

that she would not do so. There ensued a long and passionate debate about 'victim art'. The work itself is a sublime performance of great intensity where the appropriateness of form to deal with such a huge subject is on a par with Jooss's treatment of death in *The Green Table* (1932).

Jones is a performer of great power. He has transformed ideas of late twentieth century dance by asking big questions. In this, he stands comparison with major figures from early modern dance such as Ted Shawn and Katherine Dunham. However, he brings to his themes a post modern sensibility and late twentieth century concepts on representation and gender. He also has a formidable and wide ranging technique.

The interview included here demonstrates the broad and considerably thought out approach that Jones takes to dance. There are resonances of many important topics, not least that of why make dance as performance in the first place.

Compare this article with writings by the following authors in this reader

- Bausch – for another approach to dealing with social issues
- Brecht – on performance as political
- Butler – on performativity
- Rainer – an earlier advocate of post modern approaches to dance and representation

Further reading

- Jones, B.T., with Gillespie, P. (1995) *Last Night on Earth*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Croce, A. (1995) 'Discussing the undiscussable', *Dance connection*. Calgary. 13(2) (June/July/Aug. 1995): 20–28.
- Zimmer, E. and Quasha, S. (eds) (1989) *Body Against Body; the Dance and Other Collaborations of Bill T. Jones & Arnie Zane*, New York: Station Hill Press.

Tadeusz Kantor

THE THEATRE OF DEATH: A MANIFESTO

*I Craig's Postulate: to bring back the marionette.
Eliminate the live actor. Man – a creature of nature
– is a foreign intrusion into the abstract structure of
a work of art.*

According to Gordon Craig, somewhere along the banks of the Ganges two women forced their way into the shrine of the Divine Marionette, which was jealously hiding the secrets of the true THEATRE. They envied the ROLE of this Perfect Being in illuminating human intellect with the sacred feeling of the existence of God, its GLORY; they spied on its Movements and Gestures, its sumptuous attire and, by cheap parody, began to satisfy the vulgar taste of the mob. At the moment when they finally ordered a similar monument built for themselves – the modern theatre, as we know it only too well and as it has lasted to this day, was born. A clamorous Public Service Institute. With it appeared the ACTOR. In defence of his theory Craig cites the opinion of Eleanor Duse: 'to save the theatre, it must be destroyed, it is necessary for all actors and actresses to die of plague . . . for it is they who render art impossible . . .'

2 Craig's Version: Man – the actor ousts the marionette, takes its place, thereby causing the demise of the theatre.

There is something very impressive in the stand taken by the great Utopian, when he says: 'In all seriousness I demand the return to the theatre of the imagination of the super-marionette . . . and when it appears people will again, as before, be able to worship the happiness of Existence, and render divine and jubilant homage to DEATH . . .' Craig, inspired by the aesthetics of SYMBOLISM, considered man to be subject to unpredictable emotions, passions, and consequently to chance as an element completely foreign to the homogenous nature and structure of a work of art, which destroys its principal trait; cohesion.

Not only Craig's idea but also that whole elaborate programme of symbolism – impressive in its own time – had in the 19th century the support of isolated and unique phenomena announcing a new era and new art: Heinrich von Kleist, Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffman. Edgar Allan Poe. . . . One hundred years earlier, Kleist for the same reasons as Craig, demanded the substitution of the actor by the marionette: he regarded the human organism, which is subject to the laws of NATURE, as a foreign intrusion into Artistic Fiction, based on the principle of Construction and Intellect. This accounts for his reproaches stressing the limited capabilities of man and charges of an incessantly controlling consciousness, which excludes the concepts of grace and beauty.

3 From the romantic mysticism of mannequins and the artificial creations of man in the XIX century – to the rationalism of XX century abstract thought.

On what seemed to be the safe road traversed by the man of Enlightenment and Rationalism there appears out of the darkness, suddenly and in increasingly greater numbers, DOUBLES, MANNEQUINS, AUTOMATONS, HOMUNCULI. Artificial creations, a mockery of the creatures of NATURE, bearers of absolute degradation, ALL human dreams, DEATH, Horror and Terror. There is born a faith in the unknown powers of MECHANICAL MOVEMENT, a maniacal passion for the invention of a MECHANISM surpassing in perfection and severity the human organism and all its weaknesses.

And all this with an aura of demonism, on the brink of charlatanism, illegal practices, magic, transgression and nightmare. This was the SCIENCE FICTION of those days, in which the demonic human brain created ARTIFICIAL MAN.

