Tadeusz Kantor and Hamed Taheri

Of Political Theatre/Performance

Michał Kobialka
The current models for political theatre have outlived their promise to give us a representational praxis that could provide support for or challenge the existing political regimes. Consider, for example, both the theoretical and the performative “empowering” and critical interventions offered by the Constructivists of post-1917 Russia, Erwin Piscator’s political theatre, Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre, Mao Zedong’s 1942 speech at the Yan’an conference on literature and art, Fidel Castro’s 1961 “Words to the Intellectuals,” or Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, just to mention the most often quoted ones in the annals of Western theatre history. They are outmoded because the revolutions Piscator, Brecht, and Boal were part of have long since lost their immanent presence; because the Chinese cultural revolution morphed into a bloody trail left by bureaucratic socialism, which, in turn, was replaced by a free-market economy; and because Castro’s famous uncompromising slogan, “Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing” (1962:18), long ago lost its radical power to eliminate the vestiges of foreign/US influences.

The present historical moment makes me consider a limited number of possibilities of how to think about political theatre when confronted with the disastrous failure of the emancipatory endeavors prompted by the Western idea of liberal democracy, which took the form of ethnic conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa; when enveloped in a recurring utopian dream that it will still be possible to construct a rational order of things; or while maintaining a cynical distance taken in order to be able to participate in the political maneuverings.

Taking a cue from Theodor Adorno’s dictum that it is part of morality never to feel at home in one’s home ([1951] 2002), Edward Said’s conviction that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations ([1994] 1996), and Alain Badiou’s belief that ethics sets the task for the subject or the individual to attend to the West’s imperfections and to relentlessly confront any dogma or orthodoxy ([1998] 2001), I would like to explore political theatre that is not consensual, but which nonetheless designates how we critically and physically or performatively relate to what is going on in the space of the now.

That which is contained in “what is going on” is not a smooth surface of the shown and seen but, like Badiou’s “event,” goes beyond the “ordinary” realm of established interests and differences; beyond the “ordinary” realm of approved knowledge; beyond the “ordinary” realm of the desire for the jouissance of prelapsarian times where we are protected by neoliberal politics and the ideals of balance, mediation, or the principles of allonomy used to construct social alliances, networks, and communities; and beyond the “ordinary” realm of theoretical innovations constituting how we understand the overdetermined categories of gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

This event breaks away from the inscription contained in “what there is”—“what is possible or can be done”—structured according to those who dominate the situation (Louis Althusser’s

Figure 1. (Facing page) The found object. Home Is in Our Past. City Theatre, Tehran, Iran, 2003. (Photo by Masoud Pakdel, courtesy of Hamed Taheri)

Michal Kobialka is Professor of Theatre Arts at the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance, University of Minnesota. He has published over 75 articles, essays, and reviews in academic journals in the US and Europe. He is the author of A Journey Through Other Spaces: Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990 (University of California Press, 1993), This Is My Body: Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages (University of Michigan Press, 1999), and Further on, Nothing: Tadeusz Kantor’s Theatre (University of Minnesota Press, 2009); editor of Of Borders and Thresholds: Theatre History, Practice, and Theory (University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and coeditor (with Barbara Hanawalt) of Medieval Practices of Space (University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
structured dominance; see for example his “The Errors in Classical Economics” in Reading “Capital” ([1968] 1970), or according to a state of affairs in which pragmatic philosophy defines the modes of analysis of public life and activism or actionism, which aggravates itself for the sake of its own publicity without admitting to itself to what extent it serves as a substitute utopian pseudo-reality (Adorno [1963] 1998:291). This event, like Ernst Bloch’s notion of “educated hope” ([1961] 1998), involves taking the risk of challenging people to question their structures of belonging in order to become conscious of their constructed and reified nature. More than that, this event involves taking the risk of challenging the people to question their own convictions in order to arrive at others. It is thus oriented toward the future. It does not address itself to that which already exists. “For these are always, merely subjectively modified moments or objectively reified stoppages within a historical course of events,” according to Bloch. Consequently, the event, Bloch avers, “dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy” ([1961] 1998:341). It is committed to radical transformation, which is grounded in historical process—the world-process. It does not surrender when setbacks occur; with a renegade spirit, it gambles on whatever has been negated, rejected, or glossed over up until now. It becomes wiser through injury. It thinks its own history (the past), but it does so in order to free itself from what it thinks (the present) and be able to finally think otherwise (the future).

