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Michael PAGE

NOTES TOWARD A THESIS ON THEATRE AND MEMORY

...memory is the same as imagination...
(Giambattista Vico, *New Science*, 1725)

Abstract. This essay initiates an enquiry into theatre as an action of memory. From a consideration of Foucault's concept of heterotopic spaces it moves to a review of the imaginary spaces of classical mnemonic techniques and theories, and thence to their incorporation into the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages. From there it goes on to engage with the imaginary spaces of the Renaissance, known as Memory Theatres, as well as the physical space of the actual theatres of the Elizabethan period. It then seeks to discover some ways in which these conceptions of space and memory are reinvented in 20th

century and contemporary European theatre in the work of Beckett and Kantor, and finally in the reappearance of memory through the image in the work of contemporary eastern European playwrights and directors. Here the discussion focuses particularly on some recent productions at the Hungarian National Theatre in Cluj, which to this writer strongly suggest that the work of some contemporary Romanian and Hungarian directors implicitly acknowledges that theatre is, in some of its forms at least, a reification of memory images in space.

I

In his essay, "Of Other Spaces," Michel Foucault speaks of the modern era as one characterized by concern with – and anxiety about – space. This space in which we live is "a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another

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and absolutely not superimposable on one another" (OOS, 23). He describes these sites, or spaces, as being of two main types: utopian and heterotopian. Utopias are "sites with no real place," but heterotopias are "real places...that are formed in the very founding of society... which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites...are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Ibid., 24). Not surprisingly, Foucault cites the theatre as a heterotopia which juxtaposes "in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Ibid., 25). Though Foucault does not pursue the theatrical example, it goes without saying that representing, contesting, and inverting are exactly what theatre has been about to a greater or lesser degree throughout history.

Michal Kobiałka designates the room of Tadeusz Kantor's *Wielopole*, *Wielopole* (1980) as a heterotopic space, and I would go further to suggest that Kantor's work particularly, and much of Beckett's are prime instances of theatre as heterotopia, and that – most evidently in Kantor and in Beckett's *Endgame* – the locations are memory spaces. Still further, I would like in these "notes toward a thesis" to explore the notion that certain kinds of theatre constitute an interface in which memory and heterotopic space uniquely come together.

The conception of memory as spatial and imagistic has been present in the thinking of mnemonic theorists since the earliest times, and our enquiry should

start with a brief review of the classical treatises on artificial memory and its cultivation from which so much later theory developed.

The first surviving treatment of memory and its enhancement through the art of mnemotechnics, is found in Book III of the treatise *Ad C. Herrenium*, which dates from 86-82 B.C. and was once thought to be by Cicero. The unidentified author calls Memory "the treasure-house of the ideas supplied by Invention" (ACH, 205), and goes on to distinguish natural, innate memory, and artificial memory, that is, memory activated by training and discipline. His conception of the latter lays the foundation of our enquiry:

The artificial memory includes backgrounds and images. By backgrounds I mean such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale...so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory – for example, a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like. An image is, as it were, a figure, mark, or portrait of the object we wish to remember; for example, if we wish to recall a horse, a lion, or an eagle, we must place its image in a definite background. (Ibid, 210)

The imagination, the author goes on to say, can embrace any region whatsoever and in it at will fashion and construct the setting of some background. The operation of the image against this background is illustrated by the author with a scenario that is essentially dramatic. It demonstrates the power of "one notation, a single image" to evoke an entire narrative sequence, and

it is worth quoting in full:

For example, the prosecutor has said that the defendant killed a man by poison, has charged that the motive for the crime was an inheritance, and declared that there are many witnesses and accessories to this act. If in order to facilitate our defence we wish to remember this first point, we shall in our first background form an image of the whole matter. We shall picture the man in question as lying ill in bed, if we know his person. If we do not know him, we shall yet take someone to be our invalid, but not a man of the lowest class, so that he may come to mind at once. And we shall place the defendant at the bedside, holding in his right hand a cup, and in his left tablets, and on the fourth finger a ram's testicles [from which purses were made]. In this way we can record the man who was poisoned, the inheritance, and the witnesses. (Ibid, 215)

