

III
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

THEATRISM:

Radicalism in Contemporary Art
and Theatre in the Face of the Crisis
of Democracies



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Radicalism in Contemporary Art and Theatre in the Face of the Crisis of Democracies

As part of the 2025 Exhibition Programme, *Arte es teatro* [Art Is Theatre], the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires presents the international symposium *Teatrismo* [Theatrism], which sets out to examine the links between contemporary art, theatre and society in light of the current crisis in democracies, the digital duplication of life and the disruption of human relations caused by the global experience of the pandemic.

Renowned Argentinian and international artists, thinkers and specialists will share their knowledge and ideas over three days of lectures, public talks, performances and film screenings.

Participation & works by: Ana Alvarado, Norman Briski, Alejandro Cruz, Carlos Furman, Víctor García, Emilio García Wehbi, Ricardo Ibarlucía, Tadeusz Kantor, Susanne Kennedy, Brai Kobla, Federico León, Ana Laura Lozza & Barbara Hang, Jarosław Lubiak, Małgorzata Ludwisiak, Juan Carlos Malcún, Victoria Noorthoorn, Mariana Obersztern, Małgorzata Paluch-Cybulska, Alejandro Tantanian.

DAY 1 - THURSDAY, 2 OCTOBER

CIVIC THEATRE

In a global context where the very possibility of living together as a social body is in crisis, how is the power of theatre as an inherently collective art form involving the body revitalised? Can theatrical fiction take on the role of a public agora? In what ways can the theatrical experience counteract the rise of hate speech and the erosion of democratic institutions? What responsibilities and opportunities confront cultural institutions such as museums and theatres in this social and political climate? Can the performing arts offer a new grammar for the social imagination? How can a politics of presence reformulate the way we understand the living and the collective in a post-pandemic context? Are new ritual forms emerging in the theatrical sphere?

Welcome speech

1.30 p.m.

Victoria Noorthoorn, Director, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires.

Introduction to the Symposium

1. Round table – The Tradition of Radicalism

1.45 p.m. to 2.45 p.m.

Alejandro Tantanian, **Federico León** and **Brai Kobla** review the legacy of anti-naturalistic theatrical experimentation in the 1960s and 1980s and reflect on the meaning and urgency of such theatrical radicalism today. What forms of experimentation resonate most with the current crisis of representation?

Moderated by **Alejandro Tantanian**.

2. Interview - Norman Briski

3:00 p.m. to 3:40 p.m.

Renowned actor, director and acting teacher **Norman Briski** stands as a living witness to the scene that emerged out of the Di Tella Institute's Audiovisual Experimentation Centre (CEA), featured in the exhibition *Esto Es Teatro*. His aesthetic commitment is inseparable from the social activism he pursues from his theatrical platform: the independent Caliban Theatre. Interview to be conducted by **Fernando García**.

Break: 3:45 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

3. Interview - Archives of Radicalism: Víctor García

4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

In an interview to be conducted by **Alejandro Cruz**, set designer and architect **Juan Carlos Malcún** guides us on an exploration of Víctor García's visionary theatrical language. He also reflects on the role of archives in documenting theatre, an artform defined by its very ephemerality. How can symbolic and material archives keep a record of experiences that are at once intense and fleeting? How can archives be re-imagined and exhibited for today's audiences?

4. Screening - Susanne Kennedy's *Angela*

5:10 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

A screening of **Susanne Kennedy's** piece, presented by **Alejandro Tantanian**, and a short video by the artist. Susanne Kennedy is a German contemporary theatre director and playwright whose works inhabit a powerful and disturbing theatrical universe. Through the use of masks, pre-recorded voices and other means of altering perception, it challenges the conventions of realism and the presence of actors on stage.

This activity is supported by the Goethe-Institut Buenos Aires.



Still from the film *Gdzie są niegdysiejsze śniegi*
[Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear?]

Directed by Andrzej Sapieża, 1984, 32 min.
Produced by WFO, Łódź.

DAY II - FRIDAY, 3 OCTOBER

THE DRAMATIC MACHINE: TRAUMA AND THE BODY OF THEATRE

Can theatre heal the wounds of history? What does a term like 'performance' mean in a context where the limits of humanity are blurred by such technological advances as artificial intelligence and bio-engineering? Does the stage still belong to the human? How can theatrical practice respond to the crisis of meaning accelerated by contemporary phenomena? Is the 'actor' still a central figure, or has a new figure of the more-than-human 'performer' emerged? What light does Tadeusz Kantor's experience of theatrical radicalism shed on the contemporary condition? How can we redefine contemporary art and its possible reparative function if we view it through a Kantorian lens?

