

A Journey Through Other Spaces
Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990

Tadeusz Kantor

Edited and Translated by Michal Kobialka



With a Critical Study of Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre
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a predominant part of the space within the space of life!¹⁰⁸

These revisions return us to Kantor's autonomous theatre, which produced its own space within the space of life. It manifested human spiritual activity, which was expressed most poignantly by Kantor's treatment of actors. It was his belief that theatre began with acting—that is, when "OPPOSITE those who remained on this side there stood a MAN DECEPTIVELY SIMILAR to them, yet infinitely DISTANT, shockingly FOREIGN, as if DEAD, cut off by an invisible BARRIER—no less horrible and inconceivable, whose real meaning and THREAT appear to us only in DREAMS."¹⁰⁹ Acting and theatre, according to Kantor, did not originate in a ritual but in activities that were, as he called them, "illegal" and opposed to ritual. These "illegal actions," or "actions of alterity," were directed against religion, politics, the social order, the establishment, and their institutions of coercion. Because, for Kantor, traditional theatre was an institution supporting only "legal actions," his theatre and his actors could not find themselves within its boundaries: "When I talk about art and artists, I mean art which is *against* rather than *for* the establishment and artists who belong to the circle of *artistes maudits* rather than those who enjoy official recognition."¹¹⁰

While travelling through the different spaces of the twentieth century, Tadeusz Kantor assumed the function of a chronicler of the events that swept the stage of this *theatrum mundi*. His productions, paintings, and theoretical writings between 1944 and 1973 explored Adorno's and Artaud's principles of the autonomous work of art and registered contemporary events—the wars, the politicians, the dignitaries, and the revolutions in the fine arts. His work needed to cross all these thresholds and go through all these transformations before it could achieve closure of representation and acquire the form of personal commentaries—commentary intended to transgress all physical and mental boundaries and to express the most intimate thought processes that occur in the artist's private space and imagination or, as Kantor would say in 1988, in the theatre of personal confessions.¹¹¹

The Quest for the Other Space/Memory

Thus from Hegel to Marx and Spengler we find the developing theme of a thought which [. . .] curves over upon itself, illuminates its own plenitude, brings its circle to completion, recognizes itself in all the strange figures of its odyssey, and accepts its disappearance into that same ocean from which it sprang.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

I

In the 1944 production of Wyspiański's *The Return of Odysseus*, a German soldier, who appeared in a bombed room and gave himself the name of a soldier who had died centuries previously, froze a current of time. Only a split second was needed to see his return in "all the strange figures of [the] odyssey" registered in memory. In the 1988 production of *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor, who entered the Inn of Memory and sat with the 1944 Odysseus at the same table, shuttered the binary opposition between reality and art. In a split second, this time the two figures illuminated their plenitude and brought the circle to completion. In both instances, on entering the rooms, the soldier and Kantor defined themselves in terms of the Other. The soldier said, "I am Odysseus; I have returned from Troy."¹ He alone survived to tell the horrible tale of death and human suffering. Kantor read the closing lines of Wyspiański's hero: "The waves separate me from their voices. The waves separate me from a boat of the dead. Wait! Stop! Stand Still!"²

The moment the words were uttered, the Self selected an image, a memory trace, out of a timeless odyssey. Within it, all possible interpretations of return as well as departure were contained. Wyspiański's Odysseus, a man cursed by the gods, returned to his Ithaca, his homeland of desires. "Now I yearn for her alone. A shadow. I yearn for a shadow."³ In 1944, Odysseus returned to Kraków under German occupation. In 1988, Kantor walked into the "inn" of his self-examination.

In both instances, the Self saw the Other. This encounter between the Self, the three-dimensional body, and the Other, the multidimensional memory, took place within the space referred to by Kantor as some secret "river crossing," which would reveal "*the traces of transition from 'that other side' into our life.*"⁴ Even though the Self and the Other belonged to different dimensions whose cognitive parameters were contained neither in the previous knowledge of the Self about the Other nor in the knowledge of the Other about the Self, they functioned alongside, "as if past and future ceased to exist. It is as if there was no cause or effect. [. . .] With the passing of time, one sees that everything ultimately stays in the same invisible *interior*. Everything is intertwined, one could say: everything exists simultaneously."⁵ In the 1944 production, a soldier evoked multiple memories of all Odysseuses who returned and said, are saying, and will say the famous opening line. In the 1988 production of *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor, seeing himself in Odysseus, reexamined his discourse on memory, which for him was real matter in the creative process.

Kantor discussed this discovery in the essay "To Save from Oblivion" (1988), where he asserted that *The Dead Class*, *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, *Let the Artists Die*, and *I Shall Never Return* were his answer to the twentieth century's official and legitimized histories of mass movements, ideologies, wars, and crimes as well as to the emptied-out processes of depreciating the value of traditional representation.⁶ He positioned against them his intimate, albeit painful, statements about the artist's solitary space in which the Self played the Other again and again to compose and decompose its memories, and the Other played the Self again and again to compose and decompose the image of *Ecce homo*. Nothing expressed this relationship between the Self (the body) and the Other (the memory) more profoundly than the bent, helmeted figure of Odysseus in 1944 or Kantor sitting opposite a veiled figure of Odysseus in 1988.

This relationship between the Self and the Other, between the body and memory, in Kantor's post-1975 theatre experiments suggests a parallel with the phenomena of reciprocal reflections and multiple transformations in optics. Mirrors reflect us and allow us to see that we have an outside (the body) that separates us from other realities and that we

exist in "real" space. At the same time, a process of transference takes place in which the image existing within the mirror's surface is accessible only to sight and mind. Because our points of view determine what reality is to us, we assume that what we see is the "ghost" of ourselves living in an imaginary space. We are not, paradoxically, where our eyes are but over there, on the other side. We become aware of the Other whose existence is legitimized by the existence of the Self.

The Dead Class, *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, *Let the Artists Die*, and *I Shall Never Return*, however, expanded the reflective processes of traditional optics in a twofold manner: (1) by giving the Other the site from which it could speak and (2) by introducing the concept of the Other that "was not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, an identical newness, in unavoidable duality."⁷ In Kantor's theatre, the Other took the form of memory that folded back on itself and thought itself; memory that transformed in space rather than in time. We can discuss his theatre of space/memory in the context of four art works that supply a framework for this discourse.

II

By 1944, Kantor had already rejected the idea of theatre as a "mirror [held] up to nature" and was concentrating on the intimate process of creating art. This rejection of a representational ideology governing the theatrical work forced the artistic process to move in the direction of an autonomous process for creating art. In "Lesson 3," Kantor explained his aesthetic choice:

I am fascinated by a mystical or utopian idea and a supposition that in every work of art there exists some kind of

U R - M A T T E R that is independent of an artist, that shapes itself, and that grounds all possible, infinite variants of life.⁸

Alfred Khnopff's frontispiece for Grégoire Le Roy's collection of poems, *Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois* (see Figure 14) serves as a visual metaphor for the process Kantor discusses. A woman in front of a mirror touches its surface. The mirror not only reflects her image but also functions as a window into a different reality or dimension. The images of the woman and the town on the other side of the mirror/window create the impression that they exist independently. They, however, seem to touch each other in the space illuminated by the light that "is the common mirror of all thoughts and all forms; it preserves the im-



Figure 14. Alfred Knopff, frontispiece to *Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois* by Grégoire Le Roy (Paris: Vanier, 1889).

ages of everything that has been, the reflection of past worlds, and by analogy, the sketches of worlds to come.”⁹

All processes of exchange are initiated within the space where an interplay between the twin forces of the Self and the Other takes place. This interplay is framed by two questions: “Who is speaking?” and

“Who is there?” To the former, Nietzschean question, the woman in front of the mirror replies that she recognizes her Self in the Other, in its solitude, in its landscape, and, finally, in its image, accessible only to sight and mind. To the latter, Shakespearean question, the contour behind the silvered surface of the mirror replies that it recognizes itself in *Ecce homo*, which chose this particular form from all possible, infinite variants of life.

The Dead Class and *Wielopole, Wielopole* translated these two questions into a discourse on memory and space. In his essay “Memory,” Kantor observed that

the past exists in
memory.
D E A D !
Its inhabitants are
D E A D , too.

They are dead but at the same time
alive,
that is, they can
move, and they can even
talk. [. . .]
Pulled out of a three-dimensional,
surprisingly flat
practice of life,
they fall into the hole of—
allow me to say this word—
E T E R N I T Y .¹⁰

The Dead Class opened at the Krzysztofory Gallery in Kraków on November 15, 1975. “The Theatre of Death” manifesto (1975) recorded Kantor’s thought processes. Noteworthy is a shift from visible and concrete reality towards the regions “on the other side.” The necessity for this transformation was explained in two passages in the manifesto.

In the first passage, while acknowledging his indebtedness to Craig and his idea of mannequins, Kantor dissociated himself from Craig’s conclusions about the fate of the actor by saying that

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! [. . .]

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



Figure 15. *The Dead Class* (1975). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of the Cricoteka Archives.

(THE ACTOR) DECEPTIVELY SIMILAR TO US, YET AT THE SAME TIME INFINITELY FOREIGN, BEYOND AN IMPASSABLE BARRIER.¹¹ [See Figure 15.]

Here Kantor extracted the actor from reality and positioned him or her within the space set against reality itself.

In the second passage, Kantor suggested that his paintings, Emballages, and theatre in the period between 1956 and 1973 had been controlled and limited by external factors. He intended, therefore, to abandon previous experiments for the realm that was separated from physical space by a boundary: "THE CONDITION OF DEATH [...] the most extreme point of reference, / no longer threatened by any conformity."¹² The idea of an impassable barrier and the condition of death, which liberated the artist and art from the need to comply with the existing norms and categories, were crucial for his theatre of personal confessions. We can explore its attributes through a brief summary and an analysis of select scenes from *The Dead Class*, which was staged in the renaissance basement of the Krzysztofory Gallery in Kraków.

Two ropes divided the audience from the actors, or, to use a metaphor from the manifesto, the world of living from the world of the dead



Figure 16. *The Dead Class* (1975). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of the Cricoteka Archives.

(see Figure 16). The performance space, a rectangular low-arched ceiling room with two openings opposite each other, was occupied by four rows of school benches where twelve actors playing the parts of pupils/Old People were seated, by a chair where a man in a uniform sat, and by a bent figure in black. Kantor watched the entrance of the audience through one of the passageways. Simple lamps hung above the benches. As Kantor pointed out in his essay "Memory" and in his notes to *The Dead Class*, the performance space, however, was not defined in terms of its physical layout:

In a for-gotten space of our memory, somewhere in a corner, there are a few rows of old wooden school BENCHES.¹³

Wooden benches are always in a classroom.

But it was not a classroom, a real site.

It was a black nothingness, in front of which all the audience members would suddenly stop. [Were they stopped by] an offensive, thin rope [that] functioned as a barrier?

All human states and emotions—suffering, fear, love—were inscribed into [school benches]. School benches would impose order and control on a vibrant and lively human organism. They were like a placenta by which

something new and unexpected would be nourished; something that would venture outside a bench into the black empty space, only to return to it, the way one always returns back [to the] home-womb.¹⁴

The school benches thus were not a stage prop but a mechanism controlled by Kantor. Its function was to bring the Old People from the condition of being dead to the condition of being alive through the process of recreating and transferring the past (Kantor's memory) into the present moment.

The opening sequence of *The Dead Class* illustrated this technique. The Old People, wearing black old-fashioned clothes reminiscent of funeral suits, were seated on the benches. This image resembled a black-and-white photograph, a stabilized moment in history, taken a long time ago. Once Kantor gazed on it, however, the moment of stillness was but an afterthought. The dead came alive. A two-dimensional photograph acquired new properties once brought into a three-dimensional space—the Old People began to perform actions that were not evident in the photograph [see Figure 17]: “Pupils, old people at the verge of their graves and those who are already absent, raise their hands, a well-known gesture to all of us, and keep them up, as if they were asking for something, as if that would be their last request.”¹⁵

The group disappeared into the opening at the back of the performance site, a black vortex. There was silence. Kantor walked around the emptied space. The faces of the Old People appeared frozen in the space of the vortex. The image resembled yet another photograph. Kantor looked at it. The stillness of the image was destroyed. The Old People entered with the wax figures of children, “looking like dead bodies or TUMOURS of their CHILDHOOD,” on their backs.¹⁶ The sounds of a Viennese François waltz were heard. “This waltz will accompany this troupe of comedians and their hopes, illusions, and defeats till the end of the performance. Now, they move forward, walk around the benches, one behind the other in this Grand Parade.”¹⁷ The Old People carried their childhood, or the memory of their childhood, with them: “The memory of childhood was turned into a poor and forgotten storage-room where dry and forgotten people, faces, objects, clothes, adventures, emotions, and images are thrown. . . . The desire to bring them back to life is not a sentimental symptom of me getting older, but it is a condition of TOTAL life, which must not only be limited to a narrow passage of the present moment.”¹⁸

As the Old People returned to the desks and froze once again, Kantor broke the still moment to reveal a different three-dimensional image. This time, it represented a lesson about Solomon and King David. The sequence consisted of numerous random associations with the subject



Figure 17. *The Dead Class* (1975). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jacquie Bablet (1983).

matter as well as traces of memories drawn from Kantor's/the pupils' learning about Solomon and King David. Before the actions of the Old People could develop into a composed picture, the three-dimensional image was interrupted once again by the sounds of the waltz: “For a split second, it seems that we have witnessed an unquestionable miracle. The Old People rise from the benches. They create a wall made of people brought to life by the sounds of the waltz; age-withered people straighten their postures, they raise their heads, their eyes glitter, their hands are raised as if to a toast. We become sure that these people found their time of youth . . . [their] dead [time of youth].”¹⁹

The sounds of the waltz disappeared; so did the energy that had triggered the actions of the Old People: “The needed REALITY was created at the price of a total DISINTEGRATION and COLLAPSE.”²⁰ The Old People returned to their benches and re-created the opening “photograph.”

