***The Theatre of Death*: The Uncanny in Mimesis**
Tadeusz Kantor, Aby Warburg, and an Iconography of the Actor;
Or, must one die to be dead?

Mischa Twitchin

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

The Theatre of Death: the Uncanny in Mimesis (Abstract)

The aim of this thesis is to explore an heuristic analogy as proposed in its very title: how does a concept of the "uncanny in mimesis" and of the "theatre of death" give content to each other – historically and theoretically – as distinct from the one providing either a description of, or even a metaphor for, the other? Thus, while the title for this concept of theatre derives from an eponymous manifesto of Tadeusz Kantor's, the thesis does not aim to explain what the concept might mean in this historically specific instance only. Rather, it aims to develop a comparative analysis, through the question of mimesis, allowing for different theatre artists to be related within what will be proposed as a "minor" tradition of modernist art theatre (that "of death"). This comparative enquiry – into theatre practices conceived of in terms of the relation between abstraction and empathy, in which the "model" for the actor is seen in mannequins, puppets, or effigies – is developed through such questions as the following: What difference does it make to the concept of "theatre" when thought of in terms "of death"? What thought of mimesis do the dead admit of? How has this been figured, historically, in aesthetics? How does an art of theatre participate in the anthropological history of relations between the living and the dead? In this history, how have actors been thought to represent the dead – not in the interpretation of fictional "characters" (from the dramatic canon), but in their very appearance, before an audience, as actors? How might (a minor history of) modernist theatre practice be considered in terms of an iconography of such appearances – as distinct from a question of actor training, still less as a question of written drama?

***The Theatre of Death*: The Uncanny in Mimesis**

Tadeusz Kantor, Aby Warburg, and an Iconography of the Actor;

Or, Must one die to be dead?

The events surrounding the historian, and in which he himself takes part, will underlie his presentation in the form of a text written in invisible ink. The history which he lays before the reader comprises, as it were, the citations occurring in this text, and it is only these citations that occur in a manner legible to all. To write history thus means to cite *history. It belongs to the concept of citation, however, that the historical object in each case is torn from its context.*

Walter Benjamin [*Arcades Project*, N11,3]

Table of contents

***The Theatre of Death*: The Uncanny in Mimesis**

Introduction: *Thinking of the dead through a concept of theatre* (part one)

When I speak of truth, I'm not thinking of the weight of moral significance attached to this word, but of the formal consequences of it. Truth, for me, is the counterbalance to the stylisations employed in theatre and literature...

Cricot has always had a very precise artistic-conceptual programme: a programme precisely defined at each stage of our investigations...

The artist "creates" more or less within the artistic conventions dominant in a given period. I would cite the example of Wyspianski, who has an impeccable individuality, but whose art lies entirely within the period of the Secession, Art Nouveau, and Modernism...

 – Tadeusz Kantor[1]

These three observations made by Tadeusz Kantor (in conversation with Krzysztof Miklaszewski, in 1981) offer particular, historical instances of general, theoretical concerns that are addressed throughout this thesis. Principally, that the theatre in question, in its concept, is not one of entertainment simply, but one that explores the meaning of an aesthetic and anthropological truth – concerning what it is that theatre makes apparent, visible, or known about human being(s) within cultural memory; specifically, as a form of mnemotechnics that addresses the dead. Theatrical research in this context (as concerns a "precise artistic-conceptual programme") distinguishes art from kitsch, form from mere style, and performance from simply professional production or the applications of technique, however effective for an audience these might be. The question of truth is rarely posed in a context in which success, in practice, is typically understood in terms of command over resources, as an inscription of ambition within institutionally mediated relations with audiences, and as conformity to prevailing "standards" of production. By contrast to these conditions of practice, questions of "formal consequence", "artistic-conceptual programme", and the relation between "creativity" and "convention" or "period", will inform the

---

[1] Tadeusz Kantor, "On the State of Things, the Avant-Garde, Innovation, Luck, Truth, and Success" (1981), in Krzysztof Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.86 and p.87.

thought of theatre in this thesis, as these resonate, specifically, through Kantor's concern with what is avant-garde.[2]

With respect to "professional" criteria, an *art* of theatre concerns the exception – not in an abstract sense, but as it occurs historically (as indeed a question of theatre history); not least, that of the *modern* (or so-called experimental) theatre of the last century, in the thought of an aesthetic avant-garde in a Europe still divided by the Cold War. Although it is a quarter of a century since the "fall" of the Berlin Wall, this – divided – European history informs much of the reception of Kantor's theatre that will be cited here, a history that generated a sense of period (and of artistic convention) that cannot be simply relegated to a "dispensable" past for an understanding of what remains present of that work today. It sometimes seems as if the "victory" of the former West (the formerly proclaimed "end of history") now extends backward to rewrite the past from the point of view of a future was not then part of its present.[3] After all, the walls of the former Eastern Jericho did not come tumbling down at the blasts of the neo-liberal ram's horn, but crumbled through the friability of their own mortar.[4]

---

[2] This could be compared with Kantor's friend, and one of the co-founders of the Cricot 2, Maria Jarema (*cf.* Laurie Koloski, *Painting Krakow Red: Politics and Culture in Poland, 1945-1950*, PhD Thesis, Stanford University, June 1998, pp.254-56).

[3] This retroactive (or revisionist) attempt to write out of history any sense of an "alternative" to what now appears as a universal "post"-modernity was already anticipated by such German writers as Günter Grass and Heiner Müller at the time of the European "reunification"; and has been subsequently remarked within art history, for instance, by Hans Belting (*cf.* chapter 7 in *Art History after Modernism*, trans. Caroline Saltzwedel, *et al*., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003 [esp. pp.58-61]). A contrasting sense of the post-Yalta European settlement as necessary for understanding the 1980s politics of martial law in Poland is offered by Jakub Berman (one of the Stalinist governing triumvirate, 1944-56), in Teresa Toranska, *Oni: Stalin's Polish Puppets* (trans. Agnieszka Kolakowska, London: Collins Harvill, 1987, p.309). The contemporary phantom (spectre or symptom) of this alternative (precisely its seeming lack or absence) will be returned to in the last section of part two of this Introduction (*Elimination*).

[4] The Czech dissident Jan Urban observes of the Velvet Revolution, for instance: "It's not that we won – it's that they collapsed." As Marci Shore, who records Urban's reflections, comments: "Urban could not remember any occasion from the 'old days' when they [Charta 77] had discussed the future, what would come after communism. There were no such expectations; the dissidents had no project, no future of their own. And this, he thought now, had been their great mistake." [Marci Shore, *The Taste of Ashes*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2013, p.33.] In Poland, however, the KOR and Solidarity negotiations with the Party set an example before the imposition of Martial Law, under which then a virtual "alternative society" operated in Poland.

The impossibility of thinking of history through its "end(s)" remains all too evident, even retrospectively (always unforeseen by any so-called "intelligence agency"), while contemporary capitalism (still subscribing to its colonialist myths) continues to lay waste to its erstwhile European "home", all the more cynically whilst advocating "democratic values". Under the subtitle of "the end of Europeanism", Stathis Kouvelakis remarks, for example, in his introduction to the SOAS Research on Money and Finance group's analysis of the Euro zone crisis:

> The dark side of Europeanism has now come to the surface: blaming the losers, the 'lazy' and 'profligate' southerners, has now become the conventional wisdom of the mainstream media and politicians. It is crucial however to stress here that the revival of these racist stereotypes should not be understood as a return to the past, even if it draws heavily from an old Orientalist stockpile. This intra-European neo-racism is rather the purest outcome of the newly polarised reality created by the internal logic of so-called 'European integration', the realities of which were already quite familiar to the inhabitants of the European *Mezzogiorno* constituted by the former Eastern Bloc countries.[5]

Concerning aesthetic work, Jaroslaw Kozlowski, reflecting on the history of Polish conceptualism in 1990 (immediately after the demise of the Communist Party's proclaimed "leading role", not only in society but also in History), evokes this situation in comparative terms, fearful, precisely, of an incipient cultural-historical universalism by and for the former West:

> Because of the very strong Constructivist tradition in Polish art (and perhaps also because of the economic situation in our country), the artwork in Poland has never been understood as an object, a product you can sell. It has always

---

[5] Stathis Kouvelakis, "Introduction", in Costas Lapavitsas (*et al.*), *Crisis in the Euro Zone*, London: Verso, 2012, p.xix. To be quite clear how perniciously ingrained these racist stereotypes are, they are propagated in defiance of the OECD's own statistical data, which state that "the Greeks are the reigning champions of work at 2,119 hours a year. They 'work' 52% more than the Germans (1,380 hours). The Greeks also work longer. In Greece, 31% of the population aged 59-65 work, compared to 23% in Germany...", as quoted by Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of the Indebted Man*, trans. Joshua Jordan, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012, p.194.

been regarded as a message, a way of thinking, of investigating reality, an intellectual and moral process in order to decode the sense of the world... I am very much afraid that we will slowly lose the philosophical aspects that have always been essential and characteristic of Polish art in the sixties, seventies and eighties and which provide a different function of art in Poland compared to that in the West.[6]

The point here is not whether Kozlowski's claims about this historical situation of and for Polish art (beyond that of his own work, at least) are true, but simply that they made sense for him in trying to address the end of the "short" twentieth century[7] from a point of view distinct from – or compared with – that of the former West.[8] Here, Eric Hobsbawm stands for any number of critics and historians who have observed the "unique sense" of artists "being needed by their public" in Eastern Europe during the post-War period, when he writes: "Indeed, in the absence of real politics and a free press, practitioners of the arts were the *only* ones who spoke for what their people, at least the educated among them, thought and felt."[9] The issue here is to engage (however superficially in translation) with the "period" controversies and contestations that gave form to such thought and feeling; and to engage with the fact that the heterogeneity of aesthetic truth between East and West was not predicated on homogeneity within either bloc.

---

[6] Jaroslaw Kozlowski, "On Poland", quoted by Martin Patrick in "Polish Conceptualism of the 1960s and 1970s", in *Third Text*, Spring 2001, p.45.

[7] "The Short Twentieth Century, that is to say... the years from the outbreak of the First World War to the collapse of the USSR which, as we can now see in retrospect, forms a coherent historical period that has now ended," Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London: Abacus, 1995, p.5. (Hobsbawm credits the former President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Ivan Berend, for this concept of historical period, *ibid.*, p.xii.) Alain Badiou refracts this "short century" through the threefold prism of the "Soviet century", the "totalitarian century", and the "liberal century" (in *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Cambridge: Polity, 2007). Kantor's own lifetime – 1915-1990 – curiously enough spans precisely the years of this "century".

[8] This is not simply to concur with Hans Belting's "two voices" approach (*Art History after Modernism*, p.61) to European modernism, but at least to acknowledge it. This is addressed by Piotrowski (below), putting in question an art history that would ignore differences in situation (as also "period"), as distinct from simply affirming an "alternative" historical perspective (undermining the project of one "universal" history only by asserting another). The phrase "former West" here is not simply an historical description but refers to an ongoing research project under the aegis of BAK (basis voor actuele kunst), in Utrecht: http://www.formerwest.org/.

[9] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London: Abacus, 1995, p.506.

This relation between art-culture and society evoked by Hobsbawm in the former East can also be compared with Zygmunt Bauman's recent observation, echoing Kozlowski's fear of a quarter century ago, that: "If artists have no great and momentous tasks to perform, if their creations serve no other purpose than to bring fortune and fame to a chosen few and entertainment and personal pleasure to their beneficiaries, then how are they to be judged except by the public hype that happens to accompany them at any given moment?"[10] The question of truth in the making of art – distinct from professional or commercial successes – has itself to be recognised by theatre historians, if they are to address the creative inspiration in and of the work that they study. What is at stake in such work is not what may be described analytically, but what of its after life is to be transmitted or communicated; what it is that makes the thought of an artistic work significant. The question as to how (and why) certain works remain *aesthetically* challenging, even anachronistically, is of fundamental importance to this thesis' exploration of a possible concept of the "theatre of death".

As shall be seen in part three of the thesis, Kantor's art was constantly engaged in polemical confrontations with ways of making sense of the Polish context prior to 1990; for instance, denouncing a "pseudo-avant-garde" in the visual arts – including theatre making – from the late 1960s on.[11] That his work may be thought to "transcend" this former East European context typically means today that it can be assimilated into a "universal" art-theatre history that simply glosses its own historical particularity. Whilst a critical sense of the "end of the avant-garde" has been well established since the 1960s – not least in the appeal of and to a "neo-avant-garde", which has since been subsumed within a generalised promotion of "post-modernism",

---

[10] Zygmunt Bauman, *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, trans. Lydia Bauman, Cambridge: Polity, 2011, p.15. This echoes the familiar Kantian sense of art as exemplary in its freedom from "values" other than its own, as essentially imaginative [*pace* Jacques Derrida's close reading of sections in the third Critique, for example, in "Economimesis", trans. Richard Klein, in *Diacritics*, June 1981]. It can also be compared with the mordant reflection of Martin Simecka, who Marci Shore quotes, commenting that: "In 1989 East Europeans had hoped that they would have something to teach, to give to Western Europe; they cherished the conviction that the experience of suffering had made them more sensitive, more inquisitive, more intellectual. 'Today,' Martin said, 'that hope looks pathetic.'" [Shore, *op. cit.,* p.349.]

[11] Besides the already cited Belting, Hobsbawm, and Bauman, reference concerning the "end of the avant-garde" will be made to essays by (for example) Peter Bürger, Donald Kuspit, Yves-Alain Bois, and Martin Puchner.

as the abandonment of any specifically aesthetic truth value in art – a sense of the avant-garde beyond the Iron Curtain (at least, here, in the example of Poland) must be recalled before Kantor's particular position may be addressed historically, and therefore theoretically, "today" (in English).[12]

In so far as the understanding of this thesis is itself historically limited by the particularity of translation(s) – when and why do certain materials get published in translation (as a question of what constitutes a field of knowledge)?[13] – it nonetheless attempts to address "period" questions of aesthetic truth, as these themselves put into question such limitations of understanding through translation(s). How concepts of historical research inform those of aesthetics (and of the archives in which the *work* of art, including theatre, is remembered) is one of the key concerns of this thesis – not least, as this is already in question for Kantor himself, in the relation between the concepts of "the theatre of death" and of a "living archive" (which will be addressed in part three).

The second of Kantor's observations (cited in the epigraph above) addresses the conditions of and for theatre making (or research) as that of an ensemble – the Cricot 2 – where claims of authorial uniqueness do not so much provide a means of explanation as stand in need of explanation themselves. Despite the referencing of named sources, the authorial subject in this thesis is "artistic-conceptual" rather than simply biographical. This thesis is concerned with the meanings implied – or generated – by a concept of the theatre of death, rather than with any author who may

---

[12] As simply one example, we might note the complex history of Fluxus East, *cf. Fluxus East*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007. It is conspicuous that "beyond" and "behind" in referring to the cultural space defined by the Iron Curtain in English are themselves predicated on the point of view of the former West.

[13] The paradox of English as the contemporary "lingua franca" is recognised by – for example – many Polish galleries and museums in their catalogue publications, as well as the work of the Mickiewicz Institute actively promoting literary translations since the accession of Poland to the EU. Crucially, however, this activity is little reciprocated by Anglophone monograph publishers; but, just as crucially, this concern with international "accessibility" was already characteristic from the late 1960s for some Polish galleries. Many of the artists' manifestos and critical texts that will be referred to here were originally published, alongside their Polish editions, in both English and French versions also.

be thought to have "originally" produced such meanings.[14] While the concept of the theatre of death is an abstraction from the research that informs it, it is not (*pace* the third of Kantor's observations) to be understood in the abstract but contextually, where the conceptual is understood historically; not least, as this raises a question of aesthetic truth concerning the modernism to which it testifies.

In the case of Kantor this question of truth – both of and for modernism, and thus of and for an understanding of its afterwards that is not simply "post"-modern – refers to an understanding of the avant-garde which is not defined by the "tacit assumptions of modernist artistic geography" (as Piotrowski identifies these in the *October* group's canon, for instance[15]). While this "geography" has – still – to be considered in relation to the Cold War ("in the shadow of Yalta", as Piotrowski discusses it), this historical refraction (*pace* Kozlowski) must itself be theorised, rather than accepted as a given condition of and for such historicisation. Eric Hobsbawm, for instance, observes:

> On the old Continent, to some extent following the American trend, which now inclined to associate modernism with 'Western values', abstraction ('non-figurative art') in the visual arts and modernism in architecture became part, sometimes the dominant part, of the established cultural scene, even reviving in countries like Britain, where it had seemed to stagnate. Yet from the end of the 1960s a marked reaction against it became increasingly manifest and, in the 1980s, fashionable under such labels as 'postmodernism'. It was not so much a 'movement' as a denial of any pre-established criteria of judgement and value in the arts, or indeed of the possibility of such judgments.[16]

As noted before, this is not a question of simply reversing perspectives, but of considering how the former East and former West are inscribed in the historical reception of artistic work, including "theatre"; that is, as a question of and for a

---

[14] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald Bouchard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.
[15] Piotr Piotrowski, "The Spatial Turn", in *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2012. (Piotrowski's critique of the Western-oriented "vertical" history of modernist art addresses the October group's monumental *Art Since 1900*, amongst other examples, pp.25-26.)
[16] Hobsbawm, *op. cit.,* pp.515-16.

contemporary understanding, both then and now. It is a moot point, after all, how far the situation in Anglophone arts research (at least in theatre) has changed – despite the increasing availability of work in translation – since Krzysztof Wodiczko could observe (in 1986) that: "Poland is marginalised less by lack of information about art in the West than by the lack of information about art in Poland available in the West."[17]

The question of "information" here is not simply one of its availability, but of understanding what such information may already be thought to be. The significance of availability (or its lack) itself informs an understanding of what is (or may be) in question as, precisely, "information". This thesis, written in English, attempts to outline how both the concept and context of *the theatre of death* may be construed, both historically and theoretically, as a question (in part) of reading such material as is indeed available in translation. Although, for pragmatic reasons, the thesis offers only limited comparative analysis with other European theatre artists, it attests to the possibility of an Anglophone construction of a concept that – even in its specific reference to Kantor – is not, however, defined in, or by, those of its sources that were written in Polish.

At a fundamental level – concerning such "information" – there is the example, within those Polish sources, of a profound sense of dialogue between artist and theorist; for example, as conceptual art informed the sense of an avant-garde in the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than Anglophone academic theatre scholars (such as Herbert Blau, Marvin Carlson, Joseph Roach, and Alice Raynor), this thesis draws on the work of such art theorists as Wieslaw Borowski, Andrzej Turowski, Artur Sandauer, and Jerzy Ludwinski – who not only commented on art but were "at the same time... locating theories as if within [art's] enclave..." As Andrzej Kostolowski, himself a participant in this history, continues:

> In this connection, besides the activities of the critics-cum-organisers of the
> Foksal and Mona Lisa galleries [in Warsaw and Wroclaw, respectively],
> mention is due to a practice that developed from the late 1960s which

---

[17] Krzysztof Wodizcko, quoted in Martin Patrick, *op cit.*, p.45.

consisted in the publication – after the pattern of catalogues – of limited editions of theoretical brochures..., performative lectures..., and art theoretical declarations.[18]

This sense of theoretical production informing artistic presentation (and vice versa) also characterises "avant-garde" theatre in Poland at this time, with such collaborations as those of Grotowski with Ludwik Flaszen, and of Kantor with both Mieczyslaw Porebski in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and with Wieslaw Borowski from the mid-1960s on.[19]

It is perhaps worthwhile to quote here, at due length, Kostolowski's discussion of this phenomenon, as he evokes many aspects of what was at stake in the question of "information" concerning the period addressed in this thesis, which provides a context for considering later the theatre of death in the specific example of Kantor's work (as a return, for instance, during the 1970s, to "the closed work" of art).

> Beginning in 1964, within this multifunctional system, almost unprecedented in other countries, developed radical 'independent' galleries of the first generation, run by artists and critics. (Those operating later in the 1970s are classified as the second generation; these, rather than the earlier ones, were called 'authorial'.) The undertakings discussed were totally or almost totally non-commercial. Though bureaucrats were on the alert for any 'abuse' of liberties there, they were the genuine micro-worlds of those years to use Piotr Piotrowski's term. They mainly deserve the credit not just for the cultivation of imagination but for what may be called silent though ceaseless struggle against the checking of imagination. Perhaps one of the reasons why this art grew more radical was that those concerned exerted themselves to clear a

---

[18] Andrzej Kostolowski, "Polish Conceptual Inventions", trans. Joanna Holzman, in *Experience of Discourse: 1965-1975. Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art*, Pawel Polit and Piotr Wozniakiewicz (eds.), Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000, p.202.

[19] It is worth noting that Artur Sandauer was a member of the Krakow Group of artists; and mention should also be made of the so-called "Krakow school of criticism" that developed under the aegis of Kazimierz Wyka at the Jagellonian University, which included Ludwik Flaszen, Jan Blonski, and Konstanty Puzyna, all of whom will be referred to here; *cf.* "Returning to the Garden of Childhood: Krystian Lupa in conversation with Jean-Pierre Thibaudet and Béatrice Picon-Vallin," trans. Jancis Clarke, *et al.*, in *Polish Theatre Perspectives* 1.1 (2010), n.13, p.284.

passage through what offered resistance and acted as a barrier. A peculiar kind of 'poverty' or stopping at what was the phase of almost *pure discourse* was a good solution in the face of continual shortage of supplies. What in the West resulted from satiation and the consumer world's attitude coming close to aggression, was almost practically motivated in Poland.[20]

While Kantor's relation to the development of conceptualism in Poland is complex (including associated work in the emergent field of what would be called by the mid-70s "performance art"[21]), Kostolowski's account serves to recall a context that was not "always already" that of a former Western academic reception (starting with the CNRS in Paris and the major studies of Kantor's theatre commissioned by Denis Bablet[22]).

> It should be added that the galleries and related symposia and workshops were financed from state funds (there being no other sources) within the framework of activities of houses of culture, clubs, artist and student organisations, the opposition of which was to some extent the effect of pressures exerted by artists and critics. They simply had to be there, as necessary as safety valves or thermostats. All-embracing totalitarianism, like that in the USSR, was not possible in Poland. There was too much individualism here. Besides, members of the intelligentsia had developed too much liking for coffee, shaded tables at cafes, cabarets and galleries for the authorities to deprive them of the last meeting-places where they felt at home. Such were the *caves of*

---

[20] Andrzej Kostolowski, "Polish Conceptual Inventions", trans. Joanna Holzman, in *Experience of Discourse: 1965-1975. Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art*, Pawel Polit and Piotr Wozniakiewicz (eds.), Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000, p.202.

[21] The institutional appearance of the word "performance" in Poland (it not being a term, in this sense, in Polish) in a gallery context in 1978 – and subsequently as the title of a book by Grzegorz Dziamski in 1984 – is discussed by Lukasz Guzek in his essay, "Above Art and Politics – Performance Art and Poland", in Richard Martel (ed.), *Art Action: 1958-1998*, Quebec: Les Éditions Intervention, 2001, pp.254-6.

[22] As Elie Konigson notes, introducing the re-edition of the second of the CNRS volumes dedicated to Kantor edited by Bablet: "Kantor's celebrity in the West owes a great deal, if not all, to the tireless work of presentation and analysis which Denis Bablet devoted to him" (Konigson, "Avant-propos", in "Tadeusz Kantor 2", *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale* 18, Paris: CNRS, 2005 [1993], p.7). Also, "Tadeusz Kantor 1", *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale* 11, Paris: CNRS, 2005 [1983].

conceptualism. After Piotrowski, we may see them in terms of a 'silent discourse', a 'form of resistance against the system'...[23]

Kantor himself played a very particular role in this post-war Polish artistic context, using the "privilege" of his many contacts with, and visits to, the (former) West to promulgate his own sense of avant-garde aesthetic "developments", such as *informel* in the 1950s, or Happenings in the 1960s.[24] It is in terms of these dialogues that the specificity of the Cricot 2 for thinking through theatre history takes on renewed meaning today – in comparison, for example, to the Grotowski legacy. Rather than being simply assimilated into the canon of international festival theatre presentations (which has, typically, informed Anglophone reception of such artists' work), the aim here is to acknowledge the limitations of an Anglophone analysis without that acknowledgment limiting the sense of conceptual or theoretical dialogue – upon which Kantor himself insisted so resolutely – in addressing questions of theatre aesthetics. After all, the question of "resistance against the system" – against the "professional" pressures that limit the imagination with respect to the conceptualisation of theatre practice – is of no less significance in the present century than the past one.

While Kantor is not the author of the concept of "the theatre of death" (in the terms of the present thesis), this specific title is nonetheless the name of a manifesto written by him and initially published – to accompany the Cricot 2 production of that year, *The Dead Class* – by the Foksal Gallery, Warsaw, including an English translation by Piotr Graff, in November 1975. The production premiered on the 15th November at the Krzysztofory Gallery, Krakow, a date which is significant for also being the anniversary of the inaugural meeting, in 1956, of the Krakow Group Artists Association – the organisation under whose aegis the Cricot 2 worked, at its "home" in the Krzysztofory.[25] Subsequent English translations of Kantor's manifesto have

---

[23] Andrzej Kostolowski, "Polish Conceptual Inventions", trans. Joanna Holzman, in *Experience of Discourse: 1965-1975. Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art*, Pawel Polit and Piotr Wozniakiewicz (eds.), Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000, p.202.

[24] This aspect of Kantor's "influence" is discussed by, for example, Piotrowski in his history, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2005.

[25] The Krakow Group was formally registered the following year, May 13th, 1957 (*Grupa Krakowska*, exhibition catalogue, with an essay "Avant-garde tradition and Traditional

been published by (former) Western academic institutions, indicating a migration of the Anglophone critical reception of the related performance work from galleries to universities, even during its own life time – a migration that accompanied the concomitant international embrace of the Cricot 2 by established theatre spaces also.[26]

The Dead Class (in three different versions) toured the world up until Kantor's death in 1990, and it was even performed "posthumously" during 1991-92, alongside Cricot 2 performances of the "last rehearsal" of *Today is my Birthday*, the production on which the company was working at the time of Kantor's death.[27] The relation between the terms "theatre" and "death" – especially where the meaning of performance is marked, in its very concept, by the mortality of an artist; where it is not simply a question of a play that can be "put on" through the reproductive practices of professional theatre – concerns the very possibility of theatre *studies*, addressing the after life of performance as both the material of a "theatre without theatre"[28] and, indeed, the very concept of its study. The *theatre of death* names not only an object of research, therefore, but also the very possibility of that research – in the migration of

Avant-garde" by Hanna Wroblewska, trans. Pawel Skalinski, Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery, 1996, p.21).

[26] The Polish text of the manifesto is reprinted as part of the Foksal Gallery archives [Malgorzata Jurkiewicz, Joanna Mytkowska, & Andrzej Przywara (eds.), *Tadeusz Kantor in the Foksal Gallery Archive*, Warsaw: Foksal Gallery, 1998, pp.302-311], and was republished in 1979 [*ibid.*, pp.338-39]. The manifesto was subsequently published, in a new English translation by Vog and Margaret Stelmaszynski, in *Canadian Theatre Review*, 16 (Fall 1977), which was reprinted in *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, ed. Bohdan Drozdowski, London: John Calder, 1979; and then again in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Another translation was subsequently made by Michal Kobialka and published in his book *Further On, Nothing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

[27] See the chronology of Cricot 2 performances, in Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.304. Films of each of these three versions were made, respectively, by Andrzej Wajda, Denis Bablet, and Nat Lilenstein (*cf.* "Returning to the Garden of Childhood: Krystian Lupa in conversation with Jean-Pierre Thibaudet and Béatrice Picon-Vallin," trans. Jancis Clarke, *et al.*, in *Polish Theatre Perspectives* 1.1 (2010), n.24, p.291).

[28] This is the title of an exhibition held in Barcelona and Lisbon [Manuel Borja-Villel, *et al.*, *A Theatre Without Theatre*, Barcelona: MACBA, 2007], which can be compared with a long history of similar exhibitions within the visual arts, to cite simply Paul Schimmel's *Out of Actions* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1998] and Harald Szeemann's *When Attitudes become Form* [Christian Rattemeyer, *et al.*, *Exhibiting the New Art*, London: Afterall Books, 2010], as "primary documents" of a seemingly continually forgotten curatorial history within institutional cultural memory. Another recent example would be *Explosion! Painting as Action*, curated by Magnus af Petersens, at the Moderna Museets, Stockholm [London: Moderna Museets and Koenig Books, 2012].

an idea from the avant-garde to the academic, already associated in Kantor's own life time with that of an archive. The general sense of this constellation will be addressed in parts one and two of this thesis, and its specific "example" in part three.

Analogy and aporia

The very title of this dissertation – *The Theatre of Death*: The Uncanny in Mimesis – itself offers a summary of its thesis, with the suggestion that something called (historically) "the theatre of death" may be understood in relation to something else called (theoretically) "the uncanny in mimesis".[29] Rather than simply a statement (in which one term "explains" the other) – as if, for instance, to answer the question "what is 'the theatre of death?'" – this relation of terms (marked by the colon, which both joins and separates them) suggests rather a twofold analogy: as theatre is to the uncanny, so death is to mimesis; and (or) as theatre is to mimesis, so death is to the uncanny. With this heuristic analogy, both parts of the thesis title are to be considered equally historical and theoretical – where the concept of theatre is as much theoretical as that of mimesis is historical, and where both are addressed by an uncanny question "of death".

Both parts of the analogy make their own demands upon understanding and should no more be condensed into a metaphor (as if each term could be substituted, in "explanation", for the other) than into a statement (concerning what either term "is" or means). Indeed, developing a conceptual understanding of "the theatre of death" – as proposed by this thesis – would distinguish this evocative title from the numerous metaphorical uses to which it may be put, as though its meaning were already understood (examples of which will be given in a later section of this Introduction [*Metaphor*]). To qualify this analogy as heuristic might, however, seem to suggest that it is simply literary; a ruse, perhaps, to evade the modernist injunction that "thou shalt not regress" from the rational thought of distinctions into an irrational belief in affinities[30] – as between animate and inanimate, visible and invisible, reality and fiction, being and appearance; or, indeed, between the living and the dead.

---

[29] The structure of the thesis in three parts already complicates this, forestalling the lure of the mimetic *in theory* (through which, nonetheless, the historical example of Kantor's "theatre of death" is to be addressed).

[30] Isabelle Stengers, "Reclaiming Animism", in *Animism: Modernity Through the Looking Glass*, ed. Anselm Franke and Sabine Folie, Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2011, p.183. Horst

There is, after all, an aporia in addressing "the dead", whose mode of existence is, apparently, non-existence; who are not discernibly subject to Cartesian co-ordination in space and time (even theatrically), in contrast – again, apparently – to either actors or audiences. Despite the ubiquitous scholarly attribution of the qualities of persons to fictions (in the interpretation of characters) in the modern or disenchanted world – often, even, in the name of (literary or dramatic) ghosts – it is supposed to be known that the dead don't exist; indeed, that they live on (or survive) only in superstition. In a sense, this thesis (concerning the art of *theatre*) is part of an archaeology of such a "knowledge"; one that jealously commands not only its adherents, but universally aims to define in advance "our capacity to affect and be affected – that is to feel, think, and imagine"[31] with respect to phenomena that give form (or mediation) to consciousness (in and of its environment).

Although the title of this thesis refers to Kantor's manifesto (which gives its name to a specific development within his own theatrical research), it is neither original, nor exclusive, to this one example. The title phrase has been used by various researchers in different fields, but as part of a widespread metaphorical use of the term "theatre" (not least in anthropology). The aim of this thesis is, then, to offer a practice- or medium-specific concept – of *theatre* – of which Kantor can be understood comparatively to offer an instance, but of which he is no more the author than any one of the other artists whose work would also support such a conceptual understanding of this theatrical *art* "of death". As will be discussed in chapter one, this concept of

Bredekamp, for instance, notes the "foreseeable rejection" in some circles of his work *Theorie des Bildakts* (*Picture Act Theory*) [Berlin: 2010] in these terms: "The... aim of acknowledging an actively engaging force in form was programmed to be accused of animism long in advance of the publication" (Bredekamp, "Horizons of Picture Act and Embodiment", in Horst Bredekamp, Marion Lauschke, and Alex Artega (eds.), *Bodies in Action and Symbolic Forms*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012, p.xix). The whole project of the College for the Study of Picture Act and Embodiment would be of particular significance for this thesis, where Bredekamp proposes that, following "the aims of the KBW [Kunstwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg]", the College is: "interested in a reformulation of the theory of expression in the sense of an all-encompassing event in which mimics and body movement are not opposed to the conceptual but are considered as its prerequisite. In the concept of the pathos formula this conviction has to date found its most prominent formulation" (*ibid*., p.xvii). This could also be related to one of Bruno Latour's major current projects, investigating an "anthropology of the moderns", called *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* [www.bruno-latour.fr/node/468].

[31] Stengers, *op. cit*., p.192.

theatre includes amongst its many precedents Edward Gordon Craig, who makes of the "ghosts in Shakespeare" the very measure of such an art (as also for thinking through the modern culture of superstition), when he reflects ironically, at the beginning of the electrical age:

> Good heavens! Is the idea of a ghost, is the idea of a spirit, so strange? Why, then the whole of Shakespeare is strange and unnatural, and we should hastily burn most of his works, for we want nothing which can be called strange and unnatural in the twentieth century.[32]

While the reading of Kantor's manifesto, of course, informs the thesis (in both its analogy and aporia), the conceptual question concerns, rather, how this manifesto itself becomes readable; as *an* instance, not *the* instance, of a concept, to which, nonetheless, it gives a name. No such general concept appears, for example, in any of the standard dictionaries or encyclopaedias of theatre studies (a lacuna which this thesis aims to rectify); nor does it appear as a particular concept in any of the standard monographs about Kantor that are available in English (with the partial exception of Krzysztof Plesniarowicz's *The Dead Memory Machine*) – in which, typically, Kantor's theatre is theorised about, rather than addressed in terms of his own theorisation(s).[33]

The separation of (aesthetic) practice and (philosophical) theory (as if between matter and form, appearance and truth) also produces various impasses or aporia itself in the *study* of theatre (which will be addressed in the first two parts of this thesis). "The theatre of death", therefore, refers both to the object of, and the methodological conditions for, its own "artistic-conceptual" research. Suffice it for the moment to refer here to Kantor's own declaration, in an interview at the Documenta 8 theatre festival:

---

[32] Edward Gordon Craig, "On the Ghosts in the Tragedies of Shakespeare" (1908), in *Craig on Theatre*, ed. Michael Walton, London: Methuen, 1999, p.176.
[33] As, for example, Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993; David Krasner (ed.), *Theatre in Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008; Reinelt and Roach (eds.), *Critical Theory and Performance*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.

I am also a theoretician and I want to turn my adventure into a theory. My adventure must then be a universal adventure. That's where the crux is. If, for instance, I showed only my present adventure it would be exhibitionism. But I do not want to be an exhibitionist. I want to turn my adventure into a universal problem.[34]

This attitude resonates with the earlier discussion of a particular Polish legacy of art-theorising in the 1960s and 1970s. The terms in which Jerzy Ludwinski refers to Robert Morris, for instance, in an essay from 1970, might also help us to think about Kantor here (without, however, suggesting that he be considered a conceptual artist):

In his articles on art he held a dialogue with himself. Not only objects and techniques and activities which until then had not belonged to the category of art phenomena were ennobled but also all theoretical texts which from then acquired the status of generally accepted forms of artistic expression. Especially as regards concept and conceptual art, it is impossible to distinguish an artist from an art theoretician for they all in the first place write texts.[35]

Pathos

Deferring until later specific reflection on the uncanny in mimesis, what "of death" is to be understood here in its analogical and aporetic, distinct from metaphorical, appeal to – or for – "theatre" (at least, amongst certain twentieth century artists)? What does this concept of "theatre" name or identify (at least, for these artists) by way "of death" specifically? The following chapters will explore how, for a certain minor tradition of modernist theatre practice (such is the claim of this thesis), the question of an *art* of theatre has been formulated in terms "of death" – as the question

---

[34] Tadeusz Kantor, "And then I appear myself...", interview with Marta Allendorf and Aleksander Mattmüller (01.07.1987), reprinted in *Cricot 2 Information Guide 1987-1988*, ed. Anna Halczak, Krakow: Cricoteka 1988, p.71.

[35] Jerzy Ludwinski, "Art in the Post-Artistic Age", trans. Maria Wanat, in *Experience of Discourse: 1965-1975. Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art*, eds. Pawel Polit and Piotr Wozniakiewicz, Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000, p.233.

of a mimetic medium that is distinct from the literary (or dramatic) arts with which both it and its study have been (typically) identified.[36]

The concern with what would define theatre specifically as an art practice turns upon what its particular medium might be (if, indeed, it has one), as this emerges from an earlier sense (with Wagner, for instance) of a "total art" form, offering a synthesis of all the arts (literary, visual, plastic, aural, temporal) beyond the (classical) dualities of relations between word and image, poetry and action, or even space and time.[37] Paradoxically, as the notion of medium-specificity in modern art gave way to conceptualism on the one hand (where the idea, rather than the medium, is the vehicle of the art work); and to various forms of "expanded" art practices on the other (in sculpture and film, for example) – or even, more generally, to concern with "other criteria" than medium within aesthetics (*pace* Leo Steinberg) – the minor tradition of an *art* of the "theatre of death" retains a seemingly anachronistic interest with its own medium as theatre (and with the question of its aesthetic truth), where the sense of

---

[36] The question of mimesis here refers not to such a classic of European cultural history as Erich Auerbach's study, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard Trask, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974 [the text was written in Istanbul, 1942-45, and first published in its original German in Berne, 1946]; but, rather, its precise contemporary, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London: Verso, 1986 [written in Los Angeles, 1944, and published in its original German in Amsterdam, 1947]. In offering testimony to the historical conditions of (and for) cultural knowledge in (and of) the twentieth century, both these key texts are part of the very history that they analyse.

[37] The "total work of art" has, arguably, been reformulated many times (recently as "intermedial art" [*cf.* Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt (eds.), *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006]). The semiotic organisation of the senses of sound (including, but not defined by, the particular semiotics of speech), vision, and movement (though rarely smell or touch), were adumbrated again by Craig as the art(s) of theatre in 1905, calling for their synthetic unity (rather than the paratactic "unity in plurality" that Kantor inherits from Witkacy). One "sense" that is typically overlooked in this semiotics (variously understood as "avant-garde", "intermedial", or "post-dramatic") is that of the emotions, which will be addressed here (following Didi-Huberman) through Warburg's concept of pathos formulae (as distinct from psychological identification through verbal images expressed in written dialogue or "drama" necessarily). This gestural "repertoire" in cultural memory refers to modernist appropriations of popular theatre – circus and variety (to cite only Meyerhold, Marinetti, Moholy-Nagy, and Beckett) – rather than Classical or Romantic literary poetics [*cf.* Meyerhold, "The Fairground Booth", in *Meyerhold on Theatre*, trans. and ed. Edward Braun, London: Methuen, 1991; Marinetti, "Variety Theatre manifesto", trans. Victoria Kirby, in *Futurist Performance*, ed. Michael Kirby, New York: PAJ Publications, 1986; and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, "Theatre, Circus, Variety", trans. Arthur Wensinger, in *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, eds. Walter Gropius and Arthur Wensinger, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996; Kate Womersley, "The twice-nightly routine: Samuel Beckett's funny turns", in *TLS*, 04.01.13, pp.14-15].

event, as it comes to characterise other aesthetic developments, is already inscribed in its very possibility as an art.

Notions of appearance (as of medium) in the theatre of death are thought through the presence – before an audience – of an "actor" (as its aesthetic vehicle, distinct from the interpretation of a "character"), in a relation that is thought to figure (by analogy) that between the living and the dead. Paradoxically, in this *theatre*, as an art "of death", the relation between the living and the dead offers a "model" for that between the audience and the actor, as also the invisible for the visible. Here anthropological and aesthetic research into the "self"-understanding of modernity, not least in reductive accounts of these fundamental relations, including also between theatre and theory, finds common ground in what will be called (after Agamben) the "paradigm" of the actor within this concept of theatre specifically.[38]

This paradigm of human appearance is understood, in the modernist instance of an *art* of theatre, as being that of "an actor" (as *persona* or *imago*), offering a figure of and for an apprehension of what is visible (or rather, perhaps, memorable) within a cultural (and affective) "schema" of human being, in (and as) its appearance theatrically.[39] The evidence or trace of this schema we might identify with what Warburg called *pathos formulae* – where the particular mimetic pathos here is that of the uncanny, and the art of its formulae is that of theatre. The heuristic analogy of the thesis title is, therefore, informed by a sense of what Warburg suggestively called the "historical concept of a psychology of culture",[40] as this characterises research about, as much as within, the historical period under review here: modernism – and where

---

[38] Giorgio Agamben, "What is a Paradigm?" in *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell, New York: Zone Books, 2009. The notion of paradigm here draws from the work of Victor Goldschmidt (reading Plato), as itself drawn upon by Foucault, whose work is then drawn upon by Agamben. The appeal to anthropology here is distinct from that within Performance Studies, as the latter eschews any question of aesthetic truth in theatre (which provides the key for the artists considered here).

[39] The relation of this to mnemotechnics and the present of a future "after" modernism, discussed by Heidegger and Stiegler in relation to Kant, will be discussed in chapter five.

[40] This formulation (which is the principal subject of Warburg's "Introduction" to the proposed *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* publication, identifying what he calls "engrams of affective experience" [Warburg, "The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past", trans. Matthew Rampley, in *Art in Translation*, 2.1, 2009, p.278]) occurs in various texts by Warburg. Here it is cited from Aby Warburg, "Letter to the Directors of the Bellevue Clinic, 12th April 1924", in Ludwig Binswanger & Aby Warburg, *La guérison infinie*, ed. Davide Stimilli, Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2011, p.189.

this challenges the "knowledge" of, for example, animism as "merely" superstition, distinct from the aporetic.

The "psychological" in this instance refers to a basic question of emotion, pathos, or animation (or of what Kantor calls, after Witkiewicz, a "metaphysical feeling", and what this thesis calls "the uncanny in mimesis"), as these may be conceived of historically in terms of pathos formulae. As is discussed in part one of this thesis, this notion of "cultural psychology" is in complex dialogue with modern notions of individual psychology, evident for example in reference to superstition, where the understanding of mimesis has been reduced by (and to) oppositions between the rational and the irrational, the modern and the primitive. These oppositions even characterise a pre- and post-Platonic orientation towards categories of experience (as of mimesis), and thus a "modernity" that remains in important respects (paradoxically) that of antiquity.[41] The question of the "psychological" in cultural history may also be related to the political, in terms of "symptomatic" instances of gesture in staging the relation between past and future (as repressive, depressive, or expressive), where the presence of the dead would unsettle present claims for legitimacy in the use of power.

For Warburg, this cultural concept of psychology concerns not so much the "bi-polarity" of individuals (with which the term has become more or less identified), as that of a collective memory – the potential for research into which is represented by his library (the Kunstwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg [KBW], now the Warburg Institute Library), as what might be called a "living archive". The library is

---

[41] For an overview commentary on Warburg's contribution to thinking of "culture" (as an object of study), we may simply cite (from amongst many other sources) Edgar Wind's essay "Aby Warburg's Concept of *Kulturwissenschaft* and its Meaning for Aesthetics", and his review article "On a recent Biography of Warburg" (both reprinted in *The Eloquence of Symbols*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Margaret Iversen's review of Wind's essay in *The Oxford Art Journal*, 7.1, 1984, pp.60-62; Carlo Ginzburg's essay "From Aby Warburg to E.H. Gombrich: a Problem of Method" (in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); Michael Diers, Thomas Girst, and Dorothea von Moltke, "Warburg and the Warburgian Tradition of Cultural History", in *New German Critique*, n.65, Spring-Summer 1995, pp.59-73; and Spyros Papapetros, "The Eternal Seesaw: Oscillations in Warburg's Revival", in *The Oxford Art Journal*, 26.2, 2003, pp.169-176. Warburg's thought is also the concern of many essays and books by Georges Didi-Huberman.

itself a cultural artefact, "providing both material and a framework of thought"[42] for an investigation into the mimetic expression and histories (or, indeed, anthropologies) of the image, as itself an artefact of human consciousness (or of what Bernard Stiegler calls *epiphylogenesis*). It construes a cultural space of and for research and reflection (what Carlo Ginzburg has called "an engine to think with, to think about"[43]) concerning the appearance of human being(s), distinct from dividing the disciplines of art history and ethnography. Warburg himself "envisage[d] as a description of the aims of [his] library the formulation: a collection of documents relating to the psychology of human expression." In a space where "primitive" thought (associative and animist) and "modern" thought (rational and detached) communicate, Warburg understood his library as a means to research such fundamental questions as: "How did human and pictorial expressions originate; what are the feelings or the points of view, conscious or unconscious, under which they are stored in the archives of memory? Are there laws to govern their formation or re-emergence?"[44] Indeed, Edgar Wind (a former director of the KBW) evokes the library's project in the name of its titular muse:

> The word *Mnemosyne*, which Warburg had inscribed above the entrance to his research institute, is to be understood in this double sense: as a reminder to the scholar that in interpreting the works of the past he is acting as trustee of a repository of human experience, but at the same time as a reminder that this experience is itself an object of research, that it requires us to use historical material to investigate the way in which 'social memory' functions.[45]

---

[42] Edgar Wind, "Aby Warburg's Concept of *Kulturwissenschaft* and its Meaning for Aesthetics", in *The Eloquence of Symbols*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, p.21.

[43] Carlo Ginzburg, "Une Machine à Penser", in *Common Knowledge*, 18.1, 2012, p.79. This entire issue of *Common Knowledge*, edited by Anthony Grafton and Jeffrey Hamburger, is devoted to "Warburg's Library and its Legacy", within the context of the present threats to cultural research in the name (paradoxically) of "performance", where this term is used in the reified sense of the financial "costs" of research as knowledge "production". This strange reversion to the "fetishism" that Warburg and his own anthropological sources (which also informed Marx) did so much to address critically is one of the tragic aspects of what is at stake in the question of what comes "after modernism" today and what might constitute any possible resistance to it. (See, for example, Christopher Wood's contribution – "Dromenon" – to the *Common Knowledge* issue, *op. cit.*, pp.106-116.)

[44] Aby Warburg, quoted by Adi Efal, in "Warburg's 'Pathos Formula' in Psychoanalytic and Benjaminian Contexts", *Assaph*, n.5, 2000, p.234.

[45] Edgar Wind, "Aby Warburg's Concept of *Kulturwissenschaft* and its Meaning for Aesthetics", in *The Eloquence of Symbols*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, p.26.

The notion of pathos formula (translated by David Britt as "emotive formula of gesture"[46]) indicates a kind of proto-type or ready-made of (and for) cultural memory (a schema of human attitude, appearance, and gesture; rather than simply mimetic narrative or dramatic "action"), as an object of historical – critical – study, distinct from kitsch invocations of a universal "soul" or "archetype".[47] The pathos in and of forms is distinct from the bathos of spiritual feeling, just as emotion is from sentimentality, where the question of aesthetic truth (posed, for Kantor, in both the material and metaphysics of "the lowest rank"; and as evidenced in post-war *art informel*) is opposed to the aesthetics of romantic, symbolist, or even naturalistic expressivity. Reflecting on the "metaphysical shock" that is the affect connected with the essential event of the theatre of death – where "an Actor who assumes the condition of a Dead Man stands in front of the audience" – Kantor offers an explicit (modernist) caution:

> Warning: Let us beware and not place easily our trust in individuals who,
> misusing those metaphysical reasons [the *shock* of human appearance(s)],
> offer us gloomy and blunt pathos or the pretentious and empty gestures of
> shamans. A feeling of a tightrope dance, irony, sarcasm, and a sense of
> humour are a *human aspect* of metaphysics. They are also a manifestation of
> human intelligence. This is a positive part of our inheritance from the age of
> Reason…[48]

---

[46] Aby Warburg, "Dürer and Italian Antiquity" (1905) and "The Emergence of the Antique" (1914), in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. David Britt, Los Angeles: Getty Institute, 1999, p.553 and p.271 (for example).

[47] Carl Jung, for instance, assimilates Worringer's aesthetic categories into his own theory of psychological types: "Abstraction and empathy, introversion and extroversion, are mechanisms of adaptation"; "Worringer's conception of abstraction therefore corresponds to the introverted attitude" ("The Problem of Typical Attitudes in Aesthetics" (1921) in *Psychological Types*, trans. H.G. Baynes and R.F.C. Hull, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p.297 and p.292). Jung's (neo-Schillerian) categories of introvert and extrovert artistic types are further developed by Marie-Louise von Franz, proposing a whole new (twentieth century) metaphysics, characteristic of "the age of Aquarius". In Walter Benjamin's trenchant criticism of this trend: "Thus, the esoteric theory of art comes down to making archetypes 'accessible' to the 'Zeitgeist'" (*The Arcades Project* (N8,2), trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.472).

[48] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Infamous Transition from the World of the Dead to the World of the Living", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.146 & p.147. This warning might be thought to address Grotowski, or at least his "many followers who were in the process of

Tragedy

One of the seeming paradoxes of the theatre of death is the relation between an ostensibly avant-garde aesthetics and a seemingly pre-modern anthropology, although (*pace* Latour) this might be seen as further evidence that modernity has never been quite as modern as it would have "itself" believed. As Kantor, again, observes (for instance, in his *Little Manifesto*):

> It is not true that MODERN man has conquered fear. This is a lie! Fear exists. There is fear of the external world, of what the future will bring, of death, of the unknown, of nothingness, and of emptiness.[49]

The discussion of "theatre" between aesthetics and anthropology (at least in the writings of the artists considered here) opens up a theoretical – and modern – account "of death" within the history of mimesis (at least, in its concept); one that is not reducible to either of the terms that constitute the various oppositions informing the aporia of modernity and, indeed, its own mythology or superstitions.

By addressing, for example, the sense of a "likeness" (a founding concept of Western iconology), in its distinction from the fascination of (typically anthropomorphic) "idols"; the sense of "animism" (a founding concept of nineteenth century anthropology, itself a development of earlier theoretical associations of idols with the thought of "fetishism"); and the sense of photography (as this changes the horizon of understanding concerning the animate and the inanimate in modern human appearance(s), not least in an evolving sense of what has come to be thought of lately

---

forming a kind of sect, with an almost religious life" in the 1970s – as Krystian Lupa recalls from his own experience ("Returning to the Garden of Childhood: Krystian Lupa in conversation with Jean-Pierre Thibaudet and Béatrice Picon-Vallin," trans. Jancis Clarke, *et al.*, in *Polish Theatre Perspectives* 1.1 (2010), p.285-7). With respect possibly to Brook also, we might note Kantor's observation about the danger of "end[ing] up watching a perfectly boring production" where the pathos of "everyday events becom[ing] symbols" in drama is compounded by a directorial "art" (in "Independent Theatre", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further On, Nothing*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.100).

[49] Tadesuz Kantor, "A Little Manifesto", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.250.

as "live" in performance), the uncanny in mimesis offers a theoretical account of "the dialectic of enlightenment" that is specific to theatre history.

What is the actor thought to offer a likeness "of" (or a resemblance to)? Of what does this corporeal – present(ed) – image offer a likeness? In what sense is the *art* of the stage – in the figure of the actor – "life-like"? Of what kind of "human" appearance is the actor a double? Typically, the actor is thought of in terms of a fiction, rather than a "presence" (or, indeed, a reality) belonging to the appearance of the human image, or figure, itself (with its potential "charisma"). In the theatre of death, the actor is thought of in terms of a "look" (as a body, or rather its schema), in an unsettling shock, not as revelatory (of the divine) but (of the dead) as uncanny. How, then, might the actor be thought of as a cultural artefact – or living effigy – of human appearance? What is the double "nature" (aspect or appearance) of the actor on stage, specifically, as distinct from his or her being "in (real) life"? How might the image (or paradigm) of the "actor" offer a key to understanding a (modern) schema of cultural (or, indeed, of emotional) memory (in its pathos formulae)? How does the "theatre of death" address the modernist aesthetic aporia of formalism *or* naturalism, abstraction *or* empathy?

The sense of "emotional memory" (as of "cultural memory") echoes here with its use, for example, by Ludwik Flaszen, in a commentary that would perhaps be read by Kantor in the ("pretentious and empty") terms that he warned against – and yet which touch upon profound points of commonality in their thinking of theatre as a practice, or an art, of cultural mnemotechnics. While the contrast between Grotowski and Kantor (prefigured in that between Limanowski and Witkacy, as also between the Reduta and the Cricot companies) is part of the theatre history addressed in part three, there remains (even in its ambiguity) much that is resonant in Flaszen's discussion here – not in the implicit allusion to Stanislavsky's (individual) psychology of emotional recall, but with respect to Warburg's pathos formulae.[50] Even with

---

[50] The underlying "history of cultural psychology" here would require a reading of both Nietzsche and Darwin, concerning the modes of mimetic expression that are, precisely, part of what has been called in performance practice "muscle memory". For Warburg, the issue is not the exercise of the muscles, but that of a symbolic bi-valence (or ambivalence) that is the measure of a cultural distance achieved from simple mimetic identification (or projection), in which the psychical is not reduced to the physical.

Grotowski's organicism (in contrast to Kantor's formalism), the affective – "restored" to the history of (concepts of) mimesis[51] – concerns the archive of performance, in its "renewals" as cultural memory. Flaszen's appeal is made in the context of an apparently modern absence of such memory (in its modern, "tragic", impossibility even), as if facing a cultural present without a past in theatre (when addressing the truth of an encounter between actor and audience):

> The 1950s avant-garde proved the inability of traditional tragedy in the
> theatre. Tragedy is possible only when values have transcendental guarantees,
> when they are perceived as having substance. When the gods die, tragedy is
> replaced by the grotesque – the painful grimace of the jester facing the empty
> heavens. The avant-garde's premises are irrefutable: today, traditional tragedy
> is dry, lofty rhetoric or trivial, sentimental melodrama. But we ask: how to
> attain a tragic dimension in the theatre which is neither a dead, picturesque
> pose, nor tomfoolery? How to achieve the ancient feeling of combined pity
> and horror, that is lost today in our emotional memory?[52]

Metaphor

Although reference to "theatre" is perhaps inevitably metaphorical (not to mention theoretical, as is discussed in parts one and two of this thesis), some sense of the specificity of the aesthetic practice to be addressed here (or, rather, its concept – and, therefore, the possibility of a "metaphorical language" specific to it) may be initially considered by identifying various counter examples. Given that the concept of the "theatre" of death does *not* refer to the literary canon of Occidental drama – with its dramaturgies of enacted or staged "death" (whether tragic or comic) – what kind of stage practice might such a concept refer to? What is this *theatre* "of", such that it might be identified by, or with, "death" – if this does not refer either to the mimesis of a staged action with its attendant motives (such as murder and revenge), or to age-old metaphors of the "world as a stage" (with human life itself understood in terms of comedy or tragedy); or in terms of the "zombie culture" of a capitalist "experience

---

[51] The whole question of the "portrayal of the passions" from the ancients through to Descartes, Le Brun, Diderot, Darwin, Warburg, *et al*., is, of course, an underlying issue informing the question of the "uncanny" in this thesis.
[52] Ludwik Flaszen, "After the Avant-Garde" (1967), in *Grotowski & Company*, trans. Andrzej Wojtasik and Paul Allain, ed. Paul Allain, Wroclaw: Icarus, 2010, pp.117-8.

economy" (which its advocates gloss with such slogans as "work is theatre and every business a stage")?[53]

Although Kantor, like Craig, apostrophises the figure of death in the history of theatre, addressing "her" in the Janus mask of the Western canon ("Tragic Death – she would elevate her wretched remnants onto the plane of pathos. Mocking Death – she would scorn everything that was mediocre and banal with her clownish laughter"[54]), neither of these roles is what is to be interpreted here. It is not a question of putting Death on stage (as in *Everyman*); but rather a question of both these artists' sense of a "partner... [as] she stood quietly backstage...", as they theorise the presence of death theatrically, in that of the actor, as art. Although Kantor moves between personal memories and stage devices in his evocation of encounters with this *figure* of Death, it is as a figure for *art* in theatre that the resonances with Craig (to be discussed in chapter one) become significant. Before considering the curiously "medium" specific example of *The Dead Class* (in the discussion of "séance" in the second part of this Introduction), it is worth first reflecting on how wide the field of metaphorical enquiry into the relation between "theatre" and "death" can be.[55]

Might the "theatre of death" refer, for instance, to the anatomy lesson – to its "theatre", precisely, and the "performance" of autopsies? Might it refer to the aesthetic display (or sight) of the waxwork tableaux of, for example, Gaetano Zumbo, which have indeed been called "little theatres of death"; not to mention the "Body Worlds" exhibitions of Gunter Hagens?[56] Or might it refer, rather, to theatre made

---

[53] This sense of "affective labour" proposed by J. Gilmore and B. Pine II (*Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999) is discussed, for example, by Lars Larsen, in "Zombies of Immaterial Labour: the Modern Monster and the Death of Death", in *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labour of Art*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011.

[54] Tadeusz Kantor, "My Meetings with Death", trans. Michal Kobialka, quoted in *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Fall 1985, p.154. (The full text of Kantor's article is translated in Kobialka (ed.), *Further On, Nothing*, pp.406-410.)

[55] "The World as a Stage" was the title of an exhibition at Tate Modern in 2008, the premise of which (despite his being cited by the curators) Kantor would have despaired of. The failure of the curators to attend to the work of metaphor means that, rather than being thought through each other, art and performance become substitutes for each other (Jessica Morgan, "The World as a Stage", and Catherine Wood, "Art meets Theatre", in *The World as a Stage*, London: Tate Publishing, 2007).

[56] "Little theatres of death" is the term used by Paolo Giansiracusa in his study of Zumbo, cited by Jane Eade in her own essay on these wax figures, entitled "The Theatre of Death", in

with or by the dying themselves, to their appearance on stage – as, for instance in Christoph Schlingensief's so-called "cancer trilogy" (2008-09), a performed testimony to his encroaching lung cancer, of which he declared: "I am moulding a social sculpture from my illness"?[57] Or might it refer to such necromantic appearances as that of the deceased Frank Sinatra "at the Palladium" (for a posthumous nine month run in 2006)?[58] Or might this title refer to a "theatre" – the public "performance" or spectacle – of grieving, distinct from the interiorisation of grief in private rituals of mourning?[59] Might it refer to the spectacle of state funerals, to the politics – always out of joint – of a claimed "sovereign" legitimacy transmitted (or inherited) through death, where power over the living is claimed in the name of the dead?

While the question of political legitimacy is the subject of great tragedies from the dramatic canon, it applies also in the example of Soviet war memorials in the former Eastern Bloc countries – symbols of both a past sacrifice and a (former) present legitimation. This conflation was always problematic, offering testimony to a future

---

Oxford Art Journal, 36.1, 2013, p.115. On Hagens, see (for instance), José van Dijk, "Bodyworlds: the Art of Plastinated Cadavers", in Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar (eds.), *Beyond the Body Proper*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

[57] Christoph Schlingensief, quoted by Florian Malzacher in "Citizen of the Other Place: A Trilogy of Fear and Hope", trans. Michael Turnbull, in Tara Forrest and Anna Scheer (eds.), *Christoph Schlingensief: Art Without Borders*, Bristol: Intellect, 2010, p.191. (Kantor also introduced "text" from his doctors' reports into his last production *Today is my Birthday*.)

[58] Described by Michael Billington in *The Guardian* as "glitzy necrophilia, that uses all the resources of technology to summon up the dead" (9.3.2006), David Leveaux's spectacular show reminded another reviewer, Peter Brown, of "watching the kind of automaton one used to see at old fairgrounds" (9.3.2006). The production company's own press release suggested that: "The future is bringing the past to life: ground-breaking use of the latest digital film and stage technology lets Frank Sinatra duet with live musicians, and sing directly to the audience… Frank Sinatra, the man who was arguably the world's greatest popular entertainer is back – larger than life." (By "larger than life", of course, is meant "dead". One might wonder whether Billington would ever think of "straight theatre" as an ordinary, non-glitzy necrophilia? It is perhaps telling that he reserves such vocabulary for musicals rather than mainstream dramatic theatre; as, for example, sharing the "dismay" of his "own reaction" to *The Bodyguard* (06.12.12): "Although the show is staged with enormous technical efficiency, it is one more example of the necrophiliac musical morbidly attracted to a cinematic corpse." Perhaps more significant is the emerging question of posthumous on-line "existence" as "inherited" by relatives or friends via Google, Facebook, etc. (*cf.* Charles Arthur, "Go gently into digital death", in *The Guardian*, 13.04.2013, p.9).

[59] The example of performed emotion has always posed a question of an ethics of mimesis for aesthetics. Horace, for instance, remarks (in the first century AD) that: "Just as at a funeral the paid mourners are on the whole more active and vocal than those who are really suffering deeply, so the mock admirer shows more appreciation than the man who is sincere in his praise." (*On the Art of Poetry*, trans. T. Dorsch, London: Penguin, 1965, p.94.)

past of political illegitimacy, in which the "post"-modern forgetting of the Short Twentieth Century was already anticipated. (The sense of the post-war occupation of East-Central Europe as being a period simply to be overcome, with no sense of an "existing" (or contemporary) alternative to the inevitability of capitalism – including its political aesthetic of fascism – seems to have become today not simply historical, but "actual" History.[60]) The national Communist parties, with their ties to a Moscow-based International (potentially and, often literally, an occupying power), drew claims for legitimacy not only from a global conflict with the capitalist (former) West, but from an understanding of this conflict as a continuation of the war with, and the liberation from, fascism, in place of "founding" national revolutions. How the post-1989 changes affect an understanding of the cultural memory at work in such theatre productions as Kantor's *The Dead Class* remains an open question, one which touches seemingly on the anachronism (if not "impossibility", *pace* Flaszen) of "emotional memory" in the so-called "post-modern" context of late capitalism.[61]

Might "the theatre of death" refer otherwise to military action, where the "theatre of operations" aims at the killing of civilians as much as of soldiers; where war is waged in representation (or propaganda) as much as in reality; and whose notion of "target" is now shared by both private and public arts funders' conception of audiences? The term "war game" has, after all, evolved its meaning in the age of the digital interface (not least, in the increasing robotisation of its "operations"), where military training, "post-traumatic" therapy, and mass entertainment all engage with claims about the (virtual) "reality" of a mimetic fantasy enacted within a topology of death.[62] Then

---

[60] For instance, the recent Council of Europe sponsored exhibition *Verführung Freiheit: Kunst in Europa seit 1945* (*The Desire for Freedom: Art in Europe Since 1945*), which includes a work of Kantor's, presents a curious, ideological manifesto – as if proposing a continuity from the past into the present of its supporting EU institutions (*Die Reise*, the introductory catalogue essay by the Berlin curator Monika Flacke, *Verführung Freiheit*, Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2012, pp.14-19).

[61] Frederic Jameson, for instance, discusses this in relation to science fiction, as it "corresponds to the waning or blockage of [the sense of] historicity, and, particularly in our own time (in the post-modern era), to its crisis and paralysis, its enfeeblement and repression. Only by means of a violent formal and narrative dislocation could a narrative apparatus come into being capable of restoring life and feeling to this only intermittently functioning organ that is our capacity to organise and live time historically..." (Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* London: Verso, 1992, p.284.)

[62] Here the virtual is linked to the twentieth century drive to accelerate the conditions of production and experience (as if we could arrive at the future faster by destroying the past). These links are the subject of extensive critique in the work of, for example, Harun Farocki

again, might "the theatre of death" refer to the "didactic theatre" of rituals of sacrifice or judicial execution? Or even of martyrdom or terrorism?[63]

Or perhaps "the theatre of death" refers to religious practices of ascesis, to the "mise-en-scène" of the *memento mori* – whether in the contemplation of such "props" as a skull, or even of a whole cadaver; of a personal, devotional object (or image), or a public, cultic object (or relic)? Perhaps this "theatre" is that of a philosophical *ars moriendi*? Or perhaps this title "of death" identifies such Oriental theatre forms as Noh and Butoh, with their *arts* of the dead and the invisible? Or perhaps it identifies the masked and trance-state "performances" that occur in probably all pre-industrial societies, where "performers" embody both deities and the deceased (and where the "audience" is typically distinguished by degrees of initiation into multiple "real" worlds)?[64] Or perhaps "the theatre of death" refers simply to the title of a particular horror film (starring Christopher Lee), with its allusion to Grand Guignol as a theatrical genre (albeit more Charles Ludlam than Pierre Albert-Birot)?

After all, as a metonym of that "theatre" of death dedicated to *the* modernist Muse, cinema offers proof of the undying appeal of vampires, zombies, cyborgs, and avatars – all of which attest to a displaced (or residual) belief in the screen shadows' doubles,

---

and Paul Virillio. Farocki, for instance, writes: "the operative war images from the 1991 Gulf War, which didn't show any people, were more than just propaganda, despite rigid censorship, meant to hush up the 20,000 deaths of the war. They came from the spirit of a war utopia, which takes no account of people, which puts up with them only as approved, or perhaps even unapproved, victims. A military spokesman in 1991 said, when asked about the victims on the Iraqi side: 'we don't do body counts'. This can be translated as: 'we are not the gravediggers. This dirty work has to be done by other people.'" [Farocki quoted by Georges Didi-Huberman, "How to Open Your Eyes" (trans. Patrick Kremer), in *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?* eds. Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun, London: Koenig Books, 2009, p.47.]

[63] St. Paul describes the Apostles as "appointed to death as a spectacle (*theatron*)" by God, in I Cor., 49:9 – where, as Ernst Curtius comments, "the idea in mind is not the stage but the Roman circus" (Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask, London: RKP, 1979, p.138). Analysis of but one, more recent example can be found in the Retort essay on the destruction of the World Trade Centre, "Afflicted Powers", in *New Left Review* 27, May-June 2004. The terrorist war against the state is the counter-part of the terror wars waged by states: "In the course of the twentieth century, wars have been increasingly waged against the economy and infrastructure of states and against their civilian populations..." (Hobsbawm, *op cit.,* p.13).

[64] The interweaving of cultural performance and literary codes of "restored behaviour" in the theatre of present(ed) ancestors is powerfully engaged with by, for example, Wole Soyinka. Here a synchronic analysis of such theatre offers insights into what, arguably, remains hidden in purely historical studies.

as if they were cast by a present body.[65] Amongst many comparative examples, this recalls Dante's poetics – or theory – of the image (entering the after life in the company of Virgil), as defined "both in analogy to the shadow and, equally, in opposition to the body."[66] Or, might "death" be a way to appeal to the difference between ("live") theatre and ("recorded") cinema, as Joseph Chaikin proposed concerning the "presence" of the actor? In Jonathan Kalb's précis, Chaikin suggests: "that theatre's difference consists not in the living actor but in the dying actor; that it finds its most stable identity, its most powerful platform for expression, in the fact that the performer could die at any moment, is in fact dying as surely as we spectators are, in the same room."[67] Or, finally, might this title refer to séances – to a "spiritualist theatre" – in which mediums "channel" the dead in the presence of the living, "in the same room"?[68] In the co-presence of actor and audience, in their "likeness", who (or what) is being evoked, by the uncanny in mimesis?[69]

---

[65] This reappears as a recycled metaphor in Worthern's return to Brook's notion of "deadly theatre" as "the zombie theory of drama" in "Antigone's Bones", *TDR*, 53.3, 2008, p.16; and this is also the underlying subject of Victoria Nelson's investigation of the survival of the "fantastic" in *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001). A different kind of "theatrical" return of this zombie double (as the nightmare of "audience participation") is given by David Hasselhoff (*The Guardian*, 06.08.12, *G2*, p.9), describing his entering "the Greggs Bakery Christmas party" in South Wales: "Can you imagine walking into a room of 500 people and everybody got up and started coming at me like the Night of the Living Dead, holding their cell phones?"

[66] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p.128.

[67] Jonathan Kalb, *Beckett in Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.148.

[68] As practised, for example, by the Fox sisters, Mme Blavatsky, Eusapia Palladino, or Helen Duncan; or as the object of "psychical research" by Edward Tylor, William James, Conan Doyle, or W.B. Yeats. Besides William James, amongst other eminent presidents of the Society for Psychical Research (founded in 1882) have been Henri Bergson, Gilbert Murray, and the Nobel Prize winning physicist Lord Rayleigh (Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Cambridge: C.U.P, 1996, p.57).

[69] A bibliography on different theatrical metaphors of death would, of course, be vast. To cite only a few examples, therefore, information on just some of the possibilities mentioned above may be found in: Deborah Blum, *Ghost Hunters*, London: Arrow Books, 2007; Jennifer Woodward, *The Theatre of Death: The Ritual Management of Royal Funerals in Renaissance England*, Woodbridge: The Boydel Press, 1997; Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Cambridge: C.U.P, 1996; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: O.U.P., 2000; Georges Didi-Huberman, *Être crâne*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2000; Pamela Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks*, London: Hambledon and London, 2003; Marina Warner, "Waxworks and Wonderlands", in *Visual Display*, eds. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, New York: Dia Centre, 1995; Vanessa Schwartz, "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus", and Mark Sandberg, "Effigy and Narrative", both in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds. Leo Charney and Vanessa

Introduction: *Thinking of the dead through a concept of theatre* **(part two)**

Séance

Kantor gave his iconic production *The Dead Class* the subtitle of a "dramatised séance"[70], where it is the qualification of the séance as "dramatised" (in the name of a specific production by the Cricot 2 company) that is significant – in which the medium is that of *theatre* (a theatre "of death"), involving actors rather than spiritualists, dramaturgy rather than parapsychology. Curiously, Witkiewicz – whose plays the Cricot 2 worked with up until (and including) *The Dead Class* – had conducted séances of his own, "until he was eventually caught pulling the strings that produced the spirit rapping".[71] According Daniel Gerould, in this practice: "we can detect the same ambivalent attitude of belief and irony, whereby the playwright vouches for the occurrence, and yet at the same time (as manipulator of the strings) acknowledges the trick and participates in its unmasking."[72] It is this very *theatre* (as a technique of appearances) of the séance that Kantor can also be seen to be practicing (distinct from the typical, hagiographic description of him as a "demiurge") in Andrzej Wajda's 1976 film of the first version (1975-77)[73] of *The Dead Class* production.

Although, on the one hand, Krzysztof Plesniarowicz notes that "*seans* is the word ordinarily used in Polish for any scheduled theatrical performance or film showing, as well as for spiritualist sessions, [and that] Kantor consistently used 'séance' to describe his performances, which he elsewhere referred to as 'the evocation of the

Schwartz, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995; Erhard Schüttpelz, "Animism meets Spiritualism", in *Animism* (Vol. 1), ed. Anselm Franke, Berlin: Sternbeg Press, 2010; Tova Gamliel, "Performed Weeping", in *TDR*, 54.2, Summer 2010; Simon Featherstone, "Spiritualism as popular performance in the 1930s: the Dark Theatre of Helen Duncan", in *NTQ*, 27:2, May 2011; and Paul Virilio and Sylvère Lotringer, *Pure War*, trans. Mark Polizzotti, New York: Semiotext(e), 2008.

[70] This phrase appears on the title page of the programme for *The Dead Class*, trans. M. Dabrowski, Krakow: Krzysztofory Gallery, 1975.

[71] Daniel Gerould, "Introduction" to his translation of Witkacy's *A Small Country House*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997, p.xiv.

[72] Gerould, *ibid*.

[73] Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2000, p.119.

invisible world'";[74] on the other hand, it is precisely this terminological distinction (of séance from spectacle or performance) that serves Artur Sandauer to make a contrast between the work of the Cricot 2 before and after 1975, with the production of *The Dead Class*, as this contrast informs the question (with respect to the twentieth-century legacy of the avant-garde; for example, of abstraction, formalism, and conceptualism) as to whether "it is still possible for a theatrical performance to evoke emotions."[75]

Kantor himself distinguishes the audience's openness to this "all-important sphere of feeling", in the reception of *The Dead Class* actors' performances, from simply a literary attempt to define or derive the "sources" (or "models") of their performances (as characters) from Witkacy's play *Tumour Brainiowicz*.[76] It is the *appearance* of the actors in that of the production itself (in its formal existence) that constitutes the "dramatised" question of mimesis, where the play text serves "...to bring out the tension between theatrical reality and some other factitious reality",[77] rather than to define the appearance(s) of characters (or ghosts). Here we have also to distinguish the particular context of the question of emotion, pathos, or empathy, from (for example) "the inextricable life" belonging to the genres of comedy and tragedy (the laughter of the one and the pity of the other); not to mention the recent turn in performance analysis to "restore" concern with empathy and mimesis (especially in choreography) in terms not of aesthetic theory but of neuroscience.[78] Kantor's insistence (to be explored in part three) on "non-participation" in theatre (at least from

---

[74] *Ibid*., p.117. (However, the Polish word "spektakle" is the one used in the Foksal Gallery archives for all the Cricot 2 productions, including *The Dead Class*.)

[75] Artur Sandauer, "Art After the End of Art", trans. Anna Bartkowicz, in "Dialectics and Humanism", *The Polish Philosophical Quarterly*, Spring 1985, p.134. This aesthetic concern with the powers of empathy, which perhaps echoes with the emergence of bourgeois drama from the Enlightenment principles of "moral sentiments" (with Smith and Diderot) more than the ancient notion of "catharsis", can be related to contemporary questions of the "death of affect" (with JG Ballard, for instance).

[76] Tadeusz Kantor, "Characters in the Dead Class", trans. Karol Jakubowicz, in *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, ed. Bohdan Drzodwoski, London: John Calder, 1979, p.137. This is also translated by M. Dabrowski in the Krzysztofory programme in 1975. The question of actors and characters with respect to Witkacy and his "comedy of corpses", as an example of pre-War avant-garde theatre, will be discussed (with Jan Kott) in chapter two.

[77] Tadeusz Kantor, "*Dead Class*, or a New Treatise on Mannequins" (1975), in Krzysztof Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.34.

[78] For example, Vittorio Gallese and David Freedberg: "Motion, emotion and empathy in aesthetic experience", in *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 11.5, 2007.

the 1970s) is a premise here for thinking through the claims to aesthetic "autonomy" that distinguish his work from alternative appeals to "avant-gardism" in this period, particularly in addressing the dynamic of the encounter between audience and actor as both affective and, in a "degraded" or "poor" sense, metaphysical.

As already observed, however, it is crucial to bear in mind that for Kantor (as for Witkacy) the question of emotion is not posed in terms of either symbolism or naturalism, as alternatives to abstraction (*pace* Worringer). The appeal of and to emotion alludes to (even if it is not defined by) Witkacy's theatre aesthetics of a form "that is pure because it does not express any emotions connected with real life, but only the 'Metaphysical Feeling'... that is the strangeness of existence itself,"[79] as this is encountered through the work of art. This "strangeness of existence itself", as encountered through the work of death, is what Heidegger identifies as uncanny – an encounter that is figured in the art of mimesis (where this is not conceived of simply in opposition to technique). With *The Dead Class*, the theatrical séance of form (of the human *figura*) makes of the actor's embodiment an art (or an appearance) "of death", as theorised by Kantor, and as informed by questions of the affective in aesthetics. In his essay (of 1981), that "is known in Poland and was quoted many times, by critics such as Krzysztof Plesniarowicz... and Jan Klossowicz..."[80], Sandauer proposes that: "This question [of *pathos* and the aesthetic *form* of theatre] can only be answered after considering what Kantor created after 1975 and what cannot any longer be called stage productions, but what should be called 'stage séances'."[81] Together with the return to the sense of a "closed work" (in rejection of a "pseudo-avant-garde"), this challenge to thinking through what theatre studies too easily historicises as simply "stage productions" is key to what "the theatre of death" opens up as a question of "the uncanny in mimesis" – not as an instance of spiritualism but of truth in art.

While the sense of "séance" has a further significance today in the question of what counts as "live" in the theory of theatre, the title of Sandauer's essay also offers a

---

[79] Artur Sandauer, "Art After the End of Art", trans. Anna Bartkowicz, in "Dialectics and Humanism", *The Polish Philosophical Quarterly*, Spring 1985, p.119.
[80] Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Kantor's Last Tape", trans. Paul Allain and Grzegorz Ziolkowski, in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 15.1, February 2005, p.36.
[81] Sandauer, *op. cit.,* p.134.

summary of its historical subject; that is, art "after" Witkacy – "a destructionist, convinced that art as well as all the principles of construction [as, for instance, with his contemporary Strzeminski] 'are coming to an end'."[82] This view of the "ends" of the avant-garde from before the War (returned to in a review of the 1970s, itself made during the 1980s) is that of a personality "who was to weigh so heavily on Polish literature of the 1930s and on what was to gain fresh vigour in the 1960s" – an instance of that "dialectic of anachronism" with which Jan Kott identified Witkacy.[83] Indeed, the question as to what might be the "contemporary significance" of this final playing with Witkacy by the Cricot 2 insists as a question of anachronism. Over half a century since *The Dead Class* ceased to be performed "live", it is in the medium of its photographic image, as itself a form of séance, that this work of theatre appears still questionable for its future audience.

