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THE POLITICS OF APPEARANCE: TADEUSZ KANTOR EXHIBITING IN SWEDEN 1958-2014

Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990) was one of several Polish artists to arrive on the Swedish art scene in the post-war period. Sweden is the neighbouring country of Poland on the other side of the Baltic Sea. Even though national borders had opened up, art historian Catherine Dossin has pointed out that sometimes the infrastructure of transportation and custom regulations were slow which made it hard for cultural and artistic exchange to take place.¹ In addition, the Cold War divide raised other kinds of obstacles. Regardless of these, Kantor's art as well as artworks by artists such as Władysław Hasiór, Jerzy Krawczyk, Alina Szapocznikow, Sofia Kulik, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Katarzyna Kobro, Henryk Stażewski and Władysław Strzemiński were included in exhibitions in Sweden.

This article explores the trajectory of the exhibitions with Kantor's art in Sweden between 1958 – 2014, with two main questions to be answered. Firstly, how were exhibitions conceptualized by the host institutions and galleries? Secondly, how did the art critics receive

the public appearances? These exhibitions and their critical reception have been researched by neither Swedish nor Polish scholars.² The aim here is to analyse the history of Kantor's presence in Sweden from a critical historiographic perspective. My method would be an answer to art historian Piotr Piotrowski's theoretical proposition of a 'horizontal' art history. Piotrowski's horizontal art history is a relational geography of art and it has been described by art historian Charlotte Bydler as a "relentless critique of the universalist voice of Western-Eurocentric hegemonic art history with its conceptual and aesthetic canon of styles, artists, and models of influence."³ It means that Piotrowski rejected universalism and emphasized that art historians need to study art from where it is made in Europe, but also to, again with the words of Bydler, acknowledge that artists and art historians during the nineteenth- and twentieth century kept relating to the metropolitan art concepts and institutions rather than with each other.⁴

The article answers Piotrowski's proposition in two ways. First, I circumvent the hierarchical centre-periphery axis structured by a Western geography and look at a specific local context on the margin of Europe, and, secondly, I treat the Western narrative not as the universal model, but as one narrative among others. In this case, it is a very dominating one considering the specific time period and place on the globe, Sweden.⁵ I will not look at this history as a sort of deviation from what happened at a presumed centre, but as an ecology of actors with its own debates and value formations. In the mediated history of this time period, artistic excellency and artistic influences have usually been understood as stemming from art centres such as Paris and New York in a one-way direction to the so-called peripheries such as the Nordic countries.⁶ This means that the specific relation between Poland and Sweden, with Kantor as the example, will contribute to this picture by presenting an alternative view to that of existing research on transnational exchange.

One major finding is that the conceptualization of Kantor's presence in Sweden and its reception in the Swedish media were filled with ideas of what national belonging meant. Considering that the time period was fundamentally shaped by ideological and political turbulence, this is by no means unexpected. It is nevertheless a finding that I will discuss because what is understood as 'Polish' changes over time and is still under negotiation. I understand 'Polish' as a dynamic value formation that will, above all, tell us how Polishness is understood from a Swedish perspective through the lens of the art of Tadeusz Kantor.

The history of Kantor in Sweden and the fluctuating reception of Polishness will be discussed with the concept of the 'close Others,' also used by Piotrowski after art historian Bojana Pejić.⁷ With this term, Piotrowski discusses the dilemma of artists in Central and Eastern Europe after 1945, being dominated by the Soviet Union, but still remaining European in outlook. Art historians writing from a 'vertical' position, that is from the Western art centres of that time, Piotrowski argues, couldn't grasp what was happening on

the other side of the Iron Curtain, which led to a politically-framed understanding of the art. This resulted in misunderstandings and assumptions that there were two different voices of Europe, instead of acknowledging the complexity of the situation. Piotrowski catches this complexity by stating: "(...) although the meanings of art in East-Central Europe were different from those in the West, art in East-Central Europe kept developing within the orbit of Western culture."⁸ All in all, there were not two different voices, but rather an entangled situation. Additionally, following Piotrowski, the 'close Others' would relate to each other hierarchically and legitimize their self-understanding via the centre providing the canon.⁹ As art historian Annika Öhrner formulates it, from a Swedish point of view regarding art in the 1960s; Piotrowski's proposed horizontal methodology challenges the canonical position of "stylistic premises originating in North Atlantic Art History, in the general art historical discourse."¹⁰

As a nation, Sweden was politically neutral during World War II, but as Piotrowski puts it, the country was considered to belong to the Western part of the world.¹¹ Even though Sweden is located on the Northern margin of Europe, this ideological position would give Sweden symbolic power in relation to Poland, situated in the Central-East part of Europe. However, as Piotrowski also argues, the self-image of Poland was identified by a "superiority complex on behalf of their own culture" in relation to nations in their own region.¹² The relationship between those two countries on different fringes of Europe is thus inherently difficult to define in a coherent way.

In order to comprehend this relational and changing situation, as its title states, this article will look into the politics of the public appearances of Kantor's art in Sweden. And the 'politics,' just as Merriam Webster dictionary defines the word, is understood both as "political affairs or business, especially: competition between competing interest groups or individuals" and referring to "the total complex of relations between people living in society."¹³ The article will look into the people active on the art scene in

Sweden, particularly the relations between single individuals and Kantor. And as the art critique becomes more charged ideologically in the late 1960s, the use of the word politics will change in order to reflect this shift. On the whole, the meaning of the word will fluctuate as the article follows the public appearances of Kantor's art.¹⁴

Kantor as a Modern Abstract

Painter – Polishness Within

the Universal Model

Kantor's career as a visual artist outside Poland began in the late fifties. From the beginning his artistic practice was very much an international affair with exhibitions, invitations to theatre festivals and tours, teaching positions, and longer periods spent abroad; even though Kraków remained his hometown until his untimely death in 1990.¹⁵ In Sweden, Kantor made his international solo debut in 1958 at a Stockholm gallery called Konstsalongen Samlaren (The Art Saloon the Collector). This was one year before Kantor had his first solo exhibitions in Germany at Kusthalle Düsseldorf and soon after in France, at the Parisian Galerie H. LeGendre.¹⁶ The Swedish exhibition history is not only relatively extensive, but also, as we will see, heterogeneous.

