cultural associations. Even if these – in a sense – erudite layers cannot be decoded fully, the emotional power of the performance resides in the eschatological issues the productions deal with. In both cases, the theatre is a transitory zone, an airlock between life and death.

#### 4.

Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, various philosophical and aesthetic formulations included the concept of the dying out of art, considered an attractive idea from the point of view of artistic representation itself. The transitory nature of art, its

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15 R. Węgrzyniak, *Teatr Polski*, in: *Notatnik Teatralny* 2006, no. 42.

impermanence, the relativity of its forms become the content of art itself. This theme is brought up in both stage productions. In Grzegorzewski's play, there is direct reference to 'superfluous daubs', from his re-working of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's *Oni* [They] in Grzegorzewski's performance: *Tak zwana ludzkość w obłądnie* [So-called Humanity Gone Mad]; there also appears a vision of works of art burning in a bakery. In his last two productions in the Theatre of Death – *I Shall Never Return* and *Today Is My Birthday* – Kantor took up, with particular intensity, the dynamic contrast between reality and illusion created through images. Let's note that the realised theatrical image, even if it refers to the absent by recalling traces of its past incarnations and realisations, employs the present tense and the live presence (the actors' personal substantiation). Thus, presence and absence are closely related. They exist as a polarised unity which can be expressed through impermanent stage visions, in their ambiguous form.

And so what has been taken from the necrotic structures of the past performances is momentarily repeated, recreated, even though the process is at all times coloured, by an ironic comment from Kantor's production which insists that all that's left is just 'licking the plate clean.' And yet, such feasting on less-than-fresh dishes can result in a 'miracle of regeneration', as Grzegorzewski's production demonstrates, postulating the 'generosity of repetition'. As Grzegorzewski's He puts it, 'What doesn't come back wasn't worth being born in the first place.'

In relation to both productions, one can mention an artistic method characteristic of high modernism, one that was close to the heart of Samuel Beckett, for one. It is governed by an exceptional artistic imperative: the artist must be faithful to himself, must stay with his own theatrical model, while simultaneously venturing beyond his own concepts; must move forward and repeat. The walking on the spot in *Godot* becomes, as Adorno notes, a representative figure of this technique, thanks to which 'the fulfilled moment reverses into perpetual repetition that converges with desolation.'<sup>16</sup> What comes powerfully to the fore here is the instant reactivating and recycling power of finality, of the 'endgame'. The restoring of the ownership of one's own work provokes observation of how art is evolving within itself. This cognitive act is connected with the evolution of forms of expression, normally observed in the dimension of cultural processes. Here, however, within the scope of their individual work, the artists took a risk: they wanted to track the laws of motion in their own creation, the energy of its progression and its obsessiveness or indeed sterility.

In constructing the sensual content of their imagery, both Kantor and Grzegorzewski used the bare reality of matter, the tangibility of the actual object. Both had the distinguishing ability to view things differently. Images from their

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16 T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London, New York 2004, p. 39.

final productions are representations which seek, in spite of everything, an *aura*, a characteristic of high art. The two artists of the Polish theatre came to know in depth the power of Constructivism and the *avant-garde* and the consequences of the modernising processes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; in their final phase, however, they attempted to regain, within the performance, the miraculous aura of an image, to replicate its magic, to get closer to its secrets. Auraticity employs objects of the demystified world, yet it does not entirely acquiesce in the demystification. A performance constructed in such a way becomes a venture into elevated art, aiming not for pathos but rather for negative features, such as: amorphousness, darkness, obscurity and un-representability. The image directs the spectator deep into the darkness. Simultaneously, acts of destruction of the representation take place – of negation as a reaction to the false deceptive hope that art carries a durable or eternal message. The destruction of the aura of the work is linked to the debunking of its uniqueness and immortality. Both Kantor and Grzegorzewski were associated with a certain phase of the Polish theatre which critics saw as distinct from the new tendencies, especially those which arose after 1990. However, if one were to relate this distinctiveness and generational rift only to the strategy of constructing the stage image as an equivalent of the inner perception or cognition, and to the discovery of the possibilities and the power of post-dramatic *auteur* theatre – this rift would not be so obvious. The theatrical experience – *Koniec* [The End] by Krzysztof Warlikowski – confirms this proposition. This 2010 production is, to my mind, a separate and original continuation of that faint, extremely élitist dramatic and theatrical line, with its starting point – the artist's inner game with his own creativity, whose key issues he revives within a single performance. These issues recur as hallucinations, as action-replays of the artist's own works presented to the spectator as stage *tableaux*. Again, one can refer to coming to terms with one's life, to the model of an auto-thematic spectacle in which the creator performs an act of self-judgment. In Warlikowski's *The End*, too, such an attempt has distinct nostalgic undertones; it exposes the artist to the powerlessness of the representation, expressed as it is via his inability to convey either the reality or the disturbed depths of his memory and his subconscious in an adequate, coherent way. The Warlikowski production is a liberal compilation of various texts. You will not find Wyspiański's *The Return of Odysseus* there; however, the theme of Odysseus is present, in reference both to the *Odyssey* and to John Maxwell Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*. The myth is linked to Warlikowski's protagonist, derived from Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. In this production – in which Joseph K. serves as the director's mouthpiece – the myth from antiquity, the archetype of the situation where Odysseus was faced with temptations, resisted death and descended into the abyss, becomes a framework to contain the artist's own predicament. The spectator is drawn into the world-as-entrapment; there,

alongside the director, he experiences the images recurrent in his art, which keep surfacing in new variants and guises. The power of art is ceaselessly put to the test by the impermanence of the theatrical matter, a lack of certainty as to the efficacy of its subjective constructions.

Horkheimer and Adorno state that:

The Promised Land for Odysseus is not the archaic realm of images. Finally, all the images reveal their true essence as shades in the world of the dead, as illusion. Having recognized them as dead he dismisses them (...). (...) the power of myth, transposed into mental forms, survives only as imagination.<sup>17</sup>

However, as Hans Belting observed, it becomes the destiny of body constantly to experience time, space and death, which we represent *a priori* in images. From the anthropological point of view, man no longer appears as lord and master of his images but – and that is something completely different – as the seat of images which have occupied his body: he has been taken hostage by images of his own creation, and this remains the case even when he tries to master them.<sup>18</sup>

Both performances, Kantor's and Grzegorzewski's – and, to a certain extent, also Warlikowski's production, referred to parenthetically – reveal the phenomenon of theatrical creation that overpowers its creator and masters him. On the other hand, the repeated images evoke their own artistic strategy as much as they demonstrate its destruction. Their energy is ambivalent: they reveal both the power and the impotence of that strategy; they make an epiphany possible, yet show how utopian it is. They also construct the truth of the impossibility of representation – the world (also the inner world) is better demonstrated in the state of decomposition than composition, in the desperate gesture of a momentary stitching into a whole of loosely connected images. The fragmentation of linearity allows one to enter into the mystery. Linearity was still a characteristic feature of the wartime *The Return of Odysseus*, to be abandoned in his post-war returns. According to Gilles Deleuze, such an act provides a chance to express one's intellect and perception.<sup>19</sup> Constant tangential departures and tampering with causality in the creation of the visual narrative favour the intimate exposure of inner values, a kaleidoscope of hidden vision. That vision, in which spectators may partake for a moment, is darkness, and – in the words of He-Grzegorzewski – 'in darkness, there is multiplicity.'

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17 M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

18 H. Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, Princeton 2011.

19 G. Deleuze, *Cinema. The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson, B. Habberjam, Minneapolis 1997, pp. 56–66.