As will be discussed further in part three, Sandauer (whose work, in his own account, encompasses the "duality of Jewish themes... and the Polish language"[84]) is also an important figure in the posthumous reception of Bruno Schulz[85] – and thus an influence on Kantor's aesthetic vocabulary of a "reality of the lowest rank" (a variant of "degraded reality"), as the meeting of art and life, or of fiction and reality, in (or as) the found (or discarded) object viewed as "trash".[86] Here neither art nor life

---

[82] Sandauer, *ibid.,* p.127. This can be compared with Yves-Alain Bois' suggested way out of the historicist "double bind" of the "end of art" – the "end" that defines the history of *modern painting* – as a "task of mourning" in *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993, pp.241-2.

[83] Sandauer, *ibid.,* p.117; and Jan Kott, "Witkiewicz, or the dialectic of anachronism", trans. Joanna Clark and James McCandlish, in *The Theatre of Essence*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984. This is also suggested by Konstanty Puzyna, who writes of a "tone of bitterness" in Witkacy born "of being before his times, and, paradoxically, of being too late" ("The Genius of Witkacy", trans. Boleslaw Taborski, in *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, ed. Bohdan Drozdowski, London: John Calder, 1979, p.33).

[84] Artur Sandauer, *On the Situation of the Polish Writer of Jewish Descent in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Abe and Sarah Shenitzer, Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2005, p.97.

[85] Jan Blonski notes that "Sandauer was the only one who wrote about the Jewish roots of Schulz's prose", citing Sandauer's 1956 article on Schulz, that identifies precisely "degraded reality" in its very title and which was reprinted as the introduction to the 1964 republication of Schulz's "works" [Blonski, "Is there a Jewish School of Polish Literature?", in *Polin: From Shtetl to Socialism*, ed. Anthony Polonsky, London: Littman Library, 1993, p.486]. (See also, Blonski, "On the Jewish Sources of Bruno Schulz", trans. Michael Steinlauf, in *Cross Currents*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.)

[86] On Schulz's term *tandeta* (trash, junk, rubbish) see, for instance, Czeslaw Prokopczyk in "The Mythical and the Ordinary in Bruno Schulz", in *Bruno Schulz: New Documents and Interpretations*, ed. Czeslaw Prokopczyk, New York: Peter Lang, 1999, pp.204-209. Kantor's

transcends the other, as appearance and reality are not conceived of as exclusive, but rather as revealing, of each other. As Czeslaw Prokopczyk notes: "Schulz's formulations at the end of his essay-interview for Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz about the 'degradation of reality', its 'bankruptcy', etc., have been popular among Polish critics ever since Artur Sandauer used Schulz's phrase for the title of his own influential essay 'The Degradation of Reality'."[87]

In another reference to Sandauer's 1981 essay, Wieslaw Borowski – for whom the term "emotional construction" applies, however, from *The Water Hen* production (1967) on – notes that the distinction of theatrical "séance" concerns a sense (for Sandauer) of *The Dead Class* performance going beyond the earlier Cricot 2 "experiments".[88] It is this interplay between the seemingly contradictory powers of the emotional and the experimental – as well as the mundane and the metaphysical – that characterises Kantor's theatre of death; where what is at stake – in the sense of "avant-garde" – is an engagement of art in and with "reality", where this is understood not simply in terms of life (as traditionally thought to be exclusive of death, as matter is of form) but in terms of an immanent (not transcendental) metaphysics (as is proposed in Schulz's famous *Treatise on Tailors' Dummies*). As with Schulz, the creativity of the "avant-garde" is understood by Kantor not in terms

own referencing of this "reality" (which never cites Sandauer, perhaps because it is well-known in the Polish context, albeit then lost in translations devoted exclusively to Kantor's writings) is associated with the 1961 performance with Witkacy's *In a Small Country Manor House*, presented as the "annexation" by and for the art work of a wardrobe ["Cricot 2 Theatre", trans. M. Dabrowski, n.p., Warsaw, Foksal Gallery Archive, n.d.]. Such neglected objects of household furniture are the subject of the "heresies" of the father in Bruno Schulz's "Treatise on Tailors' Dummies", in *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass*, trans. Celina Wieniewska, London: Picador, 1988, pp.44-48.
[87] Czeslaw Prokopczyk, "The Mythical and the Ordinary in Bruno Schulz", in *Bruno Schulz: New Documents and Interpretations*, ed. Czeslaw Prokopczyk, New York: Peter Lang, 1999, p.179. Sandauer's essay (*Degraded Reality*, with the subtitle, *Reality According to Bruno Schulz*) introduces the 1957 republication of Schulz's major fictions (Krakow, 1957, pp.7-33) and was reprinted in an expanded edition in 1964 that also included Schulz's critical essays and some letters, introduced by Jerzy Ficowski. Amongst the critics that Prokopczyk cites is Krzysztof Stala, the first chapter of whose Schulz monograph, *On the Margins of Reality*, discussing "the scope of the dispute: the crisis of mimesis", offers a summary of Sandauer's essay in English (Krzysztof Stala, *On the Margins of Reality*, Stockholm: Stockholm University Slavic Studies, 1993, pp.7-10). We shall return to this in part three, and also with reference to Luc Tuymans' 2010 exhibition in Bruges, with its title of *The Reality of the Lowest Rank: A Vision of Central Europe* (Tielt: Lannoo Publishers, 2010), in chapter two.
[88] Borowski in conversation with Jaromir Jedlinski, in *The Impossible Theatre*, ed. Jaroslaw Suchan, trans. Jadwiga Piatkowska and Maciej Glogoczowski, Krakow: Bunkier Sztuki, 2000, p.126.

of the latest artistic sophistication or technical innovation; but of the so-called "lowest rank" of the relation between form and matter, including that between the art of theatre and the actor. The *pathos* of this theatre is found not in the refined expressivity of aesthetised feelings, but in the poetics of the circus, in profane not religious mysteries. With regard to *art*, Kantor prefers the wrappings and remainders of Cinnamon Shops to the gilding and glamour of cultural temples.

This particular Polish aesthetic history (in which an aesthetic interest in the "life" of materials of the "lowest rank" may be compared with Benjamin's reflections on Surrealism) has had widespread echoes (to mention only the Quay brothers[89]). Amongst other theorists resisting the commercialised (re)production of the "death of art" in the 1970s, Donald Kuspit, for instance, also laments those "pseudo-avant-garde artist[s]... who want to look as if they are... creatively challenging and confrontational", and who "make a show of innovation", where:

> The issue is not how convincing the show is – it will be convincing to the pseudo-audience – but how rooted it is in obsolete avant-garde notions of true selfhood and innovation. They show that there is no way forward in art today, only different ways backward toward a past that is only technically usable, not emotionally and existentially convincing.[90]

The conditions of and for "obsolescence" in art practices (and their histories) concern the very claims of truth within the notion of avant-garde itself. It is with so-called "post-modernism" (as the end of the avant-garde) that art is no longer to be

---

[89] Suzanne Buchan, *The Quay Brothers: Into a Metaphysical Playroom*, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011.

[90] Donald Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.111. Kuspit's critique of post-modernism is continued in his 2005-06 on-line book, "A Critical History of Twentieth Century Art" [especially, in this context, chapter nine], published by the now defunct, but still accessible, *artnet Magazine*: http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/authors/kuspit.asp. In his Introduction, Kuspit writes: "Avant-garde critique is both immanent and transcendent, to use the philosophical terms. That is, it is a search for what is inherent to art as such, and as such genuine art – even if that means, paradoxically, that genuine art sometimes seems to be extra-artistic or anti-artistic – as well as an attack on all socially administered definitions and conventionalised conceptions of art, all of which seem to conspire to crush or manipulate creativity, that is, to impede creative freedom or what Meyer Schapiro calls the artist's 'inner freedom', for him the only kind of freedom possible in the modern world" (*ibid*., p.7).

distinguished from kitsch, the emotional from the sentimental, the theoretical from exhibitionism. These distinctions are not simply intended to be descriptive but, rather, to identify the values of an immanent critique by which the question of what art "is" have been posed within modernism.[91] However, recalling the question of "resistance" evoked previously with Kostolowski (citing Piotrowski), the truth of art – in its (enduringly) anachronistic modernist appeal – continues to "remind [the individual] of the possibility of another kind of emotion and expressivity, of the existence within him of another self than the one society tells him he has."[92] Without a sense of this resistance within the artwork itself, its history or "study" (both of its particularity and of its "medium") ceases to engage (to use the terms of Kantor's protest at Documenta 8, cited in part one of this Introduction) with its theorisation and becomes satisfied simply with exhibitionism.

The question of emotion and expressivity in relation to the avant-garde also concerns one of the few artists of the "neo-avant-garde in Poland in the '70s" to refer positively to Kantor (who had in fact been his early mentor), Zbigniew Warpechowski.[93] Indeed, Lukasz Ronduda's situating of Warpechowski within this historical context of Polish art echoes the discussion oriented by (although it is not included in) Sandauer's essay:

> Zbigniew Warpechowski's performances dealt with personal yet universal
> existential problems, such as death, the meaning of life, the absolute, good and
> evil, and faith – subjects that artists of the avant-garde circles generally
> viewed with suspicion. Warpechowski's art might be considered an attempt to
> break through the crisis of the avant-garde and restore to art the ability to

---

[91] These terms famously constitute the very title of Clement Greenberg's classic 1939 essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (in *Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. I, ed. John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
[92] Donald Kuspit, *op. cit.*, p.113.
[93] This is despite Warpechowski's criticism of the Foksal Gallery as a bastion of an "official" avant-garde (Lukasz Ronduda, *Polish Art of the 70s*, trans. Karen Underhill, Soren Gauger, & Krystyna Mazur, Warsaw: CCA, 2009, pp.124-125). The "forgetting" of Kantor can be noted in *The Impossible Theatre* exhibition, where the curatorial link with Kantor is refused by all the artists represented, "exploring performativity" in their work (Sabine Folie (ed.), *The Impossible Theatre*, Vienna: Kunsthalle, 2005). Lukasz Ronduda is also the co-author and director, with Maciej Sobieszczewski, of a film, *The Performer*, described as "the first ever art exhibition to adopt the form of a feature film", that will include "Polish performance icon Zbigniew Warpechowski" as himself. The film is scheduled for release in summer 2013 [www.artmuseum.pl].)

grapple with basic themes relating to the human condition, themes that had been art's terrain for centuries. Among the Polish artists of the 1970s, Warpechowski drew most fully from this subject matter; beginning with his participation in Happenings and theatrical activities. He was inspired by the peculiar existentialism of Tadeusz Kantor's performances, Pawlowski's concept of energetic communication, and Hindu philosophy, and Lao-Tzu. His existential and romantic performance-poetry work was an interesting contribution to the conceptual revolution in the art of the late 1960s and early '70s.[94]

Reality

Crucially, however, Kantor's "peculiar existentialism" in *theatre* concerns an understanding of "themes that had been art's terrain for centuries", as an art not of Romantic transfiguration of "reality" (or, indeed, appeal to a "higher reality") but as an "annexation" (or "appropriation") of (a poor and discarded) reality in and by the *work* of art. In this, the possibility of art is premised on its autonomy – not only from other claims of value, whether commercial or political, but also those of "professional standards". Even in his attempt to bring together Happenings and theatre in the late 1960s (with which Warpechowski was involved), as, for instance, with *The Water Hen*, Kantor still maintained a distance between audience and actors:

> In *The Water Hen* a paradoxical situation took place. Kantor employed the distinctive division into a space for acting and a space for the audience, a characteristic of traditional theatre, and went on to break it up, by means of the happening structure. Even though the spectacle took place in a gallery-cum-

---

[94] Lukasz Ronduda, *Polish Art of the 70s*, trans. Karen Underhill, Soren Gauger, & Krystyna Mazur, Warsaw: CCA, 2009, p.118. Although Kantor's work (at least up until 1975) is inoculated by Witkacy against Romanticism, Ronduda's conclusion to his discussion of Warpechowski is also relevant here: "His [Warpechowski's] romantic attitude was the exception against the backdrop of the Polish rationalist Neo-Avant-Garde of the 1970s. He reconciled paradoxes, united antinomies and ruptures (post-essentialism - pragmatism), and decided on the creative potential of the community. He did this by planning in a very rational fashion, conscious of his radically expressive creative works that drew from categories of loftiness, truth, and authenticity. Warpechowski fought for a romantic understanding of art in a very pragmatic way, for a capacity to take on man's most important existential and dramatic issues with the language of the avant-garde (performance, visual poetry, conceptualism), for giving avant-garde art something that had therefore been reserved for traditional art – the capacity to speak of mysteries" [*ibid*. p.132].

café space, the artist introduced a "wooden barrier, all through the place, which creates divisions, organising the chaos". The audience had not arrived for a happening "proper", but for a spectacle entitled *The Water Hen*, directed by Tadeusz Kantor.[95]

An emblematic artist of the "paradoxical situation", Kantor (who is credited with introducing Happenings to Poland in the mid-60s[96]) describes the "impossible" situation of a Happening as theatre (and vice versa) as, indeed, something he "did not want to achieve".[97] Nonetheless, as Michalik's description suggests, this aesthetic of the "unachieved" performance – with the Happening dynamic of the one-off event undermining, and yet undermined by, the theatre dynamic of the repeated event – retains its fascination; at least, by evoking a challenge to what may be expected of and as theatre:

> As it turned out, the audience's expectation [of a performance of Witkacy's play] failed to be met. Individual scenes of the spectacle, based on familiar actions and rituals, taking place simultaneously, were impossible to take in and comprehend fully. Thus, the audience was brutally deprived of its function, in relation to the stage plot, of passive onlooker. It was defined as "the audience", but not allowed to act as one.[98]

It is this refusal "to give the audience its rights and privileges", where "the situation of the audience is questionable",[99] that characterises Kantor's Impossible theatre of the 1960s (for instance, with "the cloakroom"); a situation he would come to

---

[95] Justyna Michalik, "A Happening According to Tadeusz Kantor", trans. Anda MacBride, in *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting. Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2012, p.104 (citing Kantor's own "score" of the production).
[96] However, earlier Fluxus-associated music events had occurred in Poland (instigated by Boguslaw Schaeffer), and indeed Maciunas had tried to enrol Wlodzimierz Borowski in Fluxus the early 1960s (while collaborating later with Jaroslaw Kozlowski in the mid-1970s); *cf* Petra Stegmann, "Fuxus East", in *Fluxus East* exhibition catalogue, Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007, p.27, p.21, and p.35.
[97] Tadeusz Kantor, "Budapest Lecture", trans. Anda MacBride, in *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting. Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2012, p.160.
[98] Justyna Michalik, *op. cit*.
[99] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Impossible Theatre", trans. Michal Kobialka, in Michal Kobialka (ed.), *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.100.

denounce in the face of its generalised (or "pseudo") application in the 1970s, as the Cricot 2 turned to an avowed framing of the separation between audience and actor, closed to the suggestion of participation. Sandauer's fundamental "question" (concerning an avant-garde – or art – of emotion) touches upon the complex issue of the conditions of and for pathos or empathy (as distinct from bathos and kitsch[100]) in specifically modern art – and, precisely, what the "function" of an audience might be concerning the end(s) of "human" representation (of "reality") in the last century.[101]

Given a history from abstraction to conceptualism, the "fate" of anthropomorphic representation in particular – with which theatre is inevitably bound up – has been widely contested (not least in its supposed identity with anthropocentrism). Indeed, "theatre" itself has been a term of critique within the visual and plastic arts (even being used on occasion to distinguish between art and non-art), just as it has been within the history of twentieth century performance practices.[102] While abstraction in various guises was the quasi-"official", state-sponsored art of the former West,[103] in Poland – uniquely amongst the former Eastern Bloc countries – it was also accepted as officially "representative" art after the Thaw. As Joanna Szupinska writes: "After 1956, Stalinism – and with it, Socialist Realism – was rejected, and abstraction, for which, at first, restrictive quotas were introduced, was officially sanctioned and harnessed for propaganda, whereby politically instrumentalised avant-gardism became proof of national liberalism."[104]

---

[100] For all that myself is an other (*pace* Rimbaud), an other is not myself. Without comprehending the difference between self and (as) other – not least through aesthetic education – there would be no question of empathy, only of emotion. (Tragically for Desdemona, for example, it is Iago who shows more "emotional understanding" than Othello.) Empathy is, by definition, a socialised "model" of and for an understanding of emotion (which informs the very concept of theatre).

[101] Jacques Derrida, "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, London: Routledge, 1978; or Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

[102] It is conspicuous that most references to Michael Fried's famous *dicta* simply ignore his approbation of Brecht and Artaud – as theorist-practitioners of the theatrical medium as a relation to an audience – in the instance of actual theatre performance.

[103] For example, Francis Frascina, "Institutions, Culture, and America's 'Cold War Years'", in *Oxford Art Journal*, 26.1, 2003: "By 1959 and 1960 confidence in a legitimated American culture, sent abroad and returned in 'triumph', confirmed a sense of the possibilities of a particular Modernist renaissance at home; one that was to enjoy an ideological dominance in institutions during the following decade" (p.59).

[104] Joanna Szupinska, "Politics, Potentials and 'Construction in Process'", in the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 3.2, 2012, p.210. Also, Luiza Nader, "'Shame!' Socialist Realist

This universalism, by the late 1960s, of what had previously been marginal (even in the former West) was addressed at the time by Clement Greenberg, in *Studio International*, replying to a request for him to define "avant-garde":

> You don't define it, you recognise it as an historical phenomenon. The avant-garde may be undergoing its first epochal transformation today. It has taken over the *foreground* of the art scene... Since what is nominally avant-garde has done this, the term and notion themselves have changed. The question now is one of continuity: will the avant-garde survive in its traditional form? (And there's no paradox in juxtaposing 'avant-garde' and 'tradition'). [105]

As we have seen with Sandauer and Borowski, the question of this (non-)paradox relates to important contextual issues (to be returned to part three) for Kantor's denunciations of a "pseudo-avant-garde", as these inform his declared return to the "closed work" in theatre in 1975.

The question of empathy – as a register for playing out a fundamental opposition between the "artificial" (or "cultural") and the "natural" (or "spontaneous") in human expression (as also between the experimental or abstract and the emotional or representational) – is continually restaged in and as theatre's "reality"; or at least in the verbal images that are supposed, traditionally, to characterise it: in Cordelia's "nothing", for instance; or that "nothing" with which the Player, in Hamlet's observation, allows a "dream of passion", a "fiction", to be moulded by or to "his own conceit". As concerns "reality", then, it is perhaps in "nothing" that the tragedy of dramatic theatre touches upon the "death" of an art theatre that is not oriented by the interpretation of literary drama (not bound to its "ends" or its aporia) – even as (with the heritage of Jarry, Strindberg, and Witkacy) its stage features a play of "corpses", mocking those actors who would "bring their characters to life". (The question of what it might mean to "imitate" a corpse on stage will be discussed in chapter one.)

Historiography in the 1980s" (and the following "Discussion") in *Rejected Heritage*, ed. Karol Sienkiewicz, e-publication of the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, 2011 [www.artmuseum.pl].

[105] Clement Greenberg interview with Edward Lucie-Smith, in *Studio International*, vol.175, n.896, January, 1968, p.5.

Concerning the mainstream of dramatic theatre, however, the "paradox" (after Diderot) is that Hamlet's speech is so often read as offering a "realistic" point of view upon the "fictions" of the Player – where Hamlet professes to be moved by the Player's art (anticipating thereby that Claudius will be equally moved). The situation is, however, quite the opposite. Hamlet is "himself" the fiction of the Player, a conceit of *theatre*. Curiously enough, as with Witkacy and Kantor – where the séance is indeed the "thing" – this theatre does not so much bring the dead to life, as to give cause for the living to remember the dead. The Hamlet character reveals to "himself" (and thereby to the audience) a theatrical reality of emotion – as a matter of (as subject to) "conceit", of a verbal image enacted corporeally – in order to experience its aesthetic truth. Such "as if" emotions are no more or less fictional than real (being irreducible to this opposition), when to feel is to imagine, through the metaphorical substitutions of presence for absence (as if of act for word), in the theatrically specific appearance of actors as doubles of the dead. In the theatre of death, however, it is not a *drama* of emotion that is at stake – as in the long tradition of an interpretative art of (actors') theatre. Rather (after Witkacy) the emotion is that of the present(ed) absence: a metaphysical affect, arising from a shock at the appearance of these "actors", in an art of *theatre* where what is experienced as "life-like" in mimesis has the uncanny sense "of death".

The paradigm (of the) actor here is a paradigm of (and for) *theatre*. What distinguishes theatre from "performance art" is precisely the recognition of the role of representation in the "co-presence" of performer (artist or actor) and audience. The resistance to this aesthetic truth in the "performative" turn is a resistance to recognising the mimetic in theory; to acknowledging the distance that is inscribed in the relation with an audience – even in the modes of performance art that descry it in the name of an identity of art and life (which has been the dominant concern of twentieth century (anti-)aesthetics). Here the question of emotion is essential for considering Kantor's return, in 1975, to the "closed work", to the distance that makes emotion *aesthetically* meaningful or significant.[106] This distance is what Warburg

---

[106] Although, as noted previously with Michalik, this "return" is perhaps more of a re-affirmation of what remained essential in the relation to an audience in Kantor's theatre.

called "the space of thought" [*Denkraum*][107] and Bion "learning from experience" (both in contrast to uncritical ideas of animism and what Freud called the "omnipotence of thought").[108] Empathy (in the experienced *pathos* of form) is not explained theoretically in terms of identification or projection simply (*pace* Worringer); but – in its appearance(s), for instance, in the arts of the human image (of the *imago hominis*[109]) – needs to be contextualised historically in terms of "cultural memory" or "cultural psychology" (*pace* Warburg). That the individual is not simply the "author" (or "origin") of his or her experience (as of being "human") is evident from a sense of the uncanny in mimesis, from the shock of (mis)recognition, where the impersonal "itself" appears to be animate(d), where the sense of the anthropomorphic includes a feeling for what is dead; where matter and metaphysics are not simply ("really") opposed.

Shock

As will be discussed in the following chapters, in the history of the theatre of death the model (for the) actor shifts from the image (or thought) of a puppet (amongst such precedents as the Symbolists) to that of the dead, amongst those artists – to name only Craig, Artaud, Genet, Kantor, and Müller – for whom this pre-modern anthropological "survival" provides a key to their aesthetic interest. The dead in (or of) this model are not literary or dramatic characters or roles – such as "Hamlet" might be thought of in the interpretation of a particular actor within the dominant Western tradition (whether in the romantic tradition of a spirit or demonic "possession" or "inspiration"; or the naturalistic tradition of insight through a forensic psychological construction) – where, in this major tradition, one can even speak of a "Shakespearean actor" (or, indeed, more generally, of a "character actor").

In the theatre of death the question of "likeness" (and "presence") touches upon an affect – a "metaphysical feeling" (or "shock" at, precisely, the uncanny in mimesis) – where the actor's appearance figures (a "return" of) the dead for an audience (in an

---

[107] Aby Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, trans. Michael Steinberg, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, p.54, where, however, Steinberg translates *Denkraum* as "space for reflection" [*cf* Warburg, *Schlangenritual*, Berlin: Wagenbach, 2011, p.75].
[108] Wilfred Bion, *Learning from Experience*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.
[109] Moshe Barasch, *Imago Hominis: Studies in the Language of Art*, New York: New York University Press, 1991.

art of theatre so conceived). Here there is something uncanny or "unlike" – familiarly unfamiliar – in the apparent "likeness" of the actor, in the unsettling of appearance as a "return" (*from* one world *to* another). Through the medium of the (present) actor the audience is touched by a sense of the threshold between the visible and the invisible, between "this world" and another; settled in neither the one nor the other simply, but rather unsettling in between, in the coming to life of a theatre of death there appears a shock at the uncanny.[110]

Where the "life like" human image is limited to the visible, "another world" is thought of as the "next world", as after or beyond death, as "life in the hereafter". The paradigm of the actor in the theatre of death, however, provokes an unsettling of the sense of *this* world. The actor is seen to be not present as him or herself, but in persona, *as* an actor ("beside" himself[111]) – rather than being "in character" (as Hamlet, for instance). The actor is, as it were, "in" the character of "being an actor", its unlike likeness to an audience; a semblance at the threshold of the recognisable. The "other" world of this theatre is not transcendental – the "beyond" of religion or traditional metaphysics – but a world still "here below", in its "degraded reality". The figure of the actor is (as if) displaced from (as if returning to) "this world", (as if) already dead, in a *theatre* that is a double of this world.[112]

These key questions of "world" (or stage) concern *from* where and *to* where the actor (really) returns in making an appearance, not simply "theatrically" but anthropologically. Kantor characterises this, in reflections on the "reality" of Odysseus' "return" in his 1944 production of Wyspianski's play,[113] not simply in terms of Troy and Ithaca, but of the real and the fictional. It is not a question of "updating" the fiction of "here" and "there", of "home" and "front", to "Krakow" and

---

[110] This also touches upon wider cultural concerns with animism and "superstition", as these relate theatre aesthetics to anthropology (to be discussed in the following chapters).

[111] The question of being "beside" oneself is of the essence of the uncanny; not least, in the figure of the double (*pace* Otto Rank).

[112] Derrida suggests something similar in reading the "subject" of Blanchot's narrative *The Instance of my Death*, in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000, p.70-71 (and on the "I" of autobiography, p.53).

[113] Stanislaw Wyspianski, *The Return of Odysseus*, trans. Howard Clarke, Bloomington: Indiana University Russian and East European Series, vol.35, 1966.

"Stalingrad", for example; but of returning Wyspianski's play to the present, to the room where the performance is "taking place", to where the audience finds itself.

> One had to *discover* the method. It was not merely the war and Troy that Odysseus had returned from. More important, he returned from 'out of the grave', from the realm of the dead, from the 'other world' into the sphere of life, into the realm of the living; he appeared among us. The return of Odysseus established a *precedent* and a *prototype* for all the later characters of my theatre. There were many of them. The whole procession that came out of many productions and dramas – from the realm of *Fiction* – all were 'dead'; all were returning into the world of the living, into our world, into the present. This contradiction between *death* and *life* perfectly corresponded to the opposition between *fiction* and *reality*. From this moment on, one had to be consistent and draw radical conclusions about acting; one had to resist the temptation of psychological, questionable, and well-known methods of demonstrating mystical states and of the situations from the verge of 'this' and 'that' world.[114]

The stage for this clandestine production during the Occupation was a room shared with the audience, where the entrance and exit, the "on" stage and "off", were both real for all the participants (actors and audience alike). The "return" signified a threshold – a remove of one step – not as the dressing of reality by appearances (decorative, illusionary theatre), but as making its reality (*between* reality and fiction, past and present) apparent or "visible". In a later production, entitled *I Shall Never Return* (1988), Kantor reflected on a note that he had made to himself as a theatre maker in 1944: "Odysseus must really return. Ever since that day, I have remained faithful to the meaning of this sentence."[115]

The ruses of Penelope's fidelity are famous and echo with the very thought of *dramaturgy*, the drama-ergon, the "work of actions" that "weave together" as "text"

---

[114] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Infamous Transition from the World of the Dead into the World of the Dead", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.145.
[115] *Ibid*.

into the form of a "plot".[116] Although the different stages of the Cricot 2 theatre's researches offer changing possibilities of what the meaning of "really" might be (concerning what is enacted in the appearance, or shock, of this "return"), Kantor did indeed remain faithful to its thought, as it "signified the need to find a *transition* from the world of 'beyond' to the world 'here', from the condition of being dead to that of being alive".[117] This was not a question of the literary interpretation of the "character" of Odysseus, by and for an actor (or an audience), but the construction, or rather the "annexation", of the reality of a theatrical space (as a relation *between* the actor and an audience, in effecting a shock in and of their co-presence).

> I would state further that *theatre is the place that reveals – as some fords in a river do – the traces of transition from 'that other side' into our life*. An Actor who assumes the condition of A Dead Man stands in front of the audience. A performance whose form is closely connected with that of a ritual or a ceremony could be equated with a treatment that makes use of a *shock*. I would gladly call it a *metaphysical* one.[118]

This metaphysical shock – a tear in the weave of the familiar, a sense of exclusion or exile from "home", the possibility that Ithaca does not even exist – is, after all, at the heart of the short twentieth century's cultural memory, in this dramaturgy from Wyspianski to Kantor (not to mention in film, for example, Godard and Jonas Mekas).[119] Producing the uncanny shock of "human" (re)appearance has been the concern of a minor tradition in modernist art theatre, from the symbolism of Wyspianski, through the formalism of Witkiewicz, to the "death" of Kantor. It is with

---

[116] Eugenio Barba, "Dramaturgy", in *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese (eds.), trans. Richard Fowler, London: Routledge, 1995, pp.68-71.
[117] Kantor, *op. cit.*
[118] *Ibid.*, p.146.
[119] Kantor continually revisited the "setting" for this production in its "model" versions – starting, long before any thought of the Cricoteka archive, with his participation in 1952 (including as the judge for stage design) in an Artists' Union exhibition of design. Laurie Kosolski writes: "[H]e displayed a mock-up for his 1945 production of *The Return of Odysseus*... The mock-up's overall impression was stark and enigmatic, close to an abstraction. Anything but socialist realist, it was not listed in the exhibit programme – but Kantor was nevertheless permitted to display it" (*Painting Krakow Red: Politics and Culture in Poland, 1945-1950*, PhD Thesis, Stanford University, June 1998, p.393-4). A history of the (re)appearance of this "scene" (or room) in Kantor's work could be the subject of a chapter of its own, relatable to the subsequent model of "the classroom" (to be discussed in part three).

this last that the image of the actor "itself" – distinct from a character – becomes theorised in (and as) a practice of *theatre*, through its concept "of death".

Major and minor

The complex interweaving of cultural and personal mythology in the example of Kantor's Odysseus will be returned to in part three, but suffice it here at least to note the shock of the uncanny in what "returns" *between* appearance and reality:

> This everyday Realness, which was firmly rooted in both place and time, immediately permitted the audience to perceive this mysterious current flowing from the depth of time when the soldier, whose presence could not have been questioned, called himself by the name of the man who had died centuries ago. A split second was needed to see this return, but the emotion raised by it stayed much longer... in memory![120]

It is precisely the relation between the modern, or avant-garde, as "shock" and the understanding of an *art* of theatre in cultural memory – not simply as entertainment but as an encounter with metaphysics, where vision is not reducible to the visible – that is identified in this thesis as the "uncanny in mimesis". The various suggestions above concerning the wide range of reference for a metaphorical understanding of "the theatre of death" are hardly exhaustive, but they serve to indicate what this title might name or identify both theoretically and historically, in relation to which the question of an *art* practice must distinguish itself, if it is not simply to become another metaphor for non-aesthetic researches. While those metaphorical examples of "theatre" appear as variations "of death", each instance modifies, in its specificity, the meaning of its practice. Such "theatre(s)" offer modes of existence to death – for survivors, for worshippers, for devotees, for mourners, and (or) for audiences. In the particularity of their event (or taking place), the site of these different encounters with the dead differentiates a theatrical concept. Here, however, we are concerned with the relation between theatre and death, not metaphorically but as a specific *art* practice.

---

[120] Tadeusz Kantor, "Theatrical Place", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further On, Nothing*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.352.

In the case of theatre, the relation between the site (whether open air or enclosed, promenade or seated, proscenium or arena) and the event (a theatrical performance or "séance") constitutes a practice of human appearance where relations between the visible and the invisible, animate and inanimate, the living and the dead, are staged or played out. As Roland Barthes notes, theatre here touches upon the fundamental divisions of western metaphysics, through which experience is categorised and re-presented by cultural practices as (if) "naturalised".[121]

In what sense though does this theatre distinguish itself from research into the paranormal, for example? In what sense is "metaphysical shock" (or the uncanny) an alternative to "superstition" in the claims of (and for) this theatre (of death)? Does the relation between aesthetics and anthropology addressed by this thesis entail some sort of intellectual "regression" (as referred to by Stengers, above), rather than a conceptual exploration of human "reality"?

To state the obvious, theatre is no more one thing (historically and theoretically) than are the practices of death, as they touch upon different cultural representations of the unrepresentable. As *theatre*, it is not death itself that is in question, but rather the question itself *of death*, of the threshold *between* presence and absence, of appearance(s) not simply opposed to reality. To attempt to articulate the specific concept of an aesthetic practice (or art form) is not to try to define (or prescribe) it, but rather to explore how it might be thought through (in) its own "theatre" of theory.[122] That the dead exist (or that death is, indeed, a mode of existence) is as obvious as it is not. With respect to the impossible possibility of its representation(s) – including its "theatre" – this thesis will explore some of the ways in which this question of existence has been addressed in modernity; not least, as conceived of

---

[121] Roland Barthes, "Lesson in Writing", trans. Stephen Heath, in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. Stephen Heath, Glasgow: Fontana, 1982.

[122] This further metaphorical turn in the relations between key terms here is perhaps exemplified by Derrida's reading of Mallarmé's *Mimique*, as it provides a model for Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of mimesis. (Another "exemplary" instance might be Samuel Weber's translation of "*entre*" in his reading of Derrida's Mallarmé, not least as this unsettles the question of "threshold" (*pace* Derrida's *Aporia* essay): "...in repeating and remarking the ambiguity of the word *entre* in Mallarmé's text, a word that can be read as both adverb ('between') and verb ('enter'), Derrida moves from purely 'theoretical' discourse, describing an object independent of it, to a 'theatrical' mode of (re)writing that *stages* (dislocates) what it also recites: the theatrical movement of Mallarmé's writing..." (Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2004, p.14).

"rationally" in terms of superstition, itself associated with, and yet distinguished from, the uncanny.

The tension between a restricted (non-metaphorical) sense of specificity concerning an aesthetic practice (within the modernist art of "theatre") and the wider, contextual – philosophical, anthropological, and historical – questions raised by its concept (precisely, "of death") will run throughout this thesis, resisting making of theatre (as is so often the case) a metaphor of these cultural practices (of death).[123] It is here a question of what distinguishes theatre as an *art*, not only within the various arts of mimesis (for instance, portraiture or photography) but also within the history of theatrical practice(s) themselves. By the end of part one of this thesis, it will be proposed that this tension between the specific (practice) and the general (concept) finds productive expression in the idea of an iconography (or an aesthetics) of the actor particular to the theatre *of death*, in so far as this itself specifies questions of *theatre* within the cultural memory (or, indeed, anthropology) of modernism.

In death, the individual's image participates in, belongs to, the universal: we all die, albeit singularly. It is in this that Kantor sees a model of and for the actor in a "theatre of death", as the distinct visibility (and *pathos*) of human being in appearance. In Kantor's words: "It is only the dead who become visible to the living at the price of acquiring their individuality, difference, and their Image..."[124] With this image (or paradigm) of human being a distinct *art* (of theatre) may be conceived of – as that "of death". The relation between the singular and the universal, the event and its concept, is complex. Its manifestation in the dominant thought of twentieth-century theatre aesthetics is as a relation between "art and life" (as also between a production and its performance, for instance; or the repeatable and the unrepeatable), where the

---

[123] For essays on the structure of metaphor (including the operation of analogy, with respect to the opening claims of this chapter), see *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. On the mutual implication of metaphor and concept ("after Nietzsche"), see Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology", in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, 1982 (although this is, of course, an interest common to all that passes for "deconstruction"). For a succinct exploration of theatrical metaphors in rhetoric, see Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask, London: RKP, 1979, pp.138-144; and, for a book length example, Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
[124] Tadeusz Kantor, "From the Director's Notebook for 'The Dead Class'", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further On, Nothing*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.240.

specificity or "ontology" of live performance has often been identified with an elision of these differences.

As already suggested, the predominant (or major) tradition that would minimise, or even nullify, the opposition between art and life – as, for instance, to render non-existent "the actor" (whether in the name of a naturalised presence amongst professional actors, or in claims to a unique presence amongst performance artists) – finds a contrasting minor tradition within the modernist art of theatre, one that insists on this very opposition, through an aesthetics (as is proposed here) "of death". Crucially, as a technician of *pathos*, "the actor" here does not necessarily mean the trained professional of European academies (one of the crowned heads of modern individualism, in which cultural memory is reduced to claims about subjective interpretations). The actor in the theatre of death is as opposed to emotive or interpretative "acting" as any performance artist. The actor in this theatre is, rather, a figure of and for human appearance, or "likeness", as a medium for experiencing the mimetic play (or conceit) between the body and its image as an art – of the uncanny.

Although the distinction here between major and minor traditions borrows the terms of Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of Kafka, it is not intended as a reading of the theatre of death in terms of their three characteristics of such a "literature": "the deterritorialisation of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation."[125] What is crucial here is the sense that a minor tradition – as Deleuze and Guattari propose – is not separate from the major but belongs to it. The mark of the minor concept here is "death", putting in question the major concept of "theatre" (predominantly understood as offering a supposed resemblance to "life"). The work "of death" is not set apart (as, for instance, performance art has claimed to be) from that art of performance called "theatre" (or from so-called live performance), but appears, rather, as its uncanny double. The theatre of death, paradoxically, exposes the major superstition that is encoded in the dominant metaphysics of the actor within the Western tradition – that of "bringing a character to life".

---

[125] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986, p.18.

Indeed, although this minor concept of theatre goes by the name "of death", its own question (as it insists in thinking through an *art* of theatre within modernism) concerns what is (or may be) "life like" in the appearance of the actor on stage (in, or as, "theatre", precisely, rather than in life). What is it that animates this semblance (resemblance or dissemblance), or analogy (or even allegory), of human existence (as theatre)? What is it that "acts" between the body and its image (the one upon the other), as between an actor and an audience? How is the emotion of the one animated by the appearance (or pathos) of the other? How does this uncanny double of human being *appear* to stage this mimetic encounter? What gives this image of a body "life" theatrically for such artists as Kantor and Craig, such that they identify it with death, in order to gauge the aesthetic truth of its appearance in that of an actor?

Elimination

In his introduction to another tradition of twentieth century theatre practice – Brecht's specifically modernist notion of an epic (as distinct from a tragic) theatre (understood as a relation to both mass politics and mass media, where mass signifies the contested representation of historical "actors") – Walter Benjamin writes:

> The point at issue in the theatre today can be more accurately defined in relation to the stage than to the play. It concerns the filling-in of the orchestra pit. The abyss which separates the actors from the audience like the dead from the living, the abyss whose silence heightens the sublime in drama, whose resonance heightens the intoxication of opera, this abyss which, of all the elements of the stage, most indelibly bears the traces of its sacral origins, has lost its function. The stage is still elevated, but it no longer rises from an immeasurable depth; it has become a public platform. Upon this platform the theatre has now to install itself. That is the situation. But, as happens in many situations, here too the business of disguising it has prevailed over its proper realisation. Tragedies and operas go on and on being written, apparently with a trusty stage apparatus to hand, whereas in reality they do nothing but supply material for an apparatus which is obsolete.[126]

---

[126] Walter Benjamin, "What is Epic Theatre?", trans. Anna Bostock, in *Understanding Brecht*, London: Verso, 1984, p.1.

Here the taking *place* of theatre (the mimetic event) is signified by the relation between stage and auditorium, in a separation that has been reduced historically from the Orchestra to the Pit; to the footlights, or simply to the front or edge of the stage; to a pretence, often enough, of no separation at all (in the name of a challenge to that particular modernist fiction – characterising naturalism – of a fourth wall).[127] The separation between the sacred and the profane seemingly means little today – as a hieratic, priestly mediation between the living and the dead (celebrated by Craig and Genet, although not by Kantor) has receded from cultural memory. (Similarly, notions of the civic have been rendered unto the Corporate, as the separation between the consecrated and the commercial, the temple and the market, is increasingly reduced to the privatised-"public" precinct of the shopping mall.) Where once theatre served to recall the dead, today it too is a site of forgetting, of entertaining consciousness in the mirror of the present – distinct from a site of politics (as Benjamin had hoped, with the decline of the cultic value of art). Rather than "open[ing] the world of the body, as a medium for transcendence"[128] (or for a metaphysics of appearance), encountered in the mimetic shock of the uncanny, theatre typically "aspires" simply to reduce the experience of the visual to the world of the visible.

Besides its architectural forms, theatre is the event of a dynamic separation of actor and audience – a *practice* of the space *between* them, in which human images may make their appearance. The static conceptual separation between reality and appearance is precisely what the theatre "of death" unsettles – where, by contrast, "theatre" ordinarily pacifies their dynamic relation by proposing the one as a metaphor for the other. As is suggested by Benjamin's analogy concerning what "separates the actors from the audience like the dead from the living" in pre-modern theatre, what distinguishes the theatre of death (as a minor tradition within modernist

---

[127] The particular development of Kantor's theatre work from the "open" structure of "zero theatre" and "Happening theatre" (in the 1960s) to the "closed form" of the theatre of death with *The Dead Class* (in the 1970s), with its insistence on the "barrier" between actor and audience, will be discussed in part three. This concerns not only a general question of semiotics and "authorship" (for instance, with the work of Umberto Eco or Roland Barthes), but also a specific Polish context, with the legacies of Oscar Hansen's pedagogy at the Warsaw Academy of Art. For a contemporary example of play with this "fourth wall" aspect of formal theatre practice, one might cite Romeo Castellucci's production at the Schaubühne in Berlin, *Hyperion: Letters of a Terrorist*.

[128] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p.106.

theatre) is (the cultural survival or superstition of) an insistence upon the threshold that separates the actor from the audience. It is this theatrical "abyss" which, rather than being "filled in" (or negated), has to be *thought* of (as it has been, in this minor tradition, in the "likeness", or figure, of death) – if theatre is not simply to reproduce "an apparatus which is obsolete".

For Benjamin, this means acknowledging the (quotable) gesture of the new media – through montage – in the appearance of the live actor, as the "progressive", rather than "reactionary", answer to the crisis of modern theatre; as a "fresh approach to the grand old opportunity of theatre – namely, to the focus on the people who are present."[129] It is precisely this return to (indeed, of) "the human being who has been eliminated from radio and film" that is the key to a theatre of and for "today" (where Brecht's own researches look equally to the "ancient" Chinese example of acting for what could be contemporary in the European).

Neither "deadly theatre" (Brook), nor the "death of theatre" (in the name of its "living" epigones), it is precisely the survival or renewal of a pre-modern (concept of) theatre in the twentieth century (as avant-garde) that poses the question of mimesis in terms of an essentially modernist concern with the possibility of its own art (as a question of what animates the appearance of "the actor"). This possibility is thought of not only in relation to theatre's past, however, but in the name of its future – a future that seems as anachronistic today as does tragedy in the context of the "post"-modern culture of late capitalism.

As Benjamin wrote, on the eve of his suicide, concerning the subject of historical knowledge (evoking the dialectical witness that might re-imagine, or re-ignite, the potential of and for an historical "materialism"): "The only historian capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the one who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never

---

[129] Walter Benjamin, "Theatre and Radio", trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings*, vol.2.2, eds. Howard Eiland, Michael Jennings, and Gary Smith, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005, p.585.

ceased to be victorious."[130] What would theatre (and theatre history) mean for a culture where "even the dead" were not safe from the "victory" of the living, where history (and the archive) had no future in the "after life" of its past?

Of this contemporary "waste land", Franco Berardi writes:

> In the late-modern phase of capitalism, digital abstraction adds a second layer to capitalist abstraction: transformation and production no longer happen in the field of bodies, and material manipulation, but in the field of interoperativity between informational machines. Information takes the place of things, and the body is cancelled from the field of communication... In the sphere of the digital economy, the faster information circulates, the faster value is accumulated. But meaning slows down this process, as meaning needs time to be produced and to be elaborated and understood. So the acceleration of the info-flow implies an elimination of meaning. In the sphere of the financial economy, the acceleration of financial circulation and valorisation implies an elimination of the real world. The more you destroy physical things, physical resources, and the body, the more you can accelerate the circulation of financial flows.[131]

Despite the hollowing out of institutional commemorations (and, indeed, their cultural histories[132]), both death and the dead (as Benjamin insists) call upon memory. Their appeal is to be remembered, in the *work* of culture. This is what Warburg bears witness to (in both his scholarship and his psychosis) through his experience of the First World War. As Kurt Foster writes: "In the very subject of his study – the social mediation of expressive human communication and the transformation of its

---

[130] Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol.4, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006, p.391.

[131] Franco Berardi, *The Uprising*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012, p.104 and p.105. What "meaning" here means is "attention... and emotional, affective reactions" and "an ethical sensibility" (*ibid*., p.97 & p.126-7).

[132] Indeed, the commemorative has been a subject for historians under the auspices of Pierre Nora; while amongst historians of death the best known is perhaps Philippe Ariès.

languages – he seized upon the failures and achievements of collective memory in history..."[133]

Even after the most "modern" war in history (with which, precisely, Futurism famously identified itself) – inaugurating the short twentieth century – there was, as Jay Winter notes, a "tendency to slide from metaphors about remembering those who have died to the metaphysics of life after death". The pre-modern appearance of, or communication with, the dead survived the demonstration (as to a mass "audience") of mechanised, "rational" destruction. The mobilisation of modern technology (as the near "total" victory of the war machine over humanity) "did not create these modes of thought [including spiritualism], but neither did [it] discredit or destroy them."[134] In Didi-Huberman's reading (quoting from Warburg's *Mnemosyne* notes):

> [T]he Warburgian analysis of the *Nachleben* rendered possible an
> understanding, at a much more fundamental level, of the anachronistic
> coexistence of a hypermodern war with so many archaisms of social
> behaviour. The psychohistorical viewpoint associated with the *Nachleben*
> made such paradoxes of temporality intelligible, with Warburg showing
> himself in 1916-17 to be once again close to Freud's analyses, in this case
> defining the indissoluble relations between psychical "evolution" and
> "regression".[135]

The contemporary sense of the "today" addressed by Benjamin (advocating a modern epic theatre) follows the first signification of "the War" to be remembered in Europe in the legacy of the last century. Given this context of understanding, *after* the second signification was memorialised for decades by the Cold War (from which any "spark of hope in the past" that it preserved has now been eliminated), what witness does the theatre of death still offer to a modern humanity *today*? How does this theatre recall the terror of a century in which capitalism made not only the past an exploitable "present", but also the future? For if the dead do not survive, then there is no theatre

---

[133] Kurt Foster, "Aby Warburg's History of Art", in *Daedalus*, vol.105, 1976, p.176.
[134] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.76.
[135] Georges Didi-Huberman, "Warburg's Haunted House", trans. Shane Lillis, in *Common Knowledge*, 18.1, 2012, p.76-7.

for the thought of death. Where the dead have no place to be (whether as actor or audience), neither will the living. For then they have nothing to hope for from the past in the future, above all in appeals – including those of the dead – for justice, rather than revenge.[136] In this situation (in the passing from elimination through extermination to extinction), the question with which this thesis is engaged (by addressing a minor history of theatre) would, indeed, be meaningless: is it necessary that one die in order to be dead?

How do the living live with the dead? Until the dehumanisation of society by capitalism, all the living awaited the experience of the dead. It was their ultimate future. By themselves the living were incomplete. Thus living and dead were inter-dependent. Always. Only a uniquely modern form of egotism has broken this inter-dependence. With disastrous results for the living, who now think of the dead as the eliminated. – John Berger[137]

---

[136] A more locally specific instance of such concerns about the dispossession of cultural memory is expressed in a letter to *The Guardian* (21.11.2012) "by over 90 professors" addressing the coalition government's ambitions for university education and the "indefensible intergenerational unfairness" of its model for the private-debt financing of higher education: "The privatisation of university funding risks transforming the vital relationship between students and educators into a cold commercial transaction between consumers and service providers..."; that is, a relation in which the thought of what is owed to the past is understood simply as a financial debt in the future; or, as the outgoing head of the Arts Council, Liz Forgan, declared, concerning secondary school education, Michael Gove "is effectively robbing a generation of its birthright and failing in the duty we all have to continue our culture" (*The Guardian*, 15.1.13 [http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2013/jan/15/arts-council-chief-gove-education?INTCMP=SRCH]).

[137] John Berger, "Twelve Theses on the Economy of the Dead (Thesis 12)", in *Pages of the Wound*, London: Bloomsbury Press, 1994 (n.p.).

***The Theatre of Death*: The Uncanny in Mimesis – Part One**

Chapter 1: *Precedents (Craig and Artaud, Maeterlinck and Witkacy)*

We do not want something beyond death for its own sake, but craftily, we desire to be able to see ourselves dead, to assure ourselves of our death by directing a veritable gaze from beyond the grave toward our nothingness, from a point situated beyond death. – Maurice Blanchot[138]

It is important – in a thesis concerned with what it is "of death" that brings "theatre" into question specifically (quarter of a century after Kantor's death, for instance) – to stress (with Blanchot) the modern, secular sense of "a life" or an "auto-biography" (here that of Michel Leiris). This perspective upon (and even from) "beyond" a certain limit or threshold in the experience of seeing, or of the gaze, concerns a secular, literary conceit addressing what it "is" to write, and not that, for instance, of a deathbed appeal of – or to – any priestly mediation between this world and the next; as if from the perspective of the dying rather than of the dead, as if to distinguish thereby being from appearance. What is vital, in terms of this thesis, is the sense here of the body as a "locus of images", where the aesthetic and the anthropological question each other in cultural memory:

> From an anthropological perspective, then, embodiment in an image is a topos: it testifies to an age-old urge to transcend, by means of the image, the boundaries of space and time that confine the human body. It would appear then that images remain tied to the body, even in our present day virtual world. Which means that there is good reason to go on speaking of that body as a living *locus of images*.[139]

---

[138] Maurice Blanchot, "Gazes from Beyond the Grave", in *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p.253.
[139] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, trans. Thomas Dunlop, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p.61.

As will be discussed later, there is a sense in which we displace into a "beyond" what is unsettling in the apprehension of standing *before* death, as this is a limit to understanding which gives its meaning to "reason".[140]

It is also important to stress that the subject of this thesis addresses a European culture (Blanchot's "we", and Vernant's "representational enterprise" in the next chapter) of "impossible possibilities" in representation, as these occur in the age of an ambivalent modernity, in its apparent "worldly" disenchantment and desacralisation.[141] A sense of the enduring efficacy of animism, for instance, no more entails a belief simply in the "irrational" than does the recognition that "rationalism" is not universal entails a simple relativism.[142] In terms of a distinction made by Hans Belting (addressing Vernant) between "the medium of remembrance" and the "medium of embodiment" (as concerns the mimetic image), the funerary image is no longer understood as animated by the spirit of the deceased, but is now a memorial image (whether a stone stelae or a photograph), the modern sense of which (as an image) remains, after nearly two thousand years, curiously Platonic.[143] The question of "likeness" today concerns portraiture rather than animation (or possession), keeping a sense of the power of images repressed. With the portrait, the "life" of the image and of the body inheres in each distinctly; while in possession each is the double of the other. This is recalled in the ancient Roman funeral (masked) mimes, to whose "theatre of death" Genet appeals, for instance, in a conception of his own in the late 1950s.[144]

The votive image in the form of a wax effigy popular in the Renaissance, as studied by Julius Schlosser and Warburg, will be discussed in the next chapter. Here,

---

[140] The question of such "limits" will return – with Heidegger's discussion of the uncanny – at the end of this chapter. This sense of the "truth" of literature (of what it "is"), as an inscription or testimony to the life of death, is the subject of Derrida's several readings of Blanchot, to cite here only his commentary on Blanchot's quasi-autobiographical narrative, *The Instant of my Death*, in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, both trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

[141] The two terms are familiar from Weber (after Schiller) and subsequently, for example, Keith Thomas. The cultural ambivalence concerning "enchantment" or "animism" is addressed by both Warburg and Freud, and underlies Latour's more recent suggestion that "we" have never been modern.

[142] See, for example, the discussion by Marc Augé of ambivalence and ambiguity in the claims of knowledge (*A Sense for the Other*, trans. Amy Jacobs, Stanford University Press, 1998, pp.30-31).

[143] Belting, *op. cit.*, pp.84-85 (and pp.108-09).

[144] Belting also discusses the Roman *pompes funèbres*, *op cit.*, pp.115-118.

however, it is the uncanny power of the image as the vehicle of a sense of the "after life" – not only of the portrayed but of the portrait itself – that concerns us. Hans Belting has discussed, for example, the renewal of pagan images of the dead in the Christian icon, as the latter detached itself from a particular place – the tomb of a saint (with its associated veneration of relics) – taking on an after life (or pathos) of distinct conventions (or formulae) which prove effective in a dispersed "locus" of cultural memory:

> Like the imperial image and the image of the gods, the funeral portrait... received a special cult that made possible the emergence of the icon. The cult of tombs promoted the cult of saints, which in turn became manifest in the cult of their images. Both private persons and saints were commemorated with their images. In the case of the saints the difference was the kind of commemoration that transcended the private sphere and, in the end, became a public cult that was sanctioned by the church. The saint's icon was a product of the cult practised at the saint's tomb. It initially resembled the private funeral portrait to such an extent that it was virtually indistinguishable from the latter. Later on, the range of types of images narrowed down when funerary portraits of private individuals went out of use and icons of saints adopted conventions of their own. Even then, they made use of the aesthetics that had been developed in ancient portraiture.[145]

Such "conventions" in the relation between bodies and their image (through manifold aesthetic and anthropological appearances) have been explored by, for example, Warburg, Freud, Taussig, and Latour, and touch upon a fundamental issue of theatre as a civic (and secular) space for cultural reflexivity (including here the concept, or paradigm, of the actor within a minor theatrical tradition "of death").

This might once have gone without saying in Europe (in the "global" self-image of "the West"), but in a context in which the production that will be the principal

---

[145] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p.98. (Also, David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989; and WJT Mitchell, *What do Images Want*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005.)

"example" discussed in chapter three – Romeo Castellucci's *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God* – had both its Paris and Milan performances (during 2011-12) disrupted by fundamentalist Catholics, who effectively wished to see the work banned, the over-determined claims about rationality and irrationality characteristic of modernism need to be recognised in – and for – their distinct (indeed, historical) "reason(s)".[146]

This is not simply a matter of a "clash of ideologies", but touches upon the sense of what it means to be mortal – as having a sense of the "limits of reason" (as of the reason for limits). Rather than tolerate their unsettling ambiguities, or even ambivalences, the fundamentalist ignores the critical sense of such limits. Not the least of what being "on the way to language" means – as to an inhabitable (rather than a transcendent) world – is a sense (for speaking, mortal being(s)) of being "on the way to death", where "the essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but remains still unthought".[147] In the case of fundamentalism there is no question "of death" in this modern sense (of the deconstruction of metaphysics[148]), and thus a spectacle may be made of death, but not (modern) art. Modernism is the constant point of reference in this thesis – as the horizon of significance for its

---

[146] See, http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/oct/25/romeo-castelluci-christian-protesters-play. The "alternative theatre" of these interruptions (acknowledged by a secular audience who applauded the arrival of the riot police on stage) is offered in a film by an organisation calling itself the "French Revival" [Renouveau Francais] (that claims links not only with the conservative Catholic, Maurras political tradition, but also with the memory of the clandestine OAS), that can be viewed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOtq_k8f3js. This "political theatre" is seemingly far removed from that evoked by a review of a show in the 2013 London International Mime Festival, which begins: "Religion and theatre have much in common. Both require their followers to believe what seems to be unbelieveable; and Catholicism in particular has truly fantastic costumes, not to mention a belief in transformations. The two are brought together in this latest, largely silent piece from Stan's Café, the remarkable Birmingham-based company that often interrogates the past to better understand the present. It takes the form of an evangelical puppet show, performed with utter sincerity but marked ineptitude by three cardinals in crimson robes, with the aid of a Muslim stage manager..." (Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*, 16.1.13). Crucially, there is no icon here, only prelates; no "concept of the Face", only profane "acting". Indeed, can theatre ever be sacred without then becoming religious? Is modern theatre necessarily secular, as a relation to public, civic space – in which images (of actions) are understood (not least by the unconscious cynicism of the fundamentalists) in terms of their "conventions"?

[147] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language", in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1971, p.107. The modern sense of "limits" and the "poetic project of being" in Heidegger will be returned to the next chapter.

[148] This history, as a question of history (not least that in and of translation between German and French), is addressed by Jean-Luc Nancy, in "Our History", trans. Cynthia Chase, *et al*., in *Diacritics*, Fall 1990 (pp.101-106 especially).

questions of art – precisely where what is at stake is the "pre-modern" survival (in terms of the distinctions by which modernism has defined itself) of a cultural concern with the dead, identified (as proposed in the Introduction) with the aesthetic dynamic *between* "abstraction and empathy".

Suffice it to note here, however, that none of the epigraphs to each of the chapters of part one of this thesis (intended to suggest its field of research) refer to theatre specifically. As was explained in the Introduction (with respect to theatre aesthetics), the theatre of death does not concern the mimesis (or theatrical representation) of death as a theme, or an action, belonging to a drama. The question "of death" concerns rather the image or thought of "theatre" itself, in the mimetic appearance of human beings to and for one another, as conceived of in the similitude (resemblance) and difference (dissemblance) between "actor" and "audience". In its stage(d) representations, death is understood here (both historically and theoretically) in terms of the techniques of an *art* of theatre; as a cultural (or mimetic) appearance of the dead made to (and by) the living. For Kantor – as for Craig and Artaud in the present chapter – the "theatrical" is not thought of simply as an applied technique (as merely a professional practice), but as the experience of a metaphysical encounter or shock, which this thesis identifies as the uncanny in mimesis.

Fundamentally, what the title of this "theatre" (in both its concept and practice) refers to is what it is "of" human beings – mimetic creatures for whom death exists (not least as a question of what is, or is not, representable) – that becomes evident or thinkable theatrically by way of "death". It refers, both theoretically and historically, to what "of" the living is represented *theatrically* by the dead – understood to be no more or less metaphorical than the reverse, in the representation of the dead by the living. Here the *imago mortui* or *similitudo hominis* – the terms by which the appearance of the dead was named in the Middle Ages[149] – return as a form of theatrical iconography. It is the sense of this shift from death to "the dead" – to the possibility of a sight from "beyond death" (seeing ourselves seen as dead, in Blanchot's evocation) – that is the underlying subject of this thesis; not simply as a conceptual return to the shades or eidola of pre-Platonic understanding, or even the

---

[149] Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2001, p.231.

possessed bodies consigned to "primitivism" by modernity, but as the conceptual return of these *figura* to a modern art of theatre, in the image of its "actors". Where traditionally this sense of vision (from "beyond") is to be "seen" in the realm of dreams, of epiphanies, or of shamanic journeys, what may be seen in theatre is today relatable to the modern techniques of autobiography and photography. Here the relation between medium and image (at least before, or resisting, the immanence of a digital universality) remains temporal, conveying still a sense of what exists "afterwards".

In an early essay on film as art [1924], Béla Balázs evokes such modern techniques of visibility, suggesting that "the natural thing is for us to be present when we observe something. However, one of our deepest metaphysical yearnings is to see what things are like when we are not present."[150] Here the appearance of living on, or "afterwards", shows us an incorporeal image of the body in a specifically modern cultural medium – no longer necessarily related to funerary practices, aiming at recognising, or placating, the (uncanny) presence of the dead. The telematic (or telepresence) has been "domesticated" (or commodified) in modernity (such that we may say, in a debased and trivialised way, that "we are all shamans now") – and yet we still dream of the dead; and photography has itself been addressed (by more than one writer) in terms of a "theatre" of the dead, not as a question of fictional characters, but as an aesthetic-anthropological question of techniques of human appearance(s) or images.

As Anselm Franke observes, Edward Tylor's account of the human soul as "a thin, insubstantial human image... capable of leaving the body far behind... appearing to men waking or asleep as a phantasm separate from the body of which it bears the likeness; continuing to exist and appear to men after the death of that body..." offers "a description that, with minor alterations, would be applicable in almost all its features to the photographic and cinematographic image."[151] These cultural practices provide testimony to Bachelard's observation (resonating through all the references

---

[150] Béla Balázs, "The Visible Man", trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, ed. Erica Carter, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011, p.61.
[151] Anselm Franke, in Anselm Franke (ed.), *Animism* (Vol. 1), Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010, p.26 (citing Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol.1, London: John Murray, 1871, p.429).

cited here) that: "'death was first an image, and it will ever remain an image,' since we do not know what death really *is*."[152]

The dead figure as a universal possibility of the individual. We all die, albeit singularly. In a reflection on the paradoxes of citing "my death" (and thus the limits of "auto-biography"), Derrida observes, that: "if death... names the very irreplacability of absolute singularity (no one can die in my place or in the place of the other), then all the *examples* in the world can precisely illustrate this specificity".[153] Even if explored dialectically, the relation between singular and universal, the event and its concept, remains paradoxical, or even aporetic, here – not least in its manifestation in the dominant thought of the relation between "art and life" within twentieth-century theatre aesthetics; as, for instance, in claims concerning the unique and the repeatable in the medium, or the event, of performance. As proposed in the Introduction, the major desire to minimise or even to nullify this relation, thought of as an opposition, finds a contrasting minor tradition within the modernist *art* of theatre; one that insists on this very distinction (on what is unsettling in it), through an aesthetics (as proposed here) "of death".

Besides any number of metaphorical references for the "theatre" of death (as discussed in the Introduction), this title refers – directly – to an historically specific practice and concept, so named in 1975 by Tadeusz Kantor. However, even in this instance neither practice nor theory is to be explained (through analogy) simply by reference of the one to the other.[154] As indicated by the question of metaphor, this thesis makes reference to the "theatre of death", in its theorisation, in terms of the "uncanny in mimesis", proposing a comparative basis for thinking through the work of other theatre artists besides Kantor. Here the mimetic possibility of "theatre" finds a comparative concept – "of death" – in theorising an iconography of the actor; that is, in the aesthetic figure of an uncanny double, or appearance, of the human being.

---

[152] Cited in Belting, *op. cit.*, p.4.

[153] Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, p.22.

[154] It is this very term ("the theatre of death") to which the thesis aims to give conceptual content – as "the uncanny in mimesis" – rather than simply amplifying the description of an historical practice (based on paraphrase of an artist's writings). The wider field of research in which these two parts of the title meet will be proposed in this chapter as being that of an iconography of the actor within such a theatre practice.

This also offers a basis for adducing different artists' critique (both practical and theoretical) of prevailing, major conceptions of theatre practice – as illusionistic, naturalistic, psychological, or, indeed, as "living" – in the image of the actor as its principal vehicle.

As also noted in the Introduction, the title of this thesis nonetheless contains a theoretical analogy that can be expressed in an historical proposition: that the relation between audience and actor has been conceived of by various theatre artists in the twentieth century as figuring a relation between the living and the dead. In this instance, the thesis addresses the historical "content" of its initial, theoretical proposition. For it is not simply a question of explaining *that* the audience-actor relation has been so thought of in the past, but of *how* it may yet be so thought of in the present – not least, as an understanding of various artists' (past) practice today.

It might seem paradoxical, for instance, that in this theatre ("of death") – when addressing the actor's appearance on stage – a visible relation is modelled upon an invisible one; that is, where the dead provide a model for the appearance of the living, rather than the reverse. This inversion of what might be ordinarily expected *theatrically* has thus to be explained (for what, after all, do the dead look *like*?), if it is not to be relegated simply to the realms of metaphor or mystery, symbolism or superstition. As will be explored in the following examples, the relation between the visible and the invisible – as conceived of in this "theatre" between audience and actor – is not one of a simple binary. The mimetic co-presence (or "reciprocity") of appearance(s), particularly in the "look" (identified typically with the face), takes the rhetorical form (as in Merleau-Ponty's analysis) of a chiasmus.[155]

This fundamental relation between beholder and beheld, as modelled culturally (and enacted theatrically), has both ancient and modern exemplars. It is, for instance, the central event of "the chain of episodes" involved in the mythical (and proto-photographic) scene of a death dealing (and death defying) encounter with the Gorgon

---

[155] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968 (specifically chapter four). As we shall see, it is precisely the unsettling of expectations concerning such "reciprocity" that characterises the uncanny in mimesis theatrically.

– as Jean-Pierre Vernant recounts it – in terms of "the eye, the gaze, the reciprocity of seeing and being seen".[156] Returning from "behind" the Gorgon's mask, the gaze itself "lives on" in uncanny ways, haunting the living with a fear of the dead (or the mimetic appearance of the inanimate). A doll, a mask, or even a non-anthropomorphic object, may seem to be animated by a look, the strange, mimetic "reciprocity" of which can be profoundly unsettling (especially when not framed by – or as – the theatrical). The effect of the Gorgon's gaze is to "still" the animate subject, in an instance of time becoming visible (an echo, or survival, of which can be seen, for example, in the playground game of Grandma's Footsteps). The vocabulary of living "after" death in the image of the Gorgon, or more commonly that of the death mask, returns in that of the photograph.[157] In each case, as with theatre, a question of mnemotechnics is posed; one that distinguishes the human image from everyday life, as a means of reading mimesis in – and as – a semblance of itself, through, precisely, the appearance of an *art* of embodiment.[158]

The frontal image, or countenance, of the face as *prosopon*,[159] the alterity of which is conceptualised in the techniques of the mask and the mirror, of the photograph and the actor's "appearance" on stage, is a fundamental theme of this thesis – for which the Gorgon, capturing the gaze, provides a prototypical figure (in relation to a mimesis of death), requiring a research (as a question of both an aesthetic and a metaphysical experience) that is distinct from a sociology of theatre spectating. This

---

[156] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Death in the Eyes", trans. Thomas Curely and Froma Zeitlin, in *Mortals and Immortals*, Froma Zeitlin ed., New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p.135.

[157] In his analysis of the photographic iconography of hysteria, Georges Didi-Huberman even refers to a "self-gorgonisation" in the example of Augustine (*The Invention of Hysteria*, trans. Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003, p.122).

[158] "For 'to resemble', or Resembling, is the name for a major concern about time in the visible. This is precisely what exposes all photographic evidence to anxiety, and beyond it, to staging…" Didi-Huberman, *ibid.,* p.65.

[159] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "In the Mirror of Medusa", trans. Froma Zeitlin, in *Mortals and Immortals*, Froma Zeitlin ed., New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p.142: "The face is called *prosopon* in Greek; it is what one presents of oneself to the gaze of others, an individualised countenance appearing before the eyes of anyone who meets one directly," with a double meaning of both face and mask. In this context, we might note that for Grotowski, for instance, an "impulse" is always a face-to-face relation with another existence – including the supernatural: "When Hamlet speaks of his father, he speaks a monologue, but he is facing his father. Impulse always exists *facing*." (Jerzy Grotowski, "Reply to Stanislavsky", trans. Kris Salata, *TDR*, 52.2, Summer 2008, p.37). (See also, Moshe Barasch, *Imago Hominis*, part one, New York: New York University Press, 1991.)

research appeals even less to a turn to cognitive science (in place of phenomenology), or even to reference to "mirror neurones" (which presuppose the very effect that they purport to explain).[160] Through the visibility of "the stage" (as itself a technology for producing the visibility of the human being as other to itself), the invisible can be thought of theatrically (in a "mirror transforming the living into the dead", as Vernant suggestively describes the effect of the Gorgon's look[161]), situating this research in theatre history in relation to metaphysics (as, indeed, the artists involved themselves insist). The claim for *art* is precisely the space between beholder and beheld as that of a work, an object, an event, which (unlike the encounter with the Gorgon) is not reducible to one or the other. In the case of the actor ("of death"), it is the image of the body that presents or figures this possibility of *theatre*.

With the Gorgon, the event of the actor-audience relation is given a mythical content – as a conceptual figure (or thought-image). In this "look", the skull becomes apparent, revealing the cavities of the eyes – those "vaults of approaching death", as Antonin Artaud identifies them in the very sight of the human face.[162] In contrast to the withdrawn, interiorised gaze of the death mask (to which we will return, with Heidegger, in chapter five), here the eye sockets stare, presenting the void of the spectator's own gaze. The skull has indeed provided an emblematic *memento mori* – relating, in the iconography of St. Jerome, the very site of thought to the sight of death. Where the Saint's head (with its contemplative look) rests in one hand, the other hand rests upon a skull, the object of his contemplation.[163]

---

[160] For example, in essays collected in Maxim Stamenov and Vittorio Gallese (eds.), *Mirror Neurones and the Evolution of the Brain*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2002; and Stein Bråten (ed.), *On Being Moved*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2007.

[161] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "In the Mirror of Medusa", trans. Froma Zeitlin, in *Mortals and Immortals*, Froma Zeitlin ed., New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p.147.

[162] In Artaud's fantastic suggestion: "The human face as it is is still searching with two eyes, a nose, a mouth and auricular cavities which correspond to the holes of orbits like the four openings of the burial vault of approaching death," in "The Human Face", trans. Clayton Eshleman, in *Watchfiends and Rack Screams*, Boston: Exact Change, 1995, p.277. As evident from the Richard Harris collection, drawn on for the Welcome Institute exhibition *Death: A Self-Portrait* (15.11.12-24.02.13), the skull is an emblem of death (and of *vanitas*) across most periods and cultures (also *Death: A Picture Album*, London: Welcome Trust, 2012).

[163] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Être crâne*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2000, p.31.

In Hans Belting's analysis (not simply of the history of art but of the ontology of the image) by the time of the Renaissance the painted image no longer depicted the dead, but only death:

> A painting was now a unity, subject to the laws of empirical perception, and there was no longer any place in such a painting for two kinds of bodies; namely, actual corpses and bodies depicting the dead in another world… The skull was introduced in the Renaissance simultaneously with the lifelike portrait and as its indispensable pendant. It was a perception of the immanent world that paintings now reproduced, as if they were painted mirrors. Death caught up with the portraits of the living, whose death, like their life, took place in the realm of the living; the artist could no longer follow them further, into the Hereafter. Art had lost its ability to transcend the boundaries of this world…[164]

Rather than the major tradition of metaphor – most familiar in allusions to art "hold[ing], as 'twere, the mirror up to nature" [*Hamlet*, 3.2.18-19], and of "all the world's a stage" [*As you like it*, 2.7.139] – in which an opposition between world and stage is elided (in the assimilation of the represented with its representation), in the minor theatrical tradition explored here the question of mimesis is (paradoxically) posed in a literal practice, or technique, of its stage(d) appearance(s).

The unsettling sense of "another world" momentarily captured, cast, conceptualised, or presented theatrically is occluded by the major appeal simply to the spectacle of "this world". This remains the case in the digital age where – in the question of the interface (that is, in the mimetic relation *between* actor and audience, addressed through voguish theatrical claims for new media) – it may be said that "the scene and the mirror have given way to a screen and a network."[165] Indeed, in a re-writing, as it were, for the Internet age of Walter Benjamin's essay on "The Storyteller" (to which

---

[164] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, trans. Thomas Dunlop, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p.138.
[165] Jean Baudrillard "The Ecstasy of Communication", ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze, New York: Semiotext(e), 1988, p.12. (See also Benjamin's essay on "The Poverty of Experience", as well as his remarks on the Epic theatre discussed at the end of the Introduction.)

we will return at the beginning of the next chapter), Jean Baudrillard uses the example of theatre for recalling the era of metaphysics before the "electronic encephalisation" of "hyperreality".[166] Baudrillard writes:

> [T]hat which was previously projected, which was lived as a metaphor in the terrestrial habitat is from now on projected, entirely without metaphor, into the absolute space of simulation. Our private sphere has ceased to be the stage where the drama of the subject at odds with his objects and with his image is played out: we no longer exist as playwrights or actors, but as terminals of multiple networks… All this destroys the stage, once preserved through a minimal distance and which was based on a secret ritual known only to its actors.[167]

Here the question of embodied co-presence, with the representational as the preservation of "a minimal distance", has been displaced by that of the "live" as an after effect of the digitally mediated.[168] The metaphysical question arising from the sense that we all die singularly is displaced by a sense that, so far as representation by the digital media is concerned, we are all already dead – terminally so. Paradoxically, therefore, "the theatre of death" offers some semblance of an aesthetic resistance to the very "post"-modernity that gives it historical specificity, as a question of understanding – anachronistically – a distinctive, minor tradition in the history of modernist art theatre from the past century.

The relation between the visible and the invisible in the technique of the stage could, however, be thought to apply more familiarly to that between an actor and his or her part or role, as when impersonating dramatically – fictionally – a particular historical dead person, or a particular literary-derived persona or character (one that can have never "lived" or "died", or have been otherwise visible in the world). In contrast to the theatre of death, the invisible in professional theatre ordinarily concerns the textual – paradoxically, since (to use Roman Ingarden's distinction) it is into the scenic register of the visible that the *Nebentext* (all that is presented in written

---

description by the playwright) appears to disappear (scenically materialised rather than simply imagined by the reader). Furthermore, making visible all that may be said to take place "between the lines" in the *Hauptext* (all that is written to be presented as speech or action) became the very work of theatre director-theorists as different as Stanislavsky and Brecht in the twentieth century.[169]

Indeed, the question of the invisible (as of making visible the unspoken, or more literally the "unwritten", aspects of the dramatic text) has been the privileged domain of the specifically modernist theatrical practice of the director or *metteur-en-scène*. As concerns the bodies on stage in such a theatre, "an unseen bears upon the scene" (in Elin Diamond's felicitous expression)[170] – where, nonetheless, the invisible remains modelled upon the visible. We shall see, below, how "death" provides a limit case of this visibility for the Western theatre; a limit case that is transformed in and by the theatre of death, the concept of which allows us to recognise its comparative practice in such precedents as Craig and Artaud, as well as in such exemplars as Kantor and Castellucci (not to mention Genet and Müller, whose work will be addressed in a separate study).

Although, as Alain Badiou proposes, the director in the twentieth century "is something like a thinker of representation,"[171] this major theatrical tradition does not necessarily conceive of itself as a "visual" (still less as a "metaphysical") theatre – that is, a theatre in which vision or visible experience is the subject (in which a Schematism of representation may be theorised in practice) – but rather as a theatre of the visible, in which objects and people occupy stage space as they would (supposedly) in (the fictions of) "everyday life", "nature", or "the real world". The

---

[169] The categories of *Nebentext* and *Hauptext* are taken from Roman Ingarden's study, *The Literary Work of Art* (and an article, "The Functions of Language in the Theatre", included as an appendix), trans. George Grabowicz, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp.208, 319, and 377.

[170] Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, London: Routledge, 2008, p.ii.

[171] Alain Badiou, *Our Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, p.40. For Badiou, the emergence of the director is a significant "symptom" for understanding the last century – "the century of the theatre as art", which "invented the notion of *mise en scène*." Badiou notes that: "It transformed the thinking of representation into an art in its own right... an independent art... that belongs neither to that of the writer nor to that of the performer, but... creates instead, in both thought and space, a mediation between the two. The theatre director is something like a thinker of representation as such, who carries out a very complex investigation into the relationships between text, acting, space and public" (*ibid*.).

relation between the verbal and the visual – as a fundamental question of Occidental aesthetics, from Horace to Rancière, which conditions expectations as to the relation between the visible and the invisible on stage in the dynamics of human appearance and gesture – has (at least, in the world of dramatic theatre) made of the actor's work of representation, or of mimesis, a relation between an interior "life" (as thought or motive) and its exteriorised expression, above all in speech (under the theatrical reign of the playwright, typically modelled, in modernity, upon the novelist).

The familiar binary construction eliding spoken intelligibility with what is enacted (as its performed, or visible, expression) characterises what can be called (in the title of a study by Marvin Carlson) "the haunted stage". The contrast of this (seemingly associated) idea of a "spectral" theatre with the theatre of death is manifest in the thought of the actor's presence. It is not characters that haunt the theatre of death but actors themselves – where the roles played by their apparition(s) are not conceived of metaphorically but metaphysically. The appearance of the invisible occurs not in the expression of a literary, fictional, illusionistic character (as opposed to a real, material, or embodied actor); but in an unsettling of this binary distinction, as an uncanny "theatrical" event in which the living appear as "the dead".[172] Such an appearance of the actor is addressed specifically by Craig, for whom the "supernatural" on stage ("in the twentieth century") provides an index for the successful theatrical understanding of Shakespeare, distinct from that of the reading imagination; for a production to "be fulfilling the poet's intention instead of turning his majestic spirits into sepulchral-voiced gentlemen with whitened faces and robes of gauze".[173]

---

[172] Roland Barthes identifies this as a "fundamental antinomy" in Western metaphysics (to be discussed below). Here we have a crucial instance (in relation to creative work with actors) of why the theatre artists discussed in this thesis are not "directors" in the usual sense (as this latter has been privileged in academic study of modern theatre history). The scenario of "the haunted stage", furthermore, has been much in vogue of late, addressing what we might call a literary "theatre of ghosts". The condition of "theory" in which this ghostly concept speaks of and to *theatre* will be the subject of critique in what follows (not least, in terms of the "theatre" identified theoretically by – and with – deconstruction, as highlighted for instance by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Mimesis and Truth", in *Diacritics*, vol.8, n.1, Spring 1978, pp.20-21).
[173] Edward Gordon Craig, "On the Ghosts in the Tragedies of Shakespeare" (1908), in *Craig on Theatre*, ed. Michael Walton, London: Methuen, 1999, p.176 and p.171.

