[missing]

Spencer Golub

He lay there, as impossible as he was real; no
comparisons now.
- Peter Handke[1]

["Why is a raven like a writing desk?" the Mad Hatter asked Alice at his Wonderland tea party.][2]

In Czech animator Jan Švankmajer's 1988 film *Alice*, the heroine's initial Wonderland fall into an old bucket proceeds through a writing desk drawer, where she encounters an array of memorial objects, time-scarred *objets trouvés* reminiscent of death. These objects are seen in the designer's "dirty" light, which clarifies texture and, via texture, illumination itself. But this clarification of light through objects cannot resist "the more powerful claims of darkness."[3] Švankmajer's doll-like objects and fossilized creatures exude their life's blood in the form of sawdust, as if they had ingested the original writing desk into their very being.

"In order to see it as it really is," Tadeusz Kantor wrote, "a man must become an object."[4] The object that Kantor eventually, and one might say inevitably, became was a writing desk. His gravesite is adorned with his sculpture of himself as a "dead-class" schoolboy seated at and bonded to a pen-scarred wooden writing desk. The image derived from a chance encounter in Kantor's adult life which, in Proustian fashion, activated a childhood memory. This is what he saw:

> 1971 or 1972 on a seashore in a tiny little town, small houses. One of them a school. Deserted. It had only one classroom. You could look inside two little dust-covered windows. I glued my face to the window glass. I took a long look into my dark and stored-up memory. Once again I was a little boy. I was sitting in a poor village classroom at a desk all cut with pen knives, ink-stained fingers smearing the ABC book with saliva. All the boards of the floor had deeply cut-in veins from consistent washing. White-washed walls, the plaster peeling off. A black cross on the wall. Today I know that there, by that window, something important happened. I made a certain discovery. Somehow very clearly I realized the existence of a recollection. It was in this way that the decade-long period of my

> two works *The Dead Class* [1975] and *Wielopole, Wielopole* [1980] started. That was an era of my own avant-garde, an avant-garde of recollection, [of] the invisible, the empty and the dead.[5]

Kantor originally recreated this image for an art installation. In this earlier version, the boy's feet dangled some six inches above the floor, upon which they cast their shadow. The gap between feet and floor evoked the space of a world that was as yet *en potentia*. At Kantor's gravesite, this gap was closed. The sculpted boy's feet were grounded, contacting that limitless vacuum in space and time below the ground where the corpse, the statue's original, was decomposing.

Paul Auster described memory "as a room, as a body, as a skull, as a skull that encloses the room in which a body sits. As in the image: 'a man sat alone in his room.'"[6] Death, art, and memory each configure what Heidigger called "human reality . . . remote from itself," the limit of the real, in figurative rooms.[7] Kantor's visual memory of himself as a schoolboy seated at his desk resembles one of Edward Hopper's "isolated moments of figuration" in which:

> People look into space . . . lost in a secrecy the paintings cannot disclose and we cannot guess at. It is as if we were spectators at an event we were unable to name. . . . Hopper's rooms become sad havens of desire. We want to know more about what goes on in them, but of course we cannot. The silence that accompanies our viewing seems to increase. It is unsettling. We want to move on. And something is urging us to, even as something else compels us to stay. It weighs on us like solitude. Our distance from everything grows.[8]

The statue of the schoolboy seated at the grave, gap, or limit suggests Kantor waiting through eternity for his father, who, unlike his hero Odysseus, did not return from the war.[9] In Kantor's art, the writing desk from which emerged a stage (a limit, a precipice) was an image of the first and last room. The first room is "memory's immobile present" retold "each time as the first time." The last room, of which we have foreknowledge but lack real understanding, is a "forgotten memory that is locked away in each and every one of us like a healed wound."[10] This last room is the "un-scene", the "no room" of speculative non-being, "the healed wound" of dying, the "forgotten memory" of death. In the absence of real death, the un-scene evokes an *en abîme* mental construct of stage death, a delimited space of being and non-being.[11] The task which Kantor set for himself and his (fellow) actors may be likened to Sartre's concept of *néantise*, self-nihilation or the making of nothing. The collision of what Sartre called "the opaque resistance of things and the subjectivity of thought" sought resolution in Kantor's art in a truthful neutrality which admitted the inaccessibility of death and memory (the abstract future and the abstract past) to representation. Sartre maintained that "the past is what I am without being able to live it. 'I think; therefore I was.'"[12] Death's pastness, like its futurity, makes it uninhabitable.