Of such iconographic specificity is theatre made: the man in bed, the poisoner, the cup, the tablets and the ram's testicles are images containing past action, and were this a scene in a play the audience would experience it as both a symbolic and actual imaging in which a complex history is made instantaneously accessible. Later, the author goes on to point out that artificial memory needs to make use of unusual or striking images or events, and not ordinary, everyday ones, and again his instances of these are active and dramatic. We must, he writes, set up images that can "adhere longest in the memory," and they will do this if they

...are not many or vague, *but doing something*; if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns or purple cloaks, for example, so that the likeness may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images... (Ibid, 221, emphasis added)

Cicero himself in *De Oratore* (55 B.C.) pursues the central conceit of memory operating as images placed or stored in localities, and – alluding to the famous tale recounted by Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* (A.D. 96) of Simonides remembering the identities of the victims of the collapse of a dining hall by retaining an accurate image of their placement before the disaster (see QOE, 63-4) – reminds us that memory images are the product of sensual experience, particularly that of sight; and further, that things heard, not seen, are best somehow translated into a visual equivalent which is then, like the others, placed in a location (CDO, 469). Interestingly, Cicero describes the images of things to be remembered as masks representing them (CDO, 360), an indication of his acknowledgment of the theatrical dimension of memory. It was Cicero, too, who established the essential connection between rhetoric and moral virtue that was to be one of the foundations of medieval scholasticism and the guiding rationale of its theatre. Memory was one of the three parts of Prudence (along with

intelligence and foresight), which was in turn one of the four cardinal virtues – the others being Justice, Fortitude and Temperance (See CDO, 327).

For Augustine, memory was one of the three parts of the soul, and in Chapter X of the *Confessions* (A.D. 397-399), he perpetuated its metaphor as a natural place like a cavern, or a constructed one like a palace, a hall or a storeroom, all of which he saw as places wherein the “inward actions” of sensory memory take place (*Confessions*, 1998, 186). He identified memory with mind and mind with self, and thus ascribed to it a high moral significance in the context of Christian faith. “Great is the power of memory,” he says, “And this is mind, this is I myself.” The infinitely diverse power of memory is a profound gift through which he is able to reach God, but it is also something that he must *transcend* in order to reach him. (SAC, 194).

In the Middle Ages the art of memory was installed unequivocally in the pantheon of virtues. From the *Ad Herrenium* and from Cicero medieval writers on memory took over definitions of the four cardinal virtues, and in this context laid particular emphasis on Prudence, which consisted of three parts, *intelligentia*, *providentia*, and *memoria*. That memory was defined as part of one of the cardinal virtues is of central importance to the nature of medieval theatre, especially of the form which prevailed after 1400 – the morality play. Frances A. Yates’ seminal book *The Art of Memory* (1966) deals extensively with medieval mnemotechnics, but curiously

she does not extend her enquiry into miracle, mystery and morality plays, which are nothing if not dramatic enactments of what every Christian needs to know and remember for salvation.

For Albertus Magnus, in *De Bono* (1246-1248), memory was the most necessary part of Prudence, and for Albertus’ student, Thomas Aquinas, writing about twenty years later, artificial memory, “the memory exercised and improved by art,” as Yates defines it, is “one of the proofs that memory is a part of Prudence” (YAM, 67, 74). Inculcating the virtues and vices, retelling the stories that make up the liturgy, teaching right conduct for salvation, all of these were imperatives that drove the art of preaching in a religious culture that predated printing, and which therefore relied profoundly on memory through the image, rather than through written or even spoken language. In their important anthology, *The Medieval Craft of Memory*, Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski consistently show through their selections that the locational model of memory as images stored in places, and the reconstituting of them as an *active* process, were fundamental to medieval teaching. As they point out in their introduction, “medieval *memoria* took the inventive function of human memory for granted, and emphasized it” (MCM, 3); in other words, “memory depended on imagination, the image-making power of the soul” (Ibid, 11). It is important to remember, though, that imagination and innovation were *aspects* of memory, which was “the faculty regarded as prior to both,

and an essential aspect to understanding" (Ibid, 22).

