# The atre for the Dead

## Oxana Timofeeva
*European University at St.-Petersburg*

# Theatre for the Dead

**Abstract**
This article refers to the famous question of the politicization versus aestheticization of art, recently discussed by Boris Groys in terms of usefulness and uselessness, or "design" and "art proper," and, by criticizing Croys' dualist approach, shows that in the biopolitical framework of contemporary ideology, the usefulness and uselessness pass into each other and thus create a circle within which any art is presented as individual or social therapy, or a sort of *phármakon* that is both poison and cure. In search for another conception of art, the article addresses to some radical avant-garde conceptions of theatre, such as Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death, and, reflecting through the ways of recombining elements and principles of what Alain Badiou characterized as a "leftist threat" for the theatre, demonstrates a rational political kernel of their destructive force.

In a wonderful sketch by Monthy Python, *Confuse-A-Cat*, a veterinary doctor arrives to the house of an elderly British couple, Mr. A and Mrs. B. The couple is extremely worried about their beloved cat, motionlessly sitting on the lawn, day and night, in a kind of apathy. "Is he... dead?"—asks the doctor. "Oh, no!"—they say. Then the vet concludes: "Your cat is suffering from what we vets haven't found a word for. His condition is typified by total physical inertia, absence of interest in its environment, failure to respond to the conventional external stimuli; it's the suburban *fin de siècle ennui*, *Angst*, *Weltschmerz*, call it what you will." The vet's suggestion comprises that the cat "badly needs to be confused," or has to be shaken "out of its state of complacency." As he does not consider himself personally qualified in that matter, he recommends a special service: "Confuse-A-Cat Ltd." Then a large van with a group of people in white dresses and a car with a general arrive. People build a stage with curtains in front of the cat. The following is quoted from the script:

> (Drum roll and cymbals. The curtains draw back and an amazing show takes place, using various tricks: locked camera, fast motion, jerky motion, jump cuts, some pixilated motion, etc. Long John Silver walks to front of stage.)
> **Long John Silver:** My lords, ladies and Gedderbong.
> (Long John Silver disappears. A pause. Two boxers appear, they circle each other. On one's head a bowler hat appears, vanishes. On the other's a sterve-pipe hat appears. On the first's head is a fez. The stove-pipe hat becomes a stetson. The fez becomes a cardinal's hat. The stetson becomes a wimple. Then the cardinal's hat and the wimple vanish. One of the boxers becomes Napoleon and the other boxer is astonished. Napoleon punches the boxer with the hand inside his jacket. The boxer falls, stunned. Horizontally he shoots off stage. Shot of cat, watching unimpressed. Napoleon does one-legged pixilated dance across stage and off, immediately reappearing on other side of stage doing same dance in same direction. He reaches the other side, but is halted by a traffic policeman. The policeman beckons onto the stage a man in a penguin skin on a pogostick. The penguin gets halfway across and then turns into a dustbin. Napoleon hops off stage. Policeman goes to dustbin, opens it and Napoleon gets out. Shot of cat, still unmoved. A nude man with a towel round his waist gets out of the dustbin. Napoleon points at ground. A chair appears where he points. The nude man gets on to the chair, jumps in the air and vanishes. Then Napoleon points to ground by him and a small cannon appears. Napoleon fires cannon and the policeman disappears. The man with the towel round his waist gets out of the dustbin and is chased off stage by the penguin on the pogostick. A sedan chair is carried on stage by two chefs. The man with the towel gets out and the penguin appears from the dustbin and chases him off. Napoleon points to sedan chair and it changes into dustbin. Man in towel runs back

on to stage and jumps in dustbin. He looks out and the penguin appears from the other dustbin and hits him on the head with a raw chicken. Shot of cat still unimpressed. Napoleon, the man with the towel round his waist, the policeman, a boxer, and a chef suddenly appear standing in a line, and take a bow. They immediately change positions and take another bow. The penguin appears at the end of the line with a puff of smoke. Each one in turn jumps in the air and vanishes. Shot of passive cat.) (Chapman and Cleese 2014 [1969])

After a pause, a no-named grey cat gets up and walks into the house, supposedly confused. The owners are happy. At the end of the sketch, the words start to roll: CONFUSE-A-CAT LIMITED, INCORPORATING, AMAZE-A-VOLE LTD, STUN-A-STOAT LTD, PUZZLE-A-PUMA LTD, STARTLE-A-THOMPSON'S GAZELLE LTD, BEWILDEREBEEST INC, DISTRACT-A-BEE.