1. Round table - Rewriting the Myth of Tadeusz Kantor

1.30 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Three leading Polish researchers and curators explore Tadeusz Kantor's theatre as a space besieged by historical trauma and preoccupied with the continuity between man and machine, as well as its potential to interpret the field of contemporary art.

Małgorzata Paluch-Cybulska, head of the Tadeusz Kantor Museum at the Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor Cricoteka in Kraków, will introduce the main characteristics of Kantor's theatrical and artistic practice. **Jarosław Lubiak**, Deputy Director of the National Museum in Szczecin, and **Małgorzata Ludwisiak**, former artistic director of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and independent curator, will present two perspectives on how Tadeusz Kantor's theatre may be reconsidered from a contemporary art standpoint and vice versa.

Moderated by **Małgorzata Ludwisiak**.

Tadeusz Kantor's theatrical work had a remarkable impact on the development of experimental theatre and the visual arts in Argentina during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1984 the play *Wielopole, Wielopole*, and in 1987 *Let the Artists Die* were performed at the San Martín General Municipal Theatre, in Buenos Aires, and led directly, among other things, to the creation of the group El Periférico de Objetos [The Peripheral of

Objects], a retrospective of which will be open during the conference. The 'post-Kantor' echoes in Argentina, on the one hand, and the absence of conscious Kantorian references in Polish art and theatre, on the other, led the symposium's curatorial team to ask questions about the possible updating of Tadeusz Kantor's radical propositions fifty years on from the premiere of the play *The Dead Class*, which, according to critics, revolutionised world theatre. What would happen if we turned Kantor's theatrical legacy into a set of methodological tools and applied them to the field of contemporary art? Or conversely, what would happen if a strictly formal visual analysis were applied to Kantor's plays?

As one of this panel, **Małgorzata Paluch-Cybulska** will present the figure of the artist and the key concepts he tested on stage. Following her introduction, two art critics will apply a visual arts approach to Kantor's theatre and vice versa. **Jarosław Lubiak** will focus on analysing Kantor's plays as time-based media works pursuing the internal relationships between the elements and rhythms of their movements. How does the very composition of the performances structure their meaning? **Małgorzata Ludwisiak** will look at such theatrical concepts of Kantor's as materiality, the body, memory and the bio-object or theatrical object, from the perspective of post-human art and as a means of interpreting contemporary artistic practices. What might 'theatristm' mean in the visual arts? Can it help us better understand our contemporary condition?

2. Interview - Mariana Obersztern

3:10 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

In this public interview with **Fernando García**, **Mariana Obersztern** will reflect on her experience with *Wielopole*, *Mezrich*, *Wielopole*, a 2017 piece in which she explored the work of Tadeusz Kantor.

Break: 4:00 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.

3. Interview - El Periférico de Objetos

4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Theatre critic **Alejandro Cruz** will talk to **Ana Alvarado** and **Emilio García Wehbi**, members of the experimental collective **El Periférico de Objetos**, about the mark left by Kantor's theatre on their materialist dramaturgy..

4. Kantor Film Night #1 –Haunting? All Returns by Tadeusz Kantor

6:00 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.

Selection curated by **Jarosław Lubiak**

I Shall Never Return, declares Kantor in the title of one of his last plays. Let us take this as a rhetorical figure, the opposite of what he means. With humour and even sarcasm, he threatens and promises: I shall never leave you, or I shall always haunt you, like a ghost. Kantor knew perfectly well how memory and history work, with their endless repetition of loss and suffering, hope and renewal. His theatrical work explored the modes and effects of that repetition. What is lost returns as a spectre, making encounters—and even life together—possible.

From our perspective, Kantor's endless mourning can be read today as an experience similar to our struggle against the loss of the world to environmental catastrophe and its accompanying crises. 'Climate mourning' may have no end and no solution, for loss, in this case, is a continuous process. We must, therefore, learn to work with grief once more. Perhaps Kantor's theatre and his strategy of spectral repetition may serve as a guide.

This screening returns Tadeusz Kantor to us in four episodes. The first film showcases his visual art, which provides context for his stage work. The second presents one of his earliest and most important plays. The third offers a summary and original re-interpretation of his early theatrical work. The fourth focuses on *cricotage*, Kantor's experiment in theatrical form. These films can take us back to a time when there was a belief that repeating the past could free us from it.

