

Colored shadow play

An Impulse of Rudolf Steiner

by Rudolf Kutzli

DeepL Translated

Once upon a time there was a miller who was poor, but he had a beautiful daughter. Now it happened that he came to speak with the king, and to give himself a reputation, he said to him, "I have a daughter who can spin straw into gold."

This is how a well-known fairy tale begins. What happens in me when I read this fairy tale? First of all, I have to take hold of the book and open it; scribes, typesetters and printers have conjured up what was originally a lively sequence of moving, light-filled and colorful images. The countless black characters of the letters are mute, page after page is bound together to form a closed, square case of the dead. What was once the shining gold of the sun, the flooding imagery of the fairy tale, has been chopped up into pages and letters and has died, it has become dead straw. Straw: the golden color of the straw still announces that it was once built, formed by the life-giving power of the sun; after the ripening of the fruit it has dried up: withered sunbeam.

But because I can "read", the ability arises in me to bring the image of the sun back to life. Through the power of imagining, of creating images, which is in every human being and freshest in the child, through the imagination set into creative activity, the fairy tale arises in my inner being, shining and precious. I have the ability to spin straw into gold! What an impressive, deeply true image: "To spin straw into gold" means to reawaken the origin of the sun in the first dead, to form it into new sun-gold. In this creative activity, I myself unite with my origin, I awaken the sun-gift of the imagination. Since I can "spin straw into gold", I am myself - the miller's daughter! In deep consternation I read on and see in the following pictures how the girl is put to the test by the king. But now she knows no more advice, the gift of spinning gold has died in her, her life is at stake. Then the little man enters through the door and offers to take everything from her; but the strange, nameless being demands a price for it. The poor miller's daughter gives him her collar, and "purr, purr, three times pulled, the coil was full." In an instant, as it were in automatic perfection, the chamber fills with gold. The girl

becomes the slave of the little miller, who demands an ever higher price. With all the gold, the miller's daughter becomes queen, but she has to sacrifice her whole future: the little, fixed devil demands her first child as a price.

We have long felt that this is no mere fairy tale. It is our own story that is being told. What once was the solar power of the Logos has died to the dry straw of our thoughts. But deep within us lies the possibility of finding anew what has been lost on a higher level: "If you change the thought into a picture, you will experience the creating wisdom" (Rudolf Steiner).

But have we not also entrusted the creative power of imagination to an initially much more perfect magician, who takes away the effort of our own creation and offers us a cheap substitute for it? What will be the price we have to pay?

Film, television is one of the many examples of this. What we have to create ourselves as a world of images when reading a book is taken from us by the refined medium and -- "purr, purr, three times pulled" - is presented to us as a substitute, as a technically produced dream world.

Hugo Mauerhofer ¹ wrote of the psychotherapeutic function of film (and this applies to a greater extent to television): " it (film) makes life bearable for millions of people every day ... it offers a substitute for a life that has become largely insubstantial; it is nothing less than a modern necessity , it frees us from fear and worry, it feeds our poor-become-imagination, --.-millions of people flee daily into its enclosure and then, transformed, step out into the day...everyone in possession of the colored reflection of life(!)"

Edmund Th. Knauer ² is even more explicit: (Der Film, das Fernsehen) "This total art of the future with its tremendous possibilities and effects, this keyboard on which we can play all the strings of the mass soul according to our intentions, gives us the possibility to bring man, who is lost in earthly matter, back to reality. The earth and man have shrunk together through technology. Therefore, man of the future will not be able to exist humanely without film (and television). With the help of technical art, the individual restores the radius of experience to which he would be inwardly capable, but which shortens his existence. man needs film (television), the legitimate cultural bearer of the machine age, because here his greater humanity, of which he can exploit only a fraction, is exemplified, lived out.

"This total art of the future with its tremendous possibilities and effects, this keyboard on which we can play all the strings of the mass soul according to our intentions, gives us the possibility to bring man, who is lost in earthly matter, back to reality. The earth and man have shrunk together through technology. Therefore, man of the future will not be able to exist humanely without film (and television). With the help of technical art, the individual restores the radius of experience to which he would be inwardly capable, but which shortens his existence. Man needs film (television), the legitimate cultural carrier of the machine age, because here his greater humanity, of which he can exploit only a fraction, is exemplified, lived out. Through the film (television), man's own dreams are discontinued (!) For every film is a kind of dream and thus of the highest magical power; it makes feelings and moods immediately and compellingly visible; even the most emotionally weak person cannot escape them and must experience them.