This event compels us to envision a new mode of being that brings to the fore that something which escapes the limits of present intelligibility, political authoritarianism, or instrumental culture—thus, of that which is thinkable or performable right now. This event cannot be grasped or understood within the confines of the ordinary *Realpolitik* and *Machtpolitik*, because, in the most concrete form molded by their intelligibility, this event shows nothing.

Moving beyond the ordinary realm, it becomes apparent that this event engenders that “nothing.” It names the void. It activates it. By so doing, it ruptures and betrays the desired “look,” “the image,” or “the appearance” whose essential form is never critical of the conditions that legitimize their existence. As a corollary, Badiou notes:

If I want to be faithful to the event of the “Cultural Revolution,” then I must at least practice politics (in particular the relation with the workers) in an entirely different manner from that proposed by the socialist and trade-unionist traditions. […] An evental fidelity is a real break (both thought and practiced) in the specific order within which the event took place. (Badiou [1998] 2001:42)

Consequently, the event takes place *in* reality, but it is not *of* it. Moreover, an evental fidelity excludes consensual ethics and compels the subject/individual to invent a new mode of being that betrays the existing conditions, which gave it life, *habitus*, and cultural capital, but remains faithful to the imperative of a radical critical thought that explores the tension between the rationalizations of the possible (retrospective reasoning compressing the future into the present) and the actualization of the virtual (a realm of potentiality that in no way predicts the actual forms). By so doing, this new mode of being will expose the technologies for the objectification of the world by overdetermined practices in any field, including the fields of theatre and performance studies, and attend to as well as nurture the *now*, unsettling the existing categories and reveling in its own uncontainability.

In light of these remarks, how can we reconceptualize the notion of political theatre, art, and performance so that their radical and transformative potential—a pure gesture, as Walter Benjamin would have it ([1955] 1986)—is resuscitated?

Tadeusz Kantor, in an uncanny way, created such a praxis in his exploration of reality, which he called the “reality of the lowest rank”—wrenched from the everyday, framed by the dominant convention or ideology and its marginalized and degraded objects—as well as in his Happenings.
in the period between 1965 and 1969 (Kobialka 2009:27–94). For example, using the medium of the Happening, which, though linked conceptually to the Happenings in the West, was grounded in his understanding of reality, matter, and space, Kantor engaged in the process not only of challenging what he had perceived as official art or mass culture in a socialist Poland, but also in the process of deterritorializing (as per Deleuze and Guattari; see for example “Capitalist Representation” in Anti-Oedipus [1972] 1983) representation by surrounding himself with objects that could no longer be or were not yet appropriated by artistic convention or commodified with an assigned use-value. Instead, the objects—the so-called “poor objects” (to use Kantor’s and not Jerzy Grotowski’s vocabulary), a broken chair, a wheel smeared with mud, a rust-eaten gun barrel, a molding wardrobe, eternal wanderers, a cloakroom, and later school desks and a cemetery storeroom (Kantor 1993:117–24; Kobialka 2009:116–22)—bereft of the security of their original structures of belonging, “entered into the closest possible relationship with [their] equivalents” (Benjamin 2002:204).

