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Grace appears most purely in that human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness. That is, in the puppet or in the god.

”

On the Marionette Theatre
by Heinrich von Kleist
Translated by Idris Parry

Photograph © Petr Našic

Ten Questions for Dr. Antonia Napp, Director of the Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck

by Ulrike Sonnenberg

Dr. Antonia Napp took over as director of Lübeck's Museum of Theatre Puppets in the autumn of 2015. She studied art history and Slavic studies in Freiburg and Vienna. Completing her doctorate in 2004 in Freiburg on 19th-century Russian painting, she subsequently worked for the Lübeck museums, the Hamburg Kunsthalle, and the Staatliches Museum Schwerin.



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**“A lot actually happened,
even if you can’t see it from
the outside.”**



Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: Dear Antonia, when I asked you if you would like to be interviewed for our blog during this renovation period of the Museum which has been closed for 3 years already, you were really surprised that 3 years had already passed! The time has flown by unbelievably quickly. What has happened in the Kolk in these three years?

Antonia Napp: A lot has actually happened, even if you can't see it from the outside. The first thing we did was to move out all our items. That was quite exciting! Then we had to completely strip the buildings inside, the showcases, the boarding, everything that was built in and obstructed free access to the building substance had to be removed. The next step was the basic research of the buildings. To get to the medieval substance of the buildings, we actually needed a lot of time! While the first year went relatively quickly, the task being to remove what was going to be thrown away anyway, we spent the whole of the last year on the building's research and archaeology. We carefully removed layers and worked with archaeologists in the subsoil and cellars to record what was there. It was necessary to "go deep" to gain accurate knowledge!

This happened in the Kolk and parallel to this, we worked with the architects to plan the building.

Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: What is the next step?

Antonia Napp: We are now at the point where all non-essential interior fittings and such, have been removed and we can therefore begin to meticulously de-construct the building which once housed our offices. The building, built in 1937, was constructed from the rubble and recycled materials of very low quality and is being very carefully de-constructed, brick by brick because it was constructed within a row of medieval buildings in much the same way as a modern row of terraced houses in England are connected.

After the de-construction, we begin with possibly the most important task: building the foundations for the new building including excavating and stabilizing the ground beneath the planned building. Once that is done the hardest work will be beneath us and we can concentrate on constructing the building from the ground (so-to-say since the street level was noticeably lower when the original building was built) up.

“Planning with the Coronavirus in mind ...

Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: That sounds very involved and has been further complicated by new regulations which the Corona pandemic has made necessary. Hygiene regulations and rules have been suddenly thrust into the limelight. Likewise, fresh air in rooms and ventilation in exhibitions have to be taken into account. What new considerations have had to be made for the medieval buildings?

Antonia Napp: Before the Corona pandemic we planned our ventilation design for the theatre hall and the large public spaces from a completely different standpoint. We had planned the building works in cooperation with the architectural firm so that these spaces could be ventilated alternately. We had also planned to be able to open windows individually and manually to quickly create a draught through which we could change the air quickly. The current health climate with the Coronavirus and its associated mutations means that we have had to re-examine this issue carefully.

Foremost in our newly examined concept was whether or not it would be possible to plan tours of our rooms with fixed entrances and exits so that visitors could make an orderly progression through an exhibit without milling in groups where minimum safe distance rules could not be adhered to. This required a new look at our floor plans whereupon we realized that while good solutions for some parts of the buildings in our planned design existed, other parts of the building needed to be re-examined. We realized that we now have the "Corona glasses" on in the planning.



Puppets

With over 20,000 objects from the field of puppet theater, KOLK 17 houses one of the five largest collections in Germany and is certainly one of the most important cultural institutions for puppet theater in Europe.

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Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: The dimensions of the exhibition space will be somewhat smaller than before. However, the collection of theatre puppets and objects is incredibly diverse and large. How will this diversity be shown in the future while respecting the available interior dimensions?

