PRAXIS: An Editorial Statement

Kent Neely

Following convention poses an unusual dialectic in theatre. The art's continuance is insured by relying upon the elements of craft in teaching students the foundations of theatrical representation. Yet the artists we often praise most enthusiastically are those who have departed from convention and redefined strategies, techniques and operations.

Consider the Italian theatre in the late 16th century and early 17th century. Distinguished by the popularity of traveling commedia troupes and the growing proliferation of opera, it is the scenic practices of intermezzi artists that often capture our imagination with surviving drawings, renderings and theoretical treatises. Reading Orville K. Larson's translations of *The Theatrical Writings of Fabrizio Carini Motta* (Southern Illinois Press, 1987), one is struck by the care and extraordinary detail which characterized the creation of those intricate settings. Motta was Prefect of Theatres and Architect to the Duke Ferdinando Carlo IV between 1671 and 1699. He was less creative than his predecessor Buontalenti and unknown compared to his contemporary Torelli. Still he stands as an excellent example of following and perpetuating a special theatrical design convention. His perspective drawings are geometrically exact to serve single point perspective settings. His plans for theatrical machines are purposefully conceived and reflect years of perfection gained from use. Motta's writings summarize scenic practices which had become commonplace since Buontalenti created his fanciful works for the Medici's sixty years prior. Representation had become systematized to exacting proportions and dimensions.

The practices and methods originated around Motta's lifetime survived and influenced theatrical representation for centuries after. Arguably, Antoine, Kean and Belasco advanced the idea of representation into new realms of realism but none of them strayed from the idea of a fourth wall ideal of representation. None save Appia who began to stretch the conception of theatrical representation away from depiction and into a plastic environment. Delcroze's conception of the theatre space as a rhythmic environment pushed the bounds of what constituted theatrical representation. The theatre ceased to be a place for a systematized convention, bending to undeniable creativity forces. In this issue of PRAXIS, three scholars deal with the dialectic of change in convention.

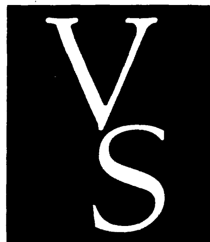
Michal Kobialka offers intriguing observations in his essay *Lost Memories: Nomad Art of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century.* Kobialka examines

Robert Wilson's 1993 installation, "Memory/Loss," as an homage to Tadeuz Kantor and as a tool for understanding Kantor's representational practices.

Mark Jennison offers an interview with Igor Nezovibatko. Amidst political and social change, Nezovibatko describes current Russian theatrical practices dominated by a long tradition of strong directors.

Finally, Per Brask looks at the techniques of Primus Theatre. Acting training is aligned with a new conception of dramaturgy and performance that Brask calls a "confluence of procedures." As a result, the performers achieve an unusual relationship with their spectators that transports them to "the world of the extra-daily."

Though not as revolutionary as the Italian designers, Appia or Delcroze, the artists examined here exemplify the lively and energetic dialectic between convention and creativity that advances the theatre.



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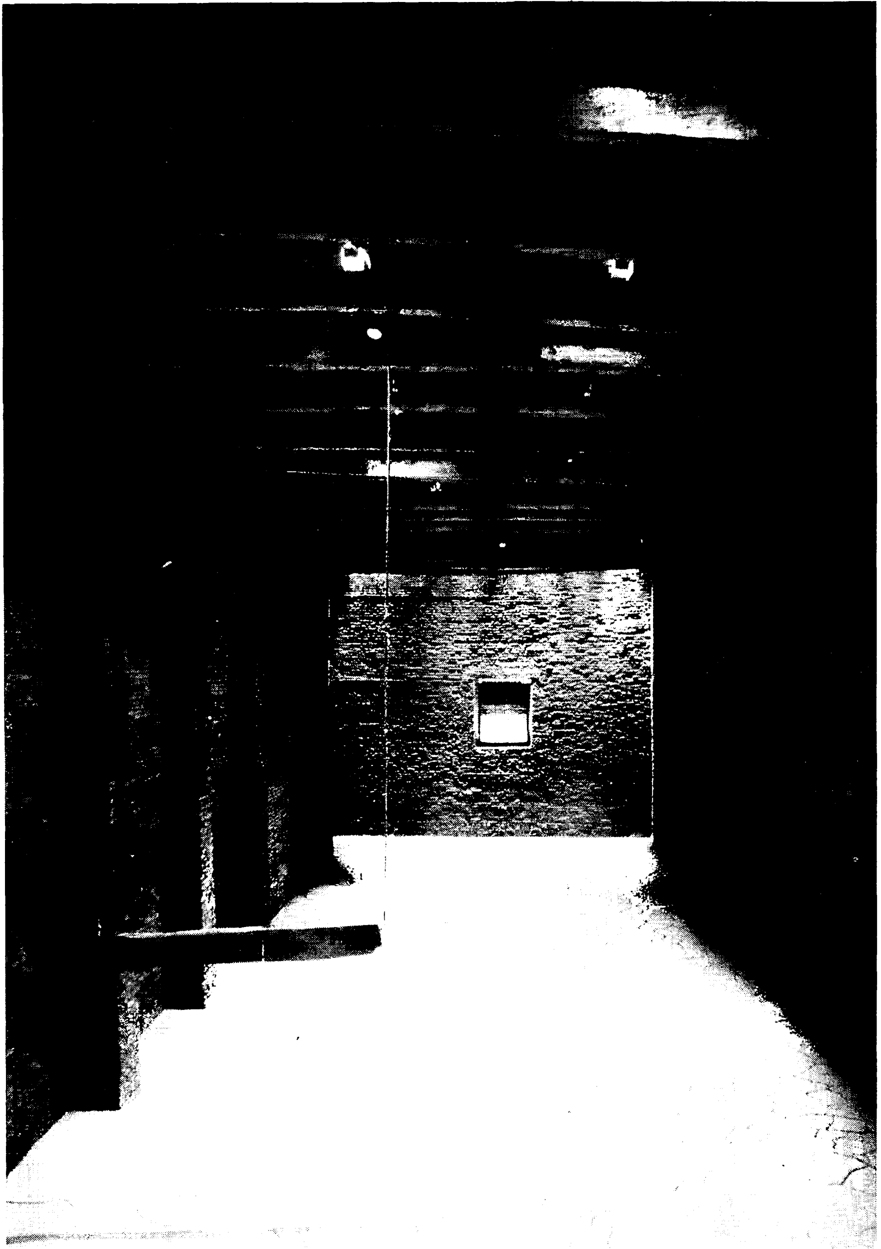

Figure 1. Memory/Loss. Installation by Robert Wilson

Of Lost Memories and Nomadic Representational Practices

It is sometimes necessary to turn against our own instincts and to renounce our experience.

Gilles Deleuze, "Painting and Sensation"

When confronted with a work by Tadeusz Kantor or Robert Wilson, a spectator is often intimidated by the images that are imagined on stage. In darkness, she or he grapples for words to comprehend the experience around and within her or him. The words that frequently come to mind are: beautiful, secret, mysterious, or an inexplicable theatre of images and visions. In this inexplicable theatre of images and visions, reality mingles with dreams, and dreams weave a secret web of associations that is reflected in an immaterial mirror held up to the spectator. In this immaterial mirror, the spectator establishes the theatre's identity along the lines of doubling of the "one that becomes two," that is, in terms of the relationship between what the subject, who is located in a particular epistemological and ontological place, is and the object, which is constituted as an optical or narrative image, represents. Consequently, Kantor's productions are said to be grounded in historical events that can be experienced by the audience. If a scene is difficult to comprehend, it is, we are told, because he was an artist responding to the political and historical pressures of Polish history. Wilson's operas are said not to have an obvious story or narrative; nor do they have an easily discernable link between words and music.

I want to depart from such an organization of knowledge about representation and move in the direction of the so-called haptic representation. According to Gilles Deleuze, haptic representation is neither defined by the authorized images of the binary logic of the "one that becomes two" nor constructed and verified by science. It can only be described by practices in a discursive formation or in a performance space. The first aspect of haptic representation is that its orientations, references, and linkages are never stable, but are in a continuous variation. The second aspect of haptic representation is that it reveals traces of representational practices within multiple spaces they occupy and the shifting conditions of their existence or modes of their operation.[1]

To substantiate this argument, I wish to discuss in this essay Robert Wilson's 1993 installation, "Memory/Loss," and Tadeusz Kantor's 1990 "cricotage," *Silent Night*.[2] Undoubtedly, both of them contribute to postmodern debates about the mode of functioning of a speaking subject and the nature of the

ideological aspect of representation by drawing attention to representational practices that were employed by Wilson and Kantor. With the analysis of the objects and the elements in the installation and the performance space, I will argue however that "Memory/Loss" and *Silent Night* are examples *par excellence* of haptic representation whose references and linkages do not and cannot produce a recognizable narrative of a verifiable transfer. Rather, its references and linkages, which are nomadic, make it impossible for the audience to construct a structure that could turn an installation or performance space into a mnemonic space of recognizable images.

I

The 1993 installation, "Memory/Loss," was part of the forty-fifth Biennale in Venezia.[3] Upon entering the installation, a viewer found him/herself in a long and narrow industrial-type space (see Figure 1). The brick wall on the right was a smooth surface. The brick wall on the left was divided into sections by square columns. The space was enclosed by yet another brick wall in the middle of which there was a barred window emanating a distinct light: white at the bottom, going through the spectrum of shades between white and blue in the middle, and dark blue at the top. The three walls seemed to be made of clay bricks. The brown walls were in contrast with the floor that resembled a sun-scorched, dry, and yellow wasteland. The contrast was further strengthened by the light whose pools were meticulously delineated. The side walls were in shadow. The wall facing the viewer was lit by a side white light and the white-blue spectrum within the opening of the window. The floor was lit by a shadowless light coming from the ceiling.

The room was not empty, however. There were at least two objects in it. Five-sixths of the length of the room, on the right, there was a brightly lit torso of a man wearing a helmet-like skull-cap on his head. Two-sixths of the length of the room, on the left, there were a wooden desk hanging on two ropes from one of the beams and its shadow immediately underneath it on the floor.