Yes, film can bring up feelings from our subconscious that we would otherwise not be capable of. It liberates and frees us from our tension and narrowness, thus bringing about the tragic catharsis to which the pale and remote art of the present is no longer able to bring us."

Obviously, the film (television), according to its medium and its contents, takes paths that the spiritually striving human being should take himself, it answers to a deepest longing of the human being, the longing for the world of nourishing images and image forces, for imaginations, for the region of the actual reality that is initially closed to him, for the higher worlds of the spirit.

But its technical perfection, detached from man, provides surrogates, relieves man of his own effort to creative activity and reduces him to a passive spectator. It seduces man into a mendacious illusory world and at the same time banishes him, ossifying and hardening him, into the earthly - the subterranean.

The dimension, the weight, the meaning of the problem become visible! I recognize the price that I – the miller's daughter of the fairy tale – have to pay: my human future! I also suspect something of the quality of the gold offered in such a fixed way: it is not the gold through which the original solar forces can resurrect, but synthetic tinsel. And the double name of the "male" sounds in me - in anticipation of the fairy tale ending – very well known.

In the fall of 1919, a year after the end of the First World War, in a time of deepest need, Rudolf Steiner spoke with Jan Stuten, the brilliant musician and stage designer at the Goetheanum, about problems of film.³ He described film, which at that time was still in its infancy, as an upcoming art genre of great importance, because it met an elementary need of human beings in a refined way; the hunger for the world of images, of forming, of the forces of image. Rudolf Steiner, however, called the film unartistic, because "unmusical". One understands him better if one holds another formulation of Rudolf Steiner against it⁴:

"I could give a strange definition of the musical – . It is ... a negative definition ... But it is the right one: What is the musical? That which you do not hear, ... that which you, not hearing, experience between the tones, that is the music in reality ... The music becomes all the more soulful, the more you can bring out the non-audible in it, the more you use the audible only to bring out the inaudible."

So, the space in between, the interval, the spiritual!

The film has no interval! An exact, phenomenological study of the medium - which we must deny ourselves here, but of which a wealth of material is already available - would show us that where in music the interval lives, in film and even more so in television there is nothingness. The real Nothing, in which no All is to be found (Goethe, Faust). Furthermore, Rudolf Steiner pointed out that film harms the body of the human image force⁵ and kills the imagination, corrupts the human relationship to space and time, works against the freedom of the human being and thus magically, leads to obsessions and (this seems to me to be the most important thing in our context) blocks the possibility of coming to imagination.

Finally, Rudolf Steiner pointed out that film is capable of reproducing the outwardly sensuous reality in moving photography, but that its innermost essence, which is the medium's own and corresponding essence, consists in the fact that it has the possibility to artificially create images (in a brilliant foresight of the drawing film!), thus to synthetically produce inner experiences, imaginations, to represent the supersensible: "visible song", "visible language"!

Rudolf Steiner said to Stuten that it would be an incredibly important concern of anthroposophically creative artists to contrast this pseudo-art, which is coming up powerfully and is taking away the most important task of the spiritually striving human being, with something that is based on the same

medium, but is creatively designed and not supplied by a technical apparatus detached from the human being. In other words, a kind of light play art to music or language of moving forms and colors, but guided by man. Rudolf Steiner encouraged Stuten to look for something like this, and Stuten asked him for a concrete task. That's when he got the topic: ... Fear!

The spiritual-essential, which has a fear-generating effect from beyond the threshold of the outer world, - so Stuten reported from the conversations with Rudolf Steiner - must be made visible, brought to view, and exactly through this it can be conquered. Ahriman is defeated when one does not flee from him, but looks him in the eye (I add: when one, as in the fairy tale, sends out the messengers to find out his name, and when one then tells him "his name"!).

If, however, this confrontation happens too brutally, then it cannot be borne at best by the human being, and he flees then from it.

What a leitmotif for a demonology and demonography of certain directions of modern art, which seeks and finds so many of its contents beyond the threshold of our waking consciousness, but lets them loose on people unchecked or even cynically!