The next sequence, “The Nocturnal Lesson,” included a series of actions during which the people, events, and incidents of the past revealed where “memory explodes into the nightmares of hell and the nostalgia of Eden, and dreams are precise renderings of ‘reality.’”²¹ The Old People, now defined as the Old Man in the WC, the Old Man with a Bicycle, the Woman with a Mechanical Cradle, the Old Man with His Double, the Absent-Minded Old Man, the Somnambulistic Whore, and

the Deaf Old Man, kept endlessly repeating words, questions, phrases, and clichés. Their erratic performance was interrupted by the appearance of the soldier, an apparition from the forgotten regions of memory, who had returned from World War I to join the Dead Class. The tones of the waltz were heard again, and the “historical nightmares” ceased. The Old People returned to the benches and recreated the opening photograph. “The Nocturnal Lesson” was followed by fragmented phonetic exercises (“The Grammar Lesson”) and a game of making faces that counterbalanced the atmosphere of the “proper” lessons. The Old People disappeared into the black vortex. Only the wax figures of children were left in the benches.

Suddenly, a figure in a black dress, who had been frozen until now, came to life [see Figure 18]. She (played by a man) was the Cleaning-woman/Death, and she began to perform her everyday duties rearranging and introducing order into the world of the classroom. On completing her work, she read the news and advertisements from an old newspaper. “The Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated.” The simple comment “There will be war” brought to life yet another silent figure, Pedel, the Custodian, who had been in the classroom from the very beginning. Having declared his nationalistic sympathies by singing the Austro-Hungarian anthem, Pedel disappeared backstage. Kantor and the Cleaning-woman remained on stage alone. The voices of the Old People repeating memorized phrases from the history lesson filled the space. The Cleaning-woman began to scrub the floor as if trying to silence the voices. She “looks around as if trying to find the source from which these voices, sighs, and complaints are coming. She looks at the benches and frozen figures of the dead children. She collects her brooms and runs away.”²²

The Old People returned. From this moment on, the reality of the Dead Class was altered by the reality of Witkiewicz’s *Tumor Brainowicz*.²³

I want to create the impression that the OLD PEOPLE, characters from the “Dead Class,” defined clearly and unequivocally by their past and destiny, were as if “programmed” by the content of *Tumor Brainowicz*. This might have happened by accident, or maybe it was Fate that wanted to make the end of their lives more exciting. [. . .] It has to be remembered, however, that the reality of the classroom is the primary matter, an autonomous reality. . . . Nothing gives the impression that there will be a production of the play. [The space of the classroom] is a battlefield where two disinterested realities will clash, have a fight, whose rules and regulations will make it impossible for either of the two sides to be victorious.²⁴

These two realities, the memory of the Dead Class and the fictitious world of Witkiewicz’s play, encountered each other in the nocturnal

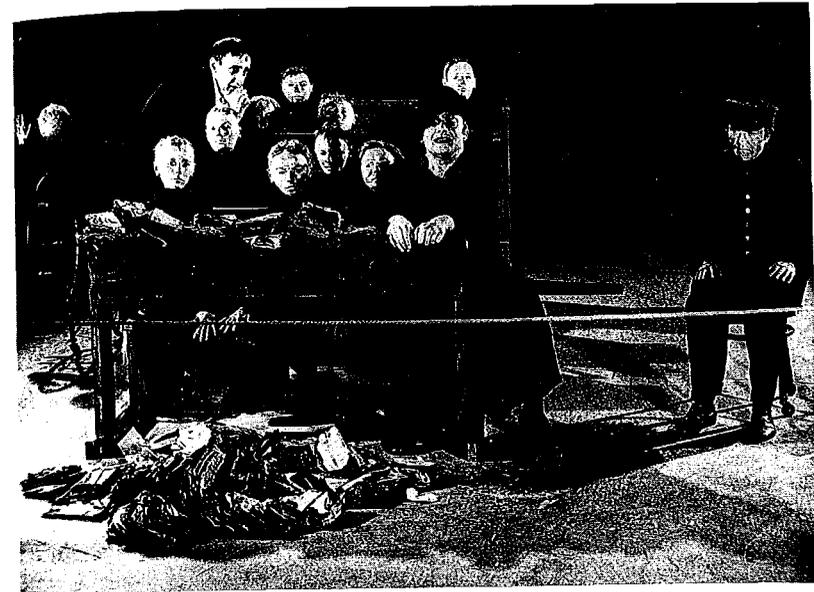


Figure 18. *The Dead Class* (1975). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of the Cricoteka Archives.

space of *The Dead Class*. Until the end, “the reality of ‘The Dead Class’ constantly slips into the sphere of the play and vice versa.” The bodies of the characters from “The Dead Class” were as if invaded by “foreign” entities that would speak through them. The lines from the play were recognizable, but because they were not spoken by the characters from the play, the lines were devoid of any structural logic. They became the ramblings of the Old People, who at that moment might have assumed the verbal functions of the characters from the play. Then, suddenly, the reality of “The Dead Class” would dominate until, once again, the play’s text invaded the classroom. When that happened, however, it was impossible to reestablish the continuity of the text of the play because the lines referred to an action that had probably taken place somewhere else, in a different reality. At the same time, the events of the autonomous reality of the classroom were presented, but it was obvious that they were reconditioned by the text of Witkiewicz’s play.

Even though Kantor had experimented with parallel actions/spaces as early as the 1961 production of *The Country House*, the parallel actions/spaces he used in *The Dead Class* modified the definition of the earlier concept:

When I started to work [on *The Dead Class*], I felt that I was losing my fascination with the method of parallel actions and that I would have to go beyond it.

The materials gathered for the production were becoming more substantial. [. . .] The atmosphere of the classroom, attempts to bring back memories, childhood, victories and defeats, more and more clearly defined the idea of the Theatre of Death, of new territories and horizons. [. . .] All of this pointed to the possibility of creating an autonomous production without the need to fall back on drama. [. . .] I have returned to the idea of parallel action. This time, however, its meaning is different. This time, I made use of Witkiewicz's *Tumor Brainowicz*, a creation of pure imagination that, as was the case with Witkiewicz, was grounded in the sphere of our lives. My fondness for literature returns again. This will explain the conflicts, doubts, and balancing between drama and theatre. *The Dead Class* emerges at the borderline of my indecisions. The characters from *Tumor Brainowicz*, who enter the stage and the classroom, bring with them their fate and destiny. As they contain in themselves the content of the play, the real action of "The Dead Class" is freed from the play's potent thought. They merge with the figures from the classroom, who also exist at the borderline between life and death. All hell breaks loose. We enter the world of dreams and nightmares. The characters from *Tumor Brainowicz* leave the stage. They disappear. The reality of the classroom begins to exist in its own environment. After some time, they return, but differently, as if changed by the events about which the audience knows nothing and which must have happened behind the doors. They return in a different moment of the plot.²⁵

Kantor's desire to transgress the intellectual and structural boundaries of his productions thus led to the creation of a new type of performance space. The placement of the action of *The Dead Class* "on the side," in a corner of a room that was divided into two parts—the world of the living and the world of the dead, as Kantor would say it—allowed him not only to focus on the interplay between a dramatic text and those aspects of memory that were usually pushed aside, delegitimized, appropriated, or discredited by adulthood, but also to destabilize the traditional site for a performance. According to Kantor, an act happening in the middle of a room would be given the status of a performance by those watching it. The same act, however, when presented on the side, beyond the circle of spectators, would be perceived as "abnormal behaviour, exhibitionism, a shameful act, completely independent and self-sufficient; an act that would not require the spectator's presence."²⁶

This space in a corner, which was beyond the gaze of the spectator, was where Kantor placed his actors or, to be more precise, his "WAX FIGURES," "infinitely DISTANT, shockingly FOREIGN, as if DEAD."²⁷ The concept of the actor on the other side was crucial to Kantor's reconstruction of the traces of for-gotten memories:

One day, or one night, I found a model for an actor that would ideally fit into the condition [of those who stood on the other side]: a dead actor. [. . .] It was difficult for me to accept this model. . . . But this difficulty also meant that

I was onto something. I continued my thought process: "If we agree that one of the attributes of living people is their ability to and the ease with which they enter various relationships, it is only when encountering the body of a dead person that the living person realizes that the aforesaid attribute can exist only because of the absence of difference between the living people. [They are all the same.] It is only the DEAD who become visible to the living. More important, the DEAD acquired their individuality, difference, and image." The Dead and the Actor—these two notions started to overlap in my thoughts. . . . A Wax figure became an entity that would exist between a dead and a living actor.²⁸

The actors on the other side were motionless, like mannequins standing in the corner of a shop window or like the dead, until all the audience members took their seats. Once the audience was seated, the pupils/Old People, "individuals built out of various parts, that is, remnants of their childhood, the events of their past lives (not always glorious), their hopes and passions," began to constitute and reconstitute themselves "in this theatrical element pushing them in the direction of their finite form, which would imprint all their happiness and pain on their masks of death."²⁹ The actions that ensued created a collage of nocturnal memories of school days, attended lessons, and historical events, which appeared and disappeared in the space of the classroom.

Unlike his other productions, the audience and the actors did not share the space. Rather, they were physically separated. It could be suggested that this impassable barrier functioned as a one-way mirror. Audience members could see through the mirror and perceive the physical action on stage, which in turn would theoretically stimulate their thought processes and cognizance. The actors, however, found themselves in a totally different space. The parallel action in the acting space, that is, the memories of school days and the reality of the play, altered the network of relations on their side of the mirror. The Old People, headed towards death, as Kantor implied in the notes to the production, encountered in their space a threshold, the surface of a mirror, to continue the metaphor. Because they could not cross it, they could only turn back on themselves to give birth to their own image, wax figures of children, in a limitless play of mirrors: "I see myself seeing myself seeing myself" ad infinitum. It was a Maeterlinckian joining of the "world of childhood and the world of old age [see Figure 19]. Neither of them can adapt to accepted reality, to the official and pragmatic world. Both these worlds are on the MARGIN. Both touch on the regions of nonbeing and death. This is the reason the Old People, who are at the threshold of death, return to their school days. Birth and Death are the two arrangements that explain each other."³⁰ In this interplay of mirrors, in which the Old People in their attempts to escape death found them-



Figure 19. *The Dead Class* (1975). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jacquie Bablet (1983).

selves where they had started (their childhood), an entirely new set of self-representations was produced. They took the form of a new language that was spoken (recall the phonetic exercises in “The Grammar Lesson”), of the process of constitution and reconstitution of historical events (the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo, the announcement of World War I), of probing into the concept of how and by whom history was written (memories of history lessons about Solomon, King David, Cleopatra, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, Poland, and the world), of bringing to life the forgotten/annihilated history of Galician Jews, and of celebrating traditions (the ceremony of the Polish Forefather’s Eve).

The space in which this interplay repeated and redoubled itself endlessly was saved from becoming imprisoned in its own illusion and representation by “a creation of pure imagination,” that is, by the characters for Witkiewicz’s play. Their “fate and destiny” counterbalanced the events from “The Dead Class.” They did so in the process of the merger between the figures from the classroom and the characters from the play. This merger, however, unlike similar mergers in, for example, *The Water-Hen*, was only temporary. The characters from the play would

leave the bodies of the Old People, and even when they returned and reentered the bodies of the Old People, the Old People would not be the same, “as if changed by the events [. . .] which must have happened behind the doors.”³¹ In a way, the characters from Witkiewicz’s play entered from a dimension unknown to the Old People.

These relationships in *The Dead Class* could be explained with the help of the concept of *topos uchronia*, that is, a space that is not altered by time or that functions beyond time.³² To a certain extent, such a reading was prompted by Kantor himself, who referred to *The Dead Class* as a séance during which one encounters phantoms and people from different dimensions: the dimension of memory, “The Dead Class,” which was brought into the present moment when recollections from childhood (school days and historical events) were enacted on stage, and the dimension of literature, *Tumor Brainowicz*, which was brought in from that realm where the dramatic text existed in its entirety. During the performance, the audience observed the emergence of various spatial formations that were produced within the *topos uchronia* of the séance. This space was described by the relationships that existed among the Old People in the classroom and by the merging of the characters from “The Dead Class” with the characters from Witkiewicz’s play. The space was also defined by the relationship between the Old People and the wax figures of the children (“looking like dead bodies or TUMOURS of their CHILDHOOD, they carried on their backs) or by the transformations that happened within characters during the production (the grand parade of the Old People to the tune of the François waltz, for example, had at least four variants: the Old People carry the wax figures, they carry their packs, they dance together, or they dance individually).

But how does one present the intimate images of the séance without letting everyday life appropriate them? The introduction of the “condition of death,” visualized by school benches and the Old People/wax figures, was the answer.