One would say that such a mixture of a circus, a fairground booth stage, and a theatre performance gives us an example of an art that achieves its practical goal. Another would even hurry to say that this is an example of the so-called art-therapy that is effective at least in the case of that particular domestic animal. Art-therapy, in turn, provides the very model of politicality, which fits the standards of contemporary cultural production. An idea persists from old to nowadays, that art, miraculously, heals the wounds of individuals as well as the wounds of the society. This idea develops into different modes, from the traditional catharsis of Aristotle's *Poetics* to contemporary artists' belief that they are the new revolutionary class or multitude that picks up from the allegedly disappearing traditional proletariat the baton of changing the world. My argument will be, however, that precisely this piece of art (performed for the cat) does not fall under the definition of an art-therapy in some pragmatic sense, but points toward a different conception of art, which I will try to articulate here.

One could represent the drama of the relationships between art, politics, and ideology either as a triangle, or as a square (where philosophy would occupy a comfortable position of a wise arbiter between the three and reveal the truth of how art, for example, prefers or pretends to stay with politics, which is good, but is in fact cheating on it or flirting with ideology, which is bad), or even as a pentagon, for we should not forget that there is yet another actor on the stage where art, politics, ideology, and philosophy play their respective roles—namely, religion. It enters where art is getting disappointed in both politics and ideology and stops to differentiate between them, but also turns its back to philosophy by losing its will to be conceptual.

Capitalism has deceived us, artists say, it has appropriated all our protest culture; therefore art has to flee from both culture industry, or entertainment, and politics, that is to say, it must avoid the temptation to at-

tach its own truth to the external political or ideological realm, in order to escape from instrumentalization, becoming tools for achieving goals which then turn bad. They ask themselves, what if political intervention condemns art to a non-intrinsic existence? What if politics is just one of the modes of limitation of art, whereas art in itself possess its own inalienable immanent truth, which can only be distorted by the external ideological meanings? The idea of authenticity and purity of form opposed to the coarse matter of the world wallowing in politics and economy brings art into the arms of religion and turns it into a sacred thing (now often called "autonomous"). As Nietzsche famously said: "Art raises its head where the religions relax their hold. It takes over a host of moods and feelings engendered by religion, lays them to its heart and itself grows more profound and soulful, so that it is now capable of communicating exultation and enthusiasm as it formerly could not" (Nietzsche 1996: 81).

As well as religion, which Marx and then Lenin rightly called the "opium of the people," art can be considered a drug. In his essay *Post-History*, Vilém Flusser defines drugs as media, or as "the mediation of the immediate" (2013: 132), which makes public what is supposed to remain private, or deeply intimate: a certain experience effectively mirroring our culture. Art, Flusser argues, is a special kind of drug, since, "after having mediated between man and immediate experience, [it] inverts this mediation and makes it so that the immediate becomes 'articulated,' that is: mediatized toward culture" (2013: 136). It "publishes the private," or "turns conscious the unconscious" (2013: 137). Both religion and art are not usual drugs, but can be classified as a φάρμακον (*phármakon*), that is, to borrow a definition, discussed by Jacques Derrida in *Plato's Pharmacy*, "the drug: the medicine and/or poison" (1981: 70). There are different ways to provide a cure, a remedy for the world which does not look perfect.

In his article "On Art Activism" (2014), Boris Groys addresses the popular question about the meaning of a true political art, and radically reconsiders the alternative, highlighted by Walter Benjamin, between the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics. Groys' article pushes forward a provocative argument that the aestheticization of politics, despite its bad reputation and the fact of being compromised by fascists, opens up another revolutionary perspective.

The opposition between politicized art and aestheticized politics borders, according to Groys, on a broader traditional opposition between the useful and the useless. Contemporary art, which mostly proclaims itself to be political, engaged, and activist, wants "to be useful, to change the world, to make the world a better place" (Groys 2014). Groys claims that this position uses aesthetics for political goals, and he names it "political design." It can be protest or loyal, emancipatory or reactionary, but in all cases corresponds to the same formal criteria of being a means of making this or that politics or ideology more effective.