Not fear and flight, but the exact opposite, the courage to know, the courage to know, is what modern man must muster if he wants to survive in the world of technical civilization and especially in the world of technical art and technical pedagogy. The attitude of "courage of knowledge" will help him to be able to jump over the abyss of "evil" at the right moment in order to "find the universe in nothingness".⁶

The demanded new art should help to exercise these forces and could thus have a pedagogical and also therapeutic effect as a training path in an eminently important sense (I add: it is the art of "spinning straw into gold again" and of recognizing the "name" of the adversary, thus defeating him, so that he destroys himself).

The artistic technique leading to this effect must be searched for anew. Rudolf Steiner pointed out the possibility of learning from the ancient, spiritual art of shadow play⁷; however, the moment had come in the history of consciousness when one could and had to resort to new means: most likely in the manner of a colored play of light.

Stuten now sketched fifteen sketches with chalk on wrapping paper as a kind of score. The stage images inspired by the sketches were to be moved and transformed with music in a way not yet specified. The composition of the fifteen pictures is such that a first series of seven sketches leads to an eighth, which is followed by a second series of seven pictures. The sequence of sketches is composed according to an alternating experience of inside and outside, of subject and object, in addition to an ever-increasing intensification. Thus according to the artistic principle of polarity and increase: the metamorphosis. In a memorial booklet ⁸ after Stuten's death some of the sketches were illustrated. For a real understanding, however, it is indispensable to know all five pictures and especially their thematic structure. This is now made possible by a first publication of the whole series in this paper; we want to try to gain some first insights into this work of Jan Stuten, which was still initiated by Rudolf Steiner, seen by him and partly even corrected.

Note: The sketch images listed below can be found in the article, "Moving Pictures" by

Image 1:

Narrow, woody, darkly rising forms, typical "forms of fear" encounter icy-cold peaks that stare down from above. An eerie, for the time being still calm motif as the starting point of a whole development; it reminds - from the distance of a completely opposite world of the demonic - of the first chapter 1 motif in the first Goetheanum building. Already, at the very beginning, it makes not inconsiderable demands on the attitude of the "courage of knowledge"; it should not be skipped over quickly, but rather taken up in a practicing, even meditative way; it demands that one occupies oneself with it, as with every following picture, so intensively that one can inwardly form a "motif swing" to the next picture, actively-creatively.

Picture 2:

The movement increases; a new, bone-like-hardened motif pushes in diagonally from the upper right and compresses itself on the lower left, forming strange sensory organs. Woody forms weigh heavily from above and are impaled by an ice-crystalline prong that juts upward. Surrounded by bony, lignifying and mineralizing formations, two strange creatures become visible (only poorly discernible in the picture; the sketches, which were not fixed for the time being, have unfortunately lost much of their clarity): one has only a head, while the other has thin, long limbs and huge ears. Beings of a

demonic intermediate realm, caricatures of the human form: a head being, a limb being; both lack the center!

Picture 3:

The motive of the missing right center shows up in transformed, intensified form: in the center of the scene stands a small, bone-thin human figure, holding the hands like blinkers at the head, and stares as if spellbound at a board which is covered with numbers or formulas. She therefore does not see or recognize what is happening on either side of her. From the right, inflated, seductive creatures are rushing towards him, moving in whitish-blue waves. On the left side, a three-stage motif appears: in the uppermost region, a nutcracker-like creature that emerges from a door like the cuckoo of the clock; in the middle, the formations of the previous picture swell up, and at the bottom: behind a green curtain, which is pulled away by a strange, insect-like creature that turns its feet upside down, it seems to be the grimace of an evil monster in an eerie fiery glow. Nutcracker-like thought life, uncontrollably welling up feelings, uncannily unleashed willpower: what a contemporary caricature of man. The whole picture can be perceived as the depiction of a man fascinated by formulas and numbers, between luciferic and ahrimanic powers, which get power over him, because he cannot act in' cognitive courage the Christian power of the center. Rudolf Steiner is said to have expressed his appreciation especially for this third picture; the nutcracker motif originates from his suggestion.

