**NB This pdf of the text is without photos (or final corrections).** Please see the actual final version in the journal, S*tudies in Costume & Performance*, 8.1 (2023), pp.11-34.

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*Kantor's Encounters with a Rhinoceros: 'Costumology' between material and metaphor*

'The structure of the human body is an expression of its life functions. The stage costume, which is the surface of this structure, and at the same time operates on the plane of art, must furnish it with different functions and qualities.' (Kantor 1962 [in Dauksza, 2018: 30])

In this proposal of Tadeusz Kantor's, the structure of stage costume is expressive of its theatrical function – 'on the plane of art' – rather than the life functions of an actor's body, which it transforms. An essentially anti-naturalist conception of art, then, this orients questions of an art of theatre around the plastic work of visual artists rather than that of actor training. Crucially, however, Kantor's avant-gardist anti-naturalism does not simply abandon the material in favour of the fantastical; nor does his sense of the autonomy evoked by art practices aim at the ideal. Rather, it holds to the materiality of what he calls the 'reality of the lowest rank', or of a 'poor theatre' that is distinct from Grotowski's.[1]

In a text outlining 'the development of my scenic ideas (1945-1962)', for example, Kantor discusses his designs for a production of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* in 1961, where he comments: 'I am writing an essay entitled "Encounter with Dürer's Rhinoceros". It is the beginning of my research into a reality that a little later I called the "reality of the lowest rank"' (*Realnoscia Najnizszej Rangi* [2000: 240; 2015: 185][2]); and, in a following note, he writes of his Cricot 2 production that same year, with Witkiewicz's play *The Little Country Manor House*, as an example of what he called *informel* theatre: 'I put into practice my idea of the reality of the lowest rank, I use the method of destruction, the method of chance (fully), I work with my definition of the poor object and of poor space' [*operuje moja definicja Przedmiotu Biednego i Miejsca Biednego*] (2000: 241; 2015: 186).[3]

With respect to a body conceived at 'the level of an "*objet d'art*"' – in his 'encounter' with Dürer's iconic image of a rhinoceros – Kantor writes: 'I try to imagine a passionate apparatus, ambiguous, in which the origin of the costume would be the material of the human body, reproducing its forms or creating others with new constructions and ideas and for new situations' (Kantor, *Encounter with Dürer's Rhinoceros* [1962], in Kantor 2000: 325; 2015: 191). Such an art of the 'new' puts into question suppositions of the expressive body that pre-structure ideas of theatrical action and space as material; not least, as they appear

[1] As Kris Salata has observed, these two theatre makers use a different word in Polish for 'poor' (the different implications of which are lost in their English translation) – *biedny* (in Kantor's use) and *ubogi* (in Grotowski's) – as these evoke an ascetic vocation (*ubogi*) and a sense of what is socially devalued (*biedny*) (Salata 2020: 157).

[2] My translations have been made primarily from the French translation of Kantor's texts, which are referenced following the Polish versions here.

[3] In a later text, Kantor reflects on the reciprocal interests of his painting and theatre in the 1950s and early 1960s in terms of *informel*: 'A discovery of a new unknown aspect of reality, of its elementary state. This state is Matter, which is freed from abiding by the laws of construction; which is always fluid; which is infinite; which negates the concept of form; which is Formless, *Informel* […]' (Kantor 1993: 117).

in the form(s) of staged drama. Opening up not just the traditional play between reality and illusion in theatre, this suggests the transformation of – and, crucially, by means of – that reality as theatrical.

The metaphor(s) of theatre, as the possibilities of its illusion, remain material here; not necessarily working on the actor's body through physical training, but on its double in stage costume. In this respect, controversies concerning nudity on stage expose an interesting play between material and metaphor in the very potential of theatricality. As Kantor writes (in his 1962 evocation of Dürer's Rhinoceros), '[i]t is hard to speak of skin here. This whole armature – this monstrous covering, as if it had forgotten the living organism which pulses gently on the inside – has developed thanks to the explosion of an exuberant imagination, bizarre caprices, audacious inventions, multiple decorative details, studs, fine embroidery, embellishments, many variations. This quasi-autonomous creation, this inexplicable weirdness and exaggeration of nature raises the rhinoceros to the level of an "*objet d'art*".' (2000: 324; 2015: 191) What might it mean, then, in the interplay between metaphor and material, 'to get under the skin of the Rhinoceros'; at least, in Kantor's understanding of costume on 'the plane of art'?

**Turning things inside out with Kantor**

In respect to what is now called 'costume agency' – 'with costume used as a means for testing theoretical concepts as well as practice-based and practice-led methodologies' (Pantouvaki and Prihodova, 2021: 144) – how might relations between metaphor and material transform those, for instance, between practice and theory as expressed through Kantor's avant-gardist commitment to 'the plane of art'? No longer regarded simply as an interpretative (still less a decorative) service for theatrical production, how might costume resist both the supposed ephemerality of the live and art's supposed destiny in the staging of exhibitions? Kantor's ironic ambivalence about the latter is encapsulated in his sense of 'an object suspended "between garbage and eternity'" (1993: 19), as it offers an encounter between a 'poor' reality, that is otherwise neglected or disparaged, and art – with the former adopted or 'annexed' by the latter, as in the example of both 'ready-mades' and 'found objects'. The paradoxes of such encounters between material and metaphor, where the possibility of the one appears to turn inside out the impossibility of the other, also extend to Kantor's own archive project, and the afterlife of his theatrical work, which is the condition of and for the discussion here.

