

## Review Article

# Reflections on the direction of the theatre after the experience of the corona pandemic

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### Abstract

Using the example of the puppet theatre piece "The Spider and the Web" by Martin Joerdens and the opera "The New Time- Morning Dawn" by Heinrich Thein, reflections are made on whether and how theatre can align itself in the experience of the Corona Pandemic in order to contribute to a more spiritually ethical civilization. In the area of tension between western-influenced thinking, using the example of the philosopher Markus Gabriel, and eastern-influenced thinking, using a description of Paññā wisdom, the two current plays will be presented and analysed.



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### Introduction

Postmodernism is formulating expectations and suggestions for playwrights: the thematization of current events such as terrorism, increasing violence, ethnic tensions, excesses, racism are expected (keywords formulated by the author after a personal conversation with Mrs. Brigitte Heusinger, dramaturge at Theater Bremen).

Also, the article by Turan (2020) "Postdramatic review of the Einstein on the beach / train scene by Robert Wilson" in the JIAE. Turan (2020) shows good insights into the theater of postmodernism.

The post-postmodern phase, marked by the wake-up call of the Corona Pandemic and the expectation for creative future concepts, can accommodate the expectation of a transformation toward "Spiritual Civilization." This orientation has classical roots, from the ancient Greek tragedies, to e.g. Friedrich Schiller: "Die Schaubühne als moralische Anstalt" ("The Theatre as a moral institution") (lecture by Schiller 26.7.1784, Mannheim, first print 1785), until today (Schiller, 1784)

What is addressed here is the communication of ethical values through the theatre. From Wolfgang von Goethe to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, we find world theatre as an orientation aid for coping with everyday situations.

Faced with this intellectual-historical background, the coronavirus pandemic first had a health-threatening effect, then an economic and social impact. However, the consequences of the "lockdowns"

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have already led to partly pathological phenomena among those directly and indirectly affected, such as feelings of fear, isolation, exclusion, discrimination, not being properly informed, and so on.

Religious leaders and philosophers struggle to point out perspectives. Welfare, beyond social caring, providing perspectives and hope becomes important. Theatre, as a reflection mirror and motor of society, faces the question: can and will the theatre find a new role?

Currently, forward thinkers are raising their voices in this crisis.

Philosopher Markus Gabriel:

"The world after Corona must be different from the one we know".

Psychotherapist Martin Joerdens (see below) formulates:

"I bow deeply to the virus that wants to help us in our development."

By study of Markus Gabriel and his recent publication "Fictions" (Gabriel, 2020), I refer to his view of fictionality. In my understanding a fiction is something that exists for the time being only in the imagination, something thought of in advance. Gabriel's work advocates at the same time for the elemental role of the humanities (liberal arts) as a voice for co-creating the future.

The more deeply a crisis encroaches on existing structures (material, psychological, spiritual), the greater the range between the prospect of progress on the one hand and regression on the other. The events force a reaction-voluntarily or involuntarily. Reacting as mental progress is never automatic and, like the concrete events that trigger reactions, it is unpredictable. Whether progress occurs is up to us. We are the sufferers, but also the doers.

Philosophy does not simply predict the future. It knows that it is in the nature of future to be open. As free, spiritual human beings, we are visionaries and shapers of what is not yet, but will one day be, based on our current decisions. Therefore, it is not easy to predict what the world will look like after Corona. It is in our hands whether and how we shape this future.

The progress of ethical values does not develop automatically, it is fragile and can turn into regression in case of small mood changes. Regression can look different: Lethargy, resistance, chaotic action, panic, etc. We could also persist in the view that we could return to what we call normality in retrospect and do miss it. The regression would be only temporary, because the coronavirus probably mutates and other phenomena appear in the universe, in nature and society. The experience of those phenomena would be only more disappointing and more painful.

Because that we get entangled again and again in our western ways of thinking into the materialistic argumentation culture, a look into the basis of the eastern philosophy is useful:

### **Paññâ Wisdom**

Paññâ means wisdom, which specifically refers to a directly experienced, intuitive wisdom. It is based on the realization of the universal mechanisms: to be created, to grow, to flourish, to mature, to bear fruit, to die.