# Present Absence in Tadeusz Kantor's and Christoph Schlingensiefel's Late Performances

*Uta Schorlemmer*

Art is exciting only when  
we are confronted with something  
we do not understand.<sup>1</sup>

Ch. Schlingensiefel

The 'CONDITION OF DEATH' is  
'the most extreme point of reference  
no longer threatened by the conformity of  
the CONDITION OF AN ARTIST AND ART.'<sup>2</sup>

T. Kantor

## 1. Art and Death

When it comes to dying, human beings meet their most powerful challenge. Kantor grew up in the shadow of omnipresent death during and between the two world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1975, fifteen years before his death, he defined the stage – following the ancient tradition of theatre based on ritual – as the world of the dead. Being present on stage not as a character but as himself – Tadeusz Kantor – he faced the challenge of exposing his artistic biography to the public. Facing obvious and unavoidable death of old age, Kantor tried to revive his life experience within theatrical rituals of great formality. Christoph Schlingensiefel, who had lost himself for years in a postmodern plethora on stage before he found out about his lung cancer in 2008, focused his late – although still excessive – work on the most essential questions of a human being. He frankly made his physical death the driving force behind his art. Theatre served him as a way to survive by recreating his life on stage: 'As nice as life on earth, heaven can't be!'<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 Christoph Schlingensiefel quoted in: G. Seesslen, *Mein idealer Künstler zurzeit*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 04.03.2010, Nr. 53, S. 38. 'Kunst wird erst dann interessant, wenn wir vor irgendetwas stehen, das wir nicht restlos erklären können.'
  - 2 T. Kantor, *The Theatre of Death*, in: M. Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis, London 2009, p. 237.
  - 3 The quote is the title of Schlingensiefel's last book, a diary of his cancer (Ch. Schlingensiefel, *So schön wie hier kann's im Himmel gar nicht sein! Tagebuch einer Krebserkrankung*, München 2010).

What unites Kantor and Schlingensiefel, two artists of different generations, cultural backgrounds, and artistic styles? Both were *clowns 'noir'* and *enfants terribles* of the theatre of their times. Both broke taboos whenever they could. Both provoked their audience to the most extreme, polarized reactions. Both combined opposites, such as sacredness and blasphemy, *Fluxus* and *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Similarly to Kantor, Schlingensiefel put himself on stage, either corporeally or as a character played by an actor. Both were not only part of most of their productions, but also the masters of them. They *were* real on stage, not playing. They were unchangeable rudiments of reality within their works of art-ready-mades, until they passed away, leaving behind emptiness. Nothing. Death. But both of them prepared their disappearance as a work of art and as an act of protest against unavoidable death.

There is a tendency to ignore the obvious. Death. Boris Groys, asked in a survey by *Art Forum* in 2000 how he imagined his future, answered: 'In the future, we will be older or dead. This is my only statement that has been censored and not published.'<sup>4</sup> The banality of death prevents us from talking about it. In Western civilization, death has almost disappeared from daily experience.

The modern Western world is a world of surviving, of clinging to life. Therefore, modern man lives in a kind of utopia or dystopia of pure surviving, which makes him structurally unable to understand death as something comfortable, livable. It is always disturbing life and has to be suppressed, ignored, and eliminated.<sup>5</sup>

This affects the relationship between Western consciousness and the human body. Corporeality is a reminder of the transitoriness of life; therefore, most people in the West try to make their body an object of their consciousness. *Corporeality* – the word in English expresses the real being of the body. Hence, human bodies seem to be the 'trash' of life.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary civilization has, according to Kamper's *Aesthetics of Absence*, two main tendencies, 'spiritualization and disembodiment'.<sup>7</sup> Gernot Böhme defines corporeality (*Leibsein*) as *being* a body, not using the body as an object. This kind of conscious being-a-body is viewed by Böhme as a crucial challenge for the human being today.<sup>8</sup> Instead of corporeally, man exists more and more virtually. Baudrillard states: 'With the virtual, we

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4 B. Groys, *Zur Situation des Geschmacks in unserer Zeit*, in: K. Tiedemann, F. Raddatz, (eds.) *Reality strikes back. Tage vor dem Bildersturm. Eine Debatte zum Einbruch der Wirklichkeit in den Bühnenraum*, Berlin 2007, pp. 21–35, 21.

5 B. Groys, *Opferstrategien der Kunst*, in: Ch. Schlingensiefel, C. Hegemann, (eds.) *Kunst und Gemüse, A. Hipler*, Berlin 2004, p. 34.

6 D. Kamper, *Ästhetik der Abwesenheit. Die Entfernung der Körper*, München 1999, p. 44.

7 D. Kamper, *Vergeistigung und Entkoerperlichung*, München 1999, p. 48.

8 See: G. Böhme, *Leibsein als Aufgabe. Leibphilosophie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*, Zug 2003.

are entering not only the era of elimination of the real and referential, but of annihilation of the other.<sup>9</sup> Hence, Dietmar Kamper defines the word 'virtuosity' as the polar opposite to 'virtuality'.<sup>10</sup> Could this concept be a chance of creating a utopia in art?

Theatre deals with transformation of bodies. It is the art of ephemeral *bodily* presence on stage, with the audience as one body in the 'triangle of bodies':

Ce triangle, je l'ai retrouvé devant une danse; un triangle du même ordre: il y avait le *corps voyant* ou spectateur – la foule, vous – et le *corps dansant* (solitaire ou pluriel, incluant le chorégraphe qui fait corps avec les danseurs et prolonge par leur danse les limites de son corps), et il y avait le pôle de *l'Autre*, qu'on invoque dans les danses sacrées mais qui est là de toute façon; c'est le foyer incandescent où se puise la création; le source d'altérités ... Et le triangle s'ébranle, ça vibre: le corps dansant convoque la foule en quête de l'Autre-polarité, de l'Autre qui n'a pas de corps palpable mais qui est une présence: celle de l'être comme origine de ce qui est, comme déclenchement de langage, de mémoire; support de ce par quoi l'être excède tout ce qui est, et notamment excède le corps.<sup>11</sup>

Theatre is alive but may represent death. Marina Abramović used to challenge her own life by risking her neck on stage and was rescued by alert members of the audience several times. Once, in 1970, she planned to play Russian Roulette on stage with a loaded revolver. She intended to dress up as her mother had demanded that she dress and to put the revolver to her temple in front of the audience. If the chamber was empty and she was lucky enough not to die, she would have changed into the clothes she really wanted to wear independently of her mother's will.<sup>12</sup> Yugoslavian officials did not give permission for this performance. Therefore, it remains a work of conceptual art, such as the one Abramović refers to in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, where a nameless artist invites his audience to a performance. He puts a white screen on the ground floor of a building, climbs up the stairs to the top floor and jumps onto the screen.<sup>13</sup> Suicide as a work of art. Groys, talking about the Western world being unable to make sacrifices in contrast to Islamist fundamentalists, perceives the relationship the other way round: 'I would say, contemporary art is a Western kind of suicide.'<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to these acts of (attempted) suicide as works of art, Kantor and Schlingensiefel aim to change their death into works of art by joyfully and tragically playing with the dialectics between their bodily presence on stage as individuals

9 Baudrillard quoted in Kamper 1999, p. 68.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

11 D. Sibony, *Le corps et sa danse*, Paris 1995, p. 132.

12 M. Abramović, *Artist Body. Performances 1969–1997*, ed. T. Stoss, Milano 1998, p. 58.

13 M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović–Hans Ulrich Obrist*, Köln 2010, p. 13.

14 B. Groys, *Opferstrategien der Kunst*, in: Ch. Schlingensiefel, C. Hegemann (eds.), *Kunst und Gemüse, A. Hipler*, Berlin 2004, p. 35.

(not actors) and their disappearance. Gerald Siegmund opposes the ‘production of absence’ in contemporary dance to Gumbrecht’s ‘production of presence’.<sup>15</sup> It is the latter paradigm that Kantor and Schlingensief follow. They make efforts to defy the finiteness of human nature by actually performing the process of disappearance, of ‘passing away’. But their absence is so active that it makes them even more present. At the same time, both artists try to contradict the vainness of earthly existence, albeit in different ways, and strive for (eternal) presence by creating all-embracing works of art, *Gesamtkunstwerke*.

## 2. Kantor’s ‘Desire for Presence’

Kantor’s theatre is famous for the presence of the director who is not an actor but an individual. Every night on stage, all over the world, he goes through the experience of exposing his *being* to the audience. In her analysis ‘Non omnis moriar’,<sup>16</sup> Katarzyna Tokarska-Stangret reveals how, during the long rehearsal period of *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor tried hard to learn to act like an actor, but finally admitted his failure. His ‘creatures’, the characters of Cricot 2, condemned their director to staying on stage as himself, to bringing his individual and completely private presence on stage. He obeyed but died during the rehearsals of his next and very last production with Cricot 2, *Today Is My Birthday*. Nevertheless, he did not fail to replace himself in anticipation of his death.

