

AND TEARS
WE COULD NOT HAVE CHOSEN WORSE IN THE TIMES WHEN
THE UNDISPUTABLE RULE BELONGED TO THE TRIBUNAL OF
THE MIND
ONE WOULD BE CHARFED NOT ONLY WITH DISSENT
BUT ALSO BACKWARDNESS,
ONE OUGHT TO HAVE POSSESSED THE STRONG HERETICAL
CHARACTER
I FELT THEN LIKE A GRAND 'HERESIARCH'.
THE NOSTALGY WHICH FOR SOME TIME ALREADY
HAD BEEN REACHING ME STRONGER AND STRONGER
WAS MY REVELATION
TO SOMETHING THAT STOOD AT THE THRESHOLD
OF THE VISIBLE,
MYSTERIOUS AND IMPERATIVE,
IT WAS THE DISCOVERY OF RECOLLECTION
IT CAME JUST IN TIME, FOR IN THE GREAT CAMPAIGN
AGAINST
THE VISIBLE,
AND THE MATERIAL,
IN WHICH I ACTUALLY TOOK PART MYSELF,
THE HEAVIEST CANNONS HAD JUST BEEN ROLLED OUT
OF SCIENTIFICISM.
IT WAS ABSOLUTELY ALIEN TO ME.
4.
AND TO CLOSE THAT CHAPTER
IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO CARRY OUT
A REVISION
AND REHABILITATION OF THE NOTION
OF THE PAST
THIS IS WHAT I DID DO.
TRAVELLING ACROSS THE WORLD I PROCLAIMED
THE TRIUMPH
OF THE PAST,
TRUSTING HUMBLY THIS WAS THE ONLY TIME
REAL AND SIGNIFICANT

(IN ART),
BECAUSE IT WAS ALREADY FINITE!
AT LAST THE MEMORABLE MOMENT OF
DECISION HAD ARRIVED
FOR ME TO
EXPRESS MY RECOLLECTIONS.
THEN IT BECAME NECESSARY TO LEARN ABOUT
THE FUNCTIONING
OF MEMORY
AND SO THERE BEGAN THE DECADE-LASTING ERA
OF MY TWO CREATIONS
THE DEAD CLASS AND
WIELOPOLE, WIELOPOLE,
WHICH WERE SUPPOSED TO CONFIRM
THE TRUTH ABOUT MY AVOWED, BLASPHEMOUS IDEAS.
IT WAS THE ERA OF MY OWN AVANT-GARDE
OF RECOLLECTION,
MEMORY,
THE INVISIBLE,
EMPTINESS AND DEATH.
5.
DEATH.
Death.
THIS IS WHEN THE ORIGINALLY INNOCENT
WINDOW PEEPING IS OVER.
FOR THE WINDOW CONCEALS A NUMBER OF DARK SECRETS.
THE WINDOW AWAKENS ONE'S FEARS AND APPREHENSIONS
OF WHAT IS 'BEYOND'.
THEA THE CHILDREN'S ABSENCE,
THE IMPRESSION OF THE CHILDREN HAD LIVED THEIR LIVES
ALREADY, THEY PASSED AWAY
AND THAT IT WAS ONLY BY THAT FACT OF DYING,
THROUGH DEATH
THAT THE CLASS FILLED UP WITH RECOLLECTIONS,
AND IT WAS ONLY THEN THAT THE MEMORIES STARTED TO
LIVE THEIR OWN LIVES

AND THEY GAINED THE MYSTRIOUS SPIRITUAL POWER.
THERE CAN BE NOTHING STRONGER, NOTHING STRONGER ...
RECENTLY, AFTER ALMOST 10 YEARS WHEN
THE DEAD CLASS TRAVELLED ROUND THE WORLD
I BECAME AWARE OF YET ANOTHER ASPECT OF THAT
FASCINATION
'THROUGH THE WINDOW'.
VISUALNESS
AS A PREREQUISITE OF PERCEPTION,
IS THE VIEW 'FROM THE OUTSIDE'
THE PRIGGISH MATERIAL 'TANGIBILITY'
THE PEDANTIC CHECKABILITY
HAD ALL PRODUCED IN ME THE SENSE OF RESISTANCE
AND THE IMPULSE TO CROSS OVER
THE VISIBILITY LEVEL,
THE PEREMPTORY AND INEXORABLE CONDITION,
THE 'CABLE', THE 'WIRE'
PROBABLY THE ONLY ONE ABLE TO GUARANTEE
ONE'S 'INSIGHT'.
THE IDEA OF *THE DEAD CLASS* WAS DERIVED
FROM THE VERY FRACTIONAL, BASHFUL VISION.
THE WHOLE METHOD OF THE PERFORMANCE FUNCTIONED
UPON THE PRINCIPLE
OF ONE'S VIEWING (OR IS THIS 'VIEWING' AT ALL?)
OF WHAT IS CLOSELY SHIELDED
BEHIND AN IMPENETRABLE SHELL.
6.
THAT MUCH ACCLAIMED FORM,
WHICH FOR MILLENIUMS HAS CLAIMED ITS RIGHT
TO BE THE CONTENTS AND ESSENCE OF THE ART WORK
IT IS HIGHLY IMPROPER
TO REFUSE TO CONTENT ONESELF WITH WHAT IS 'OUTSIDE',
TO ENDEAVOUR LOOKING DIFFERENTLY,
FROM 'WITHIN',
TO TAKE A FURTIVE LOOK.
IT IS BY NO MEANS AN EASY TASK

