

SPRING and SUMMER 06 Issue #19

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



the puppet in contemporary
theatre, film & media

PUPPETS in SPACE

- Zaloom-Does Dante
- High-Tech Opens *Sesame*
- Hoban's Novel Punch

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The Bride
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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

issue no. 19

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Editorial –



1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, USA, opened with a huge shadow show, "Olympic Ideals" (see book review, page 33).

PUPPETS IN SPACE

I was in the Theater program at the University of Maine back in the early 1970s. Al Cyrus designed all the sets for mainstage productions back then. As an aspiring actor, I presumed that a designer's work was a mix of stylistic and practical considerations: "We need a door here...an eighteenth century Colonial door," or "This is an abstract set, we'll just use a door frame...and some *black cubes!*"

Al also taught all the classes in Stage Lighting, Make Up, Set Design and Construction. In his Design class he'd start out by showing us lots of examples. "Look at this," he'd say, showing us the floor plan and elevation drawings for a set. After an attempt at analysis on our parts, he'd continue. "No, *really* look. This play is all about watching. The characters are always observing, or being observed by others. The design calls for mirrored panels here, here and here so that characters can see each other without being seen. Three mirrors, which correspond to the three main characters..." and so on. Light bulb! Eureka! A set. I understood in that moment, is not just an actor's rumpus room. It is the playwright's intent expressed entirely in physical terms. My Earth moved. My paradigm shifted.

Around that time we were visited by Al's mentor, Henry Kurth. Then at Case-Western Reserve, he had also worked with Martha Graham, Paul Taylor and Isamu Naguchi. As we pored over his gorgeous renderings on greyboard, I heard someone say: "[Kurth] doesn't design sets, he designs space."

When we proposed a "Puppets in Space" issue, these are the questions we were hoping to answer: What are the spaces in which puppets play, who designs them and what are their guiding principles? I imagined traditional playing spaces as

no more than a footnote to contemporary "designed spaces." Articles began arriving that quickly stretched my notion of "Space." For one thing, the Punch booth and shadow screen are still very much with us, both in their original forms and in countless modern mutations. To this is added cinematic space, implied space, virtual space and even literary space.

There are also buildings designed for puppet performances, including Scotland's Biggar Theatre [page 18], and The Puppet Company's new theater at Glen Echo [page 20]. Brad Clark considers two very different institutions where puppeteers perform in view of the audience—Japan's regional *ningyō jōruri* theaters [page 22], and Atlanta's Center for Puppetry Arts, in a recent production of *Anne Frank: Within and Without* [page 32].

Even our book reviews can be thought of in terms of design and space. Marc Estrin and Ron Simone have produced a book about Bread and Puppet—a company that typically fills enormous "found spaces" with its gigantic puppets. Rainer Reusch's new volume on Shadow puppetry, the third in a series, is an excellent look at how a traditional playing space has been thoroughly and repeatedly re-imagined in modern times.

Puppeteers are a creative lot. You cannot go to a puppet festival without seeing a show set in a new space—a shoebox, a washing machine, a parachute. As we consider "Puppets in Space," though, let's remember not only our innovators, but our mentors—those men and women who once sat down with young actors, and puppeteers, and said: "No, *really* look."

– Andrew C. Periale

DANTE'S INFERNO



The soon-to-be-released movie version of Dante's Inferno gives flat puppets an even flatter space in which to perform. It is an unusual mixture of the nineteenth century dynamics of toy theater and the modern possibilities of high-definition digital video. It wasn't surprising to learn that it was Paul Zaloom who convinced Sandow Birk and Sean Meredith to use this two dimensional form for the project.

SANDOW BIRK AND PAUL ZALOOM'S TOY THEATER FILM SPECTACLE

An Interview with Paul Zaloom

BY JOHN BELL

Paul Zaloom began his theater work in the 1970s with Bread and Puppet Theater in Vermont, and then carved out a career as a solo performer in New York's downtown performance art scene of the 1980s, where he was known especially for table-top object shows featuring a biting political wit and an uproarious comic sensibility influenced by Lord Buckley, Soupy Sales, and other masters of American absurdism. In these years, Zaloom was showered with awards: an Obie, a Bessie, and several UNIMA citations. Zaloom moved to Los Angeles in the early 1990s to host the popular science educational television show, *Beakman's World*, but continued his work in live puppet theater from his West Hollywood studio, and began teaching at such schools as the California Institute of the Arts. His most recent puppet spectacle, *The Mother of All Enemies*, marks Zaloom's venture into the

venerable Middle Eastern Karagöz shadow-theater tradition. In Zaloom's version, a gay, peace-loving Syrian artist meets various forms of intolerant religious fundamentalism, in a show suffused with Zaloom's ribald wit and acid political commentary.

In 2002, Zaloom's connections to the West-Coast art world led him to collaborate with artist Sandow Birk on an award-winning "comic mockumentary," based on Birk's paintings and drawings. More recently, Zaloom has collaborated with Birk again, on *Dante's Inferno*, an animated film using flat, cut-out puppets and a toy theater stage, again based on Birk's drawings, which envision Dante's classic Renaissance epic as a comment on the contemporary mores of California, and the world.

John Bell: Could you explain how and why you and Sandow decided to use a toy theater format for *Dante's Inferno*?