The field of vision did not reproduce a space closed in upon its objects, but set up an interface between the objects and the sounds. The sounds of the installation could easily be recognized as the sounds of thunder, dripping water, a telephone, a violin, a dog barking, or the sounds of words spoken without a particular order.[4]

The viewer/listener moved through this spatial and acoustic landscape fully realizing that s/he was a stranger here; a stranger who was traveling through space unaccompanied by his/her shadow. The lack of a shadow is the condition of the one who loses the memory of her/his identity and is unable to reconstruct

it, because the references either ceased to exist or lost their meanings in a barren landscape. This being the case, there is only one alternative: either return to the place where one's shadow will provide an instant gratification for the desire to know and appropriate or to linger in this space a little bit longer to experience a virtual space where one can observe not what can be seen in a striated space of invariance, but what can be thought in a tactile space of objects and sounds.

In a letter written to Robert Wilson in 1987, Heiner Müller describes a text by Tschinigis Aitmatov about a Mongolain torture which was used to turn captives into slaves.[5] We are told that a captive, who was chosen for domestic use rather than for slave trade, underwent a treatment that would turn him into a docile body. First, he had his head shaved. Second, a helmet made from the skin of a slaughtered camel was placed on his bald head. Third, he was buried to the shoulders and exposed to the sun. A natural process followed. The sun dried the helmet which embraced the skull tightly. The hair did not have space to grow; consequently, it was forced to grow back into the scalp. "The tortured prisoner lost his memory within five days, if he survived and he became, after this operation, a laborer who did not cause trouble, a 'Mankurt'. . . There is no revolution without memory."[6]

We are also told that the desk hanging from the ceiling, is not one of Wilson's objects, but is from one of Tadeusz Kantor's productions. The desk is the only object in this space that has a shadow. It has identity. Paradoxically, this identity is no longer necessary—Kantor is dead, the Circot 2 company has ceased to exist, the productions are stories told by others. This desk liberates itself from the functions imposed upon it by encouraging connections between people, objects, and sounds that previously could not have been established. A tortured captive is staring in the direction of the desk. The desk and the tortured captive are in the field of the viewer's vision. The viewer stares at both of them—his/her thinking process is hindered by the sound effects that enforce detours from instant gratification: thunder, dripping water, a telephone ringing, industrial sounds, a dog barking, a violin solo, and cut-up sentences and single words from Müller's letter read by Wilson. "By cutting up the structure of the sentences and by using only single words one loses the memory of the text and is finally unable to reconstruct the original."[7]

II

The 1990 cricotage, *Silent Night*, depicted a place after a disaster. "A long time ago, I was fascinated by/the Atlantis/disaster,/by the world before our world,/by the only known 'REPORT' about it by Plato/and by Plato's opening words:/'That night./Then everything started anew and out of nothing."[8] The

stage, a simple platform, was filled with objects and people. Up centre, there was a chimney of a burnt-down house. Stage right, there was a wooden wall containing a set of doors and a window. Stage left, there were a table and a few chairs. An Emballage, human figures veiled in white sheets, was on the floor down centre. Nino (a diminutive form of Stefano in Italian or Stefan in Polish), a figure in black holding a cello, was seated stage left. "Now then, here on this stage,/the end of the world,/after a disaster,/a heap of dead bodies/(there are many of them)/a heap of broken Objects—/this is all that is left (174)." Suddenly, the doors opened and Helka, a woman in a tattered white dress entered and came up to the window. Nino began to play the cello. Helka beckoned him to stop playing and come up to the window. Judging by her words, nothing survived outside. Everything was in ruins or dead. Nino continued to play. Angered by his indifference, Helka started to collect and wash the dishes that must have had been thrown around by guests attending a party "That night," that is, the night of the disaster. Her words were drowned by the sounds of a tango that must have been played "That night." The music stopped. "Then—according to the principles of my theatre—/the dead 'come alive' and play their parts as if nothing happened(174)." The figures tried to tell their stories; however, it was quite obvious that they had no recollection of the past. Their attempts to organize the memory shreds together came to naught. Only individual words and phrases or disconnected prayers and songs in different languages were all they remembered. Nor were their attempts at deciphering the functions of the objects they carried with them successful. A cross, a mailbag, a chair, a broom, an umbrella, and a newspaper roll were nothing more now than the poignant reminders and remanences of their past. The sounds of the tango returned. The figures began to dance in a rhythm that brought about the distant echoes of their past individualities, now, expressed through a singular motion—a slow movement, a quick movement, a jerky movement, or a circular movement. In the meantime, Helka and Nino continued to clean up the room. The sounds of the tango were muffled by the opening notes of "Silent Night." A man on his knees entered the room. In his arms he carried a baby. He left the baby in the middle of the stage. All, except for Helka and Nino, left the stage. One of the figures returned and offered the baby to Helka. Not fully convinced, Helka accepted the baby. The music increased to provide a background to this Nativity scene—Nino with his cello stood next to Helka holding a baby in her arms. The scene was observed and commented upon by the figures, now called the neighbours, whose heads could be seen through the doors and the window. Suddenly, the music dies and with it the illusion of perfect harmony. Helka left the baby on the floor and returned to her previous activity. The music returned and with it the "story" that circumvented the everyday reality—Helka was offered the baby once more, and

the Nativity scene was repeated. The music died again and so did the harmony, the story, and the topography of this "other" space. The sequence was repeated three times. Finally, to end this unsuccessful "staging" of the event, a soldier with a gun entered the room and forced Helka and Nino out of the stage.

The "kneeling man," who brought in the baby and observed the stage events from stage right, was accosted by three figures in black. While "Silent Night" was sung in German, the "kneeling man" was turned into a living sculpture by the three "suspicious characters." His body was wrapped in reels of white paper.[9]

Nino and Helka returned with the baby. They looked around. Everything seemed to look familiar. Consequently, they proceeded with their everyday activities. "This lasts for some time/long enough to comfort the audience."[10] Once this was achieved, a requiem was heard from the speakers. Nino took the cello and played along. The doors opened and a procession entered, led by a man carrying a wooden cross on his shoulders. Among those who walked in the procession were the figures from the opening sequence. The stage became Golgotha. The procession stopped. Nino watched how the cross was erected. He looked around for a person who could play the part of the "Crucified One." Carmelo, a factotum, advised him. First, Nino pointed a finger at a poor seminary student. The student was placed against the Cross. Carmelo was not however fully satisfied with the choice. He suggested a new person. This time, a Hasidic Jew was chosen to play the part. He fit the Cross perfectly well. A single shot ruptured the solemn tones of the requiem. All hurried away from the stage. A man in black brought in a wooden coffin/box. The priest, who followed him, ordered the body to be put in it. The Emballage, rather than the crucified Hasidic Jew, was put inside the box and carried away.

The crucified Hasidic Jew remained alone on stage. After some time, he looked around and decided to get down from the cross. He sat on a chair at the doors. Helka, Nino, and Carmelo entered the "room" and greeted him. They all seemed to be bored and as if waiting for something to happen. Nino, out of boredom, began to practice on the cello. Suddenly, from behind the doors, voices singing a revolutionary *Ca ira* indicated that time must have passed. The crowd, led by a woman seated on a guillotine and a priest, burst onto the stage. The guillotine was placed next to the Cross. While the woman operated the guillotine the crowd, conducted by the priest, continued the revolutionary song. For the time being, the guillotine only cut through the air. One of the women put her head on the gallows. "She must have always dreamt to be Marie Antoinette. [. . .] And this is how history fulfilled its destiny according to the possibilities existing in my poor room."[11] The head fell into the basket. The singing continued. The woman, Marie Antoinette, put her head on the gallows again. A sudden confusion. The priest ordered that she be taken away. The woman

was seated at the table next to a copy of her severed head. Nino and Carmelo started post mortem comparisons, that is, Carmelo placed the make up on the face of the woman so there was no discrepancy between her and the copy. Helka became jealous and started an argument with Nino. The revolutionary tune drowned the noise.

A split second of silence. In the last sequence, all the melodies used in the cricotage, that is, the tango, "Silent Night," the requiem, and the *Ca ira*, were mixed together. So were the events, situations and figures who were associated with a particular music. Thus, for example, a woman in black danced the tango from the opening sequence. Her dance was interrupted by "Silent Night" and Helka lulled the baby. The requiem called forth the Hasidic Jew who assumed his function of the "Crucified One." Then, the revolutionary tune and the actions of the guillotine, the tango and the dance of the woman in black, "Silent Night" and Helka with the baby, the requiem and the Hasidic Jew, the tango and the woman in black followed until they emptied themselves out of their tonality and actions. "There is nothing more left. [. . .] All, with the empty expression on their faces, stare at the audience" (see Figure 2).[12] "Silent Night" returned. A gun barrel was wheeled in. A shot. Everybody was killed. The shot was repeated. The dead bodies could be seen scattered around the Cross, the guillotine, and the chimney.

III

In the *partytura* as well as the beginning of a performance, Kantor observed that, in order to prevent a misrepresentation of his theoretical ideas, it was necessary to indicate that the chimney in the middle of the stage was his.[13] "A chimney from my painting./Each and every of my paintings is/my home./This is a chimney from my home/after a burnout./This is not a stage design."[14]

This statement regarding the presence of a chimney of a burnt-down house on stage merits further consideration. Ever since the 1944 production of *The Return of Odysseus*, Kantor desired to create a space for his theatrical experiments that could no longer be appropriated by artistic conventions or commodified into an object with an assigned use-value. Accordingly, a chair that appeared in a performance space in 1944, in a bombed room, was a decrepit object nearly obliterated by war activities that, now, "was void of any life function [. . .]. And when its function was imposed on it [during a performance], this act was seen as if it were happening for the first time since the moment of creation" (211). The 963 objects of the 1963 Anti-Exhibit (letters, newspapers, maps, used bus tickets, for example) were "THINGS THAT HAVE NOT YET BECOME WORKS OF ART./THAT HAVE NOT YET BEEN IMMOBILIZED"