THE PRICE ONE PAYS FOR IT IS
ONE'S ENCOUNTER WITH DEATH.

The Dead Class

Isabel Tejada

I believe that the force that attracts the true essence of this show is greater and changeable in the European civilisation of consumer society. Nonetheless, it seems to get closer to the awareness of notion of death in such a way that it reminds us of Romantics and Baroques, and acquires intensity that can be contemplated in the civilisations of Middle and Far East, and also in the American and Latin American art.

Krzysztof Miklaszewski

The Dead Class by Tadeusz Kantor (1976)

The origin of the Polish stage manager Tadeusz Kantor's masterpiece *The Dead Class* can be located in the emotion. For those who missed the chance to see it live, this emotion can still be felt on film and video¹ recordings or in pictures² taken on different stages all over the world. However these simple recordings are, more than just things of arts, these traces convey the death, paraphrasing Roland Barthes and allowing us to transfer his reflections on photography in the field of image in motion. Kantor, who died in 1990, was a stage manager himself, so he was always present in his performances of the corner/limbo scene. His arms directed and conducted the rhythmic movement of the actors under the sound of an old Viennese waltz, his hand was on his chin, wondering what was happening; alas these are the arms, hands and the chin of a dead man!

A hard blow seems to take out the guts. This is the result of an intense thought that goes into detail in the terrifying idea of death. The emotion was what encouraged Kantor to write and direct *The Dead Class* as well as *The Small Manifesto* and *Theatre of Death*; the emotion, an efficient means that he perfectly knew how to feed an audience in tiny but intense doses that always left the theatre overwhelmed. Kantor himself stated that in 1971 when he lived in a village on the coast "that had small houses and the down-graded school of all the schools he had ever seen—it was abandoned, empty and it had only one classroom-. I could see through the filthy panes

of the two windows, shabby windows. I placed my face against the glass and I looked deep inside my own mind. In my wayward memories, I was a little boy sitting in a poor country classroom, once again. His desk had knife scratches and he was wetting with spit his ink-covered fingers to turn over the small pages. Excessive rubbing of the floor had made the wooden floor show its grains. The classroom walls were whitewashed and had deposited the white powdery substance on the lower part of the walls. There was a black crucifix on the wall. Today standing next to the window, alas I have discovered that the memory exists".³

This vision for him was just like discovering bun of the protagonist in Marcel Proust's *In Search of The Lost Time*. Unknowingly, this had led him to his childhood in the village of Wielopole and to the school where he had studied. This was the effect of an unconscious memory recall, which without warning, sprang out of nowhere; a spontaneously redeemed memory that Kantor recreated by provoking set responses in the viewer. He superseded the time and space thanks to overcoming all hurdles, hence placing all the possible instances of time and space in the field of art. The memory revealed its both facets simultaneously: it is used as a liberating mechanism, but it also acts as a trap which, in a harsh way, makes us aware of a irretrievable past, a past that is bonded to a future in a democratic way and once for all shows the same facet to all of us –just like the medieval man proclaiming the Death Dance.

The early memories have perished and exist no more, the ones which led him straight to the idea of death. Thus, he recreated a school of dead elderly who also met the children-ghosts of their childhood (represented by dummies). Childhood was relived as a change. The tragic and grotesque characters of a time appear dislocated between the actor and the dummy, but both are alive and at the same dead. Ones who existed before exist no more. In spite of this revelation, all through *The Dead Class* stories are revealed –so perhaps this way we can rename unfinished and powerful images that make up different acts –in which we are reminded how we used to learn. However, in vain, as Walter Benjamin brilliantly explains that we cannot learn the same thing⁴ twice. This is one of the dramas of growing up and becoming an

adult hence losing our emotions we feel when we understand what a noun is or when we discover the result of adding one plus one is two. Why do the elderly say that the most intense memoirs are those that appear with greater clarity at the end of our life and are related to our childhood. For this reason, this looking back to the past, Kantor's elderly, the dead, cannot do away with what they have been; therefore they accumulate all their past and attach it to children's cerulean flesh –the man who was a soldier, the woman who was a prostitute, the woman who had a baby and became a mother, who carried on her back a small school body wearing a shiny black uniform.