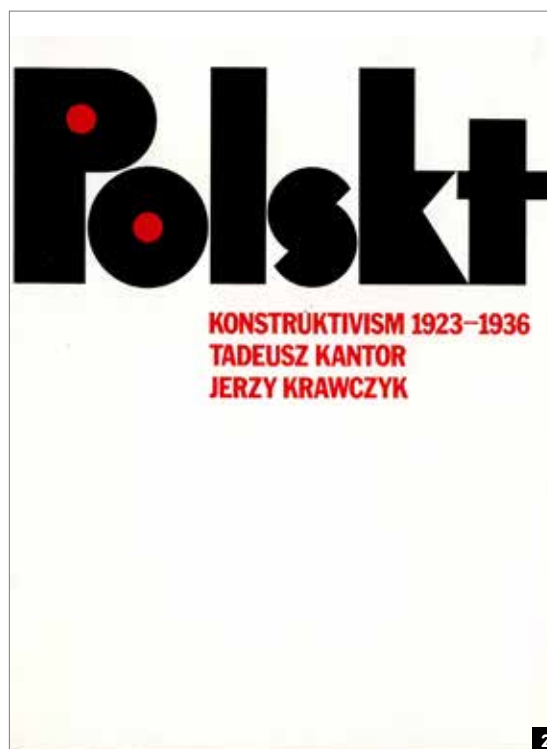
Between 1958 – 1960, Kantor's art was included in no less than five exhibitions in Sweden. After the show at Samlaren, the Art Academy in Stockholm was host for two group exhibitions in 1959. The artist-run space Galleri 54 in Gothenburg, the second largest city in the country, showed a solo presentation in 1960. The Lunds Konsthall, the public art gallery in the university city of Lund in south of Sweden, organized *Kylberg Chagall till Miro Hartung Matta* [*Kylberg Chagall to Miro Hartung Matta*], with art from the collection of businessman Theodor Ahrenberg (1912 – 1989) and his wife Ulla Ahrenberg (1931). The show included a mix of Swedish and international artists working with painting.¹⁷

Sammlaren's exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor. Polsk abstrakt expressionism (Tadeusz Kantor. Polish Abstract Expressionism)* consisted of twenty-seven paintings made between 1950 and 1958. The title referred to artistic style as well as national origin. This first event is of interest as Kantor met several individuals who already were or soon would be major actors on the Swedish art scene. The critic K.G. (Pontus) Hultén (1924-2006), who was to become the director of the Moderna Museet in the early 1960s, wrote an introduction. The text had a poetic tone and Hultén emphasized free form and anticipated that this new, 'modern' way to work had a future ahead of it.¹⁸ The gallerist Agnes Widlund (1911-2005) was originally from Hungary and educated at the Sorbonne in Paris. Widlund had started her gallery in 1943. She was well connected within the Swedish art scene as well as internationally, with personal contacts with galleries such as Denise René and artists such as Matisse and Picasso. She was among a small group of gallerists introducing modern art before the Moderna Museet was inaugurated.¹⁹ Her contacts, especially with Paris, made her a challenger to the more established galleries in the capital of Stockholm.²⁰

According to the memoirs of Theodor Ahrenberg, he was the initiator of the exhibition at Samlaren. Ahrenberg and Kantor became friends during the late forties when Ahrenberg travelled to Poland on business. He would later act as a patron, collecting Kantor's artworks as well as initiating exhibitions and organizing the artist's travel. Kantor and his wife, the artist Maria Stangret-Kantor, were also invited to Sweden as well as to Switzerland where the Ahrenberg couple had relocated in the beginning of the sixties.²¹ Just like Widlund, Ahrenberg was also challenging the Swedish art world establishment. He was not only a collector, but highly active as a free speaking debater, organizer of events, patronage, and well connected with museum directors, who he was not afraid of criticising publicly.²² As we will see, both in Sweden and internationally, Ahrenberg was to become a key person who acted in favour of Kantor until late in the eighties, when he passed away.



1. Photographic documentation from the inauguration of *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage*, Kulturhuset Stockholm, 1975. Photographer: Per Bergström



2. Cover of exhibition catalogue *Polskt [Polish]*, Kulturhuset, Stockholm Oct 31, 1975 – Jan 6, 1976

The travelling exhibition *Kring spontanismen (Surrounding Action Painting)*, made by the Riksförbundet för bildandekonst (The National Federation of Fine Arts Society), was presented at the Art Academy in Stockholm, and the art museums in Gothenburg and Malmö,²³ the second and third biggest cities in Sweden. The show was comprised of works by a broad spectrum of artists from various parts of the world, the oldest was Joan Miró and youngest was the Swede Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd. Swedish artists were in the majority, twelve out of forty-four artists, and the rest came from Europe with some exceptions from China, Japan, and Canada, with names such as Karel Appel, François Arnal, Alberto Burri, Jean Dubuffet, Hans Hartung, Asger Jorn, André Masson, Marcel Pouget, Sugi Kumi, and XaoWou-Kai.²⁴ Kantor participated with *Peinture 1* (1957) and *Peinture 2* (1958) belonging to Ahrenberg.