["'No room! No room!' they cried out when they saw Alice coming. 'There's *plenty* of room!' said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table." (93)]

Kantor said of the room of his repeated construction, the room "that keeps dying again and again," that it:

> cannot be a real space. It cannot be a real room . . . cannot be "furnished," cannot be the place beyond which the auditorium begins, cannot be the stage. If it were, the room would be nothing more than a scene design, which would irrevocably crush our hopes for achieving realness.[13]

The room in which the Hatter holds his tea party is a synoptic space for a world of fallen sight and stopped time (the absolute present), the everywhere of nowhere in which all that is only appears to be. This world of confused being and non-being, subject and object, sense and nonsense, which Carroll repeatedly likens to a stage, recalls Kantor's theatre, in which phenomena embody and exhale "a pure virtuality." People and objects are "associated with numerous functions which can be accepted in contexts which are far different from those to which they are usually attached."[14] The implications of this are enormous for theatre, which, whatever else it is, is supposed to be a field of representation of the real.

["The table was a large one," wrote Carroll, "but the three [the Mad Hatter, March Hare, and Dormouse] were all crowded together at one corner of it." (93)]

"Everything that happens in my creations happens in the corner," wrote Kantor, "because the corner is a special place." The corner renders performance, which is regularly associated with the center, unexpected and "found," like the "happenings" from which Kantor's stage work partially derived. The corner, which naturalism once used to pry open the stage convention of the real, signified in Kantor's work the furthest point a stage could physically occupy in relation to what he called the "unreal auditorium" and the equally unreal designed scenic space.[15]

Throughout Švankmajer's film, Alice appears both in her "real" incarnation and as an "unreal" doll version of herself. At one point, the "real" Alice is seen looking out through the unseeing eye sockets of her self-representation. The object-like beings and being-like objects (what in Kantor's work have been called "bio-objects"), animated from dead matter and de-animated or held in temporal regard by stop-action photography, recur in a series of theatrically appointed doll-house rooms. Kantor's *mise en scénes* played similar tricks with temporal regard and the mixing up of animate and inanimate presences. Brunella Eruli writes that "Kantor use[d] his power to observe the changes of the speed with which matter accumulates itself. Deformed, humiliated but, perhaps, for the first

time freed from all practical functions, matter aims at unknown dimensions." Philippe du Vignal asserts more generally, "we animate something which does not exist, because we do not see it."[16] We also de-animate living being(s), objectify or substitute objects for it (them) in order to see the unseen in a stopped time that eludes life and approximates death.

[Fortinbras: "Where is this sight?"
Horatio: "What is it you would see?" (*Hamlet*, V, ii, 389-90).]

Walking through a cemetery-set of his own design in which one of his actors feigned hanging himself (in the corner) while others dressed one of their own as a living corpse, Kantor charged them to "look at all objects with eyes that do not see."[17] What he sought to avoid was the romance of death's familiarity, which Hamlet wrapped around him in his father's cloak. Yorick's skull, which Hamlet contemplates in a cemetery, (dis)embodies death theatrically. Its familiarity makes death appear to Hamlet and to us to be mentally inhabitable. The stage littered with corpses similarly lends death an apparent visibility that is more characteristic of theatre. Closer to Kantor's vision of "circusized" death is Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967), which arose from the non-evidentiary fact that two corpses are missing from the stage and will not be viewed. In his film version of his play (1990), Stoppard amended the Player's final speech (after cheating death with a retractable blade) to include the line, "Deaths of kings and princes and . . . nobodies," which he pointedly directs at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.[18] Somebodies and nobodies all become no bodies after death, an intuition which helped Odysseus (using the pseudonym "Nohbody" [sic]) to cheat death in the Cyclops's cave.[19]

Like us, the deaths of Stoppard's unknowing protagonists are advertised from the beginning ("Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.") but nevertheless retain their mystery. In ironic counterpoint to the aestheticized final death tableau from *Hamlet* and in keeping with Shakespeare's instruction, Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern disappear—only this time in plain sight. Death is experienced by the living only before and after the fact, in anticipation and remembrance of the body's forgetting to return. And yet, Rosencrantz notes, the fingernails and the beard continue to grow after death (18)—the (no)body remembers what the mind has forgotten, after the death of consciousness. The reality of death and the death of the real are not necessarily synonymous, making Hamletian reflection over physical death nonsensical. In the stage-world of Elsinore, a raven is as indistinguishable from a writing desk as is a hawk from a handsaw or real death and memory from their theatrical counterparts. In all of this, Stoppard demonstrates that logic and (logical) consciousness constitute a trap for the mind that thinks it knows itself and with it the real.

[Rosencrantz: "Do you ever think of yourself as actually *dead*, lying in a box with a lid on it?" (70)]

Kott wrote that in Kantor's theatre "the dead are the doubles of the living and the living are the doubles of the dead."[20] Kantor affirmed that in his theatre "the mannequin is to become a model through which passes a powerful sensation of death, as the condition of the dead, a model for the live actor. . . . The spirit of a real dead person (a dybbuk) enters into the actor from time to time."[21] A photographic *memento mori* from his 1988 production *I Shall Never Return* depicts Kantor onstage contemplating his mannequin likeness alongside its upright coffin.[22] This image invokes Blanchot's concept of a "desire for what we are not in want of, a desire that cannot be satisfied and that does not desire union with what it desires." This desire is "austere, disinterested, without satisfaction, without nostalgia, unreturned and without return."[23] "Where is this sight?," asks Fortinbras. "What is it you would see?," asks and answers Horatio, the keeper of memory.

