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POLITICS OF APPEARANCE

A historiographical study of the art of Tadeusz Kantor with focus on Sweden from 1958

Art historians today pay critical attention to the post-war and cold war era (Piotrowski 1999, 2009, Kemp-Welch 2016, Jakubowska 2017, Bryzgel 2017, Öhrner (ed) 2017). They have shown how the narrative of modern art rests upon binary constructions of the centre and periphery as well as the East-West divide. Binaries that condition the meaning ascribed to art and artists as well as conditioning their position in the hierarcical canon formation of a vertically erected Art History. Central to my concers, relating to this critique, are also that during this period of time the consolidation of the hegemony of conceptual art comes about. With this I mean that certain aspects of art are given more prominence over others – such as content over form, means of immaterialization over the art object, and collective and participatory practices over solitary work in the studio. These mechanisms of exclusion are governed by stylistic preferences stemming from a North American and Western art idiom (Öhrner (ed) 2017), creating what I would say, narratives that limits the potential of art. Against this presented background, Im interested in how art historians can understand and shed light on particular artists and local knowledge in order to relativize these processes of historizations conditioned by narratives where geographical origin of the artist and conceptualization of the arts are given prominence.

The purpose of my PhD-project is to investigate how the meaning of the artist Tadeusz Kantor´s body of work, ascribed over time, with the main focus on the Swedish art scene, can be understood, and, what additional meaning the works of art being exhibited there and then can bring up. The aim is formulated in this way to both make visible how the interpretative structures builds up meaning over time, and, to keep the artworks at the forefront as they play a vitale role adding other kinds of knowledge in relation to these existing narratives.

Polish artist Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990) has been recognized for his multifaceted oeuvre of painting, assemblage, sculpture, set design, happening, theatre directing, and writing. His visual and performing arts has been analyzed by art and theatre historians respectively in the light of recurrent themes of memory, history, and death, the intention of the artist, and stylistic classification. Additionally, Kantor´s legacy in several European countries has been

researched, yet, scholars have not paid attention to Kantor's presence in Scandinavia, even though he early on exhibited and realized experimental artworks in this geographical area.

To answer the purpose of my project three questions have been formulated that is being dealt with in one part each of the dissertation:

1. How can meaning ascribed to Kantor's body of work, exhibited on the contemporary art scene, be understood?
2. How can the critical reception on Kantor, within the context of Sweden from 1958 until today, be understood in relation to contemporary ideas of past events?
3. What additional meaning can be garnered by looking at exhibited artworks, from the period and context, through the concept of a material sensibility?

In this years forum I will present the results of my critical historiographical research on Kantor's activities in Sweden, and additionally, propose a first idea on how to construct a close reading of the same material. A close reading that will analyze a selection of exhibited artworks using the aesthetic concept of a *material sensibility*. The aim with these close readings is to put the artworks at the forefront as I argue that they play a vital role adding other kinds of knowledge in relation to existing narratives on Tadeusz Kantor.