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Lecture, held on the VIII METHODIKA 2018 (30.11.2018):
TRUTH – MIMESIS – IMITATION – COPY

Theatre between principles of the cosmos and principles of form. Truth as “openness of being” - what does it mean for the actor? Can truth of the cosmos, of nature with its rhythm and laws be adapted to the stage or does it become imitation? When does imitation become a copy?

In resonance with the workshop of Dr. Jurij Alschitz WHAT IS MY THEATRE? (THE SEAGULL/ Anton Chekhov), which took place in AKT-ZENT in November 2004. The training was led by Christine Schmalor. Gratefully I remember the inputs of Jurij, who gently pushed me to my transformation into a CLOWN (this was the picture I got), playing the “monologue of Nina” for 20 minutes.

Dear colleagues! I want to share some reflections and thoughts with you around the thesis and questions of my lecture.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger made a definition of truth: Truth is the “Openness of Being” (Offenheit des Seins)

This implies, that truth is constantly part of the COSMOS. When it rains, or snow is falling or the sun or moon is shining, when we look at *“this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire”* [Shakespeare, HAMLET] - do we have doubts, that these appearances are true?! No! When we look, how the clouds on the sky are moving, how the ocean is breathing, we perhaps know a lot about the principles and laws, about why these elements of nature are moving in this way – but can we be sure, that we know all about it? Scientists recognize, that, the deeper they are exploring and researching on phenomena of nature – the more they have to admit, that they don’t know.... Think about the galaxy, the Milky Way, the discovering of new planets and new galaxies, about dark wholes etc. Experts say, that we know appr. 5% of the universe, but about 95% of dark matter and energy we don’t know anything...

Nevertheless, scientists discovered a hug amount of cosmic and natural laws. Among them, there are some fundamental principles, which we can observe all over the phaenomena of nature. For example, we can say: the ocean is breathing!

[Video 1](#) (breathing of the ocean)

<https://www.facebook.com/ruth.wyneken/videos/1981891578525063/>

We’ll find, that no wave is similar to the other, but: there is a certain rhythm in it, there are certain basic circles, basic principles in the appearances, that we can observe and identify as:

Approaching – retreating into distance, coming – going, conjunction –disjunction. Falling - rising, ebb - flow. We know: the tide depends on the rhythm of the moon. Why?!

And, by the way, there is an interesting phenomenon: when water strikes an obstacle, stones or rocks, we find a pure form of **drama**: the moving water and the obstacle come into a conflict with each other. A drama in aggregation, in embryo-form.

(When human being meets an obstacle, mostly there appears a zone of freedom: he has the choose how to handle it!)

The breathing of the ocean is an eternal, never ending performance. When we look at it, we even can say: these principles of approaching and retreating into distance, of coming and going, are a kind of dance.

We find them everywhere, although the rhythms are different: in the movements of water, of wind, of the planets in our galaxy. And in all animated beings: in man, in wildlife, in flora and in fauna (the changing of the seasons).

The principle of rhythmic PULSATION, of inhalation and exhalation, of approaching and removing, of tension and relaxing are working in our lungs, in our heart, in our blood, in our muscles, in our brains and all our body.

The pulsation has his individual rhythm, it is a kind of **DANCE** or **PLAY**.

And this is the point for the artist. The artist shall be in the “openness of being”, in his principles of pulsation, of approaching and removing, of “dance” and “play”. He, as identity, shall be in connection with the truth of cosmic principles, in the “vertical breathing”, not in the horizontal (the existing of everyday life).

The artist, the actor, has to develop his individuality, his own style, his own body- and psychological language in the art.

And I think, this postulation is valid in all branches of art.

You may know – the Russian philosopher Vladimir S. Solov'ëv postulated at the end of the XIX century some main tasks for the art¹: “...the transformation of physical life into a spiritual life, which shows himself in the openness of his being and the spiritualization of matter which is free from the power of physical processes and therefore lasting eternally...”²

We all know, that our planet, the earth, exists within a big circle of dying and regeneration, of death and new birth. And this big circle is, of course, also a special kind of pulsation, of cosmic principles. The appearances of cosmos are never lying, they are in perpetual movement within their own laws, they are what they are – originals, they exist in their own “openness of being”. They cannot be an imitation or a copy.