What was the condition of death? In “The Theatre of Death” manifesto, Kantor articulated his desire to abandon a theatre grounded in physical reality for a theatre of the mind that embraced an instant double of the Self, the Other, or the Unthought as a new subject constituted by the mental gaze of the Self.³³ This process needed a “different universe” that would allow the Self to travel through space in unknown directions. The space of the past, which existed dead in memory, provided a unique possibility for entering this other dimension. To Kantor, it was not enough to bring memory back to the present moment, make it visible through art, and separate it from the audience with a rope. Like the woman in Khnopff’s frontispiece, Kantor faced the mirror of

memory—the school benches, the people sitting in them, and the frozen figures of the Cleaning-woman/Death and the Custodian. His solitary figure activated the mirror with a sign, turning a flat, still memory into a multidimensional spatial fold. In the performance space, where linear time ceased to function, this fold would perpetually break up, curve, and form itself anew.

These processes of creation and disintegration could explain the lack of a recognizable continuous action in *The Dead Class*. As Kantor indicated in his notes to *Wielopole, Wielopole*, there could be no steady flow of action in a presentation of memories because memories existed only as transparent negatives of old photographs stored somewhere in the mind's scrapbook:

Memory,
 makes use of [film] N E G A T I V E S
 that are still frozen—
 almost like metaphors
 but unlike narratives—
 which pulsate,
 which appear and disappear,
 which appear and disappear again
 until the image fades away,
 until . . . the tears fill the eyes.³⁴

The school benches functioned as a mechanism to reproduce the negatives pulled out from the deep recesses of Kantor's mind. In *The Dead Class*, the negative that would constantly appear and disappear was the image of the Old People. In the opening sequence, they created a motionless image that disintegrated at a sign from Kantor. This disintegration was also the moment when the Old People engaged in representing the space otherwise silenced by the frozen-in-time photograph. The eruption of activities and words was stopped by Kantor, who, after a split second, freed them again. As a corollary, the negatives created by the Old People could not produce action or constitute narrative in time. Rather, they were defined by the rhythm of birth and collapse.

The rhythm of birth and collapse, controlled by the memory mechanism, marked a transformation from a three-dimensional world of the things that were seen into a multidimensional space of the things that could be thought. In the three-dimensional world, the Old People were dead façades, but in the multidimensional performance space, the Old People came to life as if "for the last performance in their lives."³⁵ The different "lessons" were their attempt to constitute their lives by embracing what the memory machine had brought forth from the deep recesses of the mind. This process was, however, constantly challenged

either by "voices" coming as if from another dimension (the François waltz, parades around the benches, the Old People getting up in slow motion, the appearance of figures connected with particular historical events) or by Kantor himself disrupting any continuity by enforcing the disintegration of the negative *vivant* (the actions of the Cleaning-woman/Death or the imposition of Witkiewicz's *Tumor Brainowicz*).

This discontinuity in the treatment of the negatives of memory demonstrated that Kantor was interested, not in nostalgically reconstructing memories, but in exploring the consequences of the interplay between the Self and the Other in the mirror of memory. As the production unequivocally indicated, the Self needed to realize that a complete reconstruction of memory was impossible because the rhythm of birth and collapse in the Theatre of Death would only accelerate the process of memory's (dis)appearance. And the reconstruction of memory was impossible because it was totally subjugated to the desire of the observing subject, which wanted to appropriate memory. In *The Dead Class*, the return of the Old People to the school benches, to the memory machine, expressed this complete subjugation of the Other by the Self.

The split between the Old People and the wax figures of the children also reflected this interplay between representations of the Self representing the Other, who in turn represented the Self. In "The Theatre of Death" manifesto, Kantor explained his reasons for relating the condition of death to the condition of artists and art.³⁶ The Old People stood opposite the Self, which remained on the other side of the mirror of memory. Once brought to life by the disintegration of the still negative, the Old People recreated the fragmented and discontinuous traces of the Self's memories. In the process, they reestablished the traces of lives in their own dimension. The ghosts from the negatives that participated in the events of the Dead Class were the afterthoughts of the figures on the negative. As such, they were bereft of their own individuality and could become only what the observing Self (Kantor) wanted them to become. The language they spoke was not their own; they merely repeated memorized phrases and sentences stored in the Self's memory. Similarly, their postures, gestures, and facial expressions were not their own. The Old People were not what they wanted to be because the Self stopped any action from developing that might have given them autonomy and individuality.

The ultimate control of the Self over the ghosts of memory in *The Dead Class* was exerted by introducing the parallel action of *Tumor Brainowicz*. On one level, a different reality slipped into the reality of the Old People; on another level, the dual action was virtually inscribed on their bodies (an Old Man with a Bicycle, a Woman Behind a Window, a Woman with a Mechanical Cradle, a Somnambulistic Whore, an Old

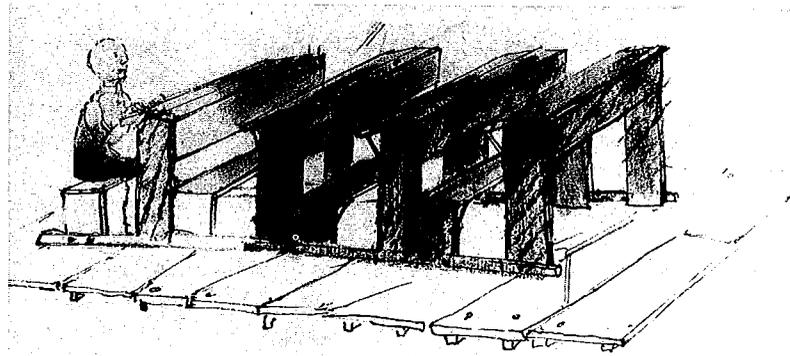


Figure 20. Tadeusz Kantor's drawing for *The Dead Class* (1975). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of the Cricoteka Archives.

Man and His Double, a Deaf Old Man) or carried on their backs (the wax figures of children), thereby reminding them of their function. Just as the Self saw the Other as the afterthought, so the Old People experienced themselves as the collapsed image that was altered again and again by Kantor observing them:

In childhood, A CLASSROOM and SCHOOL BENCHES united all of them. [See Figure 20.] Then they followed their individual calling; their paths departed. And now, when they come back for the last performance of their lives, nothing exists among them. They are STRANGERS. The bodies of children, their childhood, which they carry on their backs and which could revive memories in them, are dead. They are nearly dead, too, as if touched by some deadly disease. At the price of BEING ESTRANGED and DEAD, they get a chance to become the OBJECTS of art. The very condition of BEING ESTRANGED, which places them on a par with the condition of an OBJECT, removes biological, organic, and naturalistic [expressions of] *life*, which are meaningless in art. [. . .] The production gave them a new life. But during its development, new relationships, friendships, differences, started to grow between them. There started to emerge misty shadows of figures moulded by life; life, not always noble, that was known only to them. And so during the performance, their actions started to be motivated by causes and effects. It was therefore necessary to bring them back to the condition of being ESTRANGED, to shame them, to strip them off, to call them for the Last Judgement, and, worse than that, to

expose them the way dead bodies lie exposed in a mortuary. It was only the Cleaning-woman/Death who could perform this duty. [. . .] With no interest, she performs the ritual of meticulously and systematically washing the bodies.³⁷

There was no escape from the closed space of *The Dead Class*. The memories could only curve on themselves, illuminate the impossibility of reconstructing themselves, before they recognized themselves in their own return and disappeared into the same vortex from which they had sprung.

While working on *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980), Kantor noted a change in his discourse on space and memory and its function in the creative process of the Self: "the 'prehistory' of this production, the happy period when one can still wander through the landscape of imagination, was marked by reevaluation, changes, and shifts that happened in my world of ideas, in the INTERIOR of my ROOM."³⁸ Rather than exploring the interplay between the universe of memory and the world of literature, Kantor concentrated entirely on the room of his childhood, where all the events would unfold:

Here, this is a room of my childhood,
with all its inhabitants.
This is the room which I keep reconstructing again and again
and that keeps dying again and again.
Its inhabitants are the members of my family.
They continuously repeat all their movements and activities
as if they were imprinted on a film negative shown interminably.³⁹

The audience, which entered the performance space of *The Dead Class*, encountered not only a division into the site of the living and the site of the dead but also Kantor and a frozen group of Old People waiting for his sign to decompose a still image. The audience in *Wielopole, Wielopole* saw the solitary figure of Kantor walking around a stage. The difference in the opening sequences is significant. At the beginning of *The Dead Class*, Kantor established clear boundaries between the visible and the invisible world by placing the negative *vivant* in front of the spectators. In *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor walked around the performance space as if trying to find the traces of his life. Whereas *The Dead Class* was about the objects, the Other(s), created and destroyed by the gaze of the Self, *Wielopole, Wielopole* focused on the dimension of memory itself.

The performance space in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, a simple wooden platform, was almost empty except for a few pieces of furniture. Kantor moved around them. He opened and closed a wardrobe, pushed it to a new location, changed the position of chairs, and placed a bed on stage. Once these introductory procedures were completed, a signal was

given, the doors were opened, and the actors appeared on stage. They were divided into two groups. One group was constituted by the actors who were the family members: Uncle Olek, Uncle Karol, Aunt Mańka, Aunt Józka, Helka, Grandmother, the Priest. Their bodies were scattered around. The second group in a corner was made up of the actors who wore soldiers' uniforms. They were posing for a camera. Kantor closed the door. The process of recreating memories began. But this process was "suspicious and dubious" for two reasons. First, "memories make use of people and characters who are hired."⁴⁰ Second, the actors were hired, not to be the members of Kantor's family, but merely to bring them back to life. Uncle Karol's and Uncle Olek's futile attempts to furnish the room and to arrange the bodies of the family members exemplified this ambiguity in the process of recalling memories:

UNCLE KAROL

looks around; stares at individual objects, immobile human figures with incredible intensity and precision. It seems that there is something wrong. A black suitcase attracts his attention.

A suitcase . . .

A suitcase was on the table. . . .

Yes!

He comes up to the table, touches a suitcase as if he wanted to check something. A sudden association. He looks at Uncle Olek sitting on a chair.

Uncle Olek!

Uncle Olek was not sitting

then. . . .

He was standing or walking. . . .

Uncle Olek gets up. He also looks at the suitcase.

UNCLE OLEK

A suitcase was at the top of the wardrobe. . . .

While carefully carrying a suitcase, he bumps into a chair.

And this chair?

UNCLE KAROL

sees the body of Grandfather-Priest. A dead body of the Priest is sitting on a chair.

Grandfather?

Grandfather was not sitting either!

Nor was he standing.

He is very surprised with his discovery. Both Uncles are engulfed in their indecisions and memories.⁴¹

This exchange was followed by an exit and a reentry of different characters emerging from "an open interior of our imagination . . . where the threats of our memory are woven."⁴² Memory came to life in the form of the "dead," the members of Kantor's family, who populated the world of the stage through a repetition of events and actions and through acting. The audience thus witnessed Uncle Józef-Priest's multiple deaths, Grandmother-Katarzyna's last service to Uncle Józef, the family getting ready for the last photograph with Uncle Józef, the soldiers preparing for a group photograph before they go to battle, Father-Marian and Mother-Helka's wedding ceremony, Father-Marian's war friends, the family members' return to the room and their repetitive actions, Ada's mobilization and departure to the war, Uncle Józef's funeral, Aunt Mańka's transformation into a suspicious soldier in a uniform and her death, the Rabbi killed three times by soldiers, and the last gathering of the family before the final "departure." The appearance and disappearance of all the characters were accompanied by music (Chopin's "Scherzo," for Uncle Stasio; a Psalm, for Uncle Józef-Priest; a Polish military march, "Szara Piechota," for the soldiers; the Rabbi's Yiddish song) intertwined with silences.

