KANTOR'S THEATRE OF EMOTION

Wielopole Wielopole, named after the place where Tadeusz Kantor was born in 1915, is his latest work for the Cricot² Theatre. It came into being Florence, under the auspices of the Teatro Regionale Toscano, between he autumn of 1979 and the spring of 1980

Kantor's first work for the theatre was staged in 1956 but it took 17 ears before his stage productions were seen in Great Britain at the

Edinburgh Festival: The Water Hen in 1972, Lovelies and Dowdies in 1973, The Dead Class in 1976 (subsequently seen in London at the Riverside Studios) and Wielopole Wielopole in 1980.

His texts for Wielopole Wielopole are printed here in full. They were translated from Polish into Italian by Luigi Martinelli, and from Italian into English by Keir Elam.

TEXTS BY TADEUSZ KANTOR

ILLUSION AND REPETITION

For many years, and for various reasons, I have prized reality. But at the end of the game there was, as it were, a sacred realm, of which one could not speak in everyday language, an absolute realm. It was, quite simply, the realm of truth.

As a result I rejected the concept of Illusion (or fiction), perhaps because I was afraid of succumbing to it. It attracted me too much.

But more of that later.

For now I am a radical opponent of it.

This affirmation, perhaps summary, will help us in describing events.

Because already ambiguity, confusion of terms and superficial simplification of judgments arise.

So that digressions, clarifications and corrections are called

One, perhaps the most essential:

it is not the rejection of illusion in itself that is important, it is the motives for such a rejection that are

Not to be aware of this distinction is the cause of superficial opinions that, in the long run, always turn out to be fatal.

Apparently similar phenomena are brought down to a common denominator, without taking account of the fact that the equation will prove completely false: in this way misinformation is created.

Here is an example:

the opponents of illusion, at the time of the Great Reform of the theatre and of the Avant-garde at the beginning of this century, rejected illusion following their condemnation of realism and naturalism. In my conception of theatre, instead, I reject illusion in the name of reality, which I prize and accept: Reality, to which for centuries an intransigent convention has denied the right to become a real factor in the work of art, admitting only its Fiction and its Reproduction, faithful, of course.

This crude reality,

not reworked «artistically»,

ripped from life,

is the Real Object, which has replaced

the «artistic object».

A difference - as the comparison itself shows - that is not indifferent!

To realism, to naturalism, (and obviously to illusion) the avant-garde of the twenties opposed

Interpretation (as it was defined in the theatre). This was undeniably the only way out then.

There were quite a number of such «interpretations» in the art of the first half of the twentieth century. But we are not concerned with these

The principle of interpretation (let's stick to this term which in due course flourished in the theatre: with a certain poetic licence, in fact, it might be applied to all the artistic trends of the first half of the century, even those that did not acknowledge lyrical effusion) - the principle of interpretation, then, gradually became the categorical imperative of art.

Everyone claimed it for himself.

It was used unscrupulously as a justification!

This breakdown, increasingly apparent, of a once radical attitude and of its mediocre extensions has strengthened my fascination for Reality, so alien to all these trends of Interpretation, of Abstraction and of Construction.

And again later events have unfolded, as always, unexpectedly. Here is the result of my clashes and my transactions with Reality and Illusion: after many years and many experiences of the annexing of reality (of life), on which I thought necessary a radical operation through the structure of the work of art, of happenings, actions and displays - Reality began to make its weight felt upon me in its materiality. This was considerably influenced by the «mass conscription» of mediocre explorers in this once virgin and dangerous territory.

Truth became an unbearably tiresome vogue.

A way of deepening it had to be found.

In due course, not believing very much in orthodoxy, I said that reality cannot exist alone, that it must have its own threat: illusion. Now I realize something that goes further than this: illusion, common opinion apart, has a metaphysical aspect. The function once assigned to it by way of servility towards nature and the reality of life is by no means its essence.

This metaphysical aspect of illusion, which so far has not been mentioned, is

Repetition.

Almost a ritual.

The atavistic gesture of man who, at the threshold of history, wanted to make himself known.