All the elderly carry their childhood on their backs as if it were like a swinging rucksack that cantilevered over the wheel of their old bicycle and hung from their necks. The elderly also keep an object that represents and summarizes the story of their lives. Objects that are extremely important in Tadeusz Kantor's dramas but in a very different way from how objects are treated in other historic avant-garde plays. These are things that, not just pass through his plays, but also through his plastic arts and, even, his work in the field of performance and *happening*. Kantor's object is not an *objet trouvé* which enables him to create a meaningless sculpture that refutes the function of the original object. A sculpture, which is created and due to its analogy, awakens the bias of the image in our subconscious. Kantor's object jogs the memory and preserves the hallmarks of its owner and the traces of his energy. It is an object from a second-hand shop, which is almost useless and is piled up on a rubbish tip, it is the same object that invigorates the actions of the French artist Christian Boltanski. The object that occasionally becomes a peduncle of the character creating in this hybridisation, a dead flesh and inorganic matter monster.

More than once, the influence asserted by Bauhaus or Dadaism on Kantor's work has been discussed. Kantor himself, on occasions, mentioned this influence both in the interviews and in his texts. In the early part of the XX century, far away from the dissident banality of the genius Duchamp, Kantor lived in Cracow during the Second World War. He was born in Wielopole in 1915, in a half-Jewish and half-Catholic town, so he had observed how the Jewish homes were emptied out and how food for a last lunch was left on the table in a

dining room awaiting, in vain day after day, until it got covered with dust, or the bed which had been made for the return of someone who was never to come back. He was not persecuted by the Nazis, nevertheless he witnessed how the Jewish quarter was evacuated and he saw some deportations to the extermination camp nearby in Auschwitz –his father who had converted to Judaism died there. During the war, he used an abandoned old synagogue⁵ as a place for rehearsals. Even nowadays, if you visit the old Jewish quarter in Cracow, you can walk through deserted streets and the streets where the dirty black windows panes conceal the rooms that, under the government law, can only be occupied by the small number of descendants of those Jews. Here's the tragic sense of the objects recycled by Kantor for his works: these are memory receptacles that have the same value as a character, even as spectators. We must highlight this fact again and again, as the Polish playwright is far away from Marcel Duchamp's⁶ metalinguistic intentions; his objects do not become something else, but they remain in their silhouettes, adhere in a unit that goes beyond what regarded as functional in order to become the attribute of a dead, a trace of the past that brings back memories, as in the aforementioned Proust's bun.

The Dead Class is emotion and memory. But, why have we chosen this work to show Tadeusz Kantor's⁷ relentless work in an art exhibition? Kantor's global creativity showing contemporariness in theatre, painting, drawing, stage, photography, and occurrence, etc, would not be fully unveiled if we just focused on his paintings or on his work as a stage manager. If we look back on his creative production, we can appreciate that he worked in several different fields from the start; we can contemplate how his creations actually complement one another on many occasions hence they can help to explain one another when they do not use the same language through which these unfold questions that may not be explained just by themselves alone. For this reason, we considered that it is best to chose just one theme that summarizes a complete series of works in order to embrace and analyse it in the different contemporary terms used by Kantor. Therefore, this enables us to understand this Polish creator in all his programmatic complexity as an interdisciplinary artist.

"The penetration of plastic arts in theatre seems fully justifiable as years ago these were the neuralgic point subjected to sudden contradictory transformations and turbulences that were evidence of his vitality. As he was a painter and a man of theatre, he never detached himself from these two activities. He evidently realised that on introducing theatre in a direct and possibly in a radical way in the problems presented by plastic arts, he subjected it to the temptation of betrayal provoking it to emerge from its peaceful dwellings illegally.... Placing it in a totally unknown dimension".⁸ These words underline his militancy in plastic arts which had undergone a surprising change amongst the avant-gardes of the early part of the XX century,⁹ the mood which Kantor wished to pass onto the theatre. He profoundly rejected the subservience that the conventional theatre of the time offered with respect to literature; he considered that just through the theatrical freedom so distanced from the illustration of the text and the reproduction of the daily routine could capture the "full reality". And this freedom was only possible, according to the playwright, "through close relationships with the totality of the art"¹⁰. *The Dead Class*, set on stage for the very first time in the basement of the Krzysztofory Gallery in 1975 by *Cricot 2*. This is one of the most famous plays of the author, on the one hand, because of the number of performances that were held all around the world and the shock effect these produced throughout Europe.¹¹ And on the other hand, this meant a far-reaching rupture with respect to the previous periods of Kantor¹² inaugurating its theatrical climax ("I decided to abandon the highways of avant-garde in order to take the small paths of graveyard"). From here onwards, the works of the Polish playwright will not get away from one of his main influences, Witkiewicz. If *The Dead Class* is based on the work *Brain Tumour* of this playwright, just the fragments of the original text can be set in the dramatisation of the work by *Cricot 2*.¹³ In this work, all his previous experiences are wisely intermingled, used by an autonomous theatre that wishes to embrace the threshold of the convention and turn it into an "exclusive area of art manifestation" –in fact the complexity of *The Theatre of Death* is the result of previous stages of Kantor. A theatre that nourishes itself from multiple influences and resources that it receives

from other non-dramatic art disciplines and that, at present, works like paradigm of its successful creative expansion and of symbiotic connections between his theatrical works and his plastic art.