Yates links the medieval need to remember through imagery to the iconography found in manuscripts and sculptures, and the paintings of such artists as Giotto and Lorenzetti. This iconography is frequently grotesque, and invariably exists in significant *loci*, and thus satisfies at least two of the requirements recommended by the author of *Ad Herrenium*. But another clear link can be made to medieval drama. In the mystery and morality plays of the Middle Ages, both of which primarily were intended for religious and moral instruction, space and location, and the deployment of images within them, were of central importance to the message being conveyed. The mansions or *loci*, established within churches and cathedrals for the performances of liturgical dramas in the early Middle Ages, were essentially memory locations, whether they stood for standard features such as paradise or hell, or places specific to the story being told, such as Noah's Ark, or the temple at Jerusalem. In later vernacular religious drama, performed outside in town squares or fields, pageant wagons or scaffolds fulfilled the same function as mansions.

The supreme surviving example of the theatrical use of space for moral instruction is the morality play *The Castle of Perseverance*, which has been dated from 1400 to 1425. Not only is the conception highly elaborate, but it is visually schematized in a plan attached to the manuscript. This clearly delineates where the mansions are located, what

the central structure is, and where the audience is required to be. In this play, which enacts "the whole scheme of man's life...from birth to death, from innocence to salvation" (SAS, 1), the Castle itself is represented by a tower placed in the center of a large circle, with "mankind's bed" placed in the lower half of it. At the edge of the circle at the four points of the compass are scaffolds, which are another form of *loci* and which represent the locations of Deus (east), Mundus (west), Flesh (south), and Belial (north), with Covetous at a north-east point between Deus and Belial. The locations and personifications of vices and virtues, and the fact that the audience would not have been stationary but, like the actors, moving from place to place as the action demanded, meant that the impact of the moral instruction was highly dependent on its images being physicalized and so remembered. Morality plays were truly a theatrical translation of classical and medieval arguments on the centrality of artificial memory to the exercise of prudence and right conduct. In *The Castle of Perseverance*, Mankind encounters such Vice-embodiments as Lust-Liking, Pleasure, Folly, Pride, Wrath and Envy, who entice him to the various scaffolds until Penance draws him to the Castle. The Vices attack the castle and Mankind is tempted away then claimed by Death, but through the intercession of Justice, Mercy, Truth and Peace his soul is saved by God's mercy and ascends to the Deus scaffold.

It is interesting to juxtapose this actual enactment of what is to be remembered for

salvation with a one-dimensional scheme – “The Tower of Wisdom” a pictorial diagram made by John of Metz in the 13th century. Like the castle in the morality play the tower is an allegorical structure intended to act as a mnemonic device, with Humility as its foundation, the cardinal virtues as columns, and multiple rooms each containing a virtuous action or a prohibition against a sinful one. At the top of the tower sit actions of judgment, discipline and punishment. Running up one side of the tower is the inscription “Height of the tower is perseverance in the good.” (The diagram and the translations of its inscriptions are from Lucy Freeman Sandler’s essay, “John of Metz, *The Tower of Wisdom*” in MCM, op cit., 217)

II

In her preface to *The Art of Memory*, Frances A. Yates tells us that her book grew out of pondering two questions. The first was “Why did Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas regard the use in memory of the places and images of [*Ad Herrenium*] as a moral and religious duty?” (YAM, xii). The answer was that it seemed evident that “the Middle Ages might think of figures of virtues and vices as memory images” (Ibid). Again, Yates does not specifically mention theatre, but if this assertion is correct then we can safely draw the inference that both the religious morality plays, like *The Castle of Perseverance*, *Everyman*, *Mundus et Infans*, and *The Interlude of Youth*, and the secular ones, like *Respublica*, *Magnificence*, and *All for Money*, the virtue and vice characters

are essentially memory images operating in mnemonic *loci*.