At the same time all of this signified an abrupt loss of faith in NATURE and in that realm of man's activity which was closely tied with nature. Paradoxically, from these extremely romantic and diabolical efforts to take away nature's right of creation – there evolved a movement increasingly independent and more and more dangerously distant from NATURE – A RATIONALISTIC, even MATERIALISTIC MOVEMENT of a 'WORLD OF ABSTRACTION', CONSTRUCTIVISM, FUNCTIONALISM, MACHINISM, ABSTRACTION, finally PURIST VISUALISM, recognising only the 'physical presence' of a work of art.

This risky hypothesis, whose origin is none too attractive for an age of technology and scientism. I take upon my conscience and for my personal satisfaction.

4 Dadaism, introducing 'ready-made' elements of life, destroys the concepts of homogeneity and cohesion in a work of art, as postulated by symbolism. Art Nouveau and Craig.

But let us return to Craig's marionette. Craig's idea of replacing the live actor with a mannequin – an artificial and mechanical creation – for the sake of preserving perfect cohesion in a work of art, is today invalid.

Later experience destroyed the unity of structure in a work of art by introducing FOREIGN elements in collages and assemblages; the acceptance of 'ready-made' reality, full recognition of the role of CHANCE, and the placing of a work of art on the sharp borderline between the REALITY OF LIFE AND ARTISTIC FICTION – made irrelevant those scruples from the beginning of this century, from the period of Symbolism and Art Nouveau. The two possible solutions – either autonomous art and intellectual structure, or naturalism – ceased to be the ONLY ones. When the theatre, in its moments of weakness, submitted to the live organism of man and his laws – it automatically and logically agreed to the form or imitation of life, its presentation and re-creation. In the opposite circumstances, when the theatre was strong and independent enough to free itself from the pressure of life and man, it created artificial equivalents to life which turned out to be more alive, because they submitted easily to the abstractions of space and time and were capable of achieving absolute unity.

Today these possibilities are neither appropriate nor valid alternatives. For a new situation and new conditions have arisen in art. The appearance of the concept of READY-MADE REALITY, extracted from life – and the possibilities of ANNEXING it, INTEGRATING it into a work of art through DECISION, GESTURE OR RITUAL – has become a fascination much stronger than (artificially) CONSTRUED reality, than the creation of ABSTRACTION, or the surrealist world, than Breton's MIRACULOUSNESS. Happenings, Events and Environments with their colossal momentum, have achieved the rehabilitation of whole regions of REALITY, disdained until this time, cleansing it of the ballast of life's intentions.

This 'DECALAGE' of life's reality, its derailment from life's practices, moved the human imagination more strongly than the surrealist reality of dreams. As a result, fears of direct intervention by life and man in the scheme of art – became irrelevant.

5 From the 'Ready-Made Reality' of the happening – to the dematerialization of the elements of a work of art.

However, as with all fascination, so too this one, after a time, was transformed into a convention practised universally, senselessly and in a vulgar manner. These

almost ritualistic manipulations of Reality, connected as they are with the contestation of ARTISTIC STATUS and the PLACE reserved for art, gradually started to acquire different sense and meaning. The material, physical PRESENCE of an object and PRESENT TIME, the only possible context for activity and action – turned out to be too burdensome, had reached their limits. The TRANSGRESSION signified: depriving these conditions of the material and functional IMPORTANCE, that is, of their COMMUNICATIVENESS. Because this is the latest period, still current and not yet closed, the observations which follow derive from and are tied with my own creativity.

The object (*The Chair*, Oslo, 1970) became empty, deprived of expression, connections, references, characteristics of programmed communication, its 'message' directed 'nowhere', it changed into a dummy.

Situations and activities were locked into their own CIRCUMFERENCE: the ENIGMATIC (theatre of the impossible, 1973), in my manifesto entitled 'Cambriollage', followed the unlawful INTRUSION into that terrain where tangible reality was transformed into its INVISIBLE EXTENSIONS. The role of THOUGHT, memory and TIME becomes increasingly clear.

6 *The rejection of the orthodoxy of conceptualism and the 'Official Avant-garde of the Masses'.*

The certitude which impressed itself upon me more and more strongly that the concept of LIFE can be vindicated in art only through the ABSENCE OF LIFE in its conventional sense (again Craig and the Symbolists!), this process of DEMATERIALIZATION SETTLED on a path which circumvented in my creative work the whole orthodoxy of linguistics and conceptualism. This was probably caused in part by the colossal throng which arose on this already official course and which will unfortunately become the latest instalment of the DADAIST current with its slogans of TOTAL ART, EVERYTHING IS ART, ALL ARE ARTISTS, ART IS IN THE MIND, etc.