Farbą [With Paint]

Directed by Artur Janicki, screenplay by Zofia Gołubiew, 1992, colour, 33 mins.

Documentary on the exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting and Sculpture*. National Museum in Kraków, 1991, produced by Polish Television (TVP).

The film tells the story of the artist's work based on the exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor: Painting and Sculpture*, presented as a tribute at the National Museum in Kraków in 1991, shortly after his death. The film also includes excerpts from Kantor's statements, combined with his work. It is both an introduction to his oeuvre and a supplement to the documentation of his theatrical performances.

Umarła Klasa. Seans T. Kantora [The Dead Class: The T. Kantor Show]

Directed by Andrzej Wajda, 1976, colour, 72 mins.

Produced by Polish Television (TVP).

Andrzej Wajda's film is an interpretation of Kantor's play *The Dead Class*. It is one of his most important plays, allowing the audience to immerse themselves in his mourning for the lost world of childhood and youth, the last act of destruction of which was the Second World War. The mechanism of the return of the past as obsessive-compulsive repetition reveals itself here with greater force. At first glance, the pathos and lamentation for the irreversibility of loss appear to consume the artist and the audience. But humour and the grotesque allow the artist to break the vicious circle of dead repetition. Perhaps they, too, can help us as we live out our own catastrophe.

DAY III - SATURDAY 4 OCTOBER

THEATRE, LITURGY AND TRANSCENDENCE

How does the ritual dimension of theatre connect with the forms of liturgy? In an age dominated by disorientation and hyper-individualism, can theatre re-awaken a sense of 'sacred time' and collective transformation? What kind of dramaturgy arises from spiritual longing and how can it resist the crushing effects of spectacle, commodification and the false certainties of today's materialistic culture? Can contemporary experimental theatre, with its acceptance of mystery and ambiguity, provide a space in which deeper truths can emerge that elude the noise of conventional media and the crisis of meaning in our public discourse?

1. Lecture – Ricardo Ibarlucía

1.30 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Why do we need theatre today? Based on this question, one of the sharpest minds in Argentina's academic community outlines a historical-philosophical perspective on the contemporary possibilities of theatre.

2. Lecture - Carlos Furman

2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

From the San Martín Theatre to the Cricoteka, Photographer Carlos Furman, who has documented the whole of Tadeusz Kantor's work in Buenos Aires, reveals the story behind his exhibition in Kraków and his ties to his Polish family.

Break: 3:30 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

3. Performance - *Consummation #1*

4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Dancers and performers Bárbara Hang and Ana Laura Lozza close the Symposium with the performance *Consummation #1* (2018), invoking the ritual dimension of the theatrical act.

4. Kantor Film Night #2 – Haunting? All Returns by Tadeusz Kantor

5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Selection curated by **Jarosław Lubiak**.

Nigdy już tu nie powrócę [I Shall Never Return Here]

Directed by Andrzej Sapija, 1990, 80 mins.

Produced by Polish Television (TVP).

Kantor worked with his team on the play *I Shall Never Return* in 1987 and 1988. The premiere took place at the Piccolo Teatro Studio in Milan. The film is a recording of a revised version of the play, presented in Warsaw in 1990. In *I Shall Never Return*, the artist analyses and re-interprets his own work. It is an original summary composed of self-quotations. Kantor refers to the plays *Powrót Odysa* [*The Return of Odysseus*], 1944; *Kurka Wodna* [*The Water Hen*], 1967; *Nadobnisie i koczkodany* [*Dainty Shapes and Hairy Apes, or the Green Pill*], 1973; *Umarła klasa* [*The Dead Class*], 1975; *Gdzie są niegdysiejsze śniegi* [*Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear?*], 1979; *Wielopole, Wielopole*, 1980, and *Niech szczerzą artyści* [*Let the Artists Perish*], 1985. This was the last work the artist completed and performed.

Gdzie są niegdysiejsze śniegi [Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear?]

Directed by Andrzej Sapija, 1984, 32 mins.

Produced by Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych, Łódź.

Kantor first used the term *cricotage* (from the name of his theatre, Cricot 2) to describe his first happening in 1965. Later, based on the play *Where Are the Snows of Yesteryear?* (1979), he applied it to short theatrical forms, performed outside large-scale productions, or to stage experiments with students. In this *cricotage*, the artist continues his reflection on whether it is possible to recover the lost past, a theme further developed in the work *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980).

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