Theatrical metaphor is not a costume or garment that can be simply put on and taken off – as in a pedagogy of precursors and their influences, where art practices are reduced to an attested and applicable technique; as if learning *about* 'past masters', with one simply substituting for another, were the same as learning *from* them. Rather, 'it should be clearly indicated that by the *process* in its act of creation I do not mean *the process of creation* of this "product" ("work of art"), nor its manifestation, extolling the process of getting ready or of revealing the "back-stage" details of the act of creation. What I mean by the *process* in the act of creation is a particular *conduct* which is specified by its inner structure; which does not end nor can be ended with the final touch of a brush.' (Kantor 1986: 151) This 'inner structure' concerns a research that is already at work in any historical art practice, as it may be thought through in the ways by which it puts reality in question, not only formally but with its materially specific means of expression.

Distinct from adopting the answers to artistic questions offered, for example, by Surrealism or Constructivism (dressing the stage, actors, and action, in borrowed garb), studying an art practice, for Kantor, attempts to explore the questions posed by it, getting inside or underneath such institutionalised 'isms' – or, indeed, art historical rhinoceroses (as examples of the hide-bound) – with a view to their transformation through present understanding; indeed, turning them inside out. Such a commitment would also include each 'stage' of Kantor's own theatre research, which engaged with contemporary art in a dynamic of which one would glean little in such histories of performance art as, for example, that of RoseLee Goldberg (2001).[4] As he writes (in the text explaining 'The development of my scenic ideas'), addressing his work for the *Rhinoceros* production and recalling an idea of 'mental space' from nearly a decade before: 'I am creating a new concept: Inside Out Space [*przestrzen odwrocona*]. This is the outcome of research into mental space. The phrase itself is sort of perverse, since it has no actual reference of its own to space.' (2000: 240; 2015: 185)

**Concerning 'costumology', the rhinoceros, and post-dramatic theatre**

In their introduction to Christina Lindgren's *Costume Agency* project, Sofia Pantouvaki and Barbora Prihodova propose that it 'develops in the context of post-dramatic theatre, where text no longer sets the premises of a performance. The project challenges and de-hierarchises the established structures in the performing arts by working in a context of "extensive interdisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity and intra-disciplinarity" […] inviting us [amongst other concerns] to look at costume as a visual and spatial element that provokes dramaturgy that is not story-driven' (2021: 145). This 'no longer' of a 'dramaturgy that is not story-driven' has a long history, however, exploring theatricality beyond the sense of interpreting dialogue in varieties of 'costume drama', whether that be in period or modern dress. As we shall see, Kantor constantly played with anomalies of metaphor and material, concerning 'structure, life functions, and expression', as these are evoked by the rhinoceros in European art history – since, at least, the example of Albrecht Dürer.[5]

This particular instance of cultural avant-gardism – Dürer's fascination with what was culturally 'new' (as art rather than simply fashion) – gains a curious afterlife in Kantor's reflections on his 'encounter with Dürer's Rhinoceros', which proposes its own example of 'costumology' (*kostiumologii* [2000: 324; 2015: 191]): 'I've rediscovered the drawing by Dürer showing a rhinoceros. It is hard for me to discern the moving parts that attest to the vital functions. They are deeply hidden, in the joints of great unformed masses. In effect, one could create a whole new department of costumology: the natural.' What follows this paradoxical appeal to the 'natural' is an evocation of the 'armature […] of an exuberant

[4] Indeed, it is perhaps indicative that the museal suffix of an 'ism' – as in Expressionism, Symbolism, Realism, and so on – has not been attached to any of Kantor's own references for engaging with the art of theatre in the post-war context; to *informel*, Zero, Happening, and the Impossible, leading up to his development of the 'theatre of death' in 1975.

[5] Although Dürer's 1515 drawing is generally recognised to be 'a work of imagination rather than observation' (informed by descriptions dating back even to Pliny), it has held its grip on the European imagination despite 'later and more naturalistic portraits of the rhinoceros of 1579, 1684, and 1739' (Clarke 1986: 20). Dürer's iconic image has the appearance of an armoured beast that is suggestive of the contemporary conventions of knights and their horses, in which European legends of the rhinoceros are given an image that is manifest 'on the plane of art' rather than 'real life'. As T.H. Clarke notes: 'Dürer lived in the street next to the armourer's quarter [in Nuremberg], and was actively engaged in designing armour' (1986: 20).

imagination' (2000: 324; 2015: 191), by which we are invited to re-think the 'natural' through the appearance of the 'new' in an art of costumology.

The privileging of 'dramatic' conventions of staging – in which, paradoxically, the epitome of the illusionistic is, precisely, naturalism – is historically exemplified by authorial stage directions, narratively describing a scene in which the materiality of costume is occluded by its interpretative value. The literary premise of and for such narrative scene setting characterises the modern period – even amongst those breaking away from the novelistic paradigm, with such 'anti-dramatists' as Witkiewicz, Beckett, and Ionesco. The latter's play *Rhinoceros* opens, for instance, with a page-length stage description (from which the following is extracted): 'The scene is a square in a small provincial town. Upstage a house composed of a ground floor and one storey. The ground floor is the window of a grocer's shop[…] In the distance a church steeple is visible above the grocer's house. Between the shop and the left of the stage there is a little street in perspective. To the right, slightly at an angle, is the front of a café. Above the café, one floor with a window; in front, the café terrace; several chairs and tables reach almost to centre stage[…]' (2019: 115).