There are three types of wisdom: Perceiving and reading, own reflective thinking and wisdom based on purification. The third is going to true wisdom. How to acquire it was transmitted by Buddha (Gautama Shakjamuni), over 2500 years ago, through three stages on the path to salvation: Virtue, control over one's consciousness, and purification of the mind. Buddha explained in the "Eight steps Path" how it is possible to free one's speech and actions from greedy and primarily materialistic thoughts.

How can a person in the current Corona pandemic and here addressed the theatre creators realize this in their daily work and give impetus?

These instructions transmitted by Buddha make it possible to expand one's own knowledge and to make the experience that every person bears the consequences of his deeds himself. This insight strengthens the self-confidence to reflect on the meaning of life. Self-awareness grows and promotes mindfulness, so that every moment of life is lived more consciously. The mind no longer takes refuge in the past or future: its focus remains in the here and now. Through the responsibility for our own lives

developed in this way, we learn that we ourselves are the creators of our future. This knowledge forms the basis for the emergence of self-knowledge, self-cultivation and self-healing. But it is not easy to "swim alone". Therefore, willing and accepting communication is an important step in how to solve the problems. That the Paññā wisdom is still relevant is shown by the fact that, for example, the globally known organization "Sukyo Mahikari" (founded 1959 in Japan) teaches the "Principle of Pa" as the basis for a universal understanding of the processes of creation.

The theatre has and retains its important function of being the "stage" for these processes.

The physician, psychotherapist and puppeteer Dr. Martin Joerdens has written and presented the puppet play "The Spider and the Web" in the midst of the current Corona Pandemic lockdowns. It is an example piece of responding of the theatre creators to the actuality of what is happening. The puppet theatre, which has long since left the level of "Punch and Judy theatre for children" in terms of theatre history, shows in a concise form what potential can be used to make statements:

The following scenario of the unpublished puppet play (©Martin Joerdens, Bonn, 10-2020) is followed by the author's self-assessment and an analysis.

### Szenario

A little sheep enters the stage singing and from there explores the world: the puppeteer and also the audience. In the background, the mama sheep sings half aloud: "See the little sheep go in the sunshine, their mother calls them here, they don't want to go home. They're not afraid of the wolf and they don't see the danger, itzibitzi spider, that can't be. La, la, la, ..." (to the tune of the song "Spannenlanger Hansel, nudeldicke Dirn"). For the little sheep, this performance is only an intermediate step in its expeditions into the world. "I've been almost everywhere, only the sky and the clouds are still missing. Yes, but where are the other sheep. Where is my flock of sheep? Where is Mama sheep? Have you seen the wolf?" asks the little sheep with his bleating language, which fortunately the puppeteer can translate.

The audience always has to answer "no", because they have seen neither the wolf, nor the big sheep, nor the other sheep. But the little sheep hears Mama-Sheep coming, eludes her and goes on its way, not without asking the audience to warn it of the wolf, if it should really appear. When Mama-Sheep comes on stage, she is annoyed at the unreasonableness of her little sheep and that they run so far away. Mama-Sheep rants more and more and finally curses: "I think I'm crazy". At that moment she turns into a fat, black spider. When she turns into a spider in her anger, all her sheep children are also enchanted. The puppeteer also seems bewitched, because he too looks different compared to the beginning of the story; he now has a mask in front of his face that looks a bit like Pinocchio. And the spider speaks to the audience: "Oh, what have I done? I have enchanted myself, I am now a spider, just because I said I think I am spinning. How are the spider children supposed to manage alone without me now? Perhaps I have also enchanted all my sheep? Oh, oh, I'm even worse than a raven mother.

Here comes a beetle. It climbs around on a leaf. The spider recognises him to be one of her children. She says:

*"Oh, what a mess I've made. But I see he's doing well, he's found food and can hide well behind the leaf if there's ever any danger."*

Here comes a hedgehog. He sniffs and sniffs and finds a snail, which he eats. The spider says: "Oh, what have I done, that's one of my children. But I can see he's doing well, he's found his food and he can put up his spines if he's in danger."