But it is not so simple as it seems: We can find the phenomenon of imitation in nature: you all have heard about the fact, the appearance of MIMICRY, don't you? It has to do with a kind of assimilation, of imitation. And with the purpose to survive. Do we can say, that appearance of mimicry is a lie, a fake?

Next: When we think about the miracle, how a little child is learning to speak, learning a language (what means an immense and wonderful and great act of development of brains and limbs and extremities), we know, that is has to do with the mighty capability of imitation. The child imitates the parents, the surrounding people. The prototypes for a child are those persons, who educate him. And it imitates the mode of living of its

¹ Vladimir Solov'ëv: Der allgemeine Sinn der Kunst, S. 181 ff. Freiburg, 1953 [Original: Obščij smysl' iskusstva. Moskva, 1890]

² my own translation, it may be not exactly – I couldn't find a verified translation of his thesis into English

prototypes, the way they are speaking, the gestures, the facial expressions and so on. And the question is, if the educator is “lying” or if he is in his individual “openness of being”. You can find on Facebook a lot of examples of little children, who imitate perfectly a singer or dancer of the Show-Biz, because the educator showed this on tv. So, the responsible task is hidden in the question: What do we give, as prototype of human being, to the child? Outer forms or inner truth?

Now an example in the field of music:

The composer Haydn is not the only one, who liked to take a walk and to get inspirations from the sounds of nature: the singing of birds, and he put these sounds into his compositions - performed by flutes.

And at least: “Imitation” is an obligatory task for the education of actors. In the GITIS, in the director/actor classes of Oleg Koudrjashov, it is obligatory in the 2nd and 3rd semesters, to imitate great artists, especially singers. Why? Is it an outward form of imitation? Of course, not!

The students have to find, what school calls: the core, the **NUCLEUS** of the personality. And the outer form, the gestures and behaviour, suites the inner content, the personality! It is not at all an easy task! Of course, there is the danger of falling into parody. But Koudrjashov is a very stiff and strict teacher, he never allows things like this.

You all know, of course, that MIMESIS is a special form of imitation: it is the imitation of nature in an artistic way, a “poetically transfigured reality”. Mimesis has to be a **metamorphosis** of the original, not a simple imitation.

Video 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KprLT-JxPY> (Yma Sumac: Cuncho)

Look at the way, Yma Sumac is singing. She unites herself, her voice, with the sounds of jungle...Is it an imitation or is it mimesis?

Well, about **COPY** there is impulsively a very short comment: copy is the exact imitation of the outer form, without the “soul” of the original, without inner sense. Right?

But: For another culture, for example for Chinese people a copy has the same value as the original. They never care about, what is original and what is copy.

And it is well known, that students of painting (I know it from the St. Petersburg State Academy of Arts) are obliged to copy great painters, pictures, paintings in the museum Hermitage or the Russian Museum. And you know, I read a book from the Russian-Israeli novelist Dina Rubina “The white pigeon of Cordoba”, where the hero is a very, very talented student of painting, who is able to copy the old originals in the Hermitage so perfectly, that experts couldn’t distinguish any more, what was the original and what was the copy. He “caught” the core, the soul of the original, aside from the fully mastery in his trade. And round about this fact the writer is enrolling a brilliant and veritable thriller.

Now, back to the principles of COSMOS, of NATURE.

Most of us agree, that there is at least a higher instance, that rules the main principles of COSMOS. The principles of creation and destruction, of approaching and taking distance, of dying and new birth. The big circle of life. We call it GOD or HIGHER REASON (sanity) or whatever.

It was the Greek philosopher PLATON, who determined in "TIMAIOS" the spiritual principle of all life as WORLD-SOUL. The World-Soul is moving the world, she knows all, she contains all physical and psychical elements. The World-Soul is the pervasive, creative energy.

Later on, in the period of Renaissance, Giordano Bruno confirmed the thesis of Plato. And he was executed, burned on the pyre as a heretic for his conviction.

And again, later on, Goethe called the higher principle: the WORLD-SPIRIT which rules the big circles of life, from birth to death and to new birth and new death and so on.

From dead, which is pregnant of new life, from birth, which already includes death within it.