This is what Kantor declares that the 'new theatre' – as a question of staging and costume – has 'struck out' of its approach to scenography. In a note entitled 'My Idea of Theatre' for the programme accompanying the 1961 *Rhinoceros* production (directed by Piotr Pawlowski), Kantor addresses the audience of Krakow's Stary Theatre (the city's principal drama theatre), anticipating that they might find themselves even more surprised by the costumes and scenery than by the play's 'absurd' dialogues: 'The [new] theatre I am talking about struck out the idea of scenery as an illustration of the play a long time ago. These are the worst traditions of theatre. Scenery cannot, and must not, just fulfil the requirement of setting, in whatever manner: constructivist, surrealist, expressionist, symbolist, naturalist, or poetic. It has a much more important and compelling function: the setting of emotions, conflicts, and the dynamics of the action.' (2000 [1961]: 235; 2015 [1961]: 180)

Ignoring the juxtaposition of the ostensibly naturalistic stage directions and the estranging dialogue that it contextualises, Kantor does not discuss Ionesco's dramaturgy as evidence of his contemporaneity as an international playwright. Rather he focuses the discussion on the staging itself, to expand the reception of what was particular about this production more, perhaps, than the play. (Nonetheless, in keeping with the times, his note originally concluded with a comment on the historical metaphorics of the play, referring to 'this profoundly philosophical and anti-fascist satire, [in which the characters] become witnesses… to our inhuman times and its form.'[6]) In the terms that have characterised Anglophone discussion of the 'new theatre' (or the 'post-dramatic'), this is not a question for Kantor of 'visual theatre' vs. 'text-based theatre', but rather a transformation of the understanding of both the visual and the verbal *theatrically*, through understanding theatre *artistically*. This is often occluded in his Anglophone reception, which has largely focused on

[6] This line was amended in Kantor's subsequent re-use of the text to read simply: 'Completely enclosed, with no possibility of escape, the stage characters show their desperation, and the situation reaches the utmost tension. In this profoundly philosophical satire, they become witnesses thereby to our inhuman times and its form' (2015: 182). The reference to anti-fascism appears in the French translation, but is omitted in the Polish republication (2000: 237). The question of totalitarianism in the play – specifically, of 'pervasive complicity and impure resistance' – is explored by Mihaela Mihai in her analyses of what she calls a 'double erasure… in political memory and its aesthetics' evidenced in cultural production (2022: 5).

the post-1980 Cricot 2 productions, elaborating these in broad cultural contexts rather than exploring what is specific to the theatre practice. Kantor is typically discussed, then, as a witness to the short twentieth century, with a focus on historical-political conditions for understanding (metaphor), neglecting what is specific to theatre making (material) regarding this period's avant-garde questions of art practice (or 'process').[7]

**Considering the art of theatre with Kantor**

Commentary in theatre studies rarely ever mentions Kantor's international success as a painter, still less his activities as a tireless advocate for – and participant in – the post-war Polish avant-garde, understood by him as necessarily internationalist. By contrast, Henning Rischbieter's entry on Kantor in his and Wolfgang Storch's 1968 book, *Art and the Stage in the Twentieth Century: Painters and Sculptors Work for the Theatre*, begins with precisely a question of art practice: 'Is Kantor a painter, is he a man of the theatre?' (1968: 240); and ends with the suggestion that '[o]ut of informal painting [*informel*] and a theatre in keeping with it, Kantor has fought his way forward to the point where the distance between theatre and plastic art has been finally eliminated – in a third form that is both and no longer either.' (1968: 245)

Just as rarely is costume, as a sign of this 'distance between', viewed as a lens for refracting theatrical agency in the dynamics of collaboration. Although, for example, the idea of 'bio-objects' in Kantor's work is widely discussed, this is not in terms of the collaboration between actor and materials. Interest remains conceptually with the idea, or metaphor(s), of a production as though distinct from the material(s) of the performance. Indeed, critical reflection on collaboration between actors and Kantor, or between Kantor and technicians (where such relations often seem still conceived of in terms of skills vs. art), is little explored. Furthermore, where discussion of auratic productions dispenses with recognition of mundane rehearsal, the idea of design often occludes the materiality of making within theatre studies. Outside of technical commentaries (specified, for instance, by studies in *costume* and performance), a production is rarely seen as exposing its materials – turned inside out – as critics prefer the paraphrase of supposedly authorial metaphors.