Both Kantor and the audience, like the woman in Khnopff's frontispiece, stood in front of a mirror's silvered surface or the doors as if

giving a long farewell to our childhood;
we are standing helpless
at the threshold of eternity and death.
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 rise.
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.⁴³

Once the doors were opened, important events and people entered the room and dispersed in all directions in the process of constituting and, later, reconstituting its shape. As Kantor observed, memory could be equated with the interior of a room, that is, space. Space, as he suggested in "Lesson 3" of *The Milano Lessons*, was energy.⁴⁴ Thus, memory was energy in a different universe that could be sensed through art. *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* was an attempt to visualize memory in a three-

dimensional theatrical space. Kantor, as the holder of discourse/memory, watched the process of materialization of the most intimate aspects of the Self in the form of the Other(s). This could explain why the room was deconstructed and reconstructed in the opening sequence by Uncle Karol and Uncle Olek. Their actions were unsuccessful not only because they could not agree about the location of those objects or people, or whether they should be present in the room, but also, and more important, because the room could never be organized. Giving it a fixed and final form would signify a closure contrary to Kantor's intentions. In his introductory passage to *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor said:

These introductory remarks raise my doubts about the nature of my endeavour because we are not supposed to see it as "art" or "a spectacle." Instead, it will be a "rehearsal," that is, an attempt to bring back a time that is gone and the people who lived in it and who are gone, too. As any "rehearsal," it will be an exploration of intentions and dreams that, by their nature, can never be fully complete or logical. It will not present us with well-known people and events, whose significance and functions are dutifully described in family memories or history books. It will not be a presentation of "memorized" people and events but an attempt to "apply" the actors to those people and events. . . . One should not, therefore, be surprised when crucified Christ will not be shown. His place will be taken by Adaś, who just happened to be there, or the Priest, around whom the whole FAMILY is gathered. One should not be surprised when war's absurdity will not have a true or historical representation. This little room and the old photograph of the soldiers, who were just about to leave for the war, should be enough.⁴⁵

Another reason Kantor refused to pursue the logic of reality was that the Room of Memory could never be organized according to the laws of external systems:

The room of my childhood is a dark hole that is full of junk. It is not true that
that
a childhood room in our memory is always sunny and bright.
It is a dead room as well as a room for the dead.
Recalled by memories, it dies.
If, however, we take small pieces out from it one by one—for example, a
piece of a carpet, a window, a street going nowhere, a ray of sunshine
that hits the floor, father's yellow leggings, mother's coat, a face behind
the window—maybe we will begin to put together a real ROOM of our
childhood.⁴⁶

The pieces taken out from Kantor's memory were presented by hired actors who repeated the movements and the activities of the family members as if they were recorded and played interminably:

They will keep repeating those banal,
elementary, and aimless activities
with the same expression on their faces,
concentrating on the same gesture,
until boredom strikes.
Those trivial activities
that stubbornly and oppressively preoccupy us
fill up our lives. . . .
These DEAD FAÇADES
come to life, become real and important
through this stubborn REPETITION OF ACTION.
Maybe this stubborn repetition of action,
this pulsating rhythm
that lasts for life;
that ends in n o t h i n g n e s s ,
that is futile,
is an inherent part of MEMORY.⁴⁷

This repetition of actions, like the folding of representation back on itself, transformed the linear sequence of life into frozen-in-time negatives. In *Wielopole, Wielopole*, those stored negatives were presented as incomplete fragments that appeared and disappeared, leaving additional traces before they dissipated into nothingness. The negatives on stage produced an intricate collage that allowed the Self to integrate the pieces lifted out of memory into a new creation. *Wielopole, Wielopole* presented the following negatives: part I—family (the room of the dead), three dead photographs (Priest, family, soldiers—see Figure 21), Marian's and Helka's wedding/funeral ceremony; part II—family (the room of eternal family quarrels), Helka's Golgotha (the secrets of family life mixed with the Passion of Christ), Helka's rape by the soldiers, Marian's and Helka's second wedding/funeral ceremony; part III—family (repetition of everyday actions), the judgement of the Priest, the crucifixion of Adaś (the second Golgotha—see Figure 22); part IV—family (the fear about Adaś is mixed with the fear of apocalypse), Adaś's death and funeral, death; part V—family (the collapse of the image), the Priest's funeral (the third Golgotha), the Rabbi's song and his multiple deaths, the last supper.⁴⁸ This seemingly symmetrical structure was secondary to the process of constituting and reconstituting the negatives. All sequences were constantly disrupted by the entrances and exits of Ur-matter from behind the doors. This Ur-matter could be the family members or the soldiers who burst in and interrupted the slow development of the negative and forced it to assume a different shape. For example, the Priest's funeral cortege in part V was stopped by the sudden appearance of the Rabbi from behind the doors. A Yiddish song

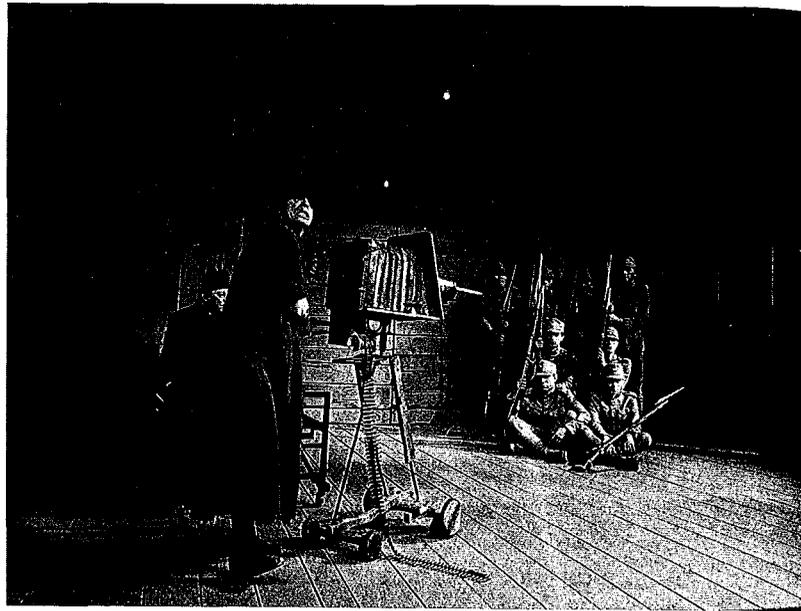
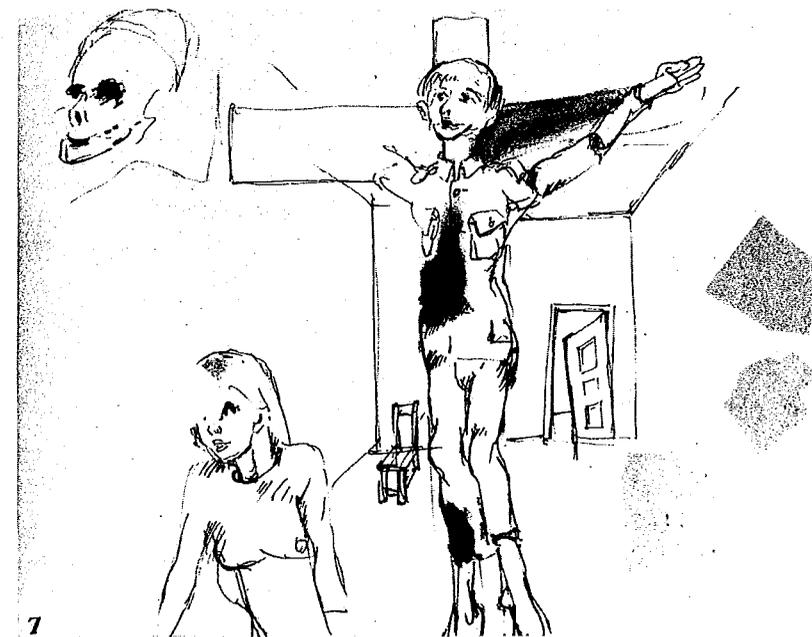


Figure 21. *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Leszek Dzieczic (1983).

was heard. The song was broken by a death squad of soldiers, who killed the Rabbi. The Priest helped the Rabbi get up. The song was heard again. The Rabbi was killed again. The action was repeated a few times. Finally, the Rabbi got up and left the stage.⁴⁹

The room created by Kantor on stage should not, therefore, be treated as a real space for two reasons. First, “if we [took] the audience into consideration, the room could not possibly be perceived as an intimate room of childhood but rather as a public forum.” Second, “the room [could not] be real, i.e., exist in our time; this room is in our MEMORY, in our RECOLLECTION OF THE PAST.”⁵⁰ Indeed, Kantor’s room was a heterotopia, a space that was a countersite to physical and visible reality and that simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted the laws of the real site.⁵¹ In *Wielopole, Wielopole*, the heterotopic space was created by Kantor’s presence on stage as well as his control of the action:

I AM
sitting on stage. And this is the text of my part
(which will never be presented).
This is my Grandmother,



7
Figure 22. Tadeusz Kantor’s drawing for *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of the Cricoteka Archives.

the mother of my mother—Katarzyna.
This is her brother, a priest.
We all called him “Uncle.”
He will die in a moment.
Over there, my Father is sitting,
the first one from the left.
He is sending his greetings
on the reverse side of the photograph.
Its date is September 12, 1914.
In a moment, my Mother, Helka, will come in.
Those others are my Aunts and Uncles.
They all met with their deaths somewhere there in the world.
Now they are in this room as the imprints in memory:
Uncle Karol . . . Uncle Olek . . . Aunt Mańka . . . Aunt Józka.⁵²

Even though this monologue was not spoken on stage, the audience watched Kantor walk among the objects of the yet-unpopulated room. He was the first to begin the process of transposing images from his memory into the heterotopic space by moving the objects and opening the doors at the back of the stage to let the members of his family/actors

in.⁵³ At the end of each act, Kantor closed the doors; at the end of the production, he folded a tablecloth used during the last supper.

The heterotopic space of the room, like the *topos uchronia* from *The Dead Class*, challenged the audience to abandon logical analysis and rational thinking for the manifestations that were created by Kantor in those spaces. Kantor made clear in *Wielopole, Wielopole* that spectators were seeing his intimate commentaries about life and death, about his family and historical events, about Christianity and Judaism. These commentaries materialized in a different, second space.

Kantor enumerated some of the characteristics of this second space. Among them, repetition and its variants were most significant:

The most profound [variant] is e c h o ,
the same as the one that exists here but immaterial,
a sudden conscious realization of passing
and death.

Another variant:

a kind of learning process,
memory, which transfers the real into
the past, which is constantly dying.

Yet another variant:

if time shrinks,
it is repetition par excellence, neverending,
frightful, and inhuman,
because the time used to describe our bodies
would not be able to save us from experiencing both
eternity and nothingness at the same time,
that is, to save us from death.⁵⁴

Repetition and echo, which are immaterial; memory, which is constantly dying; and time, which shrinks, dominated the heterotopic space of *Wielopole, Wielopole*. As the production indicated, the process of constructing and reconstructing the room, the entrances and exits of characters, and the repetition of events and gestures constituted a dense network of relationships that created a space that was "other," another real space. Inside it, the multiple deaths of Uncle Józef-Priest acquired significance in the process of the composition and recomposition of the act (see Figure 23). The echo, an immaterial equivalent of an aspect of the real, redefined traditional (religious) icons and their cultural functions. The act of putting a thorn crown on Mother-Helka's head before she was raped by the soldiers, the crucifixion of Adaś, the funeral cortege that followed a cross with Uncle Józef-Priest's mannequin on it, and the last supper of the family members before they were shot to death with a machine gun/photo camera (see Figure 24) are just a few examples of



Figure 23. *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Maurizio Buscarino.

this juxtaposition. Memory, which transferred the real into the past, was manifested in and by Kantor's presence on stage. Kantor, the holder of discourse, was constantly reconstituting the Room of Memory. This process was visualized by Uncle Olek and Uncle Karol, who moderated the number of people or objects present in the room. Because linear time had been abandoned, past, present, and future were coexistent. As a consequence, the Father in the wedding ceremony was simultaneously the Bridegroom, a soldier from the photograph mentioned by Kantor, and a soldier who had died during the war:

PRIEST

Marian Kantor

No response. [The Priest] gets up from bed and walks over to the platoon of soldiers. He looks at the Father in the first row. He is dead. The Priest pulls him up, takes a gun away. The Priest tries to make him stand. The Father falls down. The sequence is repeated. [. . .] There is nothing to be done now except for joining the Bride and the Bridegroom in a holy matrimony.

[The Priest reads the marriage vows. The Father/Bridegroom does not respond. The Mother/Bride responds in a dry voice. The Priest continues reading the vows. See Figure 25.]

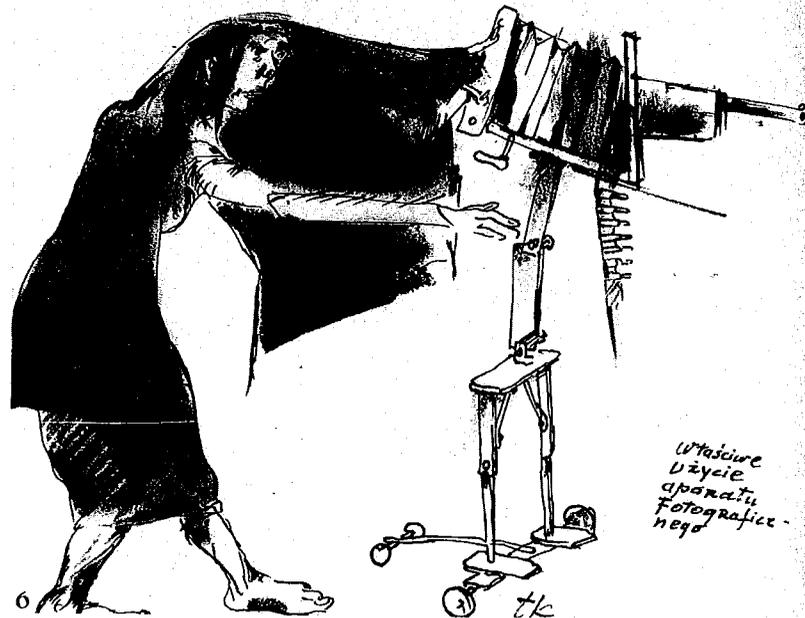


Figure 24. Tadeusz Kantor's drawing for *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of the Cricoteka Archives.

[The Priest] tries to make the Father repeat the words. But this dead façade trying to remember a human voice can produce only awful animal-like sounds. A mumble. A dialogue between the language of the living and the dead continues.⁵⁵

An interpretation of *Wielopole, Wielopole* can be derived from the tension between Kantor and the memories presented on stage. The Room of Imagination was positioned within the space of the Self. Once activated, the Room of Kantor's Memory was transferred to the three-dimensional space of the stage, a heterotopia in which the rules of real space were discarded by virtue of Kantor's rejection of traditional concepts of illusion and time. Instead, this new space was defined by repetition and its three powerful components: echo, memory, and nonlinear time. In his treatment of heterotopia, Michel Foucault provides an example that illustrates this "other space": "In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent."⁵⁶



Figure 25. *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Leszek Dzedzic (1983).