Here comes a blackbird. It runs back and forth and pecks and flaps its wings. In the end, it pecks a worm. The spider says: "Oh, what have I done," says the spider, "this is one of my children. But I see it finds food and gets along, and in a pinch it can fly up a tree."

Here comes a frog. It jumps up again and again, but it can't catch the fly that flies above it; the spider escapes from it again and again. Then the spider says: "Oh, what have I done, this is one of my children. And if he doesn't catch a fly now, he'll have to starve to death". Immediately, the spider spins a web.

The fly makes herself known. She is a fairy, a magic fairy....

She scolds the spider. She conjures all the animals back, except the spider. In her distress, the spider turns to the audience, who finally help her to become a sheep again. In this transformed state, she gets involved with the little sheep and takes it on a journey to the sky, to the clouds. "Yes, that was a day with many surprises," says the fairy at the end. The little sheep knows that the fairy helped to bring it to a good end.

### **Martin Joerdens:**

*"I have taken a deep psychological look at this play and the idea of and by the psychoanalyst C.G.Jung (1875-1961), namely the shadow sides in people (and I present this in the performances), whereby the figures of a Kaspar theatre (and this is what the play resembles) also represent Ego states and in the end the figure of Kaspar (here in form of the little sheep) resolves the turbulence and brings everything together. Everything that takes place are elements of the little sheep (of the I - I instances), the transformation, the dark force, etc. All this wants to be overcome and can be overcome, e.g. by good forces (fairy from heaven - part of the inner reality). On the other hand, the spider is not "redeemed" at first. It has to make a special effort, only then can the destructive force be overcome and connect with and engage with the ego forces striving upwards. In Kaspar plays, the villain is punished (e.g. the robber is taken to prison)- here not, or only to some extent. Thus the classifications or interpretations are different, but not contradictory." (Joerdens, 2020).*

By introducing a well-known folk song at the beginning of the play, the audience is integrated and becomes observers, later co-creators.

The character "Little Sheep" stands for the group of people who lead a carefree but also uninformed life. This gives the play the dimension of a universal theatre of knowledge with developing characters. The figure of the little sheep describes the global horizon and also includes the higher dimension, the sky. It goes on an exploration tour, a fundamental right and it has also the desire to do so. This goes hand in hand with: differentiation from paternalism and strengthening of self-confidence.

Mummy-sheep: The concern for the flock shows the influential attitude of those in power (who are also systemically given power) to the concept of an always obedient people. However, compassion also resonates in the action.

The person in power is annoyed by her own initiatives and complains publicly, feeling misunderstood in her caring attitude. (Spectators have the role of the public), she appeals to logic and curses those entrusted to her.

"I think I'm crazy" is the central sentence of the play. It is uttered in a moment of surprise and fear and shows the detachment from the social environment. With this core statement, the author touches centrally on the depth-psychological layer (reference to C.G.Jung), namely to uncover the shadow sides in people. The sentence has the effect of self-transformation, which is not reflected, but as such is immediately perceived by the audience (people) and is fundamental.

Remarkable in the global context: even the puppeteer, who has the role of the objective observer (quasi the role of the press, the independent commentator, but also the knowledgeable philosopher), transforms and does so significantly.

The role of the spectators: objective, uninfluenced but involved people.

The sheeple (citizens) transformed by the act of "spinning", what is the detachment of the powerful people from the common people, present themselves in four different forms:

Beetle: organises its own life. The spider realises that the beetle also belongs to the "family", observes and is relieved that the beetle organises itself through its strategy: Hiding.

Hedgehog: does the same, but can defend itself differently: One strategy: extend spines: Defensiveness

Blackbird: same situation, but different strategy: flying away: Escape

Frog: counterpart, but cannot defend itself. Its fate: Starvation

The author makes hunger appear in the image of the fly. The fly is the object of possible salvation from starvation. The fly is transformed into a fairy. In the confrontation with starvation, hunger shows itself to be the revealer of the truth: "...the dear magic fairy does not allow any magic. One thing is clear and everyone knows it well, a little sheep is a little sheep and not a cow." This is an appeal to the powerful that they have a duty of care to the weak and uninformed ones. Going further, an appeal to conscience: "That's not the way to do it, just bewitch the little sheep like that. I'll change all the transformed animals back again." Up to this point, the play is contemplative and leads into the theoretical question of the vision of a world conscience, a world power. The individual fate has no consideration.