In the former productions of the Theatre of Death, Kantor – besides being on stage – multiplied himself through several characters or marionettes, such as his at least five alter egos in *Let the Artists Die* in 1985 (I – Dying a stage persona; The Author of the stage persona – the I-Dying, describing through that stage creation himself and his own death; I – When I Was Six; Master Veit Stoss; and The Late Mr. X<sup>17</sup>) or the waxwork of the young Kantor as a bridegroom in *I Shall Never Return* in 1988.

When I wanted to be a child,  
someone else was a child,  
not the real ‘I’  
(this can still be excluded).

When I wanted to die,  
someone else was dying for me.  
He was playing the part of me dying.

15 G. Siegmund, *Abwesenheit. Eine performative Ästhetik des Tanzes*. William Forsythe, Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Meg Stuart, Bielefeld 2006, p. 45.

16 See: K. Tokarska-Stangret, this volume p. 281.

17 In Polish: Osobnik Świętej Pamięci.

And that 'playing',  
 which I had excommunicated,  
 functioned perfectly well.<sup>18</sup>

In his very last, unfinished production *Today Is My Birthday*, Kantor not only multiplied but also 'dubbed' himself by his recorded voice and by his (living and acting) self-portrait on stage, played by Andrzej Welmiński. A rotten desk 'came back' to this production from his 1944 underground performance *The Return of Odysseus*, now representing the deceased director. Kantor passed away in December 1990 after having finished the first run-through *Today Is My Birthday*. After his death, the desk became a powerful sign of his absence. It was one of the most meaningful 'actors' of Kantor's idea of the 'reality of the lowest rank',<sup>19</sup> a symbol of poverty of his theatre. Watching the evolving function of the desk during the rehearsals, one can perceive how it became an actor itself, a 'bio-object' on the same level of importance as the human beings on stage.<sup>20</sup> At some point, four Cricot 2 actors 'buried' the desk on stage, with the priest from *Wielopole, Wielopole* (premiered in 1980) leading their procession. The desk was actually situated at the boundary between art and life. Photo shows the same actors off stage, carrying Kantor's coffin to a horse-drawn hearse which took it to the Rakowicki cemetery in Krakow on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1990, escorted by thousands of people who paid their last respects to the dead artist.

Kantor anticipated his obviously upcoming death of old age and arranged the experience of absence when he replaced himself on stage with such a shabby object as the desk. The burial of the desk is the culmination not only of Kantor's idea of the 'reality of the lowest rank'<sup>21</sup> but also of Gumbrecht's concept of the 'production of presence'. Gumbrecht argues in favor of the sensual effect and aims for the bodily experience of the real world.<sup>22</sup> He does not accept the interpretation of the world of real objects as a superficial reality behind which 'sense' is hidden. Objects are not just representations of something more important or signs leading to an imaginary world. Gumbrecht wants to rediscover the corporeality independently of its sense, meaning, or linguistic terms. The creating of the sensation of being

18 T. Kantor, *The Real ,I'*, in M. Kobińska *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis, London 2009, p. 395.

19 T. Kantor in M. Kobińska, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis, London 2009, pp. 116-122. The meaningfulness of the desk is evidenced by the book entitled *The Plank* by Kantor's old friend Mieczysław Porębski, who writes about Kantor's search for new approaches to real objects in art during and right after World War II (M. Porębski, *Deska. Świadectwa-Rozmowy-Komentarze*, Warszawa 1997).

20 The rehearsals of *Today Is My Birthday* were recorded by Andrzej Sapija and published on DVD, *Próby tylko próby*, Kraków, Cricoteka 2008.

21 See footnote 19.

22 H.U. Gumbrecht, *Diesseits der Hermeneutik. Die Produktion von Präsenz*, Frankfurt 2004.

present is one of possible definitions of theatre in general, and this is what Kantor aspired to in particular:

IT'S NECESSARY TO RECOVER THE PRIMEVAL FORCE OF THE SHOCK TAKING PLACE AT THE MOMENT WHEN, OPPOSITE A HUMAN (A SPECTATOR), THERE STOOD FOR THE FIRST TIME A HUMAN (AN ACTOR), DECEPTIVELY SIMILAR TO US, YET AT THE SAME TIME INFINITELY FOREIGN, BEYOND THE IMPASSABLE BARRIER.<sup>23</sup>

Bogdan Renczyński, a Cricot 2 actor, states that *Today Is My Birthday* was a failed performance because, after Kantor died, the actors did not play his absence but his (missing) presence. Michal Kobialka convincingly defines – drawing on Adorno – those late works as catastrophes,<sup>24</sup> where the artist's maturity was threatened by fear of death. According to Renczyński's statement during the conference *Tadeusz Kantor Today* in Krakow in December 2010, this shows that the actors had a hard time dealing with Kantor's absence. But for me personally, while being among the audience at the Hebbel Theatre in Berlin in 1991, and knowing almost nothing about Kantor, this enigma was particularly exciting. I recognized this kind of active emptiness as the 'present absence' of somebody who had been supposed to be the heart of the show. Marina Abramović predicts for 21<sup>st</sup>-century art the disappearance of bodies as objects.<sup>25</sup> Kantor contradicts her through his concept of objects of the 'lowest rank' and his 'desire for presence',<sup>26</sup> when he transforms his persona into a ready-made on stage.

I am ... on stage  
I will not be a performer. Instead, poor fragments of my  
own life  
will become  
'ready made objects'.

Every night  
RITUAL  
and SACRIFICE  
will be performed here.<sup>27</sup>

Ritually playing with the dialectic relationship between presence and absence, Kantor confessed his classical desire for the eternal presence of the artist through his work. According to a comment by Katarzyna Osieńska, Kantor searched for as much objectivity as possible. He did not only convey his autobiography and the

23 T. Kantor, *The Theatre of Death*, in: M. Kobialka, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

24 See: M. Kobialka this volume p. 241.

25 M. Abramović, *Marina Abramović – Hans Ulrich Obrist*, Köln 2010, p. 19.

26 *Verlangen nach Präsenz*, Gumbrecht 2004, p. 37.

27 T. Kantor, *To Save from Oblivion*, in: M. Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis, London 2009, p. 393.

process of dying or disappearing from the earthly existence, but he also told the story of an individual in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, using the concept of the ready-made for his personal being on stage.

### 3. Schlingensiefel's Fear of Absence

Christoph Schlingensiefel died in August 2010, shortly before his fiftieth birthday, much younger than Kantor. As soon as he learnt about his cancer, all of his productions centered on his disease, the process of dying and his struggle against death. Like Kantor, he was present on stage as himself, Christoph Schlingensiefel, and he also replaced his person cumulatively either by actors or by audio and video recordings. He also worked with the concept of the ready-made. 'I am the music of Richard Wagner', he said about his *Kunst und Gemüse* [Art and Vegetables], Berlin 2004.<sup>28</sup> But he also made his biography and his person – as did Kantor – a ready-made on stage. Working with ready-mades means dealing with the unchangeable. However, the act of artistic creation is an act of changing. Schlingensiefel exposed – again similarly to Kantor – his viewer to the oxymoron immanent in the idea of the ready-made.

In *Mea Culpa, eine ReadyMadeOpera* [Mea Culpa, a ReadyMadeOpera], Vienna 2008, Schlingensiefel had the actor Joachim Meyerhoff play Christoph Schlingensiefel undergoing chemotherapy, more or less while the real Schlingensiefel went through the same process in life. Similarly to *Today Is My Birthday*, Schlingensiefel's performance was situated at the boundary between stage and life. His tragicomic opera was about a person in search of his own body. The actress Irm Hermann comments on this search at a certain moment during the opera:

Is representing the human body no longer a bridge to God's epiphany, to divine revelation? Oh yes. Heretofore, the human body has been represented only as a body. But now, it is imperative to represent it in God's own likeness. His invisible bodies shall become visible.<sup>29</sup>

This brings to mind the concept of Sibony's third body in the communication system of dance: the Other or rather the search for the Other – or for God after His death. *Mea Culpa* is an overwhelming spectacle, but it is all about solitude, especially when Schlingensiefel in person is on stage. His alter ego, the actor Joachim Meyerhoff, speaks of someone who falls overboard and then makes futile efforts to catch the departing ship. But the ship disappears mercilessly. In the end,

28 Ch. Schlingensiefel, C. Hegemann, *Kunst ALS Krankheit: Kunst und Gemüse*, Berlin 2004, p. 18.

29 See [www.schlingensiefel.com](http://www.schlingensiefel.com) and [http://www.kirche-der-angst.de/index\\_eng.html](http://www.kirche-der-angst.de/index_eng.html), (date accessed: 4 December 2010).

absolute loneliness prevails. The image of the boat seems to be a metaphor for Schlingensiefel (and Kantor) being on stage not as an actor but as himself: a human being in search of himself facing death – or the Other – but in the process of constant disappearance of the essence. The present Self in relation to the absent Other.