(24). Later, Kantor's Informel (1961), Zero (1963), and Happening (1973) theatres attempted to depreciate the value of traditional theatrical space by exploring its unknown, hidden, or everyday aspects.[15] By 1975, these experiments were perceived by Kantor as engendering their own existence through the processes of assigning meaning and function to the objects that were theoretically pulled out from conventional theatrical reality. "The house, I moved in to, was. . . too solid./I often went outside to look for my old/Poor Room./When back in the house, I lived, rather I 'squatted,' in different rooms./I did not feel at home there. [. . .] Finally, I deserted/this 'too solid' house."[16] In the 1975 production of *The Dead Class*, Kantor separated the performance space from the auditorium with two ropes. Behind the impassable barrier, he explored the interplay between the Self (delegitimized memories of schooldays and historical events executed by the Old People who were anthropomorphic images of Kantor's desire to subjugate his memories/autobiography to being what he wanted them to be) and the "staged" Other (the text of Witkiewicz's *Tumor Brainowicz*). In the 1980 production of *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor introduced the notion of the "Room of Memory." The "Room of Memory" was not an extension of the auditorium or a substitute for a generic performance space, but the "room" was Kantor's. It was where he could explore spatial dimensions of his memories as they were projected onto the stage by the "hired" actors who played the parts of the inhabitants of the "Room of Memory." In the 1985 production of *Let the Artists Die*, Kantor presented the "Theory of Negatives," an extension of the "Room of Memory," where the memories on stage were interimposed as if they were the frames of a transparent film-negative stacked one atop another. Consequently, the room became a frame within whose boundaries all the elements of all other frames were visible. Kantor, the Self, watched, in the performance space, the broken images of the Self (Kantor—I at the age of six, Kantor—I, the author, and Kantor—I, the dying one) that generated their own memories and histories. Finally, the 1988 production of *I Shall Never Return*, Kantor himself entered the performance space, a modified version of the "Room of Memory." He was no longer the creator of the room, as was the case in the past productions, but he was one of the participants who encountered his own artistic creations in the autonomous space. Significantly, this space was created by the overlapping of the three-dimensional universe of the physical body and the multi-dimensional universe of memory.[17]

As is apparent, the definition or perception of a performance space was never stable in Kantor's theatre. Not only its shape, but also its function, was in continuous motion. A performance space could be a real space of the lowest rank, an Emballage, a Happening, a room of memory, a space in-between, a hyperspace, or a found room. Its parameters altered with the changes in Kantor's

temporary positioning of his ways of seeing and thinking about representation of objects or memories on stage:

> I moved into a new house.
> I discovered my "pit" in it.
> I felt comfortable there.
> Then came the journey through the world.
> At any cost, I tried to squeeze this wonderful and glittering outside world inside the
> walls of my Poor Room.
> Sometimes, I managed to do so.
> But even this desire died.
> The Poor Room became too solid.
> It was not mine any longer.
> One night, it burnt down.
> There was only a chimney left
> as is often the case.[18]

The performance space was thus viewed by Kantor as his "home," his poor room of imagination. As such, it belonged to him and only to him. In *Silent Night*, the room of imagination was as if leased to Nino and Helka, who allowed other people in without Kantor's knowledge or understanding:

> From the dim recesses,
> as if from the abyss of Hell
> there started to emerge
> people who had died a long time ago
> and memories of events
> that, as in a dream,
> had no explanation,
> no beginning, no end,
> no cause or effect. [. . .]
> The imprints
> impressed deeply
> in the immoral past. (182)

In the past, as Kantor observed, the people, the phenomena, and events that emerged as images in his "Room of Memory" were often altered or camouflaged, even rendered invisible, in order to satisfy the demands of the avant-garde. "First, I found an intellectual/justification for their presence,/sudden

appearances./stubborn returns. [. . .] I believed that I needed to build pure, autonomous structures/representing consciousness over them" (181,177). Now, a simple image, not modified by conventions, stylistic ornamentations of metaphors and symbols, moral codes or idealizing procedures, was admitted to the "Room of Memory," a burnt-down house, where there was only a chimney left. But a chimney was not only a marker of the "event" that had taken place:

> Now then, here on this stage,
> the end of the world,
> after a disaster,
> a heap of dead bodies
> (there were many of them)
> and a heap of broken Objects—
> this is all that is left. (174)

The dead, according to the principles in Kantor's theatre, come "alive." "Then everything started anew and out of nothing" (174). As the actions on stage indicated, the "Room of Memory" became their only space, rather than a point, of reference. This space, however, did not have a solid framing that could prescribe the informatic or optical system of reference. Consider, for example, the figures' futile attempts to reconstruct the past events or their attempts at deciphering the functions of the objects. As was the case in the 1944 production of *The Return of Odysseus*, when Penelope's act of sitting was an act happening for the first time in this new reality. "The [physical] object acquired its historical, philosophical, and artistic function!" (212). On the other hand, the "Room of Memory" in *Silent Night*, unlike the "Rooms of Memory" in Kantor's past productions, was nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, and nonnarrative, as the erasure of the memories of the figures and of the functions of objects opened up the space of representation. This space of representation was not defined by the sovereignty of a speaking/viewing subject or a group identity. It was not yet striated, that is, ordered by "constancy of orientation, invariance of distance through an interchange of inertial points of reference, interlinkage by immersion in an ambient milieu, constitution of a central perspective."[19] It was entirely oriented towards an experimentation in contact with objects or people appearing from behind the doors. As such, it fostered connections between people and objects that were not previously established. The object "had to justify its being to itself rather than to the surroundings that were foreign to it../[By so doing, the object] revealed its own existence (211)." So did the figures.

Once their world of everyday was born, the world of the transcendental phenomena was born. The Nativity scene can serve as an example of this

practice here. It is noteworthy that Kantor's rendering of that sequence, though a relative unfolding of the event synchronized with the tempo and rhythm of "Silent Night," was not a nostalgic reconstruction of the biblical story. The sounds of "Silent Night" made Helka and Nino assume the traditional functions of the Virgin Mary and Joseph; however, the illusion of scriptural harmony was ruptured when the music disappeared. Having repeated unsuccessfully the sequence a few times, Kantor made us realize that "everything is but a recollection full of bitterness and tears, because of its futility. This futility and impossibility can be seen in the act of repetition. Nino and Helka act as if they played a difficult scene: from the 'everyday' situation, they move into the past, to that night that happened a few thousand years ago. It seems that a miracle happened, but 'Silent Night' ends abruptly." A soldier with a gun interrupted Helka's and Nino's desire to construct an event through a repetition of actions and gestures in order to orient themselves in Kantor's unstriated space.

The following scene, the Emballage scene, provided an even more penetrating commentary. Emballage, according to Kantor's 1964 essay, on the one hand, performs functions that are utilitarian and prosaic. It is enslaved to the content that it covers. Once the content is removed, the wrapping, that is, the Emballage is a pitiful sign of its past glory and importance. In Kantor's art an umbrella, a human body, and a coffin are examples of poetic Emballages that conceal and protect the content from trespassing, ignorance, and vulgarity.[20] Here, "the kneeling man," who brought in the baby, performed a nonnarrative function in a well-known sequence. He was however instrumental in constructing an event in Kantor's "Room of Memory." Consequently, the three "suspicious characters" were used to turn him into a monumental living sculpture—an Emballage. Only as an Emballage could he participate in an abstract recreation of a phantasmagoric event. But this recreation came to naught. The function of the Emballage could not be thus fulfilled. There was nothing to be concealed or protected. "Silent Night," sung in German, was a blasphemous and cynical trope for the desire to construct or determine a centre or order.

The world of miracles was not the only world that was constructed by the figures on stage. The crucifixion and the revolution sequences were the two sequences that received particular treatment. Neither of them however adhered to a biblical or historical representation, deconstruction, or collage of events. In both, their orientational references were in a continuous variation. Nino, who assumed the function of Joseph in a previous sequence, was elected to choose the "Crucified One." A woman, who was one of the dead, became Marie Antoinette. Since the orientation in a performance space was changing according to the functions assumed, the people and the objects established a complex network of relationships between themselves and the events while they were staging these

events in a performance space. Although some of the events were recognizable in terms of their historical references or subsequent productions, the images on stage challenged one's desire to reduce them to a particular cognitive or historical object or another collective subject or memory. Recall, the election of a poor seminary student to be the "Crucified One," the crucifixion of the Hasidic Jew, the entombment of the Emballage, the function of the Hasidic Jew after the crucifixion or the depiction of the revolutionary fervor. *Silent Night* made clear that the image was neither an object in the field of one's perception that could have been identified nor a subject altering one's perception. Instead, the image was the structure that conditioned the entire perceptual field of and the mnemonic practices in Kantor's "Room of Memory." As such, the image's shape could never be fully stabilized, striated, or complete.

Nothing encapsulates this notion better than the closing moments of the cricotage. The "Room of Memory," or what was left of it, was the space of unregulated relationships. There was nothing stable in the field of perception that would delineate its scope and boundaries. There was no foreground or background, no past or future, no perspective or centre. Different pieces of music—the tango, "Silent Night," the requiem, and *Ca ira*—produced events that connected randomly with other events and objects in the space—the dance, the Nativity scene, the crucifixion, and the revolution. Their traits or narratives were not necessarily linked to traits or narratives of the same nature. Instead, they brought into play very different regimes of signs, codification, and practices. There could not be a closure to this cricotage, but simply, a suggestion that, after a gun shot, the Atlantis disaster, everything started anew and out of nothing:

> Surprisingly enough, all of this
> is nothing more than a
> repetition.
> Therefore, everything and anything
> can happen (onstage):
> a different act of creation,
> deformation,
> blasphemy,
> correction. . . .
> Maybe
> this repetition
> and its creation, which is different from the "original,"
> will allow us to see our world,
> this "original"
> as if we saw it for the first time.

We, the spectators from time to time
before "that night," that memorable and dreadful night,
look at this second
"edition"
of the world
with assurance,
because we know all that there is to know,
we have known all that there is to know for so long
that reality became for us so
determinate,
it was not worth a question. (175-6)

IV

"Memory/Loss" and *Silent Night* refuse thus to provide an instant gratification to a viewer or a spectator. A spectator is constantly reminded by a white torso of a man or by Kantor's presence on stage that s/he is a stranger moving around or watching the events unfolding in a space that does not and will never belong to him or her. It will never belong to him or her, because as this installation suggests the sound-space-structure is a tactile universe in itself, or, as is the case in the cricotage, a performance space belongs to the figures without shadows, that is, the Other that appear in the "Room of Memory" to establish Kantor's mode of relation to his own historicity in the moment of their emergence. In this sense, Robert Wilson's "Memory/Loss" and Tadeusz Kantor's *Silent Night*, each in its own way, are examples *par excellence* of nomad art whose fragments are in continuous variation that cannot be defined by contexts, references, or transferences that calm the viewer.