The introductory catalogue text focused on individual artistic expressions instead of introducing stylistic schools or groups of artists. The commissioner, Lars Erik Åström, discussed the exhibited artworks in terms of *action painting* and *tachism*, and used the Swedish term 'spontanism' that can be derived from spontaneity. Åström highlighted the rhythm of the artists that was said to come alive through different application techniques.²⁵ Even if they were not in the show, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Sam Francis, and Wols were mentioned, because they were considered the ideal exemplars for the commissioner's discussion. Reading the text today, there is an interesting tension between the emphasis on individual artistic expressions and the way the artists were unified using a common language of abstraction. The different nationalities were apparently needed in order to make the

exhibition universal, which was understood as something more than the different nations together, but what the national variations signified was never explicitly discussed.²⁶

The second solo presentation took place in 1960 at the artist-run Galleri 54.²⁷ Ahrenberg was mentioned as a key person. The title of the show was simply *Kantor* and displayed thirteen canvases and an unspecified number of works in the techniques of gouache, drawing and etching, made between 1950 and 1959. In the exhibition leaflet, Kantor was presented as part of a larger tendency, wherein artists explored material aspects of painting by using unconventional substances such as varnish and resin.²⁸ Physical effects such as the tactility of the surface were also discussed. The perspective in the introduction stands in contrast to the emphasis on the spontaneity of the application technique that was the focal point in *Kring spontanismen*. In retrospect, the conceptualisation of Kantor at Galleri 54 resonates with how Piotrowski today has discussed not only Kantor's painting at the time, but also other Polish painters, positioning them somewhere between the expressiveness of French tachism and the material interest expressed by the artist group CoBrA, formed in 1948 by artists from Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam, but without their politically charged ethos.²⁹

There was almost no critical response to the two gallery shows, although in 1959, when Kantor was included in the travelling show *Femtio år polskt måleri (Fifty Years of Polish Painting)* that will be discussed below, art critics did mention the show at Samlaren. *Kring spontanismen*, on the contrary, created a debate between different artists in the art journals *Paletten* and *Konstrevy*, although Kantor was not specifically mentioned by name.³⁰ The debate circled around issues on spontaneity and abstraction, which undermined prevalent ideas about artistic craft and skills. The different parties in the debate were convinced that the radicality was within the medium of painting, but the main arguments circled around which kind of application technique was most radical.

Overall, the first three exhibitions that introduced Kantor to the Swedish audience did this by focusing on the new, modern expressions of formal and material experiments, while the reception by the art critics were more focused on the application techniques and the gestures of the artists. Kantor was seen as one of many international artists working with abstraction, independently and freely.

Kantor in Comparison – Polishness

Within the East-West Divide

The second group show Kantor participated in was *Femtio år polskt måleri*, at the Art Academy in Stockholm in 1959.³¹ A honouring committee was mentioned in the catalogue leaflet, with the main text written by professor Zdzisław Kępiński, director of the painting department at the National Museum of Art in Poznań. He was also the commissioner of the exhibition. The majority of the exhibited artworks came from the collections of the National museums in Poznań and Warsaw. Among the Polish members of the honouring committee were the minister of foreign affairs, Adam Rapacki, the Polish Ambassador in Sweden, Antoni Szymanowski, and officials from the political and cultural fields, such as artist Jan Cybis and professor Stanisław Lorentz. The same kind of mix between representatives from the art scene as well as from politics and business made up the Swedish section of the committee.³² This type of counsellor exhibition, as art historians Anthony Gardner and Charles Green calls them, was frequent in Sweden during the post-war period.³³ Museums and kunsthalls were not always able to arrange temporary exhibitions with contemporary art from abroad and it created a way for organisations on a national level within culture and international affairs, to act as organizers.

Altogether works of thirty-nine artists from the generation of *Młoda Polska* (Young Poland) the Polish modernist generation, such as Stanisław Wyspiański, were exhibited together with those of younger artists such as Kantor, Maria

Socialism och antisemitism



Över sin förskott av Karl Marx till höger Peredonad Leonid Breznev och amerikansk Michael Bakunin.

Hösten Tjugoårs jubileum i denna artikel...

NAGRA SERIER, i vilka Marx följde...

En av de gamla kommunistiska serierna...

En av de gamla kommunistiska serierna...

KONSTKRÖNIKA



TADEUZ KANTOR: Komposition.

Det är ett stort och uttrycksfullt verk...

INGEMAR HEDENIUS Tröstens villkor



Han har funnit sin egen väg

SAM LIDMAN Komma till möten

SKO CITY TIPS NR 8 REX

SKO CITY

Nu gör Morlett jobbet JERNBOLAGET ESKILSTUNA

alla litar på fakta

Polskt i Kulturhuset

Konstruktivister med uppgift att bygga en ny socialism

STREJKLÖST! Polskt i Kulturhuset är en utställning som visar konstruktivistisk konst. Den består av målningar, teckningar och skulpturer som visar en ny socialism.

Utställningen är en av de största som någonsin varit i Kulturhuset. Den består av över 100 verk av polska konstnärer som representerar den konstruktivistiska riktningen i den polska konsten.



Gustaf Aulén minnen En yrkesman med självtillit

GUSTAF AULÉN var en av de största konstnärerna i den polska konstruktivistiska riktningen. Han var en yrkesman med självtillit.

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Advertisement for 'Svenska berättare' (Swedish Storytellers) featuring a grid of portraits and names of various authors and their works.

3. Review of Femtio år polskt måleri [Fifty Years Polish Painting], by Ulf Linde in Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm], May 8, 1959

4. Review of Tadeusz Kantor: emballage, by Olle Granath in Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm], Nov 29, 1975

Jarema, Jan Cybis and Jonasz Stern, working with modern means of expression such as surrealism, expressionism, and abstraction.³⁴ In the catalogue, Kępiński focused on long time spans with the aim of outlining the historical development of a national Polish art and highlighting key moments. He discussed how Polish painting had developed from a French tradition dating from the sixteenth century, the time of revolutions, and from the Impressionists. Kępiński also employed a system of competitive comparisons and claimed that Polish painters did well, “compared to other Western European countries.”³⁵ His statement can be seen in the light of Piotrowski’s discussion regarding how the hierarchy of art historical narratives was played out as a dilemma of ‘close Others.’ Particularly in this case where Polish art historians turned to the West and overlooked relations and transnational exchanges with nearby countries in order to construct a national art history.³⁶