Now the wolf, until now only a fear image, appears real and abrupt. It stands for the sudden appearance of a real danger of death. The play goes into the concrete situation: one of the sheep has gone missing. Here, the spider acts immediately as the responsible party, like an all-powerful institution that quickly banishes the danger by throwing a net over the danger (wolf) and thus making the danger invisible. But that is only temporary, even in the eyes of those responsible: "Yes, that went well finally". This relaxes the situation and normality immediately emerges: The wolf is invisible and at the same moment the transformed sheep are back. The puppeteer is also transformed again (without a mask).

The higher authority (fairy) is asked to now also exonerate the responsables. The people, after deliberation, do agree!

The author creates the vision of a future with heavenly conditions through the act of making experiences by travelling (at the suggestion of the little sheep, bearer of the idea of freedom): "Let's make a journey to the clouds in the sky". The fairy, the little sheep and the puppeteer advice together: "And if it feels like it, then go to the end of the world, is my advice. And if there are hurdles, then... then call me, then call us!" I compare the opera "Die Neue Zeit-Morgendämmerung" (The New Time-Morning Dawn) by Heinrich Thein with the figure play.

Because that the work is also unpublished (©Heinrich Thein, Ritterhude, 10-2020), the following scenario serves as basis of the analysis.

While "Spider and Web" takes up the management of the today situation and addresses the audience directly and integrates it in a solution-oriented way, the opera libretto goes into the self-explanatory images of the present and leads into the vision of a concrete future vision.

Works such as the Icelandic "Edda", Dante Alighieri's "Divine Comedy", "Faust" by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Hugo von Hoffmansthal's "Everyman", Paul Hindemith's "Harmony of the World" show that fate, the course of life and acting develops a person's personality. The old and, with the experience of the Corona pandemic, perhaps new mission of theatre is renewed, to be an exemplary guide for society.

To present and convey a universal view of the world with its spiritual, psychological and physical dimensions, in an artistically exemplary form, archetypal images and theatrically effective mediation, that is what the opera "The New Time-Morning Dawn" shows on stage.

The opera shows many aspects of the past, present and future, of the human and the spiritual, of despair and death, of resurrection, development of the subjective situation into impressive character, up to the elevation of the future into the era of a Garden of Eden.

Key phrases that give voice to insights, prayer, reflection, praise and encouragement are highlighted in bold in the following scenario.

### Scenario

**Act 1, Scene 1** "Flower" shows the consequences of the cataclysm, like after a nuclear war, with its consequences for the people, death, devastation everywhere and loneliness, despair, hopelessness, suicide and neglect of the last survivors.

But also the strength and hope of an imperturbable man, named Iō, and his love for his young daughter.

Iō: A trouble is this, not seeing a light that would nourish us and show an end to the night. Yes, it is my dream, that we might pass through this maze of tubes without direction or end'. Never was a path without an end. There is a stream that I feel. Yes, if it goes upwards, there must also be a light.

Salvation, self-sacrifice and being saved through tenderness and selfless love is to be found at a person, the "fire wheel flower", in which the disturbed child finds its tongue again through sound syllables.

**Act 1, Scene 2: "Arbet"**. The title word "Arbet" is an amalgamation of the old monastic instruction "Pray and work - ora et labora". The stage shows the arrival at dawn with morning washing, morning prayer and praise of heaven.

A choir of angels praises heaven and encourages those who have arrived: We praise the creatures the Creator made. The glory of heaven and earth's adorn. Let's freshly greet the morning and cheerfully start to the work of life. A fair round is the run and taste every crumb, be it bitter or sweet.

Solway a god-woman embodies the sunrise and revives the many dull and pale dead to resurrection, revival and to new courage. The earth becomes green again.

Ascent of all to a volcanic cone and recognition of great perspective and connections: voice of the volcano:

From the earth the fire, it burns and swells. From the universe I bring the lineage. Above and below are the same. I melt the ice

and burn the embers. My fire is love.