The astheticization of politics, in turn, goes against the grain of progress and suspends the political. Groys traces this strategy back not to fascism, but rather to the French Revolution, which, he argues, marks the very beginning of modern art, that is art in its proper sense, for "we should see the whole art of the premodern past as, actually, not art but design" (Groys 2014). Why so? The aim of art in the old era was to decorate things, to make them move toward perfection, and was therefore nothing but "religious design, or the design of power and wealth" (Groys 2014). It was the French Revolution that, according to Groys, "turned the design of the Old Regime into what we today call art, i.e., objects not of use but of pure contemplation" (Groys 2014). Aestheticization in this perspective tends toward a defunctionalization of the status quo, the annulation of its practical efficiency and revealing the points of its collapse.

Groys goes so far as exhibiting an endorsement of the strategy of aestheticization of politics even in Benjamin, who, by all appearances, was the first to speak against it, and called it "the logical outcome of fascism" that leads to war (Benjamin 2002: 121). A slight shift, produced by Groys in the meaning of this term, surprisingly puts Benjamin on the same side of the barricade with authors like Marinetti. A famous Benjamin reference to modern art, Klee's painting of Angelus Novus, creates such a link: it "relies on the technique of artistic aestheticization as it was practiced by post-revolutionary European art," Groys comments, explaining that the angel of history, embodied by Angelus Novus, "turns his back to the future simply because he knows how to do it. He knows because he learned this technique from modern art—also from Marinetti" (Groys 2014) Aestheticization means turning art back toward progress that is at the same time a catastrophe. "Go and stop progress," says the Malevich inscription on Daniil Kharms's copy of his book (Groys 2014): under this slogan, according to Groys, an encounter happens not only between Malevich and Harms, but also between Benjamin and Marinetti and many other great figures of modern art. By defunctionalizing the status quo, art "prefigures its coming revolutionary overturn. Or a new global war. Or a new global catastrophe" (Groys 2014).

Here we see both sides of a broad field of practices that I put together under the heading of art-therapy, or art-*phármakon*. What Groys calls *design* (politicization) serves as a remedy, which heals the wounds, tries to make things useful and effective, to move the world forward toward perfection, or to correct its unfortunate errors and "bugs" (one can list numerous examples of contemporary artists feeding homeless people, dancing with refugees, speaking to sex workers, raising plants, caring about animals, children, environment, etc.). What he calls *art* (aestheticization)—serves as a poison, which makes things useless and reality dead for the sake of a pure form.

I would like to note, however, that if we try to differentiate between these approaches by applying Groys' dichotomy of art and design to a cer-

tain particular case, a certain work of art, the borderline, that seemed so clear, blurs, and one passes into another. This is because the author creates a binary opposition without seeing a dialectics between the two terms: after all, what introduced itself as uselessness proves to be more useful than usefulness, more effective, more successful, more political, and more revolutionary. Doesn't this mean that true art simply proves to be a better form of design? Groys' analysis implies that we can choose between these two things, as if they were staying separately, fixed, in front of each other. But if we choose the "right" one, would this not be from the very beginning cheating—for we already know in advance, that by choosing the poison we in reality choose a better medicine? To put it in Hegelian terms, the one (say, design) is the truth of the other (say, art), which negates it and yet keeps it as sublated. These two moments can turn into each other again and again, thus creating a bad infinity. In order to get out of this vicious circle, another step is needed, that would lead our understanding of the role of art and its politics beyond the enclosed poison/antidote dialectics of the *phármakon.*

Let us return to Monthy Python's "cat confusers." Is the kind of theatre they perform really useful, or is it useless? Does it cure the cat or poison it with art? To put it bluntly, useful is something that intends to achieve, effectively or not, a certain, more or less realistic goal. Uselessness despises effectiveness (and, within the *phármakon*-circle of art and design, this strategy proves to be more effective). Now if we look at cat confusers, we can see that they apparently have a goal, but the goal they have reveals itself as rather irrelevant. It isn't that crazy, so to speak, for itself, it has its very special dignity within the situation lived through by Monthy Python's characters—an elderly British couple, their cat, a vet, a general and a sergeant, and, finally, a group of performers—cat confusers, who are able to make all kinds of miracles for the sake of this poor living being. What makes the goal that unites all these characters look so absurd is the fact that the means to achieve it are *extremely excessive*. Artists (performers) make the impossible for some ridiculously minor thing: structurally, there is a discrepancy here between the goal and the means.

