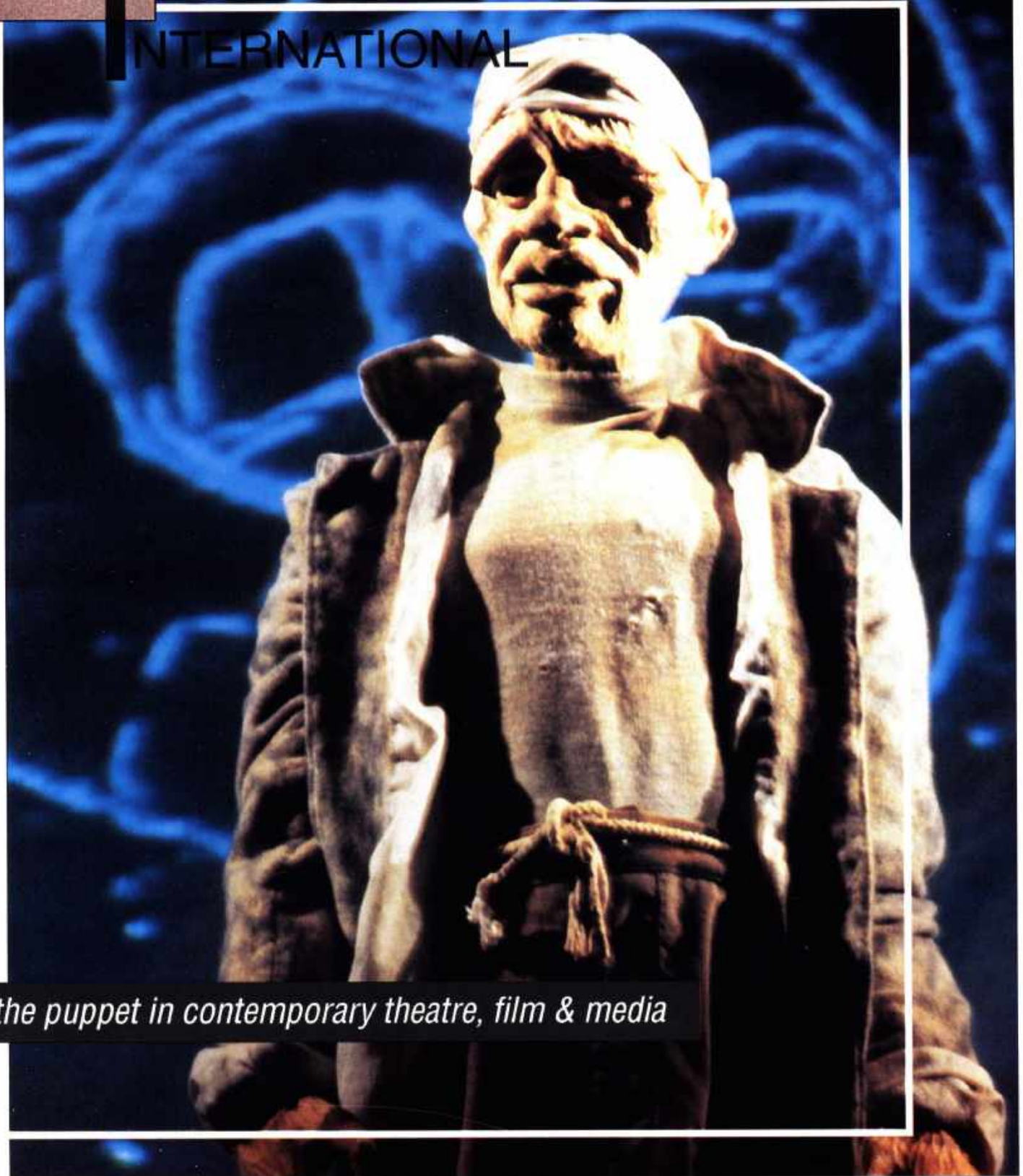


Premiere Issue

PUPPETRY

INTERNATIONAL



the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

UNIMA

Union Internationale de la Marionnette

UNIMA was formed in Prague, Czechoslovakia, in 1929 by an enthusiastic group of representatives from 14 countries. After a hiatus during and after World War II, UNIMA was re-activated and in 1957 a new constitution was drafted.

UNIMA was adopted as a member of the International Theatre Institute in 1959, making it a member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

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UNIMA-USA, founded in 1966, is the North American Center of the *Union Internationale de la Marionnette*, the oldest international theatre organization in the world, founded in 1929. The organization's mission is to promote international understanding and friendship through the art of puppetry.

It was first run as a clearinghouse through which Americans could join, participate in and receive benefits from international UNIMA. In 1966, with over 100 members of UNIMA in the United States, UNIMA-USA was formed with Jim Henson as its first chairman.

Jim Henson led an UNIMA-USA committee of Frank Ballard, Bil Baird, Nancy Staub and Allelu Kurten in incorporating UNIMA-USA into a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, UNIMA-USA, Inc., in 1979.

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THE AMERICAN CENTER FOR THE
UNION INTERNATIONALE de la MARIONNETTE

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

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On the cover:

Handspring Puppet Company/South Africa

Woyzeck on the Highveld at the International Festival of Puppet Theater in New York City.

See page 20

Back cover:

A Popol Vuh Story— Ralph Lee, Cherrie Moraga and Glen Velez.

Part of the Festival of International Puppetry, it is based on the Mayan myth and is a multi-media exposure of the rich cultural traditions of indigenous peoples of both North and South America.

Editorial

Hitting the Streets

This magazine is *not* just for puppeteers. It is for everyone with an interest in theatre, art, and other aspects of culture.

Puppetry International is concerned, primarily, with puppetry not as something "apart," but as an integral element of our performing arts, whether the performance be live, recorded on film or tape, traditional, classic or contemporary in style.

The puppet has insinuated its way deep into our culture. Whether your particular tastes run to Robert Wilson or Jurassic Park, to Hopi Kachinas or the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, the puppeteer's art is part of your experience. Such events have long been chronicled in publications devoted to theatre, film animation, mythology and popular culture. *Puppetry International* examines these events from the richly symbolic and visual perspective of the puppeteer. Our desire is to help redefine "puppetry" for our culture, so that it no longer merely conjures up easy images of plush bunny rabbits at children's birthday parties.

The puppet is naturally subversive. No one sounds that note more convincingly than Bread and Puppet Theatre

director, Peter Schumann (page 26) in an article which has now appeared in several languages. Stephen Kaplin reflects on future puppet forms in an age of integrated telecommunications and cyber-space (page 37) and John Bell examines some of the more obscure roots of Symbolist theatre—precursors of Dada and Surrealism which continue to be an influence on contemporary puppetry, performance art, and so-called visual theatre.

Finally, the notion of FESTIVAL— "Have you noticed?" asks Ted Killmer (page 4), "Now in the 90's, with an innately deep-seated undercurrent of excitement, we're hitting the streets again.... The paradigm of Festival provides the missing link." Puppet Festivals can provide a major point of intersection between the artform and the public.

The Festival of International Puppetry, our main feature in this issue, is a new festival— ambitious, multi-dimensional, top drawer. Only in its second incarnation (in-Fest-ation?), its organizers at the Henson Foundation are still looking to other theatre festivals throughout the world as models; and yet this festival is already beginning to provide a model for others.

-Editor



Woodcut from *Cesar Antichrist*
(see John Bell's article, page 32)



The State Puppet Theater,

Banialuka, one of the
oldest puppet
theaters in Poland,

was established by two Bielsko painters, Zenobiusz Zwolski and Jerzy Zitzman in 1947. Since its founding, well known artists, painters, directors, composers and writers have collaborated on the development of new works. Banialuka is best known for its full stage productions using live actors, masked figures, objects and rod puppets. The Festival will present *Solitude*, directed by François Lazaro and based on the prose of literary giant Bruno Schulz, a Polish Jew shot in his home town Drohobycz during the extermination of the ghetto in 1942. The hero of *Solitude*, Jozef, arrives at a sanatorium to visit his dying father and in this strange and forgotten place, he remembers the years of his childhood and youth. It's a fantastic and grotesque vision of the world bubbling up from the subconscious world of dreams.

A Notion of Festival

Ted Killmer

Yesterday I celebrated the birthday of a longtime friend and companion. It was a small gathering, four in fact, but a festival of some proportion. We reinvented the past. With more than a little wine, we wiped away the present. And with a final toast, we forged head-on into the future. It was a family reunion of sorts, a marker not unlike those long-missed Burma Shave signs along the roadside. They made us laugh, think, and for a moment, transcend the everyday routine.

This past March, high in the mountains southeast of Mexico City, I enjoyed another "family" reunion. The third annual general meeting of the International Federation of Centres for Puppetry Arts was hosted by the Museo Nacional del Títere in Huamantla, a town of about 20,000. Located in the heart of the culturally-rich state of Tlaxcala, the town of Huamantla surprised its guests from around the world with the unexpected. It was the first day of Spring. Everyone in town was on holiday and dressed in their finest. Before the annual meeting commenced, the siren of the town's patrol car heralded an extraordinary parade. From around the corner, community-made floats appeared carrying children dressed as signs of the season: flowers, butterflies, ladybugs, princesses, and tuxedoed suitors. To our amazement, one of the many contingents featured a five-square marching unit of pregnant women, proudly displaying their posterity in matching pink smocks. The town festival's symbology underscored the work to follow. Those in attendance at the IFCPA meeting started their discourse with a knowledge that their seeds, too, had been sown and that a human continuum infuses the global remit which they passionately share.

Shortly after the close of our meeting in Huamantla, I was deeply honored to be the guest of Pedro Amador Reyes Jaurez, one of the few remaining traditional

maskmakers in Tlaxcala. The Holy Week was upon us. On the eve of Palm Sunday, I sat in the sculptor's living quarters, sipping Coca-Cola and faced a full-scale figure of the Christ, bleeding. The exquisitely hand-molded image, articulated to animate the Stations of the Cross, was soon to be delivered to its Church fathers. Suddenly, we heard a band in the distance, fireworks, and the excitement of children. As neighbors washed the stone streets leading to Juarez's home, the Church family ceremoniously came to receive Christ. Newly robed, the figure was borne through the streets, and I became a thrilled player in the community's festival.

Have you noticed? Now in the 90's, with an innately deep-seated undercurrent of excitement, we're hitting the streets again, whether concretely or metaphorically. After more than a decade of implosive acquisition and exclusivity, the windows see the blinds lifted, the shutters thrown open, and a hybrid new world revealed. Recently, the NBC "Today" show resurrected the glass-fronted studio which brought it immediate acclaim when it premiered on January 14, 1952. NBC's return to "immediacy, electricity, and unpredictability" marks our rapid entry into the 21st century. Whether person or city, neighborhood or country, form or artform, each is seeking its own imprint of individuality within a welcome whole. As dichotomous as it seems, we now have our cake and eat it too. Regionalism is in, so is the Universe. The paradigm of Festival provides the missing link.

The annual Directory of the International Events Group, in 1991, called festivals, "the world's universal calling card." With the capacity to transcend language, politics, and prejudice as a model of affirmation, no wonder festivals are headlining discussion at tourism and marketing conferences. Festivals uniquely serve as waves of the future. Peter Lobdell, co-founder of the Ko Festival of Performance in Amherst, notes

that "Festivals have always existed to gather artists and audiences from far and wide. Festivals pollinate the artists and renew the audience's excitement for live performance. Interchange, exchange, sharing, and conversation at festivals blur the lines between the artists and the audiences. Festivals are rituals of renewal."

Dick Finkel, producer of the highly-regarded, 10-year-old Edmonton International Street Performers Festival, adds that festivals can be likened to Woodstock. "The humongous gathering changed my life. The event brought disparate groups of people together to celebrate, to create a brief microcosmic community, and to make good vibes."

In an insightful article appearing in *Hybrid Magazine* (June 1993), Clark Lawlor, a lecturer at Warwick University, writes that "Carnival is about sexuality, interconnection, the merging of one body into another and of self with the world... Carnival brings community back into art..." It is no stretch to substitute "festival" for "carnival" here. Certainly then, it's no stretch to understand Alisa Solomon in New York's *Village Voice* as she seeks awards and recognition for "events that extend our definition of theater—parades, protests, circuses, histrionic occasions of all sorts."

Whether Mardi Gras, Oktoberfest, or Wayzgoose, whether in Binche, Basel, or on a hillside in Vermont, festivals free the fool that's in all of us. Topsy-turvy, we see our own worlds from new perspectives, joyfully bouncing off each other like bumper cars. Jenny Dixon, Executive Director of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and producer of its *Buskers Fare*, provides the analogy. "For one week each year, we experience a symbiosis of community creativity that affords the businessman a temporal environment in which to play and transforms the artist/player into CEO for the day."

(continued on page 36)



*Earth Day in Times Square
Trash Monster
by Felicia Young*

photo: Andrew Scialino



*Carnaval Viareggio, Italy
Courtesy of International
Festivals Association*



*J. Fred Muggs entertains
onlookers during the early
days of TODAY.*

Festival Overview

The International Festival of Puppet Theater-'94

by Robert Boyd

New York's first International Festival of Puppet Theater had not yet begun, but already the question was being posed, "Are you going to do this again next year?" Without hesitation, the answer was always a clear and resolute "No!"

The Festival planners at the Jim Henson Foundation had spent years preparing for the 1992 event and making another one so soon just didn't seem possible. And yet, there had to be another Festival. Why go through such effort to raise the level of discourse, if not to have a good long conversation now and then?

So, when the dust finally settled and stories of the first Festival's success were fast becoming legend, tentative plans for a sequel were put forward and the departing staff marked Labor Day 1994 on their calendars and waited.

The first decision Executive Producer Cheryl Henson and Producing Director Leslee Asch made was to remove all of the 1992 companies from consideration for the 1994 season—a difficult choice, since many troupes from the first Festival could have easily returned with a new show and built on the following established during their initial visit—but, as Ms. Asch recently pointed out, "We felt that with so many great companies still out there, our efforts were probably better spent continuing to introduce and uncover artists unknown to New York audiences, rather than rest on our past successes." The result is a line-up of sixteen new companies, many making their U.S. debut.

That said, this year's Festival is similar in many ways to its predecessor. The Public Theater is playing host and the productions fill all five of its handsome theaters as they did in 1992. The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center once again has a puppetry exhibit in the main gallery, *Revealing Roots: Uncovering Influences on Contemporary American Puppet*

Theater. The popular after-hours puppet cabaret has moved to P.S. 122 which will provide better performance conditions for both artists and audiences. As Bread and Puppet Theater did for the first Festival, Velo Theatre from France will bring performances out into the streets and parks of the city, but on an intimate rather than epic scale. The symposium, an all-day marathon in 1992, has been split up into a series of smaller, less-grueling events.

The 1994 Festival will offer a number of shadow plays (a form nearly absent from the 1992 roster) and many more works adapted from scripts written for the traditional actor-based theater. While Elmer Rice's 1923 tragic comedy, *The Adding Machine*, was the only "play" offered in 1992, the new season features work derived from texts by Shakespeare, Strindberg, Büchner and Gertrude Stein. Another change from the inaugural season is the inclusion of another theater to house some of the performances. In addition to the late-night series, P.S. 122 will host two of the Festival's prime-time events.

P.S. 122 is staging Jon Ludwig's *Safe As Milk*, a roller coaster of nutsy nineties anxiety. In Mr. Ludwig's world there's a burglary every ten seconds, a glass of tainted milk just might make your baby crazy and failure to fold the sheets could lead to the total destruction of life as you know it. The cast of objects includes a car crash dummy, a bullhorn, a cyclone fence and assorted animals and dolls.

Also at P.S. 122, former graffiti artist Garland Farwell will offer the world premiere of *PIPE: A Courtroom Drama*. The piece joins Clarence Thomas in a judicial trial where Colonel Sanders, The Fried Chicken Lawyer, is pitted against a Liberal Jewish Transvestite Prosecutor while the Pregnant Immigrant Stenographer takes it all down. Divided into four acts: The Circus, Negro Ward, Rehabilitation, and Confirmation; *PIPE* will bring computer animation to the

service of live puppetry in an effort to expand and test the definition of puppet theater.