Doubleness, as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's example attests, is the sign of being marked for death. Baudrillard said this well:

> The double is an imaginary figure that, like the soul or one's shadow, or one's image in a mirror, haunts the subject with a faint death that has to be constantly warded off. If it materializes, death is imminent.[24]

In *Let the Artists Die* (1985), Kantor used twin actors in a self-impersonation of "I-Dying" and "The Author Describing His Own Death."[25] The double invokes both self-mirroring and the other side of the mirror, the realm of death and childhood memory inhabited by Carroll's Alice, who liked "pretending to be two people." (33) In his 1975 cinematic childhood remembrance *Mirror* (*Zerkalo*), director Andrey Tarkovsky appeared as a body double of the dying author seated (with his back to the camera) on a doctor's examining table.[26] Tarkovsky died from cancer in 1986. The artistic anticipation of Tarkovsky's death in 1975 and his actual death in 1986 coincided with his plan to stage *Hamlet* in 1975 and to film *Hamlet* in 1986. He succeeded in the first task, although not well, and did not succeed in achieving the second goal at all. Tarkovsky, who considered the Ghost to be "the most real, concrete character" in the play, figuratively cast his late father Arseny in the role by overdubbing his poem "Life, Life" onto a sequence of wartime death images in *Mirror*. The poem reads in part:

> . . . On earth there is no death
> All are immortal. All is immortal. No need
> To be afraid of death at seventeen
> Nor yet at seventy. Reality and light
> Exist, but neither death nor darkness.
> All of us are on the sea-shore now,
> And I am one of those who haul the nets
> When a shoal of immortality comes in.[27]

The foregoing passage closely recalls a scene from Vsevolod Meyerhold's planned but unrealized stage production of *Hamlet*, which the director described in 1938 as follows:

> A leaden gray sea. The dim midnight sun through a thin shroud of clouds. Hamlet walks along the shore, wrapped in a black cloak. He sits down on a rock by the water and gazes into the watery distance. And then suddenly in that distance appears the figure of his father. A bearded warrior in silver armor walks across the water toward shore. He gets closer and closer. Hamlet stands up. His father reaches the shore, and Hamlet embraces him. He sits his father down on the rock, and then, so that he won't be cold, he takes off his cloak and wraps him in it. And beneath his cloak he has on silver armor identical with his father's. And they sit there side by side—the black figure of the father and Hamlet all in silver. . . .[28]

For the artist like Meyerhold who insisted upon playing Hamlet, proximity to the Ghost proved to be a fatal romance. For the artist like Kantor who played the Ghost, the body of the romantic subject was vacated in order to make oneself into the object of the unseen. In Kantor's production *Today Is My Birthday* (1990), the self-portrait of the artist (Kantor)-doubled-as-Meyerhold (an influence upon Kantor's work) was positioned within a central frame whose floor rose "as if it wanted to absorb a body destined for death." Michal Kobialka left this impression of the moment, which returns us to the image of the empty chair within the encapsulating image of the framed space that is furnished but "no room":

> When the Self-portrait left the stage, the vortex created by his absence was overwhelming. The chair within his frame, the chair at the table, and the central frame were empty. A split second was needed to recognize the image, but the emotion raised by it stayed much longer . . . in memory.[29]

In Stoppard's play, Rosencrantz consciously suspects and unconsciously knows that he and Guildenstern are marked for death when he feels "a draught . . . coming through the floor." (59) This draught acknowledges the presence of "a gap you can't see" and cannot hear, even with the wind blowing through it. (124) This "gap" suggests the Wonderland "no room" that the stage constructs out of its premonition of the past and the future. Although this gap is imaginable, it is uninhabitable, the space which Richard Foreman sights and "notates" "between experience and thought." It is a trap. The body immediately falls through it.[30] In fact, the courtiers are no doubt standing upon the trap in the stage floor that serves as Ophelia's grave and, in some productions of *Hamlet*, as the place where the Prince first encounters the Ghost. It is from "under the

stage" (*Hamlet*, I, v) that the Ghost thrice commands Horatio and Marcellus to return to silence and invisibility the nothing they (along with Hamlet) heard and saw. The draught blows up through the rough scaffolding on which Hamlet impersonates and stages death (e.g., *The Murder of Gonzago* and subconsciously, the murder of Polonius through a curtain) as proof of his ("north northwest") madness.