There is another, totally different example of a discrepancy, where extreme excess is not the means, but the goal itself. We find it beyond a tiny border between the funny and the uncanny, where art aims not to confuse a cat, but "to awaken the dead." Talking about the Benjaminian angel, Groys focuses on such detail as his position back toward the future, but doesn't pay attention to the desire of the angel, which in the meantime seems to be the opposite to the desire of the Groysian artist. The latter wants to make sure that the dead will never return: this is the mission of the museum, which Groys compares to the cemetery and argues, that "the museum is much more of a cemetery than any real cemetery"—it does not conceal the dead, but exposes them, so that we can see them being inactive. A total aestheticization of the world turns it into a global

museum of itself. "The museum in the daylight is a place of definitive death that allows no resurrection, no return of the past. The museum institutionalizes the truly radical, atheistic, revolutionary violence that demonstrates the past as incurably dead. It is a purely materialistic death without return—the aestheticized material corpse functions as a testimony to the impossibility of resurrection" (Groys 2014).

On the contrary, the Benjaminian angel "would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin 2006: 392). The goal of awakening the dead seems unrealistic, and yet, perhaps, a minor thing is needed to achieve it (the thing we never do: would it fall under the definition of art?). Awakening the dead corresponds neither to aestheticization, nor to politicization. It aims to redeem the past (whereas Groysian aestheticization buries it in the museum, thus preserving the rest of the city from these uncanny ghosts), but does not invest into the future (as politicization does when follows its imperative to make the world, or the country, or the city, or this given community, better). The goal of awakening the dead lies beyond the *phármakon*-principle, there where art cannot be taken as a therapy.

One could hardly find a better guide to these territories than Antonin Artaud's conception of theatre. It was Artaud who claimed that theatre is not a cure, but is *a disease* itself, and famously compared it to a plague: "The theatre like the plague is a crisis which is resolved by death or cure. And the plague is a superior disease because it is a total crisis after which nothing remains except death or an extreme purification. Similarly the theatre is a disease because it is the supreme equilibrium which cannot be achieved without destruction" (Artaud 1958: 31). Artaud's theatre does not try to be useful or good. In contrast, it is "the time of evil, the triumph of dark powers" (1958: 30). It does not heal the wounds of society, but is itself a wound that hurts. The open wound of theatre is the very crisis of life.

The metaphor of the plague comes from St. Augustine, who, in his *City of God*, "complains of this similarity between the action of the plague that kills without destroying the organs and the theatre which, without killing, provokes the most mysterious alterations in the mind of not only an individual but an entire populace" (Artaud 1958: 26). As it touches not a separate individual, but an entire community at once, it is both a disease and a disaster. In comparison to art-therapy in both senses—either preventing a catastrophe or prefiguring it—theatre-disease is itself a catastrophe. It is an apocalypse—also in the Greek and biblical sense of this word for revelation: "If the essential theatre is like the plague, it is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is the revelation, the bringing forth, the exteriorization of a depth of latent cruelty by means of which all the perverse possibilities of the mind, whether of an individual or a people, are localized" (Artaud 1958: 30). It is a "redeeming epidemic," when contact means contagion.

As noted by Oliver Feltham (2006: 233), it was Vsevolod Meyerhold who in 1907 had already claimed that theatre was losing the power of infectious transformation (Meyerhold 1969: 60). In his analysis of modernist theatre in Badiou's theory of praxis, Feltham emphasizes that Artaud was not simply influenced, in a trivial sense, by Meyerhold, but "faithful to the Meyerhold-event" (Feltham 2006: 234). For Feltham, Meyerhold is an event in the sense that his theatrical productions and writings are the site of the beginning of transformations that finally bring to the modern theatre. They change the situation called "theatre" and mark the establishment of a new state of affairs. The main ideas of Meyerhold theatre, which produced this tectonic shift, where the one of the "corporate creative act," in which the whole material space of the auditorium was radically transfigured, and the one of the "proletarian theatre," which inscribed this material element within a broader class composition, thus turning theatre into something that, as I understand it, Marcel Mauss would call a "total social fact" (2000). For this, among other things, Meyerhold aimed to resituate the spectator as a co-creator and to reintroduce the mask, clowning, mime, etc. as essential to theatre.