As noted before, the specifically theatrical sense of the actor-audience relation might, more usually, be thought to model that between the living and the dead (as also that between the visible and the invisible) – a relation that has, indeed, been written for by many modern playwrights (to mention only Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Strindberg, Wyspianski, Pirandello, Ionesco and Beckett). For the theatre artists to be discussed here, however, the modelling of these relations is not simply reversed (where the dead and the invisible provide a model for the living and the visible in "the theatre of death"), but rather that something (already) unsettling in the order (or rationality) of these relations is theorised in the theatrical appearance of human being(s). What is "uncanny in mimesis" – distinct from the settled metaphysics of the "haunted stage" in major theatre histories – concerns not only what is strange in the appearance of the actor (that is, in the theatre "of death" specifically), but also the theoretical possibility of the analogy which informs the concept of appearance (or iconography) articulated in the very title of this thesis.[174]

This is not then a metaphorical "theatre" engaged, for instance, with sacralising the thought "of death". The possibility of the analogy condensed in the thesis title – in the aesthetic question of mimesis, as of a "likeness" or a comparison – is not given but has itself to be theorised. The theatre of death does not reproduce what is visible as theory (in its metaphor), but has first to construct it. This is, indeed, the topic of parts one and two of this thesis, as may be drawn from the indicative suggestion of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe that: "[W]e can be installed in the visible realm: we do *theory*. All of which seems, in fact, since we're speaking of theatre, to force itself upon us..." [175] It may be then that the making of propositions in this thesis will prove to be the unmaking of its analogies (if "the uncanny in mimesis" is a model for "the theatre of death"), while trying to resist the lure of its metaphors.

What precedents are there for theorising what kind of body the actor has (or is) in "the theatre", at least in that "of death" specifically? For the naturalistic (Western) theatre this question is manifestly present following a fictional death or murder on stage,

---

[174] As chapter two will explore, considering Lacoue-Labarthe's reference to the mirror (and the Gorgon), "the theatre of death" stages an image, or appearance, of what the concept of the uncanny in mimesis might be thought to refer to, as an "example" of that thought.

[175] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Typography", trans. Eduardo Cadava, in Lacoue-Labarthe *Typography*, ed. Christopher Fynsk, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, p.91.

concerning both the removal of the "corpse" and the curtain call. In the classic fifth act of tragedy, for instance, the taking up of the bodies is a convention for dealing with the actor who is supposed to die as (or with) his or her character. Significantly (as it points to what the theatre of death shows), the reality is precisely the opposite: the actor appears, in the all too "living" role that his or her body plays on stage, as the remainder of its representative character, without the fiction of its invisibility, without the alibi of its double's "life".[176]

Within the conventions of the literary-interpretative theatre, these "inanimate" bodies are supposed to represent those of the dead – albeit confined to their "death" – as characters still belonging to the world of the fiction on (indeed, of) the stage (distinct from, and yet identified with, the world of the audience). Until they are carried off, or until the curtain falls, they "act dead" – lying immobile, typically with eyes closed or faces averted, whilst pretending not to breathe, as if impersonating their death. It is here that the *theatre* proves most "deadly", in the sense famously despaired of by Peter Brook. The presence of the body becomes a limit case for the theatrical "mirror held up to nature" as precisely a question "of death". It is not simply that the concept of the theatre of death offers a different answer to the question of what these bodies are doing on stage (acting "dead"); but that the question of their appearance is itself posed differently – as a question of the nature (or conceit) of that mirror and its promising mimetic reflections.

Amongst innumerable affecting examples of this mirroring fiction one might think of the dead Cordelia, where the theatrical concept of the "mirror held up to nature" is made into both a verbal and a physical image of this character's death, with its "invisible" breath. The actor-Lear declares: "I know when one is dead and when one

---

[176] The inverse of this is expressed by Herbert Blau, who makes this the index of the body's "actuality" within a scene of signs (cited by Stanton Garner): "When Blau points out that the performer 'can die there in front of your eyes; is in fact doing so,' he is asserting only the most extreme formulation of the body's radical actuality in performance. 'Of all the performing arts, the theatre stinks most of mortality'." (Garner, *Embodied Spaces*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.44.) As noted at the end of the Introduction, this suggestion in fact comes from Joseph Chaikin; but, as Garner goes on to suggest: "Theatre, of course, draws this mortality into itself, 'ingests' it (to borrow States's term) in order to animate its fiction; for such contingency to intrude in something as extreme as the actor's actual death would involve the 'breaking' of illusion. But, unlike the represented body in film, the body's living presence on stage asserts a physiological irreducibility that challenges the stability (and the separability) of representational levels." (*Ibid.*)

lives;/ She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;/ If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,/ why then she lives" [V.3.258-261]. Itself an intimation of what the theatre of death acknowledges (concerning the "reality" of the actor's image), it is perhaps because this literal metaphor points precisely to the fiction of this moment "of death" that it is so poignant theatrically. The body, like the mirror, is present physically rather than psychologically, as Lear, holding her in the fiction of frail embrace, haltingly attempts to comprehend the tragedy of his daughter's transformed appearance, appealing still to who it is that the "cadaver" resembles. "Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little…" [V.3.269], he implores, wanting to find in her being a moment of continued recognition of his own existence. The question of whose this body "is" now (whose life regained would "redeem all sorrows/ that ever I have felt" [V.3.266-67]) – that gives the pathos of Lear seeing his own end in outliving his child (and his Fool), as precisely the event of its image (as Blanchot evokes it, in his essay concerning "two versions of the imaginary"[177]) – is the very theatrical (and theoretical) question of the actor's speech (or reflection) in which the (breath of) the audience is held.

In contrast to this verbal image of classical drama, the inspiring mirror of metaphor – with its manifold illusions – is already cracked in the "theatre of death". Here the question of mimesis addresses the presence of bodies, rather than characters; not least "after" the popular culture example of dummies, effigies, and mannequins (which will be returned to in the next chapter). Indeed, Jan Kott (in a collection of essays on what he calls "the Theatre of Essence") identifies this as a "break" in the history of Western theatre, although not in his discussion of the dead within Kantor's theatre, but in an earlier essay on Witkiewicz and Artaud. Citing the use of mannequins to figure the dead on stage (in the examples of Witkacy's *The Madman and the Nun* and Artaud's *The Philosopher's Stone*), Kott writes that: "The theatricalisation of corpses is very important in the history of the contemporary, avant-garde theatre; the centuries-old convention of portraying the return of the dead in European theatre was completely broken."[178]

---

[177] Maurice Blanchot, in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.
[178] Jan Kott, "Witkiewicz, or the dialectic of anachronism", trans. Joanna Clark and James McCandlish, in *The Theatre of Essence*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984, pp.71-2. This "portrayal of the dead" can be compared with the contemporary use of

In chapters four and five, we will critically examine how the enduring, Lazarean, sense of "bringing characters to life" informs a metaphysics governing theatre research – as a further variation of the "fundamental antinomy" (Barthes) that distinguishes the living from the dead, as the spirit from the letter of performance, the ephemeral from the enduring (or the actor from the archive) – in an example of Erika Fischer-Lichte's, describing the "nightly resurrection of the dead" on stage distinct from this "theatricalisation of corpses". As we shall see, however, understanding "the theatre of death" is not simply a question of the reversal of these possibilities (as if turning this metaphysics on its head), as if this minor tradition consisted simply in a return of these precedents in Kott's "history of the contemporary, avant-garde" from the 1920s.[179] Didier Plassard also remarks of this avant-garde's turn from a *mise en corps* to a *mise en effigie*, in an aesthetic of "dehumanisation", that: "were it to be realised [it] would overturn the meaning of dramatic art".[180] As we shall see, for Kantor (as for a concept of the theatre of death), this history involves the realisation that such a "mise en effigie" may serve as a model for the actor's "mise en corps" (rather than its replacement), in working – "after" this break (Kott) or overturning (Plassard) – towards a new possibility, at least conceptually, in and for this mimetic art.

While Kott's observation holds for a view of twentieth century European art theatre, including the impact upon it (as he notes) of the conventions of oriental theatre (although it would be important to note that Artaud's point of reference is not only the

---

mannequins to satirise the living in, for example, Bruno Jasienski's *The Mannequins' Ball* (1929) [trans. Daniel Gerould, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000], part of a tradition of the "life" or animation of the inanimate figure taking revenge on the human manipulator (as the matter or material of the "lowest rank", subject to such "manipulation", in Schulz). Harold Segel comments on Jasienski's play: "The mannequins are typical headless tailors' dummies. Their bitter remarks about the cruelty of humans, which denies them the liberty to move about freely, recalls the theme of puppets, marionettes, and other inanimate figures that eventually rebel against their creators and masters. Needless to say, the mannequins' complaints about their lot in life, the success or failure of their strikes, and that more and more they are being replaced by mannequins with heads, reflect Jasienski's views on capitalist exploitation of workers" (Harold Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995, p.254).

[179] Such a discussion is provided by Harold Segel, in *Pinocchio's Progeny*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995 (which will be returned to in the next chapter) and by Didier Plassard, in *L'Acteur en effigie*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1992.

[180] Didier Plassard, in *L'Acteur en effigie*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1992, p.12.

"Oriental theatre" but also Alfred Jarry); the minor tradition of the theatre of death offers rather a revaluation of the "dramatic" distinction between the living and the dead, as not reducible to the distinction between character and actor. What Kott suggests is the opening up of a possibility, not its conclusion (in the theatre of death), when he writes of the Western tradition:

> The actor acts the role of a character, but it is impossible to act the role of a corpse; at most it is possible to simulate it. But to simulate a corpse means, in theatrical language, to pass from the technical devices of 'acting' to 'pantomime'. The only difference is that it is a pantomime with no gesture.[181]

It is this impasse or aporia – of the "end of acting" – that the precedents of the theatre of death (such as Craig and Artaud, Maeterlinck and Witkacy) already address. To act without "acting", to take as a model a mannequin or tailor's dummy; this fundamental potential concerning the appearance of the actor (*in effigie*) in Western theatre – in Kott's own avant-gardist vocabulary, of a "complete break" in that tradition – is indeed the index of the *art* (or essence) of theatre for Craig in his modernist discussion of Shakespeare's ghosts, for instance. Not to act "like" a mannequin (which is not to act at all); nor to act "like" a dead person (in a "pantomime with no gesture") – but rather *as* (or "like") an actor, which Craig calls an *über-marionette*; or which Artaud calls an "animated hieroglyph". The distinction between empathy and abstraction (*pace* Worringer) has an illustrious (albeit also minor) tradition within avant-garde experiments (such as the Bauhaus theatre). But it is in looking beyond this distinction that Kantor is the heir to both Craig's aesthetic, and Witkacy's Dadaist, anti-aesthetic, versions of an appearance of the dead on stage (which will be explored specifically in part three).

The theatre of death (as its concept is given an outline in the relation between "precedents" and "survivals" in this chapter and the next) concerns the relation between the body and its image or representation; as a technique of the "flesh of the gaze" (Merleau-Ponty), concerning that "aspect" or "look" (Heidegger) of the dead (of the cadaver even), that appears in the actor – at least, in such an art of *theatre* that

---

[181] Kott, *op. cit.*, p.72.

finds its concept in that "of death" (as distinct from its merely deadly simulation or impersonation). This appearance is not that of the corpse itself, but of its image; more particularly, that aspect of its image figured in its "look", as this returns to the spectator from that of the actor, separated from the auditorium, on stage. How the actor "looks" is the practice of *theatre* and not that "of death" itself; for these "dead" have living bodies, after all – they are, indeed, "actors", even "in effigy".

In the particular *art* of theatre that is called "of death", the model for the actor is not then the life of a character – and the fiction of (its) death(s) – as if the theatre's double were simply another representation of the living, paradigmatically in the major, dramatic (literary-interpretative) theatre's cast of famous ghosts (not to mention such famous corpses as Hamlet or Cordelia). In the theatre of death, the actor's model is, as it were, "no one" but rather a mimetic technique – for which the doll or the puppet has long been a figure – of effecting the uncanny look or aspect of the body in effigy, through gesture, mask, and make-up; to present a "likeness" of, or resemblance to, the sight of the dead, in both a seemingly inanimate (or automatic) gesture and a withdrawn (or withheld) gaze. It is as if the eyes of the mask had a vision of their own, disturbing the sense of what is visible, of what is to be seen, in theatre.[182]

The fundamental issue – as it threads through this thesis (particularly with discussion of the photograph and of the Kantian Schematism in chapter five) – is the relation between the individual and the universal, the event and the concept, as it pertains to the appearance of the human actor on stage. In seeking to make a modern art of the actor's appearance, the puppet is often evoked as its exemplar. As Sergei Obraztsov remarks, identifying what (in his view) is specific to an aesthetics of puppet theatre:

---

[182] In a series of telling, personal vignettes exploring "what is real in theatre", Jan Kott offers the following example from Marcel Marceau, as an "allegory of theatre": "Marceau takes invisible masks out of a basket and puts them on his powdered clown face. One follows another: tragic and comic masks, dignified and grotesque masks, and scary and tearful masks. The last of these is the powdered face of a clown with a red nose and gaping mouth. He cannot tear this last mask from his face. It has stuck and refuses to come off. Finally Marceau does tear it off and, under this last mask, finds his own face of a clown with white cheeks and a red nose. The mask is just one of his faces and his face is just one of his masks. This is why in that other Renaissance paradigm of theatre (which we find in Shakespeare), the theatre is not an image of the world, it is the world that is an image of theatre" (Kott, "The seriousness of theatre", trans. Lillian Vallee, in Kott, *op. cit.*, p.212).

It is needed as a unique and irreplaceable genre of the performing arts. No actor is able to create the representation of a generalised human being, because he is himself an individual. Only the puppet can do this, because it is not a human being.[183]

It is the aesthetic and expressive possibility of what is "generalised" that the *art* of the puppet approaches – animate only when on stage, its "acting" is defined simply by its performance.[184] The individual actor, within the major theatrical tradition, is thought to approach this quality only in "acting dead", in the negation of his or her creative or expressive work. In its constraint, rather than potential, as a problematic reminder of the artifice of naturalism, "death" is an impossibility of and for the major tradition of acting. Obraztsov's aesthetic nonetheless echoes the Constructivist ambitions for the actor (as a modernist rewriting of Kleist's romanticism), as Kantor evokes these in his *Milano Lessons*:

The constructivist theatre replaced Individual Figures with Types,/ who were the carriers, and even symbols of,/ Ideals, Modes, Conditions, that is, elements grounded in/ deeper layers of matter of life./ These types were stripped of their individual, private, petty problems/ and confusions so as to disclose the elements of/ Existence; the Principal Elements of/ Existence, that is,/ the pre-matter of life.[185]

For Kantor (as for Craig and for Artaud), the question of "theatre" is precisely to learn to recognise its "ur-matter" in the appearance of the actor through the distance between body and image (distinct from their identification "in character"), in order to be able to make of it an art, both mimetic and metaphysical.

This art is not that of the major schools of actor training (such as the Stanislavsky-Grotowski heritage), but a relation to an embodied thought – its "flesh" (*pace*

---

[183] Sergei Obraztsov quoted in Henryk Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, ed. Penny Francis, London: Puppet Centre Trust, 1988, p.24.
[184] Henryk Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, ed. Penny Francis, London: Puppet Centre Trust, 1988, p.3-4.
[185] Tadeusz Kantor, "Milano Lessons 6", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, trans. & ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.231.

Merleau-Ponty) – in the relation between visible and invisible (that makes no appeal to individual psychology). Of his "discovery" of a relation between theatrical space and narrative time, of presence and absence on stage, as a place for the work of memory and repetition, Kantor writes (in 1988):

> The past exists/ in memory. Dead!/ Its inhabitants are/ Dead too. They are dead, but, at the same time,/ alive,/ that is, they can/ move, and they can even/ talk. These poor/ symptoms of life have, however, no/ *purpose* or/ *consequence*./ Pulled out of a three-dimensional,/ surprisingly flat/ practice of life,/ they fall into the hole of – / allow me to say this word –/ Eternity./ They lose their life's functions/ and all their earthly privileges/ acquired during their earthly passage/ (one should not, however, belittle the value of this passage),/ to become Eternal./ Let me make this ominous sounding word/ more human/ and say: they become *art*./ They become a Work of Art.[186]

This work of art – the actor's body presenting an image of the invisible (as metaphysical rather than psychological, concerning the shocking "appearance" of existence rather than a character's motives or interpretations); a "representation of a generalised human being" (Obraztsov[187]) – is that "transformation of the human body into representation" (Michaud[188]) which is identified by (and as) the *theatre* "of death". This minor tradition addresses what Stanton Garner identifies as the theatre's ongoing dealing with the "paradox of corporeality", where "theatre displays a subjectivity always liable to objective framing and a visuality internally vulnerable to the body and its perceptual horizons,"[189] with a modernist sense of the difference that *art* makes to the "life" of the body's representation(s).

For the theorists of a "theatre of death", what is at issue is not another representation *of* the living – as a fiction (including "death") – but of the dead *for* the living, as a look or appearance of – and from – "beyond" this world (as the stage stands to the

---

[186] Tadeusz Kantor, "Memory" (1988), trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further On, Nothing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.413.
[187] Obraztsov, *op. cit*.
[188] Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes, New York: Zone Books, 2004, p.236.
[189] Stanton Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.51.

auditorium); an appearance that permeates, or emanates from, the actor's body in its theatrical "attitude", through its movement, gesture, or technique. Distinct from naturalism, this attitude is suggestive of the automatic (as identified by Bergson and Kantor) or of the hieratic (as identified by Craig and Artaud). The actor offers an uncanny mimesis (and in its mimicry, a mockery even) of the spectator, as a body that appears possessed by a look that does not belong to it, that is not its own; in which the "I" would not recognise "itself" (as in the Gorgon's mirror); as if seen from that "other space" (in Foucault's account of the mirror[190]) of imagined (dis-)identification that we call the stage (the site of what, before shadows on a screen were set in motion as cinema, were called "phantasmagoria"). As Maeterlinck observes (much as Craig and Obraztsov):

> It is possible that we have to remove the living being from the stage. I do not deny that in this way we would return to the art of ancient times, in which the masks of the Greek tragic writers were the last remains. Perhaps someday a sculpture will be used in this respect, for people begin to ask some strange questions about sculpture. Or perhaps the human being will be replaced by a shadow, a reflection thrown on the screen, by symbolic forms or by some being that has the appearance of life but which is lifeless. I do not know: but the absence of the human seems to me essential. When a man enters into a poem, the great poem of his presence dims everything around. A man can speak in his own name only; he has no right to speak in the name of the whole world of the dead.[191]

The great drama(s) (or "poem(s)") of the major theatre's history obscure(s) what may be seen in theatre itself – an evocation of the "whole world of the dead". The aim of this thesis then is to elaborate the conceptual content of such an appearance – that of the actor *as* that of the dead – which is historically identifiable with various theatre artists' practice, in terms not only of what is specific to the stage (or to *theatre*) but also of what is identified here as "the uncanny in mimesis".

---

[190] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", trans. Jay Miskowiec, in *Diacritics*, 16.1, Spring, 1986.
[191] Maurice Maeterlink, "Menus Propos" (1890), quoted in Henryk Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, ed. Penny Francis, London: Puppet Centre Trust, 1988, pp.12-13.

Craig's concern with the artifice (as opposed to the nature) of the actor, in his visionary theatre of the über-marionette, echoes Bergson's interest in the comic (addressed in the next chapter). However, rather than the cultural (mnemonic) "survivals" evident in the comic effect (not to mention the history of "lower strata" cultural spectacles of mental hospitals, waxwork displays, or films), Craig appeals to an image of ancient temple rites to address the future art of theatre.[192] Neither a doll nor a puppet in imitation of the human, Craig's model actor – the über-marionette – offers an image or semblance of what in and of the human actor is more than human, more than simply "living". It presents an image of the human – theatrically – that evokes an appearance of what is absent from it, "death-like". For Craig, the key test for the actor – or rather for the theatre as an art – is the appearance of the supernatural on stage, the evocation of what is "beyond" simply the appearance(s) of "this world". Kantor also, in distinguishing theatre's "everyday" practice from its possible art, identifies (with Witkiewicz) this potential of present absence as metaphysical – as, indeed, did Artaud (who even entitles an essay "metaphysics and mise-en-scène"). While metaphysics itself has a history, read today through its deconstruction, it remains (even if anachronistically) a key to this minor history – that "of death" – within modernist art theatre.

Craig writes: "I pray earnestly for the return of the image – the über-marionette to the theatre"; to a theatre in which "homage [is] paid to existence – and divine and happy intercession made to death."[193] This "image", this "figure, or symbolic creature", of "ancient theatre" does not simply "replace the actor" (as even Kantor mistakenly repeats[194]), but rather provides a model for re-thinking both the puppet's and the actor's presence on stage, in an unsettling of the apparent dichotomy between the animate and the inanimate, between the visible and the invisible. Nonetheless, Craig still echoes a Platonic tone of "educating" the mimetic, when he proposes that:

---

[192] This is also the subject of the first "Prologue" to Craig's *Drama for Fools* (*cf. Le Theatre des Fous*, eds. Didier Plassard *et al*, Montpellier: L'Entretemps, 2012, pp.66-73).

[193] Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-marionette", in *Craig on Theatre*, ed. Michael Walton, London: Methuen, 1999, p.87.

[194] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Theatre of Death", trans. Voy and Margaret Stelmaszynski, in Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.108: "Craig's idea of replacing the live actor with a mannequin – an artificial and mechanical creation…"

Then shall we no longer be under the cruel influence of the emotional
confessions of weakness which are nightly witnessed by the people and which
in their turn create in their beholders the very weaknesses that are exhibited.[195]
To that end we must study to remake these images – no longer content with a
puppet, we must create an über-marionette. The über-marionette will not
compete with life – rather will it go beyond it. Its ideal will not be the flesh
and blood but rather the body in trance – it will aim to clothe itself with a
death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit.[196]

Here we return to the question, in reflecting on what death might be "like": how
might we envisage death theatrically? How does the body offer a semblance of death;
or death "become" the body? How does the question of mimesis become theatrically
specific in terms "of death"? What resemblance is possible between the actor and the
dead, as the unsettling of that between the actor and the audience? How does the
representative aspect of the dead become that of the actor – precisely as distinct from
death (the corpse or cadaver)? These questions have a long history in terms of the
mask, the effigy, the photograph (addressed throughout parts one and two of this
thesis) – and also the iconographic gesture or (what Warburg calls) the "pathos
formula".[197] It is not simply a question here of the culturally and historically various
portrayals of death theatrically (as these "haunt" the stage), but of a *concept* of theatre
(of theorising its aesthetics, both historically and anthropologically, rather than the
reverse) that is culturally specific.

The "theatre of death" (at least, as it is proposed in this thesis) is a concept of that
theatre to which Craig's reformation appeals (at the beginning of the twentieth
century), as also Artaud's appeal to theatre's "double". But this is a concept that has,
in a sense, always still to be theorised, just like that "art of the theatre of the future"
which Craig evokes – again, at the beginning of the last century – even as it may have

---

[195] This is the decline of the cathartic into pale imitation, the audience being no longer
"tent[ed] to the quick" [Hamlet, II.ii. 593].
[196] Craig, *op. cit.*, p.86.
[197] It should be noted that Craig rejected the photographic comparison, just as Baudelaire had
half a century earlier, *cf.* Craig, *op. cit.*, pp.84-5, and Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image*,
Paris: Gallimard, 1992, p.367.

been already practiced in the past. Here we touch upon what is perhaps the fundamental aesthetic trope of modernism, precisely its concept of history, interrupting notions of tradition and cultural inheritance, in which the art of the past is to be understood in terms of the present – where, at least in terms of those fragments of the past that are found to survive, it is the art of the present that "explains" or "legitimises" that of the past.

As Eliot remarks, in a line cited approvingly by Duchamp: "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."[198] The artist, Eliot writes, "is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past."[199] What Eliot calls here "a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical criticism,"[200] resonates with what Walter Benjamin later calls a Copernican revolution in the concept of history.[201] More than a reversal of values, the past "now" ceases to be a settled point of reference for the present (of influence, example, tradition, or legitimation). Any consideration of a concept of "the theatre of death", belonging to this history of modernism, is engaged therefore with various artists' sense of "the present moment of the past" as it speaks of and to a future of theatre that it thereby evokes. This sense is fundamentally what is meant by a *concept* of theatre practice here, where (as Adorno notes) its critical potential has the sense of a manifesto (in terms of which, indeed, it is often explicitly expressed):

> By turning toward their truth content, aesthetics is compelled – as philosophy – beyond the works. The consciousness of the truth of artworks is, precisely as philosophical truth, in accord with the apparently most ephemeral form of aesthetic reflection, the manifesto. The principle of method here is that light should be cast on all art from the vantage point of the most recent artworks,

---

[198] T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, London: Faber and Faber, 1951, p.15. (Cited by Marcel Duchamp in his lecture, "The Creative Act" (1957), in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Emer Peterson, New York: Da Capo Press, 1973, p.138.)
[199] *Ibid.*, p.22.
[200] *Ibid.*, p.15.
[201] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknapp Press, 1999, (K1.2) pp.388-89.

rather than the reverse, following the custom of historicism and philology, which, bourgeois at heart, prefers that nothing ever change.[202]

As noted in the Introduction, the theorisations by the artists we are concerned with here appear to provide descriptions of a particular theatrical practice (at least of their own, now in the past); but these theorisations also offer (even if implicitly) a critique of prevailing professional practices (in terms of which they still address the present). Kantor, for example, knew precisely what he was being critical of, through direct experience of work as a set designer within the professional theatre apparatus of his time.

The theatre "of" this title (*death*) has different exemplars, whose theorisations then propose ways of working in and for the future – even as they appear present in the past. As theorists their past lies ahead of them – their work makes a demand upon the understanding of "theatre" that has always to be rethought, as it is not given, where the past is a question of the present. While Craig and Artaud, Maeterlinck and Witkacy, are cited here as precedents, they are addressed not as part of a chronological history, in terms of their "influence". As is evident in this chapter from the interchanging of reference between them, all these artists are (under the concept of the theatre of death) in a sense "contemporaries". An aesthetic concept, if it aims not simply to reproduce the past, but to think truly the practice of an art, is also (*pace* Benjamin) a concept of history. As Adorno proposes: "It is in the dimension of history that the individual aesthetic object and its concept communicate."[203] The conceptual challenge of and for the writing of theatre history is, therefore, already proposed in the aesthetic practice(s) that it would address – if indeed its subject is an *art* of theatre and not simply its (professional) reproduction(s), as if the past was simply distinct from the present and its history a given of its archive. (The critique of such historicism is the very subject of "survivals" in the example of Warburg's research project, exemplified by his library.)

---

[202] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p.359. Adorno's "lesson" concerning Aesthetic Theory underlies the whole of this thesis.
[203] *Ibid.*, p.358.

Fundamentally, for a "theatre of death" what is at stake is how – maintaining the ambiguity of its active and passive senses – the actor "looks", in relation to a model; not in the sense of casting (or indeed of the way that theatre typically advertises itself professionally through images of its exponents or stars), but of how an actor is "seen" (at least, theoretically); of what an other's image, or appearance, looks like at all[204]; of how human presence signifies *being* on stage – in what can be called its living effigy, or double, *as* an actor; of how this figure or image "acts upon the eyes of the spectators".[205]

This phrase of Jean-Pierre Vernant's addresses statues of gods, in the context of discussing the "public" existence of a figure that only exists "to be seen", with the changed city architecture of the temple: "the task is to act upon the eyes of the spectators, to translate for them in a visible way the invisible presence of the god..."[206] This turn to a specifically anthropomorphic image (a fundamental question of and for human culture) is distinct – as an image, fashioned *in* a material – from the divine force that earlier animistic belief attributed *to* a material itself, often without an iconic form. Here the question of the "look" is fundamental for a *concept* of the "theatre of death". In a discussion of the misconception of the "anthropomorphism" of the Greek gods, Heidegger addresses this key term as precisely "what is decisive for the appearance of the uncanny".[207]

---

[204] Rather than "Spotlight" and "Central Casting", the question of the "look" (*Anblick*) here draws upon Heidegger's commentary on Kant's analysis of the possibility of imagining concepts (of giving an image to a concept, or of the concept's relation to experience), in the so-called "Schematism": "The pure making-sensible occurs as a 'Schematism'. The pure power of imagination gives schema-forming in advance the look ('image') of the horizon of transcendence" (in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft, Bloomington: Indiana U.P., 1997, p.64; *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1973, p.91). The question of the "look" is not simply one of translation, but the fundamental, underlying issue of this thesis; i.e. that of a *concept* of the "theatre of death". The discussion of this in chapter five will also draw on Jean-Luc Nancy's commentary on Heidegger (in *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, New York: Fordham U.P., 2005, together with Nancy's essay *Le Regard du Portrait*, Paris: Galilée, 2000).
[205] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "From the 'Presentification' of the Invisible to the Imitation of Appearance", in *Mortals and Immortals*, Froma Zeitlin ed., New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p.159.
[206] *Ibid*.
[207] Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, p.109. A proper discussion of this theme (which will be returned to at the end of the following chapter, as well as that of chapter five) would constitute a new thesis in its own right, for which the present document serves only as a prolegomenon.

The ambiguity in the sense of "look" or "appearance" – whether active or passive, as verb or noun – runs throughout this thesis, as characteristic of the *concept* of a "theatre of death". This concept does not discriminate or decide between these meanings, settling for neither one nor the other, but oscillating between them. In this way the concept echoes the ambiguous sense of the ancient *mimos* as "both the performer and what is performed, just as 'mimesis' describes both the activity of representing and the result of it..."[208] It is in this sense that theatre is a mimetic event. Despite appearances, the actor in the theatre of death is neither a character nor a puppet – although there is a long tradition amongst actors of protesting about the latter (despite its being a key trope of modernist aesthetics). Harriet Walter, for example, evokes this in a London rehearsal room, working with Yuri Lyubimov:

> The process was infuriating at times and very confusing, but if at worst we
> were puppets, so what? We could do the stuff we normally did for the rest of
> our lives. I had little sympathy for those who dug in their Method-acting heels.
> Why work with a director from another culture only to block his path with
> "That's not how we do things round here?"[209]

---

[208] Elin Diamond (citing Göran Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art*) in *Unmaking Mimesis*, London: Routledge, 2008, p.v.

[209] Harriet Walter, *Other People's Shoes*, London: Penguin Books, 2000, p.151. Still less is the actor an epileptic or hysteric – despite the interest in simulation ("malingering") in the latter case. The fear of "unseen forces" taking possession of the body – "turning something frightening into something uncanny" – nonetheless makes people wary of these symptoms, in which we speak, not only of inanimate figures, but of "a living person as uncanny". Freud notes that: "The uncanny effect of epilepsy and of madness has the same origin. The layman sees in them the working of forces hitherto unsuspected in his fellow-men, but at the same time he is dimly aware of them in remote corners of his own being." (Freud, "The Uncanny", trans. James Strachey, in *Pelican Freud Library*, vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson, London: Penguin, 1985, pp.365-6). This also the fundamental dynamic in the play of appearance(s) in Genet's play *The Blacks* and in Jean Rouch's film *Les Maîtres Fous* (first shown in Paris, to much controversy in 1955), the "parallels" with which Genet insists upon in a letter to his Anglophone translator, Bernard Frechtman (in *Théâtre complet*, Michel Corvin & Albert Dichy, eds., Paris: Gallimard, 2002, p.913). In a curious phrase, Genet suggests that what he calls the "theatre of exorcisms" (associated with these "parallels") is dead; while his then current project, *The Screens*, will offer an indication of the new direction in which he is already headed. Although Genet is a key figure in the history of the concept of the theatre of death, the focus of this thesis is only on Kantor, as the "author" of its title. The notion of a "theatre of exorcisms" is evocative but runs counter to the distancing (the "verbal architecture") that Genet's own theatre so carefully maintains, which means that one should also be wary of the lure of such "parallels".

Indeed, as we shall see, Kantor explicitly formulates the theatre of death as a way of issuing from the impasse or aporia of this major antinomy in theatre history: "The two possible solutions [for the question of an *art* of theatre in the twentieth century] – either autonomous art and intellectual structure or naturalism – ceased to be the only ones…"[210] Here we see a fundamental conceptual issue being addressed in aesthetic practice, being tested in a work of theatre as that "of death". This is precisely the interest of a concept of the theatre of death for a critical history of modernist theatre, in its relation to techniques (or theorisations) of mimesis that appear – anachronistically in the "post-modern" – to be pre-modern survivals.[211]

---

[210] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Theatre of Death", trans. Voy and Margaret Stelmaszynski, in Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.108. (This key point will be developed in part three.)
[211] The suggestion of anachronism here is itself testimony to the survival of a critical modernism, since such a concept would be meaningless in the context of a universal "post-modernism".

The Theatre of Death: The Uncanny in Mimesis – Part One

Chapter 2: _Survivals and the uncanny_

Figure of the gods, figure of the dead. In each case, the problem is the same: by means of localisation in an exact form and a well-determined place, how is it possible to give visual presence to those powers that come from the invisible and do not belong to the space here below on earth? The task is to make the invisible visible, to assign a place in our world to entities from the other world. In the representational enterprise, it can be said that at the outset, this paradoxical aspiration exists in order to inscribe absence in presence, to insert the other, the elsewhere into our familiar universe. Whatever the avatars of the image may have been, this impossible quest is one that perhaps continues to remain valid to a large degree – that of evoking absence in presence, revealing the elsewhere in what is given to view. – Jean-Pierre Vernant[212]

While thought of the dead is typically excluded from the sense of modern "reality", whether addressed in its material or psychical expressions (relegated to the realm of superstition or projection), the minor tradition of an _art_ of theatre ("of death") attests to the survival of the dead (at least, in appearance) within contemporary cultural practices. Modern science (and technology) supposedly replaces what it defines as superstition – for instance, in animism – just as the "rational" redefines the "irrational".[213] However, both the ambiguity and ambivalence of relations between the living and the dead (identified by psychoanalysis and anthropology) persist, evident in the fact that the question "of" the dead – their place in society – is continually re-addressed culturally. The public "disappearance" of both death and the dead, since nineteenth century developments in urban planning and medical science (part of the bio-political project of modernity), has a history after all. Significantly, for the cultural practice of modern art _theatre_, one of the most prominent historians of

---

[212] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "From the 'Presentification' of the Invisible to the Imitation of Appearance", trans. Froma Zeitlin, in _Mortals and Immortals_, Froma Zeitlin ed., New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p.153.
[213] This is not the least of Warburg's concerns in the so-called "Serpent Ritual" lecture.

death – Philippe Ariès – characterises the modern era as, indeed, that of "invisible death".[214]

In a profound reflection on modernity, entitled *The Storyteller*, Walter Benjamin observes the corollary of this invisibility in the lost transmission of communicated experience (in the form of remembered stories) between the generations: "In the course of modern times, dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living"; and with dying the image, the look, of the dead also.[215] In a review of a new book by Cees Nooteboom, Alberto Manguel also writes, as if it were self-evident:

> We have no patience with death these days. The idea of letting our every third thought be the grave seems inadmissible in a society that values above all a paradoxical mixture of speed and immortality. The stories we prefer must be told quickly, and allow for little pause and less reflection. Our preferred condition is foolishness.[216]

The dead do not cease to exist, however, and the question remains (or survives) as to their place in modern society (or in life). In an art that is defined neither by public

---

[214] Coincidentally, Ariès' work was published in the same years as Kantor's "theatre of death" project, the mid-1970s. (Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver, New York: Viking, 1981, and *Western Attitudes Towards Death*, trans. Patricia Ranum, London: Marion Boyars, 1994.) Derrida offers a critical reading from the point of view of philosophy – that is, as a *question*, rather than an anthropological-historical explanation, of death in *Aporias* (trans. Thomas Dutoit, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, pp.25-26). Concerning the historicity of instances of "my death", however, we may note that the medical "professionalisation" of terminal care has changed the meaning of a "good death" from one concerned with conscience (related to a "good life") to one purely of the mitigation of pain (related to pharmacology), which becomes "newsworthy" in the context of health service economics (see, for example, articles by Ian Wylie and Eve Richardson in *The Guardian*, 18.01.12, "Social Care" section, p.3). The "legal right" to one's "own death" – when made explicit in the case of assisted suicide – remains one of the most contested of relations between state and individual (as if this history, since the "example" of Socrates, was constantly being forgotten). The sense of individual death overtaken by mass death is characteristic of an understanding of the twentieth century, in which colonial genocide occurred in the heart of modern Europe itself.

[215] This latter is the "subject" of many of Samuel Beckett's late prose pieces (of which *Ill Seen Ill Said* is exemplary). (Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller', trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol.3, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002, p.151.)

[216] *The Guardian*, 22.7.2011 [http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jul/22/foxes-come-at-night-review?INTCMP=SRCH].

commemoration, nor by private remembrance, the dead have not yet disappeared from theatre – as the very question of modes of human visibility (including that of civic space, the ambiguities of which were touched on in the Introduction with Benjamin's discussion of epic theatre). Here the (re)appearance of the dead theatrically is what is to be researched; as a concept, rather than a metaphor – as the uncanny in mimesis, rather than the recent vogue for celebrations of "the haunted stage".[217] In terms "of death", the space – or rather the event – of "theatre", its modes of visibility (in the modern interplay of public and private), takes on a critical specificity of its own, the possible *concept* of which it is the aim of this thesis to develop.

While the "theatre of death" is essentially a twentieth century art theatre practice (associated with the modernist appeal to the aesthetics of puppetry and to the "Oriental" turn, for both of which Craig and Artaud appear as precedents), its concept also draws historically on forms of popular culture, which themselves draw on funerary and votive practices. The art historian Julius Schlosser noted, for instance, such survivals of cultural practice once associated with votive rites in both ancient times and in the Renaissance amongst the "lower social strata" of early twentieth century "fairground booths, barber shops, tailor shops".[218] Famously evoked by

---

[217] The question of the "material and the psychical" appearance, or return, of the dead will be discussed below with the uncanny in Freud. While the history of the dead and their literal exclusion from the modern urban environment is perhaps most trenchantly analysed by Philippe Ariès (which may be compared with a "bio-political" reading in Foucault), the terms constituting the field of research for theatre practice here – reality, superstition, and survival – are particularly those of Georges Didi-Huberman's reading of Aby Warburg, and will be returned to throughout part one of this thesis, in which the "theory" of theatre and its possible "objects" are discussed critically in the light of a concept "of death". ("The Haunted Stage" is the title of a study by Marvin Carlson [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003] that addresses the dramatic canon and the literary-interpretative theatre practice(s) that "bring it to life".)

[218] Julius Schlosser, "History of Portraiture in Wax", trans. James Loughridge, in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008, p.173. The use of the term "survivals" (and the corollary "superstition") in Schlosser is examined in the reading by Georges Didi-Huberman, "Viscosities and Survivals", trans. Jane Todd, in *Ephemeral Bodies*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli (pp.159-163), and as part of his critique of the "history" of Art History in *Confronting Images*, trans. John Goodman, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005, as well as such articles as "Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time", *Common Knowledge*, vol.9, n.2, Spring 2003. On the most familiar of "modern" waxwork exhibitions, see Pamela Pilbeam, *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks*, London: Hambledon & London, 2003, and Marina Warner's history of Mme Tussaud, "Waxworks and Wonderlands," in *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances*, eds. Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen, New York: The New Press, 1998; and on the tableaux of the Musée

Alexander Blok and (here) by Bruno Schulz, these survivals offer the "lowest rank" of man's image (*imago hominis*) as seen, or represented, "in the shape and semblance of a tailor's dummy"; or of a waxwork that "belonged to this world only in appearance".[219] Kantor himself speaks of the popular *gestus* preserved by the circus (not least in its celebration by twentieth century painters such as Maria Jarema and Pablo Picasso): "The circus, like the waxworks show, always existed on the periphery of institutional culture... And this despised *gestus* has remained in our art and our society until today."[220] Indeed, the very name of Kantor's theatre company "Cricot 2" reaffirms the Francophone anagram (read backwards) of the Polish *to cyrk* meaning "it's a circus" that was coined by the first Krakow artists' group for their theatre "Cricot" in 1933.

Besides such "lower rank" appearances of the human *in effigie* (with its popular metaphysics of a revenge of matter over form) – to which we might add the spectacle of the plastinated dead in Gunther von Hagen's contemporary "Body Worlds" shows (which also remain outside of the hallowed gallery space) – there is the appearance of the actor him- or herself.[221] The question of an iconography of the actor in its

Grévin, see Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, and "Cinematic Spectatorship Before the Apparatus", in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds. Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Mike Kelley gathered an exhibition of everyday, non-aesthetic objects evoking "the uncanny" (shown at Tate Liverpool), with a catalogue book, *The Uncanny*, Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2004.

[219] Bruno Schulz, "Tailors' Dummies" in *The Street of Crocodiles* and "Spring" in *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass*, trans. Celina Wieniewska, London: Picador, 1988, p.41 and p.185.

[220] Tadeusz Kantor, in *Encounters with Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.108. Maria Jarema was the sister of Jozef Jarema, co-founder (with Wladislaw Dobrowolski) of the original Cricot artists' theatre in Krakow in 1933; and was herself one of the co-founders, with Kantor and Kazimierz Milkulski, of the Cricot 2 in 1955 (*cf.*, Miklaszewski, p.1 & pp.5-6). In an interview with Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, for instance, Kantor notes the association of the "circus" with the Cricot theatre: "I remember that the pre-war Cricot 1 theatre had been… built on Blok's Balaganchik (Fairground Booth)," in *The Journal of Dramatic Criticism*, Fall 1995, p.224. In 1938, while a student of Karol Frycz at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, Kantor translated Blok's "Balaganchik" together with Wanda Baczynska (see the biographical "chronology" in Miklaszewski's *Encounters* (trans. Barabara Herchenreder), *op. cit.*, p.156; and Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.26). On Kantor's own contact with the original Cricot whilst a student in Krakow during the 1930s, *cf.* also Plesniarowicz, pp.25-26 and pp.48-49.

[221] In the nineteenth century medical museums also had a great vogue. Besides the major hospitals, Didi-Huberman cites the example of "the travelling museum of the [quack] Doctor Spitzner, who would go from fair to fair, with his exhibit number one hundred: a life-size

associated "moral" terms, may be anticipated here, as the debased, degraded (or even degrading) image of the human being in "society" has all too often been furnished by that of "the actor" him- or, more especially, herself.[222] Only in the twentieth century has the profession of acting been made socially or institutionally respectable, precisely to the exclusion of the newly degrading example of mannequins or puppets, as a metaphor now impugning a professional "art" or technique.[223] It is, however, this very example (or model) of and for the actor's appearance that nonetheless survives aesthetically through the minor theatrical tradition "of death".

Such expressions of the thought of human appearance – or of mimesis – from the "lowest rank" of cultural practice provide a key for Kantor's theatrical imagination (as they had for Meyerhold also, himself an important precedent for Kantor[224]). This particular historical sense of cultural survivals in the encounter of reality (of material) and art (metaphor) within the "degraded" endures, for example, in Luc Tuyman's 2010 exhibition, in Bruges, of Central European art "today", which was conceptualised – with explicit reference to Kantor – under the title of *The Reality of the Lowest Rank*.[225] The existing potential of this aesthetic idea (as also of Bruno

group representing a 'Lecture of Professor Charcot'!" (in *The Invention of Hysteria*, trans. Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003, p.30). The "Body Worlds" website also features a reproduction of Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson* painting and a citation from Kant: http://www.bodyworlds.com/en/gunther_von_hagens/life_in_science.html. Equally on the "outside" of the legitimate(d) history of human representations are such examples of "dolls" as that created by Oscar Kokoschka in the wake of his affair with Alma Mahler and by the "asylum inmate" Katharina Detzel (Colin Rhodes, *Outsider Art*, London; Thames & Hudson, 2000, pp.58-59).

[222] Jonas Barish devoted a whole study to this widespread phenomenon under the title of *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. See also, Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Theatre and the Civilising Process: an Approach to the History of Acting", in *Interpreting the Theatrical* Past, eds. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1991.

[223] Besides Craig's laments at being misunderstood in his account of the actor and the über-marionette (in the 1924 Preface to *On the Art of the Theatre*, ed. Franc Chamberlian, London: Routledge, 2009, pp.xxii-iv), see the example from Harriet Walter, observing others resisting their work with Lyubimov, cited at the end of the previous chapter.

[224] "Kantor always acknowledged Meyerhold as the greatest theatre artist of the twentieth century. He introduced the theme of Meyerhold's martyr-like death into *Today is my Birthday*," (Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.26).

[225] The curators of this exhibition cite Kantor's 1978 Rembrandt Prize speech, a reflection on the artist's relation to mortality, in referencing his "choice to use ordinary objects, the stuff of everyday life, of meaningless rubbish for the making of his art…" (Luc Tuymans, Tommy Simoens, and Edwin Carels, in Luc Tuymans, *The Reality of the Lowest Rank: A Vision of Central Europe*, Tielt: Lannoo Publishers, 2010, p.28). In this they echo the theme of the

Schulz's writings, with which it is essentially associated – to mention only the work of the Quay brothers) offers a practical refutation of the curious conclusion offered by Harold Segel's commentary on Kantor's "theatre of death", in the context of discussing modernist puppet theatre. At the end of his description of several of Kantor's later productions, Segel proposes that:

> Kantor's obsession with death and pastness, with the urgencies and fragilities of memory, are rooted in his Polishness. Extrapolating, therefore, from his own unique use of mannequins and dummies in his 'theatre of death' to any broader post-modern literary or theatrical interest in the puppet cannot be justified.[226]

Whilst one might accept the suggestion that the elision of a contemporary notion of the "post-modern" with a survival of pre-war modernism (concerned with the truth of aesthetic realities), indeed, "cannot be justified", Segel's claim concerning "Kantor's obsession" surely cannot be justified either. If it is possible to extrapolate from Kantor's work (and such is, after all, the present thesis) – not least, with respect to a "theatrical interest" in the actor – it is because Kantor's practice involves its own

---

father's lecture to the seamstresses in Schulz's *Treatise on Tailor's Dummies*: "We are simply entranced and enchanted by the cheapness, shabbiness, and inferiority of material" (in *The Street of Crocodiles*, trans. Celina Wieniewska, London: Picador, 1988, p.41). The key of Schulz's work (Kantor refers to his "kinship" [Miklaszewski, *op. cit*., p.35]) will be returned to in part two. Interestingly, in the dialogue between Alison Glass and Paulina Pobocha about the Bruges exhibition, the notion of "the reality of the lowest rank" is identified as a "sculptural concept", expanding (or perhaps amplifying) an aspect of its sense in Kantor (*ibid*., p.116; also, p.62-64). Yet more contemporary evidence of the valence of this term is given in its citation by the curators of the 2011 *The Power of Fantasy* exhibition of contemporary Polish artists, presenting (in the introductory words of the Polish Minister of Culture) "a unique meeting of two generations of artists: recognised masters and artists who began their artistic journeys after the fall of communism", at the Bozar Gallery in Brussels, accompanying the beginning of the first ever Polish presidency of the EU, *cf.* David Crowley, Zofia Machnicka, and Andrzej Szczerski (eds.), *The Power of Fantasy – Modern and Contemporary Art of Poland*, Munich: Prestel, 2011, p.16 and p.11.

[226] Harold Segel, *Pinocchio's Progeny*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995, p.331. Segel's sense of Kantor being a "dead end" in the context of modernist puppetry contrasts with (for example) Didier Plassard and Henryk Jurkowski. Comparison might also be made with Pawel Althamer, amongst those represented in an exhibition considering "performativity" in works by Kantor and contemporary Polish artists: Sabine Folie (ed.), *The Impossible Theatre*, Nuremberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2005. That Althamer himself is not interested in the comparison (*ibid.*, p.42) does not obviate the wider context in which it has a bearing, particularly as it may be explored through the paradoxes of what is and is not "visible" in the art work (*cf.* Roman Kurzmeyer, Adam Szymczyk, & Suzanne Cotter: *Pawel Althamer*, London: Phaidon Press, 2011).

conceptual articulation, above all in relation to the history of twentieth century, avant-garde art (including puppetry).[227] In complete contrast to Segel's suggestion, for instance, Roger Planchon – reflecting on the Cricot 2's visit to the Théâtre Populaire in Lyon (with *Let the Artists Die*), in June 1986 – suggests that: "The realm of Tadeusz Kantor's apparitions is the realm of our past, the pasts of such citizens of the world as ourselves, and perhaps these old-fashioned Polish pictures are the ironic harbingers of our future."[228] In so far as this thesis has a "manifesto" interest of its own, it is precisely to advocate the anachronism of a future ("after") modernism that is *not* "post"-modern.

Kantor's use of the mannequin (other than in a pleonastic sense) is neither "unique", nor simply "rooted in Polishness", in so far as it is theorisable and therefore "extrapolable" – not least as it resists siren appeals towards the cultural reefs of the "post-modern". Kantor's insistence on the sense of the avant-garde, for instance, situates his work against the claims of "post-modernism" by definition (precisely in its particular Central European, indeed Polish, context).[229] Here, however, we must beware of simply abstracting Kantor's theatre – especially in translation – out of his "Polishness". The tension between Romanticism and Modernism, for instance, has a specifically Polish history to which Kantor belongs (which will be discussed in part

---

[227] Although this is indicated in the exhibitions already referred to, the concept of "the reality of the lowest rank" is in one sense "rooted in Polishness" – with its specifically Jewish heritage, in Bruno Schulz (where this is a pre-war "Polishness" that is multiethnic). However, it is also explicitly related by Kantor to international concern with the art object, the material work of art, after such precedents as Dada and Surrealism (especially Duchamp), as well as his engagement with post-war *art informel*, in such contemporaries as Fautrier and Matta.

[228] Roger Planchon, quoted in Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *op. cit.*, p.288. Planchon's text is reproduced in the *Cricot 2 Information Guide 1986*, ed. Anna Halczak, Krakow: Cricoteka, 1986, pp.72-73.

[229] Here we might note the curious example of some of Michal Kobialka's essays about Kantor that often suggest the pertinence of such a "post-modern" reading as they inscribe Kantor's "example" into the discourses of philosophers such as Deleuze, Lyotard, and Badiou – as if this "example" was rendered contemporary by such a transcription, rather than finding in its resistance a "minor" reading, as it were, of the very pertinence of these thinkers. It is my impression that these instances concern a question of Kobialka's own academic situation rather than Kantor's: see, for example, Kobialka's "Tadeusz Kantor's Practice: A Post-Modern Notebook" (in *Performing Arts Journal*, 28.1, January 2006), where, for example, Deleuze is cited as if he were ventriloquising Kantor (p.23). For a critical discussion of the enduring interest of the avant-garde in the context of claims concerning "post-modernism", *cf.* Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (especially chapters 5 and 8), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998.

three) – a history that itself belongs to European cultural memory.[230] His commitment to aesthetic autonomy, furthermore, expresses a consciousness of the political history of modernism – allied to an avant-garde all too aware of what the fate of a Meyerhold, or a Witkacy, represents, both politically and artistically, in the terror of revolutionary "freedom"; that is, of a political "emancipation" intolerant of appeals to the autonomy of either art practice or its history.[231]

After all, the term "avant-garde" derives from a military-political context, as echoed by Jakub Berman (one of the triumvirate of Stalin's representatives in the post-war Polish communist government) in his replies to Teresa Toranska's questions about the party's monopolisation of power by 1948, in the face of widespread popular opposition:

> You can accuse us of being in the minority, and yes, we were. And so what? Nothing! That doesn't mean anything! Because what does the development of mankind teach us? It teaches us first of all that it was the minority, the avant-garde, that rescued the majority... That's simply the way that history is made.[232]

---

[230] Kantor himself relates the "universal" emotional impact of his two "theatre of death" productions (*The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole*) to the context of Polish Romanticism (with Mickiewicz and Wyspianski), given that, for him: "a national art only begins to matter when it manages to cross its national frontiers" (*cf*. Miklaszewski, p.105).

[231] The limitations of this position in the situation of the 1970s, as the example of *art informel* gave way to conceptual art, is fundamental to the reading of East European art history by Piotr Piotrowski (see, for example, "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?" in *Third Text*, 23.1, January, 2009, p.12). It is noteworthy that Meyerhold's murder figures in Kantor's final production, *Today is my Birthday*; but the nearest "contemporaries" of the situation of the artist presented there are still Kantor's friends connected with the inter-war period, Maria Jarema and Jonasz Stern. (Kantor had access to Meyerhold's ideas from 1920s publications whilst still a student during the 1930s. New editions of Meyerhold's work were not published until after his "rehabilitation" in the late 1960s, *cf*., Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *op. cit.*, p.26.). It would be important to remember in this context also the Polish author Bruno Jasienski, who had first hand experience of the Soviet revolution (like Witkacy), and who was murdered in Moscow during the purges, whose play *The Mannequins' Ball* (1927) received its first Polish production in 1957, directed by Jerzy Jarocki in Katowice.

[232] Jakub Berman, in Teresa Toranska, *Oni: Stalin's Polish Puppets*, trans. Agnieszka Kolakowska, London: Collins-Harvill, 1987, p.257.

In this ruthless, Darwinist sense of the way that "history is made" not only the living, but even the dead are condemned in the name of a future in which millions were not expected to survive.

Besides the fairground sideshows, or exhibitions of the human in effigy (survivals of pre-modern cultural practices "of death"), so celebrated by Kantor, there are also the "lower social strata" practices of spiritualist theatre represented by so-called "materialist mediums", whose performances – making of the body a double of itself through trance or possession (often with the curious "relic" of ectoplasm) – accompany the rise of mass photography, and which offer a fascinating comparison with claims for the now institutionalised culture of "live art".[233] An earlier formulation of this (gendered) evidence of forms of possession, with its implied evocation of the "little death" of orgasm, occurs already in Rabelais who describes the "hysterical" throes of the female body as offering "a real semblance of death".[234] Didi-Huberman (quoting Rabelais) does not dwell on what might be meant by a "real semblance" here, but we may note how death becomes (in both senses) the living in the uncanny appearance of the automatic within the animate (female) body, as if possessed by an organic double (distinct from the mask or photograph) in the spasms induced by a variety of techniques (in which culture masquerades as nature).

It is important to remember here that the theatre of death refers to representation rather than the "real" – to tailors' shops and not to butchers' shops, to circuses and not to bullrings. In his commentary on proto-cinema, Philippe-Alain Michaud takes up the same thread concerning survivals that appears in Schlosser's study (through its association with Schlosser's contemporary, Aby Warburg). Indeed, Michaud offers the keynote of comparison between the media of all these diverse practices of the human *in absentia* and *in effigie* by referring them to the "transformation of the body

---

[233] The "reality of the *lowest* rank" – as *informe* [or *informel*], to give it its post-war aesthetic designation (itself a key point of reference for Kantor) – is, as Schulz's "father" reminds us, "the ectoplasm of mediums" (Bruno Schulz, *op cit.*, p.46). On materialist mediums, see, for example, Simon Featherstone, "Spiritualism as popular performance in the 1930s: the Dark Theatre of Helen Duncan", in *NTQ*, 27:2, May 2011.
[234] Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria*, trans. Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, Mass.: 2003, p.69.

into representation".[235] The reappearance of the ancient Roman funerary custom of displaying wax facemasks of the deceased during the Renaissance interested both Warburg and Schlosser and is also appealed to by another key representative of the "theatre of death" (whose work will, however, only be discussed briefly in chapter five), Jean Genet.[236] As Kurt Foster summarises Warburg's development of themes broached in Burckhardt's essays on the art of the Renaissance:

> He set the prominent appearances of local patricians among the saintly actors in the frescoes of Florentine chapels in connection with the almost totally forgotten practice of placing life-size wax figures as votive images in churches. The implication of these examples for cultural history is in their interplay of past and present, in an evolving "cultural psychology"...[237]

As is suggested by the fascination of the mirror, the human body is imagined through the existence of its double, and haunted by the anxiety that this double may have a life of its own, not only in the modernity of cinema but in the "primitivism" of the shaman; not only in the magic of theatre but also in the clairvoyance of dreams.

In his "anthropology of images", Hans Belting notes "how the image has lost its symbolic power, how death has become an abstraction and the analogy between the

---

[235] Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes, New York: Zone Books, 2004, p.121. That this concerns the survival of votive practices in aesthetic ones specifically should not hide the ways in which such issues arise in the wider frame of the Capitalist "theatre of death" in the (big) business of "everyday life". In an article in *The Guardian* (21.4.12, p.46), Susie Orbach writes: "A demand that from the age of five to our dotage, we should not simply be concerned with how we look, but how our image can mimic the limited range of digitally manipulated aesthetic possibilities that we see too many times a day to count. Indeed, in a survey for Girl Guiding UK, only 5% of teenage girls said they wouldn't change any aspect of their appearance. The beauty companies, the fashion houses, the diet companies, the food conglomerates (who also of course own the diet companies), the exercise and fitness industry, the pharmaceutical and cosmetic surgery industries combine, perhaps inadvertently, to create a climate in which girls and women come to feel that their bodies are not OK. We have moved from a position in which the joys of decoration have turned into a command of transformation and the production of a body that can fit."
[236] *Cf.* Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2001, p.231; also Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York: Academic Press, 1981, pp.61-62.
[237] Kurt Foster, "Aby Warburg's History of Art", in *Daedalus*, vol.105, 1976, p.172.

image and death, which seems as old as image-making, has fallen into oblivion."[238] In this context he cites a discussion of Louis Marin's that echoes Michaud's, reflecting on the use of images (or effigies) in rituals that include the dead amongst the community of the living. Marin speaks of an "ontological transformation" of the body into an image, whereby (as Belting comments): "the social realm is expanded, for dead members remain present in their image."[239]

The terms for this "transformation" of the body – *in absentia* and *in effigie* – are taken (in this thesis, rather than in Michaud, Marin, or Belting) from Freud's critique of the dynamics of transference, as both the practice and the theoretical object of psychoanalysis. By forestalling the promise of the reciprocity of the look, the psychoanalytic "mise-en-scène" induces its fictions (in the life of phantasy).[240] Indeed, psychoanalysis offers an example of a fundamental research at the threshold of the relation between the living and the dead in the twentieth century. In contrast to the strange attempts to use photography to "verify" the powers of mediums, Freud developed a new science of this relation, in which precisely a "psycho-analysis" would transform the suggestive powers of the séance. While the Freudian "dialectic of enlightenment" affirms the sense of votive cultural practices as everyday superstitions, it theorises the capacity of psychic life – for the most modern of human subjects – of maintaining communication with imagos of the absent; not only the dead, but those who have never existed other than as the phantasy of the subject (in the constellation of the super-ego). Freud even suggests that the play of fictions in which the therapeutic endeavour is caught may be interrupted by a "theatrical" production of reality, the very shock of which attests to the lures of these phantasmatic sirens.[241]

The anthropological phenomenon of the king's "two bodies", of the shaman's two bodies, or of the divine's two bodies, also attests to the fundamental capacity of human consciousness to address the dead (the metaphysical "theatre" of which is the

---

[238] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, trans. Thomas Dunlop, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p.128.
[239] *Ibid.*, p.130.
[240] Sigmund Freud, *The Dynamics of Transference*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XII, Standard Edition, London: Hogarth Press, 1978, p.108.
[241] Sigmund Freud, "Transference-Love", quoted by Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria*, trans. Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, Mass.: 2003, p.257.

counter-part to its modern *art*). The power of the body's "transformation into representation" endures furthermore in the fascination with the cave paintings of pre-historic human beings (celebrated, for example, in Werner Herzog's 2010 film, oscillating between matter and metaphor, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*), with the sense that the handprints at Chauvet address us, or "speak" to us, from the other side of history.

Like art, death also has a history – it is not simply an accident, but is the point at which the values of social life are most radically exposed. Here one might make an inversion of the classical motto (eloquently recalled by Beckett in *A Piece of Monologue*) and say that "death was the birth of him". For, as Artaud remarks so acutely: "No one has ever been born by oneself. No one dies by oneself either."[242] That death has its history is due not simply to its historians, but to the fact that death has (in both literal and metaphorical senses) its "theatre" – in a variety of cultural practices, which include (in the modernist sense) its *art* – by which it can be conceptualised from "beyond" itself, in its (seemingly paradoxical) "after life", in its concept as an event. We appear before death, because we exist after it. Or, rather, we exist before the threshold between life and death; only images exist beyond it. Images populate the realm of the dead, the presence of which used to demand techniques of initiation, to inscribe degrees of "reality" within communal belonging. Today we find but a faint echo of these in the concept of a particular art theatre practice.

In this "theatre", as an event of human appearance(s) – which each of the theatre artists discussed here calls that of an "image" (rather than simply a body) – the dead, in their representation, have many comparative histories: whether of ancient statuary studied by Jean-Pierre Vernant, of votive effigies studied by Julius Schlosser, of represented gesture studied by Aby Warburg, physically manifested symptoms studied by Sigmund Freud, of exhumed corpses in state funerals studied by Katherine Verdery; or of actors, studied under the concept of the "theatre of death" (with the example of, amongst others, Tadeusz Kantor).

---

[242] Antonin Artaud, "Van Gogh, the Man Suicided by Society", trans. Helen Weaver, in *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p.511. (The Beckett citation will be returned to below.)

Besides the practice of appearance(s) concerning the corpse, such as those of clinical death or of funerary death (both associated in modernity with the authority of the state over the body, where "death" must be legally ratified), we can identify a minor history of "theatrical death" – that is, a history of how the dead appear, or look, theatrically. This is neither necromancy nor the spectacle of commodity fetishism (by which capitalism produces a global "theatre of death"[243]); but a particular historical aesthetics of stagecraft, of entrance and exit, of an "unseen bearing upon the scene" – all concerning the image of an "actor". With respect to the theatrically specific appearance – or theoretical apparition – of the actor as a figure, or image, those other cultural practices or survivals of mimesis would be referred to as "theatrical" only metaphorically.[244] Unlike other forms of visual representation in such cultural or anthropological practices "of death" in effigy – whether in wax, wood, or stone; in portraiture; in symbolism, whether ritualised in gesture or memorials; in photography or video – the medium of this mimetic encounter in *theatre* specifically is the co-presence of living bodies, separated by the threshold *between* "this world" (*to* which the dead return) and that "other world" (*from* which the dead return), signified by the difference between stage and auditorium (understood not simply architecturally but, as we shall see, metaphysically).[245]

"After all", writes Patrice Pavis (considering the "temporal 'event' aspect unique to the theatre"), "the theatre is always the presence of a living being in front of me, the actor who lives in a time and a space that are also mine"[246] – while "also" being, of

---

[243] This is itself critically related to mimesis by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their study of the dialectics of magic, myth, and enlightenment (contemporary with Erich Auerbach's study of literary culture under the title of "mimesis"). Here we might associate the unemployed with the actors and consumers with the audience in such a fundamentally depressing metaphorical "theatre", or spectacle, of capitalism's production of death.

[244] It is important to note that throughout this thesis the term "appearance" is deliberately used ambiguously between both its temporal and spatial aspects – to signify the "present" in time and the presence in space of the actor's image; what Stanton Garner calls the *presencing* of the body "on stage" (Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994, p.43), as this may include the "apparition" of a character. Indeed, we may call reference to the actor itself an apparition, as an abstraction from actual actors "in favour of the representation (or signifying) body" (as Garner argues against, in favour of "the phenomenal (or lived) body", *ibid.*, p.13).

[245] Here it is precisely a question as to what "live", on stage, might mean – a question that has been addressed both in terms of the marionette (Craig, Genet, Kantor) and the animal (Castellucci).

[246] Patrice Pavis, "Avant-garde Theatre and Semiology", trans. Jill Daugherty, in *Languages of the Stage*, New York: PAJ Books, 1982, p.188.

course, precisely not "mine". Pavis' account of this co-presence is contrasted with the representation of a time and space that is imagined (or simply said) to be not mine – as fictional rather than, precisely, as presenting its absence. The major theatre tradition offers the fiction of "character", rather than that of the "actor". The minor tradition ("of death") offers, in the image of the actor him- or herself, the presence of what is intangible but corporeal; of what we might call a theoretical (rather than spectral) "apparition" of the theatrical body.

Despite the much vaunted distinction between "performance" and "theatre", this sense of co-presence is basic to both – evident in the paradoxical opening declaration of Babette Mangolte's film of Marina Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces*: "performance, time-based art, features the physicality of the artist's body in front of a live audience."[247] This paradox of the film itself – of its claims about "a live audience" in support of its documentation – will be returned to below. Here let us note that, with rare exceptions in performance art (not least from Abramovic herself) – prior to the recent vogue for one-to-one performances, at least – the index of performed mimesis (distinct from painted, sculpted, filmed examples) is (like the *eidolon* to be discussed in the next chapter) the intangible. The injunction associated with most art in public – "do not touch" – applies even when this is, precisely, permitted; for the question of "intangibility" touches upon that of the materiality of the artwork, including its possible placing in an archive. With rare exceptions (where this is precisely the concern of the performance), touch the "performance artist" and his or her image (its illusion) of "presence" disappears, just as with the actor and his or her "world" (its fiction) – for this body is an apparition that is not reducible to the performer him- or herself, but rather appears (as an image) in the space between performer and audience.

---

[247] This is quoted by Amelia Jones in her essay, "The Artist is Present", in *TDR* 55.1, Spring 2011, pp.31-32. The catalogue of Abramovic's "seven easy pieces" includes a hagiographic essay (on the "experiences of a viewer"), by Sandra Umathum, entitled (*pace* Pavis) "Beyond Documentation, or the Adventure of Shared Time and Place", which concludes with a trite mystification concerning these "experiences": "These cannot be documented; they are stored only in the memories of those who committed themselves to the adventure of sharing the same time and place with Abramovic, in bodily co-presence" (Umathum, in Marina Abramovic, *Seven Easy Pieces*, Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007, p.55). It is as if the spectator were now blessed with the aura once reserved for the art(ist) and the erotics-heuristics of Socrates (*Phaedrus*) were reduced to a pornographic fantasy of "being there".

Traditionally, "distance" has been inscribed in aesthetic mimesis (as a distance between art and life),[248] which the major traditions of the twentieth century have sought to minimise (or to blur) in the name of an authentic co-presence of art(ist) and audience (as if aesthetic "reality" could be thought immanently, without representation). It is the absence in presence, however, that the actor's "appearance" in the theatre of death works with, or at least evokes. The actor's appearance makes visible a threshold, an opposition between the space of his or her body and the spectator's, together with the ambiguity of a fictional non-reciprocity in the specifically *theatrical* look (given mythical form in the Gorgon's mask) – which is effective precisely because its basic premise (indeed, its promise) is a real reciprocity (here suspended, as in the psycho-analytical mise-en-scène). The dead take on an existence that is not their own, just as the actor is not simply "himself". In the theatre of death, this unsettling relation between reality and fiction is sustained not by simply pretending, but by the show(ing) (rather than the dissimulation) of technique – of what Craig called "symbolical gesture" in place of "impersonation".[249]

Here we enter into further paradoxical terrain for the study of this theatre ("of death") and its specific (minor) sense of the visible and the invisible, generating a sense of what is "touching" or affective in what Merleau-Ponty evocatively called the "flesh of the gaze". After all (*pace* Pavis), for a written thesis this "co-presence of live bodies" is itself a theoretical fiction – the discussion of which leads us back at least as far as the dialogue between Phaedrus and Socrates, addressing the speech of Lysias in its material (physical) presence *and* absence, as a desired (psychical) object. (Here the erotic and the heuristic, as significant conditions of and for research, famously supplement each other.) Amongst contemporary references, crucial for considering what the material (the evidence of and for the theatrical event), or even the subject (as, at least, conceptualisable), of this research could be, we may note another version of the cultural anthropology of "two bodies".

---

[248] This distance (*between*) is what allows for empathy, and is what Aby Warburg (who experienced the "passion" of the collapse of this distance) called the space for thought (*Denkraum*), *cf.* the concluding paragraphs of the "Serpent Ritual" lecture. (The concept of *Denkraum* is also discussed by Mark Russell in *Between Tradition and Modernity*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, pp.46-7 and pp. 80-81.)

[249] Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-marionette", in *Craig on Theatre*, ed. Michael Walton, London: Methuen, 1999, p.84.

This is to be found in the contemporary culture of performance art, attested to in Amelia Jones' account of the "supplementarity" operative between performance art and the photographic document. "The body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened; the photograph needs the body art event as an ontological 'anchor' of its indexicality."[250] It is curious how this seemingly modern concern with the aesthetic object of performance (with how its event can be thought of distinct from its document) reprises questions of mimesis whilst largely avoiding the term – almost as if the medium-related vocabulary of indexicality had replaced it in contemporary theory (and as if theory had itself replaced aesthetics). Paradoxically, the question of indexicality here could be seen as reprising the Aristotlean account of mimesis as methexis, and offering but the most recent variation of a history of "participation" in Christian apologia for the human image in the divine icon (*Ecce Homo*), from which the "presence" of performance (against the "pretence" of theatre) draws its pseudo-sacralising pathos.

Philip Auslander has summarised a thesis (relatable to the concepts of media in Kittler and of archive in Preziosi) concerning the "live" from examples of the performing arts, concluding that "the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such"; that the aesthetic category of the "live" event is itself the product of a culture dedicated to the recorded, or mediated, performance.[251] While this discussion in theatre studies goes back to its founding by Max Hermann (to be returned to in chapter four), we might wonder to what extent, today, the notion of the "live" is itself an emerging form of what will become a new historical survival in cultural practice (which, in a sense, "the theatre of death" has already theorised). In recognising the historicity of what is "live", the theatre discussed in this thesis may appear then as something of an anachronism today, as it resists the thought of the "post"-modern. Indeed, it already offers a critique of how the term "live" has come, lately, to qualify the *art* of so-called "performance" (with its supposedly "real" or

---

[250] Amelia Jones, "'Presence' *in absentia*: Experiencing Performance as Documentation", in *Art Journal*, 56.4, Winter 1997, p.16.

[251] Philip Auslander, "The Performativity of Performance Documentation", in *PAJ* 84, 28.3, September 2006, p.5. Crucially, the issue here is the inversion of relations between time and space – the "live" becomes the mediated in "real time", a professed "simultaneity" of production and reception that is nonetheless "remote" (hence the pleonasm of "live performance", not to mention the seeming oxymoron of the "live recording").

authentic sense of the body) distinct from that of "theatre" (with its supposedly "fictional" or representational sense of the body).[252]

Before reflecting further on what reference to "the dead" might mean in theatre specifically, one might hesitate concerning what is meant by reference to "the actor" in this discussion – as itself perhaps another, albeit linguistic (or even conceptual), superstition. Is this not simply to hypostatise the multiple meanings of "acting" into an abstract figure, one that has in fact no actual or meaningful existence (whether visible, tangible, or otherwise)? In his classic essay "on acting and not-acting", Michael Kirby proposes that "to act means to feign, to simulate, to represent, to impersonate"; and that an actor – as distinct from a performer in his argument – is a person who *does* these things,[253] as typically involving the representation (*pace* Pavis) of a "time and place different from that of the spectator". In this case, "to see an actor"[254] means to understand a situation (through what Kirby calls its "matrices") in which "behaviour of the type that defines acting appears,"[255] an "appearance" that is understood as being "for an audience"; that is, "to be 'on stage'".[256] Given the major fascination with "blurring" the boundaries between art and life in twentieth century aesthetics, it is perhaps worth adding here that this sense of "actor", as summarised by Kirby, refers specifically to rehearsed aesthetic performances, and not to either the accidental or the reiterative senses in which one becomes, metaphorically, an "actor" for an "audience" in everyday life, with examples of social analysis from Irving Goffman to Judith Butler (and where the "networked society" aims at blurring still further the distinctions between private and public space).

What the actor "does" is complex, especially in the relation between preparation and performance, in all that makes an "appearance on stage" a particular mode, or art, of action or gesture. This complexity has been the subject of varied researches in modern

---

[252] The point here is not to identify a distinction between performance and theatre with that between the real and the representational (just as the "theatre of death" is not to be confused with its own object of critique, the "deadly theatre" (*pace* Brook)). The seeming paradoxes of "the theatre of death" address fundamental notions of what is seen, or thought, to be "living" in theatrical representation, as an art of mimesis.

[253] Michael Kirby, "On Acting and Not-Acting", in *Acting (Re)Considered*, ed. Phillip Zarrilli, London: Routledge, 2000, p.43.

[254] *Ibid.*, p.45.

[255] *Ibid.*, p.43

[256] *Ibid.*, p.47.

theatre history, from Stanislavsky to Grotowski (to cite but two who have given their names to "schools" of actors' practice[257]). Although this thesis will discuss a theorisation of the actor (as a vehicle of theatrical aesthetics) offered by Kantor specifically (an artist without disciples or a school, although not without his imitators), this is in the context of an underlying question concerning the type of behaviour (historically and culturally various) that has been thought to define acting. The theatre of death – as it names a minor strand within the twentieth century's many and varied attempts to revive or to reanimate theatre, to make it "live" in contrast to the "deadly" sclerosis of its professional practices – sees its practice of acting as involving (as already noted with Craig) a critique of "impersonation" (*pace* Kirby), without resorting to claims about the body (for example, "incarnating") beyond (its) representation(s).

The actor's appearance, after all, is not simply an attribute of "the actor" alone but is, rather, a relation to an audience; it is a theatrical event. The actor's entry on stage – whether or not preceded by an entrance of the stage itself, marked by a dimming of auditorium lights, the raising of a curtain, or by a threefold striking of the ground – is acknowledged by an anticipatory hush or, conversely, the demonstrative sound of applause. The corollary of this is the actors' acknowledgment of the audience's presence at the end of the performance, in the ritual of the curtain call – of which there are many variations, including the negative one of simply not "returning" to the stage, of not "re-appearing"; or, again, staging the sometimes uncanny tableau vivant of lining up and applauding the audience also. Both these extremes offer possibilities for thinking the theatre of death in terms of the opposition between stage and auditorium, between actor and audience, as it is signified in such practices, in what might be called their theatrical "after images". While there will be no particular discussion of the audience side of this relation in the following chapters (distinct from artists' theorising what they themselves "see" in theatre), applause does offer ritualised testimony to the audience's part in this mimetic practice (or event) of theatrical appearance(s).

---

[257] It is important to remind ourselves that "schools" rarely represent the real legacy of those they are named after, preferring "doctrine" to "discovery". As Grotowski insists, against claims for "method" with respect to Stanislavski, "his attitude of discovering anew each phase of life was in a way a foundation" (Jerzy Grotowski, "Reply to Stanislavsky", trans. Kris Salata, *TDR*, 52.2, Summer 2008, p.31).

This event will be discussed then in terms of the image of the actor, in the potential iconicity of this apparition (as conceived of by its artist-theorists), rather than as an event comprehending its audience (as might be studied by a sociology of theatre-going), except as it concerns a metaphysical encounter (as an instance of the mimetic). What mediates this event of theatrical appearance(s) is a question of the model of "the dead" for the actor, as also of the threshold (or demarcation line) between actor and audience, between stage and auditorium (*pace* Walter Benjamin's reflections on epic theatre in the Introduction). This is, again, the particular subject of the thesis: how the appearance of "the actor" may be understood in or by the concept of the theatre of death, as this addresses how the relation between the living and the dead is conceived of in that between audience and actor – in the concept or thought of this relation to which "the theatre of death" gives a name.

In a short essay identifying "two versions of the imaginary" (in which the image of the cadaver figures as the very question of human likeness or (re)semblance), Maurice Blanchot offers a way to think of this theatrical relation (that of a "co-presence" haunted by absence), as a relation between event and image:

> To live an event as an image is not to have an image of this event, nor is it to give it the gratuitousness of the imaginary. The event, in this case, really takes place, and yet does it 'really' take place? What happens captures us, as we would be captured by the image; that is, we are released, from it and from ourselves; it keeps us outside, making of this outside a presence where 'I' does not recognise 'itself'.[258]

This account of image and event (as a rethinking, perhaps, of the Schematism in cognisance of the unconscious) prefigures precisely Derrida's evocation of the ghost in an association of the psychoanalytic critique of memory and the modern mnemotechnics of film: "To be haunted by a ghost is to remember something you've never lived through. For memory is the past that has never taken the form of the

---

[258] Maurice Blanchot, "The Two Versions of the Imaginary", in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p.262 [translation modified]; *L'Espace Littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955, p.275.

present."[259] Here memory is evoked as a blind spot in and of mimesis, as a gap in the mirroring of thought and perception. With the "I" that does not recognise "itself", we find an echo of that uncanny alterity of the *prosopon* met with in the ancient mnemotechnics of the mask, in the haunting look of the Gorgon, through which what Artaud calls the "mortal architecture" of the face becomes visible. As Vernant, again, evokes it: "It is your gaze that is captured in the mask. The face of Gorgo is the Other, your double... yourself in the world beyond."[260]

As with the mirror, reference to "the actor" here (as to the mask of identity, to the "I ('I')" of mimesis, as Lacoue-Labarthe writes it[261]) evokes an image that reflects the captivating event of appearance, as it may be conceived of as the uncanny not simply in, but of, mimesis. It is with this reflection (in the mirror "of" thought) that, as Lacoue-Labarthe proposes, a certain image of the mimetic becomes representable, "installed – theorised", in an "apparatus for gorgonising Medusa".[262] Writing after Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe explores the question of the relation between mimesis and model, copy or imitation and original, as already caught in a play of doubling. The question "of" mimesis here is "itself" mimetic, where "of" has the double sense of a question posed by the very topic about which it asks.