Femtio år polskt måleri had several reviews in the main daily and evening papers and Kantor’s fleshy, expressive *Ramamaganga* (1957) was used as the illustration. This confirms the curiosity for Kantor’s abstract art in Sweden at that time.³⁷ Kępiński’s way of comparing the five last decades of painting in Poland with a French tradition became the central discussion point for the Swedish art critics. Parisian-oriented modernism was the uncontested standard against which the Polish national version was tested. In a review in *Svenska Dagbladet*, one of the main daily papers, Lars Erik Åström affirmed the Polish proximity to French art, especially as he knew that artists such as Kantor and Kujarski also exhibited in Paris.³⁸ Åström acknowledged their successful way of expressing themselves in a ‘modern’ way. One should note that it was Lars Erik Åström who was the commissioner of *Kring spontanismen*, which means he was already invested in the debate around informal, expressive styles at the time. On the contrary, Hans Eklund in a review in one of the major evening papers, *Aftonbladet*, found the Polish art to be inferior to what was already presented in Paris.³⁹ He also mentioned that he could see a strand of melancholy in the artworks. A third critic, Ulf Linde, in a review in the main daily paper *Dagens Nyheter*,

expressed his surprise that Kantor was so free and modern in relation to Pollock, Mathieu and Tapes.⁴⁰ What Kępiński tried to do with his catalogue essay was used against his intentions as the Swedish critics were biased. The Swedish critics, even though not speaking from the Parisian centre, seemed to perceive themselves as more Western and modern which allowed them to judge the Polish artists accordingly and they did not buy into Kępiński’s analysis.

Between 1966 and 1975, Kantor’s art was included in four exhibitions in Stockholm. Among them, *Fri polsk konst (Free Polish Art)* at Sveagalleriet (Svea Gallery) in 1968 (September 21 – October 13, 1968) was given much attention by the critics. The gallery was part of ABF, the educational department of the Swedish labour movements.⁴¹ In a similar way as in *Femtio år polskt måleri*, the text in the leaflet addressed the exhibited art within a national framework, although it focused on contemporary artists and not constructing a grand historical narrative on a national school. *Fri polsk konst* included artworks by fifteen artists such as Boguslaw Balicki, Jerzy Krawczyk, Jerzy Federowicz, Maria Hiszpanska Neuman, to mention a few beside Kantor. The mission of the gallery was to present art from both Eastern and Western Europe, for which the organisers were also criticised because Swedish critics considered this a way to support authoritarian socialist regimes.⁴² The catalogue text focused mainly on the mission of the gallery; to “inform about art and the working conditions for artists in different countries” and to show the selected artists were united by the truly free and heterogenous way of expressing themselves, which was also reflected in the title *Free Polish Art*.⁴³

The critical reception of this exhibition followed the same logic of competitive comparison as *Femtio år polskt måleri* (1959). Polish and Western artists were compared, including French, but now also American and British pop-artists were mentioned. The Polish artists were subordinated to their Western fellow artists, but what was most frequently expressed was a scepticism against how ‘free’ the artists really were, arguing against the title of the show by referring to the authoritarian grip the Soviet Union had on Poland.⁴⁴ Torsten Bergmark, in

Dagens Nyheter, went further saying that the artists might live under the illusion of being free, because as long as the Polish state wasn't explicitly criticized, the politicians understood the value, economical and ideological, of letting artists work as they were considered rather harmless. A tone of nostalgia, avoidance and an unarticulated stroke of sadness could also be discerned in Bergmark's critique because of the 'unfree' lives of the artists. Overall, the reviews, compared to the previous ones published a decade earlier, were much more politicised. Sweden, at the time, was facing a political radicalization. The socialist and more radical left was fragmented because of internal conflicts. During the 1970s, the left was also critiqued for becoming more dogmatic. This fragmentation also arose within the cultural field, creating different fractions among the critics.⁴⁵

By that time, Swedish critics assumed that Kantor and his fellow artists were not able to express themselves freely.⁴⁶ They took for granted that even if they were aware of modern trends in Paris or New York, they couldn't express these concerns accordingly. The artists were reduced to a kind of 'repressed essence' generated by the ideology of the Communist regime.⁴⁷ Kantor, on the contrary, was part of the circle around Galeria Foksal with other artists, art critics, and curators, highly engaged in artistic experimentation and advanced theoretical debate. Even if they can be criticised for not addressing what Piotrowski calls the "velvet prison" of the "pseudo-liberal policies of the Communist Party during the 1960-70s," they can't be criticised for not being conscious about the state of affairs.⁴⁸ Exhibiting in Sweden in the late 1960s, Kantor was nevertheless perceived as a secondary pop-artist manipulated by state ideology, to put it bluntly.

Between October 31, 1975 and January 6, 1976 the large solo exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage* was running at Kulturhuset in Stockholm. Kulturhuset was the host organization, and the show was made in collaboration with the Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, with their director Ryszard Stanisławski as the curator.⁴⁹ Altogether, seventy pieces of Kantor's wrapped art works were on display. The show was part of the umbrella project called *Polskt (Polish)* with two other exhibitions; the

group exhibition *Konstruktivismen i Polen 1923-36 (Constructivism in Poland 1923-36)*, with artworks by Henryk Berlewi, Karol Hiller, Katarzyna Kobro, Henryk Stażewski and Władysław Strzemiński, and a solo exhibition with Jerzy Krawczyk.

Polskt was inaugurated by the head of the cultural department of Stockholm city, Thorsten Sundström, Polish ambassador in Sweden, Stefan Staniszewski, and Stanisławski. The invited guests represented a mix of the cultural and political actors engaged in the project. The art historical ambition to represent a specific national art, expressed by the catalogue of *Femtio år polskt måleri (1959)*, was absent in the catalogue essays of *Polsk*, even if Stanisławski used the national as a currency on an international scale when arguing for the relevance of the manifestation of Polish art in the capital of Sweden. What he emphasized was the ability of the exhibited artists to leave an imprint internationally and still keep their national specificity.⁵⁰ Writing about Kantor in particular, he pointed out that Kantor's artistic practice had to be seen as radical as he was the first in Poland to explore informal painting, an anti-naturalist absurd theatre, and he introduced objects in visual art.⁵¹ Kantor was presented in close proximity to a stylistic narrative based on Western art.