Such a conceptual corseting distorts Kantor's reception, given that he did not make theatre by himself (for all that he was, in person, 'his own theatre'), but rather in the collaborative context of the Cricot 2, the theatrical project of the post-war Krakow Group of artists. 'Re-assembling' this context, rather than reproducing the often hagiographic approach to Kantor himself, is one of the interests of considering his work through costume, as precisely a question of and for theatre studies. It is conspicuous, for instance, that Kantor's rare attempts to make theatre as if simply 'a director' – with a 'properly' professional company of actors and technicians (as in France, in 1972, in a production with Witkacy's play *The Shoemakers*) – were evidently difficult experiences for everyone involved.[8] As Kantor tells Krzysztof Miklaszewski (himself a participant in the Cricot 2), 'I depend entirely on the ensemble' (Kantor in Miklaszewski, 2002: 12). Of the experience with *The Shoemakers* in Paris, then, he refers to '[m]y difficulties with the actors. Not because of the obscurity of

[7] I have highlighted this, for instance, in reviewing a recent collection of essays (eds. Romanska and Cioffi, 2020) that offers many examples of the 'context' usually adopted for an approach to Kantor today (Twitchin, 2022).

[8] Stanislaw Witkiewicz's name is commonly abbreviated to 'Witkacy'.

Witkacy's texts, purely technical difficulties. All my problems arose from the intrinsic characteristics of the French actor: he's a hireling, he's efficient, he's highly trained, but he's quite incapable of grasping those issues which the Polish amateur "wandering actor" can work through without difficulty if he keeps his mind on the job' (Kantor in Miklaszewski, 2002: 12-13). [9]

Being 'highly trained' can be a source of resistance, for instance, to an understanding of the actor as a 'found object' – as this idea profoundly changed the sense of material in twentieth century art – as though it would be a derogation of that training (with all its qualifications) and the technical ability that characterises the professional. By contrast, Kantor's approach to theatre-making allows for such fundamental insights as that concerning the difference between 'imitating' (interpretation) and 'performing' (as in Michael Kirby's 'non-matrixed' action [Kirby 1972]), where: 'An actor *imitating* an action is always situated above the action. An actor *performing* an action in reality is placed on the same level as the action. In this fashion the basic hierarchy changes: object-actor, action-actor' (Kantor in Miklaszewski, 2002: 11). Kantor's underlying commitment to an 'impossible' theatre, as the necessary index of and for its possible *art*, resists the reproduction of professional (or industry) 'standards' – including, then, opening new possibilities for considering 'costumology'.

With his founding (in Krakow in 1980) of an archive – rather than a school – to engage interest in an art of theatre amongst those who had not necessarily seen the Cricot 2 live in performance, we engage with another paradox of Kantor's avant-garde commitments. The archive offers a sense of theatre which is not defined by or limited to the prevailing conventions of its time; that is, a conventional theatre (distinct from an impossible theatre) that has no artistic afterlife, howsoever successful or award-winning it may have been (Twitchin, 2016). Although ostensibly concerned with 'documentation of the art of Tadeusz Kantor', the archive is in principle an enduring project of the Cricot 2 (at least, in its idea), as indicated by its very name, the *Cricoteka* – a Cricoteque, as in a mediatheque or cinematheque.[10]

Almost a quarter of a century after his death in 1990, this archive continues to stage exhibitions (amongst other activities), reflecting different aspects of Kantor's work with the Cricot 2, which provide a context for discussion of that work today. This essay is itself prompted by the current exhibition at the Cricoteka, which focuses on Kantor and costumes (to which I will return in the last sections).[11] This exhibition includes Kantor's recreations of theatrical materials preceding the Cricot 2, which informed his own sense of a creative journey, as, for instance, the sculptural 'costume' made for the 'ethereal' and 'fantastic' figure of Goplana in Juliusz Slowacki's play, *Balladyna* (1839), from the Underground Theatre in Krakow in 1943 (Slowacki 2018: 242 & 245) [figure 1]; and two costumes from, precisely, the 1961 Stary Theatre *Rhinoceros* production – the latter being a rare instance of

[9] An extension of this can be seen in a note of Kantor's from 1972 remarking that the newly constructed theatre where *The Shoemakers* was to be shown in Paris had been 'built to the highest standards as regards the installations and technical equipment, even including a computer' – for which, he adds, 'I will have no use' (Czerska, Chrobak, and Michalik, 2010: 184).

[10] To access the Cricoteka online: https://www.cricoteka.pl/pl/en/

[11] 'Private. Kantor's Theatrical Costumes' (7.7.2022-12.2.2023): https://www.cricoteka.pl/pl/private-kantors-theatrical-costumes/

Kantor having preserved, in his own archive, examples from his official theatre work [figures 2 and 3].

**Collaborators: the Cricot 2, Witkacy, and Maria Jarema**

Co-founded in 1955 with fellow Krakow artists Maria Jarema and Kazimierz Mikulski, the Cricot 2 is the name under which Kantor explored the art of theatre for over thirty years (1955-1990), in explicit continuity with, and in homage to, the pre-war Krakow artists' theatre group, Cricot (1933-1939) – a name that offers, in Polish, a French-sounding inversion of 'it's a circus' (*to Cyrk*) (Czerska 2018: 119-20). The mythology of the Fairground or Circus – as itinerant, marginal, and disreputable – appealed to Kantor, as to many modernist theatre artists, for its mockery of the good taste and decorum of mainstream theatre culture. Indeed, as identified with a specific kind of civic building, forms of theatre-going could also invite their own studies in costume and performance concerning the audience. Carried into his image of the Cricot 2 as a circus or 'wandering troupe' – especially in his ideas for the 1967 production with Witkacy's *The Water Hen*, years before the Cricot 2 in fact became an internationally touring company – the artistic inversion (indeed, derision) of 'good form' is also associated with Kantor's exploration from the 1960s of the literally manifold materialism of costume – or, more generally, of 'wrapping' – which he called 'emballage'.