We all know about "World-Soul" in the monologue of the young NINA, written especially for his love Nina³ by Konstantin Treplev as a provocation against "theatre of imitation" and excogitated by the author of THE SEAGULL. So, Anton Chekhov gave two "curtains", or rather: two screens between his text and the personage, who recites the monologue in the play. No - he even puts **four** screens when we consider the fact, that an actress has to recite it for Nina, who speaks for the personage of the world-soul. In fact, we find a strong form of alienation: a sort of intrigue by the author... Instead of "screens" we can also say: the author is wearing several **MASKS**.

Anton Chekhov wrote the SEAGULL in 1895, five years after the manifest on art of Vladimir Solov'ëv. Did Chekhov know about it? For sure. And he knew about Plato's "world-soul"⁴. But did he "imitate" the manifest of Solov'ëv? Or did he transform some thoughts of the ancient Greek philosophy? Or both?!

The **inciting incident**⁵ in the play THE SEAGULL is the public performance of Kostyas play, performed by Nina, for the audience on the estate of Kostyas uncle Sorin, which ends with a big scandal.

And fatally scandalous was the premiere of The Seagull in the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg on 20th of November 1896: Chekhov "flew away from the theatre in resonance with the laws of physics, like a bomb"⁶. He himself provoked a huge scandal, comparable to the fictional scandal in his play.

³ We have to consider the fact, that Kostya wrote the monologue for his beloved Nina as the so called "**leading proposed circumstance**". Kostya wrote his play **before** the beginning of the play THE SEAGULL itself. The "leading proposed circumstance" pushes the plot to the "inciting incident", which is the premiere of Kostyas text.

⁴ Markus Herlyn told me, that Chekhov read the work of the Roman emperor Marc Aurel (a practitioner of Stoicism) and his personal philosophical writings, which later came to be called *Meditations* and was written in ancient Greek. M. Aurel studied the work of Plato and the "world-soul".

⁵ I prefer to speak of an "incident", not "event". Incident is also ordinary used in the dramaturgy of film and it means, that something happens, pushing the plot in another direction, into a change of the plot. "Event" has indeed another connotation.

⁶ Letter from A. Chekhov to Nemirovič-Dančenko from 20.11.1896

How can an actress play the monologue? Very, very rarely have I heard and seen it on stage as a result of a deeper analysis. Mostly, in theatre, actors are performing it as a text from a non-professional, or of an ironic ridiculous philosophy. Students are completely helpless in understanding it – or they don't take it seriously at all. Or they refuse to work with it. Of course, you can show or perform the setting of the monologue as our earth after an atomic catastrophe, or, what is even very actual today: as our world after the ecological catastrophe.

But something doesn't fit with the text of Chekhov-Kostya-Nina-World-Soul: This point of view is settled in the horizontal understanding of the text, of theatre. It will not open all the dimensions of the text.

During these days of METHODIKA we talked and heard a lot about playing-distance, about the vertical of the role ... Of playing with connection or an echo to cosmic principles. But I want to insist not only on so called **ludic-theatre**, I found in the monologue of Nina a kind of literary genre, which is serious and funny at the same time, a genre which belongs to the so called "carnivalized literature".

You probably heard from Michail Bachtin, the Russian philologist, philosopher and scientist, who researched in the field of literature and carnival (especially on the period of Renaissance, later particular on Dostojevski's work)⁷. He found the carnivalization as perception, as conviction of the world in literature. Typical for the perception of a "carnivalized feeling of the world" is the power of transformations, of changes from death to new birth; of destruction and rebuilding, of the biggest cosmic circles to the smallest circles of human life or animal or bacillus. Life or circumstances in life can change in a second from seriousness to laughter; a king may become a bagger and a bagger a king, like the pictures in playing cards. What is on the top can become the bottom, upside down will change to downside up etc.

The carnivalizing of the world includes an immense power of vitality, of changes and transformations, of a plurality of styles and voices, of authors, **wearing several masks**. A text out of the "carnivalized world" can be a mystery play with its eschatology-questions, it can take place all over the world and in eternity or on another planet, outside the earth. A second can last hundreds or thousands of years. That means: **Carnivalization asks completely another conception of Space and Time, another point of view**. It includes a special humour and "cosmic" or "ritually laughter" (not the cheap laughter of pubs or taverns, and never cynicism!).