It is important to remind that in the area of plastic arts, in the 60's there was a bitter controversy amidst those that defended a modernisation based on the "irreducible essence" of different disciplines regarded for pure extensions, as oppose to some artists – amongst which we find the Minimalists but also the creators that waded away from the stringent rules of modernity- that make attempts to integrate different arts. One of the grand figures of modernity, the North American critic, Michael Fried considered that the identification of art dimension of the spectator that was mainly provided by the Minimalism –a tendency that attacked till extenuation – dropped out from the theatre, which endangered the survival of the art itself.¹⁴ He defended the independence of the work as a phenomenal manifestation that existed away from the real dimension, preserved its temporality and acclaimed both for painting and sculpture the instantaneous perception of the whole of this due to the existence of "some essential internal relationships".

Also, the North American, Rosalind Krauss defended her contemporary artists, acclaiming that, in the case of sculpture, one could say that the theatre and "in particular its relationship with the spectator context as an instrument to destroy, investigate and rebuild".¹⁵

These mutual influences, which in fact had bloomed to portray their presence in the latter part of the 50's both in Europe and in USA, were the creative magma of Kantor, seen from the other side i.e. the side of the theatre. What the modernity considered as the beginning of the end of art and the corruption of its rules, for the playwrights such as Kantor, Sol Lewitt, Yves Klein, Marcel Broodthaers or Dan Flavin – just to quote some – was the beginning of a new era of creation. The corrupted Arts, in the sense of influenced, undisciplined and hybrid, as a path, as Kantor himself explained, in order to obtain an art that is independent from tyrannies of a convention that is incapable of producing emotions for already well known. If the rebellion for the plastic artists meant conceiving the dimension as a contingent area,

as something open to the spectator, as a work that can be especially extended and transformed in each perception, for Kantor to tread on the changing path was hard, as since 1920's, the theatre had not had any incidences that meant structural transformations in its conception. If the artists of the *Land Art* came out to perform in the open air, and if the performers y musicians of *Fluxus* carried out their performances in any public place, Kantor abandoned these conventional stages and preferred any place that was full of daily connotations. The basements of Krzysztofory Gallery had a low brick vault that did not allow the separation between the stage and the stalls, but equally it could be performed in a laundrette, on a glacier, in a hospice, at a train station –nonetheless it could also be performed at conventional theatres.

If the Polish artist was to take any of the more radical occidental avant-garde tendencies of the late 60's and early 70's were taken to the field of theatre, what relationship will he keep between different creative facets?. To begin with, what strikes us the most that these penetrated the same space and shared the identical iconography. For example, one can interpret a parallel and influenced trend how Kantor's mind shaped characters, objects and scenes in his plastic art works. He even created *A school class. The Closed Work* (1983) deserves to be considered as the best visual speaker of his work. It was created in the early part of 80's when Kantor was invited to participate in panoramic presentation of art in Poland at the Centre Georges Pompidou de Paris (*Présence Polonaise*, 1982). Instead of a setting, this work should be considered as an architecture in line with the work by Richard Hamilton (*Fun House*) or Ben Vautier (*Le magasin de Ben*) made at the latter part of the 50's and the early part of the 60's, and even closer to the abandoned daily spaces recreated by Ilya Kabakov (we visualise the architectural setting *The man who went flying in space*, 1981), generates an inner space to which the spectator can only reach visually – Kantor allows the spectator to observe a child sitting at his desk with just one of the windows open of the circular tower (a window used as a metaphor for threshold between life and death) the same way what he experienced in 1971 during the unforgettable memory that gave birth to the *Theatre of Death*. A dead child sitting at the desk next to the cross that crowns his grave and hieratically looking at the

blackboard, creates another space, a *tableau vivant* paradoxically dead in which the space of death, separating the boundaries of life represented by the visitor created in the same way as Kantor secludes the public from the stage set in the basement of Krzysztofory's. The barriers that traditionally, both in the scenic art as in the plastic arts, underline the separation between the space of art and the space of life but it is rejected here. The existence of two spaces are reused to express in metaphors, the space of life and the space of death. Its feeble parapet appearances vanish into the work, thanks to the empathic emotion.