The second question was, “Why, when the invention of printing seemed to have made the great Gothic artificial memories of the Middle Ages no longer necessary, was there this recrudescence of the interest in the art of memory in the...Renaissance...?” (Ibid). In seeking the answer, Yates examines in detail the work of three hermetic philosophers of the period, Giulio Camillo (c. 1480-1544), Giordano Bruno (c. 1548-1600) and Robert Fludd (1574-1637). Of these three it is Camillo and Fludd that particularly concern us here because they were the creators of the mnemonic devices known as Memory Theatres. Though these were not actual theatres it is the intention of this essay to suggest that the construct is more than an image of memory processes and memory enhancement, but a conception of theatre itself.

Camillo’s Theatre was unique in that it was a physical structure made of wood and big enough to accommodate two people. It was, according to the account of Viglius Zuichemus who saw it in Venice, marked with images and full of little boxes, and as Viglius describes it, embodied Camillo’s conception of the mind:

He pretends that all things that the human mind can conceive and which we cannot see with the corporeal eye, after being collected together by diligent meditation may be expressed by certain corporeal signs in such a way that the beholder may at once perceive with his eyes everything that is otherwise hidden

in the depths of the human mind. And it is because of this corporeal looking that he calls it a theatre. (Quoted in YAM, 131-2)

This reminds us immediately of the etymology of the word 'theatre,' which derives from the Greek *theatron* – a place for looking at something, with that something implicitly being live and active. However, as Yates shows, the normal configuration of stage and auditorium is reversed in Camillo's theatre, with the 'audience' – i.e. the person whose mind is being exercised – standing on the stage and the "corporeal signs" occupying the seats of what looks like a Roman theatre. What the theatre essentially does is to present a scheme wherein the entire universe can be placed in the mind, and its physical and mystical particulars accessed through memorized locations. It is worth quoting Yates' summary of Camillo's vision. It represents, she says,

A new Renaissance plan of the psyche.... Medieval man was allowed to use his low faculty of imagination to form corporeal similitudes to help his memory; it was a concession to his weakness. Renaissance Hermetic man believes that he has divine powers; he can form a magic memory through which he grasps the world, reflecting the divine macrocosm in the microcosm of his divine *mens*. The magic of celestial proportion flows from his world memory into the magical words of his oratory and poetry, into the perfect proportions of his art and architecture. (YAM, 172)

Such an exalted conception of the power of memory as a space in which universal

truths can be explored and comprehended plays directly into the micro- and macro-cosmic implications of the Elizabethan "wooden O," wherein can be contained not only "the vasty fields of France" as in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, but the whole celestial order, whose all-encompassing presence was represented by the emblem of the zodiac painted on the canopy above the inner stage of the Globe Theatre, which was known as "the Heavens."

Hamlet calls his mind a "distracted globe" in which "memory holds a seat," and it has been suggested by at least one scholar that *Hamlet* the play is a "complex memory system," full of memory objects like Yorick's skull, and macro- and micro-cosmic images like the "nutshell" of physical limitations and the "infinite space" of the imagination (see RDK, 153, and the chapter "Bruno and Shakespeare: Hamlet" *passim*).