V

To open up the space of this essay, let me close with a description of one of Tadeusz Kantor's drawings (see Figure 3). On the left side of the drawing, there is an image of a man (Kantor) seated on a chair. He is facing the inside or the right edge of the drawing. He is sitting sideways and parallel to open doors. He is staring at a wooden desk hanging on two ropes from the "ceiling" and, beyond it, into the depth of the space of the drawing. A word "Night" is written on the desk. Behind it, there opens a space marked by varying degrees of darkness:

And now—

I do not know if the roof still exists,
Because darkness
has veiled everything around and above me.
But, even in this darkness
I keep building my walls, my windows, and my doors
Anew
In the growing space of my imagination—
But only in the space of my imagination,
and in my solitude. [. . .]
It is getting dark.
It is probably the time to close
the doors of my Poor Room of Imagination.[21]

Signed: T. Kantor, 10, 07, 12h. (July 10, midnight).

Dr. Michal Kobialka
Department of Theatre Arts & Dance
University of Minnesota

Notes

1. See *The Deleuze Reader*, edited with an introduction by Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) for a detailed discussion of "haptic representation," "nomad art," and "striated space."

2. A "cricotage" can be defined as a piece where Kantor "investigated" ideas, some of which received a detailed and more complete treatment in an ensuing production. For example, *The Machine of Love and Death* (1987) proceeded *I Shall Never Return* (1988); *Silent Night* (1990) proceeded *Today Is My Birthday* (1990-1).

3. Robert Wilson, "Memory/Loss," Biennale di Venezia, XLV Esposizione Internazionale D'Arte, July 13-October 10, 1993.

4. The sound score was created by Hans Peter Kuhn.

5. Heiner Müller's letter is quoted in *Robert Wilson: Disegni di Gibellina, Memoire della Terra Desolata* (Milano: Cappelletti & Riscassi Arti Grafiche Corsico, 1994) 66.

6. Ibid.

7. Hans Peter Kuhn quoted in *Robert Wilson* 66.

8. Tadeusz Kantor, "Silent Night," *A Journey Through Other Spaces*, edited, translated, and with a critical commentary by Michal Kobialka (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1993) 174. All references to Kantor's essays and theoretical writings refer to page number in this volume.

9. This sequence is reminiscent of Kantor's "Living Emballage" that was executed as a part of Happenings done in Warszawa in 1965, Kraków in 1966, and Nümberg in 1968. See Wieslaw Borowski, *Kantor* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Artystycine ¡ Filmowe, 1982) 68-76.

10. Taduesz Kantor, *Ô douce Nuit* (unpublished ms., nd) np.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. While working on his production, Kantor wrote *partyturas*. A *partytura* can be understood here as a collage of various texts, notes, and descriptions of terms and concepts that were created by him during the process of developing a production.

14. Ibid.

15. See *A Journey*, chapter 1, "The Quest for the Self: Thresholds and Transformations," for a discussion of Kantor's theatrical experiments in the period between 1944 and 1973.

16. Tadeusz Kantor, "A Short History of My Life," *Performing Arts Journal* (May 1994) 37.

17. See *A Journey*, chapters 2 and 3, "The Quest for the Other" and "Found Reality."

18. "A Short History of My Life," *Performing Arts Journal* 37.

19. *The Deleuze Reader* 166-7.

20. "The Emballage Manifesto," *A Journey* 77-81.

21. "A Short History of My Life," *Performing Arts Journal* 38.

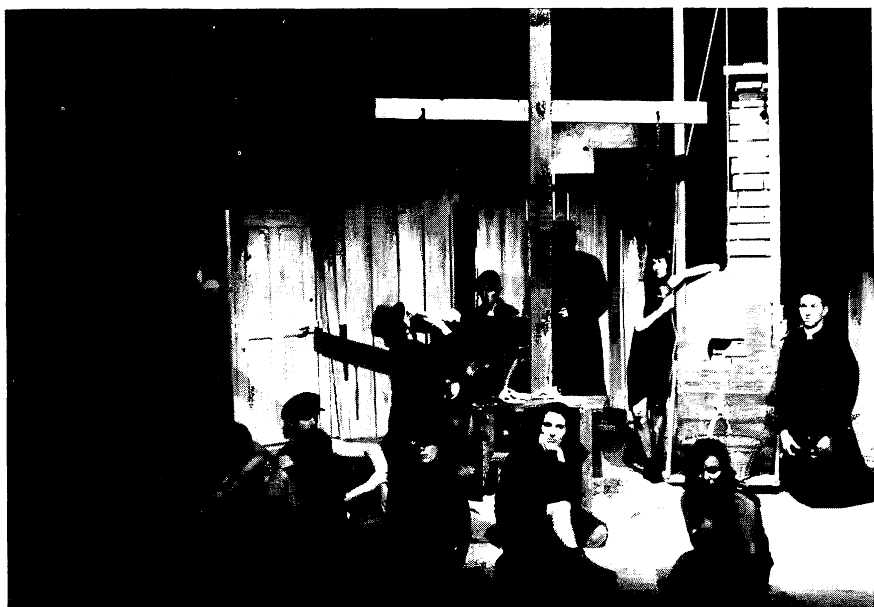

Figure 2. *Silent Night.* Photo by Monique Rubinel

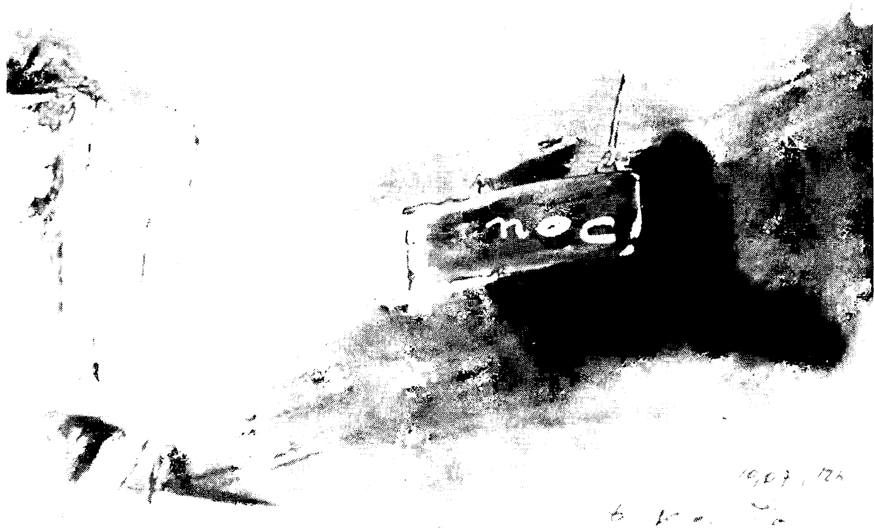

Figure 3. Untitled. Drawing by Tadeusz Kantor.

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An Interview with Igor Nezovibatko

This interview was conducted during a series of negotiations between LaCie, Don Quichotte and Mr. Nezovibatko on the subject of artistic exchange—September 5, 1993, Paris.

Igor Nezovibatko was born in 1963 in Kharkhov. He began his career as an actor at the Samarsky Theatre in 1984 after graduating from the Shchepkin Institute of Dramatic Art in Moscow. For four years he created roles primarily from the classical repertoire, (Gogol, Ostrovsky, Pisemsky, etc.). His early work was, to use his own words, "terribly conservative". He is not ashamed of this background, believing that the ladder of artistic growth is best supported by "classical" training: "It is only natural for one to learn how to walk before he attempts to fly." Conservative or not, his work at the Samarsky came to the attention of Mark Zakharov, (the progressive artistic director of Moscow's LENCOM Theatre). Zakharov immediately accepted Igor into his directing program at the Russian Academy of Dramatic Art.

In 1991, Igor's production of *Othello* at the RATIS Theatre in Moscow shocked more than a few audience members. He chose a politically volatile artistic interpretation in giving the role of Othello to an Afghani actor who performed both in Russian and his native tongue. The controversial nature of this production was probably due to the recent Russian military defeat in Afghanistan, and it was for this reason that the show did not enjoy a long run.

In 1992, he directed two productions for young audiences at the National Theatre of Voronezh: *Pinocchio* and *Treasure Island*. Both shows demonstrated his ability to weave in a variety of acting styles, (commedia dell'arte to realism) in creating a unified production. These shows were followed by a production of his adaptation of John Fowles' *The Collector* in 1993, also at the National Theatre of Voronezh. The overwhelming success of this play will permit it to have a long run in Moscow.

Igor is currently working as a freelance director for Moscow Television, and he is preparing a stage production of his latest adaptation of Bunin's work *Amata Nobis*. Unlike many directors of his generation who have fled to the West in search of quick money, Igor has chosen to stay in Russia: "This is my home. I have an artistic, and thus a moral, responsibility for our future."

Q: Many critics here in France believe that we have passed the period in theatre history in which the director is considered as the prime ingredient. They feel that we have entered a new age in which the author and his text have become the

major focus in the theatre. Are you experiencing a similar shift on the Russian stage?

A: The director in the Russian theatre still plays the leading role. We have a rich tradition of theatre directors which began in the early twentieth century with Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Vakhtangov, and Tairov. This tradition has held strong up to this day with directors like Efros, Lyubimov, Zakharov, and Vasileev. The public today, as in the past, considers a play to be the product of a particular director. When a new show opens in Moscow, for example, the public asks firstly who directed it, then who is playing in it, and only then, what is playing. It is on the basis of this hierarchy of questions that determines if one will attend a show or not. Today it is not very important as to what we produce, but rather who produces it and what they do with it.

Q: Why?

A: It is very difficult to fall-upon a truly original idea that exists only on paper. The necessity of today is not so much a question of what to do, but rather how to go about doing it. It is for this reason that our directors still hold a very important position in the theatre.

Q: You have a very rich history of playwrights. Has the tradition not been passed on?

A: Our playwrights do a very mediocre job lately. Modern plays are really of no interest.

Q: Why?

A: They are unable to attain the *finesse* that can be seen in the former masters of our literary tradition. In very recent history we have had such good playwrights as Petrushevskaya and Galin. Their works however have fallen-off. Petrushevskaya, in fact, no longer writes plays, and Galin's works just are not as popular anymore. Volodin, Roshchin, and Rozov are simply too old, and the public doesn't want to hear about them.

Q: You can't say that there are no new playwrights in the Russian theatre today?

A: No, of course not. There is one very popular modern playwright that has been a commercial success. His name is Koliada, and he is an actor himself. He understands the financial difficulty of the theatre today as he has written many plays for one to three actors. His works are not very deep, and they can be considered as *Boulevard* plays, to use the French expression. Yet the public loves to see his work, and actors get much pleasure in working on them.

Q: Their pleasure is measured by the play's success?