In his performances at the Krzysztofory's Gallery, Kantor presented ropes attached to wooden balls that warned us of the separation allowed between a painting or a sculpture in a museum.¹⁶ Whenever he travelled and he had to work in conventional theatrical spaces, such as his visit to Maria Guerrero, he maintained the ropes limiting just a tiny part of the proscenium where the action took place – a spatial restriction that comes from the period of the *Zero Theatre*. Even in his French settings, he created a scene that could not be refuted. He let his work influenced by other disciplines – even he deliberately used the rope – he constantly recreated drawings and frequently referred to paintings.

On the other hand, drawings which were considered as scenic sketches, are the papers that Kantor signed as a finished work. And, on occasions, these were painted at a later stage after 1975. The drawings that make up the series of *The Dead Class*, and of which three magnificent examples, mainly made in 1983, are shown at this exhibition. These are oil paintings adapted for children – in fact, and for the Spanish public, it seems more like a cuddly toy than a dummy- that have been deprived of their will and whose members fall off show no strength, as if these was not a muscular mass or spread over a desk that can be seen through it, a desk that provides greater physical matter than the flesh – in the case of the oil paintings which are kept at the Muzeum Sztuki of Łódź; we find weak children coming out of the terrible darkness of a window that is used as a metaphor for death and who move towards the other darkness which is just as black – in the painting that belongs to the Galeria 86, a window appears as a

continual resource both in the paintings and in the drawings, in the aforementioned settings in Pompidou and in the theatre work (this is the attribute of one of the female characters of *The Dead Class* that always observes what surrounds her through the framework of absent dwellings). The objects are constantly appear in images that could suffered an array of interpretations, but images brought forth by the creator's mind who establishes that "the art must be enigmatic, hermetic till it reaches inaccessibility".¹⁷

There are other mechanisms that integrate the scenic work and plastic work of Kantor: the presence of the author. In some drawings, but above all in the paintings, he makes constant use of the self-portrait in an obsessive interpellation on the personal identity and on the idea of occupying time and space.

The ironic questioning, established as a comic script on the time and space that it occupies – the emotions that produce the work of Kantor can make us cry and laugh at the same time-, this aspect is constantly present in the work of Kantor – even in those theatre works based on the texts of Witkiewicz – such as the director of amphitheatre where performances are held on the sand; as the director of orchestra that gives the turn to the pianos and fortes in the concert: instructing those what is happening from an ambiguous place – we have called this place a limbo before-, a no-man's land – or at least just Kantor's – between what is theatrical and real, between life and death. Kantor is one of the elements that act as a source of emotion, as a corporal presence to pull down invisible barriers that separate the two spaces, shattering the illusionism of the scene.

If both spaces are the aspects of life and death, Kantor more than being Caronte –as an illustrative way he presented Jan Kott¹⁸- played the part of a demiurgo during his presence and free transition for both spaces as these were created by Joseph Beuys or James Lee Byars. The photographs that were taken show the presence of Kantor on stage during the period that stage performance lasts, even in the images taken on film by Wajda, show a thoughtful creator, above all, these show Kantor under a heroic aura. Kantor is an actor and at the same time, he is the incredible and true life and death of *The Dead Class*. Nonetheless, in his pictorial work, where the appeal for autobiography

and self-portrait constantly convert stronger and stronger at the end of his life, where there is a presentation that seems more obvious than what is *represented*, on set occasions his image appears covered with a veil of nostalgia and sadness, almost as if he is being converted from being the director of theatre to a clown who suffers from the cruellest calamities of the world: As a conscientious clown who can foresee in a dream some comic touches that appear in his *Self-portrait* of 1988. It is painted on a black background and the author is shown nude with frozen flesh, dull eyes and a cigarette in his hand, as if waiting for something.

In the other paintings, he questions the time-space concept of convention and the life itself, either by means of a painting attached to a sculpture and in which the character is presented half pictorially and the other half in the physical matter of a dummy that is situated outside the canvas – *I hold a painting in which I am seen painted while I am holding a painting* (1988); *it's about time not to be sitting. I come out* (1988); *I'm cleaning the picture, on which there is painted how I'm cleaning the picture* (1988). Finally, there is a work which is also signed in 1988 in which he represents the time of his own death while lying on the death bed, with his hands raised, erected and surrounded by candles titled with the ingenious black humour *I shall not leave this painting*. His presence in the scene of *The Dead Class* was also to anticipate his own death and, for empathy, he anticipated the death of all the characters. He offers time that is not lineal which suspends concepts such as past, present or future. A temporal tension that developed both in the plastic art as in the theatrical art: because the memory –and Federico Fellini also made us aware of this in a magnificent way – it does not have a running theme, but it is full of discontinued leaps, from tunnels that give rise to the fact that some memories are vague and unexplainably linked to the others.