In *Sterben lernen!* [Learning to die!] Zurich 2009, Schlingensiefel replaces himself dying with an actor playing the character named Mr Andersen.<sup>30</sup> This self-replacement is similar to Kantor's method in *Let the Artists Die* or *Today Is My Birthday*. Schlingensiefel's protagonist says:

Even when I am already dead, the cancer still grows for a little while, the cancer continues to live, only my consciousness of it doesn't continue to live. Only strangers can see the life of the cadaver, not the corpse itself. My own body doesn't live for me but for others. That's like it is at the Kunsthau.<sup>31</sup> There, art exists even if we are not there anymore. (...) The works of art are chatting also when we are not there anymore, also when nobody listens to them (...). These are tumorous languages. Art has become independent and throws mere chunks to us. We need to collect them, which makes us happy if some specialists and curators have found out something about these chunks. (...) Life is taking place without me.<sup>32</sup>

The distance between the bodily existence and the virtual reality is expressed in Schlingensiefel's performances concerning the process of dying. Art seems to be a way to preserve at least the memory of the human being while the body is an object of medical procedures. In *Learning to die!*, Schlingensiefel presents memories of his childhood and youth, and quotes his earlier projects combined with tomography videos of his metastasized lungs. On the one hand, the organ is a part of the artist's self, but on the other, it is a strange object, one that the artist as an individual cannot really influence. The organ has been extracted from the subject's body. This kind of Kantoresque 'bio-object' depicts the 'reality of the lowest rank', including the banality of death discussed at the beginning of this paper.

Schlingensiefel defines art as a disease. It is contagious. The actor Martin Wuttke says in *Metanoia*, an opera by Jens Joneleit, which Schlingensiefel rehearsed but which premiered only in October 2010, shortly after the director died:

What your body does is the least concrete, believe me. Even though I don't have any documentation of our conversation, I swear these cyano bacteria will stay in my DNA

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30 Schlingensiefel makes a pun on the character's name: *anders* means *different* in German.

31 The Kunsthau is the Art Museum in Zurich.

32 [www.schlingensiefel.com](http://www.schlingensiefel.com) and <http://www.temporaere-leichenhalle.ch/> (live recording), (date accessed: 4 December 2010).



and become concrete and individualized like branches, growing out of my legs. This DNA must be explicable. (...) Infection. (...) When I kiss you, I'll become a dog.<sup>33</sup>

The function of art is to infect society in order to challenge different perspectives or to rehabilitate the body as our only nature and destiny. But, pragmatically, Schlingensiefel changes it into a kind of therapy, using Beuys' statement about how helpful it is to talk about an illness. In *Die Kirche der Angst vor dem Fremden in mir* [Church of Fear], Ruhrtriennale 2008, there are doors at two sides of the stage – more or less an analogue of medieval theatre's heaven and hell – with signs saying on one door: 'Whoever shows his wound, shall be cured', and on the opposite door: 'whoever hides it, shall not be cured'.<sup>34</sup> This is what Schlingensiefel demands from his audience, as in *Mea Culpa*, where he encourages everybody to share with him diaries of personal diseases and healing processes. However, Schlingensiefel is not a prophet and does not want to be one. He is a comedian who, facing death, is desperately looking for his self.

(...) the artist is a human being who is able to say 'I', not just to himself but to the society. This might be a little irritating in a society of egomaniacs, egocentrics and, above all, egoists. Nothing has disconnected us from saying 'I' as much as the hysterical narcissism of late capitalism. Apparently the subject is crying out against his elimination instead of pulling himself together, he rather wants to be fed instead of confronting the world, he rather escapes to inner worlds. This I of late capitalism (...) is almighty and irrelevant at the same time. Something shall be done against that. Among others, through the arts. The artist is a human being that acts in complete consistency with himself.<sup>35</sup>

The 'I' present on stage is Christoph Schlingensiefel's utopia, led *ad absurdum* by the dying body. If Schlingensiefel puts his I, his whole and only personality, on

33 Ch. Schlingensiefel, *Metanoia* (live recording), Berlin 2010.

34 [www.schlingensiefel.com](http://www.schlingensiefel.com) and [http://www.kirche-der-angst.de/index\\_eng.html](http://www.kirche-der-angst.de/index_eng.html). (date accessed: 4 December 2010).

35 G. Seesslen, *Mein idealer Künstler zurzeit*, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, No. 53, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, p. 38.

'Der Künstler, meiner bescheidenen Meinung nach, ist ein Mensch, der ICH sagen kann, nicht so sehr zu sich selbst als vielmehr zur Gesellschaft. Das scheint nun vielleicht ein wenig verwirrend angesichts einer Gesellschaft von Egomanen, Egozentrikern und vor allem Egoisten.(...) Denn nichts hat uns von der Kunst des Ich-Sagens so entfernt wie der hysterische Narzissmus im späten Kapitalismus. Das Subjekt, so scheint es, schreit gegen seine Auflösung an, statt sich aufzuraffen, will es gefüttert werden, statt sich der Welt zu stellen, flüchtet es in die Innenräume. Dieses Ich des Spätkapitalismus – entschuldigen Sie das etwas abgegriffene Wort, aber leider ist noch niemandem ein besseres eingefallen – das Ich des Spätkapitalismus also ist zugleich übermächtig und bedeutungslos. Dagegen muss etwas getan werden. Unter anderen mit den Mitteln der Kunst. Der Künstler ist ein Mensch, der Dinge tut, die ihm vollkommen entsprechen.'

stage, he seems to realize what Gernot Böhme conceptualizes: ‘It is not imperative to make the being conscious but to bring consciousness to the being.’<sup>36</sup>

#### 4. The Artist Present in the Work, a Ready-Made

Contrary to Siegmund’s analysis of the ‘production of absence’ in contemporary dance,<sup>37</sup> Kantor and Schlingensief produce presence. They do not commit suicide through works of art. Like Sisyphus, they fight the unavoidable in their *Gesamtkunstwerk*, exposing their struggle to the public. Despite the risk of authoritarian tendencies in the integrative work of art and the hubris of being a totalitarian artist, they dare to be themselves on stage, exhibiting their bodies and biographies as ready-mades within their productions. Both Kantor and Schlingensief provoke their audience by their courage to stand up to the banality of death and by their struggle against the annihilation of the body. When it is time to die, both replace themselves with body doubles, objects, recorded voice or images. That way, their disappearance becomes a strong statement of the artist as an individual in the extremely individualistic but also de-individualized society. However, Kantor objectifies first his presence and then his absence on stage. He is the dying human being on stage, the *ecce homo*. Schlingensief works completely subjectively. He deals with Schlingensief and nobody else. Only the viewer may create a relationship with him which is more generalized. Kantor puts on stage his deep desire for presence, while Schlingensief celebrates the grief over his unavoidable absence. Both search for eternity despite natural transitoriness. Both increase their presence though their absence in their theatre.

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36 G. Boehme, *Leibsein als Aufgabe*, Zug 2003, p. 116: ‘Es kommt nicht darauf an, das Dasein zum Bewusstsein zu bringen, sondern darauf, das Bewusstsein zum Dasein zu bringen.’

37 See: footnote 15.

## About the Authors

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Born in 1960 in Judenburg, in Austria. Studies theology, philosophy and sociology in Graz and Berlin. PhD in theology (1992). In 2001 co-edited an edition of *Editio Burgtheater* together with the director of the Burgtheater Klaus Bachler. Published books about Tadeusz Kantor (1994), Christopher Marthaler (2000), Peter Zadek (2001), Gert Voss (2001), Otto Sander (2002), Andrea Breth (2004), Ignaz Kirchner, Martin Schwab (2007), Klaus Grüber (2008), Jutta Lampe (2010), is the author of *Das Burgtheater 1955–2005* (2005) and *Next Generation* (2009). In 2010 published interviews with Anselm Kiefer entitled *Die Kunst geht knapp nicht unter*. Lives in Berlin.