After the Meyerhold-event, according to Feltham, two general lines of fidelity to it can be traced in modern theatre. The first is presented by Bertolt Brecht, who investigates the social function of the theatre, which should be different from the one of providing an evening's pleasure (Brecht 1964: 36). Positing itself against classical Aristotelian mimesis, Brecht's theatre seeks to politicize the audience. "In line with Meyerhold's embrace of masks and mummery" he "incorporates into the language of theatre complicated stage machinery, marionettes, and the projection of titles and pictures onto screens" (Feltham 2006: 231). For the second line we return to Artaud, who opposes psychological and literary, or, as he also calls it, Occidental theatre. He, too, admires Meyerhold and develops, in his own manner, the ideas of the dissolution of the distinction between the audience and the actors, of the theatre of action and of masses, and adding of masks, mannequins and other objects at the stage. However, there is a point where Artaud distances himself from the "Russian" conception of the theatre, for it places the theatre "at the service of immediate political or social ends" (Virmaux 1970: 138, quoted in Feltham 2006: 233). Artaud divorces both from Brecht and Meyerhold, because, to put it bluntly, their theatre is too politically engaged. Or, if we are allowed to use a Groysian term here, it is too "design." This doesn't mean, however, that he chooses for what Groys calls aestheticization. Artaud's theatre of cruelty and of an immediate communication-contagion, or "metaphysical" theatre, inspired by Oriental ritualistic tradition, hardly meets criteria of either politicization or aestheticization, but—let me repeat—goes beyond the *phármakon*-circle they create.

If Artaud praises the "Balinese theatre" that "restores the theatre, by means of ceremonies of indubitable age and well-tried efficacy, to its orig-

inal destiny which it presents as a combination of all these elements fused together in a perspective of hallucination and fear" (Artaud 1958: 53), a great Italian actress Eleonora Duse, who also uses a plague metaphor, is inspired by the idea of the "returning to the Greek": "To save the theatre, the theatre must be destroyed; the actors and actresses must all die of the plague. They poison the air, they make art impossible. It is not drama that they play, but pieces for the theatre. We should return to the Greek, play in the open air; the drama dies of stalls and boxes and evening dress, and people who come to digest dinner" (Craig 1978: xxi). Here, again, we are witness to a paradoxical moment of discrepancy between the means and the goals or art: it is necessary to kill all the actors and actresses in order to save the theatre itself. A plague is an excessive means to achieve the goal, which, by these very means, is seemingly made absurd—what could a theatre do without actors?

At the dawn of modernist theatre, the aforementioned idea of the return of the theatre to masks and mannequins shared by Meyerhold, Brecht, Artaud, and others, was in the air. Thus, Edward Gordon Craig, a famous English theatre theorist, actor, director, and set designer, frequently referred to Eleonora Duse and claimed that actors should be replaced by marionettes or mannequins (Craig 2008). This idea goes back to Heinrich von Kleist, who in 1810 wrote an essay "On the Marionette Theatre" (Kleist 1972). In this perspective, the theatre could actually go on without actors.

Would, however, a simple puppet suffice to respond to the impossible task of "saving" the theatre and returning to it its magic force of an immediate social happening? Contemporary polish director Tadeusz Kantor found this idea too simplistic. In the 1950s, he began experimenting with the juxtaposition of mannequins and live actors, and in the 1970s came to introduce "The Theatre of Death" (1990). In the manifesto, he writes:

> I do not believe that a MANIKIN (or a WAX FIGURE) could replace a LIVE ACTOR, contrary to Kleist and Craig. That would be too easy and too naïve. I am trying to make sense of the motives and purpose of that unusual object, which appeared suddenly in my thoughts and ideas. Its appearance is consistent with my growing conviction that life can be expressed in art only by means of the absence of life, by way of references to DEATH, through APPEARANCES, through EMPTINESS and a dumb MESSAGE. The MANIKIN in my theatre is to become a MODEL that mediates a strong sense of DEATH and the condition of the DEAD. It is to be a model for the LIVE ACTOR (Kantor 1990: 112).