Therefore, it is not his presence which is the simple hallmark of his work or a hint of complexity latched onto the public –as we can appreciate in the case of Alfred Hitchcock- but a vital determination with the assumption –preceding from the avant-garde, mainly from Dadaism¹⁹ that the barriers between art and life are very fragile. A work related to performance in which the element Kantor cannot be

substituted. Hence his disappearance means the end of his work –his works have not been performed again-, his work whose remains have converted into the hallmark and the documentation²⁰ in the same way as the fragments of fats that Joseph Beuys used in his *performances* and that are jealously guarded by some museums as if these were the Holy Grail. There are the hallmarks. No matter, some exhibition halls insist on converting these as works of art of their project creation. Kantor and his actors are located in the space only reserved for death. The actor repeatedly and vigorously recites the words and reminds us of the learning that was a game just like the maze. Sentences that do not tear information apart but are a vehicle towards the first vocalisation, towards the mantic reiteration of the school. The place of death is of action and motion –as revealed in a similar game *Pedro Páramo* de Juan Rulfo-. This is its sense. The spectators –the only ones that according to Kantor are alive-²¹ occupy the space of life in a paradoxical impasse of motionlessness and mutism, and just subtly, for empathy's sake and for association, can have an intimate active mood that is personal and non-transferable to anyone that happens to be sitting by you.

Kantor selected the idea of death so that the theatre could feel emotions. And for the human beings, the death or just the idea of death create the strongest commotions that make us aware of the life itself. As a fact, being conscience before the arrival of life, at the same time, is related to being conscience of death²². Every second, we live with the spade of Damocles, which is bearable thanks to our mind that is full of concealment strategies, thanks to thinking of death with intensity that is precise just on some occasions. Kantor tears apart these strategies and obliges us to think and feel intensely till reaching the unbearable limits, till scrutinising the memory. This is the path that takes you to occupy another space and to participate through emotion.

¹ On this occasion, research documents and two recordings made from two different viewpoints were used as presentation material. One the one hand, the presentation of the film made by the Polish director Andrzej Wajda in 1976 under the production of Pöltel (Polish Television) and with the consent of Kantor. Wajda's work can be considered as quite an open interpretation of *The Dead Class*, one can

appreciate this from the scrapping of the basement scenes at Krzysztofory's Gallery. Here the dead elderly people run through the fields in a sunny and free recreation time or wander in the basements of a dull building. According to some of the actors of *Cricot 2*, who at present are managing the Cricoteka (the centre that safeguards the great part of the scenes and documentations of Kantor in the world and that is mainly in charge of studying his work). This interpretation by Wajda displeased Kantor, giving rise to anger and fury in a man who by nature was a difficult character, anyway. The other recording corresponds to the visit of the same play to the Teatro María Guerrero of Madrid on 30th March 1983; a video by A. Gallego and F. Echegaray that is stored in the archives of the *Centre of Theatrical Documentation of Ministry for Education, Culture and Sports of Spain* to which we thank for such a deed.

² The *Cricoteka* preserves in its archives some magnificent photos by the Italian photographer Maurizio Buscarino; although those images, which documented the work, were also immortalised in abundance by Romano Martinis, Jacquie Bablet or by the local photographers that belonged to the towns where the *Cricot 2* went. In our case, we have taken photographs from the archive kept at the Centre of Theatrical Documentation and those taken by the photographer Ángel Fernández Saura when *The Dead Class* visited the town of Murcia in 1983.

³ In the documentary "Kantor", *Tadeusz Kantor w kolekcji filmowej*, by Andrzej Sapija. Produced in 1985 by the Polish Television.

⁴ BENJAMIN, Walter, *Infancia en Berlín hacia 1900*, Barcelona, Círculo de Lectores, 1992.

⁵ Vid. DORFLES, Gillo, "Kantor" in *La mia opera, il mio viaggio. Comento intimo*, Milano, Federico Motta Editore, 1991, page. 7. Dorfles highlights that the work of Kantor is influenced as a result of having lived the tragic years of the Second World War in Nazi occupied Poland.

⁶ Dorfles underlines the conceptual distance and mainly existential one that existed in the objects used by the dadaists, and even the formal comparisons that on occasions are made with Kantor's work with the Povera Art. Dorfles quotes the following text of Kantor, in an existential manner, is related to the object on the cutting edge which

during the Second World War separated those who were alive from the dead. " Shall we consider a lost object as a thing of art? Who cared after the war of this term that was originated in the times of the First World War and of Cabaret Voltaire... But, with respect to my work, it was not so simple and rational conceived with a halo of aestheticism as it had already happened then in Zurich in that cabaret ... The war was another thing. We played with death, not in a café, but in passing of every day and night" *Ibidem*, page 9.

⁷ The first time in our country, we had the chance to see an anthological exhibition on the plastic work of the Polish artist was in *The Memory Corner* (1960 – 1990), organised by the *Fundación Telefónica* in 1997 in collaboration with the *Fundación Caixa de Cataluña*, expositions that visited the towns of Madrid y Barcelona –this show is based on the plastic art of Kantor. The *Instituto Cervantes* organised in Poland (Fine Arts Museum in Cracovia) the following the under the title of *Motivos españoles en la obra de Tadeusz Kantor* whose expository speech was mainly iconographic.