In this process of transfer, Kantor saw himself where he was not, in an unreal space that opened behind the surface of a mirror. Within this space, his actors were put into motion or stopped by him. Kantor made the invisible visible by locating his immaterial memories in a three-dimensional heterotopic performance space. What spectators saw was the decomposition and recombination of parts of his life. At the same time, the images on the other side of the mirror in the imaginary, heterotopic space were negatives of Kantor's memory. Paradoxically for the viewer, whose gaze was positioned between Kantor and his Room of Memory (see Figure 26), both spaces were real, even though they functioned in different dimensions.

III

Topos uchronia and heterotopia embodied Kantor's desire to move beyond the physical aspects of theatre in the direction of metaphysical theatre, which he defined as "an activity that occurs if life is pushed to its final limits where all categories and concepts lose their meaning and

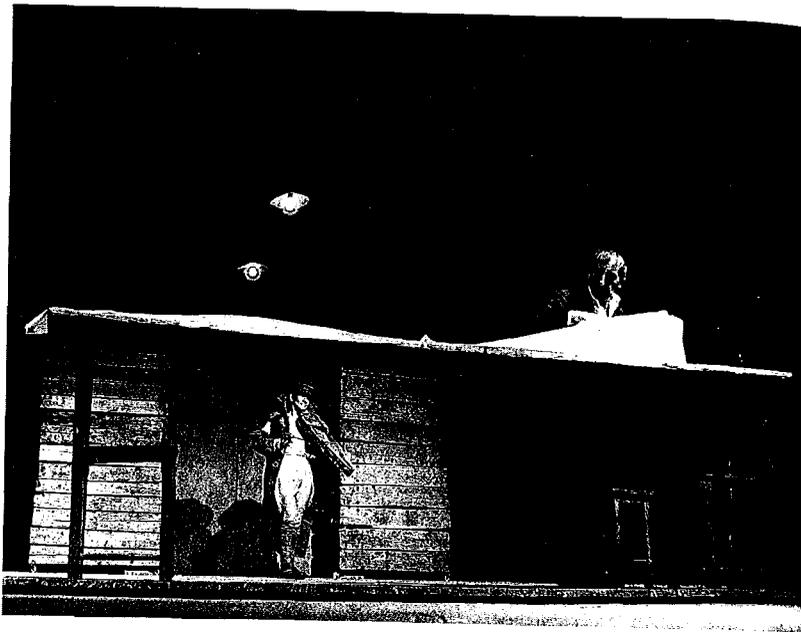


Figure 26. *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Maurizio Buscarino.

right to exist; where madness, fever, hysteria, and hallucinations are the last barricades of life before the approaching TROUPES OF DEATH and death's GRAND THEATRE."⁵⁷ Kantor was fascinated by the relationships on both sides of this borderline. *The Dead Class* was shown in a space separated from the world of the living. *Wielopole, Wielopole* was presented in a room populated by "dead" family members. *Let the Artists Die*, created in 1985, presented yet another strategy for the exploration of intimate memories. In his commentaries on *Let the Artists Die*, Kantor indicated that

one will find neither the setting
nor the action on this stage.
In their stead, there will be a journey
into the past, into the abyss of memory,
into the past time that is gone irrevocably
but that still attracts us,
into the past time that floats into
the regions of DREAMS, INFERNUM,
THE WORLD OF THE DEAD,
AND ETERNITY.⁵⁸

The performance space was not a room that was constructed and re-constructed by Kantor but a Room of Memory whose shape was constantly altered by the characters and forces invading it from behind the doors. For this reason, the concept of "the Room of Memory," was altered to "the Inn of Memory," a place where characters from all different past events would meet. The "wayfarers" appearing in the Inn of Memory brought different memories with them. Again, those memories were not presented in chronological order; rather, they were put together as if they were film negatives stacked one atop another. In the program notes to the production, Kantor defined these negatives in the following manner:

Negatives

do not describe the place of action
but are the NEGATIVES OF MEMORY that are interimposed,
that are recalled from the PAST,
that "slip" into the present moment,
that appear "out of the blue,"
that place objects, people, and events together, . . .
that discard patterns of logic that are binding in everyday life.⁵⁹

Unlike *The Dead Class*, where negatives were produced by the memory machine, or *Wielopole, Wielopole*, where they were acted out by "hired" characters who created and re-created the Room of Memory, *Let the Artists Die* presented negatives that were interimposed in space. Once memory was called forth, "it curve[d] over upon itself" and generated waves that swirled up and crashed into each other. On stage, these memories were shown simultaneously as a cluster of negatives. Because, as Kantor pointed out, they were transparent, the Self, or the audience, could see only one frame, which contained the imprints and traces of all other frames recalled from the storeroom of memory. For example, the space in Act I resembled both a childhood room and a cemetery. A bed, a night table, a door, and chairs shared the space with cemetery crosses (see Figure 27). There was no division between them. The space in Act II was both a childhood room and an asylum for beggars; in Act IV, both an asylum and a prison cell.

The childhood room/cemetery was ready to be transformed in any direction. It waited for something or somebody (a negative or a set of negatives) to appear from behind the doors of the room. At the beginning of "The Overture," the doors were opened by a caretaker/circus performer. The actors, "those who accompany you to the place of eternal rest," entered and waited for "the one who would be departing." Their presence transformed the Room of Memory into a cemetery

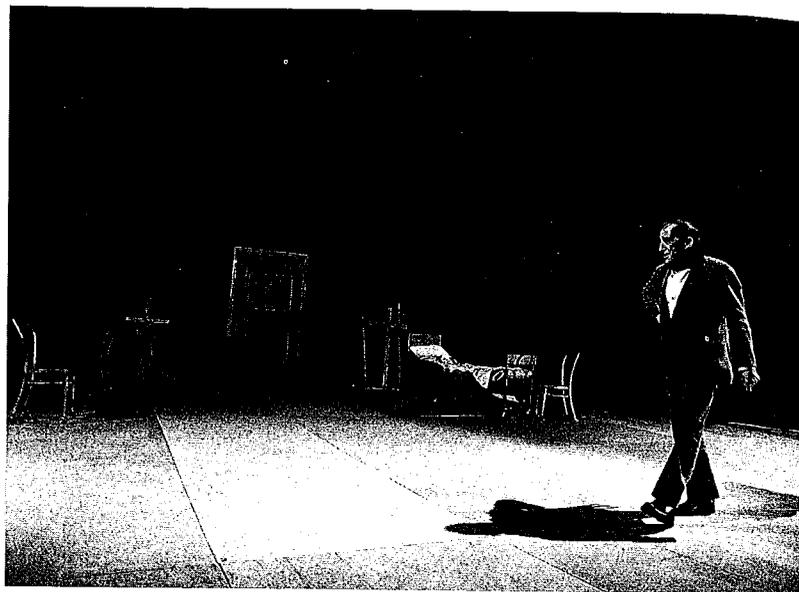


Figure 27. *Let the Artists Die* (1985). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Leszek Dziedzic (1986).

storeroom, where, with the help of the circus pranks of two twin actors, Kantor, using the theory of negatives, explored the consequences of his presence on stage:

I consist of a multiple series of characters embracing all possibilities from childhood up to the present moment—
all marching from the DEPTHS OF TIME.
They are all me.
I am sitting on stage: I, THE REAL ONE.
On the bed lies one of the twins:
I, THE DYING ONE. . . .
In a moment A LITTLE SOLDIER will show up—
I, AT THE AGE OF SIX
IN A PRAM.⁶⁰

All these different negatives of Kantor were simultaneously present on stage. The appearance of the various images of Kantor evoked different memories, which assumed physical shapes and generated their own memories. Thus, “the happy Little Soldier [was] followed by his entourage and his dreams [see Figure 28], THE THEATRE OF DEATH, THE COFFIN GLORY OF THE MAN WHOSE NAMES WILL NOT BE MENTIONED HERE, A MISERABLE FIGURE WALK-



Figure 28. *Let the Artists Die* (1985). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Leszek Dziedzic (1986).

ING ONE STEP BEHIND THE LITTLE SOLDIER, HIS LOYAL GENERALS, TIN SOLDIERS, DEAD, just their uniforms. Silver ones. For the first time my Little Room of Memory is exposed to suffering and mutilation.”⁶¹ Kantor’s Room of Memory was invaded by a sudden appearance of characters from history and from his theatre of death, who caused the room to collapse.

In Act II, “the COMPANY OF WANDERING COMEDIANS breaks in from nowhere, as if pulled in by some secret power, into the room. The Little Room of My Imagination turns into a Nocturnal Asylum.”⁶² The performance “Let the Artists Die,” presented by the comedians, merged with the characters and objects from Kantor’s past performances. Those bio-objects, a Hanged Man with his gallows (see Figure 29), a Pimp who was addicted to card playing and his table, a Bigot with her kneeling desk and her rosary (see Figure 30), and a vulgar Dishwasher with her sink, tried desperately to put together their autonomous lives with the help of words, gestures, and actions from the productions they had been in. Their futile actions of gaining independence were interrupted by the appearance of Veit Stoss, a fifteenth-century sculptor, the author of a famous altarpiece in one of Kraków’s churches, who was severely punished for his debts on his return to Nürnberg. Now, however, he was dressed in the costume of a Bohemian

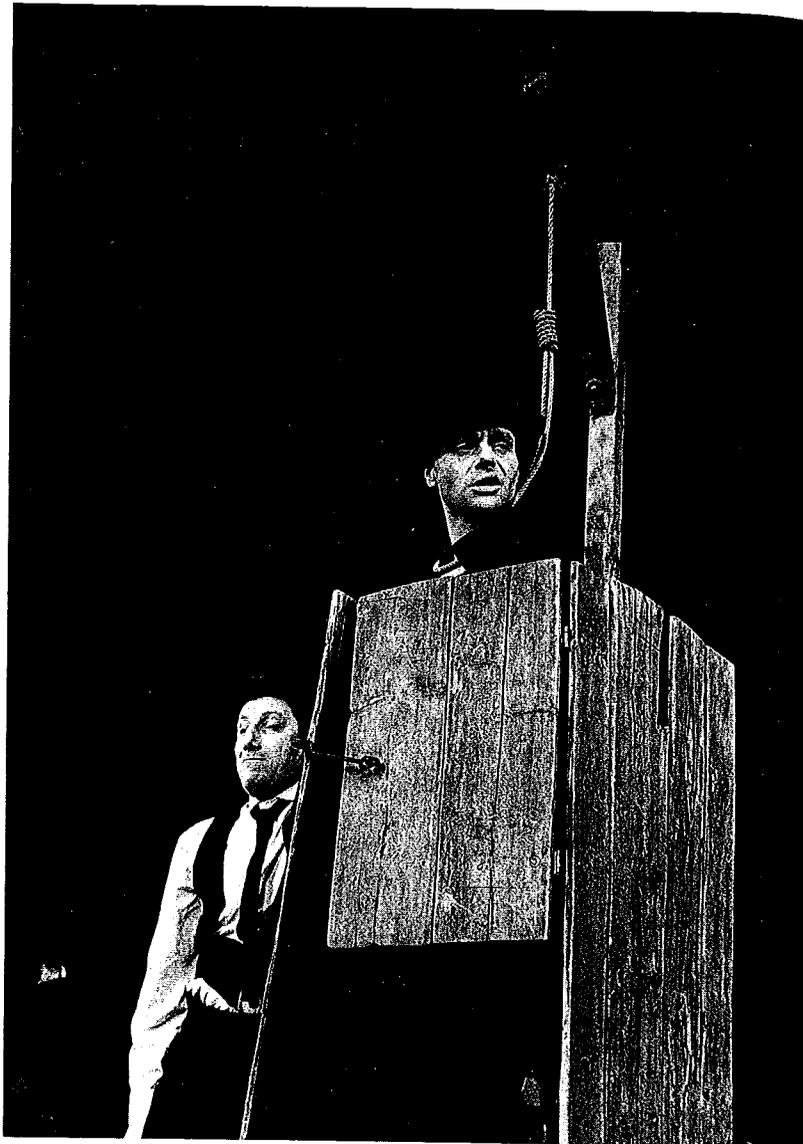


Figure 29. *Let the Artists Die* (1985). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Leszek Dziedzic (1986).

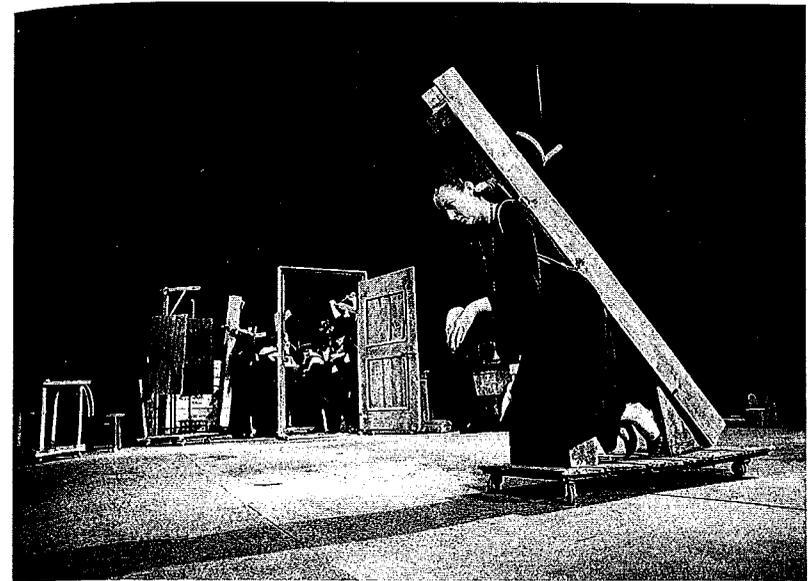


Figure 30. *Let the Artists Die* (1985). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Leszek Dziedzic (1986).

artist from Montmartre. In the Room of Memory, Kantor created for Veit Stoss (a guest from the other side) an asylum for beggars, artists, and cutthroats where Stoss would build an altar that resembled his Kraków masterpiece. In a world governed by the Theory of Negatives, the altar was transformed into a prison cell and a torture chamber from which the artist tapped his "message" out to the world. The characters in the asylum became the inmates of an apocalyptic theatre of death (see Figure 31).