Another notable Renaissance Theatre Memory system was that of the English philosopher and hermetic scholar Robert Fludd. In his *History of the Two Worlds* (1619), Fludd describes how he based his system on the configurations of actual London public theatres of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, particularly the Globe Theatre. As Frances Yates shows, he was familiar with the mechanics of how theatres worked and with the practical elements of theatrical production, so when he called his memory buildings 'theatres' he was not simply making use of a conceptual image. That said, it is important to note, as Yates does, that by 'theatre' Fludd actually means a stage, not

a stage plus auditorium. Fludd explains in his *History* that artificial memory consists of two types, the *ars rotunda* or 'round art' and the *ars quadrata* or 'square art.' The first is that of "the ethereal part of the world," of ideas, "which are forms separated from corporeal things," and turned into what Yates calls talismanic images, and the second is that of corporeal images – people, animals, inanimate objects (see *YAM*, 327, 329). The locational paradigm of this memory system, Fludd insists, must be drawn from a real theatre, and lest there be any doubt that he is thinking in dramatic terms he introduces his memory theatre with these words:

I call a theatre (a place in which) all actions of words, of sentences, of particulars of a speech or of subjects are shown, as in a public theatre in which comedies and tragedies are acted. (*History*, quoted in *YAM*, 331)

Shakespeare's "wooden O" – the Globe Theatre – which consisted (in both its 1599 and 1614 incarnations) of a hexagonal exterior, a round interior and a square stage, thus becomes itself an image of Fludd's memory system, with the 'square art' being able to contain the cosmic dimensions of the 'round art.'

In a later book, *Theatre of the World* (1969), Yates explores in more detail the interconnectedness between such memory systems as Fludd's and the actual Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres, and the world view that they embodied. The Renaissance concept of *theatrum mundi* was the seminal image behind the theatre of Shakespeare and his contemporaries,

and for this reason it had enormous moral significance. Though not didactic in the manner of the medieval morality plays, the works of the Elizabethan theatre were not a break from, but a continuation of the moral resonances of those earlier dramas into cosmic rather than theological or liturgical realms. In her chapter "The Theatre as Moral Emblem" Yates quotes the Jacobean dramatist and poet Thomas Heywood, who, in his *Apology for Actors* (1612) makes the through-line very clear:

Then our play's begun
When we are borne, and to the world first enter,
And all find exits when their parts are done.
If then the world a theatre present,
As by its roundness it appears most fit,
Built with starre galleries of hye ascent,
In which Jehove doth as spectator sit,
And chief determiner to applaud the best,
And their indeavours crowne with more than merit;
But by their evill actions doomes the rest
To end discrac't, whilst others praise inherit;
He that denyes then theatres should be,
He may as well deny a world to me.

(Quoted in *YTW*, 164-5)

With the theatre holding such centrality in English moral, cultural and imaginative life, the significance of Fludd adopting actual theatrical space for the deployment of his memory system is very great. Yates concludes that in the English Renaissance "the ancient theatre could be moralized and transformed into a building which was not only a Theatre of the World in the cosmic sense, but also in a sense compatible with Christianity and its teachings" (*YTW*, 168). The cultivation of memory as a moral imperative is there

in the earliest writings on the subject; it is taken over and intensified by medieval mnemotechnicians; and in its humanist form it is there in the hermetic philosophers of the Italian and English Renaissance. Common to all these systems is the conception of artificial memory as locational and spatial, and implicit in them (and in Fludd's case explicitly) is the sense that what happens in these spaces is most effective when it is dramatic. This suggests that the equation can work both ways: that if memory can be thus imaged theatrically, theatre itself can be conceived of as a memory system, and that when it is so conceived it has moral purpose akin to that which necessitates the cultivation of *ars memoriae*.

III

The square platform stages of the Elizabethan and Jacobean public theatres, with their five entrances at stage level and a balcony above, did not lend themselves to playwrights and actors following literally Hamlet's injunction to the players to "hold the mirror up to nature." Hamlet's mirror was not a realistic or illusionistic one, but one that operated metaphysically. With no obligation to "reproducing" life the Elizabethan-Jacobean stage was a singular example of a heterotopic space, a counter-site in which the cosmic drama of man's life could be represented, contested and inverted.

