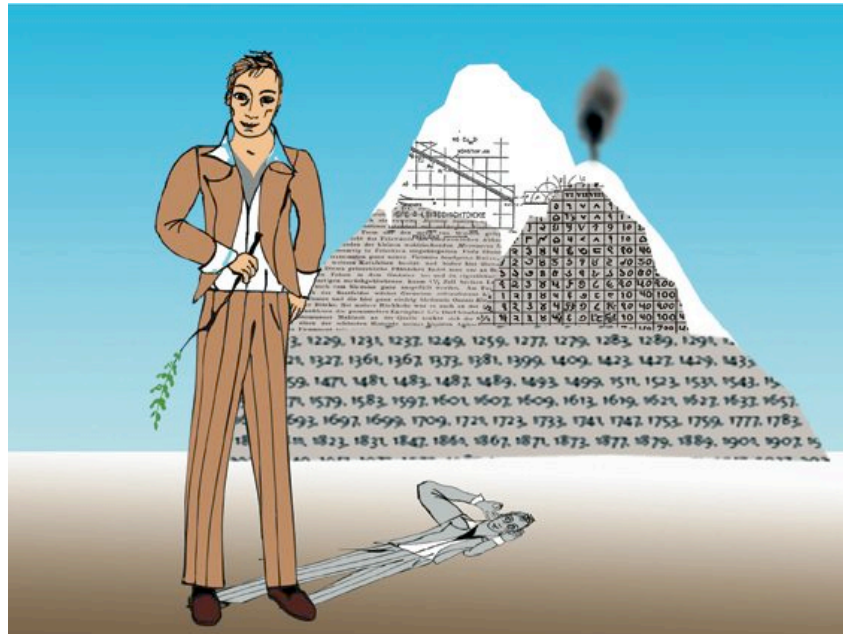


Schöne Gegend presents:

COSMOS CLANDESTINE

The Secret Worlds of Alexander von Humboldt



A Walk-In Audio Play

Director: Simone Henneken,
Fredrik Nedelmann

Script: Simone Henneken

Music: Richard von der Schulenburg

Production: Fredrik Nedelmann

#_PREFACE

Have you ever gotten lost in your inner ear? It's quite confusing, not to mention loud. Exactly this is what happens to the explorer Alexander von Humboldt during his famous journey through South America. In his recently discovered diaries, we come across strange beings and visionary theories which cast a new light on this great thinker and form their own secret universe – Cosmos Clandestine.

The play is set against the background of Alexander von Humboldt's world-renowned epos "Cosmos: Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe". The fictional story "Cosmos Clandestine" is based on a supposedly newly-resurfaced sixth volume of the work. It contains secret documents drawn up during Humboldt's exploration of South America and tells us about the unbridled passions and obsessions of this celebrated explorer.

#_ BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The historical Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) is a passionate explorer with a burning desire to investigate every aspect of the world in which he lives. *Schöne Gegend* portrays a tireless explorer, whose manic zeal for work forms the backdrop to an absurd and comic story. The struggle between his vivid imagination, his obsessive sense of orderliness and the need to market himself gradually escalate beyond his control.

The explorer's foil is his fellow-traveler, the botanist Bonpland. (Aimee Bonpland: French for "beautiful and beloved plant") He's a happy-go-lucky fellow with a burning admiration for both plants and women and an avid collector of both.

The audience accompanies the explorers on their search for the confluence of the Orinoco and Amazon rivers. In the dense primeval forests, they stumble ever deeper into the secret cosmos, a mixture of natural beauty, mythological creatures, historical and geographical facts and scurrilous experiences.

Scientific faith, indisputable objective knowledge, the subjectivity of worldviews and the random nature of learning are all interwoven, culminating in the personality of Alexander von Humboldt and raising new questions about how to view and interpret the world.



#_ DETAILS

On 5 June 1799, the day of his departure to South America, Humboldt writes a letter: "I will collect plants and fossils and be able to make astronomical observations with the finest of instruments (...) But all this is not the main purpose of my voyage. My eyes will forever be focused on the combined effects of forces, on the influence of inanimate creations on living creatures, on this natural harmony!" Elsewhere, he describes the goal of his work as "uplifting the soul and expanding our powers of visualization".

Our theory is that interdisciplinary thinking is only possible where there is room for free association and imagination. Our aim is to find this space in the personality of Alexander von Humboldt.

Our lynchpins are the figures of the "artist" and/or "scientist" as specialists, whose task it is to cross frontiers, reinvent them and, if possible, eradicate them. During this process, Alexander von Humboldt leads us into a kind of limbo in which terms such as knowledge and society and aspects of the distribution and marketing of knowledge cross paths with poetry, wordplay and fictional science.

The motifs of the tale are based on the true story and other narratives of Humboldt's life, while the inclusion of the fantasized and the absurd divorce it again from reality. These stylistic attributes of the text on which the story is based create images which in turn trigger new associative ideas.



#_ REALIZATION

"... a lucid mixture and overlapping of cinematic, theatrical, comic-like, musical and audio-play styles." (D. Lampalov, Vijenac, Zagreb 2007)

The main focus of the realization is on designing the narrative spaces and landscapes. We do not separate audience and stage. Instead, we move the audience through rooms framed by movable canvasses with projected film, images and soundscapes. This allows situations to arise in which the audience, "separated" from stage and canvass by a curtain, will be able to follow the plot acoustically, but not visually. On the other hand, spaces may open up or close down around the audience. It's a game in which things are made visible, discovered and hidden, in which stasis and listening are substituted with music, movement and changing spaces.

In the spaces thus created, the audience will hear dialogues and narratives from pre-produced audio play sequences, as well as music that is either played back or, at certain points in the play, played live. At times, the plot works without the spoken word, using animated text instead. Some parts of the plot feature still images, such as a slide show, to accompany the text. Other content, meanwhile, is portrayed in a more pronounced fashion, through spoken scenes performed live by actors, while others still are portrayed by projecting fictional, comic-like, animated figures.

Visually, the many playful levels of the story are narrated using computer animations and video sequences. This portrayal, true to the linguistic idiosyncrasy of the text, also oscillates between the historical and the contemporary. The musical design of the story represents a further foundation stone for the realization.

The music for "Cosmos Clandestine" will be created by Richard von der Schulenburg (Die Sterne), weaving a musical plot through the episodes and scenes.

#_ CONTACT

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