**“There will
be more variety!”**

Antonia Napp: The disproportion between our physical space in these medieval buildings and the considerable size of our collection has been with us since the museum was founded. That is unfortunately a fact meaning we can only solve the problem by using the available space differently. This means that in the future we will compose exhibitions thematically concentrating on specific issues with the courage to acknowledge that not all of our collection can be seen in one space at one time.

One will not be able to see every item from every puppet theatre tradition we have in a single visit to the museum. We will reduce in this regard, but we plan to change the nature of our exhibitions to bring them more to life! There will be more variety!

Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: The conversion of the museum offers a great opportunity for people with disabilities to visit both our museum and the puppet theatre in the future. But the term ‘barrier-free’ can mean much more. What other ways will you seek to make the building barrier-free in the fullest sense of the term?

Antonia Napp: Accessibility should not only be equated with wheelchair access. Though we may have to make compromises, we are pleased to announce that facilities such as an elevator and larger toilets designed for people with disabilities will be present. Due to the medieval, listed structure of our buildings, we can not be as free in our design as we might like and small diversions may, for wheelchair users be necessary. However, we are working to inconvenience our visitors as little as possible.

I would also like to pursue the concept of accessibility more strongly on other levels. For example, the communication of content in “simple language” or the challenge of making the content possible for people with visual disabilities to experience our exhibition as well.

**“Also in the archive,
we are not short of
finding things to do.”**





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Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: That's an exciting look into the future. I now turn to the present and look towards the archive where our objects are kept. What work needs to be done in the archive now?

Antonia Napp: Absolutely all of the objects in the museum and theatre had to be moved to the archive. There we have created a basic order and are now cataloging everything. The inventory involves the registration of those objects and all the information we possess regarding them. That information is then entered into a database where it will be scientifically processed.

With the enormous size of our collection, we have to divide it into smaller groups. We have already determined what will be displayed in the first exhibition for the opening of the museum. We are concentrating on these objects first: recording all relevant data, scientifically processing them, and researching their background. This is how we record our collection in manageable groups. Once we have completed that for the first exhibition, we will be able to move on to the next group for the subsequent exhibition.

TheaterFigurenMuseum Lübeck



Collections

Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: Now, during the Corona pandemic, it is almost a stroke of luck that we are currently closed for renovations and that the Museum of Theatre Puppets can be digitally present with its blog behind closed doors. What will the digital presence look like when the museum reopens and the Corona pandemic is hopefully under control?

“We will develop beautiful formats.”

Antonia Napp: When we reopen, we will indeed open as the new institution KOLK 17, Puppet Theatre & Museum! An institution entirely dedicated to puppet theatre, both in the current, performance-based live form as well as displaying objects in a historical context in the form of exhibitions. A new website will be created specifically for this.

In our current blog, we already show these two forms: the exhibitions, the research, and also the puppetry. We will continue to integrate this into our web presence.

OTHELLO

A production with marionettes and masks for adult by KOBALT Puppet Theater Lübeck



Of course, technology will play a stronger role in the exhibitions and possibly also in our theatre work. For the exhibitions, I can for example say quite clearly that a lot of information will be made public in a digital format. That means that not everything we know about an object will be written on small plates hanging in the exhibition space, rather we will develop inspiring formats perhaps in the form of an app. I imagine it as if the institution has a digital twin on the internet, where every visitor can then delve deeper into the subject matter at will.

There are already many innovative systems. The user decides whether he or she wants to look at an object in the exhibition only on an aesthetic level or whether they would like to look more closely into the knowledge of this puppet theatre tradition and watch interviews or look at historical photos. This is made possible by the app.

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DIRECTOR: Dietmar Staskowiak
PLAYERS: Silke Technau, Sebastian Putz, Stephan Schlafke
CHARACTER DESIGN: Doris Gschwandtner
CHARACTER CONSTRUCTION & STAGE: Doris Gschwandtner, Stephan Schlafke, Stefan Lück, Sebastian Putz, Silke Technau

Co-production of the Meininger Staatstheater/Puppentheater with the KOBALT Puppentheater Berlin and the Berlin marionettenbühne

“We want to appeal to a lot of people.”

Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: Another stroke of luck is that the Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck and Puppet Theatre Lübeck belong to the Possehl Foundation, which celebrated its centenary in 2019.

How are the foundation's goals fulfilled by us as a museum?

Antonia Napp: We fulfill the purposes on different levels. First of all, we are a non-profit institution and serve the common good. The purpose of the Possehl Foundation is to promote charitable institutions. The second purpose is to promote art and culture. We also fall into this category in terms of content.

The fact that our medieval, historic buildings in the Kolk are being renovated in a manner befitting a listed building enhances the cityscape. Thus we fulfill another important purpose of the Possehl Foundation: enhancing the image of our beautiful city! These are the most obvious purposes we fulfill for the Possehl foundation.

Personally, I always think that we also fulfill one or two purposes beyond our remit! Since we are 100 percent owned by the Possehl Foundation, we have in mind the promotion of youth as well as those less fortunate. A museum and a theatre are educational institutions, places of education. This is something that is very close to my heart and that I would like to pursue even more strongly with our institution in the future.

The core of our identity as part of the Possehl foundation is to be for the common good. We are not an elitist institution. We want to appeal to a wide demographic, especially those who would otherwise not dare to enter such (on the face of it) specialized institutions as a museum of theatre puppets or even contemplate visiting a museum. It is very important to me that we do not lose this building block of our identity, but that we positively retain this accessibility! I think that this is indeed in the spirit of the Possehl Foundation.



Karagöz Shadow Theatre

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All the Rest © Yapı Kredi Museum



Karagöz is the traditional shadow puppet theatre of Anatolia, Turkey. It is known as one of the oldest shadow performances in the world dating back nearly 700 years.

KOLK 17 collects around 250 pieces of Turkish Karagöz shadow theatre, whose art and play form UNESCO has been recognized as an intangible world cultural heritage since 2009.

“Art and culture are something primal.”

Museum of Theatre Puppets Lübeck: Statistics show that during the 2017/2018 season, a total of 21.4 million spectators gathered in football stadiums in Germany alone watching matches in the first, second, and third leagues. In theatres, on the other hand, 34 million audience members and 114 million visitors to museums were counted during the same period. Art and culture reached far more people than football. Nevertheless, art and culture are not considered systemically relevant. What do you think about that?

Antonia Napp: I have thought about this question for a long time. The fact is that art and culture are indeed something primal – one must only pick up a National Geographic to know that different cultures in the world have made artistic representations going back hundreds of years. It is fair to say that football, a game played according to certain rules, is also a cultural technique and as such belongs to it! I think that this is indeed something essential and inherent to human beings. The question of systemic relevance is not quite so simple, because as we say in

Germany first comes to the food, then comes the morals. This means for us first come to the very basics: we all have to eat, we all have to be able to go to the doctor. Then come to the higher passions.

Of course, I also find it sad and would like to reopen the theatre and have visitors in the museum. That is clear! As soon as the circumstances relating to the Corona pandemic allow it again, one could cautiously reopen cultural institutions such as theatres and museums, where the flow and movement of visitors can be controlled well. I actually find this question of systemic relevance very difficult, because when it comes to pure survival, we really don't need anything more than food, drink, and health care. But that's not actually all there is to being human either!

Theatre of Museum Puppets Lübeck: As a human being, is there anything you envy about a theatre character?

Antonia Napp: I don't really envy theatre characters. Many things that the puppets can do are certainly great. Theatre puppets can do much more than we humans. They can fly or achieve the impossible in a play. That's something beautiful, however, it's an illusion! And there is one thing that distinguishes all theatre characters: they need a puppeteer to breathe life into them, to bring them to life. The autonomy that I have as a human being,

that my motion and very being, comes from myself alone, this liveliness, this freedom, of course also the responsibility for my actions, I wouldn't want to give all that away! When the theatre puppet has given its performance, it can rest in its case and have its peace. That might seem tempting in the evening, at the end of a long day. But, no, I wouldn't want to change places with a theatre puppet!

Thank you very much for the interview! ■