As I argue in my dissertation on Kantor's inherent width of artistic expression, this way to conceptualize Kantor can in hindsight be problematized according to Piotrowski's discussion on the relation between Eastern and Western Europe during the nineties.⁵² Piotrowski criticizes the way many Eastern European curators, critics, and art historians have internalized a Western canon without reflecting on how they reproduce a Western biased, so called universal artistic development.⁵³ In his critique he doesn't mention *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage*, but the large scale exhibition project *Europa, Europa* made by Stanisławski in Bonn in 1994.

Even if *Polskt* was grand in scale, the art critical attention was moderate. One fairly long review was published in *Dagens Nyheter* by art critic Olle Granath and it stands out compared to the previous ones published in relation to *Fri polsk konst* in 1968.⁵⁴ Granath did not connect

the exhibition to a Polish political context, but discussed Kantor's body of work in detail, visual art as well as his work in theatre.⁵⁵ Granath appears to be well informed about the *oeuvre* of Kantor and the artistic context of Poland at the time, which was confirmed in a conversation I had with Granath in 2015.⁵⁶ During the seventies, Granath got to know Stanisławski's work as a curator and museum director of the Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, he was acquainted with the art critic Wiesław Borowski and the activities at Galeria Foksal. Granath was to become the director of Moderna Museet 1980-1989, but he never exhibited Kantor at the museum. On the contrary, Maria Stangret-Kantor and the twin brothers Lesław and Waclaw Janicki, all part of Kantor's theatre group called Cricot 2, were included in the group show *Dialog (Dialogue)* made by Granath in 1985.⁵⁷

Polishness Reloaded – from Repressed to Political Radicality

After Kantor's death in 1990, artworks and objects from performances of his Cricot 2 theatre appeared in Sweden four times. Ahrenberg's collection was on display at Passagen, a municipal Kunsthalle in the university city Linköping, south of Stockholm, and at Gothenburg Art Museum, in 1993. In the reviews, Kantor's art was not mentioned. Marionettmuseet (The Museum of Marionette Dolls) showed set design with objects, costumes, and documentation, from Cricot 2's productions in the exhibition *Tadeusz Kantor. Ett livsverk (Tadeusz Kantor. Life's Work)*, in 1998.⁵⁸ The exhibition was as comprehensive as the title suggested and co-produced with Cricoteka – The Center of Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor in Kraków. The exhibition was mentioned in the press, but in relation to the huge ambition the critical reception was small. In 2007 at WELD, a project space for contemporary dance, visual art and performances in Stockholm, a one evening event was held with a lecture by theatre scholar Tomas Håkanson and performance by the Polish

artists Aleksandra Kubiak and Karolina Wiktor's group *Sędzia Główny*.⁵⁹ Several of these events were organized by the Polish Institute but taken together they appear as rather disparate considering their different contexts and diffusion over time.

The last time that Kantor's artworks appeared in a temporary exhibition in Sweden was 2014, when Moderna Museet's local branch in Malmö organized the thematic group show *Society Acts* (September 20, 2014 – January 25, 2015).⁶⁰ As the title expressed, art and society was addressed, with a Baltic perspective, combining contemporary artists with works made by an older generation.⁶¹ Kantor, as one of the older artists, was represented with two artworks. The assemblage *Signez s'il vous plait* (1965) was included in the show and in the catalogue the paradigmatic photography of the artist Władysław Strzemiński, conducting the waves of the Baltic sea, was published.⁶² Strzemiński's conducting performance was part of Kantor's *Panoramyczny Happening Morski* that took place one day in the summer of 1967 at the beach in Łazy.

In the thematic framework, that highlighted artists who intervene in the 'social fabric,' Kantor appeared as a socially engaged artist. Additionally, the time and place where Kantor was active, Poland during the Cold War period, was of interest. From the perspective of this last show, I interpret the geographical context as rather positive because Kantor's actions were understood as critical, politically and socially. As I argue elsewhere, this kind of reading can be nuanced by the writings of researchers Sebastian Stankiewicz and Klara Kemp-Welch, who independently of each other have written about Kantor's happenings. They have pointed out that Kantor's happenings first and foremost should be understood artistically in contrast to artists who, during the same time period, explored the media with explicit political and ideological intentions.⁶³ Kantor, as well as other Polish artists, strongly believed in modernist values such as the autonomy of the arts, which in turn can be read against the doctrine of social realism.

Society Acts was introduced by the director of Moderna Museet Malmö John Peter Nilsson, as being the first one to introduce Baltic artists

in the Swedish context in one hundred years.⁶⁴ The geographical focus referred to the hundredth anniversary of the *Baltic Exhibition*, an exhibition of industrial and crafted goods that took place in Malmö in 1914. Considering the current article, this statement can be discussed. And, even if the curatorial perspective of Andreas Nilsson and Maija Rudovska, expressed in the catalogue essays, is much more nuanced, the impulse of announcing oneself as the first institution in a long time to explore the Baltic region has to be understood as rhetorical. Regardless of the specific reasons for why the museum director didn't acknowledge previous exhibitions of Kantor or any other Polish artists in Sweden during the post-war period, the attitude can be understood as indicative of a larger symptom of the way this time period has been historicised in written art history.

Speaking in terms of discursive social formations, I would say that the particular venues and individuals connected to Kantor's exhibitions in Sweden, had important positions on the art scene at the time. Despite this they haven't been included in written art history, nor left any lasting impact on the contemporary historical imagination of that time. Galleries such as Samlaren, Galerie Pierre, Galleri 54, Sveagalleriet, and, Kulturhuset in Stockholm have no comprehensive archives. Compared to Moderna Museet, very little is written or discussed about their past activities, either from the institutions themselves (the ones that still exist) or within the academic field. This means that the history of Kantor in Sweden, to a certain degree, has been sealed up in a not-yet written history of these venues. Due to charges of economic crime, the collector Theodor Ahrenberg had to flee the country in the early sixties, setting up a home in Switzerland where Tadeusz Kantor and Maria Stangret-Kantor were frequent guests. Ahrenberg's legacy on the Swedish art scene is currently being considered, with a book initiative from his family. The story of gallerist Agnes Widlund, who together with a handful of other gallerists paved the way for modern art before Moderna Museet was inaugurated, is still to be written.