In order to accomplish this, Kantor introduced the process of annexing reality, or the process of incorporating into an artistic activity ready-made elements, that is, the objects, the events, and the environment. This reality was not subjugated to artistic molding or formal requirements. It did not function as a model that existed prior to a work of art, and, consequently, it did not correspond to any convention of representation. As noted by Kantor:

Reality can only be
“used.”
“Used” is the only appropriate term.
Making use of reality
in art
signifies
an annexation of reality. […]
During this process,
reality
transgresses
its own boundary
and moves in the direction of the
“impossible.”
The annexed reality contains in itself
real objects,
situations,
and an environment described
by time and place.
Their reactions to each other,
the interconnections between them,
the annexing gesture

of (as if, casting a spell on reality)

ri t u a l

are substituted for

the process of molding

which is out of place here. (Kantor 1993:96–97; Kobialka 2009:181–82)

The strategy of annexing reality signified the process of wrenching the objects from reality in order to explore their objectness in the environment where they acquired their function in relation to other elements positioned in this space. Thus, the objects are unstriated and non-conceptual in Adorno’s sense of the principles that govern autonomous works of art (see Adorno [1962] 2002). The focus is on their inherent structure, rather than on the totality of the effects; on a manual process of signification, rather than the visual sovereignty of the eye producing the representational image in a classical, three-dimensional space; on the nonrepresentative, nonfigurative, and nonillustrative processes, in which the eye does not perform a visual ordering function, but instead follows the relationships that organize its field of perception; on the unrepresentable in presentation itself; on that which “refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting a common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and inquires into new presentations” (Lyotard [1988] 1993:80).

Using poor objects, matter, marginalized objects, degraded objects, which are positioned within a dynamic, fluid, and open fabric of reality, Kantor perturbed a model of culture or artistic activity that is based on restriction, negation, transformation of the image/object. In its stead, Kantor offered a praxis that troubled the recognized reality by bringing to the fore its unknown, dismissed, or illegitimate aspect. Kantor by no means transformed reality, the real, or the everyday. He took it in order to rethink its singularity, rather than to explore its relation to the mimetic program of realism. If indeed reality was taken up rather than transformed, both it and its content were viewed as ready-mades, which were defined by the whole system of values connected with its ideology. What Jean Baudrillard calls “the murder of the real” (2000), Kantor referred to as annexing reality in order to dislocate the existing configurations (1993:71). These existing configurations were disfigured by subjecting both actions and objects to disinterested and repetitive operations, by liberating them from “the bondage of [moral or aesthetic] utility” (Benjamin 2002:204), and by constructing new relationships between them to exhibit their mediality. Existing-in-a-medium, thus, liberated objects from the need to be defined by a pre-assigned use-value, which allowed them to become the subjects of an artistic exchange as defined by the culture industry. Bereft of this need, objects, or actions, existing-in-a-medium were autonomous, non-conceptual objects/actions in Adorno’s sense of the term ([1962] 2002:317).

Kantor, thus, created a praxis that was not lodged on a smooth surface of the shown or the seen, or in the consensual or the salvific function of theatre to express oneself, but a praxis that, indeed, went beyond the “ordinary” realm of established interests and differences. Kantor’s theatre was a radical departure from, or rupture within, the normative representational theatrical categories or structures. It created a possibility of seeing that which cannot really be grasped or understood, because in its most concrete staged form it shows nostalgia for what was impossible to attain or, at best, the confusion between the representation of hope and the reality where the hoped-for action did not take place. Kantor’s theatre with its components—such as a poor/real object, reality of the lowest rank, the autonomous work of art, zero zones, the impossible condition, the complex mnemotechnics, and the emballage, which were given different shapes and meanings depending on the pressures of the historical, cultural, and ideological networks of relations within which Kantor found himself positioned (Kobialka 2009:27–94)—elaborated an initial forgetting, that forgetting which was so poignantly described by Jean-François Lyotard on the pages of The Postmodern Explained ([1988] 1993:80). Kantor shed light on those aspects of reality, marginalized objects, and everyday practices that were pushed aside by reality and its triad of: spatial practice (perceived), which embraces the produc-
tion and reproduction of each social formation; representation of space (conceived), which is linked to knowledge production; and representational spaces (lived), which form all senses and all bodies.