To do something for the second time,

in an artificial fashion,

«on one's own account» - a human account to repeat something that had already been done by the

to leave oneself open to their jealousy and revenge, to take the risk,

to face up to the awaiting catastrophe,

knowing full well that the works involved are useless, without prospects,

«once only»,

lacking in any luminous final meaning or any effect in life,

a ritual

set as if on the other side of life, in connivance with death.

Let's say it openly and clearly:

this obscure process of Repetition is a protest and a challenge.

And now one can readily add:

it is the core of art!

It is at once the idea that permeates our performance, with its significant title:

Wielopole-Wielopole.

Like everything in the theatre, though,

it is subject to its enchantment and its poetry.

For this reason, maybe, I shall insert, «on the spot», the following appendix and theatrical note.

Illusion transfers reality into a different orbit.

The poets would say: into the orbit of poetry.

Maybe it is another, different space.

And at the same time absolute, not ours.

Maybe poetry is the sign of this other world, which turns in a different orbit,

beyond the walls of our room.

This Transfer takes place in a particular way,

almost through a method taken from the world of children: through Repetition.

Repetition has different variations. The deepest is like a kind of echo.

The same as that existing *here*, but immaterial. A certain sudden awareness of time passing and of dying.

Another variation:

the learning type (memorizing).

Precisely: memory, which transfers the reality of the past that continually dies.

Yet another variation:

if time were compressed, we would have a repetition which is perfect, infinite, terrifying, inhuman, since good old «solar time», «applied» and adapted to our organism, could not protect us from the simultaneous sight of Eternity or of the Void.

Or rather, of death.

I shall give still other examples of this repetition, because they offer a whole series of creative possibilities for actors, of Acting.

Yet another variation (not the last): repetition: mimicking. The habits of babies. Endless enjoyments, not without a profound meaning. The best weapon against obtuse, dangerous pseudoseriousness

Dangerous for life. We know it perfectly well from history. The baby defends life, sets its terms.

The artist does the same!

Repetition takes away from reality its vital fiction, its vital meaning, the force of the practical activity of life.

Following such an operation (which a very long time ago, for the first time was carried out after a brilliant discovery),

reality becomes impotent and fruitless for the purposes of practical life, but in this way it takes on a colossal power in thought, in imagination, i.e. in the sphere that decides the dynamics of human life and its

Development.

Brilliant operation!

SPIRITUALISM

In the «prehistory» of this production, that happy period in which the problems of the stage realization had not yet arisen, during the journey through the empty terrain of the imagination – in my world of ideas certain revaluations, certain changes, certain shifts came about, just as if the interior of my room had changed.

The word spiritualism has always awoken suspicion in me. I don't know if my intellect was in effect the gland that aroused in me my passion for a radical avant-garde, or maybe only erected a shelter and a defence against the absurd organization of our world and the mire of postwar culture.

In any case such a concept helped me in many difficult moments.

But evidently the world is more complex than one believes. In fact everything has begun to crumble in this world of

The absolute fullness attributed to the intellect begins to show serious gaps and lacks, causing fatal consequences.

Both in life and art. But above all in art.

So I go back to my childhood. When, during long walks, I searched for solitude so I could «memorize» Maeterlinck's Lesson. That, in fact, is the time in which we «memorize» everything.

SPIRITUALISM AND SPIRITUALIZATION

(Naturally I'm still referring to art. Let's leave life aside. It

is a personal question, and is not lived so as to motivate our art. At least for as long as we are alive).

In reflecting on my new work, to assume spiritualism as a postulate was a risky decision, since at the same time it was linked to the Gospel as the only means of expression.

This great myth, as if similar to Pure Art, which has nourished our culture and our existence throughout the millennia, been digested throughout the ages, ceaselessly regenerated, has in our century been driven to the outskirts of our civilization of Sacred Technology, of the Consumer and of Politics. All is not yet lost however.

The outskirts do not in the least mean ruin and depreciation. In my private vocabulary there exists the term Reality of the Bottom Rank.

Territory reserved (illegally) for Art.

And thus for all the highest human values. There the outskirts have their top rank.

The explosions of this myth, which appear in the least expected places, occur, in the last analysis, in no other zone than the very outskirts.