After the demise of the great public theatres the cosmic frame diminishes and disappears.

The artificiality and illusionism of Inigo Jones' court masques and some of the

productions in the private theatres in the Jacobean age signal a narrowing of focus and a reduction in the resonance of theatre. When the theatres were reopened in 1660 with the restoration of the monarchy the dominant preoccupation was comedy of manners, with highly artificial tragedies not far behind. For over 200 years the image of theatre as a memory space disappears, being replaced in many and varied forms by the theatre of illusion, mannerism, naturalism and realism, more often than not confined behind the proscenium arch of a picture stage. In a real sense the pictorial, illusionistic, fourth wall stage is the opposite of a memory stage because it is concerned with the reproduction of reality outside the mind, rather than making tangible the inner life and workings of the mind itself.

One of the first theorists to place theatre back in the mind was Edward Gordon Craig, who, in "The Actor and the Über-Marionette" (1907) asserted that to "restore its art" theatre needed to banish "impersonation" and "the idea of reproducing Nature" (OAT, 75). For him personally the creative inspiration needed to do this came

...from that mysterious, joyous, and superbly complete life which is called Death – that life of shadow and of unknown shapes, where all cannot be blackness and fog as is supposed, but vivid colour, vivid light, sharp-cut form; and which one finds peopled with strange, fierce and solemn figures, pretty figures and calm figures, and those figures impelled to some wondrous harmony of

movement – all this is something more than a mere matter of fact. (Ibid, 74)

With this release from any “reproductive” necessity theatre would, Craig believed, reconnect with its ancient spiritual origins. At the conclusion of his essay he writes:

I pray earnestly for the return of the image – the über-marionette to the Theatre; and when he comes again ...it will be possible for the people to return to their ancient joy in ceremonies – once more will Creation be celebrated – homage rendered to existence – and divine and happy intercession made to Death. (Ibid, 94)

Though Craig does not speak of memory specifically, his vision of theatre here suggests a memory structure: if theatre in this ideal form articulates “the complete life which is called Death”; if, in other words, it resurrects that which is already past, then it is a location in which memory images – shaped by the artist – can now acquire a life of their own, not circumscribed by any requirement to reproduce an actual past, or to be “real” or “natural.” The dramatic performance becomes the endlessly re-enacted ritual of death and resurrection: we enter the theatre space, we witness the ceremony that celebrates creation and intercedes with Death on our behalf, and we are renewed, to die again, and again return to be renewed.

We participate in such a process when we witness the infinitely recurring process that is Beckett’s *Endgame*. It may be hard to think of this play as a “joyous” celebration,

replete with Craig’s “wondrous harmony” or “vivid colour,” but in the sense in which we have discussed above it is a celebration, particularly if we take the word in its original Latin meaning of “to honour by assembling.” The witnesses to Hamm and Clov’s “life” in the ante-Purgatory that is their room watch a piece of memory theatre in one of its clearest forms. Their play is a cyclic ritual in which fragments of the past are endlessly recounted and reconstituted, in which memory images are rearranged and relocated, and – if, as many critics interpret it, the room of the play is the mind itself – a ritual in which the two main characters are themselves memory images.

This sense of mnemonic ritualized engagement with Death is explored by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980), a book of reflections on photography in which he sets up an important triangular relationship between Death, theatre and photography. Barthes argues that the art of photography is not akin to painting but to theatre, that its origins are in *camera obscura*, dioramas and animated light shows. But the connection goes deeper:

...if Photography seems to me closer to the Theatre, it is by way of a singular intermediary...Death. We know the original relation of the theatre and the cult of the Dead: the first actors separated themselves from the community by playing the role of the Dead: to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead...; however “lifelike” we strive to make it (and this frenzy to be lifelike can only be

our mythic denial of an apprehension of death), Photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of Tableau Vivant, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead. (CL, 31-32)

