

With Us and Without Us . . .

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Writing about Tadeusz Kantor means, more than anything, trying to write nothing that might sadden or anger him in his grave. That promises to be a very difficult task. Writing about Tadeusz Kantor also means warning the potential reader that this text can be neither scholarly nor intimate. On the one hand, I am not a theorist on Kantor's works. On the other, I cannot claim to have had a close friendship with him. But destiny would have it that one day we'd meet, and from that point on we saw each other often.

One could give this coincidence a time, a place. Without wanting to fabricate another legend, I still think it possible to say that we fell, he and I, "nose to nose" and that the occurrence had, strangely enough, neither beginning nor end. I wish to do nothing more than report and share, no doubt incompletely and very clumsily, a still-confused sentiment that is composed of strong impressions, of rare emotions, and that will have absolutely no historical value . . .

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Why "nose to nose"?

Because, from the time of our first meeting, I can boast of having been able to observe, as I pleased, the face of Tadeusz Kantor during the long scenes we shared on stage, during the show *I Shall Never Return*. On stage we were face to face, often very close, in a sort of public intimacy for the duration of a performance. Evening after evening we contemplated each other, and sometimes I allowed myself a good look at Tadeusz sitting there at the other side of the table.

The face of Tadeusz Kantor was not the face of a leader or visionary, nor was it a sensual face. Kantor did not conform to what one might have expected of him, because he no longer had the tormented features of a *créateur*. He had been photographed a thousand times, but his face will remain impenetrable, an eternal enigma. The arrogant and mischievous eye, the imperious and insulting mouth, the rugged topography of his prehistoric nose, the antiquated coiffure of a Roman emperor (without curls)—the ensemble formed an out-moded portrait: ancient, restless, and incomprehensible.

That one must have the mask of one's role at a given time or situation in our current system of production (the "overcoding" of surfaces) will soon make easier the fabrication of a prototype for the average European, an Odysseus for

the new century. In the end, nothing is less personal than the face, and this lack is everywhere avenged. Kantor understood this, he who masked with a hat and scarf the head of a hero: Odysseus. By this I mean that to which we must never surrender . . . the disfiguration of the world.

Somewhere it has been said that the first man on earth was a tree. Kantor was a landscape, like a scene with a tree that protects in its shadow a child who innocently plays with death, where nothing can be stopped, neither the child nor death. The landscape of Kantor's face bore witness—as did his theatre—to this secret, to this revelation that let his countenance fall, perpetually astonished, drawing it into the unknown, the unexpected, he, Tadeusz, who all the same knew . . .

The beauty of the venerable child . . .

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Why neither beginning nor end?

Tadeusz Kantor was Polish, but his theatre transcended the frontiers of a single country. At the height of his work, Kantor made himself the object of his art, questioning his world and us through a game of memory and unbroken correspondences. Thus as actors and spectators from everywhere and nowhere, we could perceive the alloys and allies of his work. But we needed to understand that what took place there created itself with us, but also without us, before us and after us . . .

Such was my feeling, an impression never denied, from the first to the last of our encounters. For how does one know where solitude begins and where it ends? Without wanting to offend those who loved him, I confess that I still hold onto this impression that Kantor was alone.

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Kantor is dead.

Without an heir but with many orphans. Gone are his joy, his rage, his love, his vitality that he knew how to create and share.

The archives remain, that is true. But what remains above all cannot be thought of as an explanation nor a revelation. For this reason the question of what comes after Kantor is a poor one, because it restricts our freedom, it maps a false lineage, and it conflates what should not be compared. Tadeusz Kantor's face was that of a man who was indebted to nothing and to no one.

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