ŚWIAT I SŁOWO WORLD AND WORD
42 | 1 | 2024 ISSN 1731-3317
http://doi.org/10.53052/17313317.2024.11

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"Alien Specimens" Tadeusz Kantor's Monstrous Onto-epistemology of Memory

But what is a stage which presents nothing to the sight?
Jacques Derrida[1]

The Theatre of the Undead

Since this paper is predominantly interested in alienation and monstrosity, it should begin with something that is most monstrous from the perspective of academic rigour: a digression. The extent to which contemporary Western culture revisits, transforms, and capitalises on the figure of the undead is profoundly disturbing. Ghosts, spectres, wraiths, vampires, ghouls, zombies, and the countless other forms that death tends to embody in cultural practices are weirdly familiar even though their shared liminality of life and death should necessarily render them incomprehensive. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes: "Undead names the zone of restless and perplexing activity from which monsters arrive, a gap in the fabric of the known world that opens a space neither real nor chimerical, a breach in which everything familiar loses its certainty – including what

[1] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 306.

constitutes life."[2] Perhaps this attack on reason, which consequently urges us to concretise the unknown up to the moment when it does, at least, become familiar, is the underlying factor in the modern proliferation of the undead. The possibility of successful exploration against the burning limit is readily adaptable to the narratives of mystery and crime, trauma and loss, guilt and redemption, or survival and adaptation. And yet, the meaning of the undead is broader than that of mere antagonism, threat, or mystery; the undead mark a gap in the binary notion of life and death, for while they are not entirely (or are no longer) dead, they are hardly alive within the anthropocentric pantheon of living creatures. In Western culture, the unexpected return of the dead to life tampers with the scientific convictions of life's finitude and religious accounts of resurrection and redemption. Finally, the undead are thrown into a reality with which they can interact only in a highly automated way: they haunt, roam, hunt, or scavenge as if driven by an irresistible impulse that makes them excessively vivid yet not necessarily alive. In a sense, cultural practices stage appointments with the undead in which they unravel as figures that tamper with our stable presumptions: they are figures of disappointment.

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This paper attempts to reconcile the monstrous realms of the undead with Tadeusz Kantor's theatre of death, with special emphasis placed on *Wielopole, Wielpole*. The purpose is to map Kantor's rigorous negotiations of the boundaries of life and death, which often abolish overly individual, human, or linear understandings of both categories and instead expose us to the nonhuman vibrancy that underlies them. The key manifestation of this tendency is visible in what I tentatively call "monstrous onto-epistemology of memory." In my reading, Kantor envisions memory as the monstrous other to the past; memory here has its own nonhuman agency, thus tampering with our anthropocentric preconceptions of memory as a finite archive or controlled recollection.

The choice of such a figure would in all probability be perceived by Kantor as either appalling or repulsive if we recall his highly critical views

[2] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Undead (A Zombie Oriented Ontology)," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23, no. 3 (2013): 398.

on consumerist culture, which capitalises on the modern understanding of the undead, turning them into pop-cultural monsters.[3] Moreover, it is a choice that, following the spirit of the opening remarks, might result in disappointment. Even though I borrowed "alien specimens"[4] from Kantor, this phrase mostly connotes scientific and technological discourses of Western cultural imagery, which, in this case, are rather incongruous if we consider the formal minimalism and abstract imagination of Kantor's theatrical project. At the same time, alien specimens hardly indicate any monsters, which in Kantor's theatre are scarce. Considering how often lay uses of "monstrous" as an adjective point to grave ethical or aesthetic violations, such scarcity should surprise us even more. After all, the atrocities of the twentieth-century genocides and the avant-garde imperative of reinventing the theatrical gaze determine Kantor's work to a great extent.