### **Act 2, Scene1: "Conversion-The Judgement"**

Iō, who is now called Tulipan, is facing the rebuilding of the world:

I will go to the uttermost edge and open eye and ear.

He is the final judge, but already in the view of the new age that people place themselves in their fate by their behaviour.

Court with clerks in a cave that opens to the edge of the sea:

There is no judge. It is decided by insight.

Images from history and the present emerge and become plausible:

Ancient Egyptian ships of the gods, Maori of the Easter Islands, Caesar slaying vassals, Jesus carrying the cross, a Pope exposing himself, a group of disoriented adolescents, a loving elderly couple, an orchestra with conductor, 2 doctors and one of them driven by greed for profit, a workshop man gone mad who paints his own money:

I paint my own money. The wheels are spinning, they are their own world. I do give a damn about them.

I laugh and I'm already crazy. Then I paint my crazy face on the banknote and don't scare myself, because the cycle it is me.

An overstrained young woman who wants to have an abortion and finds new courage through the love of the firewheel flower.

The last judge and the court clerks rise:

Open your eyes and close them. What you hear is the low hum of blood in your veins. And if you lay your hand on a tree, you will feel it seeking the earth's axis with its roots to nestle against. Then get up and walk your loops.

The situations have been exposed and decided by their own presentation.

Tulipan walks out- on to the sea. The earth emerges.

### **Act 2, Scene 2: "Pearls I"**

An invisible bird's voice. Sunrise. Chorus:

How beautiful a morning star shines for us in this new time. A bird will come and bring a branch.

Looking back on wars and memories of war remembrances in form of image projections rise. Tulipan:

But all the beauty of the gardens, the parlours, the people, their curiosity, their souls began to ferment. Gas arose, explosion and war. The giants slew each other and the little ones did the same. They churned up the earth and ploughed through land and sea without meaning to, with guns of fire. Horny and insolent the smallest worm still, if only he could destroy. So every rose was trampled down and rootstocks burnt. The mighty and the powerless cut the earth in two, strangled the sun and moon and forced every creature into a skin of glass. Then the earth burst and we with it.

The memory fades. Birds fly in with green branches in their beaks. The child has grown up and is now called Maria. She tries to dance. Solway joins her and they dance together. Tulipan takes a tulip bulb out of a capsule and puts it into the ground:

From far away I carried the treasure on my breast, to marry the gentle dawn of the Orient with the harsh evening glow of the Occident.

Mary is given the name Faira, Princess of the Dawn. The earth becomes green again. Everything awakens to new life.

### **Act 3, Scene 1 "The hidden door, opened again".**

Faira and Solway, a sun goddess, make their way through a narrow gorge. Coloured bundles of energy stream towards them in a channel. A wise man, Old Rock, tells them of life's stark contradictions and advises them to go ahead. In a "drill head" Faira's youthful armour shatters with a crash and she walks towards a light-filled gateway. Solway:

Sister, this is a tunnel, a channel. Everything bundles together and becomes a stream. The power station, the life, the pulse. Here a bundle is boiled, braided and sifted. Follow me, we go towards the streams. Still fire teeth have clenched. In the soul, in the body, in the earth.

The hidden door opens again. But the dawn loses its rigid skin, the more it rises. The ice, the hoar frost, the fear, the grief, the resentment, the sickness, the sulphur. I suppose it will all crumble in the morning.

Solway:

Your eyes see nothing. They are still blinded by the new light. The gate is open and will remain open. Of that you can be sure.

What is there to bargain for where there is nothing left to bargain for.

Solway carries the weary one through the golden gate.

### **Act 3, Scene 2 "Pearls II"**

Faira staggers through a plain town, pondering. Chorus:

It's sunday, sunny day. The world of thoughts and feelings, of clouds, of joys.

A Doubter expresses himself gloatingly and drastically:

It's all just a lot of nonsense.

A "Racing tiger", "2 Brothers", a "Green tomato" give Faira courage for her new phase in life. A "Mountain of tears" shows itself silently. Faira: Welcome, my mountain of tears. I kept you hidden, now you are friend of mine. You are silent and still and long burdened by me.