⁸ KANTOR, Tadeusz, "El teatro imposible" in *El Teatro de la Muerte* (Denis Bablet Dir.), Buenos Aires, Ediciones de la Flor, 1984, page. 233.

⁹ This trust in the creative possibilities and dissidence of plastic creation is owed to a profound knowledge of Historic Avant-garde Movements such as the Russian Constructivism and the Bauhaus –which were used in the settings during the German occupation such as *Balladyna* by J. Slowacki-, the dadaism and surrealism, result of a pictoric preparation that commenced when he finished his high school studies at the Tarnów High School and started his studies at the School of Fine Arts in Cracovia in the 30's. it seems symptomatic that, also following the tendency inaugurated by the Avant-garde, Kantor would never write texts but manifestos.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, page. 229.

¹¹ Peter Brook illustrated it as follows: "*The Dead Class* meant an enormous *shock*. It gathered the sufferings of Europe. I have often stated that the theatre is the life concentrate. *The Dead Class* was exactly that: the experience of the people concentrated in just one image. A spectacle after which the theatre was not the same again" .

¹² *Clandestine Theatre, Informal Theatre, Zero Theatre, Theatre-Happening, Impossible Theatre and Theatre of Death – The Dead Class* belongs to the latter mentioned period – these are the creative periods of Kantor. "Every time I write a new spectacle, there is a change, not in the attitude because the attitude remains to be the same throughout one's life, but in the formal means; it is necessary to have a new answer from the reality of the external world, and from the present situation". Vid. UBERSFELD, Anne, "Kantor –presents. Entretien avec Tadeusz Kantor" in *Théâtre Public*, n° 39, Gennevilliers, May-June 1981, page. 59 (Cit. in BABLET, Denis, "Tadeusz Kantor y El Teatro Cricot 2" in *Tadeusz Kantor, ¿Qué revienten los artistas!*, in *Cuadernos El Público* (n° 11), Madrid, Theatrical Documentation Centre, 1986, pages. 22-26). It is essential to highlight that the texts, and even some decisions in the theatrical play of Kantor, are full of traditions; the contradictions that he acknowledged as the motor of his creation.

¹³ There were three main influences of Kantor: Gombrowicz, Witkiewicz and Bruno Schulz. Vid. BABLET, Denis, "Tadeusz Kantor y El Teatro Cricot 2", op. cit., page. 8. Witkiewicz, apart from being the author of the great part of the texts that gave birth to the Kantor's plays – *The Octopus* (1955), *In the Country House* (1961), *The madman and the Nun* (1963), *The Water Hen* (1968), *The Dainty Shapes and Haizy Apes* (1973) – This had a great influence on him with respect to his theories on the fall of the theatre, denunciation of naturalism, the role of the actor or the reactions that the theatre must arouse in the spectators. His free inspiration of the play by Witkiewicz and his conviction of that this way he was much closer to the original text. He summed up just in one sentence "we do not interpret Witkiewicz, interpret with Witkiewicz". Ibidem, page. 18.

¹⁴ "The success, even the survival of the arts more and more depended on his ability to defeat the theatre. ... The concepts of quality and value are significant –till the point that these are vital for the art or substituting the art- or fully significant, just within the individual arts. What underlies amidst art is the theatre, in FRIED, Michael, *Art and objecthood*, in *Minimal Art*, San Sebastián, Koldo Mitxelena, 1996, pp. 76-79. Original in *Artforum* (June, 1967).

¹⁵ KRAUSS, Rosalind, *Passaggi. Storia della scultura da Rodin alla Land Art*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 1998, p. 242.

¹⁶ Precisely in the works that precede *The Dead Class*, Kantor does not create this artificial separation with the public; in isolation that, in fact, reminds us of the structure of the traditional theatre from two independent areas: seats and stage. However, since 1975 balls with a rope are placed because he considers that, from the avant-garde, the cancellation of this barrier has been done mechanically, which was not efficient for this space to be real. So he tried to cancel the division by means of light and immaterial things: through emotion and psychological shock Vid. QUADRI, Franco, "Con Tadeusz Kantor" in *Tadeusz Kantor, ¿Qué revienten los artistas!*, in *Cuadernos El Público* (n° 11), Madrid, the Centre of Theatrical Documentation, 1986, page. 32.

¹⁷ ALEXANDER, C., "Kantor: L'art doit être énigmatique" in *Les Cahiers de l'Est*, Paris, Editions Albatros, n° 12-13, 1978, page. 83.