A: Yes, of course, but I was talking more about the process of working on his plays. They serve, more-or-less, as a showcase for the actor's technical talents, and this is where the pleasure is derived from. It is my advice to produce a Koliada today if one wishes to produce a modern play.

Q: Are there any playwrights of a more serious genre? At least a playwright who has critical acclaim more than popular support.

A: Critics! Why bother bringing them into the picture! The critics are playing a double game that I can't figure out. They spend their time mourning over the fact that there are not enough modern playwrights, yet they tear-apart all the new plays that are produced. Let's leave the critics out of the discussion.

As far as modern serious playwrights are concerned, I believe that there is a future possibility in Shipenko. His works however are very difficult to understand. Nobody has adequately decoded his plays as of yet. Nevertheless, he has a small following and it may get larger as the years continue. All things considered however, in the case of modern plays, the public just doesn't get out to see them.

Q: Could this be due to the fact that there is a certain theatrical language that is missing between the playwright and the modern audience?

A: This is most definitely the case. Directors and playwrights alike are searching for the correct means by which they can communicate to the public. Again, it is not so much a question of the text, but how one is to go about producing it. This is why Zakharov has lately taken so much time to produce a new show. He has attempted to mount *The Sea Gull* three times now and has always stopped before the final product. He realizes that staging Chekhov in the old manner will no-longer be accepted by the public, yet he does not wish to stage something new just for the sake of it being new.

Q: It seems to me, from what you are saying, that the text is really not very important to the modern Russian stage regardless of the lack of playwrights or the form of communication. This has not always been the case in your history. What is the source of this phenomenon?

A: The source is found in the public itself. People are fed-up with words, to put things simply. They have very little interest in the text. The public wishes to see a clear course of action, and a lot of visually oriented stimuli in the theatre. The text is merely a secondary factor on the Russian stage; it is simply the means by which we act.

Q: Do you believe that television and film play a major role in this point of view?

A: We cannot spend our lives blaming everything upon television. Television exists, and we must exist with it. I am not looking for the culprit in this change between the theatre and its public. All I care about is what I see, and I know that our audience is tired of words. I have seen many shows here in France that consist of nothing more than magnificent philosophical dialogues. If this is what interests the French public, so be it. All I know is that if you did such a thing in Russia, your entire house would simply fall asleep. Our public demands carefully executed and arresting action. This is what Mark Zakharov understands the best.

Q: When you speak in terms of action and visual stimulus, are you referring to outstanding sets, lights, and big dance numbers such as what we see in a good Broadway musical?

A: No, not necessarily. I'm referring to the action that the actor possesses in himself coupled with a theatrical image. The actor should perform in a manner in which the audience can never guess what he is going to do next, even if they know the end of the story. As far as the image is concerned, you realize that the minimum almost always creates the maximum effect.

Q: It seems to me that you are saying that with the text playing a subordinate position to the action, the theatre in Russia is no longer a forum for ideas?

A: This is true. In the beginning of the '60s and into the '70s, the theatre was the freest, most expressive, and most interesting arena for thought. All of the new ideas first appeared in the theatre. Therefore, the public went to the theatre

particularly for that reason. They found in the theatre the answers to questions that addressed the particular problems of the day. It was in this period that many new theatres were formed. The problem, looking at this period in a historical context, is that these new theatres had their roots of existence planted in suppression. Each new show was a battle for freedom over the oppression of the censor. Lyubimov's theatre is a classic example of this. In the '80s however, the censor was lifted and a tide of once banned artistic work flooded the theatre world. It seems to me that once this happened, the theatres that found their force in the expression of ideas lost their sense of purpose. I'm not saying that Lyubimov's theatre is dead. It still exists and people still attend his productions. It is simply that he has become somewhat of a relic: As if the lifting of the censor has taken away his force. People no-longer have to go to the theatre to remain current with the ideas of today.

The theatre has become a delicacy for a culinary appetite. In the '60s, it was considered a great honor to go to the theatre, whereas today it is simply a question of taste. The intelligentsia attends the theatre out of habit, and the only other real public consists of the true theatre lovers. The average theatre patron no-longer goes to the theatre. They prefer the movies, or to rest at home and watch television. I believe however that this is a phenomenon not only isolated to Russia.

Q: Do you believe this is a problem which needs to be addressed?

A: I don't know if this is a problem, or a simple change in the society. If it is a change in our social behavior, it is up to the theatre to adapt. If it does not adapt, then the theatre is to blame not its public. I don't know if this is to be considered a tragedy or not—it is more a necessity. Our greatest crises in the theatre was two-years-ago. Now things are better and, with every year, more and more people are returning to the theatre. Things can only get better. There are many who believe that the second half of the '90s will be marked with a renaissance in the theatre. I guess all we have to do is wait.

Q: Are you doing anything in particular today with your work that progresses towards this new theatre?

A: I have to tell you honestly that I don't think about that. I work in a manner that pleases me personally. I stage a show so that Igor, the audience member, enjoys what he sees. A lot of my work deals with a careful study of audience reaction. Of course I can't take this study too seriously. I learn from them and then adapt my work according to my own judgement. You know as well as I

that the theatre public is probably the most conservative artistic audience, and one cannot depend upon them as well as in film for example. All in all, I employ a method that allows me to produce a show in the manner in which I would like to see it.

Q: What method do you use when working with your actors?

A: You realize that in the past there were all kinds of methods and schools: the Stanislavsky school, the Meyerhold school, the Vakhtqangov school, etc. There were many directors, particularly in the '70s, that said for example: "I have studied in the Meyerhold school. I work strictly in the Meyerhold method." Or, "I work strictly in the Stanislavsky method. It is the best school in the world. I am the expert in Stanislavky." This is funny because I know of at least ten directors who have said this, and not one of their works resemble the other—so will the real Stanislavsky please step forward.

Stanislavsky was a great artist who constantly changed and adapted his work. It was always in a state of flux and was never finished. Unfortunately there are some directors who read his work like fanatics who read the Bible, or the works of Lenin for that matter. My generation today does not talk in this manner. We have all studied and borrowed from past masters, but we like to say that we work in our own manner. The theatre, after all, does not have the same objectives as a museum. There are no universal methods today, everybody works in his own way. I don't know if this is good or bad, but at least it is interesting.

Q: What is interesting in your work, *Treasure Island* for example, is that you employ a large variety of styles in the production itself.

A: Again, I cannot say this is a new method. Many directors like to work in a unified style, whereas I prefer to use many different styles. It is a simple question of preference. I believe that is similar to what you call Postmodernism. That has become a very popular word in the Russian theatre today, and directors spend their time pulling-out each others beards disputing over what it actually is.

Q: What is Postmodernism?

A: Again, this is a very tricky question. Everybody sees it differently. I can merely tell you from my point of view; whether it is right or wrong, I could care less. It seems to me to be an eclectic genre: it is art that makes use of the history of art in the creation of art. This art then attempts to reflect our current history which, in-and-of-itself, is fluid and thus void from the very start. We are

aware of certain history of art, cinema, and the theatre, and it appears to exist as a constant. One uses this history in the creation of a work that, in turn, comments upon both the past and the present.

Q: According to your Postmodern view, artists collect a historical past in order to support the present, and in turn that present alters the view or context of the past and the present.

A: Yes. In my work for example, I borrow a lot from former films, music, and *mise en scenes.* I take these forms from their historical context and put them into my shows. In doing this, I not only comment upon the present action through a historical kaleidoscope, but I also breath life into the given artistic work in its original background.

I must be specific however in saying that this is merely my approach to Postmodernism. It is not a definition. I cannot define it. Can you?

Q: I prefer not to build a fence around something when I do not know what it is. Particularly in the case of Postmodernism when the materials from which we are building such a fence seem to consist of the very same unknown in which we are trying to fence-in.

A: Exactly. It is not wise to make a cage out of bears to hold-in a bear. My Postmodernist work is of course always changing. For the moment however, it functions on three levels: The first step is a matter of the piece: the story and its outwardly manifested action. It is very important to give this careful thought when creating a show because it is the level that is accessible to the greatest number of audience members; this is what they have come to see. The second step is a bit more difficult intellectually and appeals to a fewer number of theatre-goers. It deals with subtext, irony, and all things that are not readily apparent on the surface of the production. It also functions more on an intellectual level in terms of theme and content. The third level is for the artistic specialists, and it works on an eclectic plane. There is sure to be at least one person, if not yourself, in the audience that will appreciate this level. It is on the third level that the Postmodern work is done.

Q: You strive to have all three of these levels at work in any given show?

A: Absolutely. The job of the director is to knit all three levels so as to not have any seams that show. The audience member that is interested in the first level for example, is never left questioning an obscure element of the third level

which was not meant for him in the first place. In this way the production is capable of touching all the members of the public.

In my early work, I was only interested in the third level: I felt it to be the most "artistic", and therefore my efforts were concentrated there. I found very quickly that working in this manner merely confused the majority of the public. It is not in our interest to confuse the audience. Thus I changed my views, and now I work on all three levels so that each member of the audience can take that which they have come for.

Q: Can you give us an example of these three levels in one of your productions?

A: My *Pinocchio* is in principle a children's play, and it has everything that the first level requires: It is a suspenseful story with a lot of action and clowning. Yet, as you saw in the video, there is much more at work than the simple plot. On the second level, the production pursued the question concerning the boundaries between love and eroticism. This was done in such a way, of course, that was both tasteful for the young public, and yet posed some serious questions to those who were capable of drawing the line between simple slapstick and biting satire. On the third level, the play was actually a commentary upon our Russian theatre. Played at times in the commedia dell'arte form, Meyerhold could be seen in the character of Pierrot. It draws reference, of course, to the Meyerhold production of Blok's *The Puppet Show*. This coupled with the theme that one should not tell a lie, works on many historical, social, and political levels.

I also made use of a very rich musical accompaniment that underscored practically all of the text. The use of music, in my opinion, was also Postmodern. In the love scene for example, I borrowed the music from the film *Romeo and Juliet*. This music worked in two ways: in the first place, its use was purely esthetic (it had a beautiful melody and worked well with the scene). Secondly, it functioned on an ironical level. That is, we have seen this music used in another context for another reason, but we see it again in the present with a different text and a different action. It is not important that the music was not original because it becomes new in the light of its former use.

There are many examples of this kind in *Treasure Island* also.

Q: How much of this intellectual stratification do you make available to your actors during the rehearsal process?