Speaking in the language of art and poetry: in the poor yard, in the painful corner where we hide our most secret hopes, our imagination, our threatened «humanity», our personality.

And - probably - only there we can save ourselves.

THE ROOM

The room of my childhood is dark, a cluttered Cubbyhole.

It is not true that in our memory the childhood room is sunny and light.

It is so only

in a mannered literary convention. What we are dealing with is a Dead room or the dead.

We try in vain to put it in order:

it will always die. If nonetheless we extract from it some ephemeral fragments,

a bit of settee, the window, and further on a street lost in the background,

a sunbeam on the floor, my father's yellow leggings, and my mother's crying,

and the face of someone on the other side of the windowpane

then it is possible that our true childhood Room

will begin to piece itself together, and maybe our performance

will also manage to piece itself together for the

The important thing is the window! Further on, as I have said, a Street lost in the background and at the end of it a Multi-storeyed Pink

Building. From this corner my mother disappeared, when she went away for a long period, round that bend

which was the End of the World. It is difficult to define the spatial dimension of a memory

Here is the room of my childhood, which I continually put in order, and which continually dies, together with its tenants, what's more.

The tenants are my family.

All of them repeat their own activities endlessly, as if they were printed on a photographic plate, forever.

They repeat them ad nauseam, all concentrated on the same gesture, with the same grimace, they will repeat those banal, elementary, neutral activities, without expression, with exaggerated, obtuse precision, with terrifying ostentation, stubbornly, tiny activities that fill our lives . . . «ineffective», because repeated, as if they did not have a definite effect in view, as if they did not have a meaning, without causes and effects, isolated. autonomous (but this is exactly the point!) dead falsifications that gain their reality and their importance (fortunately artificial) thanks to this insistent Repetition. Maybe, what's more, this is precisely the peculiarity of

which returns incessantly, which comes to nothing, and is useless There is one place left: Behind the Door. as in the back and in the margins of the Room, another space, in another dimension, where childhood memories are collected, recollections recalled in vain, fermenting an interior of the imagination, inaccessible, in the corner. behind the wardrobe, in the attic, behind the door, in a poor yard where objects die,

the recollection:

this rhythm of pulsation,

.... Uncle Stasio, the lugubrious figure of a Deportee, Wandering beggar with a barrel-organ.

and where many forgotten secrets can still be found.



AGENCY FOR THE HIRING OF THE DEAR DEPARTED

In memories

truthful and magnanimous people do not exist.

Let's say it quite openly: the process of evoking memories is suspect and none too clean.

It is simply a hiring agency

The memory makes use of «hired» characters.

They are sinister individuals, mediocre and suspect creatures waiting to be «hired» like home helps «by the hour».

Almost crumpled, dirty, badly dressed, sickly, bastardized, acting out badly the parts of people often near and dear to us.

This ambiguous character is disguised as a recruit, pretending to be my father.

Mother is evidently played by a street walker,

my uncles are mere ragamuffins.

The window of our town's esteemed photographer, who daringly keeps up the name of the photography shop,

«The Memory», is usually a foul cleaning woman in the parish morgue.

As for the priest, better not mention him.

His sister is a simple scullery maid.

And again Uncle Stasio, the lugubrious figure of a Deportee,

Wandering beggar with a barrel-organ.

THE ARMY LES SOLDATS - L'INDIVIDU MILITAIRE

The reason I'm interested in this *Human Species* has nothing to do with patriotism, nor with antimilitarism, nor with the struggle for peace, nor with any political, social or other programme.

I could be subject to recriminations from anarchists, from chronic antimilitarists, from Jehovah's Witnesses, from dadaists and surrealists (if they were still alive),

from every kind of demonstrator, even on the part of the Schweiks and the Invalids, and finally on the part of the Unknown Soldier.

Because the reason I'm interested in this exceptional human condition is of a merely formal and artistic kind.

Army. Mass. One can't be too sure whether mechanical or alive,

of hundreds of heads all the same, of hundreds of legs all the same, of hundreds of arms all the same,

In rows, lines, diagonally ordered, regular,

heads, legs, hands, arms, boots, buttons, eyes, noses, mouths, rifles.