In his film, Stoppard momentarily implicates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the mad attempt to render death visible on the stage, but only so as to undermine the Polonius-like bluster of the theatrical conventions that attend this task. Guildenstern eavesdrops through a window grid on Polonius, who is conversing with Claudius on the subject of Hamlet and Ophelia. Later, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern eavesdrop along with Polonius on the Hamlet-Gertrude bedroom scene. The courtiers' sudden appearance behind the hanging tapestry causes Polonius to cry out in surprise, which alerts Hamlet to the old man's presence and precipitates his death. When Hamlet opens the curtain, revealing Polonius's corpse, he does not see Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who frame the discovery space like the proscenium figures (plainclothes policemen) in Rene Magritte's painting *The Threatened Assassin* (*L' assassin menace*, 1926-27). Death's proscenium positioning suggests a limit beyond which there is nothing, "the dissolution of the Outside", of a separate identity.[31]

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's doubleness, like that of Kantor and his identically-dressed stage surrogates, is more figurative than literal, more a matter of metaphysical similitude, difference-in-likeness (like a mirror image) than of physical resemblance or exact likeness. This kind of doubleness undermines absolute reality, as does stage-likeness or illusion, which, when successful, erases the appearance of difference, although not difference itself. Michel Foucault wrote:

> Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similitude serves repetition, which ranges across it. Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar.[32]

Blanchot noted that "in the rare instances when a living person shows similitude with himself, he only seems to us more remote, closer to a dangerous neutral region, *astray* in *himself* and like his own ghost already: he seems to return no longer having any but an echo life."[33] Paul Auster wrote of his late father that even in life, "he did not seem to be a man occupying space, but rather a block of impenetrable space in the form of a man."[34] The same might be said of "Tadeusz Kantor", who surveilled the stage's "echo life" like the solitary raven or Ghost on its deathwatch. But Kantor's "neutrality" was not so much "dangerous" as fearsome, emanating from a metaphysical space beyond the reach

of Hamlet's fearful logic. It was in this space that Kantor as the schoolboy at the writing desk sat and into this space that he looked.

Perched on the rim of the gap/hole/grave, the (no)body inhabits "that frozen moment" in which "the trap door closes ready to fall." Blanchot dubbed the theatre "Midnight's space, a moment which is a place."[35] Kantor saw this too and used the theatre to construct *mise en scènes* of the foreseen. Renato Palazzi remembers Kantor "standing on the stage and summoning himself, from the past, when he was six, and summoning himself dying in the future while he is standing there, observing himself and others."[36] Kantor's assertion that "life may only be experienced in art through the lack of life, through reference to death" logically extended Heidegger's notion of "human reality . . . remote from itself," since death constitutes the limit of that reality.[37]

Kantor died on December 8, 1990. Shortly thereafter, he formally "showed" himself as a "no-show", as the Ghost, and the Ghost saw his "unreal" audience as an actual fiction. At the final rehearsal for the Paris run of *Today Is My Birthday* (1990), Kantor's prerecorded voice, the sound of foreseen invisibility, announced:

> Again I am on stage. I will probably never fully explain this phenomenon either to you or to myself. To be precise, I am not on stage but at the threshold. In front of me, there is the audience. . . .[38]

On this occasion, Kantor's actors wore his trademark white shirt and black suit, hat and tie, as always adopted "gestures imposed by space" and performed a "compulsion of repetition," of similitude.[39] This compulsion, wrote Jacques Lacan in another context, signified death or "the limit of historical function of the subject."[40] As in that other case of similitude, the raven and the writing desk, which are in turn stand-ins for death and art, repetition renders resemblance apparent and absurd. Kantor's *mise en scènes* repeatedly rejected the "pure presence" which the "haunted stage" routinely rehearses without real conviction and which the ironically entitled *Today Is My Birthday* (a nominal tribute to a repeatable event and to the event of repetition) converted into the public(ized) absence of its guest of honor.[41] Owing to both the resemblance and the similitude of Tadeusz Kantor and "Tadeusz Kantor," this posthumous performance could be subtitled not merely descriptively but ironically, "Tadeusz Kantor is dead." The spectacle of (self-)observation/seeing the self objectively, which since childhood had constituted Kantor's Wonderland pursuit, reached its logical conclusion at the threshold of his vanishing from the stage. Like Stoppard's "Rosencrantz" and "Guildenstern," the more substantive shadows of Shakespeare's originals, "Tadeusz Kantor" sought to capture in similitude the real absence present in theatrical reflection: "Now you see me, now you—"

["She was no longer able to close her eyes. There had been a GREAT FALL . . . in her consciousness."][42]