A: It is completely unnecessary to speak in these terms with the actor because once one does, the actor feels that he knows everything and his work becomes boring. It is better for the director to work in terms of enigmas when the actor is concerned. An actor should never have a tight grasp upon his character so that he believes that there is always something more to be gained from his work. It is a good sign for a director when the actor approaches him after a rehearsal with questions of how future scenes in the production are going to be staged. This shows that they are curious and excited about their work. If a director explains everything, the play will become boring to the actor, and his work will reflect this.

Q: At the end of the rehearsal process, should all three levels be clear to the actor?

A: No, this is not necessary. Of course there are some cases in which the actor really wants to know everything because this is the manner in which he works best. A director should accommodate these actors. Most actors are not interested in the big picture. All they are really concerned with are the events that effect their character. On a more basic level, all they really need is to be reassured that what they are doing will please the public. Therefore, they are only interested in the first, and sometimes, the second levels.

Q: Thus you rely on a certain ignorance as far as the actor is concerned?

A: Yes. This is not only important in rehearsal, but the performance as well. On the stage, the actor should strive to be not fully aware of what it is he is to do next. Of course he has a general idea of where his character is to go, but he is not always certain of how to get there. If we draw out his action from the beginning to the end of the performance, we find that the path does not form a straight line but rather zig-zags to its final destination. It is this zig-zagging that in turn draws the audience to his performance. In this way, the public is never quite sure what the actor is going to do next. If the actor carefully draws out his character, and makes clear all his motivations for every action, the audience will soon be able to premeditate the outcome of the character, and his performance will become boring.

I believe firmly in the zig-zag. It is an attempt to wake-up the audience, and it permits them to be conscious of the fact that something is actually transpiring on the stage. The objective is to maintain this state of alertness throughout two hours of performance, but it is rare if this can be accomplished

for five minutes. That five minutes however, should be counted as a great success.

Getting back to the question of ignorance, I prefer to replace that word with innocence. I tell my actors what they should do but I never really explain why. If I need to explain to them why, I never explain everything.

Q: So you work in a manner that is quite different from our perception of the Russian rehearsal process in which a lot of work is done at the table in discussion?

A: Yes and no, that all depends upon the text. In *Treasure Island* and *Pinocchio* there was not much in the way of internal or psychological action, therefore we almost immediately began the rehearsals on the stage. With *The Collector* however, we took a lot of time reading and talking-through the action. The reason for this being that it was a very internalized play. The psychological motivations were not readily apparent in the text, yet highly important to the production. The aspect of "the reading" in the rehearsal process always depends upon the play. For the most part, as you know, the actors never really like to sit and study a text: They prefer to get up on stage and give it a try. Thus, I keep the discussion to a minimum.

Q: I have noticed that there are many romantic tendencies in your productions. Are you a romantic?

A: Yes, I have a great yearning for the past. It is a yearning you understand, that comes from a present situation that is filled with nothing but skepticism. Thus there are many of us today that dream romantically—of that romantic period when everything was beautiful. Everybody has their own opinion of what is beautiful, thus it is more of a desire for beauty, a desire for the grand emotions, a nostalgia for the beautiful life that has been long lost in history yet we still feel it in our hearts today.

Q: Is this another ironical Postmodern approach?

A: There surely is a certain irony. I realize that romanticism cannot serve our present situation, but it can be of service to the art of the theatre. One has a yearning for the romantic, and the theatre can accommodate this, yet we all know that the events are transpiring in the theatre and not our real lives. This is best exemplified in the staging of *The Collector*: The present action is as cynical and cruel as our times, yet the entire text is underscored by the music from Mozart's

The Magic Flute. In *Treasure Island*, the action and the music were highly romanticized, yet it is a play that deals with the art of killing.

Romanticism seems to be always allied with a certain degree of catastrophe which in and of itself is romantic: Take our revolution for example. I'm not saying that romanticism is good or bad. I don't know. All I know is that I yearn for it and that is enough, because without romantic dreams, life simply becomes too frightening.

Q: For you, the theatre is a place of dreams?

A: Yes of course. People go to the theatre for that very reason. It isn't necessary to go to the theatre and see life as it really is. That belongs on the street where we confront it everyday.

Mark Jennison
Artistic Director, La Compagnie Don Quichotte
Paris, France

Donald Kitt and Ker Wells in the Primus performance *Alkoremmi*, 1991. Photo credit: Paul Martens.

Dilating the Body, Transporting the Mind: Considering Primus Theatre

> What is required to shape a theatrically appropriate performance?
> First of all, it needs a presentation, an acting achievement which makes the spectator at all times feel the mastery of the actor. When a talent shows [his/her] mastery, when the solutions to stage tasks are in the hands of a true master, then it will work theatrically.
>
> Vakhtangov, "On Theatricality", 192[1]

Alkoremmi

Audience members are led into the hall where Primus Theatre presents its show, *A Last Circus (wide and tall) a Command Performance (within the wall) of Alkoremmi*. They are led, in separate groups of five or six, by a woman dressed in a short white dress and boots. She is carrying a parasol with a lit candle poised at its top. This vision of a highwire dancer, or of the goddess Diana, lights our path with a flashlight through the darkened room and seats us, in bleachers or on the floor, in a space rectangularly surrounded by ladders connected, in twos, by wooden planks at the very top. The room seems damp and smoke rises from candles atop the ladders. A chanting woman, completely concealed in red cloth, a veil over her face, extinguishes the candles with a snuffer tied to the end of a long stick. A musty, dense smell of devotion perfumes the air. In the centre of the space a huge bolt of black cloth lies folded into the shape of a butterfly.

When everyone of the approximately 70-member, capacity, audience is seated, we are called to attention, invited into this strange circus, by performers whispering into huge copper megaphones, their voices seemingly hovering right in front of our ears. An angel is called down from up high, nimbus glowing around his face. Suddenly, the large butterfly gives "birth" to a giant who, after an exhausting dance, herself gives birth to a person emerging from under her skirt, struggling to break out of his membrane.

A little person, that staple of the circus and carnival world exerts considerable energy as he climbs a ladder, slowly, step by arduous step. He stops, stares at us, smirks and says, "You know what? Up above your heads there's a place in heaven, a sort of waiting room, where all the souls wait in line to drop like coins into the bodies of the newly born. You know what else? The

last soul in line is already frightened, because when he is born, all the storytellers will be dead, and that's when the end of the world will come."

The giant serves as a kind of May Pole by holding a long stick above her head, a ribbon hanging from each end, as two women dance around her chanting a Sami *joik*, evoking both the return of the spirit in the Nordic celebrations of spring and the legend of the Sami prince and his courtship in the land of the giants.

The performances are executed with a high degree of physical skill and precision. Everything here is carefully worked out, no movement, no sound is accidental. The performers carry themselves with a degree of deliberateness and artfulness more akin to what one might associate with dance rather than with the dramatic theatre. In fact, there are even, at times, hints of performance qualities one might expect to find in traditional Asian performance styles. But these are only hints, the show is thoroughly modern, avant-garde and Western in its sensibilities. A circus atmosphere is generated by the performers' acrobatic skillfulness, a rapid succession of "numbers", both solo and group, the noise and the spectacular surprises such as when the giant, on stilts, suddenly appears and when she dances, to the accompaniment of loud drum beats, around the performance space kicking her "legs" towards the audience.

The show, *Alkoremmi*, flashes of which are described above was produced by the Primus Theatre in 1991 and it has toured since.

In his book, *Skuespillerens Vandring*, on the work of four members of the Odin theatre, the Danish scholar Erik Exe Christoffersen[2] likens the experience of watching this kind of theatre to the passage in Italo Calvino's novel, *Invisible Cities*, where he describes the manner in which Marco Polo, unfamiliar with the Leavantine languages, communicates with Kublai Khan:

> Returning from the missions on which Kublai had sent him, the ingenious foreigner improvised pantomimes that the sovereign had to interpret: one city was depicted by the leap of a fish escaping the cormorant's beak to fall into a net; another city by a naked man running through fire unscorched; a third by a skull, its teeth green with mould, clenching a round white pearl. The Great Khan deciphered the signs, but the connection between them and the places visited remained uncertain; he never knew whether Marco wished to enact an adventure, an exploit of the city's founder, the prophecy of an astrologer, a rebus or a charade to indicate a name. But obscure or obvious as it might be, everything Marco displayed had the power of emblems, which, once seen, cannot be forgotten or confused.[3]

On one level, the level of narration, *Alkoremmi* tells the story of a child being born with the last available soul. After his birth all children will be born without a soul. The events of the show tell the story of this child's encounters in the last days of the world. On a more important level, however, the show is not about this story. Instead, it provides an experience which lies beyond the normal equations necessary for identification, the story is merely the instrument which keeps us in the flow of time.

These two levels are ever-present in the show, creating a tension between the despair of an impending soulless world and the rowdy, noisy circus-like events evoked by the performers' skillful turns, a skillfulness so forceful it rouses hope. Poised in this balance between despair and hope one is reminded of Theodor Adorno's statement that,

> The only philosophy which can be reasonably practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.[4]

Training and Dramaturgy

In 1989, Winnipeg, Canada, became the home of Primus Theatre. By then Primus had already germinated for a couple of years.

It all began in 1986 when Nick Hutchinson, then the Head of the English Acting Section of the National Theatre School of Canada in Montreal, invited Richard Fowler, who had been working with Eugenio Barba's Odin Theatre in Denmark since 1980, to conduct a workshop with the school's second-year class. The kind of theatrical practice Fowler introduced these students to was based on his research with the Odin Theatre.

Since the mid-1960s Eugenio Barba, a student of Grotowski's, and his company have concentrated their work on the investigation of the art of the actor and since 1980 with the establishment of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) this research has focused on a transcultural study of the preconditions for the construction of actorly presence: i.e. the analysis of how a performer becomes present in front of an audience before any meaning is communicated or expressed, termed, by Barba, the pre-expressive level. This

level, however, does not exist as a materially independent activity, but seems more akin to an archetype. Says Barba,

> Obviously, the pre-expressive does not exist in and of itself. Similarly, the nervous system, for example, cannot be materially separated from the entirety of a living organism, but it can be *thought* of as a separate entity. This cognitive fiction makes effective interventions possible. It is an abstraction, but is extremely useful for work on the practical level.[5]

Barba's interrogation of pre-expressivity has been conducted by examining training techniques and performance styles all over the world and across many cultures both through studies in the field—the Odin Theatre tours widely— as well as by bringing performers from diverse backgrounds together in seminars and labs. Since the beginning of ISTA, Richard Fowler has assisted Eugenio Barba in his work. Much of the focus of this work has concerned the manner in which a performer is able physically, bodily, to mould and shape energy and hence become present in a way that attracts the spectator's attention. Says Barba,

> Energy is commonly reduced to imperious and violent behaviour models. But it is actually a personal temperature-intensity which the performer can determine, awaken, mould. But which above all needs to be explored.[6]

Thus, when the students at Canada's foremost theatre school began working with Fowler they first had to become used to not having to express or interpret something. There was no script nor characters to be interpreted, the task rather was to generate a physical score. Some of the students in this class eventually formed the nucleus of what was to become Primus Theatre.