It is here that the thought "of death" – beginning with a question of mimetic practice as "theatre" – returns to the *look* of human appearance (as the *theatre* of death). The theatre offers an idea of, and an apparatus for, "seeing" seeing, a scene for the seen, a technique for thinking the very practice it produces – and of which it is itself the product. In the "perceptual duality of performance" the non-coincidence of "the embodied I of theatrical spectatorship" and "the embodied eye" is staged, a "gap

[259] Jacques Derrida in *Ghost Dance* (directed by Ken McMullen), and taken up in *Echographies of Television*, with Bernard Stiegler, trans. Jennifer Bajorek, Cambridge: Polity, 2007.
[260] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Death in the Eyes", trans. Thomas Curely and Froma Zeitlin, in *Mortals and Immortals*, Froma Zeitlin ed., New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p.138.
[261] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Typography", trans. Eduardo Cadava, in Lacoue-Labarthe *Typography*, ed. Christopher Fynsk, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, p.47, p.89, and p.138. An everyday example of this from Freud's experience, broaching a question of the theatre and its "double", will be discussed in chapter five.
[262] *Ibid.*, p.92. (We may relate this paradox of "undecidabilty itself" to Foucault's discussion of the mirror as a heterotopia, in "Of Other Spaces", trans. Jay Miskowiec, in *Diacritics*, 16.1, Spring 1986, p.24; and on cemeteries, p.25.)

which we ourselves are" (in Stanton Garner's paraphrase of Merleau-Ponty).[263] Here mimesis is both what needs to be explained, and a primary source of such explanation.

While the discussion in this thesis implicitly refers to the actual work of actors (who could be individually named, and some of whom are still living[264]) – as their work is reflected upon by Kantor specifically – it takes as its subject the sense of "actor" as various theatre artists have theorised it (rather than simply described it) in terms of "the dead". This is not then to speak of (still less from) the point of view *of* the actor, about which so much has been thought in twentieth century theatre research, but a point of view *on* the actor, on the appearance of "the actor" – thought in its concept or paradigm, as distinct from any particular actor's qualities. There is no "iconic" actor in Kantor's theatre (apart, perhaps, from himself) – no Ryszard Cieslak, for instance, as Ludwik Flaszen evokes him:

> One of the emblematic icons, often reproduced in books on the history of the
> theatre, presents a young man with white bands of material wrapped around
> his hips, kneeling, with a naked chest, open to the space, with a radiant face
> and the expression of a yogi in rapture or a Christ-like holy man. This is

---

[263] Stanton Garner, *Embodied Spaces*, p.31 (citing Merleau-Ponty, p.207). This is played out in Garner's analysis (this time citing Harry Berger) in the non-mutuality of the gaze between actor and audience: "When the actor is 'in character', according to Berger, his or her outward gaze is always directed at a virtual or fictional spectator, necessarily other than the actual individual whose gaze he or she meets. To the extent that the spectator perceives this gaze, he or she responds either by assuming the role of a fictional auditor in the dramatic representation or by rendering himself or herself absent, invisible. But if this analysis (what Berger calls the 'textualisation of the audience') has the virtue of implicating the audience in the perceptual duality that characterises performance as a whole (like the actor, I become other than myself, to the point of rendering myself the absent or fictional correlative of the actor's performance), it does so at the expense of the actuality that constitutes the ground and the other side of theatrical fictionality. If this actuality can only fully manifest itself at the cost of the illusion it sustains, the real proximity of performer to spectator nonetheless makes itself felt throughout the actor's performance and the audience's response. Aware of our sustaining presence to the performance we witness – the fact that this spectacle is set into motion by our gaze – we sanction this being-present through our applause, our laughter, even the attentiveness of our silence." (Garner, *ibid*., pp.48-49).

[264] Amongst these is Andrzej Welminski who (besides other roles in earlier productions) played Kantor's "self-portrait" in the last Cricot 2 production *Today is my Birthday*. The role included being one of the pall bearers for the plank that represented Kantor's coffin in the production, a role taken on actually only a few weeks after the staging of this "last rehearsal" (*cf.* Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Kantor's Last Tape", trans. Paul Allain and Grzegorz Ziolkowski, in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 15.1, 2005, p.29).

Ryszard Cieslak, Teatr Laboratorium actor, performing his legendary role in *The Constant Prince* based on Pedro Calderon de la Barca, in a famous Polish version by Slowacki, staged by Grotowski and presented for the first time in 1965 in Wroclaw.[265]

By contrast, in the Cricot 2 the particular qualities of, for instance, the Janicki twins are recognised as "annexed" realities, as "ready-made" appearances, not as the personal research of "the actors' dramaturgy", which offers a late echo of Romanticism (at least in the Polish context), rather than a modernist formalism.[266]

The reality of this "iconic" appearance, of the actor's art of mimesis, is addressed in the theatre of death in terms of a metaphysical effect rather than of its "realism" or its being (or appearing) "true to life". While this is explicitly the concern (discussed in chapter one) of Craig's account of the über-marionette, as also of Artaud's image of the "Balinese dancer", it proves (paradoxically) the case even when, in fact, it is a particular physicality that makes for the choice of performer – not necessarily a professional actor – in this theatre. For in the theatre of death the actor offers a material equal to the stage, where neither serves as a surrogate for the other (nor for "the text" in any "impersonations" or "settings"). It is only by developing its artists' theorisations (in terms of "the uncanny in mimesis", for instance) that the concept of this theatre may be more than the inevitable paraphrase of its sources, and even perhaps propose some semblance of the thought of mimesis – as of "theatre" – as it has been figured, historically, by "the dead".

As with "the actor", so "the dead" offer a figure of – and for – thought. It is important to stress, again concerning both "the dead" and "the actor", that the theatre of death is concerned with representation, with the figure of the dead rather than with the reality of death – with the stage, rather than the mortuary or the anatomy "theatre". Jean-Pierre Vernant notes that culture is concerned with the symbolic representation of the body ("the dead"), rather than with the corpse ("death") itself.[267] Culturally, it is "the

[265] Ludwik Flaszen, *Grotowski and Company*, trans. Andrzej Wotjtasik and Paul Allain, Wroclaw: Icarus Publishing, 2010, pp.43-4.
[266] *Ibid*., pp.126-27.
[267] There is, however, a sense in which this distinction is itself questionable, in that it is the means by which one of terms is distinguished from the other – as culture from nature in its

dead" that are opposed to the world of the living – classically, as disembodied, immaterial instances of "spirit", or image, that can "return" to this world, to haunt the living (or even, indeed, to possess them) – rather than the ongoing organic life of decomposition, of maggots and flies,[268] as given a frame and a title, for instance, by Damien Hirst's installation (whether understood as a sculpture or a concept) *One Thousand Years* (at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin). The body as cadaver or carrion – as consumed by its wound in Kafka's *Country Doctor* description – is not the concern of the *theatre* of death. Here the question of the wound – or of mortality – is metaphysical (as it is evoked by Kantor, and by both Craig and Artaud), rather than medical or forensic.

As Evans-Pritchard emphasises (introducing Robert Hertz's classic essay on mortuary rituals), the issue "of death" concerns collective representations of value and feeling, which are not reducible either to explanations in terms of "utility" (concerning hygienic dealing with the cadaver) or to a psychology of horror at the cadaver's "dissolution".

> Again, the easy explanation of social procedures after death is horror at the passing, the *rigor mortis*, and the onset of dissolution, but Hertz shows very clearly that in many cases there is a minimum of reaction at death, an almost entire lack of concern, so that this cannot be the right interpretation. On the contrary, the more repulsive features of dissolution, far from being shunned or secreted, are often emphasised for all to see, for they exhibit objectively the passing of the soul to its happy home. The changing condition of the body signifies changing mental states in the survivors.[269]

---

own terms. The distinction is only partial therefore; after all, the "natural causes" of death are of pre-eminently cultural definition, as being both medical and legal.

[268] See, for example, Vernant, "La Mort ou les Morts", in *Autour des Morts: Mémoire et Identité*, eds. Olivier Dumoulin and Françoise Thelamon, Rouen: University of Rouen Press, 2001, pp.7-8; and "Psuche: Simulacrum of the Body or Image of the Divine?", trans. Froma Zeitlin, in *Mortals and Immortals*, ed. Froma Zeitlin, Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1991, pp.186-192. On occasion, of course, the body itself – usually as a question of its "(re)burial" – becomes a symbolic medium (a "relic"), as a question of the writing (or naming) of memorials in the service of political legitimation (*cf.* Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[269] E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "Introduction", to Robert Hertz, *Death* and *The Right Hand*, trans. Rodney and Claudia Needham, Aberdeen: Cohen and West, 1960, pp.19-20.

If the theatre of death echoes the transformations in both "the changing condition of the body" (its representation in and as its image, look, or appearance) and "changing mental states" (with a sense of metaphysical shock) amongst the living, it does so in terms of the restricted example of an art practice (indeed, as a question of a mimetic practice restricted to that of its *art*) in modernity. As proposed in the Introduction, this is not a metaphorical "theatre" – as, for instance, in the understanding of ritual in performance studies (following the methodological dialogue between Victor Turner and Richard Schechner). The point here is not to turn away from aesthetic theory, but to develop a sense of how art has been understood in terms "of death" in theatre history (as, paradoxically, a "live art").[270] This raises a question of mimesis in the understanding of modernity – and therefore a thinking of aesthetics with anthropology (in consideration of animism, for instance); not as a study of shamanism or of "ritual", but of cultural survivals manifest in the practices addressed by theatre history.

With respect to Kantor, this thesis would not therefore follow Amos Fergombé, for example, in eliding the theatre of death with a question of funerary rites – where both categories are generalised to a point of equivalence (or, at least, to a point of metaphorical association). Fergombé writes, in a way that occludes what might be specific to either theatre (aesthetics) or to processes of grieving (psychology or anthropology): "Like all funerary ritual, Kantor's theatre allows us to participate in a staging of death [*assister à une mise en scène de la mort* (to attend, to be an audience of, a scene of death)], in a sublimation made possible by the presence of laughter and emotion through that of a master of ceremonies."[271] To attend a funeral or a theatre performance is not the same – at least if one is concerned with a truth value that is specific to an aesthetic practice, with its own history of research questions; not least in that appeal to the circus or cabaret figure of a "master of ceremonies". Fergombé elides the nature of this "performance" (or "ritual") event with the work of memory (which might relate it to story telling), as of mourning (in which it might gain its

---

[270] This apparent oxymoron has widespread contemporary usage in the advertising with which major venues promote themselves in relation to their filmed performances – the National Theatre, for instance, calls its cinema presentations "NT Live".

[271] Amos Fergombé, "Le Rituel kantorien comme poïétique de dépassement de la mort", in *L'Âge d'or du théâtre polonais*, eds. Agnieska Grudzinska and Michal Maslowski, Paris: Editions de l'Amandier, 2009, p.234. (This volume offers an interesting survey of contemporary French scholarly reception of Kantor, amongst the generation after Bablet, Banu, and Scarpetta, within their particular construction of Polish theatre history.)

modern specificity as funerary ritual). This leads him to offer a curiously moral conclusion: "The ritual celebrations established by Kantor allow for the rebirth of drama, especially where human beings are confronted with massacres, with the procession of the dead and with bodies broken by unspeakable dreams. They oblige us, finally, to have our 'eyes wide open' in preparing for a passage beyond death."[272]

In a theatre of death understood without any such ritual "obligation", but rather with its own insistence on aesthetic autonomy, we have to do with actors not with corpses; with a work of art not with a work of mourning. The question of "mental states" with respect to theatre is one of cultural – aesthetic – survivals (between actors and audiences), rather than of analogy with personal or familial rituals surrounding a particular deceased individual. The *image* of the dead – on sarcophagi, in death masks, in legends, in statistics, and even "theatrically" – reveals society to itself. The work of cultural memory (or commemoration) is a communication between generations, in speaking of – and to – an image of a "beyond" (or an "after life") that belongs to the present; that is, the image of a future as a collective understanding of the past – in the figure of the human being as it "returns" in public space (as a *revenant*). But while an understanding of this mimetic "after life", from shamanism to bureaucracy, offers the most profound evidence of what human culture will have been, it is articulated here as a question of and for aesthetic theory specifically; that is, as a concern addressed by various artists themselves with respect to their theatrical work.

Funeral rites are not, after all, universal in either their form or content – differing crucially in the question of appeasing the dead, whether to propitiate their return or, on the contrary, to preclude it (although in either case as a question of the well-being of the living).[273] As Levi-Strauss observes:

> Concern for the dead – whether fear or respect – is universal. It sometimes
> manifests itself, however, in practices aimed at removing the dead, who are

---

[272] *Ibid.*, pp.237-8.
[273] The "irrational" votive value of the photograph (as offering a tactile image of the deceased), despite the descralisation of material life supposed in and by modernity, will be discussed at the end of chapter five specifically.

considered dangerous, once and for all from the world of the living; and
sometimes, on the contrary, by actions aimed at holding onto the dead, at
constantly involving them in the struggles of the living.[274]

While the anthropological reality offers a model for understanding the theatrical, the
latter is not explained by supposing it as a given model of and for the former, as
though providing a modern metaphor for "ritual", for instance. The mimetic question
of *the actor's* appearance, as it concerns a space *between* past and present (or between
absence and presence), is a question of where the actor "returns" from and to in social
or public space, as *theatre*. While the concept of the theatre of death relates to
fundamental anthropological practices, it does so precisely in terms of a (modernist)
question of its aesthetic "autonomy".

As already suggested, the conjunction of the uncanny and mimesis is in a sense
pleonastic. Rather than identifying the uncanny *in* mimesis, it might be better
identified simply *with* mimesis. In so far as it is a "human" attribute, the mimetic
always has something uncanny about it – as death exists for the living, not simply as
an untimely event, but as a relation to being.[275] As already noted, Beckett offers a
startling reminder of this, in the opening line of *A Piece of Monologue* (commissioned
and performed by the actor David Warrilow): "Birth was the death of him." In
contrast to Lear's or Hamlet's "ends" (or exit), here the actor's very appearance (or
entrance) on stage is meta-theatrically announced as being "the death of him". This
commemorative conceit has a long history. Rudolph Wittkower, for instance, cites the
sixteenth century poet Franco van Est, whose strophe "death proceeds right from the
time of birth" itself renders the sense of the first Century author Manilius' motto,
widely quoted in the Renaissance, "we die with birth, and the end depends upon the

---

[274] Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Anthropologist and the Human Condition", trans. Joachim
Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss, in *The View From Afar*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books,
1987, p.35.

[275] Claude Levi-Strauss notes the extreme example of human cultures relegating "strangers"
to the status of "others" – beyond degrading them as "animals" – when they are regarded as
apparitions: "One often goes so far as to deprive the stranger of this last shred of reality by
making him a 'ghost' or an 'apparition'." ("Race and History", in *Structural Anthropology 2*,
trans. Monique Layton, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987, p.329.)

beginning" (*nacentes mormur, finisque ab origine pendent*)[276] – which is itself most famously echoed, in the twentieth century, by Eliot. (Indeed, the commemorative plaque to the poet's remains in East Coker church reads: "In my beginning is my end... In my end is my beginning."[277]) With a similar resonance, Derrida begins a reflection on photography, as the paradigmatically modern *memento mori* (whose relation to the stage we will return to in chapter five, in discussion of Barthes and Heidegger): "We owe ourselves to death."[278] Kenneth Gross, meanwhile, cites the playful example of Felix Klee, animating two of the hand puppets made for him by his father – Dr Death and a puppet of the artist himself – with the former whispering to the latter "in an insinuating, cackling, high-pitched, childlike, self-amused, voice: 'Death is life and life is death'."[279]

Of the post-Christian (or even post-Humanist) return to this unsettling self-knowledge (as the experience, in life, of another), Heidegger proposes that it is intimately related to a sense of the uncanny:

> But this uncanny that banishes us once and for all from everything in which
> we are at home is no particular event that must be named among others
> because it, too, ultimately happens. It is not only when he comes to die, but
> always and essentially that man is without issue in the face of death. Insofar as
> man *is*, he stands in the issuelessness of death. Thus his being (*Dasein*) is the
> uncanny happening. (For us this uncanny happening must be initially
> grounded in human being (*Dasein*).) With the naming of *this* force and

---

[276] Rudolph Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997, p.165.

[277] A photograph of the church and the plaque appears accompanying an article about building "development" at East Coker in *The Guardian*, 23.08.2011, p.12.

[278] Jacques Derrida, *Athens, Still Remains*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brant and Michael Naes, New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, p.1 (*Nous nous devons à la mort*). This is echoed in terms of cultural memory – or of historical irony – in the title of one Heiner Müller's interviews with Alexander Kluge, loosely translated as "I owe the world a death", or more properly, "I owe the world a dead person", which gives the title to a collection of these interviews: *Ich schulde der Welt einen Toten*, Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1996. (The question of the dead person here alludes to the sacrifice that founds political community, with its repressed questions of political legitimacy.)

[279] Kenneth Gross, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011, p.149. As concerns an anthropology of the image, to which we will return at the end of this chapter, Régis Debray similarly begins his discussion of the genesis of images under the title, "Birth through death" (Régis Debray, *Vie et mort de l'image*, Paris: Gallimard, 1992, pp.23-57).

uncanniness, the poetic project of being and human essence sets its own limit upon itself.[280]

Such "issuelessness" (as addressed by Blanchot in the epigraph to the previous chapter) means a fundamental revaluation of any sense of an "after life" in secular understanding. While this will be discussed again in chapter five, through Heidegger's reading of Kant in relation to both the death mask and the photograph (where the question of the uncanny in mimesis is addressed as that of the relation between the image and concept of human being, or "presence"), we might note here that it also occurs in early theories of cinema. As noted previously, Béla Balász, in his reflections on this pre-eminently modern medium of human visibility, comments that: "One of our deepest metaphysical yearnings is to see what things are like when we are not present," an undoing of the normal conditions of and for our observation of things in (and of) the world (in and of light) that we have to be present (even in dreams).[281]

Here the relation to the human image – as of seeing "the dead" – takes material, mnemotechnical form; but it is equally attested to in records of "immaterial" – oneiric and phantasmatic – cultural (embodied) mediums, as found for instance in the archive of the Inquisition. The attempted extirpation of the pagan past in the Christian (and later scientific) European present has a long history, the "reason" of which is perhaps better addressed by anthropology than by philosophy.[282] Carlo Ginzburg reflects on the motives of those claiming intercourse with the dead in 1581, for instance, in terms that translate easily into those of Balász (writing in 1924), referring to:

> An extremely common but also insatiable desire, the longing to know
> something about the fate of a departed loved one (and linked with the hope of
> life beyond the tomb), mingled inextricably with the instinctive inability to

---

[280] Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959, p.158.
[281] Béla Balász, *The Visible Man* [1924], trans. Rodney Livingstone, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011, p.61.
[282] As, for instance, Marc Augé, *A Sense for the Other*, trans. Amy Jacobs, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

think of a dead human being without restoring it to the life it no longer possessed.[283]

The "poetic project" of human *being*, in its "issuelessness", as evoked by Heidegger in the thought of death, is famously the subject of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, where this project of (and for) *Dasein* is associated with the modernist image of puppet theatre (related neither to Guignol grotesque nor Witkacy's "comedy of corpses" (*pace* Kott), but rather (*pace* Kleist) to the grace of angels). In Rilke's poetic "theatre", the child's play with a doll – "when alone, we entertained ourselves/ with everlastingness", when "what lay before us/ was not the future!" – is transformed by an impossible *art* of being. "Angel and doll! Then there's at last a play./ Then there unites what we continually/ part by our mere existence," where "death,/ the whole of death, before life's start, to hold it/ so gently and so free from all resentment,/ transcends description."[284]

"Everlastingness" then is possible only "before life's start" (where "birth was the death of him"), before the "issuelessness" of "our mere existence" in which, paradoxically, what is "afterwards" becomes both culturally vital and empty (as is the tomb in language). The fragile thought of what has been, constituting the possibility of what might be, becomes manifest in a future to which it cannot know how it belongs. Kantor, in his acceptance speech on receiving the Rembrandt Prize (of the Goethe Foundation, Basel) in 1978, insists that modern man is not liberated (by medical science, for instance) from the knowledge (or the fear) of death. Death remains the existential horizon of the visible "in" this world, in and of the mundane. When the image finally takes leave of its corporeal, mortal medium, the body "remains", as the "refuse" that it is always becoming. Amongst Kantor's images of a transformation of this "poor" and "degraded" existence by art is the sculpture he made two years previously for his gravesite (shared with his mother, who had already died)

---

[283] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992, p.34. This "reason" is the subject of dialectical critique in Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis of "enlightenment" in the darkest of times.
[284] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman, London: Chatto & Windus, 1981, pp.51-53.

of a child sitting at a school desk, whose feet do not reach the ground.[285] In this quasi-votive work, as in the twentieth century art-theatre practice and theory called (after Kantor's proposal) "the theatre of death", we recognise the re-appearance – or the survival – of a pre-modern mode of thought[286], as precisely a "superstition" in Edward Tylor's use of this term.

---

[285] A facsimile of the typescript of Kantor's anti-Promethean speech – in its English version – is included in Luc Tuyman's exhibition on "the Reality of the Lowest Rank", *op. cit.*, p.87.

[286] As Adorno and Horkheimer declare, opening their analysis of the "dialectic of enlightenment" (in the age of commodity fetishism): "the human mind, which overcomes superstition, is to hold sway over a disenchanted nature... [as] the extirpation of animism... Technology is the essence of this knowledge. It does not work by concepts and images, by the fortunate insight, but refers to method, the exploitation of others' work, and capital" (Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London: Verso, 1986, p.4 and p.5). A "theory of ghosts" is also what Adorno and Horkheimer entitle their reading of Freud's essay on the uncanny (*ibid.,* pp.215-16).

The Theatre of Death: The Uncanny in Mimesis – Part One

Chapter 3: _Superstition and an iconography_

The rituals of knowledge are a response to the enigma of the individual in the world of man. They are not the explanation (there is no explanation) but the emphatic repetition of the place where the paths of knowledge and of identification merge. Like the doll dancers in the Kachina ritual, the researcher gives meaning to something that has no meaning – not in understanding _but in_ reproducing _the world in the closed universe of representations._ – Philippe-Alain Michaud[287]

The sense of "superstition" as it appears in Julius Schlosser's study of wax portraiture, drawn from Edward Tylor, is examined in a reading by Georges Didi-Huberman, linking it with the key theme in Warburg (as discussed in the previous chapter), that of the "survival" of forms of emotional expression from pagan antiquity into the Renaissance, and hence into the understanding of modernity.

> In 1865, Tylor gave a first definition of _survival_, inferred from the Latin word _superstitio_: '[A survival is] the "standing over" (_superstitio_) of old habits into the midst of a new and changed state of things.' That definition was taken up... and discussed for several chapters in _Primitive Culture_, the fundamental anthropological work Tylor published in 1871... Tylor went on to extend that mode of observation to every dimension of culture from clothing styles... to the behaviours associated with sneezing... profoundly chang[ing] the relationship between anthropology and the historical sciences.[288]

---

[287] Philippe-Alain Michaud, _Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion_, trans. Sophie Hawkes, New York: Zone Books, 2004, p.236.

[288] Georges Didi-Huberman, "Viscosities and Survivals", trans. Jane Todd, in _Ephemeral Bodies_, ed. Roberta Panzanelli, p.162. (For a commentary on the votive waxwork as discussed by Warburg himself, _cf._ Robert Maniura, "Ex Votos, Art and Pious Performance", in _Oxford Art Journal_, 32.3, 2009.) (_Cf._ also Didi-Huberman's remarks on Gombrich's re-writing of Warburg in "Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time", trans. Vivian Rehberg and Boris Belay, in _Common Knowledge_, vol.9, no.2, Spring 2003 (n.11, p.276).)

Concerning the more familiar sense of superstition, as that which modern or enlightened (rational) consciousness distinguishes itself from, Freud remarks – analysig, or rather constructing, a sense of the uncanny beyond the simply literary – that: "All supposedly educated people have ceased to believe officially that the dead can become visible as spirits, and have made any such appearances dependent on improbable and remote conditions..."[289]

From Tylor to Taussig, through Frazer and Freud, superstition concerns the relations between animate and inanimate, the living and the dead, and is typically identified with animism – a projection of thoughts from the former onto the latter. But in "the theatre of death" these relations, as with the visible and the invisible also, appear in an inversion, *theatrically*, with the living body figured in terms of the dead; of the animate gesture as a sign of the inanimate; the visible experience understood in terms of the invisible. Indeed, the conjunction of the animate body with the inanimate sign (in a corporeal "hieroglyph", as proposed by Artaud[290]) offers what Barthes calls (in a discussion of Bunraku) a "lesson in writing", concerning what we might call the actor's second body (or "theatre's double"). Fundamentally, this lesson offers a revaluation of the metaphysics underpinning the literary-interpretative, dramatic theatre and the work of its actors, as this is organised by "a fundamental antinomy, that of the animate/ inanimate".[291]

This antinomy provides a model for further binaries between the soul and the body, between intelligence and technique, the internal and external; indeed, the living and the dead, as it constitutes "the driving link between character and actor which is always conceived by us as the expressive channel of an interiority."[292] The antinomy

---

[289] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", trans. James Strachey, in *P.F.L.*14, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, p.370.

[290] Such terms as "animated hieroglyphics" (p.54), "veritable living, moving, three-dimensional hieroglyphics" (p.61), and a "concrete conception of the abstract" (p.64), are fundamental to Artaud's vision of the "Balinese Theatre" (in *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Mary Richards, New York: Grove Press, 1958). In terms of the focus here on iconography, the discussion will be limited to these plastic references to the hieroglyph, rather than the physical ("affective") exercises of a "hieroglyph of breath" (in the later "Affective Athleticism" essay, *ibid*., p.141).

[291] Roland Barthes, "Lesson in Writing", trans. Stephen Heath, in *Image-Music-Text*, London: Fontana, 1982, p.171.

[292] *Ibid*., p.173. The whole question of the difference between "thought" and "action" is basic to any concept of Occidental theatre practice, whether in Stanislavsky, Artaud, or Brecht, to

121

"makes sense" through all these comparable instances – masking the way in which it is the antinomy itself that is producing this sense, the sense of which has then to be rethought rather than merely reproduced. In the theatre of death, it is not a question of a simple reversal of terms in such instances, of dead objects endowed with the appearance of life, as is the key of "animation" in most thinking about puppet theatre. The mimesis "of death" (as an *art* of theatre) figures rather the oscillation of, or ambiguity between, the identities of these antinomial terms. As we shall note later, the uncanny is not an ambiguity of one identity substituting for the other – the animation of the inanimate – but an ambiguity about the distinction itself, as it draws its power from the very insistence upon it, that a phenomenon must be either animate or inanimate. Freud maintains the rationalism of this insistence for the most part of his celebrated essay on "the uncanny", but finally questions the fiction of reality as a reality of fiction, "beyond" their erstwhile division, as between art and science. The lesson or "learning experience" (concerning metaphysics) in this theatre is, indeed, that of a living object (the actor, the actor's body) endowed with the qualities of death (in its image) as one of the most fundamental concerns of human cultural practice.

For Barthes, Bunraku provides a distinct model of performed expression, as itself a corporeal writing (or semiotics) – where the visible gesture of the puppeteer is manifest alongside that of the puppet body, and where the voice of the narrator (in the paradoxical "corporeality" of its sound) is understood in terms of its physical (rather than psychological) gesture or expression. The corporeal act and its "expression" each have their own register of "writing" in such a performance, rather than being condensed – as expression and intention – into a semblance (or rather a dissemblance) of a unity as embodied "meaning". Expression itself becomes legible alongside its gestures; it accompanies the action (just as the manifest quality of a brush stroke in a painting is not reducible to the "subject" which its application is thought to realise), being no longer the expression of an intention, of a "psychical" interiority (in which the theatre's double would disappear). In a pertinent distinction made by Michal Kobialka, commenting on the "zero" condition of acting espoused by Kantor in the

---

name but three distinct approaches to the same problematic, which is also fundamental to Occidental art history, as will be discussed in the context of a production by Romeo Castellucci, below.

1960s, this allows for a "paratheatrical" rather than a "metatheatrical" relation to the actors' expression (or work of interpretation).[293]

In professional practice, however, these concerns with the metaphysics of performance are typically reduced to a sense of "bad acting" opposed to "good", of "artificial" acting opposed to "natural" – as if "quoting" a role (its "lesson in writing"), rather than "living" it, was a failure of technique.[294] This is, indeed, the fundamental "superstition" – paradoxically – of the major tradition of twentieth century theatre. Maintaining the two bodies of the actor, however, rather than their appearing as one, forestalls this theatrical illusion – wherein metaphors speak for practice(s), as if in theory. An explicit contemporary example of this non-metaphorical practice (as its theoretical embodiment) would be the Wooster Group's production with (rather than of, as Kantor would say) Racine's *Phèdre*, where the title character was split between an actor who spoke her lines and another who performed her movements. Indeed, this technique characterised the whole production, for all the parts were played with reference to the frame of the stage for a "life" (or animation) of the passions; where the lesson in "writing" was played out in terms of a de-synchronisation of gesture and image, of action (or imitation) and its model, no longer elided with the expressivity of speech (as the cadence of breath). The Wooster Group offered not so much a "new interpretation" of the play (as if reproducing the text's invisibility on stage, *pace* Ingarden), but rather a change in the sense of the theatrically visible through an understanding of the expressive possibilities (or means) of *theatre* concerning human appearance(s) on stage. For all that this technique was viewed by critics as a "radical" departure, it has a long history. Besides the example of Bunraku, Samuel Foote offered precisely such a double mode of appearance at the Haymarket theatre in the late eighteenth century, citing the authority of ancient Roman actors' practice.[295]

---

[293] Michal Kobialka, "The Quest for the Self/ Other: A Critical Study of Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre", in Tadeusz Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, trans. & ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.290.

[294] It is not unusual to find English actors eschewing the demands of *Gestus* even in performing Brecht's plays for fear that these undermine the "believability" of their appearance on stage – which is already an indictment of the production's failure to establish the visibility of that stage in the first place.

[295] Samuel Foote, quoted in Henryk Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, ed. Penny Francis, London: Puppet Centre Trust, 1988, pp.4-5.

A rather different "example" of theatrical superstition (in its major and minor keys) may be seen in a recent work by Romeo Castellucci (already cited at the beginning of chapter one), the very title of which proposes the key theme of "the look" (to which we will return in chapter five): *On the Concept of the Face, Regarding the Son of God*. The question of "regard" here is key, as it signifies a "drama" of beholder and beheld with respect not simply to the visible but to a concept (as an incarnation of the word). Presenting an object (or a question) of the gaze, a huge reproduction of the fifteenth century painting, *Salvator Mundi* (1445) by Antonello da Messina, vertically dominates the stage in this production, as itself a representation of the gaze – in the contemplation of (in both senses) the "man of sorrows". On the white canvas of the horizontal plane in front of this image of "Man" occurs what we might call the "action painting" of the staged performance. Here two actors present the characters of a father, distressed by his rectal incontinence (whether due to disease or to old age), and of his son, responsible for the old man's care. The actors perform "expression" – of voice or breath, with simple, minimal, repeated refrains such as "excuse me", "I'm sorry", and the invocation "Jesu" (in which the sound or intonation of the human voice is itself the "meaning" of the words); as well as of "tears"; and of "excrement".

Within this play, they each enact the suffering of an impossibility of communication concerning the body, as they traverse the horizontal stage picture from left to right (from the audience's point of view), in three scenes – following literally the direction of Occidental legibility. The action unfolds temporally in the imitation of reading, and resists, through being essentially repeated in each scene, any transcendence or sublimation within the timelessness or unconditionality of the vertical, devotional image that it appears to address. Indeed, the horizontal, staged performance refutes any descent of the image of the Saviour – that ideal of (and for) imitation (as an image of Man) – into that of a contemporary, theatrical "Ecce Homo".[296] The modes of expression here concern men, not "Man"; and the pity (as, indeed, the passion) of humanity is represented in the work of the actors, rather than by the (represented) icon (since this is, after all, an event of *theatre*).

---

[296] This may be compared with the discussion of "the frontal icon" in Moshe Barasch, *Imago Hominis,* New York: New York University Press, 1991, pp.24-5.

It is, nonetheless, iconography that provides criteria for "regarding" the performance. Juxtaposed in the two images, in their distinct axes, are the themes "of state" and "of action", as evoked by Meyer Schapiro in an analysis of the relation between "words and pictures" in the example of European art.[297] In Castellucci's production, the apparent story, action, or narrative – the visible *istoria* – of the performed image refuses to give the icon intelligibility as an "imitation"; as if the visible could be substituted for, or could make sense of, the invisible. The human actors remain excluded from the transcendent or divine image of man. Symbol and symbolised – man in the image of Man – are not unified, but remain temporally counter-posed in the gaze *of*, distinct from that *upon*, the audience. This is the fundamental "concept" of the production – precisely as *theatre* – addressing the phenomenology of the gaze (although both hearing and smell are significantly addressed by the performance also), as if the uncanny in mimesis could be sublimated without remainder (or, indeed, "excrement").

Refusing "to see" this, the juxtaposition of action and image is noted (but curiously separated out) in the one review to be found in *Theatre Record*, which addresses the two axes of the image narratively, sequentially (rather than as a "cross"), declaring that "what makes the show perverse rather than profound is the sudden leap from mundane medical realism into apocalyptic iconoclasm."[298] Typically, Michael Billington is not at his best when the presence of the audience informs the concept and structure of a performance; but while I would agree with his review concerning the second part of the production, not to see its iconoclasm within the "mundane" first part (in the very "elevation", theatrically, of the theme of state against that of action) is itself, it seems to me, "perverse rather than profound". Billington's criticism regards the iconoclasm as itself the subject of visible, narratable action (like the

---

[297] Meyer Schapiro, *Words and Pictures*, The Hague: Mouton, 1973. Schapiro's study is of the scriptural and pictorial example (from Exodus 17) of Moses praying, supported by Aaron and Hur, for the victory of the Israelites over the Amalekites.

[298] Michael Billington, in *Theatre Record*, Vol.XXXI, Issue 8 (9-22April), p.416. Quite how much this professional theatregoer, Michael Billington, disliked the production is evidenced by his recalling it 6 months later, in an article discussing reviewers walking out of shows (*The Guardian*, 25.10.11, pp.21-22): "...shows like the one staged by Romeo Castellucci at the Barbican earlier this year, obsessively concerned with bowel movements" are amongst the categories of shows that, as a reviewer, he would "tend to avoid".

"mundane... realism"), rather than as presenting a question of the theatre itself, of the invisible action – occurring between stage and auditorium – of the gaze.

For the gaze, the look – the "regard" – is the drama here: the relation between beholder and beheld, as the performance opens up the *question* as to who embodies these related terms, in the image of the actors, facing the audience and/or the Saviour. The image of the gaze (suggesting its action) permeates the theatre (as later does the smell of "excrement"). The countenance, in its supposed "spotless", "uncorrupted" exemplum, with its aura of sorrowful (but redeeming) contemplation, is – in being untouched – already stained by the actors' representation (muted, almost impassive) of expressive suffering, suggestive of the body's resistance to any possible empathy. As Billington notes, the second part of the production (in my view, unnecessarily) literalises the staining of the image by making directly visible its attack upon the icon, as if there was some residual "moral" character to excrement, as though the survival or superstition (amongst the twenty-first century audience) of a corporeal analogy with souls was being tested.

The drama of contemplation, between self and Other, I and You – being the idiom of the frontal face (verticality) – is distinguished from the profile (horizontality), in which action is represented in the third person (following Schapiro). The contemplative is confronted with the actors' expression, in the "literal" sense of representing what is pressed out of the body (as the site of thought) in the voice or breath, tears, and excrement. All these expressions are theatrical, of course – that is, they are real in the sense of presenting the *signs* of mortality, "of death", occurring in the time and place of a performance (juxtaposed with the reproducibility, and thus the temporality, of an image of the transcendent or "eternal").

To judge by the shuffling and sniggering in the audience, for some, the expressive repetitions (the verbal incantations, the excremental staining) were too many – and the longed for "redemption" ("the end" of the performance) too late. Indeed, it was curious how no one I spoke to after the performance offered any regard for its title – "On the concept of..." The question of contemplation (by and of the image) was left unspoken in that of narrative; what was shown was seen only in terms of what was told (reducing the staged speech simply to what was indicative of its "action"). I was

particularly taken aback by the artistic director of one London theatre (which declares itself to be dedicated to "performance art") offering a reading of the production in the most conventional of representational terms, as if (with Billington) there was no *question* of the "imitation" (or iconography) of the human, or of "man" (announced, after all, in the work's very title). The potential difference between the icon (or its "character", as the "emanation" of the image, not least in the age of its "reproducibility") – with its suggested participation in the invisible – and the symbol (or its narrative or story) – with its apparent relation to the visible – seemed to be disregarded entirely. Everyone I spoke to referred simply to the performance having to do with the "Catholic" culture of the director – in some touristic association with his being Italian – as if the relation between word and image, or icon and story, were not fundamental for thinking about Occidental aesthetics, including the production of meaning through theatre practice(s). Rather than as an experience of the gaze, of its contemplation (and imitation even) – as that of its very questioning – the *theatre* here was reduced to a story concerning the artist, to a biographical condition of intelligibility (which has, nevertheless, deep roots).[299]

Displacing audience satisfaction with what is enacted or performed as a domestic – "mundane... realistic" – scene, Castellucci's production proposes a dissatisfaction with the experience of seeing (as typically identified with what is seen). Addressing the intelligibility of our own presence as an audience – staging seeing (its scene), making the stage its subject – the production frames the "work" of *theatre*. The "empathetic identification with what is represented"[300] – supposed to characterise the devotional image in religion, as much as the audience's relation to the protagonist's "action", or "passion" even, as defined by the dramatic plot within theatre history – is here fractured by Castellucci. The elevated, vertical image is, as it were, refuted by the horizontal, in a thanatoscopic event of theatre – in which the emblem of the body's afterlife is neither the eternal countenance nor the skull that it hides, but excrement (as a metaphor of literal, *human* expression or suffering).

---

[299] One might think of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives*, for instance, as a founding example of the biographical within the "modern" history of art.
[300] Moshe Barasch, *op. cit.*, p.23.

Emanuel Levinas famously makes the face speak of and for the Other, of and for a relationship that is not reducible to the things of the world – the "mundane" – but which, like light (as, indeed, the word), makes the thought of such relationships conceivable. "Is not the face given to vision?" Levinas asks. And, "How does the epiphany as a face determine a relationship different from that which characterises all our sensible experience?"[301] (We will return to this question of light and the face in a discussion of photographs and death masks, with Heidegger, Barthes, and Nancy – the latter speaking of Oedipus – in chapter five.) While Castellucci's theatre is iconoclastic in the sense of an "epiphany" (not least in its appeal to the sense of smell), it nonetheless holds to Levinas' phenomenological iconography (in place of the mythical Gorgon) – in which the relation between seeing and seen becomes ethical. In contrast to the Catholic fundamentalists who would prefer that we did not "see" it at all, we might ask, with regard to the event (or art) of theatre specifically: how do we *envisage* death? In the second half of Castellucci's production the image of the face – that, supposedly, of compassion – is "exposed", as it is torn down like a huge advertising hoarding revealing simply the scaffolding that held it up.

With this "example", it is hardly to be supposed that an audience need read the theatre through such iconographic distinctions as that, for instance, between "His image" and "the image of God" proposed by Origen; or the Arianic Debate concerning whether – or not – Christ belonged to the created world[302]; or even, the humanist revaluation that Kantorowicz adduces from Dante, concerning the political implication of the "reflexiveness of 'man' and 'Man', of *homo* and *humanitas*, of *Adam mortalis* and *Adam subtilis*..."[303] However, one might hope that the eternal countenance is recognised as being – paradoxically – a portrait of the death of (an incarnate) god, reproducing in human guise the relation between appearance and being (as if of transcendence) that conditions pre-modern (pre-Kantian) thought of intelligible experience, as it may be thought of theatrically.

---

[301] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, p.187.

[302] Moshe Barasch, concerning Origen and the Arianic controversy, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*, New York: New York University Press, 1995, pp.142-3.

[303] Ernst Kantorowicz (tracing the lineage of "the body corporate of Man"), *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p.492.

What this example seems to offer is evidence of how little the sense of "theatre" is thought of aesthetically (theoretically), even today, in terms of the visual – other than as making visible "the story" (of a supposed "drama"). Castellucci stages "the scene" of looking (of, precisely, *theatre*), with the human figure understood in terms of its image (whether that be visual, verbal, aural, olfactory, or conceptual). As Hans Belting remarks, in terms that are basic for this research (albeit here as concerns the image as essentially visual):

> At a fundamental level, the question of what an image is requires a two-fold answer. We must address the image not only as a product of a given medium, be it photography, painting, or video, but also as a product of our selves, for we generate images of our own (dreams, imaginings, personal perceptions) that we play out against other images in the visible world.[304]

It is this event of an image-medium relation, played out as an audience-actor relation – rather than the story of a drama (its narrative plot) – that is conceptualised theatrically in Castellucci's work, offering a contemporary instance of what is proposed in this thesis as (the concept of) the theatre of death. What is staged here is the end of a religiously oriented theatrical metaphor of the face as a mask (the very opposite of the Catholic concern ascribed by some of the audience). For there is no "real face" behind the countenance – simply the bare stage, the empty place of what remains (after or beyond the curtain call).[305] The iconoclasm is already at work within the reproducibility of the image(s), which serves to highlight the non-identity of the iconic image and its medium-support. The assault in Castellucci's production on the hoarding-sized image of the Christ-man cannot touch its iconicity (despite the anxieties of the protesting Catholic fundamentalists). More pertinent here, however, is the expressive role of the iconic (or symbolic) excrement in disturbing the assumption that medium and image are one and the same, in "the body" of the actors at least.

---

[304] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p.2.
[305] This emptiness finds scarcely imaginable parody in a story such as that reported of adolescent pop singer ("the world's most famous seventeen year old") Justin Bieber having an image "of Jesus Christ's face" tattooed on the back of his left leg (report by Elisabeth Day, *The Observer*, 08.01.2012, p.32).

The limited reception of Castellucci's production in the UK seems to suggest that the theoretical space of and for such an *art* of theatre remains bound up with antimonies of mimesis that remain deeply settled, even in a contemporary "performance" culture that would distinguish itself from "theatre" (not least amongst those who even make this distinction their profession outside of academia).[306] One often hears it said – with pride – from devotees of performance art that they "never go to the theatre", as if their possible theorisation of the difference (theatre *or* performance) was not actually a question of (and for) their own practice(s). In an interview, Marina Abramovic declares, for instance:

> To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre. Theatre is fake... The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real.[307]

The naivety of this opposition between what is "real" and what is not (or what is representational), as giving content to an opposition between performance art and theatre, has garnered strange institutional support. The supposedly anti-theatrical ambition to bring "performance art to life" – to perform pieces of and from the past – becomes absurd in Abramovic's recent appeal to the notion of a musical score in legitimating her claimed "re-enactments" of "seminal works that had been performed by [her] contemporaries in a prior time and space", during the MOMA marketing "event", *Seven Easy Pieces*.[308] Here a seeming lack of interest in the performance history of music (as of theatre) is evident. A play, after all, is no more the same thing in the case of Peter Handke, Valère Novarina, or Anton Chekhov, than is a score in the case of John Cage, Luigi Nono, or Mauricio Kagel. In each case the explorations of notation are diverse and pose the question of (its) performance in equally diverse ways – in so far as the work has aesthetic truth, rather than being merely a stylistic reproduction or pastiche of accepted, institutional conditions of and for its performance. It is also as if, furthermore, such precedents of a concept of the theatre

---

[306] By contrast, fundamentalist Catholics staged their own "iconoclastic" assault on the theatre in Paris, when Castellucci's production was shown at the Théâtre de Ville in 2011.
[307] Marina Abramovic, interview with Sean O'Hagan, in *The Observer*, 3.10.2010.
[308] Marina Abramovic, *Seven Easy Pieces*, Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007, p.11.

"of death" as Craig or Artaud had not written at all, and as if the possibilities of theatre and performance lacked a history of (and within) aesthetic theory.

The effect of this situation, in which aesthetic theory has been almost withdrawn from performance art (if not entirely from its studies), can be further seen in critics' reception of Robert Wilson's 2011 production, *The Life and Death of Marina Abramovic* at the Manchester International Festival. (The citation of critics here serves to indicate the extent to which theatre research does – not – inform public discussion about theatrical practice(s) amongst its professionals outside of the academy.) Widely reviewed this time, Wilson's chocolate box surrealism (or *Wizard of Oz* pastiche) makes of the eponymous performance artist the corporate icon (a Judy Garland in "performance art" drag) of an aesthetics that, far from being engaged in the problematics of spectatorial "emancipation" (of the *thought* of images, in and as theatre), offers little resistance to its own image-as-institutional-self-advertisement.[309]

With Barthes' "lesson" (drawing out the sense of writing from the deconstruction of metaphysics), let us note the literal sense of "character" in mimesis (and mnemotechnics), as it alludes to both ideograms and movable type, where the visible appears as if legible, and the conditions of and for this very legibility – such as spacing – appear as if invisible. As Lacoue-Labarthe, in addressing "the *theorisation* of mimesis – from the Republic to the 'Mirror Stage'", proposes:

> Things begin, then – and this is what 'imitation' is all about – with the
> 'plastic' (fashioning, modelling, fictioning), with the impression of the *type*

---

[309] Given that one might think Wilson's aesthetic comparable to "the theatre of death", it would be interesting to contrast his take on "the Marina Abramovic story" with Kantor's final production, *Today is my Birthday*. For now let us note that one reviewer (Richard Dorment, in the *Daily Telegraph*, 12.07.2011) condescendingly repeats the "performance art" line for his readers, that "what happens in the theatre is essentially a deception, a way of making the audience believe something is real when it isn't" (in *Theatre Record*, 2-15.07.2011, p.793), as if anyone has ever thought of its *art* otherwise. The interest of both performance and theatre, as an art, is not this given separation between what is or is not "real"; but rather the engagement of an audience in the very question of the distinction, in the *between* that admits (an occasionally uncanny) space of – and for – thought. The "drama" of beholder and beheld – as a question of the theatrical in aesthetic theory – revalues the post-Kantian question of subject and object in theatre aesthetics, without, precisely, needing to adopt the curious current vocabulary of an "aesthetics of the performative" (*pace* Erika Fischer-Lichte), which supposes rather than questions what is "visible" in theatre, as well as the tradition of thinking performance "after" life (*pace* Kleist, Craig, Didi-Huberman, *et al.*).

and the imposition of the *sign*, with the mark that language, 'mythic'
discourses (whether they are true or not matters little; this becomes a relatively
secondary and subordinate question when the essential thing, as is said
explicitly, is that such discourses are fictive), originally inscribe in the
malleable – plastic – material of the infant soul...[310]

Barthes' lesson concerning such "impression(s)" and the soul (contrasting with
Rilke's evocation of the "original", at the end of the previous chapter) is as
fundamental for the concerns of this thesis as is Craig's appeal to the art of theatre as
a plastic rather than a literary art – whilst precisely resisting the reduction of an
understanding of the one to the other. What is a *sign* for the theatrical, when a
theatrical sign is equally a sign of the theatrical? How does it make its "impression",
as gesture (or "type"), in the medium of corporeal co-presence – *between* actor and
audience? How is this "imitation" to be theorised when its "model" (or "type") is
what becomes (of) the theatrical itself? How does this undo the opposition between
"real" and "representation" that Abramovic, for instance, sees in both blood and
emotion, as though act and motive were identical?

Barthes, like Craig, draws from the example of puppetry (itself significant for a
conceptualisation of the theatre of death) to question the "presence" of the Western
actor on stage, as a speaking being, its body thought of as animated by an "interior
life" of meaningful intention. Besides the reception of the Castellucci performance,
we may consider the effect of Barthes' "lesson in writing" in another example, where
again it has seemingly still to be learnt. An article published in a recent issue of
Critical Inquiry (Spring 2010), perhaps surprisingly, addresses puppetry – opening
with a (perhaps equally surprising) claim to address what its author, Tzachi Zamir,
calls "the new focus on performance and theatre within contemporary aesthetics".[311]
With respect to "contemporary aesthetics", then, this article is intriguing for pointing
out the space that the concept of the theatre of death addresses – at least, as it might

---

[310] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Typography", trans. Eduardo Cadava, in Lacoue-Labarthe
Typography, ed. Christopher Fynsk, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, pp.126-7.
[311] Tzachi Zamir, "Puppets" in *Critical Inquiry*, vol.36, n.3, Spring 2010, p.386.

be drawn from Barthes (that is, as concerns puppets as a model for actors) – without, however, offering any such concept itself.[312]

The puppet is anthropomorphised in this inquiry by reading its agency in terms of categories, such as inside and outside, which, for Barthes, it precisely allows us to critically re-examine. Zamir writes:

> The puppet... is internally dead and externally alive. The imagination in this instance does not merely fill out a missing picture but rather allows itself to be affected by what it acknowledges to be a void shrouded by expression. The amusement and laughter that puppets typically invoke can point to the uncanny nature of the content of this art form, playing as it does on the boundaries between lifelessness and life...[313]

While this reproduction of the antinomy of internal and external (albeit through a reversal of their standard values) identifies a challenge to prevailing conceptions of mimesis in "performance and theatre", it does not develop what this challenge might be: to explore what is unsettling in the very possibility of such a reversal as it might apply, paradoxically, to the "live" actor (as to human agency), whose "death" after all is never – *as* an actor – "lifeless" (except metaphorically). For Zamir (unlike Barthes), the question of "contemporary aesthetics" in "theatre and performance" addresses the difference (or boundary) between lifelessness and life simply, and not that between the dead and the living. Even so (at least, in theory), the issue is not so much a question of the boundary between one and the other – to recall the misting of Lear's mirror – as the uncanny oscillation between them, the unsettling of their mutual determination in and by their opposition, in the *theatre* "of death". Indeed, this will return in discussion (in part three) of Kantor's unsettling place "in" the performances of the Cricot 2, as this transcribes the experience of the look (of being seen seeing) as that "of death" – in terms of *theatre*. The modernist segregation of inner and outer, of

---

[312] The article uses puppetry, rather, as a suggestive tool for a theoretical account of the human subject and its agency in terms of the psycho-dynamics of object-relations; that is, as itself a psychological model rather than an aesthetic one, and as distinct, for instance, from the ancient "drama" of the power of the created over the creator, the manipulated over the manipulator.

[313] *Ibid.*, p.409 (also p.402).

animate and inanimate, is also exposed by Bruno Latour with precisely the example of Bunraku in addressing the iconoclash over the "life" of fabricated figures, as if they are "either made or real". This false choice "is as impossible as to request a Bunraku player to have to choose, from now on, either to show his puppet or to show himself on stage."[314]

A sense of the dissociation of the living, or animate, body from itself (as its double conceived of in theatre aesthetics, distinct from a spiritual separation from the cadaver conceived of in religion) is familiar within modernist thought – not only in relation to its "Oriental" turn and to puppetry, but also through an association of psychiatric studies with reflection on a range of popular entertainments, including early cinema.[315] Henri Bergson, for instance, identified the comic effect (or "character") corporeally in the conjunction precisely of animism and automatism, in what might be called (with Lacoue-Labarthe) a form of embodied "typography". (We might note here the ambiguities of theatrical spectatorship evident in the laughter that at first greeted Tommy Cooper's dead body on stage, as though it was "acting" automatically.) Indeed, Bergson's formula for the comic, in an intimation of the effects of the new mimetic medium of film (in itself emblematic of the mechanisation of movement, satirised by Chaplin, characteristic of Taylorist "modern times"), is precisely that of "the mechanical superimposed onto the living",[316] of the animate "signed" by the automatic; or, even, as might be said – this time with Craig – of the actor's body "clothed with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit".[317] In a note "after a showing of *The Circus*", Walter Benjamin speaks of Chaplin in terms that weave all these themes together, noting of one scene that "the mask of non-involvement turns him into a fairground marionette".[318] It is here, precisely, that the former theatrical "superstition" is revealed in its specific iconography, recalling the

---

[314] Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, p.81.

[315] As addressed, for example, in both Rae Gordon, *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001; and Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes, New York: Zone Books, 2004.

[316] Bergson, "[D]u mécanique plaqué sur du vivant", quoted by Rae Gordon, *op. cit.*, p.15.

[317] Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-marionette", in *Craig on Theatre*, ed. Michael Walton, London: Methuen, 1999, pp.86-7.

[318] Walter Benjamin, "Chaplin" [1928-29], trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings,* vol.2.1, eds. Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005, p.200.

heuristic analogy of this research (discussed in the Introduction): as theatre is to the uncanny, so is mimesis to death.

As has been suggested throughout the thesis, a comparison may be made here with Warburg's "anthropology of the visual", in terms of its pathos formulae. Georges Didi-Huberman emphasises the anthropological basis of Warburg's art historical concept, not only as emotionally expressive, but as gesturally performed (as by an "external prompting"):

> The *Pathosformel* gave art history access to a fundamental anthropological
> dimension – that of the *symptom*. Here the *symptom* is understood as
> *movement in bodies*, a movement that fascinated Warburg not only because he
> considered it 'passionate agitation' but also because he judged it an 'external
> prompting'... as visible expression of *psychic* states that had become
> fossilised, so to speak, in images. Here it is possible to think of the
> iconography of hysteria as Charcot might have recreated it by following the
> same threads of a history of styles. But Warburg went beyond the
> 'iconographic' notion of the symptom found in nineteenth-century mental
> hospitals. He understood that symptoms are not 'signs' (the *semeia* of classical
> medicine) and that their temporalities, their clusters of instants and durations,
> their mysterious survivals, presuppose something like an *unconscious
> memory*.[319]

Relating an iconography of the actor (as a cultural or anthropological "symptom" of human appearance) to Warburg's "nameless science" allows for a research into an embodied archive of an unconscious memory of theatre practice(s), of "types" of "movement in bodies" that "demand to be understood" as Fischer-Lichte proposes, (cited in the next chapter), as instances or "symptoms" to be translated (*pace* Freud's "dynamics of transference") into concepts (addressing their repression, enacted by the

---

[319] Georges Didi-Huberman, "Foreword – Knowledge: Movement", in Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes, New York: Zone Books, 2004, p.13, & pp.15-16. Charcot described the Salpêtrière as a "living museum" of "attitudes passionelles", evidenced in its purportedly nosological photographic iconography (Didi-Huberman, *The Invention of Hysteria*, trans. Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, Mass.: 2003, p.17). See also, Sigrid Schade, "Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body," trans. Aileen Derieg, in *Art History*, vol.18, n.4, December 1995.

metaphors of realism, denying the motive powers of both animism and allegory). Crucially, the question of what "demands to be understood" in theatre studies is not reducible to documentary materials, but touches upon what Witkacy calls "metaphysical feeling",[320] in the mimetic question of and for *aesthetics* (at least, in theory). Indeed, this is perhaps the principal theoretical claim of this thesis (after that of claiming the historical existence of a minor tradition within the aesthetics of modernist theatre and theorising the potential meaning "of death" for it) – that there is more to the theatrical sign or gesture than the mere appearance of "life".

If the dead exist only in so far as they live on amongst the living, from where do they "return"? How do the living testify to the existence of the dead? How do the dead bear witness to the living? In what sense do the dead offer a mimetic model for (living) actors, as then these actors do for an audience? Although the focus here has been on the "theoretical scene" of the stage (as distinct from the auditorium), the relation between the living and the dead broaches a wider historical context – particularly as modern theatre is associated with the political community, with the development of cities, and with the place of the dead in both.

Before turning to the question of an iconography of the actor specifically, let us note some further instances of the material and psychical "life" of the dead. Analysing the psychological claims of superstition, for instance, Nicholas Abraham writes (in his "notes on the phantom"):

> It is a fact that the 'phantom', whatever its form, is nothing but an invention of the living... The phantom is therefore also a metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.[321]

In a public context, the dead give their name to political "secrets" (which is, after all, the story of *Hamlet*[322]), as they touch upon the sovereignty of the state in its use of

---

[320] Stanislaw Witkiewicz, "Pure Form in Theatre", in the *The Witkiewicz Reader*, trans. and ed. Daniel Gerould, London: Quartet Books, 1993, pp.149-50.
[321] Nicholas Abraham, "Notes on the Phantom", in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, trans. and ed. Nicholas Rand, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, p.171.

violence against the body. This "biocratic" (distinct from an earlier theocratic) condition of modern political life finds emblematic expression in Walter Benjamin's compelling reminder that "even the dead" are not safe from "the enemy" in the understanding of history.[323]

As a theatre practice of the twentieth century, the theatre of death may be contextualised historically in terms of that "disturbed relationship with the dead today" (no less true of the realities of this century than of the last), that characterises modern capitalism (not least in its dialectical relations with mimesis), about which Adorno and Horkheimer remark (in 1944):

> In reality, the dead suffer a fate which the Jews in olden days considered the worst possible curse: they are expunged from the memory of those who live on. Men have ceased to consider their own purpose and fate; they work their despair out on the dead.[324]

This global "theatre of death", in the perpetual world war of capitalism,[325] produces nonetheless some symptoms of its own cultural resistance in the name of history, as evidenced in the truth content of particular aesthetic practices. This is profoundly the

---

[322] This is analysed, for example, by Carl Schmitt in *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of Time into the Play*, trans. David Pan and Jennifer Rust, New York: Telos Press, 2009.

[323] Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", trans. Harry Zohn, Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006. The development of the "biocratic" is explored, for instance, in Eric Santner's study of the modern survival of the political theology of the king's two bodies (*The Royal Remains*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[324] Adorno and Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London: Verso, 1986, p.216. As an expression of imperialism, the genocide of a specifically Jewish "sub-humanity" lies at the heart of modern European cultural history (the illumination of its so-called "darkness"). This is a topic with innumerable tragic contemporary ramifications, to mention only the so-called "restitution" politics in Europe and the "right of return" in Palestine. The literature addressing the effects of these "phantoms" is vast and various, to cite only a few (besides the work of Hannah Arendt): Enzo Traverso, *Understanding the Nazi Genocide*, London: Pluto Press, 1999; Schlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, London: Verso, 2010; Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry*, London: Verso, 2001; and David Grossman, *See Under: Love*, London: Vintage, 1999.

[325] Where the "value" of work, for instance, is abstracted into a purely monetary equivalence the ubiquitous presence of the dead in modern societies is as the unemployed. Paradoxically, as the dead have been removed from the city since the beginning of the nineteenth century, so also has the city become an open cemetery for the living through the development of aerial warfare.

case for another artist whose work could also be compared here (that is, under the *concept* of the theatre of death), Heiner Müller.

With respect to this wider context for thinking through the concept (as the history) of the theatre of death, the "event" of theatre in this thesis (as that of its theorisation) concerns principally the *concept* or figure of the actor, as distinct from the significance of performance practice, or of interpretative acting. In this sense, the temporal aspect of "performance" is considered in its plastic dimension, as this is embodied in the theatrical question of the co-presence of actor and audience. As has been suggested throughout these first three chapters, we are concerned here – in the vocabulary of Aby Warburg – with the "survival" of forms, or conventions, of mimetic (or "pathetic") expression rather than with any particular actor training, associated with (or indeed named after) a particular theatre director. This is so not least as "performance", in the institutionalisation of its "studies", has been theorised – in distinction from aesthetics – in association with an anthropology focused upon examples of "ritual" and (metaphorically) "drama", rather than the concept of mimesis.[326]

Concerning the "live", the temporal aspect of theatre – as "performance" – has recently been the focus of such study, or theorisation, to the exclusion of the plastic or empathic (even as the "presence" of the body has been fetishised). Constructing a conceptual figure of the actor in the theatre of death – distinct from addressing any specific performer (as, for instance, Jean-Louis Barrault in Artaud's writing, or Etienne Decroux in Craig's[327]) – is to address the question of how the human being "looks" when on stage, asking: what is it "of" human appearance that appears there? What is human in this appearance "of death" as theatre? (Or, indeed, what is theatrical in this appearance "of death" as human?) What is it that the human being looks *like*

---

[326] Rather than working through this well established discourse from Turner and Schechner (for example, by discussing, in contrast, Boas and Warburg, not to mention Augé and Belting), this thesis will simply work around it – touching upon it only by addressing Erika Fischer-Lichte (in the next chapter), whose enduring fixation on the "liminal" has been one of the constants of such theorising over the past thirty years.

[327] Antonin Artaud, "Autour d'une Mère: a Dramatic Action by J.-L. Barrault", in *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards, New York: Grove Press, 1958; and Edward Gordon Craig: "At Last a Creator in the Theatre, from the Theatre", in "An Etienne Decroux Album", *Mime Journal*, eds. Sally and Thomas Leabhart, Claremont: Pomona College, 2000/2001.

on stage, in such a theatre? What is it of human appearance that the actor (that of "the theatre of death") offers *theatrically* a semblance? What is this theatrical *appearance* that simultaneously assimilates spectators to its image and yet distinguishes itself from them? What is it (with the example of Blanchot's "two versions of the imaginary" in mind) that returns as an image on stage, but under a prohibition of touch? Is it perhaps in this very prohibition, between audience and actor, that (this) theatre comes closest to the anthropological dimension of its concept, as it addresses materially – in practice – the phantom or spectre (the "symptom") of the presence "of" the dead?

It might be said, in conclusion of this chapter that the theatre of death offers, both historically and conceptually, a contribution to a discipline that seems as yet to exist only in outline: an iconography of the actor. Such an iconography might already address the representation of actors historically, exploring how portraits of actors in any given period, for instance, are distinguished in particular ways from other subjects of portraiture. It might also trace the symbolism that attends the representation of actors specifically, exploring how this has changed historically.

While the sense of iconography is widely contested within its principal domain, the history of art, the limited sense of "a mere technique of deciphering" (or more waspishly, "rote cryptography") is certainly not what is intended here.[328] Besides Preziosi, Georges Didi-Huberman in particular has made the case for a "return to Warburg" as an undoing of Panofsky's categorisations, offering a profound critique of the "ends" of an iconography that would shelter from the knowledge of Freud, limiting its questions concerning the intelligibility of images to the purportedly conscious reason(s) of their "history" as art.[329] WTJ Mitchell, meanwhile, taking up the second of Panofsky's categories, has made a case for "a revived iconology" – "beyond the comparative study of verbal and visual art" – taking it "into the basic construction of the human subject as a being constituted by both language and imaging."[330] Here, in a sense, iconography (holding to the suffix "writing") would

---

[328] Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p.112.
[329] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, trans. John Goodman, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.
[330] WTJ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p.24 and p.25. (Also, *Iconology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.) Curiously, a letter from

turn from philology to philosophy (or to a philosophical anthropology), addressing the truth content of its aesthetic object(s), rather than the textual deciphering of images as cultural artefacts.[331]

Fundamentally, the sense of iconography intended here touches upon Warburg's research into pathos formulae, as mimetic symptoms or "survivals" of cultural memory; or, rather, of the embodied practices of a cultural unconscious (as this is understood anthropologically rather than mythically), in addressing their aesthetic truth content. The understanding of such knowledge (or research) of culture in English already has a contested history of its own – not least in Edgar Wind's critical review of Gombrich's biography of Warburg. All this concerns the terms in which a research such as this into various theatre artists' own theorising is (or may be) thinkable. Suffice it for the moment to cite Fritz Saxl (from an essay, written shortly after Warburg's death, on "the expressive gestures of the fine arts"):

> The kind of psychology that is needed in our science of art and culture cannot
> be merely a psychology of expression that interprets expression and image as
> fixed formulations of the psyche that have taken on form, but rather a
> psychology of expression that understands the stamp and continuing life of

Cassirer to Warburg concerning the development of what became the "philosophy of symbolic forms" is kept in a box marked "problems of iconology" (Ikonologie Probleme) in the Warburg Archive (cf. John Krois and Donald Verene, "Introduction", in Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Volume Four), trans. John Krois, eds. John Krois and Donald Verene, New Haven: Yale U.P., 1996, p.xiii, n.18). The very first of the lectures published in the collection of the Warburg library (after an introduction to the library and its aims by Fritz Saxl) was by Cassirer on "the concept of symbolic form in the construction of the humanities" [*Geisteswissenschaften*] in *Vortrage der Bibliothek Warburg* 1921-22, ed. Fritz Saxl, Leipzig: Teubner, 1923. Cassirer's own development of "cultural science" research would be another thesis topic. His encomium to Warburg, on the occasion of the latter's sixtieth birthday (13th June 1926), however, includes the inspiring suggestion that Warburg's library (on the eve of its move into its new building) itself constituted an "organon of intellectual-historical studies", representing "in its organisation and in its intellectual structure... the idea of the methodological unity of all fields and all currents of intellectual history" ("Letter of Dedication", in *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963, p.xv). This speaks of an age when "inter-disciplinary" was the practice of research understood *between* intuition and concepts, rather than a word for simply a form of the institutional administration of research.
[331] As Adorno writes: "The truth content of works must be rigorously distinguished from all philosophy that is pumped into them by authors or theorists... On the other hand, aesthetics brusquely repudiates the claim of philology – however useful it may be in other contexts – that it assures the truth content of artworks..." (Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London: The Athlone Press, 1999, p.341).

expressive values retained in social memory as meaningful, quasi mental-technical functions, and which does not classify the *symbol as a final product* of inner energy, but rather sees it *within the psycho-physical process* and clarifies the significance particularly of the repercussions of the symbol for psychic life.[332]

Leaving aside questions of art history, however, considering the appearance (and re-appearance) of certain gestural idioms, postures, poses, and attitudes, amongst actors; such an iconography (whose "images" are not limited to pictures after all) might turn to theatre anthropology, which studies these in corporeal practice – albeit to distinguish the "pre-expressive" possibilities of and for the performer from any culturally specific (indeed, iconographic) forms of embodied expression. (This is distinct from the moralised iconography that has dominated questions of "appropriate" casting, which curiously survives into the mimetic conventions of naturalism still today.) Considering the image of the actor within modernity (in the examples of Craig, Artaud, Castellucci, and Kantor), this study would be (as Warburg proposed) both iconographic and anthropological in its approach to what is specifically *theatrical* or aesthetic. It would address the image given to – or that admits of – a figure of human appearance, as that, specifically, of "an actor", as this has been conceived of by these different theatre artists; that is, of the actor (a living body) presenting, for an audience, a figure of – and even, perhaps, for – the dead.

That the *theatre* "of death" is not representational in the sense usually conveyed by "of" has, hopefully, been made clear. This theatre is not simply the employment of means or devices (not least, of actors) to give a (realistic) representation "of", or to, death, as it exists or occurs elsewhere than as theatrically. And yet it is also nothing but representational, as already discussed concerning the "transformation of the body into representation" (Michaud). The question of the representational here applies to the theatre (to a mimetic *art*) as it occurs in relation to "death"; not as a *momento mori*, nor as the staged death of tragic characters, but rather as the thought of death as it is theatrically specific (in the event of the actor's appearance) – as death is already

---

[332] Fritz Saxl, "The Expressive Gestures of the Fine Arts", quoted in Sigrid Schade, "Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body", trans. Aileen Derieg, in *Art History*, vol.18, n.4, December 1995, p.501.

inscribed within representation. The critique of the prevailing naturalism in "theatre", signified by way "of death", follows this inscription in a minor aesthetic tradition of what theatre is or could be. As we have already seen, the effigy or mannequin plays a significant role in this aesthetics – as part of a twentieth century (modernist) legacy of both practice and polemic, technique and theory, in which both Craig and Artaud (and Maeterlinck and Witkacy) are important precedents.

This concept of theatre is not, then, to be understood simply in terms of professional practices, or prevailing ideas of actor training. It concerns, rather, how such practices may be re-imagined, or re-thought, within the history of mimesis, understood in terms of a possibility of a broadly anthropological and aesthetic research, to which Moshe Barasch, for instance, alludes when he writes (in *Imago Hominis*) that: "the human figure is an emblem of what may be described as 'the human world'. In a true sense of the word, the body of man is a symbolic form."[333] While a discussion about the use of this term ("symbolic form") within the history of iconography would merit a chapter of its own, suffice it to note here that this theatrical iconography – that of Craig's "figure, or symbolic creation", the "image" of human being;[334] Artaud's "animated hieroglyph"[335]; or Kantor's "live effigy of man"[336] – concerns, in this art theatre practice understood in its anthropological dimension (*pace* Philippe-Alain Michaud's epigraph to this chapter), "a response to the enigma of the individual in the world of man."[337] The points of orientation from Michaud, Barasch, Vernant, and Didi-Huberman referenced in this chapter find further echo in Hans Belting's project for an "anthropology of images", where he writes (with specific regard to the relation between images and death): "Here we grasp the roots of that very contradiction which

---

[333] Moshe Barasch, *Imago Hominis*, New York: New York University Press, 1994, pp.18-19.
[334] Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-marionette", in *Craig on Theatre*, ed. Michael Walton, London: Methuen, 1999, pp.86-87.
[335] Antonin Artaud, "Balinese Theatre", in *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Mary Richards, New York: Grove Press, 1958, p.54.
[336] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Theatre of Death", trans. Vog and Margaret Stelmaszynski, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp.113-14.
[337] Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes, New York: Zone Books, 2004, p.236.

will forever characterise images: images make a physical (a body's) *absence* visible by transforming it into iconic presence."[338]

The iconographic actor (or the concept or paradigm of the actor) in the theatre of death offers such a cultural "response" (Michaud) by evoking the uncanny appearance or aspect of human being(s): the universality of death (in which a collective representation, as an already existing "after life", haunts the individual). This is distinct from a moral aspect, for instance, as it might be addressed by both a classical iconography of the actor (as this survives in the *Commedia* figures or types) and by a modern naturalism (albeit with its quite different sense of the representative attitude or gesture concerning character or motive). In genre terms, echoes of the good or noble figure in tragedy, and the stupid or coarse figure in comedy, have oriented the guises (or masks) of the actor up until modernity; including elevated speech (verse) for the tragedian (in "high art"), and vulgar speech (prose) for the comedian (in "popular culture"). In such an iconography, the "character and physiognomy" (to use the title of an essay by Barasch) of the *prosopon* – as the type, or mask – would indicate two sides of that naturalising of moral ideologies (analysed by Barthes as "mythology") which still resonates in the prejudices of casting to "type". While Carlson, for example, cites "one of the earliest extended treatises on the art of acting, Sainte-Albin's 'Le Comédien' in 1749", the same terms apply in contemporary advertising. In the eighteenth century it could be remarked that:

> [A]lthough many physical types were acceptable on the stage, actors,
> whatever their ability, could not depart far from audience expectations of the
> type of roles they were playing – heroes must have imposing bodies and lovers
> attractive ones; actors must look the proper age for their roles and have the
> natural vocal qualities suitable for their characters.[339]

Such claims about the appropriate moral likeness of "models" have been applied in painting also, and inform the curious (pseudo-)mimetic judgment of actors by casting

---

[338] Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, p.3.
[339] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003, p.53.

directors, supposing the "right look" for a part (which is after all but a fiction) and also for association with a particular product (or brand) in advertising.[340]

In contrast, furthermore, to the mainstream of theatre theory in the twentieth century (from Stanislavski to Grotowski, for instance[341]), the concept of the actor in the theatre of death is not the foundation of a school, with a practice to be transmitted and reproduced. Although this concept – through its theorisation – records different artists' practice, as the object of study, it has itself to be thought through in the very terms of this study (that is, as a *concept* of "the theatre of death"). What may be described historically has already been theorised in practice, as it attests to what is *thought* of theatre in and by this concept. But this theory has then to be identified, just as a possible iconography of the actor has also to address its own possibility – it is not an historical given. As with the relation between aesthetic theory and its object(s), this research is also its own object (heuristically), as it concerns different artists' testimony as to what may be seen in theatre. (This will be expanded upon in the following two chapters, as indicated by their very titles: "What do we see in theatre – in theory?" and "A question of appearance – enter the actor".) As Adorno insists, aesthetics is not simply a question of elaborating a concept by which an historical object (a set of art practices, which involve their own theorisation) becomes thinkable. It is also a question of exploring the determination of such a concept, as it is – or becomes – itself thinkable historically; that is, in terms of its truth content, rather than simply in terms of reflection on historical change within aesthetic categories, such as genre or medium-based technique, still less as a question simply of style.

In his much cited reflections on the photographic testimony to death, Roland Barthes notes that such reflections must be understood as part of an enquiry into "the anthropological place of Death": "For Death must be somewhere in a society; if it is no longer (or less intensely) in religion, it must be elsewhere..."[342] The issue here, again, is not "death" as such but its representation, or rather those "representatives"

---

[340] The sense of the body as itself a vehicle for corporate "brands" is a major topic of the "fictions" of JG Ballard.

[341] *Cf.* Philip Auslander, "Just be yourself", in *Acting (Re)Considered*, ed. Phillip Zarrilli, London: Routledge, 2000, p.60. Krzysztof Miklaszewski cites Kantor, suggesting that: "*He* was the 'Kantor school', he said; his imagination, his unconscious, his performance, and... chance." (*Encounters with Kantor*, p.153).

[342] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Flamingo, 1984, p.92.

(that become the image) of the dead – of their way of being or appearing amongst the living, as a testimony to (and by) the practice of an art. One such place for evoking – indeed, of staging – this "elsewhere" (besides religion) has always been, as Barthes himself notes, theatre. The presence of bodies – the condition of the visible as theatre – remains bound up with this elsewhere of the stage (distinct from the social nowhere of the digital, with its so-called avatars that allow people to role play the desire to be another). The fantasy (un)fulfilment of a "second life" is testimony to a post-theatrical illusionism – with its associated research field of the so-called "uncanny valley" – in which the art of the theatre of death may simply appear anachronistic. But it is this very anachronism – a resistance to the digitalisation of questions of semblance – that is not the least part of its fascination and appeal. As Carlo Ginzburg writes of the *Pathosformel* in Warburg: "The representations of the myths inherited from antiquity were conceived as 'evidence of mental states transformed into images' in which later generations... sought out the permanent traces of the most profound emotions in human existence."[343]

To explore its subject, then, this thesis is not confined to theatrical reference (to an aesthetic practice, rather than a metaphorical one), within the discipline of "theatre studies". Rather, with the example of the interdisciplinary field of Aby Warburg's "nameless science",[344] as this explores the cultural memory of affective images of the human (the *imago hominis*) in its "living archive" of pathos formulae, the thesis seeks to draw the outline of certain "survivals" of European cultural practices, from an ancient sense of the votive to a modern sense of the performative, in giving content to the concept of a "theatre of death". As indicated by the concept of "survivals", this "from...to..." is not chronological. The history of the votive and performative within modernity is not that of a passing from one to the other, but rather the refraction of the one in and by the other. Kantor's reflections on the medium of his own "discoveries"

[343] Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992, p.20 and pp.28-29.
[344] Warburg's work is, of course, in dialogue with anthropology (quite literally with Franz Boas), and this is also the case here – with the work of Michael Taussig, however, rather than Victor Turner. Intriguingly for this study, Louis Marin also suggests that "figurability is a concept stemming from the interval or space between art history and psychoanalysis", rather than as belonging simply to art history (alluding to a dialogue with Pierre Fédida, which would also make for the topic of another thesis), *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter, Sanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, p.54.

attests to this, responding to criticism that he was neither a "genuine" painter nor theatre professional: "I realised that the conventional thinking about art needs to be corrected; that the rigid boundaries between the arts must be erased... always limit[ing] and restrict[ing] *thought* and its capricious and unpredictable course."[345]

Following the course of such *thought* takes one beyond the confines of art history *or* theatre studies, anthropology *or* iconography. It demands, rather, what Warburg called "a workbench in the laboratory of the *iconological science of civilisation*";[346] or the "laboratory of cultural-scientific picture-history" [*Laboratorium kulturwissenschaftlicher Bildgeschichte*].[347] To address the aesthetic truth content of this concept of theatre – that "of death" – requires a field of enquiry that, in Giorgio Agamben's characterisation of Warburg's research, "aims to diagnose Western man through a consideration of his phantasms,"[348] amongst which – it is proposed by this thesis – the figure of the actor may be included.[349] Here the living body of the actor is understood as uncannily modelled by the artificial body of the effigy, as a medium for the transmission of an image of the dead. It is with the actor's appearance on stage (at

---

[345] Tadeusz Kantor, "My Work, My Journey", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further On, Nothing*, p.7. We may compare this with Warburg's own sense that: "Not until art history can show... a few more dimensions that it has done so far will our activity again attract the interest of scholars and of the general public..." (letter, quoted by Gombrich and cited by Schade, "Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body," trans. Aileen Derieg, in *Art History*, Vol.18, N.4, December 1995, p.513).