Kantor, who called for the artist to regard the world with sightless eyes, as if from a different space, understood the interchangeability of the space above and the space below, of the seen/unseen and the scene/un-scene. In his 1981 Moscow Art Theatre production of *Tartuffe*, Anatoly Efros proved that he did too by pulling the table out from over and the stage floor out from under Orgon in Moliere's famous scene of voyeurism and revelation.[43] In Efros's staging, a vexed Tartuffe, in his eagerness to seduce the elusive Elmire, lifted and cast aside the table which separated them and under which Orgon was ostensibly hiding. The audience, who saw the corpulent actor playing Orgon crawl under the table at the beginning of the scene, was as astonished as Elmire to find that he was absent when the table was removed. The stage, its appearances and disappearances, conforms to the notion set forth by Blanchot that "the finite, inasmuch as it is finite, always gives itself as a vanishing object."[44] The vanishing objects and points of the stage bespeak a spectacle of constraint. Orgon's disappearance constituted a Wonderland fall through a table (of which the audience configured him as the bottom part—in sum, a bio-object) and the stage floor. This self-induced vertigo invited dream, displacement, absurdity and delirium *before* the fact of death.[45] The invisibility of the opening and the fall blinded spatial perception, casting the audience back upon consciousness itself. This Orgon, co-created by an author (Molière) whose death just barely escaped the stage and a director (Efros) whose heart failure had by this time already been once rehearsed, leapt into a space which came closer to representing death on the stage than the prop grave assaulted by Hamlet. Orgon, who was so deceived by the appearance of truth in Tartuffe that even "if he saw the worst, he'd doubt his sight," fell into the gap, the unseen/un-scene in the space of representation.[46] The rapping upon the stage floor that raised the curtain and made the scene appear in the baroque theatre may have been a secret signal to other Orgons to stay in hiding, to not give up the ghost of theatrical mystery to the material representation of theatrical appearance.

"When concealment appears, concealment having become appearance, makes 'everything disappear.'" But, adds Blanchot, the appearance that "everything has disappeared is exactly what we call an apparition. And the *apparition* says precisely that when everything has disappeared, there still is something."[47] Perhaps what remains is consciousness (*cogito*) alone thickened into a thing (*cogitatum*) by the stage's rough magic. Blanchot maintained that "consciousness [like death] is our destiny; we cannot leave it; and in it we are never in space but in the *vis-à-vis* of representation where we are always busy, moreover—busy acting, doing and possessing." The space of consciousness is a theatrically "circumscribed space" of physical and mechanical visibility, in which we only think we see real life, death, and memory. This occurs, at least in part, because in theatre and memory, time is not only repeatable but is already repeated and in this sense unreal. Spectacle, like Perseus's bronze shield, deflects the stoney gaze of Medusa and so consigns death to the unforeseeable future and to the unseen

space beneath the stage. However, the spectacle that shields us also blinds us with its reflected image of apparent (theatrical) truth. Blanchot noted that:

> The theater, whatever the content of the play, instinctively makes us believe in an inimitable human kind, in an eternal order and inordinate forces, before which, ceasing to be ourselves, we are turned into shadows or heroes—which means that the theater is guilty of making us believe in theater.[48]

In this, we are as gullible as Orgon, as eager to configure the world according to sights to which we abnegate insight. Our consciousness casts us as Rosencrantz and Odysseus, Oedipus and Guildenstern, as somebodies/some bodies and nobodies/no bodies, all of whom are "real" only as shadow selves. Kantor wrote: "Recollections of the past [i.e., narrative inscriptions], the functioning of MEMORY, are real because they are . . . futile!"[49] The stage is the preserve of the real only insofar as it (the real and death as the real) is impossible to achieve.

So, why *is* a raven like a writing desk? Carroll answered as "an afterthought" (in keeping with death's being always before or after the fact of cognition), "because it can produce a few notes, tho they are *very* flat; and it is never put with the wrong end in front!" Alice and Orgon, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern fall through the stage floor of the writing desk, through the flat narrative construction of art and into the space of a more profound theatrical mystery.[50] By exposing the gap, they fill it with a newly-expanded consciousness of the stage and its relation to death. Foreman said it best in his play *Lava* (1989), which, like Kantor's 1990 invisible "performance," is dominated by the Ghost's (unseen author's) voice coming over a loudspeaker. One of the Foreman surrogates proclaims:

> A gap is that void which
> Is the self
> And is the real.
> That gap which is the void which is the real and is the
> "god" in that void.[51]

The gap is "the field of all creativity" and, at the same time, "evokes the unnameable," again linking art in Foreman's mind with death.[52] The gap is real and rejects the mirror which is unreal and affects a frozen, reflective posture. The gap opens, writes Foreman, when one "reaches for a fish in the water when the fish isn't/quite there because the water makes it somewhere else." The parting of the curtain reveals a stage that cannot help but mirror and concretize an already visible world or, as Švankmajer's film illustrates, an invisible (nominally underground) world which "arises in [the] gap."[53]