Why resort to "monsters," "monstrosity," or "specimens," then? There are at least two reasons for that. First, I do believe that monstrosity might offer a useful interpretative key to Kantor's late theatrical works, especially if we read them as a series of attempts to construct "the world of the dead" on stage. It is the world in which the artistic resurrection of historical and familiar figures is augmented by the symbolic suspension of the division into the living and the dead. Moreover, the performative reality of Kantor's "theatre of death" shows how the figure of the undead, as we would call it today, functions at the intersection of the intimate, the historical, the autobiographical, and the artistic, penetrating their seemingly contained realms. Second, imagined in such a way, the inhabitants of Kantor's theatre – family members, infantrymen, priests, rabbis – are vivid although somewhat worn-out, easily recognised but certainly unfamiliar. They are embodied in poses which are crippled, involuntary, and automated, subjected to the routines and gestures they followed in the past. In this sense, their existence meddles with our anthropocentric imagination, envisioning them rather as non- or in-human.

[3] See: Tadeusz Kantor, "The Milano Lessons. Lesson 12," in *A Journey through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, ed. and trans. Michal Kobialka (Berkley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993), 246–65.

[4] Tadeusz Kantor, "Fotografia rekrutów," in *Wielopole, Wielopole* (Kraków and Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), 22. All the translations of Kantor's texts are mine unless specified otherwise.

Autobiographical Hyperspace

Wielopole, Wielopole is a spectacle which reconstructs Kantor's family home in Wielopole Skrzyńskie, a village in rural southeast Poland, in the early twentieth century, out of distorted and dispersed images, memories, and documents. As it quickly turns out, this reconstruction is by no means faithful or finite. Except for the grand doors at the back of the stage, arguably the doors of imagination and memory, the scene contains random objects – a window, a table, a wardrobe, a bed, and a suitcase, to name a few – whose position is never definite.[5] The inhabitants are persistent in moving these objects in search of the historical organisation of the room as it were in the past, yet none of the results seems to satisfy all of them completely. A similar clash of stasis and dynamism is noticeable in their other actions. All of the figures inhabiting the room of memory are somewhat stuck in their habits or routines, or trapped in the looped activities that they were associated with in the past. Kantor states in the text accompanying the spectacle: "[T]he room of my childhood is a dark and cluttered hole."[6] The incomplete and transient nature of memories makes it impossible for us to represent them faithfully within a linear and logical narrative; rather, they arrive in series, contesting or reaffirming previously reconstructed realities in the process of reminiscence.

This autobiographical reference is used by Kantor to uncover the deeply hidden otherness that resides inside what we consider to be most intimate, personal, and familial. In order to achieve this, Kantor focuses on the central trope of repetition. According to Kantor, repetition, inherent in any act of memorising or reminiscing, is one of the most primordial human gestures.[7] As he notes in "Illusion and Repetition," repetition is the other side of creativity; it is an elaborate fiction or illusion. In a quasi-mythical perspective, as Kantor argues, human beings invented repetition when they decided to create something on their own for the very first time (that necessarily imitated the world around them).[8] For Kantor, therefore, repetition is a deeply Promethean act. Promethean acts carry a backlash

[5] Tadeusz Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole. Partytura teatralna*, in *Wielopole, Wielopole* (Kraków and Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1984), 34–40.

[6] Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, 32.

[7] Tadeusz Kantor, "Illusion and Repetition," in Michal Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing. Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 402–03.

[8] Kantor, "Illusion and Repetition, " 403.

through the inevitable vengeance of the gods: in this case, the inability to create. And yet, repetition is an indispensable element of theatrical productions, if not art in general. The paradox also influences Kantor's examples of repetition that revise our temporal and spatial orientation, that is, an echo, memory, and eternity or void.[9] An echo is a repetition of a dying sound at the verge of the material and the immaterial[10]; memory accesses the past that is gone just to reaffirm or restage its loss[11]; finally, the perfect act of repetition, in the form of either a radical contraction of time or an expanded loop, is eventually transmuted into a figure of eternity or of void, both of which are the domains of death. These instances inspire Kantor to acknowledge repetition as a "'dubious' procedure"[12] that invalidates the fixed limits of life and death, exposing us to their interconnections and interdeterminations.