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**Anna Halczak**

Born 16 July 1960 in Słupsk, died 3 August 2011 in Krakow. Graduate of theatre studies at the Jagiellonian University, from 1980 she worked closely with Tadeusz Kantor on productions of Cricot 2 Theatre, in which she also acted (a Recruit – *Wielopole, Wielopole*, 1980; *This Lady – I Shall Never Return*, 1988); she was Kantor's assistant in the workshops run by him and in Cricot 2 productions (cricotages: *The Wedding*, 1986; *Machine of Love and Death*, 1987; *A Very Short Lesson*, 1988; *Silent Night*, 1990), and also during work on exhibitions, publications and films dedicated to the work of the artist. Since the inception of the Cricot 2 Theatre Centre at No. 5 Kanonicza Street in Krakow, she co-created together with Tadeusz Kantor the Cricoteka Archives, from 1986 as its manager. During the 1980s, Tadeusz Kantor created a collection of nearly three hundred drawings that presented the successive phases of the development of his opus. These works, annotated with the letter 'A', were dedicated to Anna Halczak and entrusted into her care by the artist. Following Tadeusz Kantor's death, she organised exhibitions in Cricoteka as well as elsewhere in Poland and abroad and produced numerous publications concerning Kantor's art. She was tirelessly dedicated to the idea of disseminating the artist's heritage and propagating sound knowledge about his opus.

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Born in 1955. Studied art history at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and at the Courtauld Institute, University of London. Belonged to the independent culture movement in the 1970s and 80s. Member of CIMAM (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art) at the ICOM (Committee of the International Council of Museums), UNESCO. Member of AICA (International Association of Art Critics); member of the Art Historians' Association. 1991–1996: director of the Museum of Art in Łódź, where he had worked since 1980; 2006–2008: director of Gallery Foksal in Warsaw. Lecturer in art, art exhibitions and museology in institutions including the National Higher Film, Theatre and TV School in Łódź, the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań, and on various occasions in numerous institutions all over the world. Organiser and co-organiser of many exhibitions, author of publications, texts and interviews with artists, co-author of films about art. Presently, an independent curator. Recently prepared and put on exhibitions including: *Marek Chlanda* *Beatyfikacje 2006–2007*, shown at the end of 2009 at the National Museum in Poznań, and the exhibition *Joseph Beuys / Tadeusz Kantor. Pamięć (Beuys / Kantor: Remembering)* presented in 2012 at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

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design' in the Polish edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Poznań 2004. So far she has published *Przestrzenie obrazów Leszka Mądzika* (2008), she has also co-edited the volume *Przestrzenie w dramacie, teatrze i sztukach plastycznych* (2006).

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### Zbigniew Osiński

Born in 1939 in Poznań. Theatrolgist, professor (emeritus) at the Faculty of Polish of the Warsaw University. In 1962, graduated in Polish at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, where he held an academic post for eight years. From 1970 until 2009 he held a post at the University of Warsaw. In 1966 and 1967 he worked closely with the Teatr Ósmego Dnia in Poznań. In 1973–1977 he was the literary director of the National Sary Theatre in Krakow, and in 1978–1984 he was associated with the Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practice. He initiated the idea, and was the first director of, the Centre for the Study of Jerzy Grotowski's Work and for Cultural and Theatrical Research in Wrocław; from 1990 until 2004 he was the artistic and academic director of the Centre. The author of works on the history of the theatre, the theory and anthropology of the theatre and teatrology. Most important books: *Teatr Dionizosa. Romantyzm w polskim teatrze współczesnym* (1972); *Grotowski i jego Laboratorium* (1980) – also a USA edition, *Grotowski wytycza trasy. Studia i szkice* (1993); *Jerzy Grotowski. Od divadla przedstawieni k rytualnym hrám (Jerzy Grotowski. Od teatru przedstawień do sztuk rytualnych)* (1995); *Jerzy Grotowski. Źródła, inspiracje, konteksty* (1998); *Pamięć Reduty. Osterwa, Limanowski, Grotowski* (2003); *Nazywał nas bratnim teatrem. Przyjaźń artystyczna Ireny i Tadeusza Byrskich z Jerzym Grotowskim* (2005); *Polskie kontakty teatralne z Orientem w XX wieku. Część pierwsza: Kronika. Część druga: Studia* (2008); *Jerzy Grotowski. Źródła, inspiracje, konteksty*, volume 1, the second altered edition, volume 2: *Prace z lat 1999–2009* (2009); both volumes contained comparative studies on Tadeusz Kantor and Grotowski, translated into Bulgarian, Chinese, French, Russian, Hungarian and Italian; *Jerzy Grotowski e il suo laboratorio. Dagli spettacoli e L'arte come veicolo*, Traduzione e cura di Marina Fabbri, Prefazione di Eugenio Barba con una Postfazione di Franco Ruffini, (2011). Editor of writings by Mieczysław Limanowski, Juliusz Osterwa, Waclaw Radulski, Konrad Swinarski. Jointly with Janusz Degler he edited the only book by Grotowski to have been published in Poland in his life time: *Teksty z lat 1965–1969. Wybór* (1989).



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Born in 1970, assistant professor at the Institute of Polish, the Faculty of Art and Culture at the University of Gdańsk. He specialises in the history of literature (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) as well as teatrology and theatre criticism. He is the author of four monographs: *Diabeł w dramacie polskim. (Z dziejów motywu)* (1996); *O bohaterach II części Dziadów* (1998); *Mickiewiczowskie figury wyobraźni* (2002); *Miejsca wspólne, miejsca własne. O wyobraźni Leśmiana, Schulza i Kantora* (2006). He is a member of the Association of Polish Writers and the Programme Council of the Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre.

### **Renato Palazzi**

Born in 1947 in Milan. In 1968–1972 he worked at Piccolo Teatro di Paolo Grassi, mainly on school performances. Subsequently, he took up theatre criticism, working closely with *Avanti* and *Corriere della Sera* and from 1988 with the Sunday cultural supplement *Sole 24 ore*. In 1986–1995 he was the director of the Civica Scuola D'Arte Drammatica Paolo Grassi in Milan, to which he invited Tadeusz Kantor to give a series of lectures and seminars. In 1987 he acted in Kantor's cricotage *Machine of Love and Death* as a machinist. Since 2001 he has taught at Corso di Laurea in Economia per le Arti, la Cultura e la Comunicazione (CLEACC), lecturing on the economics of the theatre, culture and communications at the Bocconi University in Milan. Recently, he published the book *Kantor. La materia e l'anima* (2010), on the concept of matter and metaphysical contexts in Kantor's art.

### **Małgorzata Paluch-Cybulska**

Art historian, since 2003 has been working at the archive of the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Krakow of Cricoteka; post-graduate student at the Institute of Art History at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (where she is working on her PhD thesis on Tadeusz Kantor's late paintings). Exhibition curator, author of texts and studies on Tadeusz Kantor's visual art; a co-ordinator of projects about Kantor.

### **Marek Pieniążek**

Born in 1970, PhD in humanities, graduate of theatre studies at the Jagiellonian University, presently an assistant professor at the Institute of Polish at the Pedagogical University in Krakow. He worked in the Śródmiejski Ośrodek Kultury and the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka in

Krakow, as well as being a journalist and teacher of Polish. Author of the books *Akt twórczy jako mimesis. Dziś są moje urodziny – ostatni spektakl Tadeusza Kantora* (2005), *Szkolny teatr przemiany. Dramatyzacja działań twórczych w procesie wychowawczym* (2009). He published a number of volumes of poetry, including *Zasypiam w twoich oczach* (1994), *Sen nas owiewa* (1995); *Dajcie mi ciszę* (1998). Edited the new editions of pre-war novels by Jan Waśniewski (*Ognie w pirytach*, Bolesław 2008; *Po dniówce*, Bolesław 2009). He is the author of some dozen articles outlining the anthropological and performative didactic model in the teaching of Polish. In 2013 he published the book *Uczeń jako aktor kulturowy. Polonistyka szkolna w warunkach płynnej nowoczesności*. Jury member at poetry and theatrical competitions, he is in charge of the Literary Club at the Municipal Cultural Centre in Olkusz.