Image 4:

In addition to the element of intensification, the motif of polarity is particularly evident. Dark curtains veil the previous, demon-like events, eerily hinting at what is to come. With each scenic step, increased demands are made on the courage and cognitive powers of the practicing viewer. Fear and flight, these manifold, omnipresent psychic mechanisms of our time, must be overcome step by step; the power of cognitive courage grows. But one also notices how the most essential thing is not even the scenes themselves, but the step from one stage to the next, that which stands as an interval, as a tension between the pictures and appeals to the creative ability of image-making in man, the power of imagination. In the viewer, an attitude is awakened that is in all respects the absolute opposite of, for example, passive, consuming viewing in front of the television set.

Picture 5:

Caught in a spiked fence of dead staring posts, which form a border of knowledge and experience to the world of the spiritual, which is only visible as an unsubstantial whirling spiral, a council of discussing people meets. A dead skeleton sits on the table and beats the beat to their debate (one considers: it is the time of the first League of Nations!). Where two or three are not together in "his", the Spirit's name, death is in the midst of them.

Picture 6:

One penetrates now as it were into the forest of the staring Spires. They begin to move, they sway, swell up ulcer-like, and behind them a bluish-yellow oscillation becomes visible. One senses: only one more step, one last push through, and one is at the goal of the seven-step path:

Image 7:

The jagged forms tear apart, and before a sulfurously phosphorescent background, a grandiose vision of evil appears as a distorted, bony skull structure, huge in comparison to a tiny human figure in the foreground. The evil, "the evil one" reveals itself, shows its nature, "calls its name"! If one would be confronted with this picture, which would appear in addition still moved and accompanied by appropriate music, abruptly: one 'would be crushed, one would not be able to bear it, one would have to flee Through the preceding steps in artistically formed approach, through the gradual path of a catharsis, through the practiced training path of the "before", an "after" is now also possible. Without that only the fall into the abyss, the annihilation would remain.

Through active practice, forces have been formed that cannot be drawn into the downfall, that can leap over the round of "nothingness" that opens up in the next image. The fairy tale of Rumpelstiltskin, which shows us how the queen, by being able to name her adversary, becomes independent of him and leads him to his own destruction, experiences through Stuten a tremendous increase to a real mysterious drama. Stuten may have thought of his teacher, Rudolf Steiner, who had not only said that the medium of the colored light and shadow play was particularly suitable for reproducing mystery dramas, but who himself had taken up the Goethean fairy tale of the Green Serpent as a seed motif for his four mystery dramas. And so, through the sequence of the next pictures, we learn even more than the Grimm fairy tale is able to give us; a path of purification is now

shown, which in the last picture lights up the light and color forms of a higher world. We learn how we ourselves can "spin straw into gold" in a new way.

Picture 8:

It is the middle picture of the whole series. In it, an abyss of chaos opens up, anti-rhythmic fragments of form swirl cacophonically, parts of machines, strangely demonic beings appear, the deadly beat of the black motifs thunders like drumbeats. In this picture, Stuten spoke of many beats, of anti-rhythms of the compulsive gestures of modern "dances"; one thinks of his ingenious music for the witches' kitchen in "Faust".

Image 9:

In the background, a cascade of skeletons plunges into the depths; in front of it, the dead stump of a tree of life protrudes. But in the depths, like a new seed, a golden light motif has formed; inner light and inner warmth, wrested from fear and death, shine forth in yellow and red.

Image 10:

As if in response to the germ of light that has formed inside, a cosmic force of light breaks in between dark cloud forms that are tearing apart. A black, death-cross-like figure with distorted physiognomy plunges in the foreground, while in the center a light figure in sun gesture connects the rushing in color floods with her heart. Stuten thought that trombones should sound here, he was talking about Bruckner. And now the pictures become more and more colorful:

Image 11:

In polarity to the previous picture, as an inner counterweight, luminous crystal formations are formed. The mood of "pure thought" prevails, in which one finds the self that can hold itself. "In pure thought you find the self that can hold itself", this saying of Rudolf Steiner lived in Stuten - that's how he pronounced it - when he designed this sketch as a step of a purification path.

Image 12:

The next step shows how the solid crystals work transformed; forming forces reveal themselves in luminous radiators, a red vortex forward, a green one backward.

Image 13:

As in "Magic Flute," the spheres of purifying elements are now passed through. Fire and light beings reveal themselves.