Let the Artists Die not only provided an extensive commentary on the theory of heterotopic space but also altered it. The characters who appeared in the space were generated by Kantor's memory. The characters who shared the Room of Memory built three-dimensional pictures out of frequently repeated gestures of everyday reality (washing feet, playing cards, making love, praying, travelling, dying). The images were in a constant process of transformation bereft of any logical, causal, or continuous patterns. These transformations were instigated by the appearance and disappearance of characters from behind the doors. In Kantor's theatre, neither he nor the audience could know what was hidden behind the doors. The doors were the partition behind which a different space existed. This other space had the power to destabilize the

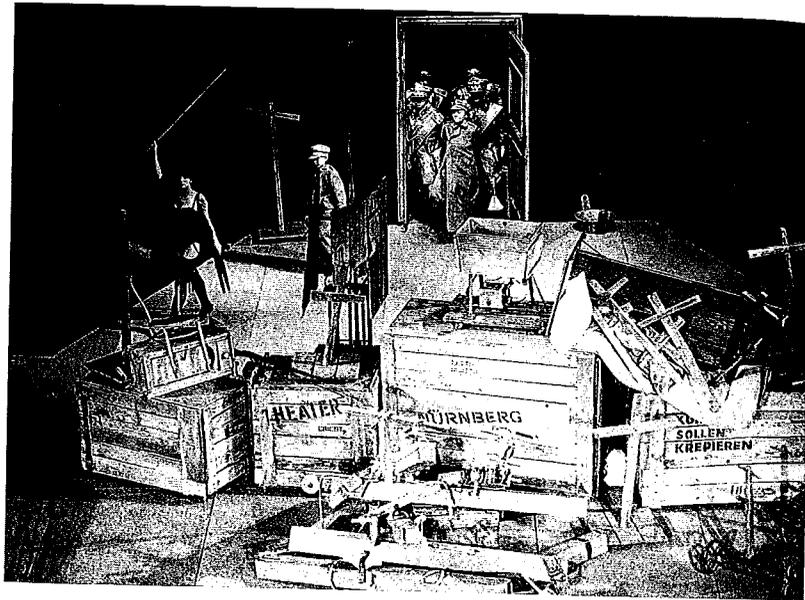


Figure 31. *Let the Artists Die* (1985). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Leszek Dziedzic (1986).

Room of Memory by revealing the forces and shadows that had been rendered invisible, erased, or killed.

The multiple and variable dimensionality of the space of memory, of the Other, were also shaped by the superimposition of negatives from different times. As Kantor indicated, the negatives of memory that were recalled from the past slipped into the present moment. This coexistence of past, present, and future moments was clarified by Kantor's discussion of his figures of the Self (I, the Real One) and of the Other(s) (I, at the age of six and I, the Dying One). The Self posited in front of the mirror surface was observing its relation to the Other(s) located on the other side. The emergence of this relationship in Kantor's theatre made the observer ask some crucial questions.⁶³ Did Kantor, who was approaching a mirror, leave behind three-dimensional, absolute space and time to reveal a multidimensional image? Did Kantor project onto the mirror that fragment of the Self that used to disappear with him as image maker? Is it possible that the moment the Self turned to look at the mirror, he saw himself as a distant ghost, an instant double, the Other(s)? Did the Other acquire its own, autonomous identity, and could it now approach the Self from an unknown direction, from the in-visible (the past: I, at the age of six), and from the un-visible (the future: I, the Dying One)?

Kantor attempted to provide some answers to these questions in his essay "Reflection":

I want to restore to the word "reflection" its essential meaning. [. . .] Neither copying nor recreating is the issue here.

Something far more important is—the extension of our reality beyond its boundaries so that we can better cope with our lives. [. . .]

I am walking forward. There is a mirror in front of me, the invisible boundary of a mirror that marks the beginning of an extension of reality and the time of poetry. [. . .] I am walking forward. Someone, who is another I, is walking up to me. In a moment, we will pass each other or bump into each other. I am thinking about this moment with growing uneasiness. But it does not escape my perception that I am walking, not forward, but in the direction of the depth where I started a moment ago. I am walking forward back.

And then I realize that the other person, the I-Over-There, is walking, not forward, but in the direction of the depth I left behind me. I lift my hat with my right hand. The raised hand is on the right-hand side of my body. He, the Other I, makes the same motion. Even though he does it on the same side of the body, he uses his left hand. I tell him to use his right hand as I did. He obeys. [. . .]

I have noticed that this correction of reversibility gives the right impression of REFLECTION on stage in real space.⁶⁴

By being on stage throughout the performance, Kantor positioned himself within the boundaries of the visible world, organized according to the idea of the permanence of objects. This reality was questioned by him, however, because it excluded the space of the Other generated by the Self "on the other side." The other space was an extension of present reality into the regions of both the past (in-visible) and the future (un-visible), all of which, as the Theory of Negatives pointed out, were coexistent. The Self therefore could encounter all of his own creations at the same time: I, a naked baby; I, at the age of six; I, a barefoot boy in shorts; I, in a school uniform; and I, the Dying One.

Kantor's rendering of the relationship between the in-visible, the visible, and the un-visible can be explained with the help of René Magritte's painting *Décalcomanie* (see Figure 32). Two-thirds of the canvas is occupied by a red curtain, which partially conceals a landscape of sky, sea, and sand. A man in a bowler hat looking out to sea stands beside the curtain. But a closer investigation reveals that the curtain has been cut out in exactly the shape of the man, for the beach is visible in the large opening. As Foucault points out in his essay on Magritte, this painting could be a representation of a man who, having been away from the curtain, exposes what his silhouette hid from the viewer, or the painting could reveal the fragment of landscape that has "leapt aside" before the man turned to look at it. In either case, the canvas reveals

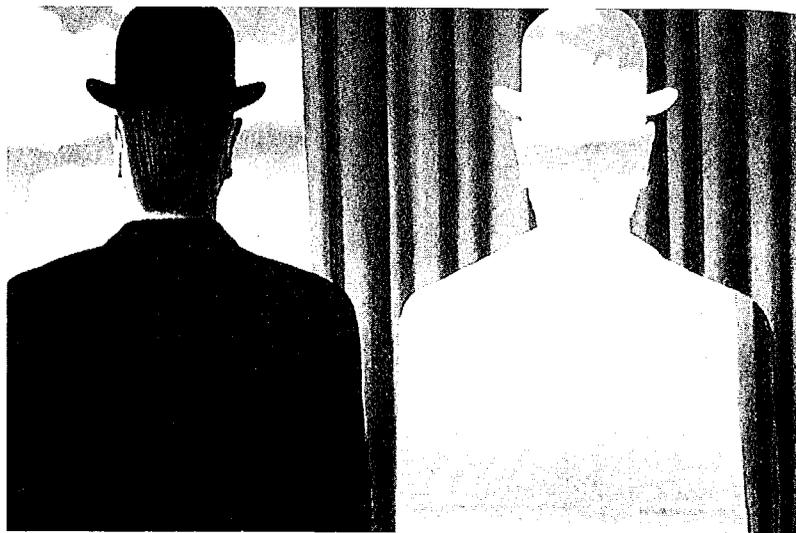


Figure 32. René Magritte, *Décalcomanie* (1966). © C. Herscovici / ARS, New York. Reproduced by permission.

what recognizable objects cover up, prevent from being seen, or render invisible.⁶⁵

I wish to suggest that in *Let the Artists Die*, the images of I, at the age of six and I, the Dying One can be seen as a spatial representation of the images on Magritte's canvas. Moving in the direction of the mirror, the Self perceived its silvered boundary. Faced with the boundary, the Self projected its own image on the surface of that boundary. This image was not, however, a reflection of the Self but was created by the "I-Over-There," the Other (the twin brother) who could not be silenced or appropriated by the Self. The Other was the Self in "a different universe that exists and that can be sensed only through art."⁶⁶ In the Theory of Negatives, the Other-in-a-different-universe contained all possible past, present, and future variants that were generated by the Self. Kantor, the Self in a Room of Memory/cemetery storeroom, could then see himself seeing himself at the age of six seeing himself dying seeing himself ad infinitum.

The process of the Self playing the memories of the Other again and again to constitute and re-constitute itself was enriched by the imposition of the negatives of different historical, moral, and ethical codes on it. In Act II, the Room of Memory was turned into an asylum where the company of travelling artists presented a performance of "Let the Artists Die." "Things are happening that are possible only in a dream.

The only DOOR in this place, which is said to have some great secret meaning, begins to move in our direction."⁶⁷ Veit Stoss, a *personnage trouvé* from "the other side," built an altar. But here, in a world governed by the Theory of Negatives, the altar was transformed into a prison cell. The concept of an artwork born in prison expressed Kantor's fascination with the ambiguity contained in different types of coercion. On the one hand, prison was for him a mechanism of discipline that created docile bodies. Therefore, the closing of gates behind a prisoner was like the closing of the coffin over the dead body. In both cases, the person was "shut off" from exerting any impact on the world of the living. On the other hand, prison was "an idea separated from life by an ALIEN impenetrable barrier," a heterotopic space freed from the external order of things, from social observation, from normalizing judgement, whose powers stopped at the threshold of prison. At the same time,

the man who is already "on the other side" is setting off on his journey. He is going to travel alone [. . .] with nobody but himself to rely on. [. . .] I saw this apparition in front of my eyes in a ghostly landscape of horror. [This apparition] was like an idea that against all reason and logic, cruelly and absurdly, like a taunting grin, hovers at the doorway of my new THEATRE.⁶⁸

Although *Let the Artists Die* contained all the elements of Kantor's theories of theatre, the play's emphasis was on the perception of theatre as an autonomous space in which the Self acknowledged the power of and the desire to be with the image(s) in the mirror. The mirror surface was the site where two simultaneous dimensions converged: the dimension of the mind (Kantor's memory) and the dimension of a theatre space (Kantor's memory enacted). Even though Kantor had always been present on stage during every performance to correct or erase the actors' work, he broke the pattern of reflective space by rejecting any deterministic, reproductive mirroring of real space. Instead, his Room of Memory was ready to be transformed in any direction by energy from behind the doors of the room. In Kantor's theatre, the doors functioned as an opening through which the unknown would burst in and irrevocably alter the network of relations. "It is enough to open [the doors]."⁶⁹

Magritte's *Décalcomanie* exemplifies the process of revealing forces and shadows that have been rendered invisible. Similarly, in Kantor's

theatre, the characters who appeared on stage were like the images of the beach and the sea in the large opening within the space of Magritte's curtain. They were the shadows that had been made in-visible when first conceived in Kantor's memory. During the performance, however, the shadows leapt aside into the space "on the other side," a space not bounded by linear, temporal progressions. In *Let the Artists Die*, the characters who unfolded themselves in the Room of Memory weaved three-dimensional pictures by using gestures from everyday reality. Like the relationship between the spaces in Magritte's painting, the relationship between Kantor's space and the space of his characters was never stable. During this process, in-visible (the past) and un-visible (the future) traces were made visible because of the forces existing behind the doors and because of the laws of reversibility functioning in that space. Consequently, as Kantor asserted in his essay "Reflection," "if we make a step further on this road, it might happen that a smile will turn into a grimace; virtue, into a crime; and a whore, into a virgin."⁷⁰

IV

Las Meninas, a painting by Diego Velázquez (see Figure 33), is a summary par excellence of the relationship between art and its spectators, between Kantor and the audience, and, finally, between the Self and the Other. In the language of mirrors, reflections, doubles, transferences, and transformations, one hears a distant echo of the questions "Who is speaking?" and "Who is there?"