The pre- and post-war continuity of the Cricot theatre project was embodied in the person of Maria Jarema, sister of the first company's founder, Jozef Jarema, who went into exile in Italy after the war.[12] A close friend and collaborator of Kantor's, Jaremianka had both performed in and designed for productions of the original Cricot and did so again with the first production of the Cricot 2 in 1956, where the play chosen to work with was Witkacy's *The Cuttlefish*, which had been premiered by the original Cricot in 1933. As Anna Batko describes the Cricot 2's work: '[T]he role of Jaremianka is not limited to the design of costumes and stage design or her acting [she played the role of "the tragi-comic Matron II", while her "costumes reverberate with the grotesque and an aura of strangeness"]. Yelling over Kantor – with whom she is supposed to be like yin and yang despite their endless arguments – she instructs the actors on how to act. Apparently, she tells them to recite their parts in an extremely automated manner, while Kantor tries to make them laugh behind her back' (Batko 2018: 78).

Given the play's satire of interwar political authoritarianism – the 'Hyrcanian world view' of its subtitle – there is special resonance in the choice of this work, with its own debating of relations between art and politics, which serves to re-affirm a Polish avant-garde history against the traumatic interruptions of the Nazi occupation and then the Stalinist orthodoxies of Socialist, not to say Soviet, Realism that were officially mitigated only from the mid-1950s. (Exploring the resonances with Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* – in terms of theatrical conventions and, especially, the politics of institutional theatre production – would require another essay of its own.) With their resolutely anti-realist vision of theatre from the interwar period – indicated by the author's own descriptions of them, such as 'a non-Euclidean drama' (*Gyubal Wahazar, or Along the Cliffs of the Absurd* (1921)) – the plays of Witkacy provided their own 'post-dramatic' repertoire for the first two decades of the Cricot

[12] For an accessible introduction to Jarema (Jaremianka), see Anna Batko 2019.

2's experiments (1955-1975). Indeed, *The Cuttlefish* also includes 'impossible' descriptions of 'an extraordinary, non-Euclidean tension throughout all space', in which '[t]he whole world has shrunk to the dimensions of an orange' (2004: 271).[13]

Although Witkacy offers elaborate description of the staging in his plays, he does so as a provocation rather than an attempt to pre-empt the director. Commenting, in a lecture from 1921, on what he called 'the theatre of pure form', he insists that: 'A theatrical work in Pure Form is self-sustained, autonomous[…] The actors and actresses appearing in such a play, created by the director as a creative artist on a par with the author, do not impersonate more or less skilfully any sort of hypothetical people, but they create their roles within the overall totality of happenings on stage, consisting of formally joined actions, utterances, and images, capable of being put together, depending on compositional requirements, in the most fantastic way from the point of view of life and common sense[…] Working together, the director and actors create the play on stage for the first time, naturally providing that they do not interpret it realistically, which can be done with any play.' (1993: 151)[14]

**In memory of Jaremianka**

How, then, did the Cricot 2's experiments with Witkacy manifest their own sense of costume agency, playing with the creative dynamics of performance beyond the standard expectations of dramatic interpretation, especially when not viewed 'realistically'? For, as Rischbieter observed concerning the Cricot 2 in 1968: 'The literary motives, Witkiewicz's texts, obviously exercise only a releasing function. The actors, who in these plays scarcely take parts but merely evoke feelings, and the objects with which the actors deal, through which they force their way, with which they load themselves, cover themselves, disfigure themselves, are the "material" of these actions, whose techniques, intentions, and phases – assembly [*assemblage*], destruction, zero point, silence – resemble those of the happening' (1968: 245).

Had Jarema lived beyond 1958, the history of the Cricot 2 would no doubt have been different, and Kantor continued to invoke her memory up until his last production, in 1990, *Today is my Birthday* (having also devoted a Happening to commemorating the tenth anniversary of her death in 1968). In a sense, one might also see him honouring Jarema's memory in 1961, taking the example of their collaboration (as expressed in costume specifically) into the official theatre with his designs for *Rhinoceros*. We can read in his programme note, for instance, an observation that echoes precisely the dialogue with Jarema evoked in the text from which the opening epigraph is taken: 'If we accept that the body of the actor, like that of any individual, is, in its proportions, its constitution, its arrangement of parts, formed according to precise functions, practical and vital, then the

[13] The Cricot's premiere production of *The Cuttlefish* in 1933 (the year of Hitler's coming to power in neighbouring Germany) was designed by the sculptor Henryk Wicinski, who dressed the play's dictator figure, Hyrcan IV, as a Nazi. (The play itself had been written in 1922, a year before the Munich Putsch.)