I hate crowds. In 1973 I wrote a draft of a new manifesto which takes into consideration this false situation. This is its beginning:

From the time of Verdun, Voltaire's Cabaret and Marcel Duchamp's Water-Closet, when the 'status of art' was drowned out by the roar of Fat Bertha – DECISION became the only remaining human possibility, the reliance on something that was or is unthinkable, functioning as the first stimulant of creativity, conditioning and defining art. Lately thousands of mediocre individuals have been making decisions, without scruples or any hesitation whatever. We are witnesses of the banalization and conventionalization of decision. This once dangerous path has become a comfortable freeway with improved safety measures and information. Guides, maps, orientation tables, directional signs, signals, centres, Art Co-operatives guarantee the excellence of the functioning of creativity. We are witnesses of the GENERAL MOVEMENT of artist-commandos, street fighters, artist-mediators,

artist-mailmen, epistologs, pedlars, street magicians, proprietors of Office and Agencies. Movements on this already official freeway, which threatens with a flood of graphomania and deeds of minimal significance, increases with each passing day. It is necessary to leave it as quickly as possible. This is not easily done. Particularly at the apogee of the UNIVERSAL AVANT-GARDE – blind and favoured with the highest prestige of the INTELLECT, which protects both the wise and the stupid.

7 *On the side streets of the official avant-garde, Mannequins appear.*

My deliberate rejection of the solutions of conceptualism, despite the fact that they seemed to be the only way out from the path upon which I had embarked, resulted in my placing the above-mentioned facts of the latest stage of my creativity and attempts to describe them, on side streets which left me more open to the UNKNOWN!!!

I have more confidence in such a situation. Any new era always begins with actions of little apparent significance and little note, incidents having little in common with the recognised trend, actions that are private, intimate, I would even say – shameful. Vague. And difficult! These are the most fascinating and essential moments of creativity.

All of a sudden I became interested in the nature of
MANNEQUINS

The mannequin in my production of THE WATER HEN 1967 and the mannequins in THE SHOEMAKERS 1970, had a very specific role: they were like a non-material extension, a kind of ADDITIONAL ORGAN for the actor, who was their 'master'. The mannequins already widely used in my production of Slowacki's Balladyna were DOUBLES of live characters, somehow endowed with a higher CONSCIOUSNESS, attained 'after the completion of their lives'.

These mannequins were already clearly stamped with the sign of DEATH.

8 *The mannequin as manifestation of 'REALITY OF THE LOWEST ORDER'.*

The mannequin as dealings of TRANSGRESSION.

The mannequin as EMPTY object. The DUMMY. A message of DEATH. A model for the actor.

The mannequin I used in 1967 at the Cricot 2 Theatre (*The Water Hen*) was a successor to the 'Eternal Wanderer' and 'Human Ambellages', one which appeared naturally in my 'Collections' as yet another phenomenon consistent with my

long-held conviction that only the reality of the lowest order, the poorest and least prestigious objects are capable of revealing their full objectivity in a work of art.

Mannequins and Wax Figures have always existed on the peripheries of sanctioned Culture. They were not admitted further; they occupied places in FAIR BOOTHS, suspicious MAGICIANS' CHAMBERS, far from the splendid shrines of art, treated condescendingly as CURIOSITIES intended for the tastes of the masses. For precisely this reason it was they, and not academic, museum creations, which caused the curtain to move at the blink of an eye.

MANNEQUINS also have their own version of TRANSGRESSION. The existence of these creatures, shaped in man's image, almost 'godlessly', in an illegal fashion, is the result of heretical dealings, a manifestation of the Dark, Nocturnal, Rebellious side of human activity. Of Crimes and Traces of Death as sources of recognition. The vague and inexplicable feeling that through this entity so similar to a living human being but deprived of consciousness and purpose there is transmitted to us a terrifying message of Death and Nothingness – precisely this feeling becomes the cause – simultaneously – of that transgression, repudiation and attraction. Of accusation and fascination. All arguments have been exhausted in accusations. The very mechanism of action called their attention to itself, that mechanism which, if taken as the purpose, could easily be relegated to the lower forms of creativity! IMITATION AND DECEPTIVE SIMILARITY, which serve the conjurer in setting his TRAPS and fooling the viewer, the use of 'unsophisticated' means, evading the concepts of aesthetics, the abuse and fraudulent deception of APPEARANCES, practices from the realm of charlatans.