Testing boundaries seems reason enough for a festival and the 1994 line-up should issue plenty of challenges. That it is also a great deal of fun, well that's just icing on the proverbial cake. The Public Theater and P.S. 122 are where it all happens, September 6 through 18. •

Event Calendar

For Adults

Handspring Puppet Company
Hanne Tierney
Teatro Hugo and Ines
Dondoro
Marionetteatern
Teatro Gioco Vita
Suzy Ferriss
Banialuka
Intar/Ralph Lee
Velo Theatre
Larry Reed
Fred Curchack
Jon Ludwig
Garland Farwell

For Kids

Hobey Ford's Golden Rod Puppets
Penny Jones & Company
Teatro Gioco Vita

Symposia

Towards a Visual Theater
The Sacred and the Profane

Exhibition

Revealing Roots: Uncovering Influences in Contemporary American Puppet Theater



Solo artist

Hoichi Okamoto founded his company, Dondoro, in Tokyo in 1974. Dondoro uses life sized puppets and masks to conjure emotional worlds of the deep unconscious. Unlike traditional bunraku or modern mask plays,

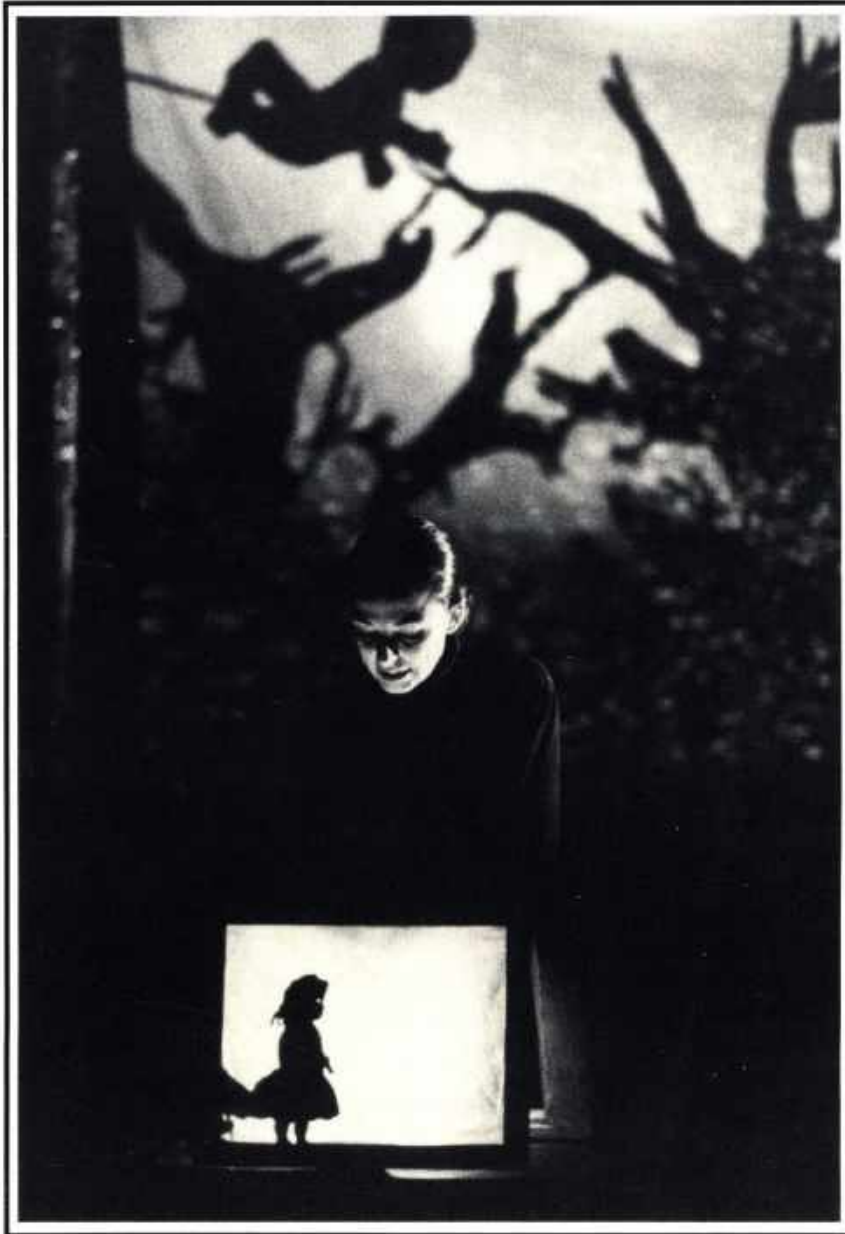
Dondoro's emphasis is on discovering the wonder and charm of the puppet itself and leading the audience into a realm of dreams and fantasies. Born in Hiroshima in 1947, Hoichi Okamoto will perform *Kiyohime Mandara*, the story of a young

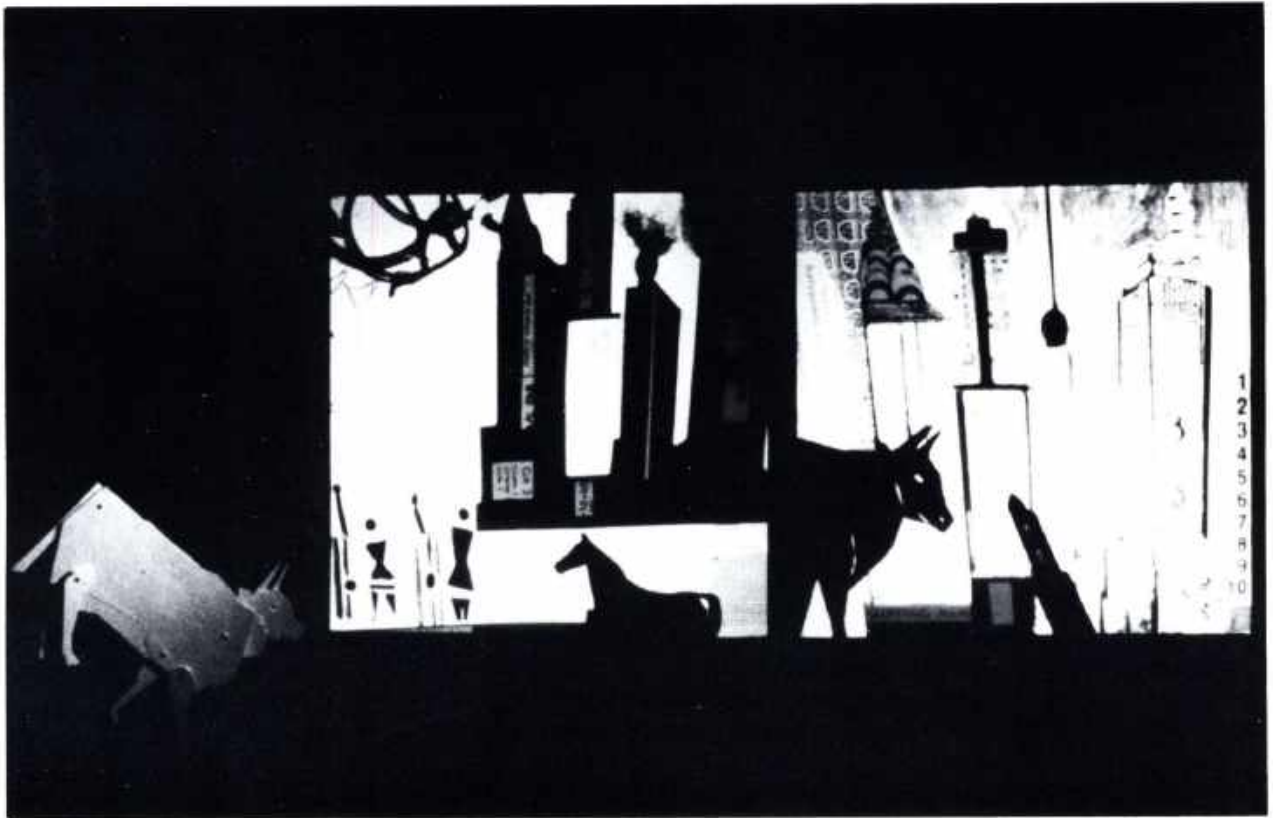
monk who deserts his betrothed. It is one of Japan's most famous traditional tales and has been adapted to many of Japan's classic art forms including noh, kabuki and bunraku, as well as music and dance presentations. The story follows the title character

Kiyohime who, discovering that she has been betrayed, turns into a snake, kills her lover and then herself. A story of erotic love and betrayal, transformation and death, the production draws upon the traditional to create a unique contemporary hybrid.

Catching shadows on a variety of

screens and shifting surfaces, Teatro Gioco Vita spins the stories of Peter Pan's origin as described in J.M. Barrie's famous books. *Peter Betwixt and Between* takes audiences on a lyrical and poetic shadow journey with the infant Peter who, upon discovering that the souls of babies come from birds, tries to return to the nest. An exquisite tale of loss and love captured between layers of shadow and colored light, the production applies modern means to this ancient form resulting in a stunning succession of visual effects. The company, whose past shadow epics have ranged from *Gilgamesh* to *The Baron of Münchhausen*, is also featured in the Festival's Just For Kids series presenting *Pescetopococodrillo*, or Fish-mouse-crocodile. This show is a trilogy of three Italian fairy tales by prize-winning author and illustrator Leo Lionni, relating the stories of a fish with wanderlust, an impractical poet mouse and a nonconformist crocodile.





Suzy Ferriss, a painter

Suzy Ferriss, a painter and visual artist, has been exploring the interpretive possibilities of puppet theater since 1988. Living in Atlanta, she learned of the experimental work being performed at the Center for Puppetry Arts about the same time that a few people from the Center took note of her paintings at local showings. They encouraged her to experiment, bringing her two dimensional characters to life through dance, full body costumes, rod puppets and shadow images. *Arnie's Cow Goes to New York*, one of the pieces on the mixed bill she will present at the Festival, is the tale of a cow and a horse who traverse galaxies aboard a floating teacup. *The Mystery Play* is an absurd game of chance during which the three main characters embark on a desperate journey through bars, tea dances, amusement parks and their own dreams. *Box of Night*, the final installment of this triple-feature, has life-sized puppets cavorting in the "Theater and Bar District" and taking off on an interplanetary voyage.



Larry Reed is a performer,

film director, and practitioner of Balinese mask and puppet theater. In 1972 after training in

Indonesia, Reed founded the Shadow Play Theater and took the Balinese art form to the U.S., Canada, and Europe. He has designed shadow effects for numerous contemporary productions including *Orfeo* at the Santa Fe Opera, *Body Cak*, a Balinese-American

Production, and *Conquest of Mexico* for the Music America Festival. *In Xanadu*, a shadow spectacular, was conceived and directed by Mr. Reed in collaboration with members of the Chaksam-PA Tibetan Dance and Opera Co. Projected onto an enormous stage-wide

shadow screen, Kublai Khan's spiritual journey upon the death of his wife and during his reign over the Mongol Empire is presented as a cinematic epic with a cast of twenty puppeteers and performers, and a multitude of shadow puppets. *In Xanadu* draws from a strong base of traditional shadow theater adapting the form by projecting the shadow images of live masked actors.

In French, "velo" means

bicycle and in 1978, the Velo Theatre began performing in the streets with productions designed to be toured and performed on a bicycle. The work has evolved into a whimsical and wordless theater of objects that plays indoors as well as outdoors. The Festival will feature the company doing both.

At The Public, *Enveloppes et Deballages*, which loosely translates to *Envelopes and Unwrappings*, introduces an inscrutable postman on an ancient bike laden with booby-trapped parcels. When one of his packages seems to be on fire, he opens it and a whole landscape complete



with smoking volcano spills forth. This, of course, leads to the unwrapping of more parcels, each one revealing a world in miniature. *Crocodile*, *Crocodile* will travel around the city, stopping in parks and plazas, performing for unsuspecting citizens, and spreading the reach of the Festival beyond the confines of ticket-buying theater goers.

1992 Keynote Address by Henryk Jurkowski for
**The Theatrical Inanimate:
 Changing Perceptions of Puppetry**

compiled and summarized by Rachel Elfenbein

"I like very much this theatrical inanimate... very good substitution of many other terms, ... because nowadays it seems that a puppet player is feeling rather badly in his old skin and like a snake he would like to change it and that's why every young man starting his own group he's trying to find a new designation of his art— Figure Theater, Theater of Figures of Speech, Material Theater and so on... I like very much this 'Theatrical Inanimate' because maybe it will cover all the other terminology." This was how Henryk Jurkowski opened his keynote address of the 1992 International Festival of Puppet Theater's day-long puppetry symposium, *The Theatrical Inanimate: Changing Perceptions of Puppetry*. His statement



alludes to puppetry's present day *Zeitgeist* that is the basis for conducting this puppetry symposium. Simply put, puppetry is changing and the puppetry community is scared. But Jurkowski, modern puppet theory's patriarch, was not chastising the puppetry community, as many people have. Instead, through his eloquent explanation of the history and nature of puppetry's changes, his remarks

inspired hope and focus for puppetry's future.

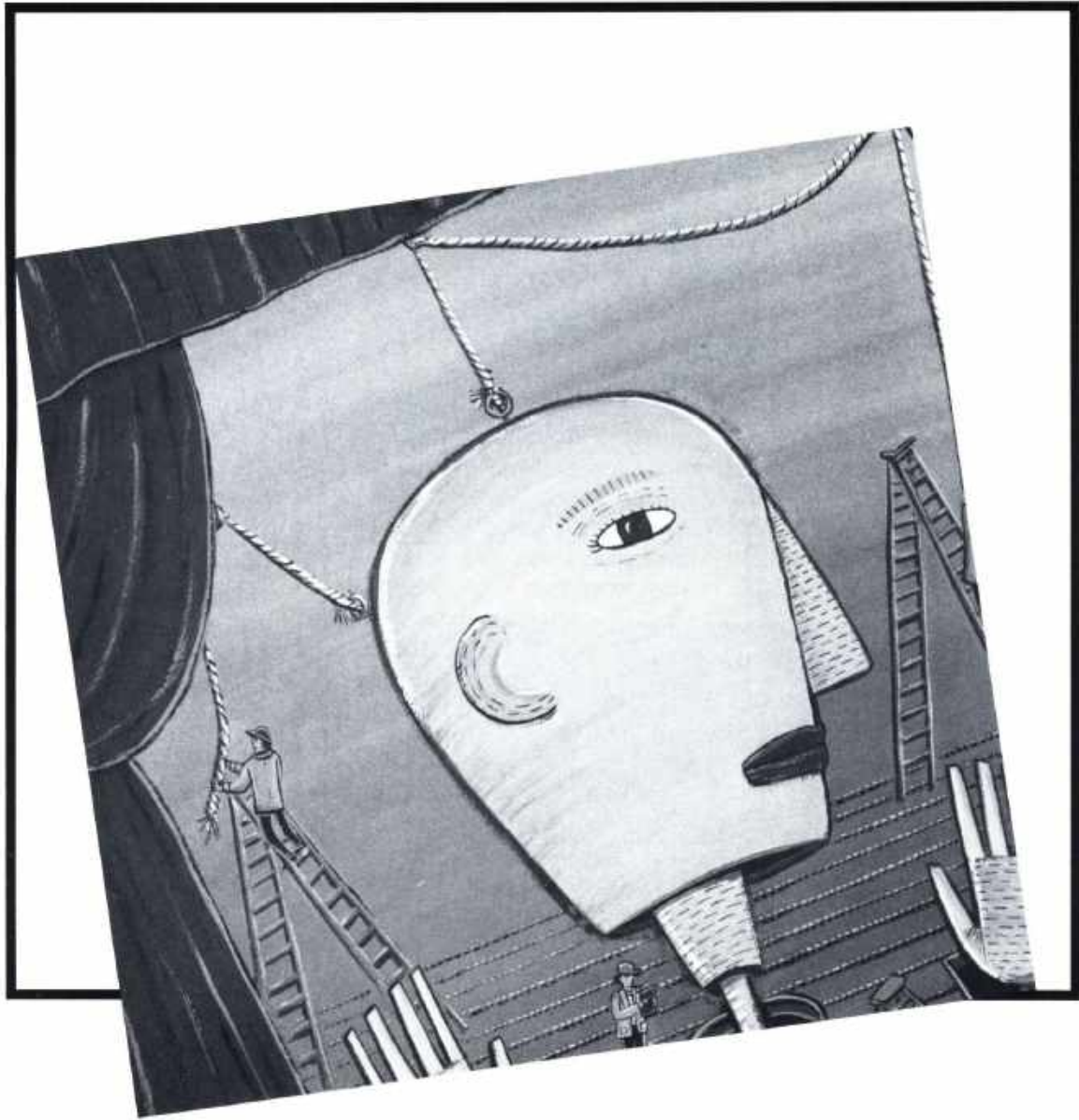
As he pointed out, one of the main entities that has changed puppetry is the artists, particularly those influenced by the Modern Art movement. They brought new ideas from other arts to puppet theater. Jurkowski stated that "one of these ideas was to treat a work of art as having independent value— with no duty to imitate reality." This idea, judging art with independent value, led to the exploration of theater's "theaterness" and puppetry's "puppetness." Therefore, the focus changed from concentrating on the puppet alone to examining the entire system of puppetry. As Jurkowski explained this trend, he stated "You have screen, you have puppet, behind the screen you have player. If you take away a screen you have the system quite visible. And it was done. It was done and it provided a lot of changes." Jurkowski calls this exploration autotelic or autothematic puppet theater-making anti-illusionist puppetry exploring the system of puppetry. He credits the concept of a play composed with elements of illusion and reality to Bertolt Brecht.

This movement had a huge effect on theater. He stated: "playing with the different parts of the theater, we came to the important moment of decomposition. And I am calling it the atomization of the old theater." Jurkowski declared that puppetry has, as Levi-Strauss and John Barthes term it, experienced entropy— puppetry is exhausted. He cited two examples showing that puppetry has been caught in entropy's void. First, in the 19th century, puppet theater was given over to children as entertainment instead of adult audiences and second, he cited the rise of Naturalism that began in the 1920s which opposed puppetry as a non-Naturalistic artform. And thus, he states that puppetry "will share vicissitudes with Commedia

del'Arte, Baroque Opera and things like that" and that puppetry that remains will be "nothing more [than] a quotation from yestertime."

Jurkowski didn't seem too concerned that puppetry might never recover. He believes it is time for a new puppetry and that it is our hope for survival. He then spoke of our awareness as being the overriding characteristic of our time. Artists are aware of literary form, theatrical form, etc. and they treat this awareness with irony. Today there is a "juxtaposition of different values. Juxtaposition of values of different cultures, juxtaposition of different means of expression, juxtaposition of threads and literary methods... you have everywhere collage." It is all a part of what he points out is a very interesting aspect of our lives— "we are participating in a very very important break in understanding of the world and in perception of reality." We are coming to realize and present in the theater a new vision of reality. "We are looking for the new relationship between object and subject, between man and reality." As an example, he gave object theater as representing the new vision of reality "because we were so much invaded by objects, it was necessary to react; it has some philosophical meaning, and social meaning." Whether puppet artists explore the boundaries of puppetry or are more concerned with the world's social problems, "it is necessary that our participation in the transformation of this vision of reality...is very important."