Let's hear the original in Russian:

Recitation monologue of Nina / Kostya / Chekhov

Chekhov seems to start the text with the holy images of the four evangelists, which we can find in ancient churches and cathedrals: Men, Lion, Eagle – and then, instead of the 4th, the Taurus (bull) - he moves straight ahead into humour: partridges and horned deer...and up to the smallest animal of the fauna and even to non-visible beings, like microbes etc. He doesn't start with an image of an awful desert, in the opposite, he gives us an image of rich, full life on earth. And immediately after, he tells us about the negotiation. So, it seems he takes us, the reader, on a kind of journey from earth into

⁷ Michail Bachtin: Literatur und Karneval (Literature and Carnival), München 1969. S. 47 ff.

the hades, where Gods are dead and the Garden of Eden is totally lost. He is expanding the dimension of time into a cosmic time!

The “monologue of Nina” has several *pauses*, which structures the text into 5 parts.

In the 2nd part he switches to the voice of the WORLD-SOUL, who speaks (mask Nr. 4).

This World-Soul is an enclosed universe, which includes and keeps the transformations of all matter and of all hidden memories (what is a direct allusion to Plato’s MENON)

The World-Soul conserves the consciousness of men and the instincts of animals and is processing an immense cosmic transformation.

Here comes once again a break: the author gives some dash of “cosmic humour”: some lights out of the swamp appear.

In the 3rd part the World-Soul speaks about her solitude and uniqueness, speaks in an arrogant way about all appearances of matter, as the lights of the swamp and the dependency of all matter to the devil and the bondage to never ending changes. But the World-Soul belongs to other dimensions, like the SPIRIT, which lives constantly in the universe...

Anton Chekhov was not only a writer, but also a doctor, as we know. Where, in which region of living beings we find a process of permanently changing of matter? Of course, in the digestive system of human, animals and plants, in all living beings. It is a matter of fact, that the digestive system of mammals is working without any break, all the changes of our food in the stomach, in the small intestine and the large intestine, the mix of gall and saps and sulphur (**devil’s attribute!**) - it is a nonstop process of changes of food ingestion and expulsion (the same principle of in - out, coming – going). Our “inner swamp” is fulfilled with bubbles, vapours, gases and winds...

When we consider all this, we can read the 3rd part of Nina’s monologue also as a scientific verified, but very funny view of a medic, a health professional, who knows, what’s going on in our bodies: the metabolism. Besides the above-mentioned masks, we find a double level in the text. The world-soul is speaking about “metabolism” of the cosmos, but Chekhov placed it inside our bodies. What a provocation...

(Attention – I don’t recommend to play this part as a realistic imitation or copy, even when that might be very funny....)

In the 4th part the World-Soul says, that she knows only about her great **mission**, but not the way, how to get there. Her mission is to win the fight, to overcome the chasm, the gap between spirit and matter, until both are united to a kingdom of **harmony** and **beauty** and the empire of the **World-Spirit**. Again, the expected time the World-Soul speaks about, is an incredibly for human beings lasting cosmic time, and the mentioned planet Sirius is one of the stars in the constellation Big Dog, it has nearly the twice size of the earth and 35 times brighter than our sun!

Now, in the short 5th part, there again follows a break to veritable cosmic laughter: the World-Soul speaks about the appearing of the red eyes of the devil, out of the lake.

Come on: the fight is starting...

Arkadina: *It smells of sulphur. Is it meant to?*

Kostja: Yes.

Arkadina (laughs): *Yeah, what an effect!*

Kostja: *Mama!*

And the last words of the World-Soul: *He (devil) is longing for human beings.*

So, does anybody have doubts about the carnivalization, the handling of last questions and the cosmic laughter in this text, hidden after several masks? I hope - not! How to play it? There are a lot of possibilities – but the “dance and play” with several levels, positions and masks is obligatory, of that I am sure.

And now, here comes a surprise for you. In German.

Recitation of the “Prologue in Heaven”/ Goethe FAUST/

I added this because of some parallels in the dramaturgy: not only the view from the cosmos (three archangels, praising the creation of the world) the Lord (World-Spirit), and then the leaving archangels... It is really hard in our times, to read this text without some kind of cosmic laughter... And who enters, after the archangels left? The devil himself! Mephisto...

FINITO!

(No, no, there are 3 archangels leaving..., the third is very small and walks ahead...)

