

# How to make avant-garde theatre accessible? The case of Tadeusz Kantor's "Theatre of Death" plays

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# Tadeusz Kantor

## 1915-1990

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- Born in Wielopole Skrzyńskie (80% of population Jewish)
- WWII survivor
- Cricot 2 theatre
- A prophet known outside of his land



# What is Cricotage?

- Freed of any "plot". [...] Relics and traces uprooted by force of imagination defying all conventions and "clever" sense.
- Break and disintegrate at any moment. This feeling of danger and the permanent imminence of catastrophe is the essential quality of the Cricotage.
- All the life meanings are immediately defied and erased. A wedding immediately becomes a funereal ceremony. No "programmed" message exists what exists is an air that causes the Cricotage to come close to symbolism.
- any "semantic" explanation is false and out of place

# “Where are the last year’s snows...”

- First performed in 1979
- Recorded (twice) in 1983
- No linear plot
- Programme
  - What is Cricotage?
  - Participants (i.e. actors)
  - Characters
  - Scene titles
  - Note on meaning (see previous slide)

# Intertextuality

- Music: Mordechaj Gebirtig's "Our town is on fire" (hymn of the Jewish Ghetto)
- Title: quotation from François Villon

# Filmed play

- Two different versions, each focuses on different things (the quality of two versions differs)
- “Technicalities” visible on the screen (omitted in AD)
- “The Gentleman well-known to us is played by a woman. My task is to describe what I see” (audio describer)

# How to deal with non-linear plot? (1)

- This straight line
- The Indefatigable Surveyor
- The people of the street
- The ill-timed Wedding and Funeral
- The Trumpet of the Final Judgement
- The Entrance of the Great Actors
- Our town is on fire
- Et super nivem dealbabo
- I shall grow whiter than snow
- The Gentleman well-known to us
- The right echoes

## How to deal with non-linear plot? (2)

- "The only thing that remains is to lay down a small black materace stripes on the floor. We will soon learn about its purpose."
- Kantor's own writings help us to grasp non-linearity



# Character / scene descriptiona (1)

- "The gentleman well-known to us" comes back. The military hat slides low. A military coat with a collar, tightly wraps up a small, female person. [...] "Only the skull is missing. But we are not interested in taking these things literally".
- An individual is on his knees and continues his "delicate activity that demonstrates senselessness of human's actions".



## Character / scene description (2)

- The Rabi runs back and forth. "With scattered halves of his coat, he looks like an ominous Angel of Death".
- Enter the passers-by in "Purple bishops' infeuls". They are followed by the "neither a bride in veil, nor a streetgirl".

# Character description (3)

- “Sometimes the names of his characters differ in his guide and programmes for the audience. Fo example: “the death” becomes “the skeleton” (audio describer)



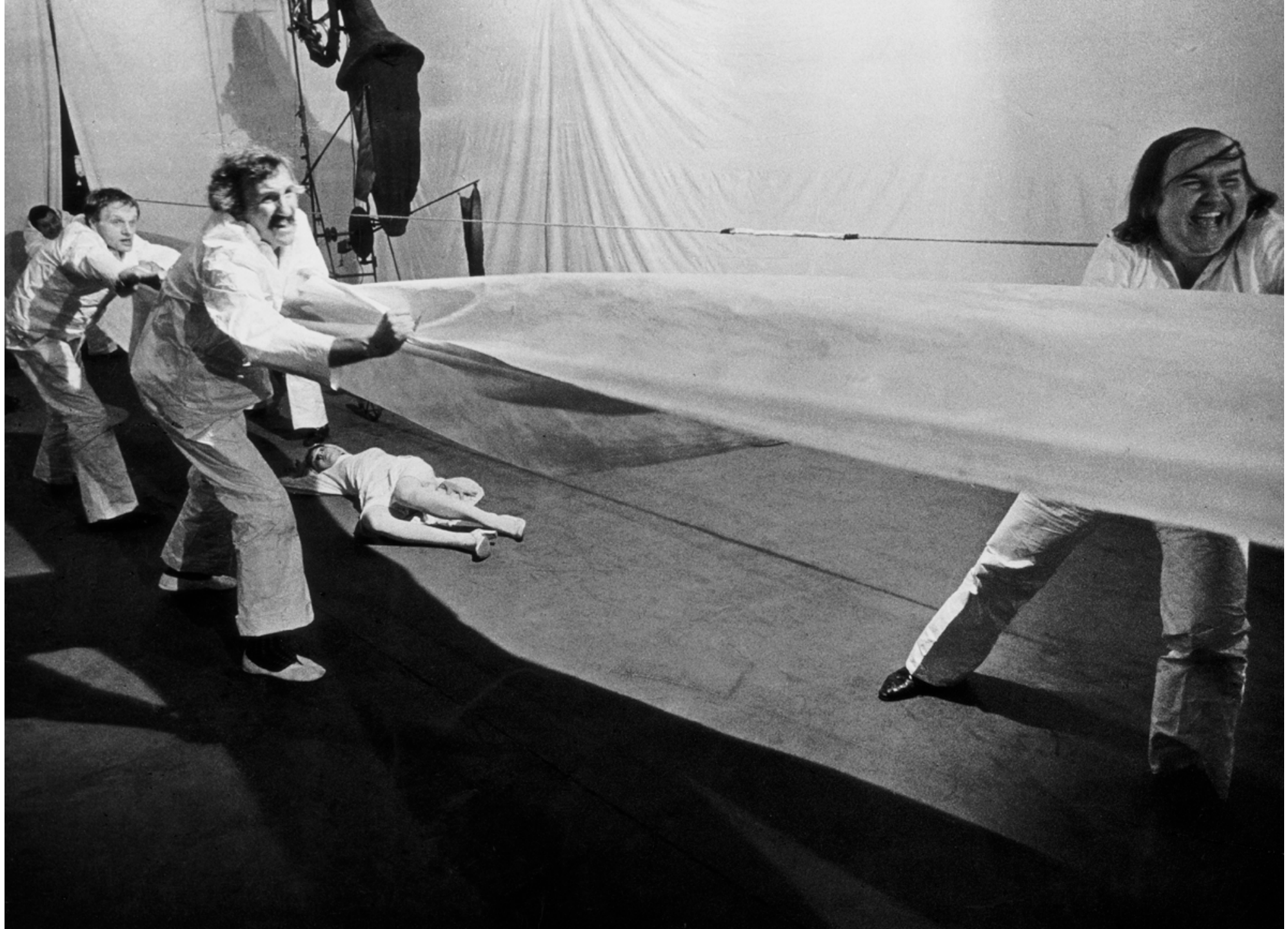
# Objects

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- The trumpet of the final judgement
- Jericho Trumpet. Something very strange. Neither an instrument (trumpet that triggered the tragic Hymn of the Jewish Ghetto), nor a siege machine by the walls of Jaricho. A circus cart pushed by the desperate Rabi, It holds the holy trumpet, a mourning "emballage": a sack from which the sounds would fall into a tin bucket. (audio introduction)

# Drawing paper

- All the clothes of actors were made out of it
- It produces a very characteristic sound
- It is available in the museum, it can be touched by blind audiences









# Solutions

- Audio introduction (with elements from the Programme)
- Kantor “speaks” through AD
- Touch tour (“trumpet of the final judgement” – original props and tactile models)
- Workshops (avant garde theatre, context, participation / performance)
- Meetings with one of the actors who played in Kantor’s theatre
- Permanent exposition in the Cricoteka Museum



That's it!  
Thank you!

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