Finally, he closed his remarks by stating that ultimately puppetry, whether it is used as personal or political expression, is an interdisciplinary art much more than a synthetic art and for that reason, scholars should apply interdisciplinary methods of research to puppetry. •



*Cover illustration for 1992
INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL
OF PUPPET THEATER
by Janie Geiser*

A Sampling of International Festivals of Puppet Theater

FESTIVAL MONDIAL - Charleville-Mézières, France

The "Vatican" of puppetry exists in a charming town in the Ardennes region of France. The town, Charleville-Mézières, is home to both the *Institute International*, the world's premier school for puppet theater, and the Secretary General of UNIMA— the international organization of puppeteers. Every three years this otherwise quiet town is home to a unique and unequalled celebration of puppetry. For nine days, some 200 different companies perform. This year a total of 400-500 performances are planned.

ANNUAL PUPPET FESTIVAL - Iida, Japan

Every August, a wonderful puppet festival takes place in the mountains of Japan. Iida is the location of Japan's largest puppet festival. During the festival, both professional and amateur puppeteers— over 1500 of them— converge in this scenic Ina Valley town. Puppet shows are held in various locations throughout the valley. The festival integrates puppeteers with people who live in the area. All performances are open to the public.

—J. Bradley

CON OJOS DE NIÑO - Buenos Aires, Argentina

This children's festival, held annually, is sponsored by the Paradigm Foundation under the auspices of UNICEF Argentina. This foundation's primary objective is to stimulate the spread of arts, sciences and technology in Argentina— and this festival they sponsor is incredible. The festival we attended ran from July 10 until August 2, 1992, and had about 3,000 children attending daily, 6,000 on each of the weekend days. Four hundred functions, 30 different daily activities for children running continuously, and over 100,000 people attended the 23-day festival.

—K. Bolch

LES SEMAINES DE LA MARIONNETTE - Paris

Beginning in 1981, this festival was held annually for a period of several weeks. Begun as a forum for professional puppeteers and animators, its purpose was to bring shows into mainstream public arenas. Designed for general theater-going audiences, this was actually one of the inspirations for our New York festival. *Les Semaines* continued for some years until the organizers decided to switch their focus to hosting a full theater season.

IMAGES - Netherlands

Until 1992, The Netherlands was home to a multitude of small festivals held throughout the country. As part of the reorganization of the national institutes of the various performing arts, it was decided that there should be one major festival, to be held alternate years in Arnhem. Entitled, *IMAGES*, the first festival of this new model was held in October 1992. It featured a broad definition of puppet and visual theater and is perhaps the best possible model for the future direction of the New York festival.



Brian Henson and Franz Fazakas

Below: from left to right:

Roman Paska, Janie Geiser, Peter Sellars, Cheryl Henson, Eric Bass

photo: Richard Termine

A Look Back

1992 Symposium Sessions



Eileen Blumenthal

"In order to understand why [puppet theater is going through a revival], I think we probably need to look at why the thing needed reviving. How come it was dead in the first place or at least playing possum or at least marginalized into something to keep kiddies occupied." "Probably the biggest [factor] ... was the virus vogue of realism that hit Europe and America in late 19th century and is still with us. Realism is one of the few areas of theater in which puppets don't excel."

Peter Sellars

"A puppet is a conscience. A puppet by its existence thrusts a conscience upon you. Puppets are always figures of reminding, and that can be very funny or very frightening, but it's always a little voice that says, 'By the way..We're watching you.' That is a voice of conscience. I think the most important puppetry I know and the puppetry that changed my life was rooted in the idea that in this life we have these figures of conscience and that's the highest service I think a puppet can render."

Franz Fazakas

"This [technology] is not a thing we ever thought of doing for its own sake whatsoever, but as a tool to enhance the craft of the artist/performer. Technology is inanimate and inarticulate. Technology has no mind, yet it may develop one."

Brian Henson

"We've had a couple [of] companies in England who've come to us saying, 'We've created this incredible thing that'll do anything,' right? And then, of course, they say, 'and we haven't a clue what to do with it!' So... they quite astutely think... you can do anything you want in a puppet production, and one of the things that's interesting in a lot of the computer animation and very fancy stuff, [is that] they're finding the potential is so limitless."

The International Festival of Puppet Theater-'94

The Symposia Series

by *Leslee Asch*

The 1992 Festival featured an all day conference exploring different aspects of puppet theater.

For the 1994 Festival, we have selected two rather broad areas of pursuit, and an exciting roster of artists and scholars to bring varying viewpoints and provocative insight to the questions. The topics chosen are central to the understanding of puppet theater, but clearly are not limited to or defined by puppet theater exclusively. It is in the "edges" and places where the definition of puppetry is least clear that the points of intersection and most important understandings occur. Having been drawn to the field by the provocatively visual work of people who did not consider themselves puppeteers, i.e. Alfred Jarry, and Eugene Ionesco, I have long been fascinated by puppetry's edges. Recently, with the passing of Ionesco, it was widely reported that his first exposure to theater had been as a child growing up near the Luxembourg Gardens, where, he said, "I could stay there, entranced for whole days... spellbound by the sight of these puppets... It was the spectacle of the world itself."

TOWARDS A VISUAL THEATRE- "Symbol, Image and Vision"

A number of artists working in puppetry today have begun to use new terms to define it. This is both an effort to avoid the "loaded" term puppetry and to hopefully come closer to a useful definition of their work. Names commonly in use include Theater of Animation, Figure Theater, Object theater, Material Theater, and even as we titled the 1992 conference, "The Theatrical Inanimate." Philippe Genty, with his successful production *Derives*,

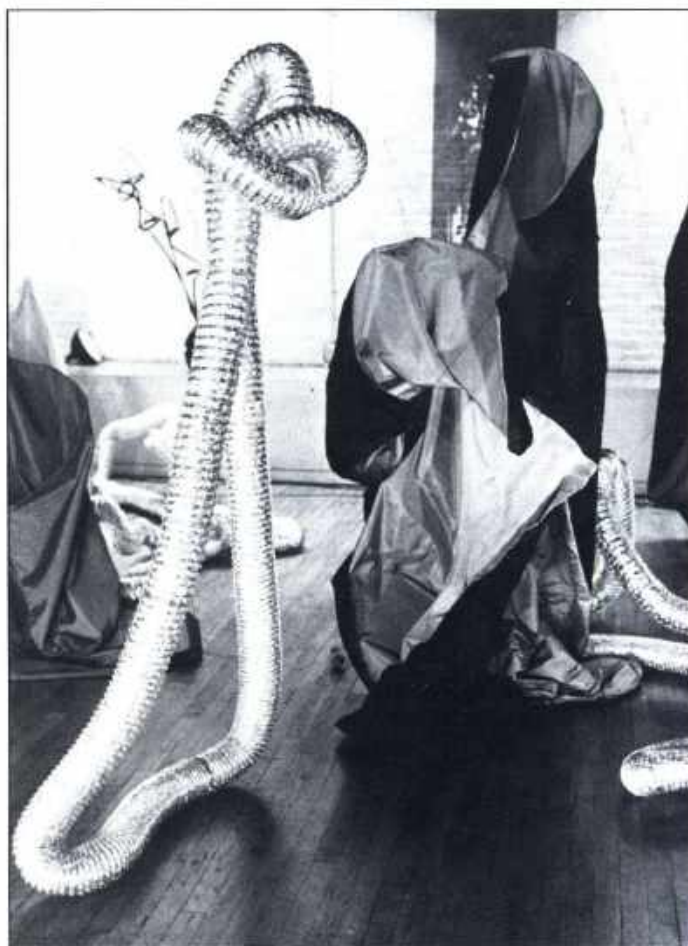
began calling his work "Visual Theater," a term which seems to successfully define his work.

Some of the greatest minds of the theater have created new terms to define their method and intentions, as in Grotowski's "Objective Theater," and "The Theater of the Absurd."

Symbolic thought and its representation did not begin and end in a convenient period of art history. It is not something to be shelved away and forgotten, but a vibrant and necessary means of organizing and presenting information. A growing number of theater artists and puppeteers have rediscovered the power of the symbol and are finding provocative ways to integrate this discovery into their work. Expressive work which unlocks the doors of the highly neglected imagination and reconnects with a larger world view and spiritual strength may help us reconnect with some of our lost glory.

This panel will feature a number of artists who are working to provocatively explore the power of theatrical expression. Panelists will include:

JULIE TAYMOR - "One of the things that attracts me to the theater is that it is about personal transformation. A play isn't a play unless it has that evolution of character.



Hanne Tierney, New York.

A Play Called Not and Now

Written by Gertrude Stein in 1936, it is interpreted by Tierney through the choreographed movement of taffeta fabrics and industrial materials.

photo: Richard Nonas

And making physical that evolution through the power of the visual image, I think, is the reason to do theater."

Julie Taymor has become known as an extraordinary theater artist and director, her work has included the critically acclaimed *Juan Darien*, as well as her more recent directorial work, the opera *Oedipus Rex*, and the most recent, *Titus Andronicus*.

PING CHONG - "My first experience of theatre in this country as a child was the spectacle of Southern Chinese opera. My first memory of the visual arts was a sketch by my father's best friend, a Chinese opera scenic shop painter, and a book of Japanese woodblock prints he gave me. I would spend my summers as a child seeing double-features back-to-back until the matrons in the movie houses threw me out. I have always thought of the theatre as a visual medium and always will."

While not directly coming from the puppet theater, Ping Chong's provocative stagings in works like, *Deshima* have explored and echoed many ways of imaging. He recently conducted an in-depth workshop/seminar at The Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta and is currently beginning work on a new piece with puppeteer and director, Jon Ludwig.

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE- "I used to think of the animated films I made as drawings for projection. The puppets are a way of drawing in three dimensions, the play a way of extending that drawing in time, and the sound (including dialogue) an audible drawing. Unlike academic painting, for which a preliminary sketch has been made, the work is the sketch. Not that it is thin or insubstantial but that the thinking and planning happens in the making."

William Kentridge is known in South Africa for his hauntingly beautiful animated films, he has long thought about collaborating with the Handspring Puppet Theater. *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, is the first of these associations. His insight into the interaction between film and puppet theater has yielded astonishing results.

THE SACRED and THE PROFANE - "Reflection and Light, Soul and Story"

As Cheryl Henson and I looked at the shape of the festival and the pieces we'd selected we realized that although we had not sought to impose a "theme" on the festival one had, in fact, emerged. The predominance of shadow puppet imagery, a form which had been wholly unexplored in the first festival, was at first glance worrisome. Perhaps, we thought, we were allowing too great an imbalance. But, as we looked more closely at the selections, we became comfortable with the idea that indeed there was a profound range to the explorations of the form and that it would be interesting to initiate a deeper look at this, in many ways, most ephemeral of forms.

The shadow or shaded image is interesting in its relationship to the examination of myth and the human psyche. In her book, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estes says, "This land between the worlds is that inexplicable place we all recognize once we experience it, but its nuances slip away and shape-change if one tries to pin them down, except when we use poetry, music, dance...or story."

The importance of theater as reflection, and theater as myth will bring us to an examination of some of the underlying issues putting us in touch with the sacred nature of theater.

In his book, *The Primal Mind*, Jamake Highwater, in examining Native American culture makes some startling observations. The question of the sacred nature of art in these societies is an integral aspect of understanding them. In discussing the existence of professional actors in the West, he states, "but among primal peoples it is inconceivable for such performers to exist outside the priesthood or the ritual groups that perform sacred ceremonies." He also clearly expresses one of the central issues of this panel, the coexistence of the sacred and the clown, he states, "The fact that the Kachinas are sacred doesn't obstruct their potential for actions that are grotesque, outrageous, and highly humorous - all such qualities exist." He goes on to say that in his opinion "a

parallel to such mordant antics may be seen in the Theatre of the Absurd, where we discover in the characters of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco people for whom the bizarre, the irrational, the comic, and the tragic are utterly compatible..."

This panel will include a guest mythologist to provide a context for the artist statements. Panelists will include:

LARRY REED - "In the West we often confuse the sacred and the sacrosanct. The sacrosanct is exclusive and narrow in scope, while the sacred can be all-inclusive."

Larry is the creator of *In Xanadu*. Based in San Francisco, Larry has become well-known for his work with Indonesian shadow puppetry. This production is part of a series of new works for giant shadows. It is a collaboration with performance artists from China, Tibet, Japan, the U.S., and the Middle East.

DIEGO MAJ- World renowned for its experimentation and innovation, Italy's Teatro Gioco Vita has been experimenting with the mythic and transformational nature of shadow imagery. Teatro Gioco Vita's director, Diego Maj, will offer his views on the sacred nature of the shadow image and its power to communicate across and bridge the gaps between worlds.

RALPH LEE- "The audience is always aware that the actor is wearing a mask. The spectator sees him take it on and off when the actor speaks his lines. The audience shares in the use of these storytelling devices. In one sense, this has a distancing effect; in another, the spectator is engaged in the process of making theater, and the experience of the event deepens."

As director of the Mettawee River Theater Company, Ralph Lee has become well known as an artist who regularly draws upon the riches of myth and mythic explorations. The festival will present *A Popol Vuh Story*, the newest Ralph Lee creation, which is a collaborative piece produced by Intar Hispanic American Arts Center. •

Revealing Roots

An Exhibition

by Kerry McCarthy

Revealing Roots: Uncovering Influences on Contemporary American Puppet Theater, an exhibition at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts June 7 — September 30, 1994, uncovers parallels between the work of contemporary American puppetry artists and traditional puppet theater from diverse cultures worldwide. This exhibition juxtaposes the puppets, sets, and props of 23 American companies with a wide range of traditional and folk puppetry including, among others, Japan's *bunraku*, Indonesia's *wayang*, and the *Bamana* puppetry of Mali. The exhibited artists successfully blended traditional puppetry with personal symbolologies and modern influences and rediscovered enduring traditions that offer ancient iconography, mythology and spirituality— influences expressed and revealed in their work.

Each new work of art, regardless of the form it takes, contains remnants, references and/or homage to other artists and artistic traditions. Artists of all disciplines have examined the expressions of "others." In his work with the Mettawee River Theater Company, for example, Ralph Lee creates puppetry performances intentionally rooted in non-European cultures. Mr. Lee recently commented,

...The gulfs between different cultures are impossible to overcome which is all the more reason to try to bridge the gaps. Most of the theater pieces I make are based on myths and legends from other cultures, living or past. I am forever involved with this impossible dialogue... I try to assimilate that world, picture myself in it... I would like to think I'm working out of that world— that the things I make are somehow in harmony with the aesthetics of the original culture even though it is my work, my take on the "other."

Just as Jean Dubuffet, a former puppeteer and puppet builder, looked to *art brut* or the art of the cultural outsider for inspiration in his painting and sculpture, today's puppetry artists examine the expression of "others" in an attempt to better understand themselves, their world and their art.

American artists often incorporate traditional styles of puppetry because the metaphoric qualities inherent in the form itself can heighten the meaning of the theatrical experience. In discussing *Way of Snow*, 1978, which took place in Alaskan, Indonesian and New York settings, Julie Taymor stated,

In the Indonesian section, puppets inspired from all of the *wayang* forms were used and, in the traditional manner, an oil lamp cast shadows. In the New York section overhead projectors and plexiglass shadow puppets were used instead of leather. This switch to an electric bulb made a powerful statement when it was performed in Indonesia. At that time many *dalangs* (puppet masters) were giving up the use of fire for more modern techniques. In so doing, they were abandoning the metaphoric meaning of the fire as a source of life and the flickering of the shadows with their aesthetic beauty and fragility.

Similarly, In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theater of Minneapolis turned to the Day of the Dead, an annual Mexican celebration that provides an opportunity for the community to remember deceased family and friends. The company found the imagery of this event's attendant costumes and masks an appropriate vehicle to reveal the darker side of Christopher Columbus and his conquest of indigenous people in *The Reaper's Tale*, 1989. In this production, the dead rise from the grave to recount greed's destruction of paradise.

In many instances, puppetry artists

turn to their own cultural past and appropriate directly from it. For example, the Czechoslovak-American Marionette Company uses antique and contemporary Czechoslovakian rod marionettes in an Americanized production of *Faust*. In another case, the Manteo Family Marionettes, a Sicilian-American puppetry company that has endured for three generations, performs the Renaissance tales of chivalry drawn from Orlando Furioso. With the participation of clan groups, Naa Kahidi Theater, too, preserves and sustains the stories and masking traditions of Native American culture by bringing to life the magical stories and strong visual style of Alaska's native people.

The curatorial process revealed many cases in which traditional and popular forms of puppetry impressed American artists. Japanese *bunraku* inspired Janie Geiser, Hystopolis Puppet Theater and Jon Ludwig, Ninth Street Theater, Roman Paska and Larry Reed found affinities with Indonesian *wayang*. Suzy Ferris included Mexican masking forms in her work. Peter Schumann and Michael Romanyshyn looked to Russian *vertep*; Paul Zaloom to England's irascible *Punch*. Schroeder Cherry, Garland Farwell, and Barbara Pollitt found source material in African puppetry and masks.

While the U.S. artists in this exhibition borrowed from the transformed multiple ethnic traditions of puppetry, they also had a significant influence upon puppet theater in other cultures. Cultural transmission is a two-way street. For instance, Larry Reed and Lee Breuer have worked with Dalang I Wayan Wija, a master puppeteer in Bali, and influenced the way he and other *dalangs* examine their native *wayang*. Dalang Wija now includes bits of Western culture and performance technique in his puppetry. American impact can also be seen in the international broadcast of Jim Henson's *Muppets*. *Sesame Street* and *The Muppet*

Show have been seen in 136 countries, thus leading to an increase in the use of hand-and-mouth' style puppets globally. In another example, Yaya Coulibaly, a puppeteer in Mali, mixes the iconography and framework of the Bamana folk performance with a western narrative structure and manipulation technique to create works that inject new ideas and forms into a traditional expression.