A show like *Alkoremmi* may be said to be the result of a particular process, a distinct way of viewing the theatrical event and, ultimately, a way of life. It is this confluence of procedures which is the topic of this essay.

In addition to its director, Richard Fowler, Primus Theatre consists of five actors, Donald Kitt, Tannis Kowalchuck, Stephen Lawson, Karin Randoja and Ker Wells. One of the central foci in the life of this group is the daily training, which is conducted both individually and as a group. Each member of the group explores her/his physical and expressive potential through a variety of exercises. Says Fowler,

> The base of this physical work is the concept of action, of "act-ing" in the literal sense of the word, rather than in the sense of representing or portraying, and the releasing, modelling and forming of energy in space.[7]

Much of the physical training consists in the exploration of parts of the body; the head, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, hips and legs; balance, breathing and the modulation of energy. These exercises are not conducted only as an investigation into how parts of the body may move. More importantly, individual actors explore how a specific part of the body may become engaged, how energy may be utilized in such a way that it assists the actor in becoming present in the theatrical sense of the term, that is, able to attract the attention of the spectator. Training, however, does not lead to the discovery of a "trick" which from then on can be successfully repeated. Says Barba,

> Our training does not teach us how to be an actor—how to play a role in the Commedia dell'Arte—or how to interpret a tragic or grotesque part. It doesn't give a sense of being able to do something. Training is an encounter with the reality which one has chosen.

In the process of training the actors not only gain imaginative control over their bodies, making their bodies responsive to any impulse and making their minds responsive; they also develop sequences of action which may be used later in rehearsals for the building of a physical score for the character.

In this daily work, the voice, too, comes under scrutiny as a physical element of the actor's total body. The investigation of various resonators, whispers and singing is a frequent part of the training. Apart from the individual training the daily sessions also involve improvisational exercises with other members. In this way the group forms a strong sense of individual commitment to a particular aesthetic as well as a sense of this group as a cultural entity, a social cell, committed to working together, as if for ever. Said Eugenio Barba in a brief to the participants of the Encounter on Third Theatre in Belgrade, 1976,

> . . . the theatre is a means to find their own way of being present—which the critics would call "new expressive forms"—to seek more than human relationships between men, with the purpose of creating a social cell inside which intentions, aspirations and personal needs begin to be transformed into actions.[9]

Though a lot of the training for the actors is individual and independent, it is still guided by Fowler. The five actors of Primus are in many ways studying with a master. Looking for a master was what led Fowler himself to seek out Eugenio Barba's Odin Theatre in 1980.

> One of the reasons I chose to work there was that I too had been looking for a master, someone who was an expert, who could help me develop in ways I couldn't foresee. You can want to develop yourself. You can want to change your way of doing things. You can want to realize your sensed potential. But this can be very hard if you have no models, no teacher. I wanted to work with such a person, a master teacher and a director.[10]

In this way a performance tradition is perpetuated along a line which goes from Grotowski to Barba to Fowler to members of Primus and so on. As the performance knowledge of this tradition moves through time, it is modified, and expanded, according to the needs of the particular artists who "inherit" it.[11]

The aim of the training is to develop an extra-daily technique, a technique which alters the actor's daily, enculturated behaviour based on functionality and conservation of energy and allows for an acculturated, fictive and chosen behaviour based on a maximum of energy. This is based on the idea that the theatrical event is not a representation of daily life, but a particular and special situation leading to an out-of-the-ordinary perceptual and emotional experience. This technique expands, dilates the actor's body, making it engaged. Says Barba,

> The performer's extra-daily technique, that is, presence, derives from an alteration of balance and basic posture, from the play of opposing tensions which dilate the body's dynamics. The body is re-built for the scenic fiction.[12]

In this way a body ready for the generation of a theatrical event is constructed.

The event itself—the kind of event described in my opening, an event in which presence is everything—is the result of the creation of a performance text, that is a score of actions pertaining to an entire show. A performance text is not a written text, though writing may be part of it. A performance text is, says Richard Schechner, ". . . all that happens during a performance both on stage and off, including audience participation."[13] The performance text for a work like *Alkoremmi* is not derived from an approach to a written text; the rehearsals are not focused on the interpretation of a play or on ferreting out implicit actions

inscribed in one. Rather, the rehearsal process consists in the "weaving together"[14] of sequences of action generated by the actors and put together in a montage by the director. The rehearsal process, thus, does not set out to *express* an idea or a meaning, it sets out to generate an experience which will generate meaning, though not necessarily the same one for all audience members. The performance text is therefore purposefully multivalent. In reference to Barba's work, Ian Watson has described this multivalence as a result of a dramaturgy which is open as opposed to closed. Says Watson,

> The open nature of Barba's dramaturgy, combined with the dialectic between the actors' and the director's understanding of a production's meaning allows spectators a wide scope in choosing their reading of the work. These readings may vary greatly because of Barba's limited use of closed signification, and his emphasis on the synthetic level of communication. But this rejection of a closed meaning structure should not be mistaken for disregarding the audience. Barba, in fact, [. . .] demands more from his audience than mere passivity. He maintains that viewing a performance is action: it is work [. . .]. Barba has been accused of making theatre that is difficult to understand, but he is not interested in productions that require no effort on the part of the spectators. The audience, just like the actors, must be active during a performance, even if the action is entirely mental.[15]

The clarity sought in rehearsal is, thus, not that which will exact the communication of a distilled idea or notion. The clarity sought here concerns the precision with which a single action or sequence of actions is performed and the precision with which the actions are woven together and executed, to create a multi-layered, non-linear mosaic of meanings. Says Fowler,

> The form of preparation we do is based on the development of a psychophysical score, on which the actor's performance is built. Rather than finding a way for the actor to become a character, our technique is used by the actor, through the application of certain physical principles, to find a way to create another version of him/herself. A version which is both daily, non-daily and specifically chosen, formed, codified, through the actor's research and training. He or she then performs not the result of his or her psychological interpretation of a character, but another version of him/herself given form through a physical and vocal score. The final performance is then like a piece of music played by an orchestra, each of the

musicians (actors) playing a score which when combined becomes the full performance. This full performance is not only composed of the actors' actions. There are many other elements—the sounds they make, the songs they sing, the music they make, the way the lights are used, the scenic architecture constructed for the event, the use of props—and combinations and interactions of all these elements. The meanings, associations, and denotations perceived by the audience are arrived at by the dramaturgical relationship of these elements, of which the text is only one. Hence the text is not the primary conveyor of the performance's meaning and the actor no longer has the onus for the transmission of meaning to the spectator. The actor is no longer told to express a given meaning for the audience. [. . .] The spectator "reads" the performance on the basis of all the signs that make up the performance score.[16]

The dramaturgy of a piece like *Alkoremmi* is "woven"[17] by running the threads of its actions in two different directions. One set of threads produce the linkage of events through the time of the piece, establishing a montage of action sequences, connecting one sequence to the next. In *Alkoremmi*, this thread is provided by the story of the child born with the last soul. The other set of threads jumps in and among the first set, producing simultaneity of many events, setting them in a synchronic montage, allowing images and events to fly like sparks from one side of the stage to the other, leaping like electrons defying fixity. The resulting opacity, in the sense that all images and figures ultimately resist transparent transcription into language, heightens the audience's experience of an experience, As Jean-François Lyotard reminds us,

By virtue of the fact that it sets up a closed circuit intercom system of the work itself, the figure surprises the eye and the ear and the mind by a perfectly improper arrangement of the parts.[18]

Like the actor dilating her/his body through extra-daily behaviour, the surprises generated by this dramaturgy provide the spectator with a sense of a dilated mind, a transporting experience, in which the experience of the non-daily becomes more important than the narrowing of specific meaning. In addition, says Barba,

Making it possible for the spectator to decipher a story does not mean making him/her discover its "true meaning" but creating the conditions within which s/he can *ask her/himself* about its meaning. It is a question of exposing the knots of the story, those points at which

> extremes embrace. There are spectators for who [*sic*, ed.] the theatre is essential precisely because it does not present them with solutions, but knots.[19]

Creation of the Performance Text

The sequences of action which spin the threads of the performance text are in the first instance generated by the actors' individual research and training.

Ker Wells's warrior character, Gall, appears in the show bare-chested, wearing a head piece made from a black horse-tail, manipulating two sticks, each with a lock of hair attached to the end, and issuing loud shrieks. His presence is commanding, threatening, his dancing confident of victory. Wells's research into this character began with his interest in juggling which he had incorporated into his daily training. Says Wells of this early work,

> My objective was simple, I wanted objects that were not immediately identifiable as juggling clubs, and only useful for that purpose; I wanted objects that could "become" something else, both for me, and in the eye of an observer. In addition, I wanted something that would "hit back", that would demand my physical engagement and attention. In this respect these sticks were ideal; oak is a dense, hard, heavy wood, if I dropped a stick on my foot, or allowed it to rap my knuckles, it hurt, thus they demanded my respect.[20]

As he improvised with these sticks a character began to emerge for whom he evolved a score of physical behaviour. At the same time he would read about various extinct cultures, such as the Aztec, the Beotuk and the Yahi, and their mythologies, and look for visual stimulation in a wide variety of sources which might help build his character. During this search he came across a picture of a Japanese mythological character with long black hair. At this point he obtained the horse-hair and materials necessary for constructing a head piece. The character was named Gall, after a plains Indian warrior. Through further improvisations and visual stimulation Gall's physical score became increasingly precise.

When constructing the character of the child to be born with the last soul, Wells began his work by responding to the visual stimulation found in photographs of embryonic development and out of this he created a behavioral score, beginning with the birth as the child breaks out of his enveloping membrane, through learning to walk, etc.