Image 14:

The mood of the watery shines forth, at the bottom a form of the solid. Wonderfully musically the two [?] forms incline towards each other.

Image 15:

A balanced symphony of moving colors and forms, held from within by an inwardly radiating heart of shining sun-gold. One can discover the gradient, e.g. from the achromatic to the chromatic, but also the polarities, e.g. between the first and the last, between the second and the second last picture, etc., and in addition many other secrets of the ingenious composition. Unfortunately, no notes to the 15 sketches have been found in Stuten's estate.

Notes:

1. H. Mauerhofer, Zur Psychologie des Filmerlebnisses, Schweizer Annalen 1944, Heft 4/5.- Blocking by R.K. '
 2. E. Th. Knauer, Der Film, Berlin 1943
 3. The following from notes after personal conversations of the author with Jan Stuten
 4. Rudolf Steiner, Eurythmy as Visible Song, Dornach 1956
 5. See also: Rudolf Steiner, Christmas Course for Teachers, Goetheanum 1921/22, answer to questions of 5.1.1922. Cf. p. of this paper.
 - 6 See also: Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophical Guidelines, Dornach 1944, esp. February 15, guiding principle 164.
 - 7 See the essay by Lotte Boelger-Kling, p. 60 in this publication
 - 8 In Memoriam Jan Stuten (August 15, 1890 - February 25, 1948), Dornach 1949.
-
-

Note: Remainder of the article was translated by Thomas O'Keefe on the basis of DeepL translation software, March 12, 2021]

What has become of this impulse of Rudolf Steiner?

On the occasion of the Paris World Fair in 1938 [actually 1937], eurythmy was also performed by the Goetheanum. This performance was seen by the Spaniard Zamorra (Walt Disney), who after the sudden death of his parents at the age of three was adopted in America and since then bore the name Walt Disney. He became intensely interested in eurythmy, this “visible singing”; thereupon he sought out Jan Stuten, who had also come to Paris with the artists of the Goetheanum. On this occasion it happened that Stuten showed him his sketches, for which Disney, as a film maker, showed the greatest interest.

A few years later Disney's film “Fantasia” appeared, which has become a much admired and much disputed landmark in the history of film-art. Here I am allowed a personal remark: I saw “Fantasia” for the first time in 1942; I was very curious about it, since it set itself the task of “making music visible.” Without knowing at that time the connections just described, this film affected me deeply, and it became an occasion for me to collect material about film in general and to think about it. In the summer of 1947 I gave a lecture about it at the Goetheanum; after this, Stuten showed me the sketches for the first time.

“Fantasia” was remarkable in many ways. At the beginning one saw a large orchestra, the musicians came in, instruments were tuned. And now it already went beyond mere photography; with the cello sound, the instrument glowed in

a warm red, flute notes showed up as bright yellow rays. Then came the great magician, all pose, all suggestion, the conductor Leopold Stokowsky – it is known of him that he was intensively occupied with the problems of electronic, synthetic music; he wrote, fascinated by these things, “in order to calculate all the electrical oscillations that produce a single aria of the ‘Magic Flute’,” he saw in the electrical synthesis of sound, of music, possibilities “in the way of whose reproduction the human medium of the orchestral musician had hitherto stood as an obstacle,” he saw in it the “triumph of pure music,” – and now, under his leadership, the orchestra played Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D minor, or, more precisely, an American arrangement of the grandiose work.

The playing musicians transformed in a mysterious way; the external gradually disappeared and became a self-moving play of forms and colors. An enchantingly beautiful, uncanny dance of colored lights and shadows, of forms that transformed according to the music: “visible music, visible song”!

And the truly shocking thing about the whole event was this: here not only was something shown externally, and thereby taken from the listener, which can be a musical experience in the inner realm of the human being, but which could at best be a purely subjective re-creation of Disney’s invention, but – one held one’s breath! – this imaginative-inspirational world of forms and colors was even in a certain way objectively “correct,” unfolded according to conditions known from eurythmy, was a kind of imitated “synthetic eurythmy” presented with the utmost perfection!

For one who has seen “Fantasia” and knows the Stuten-images, there cannot be a fragment of doubt that Disney was inspired by the sketches, even that he copied them in part down to the details!