[14] In 1938, Witkacy also celebrated the Cricot group in the following terms: 'It is with joy that we should, as the saying goes, welcome the founding of the theatre Cricot in Krakow, which is not, I gather, an experimental theatre (despite the name) where unfocused energy is expended without any awareness of what the nature of theatre is, but rather the beginning of a creative, artistic theatre, which each of our cities should have alongside the others unless our theatre is to die an unnatural death, rotting away, while still alive, in its own odourless sauce' (1993: 337).

idea of modifying these proportions and this arrangement becomes very attractive. It offers enormous possibilities for the actor, then, of transmitting contents that themselves have no place in the incidental and ephemeral life of the everyday.' (2000 [1961]: 235; 2015 [1961]: 180)

Both Kantor and Jarema – just like Witkacy – see in the potential of costume the transformation of the theatrical, refusing any reduction of the latter to incidents from the everyday. As Kantor observes regarding *Rhinoceros*: 'This is why I am not taken by "doing" streets, a café, interiors. These are not the places in which the conflicts in the work occur. I put all the emphasis on the form of the stage characters that must be more suggestive and powerful than that of the spectators' (2000 [1961]: 236-37; 2015 [1961]: 182). Nonetheless, we might say that – despite appearances – the idea of the time and place of the interactions (or drama) in Ionesco's play are not illustrative of the street and the café as described in the stage directions quoted earlier. Scenery or setting offer a way to stage what is ordinarily invisible (after all, this is the core interest of Ionesco's own dramaturgy), which is then transformed again ('turned inside out') in Kantor's conception of stage space and costume.

To return to the question of nudity on stage raised at the beginning of this essay, Kantor's costumes for *Rhinoceros* include, precisely, prosthetic skins; as if the external appearance of the body were portable by itself, with this double of nakedness a means to re-think costume – and thereby both the theatrical metaphor and materiality of the actor. The impossible separation of the body's outer covering from the internal structure that defines its parts and proportions (as with the illusion of taxidermy and, for example, the iconicity of Dürer's rhinoceros) shifts nudity into the realm of art functions rather than life functions, however naturalistic (or even, perhaps, grotesque) it then appears to be. (After all, in 'real life' the skin cannot stand on its own, without the body of the actor that animates its appearance on stage.) Here the material of the costume appears as its own metaphor for that of nakedness – for the vulnerable human body on stage (as in the world) – rather than showing an absence of clothing as exemplary of 'realism' in some dramatic situation. This is one of the lessons of Kantor's encounter with the rhinoceros, anticipating that with Dürer (in his 1962 text), which provides a link to subsequent work with the Cricot 2 and emballage. This new stage in Kantor's theatrical research was, indeed, already suggested in the first 'Kantor' Cricot 2 production, also in 1961, with Witkacy's *In a Small Country House*, which was set inside a wardrobe, annexing the domestic space that houses clothing – here reduced to sacking – for its own theatrical purposes.

The Jarema-Kantor collaboration is further echoed in a text that Kantor published the following year (1962), from which the epigraph is drawn, celebrating the memory of Jarema as an artist and which is here quoted more fully: '…her costume designs were sensational. She created the costume in a similar way… as the costume of Pierrot or Kolombina, by means of contemporary painting. More: her own painting. She knew that she could not stop on the surface, using forms employed in her paintings [she knew] that she had to achieve them in new conditions, with new materials. The structure of the human body is an expression of its life functions. The stage costume, which is the surface of this structure, and at the same time operates on the plane of art, must furnish it with different functions and qualities. For Jaremianka this meant, as a consequence of her painting, going beyond the main scheme of bodily structure, moving inside the silhouette and, in this movement of

forms, achieving a new equilibrium… Colourful animated forms, animated by actors, were moving on stage. Autonomous costumes – never detached from the actor, intensifying their personal expansion…' (Kantor 2001 [1962]: 31 [quoted in Dauksza 2018: 30])

**An exhibition of costumes at the Cricoteka**

The paradox of 'autonomous costumes – never detached from the actor' poses its own question concerning the relation between the specific time and place of a performance and the potentially interchangeable ('detached') location of an exhibition; as equally between the autonomy of art and its recognition as 'art' by galleries, which is then contextualised as art history by museums.[15] The shifting value of autonomy or agency regarding costume becomes complex in the relation between the ephemeral (an actual performance) and an exhibition, where this distinction in the archival availability of costume for a curator is the established means of conceptualising the 'work' in relation to an artistic 'process' – albeit in both cases as a question of (and for) an audience (since, of course, the exhibition is itself ephemeral in relation to the archive [Voorhies, 2017]). Kantor, indeed, locates his work explicitly within the Duchampian heritage of avant-garde (anti-) aesthetics (Twitchin, 2018); and before engaging with Happenings in the second half of the 1960s, he had already staged a so-called 'anti-exhibition' in 1963, where no hierarchical difference was supposed between those items that would normally be excluded – as merely evidence of 'process' – and the recognised, even venerated, items deemed to be 'finished works'. As with the Cricot 2 theatre performances, especially those between 1955-75, this concerns the transvaluation of 'process' when no longer defined simply in opposition to 'the work'. The 1963 exhibition, then, staged a critique of the dominant sense that the designation 'of art' applies to works rather than process, as a question of and for, precisely, the artistic 'value' of Kantor's practice within a gallery space.