¹⁸ At <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/1998/mar98/980322/sem-kott.html>; text taken from the book *Kadish. Ensayos sobre Tadeusz Kantor*, by Jan Kott, Gdańsk, Ed. Siowa i obraz, 1991. Translation: María Sten y Alfredo Michel.

¹⁹ Kantor accedes to Duchamp as in the decade of 60's within the Neodadaism that tended to influence greatly both on the North American art and on the European avant-garde art of the post Second World War period.

According to this, during the 50's, there were elements of the *Informal Theatre* that had a lot to do with Dada theme. However, these had reached this conclusion in an independent manner as Duchamp, who lived in USA and in Europe at that time, had been forgotten somewhat. Many of the manifestations of the absurd, use of the embellished words and the repetitions of the same element till tedium or provoking the public –as if the actor were spitting at the spectators sitting in the front row –this had a precedent in the Dada theatre for example in *Parade* (Satie, Picasso, Cocteau and Massine) of 1917, *Le coeur à gaz* (Tzara) of 1921, or in *Relâche* (Picabia and Satie) of 1924. Cfr. GOLDBERG, Roselee, *Performance Art*, Barcelona, Destino, Thames and Hudson, 1996.

²⁰ Vid. He catalogued the references that Lech Stangret made in his text "La trampa de Kantor" on the symposium at the Jagelonic University of Cracovia in 1995 after the death of Kantor, it deals with how his work should be studied there onwards. Vid also KOTT, Jan, "Post Mortem, Tadeusz Kantor 1915-1990", in *Kadish. Essays on Tadeusz Kantor*, op. cit., in which the author considers that, after the disappearance of Kantor, "his theatre is like a body with no soul" and he opted for not repeating these anymore in his works.

²¹ In the programme pamphlets of the *Dead Class* during the tour around Spain in 1983, Kantor ordered to print the sentence "in the theatre, the only living beings are the spectators".

²² "(this was) one of the main points of my self-definition. It was the certainty, which was progressively controlling me, that the notion of life cannot be recovered in art more than the absence of life ... I am interested in recovering this initial moment of emotion, which is perhaps being over-ambitious. When one sees a man fall in the street and is a victim of a sudden death, there is a separation between him and spectator, a hurdle that is felt for the first time: and it is the first time that he sees this man. And the actor feels likewise, that human looks like us in all his physical features and at the same time he is a complete stranger, behind a un breakable wall." Cit. by MIKLASZEWSKI, Krzysztof, "A *Dead Class* by Tadeusz Kantor or the new treatment of dummies in the theatre *Cricot 2* of Cracovia", in KANTOR, Tadeusz, *El Teatro de la Muerte*, op. cit., pages. 262-272.

Grzegorz Musiał

The idea of the exhibition was born in Cracow when I was wandering through Tadeusz Kantor's *rooms of imagination*.

The Cricoteka in ul. Szczepanska, the centre for documentation of the oeuvre of Tadeusz Kantor, initiated and founded by the artist himself as the place where he deposited – already in his lifetime – the art pieces and documents connected first of all with the activity of the Cricot 2 theatre.

The artist's studio in ul. Sienna, his private space, inaccessible to the

public, reserved but for his artistic activity now serves the exhibition purposes.

The Krzysztofory, a cellar, a gallery, a cafe – the magical place for the arts, the spirit of Tadeusz Kantor probably still there. The place where the artist realised his major theatre designs: *In a Small Manor House, The Water Hen, The Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes, The Dead Class*, as well as some plastic art presentations. The final decisions as to his exhibition in Murcia were taken at his table at the Krzysztofory Café.

In was in the Krzysztofory that Kantor launched his rehearsals for *The Dead Class* in 1974. Over the period of several months *The Dead Class*, the work that turned out to be his major achievement, was created. The total creation, desired to be seen by the international audiences all over the world. The performance that carried with it the hitherto unprecedented message, appealing to the viewers from different cultures and various historical backgrounds.

The Dead Class by the Cricot 2 company was presented ca two thousand times for seventeen years.

The Dead Class is much more than yet another performance of Kantor's. It is an absolute breakthrough in the artist's activity. It means both departure and arrival. It is the projection of the ideas of Gordon Craig who said the theatre had to be destroyed only to be built. The former performances by Kantor, mentioned above, were the kind of artistic dialogue with the other Polish avant-garde artist Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz – Witkacy, whose plays had provided the groundwork for his earlier productions. *The Dead Class* is the visual realisation of the idea of the Theatre of Death that followed the artist until the end of his days. His later achievement always referred to the resources rendered by *The Dead Class*.

Kantor decided to preserve the uniqueness of *The Dead Class* in the extra-theatrical form, too. In the early 1980s he realised the plastic pieces referring directly to the idea of the Theatre of Death. Upon the invitation of the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, in connection with the exhibition prepared by the Centre Pompidou in Paris the artist executed his installation *The Schoolroom – Closed Work*. A simple wooden room, almost inaccessible to the viewer, revives one of