Each of the characters encountered in *Alkoremmi* was created by painstakingly building movement upon movement, sound upon sound. Stephen Lawson's research into angel and carnival/cabaret styles, and ways of generating the image of a nimbus, grew into characters like the Master of Ceremonies and the little person. Donald Kitt's training with stilts and his studies in shamanism evolved into the giant. Karin Randoja's investigation into the images of women in mourning in a variety of cultures produced the veiled red lady and the sensual, "wild", black lady. Tannis Kowalchuk's readings in alchemy and the hermaphrodite transformed into the woman dressed in white carrying the parasol with the lit candle atop. The process of character creation leaps in stages into existence as the actors integrate impulses and various kinds of material into their work. Says Barba,

> Creative thought is actually distinguished by the fact that it proceeds by leaps, by means of an unexpected disorientation which obliges it to reorganize itself in new ways, abandoning its well-ordered shell. It is the thought-in-life, not rectilinear, not univocal.[21]

Through the whole process the actors were guided in their search by Richard Fowler who would present them with specific challenges and tasks to be executed. All the characters were thus well under way before rehearsals began. For the twelve weeks of actual rehearsal, the company was joined by dramaturg Sean Dixon, who is a former member of the company. Dixon would throughout the process observe the actors' work, individually and as a company, and he "begins to find possible stories, connections, scenarios, texts, etc., which he develops in consultation with Richard Fowler."[22]

Using the behavioral sequences created by the actors like strips of film, Fowler slowly constructed the montage which eventually became the show *Alkoremmi*.[23] In a montage, the strips of the action which are put together and juxtaposed may not be used in a context similar to the one that generated them. In a new context they take on different meanings but their physical execution, the score, remains the same. A performance text comes into being. This "text" does not only consist of the physical scores performed in front of the audience. Since the actors control all aspects of the performance, movement behind the "set" must also be choreographed in order to maintain the proper rhythm and precision of the show, the final result generating a wealth of visual and auditory impressions for the audience. Says Fowler,

> When I go to the theatre I want a primarily kinaesthetic experience, not a primarily intellectual one. I don't go to the theatre to sit and

think, activities for which I have other times and places, but to experience, to be taken out of myself, to have my presumptions about life and living surprised and changed, not confirmed and reassured. And when I go to the theatre I want to see magicians not reciters, I want to see actors using their bodies, minds, emotions, energy, in ways which astonish and transport me to other levels of reality and perception.[24]

The Group As Culture

Since 1989, the members of Primus have trained together and rehearsed together, indeed, they have committed themselves to work together, as if for ever. The commitment this group of people has to each other is thus different from what is required from the average ensemble company. Since they do not select plays to be interpreted but are dependent upon each other's contributions to a show, in the form of original artistic research leading to theatrical scores, that show can no longer be performed if someone decides to leave the company. The Odin Theatre in Denmark has existed since the mid-1960s and though there has been some change in the personnel, the nucleus of that company remains intact. Primus, too, has had some change of personnel, but the essential commitment to the integrity of the group remains unmarred.

Despite the paucity of available funding and the extensive periods of creation Primus requires to produce a show, its members train daily, exploring extra-daily techniques, generating scores of action. This exacting daily mental and physical regimen, in fact, creates the group as a specific culture, a culture not only in the sense of a group of people pursuing and making manifest a set of goals, priorities. Indeed, the members of this group alter their bodies in the process of becoming Primus. During the explorations of pre-expressive shaping of energy their bodies become sharply responsive to impulses, producing themselves as flexible theatrical instruments. The life of the group is thus both mental and physical. And since all material performed is generated by the group—whether it be based on their individual lives or on their reactions to other people, other cultures—they create a relationship with their spectators which in the first instance is not about the delivery of a message, or about communicating an idea. It is rather about sharing the results of their investigations by creating an experience, about transporting the spectator's mind to the world of the extra-daily. I.e. their shows are a way for this group to be together with their spectators.

In daily training too, the individual commitment is reaffirmed. Says Barba,

> Whatever you do, do it with your whole self. It sounds like—and is—a facile and rhetorical phrase. Anybody can say it. But we have only one responsibility: To live it, to carry it out in our daily acts. And the training reminds us of this.[25]

For the members of Primus Theatre, the enactment of their whole selves is not a mere phrase, it becomes a living theatre.

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While preparing this article I have benefited greatly from discussions with colleagues at the University of Winnipeg, Professors Bill Morgan and Neil Besner, of the departments of Anthropology and English, respectively, and with Richard Fowler, Artistic Director of Primus Theatre, and Patrick Friesen, the poet.

Notes

1. Translated by me from a German translation published in *Meyerhold-Tairow-Wachtangow-Theateroktober*, (Leipzig, 1972) 355.

2. (Aarhus, Denmark, 1989) 8. English edition, *The Actor's Way*. Translated by Richard Fowler (London: Routledge, 1993).

3. (London, 1979) 20-21.

4. *Minima Moralia*, (London, 1974) 247.

5. *The Paper Canoe: A Treatise on Theatre Anthropology*. Translated by Richard Fowler, 136, in manuscript. To be published in 1994.

6. Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese: *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*. Translated by Richard Fowler (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 81.

7. In a letter to the author dated September 10, 1991.

8. From the video tape *In Cammino Attraverso il Teatro* [On the Way though the Theatre] by Erik Exe Christoffersen, Institut for Dramaturgi, University of Aarhus, Denmark, 1992.

9. "Third Theatre" in *Beyond the Floating Islands* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986) 194.

10. From an interview with the author, "The Anthropology of Performance: An Interview with Richard Fowler" in *Canadian Theatre Review*, no. 71, Summer 1992.

11. Indeed, one might construct a genealogy of ideas which proceeds from Diderot's discussions of the actor's paradox, mutating through Copeau's investigations at the *Vieux Colombier*, the Stanislavski of physical action, Vakhtangov's "Fantastical Realism" (melding elements from Meyerhold, Tairov, and Stanislavski), and Michael Chekov's "Psychological Gesture", and Brecht's social *Gestus*, to Grotowski's "Holy actor" and Barba's transcultural actorly presence.

12. See Barba and Savarese 81.

13. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1985) 22.

14. See Barba and Savarese 68.

15. *Towards a Third Theatre: Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 99.

16. Interview with Richard Fowler 87.

17. See Barba and Savarese 158: "To compose (to put with) also means to mount, to put together, to weave actions together [. . .]"

18. In "The Dream-Work does not Think", *The Lyotard Reader*, edited by Andrew Benjamin (Oxford, England and Cambridge, Mass.: B. Blackwell, 1989) 30.

19. *The Paper Canoe* 122-23.

20. Ker Wells, "Summary of source material for the character "Gall"", p. 1, in Independent Theatre Productions Grant application to *Manitoba Arts Council*, August 1990.

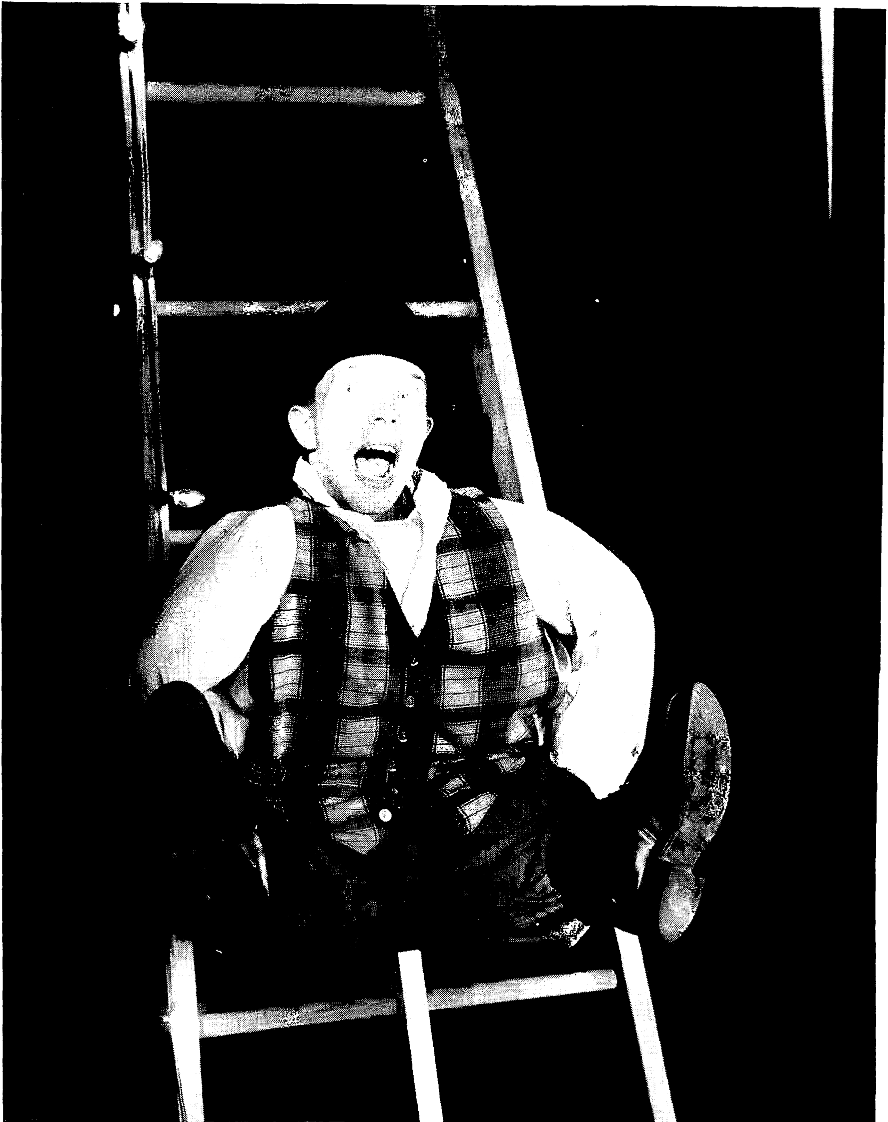
21. Eugenio Barba 58.

22. "Final Report on Development and Performance of 'Alkoremmi'" 2 in reports to *Canada Council* and *Manitoba Arts Council*, May, 1991.

23. "Restored behaviour is living behaviour treated as a film director treats a strip of film." Richard Schechner in *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1985) 35.

24. Interview with Richard Fowler 88.

25. From the video tape by Erik Exe Christoffersen.



Stephen Lawson in the Primus performance *Alkoremmi.* Photo Credit: Cam Timlick

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