Revealing Roots is an exhibition that systematically examines the foundations of contemporary American puppet performances in specific cultural traditions of puppetry. While many stylistic and formal relationships were uncovered, the American artists affirmed that their art draws from many inspirations— visual, performing and literary expressions, political and social events, and personal experience. Each source is carefully mixed and blended, and then filtered through a sieve of personal expression and symbology. The end product for each artist is a highly individual and singular performance.



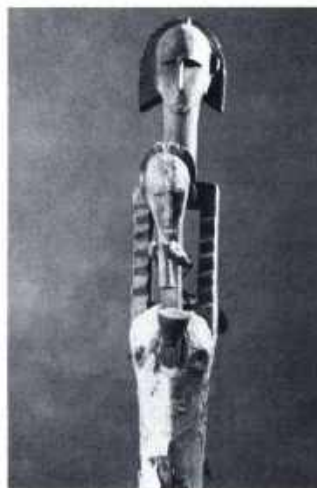
Naa Kahidi Theater, Box of Daylight

photo: Mark Kelly



The Colonel, from The Fish
Janie Geiser's Jottay Theater, 1989

photo: David Zeiger



African Puppet, Bamana Society, Mali

photo: John E. Barrett

Woyzeck on the Highveld

by Margaret Heinlen in conversation with Handspring Puppet Co.

In recent history, South Africa has most often appeared as a shrouded and distant country, a country with a face but no voice. With the recent political changes, South Africa is being welcomed back into the international community and must now find a voice for itself in politics, economics and the arts. It is somehow fitting that the Handspring Puppet Company chose to produce an adaptation of Büchner's *Woyzeck*, a play whose power lies in its universal and timeless representation of a common man capable of greatness of mind and feeling, driven to self-destruction by circumstances.

Director, designer, and animator of *Woyzeck on the Highveld*, William Kentridge, initiated the collaboration with Handspring Puppet Company, "to work in an area in which performance and drawing come together, to try and see if I could find an emotional depth and weight without recourse to the obvious technique of psychological transformations on an actor's face." After receiving a bachelors in Politics and African Studies, Kentridge studied theater and moved successfully from acting to directing and set design. As a natural outgrowth of this artistic evolution, he soon began to animate his personal drawing and graphic work, resulting in award-winning animated films.

Kentridge and Handspring share an interest in subject matter that explores South African realities and, "the enormous pressures on people—economically, politically, socially and personally—which pushes people to the extreme. That means also to violence."

However, he says of the decision to produce "Woyzeck," "We never had the intention to stage a modern Büchner interpretation. We wanted to say something about the present-day South Africa."

Founded in 1981, the Handspring Puppet Company set out to create puppet plays for children to tour through schools in Southern Africa. Since then the company has gone on to create award-winning adult productions, conduct puppetry workshops, mount exhibitions and produce TV programs, commercials and educational videos. The collaboration on *Woyzeck on the Highveld* seems as natural an extension for Handspring as for Kentridge.

Describing the process of their production, Kentridge noted its serendipitous consequences: "We started with the animation and created a cast of puppets that could inhabit such a harsh space by leaving the puppets raw wood roughly-hewn. So, like Commedia dell'arte, we then asked ourselves, what are we going to play tonight? We began writing and realized that we were doing Büchner and conceded that he did it much better than we. Likewise in rehearsals we found no way to hide the puppeteers, and their presence has become one of the strongest parts of the production."

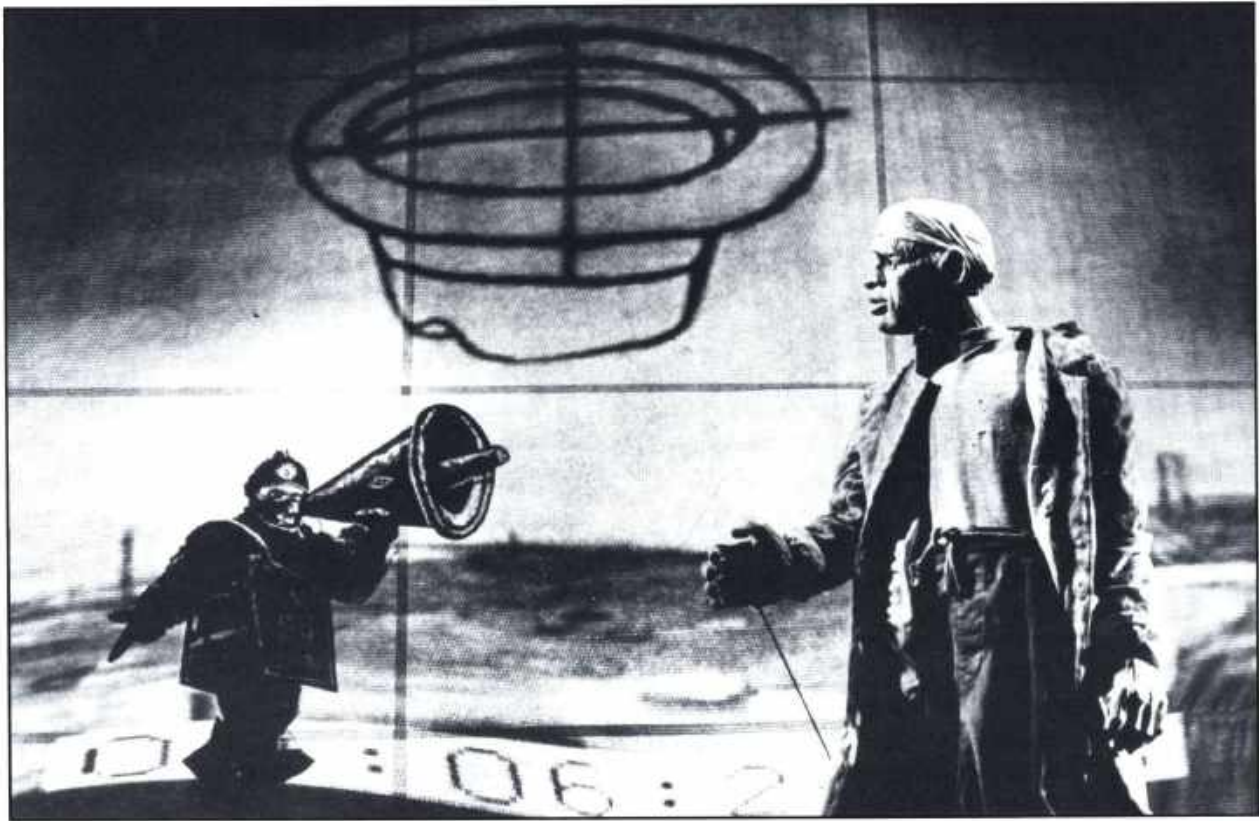
The three levels of action, rear-projected animation, live actors and puppetry, shift the story into the metaphysical realm which *Woyzeck* inhabits. In his first experience working with puppets, Kentridge has been most impressed by the, "strange condition where the manipulation of the puppet is completely transparent, where, in spite of seeing the palpable artificiality of the movement of the puppet, one cannot stop believing the puppet's own volition and autonomy."

This phenomenon is one of the reasons founders Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones who currently run the Handspring company came to puppet theater. Kohler, trained as an actor, says of his characters, "When a puppet performs simple everyday

actions, the audience seems to observe the action for the first time and the puppet's movements become somehow epic. For example, it is difficult for an actor to suggest the heroism in an act like drinking tea, but the puppet can make that leap and the audience can follow."

The three principal actors in *Woyzeck*, Louis Seboko, Busi Zokufa and Tale Motsepe, hail from the internationally-known Market Theater. Since their first collaboration with Handspring in the production of *Starbrites* which toured in South Africa and the United Kingdom in 1991, Busi Zokufa has decided to become a professional puppeteer.

The complex and tortured mind of *Woyzeck* is graphically illustrated in the juxtaposition of his explosive inner world animated on the backdrop/screen and his constraining external existence on the stage. We see *Woyzeck* through the eyes of madness. The animation not only conveys a sense of his environment from countryside, to shanties to interiors but also gives us these visions interpreted by the main character. The distance between the action on screen and stage is the thin line between reality and *Woyzeck's* twisted dream of it. The interplay of these very different realities are what most appeal to Kentridge who says of the text, "It is a modern piece in which the first signs of absurd theater are visible." This is also what attracts the audiences which will experience *Woyzeck on the Highveld* at the International Festival of Puppet Theater. •



Georg Büchner died at the age of 24 but left us three plays: *Dantons Death* (1835), *Leonce and Lena* and *Woyzeck*. At the time of his death *Woyzeck* was still an unfinished work.

In Woyzeck, Kentridge uses animated film shot on 16mm film. A series of charcoal drawings evocative of the drab metropole form the background. Behind the screen on stage, two dimensional shadow puppets are used and in front, three dimensional puppets. To complicate matters even further, an actor and four puppeteers are used to manipulate each puppet.



Fred Curchack

Dancing on His Own

interview by Rachel Elfenbein

Although Fred Curchack has never seen himself as a puppeteer or even as an actor, director, playwright, composer, visual artist or any category particularly, he has been developing puppets and puppet-like phenomena since he was a child growing up in Queens. There were twenty-eight kids on his block and they made puppet shows and House of Horrors in the garages and basements of their "lower-middle class attached houses." When Curchack was nine, he directed a Walt Disney extravaganza with about 20 of the 28 kids; he knew from the start that performance was for him.

Since then, Curchack has created over 40 original works, ten of them solos. He has studied Indian Kathakali with Krishnan Nambudiri, Japanese Noh with Kita Sadayo, Balinese Topeng with Nyoman Wenten, African Dance with Dinizulu, choreography with Alwyn Nikolais, and studied with Grotowski and the Polish Theater Laboratory.

RE: What are the main themes that you explore in your work?

FC: The main themes, well, what are the main themes in life, you tell me, you've lived. What are the themes in life.

RE: Well what do you focus on?

FC: I focus on what is of utmost necessity in my daily life and relationships and for me, if you want to call it philosophical, psychological, anthropological, sociological, or if you want to come out and say religious or spiritual, there's a profound need to understand, not just to acquire more and more knowledge about life and art - but to understand. As the Buddhists like to say, why we're born, why we suffer and why we die and I guess that time honored quest is absolutely essential to me

in my life and my work. I generally relate my research to the little details of daily life, the quotidian realities in which the true luminosity of the spirit and the true sources of suffering and possible solutions to the global problems can be located. I'm extremely political in my actions, I travel globally quite a bit. I've just been asked by the US Information Service to create a human rights video in Tunisia; and I've interacted with people from Arab nations and...

RE: I was going to ask if you see yourself and your art as political.

FC: Yeah, of course, I mean life is political and I have NEA funding and I've liberally spent the tax payers' dollars and I feel that its incumbent on me to understand the political, economic implications of accepting that money and spending it; and hopefully I spend it in ways which would really totally infuriate a lot of people (laughs). If they could understand what it was, but then again if they could understand what I was doing, they wouldn't be so pigheaded because their understanding would make them a lot more flexible...But I tour the world quite a bit...Dave Brubeck and his wife made an album years ago, very obscure and not that great an album but Louis Armstrong was on it and it was called *The Real Ambassadors*. The basic premise was that jazz musicians and artists were the real ambassadors and that all the political and economic and scientific exchange was surely important but that the artists are opening up possibilities which are absolutely essential for human

communication and international communication. But I really try to eschew, avoid didactic polemic, you know, political posturing. Telling people that this is right and this is wrong because I know it. What's important to me is that the work becomes a kind of real research, that I want to discover something, something that might be covered up and needs to be uncovered or discovered and that assumes that I don't know the answer to certain things. So I'm not going to bother making a piece about something I know the answer to because that'll just put me and everyone else to sleep.

RE: I want to talk specifically about *What Fools These Mortals Be*. What in particular attracted you to choose *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Was it an extension of your last piece in form or did you want to do something completely different?

FC: Well, there's always this issue of extension of my last piece. But the truth is, for instance, in the past few months I've worked on six different pieces. Some of them quite old, some of them quite new and each having a radically different line of formal concerns and aesthetic choices. So there are a lot of lines developing simultaneously for me. This is a continuation of a line of development of form that began with *Stuff That Dreams Are Made On*. It continues the use of mask, mask as puppet, puppet and shadow, and transformation of Shakespearian texts and using Shakespeare as the cultural icon that he represents. You know, to question culture, to question the values which have been encoded and enmeshed in our culture, not just since Elizabethan times, but they surely go back at least to the Greek times in which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* takes place. It happens in Athens and the hero, one of the heroes, is



Fred Churchack— U.S.A.
What Fools These Mortals Be

photo: Marvin Lichtner

Theseus, the founder of Athens, the founder of modern democracies. As such it has an extraordinary political basis and concern...It [*What Fools These Mortals Be*] is not just a continuation of the aesthetic concerns, it came because it was necessary at that moment in my life because of my relational world, because of my separation from my wife of sixteen years. The kind of turmoil I was going through in re-evaluating and coming to a new understanding of relationship and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of those relationship shows, *par excellence*. It takes a hideously dark view of relationship, anybody who wants to hold out that it's the most frothy and charming of Shakespeare's comedies had better ask a few simple questions - had best look at a few of the simple facts about the play. It begins with one of the most famous rapists in Greek mythology, Theseus...he's just subdued

Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons in battle and is now going to marry her. "Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword" (Churchack states in character) I try to make him, you know a kind of Greek Gyro salesman...and she [Hippolyta], my puppet, is a doll's head mounted on a little broom stick wearing a bridal veil and with battered, I inked in battered bride marks all over her battered face and he [Theseus] sticks his sword through her head as a part of his magic act.

RE: Well you seem to have these two themes ... the very sacred and then you have these doll heads and Howdy Doody dolls and things like that, are they in some way connected with issues too?

FC: Yeah, well Howdy Doody dolls are sacred to me. Why are they sacred? Actually I went and found two of the

dummies, two of the puppet ventriloquist dummies that I had had when I was a little boy. I mean the same basic models, the Jerry Mahoney and the Howdy Doody, and these are kind of, how can I say it, they are archetypal, they're images of eternal boy...which I've had since I was a little boy. And they were very spooky, you know, like the Twilight Zone dummies or those movies about the talking, killer dummies (laughs).

RE: Those are very creepy

FC: They're totally creepy.

RE: So do you think those objects are just as sacred as shadow puppet imagery?

FC: Well, sacred is a tricky term. I mean, sacred is as sacred does. For me the profane and the sacred are utterly intertwined and its hard to tell one from the next and you know, I give Diana, goddess of the moon her due but give me Aphrodite any day. Its pretty hard in that form of worship (he laughs) to discriminate between sacred and profane - particularly in our hopelessly confused society. So this is an extremely erotic play of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*...The puppets have a license to circumvent, to transcend or just plain not know about the limits of ordinary taboos. They're not as easy to censor, they're not as easy to hold back. When you see kids using puppets they let the puppet do all sorts of amazing things that they feel or they have in their dream world or have in their subconscious or close to the surface that they couldn't get away with ordinarily, you know and they'll have their little dollies do that stuff or little GI Joes or, for me, there was a Robby the Robot, who did all sorts of astonishing things in my youth. Actually, also I love the Jungian sand therapy, do you know what that is?

RE: No.

FC: They have this tray with sand and you sculpt it however you want and you fill it, they have racks and racks of little dolls, icons, tiny figurines of every kind and you fill it with all this stuff and that becomes a projection of your state of being at that

moment - this artistic portrait of your own inner life, the constellation of your psyche at that given moment - and then you talk about it... Its very good for kids because they're able to express very complex states of being just by looking at a rack of dolls and figurines and choosing the ones that they are attracted to and putting them in a certain relationship. And that's an image of a kind of artistic work that gives voice to the depths of the psyche.

RE: Do you think puppetry does that for you?

FC: Puppetry does that for me. Puppetry does that for everybody, I mean, give me a break. What's a talking frog and a talking pig...Puppets do that for everybody and...so for me, the dance, the theater, the playing of roles, the wearing of masks, the dancing of dances, the manipulation of puppets are all invitations to open up an aspect of our lives which is hideously neglected in contemporary life. We live lives of such obsession with recreation and entertainment, and we're so scornful of religions, probably for very good reasons, (laughter). But they are the sources of phenomenal astonishing energy, astonishing insight and intuition which are terribly neglected in education. I've been concerned about that neglect in my work with children, at the United Nations School and I've worked in kindergarten through sixth grade programs and I've advised educational programs and I've worked in universities as a professor for over 25 years...I did study a little bit with an old Huichol Indian shaman Don Jose, he's dead now, but he was over 100 years old and I asked him why he had become a shaman and he said, well he felt stupid because his culture talked about these astonishing human potentials and he didn't have them so that's what drove him on in his search. And I asked how long he had done his apprenticeship and he said 60 years. 60 years. That sobers you right up if you have any desire to open up something truly profound in artistic research that's akin to this ancient purpose of performance which is to perform the life of one's people and to open up the potentiality of human beings. It is so much vaster than ordinary education and upbringing indicates. If you really want

that then its sobering to think of a 60 year apprenticeship. And I do think in those terms, and that's my answer to your question of what I love in performance. Why I'm still involved in it. For me, it is my religion in a sense.

RE: How did you first work on the script? Did you have an idea of the script first and then work with a group?