### **Loriano Della Rocca**

A sculptor, he graduated from the Faculty of Stage Design at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence; from 1980 until 1992 – an actor of the Cricot 2 Theatre; one of his roles there was as the Shadow of Tadeusz Kantor in his last spectacle *Today Is My Birthday*. Since 1990 has embarked on his own theatrical activities, staging productions in various Italian cities; in 1992 he played Bruno Schulz in the film *Repubblica dei sogni*; in 1997–2000 he produced the project *Kantor – 2000 – la consegna dell'esperienza kantoriana* in association with Teatro S. Martin and DAMS. Since 1999 he has lectured at the Bernstein School of Music Theatre in Bologna.

### **Josep Maria de Sagarra Àngel**

A Slavist, writer and translator from Polish and Russian into Spanish and Catalan. As translator he specialised in texts by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Sławomir Mrożek and Michaił Bułhakow. He has published studies on the culture and literature of Slav countries in Spanish magazines including *Avui*, *El Punt*, *El País*, *La Vanguardia* and *Revista de Occidente*; his works have also been published outside Spain in the magazines: *Rzeczpospolita*, *Politika* (Belgrade), *Élet És Irodalom* (Budapest) and *Teatr. Żurnal o teatrze* (Moscow). Since 1997 he has popularised the artistic heritage of Tadeusz Kantor in Spain. He was the director of the Cervantes Institute in Warsaw and Budapest; presently he is the director of the Cervantes Institute in Moscow.

### **Uta Schorlemmer**

Born in 1970 in the DDR to a dissident family. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, she studied Polish, German and teatrology in Berlin, Paris and Krakow. In 2003, she was awarded a PhD for her thesis on the theatre of Krystian Lupa. From 2003 until 2006 she led a research project on the art of Tadeusz Kantor, with a conference and exhibitions in Leipzig and Krakow. In 2008–2010 she held a post as professor at the Occidental College in Los Angeles. Since 2011 she has taught teatrology and German at the BIP-Kreativitätsgrundschule in Berlin-Pankow; she has been the co-ordinator of the Bilinguales Gymnasium Weißensee. Publications: *Magia zbliżenia i tajemnica dystansu. Krystiana Lupy poszukiwania nowych mitów w teatrze* (2007), *Sztuka jest przestępstwem. Tadeusz Kantor a Niemcy i Szwajcaria. Wspomnienia – dokumenty – eseje – filmy na DVD* (2007).

### **Rafał Solewski**

Born in 1969 in Krakow. He graduated in teatrology and art history at the Jagiellonian University where he was also awarded a PhD. In 2010 he was awarded a higher doctorate at the Faculty of Philology at the University of Łódź. Worked at the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka in Krakow. Professor at the Faculty of Art at the Pedagogical University in Krakow, editor-in-chief of the Faculty Annual. He is the author of books: *Synteza i wypowiedź. Poezja i filozofia w sztukach wizualnych na przełomie XX i XXI wieku* oraz *Franciszek Mączyński (1874–1947) krakowski architekt*, as well as numerous articles published in *Art Inquiry*, *Estetyka i Krytyka*, *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny*, *Rocznik Krakowski*, *Centrop*, *Dekada Literacka*, *Kresy* and exhibition catalogues. Awarded a grant by the Lanckoroński Foundation, the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte, the Tokyo Foundation, Research Support Scheme as well as TEMPUS and Socrates/Erasmus programmes; he has participated in projects financed by the Committee for Academic Research and the National Academic Centre.

### **Lech Stangret**

Born in 1959 in Warsaw. Graduated in art history at the Jagiellonian University of Krakow, PhD. He was an actor with the Cricot 2 Theatre. Until 2004, he held the post of director of the Tadeusz Kantor Foundation and was deputy director of Cricoteka in Krakow. He published some dozen articles on the art of Tadeusz Kantor. The author of the programme of the Tadeusz Kantor Festival Krakow 2000 – European City of Culture; curator of numerous exhibitions in Poland and abroad devoted to the art of the artist, including at the Museum of Fine Arts in Prague,

Fundación Telefónica in Madrid, Casa Mila in Barcelona, La Bellone in Brussels, CEAC in Strasbourg. His publications include *Tadeusz Kantor. Malarski ambalaz totalnego dzieła* (2006), and recently *Zbigniew Gostomski. Ad rem* (2012).

### **Paweł Stangret**

Born in 1980. PhD. Received an award from the Institute of Literary Research at the Polish Academy of Sciences for his thesis on the literary art of Tadeusz Kantor. He specialises in avant-garde correspondence of arts. Holds a post at the Cardinal Stanisław Wyszyński University. Recipient of a grant from Polish Academy of Sciences.

### **Klaudiusz Świącicki**

PhD in humanities in history, professor at the GSW Milenium in Gniezno, Dean of the Faculty of Culture and Tourism. Lecturer at the UAM in Poznań. He worked at the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka. His academic interests focus on cultural history, especially history and anthropology of the theatre, the performativity of social and cultural productions from a historical point of view, memory and national heritage and oral history. The author of two monographs: *Małe ojczyzny Europy w teatrze Tadeusza Kantora* (Kraków, Gniezno 2002), *Historia w teatrze Tadeusza Kantora* (Poznań 2007) and a few dozen articles about Tadeusz Kantor. Editor of collective volumes: *Polacy wobec wielości kultur. Wczoraj – dziś – jutro* (co-edited by G. Pełczyński, Gniezno 2009) and *Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia jako przestrzeń spotkania. Na szlakach tradycji kultury* (2012). Member of the international academic team *Galicja 1772–1918*. He leads artistic projects and workshops on the theatre and intercultural dialogue.

### **Jean-Pierre Thibaudat**

A writer and journalist, currently director of the Passages Festival in Metz, France. The author of the blog *theatre et balagan* about the theatre and eastern culture, created in the electronic publication *Rue.89.com*, founded by ex-*Libération* journalists. In 1978–1986 a journalist and reporter for *Libération* its correspondent in Moscow in 1992–2000. Major works: *Chroniques d'un chasseur d'oubli* (Christian Bourgois); *Rien ne sera jamais plus calme à la frontière finno-chinoise* (Christian Bourgois) ; *Entretiens avec Krystian Lupa* (Actes sud); *Le roman de Jean Luc Lagarce* (Les Solitaires intempestifs)/ biography.

### **Katarzyna Tokarska-Stangret**

Born in 1981. A post-graduate student at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, writing a thesis on the video recordings of the rehearsals of Tadeusz Kantor plays. Secretary of the editorial team of the magazine *Teatr*.

### **Jerzy Turowski**

Art historian and critic. Until 1983, he lectured at the Institute of Art and History at the University of Poznań. Professor emeritus of the Burgundy University in Dijon, France; prior, professor at the Clermont II University in Clermont Ferrand (1985–1990), professor at the École d'Architecture de Paris-La Villette. Co-director of Galeria Foksal in Warsaw (1970–1983). Doctor *honoris causa* of the Strzeмиński Academy in Łódź (2004), director of the Centre de Recherche Comparative sur les Avant-gardes (1990–2000). He specialises in contemporary art. His numerous monographs and articles (numbering over 300), which have been translated in many languages, focus on themes related to the avant-garde in Central Europe. His publications include: *W kregu konstruktywizmu 1976 (Exit-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est, 1986)*; *Konstruktywizm polski* (1981), *Wielka utopia awangardy* (1990), *Awangardowe marginesy* (1998); *Budowniczości świata. Z dziejów radykalnego modernizmu* (2000). He has edited numerous publications on the culture and art of the 1930s: *L'art. et le discours face à la Révolution* (1998) and *Arts et artistes autor de Zervos* (1998), as well as compilations of avant-garde texts *Między sztuką a komuną* (1998). Curator of numerous exhibitions, including *L'Europa dei razionalisti* Milano/Como 1989, *Europa, Europa*, Bonn 1994, and recently *Powtórka z teorii widzenia*, Warsaw 2010.