Even though Kantor had a long and heterogeneous history of exhibitions and theatre performances in Sweden, they were treated as peripheral by Moderna when not referring to, or building upon, them. The historical gap makes it possible for Moderna to proclaim themselves as the ones introducing Kantor and his legacy to a presumably unaware audience. My main argument, however, is that the presence of Tadeusz Kantor's art in Sweden both tells an untold part of Swedish exhibition history and gives a perspective on the Swedish art scene which was periodically marked by a Cold War rhetoric of an East-West divide and importantly, not fundamentally governed by it since artworks and theatre performances were still presented.

As art historian Katarina Wadstein MacLeod has pointed out, periphery is a "politically sensitive and contested concept in art history and portrays a disharmony between writing history and events as they were lived."⁶⁵ Following her line of arguing it is impossible to define Kantor's presence in Sweden between 1958 – 2014 in a unified way. Rather, his presence evokes questions such as, was he an artist from a peripheral country behind the Iron Curtain exhibiting at peripheral art venues in Sweden? Was he a rising star looking for opportunities in a semi-peripheral country with his eyes turned to the art centres of Paris and New York? Or, as I argue, Kantor's art was and still is present in Sweden and he visited the country many times. He had his personal connections with a smaller group of people, the critics and the audience met him with both admiration and scepticism. His art moved through the country, it appeared in several different artistic contexts in many different kinds of institutions, and the art was subjected to different kinds of debates. There is not one straight history to write, as his presence in Sweden both follows and opposes what we already know about art in post-war Europe. These new layers make the picture more complex. They have been added with the methodological approach that follows what art historian Agata Jakubowska urges art historians to do, to look from the perspective of the personal.⁶⁶

Notes

- ¹ Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s-1980s*. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 53-54.
- ² Compared to research made on Kantor's presence in Germany, Switzerland and the UK in the following two publications: Uta Schorlemmer, ed., *Kunst ist ein Verbrechen. Tadeusz Kantor, Deutschland und die Schweiz. Erinnerungen – Dokumente – Essays – Filme auf DVD* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst-Cricoteka, 2007); Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius and Natalia Zarzecka, eds., *Kantor was here. Tadeusz Kantor in Great Britain* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2011).
- ³ Charlotte Bydler, "Piotr Piotrowski. In Memoriam," in *Baltic Worlds*, 3-4, 2015, 12.
- ⁴ *Ibidem*, 12-13.
- ⁵ Piotr Piotrowski, "Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde," in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, ed. Sascha Bru and Peter Nicholls (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 54.
- ⁶ Annika Öhrner, "Barbro Östlhn & New York: Konstens rum och möjligheter" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Uppsala Universitet, 2010), 189-90.
- ⁷ In a footnote Piotrowski mentions his reference to Bojana Pejić's essay "The Dialects of Normality," see: Piotrowski, 52-53.
- ⁸ *Ibidem*, 54.
- ⁹ *Ibidem*, 55. Art historian Marta Edling investigates the contacts between Stockholm and Paris during 1944 – 1953 and she concludes her findings by pointing out the mutual dependencies between what she prefers to call two local contexts and she stresses the importance of the translocal which rather diffuses the presumed one-way direction of centre – periphery Marta Edling, "From Margin to Margin? The Stockholm Paris Axis 1944–1953," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 88, no. 1 (2019): 9-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2019.1576764>. And in the context of the Nordic region her research nuances how Piotrowski discusses regional contacts as governed by the relationship to centres such as Paris, when she points out that Paris, during the first decades of the twentieth century, served not as a given source of innovation, but as a key-junction where contacts to fellow Nordic artists were made, which provided peer support in future careers, "Building New Collaborations With Old Networks: The Early Years 1945-59," in *75 YEARS – The Nordic Art Association's Swedish Section*, edited by Björn Norberg, Camilla Larsson and Jonatan Habib Engqvist (Stockholm: Orfeus Publishing, 2020), 17-19.
- ¹⁰ Annika Öhrner, "Introduction," in *In Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop: Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies*, edited by Annika Öhrner, Södertörn Studies in Art History and Aesthetics (Huddinge: Södertörn Universitet, 2017), 17-19.
- ¹¹ Piotr Piotrowski, "Why Were There No Great Pop Art Curatorial Projects In Eastern Europe In The 1960s?" in *Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop: Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies*, edited by Annika Öhrner, Södertörn Studies in Art History and Aesthetics (Huddinge: Södertörn Universitet, 2017) "Towards a Horizontal," 57.
- ¹² "Politics," in *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*,
- ¹³ The philosophical meaning of the word, that can be related to the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, will be left aside, even if Kantor's art has been analysed in existential terms by dance - and art historian Martin Paul Leach, "Even the thing I am...": Tadeusz Kantor and the Poetics of Being" (Ph.D. Dissertation, De Montfort University, 2012).
- ¹⁴ According to Kantor himself his international theatre career occurred when Cricot 2 made *Kurka Wodna* (1967) and started to tour with this piece in the early seventies, Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, *The Dead Memory Machine. Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre of Death*, translated by William Brand (Aberystwyth: Black Mountain Press, 2004), 77.
- ¹⁵ Before 1957 Kantor's artworks had been included in group exhibitions internationally and the decisive moment for his international career as a visual artist was the solo exhibition at gallery H. Le Gendre in 1959, according to *ibidem*, 76-85.
- ¹⁶ *Kylberg Chagall till Miro Hartung Matta* (Lund: Lunds Konsthall, 1960), Exhib. cat.
- ¹⁷ *Tadeusz Kantor. Polsk abstrakt expressionism* (Stockholm: Konstsalongen Samlaren, 1958), Exhib. cat., n.p.
- ¹⁸ Rolf Söderberg, "Agnes Widlund legend inom svensk konsthandel," *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 25.02.2005.
- ¹⁹ Three commercial galleries in Stockholm, Svensk-Franska galleriet, Blanche and Färg och Form, have been pointed out as the most important regarding international contacts during World War II, and Widlund's Samlaren was included in this troupe when it was opened in 1943, see: *ibidem*.
- ²⁰ Monte Packham, "Ett liv med Matisse, Picasso och Christo: Theodor Ahrenberg och hans samling," edited by Carrie Pilto (Stockholm: Arvinius-Orfeus Publishing, 2018), 285.
- ²¹ Ahrenberg openly challenged representatives from the larger art institutions, such as Carl Nordenfalk at Nationalmuseet and Pontus Hultén at Moderna Museet, and got himself into conflicts with several of them, trying as an outsider to steer what exhibitions the museum should put on and which art to collect. Per Borissov Bergström, Ogy Donatsch, and Jürg and Anna Strand, eds., *Ahrenberg Collection* (Göteborg-Linköping: Göteborgs konstmuseum-Östergötlands länsmuseum, 1993), 17.
- ²² The Federation started 1930 and aimed to introduce and spread the knowledge about art in Sweden with travelling exhibitions.
- ²³ *Kring spontanismen*, Vandringsutställning (Stockholm: Riksförbundet för bildande konst, 1959), Exhib. cat.
- ²⁴ Lars Erik Åström, "Trädet, muren och tecket," in *Kring spontanismen*, Vandringsutställning (Stockholm: Riksförbundet för bildande konst, 1959), n.p.
- ²⁵ Art historian Kristoffer Arvidsson researched abstract art exhibited in Gothenburg and Stockholm in the post-war period, and he also discusses the tension between abstraction considered as a universal language and the national variations, that was more of an issue if the artists were from countries further away from the presumed centres with their canonical artists, Kristoffer Arvidsson, "Den romantiska postmodernismen. Konstkritiken och det romantiska i 1980 – och 1990-talets svenska konst" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Göteborgs Universitet, 2008), 478-84.