FC: Not an idea so much. Well I did start with an idea - I'm going to play all of the roles. That's a hell of an idea to start with because I think I play 12 different characters in this one, which isn't all of them but its a lot of them and that I'm going to accept these roles as attributes of myself, The Self, and that these are all aspect of my life and that I am going to really try to get into each one without satirizing them. If I'm going to play Theseus as the founder of a thoroughly misogynistic [society] - having just defeated the matriarchy, the queen of the Amazons, having just suppressed all forms of goddess worship and getting on with a good old marriage - if I'm going to accept that as my point of view about what's going on in Shakespeare, why he chooses a marriage between the founder of democracy who defeats the queen of the matriarchy, then I'm going to get into it. I'm going to find out what is the most sexist and male competitive misogynistic aspect of myself that I can liberate and believe me that stuff is not far below the surface. And if I'm going to be the queen of the Amazons and the representative of a matriarchal form, I'm going to try to figure out what that is.

RE: Do you do that in a workshop or in a studio? Do you have a trunk full of dolls and things you keep?

FC: I searched and I built, I sculpted a lot of the masks and stuff or took apart a lot of dolls and rebuilt them in different ways but mostly I looked for things from my childhood, things I remember my sister playing with ... and in fact, there are photos of her with dolls that look just like these '50s dolls that I found for this; and the male dolls, the ventriloquist boy dolls

that I played with. The roots of our beliefs and behavior are to be found in childhood, surely, and the way we played house, the way we saw our parents interacting and what we brought into our present relationships. So why I found those kinds of puppets to work with, why they are important to me and why they have a radiance, why they have a force for me, because they are alive. They are alive in my memory.

RE: And your audiences'?

FC: Oh absolutely and even kids love this stuff, I mean its way too frightening for little kids but for teenagers and even for pre-teenagers they flip over it because its so, infantile, the stuff I do (laughter) and the jokes are so completely bad taste kiddy pee pee jokes

RE: And you're doing it!

FC: And I'm doing it because that's one of the gateways into the subconscious. Was it Freud who said that dreams are the royal road to the subconscious. I did some years of Jungian dream therapy and I love analyzing dreams and their sources in my subconscious and in my daily life. And *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be taken that way. In a dream, you always have to come back to very concrete feelings about each image and these little dolls are filled with that kind of dream-like presence. Oh, so this is what I wanted to say, way back...about the evolution of the form, which is when I was working on this piece, I had a dream which was a very important dream for the piece. I was working on this piece and I had an insight to develop my shadow art further. I discovered a way in the dream that I could project no, no it wasn't that I discovered a way. I saw a beautiful young girl, like my daughter, who was like 10 years old at that time. This kind of divine little girl is projecting her own image onto a screen and I saw her doing that and from the other side of the screen. It was more exquisite and inspiring and beautiful than any work of art that I had ever seen, more beautiful, surely, than a movie or a video projection. It was a kind of projection but it was projecting one's living face, living

image onto a screen. I said wow! this is amazing, how did you do that little girl? And the little girl in the dream showed me how to do it using a lens. I woke up and this was one of those lucid dreams that are in color and vivid and I remembered every aspect of it. I wrote it down and immediately found a lens store and went out and bought a bunch of lenses and a bunch of lights and experimented with a kind of opaque projector, projecting my face and my hands onto a screen and I found out how to do it from the dream. I was dancing with a kind of joy when I figured out how to do it. Now I ultimately didn't use that same technique for the shadow projections in this play. But for me it was not just a formalistic breakthrough like figuring out a new technique...I mean its not going to make technological history but the thing that was there was this innocent happy beautiful aspect of the self which was projecting colored luminous images onto a screen. For me that was a breakthrough psychologically from the very dark realm of *Stuff That Dreams Are Made On* which I still perform and still love to perform and it still has a luminous quality for me but this next phase in *What Fools These Mortals Be* is filled with colors, rainbows, light and color and reflections of gems, jewels, crystals and things that are filled with color. That was a moment of growth in my own inner life which is that its not just going into the dark shadowy painful realms of relationship but really into that glorious luminous aspect that travels side-by-side with the shadow.

RE: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

FC: Well, hopefully that it is extremely funny. I mean I really want to cry when I work on this stuff, I want to be disarmed, I want to feel my own vulnerability exposed and not use the performance as a way, as a subtle way of creating ever more complex ways of hiding, ways of arming myself, ways of masking myself or en-puppeting myself. But, if its not filled with laughter, really belly laughs, completely outrageous surprises and astonishment and if I don't feel in touch with that from moment to moment then I know that I'm not on the right path in this particular work

because *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for all its darkness, is a comedy....I don't know if its just a higher form of masturbation or (laughter) some sort of incredible research into playing multiple roles but the dialogue between a puppet and a shadow or between a mask and a not mask or the doll and the person are all central concerns of this piece. How can you tell the dancer from the dance, how can you tell the puppet or the mask from the person is symbolically an interesting question for me because I discovered long ago that there was something very puppet-like about my daily behavior. I discovered long ago that there was something intriguingly and sometimes terrifyingly puppet-like about my own daily behavior; that I behaved as if I was being operated not from my own center but from some external force - maybe it was the force of society or my education or my upbringing. Maybe it was the force of who knows what: heredity, astrology, religion or acculturation but there didn't exist a center to my thoughts or feelings or actions and in noticing this quality of daily life I developed a tremendous need to stop acting like a puppet and that is probably the central interest I have in playing this in this relatively grown up phase of my life. Playing with puppets helps reflect what is puppet-like in my behavior and what is the puppeteer. Who or what is actually operating this...I am concerned about living my life very fully and not living as a mere puppet. So this piece, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and particularly in relationship, which, I don't mean just sexual or romantic or domestic partnerships but with my own children and with my students and with my teachers and with my friends and most particularly with someone with whom I am so intimate that we express ourselves sexually, there is a desire not to behave like a puppet and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the characters are so clearly being manipulated by a puppeteer. Even though Oberon and Puck cast all sorts of spells that manipulate people, one has a sense of their being puppeteers. Even puppeteers operating the puppeteers. Somehow that cutting of strings would be the happiest things that could happen from this kind of research. That the Pinocchio fellow could actually get up and dance on his own. •

THE RADICALITY OF THE PUPPET THEATRE

PETER SCHUMANN

I wrote this essay at the request of Irina Uvarova and Viktor Novastsky for a brand-newborn Russian puppetry magazine, during Bread & Puppet Theater's first tour to Siberia in May 1990, between rehearsals in Tomsk, Novn Vasyugan and Abakan, while being overwhelmed by totally new impressions. Naturally, my observations and conclusions are from a distinctly Western perspective. But even though puppet theatre in Communist countries has, until now, been an official branch of the government-sponsored culture, the malaise of puppet theatre, as well as its background and future possibilities, are essentially the same in both worlds. Where the polemics don't apply, they may serve as a warning for what could be in store as an inevitable by-product of cultural liberation.

Thinking is an activity which takes bulky, disorganized storage in the brain, and attempts to put the pieces into a harmonious relationship. The result pleases the brain and makes the thinker happy. But to inspire such a process there needs to be a desire to communicate the happy conclusion to the world-at-large where its validity is tested. In the case of any revelations that can be made about the true nature of puppet theatre, I am not sure that I feel the communicative urge, that I don't prefer the confusion and obscure circumstances which typify the situation of puppet theatre.

Puppet theatre, the employment and dance of dolls, effigies, and puppets, is not



only historically obscure and unable to shake off its ties to shamanistic healing and other inherently strange and hard to prove social services. It is also, by definition of its most persuasive characteristics, an anarchic art, subversive and untameable by nature, an art which is easier reached in police records than in theatre chronicles, an art which by fate and spirit does not aspire to represent governments or civilizations, but prefers its own secret and demeaning stature in society, representing, more or less, the demons of that society and definitely not its institutions.

The puppeteers' traditional exemption from seriousness— (e.g.) from the

seriousness of being analytically disciplined and categorized by the cultural philosophy of the day— and their asocial status acted also as their saving grace, as a negative privilege that allowed their art to grow. The habitual lament of modern puppeteers about their low and ridiculous status is unfortunately disrespectful of their own art, or proves an impotent attempt to market their work as so-called serious art. (The physiognomy of modern puppetry is often a sad example of this impotent seriousness, especially where animals are portrayed with the jolly stupidity of chewing-gum advertisements, adding the creatures' fateful features to the already existing set of human stereotypes, defunct physiognomies, really, meant to be cute but desperately sarcastic at heart.

In the meantime, the modern German puppet-interpreters have come up with the grand solution to the social-status problem of puppetry, rebaptizing it "Figuretheater," so that nobody will find them guilty of complicity with Kasper, Punch, or Petroushka. Luckily, the old art of puppetry is much too old to be seriously affected by such silly ploys, and luckily there are plenty of live examples to prove it.

And yet, despite the general tendency of our cultural effects to be subservient to the power of the market, to money-making and to the associated steeping of our souls into as much nonsense as possible, despite the fact that puppet theatre exists mostly in the feeble manner of an art obedient to the demands of the entertainment business, puppet theatre also exists as a radically new and daring art form: new, not in the sense of unheard-of newness, but in the sense of an uncovered truth that was there

all along but was so common it couldn't be seen for what it was. Radical in the sense of not only running away from established concepts, it also succeeded in a widening of the heart that allowed for greater inclusion of more modern and ancient art into the ancient art of puppetry.

The radicality of the puppet theatre includes a redefinition of language as not merely a tool of convenient communication. Puppet language is more than an instrument of fine-tuned information. It is an experiment which strips words and sentences of their secondary fashionable contexts and condenses quantities of habitual gossip into singular terms. The puppets need silence, and their silences are an outspoken part of their language.

In puppet language words sing and stutter in the mouths of singers and stutterers who are especially equipped for this task, whose vocabulary is not academically learned or extracted from everyday uses of language, but shows an ongoing struggle to come to terms with the naming of things by their right names in a slow, haphazard way. In the puppet theatre words are attached to faces which don't move externally but are all the more obviously able to produce meaning.

Language in the dramatic arts is the reflector of human thought and trivia through the actors' imitative efforts. Acting is an art that the actor knows about from the growing-up practices of children, who mimic adults as a means of entering their world just as they mimic animals to cast off their fear of the wild. Unfortunately, the actor lacks the child's sincerity at this game and has to replace the child's urgent need with an education of trickery, with facial and vocal gymnastics aimed at the most naturalistic pretending of something unreal and intangible: the ghost of a reality that is not there but insists on our acceptance of its



existence. His whole education is geared towards the intensification of this fakery that is supposed to transport the viewer over the gap of missing reality. It isn't this gap between made-up and real reality, though, which is so bothersome. The weightiness of the unasked-for and affected sincerity in the aping of kitchen and bedroom intimacy, and the intimacy of pain—that is what is so demeaning. Real pain in life is a serious relative of death, a terrorizer, usually a visitor of great consequence. The detailed imitated pain in movies makes a mockery of the vital resources which enable our nature to fight pain or even submit to pain gracefully.

Sincere intimacy, if anything, seems to be the addictive spice with which the movie industry—the most visible exponent of the art of acting—has modern humankind hooked. Subject matter and visual adornment are secondary to this technique: the peep-show secrecy blown up into the dimension of public frenzy without teeth because of the regularity

with which it occurs. Eventually, real intimacy has to bear the weight of the imitated intimacy.

Because of its domineering status in the consciousness of the general public, acting performs an unquestioned political role in the manipulation of public self-consciousness. The self-conscious viewer's second-nature sincerity feeds entirely on the viewer's educated identification with nothing much, with replay of his own littleness. And even if one would consider this an endearing trait which is generally justified considering our decrepit circumstances, it is defeatist by nature, not modest. On the whole, it amounts to weeping and whining in the face of a harsh world.

I find acting sad, a sad art, especially in the movies: the jollier they try to be, the sadder they are. (The glib, self-satisfied expressions on so many faces of First World beneficiaries are a direct result of the movies. The faces seem to belong to actors who use their features to perform the standard role of the Good Life for the benefit of everybody else.)

Remember, not long ago, B. Brecht took a look at the Chinese theatre and, also, I suppose, at puppet theatre) and realized that the actor's service to the dramatic arts could be salvaged from this psychological dilemma if the actor was allowed to enjoy his art as an art of faking, and with that be liberated from the self-possessed art of acting, and instead by allowed to concentrate on the text. And Brecht went to Hollywood and half-heartedly fought with Hollywood about this issue. But Hollywood understood very well the human weakness for perfect recreation, the abandoning of ourselves and our unrewarding lives, the need for a pillow for our brains which translates into the sentimental excuse for any brutality whatsoever, and has since served us countless sentimental brutalities, successfully avoiding Brecht's message.

If the movies were not so big and acting so glorious, I would say: let it go as

it goes, they will eventually act themselves to death anyway. But here it is, the perfectly adequate symbol of our culture, exposed in what it presents to us with oppressive regularity: a pretty face in distress, on the surface nothing more than a pitiful story, but in reality a corporate giant, a political powertool, very able to hurt, very willing to be used in any direction, very able, as we all know now, to serve up presidents, dwarfs, and demagogues at random.

Compared to the highfalutin aspirations of actors, the puppeteers' handling of themselves and of the objects and effigies entrusted into their hands seems quite formal and modest. The considerable talents for the puppeteers' bag-of-tricks showmanship all originate in their preoccupation with things. The puppeteers harvest piles of humanlike and yet otherworldly qualities from the observation of objects, especially from their practice of moving these objects. The souls of things don't reveal themselves easily. What speaks out of a doll's eyes is often beyond control. The manipulation of puppets is over and above the willful targeting which aims for certain results from an audience. The puppeteers' only hope of mastering their puppets is to enter their puppets' delicate and seemingly inexhaustible lives. Puppets are not made to order or script. What's in them is hidden in their faces and becomes clear only through their functioning. They are born from the raw clay. Their creation has to be as far removed as possible from the purposeful definitions of dramatic characters or story. Only through this disconnected distance are they able to enter actively into the story as independent agents, not as providers of purpose.

The radicality of the puppet theatre is further evident in its employment of music as music, as sound production in its own right, operating in its own sphere, parallel to and not governed by the visual theatre. The listening which the puppet theatre



teaches is diametrically opposed to the modern notion of music as a service tool for the consumer and his vacationing and working habits, a wishy-washy, something between Muzak and white noise, meant to stimulate the desired moods in an exhausted brain. It is exactly this service attitude, culminating in the unquestioned duplicity of effect of vision and sound, or rather, the misuse of sound for the purposes of vision, which keeps music from acting as music for the benefit of the larger scheme of collaborative production.

(Modern puppet theatre suffers from the tape recorder just as much as it suffers from foam rubber. As in so many other examples of 20th-century inventiveness, the genius of engineering also seeds the virus of decay. The all-purpose, multitalented cassette player, loaded to the brim with wonderfulness, inhibits modern puppetry like nothing else. The little machine is an international omnipresence in the puppet world. It stinks. It takes the guts out of the trade.)

Music hurts as the animal kingdom hurts. From what? From the dispirited understanding of its sense, from the exploitation of its innards by a race of spoilers and manipulators, from not being allowed the circumstances it needs for its own growth and life.

The tolerance and indiscriminate loving-power of music are proverbial. But the political usage of the healing and soothing traits of music makes it hard for musicians to create actively helpful sounds or to extract already existing sounds from the world of sound without losing them to an exploitive culture. Air which is burdened with tons of carelessly discarded sounds has trouble carrying selective sounds and needed sounds. If music is the relationship of some and all sounds to each other and the psychic effects of these, but also if music is one of the rare, wholesome utterances of self, where the self is not only bone and brain but an attuned part of a large body of selves, like ourselves and more than ourselves, then the concert stage with its thoroughly specialized clientele is too small a forum for the message of music.

I think of puppet theatre as a possible context for music, a place where music can be useful without being corrupted.

Finally, the radicality of puppet theatre derives from the definition of puppet theatre as applied and socially embedded sculpture. Puppet theatre is committed to common sense as a guiding principle in the making of sculpture. The sculptural effigies which try to give meaning to our public places have long ceased to represent public heartbeat and yearning. They also don't frighten us any more, other than intellectually, as symbols of status quo cultural politics. The meaning of sculpture has long been connected to its expense, and with that, to its sponsorship. The shift of sponsorship from princes and churches to governments and cigarette-makers is as sad as the drudgery of history, a shift from one

oppressive authority to another. The liberating momentum of sculpture in puppet theatre lies in the fact that it provides a better *raison d'être* for sculpture than that of a sculpture's retirement into statues, be they in private chambers or public places. In the puppet theatre sculpture serves a quasi-narrative purpose, if narration is understood as the revelation of an inner world and if we allow the possibility that the narration hinges on and is inspired by the sculpture.

Puppetry is conceptual sculpture, cheap, true to its popular origins, uninvited by the powers-that-be, its feet in the mud, economically on the fringes of existence, technically a collage art combining paper, rags, and scraps of wood into kinetic two- and three-dimensional bodies. The conceptual element, the sheer concentration on concept at the expense of communicative pleasantness, the sacrificing of the decorative or handsome appearance of an inner theme in an outside form or art object for a greater adherence to this inner theme, are practiced with a certain restraint in a puppet theatre.

Unlike most modern conceptual art, puppet theatre realizes its conceptualizations in an atmosphere of what is possible or of what can be understood and taken from it, and not as an exercise which demonstrates an extreme example of concept. This excessive exhibition of process and avoidance of the art object confine most modern conceptual art to a tiny clique of makers, interpreters, and investors.