In Kantor's theatre, the actor himself should be transformed into its uncanny double, a dead corpse—and this is the only way to become, in a way, alive, for an actor, who, like phoenix, is thus to be reborn from his own ashes:

If we agree that a trait
*of living people*
is the ease and ability
with which they enter into mutual and manifold
*life relationships*,
only then
with regard to the dead
is there born in us a sudden and startling
realization of the fact that
this basic trait of the living
is brought out and made possible by
their complete
*lack of differentiation,*
by their
*indistinguishability,*
by their universal *similarity,*
mercilessly abolishing all other opposing delusions,
common,
consistent,
all-binding.
Only then do the *dead*
become (for the living)
*noteworthy*
for that highest price,
achieving
their individuality,
distinction,
their CHARACTER,
glaring
and almost
circus-like
(Kantor 1990: 115–16).

*The Dead Class* (1975) is the most famous of Kantor's theatrical pieces, where he himself played the role of a teacher who presided over a class of apparently dead characters confronted by mannequins which represented their younger selves. As Jacob Juntunen interprets: "The dead referred to and represented in *The Dead Class* were threefold: they were Kantor's childhood classmates, most of whom were killed in the World Wars; they were a synecdoche for the millions of World War II dead in Kantor's native Galicia… and they underscored the geographical proximity between his adult home, Krakow, and the nearby Nazi camps, Auschwitz and Birkenau, at which Kantor's father died" (Juntunen 2012).

Doesn't Kantor's theatre, in a way, target the excessive goal of awakening the dead, as introduced by Benjamin? To achieve this goal, an actor,

confronted by a mannequin, must vanish himself, get rid of any character, of any personality, jump into an indifference of death, and join the crowd of no-name dead corpses without faces, without individuality, without glory, without life. The essential here is that it is not the actor who thus, through this negation, acquires individuality and comes into existence, reflected through the theatre, but a character itself: an actor must vanish for a character to arrive. This character is not a living man, but a dead corpse—of a classmate, of a father, of a comrade, or those who died during the war, or in camps. In his *Rhapsody for The Theatre* (2008), Badiou indicates three elementary conditions of theatre (which, for Badiou, constitutes one of philosophy's truth procedures): public, actors, and textual referents (Badiou 2008: 191). Kantor's radical resurrection comprises that the dead, to whom theatre wants to pay justice, reappear at all these three levels—as public, as actors, and as textual referents. As actors, they appear on the stage and look at us, spectators. Otherwise, they are themselves spectators, and the theatre show goes on in order to awaken them, to "confuse," to make them move. But, first of all, they are characters, or textual referents, who revive in actor's bodies.

With an image of the dead awakening we arrive at the realm of the uncanny (and yes, Kantor's scenes are uncanny, but also, in a way, comic). In turn, the uncanny, or *unheimlich*, as Freud famously explained, is that kind of fear that appears with what in psychoanalysis is called the return of the repressed. It is "nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud 1976: 634). Freud refers to Schelling's romantic definition of the uncanny, which preconditions the sublime: that which ought to remain secret, but which has come to light. Isn't theatre the place, where, as the curtains—if there are any—go up, that which was hidden comes on the stage, and the uncanny and the sublime, so to speak, naturally coincide? Not only Kantor, but any theatre worthy of this name has a potential of that return of the dead, as deeply repressed. Think about Hamlet's father, or the statue of the Commander at the first place: the *un*dead is the dead that returns in the experience of the *un*canny (here: in the sublime theatrical experience).

I must mention one more thing here. The dead are not only repressed, in a psychoanalytic sense, but also oppressed. They are oppressed by the very fact that an ultimate injustice, that is, death, occurred to them: how could one redeem it? Together with their individual lives, they lost their properties, their names, their faces, their bodies, their stories. They have to disappear from the eyes of the living, to be excluded and consigned to oblivion (which is the seamy side of the social practices of remembrance). Moreover, the dead is one of the paradigmatic models for the living oppressed—in Marx, for instance, for the worker, who does not live properly, but transforms his living labor into the dead capital, and is therefore a sort of a living dead. In this broad sense, one can say that the dead, too,

create a class. Thus Kantor's title, *The Dead Class*, acquires a new meaning. What is on stage is not only a classroom, but a kind of polis, where the repressed returns as the oppressed rise.