Movement carried out in identical fashion by hundreds of identical individuals hundreds of organs in this monstrous geometry of rigour.

rmv

which marches in groups of four in order

and in a rhythm dictated by the steps and shouts of command: lef, ri,

composed of individuals in whom we recognize ourselves,

of our own kind: human;

we are ourselves! only strangers!

As if we saw ourselves for the first time, sideways, i.e. dead,

this is why the Army (on the march) attracts us so

Its condition, hard and relentless like death,

reveals to us our own image.

Separated from the rest of mankind,

from us Civilian-Spectators

by a law so drastic

as to resemble the law of death:

an inexplicable barrier for the human intellect.

Such a universal condition is most apparent when the Army moves, i.e., precisely: marches

in order. in groups of four,

and in time.

The Civilians (= Spectators)

never walk in order, in groups of four

and in time.

It's utterly shameful!

And this is just the state that, in the gaudiest fashion, almost like a circus, creates that barrier.

More clear-cut than the very footlights.

Army.

They pass us by

as in a dream, horribly strange.

The same strangeness possessed in dreams by the figures of

no longer living.

Photographs of Recruits - memories of the dead.

Chosen and scarred by death,

infected by the germ of death,

unknown and rapid,

that enables them to pass on death to individuals of the same kind and to die themselves on command.

Doomed to «fall in action».

And the Uniform!

This atavistic human desire and imperative of death that levels all social classes with terrible power.

In the photos of «recruits» we can see mixed together, as in the Last Judgement,

gentlemen, peasants, intellectuals.

They are waiting for the uniform to cancel all these useless differences.

This unusual state

is literally boiling over with a primitive instinct almost with a masochistic lust for levelling.

In old photos depicting the departure of recruits, on station platforms,

for the front, we can see smiling faces, overcome with

as it were sexual, young and strong bodies, all drawn, detached by now from subtle and complex relations, cultural, social, family.

All at once everything becomes simple, they have been levelled, subordinated,

the whole shell of culture falls away...

They create a language, ostentatiously vulgar, obscene, brutal, cynical..

Finally they belong to the species!

THE ARMY

... to concentrate on only one feature of the Army, the most important one, which becomes apparent only by casting aside the familiar characteristics and signs passed down by literature, news reports and films:

- horrors of war, trenches, clay, mud, lice, filth, wounds,

gangrene, amputations, death . . .

others: sadistic-sergeants, sclerotic-colonels, lugubrious-generals, chaplains of death.

- still others: the charm of weapons, assaults, battle scenes, flag-waving, the wind of history, pantheon and Unknown Soldiers . . .

After abandoning these effects, the reduction would consist in the observation, somewhat narrow, but which seems to me philosophically substantial, and which opens nev acting possibilites:

the Army represents a Human Species in itself, separated from us Civilian-Spectators by a barrier the overcoming of which is rigorously forbidden, subject to

condemnation, unimaginable like death.

Thinking of a new production that after The Dead Class would represent a further evolutionary phase, I have attempted above all to find a New Model which could serve the actor, giving him new possibilities for action. The moment of discovery, which aroused an extraordinary excitement in me and which led me onto a new trail: a sudden electrocution at the sight of a photo-memory of recruits, probably before being sent to the front, grey, painful figures, immobilized in the face of death, which was prefigured for them in that terrifying uniform.

The Army.

The two characteristics printed most deeply in the condition of the Army are identical to those which for centuries have marked the figure of the actor: one is Differentiation, as it were Irrevocable and Absolute (as for the dead),

Differentiation from us Civilian-Spectators,

to the point where the barrier set up recalls the sense of the Impossibility of its being overcome, a sense which

is perceived only in the nightmare.

The second characteristic is the terrifying realization, still in the hallucination of the dream, that this Differentiation concerns individuals of our own species, that is, Ourselves, the awareness that we are those Strangers, those Deadmen,

that this is the image with which one has to be Associated!

The Army (difficult to say: soldier, in the singular) and the Actor.

PHOTOGRAPH OF RECRUITS

... Somewhere, in a corner of the room, behind the wardrobe,

Individuals of an Alien Species have taken refuge in this childhood room, which exists by now only in

Exercises, marches, manoeuvres are carried out . . Maybe this poor room will even become a ground of conflicts and a battlefield . . .