Basically, I think of conceptual art or of the preeminence of concept in art as the result of a lot of art-making, as in old artists' art, in the sense of a much higher concentration on essentials like gesture and meaning of gesture, or the daring of bare-bones composition in lieu of the show and its opulence. The priest in the Russian Orthodox church service is so sure of his performance of accurate motions, which

CONCEPTUAL ART



are given to him and which are totally inaccessible to his private interpretations, that, indeed, he can afford to gossip between his sacramental duties. The shaman, whose handling of objects is an accumulation of pointed, purposeful gestures which derive from attempts at divine communication, can turn his back to the audience.

The puppeteer whose performance starts somewhere else, namely with a passion for the correct or right raw materials, judged by their former uses, availability, origin, cost, weight, beauty, can perform confidently with the help of these raw materials. None of these qualities is immediately obvious to an audience. The process of their selection, their actual importance as participatory forces in the final product, are nothing more than a subtle presence, and yet he owes his show to these invisible ingredients.

To wrap it up: the modernist puppeteer struggles with the same basic questions which bother or don't bother and provoke or don't provoke all modernist artists. All art producers, even puppeteers, are children of Modernism.

What has Modernism achieved? It has destroyed taboos of perception. It has released powers of hand and brain of which hand and brain were not aware before. The tragedy of Modernism is in its political and social failure, its inability to apply more than the formal discoveries to the historical situation. The liberation process of Modernism has been confined to art and art-related production. The lofty ideals of Modernism did not penetrate the social sphere of habit or of the oppressive exercises of organizational authority. Maybe the question is: how far did Modernism mean to go? Did it ever direct its dreams beyond the Russian Revolution which it failed to survive? Kandinsky and Schoenberg believed in some higher, quasi-religious aspirations of Modernism, but Nazi Germany and modern capitalism dwindled these hopes into the specialization of sheer esoteric practices which we now think of when we say "Modern Art."

The homeless look into the elegantly empty, super-expensive gallery spaces of Soho and defy progress in art.

Does the idea of doing with art more than art still exist? Are the arts interested in more than themselves? Can puppet theatre be more than puppet theatre by giving purpose and aggressivity back to the arts and make the gods' voices yell as loud as they should yell?

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An Alchemist of the Surreal

excerpts from "Jan Svankmajer: a Bohemian Surrealist" by Michael O'Pray

Jan Svankmajer is an extraordinary film-maker. His films have exhilarated, shocked, mesmerized and entertained audiences since they first became available in the West in the mid-80's. His imagery is violent, disturbing, witty, macabre and inimitably perverse in its use of marionettes, puppets, dolls, automata and bizarre transformations of objects, materials and beings. The humor is black and surreal, reflecting his profound surrealist pessimism at the human condition. His unique sensibility and style has had an enormous impact, spawning imitators in TV advertising, pop promos and film at large. At the same time, he has inspired and influenced countless film-makers. His work finds its reflection in the dark, decadent and cruel futurisms of Scott's *Alien* and *Bladerunner*, Gilliam's *Brazil*, Lynch's *Dune* and Verhoeven's *Robocop*. That an obscure film-maker steeped in Czech culture, whose films revive and magically re-invent its marionette and puppet tradition, its Mannerist painting and its rich surrealist lineage, should strike such an accord with the Western audiences says much for his talent. It may also be a telling comment on the West's staple and meagre cultural diet. Ironically but perhaps inevitably, his reputation is greater outside his native Czechoslovakia.

Svankmajer works primarily in three-dimensional film animation. Rich poetics are expressed through his construction of bizarre universes in which an intensely physical surrealism rules. The cruel, claustrophobic world of Kafka is constantly evoked in his films, assisted particularly by his enthusiasm for puppets, dolls and cut-out figures; all forms of depicting the human in ways that suggest an evacuation of the spirit, a dehumanisation.

Puppetry is part of Czechoslovakia's traditional popular culture, and is importantly linked too with his early training in the theatre. A recurrent strain of deep black comedy also periodically informs Czech cinema (as it does many other East European cinemas), surfacing as a mix of morbid fantasy and grim humor and linking intriguingly with the contemporary works of Polanski or Borowczk (whose short "animations" still disturb more than his later art/porn features). Nonetheless, Svankmajer has always distanced himself from the existential narratives of the art cinema, and his surrealist loyalties imply a rejection of such psychologistic tendencies in the cinema.

Pier Paolo Pasolini once remarked that there were two kinds of surrealism; one emanating from and developing the French movement founded by Breton and Aragon, and the other, less culturally specific, running through Kafka. The often-bleak and sometimes cruel pessimism in Svankmajer's work are part of a disparate tradition in cinema: one in which surrealism is provocatively intertwined with such diverse components as Gothic horror, Grotesquerie and Modernism.

In this context, Svankmajer might best be termed an *alchemist*.

Jan Svankmajer

Svankmajer was born in 1934 in Prague where he still lives. He trained at the Institute of Applied Arts from 1950 to 1954 and then at the Prague Academy of Performing Arts (Department of Puppetry). He soon became involved in the Theatre of Masks and the famous Black Theatre, before entering the Laterna Magika Puppet Theatre where he first encountered film.

“ I feel that this myth [of Faust] is very central to our civilization, as much as the myth of Adam and Eve and others where one must choose a path. At times when civilizations are beginning to decay and crumble, as I feel we are, it is especially useful or important to turn to these types of myths.

I went back to what is believed to be the authentic manuscripts attributed to Faust, if one ever in fact existed. The incantations in the film are directly from the medieval texts.

I reject labels such as puppeteer, film-maker and all suggestions that my work is politically motivated. I consider myself a surrealist, which is more than an art movement for me; it is a philosophy and a way of life.

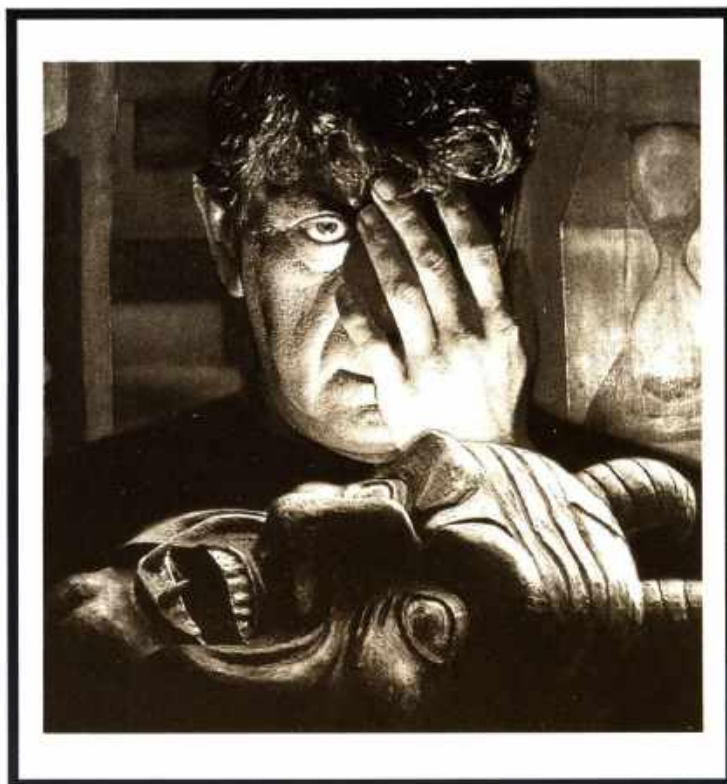
In his films, what appear to be ordinary objects such as a broomstick or a chicken actually are present as symbols or superstitious and subconscious suggestion. ”

—Jan Svankmajer (with the help of his producer Michael Havas) interviewed by Margaret Heinlen

Since 1958 he has made collages, "touch sculptures" and objects. In 1970 he met his wife the surrealist painter Eva Svankmajerova and the late Vratislav Effenberger, the leading theoretician of the Czech Surrealist Group. Svankmajer joined the group at that time and is still a member of it today. A film-maker, a graphic artist, and a ceramic maker, since 1974 Svankmajer has been experimenting with tactility. The results of these experiments have been summed up in a yet-unpublished book, "Touch and Imagination."

Faust

The film combines live action with animation and life-size marionettes.



A man wandering the streets of present-day Prague is presented with a mysterious plan which indicates a certain house in the city. In the cellar of this house the man discovers a deserted theatre dressing room and a soiled edition of *Goethe's Faust*. Putting on Faust's classic costume and reading aloud from the opening dialogue, what begins as a game becomes reality and the man finds himself in an alchemist's laboratory. Encouraged by two untrustworthy characters, the man Faust is initiated into a world of Black Magic and summons Mephisto who promises to serve him.

Faust is plunged into Gounod's opera about himself and, in a dream, experiences flying through the Cosmos—through the Microcosm, then the Macrocosm, through Heaven and Hell. Determined to have a good time, Faust visits the King of Portugal and conjures up David and Goliath. Mephisto sends Helen of Troy to seduce Faust. His passion aroused, Faust traps Helen in a cluttered props room. he throws himself upon her only to discover that he has been making love with a

wooden marionette in the shape of a repulsive devil. Faust's time is up as the clock strikes twelve. Fire breaks out and the King of Hell invades Faust's dressing room. The corridors echo with the sound of the Devil's laughter as Faust flees for his life. Reaching the safety of the streets of Prague, Faust lights a cigarette to calm his nerves, and steps out into the road...

Faust was an official selection at the Cannes Film Festival, and will open at New York's Film Forum October 26.

Real and Imaginary Objects:

Symbolic Theaters in Turn-of-the-Century Paris. Judith Gautier, Stephane Mallarmé and Alfred Jarry

by John Bell



19th century French Guignol stage

The development of American and European theater in these last decades of the twentieth century has included an expanding interest in puppets and performing objects—“material images of humans, animals, or spirits created, displayed, or manipulated in performance”—as legitimate means of making theater.¹ A growing recognition of non-western theater traditions in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, as well as an interest in “low-culture” European performance traditions, has helped performing object theater move beyond hand- and string-operated puppets into a vast array of other forms. In addition, the developments of 20th-century technology have extended machines into the world of theatrical performance, and the machine has become, in some ways, the quintessential performing object of this century.

But the modern development of performing object theater in the West is not that new, although its progress has

long been obscured by an unswerving historical focus on actors and dramatic literature. It was, in fact, at least a century ago that performing objects began to be rediscovered, as part of the invention of modern “avant-garde” theater. Since the creation of cultural hierarchies during the Enlightenment, masks, puppets, and other performing object techniques like *cantastoria* and *bänkelsang* (performance with painted pictures) has been relegated to a cultural status far below that of the theater of actors. In the nineteenth century, as cultural historian Richard Pischel said in 1900, puppet theater had become “the favorite child of the mass of the people, and only the step-child of the cultured class.”²

But Symbolism, the French literary movement that opposed realism and other idealizations of the rational which had grown out of the Enlightenment, supported an array of alternative theatrical styles which supported the development of modern performing object theater. Other European theater makers equally interested in symbols and abstraction independently followed parallel paths. In France, the symbolist rediscovery of performing objects began in the 1880s in already fertile ground. Guignol, the venerable symbol of French puppet theater, had been created in Lyon only 65 years earlier (not a long time for a national icon). The Guignol puppet theaters populating Parisian parks were but one aspect of a popular theater scene which included peep shows (*vues d'optique*), panoramas, magic lanterns, and the shadow puppets exotically termed “ombres chinoises.” Like urban artists all over Europe, writers and artists in Paris forsook the limited possibilities of state-supported and commercial stages for the home-grown delights of the *cabaret artistique* and salon performance, whose diminutive spaces were natural venues for puppet theater and other performing

objects—popular forms now “elevated” to high art.

But the influence of performing object theater was larger than this. In addition to appropriating traditional performance techniques, turn-of-the-century theater makers relied on performing object theater in two other ways. Puppet and mask theater was seen as a fresh metaphor and dramaturgical guide for a new, non-realistic actors’ theater, but, perhaps most importantly, this theater was also seen, by some artists, as a fundamental element of a modern, symbolic European theater. Different French theater artists in the symbolist years embraced one or more of these approaches, and I would like to look at a few of the ways—actual and hypothetical—that this happened.

Traditional Forms Made Modern: Judith Gautier

The extent of the turn-of-the-century rediscovery of performing objects (which actually had strong roots in the Romantic movement of the previous turn of the century) can be seen in the numbers of puppet stages permanently built into the architecture of individual cabarets in urban Europe: there was a *szopka* stage in Cracow’s “Green Balloon” cabaret, a hand-puppet stage in Barcelona’s “Els Quatre Gats,” and a shadow theater in the Parisian “Chat Noir.”³ Paris also hosted a number of *cabarets artistique*, including Henri Signoret’s “Petit Théâtre des Marionnettes,” which used moveable, statuesque automatons about three feet tall (controlled from below by levers connected to strings running inside the puppet bodies) to stage dramas by Shakespeare, Molière, and other classic European playwrights.

One of the lesser-known theater-makers of the symbolist period was the French playwright, novelist, and translator Judith Gautier. Like many innovative women performers, such as George Sand,

who began a hand-puppet theater in the mid-nineteenth century, or Natalie Barney, an American in Paris whose intimate performances with and for women took place in the 1920's, Gautier worked in the small-scale environs of salon-style theater.

Like many nineteenth-century European children, Gautier had a marionette theater while growing, and when she began to write plays for the theater in her forties, it was only a bit unusual that she would perform her first drama, *The Merchant of Smiles*, with puppets. This five-act "*pièce japonaise*," with music by her collaborator Benedictus, was then produced for over 100 performances at the Odéon theater in 1888, with actors, but Gautier maintained her interest in performing objects. She created a "Petit Théâtre" at the Salle Kriegelstein in 1897, opening with a production of *A Devil's Tear* (written by her father, Théophile Gautier), which she performed with statuesque rod puppets technically similar to Signoret's. Following her liaison with composer Richard Wagner, she made a new verse translation of his *Parsifal* and presented the first French performance of the opera at the Petit Théâtre in 1898. Edmond Harcourt's review of the production gives a good idea of the social and economic nature of this Parisian *fin-de-siècle* puppet theater:

The public? Invited guests. The actors? Puppets made of wax. The work? Parsifal. Two performances, perhaps three. For this, Mme. Judith Gautier has written a new introduction. For a year she molded her thirty or forty figurines with patient skill and fashioned joints and springs to move them. Illustrious artists anonymously painted the sets, and the costumes were discussed in solemn sessions held before the Gotha of contemporary art. Literary greats coveted the honor of serving as stagehands; the light operator is a member of the Institute. A prince sang in the chorus and a noble lady, who would not have dared tread the boards of a real theater, came to lend her talents to a wax puppet which moves but does not talk. The rehearsals took place in great mystery. One could not guess who the performers were by their voices.

Parlor games! More money will have been spent than made with them, but they will produce more pleasure than sadness.⁴

While Gautier benefitted, like George Sand, and other high-culture European puppeteers, from the assistance of various artists of her acquaintance, she also duplicated the approach of the performers of the popular theater by involving herself in every aspect of production: she built puppets, made costumes, designed and painted her sets, prepared texts, and acquired modern theater lighting equipment to make her theater.



Shadow figure from the Chat Noir cabaret

Innovations with Objects: Mallarmé and the Symbolists

In the 1890's the French symbolists produced a substantial body of theater work with producer/director Aurelien Lugné-Poe, at the Théâtre d'Art and then the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre. Many of these pieces, especially those involving the group of painters called "Les Nabis," were image-based productions involving objects. In the *Song of Songs*, music, movement, scenic elements, and colored light productions were presented as a disparate "synthesis of the arts," with no attempt to depict verisimilitude. Similar distancing effects were employed in Pierre Quillard's *The Girl with Cut-Off Hands*, which divided texts among two distinct

bodies of actors and a narrator who stood alone downstage. A backdrop of iconic angels by Paul Sérusier (one of the Nabiim) was viewed by the audience through a gauze scrim, a technique parallel to that historically used (on a smaller scale) by European marionette theaters. In the Théâtre d'Art's poetry performances, syntheses of symbolist texts (such as Rimbaud's *Drunken Boat*) and symbolist paintings by Les Nabis (like Paul Ranson's Japanese-style folding screen for the Rimbaud poem) were presented as separated theatrical elements, in a manner paralleling the traditional aesthetics of performing object theater.

Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, while not involved in these large-scale productions, performed in his own Tuesday-night salon, and proposed (but never performed) an interesting object theater piece of a quite different sort to dramatize his magnum opus, *The Book*, a work which was to "contain all knowledge" in the Wagnerian-style "total work of art."⁵ In a manner reminiscent of the object theater of New York performance artist Stuart Sherman and the chance-determined performances of John Cage, Mallarmé proposed a deconstructed reading of bits of *The Book*, in which text becomes a physical object to be manipulated in different orders to produce different structures. Theater historian Frantisek Deak describes the hypothetical performance:

The performance would take place in Mallarmé's apartment. The set consists of a lacquered library against the wall, facing the audience, and a single electric lamp under which he would read/perform the text. The beginning of the performance is announced by the sound of a bell. Slightly bent, Mallarmé the performer/operator enters through the space between the chairs. He greets the audience on the right, and glances to the other side. He approaches the lacquered library, which has a set of six pigeon holes on a diagonal. Each hole contains five easily visible sheets. He takes one sheet from each pigeon hole, flips through them, and begins to read and comment on

them. He shows some sheets physically to the audience before performing their confrontation. After he goes through all of the sheets, which would take him about forty-five minutes, Mallarmé pretends to finish the performance and brusquely leaves, taking with him sheets of "The Book." But after a fifteen-minute intermission he returns, again announced by the sound of the bell. He goes directly to the lacquered library and redistributes the sheets in a different order, then in another forty-five minute performance another series of confrontations between various texts takes place.⁶

Mallarmé's idea here foreshadows the aesthetics of what in the 1970s began to be called performance art. In his salons, Mallarmé presented his texts, not as an actor impersonating a character, but as a performing version of himself, exactly in the manner of *bänkelsang* singers or puppet show narrators. The objects in performance here are the variously ordered sections of Mallarmé's *Book* text, physically present as manipulated pieces of paper, centers of focus for both performer and audience.