I wish to draw attention to the need to abandon a nostalgic desire for the utopian performative in order to focus on historical materialism, which gives shape not only to an undifferentiated realm, but also, and more importantly, offers a critical approach that can help us examine the current forms of subjectivization that generate and remain within the realm where the distinction between the process of being and the process of appearance is often obfuscated by the suppression of the ideology that causes that experience. Kantor provided us with a critical and performative way of renting this nostalgic desire when he separated the performance space from the auditorium with a rope in *The Dead Class* (1975). Once the performance space was separated from the auditorium by a rope, the spectator could no longer see his/her image reflected in three-dimensional theatrical space or *construzione legittima*, but found him/herself in the presence of the Old People, “infinitely DISTANT, shockingly FOREIGN, as if DEAD,” who existed beyond the gaze of the spectators and refused to participate in the nostalgic reconstruction of the past or the construction of the future that would provide the spectators “on the other side” with material for consolation and pleasure (Kantor 1993:113; Kobialka 2009:236).

Using Kantor’s insights, Iranian theatre director Hamed Táheri, currently working in Germany, creates his own form of radical theatre. Like Kantor’s Old People from *The Dead Class*, “infinitely DISTANT, shockingly FOREIGN, as if DEAD”—Kantor’s model for the actor from “The Theatre of Death” manifesto (Kantor 1993:106–16; Kobialka 2009:230–39)—Táheri’s actor, the immigrant, who is included in the capitalist order by exclusion, offers a model for the actor “on the other side”:

In *Avenir! Avenir!* I wanted to work with people from different cultures, not because it was and is fashionable, but exactly to break the link between theatre and anthropology. I wanted to work with people from different cultures, who are living a naked life. So, I found one of the actors in the camp of immigrants. He was living there for 5 years. The others were found in a similar fashion. It was difficult to work with them, because some of them did not know what theatre was. It was a great research project to study their relationship and response to different types of theatre that I tried to introduce them to. It was during this process that I realized the hidden and invisible political aspect of different theatres. Finally, when I introduced them to Kantor, it was like a miracle. It was an illumination to me to discover pure political aspects of Kantor’s theatre. (Táheri 2006)

*Avenir! Avenir!* (which premiered at the World New Music Festival in Stuttgart, Germany, on 19 July 2006) comprises 30 fragments of music and text that are played for 30 individual spectators. In December 2006, when it was performed in Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt, which was being remodeled, an audience member was led into a bare room where s/he was supposed to select an object from the heap of objects buried in the dirt that covered the floor. Once the object was selected, the spectator was led to another space—a winding corridor where s/he would encounter four immigrants/performers, presenting the text generated by the selected fragment:

The structure of the project was like a LIBRARY. One spectator, alone, should come to select one fragment (book). Then he can see (read) it alone. Every night only 30 fragments for 30 spectators. The singular spectator encounters his/her fragment. S/he is really a witness. (Táheri 2006)

A watch without hands was the object I picked by chance. When I entered the corridor I was confronted with text spoken by performers, who, as I was told later, were the immigrants from Ghana, Chile, Afghanistan, and Iran. The text they spoke referred to Western political and cultural history: I recognized lines from poems by Konrad Bayer, T.S. Eliot, and Marina Tsvetaeva, a reference to a Prussian juridical protective custody law, *Schutzhaft*, a speech from...
Calderón de la Barca’s *Life Is a Dream* (*La vida es sueño*; [1636/37] 1964), and a famous dream sequence from Ingmar Bergman’s *Wild Strawberries* (*Smultronstället*; 1957). Moving along the walls of the narrow space of the corridor, I heard the voices and saw the bodies squatting along the bare walls or hanging from the ceiling. I could recognize the words they spoke; however, I could not recognize myself in the four immigrants/performers around me. They were separated from me by the impassable barrier of their and my incompatible condition and structures of belonging. What does it mean to listen to a man, who spent five years in a camp for immigrants where he could be sent back “home” every day of his stay there, evoke the old law of *Schutzhaft*—an ambiguous term describing the terms of protective custody used for those at high risk of being harmed or killed, which was exploited by the Nazis to justify the rounding-up of political opponents and sending them to concentration camps? What does it mean to hear an immigrant from Chile recite Segismundo’s speech: “Pues el delito mayor del hombre es haber nacido” (For man’s greatest crime is to ever have been born) (Calderón de la Barca [1636/37] 1964:87)? Pondering over these questions, I was reminded of a passage from Kantor’s “Theatre of Death” manifesto:

> IT IS NECESSARY TO RECOVER THE PRIMEVAL FORCE OF THE SHOCK TAKING PLACE AT THE MOMENT WHEN, OPPOSITE A HUMAN (A SPECTATOR), THERE STOOD FOR THE FIRST TIME A HUMAN (AN ACTOR), DECEPTIVELY SIMILAR TO US, YET AT THE SAME TIME INFINITELY FOREIGN, BEYOND THE IMPASSABLE BARRIER. (Kantor 1993:114; Kobialka 2009:237)

Indeed, the texts/fragments repeated here by the immigrants/performers, placed as if beyond the impassable, invisible barrier, like an echo, gave birth to that something coming into being in a space liberated from the seductions of nostalgia and its fetishized multitude of political or cultural subjectivities:

> After every performance, every night, the spectators asked me about their [the performers’] vocal and physical technique. What they could not understand was that the gesture of the people in the camp is not a technique. (Taheri 2006)

This is why Taheri sees his actor/performer as a *homo sacer* (Agamben [1995] 1998), whose entire existence is reduced to bare life stripped of every right by the existing political and juridical conditions, which define the position and status of an immigrant in Germany. Indeed, theirs is bare life, which, in this space, is necessarily in reality but not of it (Badiou [1998] 2001:42–43).

The notion of the impassable barrier and of the objects of the lowest rank participating in the political life by exclusion materializes in Taheri’s *Home Is in Our Past* (City Theatre, Tehran, Iran, 2003). The performance explores the idea of framing the memories or narratives we have never had or were not allowed to construct. To accomplish this, Taheri uses the idea of a parallel action (sound/image, text/sound, text/text) that fills the eyes by force with the images that can never be fully framed but become an opening into yet another unfolding.

A woman in a long black dress, wearing a head scarf, stands on a platform raised over a rectangular pool filled with muddy water. Wearing “the mourning dress of mercy...the black uniform of the fireman of history...the hollow of the black sun...the mourning wings of a peacock...or...” (Taheri 2009), she stands visible against a circle of white light projected onto the backdrop behind the pool2 (fig. 2). Suddenly, her body is animated by her own voice. No words—just sounds coming from her mouth. The vocal aria, reminiscent of an improvisation in the style of Meredith Monk, is accompanied by a rhythmic movement of her body as well as gestures of her hands. It seems that the woman is searching for her voice. The sounds she projects claim the right to exist in this space. More than that, they construct a sonorous space

2. All references to the performance come from the *Home Is in Our Past* DVD (Taheri and Mirtahmasb 2005).
of representation in which this woman in a black dress claims her right to have a voice. A sudden silence. Then, the acoustic void is filled by antiphonal (recorded) exchanges between an invisible man and an invisible young woman. The first exchange enumerates the ghettos that have been created throughout world history. The man pronounces the name of each ghetto and the young woman responds by saying “no” in a flat voice. This exchange activates a body dressed in rags that is submerged in a pool in front of the audience. The body—a male body—in a corner begins to twist and gasp for air (fig. 3). The second exchange brings forth the memories of Bulgarian, Russian, Armenian, Palestinian, Jewish, Turkish, and Indian immigrants: the young woman’s “no” pierces the air and reverberates in this sonic landscape after each group of immigrants is named—“The wretched of the earth. —No.” The third exchange dredges up the memories of wars:

June 28, 1914, Serbia. —No
October 1917, Siberia. —No
January 30, 1924, Dachau. —No
September 19, 1939, Berlin. —No
August 6, 1945, Hiroshima. —No
1989, Moscow. —No.