Repetition as a vehicle of otherness or uncanniness is a central trope for *Wielopole, Wielopole*, inextricably linked to the principles of "the theatre of death." In Kantor's post-dramatic space, to use Hans-Thies Lehmann's canonical category,[13] "the theatre of death" aims predominantly at "recreating the primordial shock" of the mythical first encounter between two persons – the actor and the spectator – who are deceptively similar yet strikingly different, separated by the "invisible barrier of the stage."[14] The theatre of death, in other words, has been a repetition since the very beginning. Arguably, Kantor's theatre of death revisits the cultural impact of Antonin Artaud's "theatre of cruelty"; in reference to the latter, Jacques Derrida claims: "The menace of repetition is nowhere else as well organized as in the theater. Nowhere else is one so close to the stage as the origin

[9] Ibid., 404–05.

[10] Ibid., 404.

[11] Ibid., 404–05.

[12] Ibid., 404.

[13] See: Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[14] Tadeusz Kantor, "The Theatre of Death," in *A Journey through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, ed. and trans. Michal Kobialka (Berkley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993), 114. Mischa Twitchin notes that "[i]n the theatre of death the question of likeness (and presence) touches upon an affect – a 'metaphysical feeling,' or 'shock,' owing to the uncanny in mimesis – where the actor's appearance itself figures (a return of) the dead for an audience (in an *art* of theatre so conceived). […] [T]he audience is touched by an intimation of the threshold *between* the visible and the invisible, between 'this world' and its double." See: Mischa Twitchin, *The Theatre of Death – The Uncanny in Mimesis. Tadeusz Kantor, Aby Warburg, and an Iconology of the Actor* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 34. Emphasis in the original.

of repetition, so close to the primitive repetition which would have to be erased, and only by detaching it from itself as if from its double."[15] For Kantor, repetition also marks an insatiable longing for a theatrical affect that necessarily stems from a repeated event yet might reach singularity that evades the confines of convention. In this sense, Kantor's theatre might be perceived as a machine that recognises the inevitability of its repetitive activity and subversively attempts to wear itself down within a single task, working as efficiently as possible. Kantor's examples of repetition echo Derrida's reading of Artaud in which representation is exposed to its "tragic" and "baseless necessity"[16]; Kantor's repetition also "permit[s] presence to be born to itself, and pleasurably to consume itself through representation in which it eludes itself in its deferral,"[17] for the imperfect act of imitation stages the identity of what is created in the moment of its immediate dissipation. Inscribed in creative acts, repetition marks the arrival of what is created within the endless course of difference as the identity of the former is provisory; it is established only to be immediately abolished.

Kantor's understanding of repetition as a vehicle of difference also connotes later phases of Derrida's thought. As Kantor argues in "The Milano Lessons," what is at stake is the access to the brute state of reality, "pre-reality" or "ur-matter." Still, such an understanding of matter marks the possibility of mapping radical futurality whose lack of definite outcomes only reinforces its potentiality. Kantor notes:

> This *UR-MATTER is space*! / I can feel its pulsating rhythm. / Space, / which does not have an exit or a boundary; / which is receding, disappearing, / or approaching omnidirectionally with changing velocity; it is dispersed in all directions: to the sides, to the middle; / it ascends, caves in, / spins on the vertical, horizontal, diagonal axis… / It is not afraid to burst into an enclosed shape, / defuse it with a sudden jerking movement, / deform its shape… / Figures and objects become the function of space / and its mutability… / Space is not a passive *receptacle* / in which objects and forms are posited … /SPACE itself is an OBJECT [of creation]. / And the main one! SPACE is

[15] Jacques Derrida, "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," in *Writing and Difference*, ed. and trans. Alan Bass (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 311.

[16] Derrida, "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation," 316.

[17] Ibid., 316.