All this flows into the many paradoxes of Kantor's own archive – including the historically changing contexts suggested by the current 'costume' exhibition at the Cricoteka, the first that has taken the costumes in its collection as its subject. Curated by one of the Cricot 2 performers, Bogdan Renczynski, together with Justyna Dron, it is presented under the title: 'Private. Tadeusz Kantor's Theatrical Costumes' (running from July 7, 2022 to February 12, 2023). I will return to the question raised by the first word in this programmatic title – 'private' – but perhaps the first thing to note about the exhibition is how it stages the materials; not least, in making use of the gallery itself as a condition of and for the visitor's experience, creating the feeling of an event rather than simply a display. Although the visitor may, of course, ignore it, there is a spatial shaping of the time that one is invited to spend there – from the initial sense of seeing the 'whole' on entering to discovering the detail of the tactile elements that it contains [figure 4]. The 'big picture' is organised in a kind of spiralling wave, flowing around the edges of the room from a pre-show dressing room installation, presided over by an old-fashioned treadle sewing machine, through costumes from half a century of productions hanging along one of the walls [figures 5 & 6]. By the end, this 'collection' has risen up into the air and is flying back across the ceiling, above the visitor's head, out towards the entrance – which has now become the exit [figures 7 and 8].

[15] An important exploration of similar issues has been undertaken by Donatella Barbieri at the Victoria and Albert Museum, entitled precisely 'Encounters in the Archive' (Barbieri 2012).

That one registers a sense of 'towards' in this presentation is telling, evoking (for this visitor, at least) an escape from the mundane through a poetic gesture in which the past remains unfinished, as the border between it and the future – as between material and metaphor – is swept up into an alternative possibility of the gravity (in every sense) with which 'detached' costume – its agency and autonomy – is normally construed. This scenario echoes (for me) the last image of Bruno Schulz's short story *The Pensioner*, which is also one of the texts participating in the séance of the *Dead Class*: '[A] minute later I turned a somersault and was drifting in a splendid, ascending line. Already I was flying high above the rooftops. Flying like that and out of breath, with the eyes of imagination I saw my classmates stretching out their arms, wildly pricking up their fingers, and shouting to the teacher, "Professor, Szymek's been swept away!'" (Schulz 2018: 230)

The garments are not presented here on individual stands or isolated in vitrines, as is common for costume exhibitions, offering an itemised narrative or an inventory of exemplars. Rather they are presented or staged as suggesting a question of *theatre* and its possible *art*. Are the costumes freed from the gravity of the bodies on which they are no longer worn, the latter abstracted into the skeletal form of a hanger? Have they now escaped from the bodies that wore them, in their own performance of the archive, becoming a new metaphor of the ephemeral through their materiality – and fragility – recalled from the safe-keeping of the archive's repository?

The exhibition offers curiously ambiguous evidence, then, of costume's agency. On the one hand, the stand-alone re-appearance of a garment demonstrates that the costume is not simply (or necessarily) secondary to the context in which it first appeared, now without the setting and the gestures that originally animated it. On the other hand, the exhibition's labels (noting the time and place of the production in which the costume first appeared) weave into this new appearance, in which the costume evokes the paradoxical autonomy of theatrical art in relation to its erstwhile practical uses. In the exhibition, this appearance is associated with a new text – no longer the play text, the programme book, the posters on which the image of the costume might once have figured, but various concepts for thinking about, indeed, a Cricot 2 'costumology' (following Kantor's proposal in the *Encounter with Dürer's Rhinoceros* (2000 [1962]: 324; 2015 [1962]: 191)).

**Thinking of costume with Kantor's example**

In the middle of the gallery, there is a long table covered with a white cloth, reminiscent of the one in *Wielopole/ Wielopole* [figure 9], the apparent 'centre piece' of the room, in between the garments hanging on one side and a wall-length mirror on the other [figure 10]. In the mirror, creating a doubled space, visitors see themselves in relation to the materials, evoking another 'presence' that offers its own theatrical metaphor. The visitors are simultaneously in the actual room and elsewhere – in the other space of a staging that has annexed an image of themselves. This dynamic of 'here and elsewhere' is intensified by the sound of voices which gently haunt the space, with laughter from the recording of a celebration for Anna Halczak – who was later the first director of the Cricoteka – from a Cricot 2 dressing room in the past.

Along one side of the table are various objects, which can be picked up and handled, brought up close to be looked at and played with – from sculptural figurines to wooden

boxes containing production photos, the sequence of which can be re-arranged by the visitor. These were made by Kantor as a way of revisiting a production at a time before the now ubiquitous video recording and it is notable that the exhibition does not feature any screens with the usual fragments from filmed performances. The costumes are presented for themselves, without this familiar moving-image illustration of their 'use', and are related here to a series of what one might call 'idea swatches' arranged on the other side of the table. There are also wooden chairs to sit down on and spend time with the nine conceptual 'chapters' offered. These curatorial categories for thinking with and about 'Kantor's costumes', outlining a project of and for the *studies* that might be elaborated in a future exhibition catalogue, are: '1. The making of the collection and work stages; 2. The collection of costumes of Cricoteka; 3. The costume beside the actor; 4. Transferring painting principles to theatre; 5. Kantor – stage designer in official theatre; 6. The costume as sculpture; 7. Bio-object; 8. Mannequins; and 9. Costumes made not only of fabric.' (Renczynski and Dron, 2022)