The painter, who is just about to touch a palette, is standing a little back from the painting. His eyes are directed at something or someone positioned beyond the boundaries of the canvas. He is caught in a moment of stillness observing his object. The spectator can easily discern who is caught in the painter's gaze. Is it possible that the painter is representing the spectator? The canvas, a tall rectangle occupying the left portion of the real painting, could resolve the dilemma, but its back is to the spectator. The painter is not the only one who places the spectator in the discourse. She or he cannot evade the gaze of Infanta Margarita, her maid of honour, the dwarf, Nieto, and Martin. The spectator enters the discourse as the privileged subject, expecting, with narcissistic pleasure, to be projected onto the inaccessible surface of the canvas within the picture. But this narcissistic pleasure of thought is suddenly brought to naught by one of the canvases in the painting hanging on the wall exactly opposite the spectator. Whereas the other canvases de-

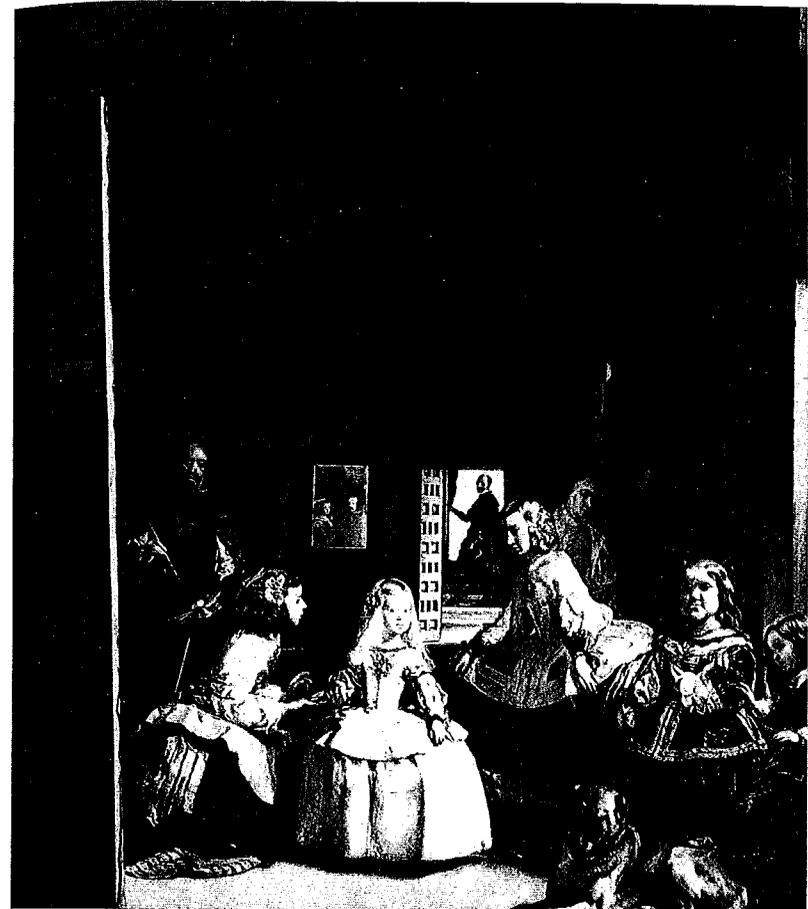


Figure 33. Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas* (1656). © Museo del Prado, Madrid. All rights reserved. Reproduction prohibited.

pict representations hard to decipher, this one shows two silhouettes enveloped in a bright and misty light. Caught by its brightness, the spectator encounters a motionless gaze that leaps out from the canvas/mirror. This sober gaze cuts straight through the whole field of representation and erases all the visible objects. At the same time, it shows what is positioned in front of the painting where the spectator is located: Philip IV and his wife, Mariana. Narcissistic pleasure dissolves because the spectator becomes aware that she or he is dismissed or, to be more precise, has always been dismissed by the gaze of the painter and the other onlookers and has been replaced by the model who,

though invisible, has always been in the space. The king "restores, as if by magic, what is lacking in every gaze: in the painter's, the model, which his represented double is duplicating over there in the picture; in the king's, his portrait, which is being finished off on the slope of the canvas that he cannot perceive from where he stands; in that of the spectator, the real centre of the scene, whose place he himself has taken as though by usurpation."⁷¹

This interplay between various gazes and images is also represented in the theatre of Tadeusz Kantor. In *The Dead Class*, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, and *Let the Artists Die*, Kantor performed a function similar to Philip IV's in *Las Meninas*. In these productions, Kantor deprived the spectator of the narcissistic pleasure of being reflected in the gaze of the actors. Instead, she or he observed the interplay between the observing subject functioning in a three-dimensional space and the object(s) positioned in a multidimensional space "on the other side." This relationship was visualized as a clash between the Self (Kantor) and the Other (his memories) because the Self never went across the boundary to meet the Other. In the earlier productions, Kantor's Room of Memory was transferred to the "other" space not bounded by traditional illusion/representation and temporality. In *The Dead Class*, this space was called the "condition of death"; in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, it was referred to as a room that was "reconstructed again and again"; in *I Shall Never Return*, it was a cemetery storeroom that was transformed into various shapes by energy bursting in from behind the doors and revealing the invisible. The actors were put into motion, corrected, or erased by Kantor, the Self, in front of the mirror.

The image on the other side of the mirror in the multidimensional space was a duplicate of the space of Kantor's memory. The Self and the Other(s) lived in different dimensions. Although the Self and the Other were linked and existed in another and for another, a unification of the Self and the Other was impossible because the Self always stopped at the threshold. Kantor, like Philip IV in Velázquez's painting, was an instigator of the action, but he was never fully a participant; only his "reflection in the mirror," as it were, reminded us of his omnipresence in the picture. The Self continued to live in real space and the Other(s) in an autonomous room controlled paradoxically by the Self, perhaps to monitor the (dis)appearance of memory traces, which existed for a split second before they were given to the infinity of the sea: "Whoever sees these beings [the figures in *Las Meninas*] will understand how hopelessly condemned to sorrow they are. They are living ghosts of people whose truth is death. Whoever looks at them . . . will wonder whether he is the ghost in the presence of these figures. And he will want to save himself with them, to embark on the motionless ship of this room, be-

cause they are looking at him, because he is already in the painting when they look at him. And, perhaps, while he seeks his own face in the mirror, he is saved for a moment from dying."⁷²

V

The desire of the Self to retain memory traces so as to be "saved for a moment from dying" was sufficient to justify the game of subjugation and domination between the Self and the Other(s) in Kantor's *The Dead Class*, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, and *Let the Artists Die*. While working on *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor observed:

When I wanted to die,
someone else was dying for me.
He was playing the part of me dying. [. . .]
When [. . .] I kept returning to the memories
of my School Class,
it was not I, but the others (the actors)
who returned to the school desks.⁷³

Kantor made clear that he wanted to destroy the dichotomy between the Self and the Other, between the spaces here and there, and, finally, between the body and memory:

I understand
this last journey in my life
as well as in my art
as a neverending journey
b e y o n d t i m e
and b e y o n d a l l
r u l e s .⁷⁴

The concept of a journey that happened beyond time and all rules was Kantor's answer to the dichotomy that had dominated his artistic creations for decades. This journey was fully explained in the notes to the production:

I have always stood by the door and . . . waited. . . . In a moment, I shall enter with my "luggage" a shabby and suspicious INN. I am here to attend a meeting with apparitions or people. To say that I have been CREATING them for many, many years would be an overstatement. I gave them life, but they also gave me theirs. They kept wandering with me for a long time and gradually left me at various crossroads and stops. Now we are to meet here. Perhaps for the last



Figure 34. *I Shall Never Return* (1988). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jerzy Borowski.

time. [. . .] They will come to this INN as for the LAST JUDGEMENT to give evidence to our fate and our hopes at the ruins of our Inferno and Heaven, our end of the century.⁷⁵

The inn, “like all inns and bistros, exists somewhere in a forgotten Street of Dreams. All the events that take place there happen at the threshold of time. One more step and we can find ourselves beyond it.”⁷⁶ A Priest, possibly a priest from *Wielopole, Wielopole*, sat asleep at one of the shabby tables. The Innkeeper sat at another table. The Barefooted Dishwasher, in a tattered sack, squatted in a corner. As the Argentine tango “Tiempos viejos” was played, the Marketplace Speaker/Orator, a drunkard, entered to deliver one of his speeches. His words were drowned out by the music. Obtrusive banging and knocking at the inn’s doors were heard. The doors opened and a troupe of wandering actors burst into the space. They were “the apparitions from the past,” characters from Kantor’s previous productions. Some of them were wearing the black uniforms of the Old People from *The Dead Class*, some were in traveling costumes from *The Water-Hen*, and some others wore costumes from *Wielopole, Wielopole* and *Let the Artists Die*. They brought in with them objects from those productions (see Figures 34, 35, and 36).

The actors hurriedly “acted out” fragments from their “plays.” Those fragments and characters were all mixed up; for example, a figure from



Figure 35. *I Shall Never Return* (1988). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jerzy Borowski.

The Dead Class used an object from *Wielopole, Wielopole*. The events on stage were suddenly interrupted by Kantor’s indecisive entrance. Wearing a black suit and carrying an object that resembled a coffin, he sat down at one of the tables. Nobody paid any attention to him. Once he was recognized by the actors, Kantor announced his desire to create the last Emballage:

Dear Actors, Colleagues. [. . .] Yes, in order to create something, create this world in which you will soundly ascend to applause, I have to fall down—and—I am falling. Our paths are reversed. When one is very unhappy, then suddenly some hellish power is born in this trash called man. One should nourish it. First unhappiness, then this power. I have virtually nothing else to say. Ladies and Gentlemen forgive me my evil and be happy. One has to endure it somehow. Stay with me at the bottom for awhile—An artist must always be at the bottom, because only from the bottom can one shout in order to be heard. There, at the bottom, we can understand one another. But later, just do not go down into hell. Perhaps. . . .⁷⁷

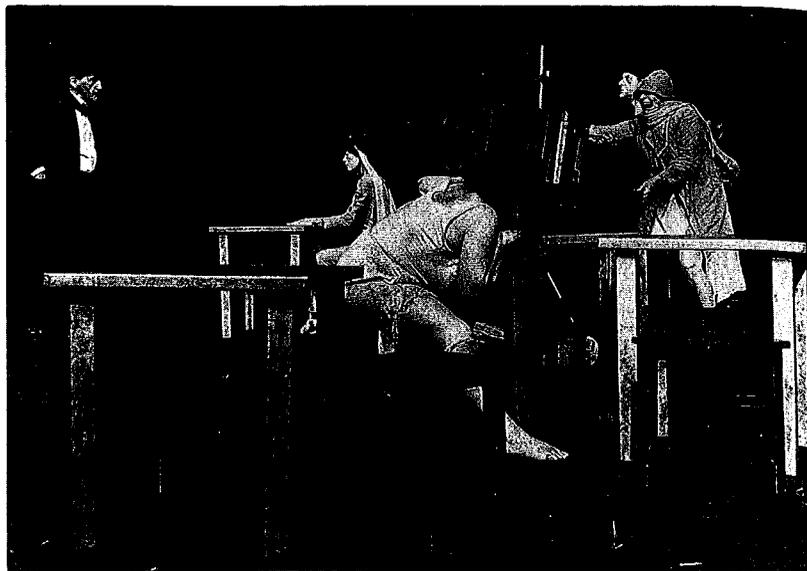


Figure 36. *I Shall Never Return* (1988). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jerzy Borowski.

The “apparitions from the past” interrupted his monologue. “I face them abused, mocked and accused. The machine gun from my *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* fires a burst of shots, without result. It is always like this in illusions and dreams. Untouched, I go out carrying my ‘graveyard’ luggage.”⁷⁸ The sounds of the tango silenced Kantor’s words. Screaming and shouting, all the characters/actors, except for the Innkeeper and the Dishwasher, left the stage.

Kantor appeared a second time as if expecting something important, but this time he was without his coffin. As “Salve Regina” was played, actors and objects reentered from behind the doors. One of the objects was a Young-Kantor Mannequin dressed up for either a wedding or a funeral. A coffin stood next to him (see Figure 37). Until the end of the performance, all scenes flowed between a “real” Kantor standing at the front of the stage and a mannequin Kantor standing at the doors. The characters/actors observed and commented on a wedding ceremony between the Bride-Coffin and the Bridegroom-Mannequin conducted by a Priest (see Figure 38).⁷⁹ This “extraordinary marriage” was followed by a “few surprises” prepared by the Innkeeper as well as by events unplanned by him: the dance of two Bishops from *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear?* the Rabbi from *Wielopole, Wielopole*, characters from *The Water-Hen*, and a parade of the Violinists/Soldiers.



Figure 37. *I Shall Never Return* (1988). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jerzy Borowski.

When the apparitions from the past disappeared, the Dishwasher “drag[ged] on more and more forgotten odds and ends”: Odysseus’ shabby military uniform in which he returned to Kraków in 1944 and “a mournful piece of junk the apparition of my FATHER.”⁸⁰ The wandering actors returned and, without Kantor’s consent, enacted parts of *The Dead Class*. The Innkeeper, who threw the actors out, was trans-

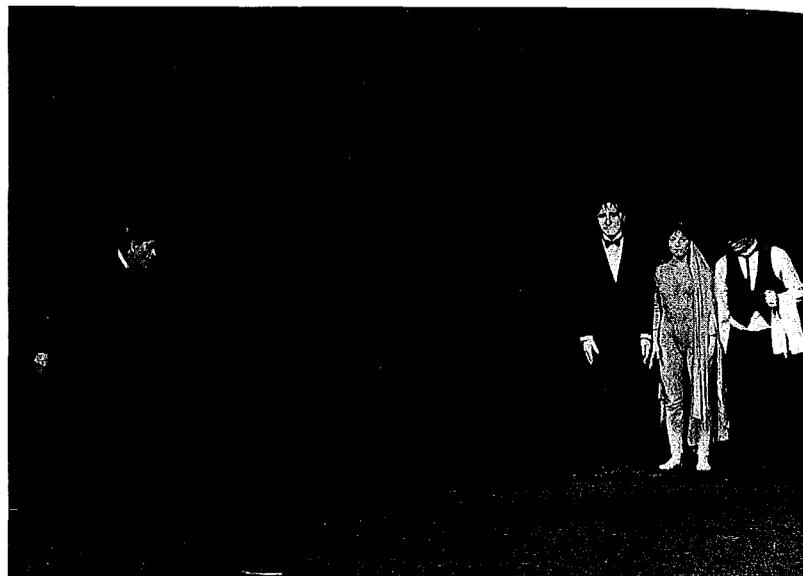


Figure 38. *I Shall Never Return* (1988). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jerzy Borowski.

formed into Odysseus. The story of his return was not shown in the form of the 1944 production but as a collage of scenes from *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, *Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes*, and *The Dead Class* (see Figure 39). Finally, having killed all the lovers with a machine gun/photo camera from *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, Odysseus and Kantor sat at the table (see Figure 40). Odysseus showed him where to read in a script Kantor had written in 1944 while working on Wyspiański's *The Return of Odysseus*: "In my own homeland, I have uncovered hell. I walked into a graveyard. I killed everything. The past's false happiness has fled. There is nothing before me. [. . .] I yearn for a shadow. A boat full of people. [. . .] Who are they? The waves separate me from their voices. The waves separate me from a boat of the dead. Wait! Stop! Stand still!"⁸¹ The apparitions/actors returned and begged Kantor to embark on yet another journey with them, but gravediggers came on stage and started to cover all the props of the grand theatre with black dust sheets/shrouds (see Figure 41). Kantor and the Mannequin left the stage together. The apparitions/actors also disappeared behind the doors. Silence ensued.