- ²⁷ The gallery opened in 1959 by Group 54, with the mission to exhibit surrealism and abstract art as a way to oppose what many younger, locally based artists in Gothenburg had experienced as an unbalanced art scene. The Gothenburg art scene was dominated by the so called Göteborgskoloristerna (Gothenburg Colorism), which never acted as a formal artist group, but got a lot of attention for their particular treatment of colour and light. Group 54 was connected to the Valand Art Academy in Gothenburg and the Hungarian artist Endre Nemes (1909-1985), serving as professor at Valand between 1947-55, Håkan Wettre, "En brytningstid. Endre Nemes – en främling i provinsen," in *Valand från ritskola till konsthögskola*, ed. Irja Bergström (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 1991), 114-19. The similarities between the local art scene in Gothenburg and Kraków with the Kapist-painters are to be explored.
- ²⁸ Kantor (Göteborg: Galleri 54, 1960), Exhib. cat., n.p.
- ²⁹ Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and The Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 75-83.
- ³⁰ The exhibition was discussed between the two artists Öyvind Fahlström and Rune Hagberg in several issues of *Paletten* and *Konstrevy* between 1958 – 1962.
- ³¹ Femtio år polskt måleri (Stockholm: Kungl. Konstakademien, 1959), Exhib. cat.
- ³² Minister of foreign affairs, Östen Undén, Swedish ambassador in Poland, Ragnvald Bagge, director of the National museum in Stockholm, Carl Nordenfalk, and representatives from the Art Academy, Hakon Ahlberg and Sten Karling, see: *ibidem*, 6-7.
- ³³ Doctoral candidate in art history Pella Myrstener points this out in her forthcoming dissertation on exhibitions in the post-war period in Sweden, and she highlights that art critics considered the exhibition format obsolete by the late 1960s and 1970s, Pella Myrstener, "Exhibiting art in a European Periphery? International Art in Sweden during the Cold War 1945–1969" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Södertörn University, 2023).
- ³⁴ Zdzisław Kepiński, "Inledning," in *Femtio år polskt måleri* (Stockholm: Kungliga konstakademien, 1959), 9-17.
- ³⁵ *Ibidem*, 9-10
- ³⁶ Piotrowski, "Towards a Horizontal," 56-57.
- ³⁷ Lars Erik Åström, "Polskt måleri under 50 år," *ibidem*, 3.05.1959.
- ³⁸ Hans Eklund, "Polska modernister," *Aftonbladet [Stockholm]*, 27.05.1959.
- ³⁹ Ulf Linde, "Konstkrönika," *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 8.05.1959.
- ⁴⁰ ABF is part of the Swedish labour movements, but works independently of any party politics. The gallery existed between 1961 – 1992. *Fri polsk konst* (Stockholm: Sveagalleriet, 1968), Exhib. cat.
- ⁴¹ Other exhibitions in the gallery exhibition programme was *Estniska konstnärer i Sverige (Estonian artists in Sweden)*, 1963, *Jugoslaviska bykonstnärer (Yugoslav Village Artists)*, 1969, *Nutidskonst från Slovenien (Contemporary art from Slovenia)*, 1970, and *Från rumänska ateljéer (From Romanian Studios)*, 1975.
- ⁴² *Fri polsk konst*.
- ⁴³ Torsten Bergmark, "Hur fri är fri polsk konst?" *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 2.10.1968.
- ⁴⁴ This development is also discussed in Arvidsson, 127-28.
- ⁴⁵ The exhibition had the following reviews: Bengt Olvång, "Öster- och västerut i konsten," *Aftonbladet [Stockholm]*, 26.09.1968; Stig Johansson, "Bra och prisbillig polsk konst," *Svenska Dagbladet [Stockholm]*, 1.10.1968; Bergmark.
- ⁴⁶ The same kind of pejorative statements was posed by French art critic Pierre Restany. Art historian Anna Markowska discusses Restany's critique in one issue of the art magazine *Cimaste*, published in 1962 (no. 57), where he meant that Kantor had lost himself in retouches influenced by the art he met while travelling abroad. Markowska also asks if Kantor's development by that time was a result of a real artistic change or "import" from a liberation journey from Stalin's Poland. See: Anna Markowska, "Rewizjonistyczny skok w Krzysztoforach," in *W cieniu krzesła: Malarstwo i sztuka przedmiotu Tadeusza Kantora*, edited by Tomasz Gryglewicz (Kraków: IHS UJ, 1997), 54.
- ⁴⁷ Piotr Piotrowski, "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art," *Third Text* 23, no. 1 (2009): 11-13.
- ⁴⁸ The exhibition in Stockholm was a version produced at Muzeum Sztuki Łódź in 1975, that was the first larger museum presentation of Kantor's art in Poland. *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage* (Stockholm: Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, 1975), Exhib. cat.
- ⁴⁹ This way of arguing taps into what art historian Robert Jensen says about the art canon. He discusses how a canon is constructed and reproduced by different actors on the art scene by them emphasising the historical significance of artists and artworks, how much value they had for their contemporary and future fellow artists, as a way to incorporate non-canonical artists in the canon, Robert Jensen, "Measuring Canons: Reflections on Innovation and the Nineteenth-century Canon of European Art," in *Partisan Canons*, edited by Anna Brzyski (Durham-London: Duke University Press, 2007), 28-32.
- ⁵⁰ Ryszard Stanisławski, "Tadeusz Kantor," in *Tadeusz Kantor, emballage* (Stockholm: Kulturhuset, 1975-76), 1-2.
- ⁵¹ Camilla Larsson, "Framträdanden. Performativitetsteoretiska tolkningar av Tadeusz Kantors konstnärskap", (Ph. D. Dissertation, Södertörn Universitet, 2021), 130.
- ⁵² Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 24-30.
- ⁵³ Olle Granath, "Polskt i Kulturhuset: Konstruktivisterna med uppgift att bygga en ny socialism," *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 29.11.1975.
- ⁵⁴ Officially Sweden and Poland, with Olof Palme and Edward Gierek as head of states, had a good relationship, that got more tense with the advent of the *Solidarność* movement around 1980. During the mid-seventies cooperation existed between the Polish opposition and