To make matters complete, the entire proceedings were accompanied by a philosophical world-view which, from the time of Plato to this day, often regards as the purpose of art the unmasking of Being and a Spiritual Sense of Existence and not involvement in the Material Shell of the world, in that faking of appearances which are the lowest stage of being.

I do not share the belief that the MANNEQUIN (or a WAX FIGURE) could replace the LIVE ACTOR, as Kleist and Craig wanted. This would be too simple and naive. I am trying to delineate the motives and intent of this unusual creature which has suddenly appeared in my thoughts and ideas. Its appearance complies with my ever-deepening conviction that it is possible to express *life* in art only through the *absence of life*, through an appeal to DEATH, through APPEARANCES, through EMPTINESS and the lack of a MESSAGE.

The MANNEQUIN in my theatre must become a MODEL, through which pass a strong sense of DEATH and the conditions of the DEAD. A model for the live ACTOR.

9 My elucidation of the situation described by Craig. The appearance of the LIVE ACTOR as a revolutionary moment. The discovery of the IMAGE OF MAN.

I derive my observations from the domain of the theatre, but they are relevant to all current art. We can suppose that Craig's suggestively-depicted and

disastrously-incriminating picture of the circumstances surrounding the appearance of the Actor – was composed for his own use, as a point of departure for his idea of the 'SUPER-MARIONETTE'. Despite the fact that I remain an admirer of Craig's magnificent contempt and passionate accusations (especially since I see before me the absolute downfall of today's theatre) and then only after my full acceptance of the first part of his Credo, in which he denies the institutionalised theatre any reason for artistic existence – I dissociate myself from his renowned decisions on the fate of the ACTOR.

For the moment of the ACTOR's first appearance before the HOUSE (to use current terminology) seems to me, on the contrary: *revolutionary* and *avant-garde*. I will even try to compile and 'ascribe to History' a completely different picture, in which the course of events will have a meaning quite the opposite. . . .! From the common realm of customary and religious rituals, common ceremonies and common people's activities advanced SOMEONE, who made the risky decision to BREAK with the ritualistic Community. He was not driven by conceit (as in Craig) to become an object of universal attention. This would have been too simplistic. Rather it must have been a rebellious mind, sceptical, heretical, free and tragic, daring to remain alone with Fate and Destiny. If we also add 'with its ROLE', we will then have before us the ACTOR. This revolt took place in the realm of art. Said event, or rather manifestation, probably caused much confusion of thought and clashing of opinions. This ACT was undoubtedly seen as a disloyalty to the old ritualistic traditions and practices, as secular arrogance, as atheism, as dangerous subversive tendencies, as scandal, as amorality, as indecency; people must have seen in it elements of clownery, buffoonery, exhibitionism and deviation. The author himself, set apart from society, gained for himself not only implacable enemies, but also fanatical admirers. Condemnation and glory simultaneously. It would be guilty of a ludicrous and shallow formalism to interpret this act of SEVERANCE (RUPTURE) as egotism, as a lust for glory or latent inclinations toward acting. It must have implied something much greater, a MESSAGE of extraordinary import. We will try to illustrate this fascinating situation: OPPOSITE those who remained on this side there stood a MAN DECEPTIVELY SIMILAR to them, yet (by some secret and ingenious 'operation') infinitely DISTANT, shockingly FOREIGN, as if DEAD, cut off by an invisible BARRIER – no less horrible and inconceivable, whose real meaning and THREAT appears to us only in DREAMS. As though in a blinding flash of lightning, they suddenly perceived a glaring, tragically circus-like IMAGE OF MAN, as if they had seen him FOR THE FIRST TIME, as if they had seen THEIR VERY SELVES. This was certainly a shock – a meta-physical shock, we might even say. The live effigy of MAN emerging out of the shadows, as if constantly walking ahead of himself, was the dominant MESSAGE of its new HUMAN CONDITION, only HUMAN, with its RESPONSIBILITY, its tragic CONSCIOUSNESS, measuring its FATE on an inexorable and final scale, the *scale of DEATH*. This revelatory MESSAGE, which was transmitted from the realm of DEATH, evoked in the VIEWERS (let us now call them by our own term) a metaphysical shock. And the reference to DEATH, to its tragic and MENACING beauty, were the means and art of that ACTOR (also according to our own terminology).

It is necessary to re-establish the essential meaning of the relationship:
VIEWER and ACTOR.