> charged with *ENERGY.* / Space shrinks and *expands*. / And these motions mould forms and objects. / It is space that *GIVES BIRTH* to forms! / It is space that conditions the network of relations and tensions between objects. / TENSION is the principal actor of space. / A HYPERSPACE…[18]

Kantor's theatre, therefore, recognises the agency and the potentiality of the material or ontological fabric that precedes our simple divisions into alive/dead, active/passive, real/unreal, or created/imitated. At the same time, if such divisions are to be made, Kantor admires the hidden vibrancy of the latter categories: it is thanks to the agencies of the inferior, poor, imperfect, inanimate, or even dead that the proper recognition of life beyond its anthropocentric framings might be made. The term "A HYPERSPACE" signals here an interesting correlation with Timothy Morton's notion of hyperobjects. Hyperobjects are viscous objects (or arrays of objects) whose gigantic properties cause them to elude our spatial or temporal concretisations yet do not negate their (often all-encompassing) existence.[19] Morton manages to revisit the Derridean legacy of *l'arrivant*,[20] or his later messianic interventions, to establish a negative cartography of an ontological pre-fabric of reality, whose spatiality, identity, and temporality are strangely shrouded, and yet which manages to penetrate our reality with its uncanny strangeness that can only be *to-come*. As the later sections of this article intend to show, Kantor's works have corresponding properties.

Repeating Childhood Memory

Let us, therefore, return to Wielopole and the imaginary family house onstage. Michal Kobialka claims that

> [t]he repetition of Kantor's memories of Wielopole as papier-mâché façades materialized in this other space and this other time wherein the illusion of the past events was a portent of this other universe. This other universe, this other life's reality could only be sensed now, in a different way, affirming the atavistic gestures of human beings, who came into a space

[18] Kantor, "The Milano Lessons. Lesson 3," in *A Journey through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, ed. and trans. Michal Kobialka (Berkley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1993), 217. Emphasis in the original.

[19] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 145.

[20] See: Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 33–35.

> liberated from the seductions of everyday life and its fetishised, enchanted simulacra.[21]

It seems, however, that liberation comes at a cost. Kantor's childhood room is a haunted place: literally and figuratively. As he argues in one of his essays, our memory is not inhabited by noble figures; the ones we remember are somewhat caricatured, twisted, imperfect, and lacking particular features. After all, they are all detached from the greater contexts of the actions through which we remember them. Therefore, Kantor argues that memory is rather an "employment agency"[22] as "[r]ecollection of the past makes use of 'hired' people."[23] Their uncanniness embraces not only the fact that the departed are remembered differently than has been anticipated, but also the way in which they challenge our apparent control over memory, traditionally understood as an archive. And so, in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, the particularly expansive uncles, played by the Janicki twin brothers, either correct or imitate one another. They participate in repetitive rituals and habits and, simultaneously, try to unmask the repetition around them as if to gain a distinctive identity. Aunt Mańka is locked in articulating an apocalyptic prophecy inspired by her own religious devotion.[24] Mother Helka is mostly motionless, passive, and emotionally detached from the events around her, acting like a living mannequin. Uncle Józef, a priest, is actually a mannequin that after death – marked by the salvo of a camera-machine gun taking the last family picture – is replaced by a living actor, whose patriotic zeal is the most "lifelike" behaviour among the other caricatured family members.

Figuratively, the room is haunted by trauma: the spectre of an absent father blends with that of the atrocities of World War I and the anti-Jewish pogroms. From the very beginning the events on stage are interrupted by violations, rapes, and murders committed by the infantry. In *Wielopole, Wielopole*, the soldiers enter the stage for the first time to form a tableau

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[21] Michal Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing. Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 281.

[22] Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, 33.

[23] Kobialka, *Further on, Nothing*, 284.

[24] Indirectly, prophecy and apocalypse are also rooted in repetition and its transformative potential. Prophecy is predetermined by its constitutive event, which turns the unpredictable future into the scripted present, as if it has already happened. The uncanny catastrophe becomes the present-in-the-making as the future horizon both archives and anticipates its advent.

of an army photograph, which after another salvo of the camera-machine gun comes back to life (or death, to be more precise). It seems that the organisation of this childhood memory might never entirely take place as it is eventually torn apart by the said intruders. This symbolic act might be read as the intrusiveness of trauma, whose volatile and destructive potential exposes the subject to such an extent that the lack of comprehension becomes compensated for through repetitive or imaginary impulses.[25] In a way, in *Wielopole, Wielopole*, Kantor manages to begin working through historical trauma which through the symbolic dissection of memory from any definite past can never be properly continued. Instead, his spectacle fuels structural trauma in the guise of historical trauma and persistently acts out what it has tried to overcome.[26]