Just as Craig maintained that it was futile for the art of the theatre to reproduce life, to “pretend,” as he put it, so Barthes decries the confusion between “the Real and the Live” that characterizes our common perception of the photograph: “by attesting that the object has been real,” Barthes writes, “the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past (“this-has-been”), the photograph suggests that it is already dead” (Ibid, 79). Not surprisingly a few pages later he remarks that “Photography has something to do with resurrection” (Ibid, 82). He does not, however, equate the impact of photography with that of theatre, and he makes this significant distinction:

...the dead theatre of Death, the foreclosure of the Tragic, excludes all purification, all catharsis. I may well worship an Image, a Painting, a Statue, but a photograph? I cannot place it in a ritual... unless, somehow, I avoid looking at it... (Ibid, 90)

Barthes’ “dead theatre of Death” brings us of course to Tadeusz Kantor and his Theatre of Death. In an important manifesto of 1988 called “Memory,” Kantor defines the central triangulation of death,

memory and space. After declaring that he gradually discovered that “THEATRE was the right place for” memory and that “THE STAGE/became its/A L T A R !” he goes on to quote from a commentary he made on his memory play *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*:

It is difficult to define the spatial dimension of memory.

Here is a room of my childhood,
that I keep reconstructing again and again
and that keeps dying again and again
with all its inhabitants.

Its inhabitants are the members of my family.
They continuously repeat all their
movements and activities
as if they were recorded on a film negative
shown interminably...

These *D E A D F A Ç A D E S*
come to life, become real and important,
through this stubborn *R E P E T I T I O N* of
actions...

Maybe this pulsating rhythm...
Is an inherent part of *M E M O R Y*...[sic]

My “DISCOVERY” (made already in *The Dead Class*)

introduces new psychological elements into
stage acting
and a new type of “SPACE,” a nonphysical
space.

The *CONDITION OF DEATH* – of the *DEAD* –
[was] *RECREATED IN THE LIVING*....

They are dead but at the same time
alive...

Pulled out of a three-dimensional,
surprisingly flat
practice of life...

They lose their life’s functions...

To become *ETERNAL*
 They become a *WORK OF ART*.
 (TKM, 157-9)

Michał Kobińska usefully summarizes the significance of these statements for the purposes of our enquiry when he writes that in the "Theatre of Death" manifesto (1975) Kantor "articulated his desire to abandon a theatre grounded in physical reality for a theatre of the mind," and that this "space of the past, which existed dead in memory" provided an opportunity to enter another dimension in which the Self encountered its double, the Other (KQO, 325). What Kantor articulated in his writings and particularly in the four works that incarnated the death/memory/space configuration – *The Dead Class* (1975) *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980), *Let the Artists Die* (1985), and *I Shall Never Return* (1988) – is a logical outcome of all those conceptions of theatre with which we have been dealing. The morality plays were not concerned with physical reality but with the mind of the faithful Christian, and later with the right mind of the secular ruler or the secular citizen leading to right conduct. Their impact was predominantly through the activation of memory images. The Elizabethan theatre which grew out of them *was* concerned with physical reality, but with these major differences: its context was cosmic, and its elements were not realistically reproduced but embodied on a square platform whereon the mind could through poetic and emblematic images "entertain conjecture," as the Chorus puts it in *Henry V*. As the theatre subsequently

moved through pictorial artifice and thence to psychological realism its space was not "of the mind," but of physical actuality, however variously conceived. But early in the 20th century, with artists and theorists like Craig, the theatre of image and memory is reactivated and reinvented, and continues vibrantly into the present day.

IV

It seems particularly vibrant in the work of Romanian and Hungarian directors over the last decade or so, and by way of conclusion (and of opening the door to another essay), I would like to cite a particular example of the contemporary presence of this theatre of memory-image. During the course of several visits to Transylvania over the last three or four years I have witnessed extraordinary manifestations of it in Romanian and Hungarian national theatre productions. They include Mihai Maniuc's *Woyzeck*, Tompa Gábor's staging of Viskó András' *Long Friday*, Andrei Șerban's *Uncle Vanya* (staged in a configuration that evokes Camillo's memory theatre), Silviu Purcărete's *Faust*, and Dragoș Galgoțiu's production of Thomas Bernhard's *The Hunting Party*. It is this last I would like to discuss, in part because of its obvious debt to Kantor.