IT IS NECESSARY TO RECOVER THE PRIMEVAL FORCE OF THE SHOCK TAKING PLACE AT
THE MOMENT WHEN OPPOSITE A MAN (THE VIEWER) THERE STOOD FOR THE FIRST TIME A
MAN (THE ACTOR) DECEPTIVELY SIMILAR TO US YET AT THE SAME TIME INFINITELY FOREIGN,
BEYOND AN IMPASSABLE BARRIER.

10 Recapitulation.

Despite the fact that we may be suspected and even accused
of a certain scrupulousness, inappropriate under the circumstances,
in destroying inborn prejudices and fears,
for the sake of a more precise picture
and possible conclusions

let us establish the limits of that boundary, which has the name:

THE CONDITION OF DEATH

for it represents the most extreme point of reference,

no longer threatened by any conformity,

FOR THE CONDITION OF THE ARTIST AND ART

. . . this specific relationship

terrifying

but at the same time compelling

the relationship of *the living to the dead*

who not long ago, while still alive, gave not the slightest

reason for the unforeseen spectacle

for creating unnecessary separation and confusion:

they did not distinguish themselves

did not place themselves above others

and as a result of this seemingly banal

but, as would later become evident, rather essential

and valuable attribute

they were simply, normally

in no way transgressing universal laws

unremarkable

and now suddenly

on the other side

opposite

they astound us

as though we

were seeing them for the first time

set on display

in an ambiguous ceremony:

pointless

and at the same time repudiated,

irrevocably different

and infinitely foreign

and more: somehow deprived of all meaning

of no account

without the meanest hope of occupying some position

in our 'full' life relationships

which to us alone are accessible, familiar

comprehensible

but for them meaningless.

If we agree that a trait

of living people

is the ease and ability

with which they enter into mutual and manifold

life relationships

only then

with regard to the dead

is there born in us a sudden and startling

realisation of the fact that

this basic trait of the living

is brought out and made possible by

their complete

lack of differentiation

by their

indistinguishability

by their universal *similarity*

mercilessly abolishing all other opposing delusions

common

consistent

all-binding.

Only then do the *dead*

become (for the living)

noteworthy

for that highest price

achieving

their individuality

distinction

their CHARACTER

glaring

and almost

circus-like.



Source

Kantor, T. (1984) 'The Theatre of Death: A Manifesto', *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, trans. V.T. and M. Stelmaszynski, ed. B. Drozdowski, English trans. and ed. C. Itzin, London: John Calder: 97–106.

Tadeusz Kantor (1915–90)

Polish designer, artist and director. He became one of the century's most extraordinary practitioners through the creation of relatively few, but highly travelled productions. Starting as a painter and stage designer, he soon moved towards theatrical form with a series of 'happenings' in Warsaw and on the Baltic coast in the early 1960s. He sought to redefine the language of theatre through a constant questioning of the relationship between the performance space and the performers. Like Wagner, Kantor created total theatre pieces, devised and controlled by himself. In 1955 he formed his performance company, Cricot², in Krakow, in conjunction with other visual artists. In 1975 he produced his most famous piece, *The Dead Class*, a surrealist evocation of a 'dead' Polish past, by a cast of artists of all ages, which toured Europe and the USA, receiving awards and prizes. This was followed by, *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1982), *Let the Artists Die* (1985), and *I Shall Never Return* (1989). Kantor continued to produce work with Cricot² until his death in 1990, rehearsing his last piece, *Today is My Birthday*.

Kantor's 'Manifesto' shows how he departs from all the main traditions of European theatre in advocating non-linear form. He encapsulates his concern with the theatrical object, and with the actor as object, emphasising his roots in the visual arts. He expresses his concept of theatre as vision; as a process of parallel actions and events folding back on themselves; continuously commenting on Polish life under the domination of communism, and on its collective memory and nationality.

Compare this article with writings by the following authors in this reader

- Craig – to whom he refers at length
- Foreman and Wilson – other approaches to non-linear theatre
- Grotowski – a contemporary Polish artist
- Kaprow – a parallel interest in 'happenings'
- Hijikata – a contemporary concern with death
- Schlemmer – theatre as sculptural object

Further reading

- Drozdowski, B. (ed.) (1979) *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, London: John Calder.
- Klossiowicz, J. (1986) 'Tadeusz Kantor's Journey' *Drama Review* 30, T111: 4.

- Kobialka, M. (trans. and ed.) (1993) *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos by Tadeusz Kantor*, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- Plesniarowicz, K. (2000) *The Dead Memory Machine*, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press.