These clandestine Tenants, posing for a photograph, like Deadmen,

enter precisely into history, and into eternity.

Their painful condition:

life which lasts just this single moment, as if through the miraculous, and at the same time terrifying and murderous process of Photography, they had been deprived of past and future.

As if they had had their past, different for each one, and their future life, full of surprises and fascination, taken

away.

To justify this they have just this single brief instant, in which they are posing in that way . . .

The stage operation will not aim to represent the vicissitudes of people in the natural development of their practical life;

besides, we do not accept representation! We ourselves will create those vicissitudes, we will imagine them, we will develop them, we will resuscitate these characters, ordering them to act as if on an abandoned minor track of life and memory . .

We will be exceptionally patient and cautious.

Every face, if it is placed under a magnifying lens, speaks of the life of each one of them, full of vicissitudes, of surprises, of happiness, of desperation,

And here all at once - in this photo - rigid, reduced to a single expression

and to a single instant . . .

It won't be easy for them to move, to stir from this

from this wearying acceptance of a life made up of An Instant.

They're used to it, they don't understand what's asked of them, they comprehend, learn, remember with difficulty.

This tiring exercise lasts a long time before they recover

the necessary ability

to Repeat their lives over again, Settle their own unresolved and interrupted affairs, Finish fulfilling their truncated dreams

from this still portrait . . .

They make an effort, don't succeed, they've clearly forgotten, they get it wrong, are discouraged, once again «die» and so on, ad infinitum . . .

THE CHILD'S MEMORY

When I paint a picture the formation process is governed by a single «will» which, in its result, is called organic form, unity, and so on. In the creation of a theatrical spectacle it is much more difficult to respect and maintain this unity

Images, ideas connected with space, with movement, with action, flow so copiously during rehearsals (this is greatly influenced by the individual actions and the «will» of the actors) that one needs a great awareness of one's own goal (which is continually lost on the horizon) to avoid agitating the imagination, that in this case has

to be more strictly controlled.

All of this is all the more essential in that in this spectacle there is no literary text (a written drama) in relation to which (whatever attitude I have towards it and whatever role it plays in the formation of the spectacle) one can find certain references, and which

can be of help during the «piloting». Considering these dangers, almost like those of a sea expedition, I have discovered a particular way of using a special «compass». Well - reconstructing childhood memories (such is the sense of this spectacle), we do not «write» a plot according to the models known from literature, a plot based on continuity.

I have established that this is a lie. While I am very interested in the truth here, i.e. in a structure which is not «cemented» or «welded» by

stylistic and formal joints and trimmings.

This reconstruction of childhood recollections must contain only those moments, images, clichés that the child's memory retains, making a selection from the mass of reality, a selection of exceptional (artistic) essentiality because infallibly devoted to the Truth.

The child's memory always conserves only one characteristic

of the characters,

the situation, the events, the place and the time.

... Father arrives (on leave) cursing continually and packs the bags . . .

... Mother, who is always leaving and disappearing,

then: nostalgia . .

In the whole recollection I have of certain people's lives

there is fixed in my memory only one expression, one characteristic.

... In the creation of the spectacle, in going ahead with the performance, such a method is a limitation. Magnificent!

This is the «compass» method I mentioned earlier.

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ILLUSION, OR THE CIRCUS TENT

There is a particular moment in the theatre in which dangerous and poisonous spells take force, when the lights are out and the audience has already left, on the stage all is grey, distant landscapes are transformed into ordinary paint stuck on something, and the abandoned costumes and props just a moment earlier stupendous and full of splendour, appear in their essence of trash and shoddy falsification, when emotions and gestures die which an instant before were so alive and passionate and so applauded.

Maybe then we would like to wander again on the stage, as in a graveyard, searching for the traces of that life that

a few minutes ago, here, still moved us . . .

But was it only a fiction?

It was for this reason that the Symbolists were so fascinated by the poetry of poor decorations and costumes of paper, by the pathos of sad Pierrot and tumbler who hid beneath the mask of ceremony and «noble» gestures the wrinkles and calamities, the tragic human condition.