### **Marie-Thérèse Vido-Rzewuska**

Slavist, PhD; theatrologist. Since 1986, has worked closely with the French laboratory CNRS/ARIAS. The author of numerous works (in French) about prominent representatives of the Polish theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, with an emphasis on Stanisław Wyspiański in *L'œuvre d'art totale*, 1995 and T. Kantor in *Les voies de la création théâtrale*, 1993; she has also written about the Reduta theatre and about the Gardzienice Centre. She has translated texts by Tadeusz Kantor into French, including *Ma Création, mon voyage* (1991), *Leçons de Milan* (1990), *L'artiste à la fin du XXème siècle* (1990), *Les classes d'Avignon*, (1991) and by Krzysztof Warlikowski (*Théâtre écorché*, 2007). She works with the *Dictionnaire international du théâtre* and the *Dictionnaire des Créatrices* de Michel Corvin as well as the specialist magazines *La règle du jeu*, *Internationale de l'imaginaire*, *Alternatives théâtrales*.

**Andrzej Welmiński**

Graduate of graphics at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. Drawings, paintings, photography, objects and installations. His participation in group exhibitions has included *The Painters of Cricot 2 Theatre*, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome 1979 and *Artyści Galerii*, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw 1984, and he has had individual exhibitions in venues including Galeria Foksal in Warsaw, Galeria Krzysztofory in Krakow, Starmach Gallery, Warsaw–Krakow 1990 and ChaOs, Miejska Galeria Sztuki, Częstochowa, 2002. His individual exhibitions include: *...cisza, nikt nie woła*, Galeria Krzysztofory, Kraków 2004, Galeria Arsenał, Poznań 2004, VITRIOL, Galeria BWA Rzeszów 2006; *i tak przeminą wszystkie historie*, the Tadeusz Kantor Museum, Wielopole Skrzyńskie, 2007; *przeciągi*, Villa Decius, Krakow, 2008; *i tak przeminą wszystkie historie*, Olkusz, 2009. Actor, director. Worked closely with Tadeusz Kantor. In 1973–1990 participated in all the productions and tours of the Cricot 2 Theatre. Created the productions: *Manjacy*, Aktorzy Teatru Cricot 2, 1993; *Ameryka czyli nie oglądaj się za siebie*, Aktorzy Teatru Cricot 2, 1995; *Demon ruchu*, Teatr Polski, Bydgoszcz, 1996; *Rzeźnia wg. S. Mrożka*, Teatr Polski, Bydgoszcz, 1997; *Da liegt der Hund begraben – Germanias Halluzinationen*, Theater Rampe, Stuttgart, 1997; stage set for the musical production *De Dolende Ney*, Amsterdam 1999. *Hydromaschinen Prozession*, theatrical open air action as part of the event *stadt im fluss*, commissioned by the Esslingen Town Council, Esslingen 2005; *minęło, minęło, i tak przeminą wszystkie historie...*, Aktorzy Teatru Cricot 2, 2007; *przeciągi*, theatrical action, Villa Decius, Krakow, 2009; *Traumatikon*, Rose Bruford College, London. Lectures and conducts workshops related to history, philosophical theory and the stage practices of the Cricot 2 theatre in venues including: Stuttgart; Romainmôtier, Switzerland; Rote Fabrik, Zurich Scuola Teatro Dimitri, Verscio, Switzerland; Loughborough University, Great Britain; University of Washington, USA; Rose Bruford College, Great Britain and La MaMa, Spoleto, Italy.

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3. Portrait of actors (Princess of Kremlin: Teresa Welmińska, Princess's Butler: Bogdan Renczyński) and the object 'Cage/Henhouse', from the production *I Shall Never Return*, Krzysztofory Gallery, Kraków, 1988

4. Andrzej Kowalczyk (as Mr Green) performing daring acrobatics (without a safety net); watching it approvingly is Mr Poulander (Adam Wojtowicz), the production of *America or Don't Look Back*, directed by Andrzej Welmiński



5. Production *It Has Been and Gone, and so Will All the Stories*, directed by Andrzej Welmiński, (at the back can be seen a neon installation by Zbigniew Gostomski)





6. Vernissage of the exhibition *Draughts* 2009, at the Villa Decius, Krakow. Jan Güntner, Katarzyna Welmińska, Stanisław Michno



7. Theatrical action *Draughts*, which accompanied the exhibition of the works of Andrzej Welmiński

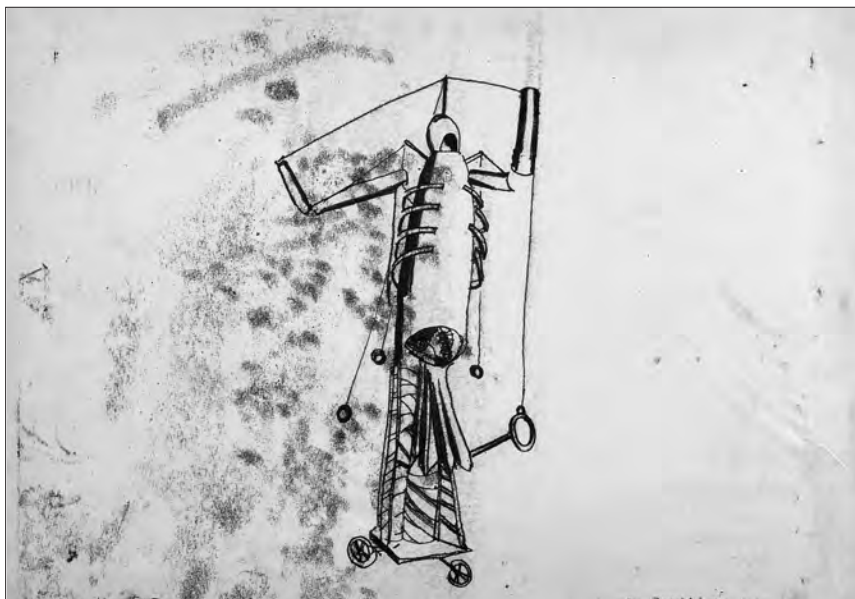


8. WLB Actors from Esslingen with their procession floats, representing water apparatus and city buildings, during the *Hydromaschinen prozession*, directed by Andrzej Welmiński

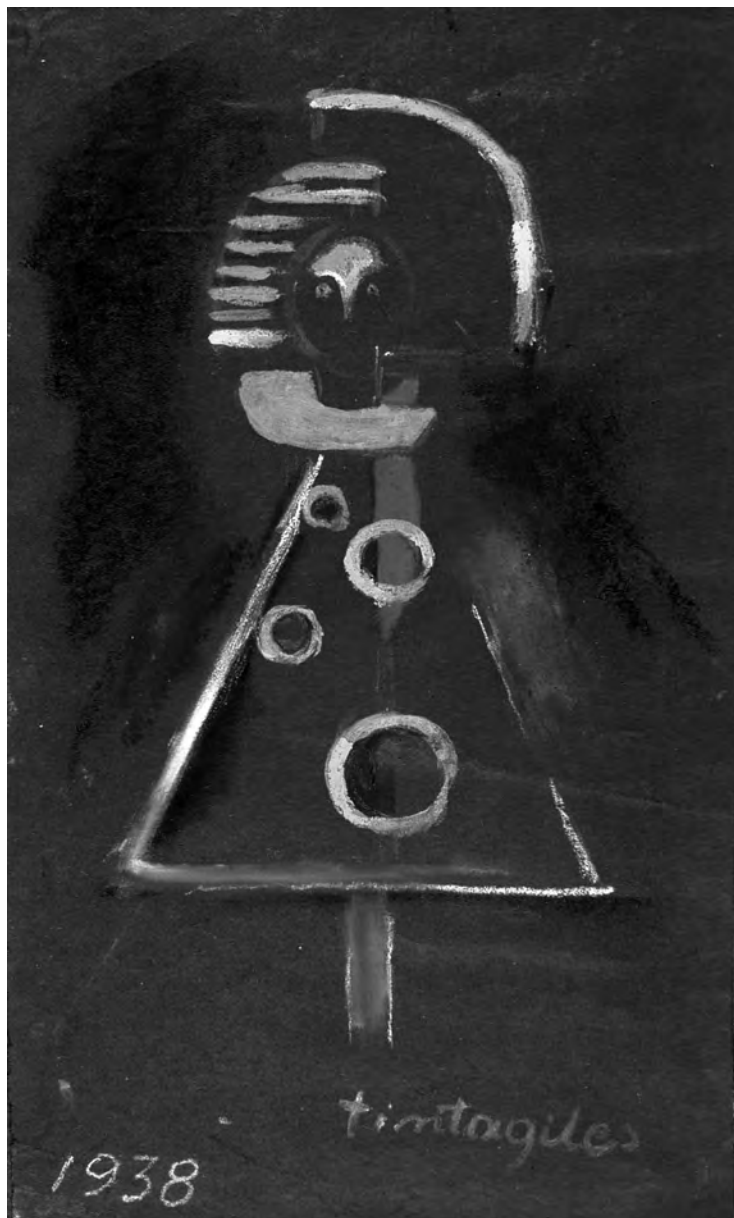


9. Tadeusz Kantor, *Über-Marionette*, stage set design, 1949

10. Tadeusz Kantor, *Über-Marionette*, stage set design 1957







11. Tadeusz Kantor, *Tintagiles*, a drawing for the production *The Death of Tintagiles* by Maurice Maeterlinck (The Puppet Theatre, A.S.P. Bratniak, Kraków 1937), 1938