Puppets as Models for Actors

While many artists of the symbolist period actually used objects in performance, others found inspiration in the particular dramaturgy of the texts of those theaters. The theater writings of Maurice Maeterlinck, Gustave Flaubert, and Alfred Jarry, for example, were all inspired by the particularly rich marionette theater traditions in northwestern France. In addition to this literary inspiration, the visually based movement language of puppets was also considered by many of those close to the symbolists to be a model for actors' theater. The stiff, ungainly leg movements of Sicilian marionettes had long ago influenced Italian actors performing episodes from *Orlando Furioso* in Italian popular theater, but the idea that low-culture forms could or should influence the profession of acting was, in the late nineteenth century, a startling idea.

Such an idea was, of course, the proposal of Edward Gordon Craig's

incendiary 1906 essay "The Actor and the Übermarionette;" and almost a decade earlier Maeterlinck defined three plays he had written (*The Death of Tintagiles*, *Interior*, and *Alladin and Palomides*) as "three little plays for marionettes." Similar designations were used by playwrights Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Paul Claudel and, later, Federico Garcia Lorca, for dramas which, in practice, were generally performed with flesh and blood actors more often than puppets, the "actor as marionette" being considered an intellectual conceit, or psychological touchstone for the actor's or character's situation. But this valorization of puppet theater as a model for actors did not necessarily extend into an acceptance of puppet theater. Maeterlinck himself, although his plays were performed with puppets as early as 1891, did not consider puppet theater a viable means of presenting his dramas. Looking back to the publication of the "plays for marionettes," he wrote in 1931 that:

Since at this time I did not have any hope of seeing these little pieces performed by actors in a normal theater, I was resigned, a bit ironically, to propose them for a marionette theater. But I never thought of writing them for marionettes.⁷

In the world of commercial Parisian theater, though, the last decade of the 19th century was ripe for an extremely popular version of actors as puppets. In 1897 the Théâtre du Grand Guignol was founded by Oscar Méténier to take the comedy and violence of the Guignol hand-puppet theater and present it life-size, with actors instead of puppets.⁸ This technique brought stage naturalism across a formal border into the distanced, stylized, larger-than-life aesthetics of popular performing object theater. Although at first it alternated lurid tragedy with comedy—and even presented actors as marionettes, with strings attached to their hands and heads—the larger-than-life enactments of sex and violence proved to be the most popular aspect of Grand Guignol, forcing literal references to its puppet theater roots into the background.



Backstage view of Henri Signoret's puppets. Paris. 1982

Modern Performing Object Theater: Alfred Jarry

For the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre's premiere of *Ubu Roi*, one year before the opening of the Grand Guignol, Alfred Jarry made a pre-show address to the audience in which he described the masked performers the audience was about to see as "man-sized marionettes."⁹ That 1896 production of *Ubu Roi* is commonly considered one of the pivotal moments of avant-garde theater, and this is mainly because it used masks, puppets, and other objects as fundamental elements in a new symbolic European theater.

Jarry's theoretical approach to the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre production of *Ubu Roi*, as his writings make clear, was as sophisticated an appropriation of the aesthetics of traditional European popular theater as Brecht would make decades later. Jarry took up the use of masks from Greek drama, hobby horses and symbolic scenery from medieval theater, the distancing devices of scene placards and unnatural voices from the puppet theater, and made the beginnings of a systematized approach to the technique of mask movement by recognizing "six main positions" of the mask.¹⁰ With *Ubu Roi*, Jarry brought on stage the aesthetics not only of Guignol (whom critics often mentioned in their responses to the play), but of a whole range of theater techniques

which, if they had survived the previous centuries of high-culture disregard at all, existed in France only at popular festivals, in artists' cabarets, and in public spaces like the Tuileries Gardens.

Jarry's performing object aesthetics were a difficult innovation for all those who saw the production, and even for some of its performers. Firmin Gémier, for example, the renowned Parisian actor who played King Ubu, later revealed that he had been quite reluctant, as a good nineteenth-century actor would be, to don a mask and padded costume:

Under the heavy mask designed by Jarry I was rigged out with a stomach Footit [a Parisian music-hall clown] had given me; imprisoned in this shell, I was hot, I was *steaming*, I terribly furious.¹¹

It is clear from English critic Arthur Symon's first-hand account of *Ubu Roi* that the famous tumult the production caused must in large part have been due to its insistent use of performing object aesthetics:

Jarry's idea in this symbolical buffoonery, was to satirize humanity by setting human beings to play the part of marionettes, hiding their faces behind cardboard masks, tuning their voices to the howl and squeak which tradition has considerably assigned to the voices of that wooden world, and mimicking the rigid inflexibility and spasmodic life of puppets by a hopping and reeling gait.¹²

Frantisek Deak has recently shown that, contrary to long-held opinions, a large part of the audience for Jarry's symbolist comedy actually welcomed its radical embrace of mask and puppet theater techniques, and only some of the spectators were shocked and outraged.¹³ The theatrical discomfort Jarry caused some of those watching has often been tied to his celebrated introduction of the profane neologism "merdre," and further explained as the result of a puerile desire to shock the bourgeois audience, but more important and more deliberate than this is Jarry's vivid articulation of a functional symbolic theater language through the recuperation of the performing object. With *Ubu Roi* all of the traditional characteristics of performing object theater were presented on a legitimate, high-culture European stage, demanding recognition as acceptable modern theater techniques, a status which even now,

almost a century later, is still controversial.

An early version of *Ubu Roi*, contained within a four-act theater script entitled *Caesar Antichrist*, shows that Jarry also thought about objects and theater in an even more extreme example of unlimited theatrical fancy that would materialize only decades later in the productions of Dada and Surrealism and, more recently, the work of Robert Wilson. *Caesar Antichrist*, similar to Mallarmé's *Book*, was never performed, but like *The Book*, it wants to contain the entire universe. In *Caesar Antichrist* Jarry switches symbolic levels radically, starting out in a "pataphysical" parallel universe where Jarry's extravagant responses to modern French society, and his identity as a homosexual artist could run free. As a recent editor of the work says, "the symbol equals the symbolized," in *Caesar Antichrist*, and:

The virtuality of objects is expressed through an animism pushed to the point where most objects, in their symbolic mode at least, are (homo)sexualized... In this world objects, animals and people undergo constant transformation, they exist in the state of flux, switching between levels of meaning and sophistication: from the ideal to the real, the symbolic to the actual, the mythic to the vulgar.¹⁴

Thus, for example, in the second, "Heraldic" act of *Caesar Antichrist*, the central character/objects are "four cardinal heralds," described in the arcane jargon of medieval heraldry (i.e., "a Templar, gules with a cross argent"). The heralds are performing objects, moving in a series of tableaux depicted in Jarry's woodcut illustrations. But in the third, "Earthly" act—the shortened version of *Ubu Roi*—the heralds change existential levels to become Ubu's guards just as Ubu, represented in the second act by merely a zero or a sphere, becomes an earthly embodiment of the Antichrist. This framing puts *Ubu Roi* in a very different perspective than its 1896 stage production, making the gluttonous, amoral king a representative of metaphysical philosophy as well as a comic parody of Shakespeare's Macbeth.

In *Caesar Antichrist* Jarry alternates image-rich dialogue scenes with silent

intervals in which fantastic images are intended to seize the viewer's eyes. It is not clear how Jarry intended to stage these ent'actes, but their mystifying simplicity is eminently theatrical and perfectly suited for performing object theater: "Whales appear at the surface of the sea," or "The heaven departs as a scroll when it is rolled together." Such theatrical images may have appeared absurd or impossible to the traditional actors' theater, but would be right at home in the visual theater vocabulary of Renaissance spectacle or the contemporary works of Robert Wilson, Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theater, or in the cyberspace reaches of virtual reality.

It is important to note that after the 1896 production of *Ubu Roi*, all of Jarry's theatrical involvements until his death in 1907 (at the age of 34) were with various puppet theaters, including the Théâtre des Pantins (1897-1898), where his artistic collaborations continued with writers, musicians, and visual artists, including Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, Claude Terrasse, and Paul Ranson. All of them built, painted, and performed various marionette productions. At the Théâtres des Pantins, with Terrasse's piano compositions as accompaniment, Jarry and his friends presented *Ubu Roi* and other plays of the Ubu cycles, Hrosvitha's *Paphnutius*, a traditional Burgundian christmas play, a contemporary satirical revue entitled *Vive la France* and *Les Silènes*, Jarry's translation of a few scenes from German Romantic Christian Dietrich Grabbe's Ubu-esque *Jest, Satire, Irony and Deeper Significance*.¹⁵ This combination of artists, puppets, and medieval, Romantic, popular, and modern theater was quite in keeping with the traditions of turn-of-the-century literary puppet theaters in Paris or Munich, but, again, with something of an edge to it, perhaps the threat that Jarry's mask and puppet aesthetics might reappear on "legitimate" Parisian stages, which in fact they did in the decades to follow, in the productions of Apollinaire, Cocteau, Picasso and Léger.

Jarry made his connection to French popular theater even clearer with the 1901 performances of *Ubu sur la Butte* at the "4 z'Arts à Montmartre." Jarry wrote this two-act reduction of *Ubu Roi* for Émile Labelle, one of the most active turn-of-the-

century hand-puppet players in Paris, who operated a puppet booth under the name "Guignol Anatol" at the Champs Élysées aux Buttes-Chaumont. In Jarry's short introductory dialogue for the piece, Guignol himself (up from his native Lyon to collect a fee of 250,000 francs) confronts the real-life 4 z'Arts director Trombert. Guignol first subdues the director with his club in order to get his money, and then sings of his noble heritage among the sages of Greece and in Eden's "tree of knowledge:"

In the time of the ancient gods,
Before the age of iron,
Before the ages of gold, of flesh and of horn,
Heads were made of wood.
In these wooden boxes wisdom was kept,
And the seven sages, the seven sages of Greece were seven wooden-headed men,
Seven men,
made from thousand-year-old oaks
who issued oracles in the forest groves of Dodona.

The roots of those old trees
groping towards the center of the earth like
fingers fingering treasures,
Through infinite space and the night of
time
Creeping towards knowledge, embracing
the universe.

In Paradise the tree of knowledge and the
apple tree were wood,
And the subtle serpent who tempted Eve
was, was, dare we say it, made of wood.¹⁶

Jarry asserts the noble lineage of "les hommes à la tête de bois" through the mouth of Guignol himself (or more accurately, through the mouth of the puppeteer Anatol), but the point taken is resonant of scholarly research throughout the nineteenth century which revealed that the roots of Greek drama—and thus the theatrical roots of European civilization—were inextricably entwined with the performing techniques of masks, puppets, and fetish objects.

Jarry's contributions to the creation of a modern symbolic language of theater, and to the modern rediscovery of performing objects, was to actually put words back into the mouth of the ancient wooden heads and through the mouths of *Ubu Roi's* stage masks, and claim the action as a legitimate event for a legitimate theater.

Notes

1. See Frank Proschan, "The Semiotic Study of Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects," *Semiotica* 47.1-4 (1983): 4.
2. Richard Pischel, *The Home of the Puppet Play* (London: Luzac & Co., 1902), 5.
3. See Harold Segel, *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret: Paris, Barcelona, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Cracow, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Zurich* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
4. *Le Gaulois* 28 May 1898, quoted in Mathilde Camacho, *Judith Gautier, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Droz, 1939) 157-158.
5. Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 85.
6. Deak, 89.
7. Maurice Maeterlinck, letter to Reginald S. Sibbald, 18 August 1931, in Sibbald, *Marionettes in the North of France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1936), 4-5.
8. See Mel Gordon, *The Grand Guignol: Theatre of Fear and Terror* (New York: Amok Press, 1988), 13-19 for an account of this theater's creation.
9. Alfred Jarry, "Preliminary Address at the First Performance of *Ubu Roi*, December 10, 1896," in *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*, ed. Roger Shattuck and Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 77.
10. See Jarry, "Of the Futility of the Theatrical in the Theater," *Selected Works*, 139-145; and "A Letter to Lugné-Poe," 132-133.
11. Firmin Gémier, quoted in Noel Arnaud, "Jarry et le Mirliton," *Europe: Revue Littéraire Mensuelle* 623/624 (1981): 142.
12. Arthur Symons, "A Symbolist Farce," in *The Memoirs of Arthur Symons: Life and Art in the 1890s* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 236.
13. Deak, *Symbolist Theater*, 233-238.
14. Alastair Brotchie, introduction to *Caesar Antichrist*, by Alfred Jarry, trans. Antony Melville (London: Atlas Press, 1992), 7.
15. For a description of the Théâtre des Pantins, see Brunella Eruli, "Ubu et l'homme à la tête de bois," *Puck* 1 (1988): 8-10.
16. Alfred Jarry, *Ubu sur la Butte*, in *Tout Ubu* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1962) 455-456.



A Notion of Festival

(continued from page 5)

Within the festival construct, we share our highs and lows, our accomplishments and failures, our joys and grief. The initiators of the AIDS Quilt knew the true meaning of Festival: Continuum. I grew up with Firemen's Parades, the mummers, the New York World's Fair, decorating my bike on the 4th of July, the ball falling in Times Square on New Year's Eve, and family reunions almost every Sunday. I still look for the Burma Shave signs. And I cherish the gatherings we call Festivals.

For many years to come, I won't forget the energy—and synergy—which filled the Time Cafe during the Late Nite performances of the First International Festival of Puppet Theater, presented by the Jim Henson Foundation at the Public Theater two years ago. My downtown compatriots—puppeteers and otherwise—still claim Late Nite to be one of the most extraordinary gatherings to occur in New York theatre in years. For us, it was a family reunion. Many felt like children again. Joined by the world-class artists from the Festival's mainstages, Late Nite crescendoed into an unforgettable union—raucous, smoke-filled, egalitarian, and free of past, future, or present (yes, there was more than a little wine). Dick Finkel asserts that festivals "must be accessible and break the norm." Late Nite was a Festival within a Festival.

I offer only a notion of Festival. I leave more heady ideas and concepts in the hands and minds of the theoreticians, politicians, and aspiring gods. For me, Festival is nothing less than a marker for the best of humanity. And so... I'm off to the Calaveras County Fair to catch the Jumping Frog Jubilee. •

Woodcut by Alfred Jarry. Replete with religious and sexual symbolism, it is from the original text of *Caesar Antichrist*.

Puppetry Into the Next Millenium

Stephen Kaplin

Standing in the final hours of the Twentieth Century, in the pre-dawn twilight of the Third Millenium, I am contemplating the future of my craft, the ancient and venerable art of puppet building and performance. From this vantage point, I can see how wave after wave of advancing technology has swept up over us, like surf on the beach of history. Each breaker brings with it new media for extending and recording perception, and these new media work to dissolve the patterns of thought and culture molded by the media of earlier waves. Now a new comber has hit the shore, and a computer-based, cybernetic technology is starting to cause another in a long sequence of cultural phase-shifts. Before our eyes, the old structures and institutions melt away, national boundaries waver and dissolve, fields of knowledge and genres of artistic expression all morph and merge at dizzying speed. We no longer even have language to describe the new forms these fields are taking, but must tack together hyphenated fragments of the old forms under the un-glamorous banner of "multi-media."

And what has been the effect of this new techno-wave on the field of puppetry? Already some of the traditional distinctions between types of puppets have become blurry. For instance, the distinction between a rod puppet and a

shadow puppet is negligible when they are seen over a video screen— both become flat mosaics of light and dark pixels. And divisions between puppetry and other genres of performance start to pale when applied to a medium that reduces all of its performers to digitized bit-maps. The old definitions become crippled and helpless when applied to the new multi-media, a tele-com web. We have yet to develop language that takes into account the changed relationship between performer and spectator, puppet and the technology used to create and transmit the performance.

What follows is a brief attempt at such nomenclature. These four terms highlight aspects of the new technology that can be applied to puppet performance in the very near future. No doubt other tags will come as the next generation of puppeteers begins to ride the techno-surf.

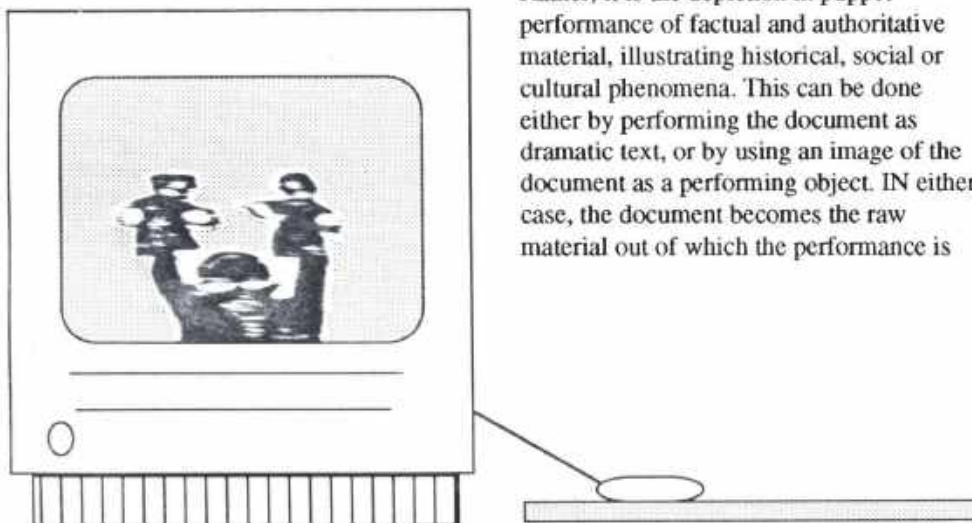
Docu-Puppetry

Drawing on the ocean of media-generated images, utilizing the whole gamut of photo-copying and photo-manipulation technologies, "docu-puppetry" is an emerging sub-genre that blurs the line between journalism and puppetry performance. Imagine a CNN news team meeting Kasperle at the local multi-media work station. Docu-puppetry is not merely substituting puppets for anchor-people. Rather, it is the depiction in puppet performance of factual and authoritative material, illustrating historical, social or cultural phenomena. This can be done either by performing the document as dramatic text, or by using an image of the document as a performing object. IN either case, the document becomes the raw material out of which the performance is

shaped. By treating text and visual source material as performing objects, docu-puppetry transforms the document in the same way that Object Theater transforms a found object, or the way that digital audio sampling can transform and weave together snippets of sound. Thus, docu-puppetry has more in common with photo-montage than it does with the television-spawned entertainments like "info-commercials" and "docu-dramas."