Stage, Circus Tent, empty world, like eternity, in which life lights up for a little while, like an illusion.

Poor tent.

At the entrance there is a decrepit Pierrot, his make-up soaked with tears: he's looking in vain for his Colombine, who has already gone back, long time ago, to her wretched inn.

RETURN TO THE CIRCUS TENT

Before the memory and image of this scene disappear altogether, before poor Pierrot goes off for good, I wish to say something that may define, in the deepest and simplest way, my path to the theatre.

Despite what I have written on the various consecutive periods, on the various «phases» and «stops», like the

names of places on milestones:

Informal Theatre, Zero Theatre, Impossible Theatre, Theatre of Poor Reality, Wandering Theatre, Theatre of Death - always, somewhere in the background, there was this same Circus Tent. And those names only defend it from official and academic stabilizing. They were, moreover, like the titles of long chapters in which I overcame the dangers of that path that always leads to the Unknown and the Impossible.

For almost half a century the poor Circus Tent has fallen into oblivion. It has been put in the shade by puristic ideas, constructivist revolutions, surrealist displays, the metaphysics of abstraction, environments, open theatres, conceptual theatres, anti-theatres, the great battles, great hopes and illusions, and also the great disasters, disillusions and failures of pseudo-science.

After many phases and conflicts, today Î can see quite clearly the road already covered, and I understand why I have always so obstinately refused an official or institutional status. Or rather: why I and my theatre have been so obstinately refused the privileges and conditions deriving from such a social position. Because my theatre has always been a Circus Tent. The true Theatre of Emotion.

Those who want to know more about Kantor can contact the Cricotheque – the Centre of Information about the activities of Cricot ² Teatro Regionale Toscano, Florence

Tadeusz Kantor. Le Théâtre de la Mort. Textes reunis et présentés par Denis Bablet. L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, 1977.



'Photograph of Recruits'
...Somewhere, in a corner of the room, behind the wardrobe, Individuals of an Alien Species have taken refuge in this childhood room, which exists by now only in memory...
Exercises, marches, manouevres are carried out...
Maybe this poor rom will even become a ground of conflicts and a battlefield...

These clandestine Tenants, posing for a photograph, like Deadmen, enter precisely into history, and into eternity.



'Here is the room of my childhood, which I continually put in order, and which continually dies, together with its tenants, what's more. The tenants are my family.'



composed of individuals in whom we recognize ourselves, of our own kind: human; we are ourselves! only strangers!



Aunt Józka (with hat) and the uncles Karol and Olek The partly hidden figure is that of the grandmother.

'The memory makes use of "hired" characters. They are sinister individuals, mediocre and suspect creatures waiting to be "hired" like home helps "by the hour"



Widow of the local photographer with Kantor on the left ... Their painful condition:

... Their painful condition: life which last just this single moment, as if through the miraculous, and at the same time terrifying and murderous process of *Photography* they had been deprived of past and future.'

In the London production the cast was as follows:

Uncle Józef, Priest: Stanisław Rychlicki

Granny Katarzyna: Jan Książek Helka, the mother: Ludmila Ryba Marian, the father, lst Recruit: Andrzej Welminski Aunt Manka, Who Knows Who, Rabin: Maria Kantor

Aunt Józka: Ewa Janicka

Uncle Karl: Wac/aw Janicki Uncle Olek: Les/aw Janicki Uncle Stasio, Deportee: Maria Krasicka Adaŝ, 2nd Recruit: Lech Stangret

Widow of the local photographer: Mirosława Rychlicka

3rd Recruit: Marzia Loriga

4th Recruit: Jean Marie Barotte

5th Recruit: Luigi Arpini 6th Recruit: Giovan Battista Storti

7th Recruit: Loriano Della Rocca Sound Technician: Krzysztov Dominik

Musical Elements:

- Psalm 110 'Oracle of God to My Lord: Sit on my Right', original live recording of a chant by mountain-dwellers in the village church of Niedzica, Poland.
- The Grey Infantry March.
- Fragment from the Scherzo in B minor by

Maurizio Buscarino