The following sequences did not have the conciseness of this first piece. After all, one saw, now presented in the technique of animated film, how, after Tchaikovsky’s “Nutcracker Suite,” growing, blossoming, withering plants were surrounded by elemental beings; in the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” after Dukas, one experienced how an astral phantom detached itself from the sleeping apprentice and floated away; after the sounds of Stravinsky’s “Sacre du printemps,” a whole cosmogony was presented: it was shown, trivializing Darwin, how an amoeba, through many transformations of form, finally evolved into man. In between, it was demonstrated in a fascinating way how, from a ghostly dancing of waves, “music is created,” in an inversion of the usual school-learned notion that sound waves are only the very last imprint of the actual musical element in matter. And finally, after a strongly shortened “Pastorale” by Beethoven with a rather tasteless spoof of the Greek mythology, after a parody of the classical ballet by Strauss, hippos and elephants (Ponchielli’s “Hour Dance”) sounded “A Night on the Bald Mountain” by Mussorgsky.

A gradually increasing dance of demons, witches, and ghosts [*Geistern – could also mean spirits*] was shown in the manner of a cartoon. The events, completely parallel to the music, changed into a kind of Walpurgisnacht, everything flowed to a mountain, from whose heights Evil itself directed everything. Dwarfish little people were crushed in his claws, the close-up grew into a hellish paroxysm [*convulsion, flare-up*], giving rise to paralyzing fear and dread – then church bells

rang out, under whose pious ringing the Evil One slowly solidified into a rock, and to the sounds of Schubert's "Ave Maria" a procession of light bearers passed through a Gothic church gate into an Elysian-paradise landscape of peace and joy! The same theme: fear; but a completely different solution; escape!

The film offered images – even if in often unbearable distortion – by which one was deeply touched and which were familiar to one as descriptions of the spiritual researcher, as attempts of one's own striving: Glimpses into the world of the etheric, music made visible, technically generated "imagination," projections of inner experiences of the soul, and finally: a most contemporary problem of mankind, the problem of anxiety and fear. A direct hit into an experience that moves all people today – more than forty years after this film – more than ever: fear of poverty, fear of responsibility, fear of freedom, fear of war, destruction, and death – the chain can be continued at will and also the chain of specific human reactions to it: the flight, flight into universally insured prosperity, flight into dream and intoxication, flight into one or another worldview system, and so on.

"Fantasia" with the caricature of "visible song," the imagination that Disney copied from Stuten – "Fantasia" with the fear motif which Rudolf Steiner had given to Jan Stuten as a task twenty years before, but now with a twist and in a medium which make the film the perfect antithesis of what Rudolf Steiner's intentions had been and are! The spiritual impulse – given by Rudolf Steiner at a time (1919) when no one could seriously speak of film or even of the coming television as a cultural factor, out of insights which not only led him to important diagnoses, but which let him give timely suggestions to actively help solve the

emerging problems posed by film through creative action – falls into the hands of counterforces, is intensively taken up by them, technically perfected precisely with the medium of film (!) and twisted into its opposite!

Enormous, almost oversized tasks show themselves there for us, together with the responsibility toward Rudolf Steiner's mission! It is true that for years, groups of artists and educators have been actively working to build up and expand the colorful play of light and shadow. But a much more comprehensive effort is necessary at a time when preschool children regularly watch, for example, "Sesame Street" on television.

I do not mean that the Stuten sketches, as they are, can or should be used today without further ado for a colored shadow play. Perhaps they are, in themselves, only of historical interest. Nevertheless, they can be extremely interesting to anyone who is concerned with the problems of film, television, and artistic shadow play. And above all, they are a living link to Rudolf Steiner's impulse, which is more relevant today than ever.

Two tasks present themselves to every teacher, to every educator, with inescapable urgency:

- To study and learn to understand [*durchschauen* – also "see through"] the technical media that are increasingly taking over the fields of art and education: "to get to know the name of 'Rumpelstiltskin'";

- to look for new means to help growing human beings [*den heranwachsenden Menschen* – also adolescents] not only to preserve themselves as human beings in the world of technical civilization, but to find a way "that wishes to lead the

spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the universe” (Rudolf Steiner): “to learn to spin straw into gold.”

The colorful shadow play can be such a means, such a contemporary help, in the most beautiful way.

Rudolf Kutzli