[346] Aby Warburg, "Pagan-Antique Prophecy in Words and Images in the Age of Luther", trans. David Britt, in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, Los Angeles: Getty Institute, 1999, p.651.

[347] As Horst Bredekamp notes, the usual translations of this term of Warburg's is "misleading" in assimilating the question of "Kulturwissenschaft" into the established (or supposed) term "iconology" (Bredekamp, "A neglected tradition? Art history as Bildwissenschaft", in *Critical Enquiry*, vol.29, n.3, Spring 2003, p.423). This is part of a larger debate about the claims of and to knowledge in the understanding of images as pictures.

[348] Giorgio Agamben, "Warburg and the Nameless Science", in *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p.98. Warburg himself refers to his own sense of the embodied "diagnosis" of cultural forms in a journal entry shortly before his death: "Sometimes it looks to me as if, in my role as psycho-historian, I tried to diagnose the schizophrenia of Western civilisation from its images in an autobiographical reflex" (quoted by Michaud, p.238). *Cf.* also Edgar Wind's critique of Gombrich's biography of Warburg ("Appendix", in *The Eloquence of Symbols*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) and Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'Image Survivante*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002.

[349] As has been suggested with reference to Vernant, Michaud, Barasch, and Belting, this would be to include theatre studies within the scope of a research that has indeed been identified as an "anthropology of images".

146

least, in its concept) that we encounter that specific aesthetic practice which remains to be theorised as the *theatre of death*.

The Theatre of Death: The Uncanny in Mimesis – Part Two

Chapter 4: _What do we see in theatre – in theory?_

1. *To establish, as is necessary for every art, that theatre thinks*. – Alain Badiou[350]

With this declaration of purpose Alain Badiou opens his ten "theses on theatre", with a challenge concerning the very presuppositions of this challenge itself, addressed to those who profess to thinking about theatre. What kind of thought would be specific to theatre, if indeed theatre is an art?[351] Badiou follows his initial proposition immediately with the reflexive question: "What has to be understood by 'theatre' here?" Theatre then becomes a term – naming an aesthetic practice – to which the question *of*, and not simply *for*, thought returns. (In the present thesis, this concerns what it is "of" theatre that has been thought – and which remains to be thought – through "death", both historically and theoretically.) What is thought in and by theatre specifically, as an art, distinct from what is thought *about* theatre in and by criticism, in its "study"? Badiou accepts the modernist prescription that an aesthetic practice raises medium-specific questions – that the expression of the work touches upon the potentials (not least the constraints) of its materials, as of its very subject (or idea), distinct from these being simply the means to immaterial ends, of and for expression *as* art. This modernist aesthetic has always been paradoxical for theatre (when, precisely, it is no longer identified by – or even with – the dramatic text), even when its materials (for example, the bodies of performers) are abstracted through a research identified with the potentials of and for "performance" (as distinct, supposedly, from representation in the question of its art).

---

[350] Alain Badiou, *A Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, p.72.

[351] It is important to note that the notion of specificity itself signifies a position within the modern history of art, highlighting a relation between medium and thought in the *work* of art, as constitutive of its own practice. Badiou's particular twist on the notion of aesthetics – the "inaesthetic" – insists that philosophy or theory is not applied to art but thought through it: "...a relation of philosophy to art that, maintaining that art is itself a product of truth, makes no claim to turn art into an object for philosophy. Against aesthetic speculation, inaesthetics describes the strictly intraphilosophical effects produced by the independent existence of some works of art" (the exergue to Badiou, *op. cit.*). How this general proposition relates to the particular art – theatre – is what is explored throughout this thesis, not least in the temporalities involved in testimony to an intensity (or "shock") of experience or encounter, in the embodied reception of aesthetic forms.

If the thought *of* theatre means that theatre "thinks" (not simply that it is an object of thought or aesthetics), then *how* does it think (in theory, "theatrically")? Of *what* does it think specifically – what is it that specifies this thought as *theatrical*? For Badiou thought is properly evental – where time is inscribed in the relation between being and thought (*pace* Parmenides and Heidegger) – as is the performance by which the theatrical is defined (even when repeated night after night). A *theatre-idea* "occurs in and by the performance. It is irreducibly theatrical and does not pre-exist its occurrence on stage," not even in "the text" (that is, as text written *for* performance, distinct from that written about, or after, it).[352] The event of thought – as of performance – is "exceptional", an interruption in the continuities of time and place that ordinarily provide the limiting conditions for thought *about* an object or phenomenon. "Truth" – whether "artistic, scientific, amorous, or political", as "registers of work-producing thought" – is what "pierces a hole" in "knowledge", not least in what is thought to be known of theatre (and its aesthetics).[353]

For Badiou the categories of a question of thought are "immanence and singularity": "Is truth really internal to the artistic effect of works of art?" and "does the truth testified by art belong to it absolutely?"[354] Badiou's questions point to the sense that the truth in question is not defined by philosophy (nor by a disciplinary study, such as performance or theatre studies), but is immanent to an aesthetic practice itself (in its idea) – if, indeed, its realisation is "truthful" (or "exceptional") rather than simply the reproduction of an established professional practice. Crucially, this concerns what does "not pre-exist its occurrence on stage" – including then the theoretical terms in which it might be appraised – as precisely Craig and Artaud address the work of Decroux and Jean-Louis Barrault respectively (as discussed in chapter one). This is

---

[352] Badiou, *op. cit.*, p.72 (translation modified, from Badiou, *Petit Manuel d'Inesthétique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998, pp.113-4). It should be noted that this only really concerns "exceptional" theatre; that is, where it is the value of the "exceptional" that is to be thought, rather than the exercise of reproducing the conditions of and for a "professional" practice of theatre performance: "to throw light on the value of exception. The value of the event. The value of the break. And to do this against the continuity of life, against social conservatism" [*cf.* Badiou, "Thinking the Event", in Badiou and Zizek, *Philosophy in the Present*, trans. Peter Thomas and Alberto Toscano, Cambridge: Polity, 2009, p.12].
[353] Badiou, *A Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, p.10 and p.9.
[354] *Ibid.*, p.9.

not reducible to an ontology of "the present", as Phelan's much cited polemic would have it, but rather (as will be discussed in the next chapter, with Heidegger), a temporal dynamic of "presencing" that involves the retention and protention of both past and future as these condition experience. With this temporality, the idea of a work – in its mode(s) of address to a prospective audience, especially in its anticipated "afterwards" – may be transferred between mediums, renewing in each instance the thought of its specificity (as a question of the ontology of its performance).

As proposed in the Introduction, what is to be thought in (or by) "the theatre of death" is the uncanny appearance of a human *likeness*; of the actor as a figure – of and for human *being* – in "its occurrence on stage", as distinct from (or excepting) the ordinary social (spatial and temporal) conditions for such appearances. As the event of his or her appearance, the actor's physical presence on stage offers an image of (and for) a concept of *being*, mimetically, for the spectator (and, indeed, for a political community). The relation between performance and thought (or between theatre and theory) "in the event" addresses mimesis not as the descriptive representation, or imitation, of something (its reproduction in another medium, as being "acted" for example); but as a dynamic relation between actor and audience, which both is and is not identifiable in time and space. As with the private theatre which psychoanalysis "stages" in (and as) transference (as well as in Freud's discussion of animism), "souls and demons", "projections", "superstitions", and dreams, offer evidence of an enduring pre-modern experience (or conception) of the relation of thought to the world, as of the individual to its environment – starting, precisely, from "the problem of death".[355]

Following Wundt, Freud notes that: "Originally souls were pictured as very similar to persons and only in the course of a long development have they lost their material characteristics and become to a high degree 'spiritualised'."[356] As will be discussed in the next chapter, this is addressed by Jean-Pierre Vernant in similar terms, as he

---

[355] Sigmund Freud, "Totem and Taboo", trans. James Strachey, in *Pelican Freud Library*, vol.13, ed. Albert Dickson, London: Penguin, 1985, p.133 and p.145. Here the question is what difference does it make to add theatre to this evidence of the ambivalence of modern thought concerning human appearances?
[356] Freud, *op cit.*, p.133.

examines the historical development of *mimesis* in his account of a "pivotal point" in the work of Xenophon and Plato for the emergence of a notion of the "image properly speaking" (distinct from earlier "archaic" notions of the figural, including the anthropomorphic): "that is, the image conceived as an imitative artifice reproducing in the form of a counterfeit the external appearance of real things", which "enters into the general category of the 'fictitious' – that which we call art."[357] While the minor tradition of the theatre of death contests the major history of what "we call art", it does so precisely (as an example of modernism) in the name of *art* – at least, in the name of an art of the theatre of the future, as Craig proposed it.

This montage of references – to Freud and Plato, Badiou and Vernant, Augé and Craig – in order to return to a *theatre-idea*, to discuss how theatre *thinks* (as a question "of" aesthetics and mimesis), might seem arbitrary. Drawing psychoanalysis, philosophy, and anthropology into a theatrical aesthetics (of mimesis) in this way – to propose an iconography of the actor, as the comparative subject of a distinct concept of theatre – might appear to render the event of thought ahistorical (and without "discipline"); even as it indicates that the present (of) thought is already an act of cultural memory. This attempt to give content to a concept of the theatre of death is, then, an attempt to recall a set of aesthetic practices belonging to the history of theatre, identified in and by their demand to be *thought* – through the theory that they propose – and not simply described. To adduce this theory (already at work, immanently, in this *art* of theatre) – rather than applying some extraneous or transcendent "theory" to it – is the task demanded of the theatre historian by the question of what is true in and of this aesthetic practice specifically.

The theatre "of death" (in reading Vernant as addressing Freud's presuppositions, for instance) engages in an unsettling of the (post-Platonic) conditions for understanding

---

[357] Vernant, "From the 'Presentification' of the invisible to the Imitation of Appearance", in *Mortals and Immortals*, ed. Froma Zeitlin, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, p.152. In several essays, Vernant investigates the possible meanings of "the notion of figural representation", as "not a simple immediate fact that could in some way be defined once and for all. The notion of figural representation does not just come from itself. Neither univocal nor permanent, it is what might be called an historical category; a construct elaborated, not without difficulty, through very different routes in different civilisations" [*ibid.*]. For a recent anthropological account of the culturally contested sense of images, see Marc Augé, *The war of Images*, trans. Liz Heron, London: Pluto Press, 1999.

"theatre" as a "counterfeit" distinct from an "event of the image" (Blanchot). "Death" evokes within mimesis that which had been suppressed in the thought of Plato – that which Vernant identifies as "presentification". Here the discussion of modernity and survivals broaches the question of appearance as engaged by Heidegger's reading of the Kantian Schematism – constituting "the central core of the whole voluminous work" of the *Critique of Pure Reason* – in so far as it concerns "the fundamental question regarding the transcendence of the finite creature"[358] (which will be addressed in the next chapter), and of being able to see oneself (rather than of simply being seen) after death (*pace* Blanchot, Balász, and Augé).

But this sense of "presentification" in Vernant (or "presencing" in Heidegger) barely affects the more recent suppression of imitation or representation, as this characterises contemporary discourse about performance – which relegates the body as representational to an idea of "theatre", rejected in favour of a claim that "the artist is present". To return to what distinguishes the "theatre-idea" in Badiou's proposal, there is the sense – indeed, the shock – of an encounter (which "death" names as that "of" this "theatre"), where "theatre is concerned explicitly, almost physically, with the encounter of an idea".[359] Here the "exceptional" encounter with the mimetic ("almost physically") – its uncanny shock – is what "of" death appears theatrically, where the spectator is "tented", touched to the quick, by the very thought of theatre "itself"; by the momentary intimation that theatre, like death, exists – on stage – in the register of the mimetic event experienced by (or as) the "I" unsettled in (not) recognising "itself", in "the look" of an other. This ("exceptional") experience concerns equally a theatre "of death" in the afterwards of its concept.

2. *What is mediated in art, that through which the artwork becomes something other than its mere factuality, must be mediated a second time by reflection: through the medium of its concept.* – Theodor Adorno[360]

---

[358] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, p.63.
[359] Badiou, *op cit.*, p.77 [translation modified, pp.119-120].
[360] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London: Athlone Press, 1997, p.358. For both Adorno and Badiou, the relation of thought – or of theory – to aesthetic practice, to the *work* of art (to its "process" rather than its "product"), is not neutral but is engaged in the political conditions of modernity.

The very title of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* orients reflection towards a theoretical aesthetics, as distinct from an investigation into aesthetics *and* theory, or even a theory *of* aesthetics, as if the one term applied to the other (or as if the one was a given of the other). "Critique is not externally added into aesthetic experience but, rather, is immanent to it," Adorno writes,[361] where the possible identification of the one term is dialectically conditioned by that of the other. Here the relation between concept and object is not given. "The theatre of death", for instance, is not a fact of theatre history; to address this title (or its reference) is not to describe something that already exists, but rather to conceptualise it, to make this reference thinkable, historically, in its very historicity as a possible concept of theatre.

For the conceptualisation of an aesthetic work, as Adorno notes, is itself necessarily historical: "It is in the dimension of history that the individual aesthetic object and its concept communicate."[362] In order to recognise the artwork in its truth – how (and even why) it appears historically – as itself a "critique of past works"[363] (distinct from pastiche or kitsch), it is necessary to acknowledge not only that: "History is immanent to the truth content of aesthetics,"[364] but that this involves the question of a concept of history. The theatre that appears under the concept "of death" (the theatre that is conceived of in these terms) is not a style that can be imitated (one might think, with respect to Kantor, of Janusz Visniewski or Andrzej Woron), but a research in terms of which theatre artists (in their ostensible differences rather than similarities) may be compared. As already discussed in chapter one (with Duchamp's approving citation of Eliot): "The principle of method here is that light should be cast on all art from the vantage point of the most recent artworks, rather than the reverse, following the custom of historicism and philology..."[365]

Before considering an example of such "historicism and philology", constraining the question of method within theatre studies, let us return to the "didactic schema" of

---

[361] *Ibid.*, p.347.
[362] *Ibid.*, p.358. It may well be, for instance, that the "time" of the theatre of death is past, or is now anachronistic; that this attempt to recover a sense in and for its concept is "only" historical. This does not mean, however, that its concept is unproductive for thinking through what "of" human appearance the art of theatre affords.
[363] *Ibid.*, p.359.
[364] *Ibid.*, p.357.
[365] *Ibid.*, p.359.

aesthetics that Badiou's "fourth schema" (of "immanence and singularity") proposes as limiting the work of art to its own ("theoretical") conditions of intelligibility, as its concept distinct from its event (in space and time), or as the memory of its thought distinct from the ephemerality of its "performance" – in the impossibility of a consciousness that is not self-conscious, of an immediacy that is not mediated, which is often uncritically invoked in the name of "live art". The relation between theory and aesthetics, addressed for instance by Badiou and Adorno, is not abstract ("theoretical") but is entailed when considering a particular theatre practice ("the theatre of death") in its belonging to theatre history (and thus to theatre studies). In the following paragraph from Erika Fischer-Lichte – who, after all, writes with the experience of a career devoted to a problem which she nonetheless constructs seemingly to avoid – we may see how the relation between universal ("theory") and particular ("aesthetic") instances of the object of study ("theatre performances") can be formulated by the discipline of theatre studies to exclude the question of aesthetics.

> While I can look at paintings that are centuries old, and read novels that were written in the far distant past, I can only see theatre performances that are taking place now, at this very moment. Thus, I am only able to regard past theatrical events from a theoretical aspect, not an aesthetic one.[366]

These four sentences are rich with problematic presupposition. *That* I can look at an historical painting, for instance, that it endures through time, does not explain *how* I may do so – as if the aesthetic experience were anymore historically transcendent than its object. The indexing of "theatre performances" to the visual, and of the visual to the "present moment", is to fail to "theorise" the "past" historically; it is to seem to describe the object of study, not to explain the relation to it. Here the "past" is simply distinguished from the "present", as the theoretical is from the aesthetic.

In the exclusion of each term from the other – the aesthetic from the theoretical, the past from the present – any meaningful sense of either (or of the present) is excluded from its own designation. (This appeal to a pre-Kantian sense of the "aesthetic" in its "literal" sense, as theorised by Baumgarten, will be discussed in section four of the

---

[366] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre*, trans. Jo Riley, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1997, p.187.

next chapter, with Heidegger's reading of the Schematism.) Theory here does not, then, mean that which is intended in and by the existence of an art work, its material form and its memory (as its mnemotechnics), but rather an applied analysis or semiotics – through the abstraction of the aesthetic into significative elements or units, organised into "sign systems" by and for a "performance analysis".[367] The question as to how the changing signifying structures of artworks themselves might inform those of their analysis, in considering how any "present" performance is historically conditioned, is posed by another (erstwhile) theatre semiotician, Patrice Pavis:

> Avant-garde theatre has brought about a crisis in the semiotic and referential relationship of the sign with the world. It has lost all confidence in a mimetic reproduction of reality by the theatre, without having invented a semiological system and an autonomous theatrical language capable of taking its place. Semiology no doubt owes its rapid development to this calling into question of the mimetic nature of art and the refusal of the stage to presume to imitate a pre-existent exterior world.[368]

Where Fischer-Lichte broaches this "refusal", she tries to maintain a sense of analogy between the art work (whether as object or performance) and its analysis (where the art work is reconstructed in the non-aesthetic terms of "scientific" analysis), even as this implies an impossibility in the claims to "knowledge".[369]

One can see how this impasse opens the door to subsequent interest in so-called "performative analysis", as if to elide the contradictory terms of "performance" and "analysis". However, the "present" of a performance is always in truth that of its "past" future – not least, as it may prove to be "exceptional" and thus continue to exist outside the supposed order of temporal exclusions. The possibility of "an autonomous theatrical language" – the modernist ambition for any "thinking" art practice –

---

[367] *Ibid*., p.188. Paradoxically, this also informs Fischer-Lichte's discussion of the impossibility of separating theatre historiography and performance analysis as disciplines (within an argument seemingly addressed to a particular historical moment of German academic organisation of the field) [*ibid*., pp.344-346].

[368] Patrice Pavis, "Avant-Garde Theatre and Semiology", trans. Jill Daugherty, in *Languages of the Stage*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1982, p.185.

[369] Fischer-Lichte characterises this in terms of a "futility", *op cit*., pp.347-8.

remains historically ambiguous, especially for theatre, but it remains an aesthetic challenge for theory. As already noted, the aesthetic-theoretic conjunction has more recently been revalued in terms of a generalised sense of the "performative" (distinct from the constative, as Auslander, for instance, uses the term to address these issues in relation to the "live" and the "documented"). Whether (or not) this is simply to displace the aesthetic challenge of its "object(s)", into an untheorised and non-aesthetic schema of possible analysis, remains problematic for the question of the truth of its "object" within theatre studies.

In terms that would be significant for limiting the readings of Kantor later (in part three), Fischer-Lichte continues (from the previous citation):

> A performance is indivisibly bound to the actors who perform it and exists only in the brief moment of its creation. Although single elements, such as costume, props, and set may last beyond the process of performance and can even be accessible centuries later, all that remains are single elements ripped from their original context, and never the performance from which they are derived. The performance itself can never be handed down to us.[370]

Any simple reference to "the performance itself" is, of course, precisely what a *concept* of theatre would render complex. Beyond a merely tautological reference, defining "the performance itself" simply in terms of such use – as meaning "the ephemeral" in an abstract or formal opposition to "the enduring" – the "performance itself" remains an aesthetic challenge to any attempt to render it as an event in some other medium – such as, for instance, writing – which might admit the performance's affective sense through the temporality of its concept and thus its demand for "testimony". In so far as we can conceive of – let alone imagine – what reference to "the performance itself" might mean (as it is supposed by Fischer-Lichte's use of the phrase), its implied concept necessarily mediates this reference to what is "untheoretically" aesthetic. For it would be meaningless even to say that it "can never be handed down to us" unless, in some more significant sense than the merely tautologous, this was untrue of what is identifiable in the artwork. Reference to the

---

[370] *Ibid.*, p.187. What is missing here is any sense of "the show and the gaze" as mediums – the very subjects, indeed, of a theatre of death (*pace* Heidegger on Kant).

"performance itself" signifies both the abstract concept and the abstract content that it supposedly excludes; which merely defines it as "exist[ing] only" in the brief "moment" of its (aesthetic) apprehension, as if without (its theoretical and historical) comprehension.

In Fischer-Lichte's account, "the performance" is defined in terms of an aesthetic temporality that has no material content, other than the merely formal possibility of its being experienced or simply perceived. The possible "material content" of the performance is reduced to the "props, costume, and set" that may endure – and which are therefore distinct from "the performance". However, the supposed impossibility of reference to a performance does not preclude a great deal of referring to performances throughout her essays – typically, of course, in terms of what they are declared, theoretically, not to be (documents, materials, or even unattributed descriptions of "what happened").

This is a consequence of understanding theatre "theory" separately from its "aesthetic" object – making of this critical relation one of supplement, with the value of each term supposed as what is lacking to the other. Here the contradictions immanent to the appeals of theory to theatre or performance are thought to be avoided by separating out the categories by which these are defined, rather than thinking them through dialectically. The sense in which theatre (or art) is itself a theoretical practice has then still to be explored in such studies – which perhaps explains why the writings of theatre artists themselves are rarely referred to for their theoretical (distinct from descriptive) testimony. As Susan Melrose writes of the "notorious ephemerality of performance" it "has only ever been specific to spectating's experience of a given performance, and [is] not at all appropriate to an understanding of performance practitioners' own 'knowledge engagement' in performance production." [371]

Before turning to a second example from Fischer-Lichte – one that appears to suggest an understanding of the theatre of death, albeit in descriptive terms (even in metaphorical, rather than conceptual, terms) – let us consider how this failure to *think*

---

[371] Susan Melrose, "'Constitutve Ambiguities': Writing Professional or Expert Performance Practices", in *Contemporary Theatres in Europe*, eds. Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout, London: Routledge, 2006, p.121.

through performance in theatre studies informs another researcher's question – "must it die?" – in one of the very few discussions to address directly the after life of "Kantor's Theatre of Death" in its very title. Jan Klossowicz, who posed this question concerning the concept of a theatre of death in Kantor's presence (for the temerity of which he was duly chastised[372]), reproduces the same distinctions as Fischer-Lichte – ranging Kantor's paintings, on the one side, as "eternal" objects; and his theatre projects, on the other, as "ephemeral". Interestingly, Guy Scarpetta notes (in 2000, ten years after Kantor's death) the paradox that it seems to be the "ephemeral" work of the theatre performances that retain an aura of fascination, more than the paintings (at least, for the time being).[373] Here it is not a question, however, of the ephemeral opposed to the enduring, but rather of what endures in and of the ephemeral – a question already raised by Kantor in the example of his so-called "Anti-Exhibition" held in 1963. Unlike Fischer-Lichte's account of this disciplinary distinction (between the ephemeral and the enduring), Klossowicz does acknowledge that the "ephemeral" work represents a choice by Kantor, as a theatre artist, one that is informed by "his theory of theatre" – characterized by its "two most important notions", identified by Klossowicz as "Death and Memory". Here, at least, there is the beginning of an attempt to think the (aesthetic) reference to performance specifically; that is, in the possibility of its own theory.

Given the choice to make such "mortal" work as theatre productions (despite Kantor's own claims for its immortality!), Klossowicz proposes – perhaps more by word association (or metaphor) than by the terms of the artist's theory to which he has nevertheless alluded – that it is a paradox that Kantor then goes to such lengths to "preserve" these works. He details the various types of object that document the performances within the archive of the Cricot 2's activities – the Cricoteka – as a

---

[372] In his later reflections on the presentation of this paper, "The Theatre of Death, must it die?", Klossowicz notes: "With my closing words a roar was heard. Kantor rose, strongly gesticulating, and shouted in French with his very Polish pronunciation of 'r': 'Mon théâtre ne mourira pas! Mon théâtre est immorrrtel! Immorrrrrtel!'" (Jan Klossowicz, "Kantor's Legacy", in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Fall 1995, p.189.) Jan Kott's description of the same occasion – at which Kantor addressed him as a "Stalinist oppressor of art and free speech" (Klossowicz, *ibid*.) after Kott had cut short Michal Kobialka's talk – offers the following observation: "He screamed at every speaker during the symposium the way he used to scream at his actors and technicians and everybody else during his rehearsals… He was unique, a theatre unto himself" (Jan Kott, *Still Alive*, trans. Jadwiga Kosicka, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, pp.274-5).
[373] Guy Scarpetta, *Kantor au présent*, Arles: Actes Sud, 2000, p.203.

catalogue of all those "single elements" that Fischer-Lichte identified as only what "remains" of theatrical performances (having separated them from their expressive "uses"). In the archive of "the theatre of death", there are even what Klossowicz calls Kantor's "scores" of the performances. Crucially, however, these were written up "long after the first performances", as the performances were "born on the stage" rather than following from 'scores' "written for" them. Paradoxically, Klossowicz even calls these documents (professedly after Kantor himself) "plays".[374]

This choice of legitimating noun is unfortunate as it implicitly undoes the work of the Cricot 2 in de-legitimating the history of theatre as that of its playwright "authors". In the separation of theory and practice, operating thereby a false aesthetics, the objects of each cease to be the means of recognition for – and by – the other. For the plastic "writing" of the event – its *thought*, or idea, as its *theatre* (as "born on the stage") – is again reduced to its (pre-supposed) literary "model" (even if written afterwards), referring the work back to very aesthetic criteria of which Kantor's practice offers a critique. It is as if such precedents as Craig and Artaud had left no legacy "in theory", itself associated with the near universal critical disparagement of their own legacy of "practice". The sense that Kantor's "scores" make the performances accessible beyond their documentation – through their possible "re"-performance by other "directors" (as if this was the key to a "living" archive) – misses the point that Kantor was not himself simply another director, but the artist-theorist of an aesthetic practice that offered a critique of theatre as the interpretation of a pre-existing written (or textual) artefact.[375]

---

[374] In his reflections on the Paris conference, Klossowicz comments on the written versions of the Cricot 2 performances (in contrast to other "documentation"): "Much more important are, in my opinion, his scenarios of the performances, *partitions* or 'plays' as he calls them. Part of his theatre is preserved in texts that may be performed in the future by other directors, even by those with ideas contrary to Kantor's…" (Klossowicz, "Kantor's Legacy", *op cit.,* p.189). The whole question of the "re"-performance of Kantor's "scores" (rather than "plays"), even by surviving members of the Cricot 2, is profoundly problematic. Michal Kobialka, meanwhile, glosses the term "score" (*partytura*) as follows: "Kantor wrote *partyturas* while working on his productions. *Partytura* here means a collage of various texts, notes, and descriptions of terms and concepts that were created and used by him during the process of putting on a production. Sometimes the *partytura* was amended by Kantor many years after the first performance of a piece" [*A Journey Through Other Space*, p.390 (n.9)].

[375] This can be compared with the curious example of Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces* project referred to in chapter three.

In this strange elision of aesthetic specificity with the standard form of writing associated with theatre practice (as ostensibly written *for* rather than *about* performance), Klossowicz nonetheless suggests that these "scenarios" contain the "idea of the show". Unfortunately, this "idea" has taken us away from the "theory" mentioned before – as the traditional separation is maintained between the written scores (the page), which remain their durable medium (distinct even from their "ideas"), and the theatrical work which "lives and dies on the stage". The question of the immanent "birth [that] was the death of him" is eschewed by a disciplinary method that would have birth and death occur in parallel worlds. With this separation of aesthetics and theory, it is the concept of the theatre of death – as that through which one thinks of particular performances, to understand not simply their "life and death" on stage but their immanent afterlife, as their concept – that is precluded. The very possibility of addressing the object of study (or its reference) as "theatre" (even when, in Kantor's presence, it is still "alive") is here forestalled. To address the theatre artists of this minor tradition ("of death") historically requires first to address the possibility of representing or thinking of their work, in which the practice of the "theatre" (its existence) is the practice of its (mimetic) concept – as that "of death".

Let us now return to Fischer-Lichte who appears to offer an excellent précis, or evocation, of the "theatre of death" – at least, as it might be thought of in terms of metaphor, or of "the ghost in the theatrical machine", which ignores that "break" in the Western tradition identified by Kott and Plassard (not to mention Craig, Artaud, and Barthes) discussed previously, in which the appearance or apparition of the actor on stage is made questionable *in effigie*.[376] In her introduction to a collection of essays ostensibly addressing "the show and the gaze of theatre", Fischer-Lichte writes:

> Theatre in contemporary Western culture serves as a place of mediation
> between past and present. The bodily presence of the performer, in this sense,
> is endowed with a particular historical signature.[377] For when plays of the
> occidental tradition are staged, from Aeschylus to Samuel Beckett, figures
> appear on stage whose history forms part of our cultural memory. However,

---

[376] This questioning will be the "scene" of the first section of the next chapter.
[377] Here we might note the "exceptional" instance of Kantor's own presence on stage – in contrast with its imitation by, for instance, Visniewski.

they do not appear as in our dreams, imaginations, and memories or as in the new media – rather, they adopt a bodily appearance. The performance takes place as a nightly resurrection of the 'dead'.[378]

This appeal to the "plays of the occidental tradition" obscures the theatrically specific question of aesthetic theory – and not only in the theatre of death – as its supposition concerning the mediation of cultural memory translates into that of a metaphor substituting for a specific practice of actors. As so often happens in theatre studies, the metaphorical "nightly resurrection" of (literary) characters replaces thinking through the "bodily presence" of the actors. The suggestive Christian idiom of a "nightly resurrection" glosses a possible theatre of death in a way that makes its concept, or idea *as* theatre, literally unthinkable.[379] As the actor is represented (or negated) by these "figures" (or characters) so is their "death" negated by a nightly "resurrection". Here the "dead" are not apparitions; their "bodily appearance" is that of a fiction (in – metaphorically – theory) rather than of an actor (in – materially – practice). The return of (and from) cultural memory here is purely literary; it is not that of the stage, of "the body of man [as] a symbolic form" (Barasch), "the transformation of the body into representation" (Michaud), or the "representation of a generalised human being" (Obraztsov) – as these inform the sense of a theatrical iconography or "cultural memory" (in the theatre of death); a figure of which, for Kantor's own life time – and with which this thesis will conclude – is Odysseus.

Paradoxically, theatre studies cannot stop remembering "theory" in the image of the ghost, haunted as it is by what it excludes from its study – the body, in its theatrical or plastic, as distinct from literary, appearance(s).[380] Fischer-Lichte, indeed, introduces the "dead" (the quotation marks are her own) into her theorizing *about* theatre, as witnesses to her attempt to distinguish between theatre (as a "live" event) and the so-

---

[378] Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre*, trans. Jo Riley, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1997, p.22.
[379] This scenario offers an interesting way to reflect back upon the Parisian objectors to Castellucci's production discussed in the previous chapter, as well as the uncanny (with Heidegger) at the end of chapter two.
[380] This "repressed" element – moralised, as we have seen in chapter three, by Abramovic, as a question of "reality" and "deception" – "returns" in the field of "performance art" and its "studies", as if separated from an art of performance that is theatrical.

called "new media".[381] Already under the sign of an older sense of "medium" – such as it interested many early twentieth century playwrights (for example, Maeterlinck, Yeats, and Strindberg) – theatre is always concerned, in its very mode of production, with relations between past and present. In common with many writers on theatre, it seems, Fischer-Lichte likes to think simply in terms of a "medium" – as identified with the actor's body, with a corporeal presence – rather than an aesthetic technique of its image, in its iconographic or anthropological study.[382] Rather than asking *how* that corporeal presence defines *what* kind of "theatre" particularly (within the major or minor traditions identified here), it is as if a spiritualist theatre "of death" (to return to an example mentioned in the Introduction) had invited only Mme Blavatsky and not William James to its study.

Although the thought – as the remembrance – of the "dead" is curiously alienated here by Fischer-Lichte's quotation marks, we might imagine that their "resurrection" (as distinct from their "return") is informed by work such as Grotowski's, imbued with a romantic conception of the "Occidental tradition". It is as if Fischer-Lichte had gone back a century (past a forgotten Brecht, for instance) to Mickiewicz's *Lectures on Slavic Drama*, for her sense of a "contemporary" medium specific to theatre.[383] Whilst concern with a "metaphysical" theatre resonates here, the basic break (*pace* Kott and Plassard) in the modernist relation of body and image on stage is ignored and it is no accident that the key reference in her essay is indeed to Grotowski and not Kantor (who simply does not feature in her history of European theatre). More importantly, however, what is missing here is the sense of mediation of and by the

[381] "The dead", albeit unnamed as such (displaced here into the category of the political in theatre), play a fundamental role, however, in a later volume which develops the basic point made in this essay here: *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, London: Routledge, 2005.

[382] In her essay contributing to the "institutional effect" of Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces* project, Fischer-Lichte translates this "nightly resurrection" of the theatre into the "presence" (printed in capital letters) of performance art – as "whenever the performer brings forth his body as an energetic body that releases energy and allows it to circulate in the space and to energise spectators so that they sense the performer as well as themselves not only as intensely present, but as embodied minds…" (Fischer-Lichte, "Performance Art – Experiencing Liminality", in Abramovic, *Seven Easy Pieces*, Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007, p.42).

[383] In Fischer-Lichte's *History of European Theatre and Drama*, trans. Jo Riley, London: Routledge, 2004, Mickiewicz is cited simply as a precursor to Grotowski's "redemptive" theatre (pp.333-34), in which the "truth" of the actor's presence, before that of any "character" or "role", is the key to what theatre "is". It is perhaps worth noting that Kantor does not get a mention in either this "history" or the essays collected in *The Show and the Gaze*.

concept – not the ghost or spirit – of theatre, in order to recognise its modes of appearance, or performance, as aesthetically specific; and thereby broaching the question of an iconography of the actor in terms of what is uncanny in human appearance.

Fischer-Lichte sees in Grotowski a "redemptive theatre", with Mickiewicz as its precursor;[384] where, by contrast, the minor tradition of a "theatre of death" reads Mickiewicz, with Kantor, after Witkacy (not to mention Duchamp). Indeed, in Kantor's writings any notion of "resurrection" associated with theatre as the staging of cultural memory appears under the sign of "impossibility". This has to do with a fundamental historical sense of the difference it makes to be thinking about art in the twentieth century specifically. Here precedents and survivals are not understood in terms of an historicist concept of the past's "influence" on the present, but in terms of a modernist concept of the past's revaluation in and by the present.

The point here is to consider what makes the thought of a theatre of death possible – or not – in the discipline of theatre studies, insofar as its concept already addresses (or translates) the possibility of own historical practice. The "nightly" presence of the "dead" on stage – understood as the "bringing to life" of a play, as the "nightly resurrection" of literary characters or "historical figures" – is not the concern of this theatre ("of death"), even when it deals with "plays of the Occidental tradition", such as Witkacy's or Genet's (not to mention Mickiewicz or Shakespeare). The theatre of death offers an unsettling of Fischer-Lichte's order of categories ("in theory") between fiction and reality, figure and body, the psychical and physical. The barrier between the living and the dead is not suppressed in this theatre (as is suggested by Fischer-Lichte's appeal to a "nightly resurrection"), but is made visible, as apparent as the opposition between stage and auditorium. The return of the dead to the theatre is a way of seeing the living – as an appearance of the uncanny in (rather the transcendence of) mimesis.

---

[384] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Theatre and Drama*, trans. Jo Riley, London: Routledge, 2004, pp.333-34.

3. *Often what a word expresses is distorted and suppressed by its 'meanings'* – Martin Heidegger[385]

Reflecting on the fate of words (in this instance, the "demoniacal") as they pass – or are "translated" – from Greek into Latin, and then into the philosophical vocabularies of Christian and modern scientific cultures (informing any contemporary attempt to engage with the Greek "roots" or "origins" of "Western thought"), this ambiguous observation of Heidegger's speaks of the kernel of all his work to recall the expression(s) of Being from within their historical meaning(s) in metaphysics. Here, the further translation of Heidegger's "Destruktion" of metaphysics through the French of Derrida's "deconstruction" already constitutes the text of its own history, not least as it is translated into "English".[386] As Derrida remarks, it is not that *deconstruction* is a word that simply "exists" in, or "belongs to", French (any more than *Destruktion* to German). The word concerns, rather, what "belongs" to (a) language "in translation", as this unsettles claims for identity (for self-present, and "self-evident", modes of being).[387]

> For if the difficulties of translation can be anticipated (and the question of deconstruction is also through and through *the* question of translation, and of the language of concepts, of the conceptual corpus of so-called Western metaphysics), one should not begin by naively believing that the word 'deconstruction' corresponds in French to some clear and univocal meaning. There is already in 'my' language a serious problem of translation between what here or there can be envisaged for the word and the usage itself, the reserves of the word.[388]

---

[385] Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, p.109.

[386] On this history see, for example, Jean-Luc Nancy "Our History" in *Diacritics* 20.3 (Fall 1990) and also (echoing Heidegger's own example) Derrida's "Letter to a Japanese Friend" (trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in *Psyche II*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, pp.1-6).

[387] This unsettling is the very *work* of philosophy for both Heidegger and Derrida, not least as it touches upon questions "of death".

[388] Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend", trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in *Psyche II*, eds. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, p.1.

Lest this discussion seems a little abstruse in the context of theatre studies, it is worth wondering why it is that such concerns about translation, or translatability, rarely register within disciplinary histories of theatre which themselves continually plot a linear chronology from ancient Greek to modern drama.[389] It is curious that the pillars of this history – *from* Aeschylus *to* Artaud, *from* Aristotle *to* Appia – remain standing, despite the continual rearrangements of academic archaeologies. In dialogue with Gregory Ulmer (for whom "theory" is a question of "curiosity"), Susan Melrose refers to the all too familiar "etymological fallacy" that characterises the modern (and, one might say, "unoriginal") turn from theatre to theory.[390]

The question of "meanings" in the citation from Heidegger addresses the modern German of his texts and seminars, as these have in turn been translated into other modern languages pursuing the tradition of philosophy (even into English!), as much as it does the Greek words whose "translations" – in the very work of addressing those "meanings" – become the medium (or memory) of and for this thinking. Such thought pertains to the word "theatre" also, not least as its "etymology" – particularly in its "shared root" with "theory" – is so often cited in theatre studies, as if this offered direct, rather than "distorted", expression of its "meanings". While the idea that "etymology can serve as a category of objective cognition" goes back at least to Plato's *Cratylus* within the philosophical tradition,[391] it also serves as what we might call, after Freud, a "screen memory" in the construction of modern theatre studies. The relation between theatre and theory is *not* to be found in etymology but in artists' practice – including, as Adorno reminds us, their manifestos: "By turning toward their truth content, aesthetics is compelled – as philosophy – beyond the works. The consciousness of the truth of artworks is, precisely as philosophical truth, in accord with the apparently most ephemeral form of aesthetic reflection, the manifesto."[392] The question of truth in theatre theory – drawn from, rather than applied to, a

---

[389] This touches on the critique of historicism that characterises modernism (*pace* Adorno and Benjamin, as well as Duchamp and Eliot).

[390] Susan Melrose, "'Constitutive ambiguities': writing professional or expert performance practices and the Théâtre du Soleil, Paris", in *Contemporary Theatres in Europe*, eds. Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout, London: Routledge, 2006, pp.129-30.

[391] Moshe Barasch, *Icon*, New York: New York University Press, 1995, p.73.

[392] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London: Athlone Press, 1997, p.359.

theatrical art practice – is a question of aesthetics, as distinct from a history or a sociology of professional practices.

The thought of "theatre-theory" (as distinct from Badiou's "theatre-ideas" with which this chapter began) has often evoked the "scene" of deconstruction in philosophy, as a play of reading(s) "after" (or in the wake of) Derrida. In the most thoughtful of these, theatre, or the theatrical, becomes a trope for theorising the questionability of the very subject of theory (just as the theory immanent to theatre proves the undoing of the identity of the traditional dramatic subject). In this context, the supposed etymological interest of these words' "root" (or "radical") meanings may be contextualised in terms of Platonic readings (as already discussed with Vernant). To cite only two such instances, Samuel Weber (broaching the fundamental question of "theatricality as medium" within the history of metaphysics) writes that: "To understand what is at stake… one need only return to a well-known and often-discussed fact: the term *theatre* has the same etymology as the term *theory*, from the Greek word *thea* designating a place from which to observe or to see..."[393] And, secondly, in another study with similar relevance to this thesis, Johannes Birringer (appealing to the ghost of theory, counter-pointing Baudrillard and Blau) writes (concerning examples of the "forgetting of theatre"): "In fact, the two words – *theatron, theoros* – are of the same root; the Greek *theorein* derives from the coalescing of *thea* and *horao, thea* meaning the outward look, the aspect, in which something shows itself, and *horao* meaning to view closely..."[394]

Besides the indexing of "theory" with the visible, it is the appeal in even such examples to a sort of Archimedean linguistic arbitration – a "fact" as both authors call it – that is problematic. Indeed, it is at odds with the very claims being made concerning theatre-theory, perhaps because – unlike Heidegger – the question of the Greek is set apart in these examples from the (modern) language in which the

---

[393] Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2004, pp.2-3. This reference is preparatory to introducing Plato's parable of the cave, addressing the question not simply of what we know, but how we know it. This example is "translated" by Weber into a quite distinct set of terms. Instead of an apparently fixed perspective on visibility in Plato, Weber introduces the spatio-temporal conditions for the "staging" of such a concept of visibility, as an event that "takes place" (p.7).
[394] Johannes Birringer, *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p.83.

question of theatre (in, and as, theory) is being posed. It is as if this instance of translation – as apparent transliteration – provided the terms with which to pose the question of the relation between theatre and theory, rather than this relation (including, precisely, what is not translated in it) being an instance of how each term may be already in question with respect to the other. The appeal to etymology is made as if one were to think *about* words simply, rather than to think *with* them.

While the judgment of "distortion and suppression" in the Heidegger epigraph (above) might appear to depend upon a similar sense of arbitration concerning "facts" of language, Heidegger does not apply etymology to the question of meaning; rather he resists the ways in which it is already at work in language, exploring how it conditions the "use" (or meanings) of the words *by* which (rather than simply *about* which) the question of meaning – in this case of "theatre" – is posed "theoretically". As noted before, Weber (like Lacoue-Labarthe), writing after Derrida (himself writing after Heidegger), is part of a tradition in which the question of mimesis is that of its own (theoretical) specificity – where the question of meaning (in and of theory) is posed *theatrically*; that is, in an awareness of the double identity of any representation – not as a distinction simply between the represented and its representation, but as the representation is itself represented (as representing "itself"). Distinguishing the representation from the represented displaces a distinction that pertains to representation in and of itself. (This is precisely the Duchampian turn in the history of art that is a key point of reference for Kantor.) In this "deconstruction", the theatrical-theoretical etymology is unsettled, together with the series of distinctions that it has traditionally informed, such as that between appearance and reality, illusion and truth, copy and original, replica and model, secondary and primary.[395]

Concerning etymology specifically (not least, in the curious mimesis of transliteration), Heidegger cautions that:

---

[395] An exemplary instance of this undoing occurs in Weber's discussion of – and thereby as – the translation of the word *entre* as it "appears" between entrances in Derrida's "Double Session" with Mallarmé's *Mimique*, introducing the question of "presence" (Weber, *op cit.*, pp.14-15).

What is decisive is the way in which this happens. The mere identifying of old and often obsolete meanings of terms, the snatching up of these meanings with the aim of using them in a new way, leads to nothing if not arbitrariness. What counts, rather, is for us, in reliance on the early meaning of a word and its changes, to catch sight of the realm pertaining to the matter in question into which the word speaks. What counts is to ponder that essential realm as the one in which the matter named through the word moves. Only in this way does the word speak, and speak in the complex of meanings into which the matter that is named by it unfolds throughout the history of poetry and thought.[396]

Despite this, the etymological rhetoric ("fact") of theatre "theory" is typically presented as if what it expressed was already given, as if citing it simply restated something that actually stated itself, as if the history of this thought remained, as it were, unaffected by that of its "poetic" memory.

In his introduction to a collection of essays evocatively entitled *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime* (a relation of themes with which few of the essays themselves seem concerned!), Timothy Murray, for example, expands on this unoriginal "fact" of language, offering a citation from the very essay of Heidegger's that includes this caution concerning etymology. Murray writes that Heidegger, in posing the question of "representation" with respect to "the real in relation to theory [science]... positions the science of knowledge in relation to the theoretical procedures of visibility and the phenomenological conditions of perception," which (according to Murray) are "shared with theatre".[397] He then cites Heidegger's text directly:

The word 'theory' stems from the Greek verb *theorein*. The noun belonging to it is *theoria*. Peculiar to these words is a lofty and mysterious meaning. The verb *theorein* grew out of the coalescing of two root words, *theatricality* and *horao*. *Theatricality* (cf. Theatre) is the outward look, the aspect, in which

---

[396] Martin Heidegger, "Science and Reflection", trans. William Lovitt, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, p.159. The history (or memory) of a poetics of thought, as the thought of poetics, is a fundamental concern of Heidegger's "destruction" of metaphysics.
[397] Timothy Murray, *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, p.11.

something shows itself, the outward appearance in which it offers itself. Plato names this aspect in which what presences shows what it is, *eidos*. To have seen this aspect, *eidenai* is to know [*wissen*]. The second root word in *theorein*, *horao*, means: to look at something attentively, to look it over, to view it closely. Thus it follows that *theorein* is *thean horan*, to look attentively at the outward appearance wherein what presences becomes visible and, through such sight – seeing – to linger with it.[398]

By abstracting this paragraph from Heidegger's wider discussion of "truth" (or "essence") here – as if, again, the text simply offered an etymological "fact" – Murray then makes a strange use of it to affirm a "meaning" that for Heidegger is in question (even, Heidegger says, "uncannily"); that is, "to recognise what is new in the essence of modern science as a theory of the real".[399] According to Murray:

> The theoretical subject is here authorised by procedures of perspective and speculary through which the subject stands at the ontological centre, as the maker of the presence of absence, as the locus of meaning. Fundamental to modernist concepts of mimesis, I cannot stress too strongly, is this conflation of theatre as outward appearance and of theatricality as the subjective performance of attentive gathering.[400]

How this "conflation" may have been variously understood as fundamental to "modernist concepts of mimesis" is part of what is in discussion with the uncanny in the theatre of death. The reduction of *theatre* to certain modernist theories of the visible – not least, Panofsky's claims concerning "perspective as a symbolic form" (alluded to in chapter three), and its framing of what the experience of visibility (as that of a "spectator") might be – is one that the modernist art theatre "of death" resists. In this minor tradition of modernist theatre, "appearance" is not an outward as opposed to an inward reality, as an "undeconstructed metaphysics" would posit – as,

---

[398] Martin Heidegger, "Science and Reflection", trans. William Lovitt, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p.163; quoted in Timothy Murray, *op cit*.
[399] Heidegger, *op cit*., p.166. Here Heidegger also raises the question of the uncanny, as the undoing of claims of modern science of being "disinterested" (p.167).
[400] Murray, *op cit*.

indeed, this is foundational for the main line of twentieth century actor training, from Stanislavsky to Grotowski (and the many epigones of each). The metaphysics of subject-object relations that are fundamental to this conception of theatre are, precisely, what the *uncanny* in mimesis unsettles. The actor in "the theatre of death" is not "the maker of the presence of absence," the creator of signs on stage, as if what was absent was present elsewhere, off stage, requiring only to be re-presented, as with prevailing varieties of naturalism and its conventional fictions. It is rather the very presence of this absence on stage – the "issuelessness of death" (recalling Heidegger, cited in chapter two) – to which the actor's appearance (in the image of a body) offers its mimetic testimony, as its "medium" *in effigie*.

The contrast between the theatre of death and, so to speak, the "living theatre" could not be clearer than here "in theory". As Philip Auslander writes:

> Theorists as diverse as Stanislavsky, Brecht and Grotowski all implicitly designate the actor's self as the *logos* of performance; all assume that the actor's self precedes and grounds her performance and that it is the presence of this self in performance that provides the audience with access to human truths... An examination of acting theory through the lens of deconstruction reveals that the self is not an autonomous foundation for acting, but is produced by the performance it supposedly grounds.[401]

Absence is an effect of the actor's presence in the theatre of death (where the actor's "model" is not the living but the dead). This "death" belongs to the stage (as opposed to "life"), rather than being represented as if existing in a parallel reality off stage, as if "the actor" (distinct from a "character") were not already its sign, as a double of its own representation. (Not as a representation "of" something else, elsewhere; but as an "actor", a representation of him or her "self".) Again, it is in the appeal of "popular culture" forms that modernist art theatre shows this evocative, uncanny, emptiness of representation – with examples drawn from the circus, such as the white face of the clown and the glitter of the aerialist, which offer a mimetic "theorisation"

---

[401] Philip Auslander, "Just be yourself", in *Acting (Re)Considered*, ed. Philip Zarrilli, London: Routledge, 2000, p.60.

(theatricalisation) of the beholder beheld (suspended or stilled), of an audience "acted" upon by the "look" of the actor, in an echo of the Gorgon's mask.

It is noteworthy, furthermore, that in Murray's citation of Heidegger the key word *thea* – key because it links to Heidegger's reading of *aletheia* (as "the unconcealment from out of which and in which that which presences, presences"), which links to his reflections on (or with) Parmenides – is translated out of the text.[402] (It is after all to Parmenides here, to the thought of being in time, rather than to any modernist sense of "theatre" that Heidegger turns to explore the resonances of "theory", as they touch upon pre-Platonic conceptions of mimesis, in a poetics of thought that eschews etymological "statement" or "fact".[403]) Where Heidegger's text writes *thea*, Murray's writes *theatricality*, as if to prove the point perhaps that it is not so much a question of what authors mean as of what languages themselves have to "say". Here the "essential" relation between the theatrical and the theoretical (as the presencing of what is not simply visible[404], as *testimony* [*theoria*]) – explored in deconstruction – reverts to being thought simply in each term's supposed "applicability" to the other (in what is forgotten rather than remembered of the one in and by the meanings of the other).

Heidegger's reference to "theory" (rather than "theatricality", after all) occurs in his questioning the meaning of "essence" in relation to "science", especially by invoking a consideration of how the (German) noun "wesen" ("essence" or, as it may also be translated, to evoke its temporal conditionality, "coming to presence") is conditioned by the prefix "an-" (in "das Anwesende", "presencing", for instance). For Heidegger, the question is not understood in terms of a Greek "answer" through etymology, but through the German in which the question is posed (as already a question of translation, or rather of translatability; that is, in the thought of language). In Heidegger's text, the concluding line in Murray's quotation (above), concerning "outward appearance", is engaged not so much in an etymological demonstration

---

[402] Martin Heidegger, "Science and Reflection", trans. William Lovitt, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, p.164; quoted in Timothy Murray (ed.), *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, p.11.
[403] Heidegger, *op. cit.*, pp.164-5.
[404] As, for instance, a goddess (*ibid.*).

from the Greek as an exploration of what Heidegger's translator, William Lovitt, calls "the force" of the German prefix *an*-, as it conditions these phenomena of philosophical reflection – "outward appearance" (*Anblick*), "presencing" (*Anwesende*), and "becoming visible" (*ansehen*).[405] Lovitt cites Heidegger's suggestion (in *What Is Called Thinking?*) that "the German preposition *an* [unto] originally means simultaneously 'toward' [*auf*] and 'into' [*in*]", in relation to which the double sense of the German noun *Gegenwart* as "both 'presence' and 'the present'" is glossed as a "tarrying over against and toward",[406] as an enduring (presence) in and of the present (as that which *is* in and of the present).[407]

By making the question of "outward appearance", "look", or "aspect" [*ansehen*] already (or "essentially") one of "theatricality" rather than "truth", Murray quite literally makes this "knowledge" of "theory" tautological (as we have seen also in Fischer-Lichte's understanding of aesthetics "in theory"). The sense of testimony in (or toward) presencing (an event of thought in time) becomes eclipsed by reference to a transcendent present (a statement). The claimed etymology (as a "fact of language") allows for the substitution of the theatrical by the theoretical, rather than the appearance of an ambiguity between them, as that which is not identifiable with either one separately (as is opened up in the question of the uncanny in mimesis). The "force" of this German prefix [*an*], as conditioning the thought of what is in question ("what is 'theatrical'?"[408]), does not "translate" simply into English (as if it were to disappear in what it "expresses"), but thereby insists (in its appearance) as a question of translatability, as the thought of language(s). It is such resistances that constitute

---

[405] *Ibid.*, n.14, p.163.

[406] *Ibid.*, n.6, p.159.

[407] As Lovitt writes, in the very first "translator's note" in this volume of Heidegger's essays (*ibid.*, p.3): "*Wesen* [essence] as a noun derives from the verb *wesen*, which is seldom used as such in modern German. The verb survives primarily in inflected forms of the verb *sein* [to be] and in such words as the adjective *anwesend* (present). The old verbal forms from which *wesen* stems meant to tarry or dwell. Heidegger repeatedly identifies *wesen* as 'the same as *währen* [to last or endure]'" (citing here "The Question Concerning Technology", *ibid.*, p.30). Evidently, this is not a question of "definition". A concept of "theatre" is already a question of a "concept" of theatre; in this instance, specifically, as that of its *art,* understood as that "of death".

[408] This question is posed, precisely, by the curators of an exhibition that took as its subject "a theatre without theatre" (Manuel Borja-Villel, *et al.*, (eds.) *A Theatre Without Theatre*, Barcelona: MACBA, 2007, p.20).

the very memory of thought with which translations of Heidegger are engaged (not least as concerns, in this "example", the relation between theatre and theory).

For Heidegger, in the passage that Murray cites, the issue is not one of identifying these terms – "theory" and "theatre" – through a supposedly shared etymology, but of considering what is (or becomes) apparent (or "visible") to and as thought. What is *Anwesende* is what "endures into reflection or presencing", suggesting (as noted above, in the association of the verb *wesen* with *währen*) what lasts or endures, rather than thinking of what endures as, with Plato, the *idea* opposed to appearances (a "text" opposed to performance, or theory opposed to aesthetics). What demands to be thought theatrically (*pace* Fischer-Lichte) is not reducible to an opposition between the enduring and the ephemeral, the archive and the actor, but addresses the very conditions of temporality in its theatrically specific appearance (as this resembles, or dissembles, what is "life like" in its mortality).

The opening lines of Heidegger's lecture "concerning technology" are apposite here (if we substitute "technology" with either "theory" or "theatricality"):

> In what follows we shall be *questioning* concerning technology [theatre/ theory]. Questioning builds a way. We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics. The way is a way of thinking. All ways of thinking, more or less perceptibly, lead through language in a manner that is extraordinary. We shall be questioning concerning *technology* [theatre/ theory], and in so doing we would like to prepare a free relationship to it. The relationship will be free if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology [theatre/ theory]. When we can respond to this essence, we shall be able to experience the technological [theatrical/ theoretical] within its own bounds.[409]

Crucially, the question of coming to presence alludes to a pre-Platonic concern with what it may mean to think (which is associated, as discussed at the end of chapter

---

[409] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", trans. William Lovitt, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, pp.3-4.

two, with the uncanny). This sense of appearance (*thea*) unsettles the dichotomy between transient phenomena ("mere appearance") and transcendental ideas, which (as we have already seen with Fischer-Lichte) is "how metaphysics in its most varied interpretations thinks an essence",[410] and which has conditioned aesthetics within the understanding (for instance) of theatre. How does the thought of performance make itself appear (otherwise than by its suppression or distortion)? How does the "afterwards" of a performance give testimony to its event, or taking place, theatrically? To "open our human existence to the essence of [theatre]" is what theatre artists aspire to – as this may be apprehended through an "anthropology of images", understood not from a "Panofskian perspective" but as a "Warburgian symptom", in the example of the theatre of death; as a "transformation of the body into representation" [Michaud] which bears witness to an uncanny sense (or presence) of the *imago hominis*.

Besides Heidegger's "return" to Parmenides (in a reading that entails a "deconstruction" of the post-Platonic vocabulary of metaphysics), in the next chapter we will consider Jean-Pierre Vernant's studies of Greek thought in which he identifies the suppression of what he calls "presentification" by representation. As discussed in the Introduction, it is curious, however, how few theatre "theorists" (or academics) draw their references from reflections on "seeing" by theatre artists themselves – whose writing about what they see in theatre (not least, in theory) offers testimony to the *work* of mimesis (to its aesthetics) in a concept of *theatre*. Academic theatre theorists refer typically to each other's writing, using "examples" – often in paraphrase – drawn from artists' work. The latter is not cited as the *theoretical* source of (academic) questions (where Auslander's explicit reference, above, to directors as theorists is a rare exception), but as "examples" of what has been "theorised" separately, in terms of reading (rather than "seeing"); as if an example such as Castellucci's *On Regarding the Face of God* (in chapter three) becomes theoretical (distinct from theatrical) when thought of, or addressed, only in such writing. (Paradoxically, most theatre discussed in its "studies" has not been seen, or is not discussed as a question of seeing, of a practice of seeing, as an aesthetic question in and of its theory.) It is as if the aesthetic question (of the visible, the theatrical, or the

---

[410] *Ibid.*, p.30.

mimetic) was not itself theoretical; as if the thought or concept of appearance (of "look" or "aspect") was not itself theatrical (*pace* Badiou); as if "the actor" was a given and not the very question of an appearance of "art" theatrically, as this concerns the unsettling "co-presence" of actor and audience; or, rather, the unsettling of co-presence *between* actor and audience.

The Theatre of Death: The Uncanny in Mimesis – Part Two

Chapter 5: _A question of appearance – enter the actor_

1. _Thou art a scholar, speak to it, Horatio – Question it..._ (Hamlet, 1.i)

The opening scene of _Hamlet_ offers an example of scholarship attempting to question theatrical appearances – a meta-theatrical attempt to address the "apparition" (the image) of the actor in the figure of the ghost. As an actor, how does "the ghost" appear "this night" – as a figure that is "more than fantasy" and which "looks... like" a messenger from "beyond" this world? After all, what does one returning from the next world look "like", on stage at least? What "of" human being (in its appearance) does this apparition resemble, such that its difference from the living may still be recognised? Freud – a "scholar" who (alongside Edison) developed a specifically modern way of communicating with the dead (with the figures _in absentia_ and _in effigie_ who people the psychoanalytic transference) – seems, at first sight, clear that theatrical appearances (being confined to fiction or to "poetic reality") are not uncanny. As a modern rationalist, engaged in the demystification of superstitions, he observes that:

> The creative writer can also choose a setting which though less imaginary than
> the world of fairy tales, does yet differ from the real world by admitting
> superior spiritual beings such as daemonic spirits or ghosts of the dead. So
> long as they remain within their setting of poetic reality, such figures lose any
> uncanniness which they might possess. The souls in Dante's _Inferno_, or the
> supernatural apparitions in Shakespeare's _Hamlet_, _Macbeth_, or _Julius Caesar_,
> may be gloomy and terrible enough, but they are no more really uncanny than
> Homer's jovial world of gods. We adapt our judgment to the imaginary reality
> imposed on us by the writer, and regard souls, spirits, and ghosts as though
> their existence had the same validity as our own has in material reality. In this
> case we avoid all trace of the uncanny.[411]

---

[411] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", trans. Angela Richards, in _Pelican Freud Library_ vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, p.373-4.

As concerns the supernatural, a theatre of the marvellous or the magical (conceived without a grounding in a "material" practice other than reading) would here be distinct from the metaphysical theatre envisaged by Freud's contemporaries, Craig and Artaud, Maeterlinck and Witkiewicz, precisely while remaining within a "setting of poetic reality". For these theatre artists, it is the very presence of the actors before an audience (rather than the literary fiction of characters) that will serve to unsettle judgement as to the seeming distinction between "imaginary" and "material" reality. Indeed, Freud himself (as will be returned to, below) comes to reflect on the undecidability of this very opposition as his essay progresses, where the thought of an image distinct from its medium or material (in this case a body) becomes ever more complex (rather than simply irrational) in his account.

Literary reference, in Freud's essay, to "daemonic spirits" (distinct from today's digital-game avatars) indicates a culture that granted even modern science a connection to antiquity during the last century. Like the archaic *eidolon*, the stage figure of Hamlet's ghost – so the narrative fiction would have it – is both visible and audible, but not tangible. The scholar, in the play, might refer the ghost's appearance to the "sheeted dead" of ancient Rome, but the theatrical image in question (one that appears after death) would speak to the conscience, rather than to the knowledge, of history.[412] The question of the past that haunts the present (besides the ghost's familial tale of regicide) concerns the inheritance of Fortinbras, providing, in the first scene, a screen for that of Hamlet (his potential disinheritance) – for what will have become of it ("the rest is silence") in the last scene. Theatrically, the bodies may finally be taken up; but theoretically there remains the mote to trouble the scholarly mind's eye, concerning all that reason "shall have cause to speak" of. At stake is an understanding of "appearances", and the communication to be had, in theatre, not only about them but also with them.

---

[412] Besides the example of regicide in the Scottish play, Julius Caesar's bloodied clothes are also made to speak in Anthony's oration (Act III) and Caesar later appears as a ghost to Brutus (Act V). The political questions of murder at Court and the legitimacy of "sovereign" rule in England are the very issues of "History" in Shakespeare's plays (as analysed in the case of *Hamlet* by Carl Schmitt, for example, in his monograph *Hamlet or Hecuba*, trans. David Pan and Jennifer Rust, New York: Telos Press, 2009).

In his essay on the ghosts in Shakespeare's plays, Edward Gordon Craig makes the appearance of the ghost the very measure of theatrical specificity,[413] contrasting this with the apparent sufficiency for understanding of simply reading the plays. Addressing the kind of rationalisation offered by Freud, Craig asks what does performance bring to the play more than reading, when the experience of performances so often proves to be much less? "What is it makes the ghosts of Shakespeare, which are so significant and impressive when we read the plays, appear so weak and unconvincing on the stage?"[414] The question addresses precisely the *art* of theatre and its "material" (or medium) – which, in Craig's theorisation of the theatrical in terms of the visible and the invisible, concerns a relation that is at the "origins" of the concept of mimesis (at least, in following the analysis of Jean-Pierre Vernant).[415]

In the exchange between Theaetetus and the Stranger in Plato's *Sophist*, for instance, two versions of the "imaginary" are already at play – an archaic sense, in which the image is its own reality (a "double"); and a Platonic sense in which the image (*eikon*) is only the simulacrum of something real. Vernant addresses Plato's discussion in terms of a broader philological question: "To what extent did the ancient Greeks recognise an order of reality corresponding to what we call image, imagination, and the world of the imaginary?"[416] For Plato, the image is thought of as but an illusion or unreality, a "mere semblance", a "representation" of reality.[417] This marks a change from an earlier notion of the archaic *eidolon*, a "real semblance", as it were, of which Vernant gives three examples (all associated with Homer): a "dream image (*onar*)",

---

[413] "[T]hey carry us to the clearest statements we can ever receive as to Shakespeare's thoughts about the stage" (Craig, "On the Ghosts in the Tragedies of Shakespeare", in *Craig on Theatre*, ed. Michael Walton, London: Methuen, 1999, p.170).

[414] Craig, *ibid*.

[415] Hans Belting too follows Vernant here, in theorising his own project for an "anthropology of images": "My aim is to generalise Vernant's configuration and to propose a triangular interrelation in which image, body, and medium would be three poles" (Belting, "Toward an Anthropology of the Image", in *Anthropologies of Art*, ed. Mariët Westermann, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005, p.44). This is also the basis of Monique Borie's discussion of much the same issues as addressed here, in *Le Fantôme, ou le Théâtre qui Doute*, Arles: Actes Sud, 1997.

[416] Jean-Pierre Vernant, "The Birth of Images", in *Mortals and Immortals*, Froma Zeitlin ed., New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p.164.

[417] *Ibid*., p.166.

an "apparition sent by a god (*phasma*)", and the "phantom of a deceased (*psuche*)".[418] Curiously, all three are invoked in Hamlet's reflection "for in that sleep of death what dreams may come" – wherein the question of what it means "to be or not to be", on stage, becomes the very cause of the actor's speech. Are these dreams (or phantoms) mere superstition, "only" theatre, or something real? How do they affect the spectator (which is the very test of the play-within-the-play)? How are these images of bodies ("actors") "brought before the spectator's eyes"? Here the question of mimesis, as that of metaphysics, unsettles the distinction between the "realities" within which Freud would have it played out. Yet, as Freud himself analyses as well as anyone, mimesis – as it haunts theory – is here addressed not simply in the metaphorical "mirror" of the stage, but as the uncanny "double" of theatre.[419]

In Homer, according to Vernant, the *eidola* of the deceased "incarnate an actual presence that stands before the particular hero, who addresses them and converses... as though speaking to a real" person.[420] The only proof that this appearance belongs to the soul and not to the body is that, in the living person's desire to embrace it, "all [one] can grasp is empty and insubstantial air." These are, as it were, the "living" figures of those who are known to be dead (and are thus not the image of their cadavers). With them, the look that evokes presence is reciprocated, neither withdrawn nor withheld (although, while seemingly embodied, intangible). Vernant comments that:

> The *eidolon* manifests both a real presence and an irremediable absence at the same time. It is this inclusion of a 'being elsewhere' in the midst of a 'being here' that constitutes the archaic *eidolon*, less as an image in the sense in which we understand it today than as a double.[421]

---

[418] *Ibid*., pp.167-68.

[419] In this respect, Belting cites Augé who "speaks of the 'dreams' the individual has, against the 'icons' of the public realm that live on in the dreams. Their give and take make the collective *imaginaire* a highly contested area that also attracts the desire of political control" (Belting, *op. cit*., p.51).

[420] Vernant, *op. cit*., p.168. In Kantor's invocation of Odysseus (with which this thesis will conclude), the "actual presence" and "particular hero" become – uncannily – one and the same, where for a moment the theatre's double appears on stage.

[421] *Ibid*.

This sense of "a double", as if the image had a life of its own, suggests for the modern subject – the theatregoer in Craig's *Dialogues*, as also the addressee of Freud's "new science" – the realm of superstition. As discussed in chapter three, these appearances are referred to only in order to affirm that they are such things as are not believed in; the "primitive" (or "infantile") belief in spirits having been – as Freud declares – "surmounted" in the modern adult's consciousness.[422] However, if no one believes in ghosts today, how and why is credence still given to these *actors*? How might the scholar question them still (these semblants, doubles, and apparitions), in whose appearance the "I" does not appear to be simply "itself"?

In contrast to the fiction he identifies with the stage (or, more precisely, the page), Freud offers an example of such a "modern" double, or *eidolon*, from the experience of everyday life – addressing the sense of the uncanny in a case of mistaking "the material reality of the phenomenon" of appearance(s). In a long footnote (adding rationalist credentials by citing also the experience of his eminent contemporary, the physicist and philosopher of science Ernst Mach), Freud writes:

> Since the uncanny effect of a 'double' also belongs to the same group it is interesting to observe what the effect is of meeting one's own image unbidden and unexpected.[423] Ernst Mach has related two such observations in his *Analyse der Empfindungen* (1900, p.3). On the first occasion he was not a little startled when he realised that the face before him was his own. The second time he formed a very unfavourable impression about the supposed stranger who entered the omnibus, and thought: 'What a shabby-looking school-master that man is who is getting in!' – I can report a similar adventure. I was sitting in my *wagon-lit* compartment when a more than usually violent jerk of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and a travelling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my

[422] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", trans. Angela Richards, in *Pelican Freud Library* vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, pp.371-2 and pp.374-5.
[423] This can be compared with Otto Rank's discussion of Heinz Ewer's "film-drama" *The Student of Prague*, in chapter one ("The Statement of the Problem") of his study *The Double*, trans. Harry Tucker, London: Maresfield Library, 1989.

compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realised to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. Instead, therefore, of being *frightened* by our 'doubles', both Mach and I simply failed to recognise them as such. Is it not possible, though, that our dislike of them was a vestigial trace of the archaic reaction which feels the 'double' to be something uncanny?[424]

What is uncanny in this momentary failure of recognition between "here and there" – a shock of (non-)recognition that nonetheless bears a charge of affect (in which the "self"-image is "thoroughly disliked", as that of an other)? From where and to where does the "other" return to shock the "I"? Imagine, further, the affective charge were the "I" not even to recognise in another the sense of self, "like" its own? Although the modern question of superstition and of survivals (from Tylor and Frazer, for example, through to Augé and Taussig) is fundamental to that of the uncanny in mimesis, what kind of theatre (or "actor") would be possible where such spirits or doubles are indeed recognised and believed in? This would be the metaphorical "theatre" of anthropologists (or psycho-analysts), reporting on the rituals of spirit possession and shamanism (or of hysteria and transference). Rather than the suspension of disbelief even in the presence of a deceased character on stage, we "moderns" find no cause to believe – as Freud specifies[425] – in such ghosts or spirits. In the theatrical séance, we do not believe, as Hamlet has it, in "nothing!" As discussed in previous chapters, we understand such anthropological possession as but a conceit: "That this player here,/ but in a fiction, in a dream of passion,/ could force his soul so to his own conceit/ that from her working all his visage wann'd,/... and all for nothing!" [*Hamlet*, II.ii, l.545-551] This meta-theatrical lament of the actor – for whom "nothing" remains the very "cause" of speech – addresses a literary theatre of ghosts, rather than that "of death".

Locating the question of mimesis in a situation or event of performance, that is, in the relation *between* actor and audience (as will be seen with both Kantor and Genet in the next sections of this chapter), is part of a modern return to a "pre-Platonic"

---

[424] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", trans. Angela Richards, in *Pelican Freud Library* vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, p.371.
[425] *Ibid*., pp.373-4.

concern with the double, not least as a question of "theory". As we have seen, with Craig, this relates the question of the ghost's appearance ("mere semblance") to that of the actor ("real semblance"). Vernant, indeed, discusses the notion of *eidola* in these terms:

> In this way, [Plato] seems to have modified the orientation of this semantic grouping [of image and imaginary] and to have upset the balance among the three terms implied in the act of *mimeisthai* – that is, the model, the imitator, and the spectator – to the advantage of the first two (model and imitator), which, from now on, are established as the operative pair in the mimetic relationship. In the fifth century, *mimos* and *mimeisthai* had placed less emphasis on the relation of the imitator to what he imitates than on the one between imitator-simulator and the spectator who observes him...[426]

To return to an earlier discussion, what is "at stake" here (as this same history is given by Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Platonic mimesis in – and, indeed, by – Heidegger) is: "to deliver mimesis from imitation (which is the derivative interpretation, deforming and, historically, all the more active and powerful the more reductive, spontaneous, and easy it is) and consequently to wrench mimesis away from the *classical* problematic of (in)adequation in order to back away from the bi-millenial erring for which philosophy has become responsible."[427]

In the context of anthropology or psycho-analysis, this "erring" between rational and irrational (in the sense of "superstition") is marked by an absence (a phantom) that has material presence, as it affects the body to which it returns. As already discussed in the previous chapters, in the relation between animism and automatism, the question of "acting" – in the eye of the beholder – is both unsettled and unsettling in this "theatre". Indeed, as Freud admits in the conclusion of his *Uncanny* essay, the distinctions between material and psychical realities[428] – as between science and

---

[426] Vernant, *op. cit.*, p.165.

[427] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Typography", trans. Eduardo Cadava, in Lacoue-Labarthe *Typography*, ed. Christopher Fynsk, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, p.119.

[428] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", trans. Angela Richards, in *Pelican Freud Library* vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, p.372.

fiction, or between "the uncanny that we actually experience and the uncanny that we merely picture or read about"[429] – "are not always sharply distinguishable".[430]

This unsettling *ambiguity* between what is "actually" experienced and what is "merely" imagined is lost when the scene or the event of these appearances (or apparitions) is thought of only metaphorically as *theatre*. This is the lesson of Craig and Artaud (in chapter one), as also of Kantor and Genet (in the present chapter): that the *theatre* "of death" is not that of a relation between a present actor and a represented, or fictional (absent), "death" – but the very intangibility of the relation *between* actor and audience. Giving representation to the dead *as* theatre makes them present in appearance. It is with a possible "science of ghosts" (as Adorno and Horkheimer, and later Derrida, call it), or with what we might call a "science of theatre" – of mimesis in the "material and psychical reality" of (rather than opposed to) its own fictions – that we can begin to address what is affecting, haunting, or unsettling in the theatre of death.[431]

2. *It is necessary to recover the primeval force of the shock taking place at the moment when opposite a man (the viewer) there stood for the first time a man (the actor) deceptively similar to us, yet at the same time infinitely foreign, beyond an impassable barrier.* – Tadeusz Kantor[432]

This proposal for an understanding of theatre comes from the manifesto that gives the concept of "the theatre of death" its title. Written to accompany Kantor's 1975 production *The Dead Class*, it identifies the event of theatre as an encounter between two persons, actor and spectator, where – in the appearance of the one to the other –

---

[429] *Ibid.*, p.370.
[430] *Ibid.*, p.372.
[431] To anticipate the last section of this chapter, this could be imagined in the event of what Jean-Luc Nancy, in a reflection on (the mask of) the face, calls "the oscillator" – where "the mouth and the look are turned forward and are parallel, turned into the distance, toward an infinite perpetuation of their double and incommunicable position. Between mouth and eye, the entire face oscillates" (*The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, p.73). This could also be "that imperceptible tremor unworthy of true plaster," which Beckett suggests is the "ill seen ill said" of the other in one's own eye (*Ill Seen Ill Said*, London: John Calder, 1997, p.57).
[432] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Theatre of Death", trans. Voy and Margaret Stelmaszynski, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.114.

each appears at once similar, and yet dissimilar, to themselves. The mark of this dissembling resemblance – of an uncanny recognition of similarity in difference – is the separation between the two ("when opposite..."), as formalised by *theatre* as the event of a "barrier" between them (as an instance of the thought, or "theatre-idea", of the relation between audience and actor). Crucially, this complex signification of the theatrical – as "opposition", as "barrier", as appearance or apparition, as resemblance and dissemblance, as aspect, "look", gesture or attitude – concerns not only the explicit appearance of the actor but also the implicit disappearance of the spectator.

Although the separation between these two bodies is asserted rather than analysed by Kantor, we may note its resonance with, for example, the conclusion of a pioneering study of "the collective representation of death" by Robert Hertz (remarking on the occurrence of "second burials") that: "for collective consciousness, death is in normal circumstances merely a temporary exclusion of the individual from human society. This exclusion effects his passage from the visible society of the living into the invisible society of the dead."[433] The dead depart twice – firstly, corporeally (or materially); and secondly, culturally (or psychically). There is a twofold leave-taking even in its minimal, enlightened or rational, modern version of a passage from clinical death to memorial (or "spiritual") death; the latter in fact offering a return to the community, in which a place is found for the dead in some cultural variation of "here lies".[434] Theatre offers, precisely, a play with the understanding (or memory) of this "second" possibility.[435]

We have already seen how the "birth" of the actor – as an "intercession made to Death" – was associated by Craig, at the beginning of the twentieth century, with a fantasy of "the ancient theatre" along the Ganges, in contrast to the contemporary

---

[433] Robert Hertz, "A Contribution to the Collective Representation of Death" in *Death and The Right Hand*, trans. Rodney and Claudia Needham, London: Cohen and West, 1960, p.86.
[434] As Evans Pritchard notes in his introduction: "We do not understand what the double disposal of the dead in Indonesia means until we know also the beliefs held about the ghosts of the dead and also about the rules of mourning, but once we have grasped the three sides to death – corpse, soul, and mourners – we see that each expresses the same idea of transition" (in Hertz, *op. cit.*, p.15).
[435] The political dimension of this has already been noted with Schmitt (in this chapter) and Verdery (in chapter one). As will be discussed in section four of this chapter (below), photography disturbs an insistence on a clear-cut distinction between the material and the psychical, the visible and the invisible, the living and the dead, the rational and the superstitious – as theatre has always unsettled the identity of these terms in their opposition.

manifestation (a survival of such symbolic forms or cultural practices) of the mannequin on stage after Jarry, for instance (with its after life celebrated in Dada and surrealism). It might well be that the idea of a "first time" for anything (such as that of the actor's appearance) necessarily entails an "as if" speculation; but we can, at least, distinguish the estrangement of the habitual (the "exceptional" in Badiou's account) from the appeal to an "original" in Kantor's theatrical (and theoretical) evocation of the *imago hominis*.