14. Jan Wandelaar, illustration (with Clara in the background) in *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani*, the anatomical atlas of Bernhard Siegfried Albinus, Leiden 1747



15. Tadeusz Kantor, [*Dudard*], design for a male stage costume for the production *Rhinoceros*, directed by Piotr Pawłowski (Stary Theatre, Krakow 1961)





16. Tadeusz Kantor, *De-emballage. Happening*, Nürnberg 1966

17. Wojciech Krakowski, *Don Quixote*, a drawing from the program for *Don Quixote* by Jules Massenet, directed by Tadeusz Kantor, Jan Biczycski; staging, stage set and costumes by Tadeusz Kantor, Municipal Music Theatre, the Opera and Operetta, Krakow, 1962



18. Photographs from the final scene of the programme *Don Quixote*, by Jules Massenet, directed by Tadeusz Kantor, Jan Biczycski; staging, stage set and costumes by Tadeusz Kantor), Municipal Music Theatre, the Opera and Operetta, Krakow, 1962





19. Tadeusz Kantor, Untitled, 1st page of technical sketches for the production *Don Quixote*, Municipal Music Theatre, the Opera and Operetta, Krakow, 1962



20. Tadeusz Kantor, [Untitled], sketch for the character of Don Quixote, the production *Don Quixote*, Municipal Music Theatre, the Opera and Operetta, Krakow, 1962



21. *Las Meninas*, Diego Velázquez, 1656; oil, canvas, 318 x 276 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid





22. Tadeusz Kantor, *Relic no. 2*, the emballage period, 1963



23. Tadeusz Kantor, *The Infanta after Velázquez*, from the series *Museum Persiflages*, 1966–70



24. Tadeusz Kantor, *One Night Velázquez's Infanta Came into My Room*, from the series *Further on, Nothing*, 1988



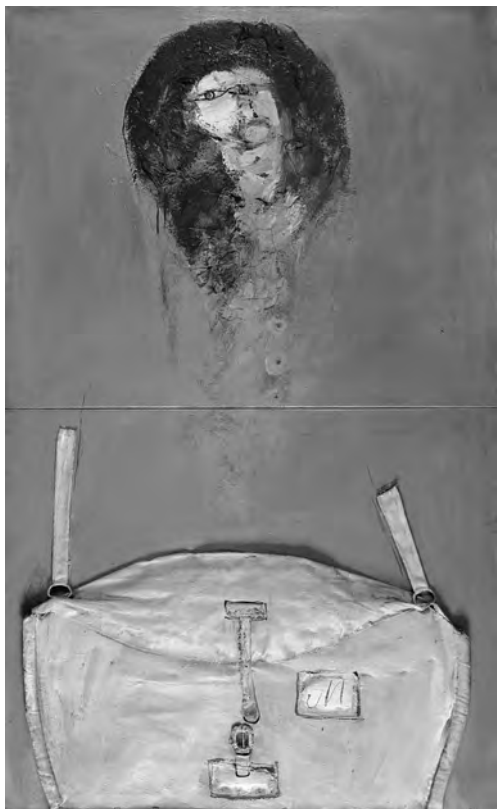
25. Photograph from the production *Today Is My Birthday*, Act 4, *Another Visit from the Infanta*; Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse, 1991. The Infanta from Velázquez's painting: Teresa Welmińska; Self-portrait: Andrzej Welmiński



26. Tadeusz Kantor, *Self-portrait, Bilbao*, 1987, from the series *Travel Diary*



27. Tadeusz Kantor, *Cathedral [X] – final*, 1987, from the series *Barcelona Cathedrals*



28. Tadeusz Kantor, *Mr V. Prado II, The Infanta*, 1965, National Museum in Krakow



29. Tadeusz Kantor, Emballage of a painting by F. de Goya *The Third of May 1808*, 1970

30. Tadeusz Kantor, *One Night Velázquez's Infanta Came into My Room (for a Second Time)*, 1990



31. Tadeusz Kantor, *Once Again a Napoleonic Soldier from a Painting by Goya Crossed My Path*, 1990





32. Photograph from the production *The Dead Class*; sequence *Procession. The Dead Childhood*, Recording Hall, Adelaide 1978, group scene



33. Photograph from the production *The Dead Class*; sequence *The Theatre of Automats Continues*, Recording Hall, Adelaide 1978



34. Tadeusz Kantor on the stage of the production *Wielopole, Wielopole*



35. Photograph from the production *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Act 5, 7. 'Funeral ceremony disturbed by an unforeseen incident: the RABBI, his TINGEL-TANGEL funeral song and his later (much / later) fate,' group scene



36. 'The Artist's Table', an object from the production *Today Is My Birthday*, photograph from the exhibition of theatrical objects, Cricoteka the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor





37. Photograph from the production *Today Is My Birthday*, Act 1, 'IN THE DOOR, which is inside the painting, backstage / through which THE DEAD enter, / A POOR GIRL appears (...),' Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse 1991, A POOR GIRL WHO DOES NOT EXIST: Marie Vayssière



38. Photograph from the production *Today Is My Birthday*, Théâtre Garonne Tuluza, 1991, A POOR GIRL WHO DOES NOT EXIST: Marie Vayssière



39. Photograph from the production *Today Is My Birthday*, Théâtre Garonne Toulouse, 1991, His SELF-PORTRAIT: Andrzej Welmiński, A POOR GIRL WHO DOES NOT EXIST: Marie Vayssière



40. Photograph from the production *I Shall Never Return*, Stodoła Student Club, Warsaw 1990; sequence *Reviling. My Monologue – Testament*, Card Player – L. Stangret, T. Kantor, She – M. Vayssiere, English Lady – Z. Bednarczyk



41. Photograph from the production *I Shall Never Return*, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 1988, sequence 4.5. *Reviling. / My Monologue – Testament* (the first version of the production), group scene



42. Photograph from the rehearsal of the production *Today Is My Birthday*, Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse, 1990, W. Janicki, M. Krasicka, R. Siwulak, Z. Bednarczyk



43. Rehearsal of the production *Today Is My Birthday*, Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse, 1990, L. Della Rocca, T. Kantor, L. Ryba



44. Photograph from the production *Today Is My Birthday*, Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse, 1991; Self-portrait – A. Welmiński



45. Photograph from the production *Today Is My Birthday*, Théâtre Garonne, Toulouse, 1991; sequence *Circus Parade of Emballages – Clichés and a Ritualistic Auscultation*, Doctor Klein-Jehova: M. Rychlicka, Emballages: A. Kowalczyk, E. Doni, B. Renczyński



46. Poster for the opening of the production *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Florence 1980, Cricoteka Archives





49. Tadeusz Kantor, *My Monument*, design for the monument at Kanonicza Street in Krakow



50. 14 December 1990, Cricoteka, Tadeusz Kantor's funeral





51. Tadeusz Kantor, *Odys d'après Malczewski* / *I have Not Returned*, design for the production *I Shall Never Return* [1987–88], owner unknown



52. Jacek Malczewski, *My Life - the Right-hand Side of the Triptych (Naked Woman with a Scythe Standing by the Fence)*, 1911



53. Jacek Malczewski, *Solace: Thanatos*, the Raczyński Foundation at the National Museum in Poznań



54. Tadeusz Kantor *I am Falling down like Hell*

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