Pushing aside a white linen clothesline curtain, Švankmajer's Alice sees the silhouette of two duelists, a playing-card Hamlet and Laertes, crossing a stage in

mid-fight. Anticipating by a moment their death scene, the Queen of Hearts orders the White Rabbit to cut off their heads, which he does. The two headless adversaries continue their duel pressed flat against the stage floor. Perhaps these duelists, whose deaths are foreseen in the conventions of the stage world they pass through, are closer to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, haplessly flattened against and dropped through stage floors (an image that repeatedly occurs in Stoppard's film). The duelists' decapitations signal a condition that they share with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of being a part of, yet apart from, the central plotting of a play that they think they carry in their heads. Švankmajer's Alice follows the Queen and her retinue into the wings, proceeding to a second stage which is a miniature of the first. From there she spies a third identical stage on which the Mad Hatter and the March Hare are seated at a table playing cards. Following the Queen's orders, the magical White Rabbit (the first figure seen on a stage in the film and the theatrical agent in the story) cuts off their heads. The Hatter and Hare exchange heads, and the Queen leaves the room through a door of her own design. That is, the space within the doorframe is filled with a playing card into which has been pre-cut (before the fact of her passing) the Queen's silhouette. The Queen's flattened body fills this hole/gap in the shape of her person, fulfilling the un/reality of her reanimated theatrical being, as she passes through it. The other cards follow suit.

Kantor asked, "Is there anything more banal than a person who enters and leaves through the door?" to which the answer is, of course, "yes" and "no". Familiar objects and actions are often repositories of mystery. Kantor's doors were sometimes freestanding and transported in his productions to and by his characters, whose passages in and out of sight, consciousness, and being were equated with them. At other times, Kantor painted his doors after the baroque fashion so as to disappear into the walls, like a trap signalling the unseen space beneath the stage floor.[54] These invisible doors augured the silence and mystery of the void, where Beckett's and Foreman's absent god waited: "BACK"[stage],/a True Stage that is/huge and awe inspiring/as if lying in wait. . . ."[55] Together with the space below the stage, the backstage constituted a second site of the unseen/un-scene, just across the border from where the stage constructed its "simulacrum of accumulation against death," its representation of the real, impervious to time.[56]

Kantor's stage figures, seated at tables and writing desks, defined "a place where free matter with a stiff structure of meanings has its beginning."[57] They did so within *mise en scènes* that struggled with authoritarian history and aesthetics to define the shape and substance of first and last things. In his art, Kantor sought "to get to the people of authority through the dead" whom they resemble in the secrecy and exclusivity of their communications.[58] Aesthetically, he interrogated and degraded authority on either side of the artificial boundary which separates reality and illusion. "I told myself that reality without illusion would not exist, or it would exist but there would be no art. And if there were no art, it is hard to say whether there would be reality at all."[59] Within the

"ridiculously small space for acting and living" that we call the stage and he called "the room of memory" and "the [impossible] theatre of death," Kantor and his doubles contemplated the mirror that on occasion nervously sights and acknowledges the gap and the gap that begrudgingly acknowledges the obstructive mirror.[60]

A 1991 film tribute to Kantor concludes with the image of the schoolboy at his writing desk, over which Kantor's voice intones:

> It is not true that the artist is a hero and a conqueror. He is not fearless as legend has it. He's a poor man who has his share of defenselessness, because he has consciously taken up his attitude toward fear. [The same can be said of the philosopher.] Fear is born in consciousness. Here I stand in front of you fearfully. I stand before you spent and accused. I need to justify myself, to see evidence, I don't know, of my innocence or guilt. Here I stand in front of you like I used to in school and say, "I've . . . I've forgotten, but I did know. Sure I did. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen."[61]

"Forgetting," wrote Blanchot, "is the primordial divinity, the venerable ancestor and first presence of what, in a later generation, will give rise to Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses." The image actively participates in this "forgetting", as Blanchot suggested:

> The image needs the neutrality and the fading of the world; it wants everything to return to the indifferent deep where nothing is affirmed; it tends toward the intimacy of what still subsists in the void. This is its truth. But this truth exceeds it. What makes it possible is the limit where it ceases.[62]

Each image, even the first one and especially the last one, represents "the fading of the world," and, as such, is so horrible, so incomprehensible, that it provokes forgetfulness in the midst of memory. Time and space recur. "Only we are missing."[63]

Notes

1. Peter Handke, "The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick," trans. Michael Roloff, in *Three by Peter Handke* (New York: Bard/Avon, 1977) 60.

2. Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in *The Annotated Alice*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Wings Books/Random House, 1960) 95. All future references to the "Alice" stories in the text are taken from this source.