Crucially, the essential "foreignness" in the presence of the actor, according to Kantor, finds its "model" in that of the dead.[436] The shock of this appearance is registered as "metaphysical" where the human presence – "whose real meaning and threat appear to us only in dreams"[437] – is encountered "as if for the first time". The ancient separation of the "actor" from the community, making of appearance an act or an event (an "apparition"), survives – for Kantor – in the modern "tragically circuslike Image of Man, as if ["those who had remained on this side"] had seen him for the first time, as if [they] had seen their very selves. This was certainly a shock – a metaphysical shock, we might even say. The live effigy of Man emerging out of the shadows, as if constantly walking ahead of himself…"[438]

Kantor's vision of this *imago hominis* in that of the actor – the "live effigy of man… as if constantly walking ahead of himself" – is profoundly resonant. With its appeal to the profane mysteries of the circus and the fairground (echoing in the very name of the Cricot 2 company) we find again a theatre recalling popular cultural survivals in modernist art practice (of human appearances seen "as if for the first time" in performances of "the lowest rank"). Death is thought "of" theatrically (in a metaphysical shock, as the uncanny in mimesis) in the figure of the "live effigy of Man" – as an "actor". While Kantor's reference to the metaphysical is specific to his own question of this "model" actor, it also draws upon the Cricot 2's twenty-year engagement with the work of Witkiewicz, whose plays provided a ready-made

---

[436] This is what Blanchot characterises as "ambiguity" (Maurice Blanchot, "The Two Versions of the Imaginary", in *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p.263; *L'Espace Littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955, p.276).
[437] Kantor, *op. cit.*, p.113.
[438] *Ibid.*, pp.113-14.

element (as Kantor identified it) in each of the company's productions up to and including *The Dead Class*.[439]

In Witkiewicz's conception, the *art* of theatre (conceived of in terms of "pure form") is grounded in the possibility of and for "metaphysical feeling", which is opposed to the "mechanisation" of modern life: "Art is the expression of what I call *faute de mieux* metaphysical feeling... the expression of the directly given unity of our individuality in formal constructions of any elements (complex or simple), in such a way that these constructions affect us directly, and not through cognitive understanding."[440] From this sense of "unity in plurality" (which is occluded in the everyday banalities of the "problem play" and the dramaturgy of "realism"[441]), Witkacy declares that: "On leaving the theatre, the spectator ought to have the feeling he has just awakened from some strange dream, in which even the most ordinary things had a strange, unfathomable charm…"[442]

In a later essay, Witkacy comments on the "thoroughly falsified" accounts of his theories that critics constructed for themselves in reaction to the term "metaphysical" – lamenting that apparently "not everyone knows that there is a vast abyss between the concepts 'metaphysical' and 'mystical'."[443] For Witkacy, the aesthetics of pure form are the corollary of the experience of (self-)consciousness – a unity of apperception that accompanies the plurality of perceptions, to which art gives existence through form. Most commentary on Kantor's relation with Witkacy focuses

---

[439] Besides Witkacy, Kantor's Cricot 2 – whose first production, in 1955 (the first post-war Witkacy performance in Poland), was *The Cuttlefish* – also paid homage to the original Krakow artists' company "Cricot", which had first performed this same play in 1933. (This will be returned to in part three.)

[440] Stanislaw Witkiewicz, "Pure Form in the Theatre" (1921), trans. Daniel Gerould, in *The Witkiewicz Reader*, ed. Daniel Gerould, London: Quartet Books, 1993, p.147.

[441] "Who cares what goes on at 38 Wspólna Street, Apartment 10, or in the castle in the fairytale, or in past times? In the theatre we want to be in an entirely new world in which the fantastic psychology of characters who are completely implausible in real life, not only in their positive actions but also *in their errors*, and who are perhaps completely unlike people in real life, produces events which by their bizarre interrelationships create a performance in time not limited by any logic except the logic of the form itself of that performance..." (Stanislaw Witkiewicz, "On a New Type of Play" (1920), in *The Mother and Other Unsavoury Plays*, eds. & trans. Daniel Gerould and C.S. Durer, New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1993, p.235).

[442] Stanislaw Witkiewicz, "On a New Type of Play" (1920), *ibid.*, p.237.

[443] Stanislaw Witkiewicz, "Metaphysical Feelings" (1931), trans. Daniel Gerould, in *The Witkiewicz Reader*, ed. Daniel Gerould, London: Quartet Books, 1993, pp.285-6.

on the dramaturgy of a particular play associated with a particular Cricot 2 performance, rather than the aesthetics of performance that is Kantor's concern (and for which the plays offer but a pre-text to explore). The neo-Kantian associations of Witkacy's aesthetics (as well as their relations with the theories of Leon Chwistek) have yet to be addressed (as far as I am aware) in Anglophone discussion of Kantor.[444] It is however precisely such concerns that Kantor's work opens up to comparative analysis (in aesthetic theory), rather than closing down to theatre-studies "disciplinarity".

In terms that themselves provide a basic orientation for thinking through Kantor's own subsequent performances "with" (rather than "of") his plays, Witkacy writes, concerning the creation of "a theatrical idiom capable of expressing metaphysical feelings within purely formal dimensions":

> What is essential is only that the meaning of the play should not necessarily be limited by its realistic or fantastic content, as far as the totality of the work is concerned, but simply that the realistic element should exist for the sake of the purely formal goals – that is, for the sake of a synthesis of all the elements of the theatre: sound, décor, movement on the stage, dialogue, in sum, performance through time, as an uninterrupted whole – so transformed, when viewed realistically, that the performance seems utter non-sense. The idea is to make it possible to deform either life or the world of fantasy with complete freedom so as to create a whole whose meaning would be defined only by its purely scenic internal construction, and not by the demands of consistent psychology and action according to assumptions from real life.[445]

Here Witkacy addresses directly the terms of Freud's construction of "the uncanny", offering a contemporary (rather than a Romantic) example of the relation between fiction and reality in this "border concept" (as Witkacy calls his concept of pure form). As Jan Leszcynski notes, it is a moot point whether Witkacy's plays

---

[444] A similar historical discussion could contrast here Leon Chwistek (pre-war Polish theorist, and advocate, of formism) and Michel Tapié (post-war French theorist and advocate of *informel*) in relation to Kantor's aesthetic "discoveries".
[445] Stanislaw Witkiewicz, "On a New Type of Play" (1920), *op. cit.*, p.234.

themselves realise his own aesthetic criteria, being written with linear exposition and recognisable stage directions and settings (however bizarrely "painterly" these often are).[446] It is the particular distinction of Kantor's productions to have explored the challenge of this formal aesthetic *theatrically* (qualified variously as "impossible", "*informel*", and "zero") – especially as this concerns the reality of the actor.

As already suggested in previous chapters, the "barrier" which Kantor identifies in his *Theatre of Death* manifesto between stage and auditorium, as between death and life, is not simply to be thought *about* theatrically (as if it were given); it is itself a marker *of* and *for* theatrical thought. It evokes the traditional (if not ancient) separation of auditorium and stage by the orchestra – whether as a site of sacrifice (overtaken by modern technology, as Walter Benjamin describes), or as a condition for aesthetic (indeed, for empathetic) thought (creating a space for thought or reflection, as Aby Warburg describes). As a *theatre-idea* (*pace* Badiou), this "barrier" also offers a limit case for the actor's appearance within European naturalist theatre – as discussed in the first chapter (for instance, in the actor's exit from the stage when his character has "died"; or, again, in his return to the stage, the bodies having been taken up, for a "curtain call"). Crucially, for Kantor in 1975 (at the end of his working with Witkacy's plays) "the theatre of death" indicates a way to think – through the work, over twenty years, of the Cricot 2 – beyond the dichotomy of "naturalist" or "art" (and abstract) theatre (as proposed by Witkacy in the 1920s); that is, beyond Stanislavsky or Craig (and Schlemmer), where "the two possible solutions – either autonomous art and intellectual structure or naturalism – cease to be the only ones".[447]

A fundamental aspect of this theatrical thought, however (which will be explored further in part three of this thesis), is what Kantor precisely does not address in this manifesto: his own presence (as a "theatre artist") on stage, as an "act" or appearance that unsettles and renders ambiguous (or "undecidable" as Lacoue-Labarthe would have the question of mimesis) the "impassibility" of this barrier as *theatre*. In the hagiographic commentary that wishes to surrogate itself for Kantor's point of view

---

[446] Jan Leszcynski, "Witkacy's Theory of Art", trans. Lech Petrowicz, in "Dialectics and Humanism", *The Polish Philosophical Quarterly*, Spring 1985, pp.63-4.
[447] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Theatre of Death", trans. Voy and Margaret Stelmaszynski, in *A Journey through other spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.108.

(mistaking his play with, or even parody of, the director), the role of the two "supervisors" of the dead class of actors – the Beadle and the Charlady (who belong to the "other side" of the barrier) – is never discussed. The ambiguity of Kantor's position becomes visible in its contrast with theirs, rather than his role being simply identified with "this side" of the barrier (as with the endlessly repeated metaphor of the scenic "conductor").[448] The particular relation between Kantor and Stanislaw Rychlicki, the actor playing the Charlady, is affecting both within the scenario and, as it were, "in person" – as this can be glimpsed in Andrzej Wajda's film, made at the time of the first version of this production. His relationship with Krzysztof Miklaszewski, who played the Beadle, on the other hand, is commemorated in the latter's book of "encounters", recorded over many years.

In his notebooks accompanying the production of *The Dead Class*, Kantor writes of his realisation of a "model" for the actor (at least, in this new stage of his theatre) derived from the dead:

> If we agree that one of the traits of living people is their ability and the ease with which they enter into various relationships, it is only when encountering the body of a dead person that we realise that this essential trait of the living is possible because of the lack of differentiation between them, because of the sameness and... the 'invisibility'. It is only the Dead who become visible to the living at the price of acquiring their individuality, difference, and their Image...[449]

While the most obvious modern instance of such an "image" would seem to be the photograph (at least, in its pre-digital form) – as, indeed, it becomes an object in

---

[448] In the cringingly awful films documenting the Norwich Sainsbury Arts Centre Kantor exhibition (in 2009), one of the curators even describes Kantor as the conductor in the famous Sea Concert Happening – a role in fact "played" by Edward Krasinski. (The films can be viewed on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dXPLUjADwEU&feature=relmfu; and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yhgw9cKvF7U.) By contrast, the book in which the contributions to the associated symposium are published is excellent: *Kantor was here*, eds. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011.

[449] Tadeusz Kantor, "From the Director's Notebook" [for *The Dead Class*], trans. Michal Kobialka, in Michal Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.240. (This is exactly the view expressed also by Genet in (amongst other texts) *Prisoner of Love*, trans. Barbara Bray, London: Picador, 1990, pp.261-3.)

Kantor's productions (to which we will return in part three) – in *The Dead Class* there is also the return of such "popular culture" survivals as "fairground booths, barber shops, tailor shops" (Schlosser) and of waxwork displays (Schulz). The dead find their own image in this production in the actors' child doubles (who are unaffected as the photographed adult class descend into their "immaturity"), a motif drawn from the example of both Gombrowicz's *Ferdydurke* and Bruno Schulz's story *The Pensioner*.[450] In one of his conversations with Krzysztof Miklaszewski, Kantor offers "a theatrical image" of these doubles as the material replicas of the "second childhood" to which old age is said to return (and which, for Schulz, opens up the world of adulthood to the lost "age of genius"):

> ...[Y]es, although my work is proceeding in a slightly different direction towards "degraded reality". I was drawn to this by my experiences of the sixties: which is to say, by a series of insights related to an understanding of death. Allow me to translate those experiences into an image I can present to you in terms of my theatrical "séance". In come some human beings in the twilight of their lives, dressed in rustic mourning clothes, who have become "ingrown" with the corpses of children. These child-corpses, growing in some kind of an extra-biological dimension, are like parasitical excrescences on their bodies. They are actually the same person in a larval form which contains the entire memory of their childhood, discarded and forgotten out of insensitivity because of the mindless drudgery of everyday life, which strips us of the capacity to grasp the bigger picture. It is the facticity of everyday life which kills our ability to imagine the past. This is the basis for all my thinking on this subject. This is consistent with what I said in my *Anti-Exhibition* of 1963. In my "séance" I try to demonstrate how our past becomes a forgotten element, where feelings, photographic images, and likenesses we once felt close to lie scattered, together with clothes, faces, accidental things. Their "dead" state, however, is deceptive, as it only takes a slight shift for them to begin living in memory and interacting with the present. Images like these are

---

[450] Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke*, trans. Danuta Borchardt, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000 (particularly chapter four, "Preface to 'The Child Runs Deep in Filidor'"); and Bruno Schulz, "The Old Age Pensioner", in *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass*, trans. Celina Wieniewska, London: Picador, 1988.

not the by-product of boredom or middle-aged sentimentality; they bear witness to the urge to discover a full, rich life, the life of the past, present, and future.[451]

This doubling of "likeness" (between the living and the dead) offers a specific instance of the general point made by Didier Plassard, introducing his study of the "actor in effigy" in the modern theatre (specifically in the avant-garde of the 1920s): "the play with effigies, as practised by the futurists, Dadaists, surrealists or the Bauhaus, thus redoubles the fiction, introduces on the stage the imitation of an imitation, a kind of simulacrum to the second degree."[452]

This unsettling of the mimetic relation supposed of the model-copy antinomy[453] reminds us that the fundamental theatrical question "of death" concerns the "likeness" between them, a relation between art and life for which "the actor" is a figure. It is the "live effigy", the sense of the living actor seen in (or as) the image of its replica – in the "look" of its *prosopon* – that evokes the uncanny presence of "dissembling resemblance". The mimetic is not "dramatic" here (it does not consist of the doubling or imitation of "action", in the performance of a narrative art); rather the mimetic itself "acts" in the uncanny power of this doubling, or imitation, in the "person" (or image) of the actor (through the automatism that appears to animate its body, through its technique).

In Kantor's example, the question of human visibility – of *theatre* – occurs with death, in the appearance or "look" of the actor. To echo the terms of portraiture, this is a life "after" death, as its image. The metaphysical shock of seeing a human being "as if for the first time" returns the subject to the uncanny question "of" mimesis – in the figure of a "return of the dead", the presence of an *eidolon* or double of the human being (which appears here as that of "the actor").[454] The iconography of the actor's

---

[451] Tadeusz Kantor, "Dead Class, or a New Treatise on Mannequins", in Krzysztof Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.36.
[452] Didier Plassard, *L'Acteur en effigie*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1992, pp.11-12.
[453] This antinomy was addressed by Vernant in part one of this chapter and, in terms that will re-appear in part four, are named, in his "rather unusual German", by Conrad Fiedler *Vorbild* and *Nachbild* [Moshe Barasch, *Theories of Art*, vol.3, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p.128].
[454] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", trans. Angela Richards, in *Pelican Freud Library* vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, p.370; and Kantor's preparatory

body as image, or as symbolic form, concerns its appearance as an event, including Kantor's *prosopon*, as "an act" (of autobiography) rather than a (descriptive) portrait. Kantor's manifesto records his self-reflection, as a theatre artist-theorist, on the production of stage images (including the image of his own "presence"). His gesture on stage is not so much interpretative, as it enacts a form of address to those who are not (co-)present. It suggests that "desire to see ourselves dead" evoked by Blanchot (in the epigraph to chapter one), as the trace or figure of an autobiographical "after life", and exposes the paradox of theatrical (co-)presence in "speaking" (as an art) of and to those who are not there – in a form of address to an audience who are nonetheless apostrophised as if present. This is the very condition of the *work* of theatrical art – that it is conditioned, not defined, by co-presence; that it "exists", even as do the dead, for the living.

3. *Theatrically, I know of nothing more effective than the Elevation of the Host. When this appearance appears finally before us…* – Jean Genet[455]

Although Genet, as another key artist of the theatre of death, will be the subject of a subsequent study to this thesis, suffice it here to introduce some significant aspects of his comparative interest. In 1954, Genet wrote a "letter to the publisher" that would serve as an introduction to Jean-Jacques Pauvert's single volume edition of two versions of *The Maids*. Rather than comment specifically on the play – or on the differences between the two versions of it that were being published together – Genet offers instead to "say a few words about theatre in general", beginning with the remark: "I do not like it".[456] This commentary about "theatre in general" is distinct from his later commentary on "how to play *The Maids*" (published with the 1963 republication by Marc Barbezat), which addresses quite specifically the stagecraft necessary (at least in Genet's own view) for an effective performance.[457] Nonetheless,

---

notes for the *Dead Class* production, translated by Kobialka in his collection *Further On, Nothing* (*op cit.*).

[455] Jean Genet, "Letter to Jean-Jacques Pauvert", in *Théâtre complet*, Michel Corvin & Albert Dichy eds., Paris: Gallimard, 2002, p.817.

[456] *Ibid.*, p.815. For an account of the various versions of the play text, see Corvin and Dichy, pp.1043-1060; summarised, pp.1080-81.

[457] It is noteworthy that publication of Frechtman's English translations of Genet has largely kept his plays separate from his own reflections on their dramaturgy. While the more "theoretical" texts have been published separately in new translations by Charlotte Mandell

these later remarks – informed especially by having worked, in the meantime, with Roger Blin (a former collaborator of Artaud's) on the first production of *The Blacks*[458] – remain infused with the vision already given in the Pauvert commentary.

After his opening provocation in the letter, Genet immediately contrasts the "coarse format" of Western theatre with the "ceremonies" of Oriental theatre, a contrast that is made explicitly in terms of his experience – as a playwright – of (Western) actors. He writes, for example, of what he calls the "insolent stupidity of actors and theatre people", "their triviality... [and] lack of culture", and of their "choice of livelihood... motivated by [the] mistaken idea that the world is not demanding but easily pleased".[459] Of course, the majority of theatrical productions, working simply to the demands of professional practice, are not "demanding" in Genet's sense. But his diatribe is not merely an excoriation of those who had, nevertheless, facilitated some degree of success (even of scandal) for *The Maids* – especially the celebrated actor (indeed, the "celebrity") Louis Jouvet, whom Genet disparages by simply referring, without name, to "an actor who was famous in his day".[460] Jouvet, who had died a few years before, was also famous as a director and both versions of the play published by Pauvert had been instigated by him in preparation for the first production (in 1947), which he had directed. One version was a second draft of the original text, which had been promoted to him by Cocteau amongst others, which Genet preferred (and was subsequently performed in a second Paris production of the play by Tania Balachova in 1954); and the other version was the final performance script as used by Jouvet for the premiere.

(*Fragments of the Artwork*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), they are again presented as if without connection to the plays. (The volume does not include either of Genet's articles "How to play *The Blacks*" or "How to play *The Maids*.") The Grove Press 1982 re-edition of *The Maids and Deathwatch*, for instance, still uses excerpts from Sartre's essay on *The Maids* (from the appendices to *Saint Genet*) as an introduction, rather than either (or both) of Genet's own notes on the play. Here again the publishing industry colludes with an academic or institutional division of knowledge (or "practice"), as between theatre artist and "theorist".

[458] Genet's experience with Blin was positive; without doubt his vision was also sharpened, however, by his negative experiences of working with both Peter Zadek on *The Maids* and Peter Brook on *The Balcony*.

[459] Corvin and Dichy, pp.815-16.

[460] Corvin and Dichy, p.816; for reviews of the production, pp.1070-1073; and Edmund White, *Genet*, London: Picador, 1994, p.352. Genet maintains the fiction of the play's origin (thus writing out of account Cocteau's role, for instance) in a later reference, in which he nonetheless restores Jouvet's name: "Louis Jouvet was a famous actor in France in the late forties..." (*A Prisoner of Love*, trans. Barbara Bray, London: Picador, 1990, p.90).

Despite giving Genet a new platform – and even a pretext for Sartre to engineer his being awarded a new literary prize – the production was not received on Genet's terms but Jouvet's, as a curtain raiser to the Paris premiere of a play by the recently deceased, and very much established, Jean Giraudoux.[461] To Genet's distaste, the world of these performances' "society" audience was typically read into that of the stage world of Madame and her maids in his play, as if intended to "reflect" it (with Madame's dresses in the production produced by Lanvin, a society couturier), rather than re-imagining the "ritualistic and rhetorical possibilities" of either world.[462] As is evident from his remarks about actors, for Genet "stage" and "society" were quite opposed. Indeed, in his later letters to Roger Blin (reflecting on his production of *The Screens*), Genet writes explicitly: "If we oppose life to the stage, it is because we have the feeling that the stage is a place adjoining death..."[463] In common with the other theatre artists discussed here, Genet rejects the way in which critics' presumptions (concerning motive, for instance) informed interpretation of his plays (as much as they did of his own persona). Furthermore, critics typically attempt to reduce a plot to its story – a relation that all of Genet's work aims, rather, at making more complex. As Genet later writes, introducing George Jackson's letters from prison (as he might equally have done his own): "Every authentic writer discovers not only a new style, but a narrative form that is his alone and that he tends to exhaust, drawing out all its effects for his own purposes..."[464]

Genet's diatribe against "actors and theatre people" (amongst whom perhaps he also intends his former patron, Jean Cocteau), as obscuring his "purposes" as a playwright, is significant not in terms of personalities, however, but for the particular terms in which it is expressed. These fundamentally oppose a theatre where "everything happens in the visible world and nowhere else", and which "too exactly reflects the visible world", to "a ceremonial play [that could be] exquisite... and close to invisibility".[465] It is this interplay between the visible and the invisible that informs

---

[461] Edmund White, *Genet*, London: Picador, 1994, p.346.
[462] *Ibid*., p.352 and p.351.
[463] Corvin and Dichy, p.846.
[464] Jean Genet, "Introduction to *Soledad Brother*" in *The Declared Enemy*, trans. Jeff Fort, ed. Albert Dichy, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, p.49.
[465] Corvin and Dichy, p.816 and p.818.

the values ascribed by Genet to the appearance of the actor, not least in regard to the possibility of a poetic (rather than a "realistic") language for the stage (not only in its "dialogue", but in its whole "verbal architecture"[466]). This alternative use of language was largely obscured in the early productions (and, indeed, is often ignored in performances even today). Rather than "exhibitionism" or "masquerade", what Genet wanted to see in an actor was "a sign charged with signs".[467]

All of this appeal to a theatre guided by the "Orient" follows in the train of theatrical practices already advocated by many in Paris, from Jacques Copeau to Gaston Baty; and, as already discussed in chapter one, from Craig to Artaud.[468] What makes Genet's use of such thinking particular is its association for him with the dead, already in this transitional text, as he begins to define his own sense of theatrical practice, specifically with regard to the fundamental question of the actor's presence or appearance. The issue is not then the appearance of this or that actor (whether or not "famous in his day"), but the terms in which this appearance is to be thought. While Genet repeats the standard reference (associated with, or "after", Craig) to the marionette as a figure for such a concept of the actor,[469] it is his reflections on the human figure modelled by Giacometti, while sitting for his own portrait, that gave Genet a new orientation in his own, unrealised project of a theatre of death.[470]

At the heart of the 1954 manifesto letter (seeking to pre-empt any traditionally "theatrical" reading of his plays[471]), however, Genet evokes the Eucharist as a model for thinking about the relation between actor and audience; that is, in, and for, a theatre of the relation between the visible and the invisible.[472] In the Eucharist rite,

---

[466] This phrase appears in Genet's later text *The Strange Word...*, in Corvin and Dichy, p.883.
[467] Corvin and Dichy, p.816.
[468] The key texts of both are also included amongst the "five works" which encompass the history of theatre practice in Jean-Louis Barrault's "reflections on the theatre", published in 1949 (and in an English translation by Barbara Wall, London: Rockliff, 1951, p.50).
[469] Corvin and Dichy, p.817.
[470] Of an anticipated cycle of seven plays in this project, only *The Screens* (itself originally entitled *Death*) was produced [White, *op. cit.*, p.450].
[471] Simply "reading the play," he declares, "will convince" the reader of the playwright's declared "dislike" of theatre ("in general"), p.815.
[472] See the epigraph to this section of the chapter. Corvin and Dichy remind us (in a note to the text) that Genet had served as a choir boy, close enough to the priest to hear the wafer snap in the mouths of those taking communion (n.6, p.1324, re p.817; also, n.8, p.1162). Edmund White quotes another chorister's later observation of the then nine year old Genet: "I

something is shown which, as an "object" of worship, is not meant to be seen – the meaning of which is concealed in being revealed. The Host, as a sacrament, is neither an image nor an idol, but is the occasion for a theatre of "appearance" (of its monstrance).

In their notes to this essay (in the *Pléiade* edition of Genet's *Théâtre complet*), Michel Corvin and Albert Dichy propose that: "If Genet underlines the words 'appearance appears', it is doubtless to draw attention to the different sense of each of them, in a kind of oxymoron in which the first is given a negative value – it is just appearance – and the second a positive value: to appear is to be revealed, to be manifested."[473] Rather than dividing neatly between noun and verb, however, this "oxymoron" perhaps oscillates (like the aesthetic "in theory"), maintaining an ambiguity between what would otherwise be simply identified with what it is not.

While Genet is hardly concerned with the "real presence" of the Host (in a theological sense), the relation between presence and appearance – in the actions (the "service") of both "actor" and "audience" – remains a question of a visible invisibility, of the invisible in the visible. It is not simply that the "visible appears" (as one would expect), but that the "invisible appears" (as a challenge to theatrical thinking, as concerns the actor especially). The Host (which, quite literally, appears to disappear) is perhaps "just" a wafer (as Genet writes, "a simple white wafer"); but it is also an emblem of appearance, of presentation – the Elevation – for an audience who do not see it, whose gaze is lowered, "since all heads are bowed".[474] The Host is not an immaterial *or* material presence theatrically (rather than theologically), but both simultaneously for all the participants.

The make believe of this ritualised enactment is not that of an illusionistic theatre, then, but of a public complicity concerning an object's appearance as "theatre". Genet relates this "communion" to an anecdote of Sartre's concerning a performance, in a

---

can still hear his voice in church when he was a choirboy, reciting perfectly and with the greatest seriousness the Latin text" (Jean Cortet, in White, p.29). White also draws on *Our Lady of the Flowers* to evoke Genet's impression of – and disillusionment with – the mass (which is also at play in *Elle*).
[473] Corvin and Dichy, p.1322.
[474] Corvin and Dichy, p.817.

prisoner of war camp, of "a French play put on by soldiers, mediocre actors", "evoking some theme – revolt, captivity, courage? – and the distant Motherland was suddenly present not on the stage, but in the room."[475] It is this "theatre of shadows" in the room, rather than any nostalgic "Motherland" [*la Patrie*], that moves Genet in Sartre's example[476]; and he goes on to offer an example of children's make believe (after an allusion to what theatre could be for the Mau-Mau), as a basis for a theatre that, in contrast to the "celebrity" world of brightly lit "premieres" (*pace* Jouvet and Cocteau), he could be entranced by.[477]

In the children's game, as Genet evokes it, bodies are animated by what can be imagined. One need not stage the representation of "night", if – with a word – one can simply "play" it. Moving by the rules of this "night" the children animate its darkened world – in broad daylight. As discussed in previous chapters, this relation between individual and environment (as that between image and event [Blanchot]) echoes that between animism and automatism. In his reflections on "the problem of locating a phenomenon in normal consciousness that corresponds structurally to the framework of [a] patient's morbid world", Eugène Minkowski proposes, concerning "lived space" and the distinction (or the lack thereof) between the "ego" or individual and "environment" or milieu, that: "Darkness is not the mere absence of light; there is something positive about it... Light space is eliminated by the materiality of objects, [while] darkness touches the individual directly, envelops him, penetrates him, and even passes through him..."[478] In consequence, he suggests that "one could almost say that while the ego is permeable by darkness it is not permeable by light."

The consequences of this quite fantastic observation for thinking about theatre are manifold. Suffice it to note here that rather than holding up the lantern that would signify a Midsummer's Moon (not to mention using the lighting apparatus of theatre in the electrical age) the whole body can play this night that pervades or "passes through" it, in whose image the invisible becomes visible (without being graspable).

---

[475] Corvin and Dichy, p.818.
[476] *Ibid.*
[477] *Ibid.*, pp.818-19.
[478] Eugène Minkowski, "Lived Time", quoted in Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia", trans. John Shepley, in *October* 31, Winter 1984, p.30. [Minkowski, *Lived Time*, trans. Nancy Metzel, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, p.427.]

Rather than "acting" at night-time (reacting to the elements of a representational scene), the body is animated by the very "image" of night in its own behaviour.[479] The animation of the body evinces the very sign of "night" as the event of its performance (as theatre).

Relevant to the relation between noun and verb ("appearance appears"), as a potential signification of "the actor appears", Corvin and Dichy draw on Genet's later text *The Strange Word...* to note that the value or meaning of being "on stage" for Genet is more than simply the representation of an absence, but the making it present: "presence, that of the actor, for an absence, that of these 'active symbols' which escape immediate apprehension."[480] This absence is present, not just signified; where theatre's "double" is not the representation of what is present elsewhere, but the evocation of that "nothing" that is the truth of (its) representation – where theatre "adjoins death". As a "cause" for speech this is at the heart of Genet's "aesthetic ontology,"[481] as it becomes explicitly thought of during the 1950s as addressing the dead. It is this that distinguishes what is otherwise simply the very definition of the theatrical – as, for instance, in Anne Ubersfeld's use of the Freudian "negation" in the analysis of the theatrical sign[482] – within culture more generally, as it concerns the "phantasms" (*pace* Agamben on Warburg) that appear "on stage" as the doubles of human appearance.

4. *If Photography seems to me closer to the Theatre, it is by way of a singular intermediary (and perhaps I am the only one who sees it): by way of Death. We know*

---

[479] The other side of this capacity to play "at night" is the anxiety often associated with actual night-time (and not only for children). Indeed, Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" concludes with a reminder that "concerning the factors of silence, solitude and darkness, we can only say that they are actually elements in the production of the infantile anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free" [in *Pelican Freud Library* vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985, p.376]. This relation to the "darkness" of desire and theatre would be the subject of another study. Suffice it note that the key difference with the game is perhaps the sense of isolation in relation to an environment contrasted with its social sense of environment. (This is, indeed, Freud's own observation concerning an instance of childhood fear of "the dark" [in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality", trans. James Strachey, in *Pelican Freud Library* vol.7, ed. Angela Richards, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983, p.147].)

[480] *Ibid.*, p.1323.

[481] *Ibid.*, p.1324.

[482] Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999 (section 3.4 specifically).

the original relation of the theatre to the cult of the dead: the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the Dead: to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead: the whitened bust of the totemic theatre, the man with the painted face in the Chinese theatre, the rice-paste make-up of the Indian Kathakali, the Japanese Noh mask… – Roland Barthes[483]

Barthes is evidently not the "only one" for whom "the way of death" has been significant for thinking about theatre. If not the nominal subject of his essay, this "singular intermediary" (as "the way of death") is clearly its principal interest, which, even if not always in theatre, has always been seen in the photograph. This is evoked in the "unconscious thought" of its history by Benjamin, for instance, when noting the "necessary" association of the cemetery with exposure time in the early portraiture of David Hill. The Greyfriars Cemetery in Edinburgh, Benjamin notes, provided a place for the "quiet concentration" of the sitter, where "the procedure itself caused the subject to focus his life in the moment rather than hurrying on past it…"[484] Hill's photographed subjects, Benjamin suggests, "were at home in the cemetery".[485] Photography, indeed, offers its own question as to what is seen in death, as the inscription (or "transcription") of death within vision – as the "look" of the other, of their countenance, as the "likeness" of a human being. Barthes too identifies this contemplation of the body's "passage into immobility" in sitting for a photograph (albeit with a much condensed time of "exposure") as: "...that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter."[486] The photograph, like the stage, makes this intimation of the spectral visible – an effect of the frontal mimetic encounter of the *prosopon* in its alterity.[487]

---

[483] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Flamingo, 1984, p.31.
[484] Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography", trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, *Selected Works*, vol.2.2, eds. Michael Jennings, *et al*., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005, p.514.
[485] *Ibid*., p.512.
[486] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Flamingo, 1984, p.13-14.
[487] In two examples that would be returned to a subsequent study to this thesis, Derrida is caught on film improvising the same "spectral" reflections as Barthes, as he addresses the image of Pascale Ogier in Ken McMullen's *Ghost Dance*; and this "scene" of contemplation

Before turning to a consideration of the photograph in Heidegger's commentary on Kant's Schematism (below) – as the very faculty of being able to imagine concepts at all (considered, specifically, in the image of the death mask) – it is important to note what it is that Barthes proposes about theatre in this much cited paragraph from his essay. Fundamentally, there is a focus here on the techniques of appearance, as those of a "separation" between actor and audience (or community); making visible a "barrier" between them through make-up, for instance, as this figures the relation between the living and the dead. It is conspicuous that Barthes' examples are of non-European theatre (without any echo of *Hamlet*, for instance), but it remains a question as to what kind of "theatre" is meant – after all, this "oriental" turn (as already discussed in chapter one) is that of an occidental tradition. To think a concept of "the *theatre* of death" – even in the sense of "the only one who sees it" – requires that one has already engaged with such precedents as Craig, where this is not the literary theatre (of ghostly characters and "haunted stages"), but precisely a *theatre* of death. How the look or appearance of the actor is "made up" (or masked) – as one amongst several significations of dissembling resemblance between audience and actor – is addressed by those European theatre artists (Genet, Kantor, Müller, Castellucci, Nadj) whose practices (none of which is "the only one") may be comparatively studied under the title of "the theatre of death".[488]

"If Photography seems to me closer to the Theatre," Barthes writes, then closer than what? The essay speaks of theatre at this point in relation to painting, as the production of an image from which photography is distinguished. This reference to visual art is usually ignored in theatre studies' citations of this passage, perhaps because it addresses how notions of "realism" (or, indeed, of representation) are embedded in those of technique and medium (not to mention what it is that makes of photography, and by comparison theatre, an art). Indeed, the difference that photography makes to an understanding of mimesis (in painting and theatre) is present from the very beginning of discussion of the "new medium" in terms of

is also evoked by Genet's reflections, whilst "sitting" for him, on the look of the painter, Alberto Giacometti.

[488] It is worth noting here also that the focus on twentieth century European art theatre for elaborating this concept of theatre – oriented by the provenance of its title – should not be thought of as exclusive of other historical practices, to cite both Noh and Butoh, for instance.

aesthetics. Baudelaire, for instance, condemned photography as an "insult to both the divine art of painting and the sublime art of the actor,"[489] while Craig too refused to accept this new art of visibility as any kind of model for theatre.[490]

For Barthes, however, the contrast with painting brings out an association of theatre and photography, in the sense of a "here and now" (in relation to what is visible) that is nonetheless permeated with the "there and then" (a relation to what is invisible in the image). In this association of photography and theatre, an art of theatre is related to its "origins" (the "first actors"), where the thought of theatre and death is condensed into that of a "theatre of death". As we have seen, this is true for both Kantor and Genet, with the separation of actors from the community, "by [their] playing the role of the dead". Here "actors" stand in for the dead, rather than play the role of Death (as in the Mystery Plays, for example). This is not so much the description of an historically attested, modernist practice in relation to a mythical one (*pace* Craig's invocation of ancient Indian temples), however, but the identification of a common cultural *thought* in addressing the mimetic work of art. Furthermore, the relation between the theatrical and the photographic is crucial for any consideration of theatre research, where the "material" of study poses a question of the relation between aesthetics and ontology (already touched on in the discussion of Adorno and Fischer-Lichte in the previous chapter).

The relation of the medium to aesthetics – as a question concerning the ambiguity of a "likeness" of human being (as resemblance or dissemblance) – is significant, not least because Barthes' discussion is a reflection on what it means to *see* a photograph, as a testimony to the "life" of the spectator (of their emotion) in relation to the present absence that is figured in and by its image. In contrast to the "frenzy to be lifelike" in both mainstream theatre and photography, for Barthes photography may be viewed as

---

[489] Charles Baudelaire, "The Salon of 1859", in *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. P.E. Charvet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.295.
[490] Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Über-Marionette", in *On the Art of the Theatre*, ed. Franc Chamberlain, London: Routledge, 2009, pp.30-31. A view of this ongoing debate in the 1930s is given by Benjamin, in his second "Letter from Paris", championing Gisèle Freund's study of photography in France in the nineteenth century, not least in relation to the arguments of the surrealist poet, Louis Aragon (Benjamin: "Letter from Paris (2): Painting and Photography", trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings*, vol.3, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

"a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead."[491] This analogy concerns the conditions of and for seeing: how, indeed, does one *see* "the dead"? How and why does this analogy with the "primitive theatre" (*pace* Murray) address the experience of the photographed, as that of the technologies (including theatre) of human visibility?[492] The photograph is not simply "of" the dead; it produces an image of the living as (if) dead – a possibility that then belongs to human appearance, as this was previously associated (according to Barthes) with theatre.

In addressing the dead, Barthes' essay is exemplary in evoking a personal "cult" of their image within modernity. The essay famously turns around an image – a votive image for Barthes' own memory, kept "in front of me, on my work table... sanctified"[493] – that falls under a private taboo against public exhibition.[494] In an echo of animist belief, the medium of the image is itself emotionally identified with the figure, or person, of whom it is – in appearance – an image, whose look it "captures", "takes", or, as Heidegger writes, "transcribes" [*eine Abschreibung*].[495] Here, fundamentally, we find a curious revaluation of the sense of an indexical "realism" – as, paradoxically, an image of the "after life", in which the photograph (in the light of its look) has become a relic (in a private cult of memory). Like Benjamin, André Bazin relates this to surrealism, remarking that photography as "an hallucination is also a fact".[496] This is the very ambiguity, concerning the "material and psychical realities" (*pace* Freud) of actors and the dead, that was discussed in section one of this

---

[491] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Flamingo, 1984, p.31-2. The example of the "tableau vivant" and the question of "medium" receives widespread discussion in the critical reception of James Coleman (which would also be the subject of subsequent study to this thesis).

[492] Artaud, by contrast, offers an extraordinary testimony of the face as "an empty force, the field of death" ["The Human Face", in *Watchfiends and Wrack Screams*, trans. and ed. Clayton Eshleman, with Bernard Bador, Boston: Exact Change, 1995, p.277].

[493] Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 2010, p. 220.

[494] "I cannot reproduce" it, Barthes writes; for the reader there would be in it "no wound", *Camera Lucida*, p.73. As an essential register of the after-life of "an event lived as an image" (Blanchot), the figure of the wound is also invoked by both Genet and Barba, and touches upon the very condition of knowledge that this thesis addresses (*pace* Warburg).

[495] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, p.66; *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1973, p.93.

[496] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image", in *What is Cinema?* vol.1, trans. Hugh Gray, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p.16.

chapter. As concerns the place of the dead, Heidegger's "example" of the photograph (below) relates, similarly, to the ancient Roman conception of the *imago*,[497] as a materialisation of the "look" rather than its metaphorical evocation. With this question of mimetic technique we return to the fundamental issue of what is (or is not) "life like" in the appearance of the dead.

Both Barthes and Heidegger write of the photograph in the light, so to speak, of an "impression" made or taken in the form of a death mask. This is explicit in Heidegger's text (discussed below), albeit drawing from an unmentioned source (at least, as Jean-Luc Nancy proposes) – Ernst Benkard's *Das ewige Antlitz* (loosely translated as "Undying Faces"), which "presents photographs of the death masks from the collection of the Schiller National Museum of Marbach."[498] In Barthes another such intertextual reference is implicit (at least, as Colin MacCabe proposes) – drawing on André Bazin's "meditation on the relation between photography and death, particularly in relation to family portraits" in his 1945 essay on the ontology of the photographic image (reprinted in 1958 and 1975).[499]

In a footnote to this essay, discussing the relation between painting and photography (in which what is at stake is the notion of "likeness"), Bazin writes: "There is room, nevertheless, for a study of the lesser plastic arts, the molding of death masks for example, which likewise involves a certain automatic process. One might consider photography in this sense as a molding, the taking of an impression, by the manipulation of light."[500] This minor history – of the "lesser plastic arts" – is the subject of Julius Schlosser's study of wax portraiture (already referred to in chapter

---

[497] "The *imago* guarantees that the deceased will be present on earth after his funeral. This presence is real, and has nothing to do with the presence/ absence of images that merely resemble him... For the *imago* is, strictly speaking, neither the wax mask nor the wax of the mask, but, as we have seen, a form detached from the corpse and transmitted to the wax" (Florence Dupont, "The Emperor-God's Other Body", trans. Brian Masumi, in Michael Feher (ed.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, pt.3, New York: Zone, 1989, pp.413-414). This relates, of course, to the discussion of wax works within popular cultural "survivals" in chapter two.

[498] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, p.91.

[499] Colin MacCabe, "Barthes and Bazin: the Ontology of the Image", in *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, p.75.

[500] André Bazin, *op. cit*., p.12.

two), where we find this earlier form of Heidegger's "transcription" in what Schlosser calls (with Vasari) "casting from nature".[501] In fact this notion goes back to testimony in Pliny, and offers precisely an example of what Lacoue-Labarthe identifies as a "typological" conception of mimesis, itself grounded in a metaphysics of the distinction between active and passive, form and matter.[502] The relation of this history of "likeness", or technique of mimesis, with theatre is explicit in the tradition of the ancient Roman funeral mime (discussed previously, and with Belting in chapter one), to which Genet also famously alludes.

The relation of the face, or rather of its look or countenance, to the very concept of an image is given in the example with which Heidegger reads Kant's Schematism; an example, which – as Jean-Luc Nancy notes – is "essential", not least because it goes without any comment by the "thinker of 'being-toward-death'".[503] To clarify "the Being of image [*des Bildseins*]" in "what Kant discusses under the heading of 'Schematism'",[504] Heidegger offers an account of the three temporal senses of the "image" [*Anblick* (*Bild*)]: as an impression of present [*Bild*], past [*Nachbild*], and future [*Vorbild*] possibilities of appearance.[505] In this context, Heidegger writes of the transition from the first sense – of "what shows itself ('this-here')" – into the second, that: "the image is always an intuitable this-here, and for this reason every likeness [*Abbild* ("literally 'image from'"] – for example, a photograph [*Licht-bild* (in Heidegger's own note), literally a "light-image"[506]] – remains only a transcription [*Abschreibung*] of what shows itself immediately as 'image' [*Bild*]"[507]; that is, the

[501] Julius Schlosser, "History of Portraiture in Wax", trans. James Loughridge, in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008, p.236.

[502] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Typography", trans. Eduardo Cadava, in Lacoue-Labarthe *Typography*, ed. Christopher Fynsk, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, p.126.

[503] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005, p.92.

[504] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, p.65; *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1973, p.93.

[505] *Ibid.*, p.65/ 92.

[506] This is in contrast to the more familiar *Aufnahme*; or, indeed, more simply *Bild*, for a photograph.

[507] Heidegger, *op cit.*, p.65-6/ 93.

photograph offers an "after-image" [*Nachbild* ("'copy', literally 'after-image'")] of that which presents or shows itself in its image.[508]

Barthes tells his reader that the so-called "winter garden" photograph (that he will not reproduce in his book) features his mother aged five, in the company of her brother aged seven. The image is found by Barthes, as it were, to belong to his memory; an image that pre-dates his own birth, but in which he sees something of his relationship with his mother's look – or (in the vocabulary of Levinas) her countenance as it "shows itself in its image".[509] This photograph is inscribed in the essay as witness to the existence, for Barthes, of this look after her death; that is, to an enduring of their relationship, her look having been withdrawn from life, in already being given to death, as it were, by the photograph, even before his own birth as its witness. (This recalls the suggestion of Derrida's, addressing the age of the photograph, that "we owe ourselves to death".) This "look" then exists, although its subject is dead. The "look" does not belong only to its subject, but to the spectator; the after life of the seen is what animates the seer. There exists something in the art or technique of mimesis (to which the photograph testifies in its modernity) that is no more reducible to representation than is a cadaver (*pace* Blanchot's "two versions of the imaginary"). Just as we imagine the fiction of Cordelia's breath in *Lear*, we imagine Barthes' sense of what is not "showable" (even if woundingly visible) in a photograph. With this "stillness" of the image, by which we are animated, moved, or touched, we might suggest that the proto-cinematic gesture is not so much the casting of a death mask (in Heidegger's "transcription"), but the practice – when people died at home, and were visited there before burial – of stopping the clocks at the time of death. This relates to theatre, where "real time" and "event time" are identified in the experience of an audience, as a "time out of time", from which we "return" to the everyday.

Distinct from Barthes' critical concern with the photograph as an anonymous medium of death (where, nonetheless, a particular instance touches the spectator to the

---

[508] Heidegger's discussion here can be contrasted with Hans-Georg Gadamer's remarks on "Plato as Portraitist" (trans. Jamey Findling and Snezhina Gabova, in Richard Palmer (ed.), *The Gadamer Reader*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), on the *nach/ vor-bild*, specifically, p.311; and on photography, specifically, p.317.
[509] To relate this to the question of countenance, and "look", in the Castellucci production discussed in chapter three would be for another occasion, addressing what remains "auratic" in the age of technological reproducibility.

quick),[510] Heidegger's "schematic" concern (as it were) with the photograph seems untouched by the thought of a "dead person", with the paradoxical allusion to their death mask as an anonymous image. Where Barthes tries to capture something of the dead person's presence in the "transcription" of absence that is "punctual" (or wounding), Heidegger adduces what is universal (for the schema is the very condition of thought abstracting from images). Photography is emblematic here (at least, within a certain "common sense"), as Bazin writes: "All the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence."[511]

Nonetheless, Heidegger's account allows us to reflect on Barthes' example of the Winter Garden photograph, as: "according to the meaning of the expression 'image' hitherto delimited, making-sensible means on the one hand the manner of immediate, empirical intuiting, but on the other hand it also means the manner of immediate contemplation of a likeness in which the look of a being presents itself" (that is, in which it endures, in its *Nachbild*; a "present" that inscribes absence)[512] – thanks to which comparison (or "a world") is possible. In its "after image", the past discloses a present future. The past becomes visible in and as a present that it never was, a sense of being seen that Barthes calls a "theatre" of death.

The further meaning of the image in its survival (as superstition), which Heidegger proceeds to address – in which it can show something (of human *being*) "in general"[513] – is exactly what Barthes' writing wishes to resist. In Kantor's theatre of death productions (*The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole*) "a kind of tableaux vivant" gets staged, regarding the generic photograph of a school class, or a company of soldiers (from the First World War). It is on the basis of the image "in general" that the question of the look informs "the making-sensible of concepts", the "look of [its] possible likenesses", in Heidegger's (modern) reading of the Kantian Schematism – a

---

[510] Barthes writes, for instance: "Contemporary with the withdrawal of rites, photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual...", Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Flamingo, 1984, p.92.

[511] André Bazin, *op cit.*, p.13. (This can be compared with both Maeterlinck and Obraztsov, reflecting on the puppet rather than the actor, in chapter one.)

[512] Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997, p.66; *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1973, p.94.

[513] Martin Heidegger, *ibid*.

process of which, however, there can be no "transcription" as such ("the concept is also essentially not capable of having its likeness taken" [*der Begriff ist wesensmässig nicht abbildbar*][514]). It is in this aporia (of the photographic analogy) that the question of the theatre archive (and its study) re-appears. What is it that so appeals to be remembered in certain images of Kantor's performances? What is their actors' "likeness" [*Abbild*] to – for the concept of the *theatre* of death – as an event, albeit as "still-ed" (in their *Nachbild*)? As remarked (with Amelia Jones and Philip Auslander) in chapter one, this "theatre" – in its concept "of death" – can be theorised as it has been photographed; that is, theorised in the light of, or "after", its image [*Lichtbild*].

Jean-Luc Nancy offers various reflections on the example of Heidegger's reading of Kant, drawing attention to his example of the death mask – "the *Gesicht* (face) of one without *Sicht* (sight), such is the exemplary image"[515] – without however commenting on the very example of the "example". What makes of something an example? What aspect of its "aspect" gives it to such use – in the "Morgue", for example, where Rilke writes of those whose "eyes beneath their eyelids have averted/ their gaze from outwardness to that within"?[516] How can a person be seen, for instance, not as or for themselves (a subject) but as either "dead" or as "an actor", in or as the uncanny mimesis of their own appearance? Perhaps it goes too far to suggest an analogy between the Schematism and the stage (as Heidegger does between the Schematism and the exposure or "transcription" of the photograph), which would re-inscribe the analogies of this thesis into questions of an historical-philosophical critique.[517] In its possible impossibility, however, this is something that the following chapter will explore with the theorisation of theatre by Kantor – not least in the very possibility of being able to conceive of this theatre in its "after image", in the very possibility of its "example" as the study (or concept) of the "theatre of death".[518]

---

[514] *Ibid.*
[515] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image, op. cit.*, p.24.
[516] Rilke, "Morgue", in *Selected Works: Poetry*, trans. J.B. Leishman, London: Hogarth Press, 1980, p.166.
[517] How analogy operates in the method of critique that construes the necessity of the Schematism would be a topic for further study.
[518] Despite the scepticism concerning etymology in the previous chapter we might note that "schema" is a word used for mask (also signifying shade and phantom) in the middle ages – alongside the double sense of the Latin *larva* and *masca*, signifying both mask and ghost, where this pagan vocabulary is mediated for the Christian era by Augustine (Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Le corps, les rites, les rêves, le temps*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2001, pp.230-31).

***The Theatre of Death*: The Uncanny in Mimesis – Part Three**

Chapter 6: Tadeusz Kantor – *An Avant-Garde of Death*

And this is how there began a ten-year era of two of my productions The Dead Class
and Wielopole, Wielopole, *which were to give testimony to the true nature of my
heretical ideas. It was the era of my own avant-garde. The avant-garde of: the
recollection of the past, memory, the invisible, emptiness and death.*
– Tadeusz Kantor[519]

So far this thesis has addressed the "theatre of death" not so much in terms of an
historically specific theatrical practice, as of a concept for comparative research
within the history of theatre studies; or, more specifically, as a concept of and for a
theoretical (or paradigmatic) iconography of human appearance – as that of an actor
within this particular art practice. The mimetic figure of "the actor" has been
addressed in anthropological-aesthetic terms as a "likeness" that refers to a model or
paradigm – in this theatre specifically – of "death". Examples of this figure, or
paradigm, discussed so far have included Craig's über-marionette and Artaud's
"animated hieroglyph" (in chapter one), and Genet's "sign charged with signs" and
Kantor's "live effigy" (in chapter five). Rather than taking the title of the "theatre of
death" as a single, composite whole, the thesis has considered how, both historically
and theoretically, a concept "of death" distinguishes this concept of "theatre". It has
indicated a minor tradition of theatrical practice(s) within the larger field of European
cultural history, in which a particular sense of the mimetic has been distinguished by
the thought "of death"; for example, in terms of the photograph, discussed by both
Heidegger and Barthes.

The preceding chapters have considered the question as to how a mimesis of death (as
an experience of the uncanny in and of human life) has been thought of theatrically
(not least, as a question of theory), as a site where the dead make an appearance – not
as ghostly characters belonging to the interpretative staging of literary drama (a
metaphorical hauntology), but in the very figure of the actor, who represents the "life"
of the stage specifically as opposed to that of the auditorium (a mimetic hauntology).

---

[519] Tadeusz Kantor, "A Classroom", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, ed.
Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.228.

The actor (as paradigm or *imago* of human appearance in this theatre of death) is a figure for the concept of the opposition (as theatre) between "this world" (a material extension of the auditorium) and that of "another" (an aesthetic, indeed metaphysical, alternative to the auditorium). The space in *between* (participating equally in the similarity and difference of the terms in this opposition) is "itself" a philosophical or theoretical figure of and for mimesis, which Lacoue-Labarthe indicates by the paradox of the "undecidable 'itself'". This mimetic uncanny appears "between" the various theoretical oppositions that gloss theatrical practice (*pace* Barthes and Stengers), as between the rational and the superstitious, the sacred and the mundane, the fictional and the real. What lies between, theatrically, "is" – in and as its *appearance* – not simply an opposition, as between (either-or) appearance and being, but its unsettling, in the actor's mode of existence (as an *imago hominis*) on stage.

In this "theatre" (as Barthes observed), it is ultimately the metaphysical relation between the living and the dead, or the animate and the inanimate, which is figured by the actor's appearance opposite an audience – as each appears both similar to, and yet distinct from, the other. Here the question of these paradigmatic oppositions is transformed through the analogies and aporia of a concept of theatre, as that "of death". Borrowing a title of Warburg's (alluding to Goethe[520]), the present chapter then addresses "the problem in between", as it appears as a question of *theatre* in Kantor specifically – through his references to "barrier", "closed work", and "demarcation line" (also translated as "dividing line"), as well as his own "presence" on stage, which already presages the "death" of the Cricot 2, as the immanence of its future in the past. As proposed in the Introduction, the "theatre of death" is not the description of a past theatrical practice, but a research into the iconographic, mnemotechnical, material, and metaphysical possibilities of its concept. In the understanding of different artists – including Kantor – its meaning has always still to be produced (or invented) by, rather than derived from, its potential concept. It is this that gives the possibility of comparing these different artists' practices, as if they were addressing each other.

---

[520] Aby Warburg, "The Problem in Between", trans. David Britt, in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, Los Angeles: Getty Institute, 1999, pp.727-28. The German, however, speaks more literally of "the middle" – *das Problem liegt in der Mitte* – rather than "in between" [*dazwischen*]; *ibid.*, p.777.

Part three of this thesis, therefore, offers further refractions of the concept, as it is evidenced in Kantor's work specifically. Crucially, this approach maintains the tension between the implicit "completion" of this work (as if it were now in and of the past, available to analytical description) and its enduring challenge to historical thought – precisely to be thought, as a *concept* of theatre. Here the caution proposed in the Introduction – not to subsume the parts of the analogy offered in the thesis title into a single statement, but rather to maintain the incompleteness marked by the colon between its elements – concerns the "example" of what this concept might mean in, and for, an understanding of Kantor's theatre. Themes that will recur in the following sections, as variations of its analogies and aporia, include: the "living" archive in the example of the Cricoteka; the theatrical *instance* or "presence" of actor, object, and photograph; the after life of these in relations between performance and exhibition; ideas of "demarcation" and "participation"; and, in place of a conclusion, Kantor's image of "the return of Odysseus".

I. *What is remembered of the Cricot 2 theatre practice – between actors, objects, and photographs?*

Given that it is the concept that allows for a reading of Kantor's eponymous "theatre of death" manifesto, as distinct from this concept itself being read simply in terms of the manifesto (as though in an extended paraphrase), how does Kantor's theatre practice allow us to think of this concept of "theatre" *specifically*, as a question of its art, in the image (or thought) "of death"? While "answers" to such a question may be sought primarily in *The Dead Class* (the production which the manifesto was written to accompany), much could also be learnt from the last Cricot 2 productions (*I Shall Never Return* and *Today is my Birthday*) – as these offer their own (theatrical) interpretation, by Kantor himself, of the precedent already proposed by (or, indeed, of) such a theatre of death.

With respect to the posthumous performances of *Today is my Birthday*, as a testimony to Kantor's "presence" without his being present (the company fulfilling commitments to the many co-producing venues), this question of understanding "death" in the theatre of the Cricot 2 has been historically contentious amongst those of its "representatives" still living. Here the example of essays by Guy Scarpetta have

provided a screen for questions about Kantor's legacy between the members of the company and the custodians of its archive, the Cricoteka, such as Anna Halczak.[521] With these last productions, however, we have examples of how the avant-garde of Kantor's theatre (of death) – in the 1970s – was remembered a decade later, in their theatrical after life, as part of the Cricot 2 company's own performance history. They offer an example of the mnemotechnics, as it were, of the Cricot 2's own pathos formulae, in (and of) performance, in contrast to the exhibition work to which the archive is dedicated. This (ongoing) tension – discussed with Klossowicz and Fischer-Lichte in chapter four – is not the least of what makes Kantor's "theatre of death" specific (in comparison with Genet and Müller, for instance), as it informs the very possibility of research into its potential concept.

The transmitted *pathos* of the late performances is not that of the (literary) ghosts invoked, for instance, by North American scholars of the major theatre tradition, in which actors are thought of in terms of metaphors attributing "life" to fictional presence(s), to their roles or characters on stage.[522] What returns in the Cricot 2, rather, is an embodied "repertory" of actor-characters, which (in Kantor's terms) "are defined by the attributes of the place (a cloakroom, for example), or a specific idea (the idea of a journey, for example)."[523] Starting with *The Water Hen* in 1967, this cast of "characters" is applied to, rather than derived from, Witkacy's plays in the Cricot 2 performances. For example, amongst the "parade of characters" that Kantor reviews in his retrospective essay *My Work – My Journey* (1988) is "the Wandering Jew with the Trumpet of the Last Judgement wrapped in a black mournful

---

[521] This is touched on by Miklaszewski (in the "Postscript" to his *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, pp.150-51): "This marked the first schism in the group, [between] the actors... [and] the 'scholarly' position associated with the Cricoteka..."; and is discussed by Scarpetta in the essays "Remous posthumes" and "L'autre scène" in his *Kantor au présent*, Arles: Actes Sud, 2000 (pp.185-203).

[522] One could chart an institutional history of this invocation ("after" Derrida's "hauntology" of Marx's spectres) in the mutual referencing of publications between such scholars as Blau, Carlson, Roach, and Raynor. It is worth noting that metaphors of the "natural" (the vital, the authentic, and the true) in expressive (distinct from "dead", "lifeless", or "artificial") acting change their values historically – so that actors as opposed (by their partisans) as Garrick and Kean can both be lauded for their performances as living embodiments of the passions (as the terms by which these are described take on new, and even opposed, meanings). [See, for example, Nicoletta Caputo, "Performing the Passions", in *Assaph* 24, 2010.]

[523] Tadeusz Kantor, "Cricot 2", in Kobialka (ed. and trans.), *Further On, Nothing*, p.115.

emballage"[524] – an emblematic figure of the "idea of journey" from *The Water Hen* production, which reappears in the 1979 production *Where are the Snows of Yesteryear?*

Crucially, the "idea" of many of these actor-characters is that of the object which is their attribute, an object that has its own existence in and for an archive – the Cricoteka – as (in this case) of this *pathos* of "journey". The object is the model "actor" of an idea (neither a puppet nor a living actor), that represents "itself" beyond any particular performance in which it makes an appearance. Although photographs are the principal vehicles for this *pathos* in its after life, the object itself retains its own "theatricality" (not necessarily associated with a human figure). The emballage of the Trumpet of the Last Judgement, for instance, reappears in Kantor's "theatre without theatre", not as a document (costume or prop) but as a "character" itself, another emblem of "the lowest rank", which can still be seen by audiences in exhibitions – as, for instance, the 2011 Brussels show, *The Power of Fantasy: Modern and Contemporary Art from Poland*, which marked Poland's first Presidency of the EU.[525]

Another example of the after life of Kantor's theatre in exhibitions can be seen with the school bench and pupil figure that Kantor made as part of *The Classroom* installation for the *Présence Polonaise* show at the Pompidou in 1983, and recently included, for instance, in the 30th Council of Europe Art Exhibition (albeit in a version that is on loan from a private, German collection, rather than the Cricoteka). The theme of this exhibition is "The Desire for Freedom: Art in Europe since 1945", exploring the complex evidences of the "core values of the Enlightenment – freedom, equality, and human rights" in both "democracy and socialism" (where the "and" still

---

[524] Tadeusz Kantor, "My Work - My Journey", in *Further On*, *Nothing*, trans. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p.20.
[525] The emballage appears in a photograph on p.14 of the catalogue of the exhibition (mentioned already in chapter two). The symbolic importance of this first EU Presidency, as a new turn in the "geo-political reality" of Polish history, cannot be underestimated. It also marks the end of the beginning of the post-1989 change of horizon for thinking through an understanding of Kantor's work (discussed in the Introduction and returned to at the end of this chapter); a change not only in the distance from the history of Kantor's own "life time", but also as a change in the historical sense of that "life time" itself. As we move further away in time the sense that a "life" is the compass to understand an historical period (the "short twentieth century") becomes less evident, as it passes out of generational memory.

implies an "or"). Kantor's figure appears in the section, curated by Michail Schischkin, under the title of "Horrors and Darkness", where it is suggested that the figure is connected not simply to memories of childhood, but "the dramas of the twentieth century" (with the rather paradoxical proposal that "death had stolen [the class's] future").[526]

The "return" of various object-characters on stage in the Cricot 2 productions manifests the break made (beginning in *The Dead Class*) with the various anti-dramaturgical strategies developed for working with Witkacy's plays, from the 1961 *Little Country Manor* production on. Although the material-spatial concept of this production had its own after life as *The Wardrobe*, the conception of the actor-characters themselves (distinct from this "attribute of place") was not yet as fully autonomous from the playwright as it would become. (The first Cricot 2 production, in 1956, with *The Cuttlefish* offers a different relation again between the visual and theatrical arts, mediated then by the participation of Maria Jarema and offering a "return" of an aesthetic seen in the Clandestine theatre.) Where Witkacy's plays had offered a "pre-text" for performance (as in the "Zero theatre" and "Happening theatre" years), now – after 1975 – these autonomous "characters" (with their object-attributes) became the work-"text" of the Cricot 2 theatre itself.

In the case of *The Dead Class*, these characters were introduced by Kantor in the production's programme (given their residual association with Witkacy's play *Tumour Brainiowicz*[527]) with a "warning" that:

> And since all this is happening in a theatre, the actors of *The Dead Class* –
> loyally sticking by the rules of theatrical ritual – take on some roles from a
> play. However, they seem to attach little importance to them; their acting
> appears mechanical, borne onwards by little more than the momentum of
> general habit; we even get the impression that they ostentatiously refuse to

[526] Monika Flacke (ed.), *Verführung Freiheit: Kunst in Europa seit 1945*, Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2012, p.111.
[527] Stanislaw Witkiewicz, "Tumour Brainiowicz", in *Witkiewicz: Seven Plays*, trans. and ed. Daniel Gerould, New York: Martin Segal Theatre Centre, 2004.

acknowledge the fact of role-playing and are simply repeating somebody else's lines and imitating movements...[528]

While the pre-existing, written element – as embodying the past in the present – would seem, from the point of view of traditional theatre, to offer an occasion for the Cricot 2's early researches into the potentials of a theatrical *art* (informed also by Witkacy's own aesthetic-theoretical writings), the company's later researches play with their already existing plastic figures (or "characters"), as embodying the past in the present *theatrically*, rather than literarily or interpretatively. This also signals a shift in the actor's paradigm in the after life of Kantor's theatre of death – from its initial "avant-garde" productions of *The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole* to those of its own performance archive. As discussed in the Introduction, Kantor is at pains to remind the audience of the theatrical creation, rather than literary derivation, of the actors' "characters" in the "dramatised séance", adding to his Note in *The Dead Class* programme a warning against searching for textual sources (in Witkacy's *Tumour Brainiowicz*) for the actors' roles: "By trying to fill in the missing fragments [of Witkacy's play text] to gain full 'knowledge' of the play's plot [i.e. that of the production, *The Dead Class*], you would be displaying nothing but the unreasonable pedantry of a bibliophile. That would be the simplest way to destroy the all-important sphere of *feeling*."[529]

In Krzysztof Plesniarowicz's analysis, the post-1975 period of the Cricot 2 productions is characterised by a shift from the use of a literary-dramatic pre-text (from Witkacy) to a photographic pre-text (what Plesniarowicz calls "photographic plates of memory"). This elaborates Kantor's "discovery" of, or research into, a "theatre of memory" – as he describes the 1985 production of *Let the Artists Die* – following the example of the "historical Daguerrotype" in *The Dead Class*. In an

---

[528] Tadeusz Kantor, "Characters in *The Dead Class*", trans. Karol Jakubowicz, in *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, ed. Bohdan Drozdowski, London: Calder, 1979, p.137. (The heading "warnings" occurs in the programme notes, trans. M. Dabrowski, Krakow: Krzysztofory Gallery, 1975, n.p.) The relation of the characters to the literary elements in the production is discussed in Kantor's "Director's Notebook", extracts from which are translated by Kobialka in *Further On, Nothing* (see, for example, Kantor's "small digression and explanation", pp.262-64).
[529] Tadeusz Kantor, "Characters in *The Dead Class*", *op. cit.* This caution applies to the academic researcher too, of course (*pace* the discussion of "documents" and theatre history in chapter four).

interview with Kobialka, Kantor addresses this new stage in the Cricot 2's dramaturgy (where this "photographic" memory material replaces a play text as a model for the actor-characters):

> [T]his change had nothing to do with a sentimental return to the past, nor was it triggered by the fact that I was getting old; I was interested in a formal and theoretical aspect of this phenomenon – in how our memory functions. Our memory does not create linear plots but *le cliché* [French for a photograph negative]. These negatives are taken out of memory in an accidental way. They are mixed together; figures are transparent and one can be seen through another. *Let the Artists Die* is an example of this process. The Owner of a Cemetery becomes the Dish Washer...[530]

As Plesniarowicz highlights, this marks a fundamental shift in thinking through the *theatrical* relation between fiction and reality in Kantor's work, as concerns the model, or paradigm, of and for the actor. For Plesniarowicz, the photograph is emblematic (both materially and metaphysically) of the form (dramaturgically and scenographically) that the existence of the dead takes, theatrically, after 1975.[531] Whilst similar concerns have been discussed in this thesis with respect to the photographic (with Barthes, for instance, in chapter five), the focus here is rather on the mimetic model or paradigm of the actors' image, in relation to which the question of the theatre of death is to be developed as that of its archive, in the concept of which the photograph provides an instance but not the source.[532]

---

[530] "Let the Artists Die? An interview with Tadeusz Kantor," with (and translated by) Michal Kobialka, *TDR* 30.3, Fall 1986, p.180. The "historical Daguerrotype" in *The Dead Class* is discussed by Kantor in his "Director's Notebook", translated by Kobialka, in *Further On, Nothing*, *op. cit.*, pp.259-60. (The photograph as a key to *Let the Artists Die* is elaborated also by Kobialka, with reference to Kantor's production notes, in *Further On, Nothing*, pp.303-305.)

[531] All this bears upon the emotion-experiment relation discussed in the Introduction. (Plesniarowicz also makes an association with Boltanski, as well as the inevitable connection with Barthes.)

[532] A comparative example in terms of both Plesniarowicz's and Bablet's analyses could be made with the use of an historical school photograph from Jedwabne in the 1930s by Tadeusz Slobodzianek in preparing his play *Our Class* (although its organisation of the relation between past and present is completely different to that of the Cricot 2 productions). The photograph is reproduced on the centre pages of the National Theatre programme, for the world premiere production of the play in London, and is discussed (as also the associations with *The Dead Class*) by Teresa Murjas, "'I suggest a Night at the Theatre, Mr. Cameron':

The relevance of photography to the later stages of the Cricot 2 work is also discussed in an essay by Denis Bablet, who notes that although Kantor did not himself use it as a medium for his creative work, photography is acknowledged in his theatre as a "living [or vital] element of our mythology of death".[533] As Bablet remarks, the aspect of the photographic that is recalled is not the instantaneous capture of an image (the characteristic "snap" of the twentieth century), but the long exposure and the *pose* characteristic of the nineteenth century.[534] This modern pathos formula – of being subject to time, in a technology producing a new human attitude or "look"[535] – is manifested not simply in individual portraits (as they become generic in a mass medium), but in social rituals of the photographic (Studio) image. The photograph frames forms of social relation (as a group portrait) in the class photo or the photo of a company of soldiers, for instance. In the early twentieth century, this commemorative framing of social relations also includes the specifically theatrical "cliché" of the author reading aloud his play to the assembled cast.

In these tableaux, the memory of an individual is abstracted into a generic image (of "the lowest rank") taken by an anonymous photographer (distinct from the named images of the Nadar studio, or of August Sander's portraits, to which Barthes and Benjamin devote their reflections). These photographs already constitute their own categorisation, as a ready-made (archivable) framing of "life", which also characterises modern industries of mass "death". (The military unit is subject to the same logistical identification as its replaceable *matériel*. Indeed, the relation between the technical capture of the group photograph and the machine gun is one of the most

---

Memory, History and Responsibility in *Our Class*," in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 21.4 (2011); and by Bryce Lease, "Ethnic Identity and Anti-Semitism: Tadeusz Słobodzianek Stages the Polish Taboo", in *TDR*, 56.2, Summer 2012. The Słobodzianek text (in a version by Ryan Craig from a literal translation by Catherine Grosvenor) is published by Oberon Books, 2009.

[533] Denis Bablet, "Kantor and Photography", in "Tadeusz Kantor 2", *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale* 18, Paris: CRNS Éditions, 2005, p.263.

[534] *Ibid*., p.264. This could also be compared with Rosalind Krauss' discussion of the emergence of photography as a "theoretical" rather than "historical" object between two essays of Benjamin's (1931 and 1936), reiterating the modernist question of the medium discussed with Bazin and Barthes at the end of chapter five (Krauss, "Reinventing the Medium" in *Critical Inquiry*, vol.25, n.2, Winter 1999, p.291).

[535] Such a human image (or "portrait") is "new" in the sense of its medium, at least, with its distinct means of (re)production and dissemination culturally.

striking images of Kantor's theatre of death productions.[536]) The image in which these individuals appear exists without them, even as they are its ostensible subject. In modernity, then, the question of a "likeness" arises in the very production of an image "of" death. This "likeness" is not made "after the life" – as formerly with the death mask – but is taken serially (or, as it were, "shot") during a person's lifetime (which is thereby divided into temporal frames).

Crucially, these questions concern the medium in which the image of the theatre of death is transmitted – the image of the living actor's appearance, in and for its concept – as it offers an allegory for the aesthetic claims of the archive (between performance and exhibition), which also introduces questions of "authorship".[537] These inform theatre research (in theory, at least, if rarely in practice) concerning its "objects" of study. In a project entitled "The Author", Konrad Pustola, for example, presents a question concerning the very claim of this title in the reproduction of three "versions" of ostensibly the same photograph, "documenting" Kantor's 1967 *Panoramic Sea Happening*.[538] The three examples of this iconic image – a photograph taken by Eustachy Kossakowski – include the different captions by which each previously published instance identifies "the work", and thereby attributes authorship.[539] In the first instance, this is: "Tadeusz Kantor, *Panoramic Sea Happening*, beach at Osieski, 1967"; in the third, it is: "Eustachy Kossakowski – *Sea Concert* (*Panoramic Sea Happening* by Tadeusz Kantor), 1967"; while in the second, the caption is written over the base of the image (rather than below it, outside of its frame): "Eustachy Kossakowski/ Edward Krasinski in the *Panoramic Sea Happening* by Tadeusz

---

[536] Friedrich Kittler notes that Samuel Colt – of "the revolver that is now named after him" fame – was a technical forerunner of the cinema (of "shooting" a film), in his lectures on *Optical Media* (trans. Anthony Enns, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, pp.145-46). The application of seriality in capturing stills ("taking stills", as one might a life) is discussed in chapter one of Siegfried Zielinski, *Audiovisions* (trans. Gloria Custance, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), with the examples of a "photographic shotgun" model of 1884 and a "photorevolver" model of 1892.

[537] We might recall this being volubly pronounced at the Paris conference cited by Klossowicz, in chapter four, with Kantor's particular intonation: *Mon théâtre est imorrrrtel!*

[538] Konrad Pustola, "The Author", in *Piktogram*, n.5/6, 2006, pp.10-13.

[539] This image is *the* iconic survival of the event, in contrast, for example, to other photographs taken by Jozef Piatkowski [reproduced in Stegmann (ed.), *Fluxus East*, p.28].

Kantor/ Poland 1967." This is then followed by a copyright mark, attributing the reproduction to "Nouvelles Images S.A. and Eustachy Kossakowski, 2000".[540]

Kossakowski's name (to cite only his example) in fact belongs to an understanding of "Kantor's theatre" (especially the Happenings) in its after life, at least up until 1970, when he emigrated to Paris, together with Anna Ptaszkowska, one of the founders of the Foksal gallery. The break up of the Foksal triumvirate (Mariusz Tchorek emigrated to England at the same time) was in no small part affected by Kantor's denunciation of "participation" in relation to a space representing artists, challenging the curators' own questioning of the "theory of place" with which they had begun.[541] Discussing Kossakowski, in relation to an exhibition in Warsaw in 2008-09, Adam Mazur notes: "The fact that the exhibition presents Kossakowski's photographs of Kantor's performance seems to emphasise the figure of Kantor more than that of Kossakowski, who would probably have made a different selection for his own exhibition."[542]

The question of the archive in choosing what images represent whose work is fundamental to the possibility of any such research project as the present one. Even taking account only of Kossakowski's "Kantor" images, amongst a body of work that gives him a place in the history of post-war Polish art in his "own right", opens the question of how such photographic "collaborations" are themselves part of what constitutes that very history of art. As Mazur writes:

> Is it not possible that Kossakowski's documentation made Kantor's work a
> work of art? And further still, how would Galeria Foksal's archives and

---

[540] This demonstration may be compared with Adam Mazur's narrative account of this same image: "The *Happening* was Kantor's, the photos Kossakowski's, while the sea is conducted by Krasinski in tails. One photograph and three artists entwined in an artistic embrace. The photo is so captivating that it turns up in the most surprising places – for example, on a bag of crisps. Kantor, the 'elite artist', could surely never have imagined such popularity. Most likely, he would never have aspired to it either. After all, Kantor is no Andy Warhol." (Adam Mazur, *Who is the Creator?*, lecture at Warsaw Musuem of Modern Art, 2009, accessed on the Kossakowski website [http://www.eustache-kossakowski.com/bulletin01_uk.html], no page numbers.)

[541] This is the subject of an article by Pawel Polit in *Artmargins*, "Warsaw's Foksal Gallery 1966-1972: Between Place and Archive" [available on their website: www.artmargins.com] to which we will return.

[542] Mazur, *op. cit*.

history look if it had not been for Kossakowski's photos? To what degree have these iconic pictures shaped our perception of the events so crucial to Polish art? Did they not contribute to the mythologisation of the latter half of the 1960s and of the circles so deftly photographed by Kossakowski?[543]

And yet, like Craig (and Baudelaire) before him, Kantor discounted any possibility that photography could have a status comparable to his own performance art, despite its iconic after life in this medium.

II. *What particular conditions of production of the Cricot 2 are remembered in exhibitions?*

Under the title of *Art and Memory*, an exhibition devoted to Kantor at the 2003 Prague Quadrennial was introduced by Lech Stangret, on behalf of the Cricoteka, with the observation that: "Every Tadeusz Kantor exhibition is simultaneously a new attempt at establishing the principles to showcase a multi-layered, multi-faceted oeuvre."[544] For the purposes of the particular exhibition, however, Stangret cites only two fields (familiar from Klossowicz's proposal, in chapter four) in which Kantor's "genius was most apparent: theatre and painting."[545] This reduction of the "multi-faceted" to two aspects, separated by location – with "the emphasis on fine art" at the Czech Museum of Fine Arts and "the focus on theatre" at the Strahov Monastery – was familiar even in Kantor's lifetime, to note only the 1976 visit of the Cricot 2 to the Riverside Studios and the simultaneous "Emballage" exhibition to the Whitechapel.[546]

More intriguing than this demarcation of creative "disciplines" identified with and by their "products" (painting or performance) are the Cricoteka exhibitions where the audience has to engage with what the difference between these might be – as part of

---

[543] *Ibid.*

[544] Lech Stangret in *Tadeusz Kantor: Art and Memory*, Prague: Czech Museum of Fine Arts, 2003, p.4.

[545] *Ibid.*

[546] Nicholas Serota, "Tadeusz Kantor at the Whitechapel", in *Tadeusz Kantor: Interior of Imagination*, Jaroslaw Suchan and Marek Swica, eds., Warsaw: Zacheta National Gallery of Art, 2005; and Nicholas Serota, "Emballages at the Whitechapel", in *Kantor Was Here*, Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka, eds., London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011.

the "after life" of the Cricot 2. What is interesting here is how the curators of these exhibitions raise rather different questions to those posed by academic scholars of theatre studies. Nonetheless, it seems that Kantor, as a theorist, is typically displaced by curators and critics – who nonetheless continue to cite his writings, as if thereby "transparently" (re)presenting his work historically; as if the artist-theorist had simply offered them literal descriptions of the past of the Cricot 2 theatre, distinct from conceptually oriented (and thus critical) varieties of its (re)construction.