This section seems to disturb both frozen figures: the woman in a black dress standing on the platform behind the pool and the man in the mud pool. She restarts her vocal aria; he moves around and finds objects in the water. If indeed both of them are the wretched of the earth—the bodies upon which history is written—a man, submerged in and moving through the substance of history finds objects destroyed by those wars and those political events whose names linger in our memories. The objects are now broken, useless, and bereft of the value assigned to them by commodity fetish or the culture industry. The man tries to decipher their use (fig. 4). Bereft of the use-value, these objects are empty. Now, they acquire their function not by justifying their
Figure 3. The body gasps for air. Home Is in Our Past. City Theatre, Tehran, Iran, 2003. (Photo by Masoud Pakdel, courtesy of Hamed Taheri)
existence to the surroundings that led to their demise, but by establishing a relationship with the man holding them. The fourth exchange of the invisible voices brings forth memories and associations triggered by NATO, the Hague, the treaty of Verdun, the unknown soldier, Russian soldiers, Dresden in ruins. The man in the pool becomes a soldier. He finds an object that can function as a weapon. Now, he is a killing machine. The recorded vocal exchange takes a new form:

Would you marry me? —No.
Your husband was killed in the war. —No.
Would you make love to me? —No.
Your husband was castrated in the war. —No.
Your husband was hit by the grenade. —No.
Would you kiss me? —No.
Your husband became an addict in the war. —No.
Would you tango with me? —No.
Your husband was burnt in the war. —No.

The man in the pool finds an object reminiscent of a gas mask. He is gasping for air. The exchange continues:

Despair of Kafka. —No.
Despair of Fassbinder. —No.
Despair of Paul Celan. —No.
Despair of Pavese. —No.
Despair of Benjamin. —No.
Despair of Beckett. —No.
Century of massacres. —No.
Would you come to the theatre with me. —No.

The names that frame the history of cinematography follow. The verbal exchange ends. The man in the pool finds a stool. He is trying to sit on it. The act of sitting establishes a relationship between the man and the object, as if it is happening for the first time in this space of deregulated relationships; as if they encountered each other for the first time in this space of unregulated relationships. The voice of the woman in the black dress, like the action of the man happening as if for the first time, seems to have reached a paralinguistic sphere that no juridical language can fully express or contain. The next exchange from the loudspeakers fills the space: the laws of Newtonian physics and quantum mechanics; the names of the generals; the names
of dictators; the names of political movements—liberalism, nationalism, Zionism, fascism, capitalism, communism; the names of political leaders; the revolutions of the post–World War II period; and the memories of mass graves. The man in the pool raises his finger as if asking for something. He approaches the impassable barrier and tries to reach out to the audience on the other side. His attempts to grab onto something or onto somebody are in vain. Every time he manages to hold on to something, he loses his grip and falls back into the mud pool. After the last “No,” the exchange stops. The woman in the black dress continues her strenuous search for the voice. The man in the pool fishes out a plank from the muddy depths. It will serve as a tabletop. On top of it, he puts a spoon and a fork, which he has fished out as well. A bottle and a chair float around the table. Now, the table is set. A ritual-like meal is consumed (fig. 5).

The exchange resumes:

Are you satisfied? —No.
Is the blinking light OK? —No.
Would you ask for God’s forgiveness? —No.
Are you a virgin? —(Silence.)
Are you a virgin? —(Silence.)
Are you a virgin? —Yes.