The position granted to the infantrymen is not determined solely by biography or history; Kantor seems to admire the army for its inherent dehumanisation, which is, however, not connected to any specific event or military tactic. Rather, the infantry is elevated to an ontological category. For Kantor, the army represents a collective of human beings that are deprived of humanity altogether due to their synchronicity and unity, their mechanical actions, and their obedience. These "alien specimens," "dead" and "clandestine lodgers," are at the same time the figures of anonymous life, except for Marian Kantor, Kantor's father.[27] He is the only infantryman who seems to have a distinct identity; still, his movements are highly mechanical and lifeless, whereas his speech is replaced by an incomprehensible logorrhoea: a dark counterpart to language. If, following Kantor's tentative typology, the return of the family members is repetition in the form of an echo, which is already dead but still bears some traces of

[25] Cathy Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," *Yale French Studies*, no. 79 (1991): 181.

[26] Here, I refer to Dominick LaCapra's notions of historical and structural trauma. For LaCapra, historical trauma is linked to loss, a catastrophic past event, which has induced a temporal dissonance. The traumatic impact of the past event cannot be safely locked in the past. Structural trauma, in turn, marks a traumatic excess that is connected to absence: it is not related to any past event, but rather marks the traumatic impact of subject-formation splits, as understood in psychoanalytical theory and practice. Because of these properties, historical traumas are subject to a working-through that attempts to allocate the traumatic excess back in the past; as the structural trauma lacks its formative historical event, it can only be acted out. It can also be involved in the practices of repetition. Unlike working through, acting out might re-establish trauma instead of alleviating its damaging effects. See: Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 76–82.

[27] Kantor, "Fotografia rekrutów," 22.

a version of the past, the infantrymen – and the father specifically – rely on repetition as a void, that is, pure death; they are beings whose only activity is concerned with depriving themselves of any signs of life.

Memory and the Material Inheritance

Wielopole, Wielopole may well open up not only an inhuman space, but also an undead and monstrous one. The ongoing negotiations between life (understood as either inaccessible or counterintuitively inert) and death (revised into a vibrant agency) point to Cohen's understanding of undeadness, cited at the beginning of this article. For Cohen, "undead [i]s a kind of contact zone between the human and the nonhuman, a space in which the human becomes inhuman."[28] Kantor's work of repetition problematises the identities of the memory and its image as the humanity of the dwellers is called into question, replaced with mechanical, (un) dead-like impulses. The imperfection of memory contests those stable divisions into the human and the nonhuman, and, therefore, paves a way for the further instability of categories and limits. Kantor's devaluation of the alien specimens emphasises the role of difference. As outcasts, they do not belong to the well-furnished and overly coherent space of conventional childhood memory: if they have to take a form within it, it has to be that of a monster. As Cohen notes elsewhere, "[T]he monster resists any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead a 'system' allowing polyphony, mixed response (difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction), and resistance to integration [...]."[29] He adds: "[T]he monstrous is a genus too large to be encapsulated in any conceptual system."[30] These characteristics connote our earlier discussions of Kantor's project. For Kantor, the dedication to a primordial shock is a foundational feature of the theatre of death. It seems that the theatre of death encompasses death as it foregrounds the crises of identity, temporality, and representation. At the same time, its destructive (or deconstructive) aesthetics does not seem to be interested in total annihilation; rather, it is methodical in seeking what lurks beneath the ruined world onstage.

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[28] Cohen, "Undead," 398.

[29] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 7.

[30] Cohen, "Monster Culture," 7.