Swedish organizations, which officially dealt with working related issues, but for the ones involved it also covered other political areas. The exhibition as such had no political agenda, except that Stanislawski in his introduction, expresses his hope to contribute with deepening the already established good contact between the two countries. Even if no political issues were brought up in the art critique, it does not imply that individual art critics did not know about the repressed situation of the Polish people or had sympathies for them, Fredrik Eriksson, ed., *Det började i Polen. Sverige och Solidaritet 1980-1981* (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2013), 9-25.

⁵⁶ Olle Granath. Interviewed by Camilla Larsson (2015).

⁵⁷ The following artists participated in the show: Henryk Stażewski, Daniel Buren, Edward Krasiński, Lars Englund, Zbigniew Gostomski, Barry Flanagan, Maria Stangret-Kantor, Christian Boltanski, Tomasz Tatarczyk, Susan Rothenberg, Leon Tarasewicz, Ian McKeever, Lesław and Waclaw Janicki, Gilbert & George, Agneta Nordenankar, "Dialog med åtta polacker," *Dagens Nyheter [Stockholm]*, 7.09.1985.

⁵⁸ The museum existed between 1973-2011 and the collection is now part of Statens musikverk (Swedish Performing Arts Agency).

⁵⁹ "Föreläsning och performance, 7 feb -07," *Weld*, accessed 29.07.2022, <https://www.weld.se/program/talk-and-performance-7-february-07/sv/>.

⁶⁰ *Society Acts. The Moderna Exhibition* (Malmö: Moderna Museet, 2014), Exhib. cat.

⁶¹ The exhibition is the third one in a series of exhibitions made every fourth year to survey the Swedish contemporary art scene. The current edition expanded those limitations geographically as timewise.

⁶² Two artworks by Kantor are in the collection of Moderna Museet; the painting *Tadana VI* (1957) donated by Theodor Ahrenberg in 1958 and *Signez s'ilyous plait* (1965) bought from a private collector 1977, online search in the collection, "Tadeusz Kantor," Moderna Museet Malmö, accessed 27.07.2022, <https://sis.modernamuseet.se/search/Tadeusz%20Kantor>.

⁶³ Stankiewicz discusses differences of this kind between Kantor and Jean-Jacques Lebel and Volf Wostell, Sebastian Stankiewicz, "Akcjonizm Tadeusza Kantora w kontekście happeningu zachodniego. Kilka uwag na temat odrębności," in *W cieniu krzesła: Malarstwo i sztuka przedmiotu Tadeusza Kantora*, edited by Tomasz Gryglewicz (Kraków: IHS UJ, 1997), 61. Klara Kemp-Welch discusses Kantor's happenings in relation to dissident ideas of 'anti-politics' and 'politics outside politics,' Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art. Reticence as Dissidence Under Post-Totalitarian Rule 1956-1989* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 4-9.

⁶⁴ John Peter Nilsson, "Introduction," in *Society Acts. The Moderna Exhibition* (Malmö: Moderna Museet, 2014), 9.

⁶⁵ Katarina Wadstein MacLeod, "Troubling Peripheries: Pierre Restany and Superlund," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift / Journal of Art History* 90, no. 1 (2021): 13.

⁶⁶ Agata Jakubowska, "Personalising the Global History of Pop Art. Alina Szapocznikow and Maria Pininska-Beres," in *Art in Transfer in the Era of Pop. Curatorial Practices and Transnational Strategies*, edited by Annika Öhrner (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2017), 257.

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