Devoted love is given to it by the Fire-wheel flower:

I am here. It is to dig deep. We must work together. My chest hurts. I have nothing left to nourish. I only look at the blossom. The earth becomes beautiful again. The gods awaken to new life.... God and the world - we are one family. Our roots go back millions of years.

A figure, "The Geometry", stirs the doubter and reaches out to him for a geometric dance and hands him a flowering cactus. Tulipan joins in and throws his turban hat into the sky. From it a huge wing forms itself in the colours of the rainbow.

### **Epilogue "The Wing"**

Tulipan is together with the "Handout", the "Fullness" and the "Perfection". A boy, the "Sun-caller" walks unselfconsciously among them all:

My soul, O God breathes Thy breath.

On the wing eleven orbs pearl and drink from the firmament. Mastery.  
 Faira forms colours and attaches them to the wing at the sky. The Yellow, Brown, Red, Orange, Blue,  
 Green, Violet rise and fall with the wing. Great hymnal beauty. Orchestral finale in radiant sounds.

### Reflection and Conclusion

While "Spider and Web" takes up the coping with the current situation and addresses the audience directly and integrates it in a solution-oriented way, the opera libretto goes into the self-explanatory images of the present and leads into the vision of a concrete future vision.

Both plays show the development from catastrophe to anastrophe.

The classical principle of "per aspera ad astra-through adversity to the stars" is taken up as a basic structure and expanded to rebuild the world. In the opera, the key scene is "The court of judgement-conversion". Conversion means transformation. Tulipan, the last judge does not judge. He himself, suffering through experiences and being on the path of confrontation, has come to the view of the "New Age" that people place themselves in their fate through their behaviour.

In the puppet play, the central sentence is "I think I'm crazy". It shows the catastrophe triggered by fear. The result is detachment from the social environment, because the actors change fundamentally and show their profound characters. With this core statement, the author touches centrally on the depth-psychological layer.

In the opera libretto, the presentation is not pedagogically oriented as in the puppet play, but through self-explanatory images, scenes and central statements that the acting characters utter and which, through their impressiveness in the stage action, take on their function as reflection stimulating key sentences. The function of these central statements is thus extended beyond the current coronavirus pandemic to a vision of the future.

In both plays, the influence of the future-oriented Western way of thinking as well as the experience and confrontation with Eastern wisdom has flowed in. This synthesis includes an orientation towards values that want to be solutions for the future: Antagonism, syncretism, acceptance, knowledge of universal mechanisms and principles that connect all people.

### Biodata of the Author



**Heinrich Thein**, born 1947 in Bremen, Master brass and percussion instrument builder, Studies in music, art, pedagogy, literature, geography and musical instrument making in Bremen and Hamburg, 1973 Master examination in Munich, 1979 "Bremer Förderpreis für das Kunsthandwerk", 1984 "Auguste- Papendieck- Prize"

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Development of the composition forms Chrysanthemum and Tagesspiele,  
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*Book:* Beiträge und Gedanken zum Blechblas-Instrumentenbau / Contributions and reflexions to Brass instrument making, ISBN: 978-3-00-064602-7, Anthology: Volume 1 Erzählungen und Dichtungen, Volume 2 Schauspiele und Libretti, Volume 3 Gedichte, Volume 4 Erkenntnisse, Volume 5 Texte zu Musikalischen werken und theoretische Texte, ISBN 978-3-00-067697-0 *Book:* Welt der Altposaune / World of Alto Trombone Heinrich Thein/Peter Körner ISBN 978-605-06724-9-7 / E-ISBN 978-605-06724-3-5 Edition Young Wise Publishing London, UK. Opera: Die Neue Zeit – Morgendämmerung, Orchestral Work: Morgendämmerung Suite

1972 Founder, together with Max Thein, the internationally company: Max & Heinrich Thein Brass Instruments- Fine Brass Instruments -in Bremen, Design, development and production of trumpets, trombones, horns, tubas and percussion **Adress:** DE-27721 Ritterhude-Stendorf, Germany, **E-mail:** thein-heinrich@gmail.com, **Web:** www.thein-heinrich.de



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