3. Mark Strand, *Hopper* (Hopewell, New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1994) 32.

4. Kantor quoted in Ricardo Barletta, "The Artistic Work of Tadeusz Kantor Refers to His Theatre Work: Kantor's Man Becomes An Object," in *Cricot 2 Theatre: Information Guide 1986*

(Cracow: The Centre of Cricot 2 Theatre, 1986) 27. I am grateful to James Penner for drawing my attention to and lending me this source.

5. Kantor's chance discovery recalls a statement that appears in Proust: "The past is hidden beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die." Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 1 *Swann's Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Random House, 1981) 47. Kantor is quoted in *Kantor* (film), direction and screenplay by Andrzej Sapija, Telewizja polska, Film Polski, 1990. The image recurs in *Manekiny Tadeusza Kantora*, directed by Andrzej Sapija, Telewizja Polska, 1990. I am grateful to Mark Cohen for helping me gain access to and view the Kantor videos cited in this essay.

6. Paul Auster, "The Book of Memory" (1980-81), in *The Invention of Solitude* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988) 88.

7. Heidegger, quoted in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press/Pocket Books, 1992) 55.

8. Strand 59.

9. Kantor's father was a schoolteacher who did not return from World War I. *Kantor* (film). For information on Kantor's 1944 production of Stanisław Wyspiański's play *The Return of Odysseus*, see Tadeusz Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944-1990*, edited and translated and with a Critical Study of Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre by Michal Kobialka (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993) 35-41, 71-72, 120-121, 145, 193, 211-12, 260, 271-78, 281, 283, 295, 308-10, 358, 361, 390 n. 10.

10. Jan Kott, "Kantor, Memory, Memoire (1915-90)," in *The Memory of the Body: Essays on Theater and Death* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1992) 55.

11. "*Mise en abîme*" is a construct of self-referential embedding adapted from heraldry by Andre Gide in order to describe his particular type of literary composition. See Moshe Ron, "The Restricted Abyss: Nine Problems in the Theory of *Mise en Abyme*," in *Poetics Today* 2 (1987): 417-38.

12. Sartre 173.

13. Martin Gardner asserts: "The Mad Hatter was probably based upon Theophilus Carter, a furniture dealer, which accounts for the prominence of furniture in the tea-party episode." This injects a biographically-based physical trait and the semblance of the real into a room which is otherwise conceptually unfurnished and in fact "no room" at all. Gardner, 93; Kantor, "The Room Maybe a New Phase 1980," in Kantor/Kobialka, *A Journey Through Other Spaces* 143-44.

14. Martin Gardner writes: "Arthur Stanley Eddington, as well as less distinguished writers on relativity theory, have compared the Mad Tea Party, where it is always six o'clock, with that portion of DeSitter's model of the cosmos in which time stands eternally still." Švankmajer's use of stop-action photography breaks his film up into multiple discrete units of "presentness" which mirror the temporal "madness" of the Hatter's tea party. Gardner, *The Annotated Alice*, 99, n. 8. Brunella Eruli, "Kantor's Objects," in *Cricot 2 Theatre: Information Guide 1986*, 57.

15. Kantor is quoted speaking about the corner in Ron Jenkins, "Ringmaster in A Circus of Dreams: Poland's Tadeusz Kantor Is Locked in Mortal Combat with His Own Nightmarish Memories," in *American Theatre* (March 1986) 11. Kantor is quoted speaking about the auditorium in Lorenzo Lopez Sanccho, "*Let the Artists Die*, or Kantor at the Peak of His Theatre," in *Cricot 2 Theatre: Information Guide 1986*, 17.

16. The "bio-object" is discussed in Kantor/Kobialka, 101-3, 142, 240, 275, 390-91 n. 17; Philippe du Vignal, "Nature, Status and Aesthetics of An Object (fragment)," 122, and Eruli, "Kantor's Objects," 53, in *Cricot 2 Theatre: Information Guide 1986*.

17. *Kantor* (film).

18. In his film, Stoppard amended the Player's final speech (after reviving from a stabbing by retractable knife blade) to include the line, "Deaths of kings and princes and ... nobodies." The Player directs this line pointedly at Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. At the corresponding point in the play text, the Player makes no reference to who dies, only to how they die. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz*

and Guildenstern Are Dead (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 124. All future references to this play are cited directly in the text of this essay.

19. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1961) 151-53.

20. Kott 51.

21. Kantor says this in *Dziś sa twoje urodziny* (*Today Is Your Birthday Again*, 1991), a film by Marek Lachowicz.

22. The photo from the Cricoteka Archives is reproduced in Kantor/Kobialka 357.

23. Here is another statement on the same theme: "Forbear, fond taper: what thou seek'st is fire./Thy own destruction's log'd in thy desire,/Thy wants are far more safe than their supply:/He that begins to live, begins to die." Francis Quarles, "Hierogliphics of the Life of Man" (early seventeenth century), in D. J. Enright, ed., *The Oxford Book of Death* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987) 4; Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 53.

24. Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1990) 168.