One of the masters of this genre is Paul Zaloom. In his comic slide and lecture "informances" or "perforations," Zaloom lets government and corporate literature caricature itself. Redacted, highlighted and held up to the audience's gaze, the document's own words stand in for the stupidity and shortsightedness of its authors. Zaloom uses docu-puppetry as an extension of his found-object "theater of trash." but other approaches are also possible— ranging from Theodora Skiptaires' *Hall of Science* inspired puppet vaudeville, to the toy theater techniques adapted by Ninth Street Theater's *Terror As Usual*, which uses xeroxed images mounted on cardboard and texts culled from the daily flow of mass media news.

By sampling, cropping and re-editing, the docu-puppeteer breaks out of the normal, passive relationship to the endless river of mass media imagery and news. I suspect that the genre will spread as re-imaging technology and home laser-printers become ubiquitous, and as more and more people want to take the nightly news broadcasts into their own hands.



Virtual Puppetry

"Virtual puppets" are performing objects that exist only within the computer, generated out of digitized bit-maps, given tightly controlled behavior parameters and linked by manual controls to the outside, human world. The merging of mechanical interfacing devices and 3-D computer imaging techniques is already the stock and trade of young techno-wizards. Consider how commonplace such virtual performers are already—ranging from the stars of the most pedestrian video-games, to the free-ranging dinosaurs featured in the movie *Jurassic Park*. The J.P. dinosaurs are in fact crude hybrids when compared to the fully virtual creatures which will be possible as the technology for interfacing humans and computers develops further. Certainly, as the technology for creating virtual puppets becomes more affordable, it is likely to spread out from beyond the walls of Hollywood Special FX houses and video game arcades, becoming accessible to a wider range of artists. Eventually, tele-net users who wish to interact in cyberspace may have to dress up in a virtual replica of themselves, making every Net-user a puppeteer.

Hyper-Puppetry

Prior to the advent of the virtual universe, the size of a performing object was limited by the number of people who could be assembled in one spot to lift it and move it. Mega-puppets, like the giant Bread and Puppet pageant figures, a Chinese Dragon or Macy's parade balloon figures, could employ hundreds, even thousands, of people. But there was a practical upper limit to the number of people who could participate in the working of a single performing object. Not any more. Because the virtual object has nothing physical to lug through space, the number of people who could be involved in its operation is, theoretically, unlimited. And they don't have to all be assembled in one place, they can work together from wherever on the globe their home terminals happen to be.

This possibility of collective, tele-conferenced activity is what gives rise to a new order of performing object, the "hyper-puppet." Just as the puppet is an individual extension, or an extension of individuals, the hyper-puppet is a collective extension, a corporate entity, created out of the merged energies of its user/participants. The myriad creators and manipulators blend together with the spectators and with the life of the performing object.

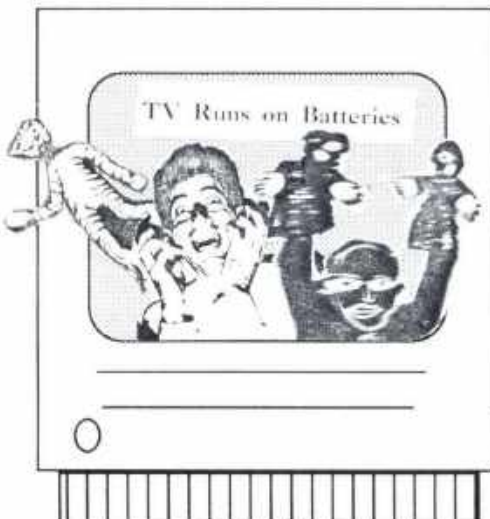
One example of how an object can so merge with the life energies of its performers and spectators is the AIDS quilt. Physically, the Quilt is a mosaic of individual panels, each dedicated to the memory of one of the disease's victims. When spread out and displayed, it becomes a monument and a field in which the community can grieve, find comfort and express hope. The Quilt becomes the focal plane upon which the Gay Community can project its living presence. Such an object is a model for what a network of on-line individuals could create on a global scale, once technology allows for the transmission of video over the Internet.

Cyber-Puppetry

The last decade has seen the Internet spread across the global cultural landscape, creating a potentially vast new venue for performance. The illusion of space within this immense computer network, "cyber-space," has almost infinitely malleable properties. It can be stretched to enormous dimensions, compacted to extreme densities, warped, fractured or stacked. All its parameters, gravity, light, form, motion can be directly controlled. And, of course the virtual figure that inhabits this space is of the same ethereal substance as the stage on which it plays. What a dream of a performance space! Like Prospero's garden.

How will future cyber-theater events be produced and distributed? since the medium itself is so infinitely flexible, this factor will be most important in determining what sort of performance eventually happens on the "Net." If the same corporate entities that control today's film, broadcast, print and music industries have their say, cyber-theater would be just one more line of product for them to peddle. Already CD-Rom players are part of any good, high-end, computer/video/home entertainment complex, and musicians, such as Peter Gabriel, are starting to create bodies of work for this new, multi-media market. But pre-recorded fare is only one possibility, and by far the most restrictive option available.

A networked computer, unlike a book, stereo system or television set, is a two-way communicating device. Any cyber-performance must take into account the "presence" of the spectators, in the same way that a live performer must deal with the presence of the audience and incorporate their feedback and energies. This interactive dimension allows for the artist to conceive of performances as collaborative creation with the audience.



The amount of interaction could be tightly controlled (the "virtual studio-audience" model,) or the audience could be given absolute freedom within the confines of the event (the "virtual playground" model.) Between these two extremes, all sorts of gradations and organizational structures are possible. What is clear is that the creators of cyber-performance must rethink traditional ideas of linear dramatic structure. Computers tend to structure ideas differently than traditional written language, favoring branching, interconnected, flow-chart type structures that foster interaction, simultaneity and multiple choosing. Writers and directors of cyber-theater will be forced by the very "multi" of "multi-media" to abandon linear formats.

At the present, these four emerging sub-genres of puppetry are still in embryonic stages of development. Some await only the vision and daring of a new generation of artist, familiar enough with the technology to explore its use as an expressive medium. In some cases, however, the necessary infrastructure is not yet in place. In order to make cyber-theater practical, the rapid transmission of video images over the phone system must be possible. The new fiber-optic telephone

lines have to be merged with the cable or satellite TV delivery system. This is already in the process, with the construction of the "Information Superhighway." By early next century, the necessary pieces should be in place. I only hope that puppetry doesn't become just one more attraction at the Info-Cyber-Mega-Mall.

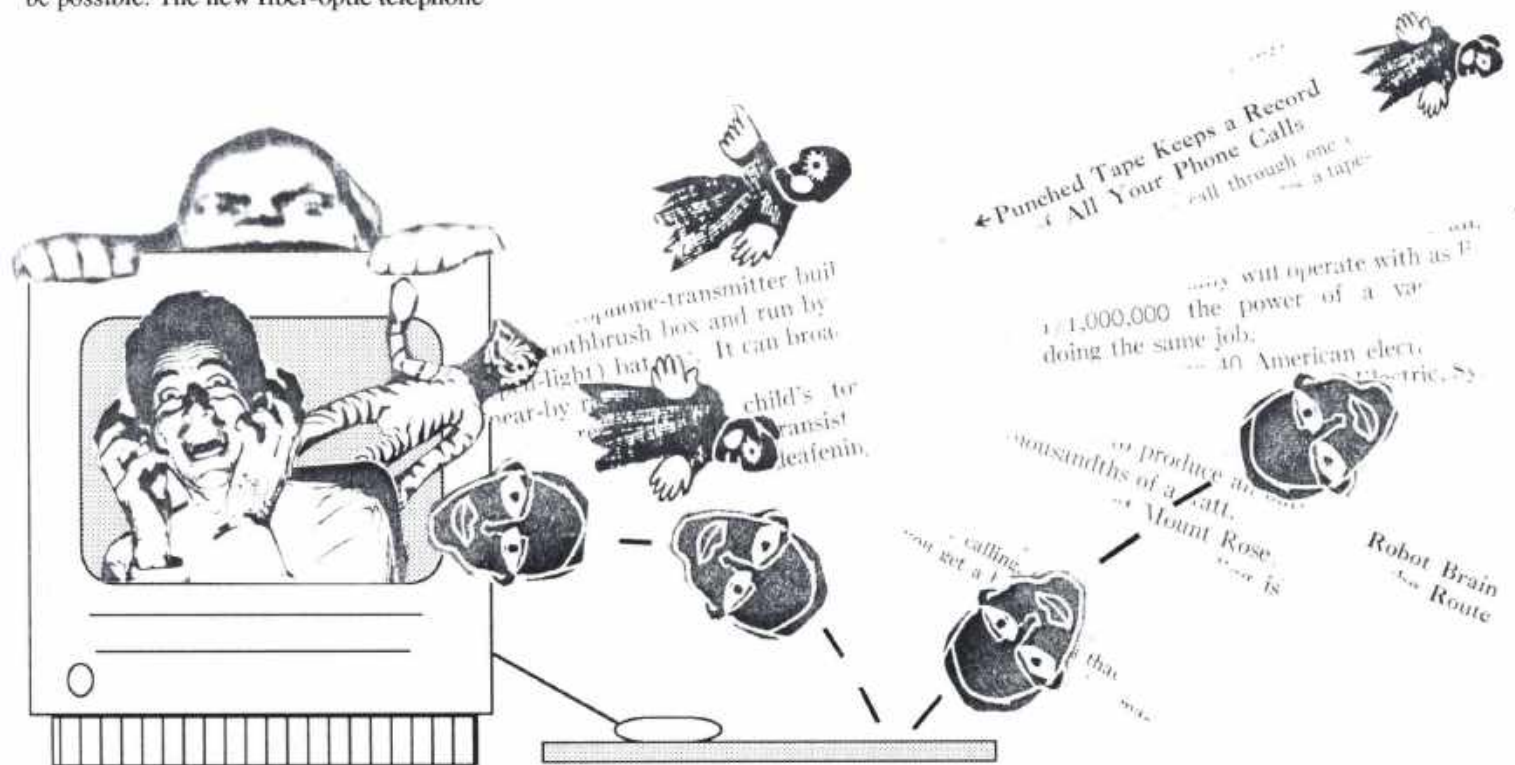
How to react to all of this? Should one sing giddy praises to the new cyber-tech, like Futurists, drunk on the first rush of industrialization? Or should one side with the Luddites and smash the machines, in hope that the broken past can somehow be reconstructed? Neither option strikes me as being satisfactory. Yet it is clear that one must come to terms with the new, or risk being ground between the teeth of the old.

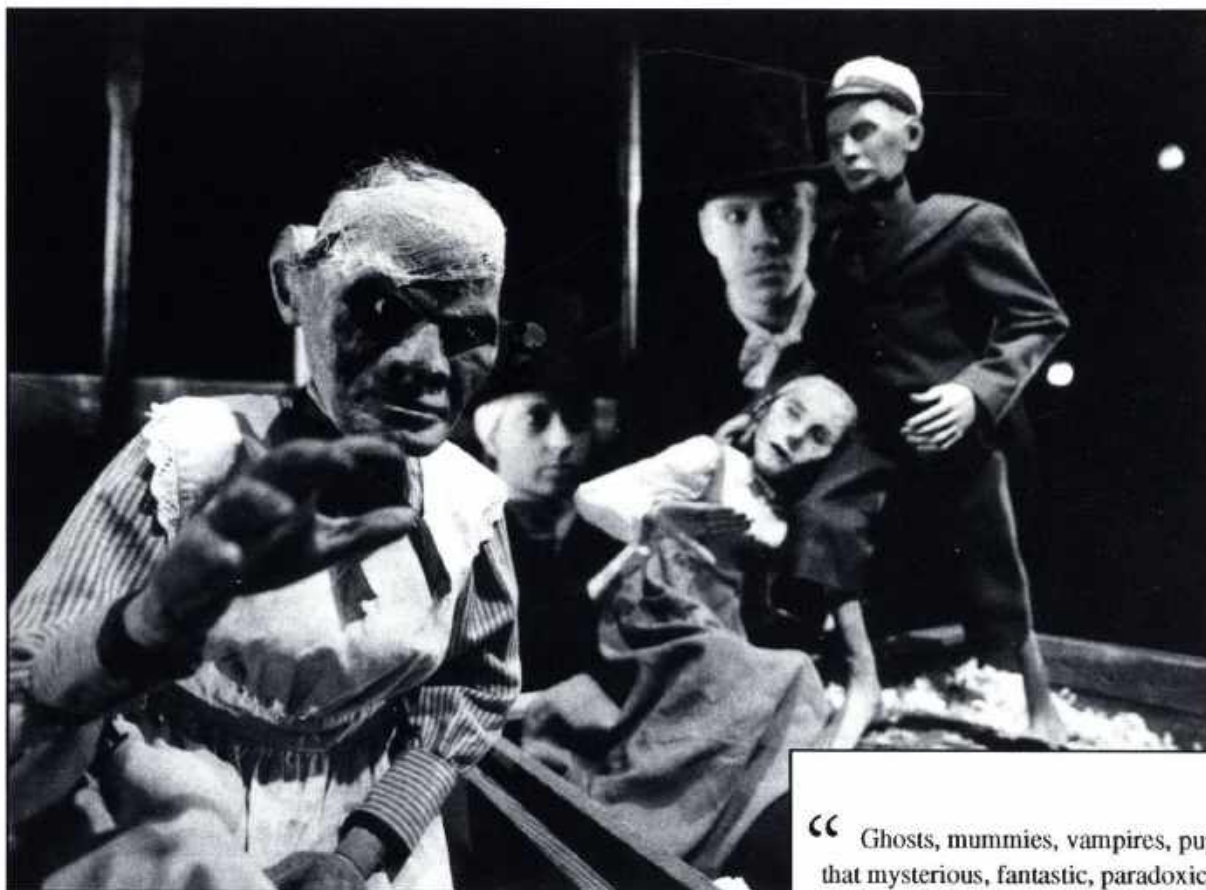
This is a terrible quandry for an artform that has one foot in the shamanistic roots of human performance and the other in the laboratories of Industrial Light and Magic. It is no problem to adapt the technology to fit the needs of the puppeteer— developing new materials and control gadgetry, and creating a global transmission reach. But the question is how does the puppeteer

adapt to the new technology? And how is the emerging global, computer-based cyber-culture changing the very nature of performance?

It does not seem likely that the emergence of new multi-media will mean the death of traditional puppetry, any more than the advent of film or television in this century killed off live performance. If it's any comfort, the older forms of puppetry will most likely be preserved for their historic, spiritual or folkloric value, like endangered species on a game preserve. And certainly there are those aspects of life performance that can not be simulated on the cyberstage. The giant outdoor pageants of Bread and Puppet, for instance, need a congregation of physical bodies, together on the green hillside, underneath the sun and the sky. Such an event can not be reproduced on the Internet.

But shouldn't these two species of puppetry be able to exist side by side—the flesh-and-blood, traditional forms of what Roman Paska calls, "the puppet primitive," and the multi-media, techno-shamanism of the new cybernetic culture? I really don't see why not. In fact, they may even enrich one another. •





Stockholm's Marionetteatern

was founded in the late 1950's by artistic director and puppeteer Michael Meschke. Under his direction the company has consistently presented challenging adult puppet theater productions of established classics ranging from *Ubu Roi* to *The Divine Comedy*, as well as original creations. For August Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata*, Marionetteatern has collaborated with guest director Roman Paska, a New York based puppet theater artist whose work was seen in the 1992 Festival. Although Mr. Paska's own work is usually performed solo and from texts of his devising, he has been directing other ensembles with increasing regularity. Manipulated by three tuxedo-clad performers, the figures constructed by Swedish puppet maker Arne Högsander measure roughly three feet and are hauntingly realistic. Set in a state beyond death, *Ghost Sonata* is of one of Strindberg's most difficult works and in this inspired interpretation of the play, puppets offer a unique solution to the problems of staging symbolic drama.

“ Ghosts, mummies, vampires, puppets... Cohabitants of that mysterious, fantastic, paradoxical realm between life and death, animate and inanimate, subject I and object It, what theosophists of Strindberg's time called *kama-loka*, the realm of desire, where astral bodies dwelt in expectation of their next reincarnation.

The characters in the *Ghost-Sonata* are living corpses in various states of decay. Doll-like and mechanical, like the dead undead. But when Strindberg wanted to call his play *Kama-loka*, he probably didn't know he'd written a puppet show. His characters are essentially personified ideas, spare of flesh and almost drained of blood, but what prevents them from being merely symbolic is the very possibility of their embodiment as puppets, masked and preserved like mummies in the state between two deaths. ”

—Roman Paska

Excerpts from the director's notebook



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