There is a movement in the mud pool. Are these objects—a tabletop, a chair, a spoon, a bottle, etc.—the debris of history floating in no direction (fig. 6)? The man moves toward the woman in the black dress standing on the platform behind the pool. He leans out and reaches toward her. She gives him a lit stick. Holding it in his hand, he lowers himself back into the pool. In one gesture, he sets the pool ablaze. Fire spreads quickly over the surface. A spectacular destruction of the collected objects and of the man, whose clothes are set on fire, punctuates the final vocal exchange:
The condemned is a 19-year-old girl. —Beautiful.
She is sentenced to death. —I will prove her guilt watching a film.
I was kind to her. —I only bit her in her lips.
She sang an indecent song from the film. —Dangerous people do dangerous things.
6:00 AM. —She is a virgin.
She will go to heaven. —In the name of justice, I will rape her 19 times.
Justice has been done. —So she does not pollute the Heaven.
Then, I will shoot her in the name of justice. —A girl becomes a woman in the eyes of justice.

But will she ever find her voice?

The performance closes with a clip from Kantor’s *Dead Class*, projected on the screen behind the pool. The Old People enter the performance space through the opening in the back. A set of school desks stands in the corner. The performance space is separated from the auditorium by two ropes. The Old People walk around the school desks with wax figures of children on their backs to the tune of the waltz (fig. 7). They sit down. A pause. Then, individually, they place the wax figures in a heap next to the school desks. Silence.

*Home Is in Our Past* consists, thus, of three visual and sonorous narratives: that of the woman in a black dress with a scarf covering her head; that of the man in rags who is submerged in the pool with muddy waters; that of the recorded exchange between the man and the young woman. What we are presented with here are objects and fragments that, like the shards of a broken mirror, cut through the epistemologies or phenomenologies that inhabit the structures of thought. The strenuous search for the voice, the movement through what can be viewed as the substance of history wherein different objects—a chair, a bottle, a fork, a spoon—are submerged,
and the antiphonal exchange between the man and the young woman calling forth the memories of the ghettos, immigrants, wars, political organizations, religious festivals, cultural icons, scientific theories, historical figures, political movements, historical events, diseases, and mass graves, interspersed with the statements about the woman’s husband—a prelude to a sinister interrogation—create the scopic landscape of *Home Is in Our Past*. This scopic landscape disrupts the desire to flatten the visual and textual image, and, like *punctum*, rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and rips across a cultural and historical field of critical thought or across a communicable experience of it (Barthes [1980] 1982:26).

Both Kantor and Taheri, each in his own way, create a praxis that can open up the potential for a radical repositioning of both dominant representational practices as well as the idea of political theatre. They expose history and politics caught in the act of inventing forms that represent for us the demands for expression, acceptance, freedom, welfare, diversity, agency, equality, and difference. They expose theatre/performance caught in pseudo-activity that promotes confusion between representation and the reality where the radical transformation did not take place. They expose performance/theatre that promotes the do-it-yourself approach to politics “in order to inspire in the unfree individuals, paralyzed in their spontaneity, the assurance that everything depends on them” (Adorno [1963] 1998:291).

The immigrant, the impassable barrier, and the *homo sacer* who float in the sonorous and palpable substance of history will always relate to what is going on in the space of the now. This political theatre is not, however, a theatre that uses actionism to address political agendas. Rather, it is a theatre where political narrative address and current historical events coalesce to show the fissures in a traditional construction of the meanings and symbols associated with national life and staged as a utopian figuration. It is a theatre where new technologies of immigrant protest and
revolt, the immigrant on the other side separated from us by the impassable barrier, offer the scopic and aural landscape through which actor and spectator move to materialize an enduring indeterminacy that can never be mediated by the lines of force produced by and within a system of domination.

This political theatre thinks its own history (the past), but it does so in order to free itself from what it thinks (the present) and be able finally to think otherwise (the future)—a theatre that goes beyond the ontologies of the present and is based upon a provisional and positional constancy of a maneuver that will always be in reality but not of it...

References


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