25. Giovanni Raboni, "My Reflections on Kantor: A Tour Round Italy," in *Cricot 2 Theatre: Information Guide 1986*, 135.

26. Vida T. Johnson and Graham Petrie, *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) 129, 304 n. 5.

27. "Altogether the Ghost ought to be the most real, concrete character in the play. (Just as in dreams we often see people close to us who have actually died.)" Tarkovsky quoted in Andrey Tarkovsky, *The Diaries 1970-1986 (Time Within Time)*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (New York: Verso/Seagull, 1993) 381; Johnson and Petrie 118, 125, 250; Arseny Tarkovsky, "Life, Life," trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair, in Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: U of Texas P, 1991) 143.

28. Aleksandr Gladkov, "Master rabotaet," in *Vstrechi s Meyerkhol'dom* (Moscow 1967), 500-502 and "Iz vsopominaniy o Meyerkhol'de," *Moskva teatral'naya* (Moscow, 1960) 365-66. Quoted in Paul Schmidt, ed. *Meyerhold at Work*, trans. Paul Schmidt, Ilya Levin and Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980) 19.

29. Michal Kobialka, "Found Reality," "The Quest for the Self/Other: A Critical Study of Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre," in *A Journey Through Other Spaces* 374, 383.

30. Foreman believes death to be "the hidden subject of *all* theater," a fact that has become even clearer in his more recent plays. Richard Foreman, "From the Beginning," in *Unbalancing Acts: Foundations for a Theater*, ed. Ken Jordan (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1992) 72; Richard Foreman, "Things I Tell Myself when I fall into the trap of making the writing imitate 'experience,'" in *Reverberation Machines* (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1985) 208; Private conversation with Richard Foreman, 8 June 1995.

31. Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) 99.

32. Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982) 44.

33. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982) 258.

34. Auster, "Portrait of an Invisible Man," in *The Invention of Solitude* 7.

35. Jennifer Bloomer, *Architecture and the Text: The (S)crypts of Joyce and Pianesi* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993) 162; Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 113 (quote).

36. Renato Palazzi, "Meaningful Return to Milan: Kantor—Sad Smiles: A Great Success of *Let the Artists Die* in CRT," in *Cricot 2 Theatre: Information Guide 1986*, 25.

37. *Kantor* (film).

38. Kantor quoted in Kobialka, "Found Reality" 365.

39. Eruli 57.

40. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977) 103.

41. The term "the haunted stage" is taken from Marvin Carlson, "The Haunted Stage: Recycling and Reception in the Theatre," *Theatre Survey* 1 (May 1994): 5-18.

42. This reference was adapted from Franz Grillparzer by Peter Handke to describe his "Alice," his mother, who commited suicide. Peter Handke, "A Sorrow Beyond Dreams: A Life Story" (1972), trans. Ralph Manheim, in *Three by Peter Handke* 239-98 (quote, p. 290).

43. I am grateful to Olga Partan, an actress in Efros's production, for sharing with me her eyewitness account of *Tartuffe*.

44. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* 248.

45. Jean-Jacques Lacercle, *Philosophy Through the Looking Glass: Language, Nonsense, Desire* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), cited in Bloomer 119, 162; James L. Calderwood, *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in Hamlet* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 65.

46. Molière, *Tartuffe*, trans. Richard Wilbur (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963) 128.

47. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 253.

48. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 136; Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 362; Brigitte Peucker, *Incorporating Images: Film and the Rival Arts* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 12.

49. Kantor, "The Room. Maybe a New Phase 1980," in *A Journey Through Other Spaces* 144.

50. Carroll gave this answer in a new preface he wrote for the 1896 edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* Among the other answers to the riddle is: "Because Poe wrote on both." Sam Loyd, *Cyclopedia of Puzzles* (1914) 114. Both quotations are in Gardner, 95, n. 3. I have adapted the idea of spatially rebuilding flat narrative from Michel Butor's discussion of the detective novel in his novel *Passing Time*, trans. Jean Stewart (London: Jupiter/Faber and Faber, 1965) 158.

51. Richard Foreman, *Lava*, in *Unbalancing Acts* 321.

52. Richard Foreman, Introduction to *Lava* 315.

53. Foreman, *Lava* 321.

54. Eruli, 56 (quote); *Kantor* (film).

55. Kantor, "The Milano Lessons 4," in *A Journey Through Other Spaces* 221.

56. Baudrillard 46.

57. Eruli 56.

58. *Today Is Your Birthday Again* (film).

59. *Today Is Your Birthday Again* (film).

60. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 254; Kantor, "Further On, Nothing . . .," in *A Journey Through Other Spaces* 68.

61. *Kantor* (film).

62. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 99, 106; Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* 254.

63. Kott 53.

Fig. 17. Tadeusz Kantor's drawing: *Untitled* (December 6, 1990). Courtesy of Anna Halczak.