Here we enter upon a paradox of Kantor's insistence on the "living archive" – a term used by the curators of the Foksal Gallery in 1971[547] – in terms of the particular history of the "theatre of death", and its appeal to the "avant-garde" in Kantor's denunciation of "participation" at the Foksal Gallery in 1969. The various objects, documents, and videos of the Cricoteka are to be present(ed) (or curated) as the past; they are no longer "material" and certainly not to be re-used. The Cricoteka represents an authorship – this is what is exhibited – even where this is surrogated by a curator, composing accompanying labels, or by a television director, such as Andrzej Sapija. It is for sure that the particular edit of a video seen during Kantor's lifetime is not open to re-doing, whether by one of the Cricot 2 actors or by another artist, who was perhaps not even born when Kantor died.

But perhaps this is not the real question concerning the "matter" of theatre memory. To use the terms with which Barthes addresses "knowledge" of the photograph, the real question concerns what cannot be reduced to the *studium* of authorship; that is, the *punctum* of an encounter. What is the metaphysical shock transmitted still by certain photographs of Kantor's performances? Barthes' questions of methodology apply in theatre studies – where the issue concerns what testimony to theatre is being offered. What thought of theatre is being (re)produced in the work of its historicisation? How does the "living archive" resist the sense of "death" associated with cultural memory, where (in Luiza Nader's reflections on Zofia Kulik's archive):

> As Derrida argues, the archive's driving force is the drive of death, which not
> only leads to the annihilation of memory (understood both as remembering,

---

[547] Wieslaw Borowski and Andrzej Turowski, "The Living Archives", in *October*, vol.38, Autumn 1986, pp.61-62.

memorising, as well as recollecting) but also to a radical deletion of all that cannot be incorporated in the memory. However, it would be impossible to construct an archive without the death drive, or desire in other words. Archive is an aporetic structure: it always works against itself.[548]

The question of the archive – as it had been proposed by Kantor in the late 1970s – contrasts with the biographical claims made, for instance, by Jan Kott and Guy Scarpetta for what could be thought of as "living" in the theatre of death (as testaments from those who knew him personally). While these claims attest to the very question "of death", or of the dead, in the Cricot 2, they do so in respect of Kantor's life (as a surrogate for the critic's own), rather than to the theorisation of his work (as already constituting an "archive" of its concepts). At the time of Kantor's death, Kott repeats an image from his earlier evocation of *The Dead Class*, as if denying (in the Freudian sense) the very situation that he is addressing by apostrophising Kantor as a theatrical Charon-figure who "always returns" because (paradoxically) he never disappeared, being "always present on stage from beginning to end in all his performances".[549] This "always" – with its undifferentiated claims about Kantor's role on stage – is, in a critical sense, false; it testifies more to the thought of theatre *and* death for a critic such as Kott, than that *of* death in Kantor's theatre.

As with Guy Scarpetta's appeal to Lazarus,[550] Kott's Charon figure serves as a reminder to be wary of resonant analogies for what remains a specific aesthetic practice, including a specific archival project. Kantor's own appearance(s) on stage offer more than simply an occasion for critics to apply classical metaphors of memory reviving the dead. They are to be compared rather with the appearances of the other Cricot 2 "characters", objects, or emballages – including Kantor's own classical figuration of Odysseus, to which we will return at the end. With these roles, the Cricot 2 – in contrast to the major theatre traditions – created its own repertoire of stage

---

[548] Luiza Nader, "What do Archives Forget?", trans. Ewa Kanigowska-Gedroyc, in Christine Macel and Natasa Petresin-Bachelez (eds.), *Promises of the Past*, Pompidou Centre, exhibition catalogue, Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2010, p.224.

[549] Jan Kott, "Kantor, Memory, Memoire", translated by Jadwiga Kosicka, in *NTQ*, No. 28, November 1991, p.302 and p.301.

[550] Guy Scarpetta, "Un art lazaréen", in *Kantor au présent*, Arles: Actes Sud, 2000, pp.203-210.

figures. Indeed, as the theatrical project of the Krakow Group Artists' Association, its conditions of production – informing its "repertory" – fundamentally distinguished the Cricot 2 from other theatre companies.

This relation between an artists' association and theatre research not only repeats that of the pre-war Cricot company and the first Krakow Group of artists (1933-39), but also that between the clandestine Young Artists Group and the Independent Theatre company during the Occupation, both of which had Kantor at their heart.[551] As August Grodzicki noted, in his 1979 "official" survey of "Polish Theatre Directors":

> The Cricot 2 Theatre has always been unlike any other theatre, not only in the
> artistic sense, but, in Poland, also in the way it has been organised. It is not an
> institution, nor is it a part of the general system of state-supported theatres.
> Kantor once said, "When I have an idea, I simply work it out." He works it out
> with a group of actors and painters on irregular and rare occasions at the
> Krzysztofory Cellar in Krakow. Then he travels with his productions or
> séances around the world. He is an independent artist who has fully retained
> the right to his own vision and views of the world.[552]

With the Cricot 2 researches, the fictional (or the illusionary) is no more subordinated to the theatrical than the reverse (as is usually the case, and is also still the implied

---

[551] The "Young Artists Group" continued after the War, and Kantor organised exhibitions for the Group in 1945 and 1946. The original Cricot theatre company was founded in 1933 by Jozef Jarema, Wladislaw Dobrowolski, and Anatol Stern. Miklaszewski cites Jozef Jarema on the aims of the original company: "The Cricot group was founded on the initiative of painters: which is to say that the specific expressive form of the Cricot's theatricality is the powerful element of *plastic* art in the staging... The action on stage is apprehended above all *visually*. The eye is the main agent of our perception of theatricality." There was an unsuccessful attempt immediately after the war to revive the Cricot, with a production in 1945 of Tytus Czyzewski's play *The Death of a Faun*, directed by Dobrowolski, with designs by Kantor (the play having been first performed by the Cricot in 1934). [*Grupa Krakowska*, exhibition catalogue, with an essay "Avant-garde tradition and Traditional Avant-garde" by Hanna Wroblewska, trans. Pawel Skalinski, Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery, 1996, p.72 and p.145; and Miklaszewski*, op. cit*., p.1 & p.5; and Daniel Gerould, "Tadeusz Kantor", in *PAJ*, 4.3, 1980, p.29.]
[552] August Grodzicki, "Tadeusz Kantor", in *Polish Theatre Directors*, trans. Lucyna Tomaszewska, Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1979, p.124. In a text about the Cricot 2, Kantor writes that: "The need to put a production together is dictated by an urgency to express an idea, which is processed for a long time, then slowly matures, and, finally, demands and is ready to be materialised..." ("Cricot 2 Theatre", trans. Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, *op. cit*., pp.110-111.)

demand of Witkacy's own use of stage directions). In the juxtaposition of these different "realities" – the fictional and the theatrical, the pre-existing and the present – the autonomy of an *art* that is not simply identified with either its literary or its performance medium becomes manifest in (and as) the "signature" work of the Cricot 2. As Kantor describes this:

> In the 1950s, when the emergence of the phenomenal texts of the avant-garde artists was equated with the emergence of a new theatre, Cricot 2 Theatre put forth the idea of the avant-garde theatre, which was not circumscribed by the staging of the avant-garde literature (usually this was done with the help of traditional stage means). The possibility of resurrecting the avant-garde, Cricot 2 Theatre practiced in a purely theatrical domain, in separating the theatrical work of art (a production) from its slavish representation of a literary text. In a theatre practice this signified a rejection of a method of "illustrating", reporting, representing the plot of the play through a stage action, and a need to employ a new method. This new method is the process of creating parallel tracks which do not illustrate, explain, or interpret each other, but "correspond" to one another through pointed dynamic tensions.[553]

As an example of this, it is revealing to contrast Kantor's 1963 production "of" Witkacy's play *The Madman and the Nun* (addressing the playwright's suggestion of "showing... a madman's brain on stage"[554]) with the earlier production by Wanda Laskowska, designed by Jozef Szjana, in 1959. In Daniel Gerould's account, Laskowska's production, at the Teatr Dramatyczny in Warsaw, was "the first of Witkacy's plays to reach the professional stage in Poland after the Second World War and the period of enforced socialist realism."[555] (The implication here that, within the record of official theatre history, the Cricot 2's *The Cuttlefish* in 1956 was, as a purely "artistic" production, "unprofessional" might well have appealed to Kantor.)

---

[553] Tadeusz Kantor, "Cricot 2 Theatre", trans. Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, *op. cit.*, p.114.
[554] Witkiewicz, "Theatre: An Introduction to Pure Form", trans. Daniel Gerould, in *The Madman and the Nun*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968, p.295.
[555] Daniel Gerould, *Witkacy*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981, p.213.

The centrepiece, literally, of Kantor's production was what he called the Annihilating Machine – an animated (or, rather, automated) 'sculpture' of folding (readymade) wooden chairs, piled on top of each other. Once set in motion – heaving up and down, expanding and contracting, with a loud clatter – the machine negated the actors' embodied expressivity through its repetitive, mechanical action. In an anticipation of Kantor's own subsequent role on stage, the object prevented an audience envisioning the play's fiction of time and place through any scenic 'illusion'. Under the concept of "zero theatre" – negating the standard interpretative hierarchy of theatrical means – Kantor's 'mechanical' dramaturgy adopted the resources of the readymade.

While Kantor's Annihilating Machine is described as supporting, or indeed imposing, the 'non-acting' of the performers, we might be tempted to read this apparatus symbolically in terms of the situation ("an insane asylum") that the play describes. It is instructive, therefore, to compare Kantor's scenario – a 'non-design', in traditional terms, like the 'non-acting' it intends – with that of his contemporary, Józef Szajna. From photographs of this production, we can see that while the setting and the actors appear highly stylised, the frame remains that of playing 'on a stage' – with all its 'given' formalisations of background and foreground – complete with appropriate scenic objects, such as the bed and the clock that are referenced in the play text (albeit both appearing monstrously out of human scale). In addition, there are strange sculptural objects, suggestive of the metaphysical and poetic aspirations of which the play speaks, and the Guignol conventions for showing the violent interplay between these aspirations and confinement in an insane asylum – the play's principal theme – are clearly present. For all its creative sensitivity to Witkacy's dramaturgy, however, both the design and the actors' work remain bound to the dissembling reality of "the stage". Kantor's machine, by contrast, starts with this as the very reality to be challenged (negated or reduced to zero), not only spatially, but also dynamically with the machine's repetitive action, contrasting the actors' expressivity with an effect of mechanical 'meaninglessness'.[556]

---

[556] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Zero Theatre", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, p.69.

Unlike Szajna's design concept, the 'zero theatre' resists reading the stage, in the image of the play's protagonist, as an interpretation of the mutual violence between repression and liberation.[557] The Annhilating Machine might appear, then, to serve for any text, or at least for any instance of a 'zero theatre' production. But Kantor's stage machines, with rare exceptions, were only ever used in conjunction with specific texts (which, then, allows for their 'quotation' in the later Cricot 2 production *I Shall Never Return*). That the Annihilating Machine is not used in any other production but appears rather as an object in Kantor's subsequent project, the 'Anti-Exhibition' (held in November of the same year, also at the Krzysztofory Gallery), suggests that it models questions of performance as posed by the particular production rather than by the play. It presents the theatrical object as itself a work of art; not, then, an 'artefact' (a scenographic scale model) documenting the interpretation of a stage space derived from literature, but a model that 'annexes' the reality of a performance, even for that of an exhibition and thereby for a new audience.

Reflecting on 'the work of art and the process', Kantor speaks of this exhibition in terms of an ambition to resist the presentation of 'finished' or 'completed' works. Preferring to speak of a 'junk room' collection of what remains of the working process, Kantor presents the 'scraps' or 'remnants' that would ordinarily be excluded by the 'professional' standards of an exhibition (in 1963). "The germ of my concept was to reject the idea of a complete and finished work of art, to discard the feeling of satisfaction derived from the denouement, and to focus on attempts and nothing but attempts!"[558] Here the Annihilating Machine plays its part, performing the paradox of the artist's concept in forestalling a 'completion' in (and by) the past tense. Kantor

[557] By contrast, Gerould and Durer quote Szajna's own description of "how he made the cell [of the insane asylum] into the interior of Walpurg's [the protagonist's] mind": "The cell in Witkacy's *The Madman and the Nun* is represented by a wall that surrounds the hero of the play and the objects that appear in the niches, a large moving head that spies on him, an automatic clock with the mechanism pulled out of it and the swaying symbol of unspecified biological form. The rocking lamp and the turned-up volume of the ticking of the clock are attuned to the mounting frenzy of the 'madman's' monologue. They help define the emotion indirectly and by allusion. Acting on the principle of psychograms, the props penetrate to the levels that often escape direct and rational rules, increasing tension." (Gerould and Durer, "*The Madman and the Nun*: Introduction", in Witkiewicz, *The Madman and the Nun and The Crazy Locomotive*, trans. Daniel Gerould and C.S. Durer, New York: Applause Theater Book Publishers, 1989, p.4.)
[558] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Work of Art and the Process", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, p.127.

writes: "The fact that the perception of the creative act takes place only when the process ceases might be puzzling. This perception is limited only to the 'consumption' of the *product*, which is presented to us in the form of a book, an orchestral performance, or an exhibited painting"; that is, in the 'artefacts' of the creative act, just as with the documents supposed of the history of theatrical production.[559]

The relation between performance and exhibition – which would become a tension between the Cricot 2 and the Cricoteka after Kantor's death – serves to show why Kantor is, in August Grodzicki's terms, "an independent artist" rather than a "theatre director" (in the sense of Dejmek, Swinarski, Wajda, and even Grotowski). The professional theatre director struggles, for instance, with an interpretation of *Hamlet*, where the theatrical "conscience" is caught in a trap of its "own conceits".[560] At least, that is the case for "real" directors, given that the merely professional ones show little interest in the promptings of such a conscience.[561] Despite its association with major playwrights (including Genet and Müller), the minor tradition of the theatre of death has an oblique relation to the dramatic heritage within European mimetic practices, as these require interpretations that address the ghosts that normally confer (authorial) legitimacy on its professional "theatre" (*pace* Blau, Carlson, *et al*.).

Replying to Miklaszewski's observation that, in twenty-eight years the Cricot 2 "made no more than ten new productions", Kantor distances his work from the conditions of mainstream theatre practice, insisting:

---

[559] *Ibid.,* p.125.

[560] This applies even to the Wooster Group and Liz LeCompte, whose production of *Hamlet* perhaps comes close to the concerns of the "theatre of death", not least in the comparison that can be made between with the way in which theatre critics have written about it and the way that art critics have written about the work of James Coleman (which will be the subject of a separate essay). [On the Wooster Group *Hamlet*, see W.B. Worthen, *Drama Between Poetry and Performance*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.]

[561] Kantor could be vehement in distinguishing his own practice from that of even the most eminent of such "theatre arseholes" amongst directors. As Kolankiewicz quotes Kantor (while expressing his own doubts about the very idea of a theatre prize being instituted, after Kantor's death, in his name; let alone it being awarded to its first recipient, Peter Brook): "It was no avant-garde that all these theatre arseholes, all these Wajdas, all these Grotowskis, these Szajnas… I include even Peter Brook among them… He's a son of a bitch… No, no, he definitely is a son of a bitch…" (Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Kantor's Last Tape", trans. Paul Allain and Grzegorz Ziolkowski, in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 15.1, February 2005, p.36.)

But they are not 'new productions'. We focus less on the 'presentation' of a theatrical work of art than on the shaping of our own material and the structure of our theatre, so that working in a situation and a new aesthetic, concepts like 'premiere' and 'repertoire' have lost their meaning. As far as these 'results' of theatre work are concerned, we should speak rather about different 'stages' which have been defined by these results.[562]

After the turn away from working with a pre-existing text (by Witkacy), and the productions "after" the theatre of death, a final stage in the history of the Cricot 2 occurred with Kantor's own death in 1990; with the company becoming a theatre without theatre, a theatre "of death" in a new sense. This has also to be addressed in relation to its specifically Kantorian example of a "living archive" – the Cricoteka – which is associated with the history of Kantor's other major collaboration, the Foksal Gallery. While the Cricoteka is a theatre "without theatre" in the sense of actors, it is not, crucially, without an audience – through its exhibitions and publications. One of the key questions of this thesis is why (and, indeed, how) Kantor's example of the theatre of death has remained a source of fascination long after it ceased to be performed, such that its practice could still demand conceptual elaboration.

After a short-lived company (under the leadership of Andrzej Welminski) of "Actors of the Cricot Theatre,"[563] the ensemble would be remembered in the form ("already") anticipated by Kantor in its "living archive", through installations, replicas, and exhibitions. Although the members of the company – who were, after all, the devising "co-authors" of its productions – still wanted to work, the Cricot 2 would become its own "theatre" of death together with Kantor himself. This precedence of death separates the actors from the characters of the Cricot 2 productions and exposes an issue that is part of the history of the archive – the exclusion of the still living participants from its concept ("of death"), as from its "theatre" (without theatre); that is, as the subject of the *work* that the archive supports (such as theses, like this one,

---

[562] Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.101. (Also, Kantor's account of the "structure of the Cricot 2", trans. Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing, op. cit.*, pp.110-111.)

[563] Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, pp.151-2.

rather than new performances). Remembered (and studied) in the absence of new productions, the Cricot 2 ensemble is represented by the Cricoteka, where the images of its characters (like puppets no longer in use) still exist, without the actors.[564]

According to Plesniarowicz, Kantor's coinage of the name *Cricoteka*:

> …comes from a blending of the name of the Cricot Theatre (an anagram meaning 'it's a circus') and 'teka', derived from the ancient Greek *théke*, which means 'a place for keeping something'. In contemporary Polish, this Hellenism can refer to a thematically uniform collection of archives, drawings, or articles – or to a sort of *packaging* of a collection of documents, arranged according to a given system. For Kantor, the institutional emballage of his own Cricot ideas was above all a metaphor for memory... 'All our crises are caused by the failure to pay respect to memory.'[565]

As noted with Klossowicz (in chapter four), this development of a theatre without theatre was, however, far from "obvious" in Kantor's own lifetime and (as noted above) was a source of controversy concerning not only the posthumous performances of *Today is my Birthday* (which travelled the world for two years, 1991-92), but also a revival by the then company of *The Dead Class* – without Kantor.[566]

Leszek Kolankiewicz (describing himself "as a critic who had followed Kantor's work closely"), while endorsing the decision to continue to perform the "final rehearsal" of *Today is my Birthday*, "also felt deep regret that the group could not

---

[564] To cite only the two examples discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the emballages of the Trumpet of the Last Judgment and the pupil and bench figure. "Theatre without theatre" was the title of an exhibition co-presented (and the catalogue co-published) by the Museum of Modern Art, Barcelona, and the Berrardo Foundation of Modern and Contemporary Art, Lisbon, in 2007. According to the director of Barcelona museum, Manuel Borja-Villel, the exhibition "examines the way in which the theatrical has altered our perception of the nature of the work of art and its position in the division of the visible" (Borja-Villel, Manuel *et al.*, (eds.), *A Theatre Without Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Barcelona: MACBA, 2007, p.20).
[565] Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2000, pp.294-5.
[566] This is referred to by Scarpetta, *op. cit.,* p.187. These performances were undertaken "in Spain, the United States, Italy, and Czechoslovakia in 1991-1992" (Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2000, p.142).

then say to itself 'Enough is enough!' with the same determination… If Tadeusz Kantor really created Kantor's theatre, then Kantor's death seems to be the natural end of this theatre's activities. No other solution can be countenanced."[567] Of course, the question of the creation of this theatre is precisely what is at stake in the different claims concerning what is "open" or "closed" in the instance of Kantor's "death" – not least as this touches upon the testimony of an archive as representative of the Cricot 2. Kolankiewicz frames his reflections on this period of the Cricot 2 without Kantor as definitive ("no other solution"), when he writes:

> Something else was striking: the inclination to leave matters open, which in all likelihood were closed. After all, artists should be able to finish the works they have begun. If Tadeusz Kantor really created Kantor's theatre...[568]

Given the example of the Welminskis still offering "Cricot 2 workshops", however, perhaps what may be thought of as "open" or "closed" serves to remind us of what is in question concerning the creation of a theatrical art, rather than simply providing answers (or "solutions").

Nonetheless, in Kantor's absence, the already present future past ("of death") in the *theatre* of the Cricot 2 became a question of its archive, "living" in the *work* of its (potential) *concept* – in "the *idea* of the Cricot 2", as the title of the first Cricoteka exhibition, in 1980, proposed. This work – of remembering, in theory rather than simply by description – is not that of citing or quoting an image of a performance (as, for instance, from *The Dead Class* in Slobodzianek's own Warsaw production of his play *Our Class*[569]); still less is it an attempt to remake (or revive) a performance – of, for instance, *The Dead Class* – from its documentary after life. Remembering, "in theory", is rather an engagement with this theatre's survival in its concept, addressing what it is "of death" that is (still) to be understood as "theatre" in Kantor's example (as distinct, say, from Grotowski's).

---

[567] Leszek Kolankiewicz, "Kantor's Last Tape", trans. Paul Allain and Grzegorz Ziolkowski, in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 15.1, February 2005, p.35.
[568] Kolankiewicz, *ibid*. Plesniarowicz cites Lupa's recollection, concerning those actors who were dropped after the first version of *The Dead Class*, that they "always complained about how Kantor had a pathological aversion to recognising their contribution to the creative process" (Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine, op. cit.*, pp.118-19).
[569] Teresa Murjas and Bryce Lease, *op. cit.*

As figured in the installation entitled *The Classroom* (made for the *Présence Polonaise* exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in 1983), a theoretical question of the "theatre" of *The Dead Class* (without live actors) is posed by Kantor through that of its visibility for the public. The exhibition of this object (which is also a spatial model) offers another view of a concept of theatre that is still in question through practice and with which we may frame a question as to what it is "of death" that may be drawn from Kantor specifically for *theatre* studies or for theatre history – whose "object" is supposedly, and paradigmatically, the "live" event.[570] The aim here is to articulate a question addressing the ontology (*pace* Fischer-Lichte and Phelan, for example) of this phenomenon – as concerns theatre aesthetics – for which Kantor identified the concept "of death" as providing a possible answer, beyond that of the preceding Cricot 2 dramaturgies of "zero", "Happening", or "impossible" theatres. In Artur Sandauer's terms (discussed in the Introduction), this aesthetic would explore how, after 1975, "the anti-theatre [of the Cricot 2] got transformed into the autotheatre"[571] – as an example of what has been identified in this thesis as a distinct, minor tradition within theatre studies and its histories.

III. *What returns in the impasse between formalism and naturalism?*

As already noted, the question of theatre in the example of the Cricot 2 goes beyond its relation to text (with Witkacy), relating to the image (or paradigm) of "the actor", as precisely a transformation of the body into an image, as an autonomous reality of the art of the stage – where, for Kantor, the "life" of both actor and stage appears in or as the "degraded [annexed, or poor] reality" of each other. The theatrical apparatus of each Cricot 2 production remakes the "pre-existence" of the stage specific to itself, the idea of which – realised in material objects – survives the appearance or animation of the live actors. Concerning this appearance (as discussed in the first two parts of this thesis), the fundamental aesthetic issue "of death" for such a theatre – as a question of mimesis within modernism, in an *art* of theatre – was (and thus remains) the impasse, in comprehending its medium, between naturalism and abstraction

---

[570] This is to repose the question of the "Annihilating Machine" from the 1963 production with *The Madman and the Nun* and the so-called *Anti-Exhibition* of the same year, and will be returned to later.

[571] Artur Sandauer, "Art After the End of Art", trans. Anna Bartkowicz, in "Dialectics and Humanism", *The Polish Philosophical Quarterly*, Spring 1985, p.135.

(between the body and its image). This is addressed specifically within the history of the Cricot 2 in the early 1970s, in contrast to Kantor's previous production concepts. To cite (once again) Kantor's declaration in the *Theatre of Death* manifesto: "Today these possibilities are neither an appropriate nor valid alternative. For a new situation and new conditions have arisen in art..."[572]

Besides the acknowledgement of Happenings as already historical, what is "new" in the 1970s is the establishment of conceptualism, not least as the manifestation of a latent possibility of abstraction (as defined by contrast to "representation" or illusion). The sense that this opposition (fundamental to the modernist sense of art) was a misrepresentation of "realism" (in the visual arts) – and, therefore, implicitly of (and, indeed, by) abstraction itself – is explored by Meyer Schapiro, in an essay (of 1937) reviewing Alfred Barr's famous catalogue book of MoMA's collection of "non-objective" painting.[573] As already discussed, the impasse or aporia in this "alternative" – which Kantor views, in the 1970s, as "neither appropriate nor valid" – has provided an horizon of meaning across the arts in the twentieth century; including in theatre history between, for example, the pre-war Cricot and Reduta companies, and (post-war) between Kantor and Grotowski.

This aporia is engaged within the history of theatre, as that of its avant-garde, where, as Sandauer suggests, it offers a seismograph of the culturally "new", always pressing at the "end(s)" of art, at its "own possibility of existence".[574] The terms in which this impasse (as an "end") of theatrical art is identified in the *Theatre of Death* manifesto offer an alternative to those more often proposed by Kantor – as already forming "a link between visual arts and theatre"[575] – between constructivism and symbolism. It was this polarity that characterised Kantor's pre-war "Ephemeral (and Mechanical) Puppet Theatre" performance of Maeterlinck's *The Death of Tintagiles* – which was

---

[572] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Theatre of Death", trans. Voy and Margaret Stelmaszynski, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.109.
[573] Meyer Schapiro, "Abstract Art", in *Modern Art*, New York, George Braziller, 1979, p.196; and Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1975 [1936].
[574] Artur Sandauer, "Art After the End of Art", trans. Anna Bartkowicz, in "Dialectics and Humanism", *The Polish Philosophical Quarterly*, Spring 1985, p.128.
[575] "Let the Artists Die? An interview with Tadeusz Kantor," with (and translated by) Michal Kobialka, *TDR* 30.3, Fall 1986, p.182.

revisited in 1987 as a Cricotage, *The Machine of Love and Death*, at Kassel for the Documenta 8 theatre festival (and subsequently touring).[576] This production, reflecting on the puppet as a model of and for the actor, offers another example of practical theorisation "after" the theatre of death (as a reflection on its precedents), which subsequently informed the making of the new Cricot 2 performance in 1988, *I Shall Never Return* (premiered in Milan, alongside the *Milano Lessons* work with students).

As with the *Theatre of Death* manifesto, historical content is given here – in the link between visual arts and theatre – to the seeming contradiction, in the representation of human appearance(s), between an avant-garde aesthetic and (if not "of") an anthropological conservatism of death; in the confrontation between aesthetic form and the theatrical "material" of human bodies. Amongst the precedents of the minor tradition of this theatre "of death", this fundamental aesthetic impasse was, for example, clearly evoked on the symbolist side (distinct from Meyerhold on the constructivist side), by Maeterlinck:

> We need... to completely remove living beings from the scene... Man can speak only on his own behalf; he has no right to speak for a multitude of the dead... It is difficult to predict what set of lifeless beings could take man's place in the scene; the strange impression one experiences in the galleries where wax statues are exhibited, for example, for some time might have put us on the trail of an art which is extinct or perhaps new.[577]

The dead are normally thought of as the guardians of tradition, of heritage and legitimacy – until, as evoked at the end of the Introduction, they are subject to a history of cultural elimination (with which some critics of modernism, such as

---

[576] *Cricot 2 Information Guide 1987-1988*, ed. Anna Halczak, Krakow: Cricoteka 1988, pp.65-101.

[577] Maeterlinck, quoted by Roberto Tessari, "Kantor's Theatre: beyond Symbolism, to the symbol of the 'lowest' rank", trans. Susan Finnel, in *Tadeusz Kantor-Cricot 2: Photographs by Romano Martinis*, Milan: Oedipus Editions, 2001, p.179. Besides his explicit interest in the typography and layout of his manifestos, Kantor's engagement with Constructivism on the other hand is explicitly explored in his "Milano Lessons" (translated by Michal Kobialka, in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pp.207-269). The relation between the cabinet of wax-figures and cinema (as between Schlosser and Balász) was discussed in part one of this thesis.

Zygmunt Bauman, have viewed the avant-garde as being complicit). By contrast to symbolism, in the theatre of Witkacy (*pace* Kott in chapter one) – "on the trail of an art which is extinct or perhaps new" – the dead appear "in the scene" (on stage) like clowns (as "living corpses"), as much parodies as paradigms. The on-stage dead become associated, through Jarry and Guignol, with the avant-garde's interest in circus and variety, seeing traditional artistic "eternity" in theatrical appearances of the "lowest rank". This is one of the contexts within which to understand Kantor's own sense of avant-garde (*pace* the epigraph to this chapter), looking backward to see ahead, envisioning the future in the past, reflecting on the theatre of death afterwards: "*The Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole...* give testimony to the true nature of my heretical ideas... the era of my own avant-garde. The avant-garde of: the recollection of the past, memory, the invisible, emptiness and death."[578]

As discussed, this impasse in *theatre* history, as it conditions the thought of the actor in the major tradition(s) of European theatre (*pace* Barthes's identification of its underlying antinomies), is addressed in terms of a model (of and for the) actor, which is identified by way "of death" – as a way to think of the *art* of the actor beyond the aporia of abstraction *or* naturalism. In his 1975 manifesto, Kantor cites Craig's "answer" to the same aporetic question, albeit mistakenly identifying the über-marionette with one side of the ("nature/ art") impasse, rather than as itself already offering a means of going beyond it. The über-marionette is, precisely, a model (of and for the) actor, comparable to (as a precedent of) Kantor's own "example" in proposing "the dead" as the aesthetic condition of human participation in an *art* of theatre – that is, as a "live effigy" (a paradigm or *imago* of and for human appearance, as an actor).

In this *art* of theatre, with the question raised of its (mimetic) *medium*, there is a shift from the appearance of opposed terms (naturalism and abstraction, animate and inanimate, living and dead) to an appearance of the space (its figure) in *between* – as also between mimesis and metaphysics, which is of the definition here of the uncanny. The theatre of death becomes visible not in terms of one side of the opposition or the other, but in and as what occurs (in theory and practice) between

---

[578] Tadeusz Kantor, "A Classroom", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.228.

them: neither Schlemmer nor Stanislavsky, then, but "the theatre of death" – as a new stage of research for the Cricot 2 artists' theatre in the 1970s. This situates the concept of the actor anew, beyond the appeal of and to a Happening theatre within the company's history, as well as the precedents of its own "zero" or "impossible" conditions. Here then is the kernel of this thesis (*pace* Adorno): how does the abstraction of its concept comprehend an example in its practice? How are the three parts of this thesis to be read in relation to each other? How is Kantor's articulation of this aesthetic impasse to be understood with respect to the founding distinctions of modernist art (in Worringer's terms) between abstraction and empathy, between rationalism and animism, or between experiment and emotion (as discussed in the Introduction)? How and why is it in the name "of death" that this example of Kantor's work broaches the concept of theatre specifically, addressing what is uncanny in mimesis – as an example in search of its concept, as a practice evoking its own theory?

This history of theatre (and its "studies") is not simply theoretical, therefore, even in the development of its concept. A "devouring" anxiety, like Kantor's, about "theatre conventions" only producing their own kinds of "theatricality" – not least in the work of the actor, who may even "adapt" to the demands of artistic discovery, reinstating this impasse (as we have also seen with Harriet Walter in chapter one) – is also testified to by Kryzstian Lupa, who observes the process of theatrical re-familiarisation even in the example of "Kantor's actors":

> They were great and tragic only when they did not know how to act, when they were dealing with issues beyond human possibilities. In *The Dead Class* and in *Wielopole*, it was not Kantor who ended. It was the actors who just learned to fulfil his demands without larger difficulties, and that is why his next pieces were... they were not discoveries. They were not overwhelming.[579]

Lupa (who studied theatre in Krakow in the 1970s, and who was an assistant to Swinarski) recalls here the context of Kantor's theatre of death productions, without,

---

[579] "Trip to the Unreachable", Krystian Lupa interviewed by Beata Matkowska-Swies, trans. Dorothea Sobstel, in *Theater*, 41.3, 2012, p.66. (Working through the contrasts between Kantor and Grotowski on this subject would require another chapter of its own.)

however, referring to them in terms of this concept. Nonetheless, finding a return to such historical-theoretical points of reference by a theatre director is rare (and is no doubt due here as much to Lupa's personal memory, as to any theoretical interest), where – for all that he is "well known" – Kantor's researches, in their possible concept, seem largely "forgotten", as if they were a mere eccentricity of his theatrical persona. This means that aspects of the Cricot 2 stage image are more likely to be imitated (as pastiche) than thought through (as art) by those who come "after". As with Kantor's reading of Craig, this concerns the truth of an aesthetic motive in acknowledging precedents (distinct from scholarly referencing). The aporia of the concept invite an attempt to understand or articulate the question that its "solution" or "answer" implies, rather than simply reciting the example of the latter as if this was given (whether historically or theoretically).

> Yes. Let us not forget Craig's proposal – distancing the scenic figure from the living human being. Craig's Über-marionette (or, as Kantor pictured it, a being positioned between a storefront mannequin and the 'cadaver' of Dr. Caligari) was supposed to cause a metaphysical alienating effect. On the one hand, it was an attempt to make an Art Object out of a living human being, deformed like other arts; on the other, a specific reaction to the ineptitude and lies of the traditional theatre regarding the actor reaching the truth of human expression...[580]

IV. "Once again I am on stage..." *How is Kantor's theatre of death informed by the thought of demarcation and participation?*

At the premiere of the Cricot 2's final production, at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, January 24, 1991, the cast announced Kantor's posthumous presence (here in Michal Kobialka's account):

> 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

---

[580] Lupa, *ibid.*, p.63.

had been recorded during the process of preparing the production; and that the chair standing at the table was Kantor's, which now, in the light of his death on December 8th, 1990, would stay unoccupied during the performance.[581]

Kantor's absence is here apostrophised, in a paradoxical stopping of time (as used to happen with clocks in houses where someone had died). The performance is in the present – in Kantor's absence – and yet, as a "last rehearsal", in the past – in Kantor's presence. This is suggested metonymically, by both an object (the chair) and a voice (the recording), as two distinct effigies of being (in space and time). Each offers traces of the body's gestural signature, the one mimetically "abstract" (the evocation of an attitude or posture) and the other "uncanny" (as if the recording was the voice itself), but both signifying a physical absence.[582]

The whole production resonates with this present(ed) absence – without which it would cease to be a Kantor-Cricot 2 event and become simply a production "of" *Today is my Birthday*. It is the artist's ("director's") appearance that is the subject of the Cricot 2 production – staging the question of an art of theatre in the parallelism of actor and director on stage. Without the latter the former are simply "actors" – no longer the Cricot 2 ensemble, no longer collaborators in a theatre of the threshold between the living and the dead, in its mimetic evocation of that between the auditorium and the stage.

The company's statement to the audience provides a necessary frame for the fictional frames that were presented on stage – addressing the audience's anticipation, the sense of the theatrical event (in terms of appearance(s) and applause), associated with Kantor's person. No one else could play this "role" – the on stage double or "self-portrait" (as played by Andrzej Welminski) is only possible in a "last rehearsal", not in a new production without Kantor himself. Here the question "of death", as it

---

[581] Kobialka, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, p.365.

[582] Curiously, this scene is essentially as it was first rehearsed, according to Waclaw Janicki's diary (February 1st, 1990, the first day of rehearsals): "Andrzej Welminski plays the part of Kantor. Here is how the situation will look: Kantor speaks to the audience at the beginning and then exits. A moment later Welminski, dressed as the Master, takes his place. That is the scene we rehearsed today. Kantor was satisfied." (Janicki, "Diary", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Fall 1995, p.269.)

pertains to the actor in such a *theatre*, is disclosed in both its historical and theoretical truth. Here the difference that the "director" on stage makes for the "life" of the actor is clear – for the (annexed) reality of its fiction. Paradoxically the actor has "two bodies" on stage (the emblem of which is the mannequin), but not Kantor, who remains at the threshold of the stage, making visible, unsettling, the demarcation line between abstraction and naturalism. This appearance of the theatre artist "on stage" is precisely what distinguishes Kantor's theatre of death from its precedent in Craig, for example. In his own death he became, as it were, simply an actor – played by Welminski, accompanied by the "mannequin" chair. Kantor's theatre of death dies with him – and yet, in its concept, it survives the "life" of its actors. Without him, without the dividing line of his "theatre", the actors no longer make visible the dead; save as they come to light in their iconographic afterlife, in that of the photograph, becoming the death into which they were born as these "actors".

The frames "on stage" in *Today is my Birthday* constituted a tableau evoking the space of "the artist's studio", related to a sequence of paintings presented in a 1988 exhibition in Krakow (and, of course, since) in which the figure of the artist is presented in the medium of paint within the boundaries of a canvas – and, in some cases, in a material assemblage (for example, as mannequin parts) "stepping out" of that painterly frame. The very titles of these paintings – such as *I have had enough. I am leaving this painting* – offer an orientation for thinking anew Kantor's concern with the threshold between the abstract and the symbolic in this last production, as a final reflection "afterwards" on what the theatre of death might have meant in the Cricot 2 specifically.[583] As announced by the company, this stage(d) tableau is juxtaposed with Kantor's disembodied voice, echoing from the theatre "speakers" – addressing the very question of the artist's "presence":

> Again, I am on stage. I will probably never fully explain this phenomenon either to you or to myself. To be precise, I am not on stage but at the threshold. In front of me, there is the audience.[584]

---

[583] Kobialka discusses these paintings in *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, p.380.
[584] *Ibid.*, p.366.

However, the chair – as also his double, inside one of the frames on stage – has its back to the audience;[585] "in front of me" is, in fact, "behind me". But besides the spatial dividing line there is also the temporal. The audience is before or ahead of the artist, as is his death; each exists in anticipation of the other. The existential sense of the performance to come, of the expected "appearance" of the theatre artist, echoes with the sense of a failing in the judgement of "time", which was already evoked in the *Little Manifesto* read to the audience celebrating Kantor's receipt of the Rembrandt Prize in 1978 (evoking the scene of "the classroom").

After the artist's on-stage double (played by Welminski) had fallen out of the frame, he approached the table next to the empty chair, took up a piece of paper and read out loud:

> Again, I am on stage. I will probably never fully explain this phenomenon either to you or to myself. To be precise, I am not on stage but at the threshold. In front of me, there is the audience – you, Ladies and Gentlemen – that is, according to my vocabulary, Reality. Behind me, there is the stage, that is, Illusion, Fiction. I do not lean towards either of the two sides. I turn my head in one direction, then in the other direction. A splendid resume of my theory.[586]

Here the play of and with the demarcation line between reality and fiction, stage and auditorium, actor and audience, life and death is reiterated in its theoretical practice. In Kantor's absence – it is over twenty years since his death – we have still before us the question of his presence on stage. The end of this performance began again, an hour later, with these same words: "Again, I am on stage. I will probably never fully explain this phenomenon either to you or to myself. To be precise, I am not on stage but at the threshold."[587] It is with this "threshold" that the concept of "the theatre of death" is concerned, as a commentary on the "barrier" that defined the world of – the stage for – the actors in *The Dead Class*. The audience (we ourselves, today) are

---

[585] This also recalls the staging of Odysseus's "return" in 1944 (the talisman of Kantor's theatrical history), where the actor sat on large gun barrel with his back to the audience.
[586] *Ibid*., p.367.
[587] *Ibid*., p.375.

"before" Kantor, in death (in the future of that past). The significance of Kantor's presence on stage is as testimony to his "theory", to his "reality" (his concept of reality), addressed to this future audience. The image of his presence on stage still conditions its afterlife, in the "metaphysical shock" of what is still uncanny in its particular encounter with theatrical mimesis.

Paradoxically – perhaps – an insightful view of this "shock" comes not from one of Kantor's celebrators, but from a self-declared "sceptic". In 1985 (in the middle of the period of martial law in Poland), the Polish critic Andrzej Zurowski (who was at the time president of the Polish section of the International Association of Theatre Critics) offered a polemic (seemingly targeting his colleague Tomasz Raczek, as much as Kantor) regarding Kantor's "presence on stage" – being especially critical of what he calls "the dangerous motif of Kantor-the-conductor".[588] Zurowski makes the pertinent observation that this "conductor" motif is made from the cloth of the emperor's new clothes – far from "improvis[ing] it on the spot" the performance is "strictly defined beforehand". For all Kantor's histrionics, this costuming is that of the critics (for instance, Raczek) rather than that of the artist, for whom the devising work has been long (lasting over a year) and meticulous. Nonetheless, the vital experience of "feeling that the performance we're attending is performed just for us; that another time it would be different, that it's created especially for those who came to see it" – which Puzyna, Wajda, and Rozewicz, for instance, insist upon in their discussion (in 1976) of Kantor's presence on stage – is precisely part of what distinguishes his work from the possibilities of "'normal' professional theatre".[589] Curiously, this impression is attested to even after Kantor's death, in what had by then become, indeed, a form of

---

[588] Andrzej Zurowski, "'Pulling Faces at the Audience': the Lonely Theatre of Tadeusz Kantor", in *NTQ*, vol.1, n.4, November, 1985, p.366. The theme of "conductor" has become part of the "common knowledge" about Kantor. An early instance can be found in Konstanty Puzyna's use during a conversation with Wajda and Rozewicz in September, 1976 (*Polish Theatre Perspectives*, 1.1, 2010, pp.346-7). In a conversation I had with Krzysztof Miklaszewski, however, I was informed that Kantor was indeed usually responding to a scene, rather than anticipating it – as a conductor would be.
[589] Konstanty Puzyna, Tadeusz Rozewicz, and Andrzej Wajda, "On Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class*", trans. Duncan Jamieson and Adela Karsznia, in *Polish Theatre Perspectives*, 1.1, 2010, p.347.

mystification, in a review by Mel Gussow, who also describes having "the impression of viewing the piece created before his very eyes".[590]

Zurowski recognises Kantor's meticulous preparation – that of an artist for whom "improvisation" in performance (as distinct from an openness to "chance"), most explicitly after the return to the "closed form" of the theatre of death – was anathema.[591] This reduces the critical image of "demiurge" to that of "an imposter":

> He, Kantor – the creator rather than a stage character – seems to create the
> 'here and now', a stage reality; yet the shape of this reality proves that it had
> been precisely formed beforehand. Aware of this, the spectator begins to
> perceive Kantor-the-creator's gestures as pulling faces, as Witold
> Gombrowicz might have said.[592]

Despite the slightly malevolent tone, Zurowski is rare in identifying precisely the ambiguous quality of Kantor's stage presence – its relation to an "immaturity" (in Gombrowicz's sense) in the role of "director", here as "the destroyer of illusion", of the actor's thought-out art.[593] Kantor himself draws from *Ferdydurke* in his notebooks, in working towards *The Dead Class* production:

> Centuries-old schoolboy's pranks: making faces, twisting one's body,
> contorting one's face. Making faces is a strikingly effective weapon of
> immaturity against the 'seriousness' of adulthood, which often does nothing

---

[590] Cited by Lech Stangret (in a catalogue article for an exhibition celebrating the appearance of the *The Dead Class* in Spain), Gussow's review is from the year after Kantor's death (during the last year of the Cricot 2 tours): "In 1991, in his review of *The Dead Class* played by the Cricot 2 in New York after the artist's death, the New York Times reviewer, Mel Gussow, said the play did not differ in any way from the ones performed in the previous years, even though the author was no longer present." Nonetheless, "the author's absence deprived him of the impression of participation in something unique, singular." (Lech Stangret, "Kantor's Trap", trans. Malgorzata Musial, in Grzegorz Musial (ed.), *Tadeusz Kantor – Umarla Klasa*, Sopot: Panstwowa Galeria Sztuki, 2004, p.115.)
[591] In one of his conversations with Krzysztof Miklaszewski, Kantor distinguishes "improvisation" as "a terribly traditional" use of "contingencies" from "a much more dangerous element at work – the element of chance", in Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.11.
[592] Zurowski, *op cit*., p.368.
[593] Jan Klossowicz, "Tadeusz Kantor's Journey", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *TDR*, 30.3, 1986, pp.111-12. (This again recalls the Annihilating Machine of the 1963 *Madman and the Nun* production.)

more than mask its lack of sensitivity, feelings, imagination, or its ruthlessness, duplicity, emptiness...[594]

While these reflections address moments of the actors' work in *The Dead Class*, Kantor relished the assault of "immaturity against the 'seriousness' of adulthood" manifested in the sense of "illegitimacy" and "unprofessionalism" in the appearance on stage of "the director", with its implication that the production remained "unfinished".[595] (It is, of course, the image of "the director" that is shown in its "immaturity" here rather than that of the production.) This is why the occasional imitation of such a role by later directors (such as Visniewski), as though it signified their "mastery" on stage, is indeed as embarrassing as Zurowski suggests (in the critics' appraisal) of Kantor's apparent "example". In such "imitation", the sense that Kantor seeks in the immaturity of pulling faces is reduced to its opposite, to a seriousness that is no longer shocking. "Making faces," Kantor avers, "must pierce the audience like an arrow."[596] In all the hagiographic affirmation of the apparent familiarity of the last Cricot 2 productions, the sense of shock that characterised the theatre of death is lost, along with Kantor's own irony about his stage persona, theatricalising the sense of "participation" in an image of the artist "that for others spells out an artistic poser" – "sitting at the table... all in black, elegant, black patent shoes, a scarf, a hat with a wide brim".[597]

Besides this self-haunting persona (that is annexed in the "final rehearsal" of *Today is my Birthday*), the division between the living and the dead (as between audience and art) is classically emblematised in *The Dead Class* performance by the presence of a little rope, itself annexed from the gallery. Indeed, together with the scenic machine or apparatus of serried, wooden school benches that proposes a "stage" for the performance, and which is autonomously exhibitable (with or without the mannequin children that were the actor-characters' doubles in performance), this rope dividing or demarcating the audience space from that of the actors is key to the appearance of the

---

[594] Tadeusz Kantor, "From the Director's Notebook – 1974", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.245.
[595] Klossowicz, *op. cit.*
[596] *Ibid.*, p.246.
[597] Tadeusz Kantor, "My Work – My Journey", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.18.

"dramatised séance". In the Krzysztofory Gallery, where the performance was devised, rehearsed, and first performed, the "stage" apparatus of the school benches – like the various objects associated with individual characters (a bicycle, a window pane, etc.) – already represents (or doubles) its use in live performance by its own "autonomous" reality, as if annexed temporarily for the performance, just as the rope plays a borrowed role, marking the appropriate distance of the public from the "tableau".

In Kantor's own account these objects counter-pointed a surrounding "black hole, a void":

> School desks are always in a Classroom. But it was not a Classroom – Real Place. It was a black hole, a void, in front of which the whole auditorium stopped. To make it worse, a rope functioned as a barrier. It must be that there existed a different barrier, one which is more powerful and terrifying...[598]

Together these objects form a theatrical *memento mori*, enduring beyond the light, reflected from the actor-characters' "look", captured in Andrzej Wajda's 1976 film of the production.[599] The film offers not only the metaphysical-temporal schema of the photograph (the "nachbild" in Heidegger's example), but also a *technique* – of focus, of angle, of depth of field (and thus foreground and background), of framing – to create an image of what was already anticipated as being memorable at the time of the performances.

Concerning the demarcation of the visibility of *The Dead Class* (in its after life, beyond the "participation" in and of the séance itself), there is (as has been mentioned) the installation that Kantor made subsequently (in 1983), entitled "The Classroom: A Closed Work", in which the cast of Characters that belong to the performance – "the Woman with the mechanical cradle", "the Old Man with a bike",

---

[598] Tadeusz Kantor, "Theatrical Place", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.365.
[599] Wajda's film (made with Kantor's co-operation initially) is a key document of this production's after life.

"the Charwoman", and so forth[600] – has been replaced by the solitary figure of a schoolboy sitting at a single desk. This character-image, in which Kantor appears as the subject of this work[601], was originally made for exhibition in 1975, after which it was cast in bronze as an installation for his mother's grave (which would also become Kantor's own in 1990). This new "model" of and for what is "memorable" – an abstraction afterwards – becomes emblematic for the relation between archive and performance, as it concerns the subject of Kantor's accompanying essay on *The Classroom*, addressing the conditions of visibility of this work – by means of exhibition – *after* the theatre of death research into the ("closed") space of and for *The Dead Class* performances (which were, nonetheless, still ongoing).

As the relation between the Cricot 2 and the Krzysztofory Gallery changed during the 1980s,[602] the "theatre" (of death) becomes a "room" (of imagination) in Kantor's reflections. And in the last Cricot 2 production, *Today is my Birthday*, the room suggests "the artist's studio", in an echo of an unrealised project of Wyspianski's, "in which the figures in the studio of a dying painter step out of the preliminary sketches and step down off the drawings on the easels, come to life, and begin to speak."[603] That they "speak" only as figures of the painter's imagination points to the "impossible" life of the actors' fiction (as has already been discussed, above, with Kolankiewicz; and in chapter four, with Klossowicz) – not least as a question of what comes forth from the archive (rather than the tomb).[604]

The installation of *The Classroom* makes manifest the implication of the rope in the performance, playing with the potential (or the signification) of an aesthetic

---

[600] Tadeusz Kantor, "Characters in *The Dead Class*", trans. Karol Jakubowicz, in *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, ed. Bohdan Drozdowski, London: Calder, 1979, p.138-40.
[601] The text for this image is provided by Kantor's "little manifesto", already quoted in the Introduction (and which is cited in Tuymann's exhibition, *The Reality of the Lowest Rank*).
[602] On December 17th 1979, the Krakow Group ratified the separation of the Cricot 2 from its activities, with the Cricoteka opening in a separate space (at ulica Kanonicza 5), in January 1980, as the official "home" of the theatre company. The Cricoteka's first exhibition was organised by Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, under the title of *The Idea of the Cricot 2 Theatre* (Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.123).
[603] Plesniarowicz, *ibid.*, p.35.
[604] Scarpetta attempts (in contrast, for example, to Blanchot) to transcend the *theatre* of death by appealing to the "Lazarean art" of "Kantor in the present", addressing Kantor's "stage presence" [*cf* the "Epilogue" in Guy Scarpetta, *Kantor au présent*, Arles: Actes Sud, 2000].

"visibility", oriented by a "demarcation line". The work is not simply something given to be seen, but is a stand-in for something that is not (and cannot be) present: that is, something to be remembered. It is a construction, a material fiction; and yet, in being fabricated and exhibited, it becomes a "real" document of the past, making visible for an audience, in an artwork, what cannot be seen by the audience, in an allusion to memory. The demarcation of the rope signifies a threshold, making visible the singular role of the artist ("director") – as the only one who is able to "participate" in the "séance", crossing the line between audience and performer, past and present.[605]

The sense of the "closed work" (in its apparent contradiction to the Happening) had, however, already been suggested in Kantor's contribution to the *Assemblage d'hiver* events that he initiated to accompany a new stage in the Foksal Gallery programme in 1969 – following the curators' text (in December 1968) addressing their own question "What Do We Not Like About Foksal PSP Gallery?"[606] Pawel Polit describes Kantor's "action" on the opening night (in January 1969), *Typing Machine with Sail and Steer*, in terms that orient an understanding of the contextual situation in which Kantor insists on the meaning of "avant-garde" in and for his theatre in the following decade:

> Surrounded by the audience Kantor typed his most important ideas regarding
> the nature of art on sheets of paper, rolled them up and locked them in a
> cylindrical container that was then suspended from the ceiling. During the
> performance he inscribed the following statement on the gallery wall: "Down
> with so-called participation." With this statement Kantor effectively cancelled
> the concept of Place as it had been proposed by Mariusz Tchorek [in the
> founding manifesto of the Foksal Gallery in 1966]. What is more he brought
> about a theoretical split in the Foksal gallery community, demanding its

---

[605] Relating this to Benjamin's evocation of the theatre "apparatus" (cited at the end of the Introduction) would perhaps take us further into a sense of what returns in the theatre of death than does Jan Kott's apostrophising of Kantor (in his obituary) as a theatrical Charon (Kott, "Kantor, Memory, Memoire", trans. Jadwiga Kosicka, in *NTQ*, vol.VII, n.28, Nov. 1991, p.301).
[606] This is included in Wieslaw Borowski, *et al*., "Foksal Gallery Documents", in *October*, vol.38, Autumn 1986, pp.57-69.

members to choose between a model of art as an isolated message, on the one hand, and the formal idea of Place, on the other.[607]

The concept of "isolated message" would be taken up by the new Foksal team – Borowski still, but now joined by Andrzej Turowski – in their subsequent proposal concerning "place" and "participation" for the Gallery, that of "living archives". Not for the first time – nor for the last – Kantor's sense of the demarcation line involved not simply a distinction between his own and others' aesthetic commitments, but an active (not to say militant) opposition. It was, in fact, under the banner of the "demarcation line" that Kantor's relations with the Foksal Gallery were founded, as the original curators participated in his first Happening (called *Cricotage*), at the café of the Society of the Friends of the Fine Arts in Warsaw, and again in Krakow, at the Society of Art Historians, in 1965 – under the title, precisely, of "A Demarcation Line".[608]

V. *How does the past of Kantor's theatre, with the "example" of the Cricoteka as a "living archive", resist the claims of what is "post"-modern?*

Following the preceding chapters (in parts one and two of this thesis), we may read Kantor "after" a concept of the theatre of death – as much as (to begin with) reading this concept "after" Kantor. Not simply supposing that it is particular to Kantor, it becomes possible to consider how to read "the theatre of death" in Kantor particularly – in terms of his "model" example of and for the actor in the figure of the mannequin and the "live effigy", and in the demarcation of actor from audience. Indeed, if the concept of the theatre of death, and its associated iconography of the actor, proposed in parts one and two, has any meaning at all, then it would have to be tested against such a reading of Kantor. The potential conceptual meaning of his manifesto is not

---

[607] Pawel Polit, "Warsaw's Foksal Gallery 1966-1972: Between Place and Archive" (p.7). This article is available on the *Artmargins* website: www.artmargins.com.

[608] The first text (1965) of this "Demarcation Line" manifesto (in its English translation) is reproduced on p.140 of *Kantor was here* (Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka (eds.), London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011) and a photograph of Kantor painting the emblematic line is reproduced on p.142 (*ibid.*). The text was also reproduced as part of Kantor's involvement in Richard Demarco's presentation of Polish artists ("Atelier 72") at his gallery during the 1972 Edinburgh Festival (*ibid.*, p.36). Kantor's Happenings are the subject of the essays and testimonies gathered by Jaroslaw Suchan in *Tadeusz Kantor: Impossible* (Krakow: Bunkier Sztuki, 2000). A brief commentary on the 1965 events is also offered, for instance, by Kobialka in *Further on, Nothing*, pp.78-81.

simply immanent in its writing, however, but dispersed through the contextual and historical conditions of its being, or becoming, readable – not least, in translation.

Rather than simply citing Kantor's own texts, then, in relation to questions applied to them, as if they illustrated a concept, such reading requires identifying what are the questions – "of death" – that these writings themselves pose concerning a concept of "theatre". As this thesis proposes, the kernel of this concept – concerning the after life of its theatre – addresses a model (or paradigmatic) appearance of the actor; while its shell concerns the appearance of a "theatre" without actors, but still with an audience, in respect of its archive. It often seems, however, that commentary on Kantor – addressing this after life – regards his writings as if they themselves defined their own reading(s), as if research required merely their paraphrase. Indeed, too often they are read (and cited) as if simply describing a theatrical practice, rather than as offering a theoretical critique of what is to be thought through the concept of "theatre" in the first place. The "theatre of death", then, concerns the very possibility of its theorisation in the historical example of Kantor's work.

Even the Cricoteka's own exhibitions have relied almost exclusively on Kantor's own writings about the Cricot 2 productions, often without distinguishing his later reflections (and even model reproductions of earlier, but since lost, objects) from the performances to which they refer – as if these writings and recreations were not themselves part of their own aesthetic-theoretical history. As Kantor himself observed:

> In art, the logic of a phenomenon's successful development does not often coincide with a linear chronology... It is only later, after it is already over, we arrange the facts and events according to the logic of our time, following our cause and effect. All these explanations of the relationships between the ideas, my attempts at locating, defining, and analysing them, help me identify for myself my expanding past, discover its transformations, which may lead me to new solutions...[609]

---

[609] Tadeusz Kantor, "Theatrical Place", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, ed. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.360.

Although Kantor's work for his archive, alongside the development of his theatre making in the 1980s, undoes any simple historical reference to materials *from* the past being available *to* the present, this does not mean we need simply ignore the historical distinction entailed, for instance, in a commitment to the avant-garde. As with the later Cricot 2 productions, while Kantor is engaged with a (re)creation of the past (as an "avant-garde of my own") this is still in the modernist image of what its future might be in the present ("after" modernism perhaps, but not "post-modern").

An exhibition about the Cricoteka's own work of curating exhibitions – showing different instances of the way that models in the archive have been presented, for example, rather than simply re-presenting them as if these replicas were identical with their historical references – would be interesting. As concerns "authorship" in and of this archive (*pace* Kossakowski, discussed above), such an exhibition might take as its subject the work of other Cricot 2 collaborators (besides the actors), such as Eugeniusz Bakalarz ("the man who built the weird Kantor machines"[610]); Adam Kaczynski ("a Polish pianist, composer and propagator of contemporary music, who for many years worked together with the Cricot 2 theatre"[611]); Stanislaw Balewicz ("indefatigable impresario of artistic life in Krakow"[612]), who was the director of the Krzysztofory Gallery (on behalf of the Krakow Group) from 1958-1988; or of his successor, Jozef Chrobak (the archivist of the Grupa Krakowska[613]), who has curated many Kantor exhibitions (including recently, *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting. Theatre*, held in Vilnius, 2012).[614]

Although the Cricoteka has published collections of contemporary reviews and articles (under the editorship of Anna Halczak), the record of Cricot 2 performances remains largely presented as (if) defined by Kantor himself. The problem here is that

---

[610] Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.151.

[611] Tomaz Tomazewski, "The Spectacle has ended, the Performance goes on!", trans. Anda MacBride, in Jozef Chrobak and Justyna Michalik (eds.), *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting. Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2012, n.16, p.65.

[612] Miklaszewski, *op cit.*, p.1.

[613] Under Chrobak's editorship, twelve volumes of documents related to the Krakow Group, and four volumes on the preceding Grupa Mlodych, were published during the 1990s [*cf* Koloski, p.219].

[614] Jozef Chrobak and Justyna Michalik (eds.), *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting. Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2012; and Hanna Wroblewska (ed.), *Grupa Krakowska* (exhibition catalogue), Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery, 1996, pp.77-78 and p.82.

these writings are often used historically (both curatorially and academically) as descriptions rather than as theorisations of these performances – as if they themselves did not already question the status of a "documented" or "described" past. As descriptions these texts are short on specific information, since they address the idea of a production rather than its practical process – a paradox that Kantor himself had already addressed in his 1963 "anti-exhibition", and which animated his deeply polemical relations with the curators of the Foksal Gallery. When Krystian Lupa remarks that "we know how much Tadeusz Kantor's actors rebelled against pointless, in their opinion, demands"[615], this is a knowledge that largely falls outside of the resources for study that are available, in English translation at least, which tend towards hagiography of the "authorial" theatre artist (without even acknowledging the theorist).

There has not been (so far as I know), for instance, a Cricoteka exhibition that has been curated with "explanatory" information derived from other authors, or by editing anew the existing documents, which would radically investigate the conditions of Kantor's claims (in 1980) for the Cricoteka to be a "living archive". This latter term, developed in polemics concerning the direction of the Foksal Gallery addressing the presentation of artists' work[616] (polemics that led to the resignation of two of its co-founders in 1970), was already applied by Kantor to an exhibition, entitled "Living Archives, Twenty Years of the Development of the Cricot 2", held at the Krzysztofory Gallery in 1976 (still as part of the Krakow Group's projects).[617] Significantly, the founding, four years later, of the Cricoteka would have the effect of separating the Cricot 2 archive from that of the Krakow Artists Group.

This development, which signifies a profound change in the history of the Cricot 2, was not without acrimony, following Kantor's decision to curate a separate exhibition of "Painters from the Cricot 2 Circle" (who were then just as much from the circle of the Foksal Gallery) within the "Polish Avant-Garde 1910-1978" exhibition, organised

---

[615] "Trip to the Unreachable", Krystian Lupa interviewed by Beata Matkowska-Swies, trans. Dorothea Sobstel, in *Theater*, 41.3, 2012, p.38.
[616] In Wieslaw Borowski and Andrzej Turowski, in "Foksal Gallery Documents", in *October*, vol.38, Autumn 1986, pp.57-69.
[617] Hanna Wroblewska (ed.), *Grupa Krakowska* (exhibition catalogue), Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery, 1996, p.80.

by Ryszard Stanislawski (director of the Lodz Museum of Modern Art) in Rome in 1979, where Kantor was also presenting his Cricotage, *Where are the Snows of Yesteryear?*[618] The "division of space, calculated to the last centimetre by the contenders, two catalogues, two posters, two different arrangements," is discussed by the exhibition's Italian prime mover, Achille Perilli.[619] Kantor's unilateralism, and its attendant politics of exclusivity, was repeated when the exhibition transferred to Edinburgh that same year – where, as Warpechowski (one of the participants) reflected ironically, "Poles lunged at each others' throats in faraway Scotland".[620]

This process of constructing "the past" begun by Kantor himself can be further seen, for example, in the editorial presentation by its translator, Michal Kobialka, of the text from which the title of this chapter is taken, as belonging to the years in which the experience it ostensibly describes occurred – even though the text itself explicitly states the retrospective nature of this "occurrence", which it theorises. In the form in which it is most easily available to the Anglophone reader – Kobialka's collection of translations in *Further on, Nothing* – it is editorially located in "1971 or 1972,"[621] transposing the past tense of the text's opening sentence ("It was 1971 or 1972") into the present of its writing, despite the fact that a later paragraph begins: "Recently, after ten years, during which *The Dead Class* toured the world…"[622] – which would suggest that it was not written before 1985. In fact the text was written in 1983 (or at least published then), to accompany Kantor's installation "The Classroom", as part of the *Présences Polonaises* exhibition held at the Pompidou Centre that year. By interpolating the past tense ("it was") in the opening sentence of his translation (where the Polish simply reads *Rok 1971 lub 72* ["The year 1971 or 72"[623]], although the opening paragraph indeed offers a narrative in the past tense), Kobialka seems to be deciding between different "archive" possibilities (as these are suggested, for

---

[618] Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.121 and p.123.
[619] Achille Perilli, "Kantor ab ovo", trans. Susan Finnel, in Silvia Parlagreco (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor-Cricot 2: Photographs by Romano Martinis*, Milan: Oedipus Editions, 2001, p.176.
[620] Warpechowski, quoted by Lukasz Ronduda, *Polish Art of the 70s*, Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2009, n.36, p.129.
[621] Kantor, "A Classroom", in *Further on, Nothing,* ed. & trans. Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.226 (and also the Contents page).
[622] *Ibid.*, p.229.
[623] Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, in *Tadeusz Kantor – The Classroom: Closed Work 1983*, ed. Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, trans. William Brand, Krakow: Cricoteka, 1995, n.p.

instance, by Chantal Meyer-Plantureux, between a "real memory transformed or [one] created by the imagination"[624]).

There are many such examples of Kobialka editorially assigning texts to dates that are contradicted by their content, constructing an apparently archival chronology that is partly his own fiction – and partly, of course, Kantor's. For example, a text by Kantor about the history of the Cricot 2 is editorially located "around 1963" by Kobialka in *Further On, Nothing*, while the text situates itself around 1975 (or later) in referring to 20 years of the company's history. Here the researcher has at least to acknowledge what Luiza Nader notes, citing Hal Foster: "practices which have an archival impulse not only use but also establish archives, revealing their elements as simultaneously found and constructed, referring to facts but at the same time being fictitious."[625]

Where Kobialka subsequently quotes "The Classroom" text within his own commentary (accompanied by a photograph of what his captions describes as "Tadeusz Kantor's model/ installation to *The Dead Class* – 'A Classroom – A Closed Work of Art' (1983)"), the decade referred to by Kantor is left out.[626] It is as if 1983 was the same as 1975, where the relation between the installation/ model (in quotation marks) and the performance-production (in italics), to which it ostensibly refers, goes without comment; as with the relation between the object-installation and the photograph, it is as if to speak of the one were simply to speak of the other. The preposition "to" that links both works in Kobialka's photograph caption seems to suggest that the one is a given of and for research into the other, rather than that each poses the very question of the "visibility" of the other in time ("after the event", whether as performance or exhibition, memory or construction) as *art*. It is, after all, a characteristic of art in the twentieth century to have called into question its relation to "documentation", since at least Duchamp.

---

[624] Chantal Meyer-Plantureux, "Les objets de Kantor", in "Tadeusz Kantor 2", *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale* 18, Paris: CRNS Éditions, 2005, p.239.
[625] Luiza Nader, "What do Archives Forget?", in Christine Macel and Natasa Petresin-Bachelez (eds.), *Promises of the Past*, Pompidou Centre exhibition catalogue, Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2010, p.225; *cf* Foster, "An Archival Impulse", in *October* 110, Fall 2004.
[626] Michal Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp.223-25. It is perhaps worth noting that, again, Kobialka makes an interpolation in his translation – adding "of art" to Kantor's title "closed work" [*Klasa Szkolna: dzielo zamkniete*]; *cf. Tadeusz Kantor – The Classroom: Closed Work 1983*, ed. Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, trans. William Brand, Krakow: Cricoteka, 1995, n.p.

Before considering this event of "visibility" and the descriptive and/or theoretical time of its occurrence (as between performance and exhibition), it is worth noting that these observations are intended not so much as criticism of Kobialka (to whom so much of the access to Kantor in English is due[627]), as to point out how the concept of the theatre of death lies hidden in full view within the history of *theatre* studies, when the question of the object of such study is not addressed as that of its own research. After all, the transposition of past performance into the present tense of analysis (or even of theory) is one of the principal fictions of theatre studies. As has been explored in part two of this thesis, the object of study (as "the theatre of death") concerns not simply *what* may be known of such a theatre (theoretically and historically), but *how* it may be known, afterwards (after the event) – if indeed the theatrical experience, in and of time, is (as is so often supposed) ephemeral or live; if this is not thought of in terms of the mnemotechnics of its practice(s).

A specific criticism of Kobialka, as providing (as it were) an "archive" of Kantor's writings in English, might, however, concern the characteristic rhetoric of his own commentary, where he often ventriloquises Kantor in the voices of post-war French theorists – as, in this instance, discussing *The Classroom* installation, Michel Foucault.[628] Kobialka often continues a sentence reflecting on, or referencing, Kantor with a theoretical citation that is attributed only in an end note, leaving the impression that the cited remark is itself a direct commentary on the Kantor example or context being discussed in the main text. Kobialka's association of Kantor's work with both a post-modernist and a post-structuralist frame of reference is one which this thesis would resist (claiming, indeed, that Kantor's work already resists it). Rather than the Baudrillard allusion in Kobialka's article *Forget Kantor*, for instance, more pertinent

---

[627] An analysis of the history of translations of Kantor into English (and the particular readings that they propose) would make for an interesting essay in itself, particularly in relation to French editions (with their research agenda led by Denis Bablet). Besides the eclipse of the work of Piotr Graff, M. Dabrowski, and William Brand, another Krakow-based writer, Andrzej Branny refers in an article to a "bound typescript" of his own translations, entitled *The Theatrical Place. A Collection of Kantor's Metatheatrical Statements* (Branny, "The Theatre of Tadeusz Kantor", in *Forum Modernes Theater*, 1.1 (1986), p.72).

[628] Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing,* p.225.

would be to examine why contemporary Polish artists have, indeed, "forgotten" Kantor.[629]

While it is a "given" of theatre studies that Kantor is (to be) remembered, it should also be remembered that he himself insisted on the avant-garde context within which such memory is significant; otherwise the Cricoteka would be in danger of relegating the Cricot 2 to being simply another part of an established theatre or art history. What does this "forgetting" tell us about the possibilities of remembering Kantor, of constructing histories of his work; not least, for a concept of the "theatre of death" as testimony to the "ends" of modernism? We need to engage with the way that Kantor himself had already addressed this question in his own lifetime by establishing the Cricoteka, alongside his condemnations at that time of an "official" or "pseudo-avant-garde".

Fundamental to these questions of past and present – both remembered and forgotten (as already discussed in relation to Fischer-Lichte and Klossowicz in chapter four) – is the mode of "visibility" that is theatre, whether in its performances, documents, or theorisations. What is the materiality of this visibility – in which the aesthetic and the theoretical address each other?[630] Condensed in the preposition "to" in the instance of a curatorial caption for a photograph (*pace* Kobialka's citation of "Kantor's model/ installation to *The Dead Class*") the whole question of an archive and the possibility of a "theatre without theatre" (as a "living archive") is inscribed in the references that constitute a thesis such as this one.

---

[629] Kobialka, "Forget Kantor", in *PAJ* 47, May 1994.

[630] This question is at the heart of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, which underlies the whole of this thesis. In a review article about Edward Krasinski's first US exhibition, Blake Stimson makes a similar point: "The 'aesthetic moment', Theodor Adorno wrote, is 'not accidental to philosophy.' By this he meant that aesthetic and conceptual relations to the world are deeply and closely intertwined in a manner made possible only by their difference: where the concept builds its claim to truth by analysis, by parsing the world into discrete, precisely defined elements, aesthetic response derives its conviction from the opposing impulse, from drawing together the diverse truths of the world – in principle, if not in practice, all of them – into a single unified affective response. Of course, not all pointed concepts rise to the standards of philosophy, nor do all woolly feelings qualify as aesthetic experience. The high bar for each is the other. The conceptual domain of philosophy is the measure of art's rise beyond that which is not art, just as art's aesthetic province sets the standard for philosophy" (Stimson, "The Line of Edward Krasinski", in *Artforum*, November, 2003, p.149).

VI. *How do claims for the autonomy of art resist those for their historical specificity –
whether as avant-garde or anachronistic?*

For Kantor, any concept of theatre – as an art (rather than simply a professional
practice) – is to be understood in terms of the avant-garde, itself an index for
challenging expectations concerning aesthetic truth and historical reality. With respect
to the discussion of Harold Segel's allusion to "post-modernist" contemporaneity in
chapter two, it is important to keep in mind that for Kantor the question of art history
was not simply formalist, but deeply engaged with the conflicted conditions of and for
aesthetic representation in the past century. As already noted, with Piotrowski's
proposal for a "horizontal history" of the avant-garde, in which centre and margin are
always plurally relative, rather than vertically hierarchical,[631] the universalist appeal
of and for aesthetic "autonomy" has different meanings in the situation of Communist
Krakow and Capitalist New York or Paris.[632]

The engagement with the professed "autonomy" of art (the sense or meaning of which
itself changes within the Polish context from the time of the Thaw to the 1970s) is
fundamental to Kantor's commitment to a generational relation with the inter-war
modernism (and internationalism) of Witkacy and the original Cricot artists'
theatre.[633] Kantor's own ambitions embodied this commitment after the War, which
could be publicly manifested again, after the years of mandatory Socialist Realism,
with the founding of the Cricot 2 as the "unofficial" theatrical project of the
subsequently founded (and officially registered) Krakow Group of artists (1957),
itself a revival of the pre-war Grupa Krakowska, of which the first Cricot had also

---

[631] "This horizontal approach will have the effect of provincialising the West. I am not
arguing that we should deny or negate the existence of the West, since its continuity is
assured on many levels, for example as an artistic tradition, system of values, institutional
infrastructure and an art market. What I am arguing for is a need to see Western culture not in
terms of its hegemony, but its geographic specificity: as a culture of one of the regions of the
world. This is the key to any horizontal approach. The revision of our discipline represented
by Hans Belting's call for 'the two voices of art history', cited at the beginning of this
chapter, represents, therefore, just an initial step in a much more ambitious project of
horizontal art history, a project that will lead to a geographic localisation of the West"
(Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London:
Reaktion Books, 2012 p.52; on the October book *Art since 1900*, see pp.25-26).
[632] Kantor received travel grants for residencies in Paris in 1947 (visiting there again in 1955),
and in 1965 in New York, as well as receiving support for stays in other cities in the West,
including Hamburg and Florence.
[633] On the original company, see Kobialka's n.65, in *Further on, Nothing*, pp.505-6; and also,
Koloski, *Painting Krakow Red: Politics and Culture in Poland, 1945-1950*, pp.217-20.

been the theatrical project. This was neither a museal interest in inter-war abstraction, nor a militant interest in a post-war aesthetic Degree Zero on Kantor's part, but rather a concern for dialogue between past and present, between formism and *informel*, between Malevich and Matta.[634] This dialogue within aesthetics bypassed questions of realism (with its overt political connotations in the (former) East), proposing a domain of "autonomous" activity that was not therefore manifestly *anti*-communist. By the 1970s, however, a new generation of artists would push artistic engagement beyond this (former) avant-garde claim to autonomy, and Kantor himself would turn to the (newly "heretical") idea of the "closed work", with its affirmation of a private space (of "memory") within social-cultural mnemotechnics.

The sense of belonging to an historical, modernist internationalism – constructing (or "reconstructing") a continuity across the trauma of the Occupation and of the Iron Curtain – offers the seeming paradox of an avant-garde tradition, of which the "theatre of death" marks the beginning of the end within the history of the Cricot 2. Crucially, this relates to the biographies of the Krakow Group artists' own lives and their memories of pre-war (and thus also of pre-Communist) civil society.[635] Indeed, Kantor's founding manifesto for the Cricot 2 makes this motivation (in relation to the history of the short twentieth century) explicit:

> The Theatre takes the name of the Cricot 2, thereby perceiving itself as a continuator of the tradition of the pre-war theatre bearing the same name. Cricot 2 is an actors' theatre, which seeks its new and radical methods of acting in contact with avant-garde artists. Cricot 2 Theatre puts forward the idea of theatre defined as a work of art, governed by its own autonomous existence, and opposed to a traditional theatre of thoughtless reproduction of forms, which has irrevocably lost the freedom and the power of action.[636]

---

[634] In the late 1950s, at least, Kantor referred to Matta, although by the 1970s this seemed to be a forgotten point of reference. ("Kantor did indeed refer... to Matta... as the 'painter he felt closest to' in a survey for *The Cultural Review* (May 12th, 1957)" [Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004. p.53].)

[635] As a student in Krakow in the 1930s, Kantor had attended performances by the Cricot company (Plesniarowicz, *ibid*., pp.25-26).

[636] Tadeusz Kantor, "Powstanie Cricot 2" (unpublished ms, 1955), in Michal Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, n.65, pp.505-06 [translation modified in consultation with Kobialka].

While, as Piotrowski notes (in advocating a "horizontal history" of the European avant-gardes), during the Cold War associations with Western culture offered an alternative to the official cultural politics of the Communist regimes, this should not entail a conceptual assimilation to an art (or theatre) history identified with – and by – the former West.[637] On the contrary, the concern of such a history (challenging the established "vertical" model) should be to explore the question of "how does the art of the margins change the perspective of the centre?"[638] How does the sense of the major history change in the light of what it constitutes as a minor alternative?

In the context of a thesis such as this one, which is researched and written in one of the "vertically" dominant European languages, this is to ask how to ensure that the work of translation – on which it depends – opens the thesis outward rather than simply drawing resources inward (for instance, as concerns the meanings of "avant-garde", or of the polemical relations between experiment and empathy associated with it). As posed in the Introduction, the question here of the relation between the object and the method of aesthetic research becomes that of how conceptual work *in* translation acknowledges its limitations as a work *of* translation.[639]

The international context was always referred to by Kantor in Poland. In 1948 (before the full implementation of Socialist Realism as official dogma), for instance, in a lecture "on the contemporary painting of France" that he gave at the Artists' Association in Krakow (having returned from a six month stay in Paris, from January to June 1947), he notes "a care for the future" in the West:

---

[637] This "horizontal" consideration *of* the Western avant-gardes is distinct from a vertical orientation *by* such Western viewpoints, as the latter produces a central-marginal art history. (It is no accident that Piotrowski's articles have been published in *Third Text*, amongst other journals.)

[638] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2012, p.31. This is to engage with a history which is itself part of the Cold War legacy (*pace* Piotrowski's reference to Eva Cockcroft's discussion [in her essay *Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War*] of the 1961 MOMA exhibition of Polish "non-objective painters", *In the Shadow of Yalta*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2009, pp.80-81).

[639] One might think that the prepositions "in" and "of" are in the wrong order here, but this is to acknowledge precisely that the conceptual work "of" translation is dependent upon pre-existing work "in" translation.

The constant effort of moving forward, the effort of searching and discovery, which at first seems to us almost abnormal. It is the constant discovery of the new profiles of things and the world; the incessant, permanent regeneration. The young generation is poised between today and the future. The question asked of art is directed at them. This may sound paradoxical in our country, but the young generation in France is not being bred; it is being listened to...[640]

Once the new aesthetic politics of a compulsory Socialist Realism had been instituted, by late 1949, the time for "listening" was officially over and this "future" foreclosed. Indeed, Kantor's teaching position at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow (which he had held since October 1947) was revoked in February 1950.