By entering the space in *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor altered all the parameters of *topos uchronia* and heterotopia. The Room of Memory/Imagination was no longer activated in real space and then transferred into "imaginary space." The Room of Memory became an autonomous

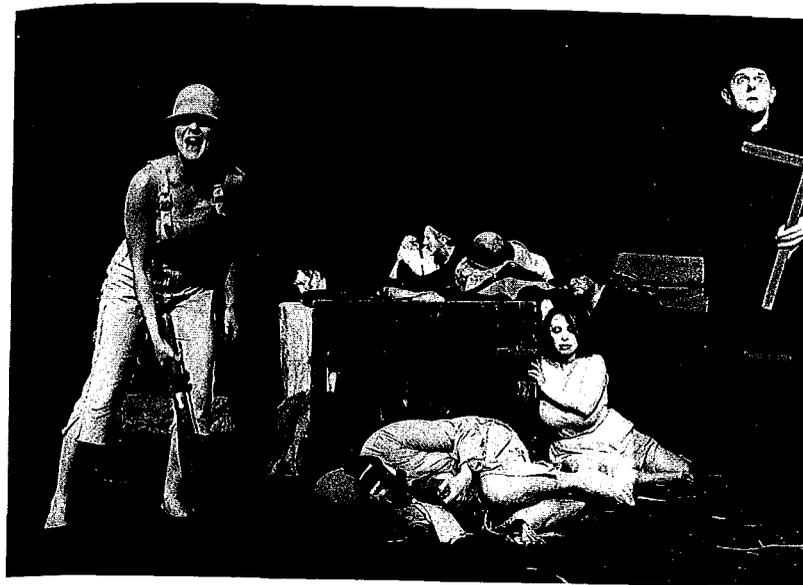


Figure 39. *I Shall Never Return* (1988). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jerzy Borowski.



Figure 40. *I Shall Never Return* (1988). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jerzy Borowski.



Figure 41. *I Shall Never Return* (1988). The Cricoteka Archives. Photo courtesy of Jerzy Borowski.

space of which Kantor no longer served as creator. The characters/appearances/wandering actors existed simultaneously within the spaces of their "plays" and could be transformed to acquire a new dimension by assuming a function of characters from a different "play." For example, two Hasidic Jews from *The Water-Hen* danced the tango from *Where*

Are the Snows of Yesteryear? and the Innkeeper became Odysseus from *The Return of Odysseus*. This coexistence was not, however, limited to the characters/actors; it was also used in the formation of the "acting" space (the inn as a café, a cloakroom, a classroom, a room, an asylum) and of the text (*The Return of Odysseus* presented as a collage from all other productions). As the Theory of Negatives suggested, all those characters, images, lines, and objects created individual negatives that were interimposed into one single negative containing the elements of all other negatives.

As *I Shall Never Return* showed, the space of the overlapping negatives was not a stable space that could have been controlled by Kantor, as he had done in all prior productions. The space in this production was altered by each accidental entrance or exit of Kantor or characters from different dimensions—perhaps from the dimension of a classroom in *The Dead Class*; a room in *Wielopole, Wielopole*; or the inn/asylum in *Let the Artists Die*. Because the apparatus of control ceased to exist and the act of transfer (from life to art) could no longer take place, the space in *I Shall Never Return* did not have its counterpart in any other real or imaginary space. Instead, this space existed for itself and could only fold back on itself. The self-reflexivity of the space was further emphasized by the presence of Kantor in it, functioning alongside other elements from the dimension of art. In this manner, the space of life and the space of art were not parallel or in opposition; rather, they coalesced to share their fate and destiny.

I Shall Never Return was an appropriate title for the production. Having crossed the threshold separating him from traditional art and his previous theatre experiments, Kantor could never return to playing the part of himself controlling, erasing, and correcting the execution of his memories on stage. In the process of transgressing boundaries, he entered the space that

does not have an exit or a boundary;
which is receding, disappearing,
or approaching omnidirectionally with changing velocity. [. . .]
Space is not a passive r e c e p t a c l e . [. . .]
It is space that G I V E S B I R T H to forms!
It is space that conditions the network of relations and tensions between
the objects.⁸²

Kantor's decision to cross the threshold considerably changed the discourse about memory in *I Shall Never Return*. Now memory was defined as an autonomous spatial fold that existed as an overlap of two dimensions: the dimension of Life (Kantor's memory, or "inside") and the dimension of Art (Kantor's memory enacted on stage, or "out-

side"). The emergence of this new formation raised questions about the redoubling of spaces, the formation of inside and outside, and the folding of spaces in Kantor's theatre.

By entering and participating in the events unfolding in the inn, Kantor altered the relationships on both sides of the mirror. Until this production, "the inside" shaped and moulded "the outside" of Kantor's "intimate commentary." A memory trace was identified, then retained, then materialized, and finally dispersed. Interiorization of "the outside" was limited to the exploration of those elements that constituted it for a split second within the boundaries of "the inside." The constitution and reconstitution of the Old People in *The Dead Class*; of the family members' repetitive gestures in *Wielopole, Wielopole*; and of the multiple spaces (a room, a cemetery storeroom, an asylum, and a prison) in *Let the Artists Die* exemplified this process. *I Shall Never Return* showed, however, that the relationship between the inside and outside could no longer be formulated in terms of the interiorization of the outside by Kantor projecting his memories onto the space; rather, the relationship had to be treated in terms of the coexistence of inside and outside.

Whereas Kantor's presence suggested the existence of a physical, visible, three-dimensional universe constituted by the gaze of the Self, the presence of apparitions implied the existence of a mental, multidimensional universe created by the gaze of the Other. This multidimensional universe could not be shaped by the certainties of absolute time and absolute space but was informed by structures that had no correspondence in the world of the body. The space in which Kantor found himself (the inn) was a site where two universes converged in their simultaneous, yet autonomous existences. As *I Shall Never Return* made clear, the new space "inbetween" these universes changed with each accidental entrance or exit of characters from different dimensions.

In this newly created manifold, Kantor's three-dimensional and the apparitions' multidimensional formations became visible and articulated their practices. This manifold, this space inbetween, was self-reflexive, a space constituted by the overlapping of the three-dimensional body and multidimensional mental structures; it was not a reproductive mechanism establishing the authority of one formation over the other. Kantor's entrance, for example, was first unnoticed by the apparitions, who were still involved in "acting out" the parts from past productions. Once they acknowledged his presence, the apparitions altered their behaviour towards one another as well as Kantor. This alteration was self-consistent. Past, present, and future were simultaneously represented by the actors from *I Shall Never Return* playing both their own parts and characters from past productions. All the events unfolding in this manifold were coexistent with the three-

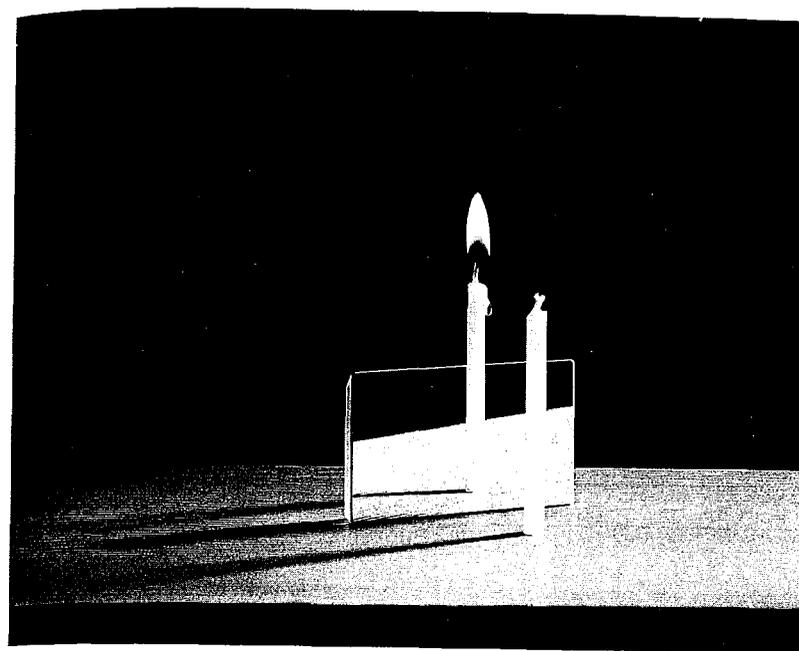


Figure 42. Berenice Abbott, *Parallax* (1958). Courtesy of Berenice Abbott / Commerce Graphics Ltd., Inc., East Rutherford, N.J.

dimensional universe of Kantor and the multidimensional universe of the apparitions.

In Berenice Abbott's photograph "Parallax," two candles exist in an optical relationship that is spatial rather than temporal (see Figure 42). The spectator looking at the photograph sees an unlit candle standing in front of a mirror whose height is three-fourths that of the candle. The silvered surface of a mirror reflects part of a table and of a lit candle. The spectator perceives the discrepancy between the image and its representation, now realizing that the lit candle stands behind the surface of the mirror. The mirror's reflection of three-fourths of the unlit candle is perfectly synchronized with the invisible part of the lit candle behind the mirror. A strong, bright light coming from the side complicates the reading of the image by introducing yet another representation: the shadows of the two candles on the horizontal plane of the table. The shadows indicate that both candles are unlit. The spectator is faced with yet another discrepancy, which increases awareness of the inadequacy of temporal perceptions: the images are both simultaneous and independent, existing in separate spaces as well as in an autonomous and self-reflexive space inbetween.

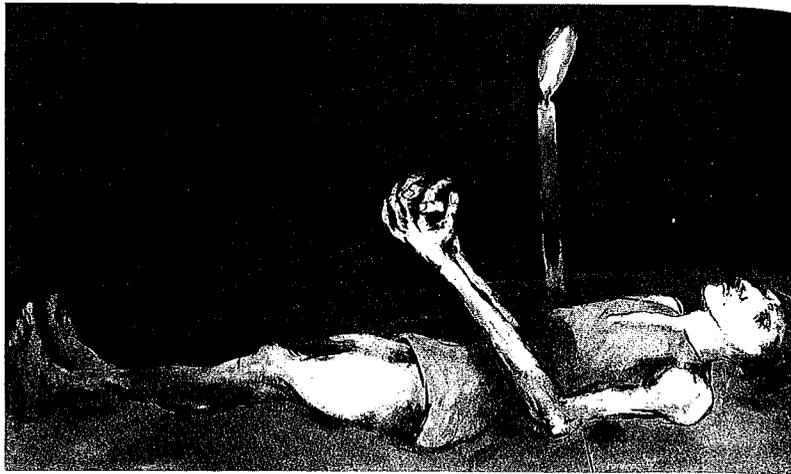


Figure 43. Tadeusz Kantor, *In This Painting, I Shall Always Remain* (1988). Private Collection/Galerie de France, Paris. Photo courtesy of the Cricoteka Archives.

Having found himself the space of the manifold, Kantor encountered the image of the Other that he had frozen in the silvered surface of the mirror and that became alive now in the space inbetween. Kantor the Self met Kantor the Other. In *I Shall Never Return*, both Self and Other watched “memories” on stage folding back on themselves. Even though they would always exist in autonomous universes, the Self and the Other were at last united. The final scene, in which Kantor and the Mannequin leave the stage, epitomized this relationship: the Self embraced the Other, and a coalescence of conscious and unconscious, organic and inorganic, known and unknown, thought and unthought, real and unreal, Eros and Thanatos, was accomplished. As Kantor observed in the catalogue for the 1988 exhibition of his paintings at the Cricoteka (see Figure 43):

“In this painting,
I SHALL ALWAYS REMAIN.”
The painting must be
victorious.⁸³

So will his Room of Memory.

Found Reality

This network of times which approached one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces all possibilities of time. We do not exist in the majority of these times; in some you exist, and not I; in others I and not you; in others both of us. In the present time, which a favourable fate has granted me, you have arrived at my house; in another, while crossing the garden, you found me dead; in still another, I utter these words, but I am a mistake, a ghost.

Jorge Luis Borges, *Labyrinths*

I

Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, January 24, 1991: before the actors entered the stage, a statement written by the members of the Cricot 2 Theatre had been read. The spectators were informed that what they were about to see was the last rehearsal of Kantor’s 1990 *Today Is My Birthday*; that the recorded voice they would hear was Kantor’s voice, which had been recorded during the process of preparing the production; and that the chair standing at the table was Kantor’s, which now, in light of his death on December 8, 1990, would stay unoccupied during the performance.¹

The stage, a simple platform, was filled with objects and people from Kantor’s Room and Inn of Imagination/Memory. Up centre, there was