The principal 'work stages' (1) of the Cricot 2 theatre, addressed here through the example of costume, include (as already mentioned) *informel*, Zero, and the Impossible; and there are 248 costumes in the Cricoteka collection (2), spanning the whole of the ensemble's existence. The sewing machine in the corner of the room (3) honours Kantor's longstanding collaboration with Ludwik Witek, a theatrical tailor who was present during the Cricot 2's rehearsals. As Rencynzski describes their working relationship: 'Kantor had a drawing which served as the base, but it was not a proper design. Kantor talked a lot about his ideas with Ludwik Witek, the tailor, who sewed a coat, for example, which Kantor would then cut and tear, and Ludwik would sew it back again until the costume was ready. More damage was done during performances, by characters, actors' (Rencynzski and Dron, 2022). The relation between painting and theatre (4), as already observed with Rischbieter (1968: 240 and 241), is a key to the whole discussion. Kantor's designs for 'official theatre' (5) include, of course, the 1961 *Rhinoceros* production, while an example of (6) 'costume as sculpture' is exemplified by the archive remake of the Goplana figure from the Underground Theatre (1943) [figure 1]. Bio-objects and mannequins (7 & 8) are familiar categories in Kantor reception and the wheel-boots that characterised the Millionaire from *Lovelies and Dowdies* (1973) are shown here [figures 11 and 12]. In Kantor's description of this character: '*A man with two bicycle wheels grown into his legs* is completely separated from reality of a different *kind* and is enclosed in an inhuman, but at least for him natural, feeling for Speed and Motion that can be realised with the help of his legs, with the consciousness of a vehicle' (1995: 102). The principal example of 'costume not made from fabric' (9) is that of the waxed paper, used in *Let the Artists Die* (1985), which had been given to Kantor by the Swedish art collector, and a personal friend, Theodor Ahrenberg (figure 13).

**Re-turning things inside out with Kantor**

Between entering and exiting, what are the 'private' evocations of the idea of costume, where the exhibition highlights something that is only visible publicly *between* the metaphorical and the material? This scenario offers an echo of Kantor's conception of an 'inside out space' from his *Scenic Ideas* in 1961, at the time of the *Rhinoceros* production (2000: 240; 2015: 185), which itself presages the later Happening performance, *An Anatomy Lesson After Rembrandt*. With the 'inside out space' concept, Kantor offers his own thought-image of a glove in contrast to the one proposed by Alexander Tairov. Following on from the

text already quoted from his *Encounter with Dürer's Rhinoceros*, Kantor writes: 'Tairov affirms that a costume should fit like a glove. In my marginal reflections – the margins are always where the imagination develops freely – this affirmation of Tairov's is already academic. Ultimately, any costume at all is something foreign that parasites on the human body. This is why I am more interested by its deviations and what follows from them, by its own destiny and by the processes to which it submits in order to become more and more autonomous, more and more exposed to ridicule, to end up finally as only a trace, one of a kind.' (Kantor 2000 [1962]: 324; 2015 [1962]: 191)

In the relation between container and contained – whether a glove or a pocket – it is not the fit between inside and outside that interests Kantor, the seamless transformation between one and the other (the occlusion of the material by its metaphor), as the mainstay of theatrical illusion; but rather what is exposed by the inversion of space, together with the remains of frayed stitching, the odds and ends that had been forgotten at the bottom of a pocket (no longer connected to any current usefulness), the seams exposed in their being torn apart, making a mockery of the line of jacket or trousers. Neither 'dressed appropriately' nor 'undressed inappropriately', Kantor's exploration of a costumology is here simultaneously material and metaphor. In its new appearance, the private becomes a found object, where what was once precious is re-discovered as ordinary – and, indeed, vice versa – in its 'poor reality'.

In the context of the exhibition, an obvious instance of the private is the recognition that the costumes were not simply designed for, or simply worn by, the Cricot 2 actors in their performances. The actors themselves were involved in their making, as the material of and for the roles or characters that they played. Here the private concerns a world of memory that remains in another dimension of material 'on the plane of art'. The costumes have passed from one generation to another not within a family (although the Cricot 2 was in a sense its own kind of family) but from the stage to the archive – no longer the 'dressing up basket' of the Cricot 2. The possibilities of seeing them are no longer those of wearing them.

Besides this, there is also the question of the private ruminations and curiosity of the visitor – as, for example, in the writing of this essay, with its emerging sense of turning inside out the rhinoceros hide of theatre studies with Kantor and Jarema. Exploring an appearance of inside and outside by means of each other, rather than simply reproducing their opposition, shifts the potential of what lies 'between material and metaphor' theatrically. This points to a transformation of the rhinoceros figure in art history, from the Dürer drawing to Kantor's performances, including echoes of the Kantor-Jarema dialogue in the non-Cricot 2 production with Ionesco. It is significant, after all, that Kantor only worked with Witkacy's texts in the Cricot 2 and not on the 'official theatre' stages in Poland.

Even as it anticipates exhibitions and publications, an artistic archive retains something 'private' – especially where one of the curators was himself a participant in the work that is documented. Crucially, perhaps, this exhibition offers a sense of the changing shapes of Kantor's artistic practice in and as its own research project, recalled here in the idea of 'costume' – where the material of this always potential metaphor of and for theatre (whether threadbare or glamourous) makes visible its reversals of past and future [figure 14]. This dynamic of the avant-garde may be figured, for a Kantorian 'costumology', in the

thought-image of the rhinoceros, the possibilities of which are revealing even as they remain, of course, never fully revealed. For that would, indeed, be an encounter with the *impossible*.

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