In my reading, I purposefully referred to a particular type of the undead earlier: the spectre. Firstly, just like for Derrida, the spectre subverts the notions of being alive and being dead, being present and being absent. As John D. Caputo notes, "[S]pectr[e] […] [is] a part of a long line of Derridean marks or graphemes – like supplement, pharmakon, hymen, margin, cinder – meant to signal the intervention upon or contravention of simple presence/absence schemas which opens up the invention of something *tout autre*."[31] Kantor's artistic deconstruction of memory similarly tackles our temporal and spatial orientation with its careful construction of undetermined inhabitants. At the same time, just like in *Specters of Marx*, Kantor's family members and infantrymen are figures caught between summoning and exorcism: each act of conjuration is also the act of conjurement, through which the unstable position of a spectre is maintained.[32] Never entirely cast away, the inhabitants of Kantor's *Wielopole, Wielopole* return over and over again just to repeat their lives compressed into fragmentary memories; being cast at will, however, they seem to return not as "noble and respectable figures," but as weird, "employed" decoys.[33]

Throughout his negotiation of memory, Kantor shows that the dead past cannot be affirmed through a living memory, but rather memory itself occupies the realm of the dead. In a sense, similarly to Derrida, he demonstrates that memory – as a form of inheritance – cannot be accepted through its seeming infinitude, but has to be reaffirmed by, as Derrida has it in *Specters of Marx*, responding to the spectres and the injunction they confront us with that "can only be one by dividing itself, tearing itself apart, differing/deferring itself, by speaking at the same time several times – and in several voices."[34] For Kantor, the ongoing struggle with fragmentariness and the inadequacy of memory opens a space for recognising the otherness inherent in what is vibrant, unpredictable, and contingent, and what temporarily breaks the cycle of repetition in a singular affect. Memory becomes, therefore, liberated from the confines of a controllable and comfortable archive in order to renew the relationship between memory and

[31] John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida. Religion without Religion* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 145. Emphasis in the original.

[32] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 49–59.

[33] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 34.

[34] Kantor, *Wielopole, Wielopole*, 33.

the past. Kantor contests both our control over memory and our right to its original past, and hence memory can no longer be locked onto a particular representation.[35] Such a figure of memory, reduced mostly to an affect (in this case mediated by the theatrical encounter), reveals its monstrous side, in the sense that it can never be entirely accepted, but comes to pass as an irruptive event instead.

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Wielopole, Wielopole offers an artistic take on the deconstruction of memory by means of transforming its realm of a childhood memory into an inhuman, if not undead, space. Being representative of the theatre of death, it revises the inhuman connections we make at the verge of familiarity and the unknown, and the nearly mythical primordiality of an experience and its appropriation. At the same time, it allows us to revisit the semiosis of life in death with respect to its material and meaningful implications in our cultural practices. Kantor demonstrates that the work of memory is predominantly rooted in a vulnerability that unravels a "more-than-human" or "nonhuman" ontological plane of memory that is difference-oriented. The monstrous onto-epistemology of memory might be read as an endeavour to stage the vibrancy of memory devoid of any particular recollection, which eludes fixed divisions into life and death. In such a reading, memory becomes inscribed into the fabric of being as a profoundly liminal concept, oblivious to our overly organised or conventional figures of memory. Then, similarly to an actual monster, memory becomes unleashed as a volatile form of expression of childhood and war trauma that compensate for inadequate representations of the past with the affective intensity of the theatrical space.

[35] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1–3.

Michał Kisiel

"Alien Specimens" Tadeusz Kantor's Monstrous Onto-epistemology of Memory

This article focuses on what might be tentatively called the "monstrous onto-epistemology of memory" in Tadeusz Kantor's *Wielopole, Wielopole* in reference to more general principles of the theatre of death (even though monstrosity is a problematic quality in this particular context). Through its contribution to the semiosis of life and death, Kantor's project is used as a way of thinking of memory as an undead space disconnected from any particular recollection. Instead, for Kantor, theatre explores a more ontological figure of memory, which constitutes a nonhuman/inhuman fabric of being. Inspired by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, investigations into the monstrous and the undead make it possible to explore the renegotiations of life and death as they weaken the anthropocentric view of memory. As liminal terms, they also help this text envision the aforementioned fabric as the monstrous other to memory. The reading is supported with a posthumanist/deconstructivist framework informed by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Jacques Derrida, and Timothy Morton.

Keywords: posthumanism, theatre of death, ontology, deconstruction, memory

Słowa kluczowe: posthumanizm, teatr śmierci, ontologia, dekonstrukcja, pamięć