In one of his works dedicated to the theatre, Badiou claims that today theatre is endangered—both from the right and the left, and must therefore be defended. According to the rightist trend, "if the theatre isn't the pious visitation of a cultural treasure, it must curve out a place for itself in the entertainment industry" (Badiou 2015: 9). Against this tendency, Badiousian theatre is, to use Mallarmé's definition, a "superior art" (2007: 142). The task is to to activate the distinction between art that invents "new forms adequate to a distance taken from that which dominates," and entertainment "which is a constitutive piece of the dominant propaganda" (Badiou 2015: 15). Another threat, according to Badiou, appears on the left, and is based on the ideas of the abolition of classical, traditional forms of theatrical representation for the sake of an experimentation of theatre with life. Of course, among others, Artaud is in the list of those who activate this threat. The danger it presents is explained by the inner destructive forces of such experimental and critical conceptions of theatre: they are too radical (Badiou 2015: 18). I am suggesting here that under the name "Theatre for the Dead" lies a potential synthesis of some of these dangerous leftist tendencies against the rightest ones. Instead of being "defended," theatre in this perspective would turn "danger" into "salvation" by mobilizing its negative and destructive forces against the real destruction operating in life beyond the stage. By the latter I mean that kind of "theatre without theatre," which was called by Guy Debord "the society of the spectacle" (1977), and where repressive violence, social inequalities and wars are the part of the show. Theatre for the dead combines elements of Brecht's epic theatre, Boal's theatre of the oppressed, Meyerhold's proletarian theatre, Artaud's theatre of cruelty, Kantor's theatre of death and other potential theatres, fairground booth stages, etc., which are brave enough to break the circle of the therapeutic function of art, which, in strict accordance with biopolitical regime of contemporary capitalism, privileges and preserves "live"—and to go beyond the *phármakon*-principle, through making an alliance with death for the sake of those who already belong to it.

# Bibliography

Artaud, Antonin (1958). *The Theatre and Its Double*. New York: Grove Press.

Badiou, Alain (2015). *In Praise of Theatre* (With Nicolas Truong). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Badiou, Alain (2008). "Rhapsody for the Theatre: A Short Philosophical Treatise." *Theatre Survey* 49.2: 187–238.

Benjamin, Walter (2002). "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." In *Selected Writings,* Vol. 3: 1935–1938, 101–33. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, Walter (2006). "On the Concept of History." In *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4: 1938–1940, 389–411. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brecht, Bertold (1964). "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre" [1930]. In *Brecht on Theatre*, 33–42. London: Methuen.

Chapman, Graham and John Cleese (2014). "Confuse-a-Cat" [1969]. *Monty Python*. Series 1, episode 5. BBC Television. http://www.montypython.net/scripts/confuse.php.

Craig, Edward Gordon (1978). *Gordon Craig on Movement and Dance*. London: Dance Books.

Craig, Edward Gordon (2008). *On the Art of the Theatre.* London: Routledge.

Debord, Guy (1977). "The Society of the Spectacle" [1967]. Trans. Fredy Perlman and Jon Supak, Black & Red. *Marxists Internet Archive.* https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm.

Derrida, Jacques (1981). "Plato's Pharmacy." In *Disseminations*, 61–172. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Feltham, Oliver (2006). "An explosive genealogy: theatre, philosophy and the art of presentation." *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 2.1–2: 226–40.

Freud, Sigmund (1976). "The Uncanny." *New Literary History* 7.3: 619–45.

Flusser, Vilém (2013). *Post-History*. Trans. R. M. Novaes. Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing.

Groys, Boris (2014). "On Art Activism." *e-flux* 56.6. http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-art-activism.

Juntunen, Jacob (2012). "Presenting Death: Uncanny Performing Objects in Taduesz Kantor's Dead Class." *Puppetry International* 31 (Spring/Summer): 14–18.

Kantor, Tadeusz (1990). *A Journey through Other Spaces: Essays And Manifestos, 1944–1990.* Ed. and trans. Michal Kobialka. Berkley: University of California Press.

Kleist, Heinrich von and Thomas G. Neumiller (1972). "On the Marionette Theatre." *The Drama Review* 163 (The "Puppet" Issue): 22–26.

Mallarmé, Stéphane (2007). *Divagations*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mauss, Marcel (2000). *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*. Trans. W. D. Halls. New York: W. W. Norton.

Meyerhold, Vsevolod (1969). *Meyerhold on Theatre*. London: Metheun.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1996). *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Virmaux, Alain (1970). *Antonin Artaud et le theatre.* Paris: Seghers.