In contrast to those who, after the Thaw, would explore theatre through the latest literary developments of "the Absurd", whether Mrozek and Rozewicz, or Ionesco and Beckett (translations of whom quickly appeared in the newly founded [in 1957] theatre journal *Dialog*), Kantor turned to Witkacy – without either assimilating him into, or applying to him, the new, "international style" of Absurdist theatricality. In this concern with the literary aspect of theatre, there is again a relation between the "local" (Krakow) and the "international" (Paris) that ought not to be read (even in translation) simply in terms of the canons of the (former) West. Even today it is almost impossible to conceive of Krakow (Witkacy and the Cricot, for example) as the international and Paris as the local.

According to Plesniarowicz, Kantor's interest in Witkacy's "extravagant dramas, which had been rejected by the theatre," began "just before the war". Kantor had even attended a lecture by Witkacy on the philosophy of Pure Form at the university in Krakow, and remarked, years later, that: "Witkiewicz made an enormous impression

---

[640] Tadeusz Kantor, "On the Contemporary Painting of France" (1948), trans. Anda MacBride, in *Tadeusz Kantor. Painting. Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2012, p.118. There is a certain irony in Kantor's "news from Paris", where he speaks as representative of the "young generation" in Krakow (the Grupa Mlodych) in relation to the institutionally dominant Kapists (Komitet Paryski), the revived pre-war artists' group of post-impressionists and post-Bonnard colourists, who had themselves studied in Paris before the War [Koloski, pp.214-215].

on me as a person."[641] Curiously though, the only reference I have found so far (in translation) to Kantor's interest in Witkacy's paintings is a remark made in an interview with Klossowicz, cited by Plesniarowicz whilst discussing Kantor's encounter with Surrealism in Paris in 1947. Kantor is paraphrased as having been struck by the "resemblance" between paintings by Witkacy and those of "schizophrenics and drug addicts" (at an exhibition organised by the Surrealists) " – which he had never been able to accept."[642]

In considering the appeal of the "avant-garde" in late 1950s theatre culture, it is important to bear in mind the fundamental importance of the literary within Polish theatre history, from the "established" end of the spectrum in the State repertory theatre, presenting the "national classics" (as Zygmunt Hübner observes[643]), to the "experimental" end, continuing a tradition of re-inventing Romantic dramas as contemporary *theatre* (as Flaszen remarks of Grotowski at this time). These examples present a major position in relation to the post-war concern with both what Ionesco termed the "tragedy of language" and what Flaszen calls the "total theatre" of "visual and technical effects", trying to go beyond "rhetoric or illusionary theatre". As Flaszen writes (in 1967), in terms which share their premise (but not their conclusion) with Kantor:

---

[641] Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.27.

[642] *Ibid.*, p.53-54. This could also be compared with Kott's sense of situating Witkacy in a "dialectic of anachronism" with respect to the drug cultures of pre-World War One European "Bohemia" and mid-1960s American "counter culture" [*Theatre of Essence*]. It also offers an intriguing concern with an aesthetic "demarcation line" between *art autre* and *art informel*, behind which perhaps lies an anxiety concerning a distinction between pathology and creativity (*pace* Schapiro, *Modern Art*, New York, George Braziller, 1979, p.232 and pp.199-200).

[643] Zygmunt Hübner, "The Professional's Guilty Conscience: a Letter from Poland", in *NTQ*, vol.IV, n.15, August 1988, p.223. Hübner's own conflictual role within the theatre establishment is used as an example by Jerzy Tymicki in his report on Polish theatre leading up to and including the suppression of Solidarity under martial law (in *TDR* 30.3, Fall 1986). A stark example of the ambiguities of the "apolitical" position of "autonomous art" is provided by Kantor's acceptance from the Jaruzelski regime of a state prize for "exceptional cultural achievement" in 1982. As Piotrowski notes, "when the majority of artists were boycotting the regime, Kantor's willingness to cooperate clearly legitimised it" (*Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2012, p.92; see also, Hübner's *Theatre and Politics*, trans. and ed. Jadwiga Kosicka, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1992, pp.209-210). It is curious that none of the principal monographs about Kantor in English discuss this mutual "recognition" of art and politics in this period.

The avant-garde has proved [the limitation of discursive content] in the theatre, but only in the realm of language and text. To be consistent, we must go further: to create theatre we step beyond literature; theatre starts where the word ends. The realisation that theatrical language should be autonomous, built up out of its own substance rather than the language of words, was a radical step already attempted by Artaud in his dreams...[644]

In the 1950s Flaszen was a theatre critic in Krakow, and he evokes the newly founded Cricot 2 as emblematic of a "resurrected" cultural life following the Thaw:

Here was a resurrected artistic Krakow, the traditional capital city of Polish bohemians, of innovative experiments, the cradle of the avant-garde. An artists' revolt, with obvious political overtones, ostentatiously breaking chains, but with the perspective of going beyond a purely political rebellion. Moving towards the revolt of the creative individual, unpredictable, inexpressible in the language of journalism, in the semiotics of discourse.[645]

This sense of the Polish October as unfolding on the Left Bank of the Vistula perhaps says more about Flaszen's generation – who had often begun their artistic or critical activities committed to the new, post-war politics – than Kantor's (who had continued their artistic experiments, albeit in private, during the Socialist Realist years). The Polish example, however, also points to the fact that claims to artistic "autonomy" (as "going beyond a purely political rebellion") differed as much between the countries of the Eastern Bloc as between each of them and the existentialist "project" underway in

---

[644] Ludwik Flaszen, "After the Avant-Garde" (1967), in *Grotowski and Company*, trans. Andrzej Wojtasik and Paul Allain, Wroclaw: Icarus Publishing, 2009, pp.116-177. This "step beyond literature" had, of course, been already attempted by Craig (*pace* the discussion of precedents in chapters one). A similar discussion is had between Kantor and Miklaszewski (*Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, pp.100-101).
[645] Ludwik Flaszen, "The Children of the October Look to the West" (2007), in *Grotowski and Company*, trans. Andrzej Wojtasik and Paul Allain, Wroclaw: Icarus Publishing, 2009, p.36.

Paris, particularly with respect to what Piotrowski calls the "aestheticisation of *Art informel* in Poland".[646]

Of the contextual impact of existentialism and *Art informel* across the Eastern Bloc in the 1950s, Piotrowski writes:

> The popularity of existentialism, with its emphasis on the individual, subjectivity, inner experience and the problem of freedom considered from an individual rather than a collective perspective, was clearly a reaction against the institutionalisation of Marxism... The negative reaction of the party 'philosophers' to existentialism, invoked with increasing frequency in Polish literary and philosophical discussions, made it even more attractive to the Polish intellectuals opposed to the regime. Because *Art informel* was connected in many ways with existentialism in the West and particularly in France, which was of great interest to the whole of Eastern Europe, interest in that philosophy created a climate favourable to the development of interest in the painting of gesture (and vice versa). In such a context, *Art informel* could be seen as a defence against the state-imposed collectivism.[647]

In relation to Kantor specifically, Flaszen recalls of this time that "the elite of Krakow's artists gathered around Kantor, a dandy and a magus" at the Cricot 2 presentation of "an intriguing performance of *The Cuttlefish* by Witkacy – an author banned before 1956 – made in collaboration with eminent artists of *Grupa Krakowska*."[648] The new Krakow Group brought together those artists who had maintained their distance from the official post-war aesthetic politics in Poland, between the closing of the *First Exhibition of Modern Art*, organised by Kantor and Porebski, in Krakow and Warsaw in 1948, and the opening of the *Exhibition of the Nine* in Krakow at the end of 1955, which led on to a *Second Exhibition of Modern*

---

[646] Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2009, p.78. It is indicative that Euro-Marxism is also called Western Marxism – to distinguish it from the Leninist-Stalinist ideology of state bureaucracy. (One might consider the question of "autonomy" through the lens of Milosz's *The Captive Mind*, at the start of this period, and Miklos Haraszti's *The Velvet Prison*, from the near end.)

[647] Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2009, p.73.

[648] Flaszen, *op. cit.*, p.35.

Art in Warsaw in 1957, as these frame the years of Stalinist winter in the visual arts.[649]

Up until the 1980s (before the development of the Cricot 2 into a "wandering troupe"), the audience-actor encounter of Kantor's theatre was mostly mediated by the space of a gallery – the Krzysztofory in Krakow. This was not simply a place for exhibitions or productions, but also for rehearsals, for process. It was also a place for informal meeting, its distinct atmosphere animated by the artists who frequented its café and participated in its events. The relation between the theatre work and the public was therefore quite distinct from that of the official stages, which were directly subject to censorship of both repertoire and performance.[650]

In an article (written in 1957) about the first production of the newly founded Cricot 2, Zbigniew Herbert also testifies to the changing cultural climate. Bearing in mind that the play chosen – a revival of Witkacy's *The Cuttlefish*[651], written in 1922 and first performed as the very first production of the original Cricot theatre – offers a satire on the relation between art and patronage (from both politics and church), Herbert wrote:

> For the audience member who saw *The Cuttlefish* in May 1956, Hyrcania, that is, a country where a few infallible and unerring partake in the orgy of power and control over a society – 'a flock of lost sheep' – was neither an abstraction nor, unfortunately, a utopia. When the words of the syndicate of the hand-made kitsch, which destroyed the paintings of the play's hero, were heard

---

[649] See, for example, Koloski, pp.274-5 and pp.246-7; and concerning the 1949 party declaration on Socialist Realism, p.304.

[650] For discussion of theatre censorship in Poland, see Hübner's *Theatre and Politics*, trans. and ed. Jadwiga Kosicka, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1992, especially chapters two and three. As Wieslaw Borowski rather wistfully recalls, concerning the relation between the Foksal Gallery, the café next door, and Henryk Staszewski's studio in Warsaw: "It was a life between the studio and the café… Generally this pretty much represented the only places where one could feel free and speak freely" (trans. Ewa Kanigowska-Gedroyc, in Gabriela Switek (ed.), *Avant-Garde in the Bloc*, Warsaw: Foksal Foundation, 2009, p.151). The question of censorship is barely addressed in the Anglophone monographic commentary on Kantor. (While Kantor was clearly not identified with the cultural policies of the regime, his seeming "autonomy" with respect to international travel, for instance, distinguishes him from many of his contemporaries.)

[651] *The Cuttlefish* is translated by Daniel Gerould in *Witkiewicz: Seven Plays*, ed. Daniel Gerould, New York: Martin Segal Theatre Centre Publications, 2004.

from the stage, the banned artists seated in the auditorium looked at each other with understanding.[652]

As the Thaw gave way to the era of "normalisation" (satirised by Tadeusz Rozewicz in his 1962 play *The Witnesses or Our Little Stabilisation*[653]), the Cricot 2 remained part of a tolerated margin of cultural politics in Poland – not part of the official theatre institutions (with their repertoires, and indeed their ensembles, supervised by the party censorship[654]), nor of the dissident culture (such as the Theatre of the Eighth Day company in Poznan[655]). Given the extra-ordinary example of the dissidents, it is worth recalling the ordinary conditions of "unofficial" civil and cultural life during the Cold War in the People's Republic, where (as Piotrowski writes):

> Autonomy functioned in this context as a political slogan, even though it meant freedom from politics. It was also understood as a reaction against politicisation of the culture by the state, or more precisely its instrumentalisation by the communist party propaganda machine. As such it was seen as a necessity of artistic freedom, the basis of art's right to be concerned solely with itself and, as an existential problematic, to be intimately concerned with the artist's inner life, rather than the public sphere.[656]

The ambiguities of this autonomy in the late 1950s, in relation to the previously banned work of Witkacy, can be seen in the fact that while the Cricot *Cuttlefish* performance, and the 1958 surrealist-grotesque *Madman and the Nun* by Wanda

---

[652] Zbigniew Herbert, "Cricot 2", translated and quoted by Kobialka, in *Further on, Nothing*, pp.56-57. In a 2007 testimony about artistic life in post-war Poland, Flaszen notes of Herbert that "he had just had his debut after the October events", referring to Gomulka's rise to Party leadership after the death of the Stalinist First Secretary, Boleslaw Beirut, and the changes inaugurated at the Soviet Union's famous Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 (Flaszen, *op. cit.*, p.19; and on Herbert also, pp.25-26).
[653] In Rozewicz, *Reading the Apocalypse in Bed*, trans. Adam Czerniawski, Barbara Plebanek, and Tony Toward, London: Marion Boyars, 1998.
[654] Hübner, *op. cit.*, pp.74-76.
[655] See the interview with the company's artistic director, Lech Raczak, in *TDR* 30.3, Fall 1986. In 2007 the company produced a "verbatim" performance – *The Files* – using material from their secret police files and the past performances that the censors had commented upon (a translation of which, by Bill Johnston, is published in *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*, ed. Carol Martin, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
[656] Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2012, p.82.

Laskowska and Szajna, went ahead as art theatre projects, an attempt to stage *The Shoemakers* in a politically critical manner in 1957 was stopped after the first night.[657] The possibility of artistic autonomy – a defining characteristic of the avant-garde – as a freedom *from* political action was uniquely recognised in Poland amongst the Soviet Bloc countries, so long as it did not trespass into a freedom *of* political action (at least as perceived by the censorship).

The effectiveness of this position of "autonomy" (in relation to an aesthetic resistance to the political) was increasingly tested amongst Polish artists during the 1970s, however, up to the point of being conceived – by the authorities, at least – as becoming, indeed, politically oppositional. To contextualise the years of *The Dead Class*, with its iconography of the actor in a "theatre of death", in relation to dissidents – rather than the turn to Schulz and pre-Communist cultural memory – might seem to take us "beyond" its concept, but for the fact that Kantor was himself engaged in a "politics" of public space, where the rarefied context of gallery representation necessarily engaged with the claims of the state in the aesthetic domain.

Knowingly adept at "playing the game", by not directly challenging its rules, the Krakow Group – like the Foksal Gallery – was an officially registered organisation, with the entitlements that this offered: "demonstrated by its quarters (provided by the state), financial support, paid staff positions and ability to engage in extensive international contacts."[658] This allowed them to present work without the constraints of "commercial" demands, within an enclave (albeit restricted) of artistic autonomy. Precisely because this autonomy defined itself as apolitical – at least in the sense of not being concerned to challenge the "leading role" of the Party – the Party made an exception in these few instances. Other galleries, however, did not enjoy this quasi-official recognition. The Repassage Gallery in Warsaw (which included amongst its associated artists Zofia Kulik and Przemyslaw Kwie) and the Akumulatory 2 in

---

[657] Hübner, *op. cit*., pp.50-52.
[658] Piotrowski, *op. cit*., p.89. Both The Foksal Gallery PSP and the Krakow Group lodged themselves officially within the umbrella organisation of the Studios for the Plastic Arts (Pawel Polit, "Warsaw's Foksal Gallery 1966-1972: Between Place and Archive", p.3 [available on the *Artmargins* website: www.artmargins.com]).

Poznan, for instance, both had to negotiate the relation between the local and the international under much more explicit pressures.

As Jaroslaw Kozlowski, the prime mover of the Akumulatory 2, recalls: "During its nineteen years of intense activity [the gallery] met with a permanent 'embargo' on information in the media; even such basic information as that concerning the dates and hours of the opening of its exhibitions."[659] Kozlowski's "NET" project of 1971, for instance – which was a means of exploring international exchange between artists, with its manifesto distributed in both Polish and English versions – had its first private exhibition in his flat broken into by the police.[660] However, in 1977, the NET project produced the first Fluxus Festival in Poland, held at the Akumulatory 2 and "the only one instructed by Maciunas and independently carried out by local artists in Central Europe."[661]

It is a curious aspect of the denunciation of the "pseudo-avant-garde" by both Kantor and Borowski in the 1970s that it did not distinguish the work of such galleries, confirming in the eyes of contemporaries the – paradoxical – quasi-"official avant-garde" status of the Foksal and its artists themselves.[662] As already remarked in the Introduction, there is an echo of these debates in Donald Kuspit's critique of the pseudo-avant-garde (under the title "cloning and coding") in New York at the same time, as he cites Gaugin (in terms that could well have been written by Kantor):

> "In art," Gaugin wrote, "there are only two types of people: revolutionaries and plagiarists. And, in the end, doesn't the revolutionary's work become official, once the State takes it over?" Plagiarists find it easier to appropriate yesterday's revolutions, but the pseudo-avant-garde artist unwittingly makes the point that it is easier to plagiarise the reified idea of the revolution – as

---

[659] Jaroslaw Kozlowski in conversation with Jerzy Ludwinski, in *Notes from the Future of Art: Selected Writings of Jerzy Ludwinski*, ed. Magdalena Ziolkowska, trans. Alina Kwiatkowska, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2007, p. 203.
[660] Luiza Nader, "Heterotopy. The NET and Galeria Akumulatory 2", in *Fluxus East* exhibition catalogue, Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007, p.114.
[661] Petra Stegmann, "Fluxus East", in *Fluxus East* exhibition catalogue, Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007, p.35.
[662] *Cf.* Piotrowski, *op. cit.*, pp.89-93.

inherently a falsification of it as a straightforward plagiarisation – than the actual one, which belongs to history.[663]

Indeed, few artists have been as trenchant in their denunciations of others' plagiarism than Kantor (not least with regard to Grotowski), but one effect of his polemical stance in the 1970s would, arguably, lead to his becoming a "forgotten" figure amongst a new generation of Polish artists, despite (or because of) the fact that he did not retreat from his own sense of an avant-garde "which belongs to history". By defining the truth claims of contemporary art in terms of the present challenge of the past – as distinct, paradoxically, from the traditional avant-garde sense of future challenge – Kantor's theatre (in a curious kind of anachronism, by returning to a "closed form" in 1975) adopted an apparently arrière-garde attitude, in a situation where the contemporary was (so he argued) *all* "avant-garde".

In the *Theatre of Death* manifesto, specifically, Kantor laments the generalisation of Duchamp's example – as well as that of the Happening – as a "universal avant-garde".[664] "We have lived to witness a process of remorseless banality and conventionality in the area of creativity," he complains to Miklaszewski at this time.[665] Aiming to resist what he perceived as a kitsch, "post modern" (conceptual) appropriation of the avant-garde – with its plagiarism and pastiche (what Kantor excoriated as "imitation, wheedling, coquetry, and psychological exhibitionism"[666]) – he insisted upon on the "annexation of reality"[667] (rather than the dematerialisation of the art work) in his own re-formulation of Duchamp, informed both by his experiences of the Occupation and (*pace* Sandauer) his reading of Schulz. Whilst supported by Borowski (and the Foksal Gallery), the return to the "closed work"

---

[663] Donald Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.111. Debate about avant-garde "traditions" (at least in the former West) could be referred to Harold Rosenberg's 1965 identification of an "historicist turn" in the arts, as well as to Peter Bürger's essays (Kuspit, p.107).

[664] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Theatre of Death", trans. Vog and Margaret Stelmaszynski, in Michal Kobialka, *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.110 (and also "The Impossible Theatre", trans. Michal Kobialka, *ibid.*, p.90 and pp.97-100).

[665] Krzysztof Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.38 (and p.106).

[666] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Impossible Theatre", trans. Michal Kobialka, in Michal Kobialka (ed.), *A Journey Through Other Spaces A Journey Through Other Spaces*, p.97.

[667] For instance, "The Impossible Theatre", *op. cit.*, p.96.

elicited sceptical comment from others however. Jerzy Ludwinski (equally concerned, as both critic and curator, with the seeming universalisation of "open art" by the 1970s) remarked, for example, that: "The return to well-defined positions is, in my view, impossible. Tadeusz Kantor, in one of his recent interviews said that for him the closed work of art was important. I do not think it is still feasible."[668]

In Kantor's theatrical work, it is significant that *The Dead Class* was the last Cricot 2 production to draw literally on a play by Witkacy; the last to set its theatricality in juxtaposition with a "ready-made" form which itself presented the past in performance.[669] In the introduction to his collection of "twentieth century Polish avant-garde drama", Daniel Gerould uses the very example of productions of Witkacy to substantiate the suggestion that, by the late 1960s, "the avant-garde became mainstream".[670] Gerould's discussion (written in 1977, following that of Jan Blonski (1970)) then addresses Grotowski, in terms that could, however, equally well apply to Kantor:

> In Poland there was a slight time lag in recognising Grotowski's importance; at first the polish cultural establishment in avant-garde drama and theatre – itself virtually routine by the mid-1960s – found little of interest in what seemed to be marginal experiments outside the mainstream. However, Grotowski's fame and influence in Europe and America, which came first, helped to bring him acceptance in Poland, where he had been at least tolerated and ultimately respected, even if he is not as widely known and admired at home as abroad.[671]

Kantor's own fame at this time was pre-eminently through gallery spaces (especially the Foksal), even for his theatre work. Only after the international success of the Cricot 2 productions in Paris and Edinburgh in 1973-75 would this begin to change.

---

[668] Jerzy Ludwinski, "The Aesthetic of Glue", in *Notes from the Future of Art: Selected Writings of Jerzy Ludwinski*, ed. Magdalena Ziolkowska, trans. Edyta Supinska-Polit, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2007, p.74 and p.79.
[669] Kantor, "The Impossible Theatre", *op. cit.*, p.98.
[670] Daniel Gerould (trans. and ed.), *Twentieth Century Polish Avant-Garde Drama*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, p.84.
[671] *Ibid.*, p.87.

VII. In place of a conclusion: how might "the return of Odysseus" offer an image of and for the concept of the theatre of death, in the testimony that Kantor's appearance "on stage" offers to the short twentieth century?

After 1975, maintaining his claim to artistic autonomy – evoked by the very name of the Cricot 2, in its relating contemporary art-theatre practice with an aesthetic-historical legacy (or "legitimacy" even) that eschewed the cultural (historical) authority of the Communist Party – Kantor turned to an evocation of Polish civil society prior even to the (newly independent) 1919 republic, to the years in which Poland did not exist as a nation state (years in which the founding members of the Cricot 2 had been born).[672] In this sense, the activity of the Cricot 2 was a site of transmission, of communication, of this cultural memory between the different generations involved in its activities. With _The Dead_ Class, for instance, the issue is not so much an image of history as constructed by the production (the séance is not a "period piece"), but the evidence it offers of an historical imagination (or "memory") in and of the time it was produced. As Kantor's contemporary (and Schulz specialist), Artur Sandauer, for example, described himself (in 1982, during the period of martial law), in the third person: "His Polishness is Central European, Austrian. He was born under Franz Josef and was educated in a classical Galician Gymnasium."[673] In this context, Kantor's classroom was not the setting for some "costume drama", invoking various writers' "memories" of the past in the present – but (as discussed in the Introduction) a "dramatised séance".

---

[672] The implicit "oppositional" stance of this relation of the Cricot 2 to the national, political context may be contrasted with that of Grotowski's "Theatre of the 13 Rows" and then "Laboratory Theatre", in its appeal to the inter-war legacy of the Reduta company, where in the Socialist Realist years Stanislavsky was the officially prescribed theatre authority (as a Moscow sanctioned model). Grotowski's research in the 1960s made a radical departure from the prevailing, professional standard of theatre practice – in the name of this pre-war Polish Stanislavsky legacy – and was no less "oppositional" therefore.

[673] Artur Sandauer, _On the Situation of the Polish Writer of Jewish Descent in the Twentieth Century_, trans. Abe and Sarah Shenitzer, Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2005, p.97. Sandauer (who also became a member of the Krakow Group, in 1980 [_Grupa Krakowska_, p.81]) associates this Galician legacy with the pre-war writings of Schulz rather than the post-war novels of Julian Stryjkowski (pp.93-97). Sandauer also wrote a fictionalised memoir of the pre- and inter-war shtetl life that he had known in childhood, entitled _Notes From a Dead Town_ (1963) (discussed, for instance, by Jan Blonski in "A Jewish School of Polish Literature?", in _Polin_, ed. Antony Polonsky, "From _Shtetl_ to Socialism", London: Littman Library, 1993, pp.475-7).

As narrated by Krzysztof Plesniarowicz in the biographical, opening chapter of his study of Kantor's theatre as a "dead memory machine" (drawing on numerous interviews with him), Kantor was also educated in a "classical Galician Gymnasium" – the Kazimierz Brodzinski First Gymnasium, in Tarnow: "a four-hundred year old secondary school… where the nineteenth century philological-classical curriculum was still in place."[674] Through this teaching of Latin and Greek, Kantor reflects that he "was in everyday contact with mythology,"[675] with a European classical mythology contrasting with the surrounding world of Catholic and Jewish cultures – and the relation between their different languages and Sabbaths[676] – in the *shtetls* of the Polish countryside.

This is the world, including its own "poor" models of Hapsburg schooling, evoked in both of Kantor's "theatre of death" productions, *The Dead Class* (1975) and *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980). The "return" to childhood – or, rather, a return of childhood – is not, however, the "by-product of… middle-aged sentimentality".[677] With both Schulz and Gombrowicz, it offers a challenge to accepted forms of "maturity" (not to mention the canon of national "masterpieces" taught in classrooms). Reflecting on the aesthetic relation between the mannequin children and the actors in *The Dead Class*, Kantor observes, precisely, that: "It is the facticity of everyday life which kills our ability to imagine the past. This is the basis for all my thinking on this subject."[678]

The very title of *Wielopole, Wielopole* annexes the "real life" name of Kantor's birth town, the Galician *shtetl* of Wielopole Skrzynskie, which he invokes somewhat mystically in an interview with Borowski:

---

[674] Kantor, quoted in Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.17.
[675] *Ibid*., p.20.
[676] The different "rhythms" of the traditions of these cultures re-appear in Kantor's later work, not least in *Wielopole, Wielopole*. As Milosz reflects: "The isolation of the Jews in this region was an old story. The reasons for it must be sought in differences of occupation (the Jews were merchants amidst a rural population) and of religion (the rhythms of Catholic and Jewish customs did not coincide)" [*Native Realm*, trans. Catherine Leach, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1981, p.92].
[677] Miklaszewski, *op. cit.,* p.36.
[678] *Ibid*.

It was a typical eastern small town or *shtetl*, with a large market square and a few miserable lanes. In the square stood a chapel with some sort of saint for the Catholic faithful. In the same square was a well near which Jewish weddings were held, primarily when the moon was full. On one side stood the church, the rectory, and the Catholic cemetery, and on the other the synagogue, the narrow Jewish lanes, and another cemetery, somewhat different.... Aside from its everyday life, the town was oriented toward eternity...[679]

As ever with the *shtetl*, personal memory becomes provincial myth, emblematised in this poetic evocation of a Wielopole "oriented towards eternity". After all, this was a Galicia of poverty and pogroms, as much as modernism and mysticism – a "land of improbabilities", as the historian Larry Wolff calls it.[680] The Polish-Jewish community was perhaps even more divided than the Catholics concerning the politics of modern cultural life, with Zionists, Bundists, and (atheist) Communists, laying different claims not to a mystical (Hassidic) or conservative (orthodox) "eternity" (*pace* Kantor's vision of a moonlit square), but more mundanely to their "national" political future in Poland, as a constitutionally recognised minority.

Even before the *shtetls* were destroyed during the Nazi Occupation, they were the subject of elegies. During the inter-war period "the vision of the *shtetl*" was that of "a form which continued to exist, but which in essence already belonged to the past."[681] This past continues to haunt Polish "reality" and has become, in some ways, ever more "present" since the fall of communism – such that the Israeli film maker, Yael

---

[679] Quoted in Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.11.

[680] This is the title of chapter 8 of Wolff's history, *The Idea of Galicia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010 (and where chapter 10 is entitled "Haunted Epilogue").

[681] Eugenia Prokopowna, "The Image of the *Shtetl* in Polish Literature", in *Polin*, ed. Antony Polonsky, "From *Shtetl* to Socialism", London: Littman Library, 1993, p.325. "Like Slonimski, a severe critic of traditional Jewish culture before the War, who after the War lamented that never again would words of longing for Jerusalem be heard in Polish cherry-orchards, they too [contemporary Polish writers such as Piotr Szewc] wish to see the picturesque and moving side of Jewishness, and also the exotic side: the warmth of spice shops, not to mention cinnamon shops, and haberdashers, the whirl of dancing Hasidim, the stillness of men poring over their sacred books" [*ibid.*, pp.328-9].

Bartana's project of the "Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland" was even chosen to represent Poland at the 2011 Venice Biennale.[682]

But Kantor's education in the classical world of mythology also contrasted with the newly independent Poland's romantic and modernist heritage (manifested theatrically in productions by Leon Schiller and Karol Frycz particularly, with stage designs by the Pronaszko brothers, with whom Kantor in fact studied in Krakow in the late 1930s).[683] As described in the Introduction, this complex engagement in cultural memory is evident in Kantor's lifelong fascination with the figure of Odysseus, with whom the past returns to the present to lay claim to a "home" from which he is exiled; and which, in Wyspianski's play, has meanwhile become a reminder, or presage, of death. In this play, Odysseus reflects on his return to Ithaca: "I have found hell in my own country. I have come into a cemetery, and I am the gravedigger."[684]

A figure "displaced" in and from his own country, Odysseus' journey resonates with both the nineteenth century Polish experience of occupation and exile and the post-WWII state, haunted by deportations, exile, and a new form of political occupation, as well as by those returning (both physically and fantasmatically) from the war and from imprisonment. This Odysseus was, however, also an apparition from Wyspianski's Krakow (connected to Vienna and Paris, rather than Moscow), from a "European" Poland before (and beyond) the post-war "borders" of the Eastern Bloc. At the end of his penultimate production – *I Shall Never Return* – Kantor reads, in his persona as "the artist", fragments from the end of Wyspianski's play, written into his director's notebook (from his 1944 production of the *Return*), which reflect on the future present of death triumphing over a past present that it is impossible to return to:

---

[682] Yael Bartana, *And Europe Will be Stunned*, eds. Joa Ljungberg and Andreas Nilsson, Malmö: Moderna Museet Malmö and Berlin: Revolver Publishing, 2010; Yael Bartana, *And Europe Will be Stunned*, eds. James Lingwood and Eleanor Nairne, London: Artangel, 2011; and Volker Pantenburg, "Loudspeaker and Flag: Yael Bartana, from Documentation to Conjuration", in *Afterall*, n.30, Summer, 2012.
[683] Tadeusz Kantor quoted in Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004, p.17-20.
[684] Stanislaw Wyspianski, *The Return of Odysseus*, trans. Howard Clarke, Bloomington: Indiana University Russian and East European Series, vol.35, 1966, p.63.

"The boat of the dead! It is sailing into the hereafter, into oblivion. Wait! Save me!"[685]

The evocation of pre-war, multi-ethnic Poland[686] – symbolised by the relation between Catholic and Jewish Poles, as well local and international modernism – is a fundamental theme in the Cricot 2 work after 1975,[687] but is already manifest in Kantor's early adoption of the Schulzian vocabulary of a "reality of the lowest rank" (or of a "degraded reality"). The appeal of (and to) this historical memory, within that of an avant-garde aesthetics of the ready-made (or of what Kantor called "annexed reality"), is a key to the emotional power of the mimetic experiments of this *theatre* "of death", in which the echoes of Central European multiculturalism and aesthetic cosmopolitanism continued to resonate within the "peace" of the Cold War.[688] As Kantor says, in conversation with Krzysztof Miklaszewski (in 1981):

> Ever since the late fifties and early sixties, I have been locked in debate over all those ways of conceptualising the work of art and its uniqueness, with the state of artistic inspiration, with artistic functions of space, so as to replace them with a notion of reality. But something else concerns me, which is why I feel the urge to recall wartime, which is when I put art, and the work of art, in context for the first time. It was then that I understood (and my production of *The Return of Odysseus* bears this out) that in a 'dense' life situation a work of art ceases to have its own significance. So together with my fellow artists in the Underground Theatre, I sought an exit from this situation: one where the

---

[685] *Ibid.*, p.71 (and also quoted, from "the programme notes to *I shall never return*", in Kobialka, *A Journey through other spaces*, p.358).

[686] A province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Galicia is part of the heritage of the modern Polish Republic, now explored by such writers as Andrzej Stasiuk.

[687] In 1976, Konstanty Puzyna, for instance, called *The Dead Class* "a kind of homage or epitaph to a world that has already disappeared... an epitaph that is poignant and magnificent" (in Puzyna, Rozewicz, and Wajda: "On Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class*", trans. Duncan Jamieson and Adela Karsznia, in *Polish Theatre Perspectives*, 1.1, 2010, p.344).

[688] Indeed, this endures, for instance, in the example of Luc Tuymans' 2010 Bruges exhibition, *The Reality of the Lowest Rank: A Vision of Central Europe* (exhibition catalogue, Tielt: Lannoo Publishers, 2010).

art object could be replaced by a real-life object. And from that day to this, I have been possessed by the notion of reality.[689]

This replacing of the art object with a real-life ("poor" or "degraded") object underlies Kantor's concern with the relation between actor and audience, past and present, the fictional and the material, the living and the dead, as well as with his own – theatrical – role in between. Here the question of mimetic co-presence – as that of an aesthetic-anthropological "return" of the human figure, its "apparition", in the annexation of "real life" on stage – becomes the material of an art of theatre, as that "of death". In a characteristic juxtaposition of Schulz and Duchamp, evoking the aesthetic promise of the short twentieth century, the model (or paradigm) actor of this return belongs to what Kantor identified as the "reality of the lowest rank".[690] To speak here of an art of the theatre – as of death – is to speak of a "degraded" iconography of its pathos formulae. These formulae were not invented by Kantor, as if "original" to the Cricot 2; they are, rather, surviving expressions of the "ephemeral" art of theatre, of specific precedents – and of their symptomatic return as an apparition, an image, of what is human within this modern *art* practice: the unsettling, mimetic *pathos* of the uncanny.

---

[689] Tadeusz Kantor, "Conversation" with Krzysztof Miklaszewski, in the context of the "Polish reality" (six months before martial law) in 1981, in Miklaszewski, *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002, p.82.

[690] All that has been discussed in this place of a conclusion can be found in Kantor's own words in the texts "Independent Theatre" and "Theatrical Place", in Michal Kobialka (trans. and ed.), *Further on, Nothing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, pp.95-105 and pp.329-367.

Bibliography

A:

Abraham, Nicholas: "Notes on the Phantom", in Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, trans. and ed. Nicholas Rand, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Abramovic, Marina: *Seven Easy Pieces*, Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007.

Adorno, Theodor: *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London: The Athlone Press, 1999.

Adorno, Theodor and Horkheimer, Max: *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London: Verso, 1986.

Agamben, Giorgio: *Potentialities*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Agamben, Giorgio: *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, trans. Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell, New York: Zone Books, 2009.

Artaud, Antonin: *The Theatre and its Double*, trans. Mary Richards, New York: Grove Press, 1958.

Artaud, Antonin: *Selected Writings*, trans. Helen Weaver, ed. Susan Sontag, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Artaud, Antonin: *Watchfiends and Rack Screams*, trans. Clayton Eshleman, Boston: Exact Change, 1995.

Ariès, Philippe: *The Hour of our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver, New York: Viking, 1981.

Ariès, Philippe: *Western Attitudes Towards Death*, trans. Patricia Ranum, London: Marion Boyars, 1994.

Auerbach, Erich: *Mimesis*, trans. Willard Trask, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Augé, Marc: *A Sense for the Other*, trans. Amy Jacobs, Stanford University Press, 1998.

Augé, Marc: *The War of Dreams*, trans. Liz Heron, London: Pluto Press, 1999.

Auslander, Philip: "Just be yourself", in Phillip Zarrilli (ed.), *Acting (Re)Considered*, London: Routledge, 2000.

Auslander, Philip: "The Performativity of Performance Documentation", in *PAJ* 84, 28.3, September 2006.

B:

Bablet, Denis (ed.): "Tadeusz Kantor 1", *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale*, 11, Paris: CNRS, 2005 [1983].

Bablet, Denis (ed.): "Tadeusz Kantor 2", *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale*, 18, Paris: CNRS, 2005 [1993].

Badiou, Alain: *Petit Manuel d'Inesthétique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998.

Badiou, Alain: *A Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Badiou, Alain: *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano, Cambridge: Polity, 2007.

Badiou, Alain and Zizek, Slavoj: *Philosophy in the Present*, trans. Peter Thomas and Alberto Toscano, Cambridge: Polity, 2009.

Balázs, Béla: "The Visible Man", trans. Rodney Livingstone, in Erica Carter (ed.), *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011.

Barasch, Moshe: *Imago Hominis: Studies in the Language of Art*, New York: New York University Press, 1991.

Barasch, Moshe: *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea*, New York: New York University Press, 1995.

Barasch, Moshe: *Theories of Art*, vol.3, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.

Barba, Eugenio: *Land of Ashes and Diamonds*, trans. Judy Barba, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 1999.

Barba, Eugenio and Savarese, Nicola (eds.): *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*, trans. Richard Fowler, London: Routledge, 1995.

Barish, Jonas: *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Barr, Alfred: *Cubism and Abstract Art*, London: Secker and Warburg, 1975 [1936].

Barrault, Jean-Louis: *Reflections on the Theatre*, trans. Barbara Wall, London: Rockliff, 1951.

Bartana, Yael: *And Europe Will be Stunned*, eds. Joa Ljungberg and Andreas Nilsson, Malmö: Moderna Museet Malmö and Berlin: Revolver Publishing, 2010.

Bartana, Yael: *And Europe Will be Stunned*, eds. James Lingwood and Eleanor Nairne, London: Artangel, 2011.

Barthes, Roland: *Image-Music-Text*, trans. & ed. Stephen Heath, Glasgow: Fontana, 1982.

Barthes, Roland: *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Flamingo, 1984.

Barthes, Roland: *Mourning Diary*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.

Baudelaire, Charles: *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. P.E. Charvet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Baudrillard, Jean: *The Ecstasy of Communication*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze, New York: Semiotext(e), 1988.

Bauman, Zygmunt: *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, Cambridge: Polity, 1998.

Bauman, Zygmunt: *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, trans. Lydia Bauman, Cambridge: Polity, 2011.

Bay-Cheng, Sarah and Holzapfel, Amy: "'The Living Theatre: a Brief History of a Bodily Metaphor'", in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 25.1, Fall 2010.

Bazarnik, Teresa (ed.): *Théâtre Cricot 2, 1955-1988*, Krakow: Cricoteka, n.d.

Bazin, André: *What is Cinema?* vol.1, trans. Hugh Gray, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Beckett, Samuel: *Ill Seen Ill Said*, London: John Calder, 1997.

Belting, Hans: *Likeness and Presence*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Belting, Hans: *Art History after Modernism*, trans. Caroline Saltzwedel, *et al*., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Belting, Hans: "Toward an Anthropology of the Image", in Mariët Westermann (ed.)*, Anthropologies of Art*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

Belting, Hans: *An Anthropology of Images*, trans. Thomas Dunlap, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Benjamin, Walter: *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock, London: Verso, 1984.

Benjamin, Walter: *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Benjamin, Walter: "The Storyteller', trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol.3, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Benjamin, Walter: "Chaplin", trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings,* vol.2.1, eds. Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Benjamin, Walter: "Theatre and Radio", trans. Rodney Livingstone, in *Selected Writings*, vol.2.2, eds. Howard Eiland, Michael Jennings, and Gary Smith, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Benjamin, Walter: "Little History of Photography", trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, *Selected Writings*, vol.2.2, eds. Howard Eiland, Michael Jennings, and Gary Smith, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Benjamin, Walter: "On the Concept of History", trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, vol.4, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Berardi, Franco: *The Uprising*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012.

Binswanger, Ludwig and Warburg, Aby (ed. Davide Stimilli): *La guérison infinie*, Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2011.

Bion, Wilfred: *Learning from Experience*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

Birringer, Johannes: *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Bishop, Claire and Dziewanska, Marta (eds.): *Political Upheaval and Artistic Change, 1968-1989*, Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, 2009.

Bishop, Claire: *Artificial Hells*, London: Verso, 2012.

Blanchot, Maurice: *L'Espace Littéraire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1955.

Blanchot, Maurice: *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Blanchot, Maurice: *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

Blanchot, Maurice: *The Instant of my Death*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Blau, Herbert: *The Audience*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Blonski, Jan: "Is there a Jewish School of Polish Literature?", in *Polin*, ed. Antony Polonsky, "From *Shtetl* to Socialism", London: Littman Library, 1993

Blonski, Jan: "On the Jewish Sources of Bruno Schulz", trans. Michael Steinlauf, in *Cross Currents*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Blum, Deborah: *Ghost Hunters*, London: Arrow Books, 2007.

Bois, Yves-Alain: *Painting as Model*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993.

Borie, Monique: *Le Fantôme, ou le Théâtre qui Doute*, Arles: Actes Sud, 1997.

Borja-Villel, Manuel *et al.*, (eds.): *A Theatre Without Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Barcelona: MACBA, 2007.

Borowski, Wieslaw, *et al.*: "Foksal Gallery Documents", in *October*, vol. 38, Autumn 1986.

Borowski, Wieslaw: "Tadeusz Kantor and the Foksal Gallery" (conversation with Jaromir Jedlinski), in Jaroslaw Suchan (ed.), *The Impossible Theatre*, trans. Jadwiga Piatkowska and Maciej Glogoczowski, Krakow: Bunkier Sztuki, 2000.

Branny, Andrzej: "The Theatre of Tadeusz Kantor", in *Forum Modernes Theater*, 1.1, 1986.

Bråten, Stein (ed.): *On Being Moved*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2007.

Bredekamp, Horst: "A neglected tradition? Art history as Bildwissenschaft", in *Critical Enquiry*, vol.29, n.3, Spring 2003.

Bredekamp, Horst; Lauschke, Marion; and Alex Artega (eds.), *Bodies in Action and Symbolic Forms*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012.

Buchan, Suzanne: *The Quay Brothers: Into a Metaphysical Playroom*, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011.

C:
Caillois, Roger: "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia", trans. John Shepley, in *October* 31, Winter 1984.

Caputo, Nicoletta: "Performing the Passions", in *Assaph*, n.24, 2010.

Carlson, Marvin: *Theories of the Theatre*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Carlson, Marvin: *The Haunted Stage*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.

Cassirer, Ernst: *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963.

Cassirer, Ernst: *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (vol.4), trans. John Krois, eds. John Krois and Donald Verene, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.

Chapple, Freda and Kattenbelt, Chiel (eds.): *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006.

Chrobak, Jozef and Michalik, Justyna (eds.): *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting. Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2012.

Cioffi, Kathleen: *Alternative Theatre in Poland, 1954-1989*, Amsterdam: Harwood, 1999.

Clark, T.J.: *The Sight of Death*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

Craig, Edward Gordon: *Craig on Theatre*, ed. Michael Walton, London: Methuen, 1999.

Craig, Edward Gordon: *On the Art of the Theatre*, ed. Franc Chamberlain, London: Routledge, 2009.

Craig, Edward Gordon: "At Last a Creator in the Theatre, from the Theatre", in "An Etienne Decroux Album", *Mime Journal*, eds. Sally and Thomas Leabhart, Claremont: Pomona College, 2000/2001.

Craig, Edward Gordon: *Drama for Fools* (*Le Théâtre des Fous*), eds. Didier Plassard *et al*, Montpellier: L'Entretemps, 2012.

Crowley, David; Machnicka, Zofia; and Andrzej Szczerski (eds.), *The Power of Fantasy – Modern and Contemporary Art of Poland*, exhibition catalogue, Munich: Prestel, 2011.

Curtius, Ernst: *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard Trask, London: RKP, 1979.

D:
Debray, Régis: *Vie et mort de l'image*, Paris: Gallimard, 1992.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix: *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986.

Derrida, Jacques: *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, London: Routledge, 1978.

Derrida, Jacques: "Economimesis", trans. Richard Klein, in *Diacritics*, June 1981.

Derrida, Jacques: *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Brighton: Harvester, 1982.

Derrida, Jacques: *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

Derrida, Jacques: *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Derrida, Jacques: *Athens, Still Remains*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brant and Michael Naes, New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Derrida, Jacques and Stiegler, Bernard: *Echographies of Television*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek, Cambridge: Polity, 2007.

Diamond, Elin: *Unmaking Mimesis*, London: Routledge, 2008.

Didi-Huberman, Georges: *Être crâne*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2000.

Didi-Huberman, Georges: *L'Image survivante*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002.

Didi-Huberman, Georges: *The Invention of Hysteria*, trans. Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003.

Didi-Huberman, Georges: "Artistic Survival: Panofsky vs. Warburg and the Exorcism of Impure Time", in *Common Knowledge*, vol.9, n.2, Spring 2003.

Didi-Huberman, Georges: *Confronting Images*, trans. John Goodman, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

Didi-Huberman, Georges: "Viscosities and Survivals", trans. Jane Todd, in Roberta Panzanelli (ed.), *Ephemeral Bodies*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008.

Didi-Huberman, Georges: "How to Open Your Eyes", trans. Patrick Kremer, in Antje Ehmann and Kodwo Eshun (eds.), *Harun Farocki: Against What? Against Whom?*, London: Koenig Books, 2009.

Didi-Huberman, Georges: "Warburg's Haunted House", trans. Shane Lillis, in *Common Knowledge*, 18.1, 2012.

Diers, Michael; Girst, Thomas; and von Moltke, Dorothea: "Warburg and the Warburgian Tradition of Cultural History", in *New German Critique*, n.65, Spring-Summer 1995.

Dijk, José van: "Bodyworlds: the Art of Plastinated Cadavers", in Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar (eds.), *Beyond the Body Proper*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Duchamp, Marcel: *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Emer Peterson, New York: Da Capo Press, 1973.

Dupont, Florence: "The Emperor-God's Other Body", trans. Brian Masumi, in Michael Feher (ed.), *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, pt.3, New York: Zone, 1989.

Duve, Thierry: *Kant after Duchamp*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998.

Drozdowski, Bohdan (ed.): *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, London: John Calder, 1979.

E:
Eade, Jane: "The Theatre of Death", in *Oxford Art Journal*, 36.1, 2013.

Efal, Adi: "Warburg's 'Pathos Formula' in Psychoanalytic and Benjaminian Contexts", in *Assaph*, n.5, 2000.

Eliot, T.S.: *Selected Essays*, London: Faber and Faber, 1951.

F:
Featherstone, Simon: "Spiritualism as popular performance in the 1930s: the Dark Theatre of Helen Duncan", in *NTQ*, 27:2, May 2011.

Fergombé, Amos: "Le Rituel kantorien comme poïétique de dépassement de la mort", in *L'Âge d'or du Théâtre polonais*, eds. Agnieska Grudzinska and Michal Maslowski, Paris: Editions de l'Amandier, 2009.

Finkelstein, Norman: *The Holocaust Industry*, London: Verso, 2001.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: "Theatre and the Civilising Process: an Approach to the History of Acting", in Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie (eds.), *Interpreting the Theatrical* Past Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1991.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre*, trans. Jo Riley, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1997.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *History of European Theatre and Drama*, trans. Jo Riley, London: Routledge, 2004.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, London: Routledge, 2005.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: "Performance Art – Experiencing Liminality", in Marina Abramovic, *Seven Easy Pieces*, Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika: *The Transformative Power of the Performative*, trans. Saskya Jain, London: Routledge, 2008.

Flacke, Monika (ed.): *Verführung Freiheit: Kunst in Europa seit 1945* [*The Desire for Freedom: Art in Europe Since 1945*], exhibition catalogue, Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2012.

Flaszen, Ludwik: *Grotowski & Company*, trans. Andrzej Wojtasik and Paul Allain, ed. Paul Allain, Wroclaw: Icarus, 2010.

Folie, Sabine (ed.): *The Impossible Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vienna: Kunsthalle, 2005.

Forde, Kate (ed.): *Death a Picture Album* (from the collection of Richard Harris), London: Wellcome Trust, 2012.

Foster, Hal: "An Archival Impulse", in *October*, n.110, Fall 2004.

Foster, Kurt: "Aby Warburg's History of Art", in *Daedalus*, vol.105, 1976.

Foucault, Michel: "What is an Author?", trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald Bouchard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

Foucault, Michel: "Of Other Spaces", trans. Jay Miskowiec, in *Diacritics*, 16.1, Spring, 1986.

Franke, Anselm (ed.), *Animism* (vol.1), Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010.

Franke, Anselm and Folie, Sabine (eds.): *Animism: Modernity Through the Looking Glass*, Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2011.

Frascina, Francis: "Institutions, Culture, and America's 'Cold War Years'", in *Oxford Art Journal*, 26.1, 2003.

Freedberg, David: *The Power of Images*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989.

Freud, Sigmund: "Totem and Taboo", trans. James Strachey, in *Pelican Freud Library*, vol.13, ed. Albert Dickson, London: Penguin, 1985.

Freud, Sigmund: *The Dynamics of Transference*, trans. James Strachey, vol.XII, Standard Edition, London: Hogarth Press, 1978.

Freud, Sigmund: "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality", trans. James Strachey, in *Pelican Freud Library*, vol.7, ed. Angela Richards, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983.

Freud, Sigmund: "The Uncanny", trans. James Strachey, in *Pelican Freud Library*, vol.14, ed. Albert Dickson, London: Penguin, 1985.

Fussell, Paul: *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

G:
Gadamer, Hans-Georg: "Plato as Portraitist", trans. Jamey Findling and Snezhina Gabova, in Richard Palmer (ed.), *The Gadamer Reader*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007.

Gallese, Vittorio and Freedberg, David: "Motion, emotion and empathy in aesthetic experience", in *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 11.5, 2007.

Gamliel, Tova: "Performed Weeping", in *TDR*, 54.2, Summer 2010.

Garner, Stanton: *Embodied Spaces*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Genet, Jean: *Prisoner of Love*, trans. Barbara Bray, London: Picador, 1990.

Genet, Jean: *Théâtre complet*, eds. Michel Corvin & Albert Dichy, Paris: Gallimard, 2002.

Genet, Jean: *Fragments of the Artwork*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Genet, Jean: *The Declared Enemy*, trans. Jeff Fort, ed. Albert Dichy, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Gerould, Daniel (trans. and ed.): *Twentieth Century Polish Avant-Garde Drama*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.

Gerould, Daniel: "Tadeusz Kantor", in *PAJ*, 4.3, 1980.

Gerould, Daniel: *Witkacy*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981.

Gerould, Daniel: "Introduction", to Stanislaw Witkiewicz, *A Small Country House*, trans. Daniel Gerould, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997.

Ginzburg, Carlo: *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992.

Ginzburg, Carlo: *The Night Battles*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992.

Ginzburg, Carlo: "Une Machine à Penser", in *Common Knowledge*, 18.1, 2012.

Golubiew, Zofia (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor – Self-Portraits*, Krakow: National Museum, 2000.

Gombrowicz, Witold: *Ferdydurke*, trans. Danuta Borchardt, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Gordon, Rae: *Why the French Love Jerry Lewis*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Greenberg, Clement: interview with Edward Lucie-Smith, in *Studio International*, vol.175, n.896, January, 1968.

Greenberg, Clement: *Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol.1, ed. John O'Brian, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

Grodzicki, August: *Polish Theatre Directors*, trans. Lucyna Tomaszewska, Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1979.

Gropius, Walter and Wensinger, Arthur (eds.): *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Gross, Kenneth: *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Grossman, David: *See Under: Love*, London: Vintage, 1999.

Grotowski, Jerzy: "Reply to Stanislavsky", trans. Kris Salata, in *TDR*, 52.2, Summer 2008.

Guzek, Lukasz: "Above Art and Politics – Performance Art and Poland", in Richard Martel (ed.), *Art Action: 1958-1998*, Quebec: Les Éditions Intervention, 2001.

H:
Halczak, Anna (ed.): *Cricot 2 Information Guide 1986*, Krakow: Cricoteka, 1986.

Halczak, Anna (ed.): *Cricot 2 Information Guide 1987-1988*, Krakow: Cricoteka 1988.

Halczak, Anna (ed.): *Cricot 2 Information Guide 1989-1990*, Krakow: Cricoteka 1988, n.d.

Heidegger, Martin: *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

Heidegger, Martin: *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1971.

Heidegger, Martin: *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1973.

Heidegger, Martin: *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Heidegger, Martin: *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

Heidegger, Martin: *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

Hertz, Robert: *Death* and *The Right Hand*, trans. Rodney and Claudia Needham, Aberdeen: Cohen and West, 1960.

Hobsbawm, Eric: *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London: Abacus, 1995.

Hübner, Zygmunt: "The Professional's Guilty Conscience: a Letter from Poland", in *NTQ*, vol. IV, n.15, August 1988.

Hübner, Zygmunt: *Theatre and Politics*, trans. and ed. Jadwiga Kosicka, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1992.

I:

Ichikawa, Mariko: "What to do with a Corpse? Physical Reality and the Fictional World in the Shakespearean Theatre", in *Theatre Research International*, 29.3, 2004.

Ingarden, Roman: *The Literary Work of Art*, trans. George Grabowicz, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

J:

Jameson, Frederic: *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* London: Verso, 1992.

Janicki, Waclaw: "Diary", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Fall 1995.

Jasienski, Bruno: *The Mannequins' Ball*, trans. Daniel Gerould, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000.

Jentsch, Ernst: "On the Psychology of the Uncanny", trans. Roy Sellars, in *Angelaki*, 2.1, 1996.

Jones, Amelia: "'Presence' *in absentia*: Experiencing Performance as Documentation", in *Art Journal* 56.4, Winter 1997.

Jones, Amelia: "The Artist is Present", in *TDR* 55.1, Spring 2011.

Jung, Carl: "The Problem of Typical Attitudes in Aesthetics" (1921) in *Psychological Types*, trans. H.G. Baynes and R.F.C. Hull, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.

Jurkiewicz, Malgorzata; Mytkowska, Joanna; & Przywara, Andrzej (eds.), *Tadeusz Kantor in the Foksal Gallery Archive*, Warsaw: Foksal Gallery, 1998.

Jurkowski, Henryk: *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, ed. Penny Francis, London: Puppet Centre Trust, 1988.

K:

Kalb, Jonathan: *Beckett in Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Kantor, Tadeusz: "Let the Artists Die? An interview with Tadeusz Kantor," with (and translated by) Michal Kobialka, in *TDR* 30.3, Fall 1986.

Kantor, Tadeusz: "And then I appear myself...", interview with Marta Allendorf and Aleksander Mattmüller (01.07.1987), reprinted in *Cricot 2 Information Guide 1987-1988*, ed. Anna Halczak, Krakow: Cricoteka 1988.

Kantor, Tadeusz: interview with Krzysztof Plesniarowicz, in *The Journal of Dramatic Criticism*, Fall 1995, p.224.

Kantor, Tadeusz: "On the Contemporary Painting of France" (1948), trans. Anda MacBride, in Jozef Chrobak and Justyna Michalik (eds.): *Tadeusz Kantor. Painting. Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2012.

Kantorowicz, Ernst: *The King's Two Bodies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

Kelley, Mike: *The Uncanny*, Cologne: Walther König, 2004.

Kirby, Michael (ed.): *Futurist Performance*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1986.

Kirby, Michael: "On Acting and Not-Acting", in Phillip Zarrilli (ed.), *Acting (Re)Considered*, London: Routledge, 2000.

Kittler, Friedrich: *Optical Media*, trans. Anthony Enns, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.

Klossowicz, Jan: "Tadeusz Kantor's Journey", trans. Michal Kobialka, in *TDR*, 30.3, 1986.

Klossowicz, Jan: "Kantor's Legacy", in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Fall 1995.

Kobialka, Michal: *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Kobialka, Michal: "Forget Kantor", in *Performing Arts Journal*, 47, May 1994.

Kobialka, Michal: "Tadeusz Kantor's Practice: A Post-Modern Notebook", in *Performing Arts Journal*, 28.1, January 2006.

Kobialka, Michal: *Further On, Nothing*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

Kolankiewicz, Leszek: "Kantor's Last Tape", trans. Paul Allain and Grzegorz Ziolkowski, in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 15.1, February 2005.

Koloski, Laurie: *Painting Krakow Red: Politics and Culture in Poland, 1945-1950*, PhD Thesis, Stanford University, June 1998.

Kostolowski, Andrzej: "Polish Conceptual Inventions", trans. Joanna Holzman, in Pawel Polit and Piotr Wozniakiewicz (eds.), *Experience of Discourse: 1965-1975. Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art*, Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000.

Kott, Jan: *The Theatre of Essence*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984.

Kott, Jan: "Kantor, Memory, Memoire", trans. Jadwiga Kosicka, in *NTQ*, vol.VII, n.28, Nov. 1991.

Kott, Jan: *Still Alive*, trans. Jadwiga Kosicka, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Kozlowski, Jaroslaw: interview with Jerzy Ludwinski, in Jerzy Ludwinski, *Notes from the Future of Art: Selected Writings of Jerzy Ludwinski*, trans. Alina Kwiatkowska, ed. Magdalena Ziolkowska, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2007.

Krasner, David (ed.): *Theatre in Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

Krauss, Rosalind: "Reinventing the Medium", in *Critical Inquiry*, vol.25, n.2, Winter 1999.

Kurzmeyer, Roman; Szymczyk, Adam; and Suzanne Cotter: *Pawel Althamer*, London: Phaidon Press, 2011.

Kuspit, Donald: *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

L:
Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe: "Mimesis and Truth", in *Diacritics*, vol.8, n.1, Spring 1978.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe: *Typography*, trans. Eduardo Cadava, ed. Christopher Fynsk, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989.

Lapavitsas, Costas (*et al.*): *Crisis in the Euro Zone*, London: Verso, 2012.

Larsen, Lars: "Zombies of Immaterial Labour: the Modern Monster and the Death of Death", in *Are You Working Too Much? Post-Fordism, Precarity, and the Labour of Art*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011.

Latour, Bruno: *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.

Lazzarato, Maurizio: *The Making of the Indebted Man*, trans. Joshua Jordan, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012.

Lease, Bryce: "Ethnic Identity and Anti-Semitism: Tadeusz Slobodzianek Stages the Polish Taboo", in *TDR*, 56.2, Summer 2012.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies: *Post-Dramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby, London: Routledge, 2006.

Leszcynski, Jan: "Witkacy's Theory of Art", trans. Lech Petrowicz, in "Dialectics and Humanism", *The Polish Philosophical Quarterly*, Spring 1985.

Levinas, Emmanuel: *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.

Levi-Strauss, Claude: *The View From Afar*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987.

Levi-Strauss, Claude: *Structural Anthropology* 2, trans. Monique Layton, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987.

Ludwinski, Jerzy: "Art in the Post-Artistic Age", trans. Maria Wanat, in Pawel Polit and Piotr Wozniakiewicz (eds.), *Experience of Discourse: 1965-1975. Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art*, Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000.

Ludwinski, Jerzy: *Notes from the Future of Art: Selected Writings of Jerzy Ludwinski*, trans. Edyta Supinska-Polit, *et al*., ed. Magdalena Ziolkowska, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2007.

Lupa, Krystian: "Returning to the Garden of Childhood: Krystian Lupa in conversation with Jean-Pierre Thibaudet and Béatrice Picon-Vallin," trans. Jancis Clarke, *et al*., in *Polish Theatre Perspectives* 1.1 (2010).

Lupa, Krystian: "Trip to the Unreachable", interview with Beata Matkowska-Swies, trans. Dorothea Sobstel, in *Theater*, 41.3, 2012.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois: *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

M:
Macel, Christine and Petresin-Bachelez, Natasa (eds.): *Promises of the Past*, Pompidou Centre, exhibition catalogue, Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2010.

MacCabe, Colin: "Barthes and Bazin: the Ontology of the Image", in Jean-Michel Rabaté (ed.), *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

MacFarlane, Dana: "'Waiting Still:' Baudelaire and the Temporality of the Photographic Portrait", in *History of Photography*, 36.1, 2012.

Malzacher, Florian: "Citizen of the Other Place: A Trilogy of Fear and Hope", trans. Michael Turnbull, in Tara Forrest and Anna Scheer (eds.), *Christoph Schlingensief: Art Without Borders*, Bristol: Intellect, 2010.

Maniura, Robert: "Ex Votos, Art and Pious Performance", in *Oxford Art Journal*, 32.3, 2009.

Marin, Louis: *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter, Sanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

Martin, Carol (ed.): *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Mazur, Adam: *Who is the Creator?* (lecture at Warsaw Musuem of Modern Art, 2009, accessed on the Eustachy Kossakowski website [http://www.eustache-kossakowski.com/bulletin01_uk.html], no page numbers).

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

Melrose, Susan: "'Constitutve Ambiguities': Writing Professional or Expert Performance Practices", in Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout (eds.), *Contemporary Theatres in Europe*, London: Routledge, 2006.

Meyerhold, Vsevolod: *Meyerhold on Theatre*, trans. and ed. Edward Braun, London: Methuen, 1991.

Meyer-Plantureux, Chantal: "Les objets de Kantor", in Denis Bablet (ed.), "Tadeusz Kantor 2", *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale* 18, Paris: CRNS Éditions, 2005.

Michaud, Philippe-Alain: *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. Sophie Hawkes, New York: Zone Books, 2004

Mickiewicz, Adam: "Slavic Drama" (from Lesson 16, Collège de France lectures), trans. Daniel Gerould, in *TDR*, vol.30, n.3, Fall 1986.

Miklaszewski, Krzysztof: *Encounters with Tadeusz Kantor*, trans. George Hyde, London: Routledge, 2002.

Milosz, Czeslaw: *Native Realm*, trans. Catherine Leach, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1981.

Minkowski, Eugène: *Lived Time*, trans. Nancy Metzel, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

Mitchell, W.J.T.: *Iconology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Mitchell, W.J.T.: *Picture Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Mitchell, W.J.T.: *What do Images Want*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005.

Moholy-Nagy, Lazlo: "Theatre, Circus, Variety", trans. Arthur Wensinger, in Walter Gropius and Arthur Wensinger (eds.), *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Morgan, Jessica and Wood, Catherine: *The World as a Stage*, London: Tate Publishing, 2007.

Müller, Heiner and Kluge, Alexander: *Ich schulde der Welt einen Toten*, Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1996.

Murawska-Muthesius, Katarzyna and Zarzecka, Natalia (eds.): *Kantor was here*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011.

Murjas, Teresa: "'I suggest a Night at the Theatre, Mr. Cameron': Memory, History and Responsibility in *Our Class*," in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 21.4, 2011.

Murray, Timothy (ed.): *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

Musial, Grzegorz (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor – Umarla Klasa*, Sopot: Panstwowa Galeria Sztuki, 2004.

N:

Nader, Luiza: "What do Archives Forget?", trans. Ewa Kanigowska-Gedroyc, in Christine Macel and Natasa Petresin-Bachelez (eds.), *Promises of the Past*, Pompidou Centre, exhibition catalogue, Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2010.

Nader, Luiza: "Heterotopy. The NET and Galeria Akumulatory 2", in Petra Stegmann (ed.): *Fluxus East*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007.

Nader, Luiza: "'Shame!' Socialist Realist Historiography in the 1980s", in Karol Sienkiewicz (ed.), *Rejected Heritage*, an e-publication of the Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, 2011 [www.artmuseum.pl].

Nancy, Jean-Luc: "Our History", trans. Cynthia Chase, *et al.*, in *Diacritics*, Fall 1990.

Nancy, Jean-Luc: *Le Regard du Portrait*, Paris: Galilée, 2000.

Nancy, Jean-Luc: *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort, New York: Fordham University Press, 2005.

Nelson, Victoria: *The Secret Life of Puppets*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

P:

Panofsky, Erwin: *Meaning in the Visual Arts*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993.

Pantenburg, Volker: "Loudspeaker and Flag: Yael Bartana, from Documentation to Conjuration", in *Afterall*, n.30, Summer, 2012.

Papapetros, Spyros: "The Eternal Seesaw: Oscillations in Warburg's Revival", in *The Oxford Art Journal*, 26.2, 2003.

Parlagreco, Silvia (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor – Cricot 2, Photographs by Romano Martinis*, Milan: Oedipus Editions, 2001.

Patrick, Martin: "Polish Conceptualism of the 1960s and 1970s", in *Third Text*, Spring 2001.

Pavis, Patrice: *Languages of the Stage*, trans. Jill Daugherty, *et al.,* New York: PAJ Books, 1982.

Perilli, Achille: "Kantor ab ovo", trans. Susan Finnel, in Silvia Parlagreco (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor-Cricot 2: Photographs by Romano Martinis*, Milan: Oedipus Editions, 2001.

Petersens, Magnus (ed.): *Explosion! Painting as Action*, exhibition catalogue, London and Stockholm: Koenig Books and Moderna Museets, 2012.

Phelan, Peggy: *Unmarked*, London: Routledge, 1998.

Phelan, Peggy and Lane, Jill (eds.), *The Ends of Performance*, New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Pilbeam, Pamela: *Madame Tussaud and the History of Waxworks*, London: Hambledon and London, 2003.

Piotrowski, Piotr: *In the Shadow of Yalta*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2005.

Piotrowski, Piotr: "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?" in *Third Text*, 23.1, January, 2009.

Piotrowski, Piotr: *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, trans. Anna Brzyski, London: Reaktion Books, 2012.

Plassard, Didier: *L'Acteur en effigie*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1992.

Plesniarowicz, Krzysztof (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor – "The Return of Odysseus"*, Krakow: Cricoteka, 1994.

Plesniarowicz, Krzysztof (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor – Classroom, Closed Work*, Krakow: Cricoteka, 1995.

Plesniarowicz, Krzysztof: *The Dead Memory Machine*, trans. William Brand, Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004.

Polit, Pawel and Wozniakiewicz, Piotr (eds.): *Experience of Discourse: 1965-1975. Conceptual Reflection in Polish Art*, Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000.

Polit, Pawel: "Warsaw's Foksal Gallery 1966-1972: Between Place and Archive", available on the *Artmargins* website: www.artmargins.com.

Preziosi, Donald: *Rethinking Art History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Prokopczyk, Czeslaw: "The Mythical and the Ordinary in Bruno Schulz", in Czeslaw Prokopczyk (ed.), *Bruno Schulz: New Documents and Interpretations*, New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

Prokopowna, Eugenia: "The Image of the *Shtetl* in Polish Literature", in *Polin*, ed. Antony Polonsky, "From *Shtetl* to Socialism", London: Littman Library, 1993.

Pustola, Konrad: "The Author", in *Piktogram*, n.5/6, 2006.

Puzyna, Konstanty: "The Genius of Witkacy", trans. Boleslaw Taborski, in *Twentieth Century Polish Theatre*, ed. Bohdan Drozdowski, London: John Calder, 1979.

Puzyna, Konstanty; Rozewicz, Tadeusz; and Wajda, Andrzej: "On Tadeusz Kantor's *The Dead Class*", trans. Duncan Jamieson and Adela Karsznia, in *Polish Theatre Perspectives*, 1.1, 2010.

R:
Raczak, Lech: Interview with Kathleen Cioffi and Andrzej Ceynowa, in *TDR* 30.3, Fall 1986.

Rank, Otto: *The Double*, trans. Harry Tucker, London: Maresfield Library, 1989.

Rattemeyer, Christian, *et al.* (eds.): *Exhibiting the New Art*, London: Afterall Books, 2010.

Raynor, Alice: *Ghosts*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

Rhodes, Colin: *Outsider Art*, London; Thames & Hudson, 2000.

Reinelt, Janelle and Roach, Joseph (eds.): *Critical Theory and Performance*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.

Rilke, Rainer Maria: *Selected Works: Poetry*, trans. J.B. Leishman, London: Hogarth Press, 1980.

Rilke, Rainer Maria: *Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman, London: Chatto & Windus, 1981.

Roach, Joseph: *Cities of the Dead*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Ronduda, Lukasz: *Polish Art of the 70s*, trans. Karen Underhill, Soren Gauger, & Krystyna Mazur, Warsaw: CCA, 2009.

Russell, Mark: *Between Tradition and Modernity*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2007.

S:

Sacks, Sheldon (ed.): *On Metaphor*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Sand, Schlomo: *The Invention of the Jewish People*, London: Verso, 2010.

Sandberg, Mark: "Effigy and Narrative", in Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (eds.), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Sandauer, Artur: "Art After the End of Art", trans. Anna Bartkowicz, in "Dialectics and Humanism", *The Polish Philosophical Quarterly*, Spring 1985.

Sandauer, Artur: *On the Situation of the Polish Writer of Jewish Descent in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Abe and Sarah Shenitzer, Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 2005.

Santner, Eric: *The Royal Remains*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Scarpetta, Guy: *Kantor au présent*, Arles: Actes Sud, 2000.

Schade, Sigrid: "Charcot and the Spectacle of the Hysterical Body," trans. Aileen Derieg, in *Art History*, vol.18, n.4, December 1995.

Schapiro, Meyer: *Words and Pictures*, The Hague: Mouton, 1973.

Schapiro, Meyer: *Modern Art*, New York, George Braziller, 1979.

Schimmel, Paul: *Out of Actions*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1998.

Schlosser, Julius: "History of Portraiture in Wax", trans. James Loughridge, in Roberta Panzanelli (ed.), *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008.

Schmitt, Carl: *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of Time into the Play*, trans. David Pan and Jennifer Rust, New York: Telos Press, 2009.

Schulz, Bruno: *The Street of Crocodiles* and *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass*, trans. Celina Wieniewska, London: Picador, 1988.

Schüttpelz, Erhard: "Animism meets Spiritualism", in Anselm Franke (ed.), *Animism* (vol.1), Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010.

Schwartz, Vanessa: "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus", in Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (eds.), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Segel, Harold: *Pinocchio's Progeny*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Serota, Nicholas: "Tadeusz Kantor at the Whitechapel", in Jaroslaw Suchan and Marek Swica (eds.), *Room of Imagination*, Warsaw: Zacheta National Gallery of Art, 2005.

Serota, Nicholas: "Emballages at the Whitechapel", in Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka (eds.), *Kantor Was Here*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011.

Shore, Marci: *The Taste of Ashes*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2013.

Slobodzianek, Tadeusz: *Our Class*, version by Ryan Craig from a literal translation by Catherine Grosvenor, London: Oberon Books, 2009.

Stala, Krzysztof: *On the Margins of Reality*, Stockholm: Stockholm University Slavic Studies, 1993.

Stamenov, Maxim and Gallese, Vittorio (eds.): *Mirror Neurones and the Evolution of the Brain*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2002.

Stangret, Lech (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor: Art and Memory*, Prague: Czech Museum of Fine Arts, 2003.

Stangret, Lech: "Kantor's Trap", trans. Malgorzata Musial, in Grzegorz Musial (ed.), *Tadeusz Kantor – Umarla Klasa*, Sopot: Panstwowa Galeria Sztuki, 2004.

Stegmann, Petra (ed.): *Fluxus East* (exhibition catalogue), Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007.

Steinberg, Leo: *Other Criteria*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Stengers, Isabelle: "Reclaiming Animism", in Anselm Franke and Sabine Folie (eds.), *Animism: Modernity Through the Looking Glass*, Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2011.

Stiegler, Bernard: *Technics and Time, 1*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Stiegler, Bernard: *Technics and Time, 3*, trans. Stephen Barker, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Stimson, Blake: "The Line of Edward Krasinski", in *Artforum*, November, 2003.

Suchan, Jaroslaw (ed.): *The Impossible Theatre*, trans. Jadwiga Piatkowska and Maciej Glogoczowski, Krakow: Bunkier Sztuki, 2000.

Suchan, Jaroslaw and Swica, Marek (eds.): *Tadeusz Kantor: Interior of Imagination*, Warsaw: Zacheta National Gallery of Art, 2005.

Switek, Gabriela (ed.): *Avant-Garde in the Bloc*, Warsaw: Foksal Foundation, 2009.

Szupinska, Joanna: "Politics, Potentials and 'Construction in Process'", in the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 3.2, 2012.

T:

Taussig, Michael: *Mimesis and Alterity*, London: Routledge, 1993.

Tejeda, Isabel: "The Dead Class", in *Tadeusz Kantor: Dead Class*, Lodz: Galeria 86, 2004.

Tessari, Roberto: "Kantor's Theatre: beyond Symbolism, to the symbol of the 'lowest' rank", trans. Susan Finnel, in Silvia Parlagreco (ed.): *Tadeusz Kantor-Cricot 2: Photographs by Romano Martinis*, Milan: Oedipus Editions, 2001.

Tomazewski, Tomaz: "The Spectacle has ended, the Performance goes on!", trans. Anda MacBride, in Jozef Chrobak and Justyna Michalik (eds.): *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting. Theatre*, exhibition catalogue, Vilnius: Lithuanian Art Museum, 2012.

Toranska, Teresa: *Oni: Stalin's Polish Puppets*, trans. Agnieszka Kolakowska, London: Collins Harvill, 1987.

Traverso, Enzo: *Understanding the Nazi Genocide*, London: Pluto Press, 1999.

Trexler, Richard: *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York: Academic Press, 1981.

Tuymans, Luc (ed.): *The Reality of the Lowest Rank: A Vision of Central Europe*, exhibition catalogue, Tielt: Lannoo Publishers, 2010.

Tymicki, Jerzy: "New Dignity: The Polish Theatre, 1970-1985", in *TDR* 30.3, Fall 1986.

Tyszka, Juliusz: "Stanislavsky in Poland", in *NTQ*, vol.5, n.20, November 1989.

U:

Ubersfeld, Anne: *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

V:

Verdery, Katherine: *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

Vernant, Jean-Pierre: *Mortals and Immortals*, trans. Thomas Curely, Froma Zeitlin, *et al.*, Froma Zeitlin (ed.), New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.

Vernant, Jean-Pierre: "La Mort ou les Morts", in Olivier Dumoulin and Françoise Thelamon (eds.), *Autour des Morts: Mémoire et Identité*, Rouen: University of Rouen Press, 2001.

Virilio, Paul and Lotringer, Sylvère: *Pure War*, trans. Mark Polizzotti, New York: Semiotext(e), 2008.

W:
Walter, Harriet: *Other People's Shoes*, London: Penguin Books, 2000.

Warburg, Aby: *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America*, trans. Michael Steinberg, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Warburg, Aby: *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. David Britt, Los Angeles: Getty Institute, 1999.

Warburg, Aby: "The Absorption of the Expressive Values of the Past", trans. Matthew Rampley, in *Art in Translation*, 2.1, 2009.

Warburg, Aby: *Schlangenritual*, Berlin: Wagenbach, 2011.

Warner, Marina: "Waxworks and Wonderlands", in Lynne Cooke and Peter Wollen (eds.), *Visual Display*, New York: Dia Centre, 1995.

Weber, Samuel: *Theatricality as Medium*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2004.

White, Edmund: *Genet*, London: Picador, 1994.

Wind, Edgar: *The Eloquence of Symbols*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.

Winter, Jay: *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Witkiewicz, Stanislaw: "Theatre: An Introduction to Pure Form", trans. Daniel Gerould, in Stanislaw Witkiewicz, *The Madman and the Nun*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968.

Witkiewicz, Stanislaw: *The Witkiewicz Reader*, trans. and ed. Daniel Gerould, London: Quartet Books, 1993.

Witkiewicz, Stanislaw: "On a New Type of Play" (1920), in *The Mother and Other Unsavoury Plays*, eds. & trans. Daniel Gerould and C.S. Durer, New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1993.

Witkiewicz, Stanislaw: *Witkiewicz: Seven Plays*, trans. and ed. Daniel Gerould, New York: Martin Segal Theatre Centre, 2004.

Wittkower, Rudolph: *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997.

Wolff, Larry: *The Idea of Galicia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

Womersley, Kate: "The twice-nightly routine: Samuel Beckett's funny turns", in *TLS*, 04.01.13 (pp.14-15).

Worringer, Wilhelm: *Abstraction and Empathy*, trans. Michael Bullock, Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1997.

Worthern, W.B.: *Drama Between Poetry and Performance*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Worthern, W.B.: "Antigone's Bones", in *TDR*, 53.3, 2008.

Wood, Christopher: "Dromenon", in *Common Knowledge*, 18.1, 2012.

Woodward, Jennifer: *The Theatre of Death: The Ritual Management of Royal Funerals in Renaissance England*, Woodbridge: The Boydel Press, 1997.

Wroblewska, Hanna: "Avant-garde tradition and Traditional Avant-garde", trans. Pawel Skalinski, in Hanna Wroblewska (ed.): *Grupa Krakowska* (exhibition catalogue), Warsaw: Zacheta Gallery, 1996.

Wyspianski, Stanislaw: *The Return of Odysseus*, trans. Howard Clarke, Bloomington: Indiana University Russian and East European Series, vol.35, 1966.

Z:
Zamir, Tzachi: "Puppets", in *Critical Inquiry*, vol.36, n.3, Spring 2010.

Zielinski, Siegfried: *Audiovisions*, trans. Gloria Custance, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999.

Zurowski, Andrzej: "'Pulling Faces at the Audience': the Lonely Theatre of Tadeusz Kantor", in *NTQ*, vol.1, n.4, November 1985.

Websites:

www.artmargins.com

www.artmuseum.pl

www.bruno-latour.fr/node/468

http://www.formerwest.org/

http://www.eustache-kossakowski.com