The Hunting Party (which dates from 1974) is in essence a Kantorian memory play, and its space – the hunting lodge – is a space of the mind, in which memory, image, repetitive speech and action, disease, disfigurement and encroaching

death are brought to play in grotesque and mechanized ritual. It is winter and the hunting lodge is located in a forest that is dying of infestation by a bark beetle. Inside the lodge are operetta-like personages out of Austria-Hungary's imperial past: a Prince and Princess almost devoid of life, scheming ministers, a maimed and dying General with a wife who is frozen into endlessly repeated card-games and compulsive talk that can only delay the onset of death. Also present is an 'outsider,' a writer who articulates the existential death-consciousness of the play:

When we look at a person
no matter who
we see a dying person...
We are condemned
to immobility
we are dead
everything is dead
everything in us is dead
(THP, 118)

The General puts this into its theatrical context: "Our writer/writes a comedy/and all of us sitting here/appear in his comedy," and then makes the theatre of the mind explicit: "You see he scribbles/all over the walls of his mind/all over/a mind covered with writing" (Ibid, 127). In this sense the characters themselves are phantoms, dead people existing only in the hunting lodge of the writer's mind. The echoes of *Endgame* are clear: the hunting lodge and Beckett's room with two windows are both skulls, memory spaces, outside which the world is dead or dying, and inside which the characters are mental images frozen in time and locked in repetitive rituals.

Dragoş Galgoţiu's recent production at the Hungarian National Theatre in Cluj actualized these elements with great power and imaginativeness. From Bernhard's spare, almost non-dramatic text he created an elaborately ritualized performance characterized by the interplay of iconic images: marionette ministers, a Prince and Princess operating like wind-up toys, the General's Wife and her double despairingly re-incarnating Klimt's and Schiele's hauntedly erotic women, and most or all of these at one time or other either photographically arrested in suspended images or obsessively repeating gestures, speech and actions. As if to throw these elements into sharper relief Galgoţiu introduced a relationship not existing in the text, an unrequited love of Anna, the cook for Asamer the woodcutter. Played 'naturalistically' this affair was all the more poignant for being not only set apart from the stylized dance of death of the other characters, but destroyed by it.

Bernhard's dramaturgy, Gitta Honegger writes, "is deeply rooted in a tradition which has been drained of its original life and serves now only as a...diversion from the overpowering obsession with decay and death." His theatricality is "intentionally frozen, mechanical, a 'reconstructed' one" (TBI, 97). The Hungarian theatre production notably articulated this dramaturgy, and in a conversation with Visky András reproduced in the program Galgoţiu not only confirms it but also acknowledges his debt to Kantor.

Galgoţiu is just one of several directors currently working in Hungary and

Romania whose productions sustain and reinvent the heterotopic theatre of the mind that is at the heart of the dramatic form. Mihai Maniuțiu's *Woyzeck*, for example, used the backstage space of the Hungarian National Theatre in Cluj and transformed it into a space/memory/death location, and suggested at the end that the militaristic and mechanized torment that *Woyzeck* endured would be repeated *ad infinitum*. The degrading and humiliating rituals, and the images – both human and mannequin – took Büchner's

ur-Expressionist play and made it a play of mind and memory. Tompa Gábor's production of Visky András' *Long Friday* used the same space to similar effect. The current vitality of theatre in this part of Europe has much to do with the work of its playwrights, directors, actors and designers restoring the central equation of space and memory that underlies and sometimes triumphantly surfaces in western European dramaturgy from the Greeks to Kantor and beyond.

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