Paul Zaloom: We had made a mockumentary together in phony Ken Burns style called *In Smog and Thunder: The Great War of the Californias*, about a fictional war between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The film was comprised of digital scans and pans of Sandow Birk's paintings and drawings, with accompanying comic narration. After that project, Sandow did a reiteration of the original Dante text of *The Divine Comedy*, using contemporary American language and expressions. He illustrated his version, set in a Hell that looks a lot like Southern California, with drawings that took off on the great Gustave Doré interpretations of the nineteenth century. When he did all three parts of *The Divine Comedy*, he got excited about making a film. To me, the natural thing to do was to turn the drawings into toy theater. What else are you going to do with drawings? It was a bit of a hard sell to get the director, Sean Meredith, and Sandow to go for this idea at first, but eventually I got them to come around. Now they love puppets.

JB: How did the actual toy theater proscenium play a role?

PZ: You see the proscenium from the beginning in a long shot that flies over the paper audience's heads as they take their seats. Then the front rag opens and is followed by seven other curtains; this gag was inspired by Joe Musil's fantastic toy theater museum in Santa Ana, CA, where he does a cool thing with curtains and swags opening and closing to music.

Toy theaters have to have a proscenium; that is what contains them, frames them, and creates the context for the shows. It's funny to have a frame in the frame: a theater frame in the frame of a film. We designed the proscenium to have the same aspect ratio of the film's frame.

I say "film," but it's really high-definition digital video. We had to go with high-def because of all the lines in the drawings; conventional digital video would have had those thin lines chattering and jiggling up a storm.

JB: A number of scenes in *Dante's Inferno* use complicated moving puppets (the helicopter, the spiral circle into which Dante falls, the Cadillac, the skating scene). How did you decide which figures to articulate and animate? What special effects were you after?

PZ: Cheap ones, as usual, and I don't just mean money cheap. I wanted to have as many cool effects and tricks as possible. I love how you can create Hell using poster board! So we were always looking for amusing ways to animate the scenes and for the characters to react in goofy, physical ways. In films like *The Mask*, faces are made to contort like crazy; we do the same thing, but with paper, in old-school, transparent, dumb-ass fashion.



JB: Did you use stop-action animation as well as live-action?

PZ: No, and there is no computer animation in the show except for the erasing of a couple of mistakes that were intolerable. Having said that, we left in the rods and strings and filament because we are from the school of puppetry that likes all that crap and doesn't try to hide it. Some may consider it distracting, but that's because they are not used to it.

JB: About how many puppets were created for the filming?

PZ: Hundreds. There were 43 different sets, designed and constructed by Sandow and art director Elyse Pignolet. They worked for months building at least 400 puppets and figuring out how to do gags and gimmicks. They did a remarkable job, creating this vast array of stuff and getting tons of hot glue burns along the way. They made so many Dantes and Virgils that we decided to use them all, in a scene about identity theft.

JB: Did the toy theater form suggest specific ways of doing things that wouldn't have come up if you had simply been making a normal animation film?



PZ: Yes. For one thing, the fact that it was a theater meant that some shots were reverse shots and showed the audience. In a way, the puppets are even cruder than animation, but I'm crude, too, so it works for me. We had some interesting experiments that worked out pretty well. For example, can you have a flat puppet start to turn, cut to the next shot half-way through that turn, and pick up the cut with a new puppet facing a different way finishing the turn? Does that work? It does, and that's pretty exciting.

JB: Were there aspects of the toy theater form that appealed to the content of the *Inferno* show?

PZ: As we wrote the show, we put everything in the script. Pretty much every frame was described. I wanted to write down everything you would see because then we knew



exactly what to build. You cannot tell a flat piece of paper to turn around and face the other way like you can an actor, because the piece of paper may not have paint on both sides. You may want a big size of a puppet for a certain shot to play with scale. All of that had to be planned out in the smallest detail so the building can happen. We also wanted to have an accurate shooting script so we would be prepared once we started shooting. We still changed lots of stuff on the fly while shooting.

JB: How many puppeteers worked on the shoot? How long did the shooting take?

PZ: We shot the film in two sections: one thirteen-day shoot and a subsequent two-day shoot. Twenty-two people came in to puppeteer, and 26 actors subsequently did voices, some for as many as six or eight characters. We used a lot of improv people from Second City and other comedy groups, lots of L.A. artists, and our pals, too. It was a lot of fun, but as one of the producers, I can say it was nerve wracking, too: you hear the clock ticking pretty loudly. But we got done on time. The two lead actors, Dermot Mulroney and James Cromwell, play the voices of Dante and Virgil respectively. It was great having very talented and experienced guys like those two in the show. But I'm the only actor on screen. I play God and the *Devil*—typecast, as usual!



JB: Did you storyboard everything first, or was there improvisation involved in the shoots?

PZ: Sandow and Elyse storyboarded everything by taking digital photos once they got done with a set, which helped immensely. They did a shot for each cut in the script. Then, once in rehearsal, we would improvise some stuff, as well as on the stage while shooting, but the puppets don't allow for lots of ad libbing. Charlie McCarthy they ain't. We did a lot of preparation for the shoot, and that was a good thing. But we still changed a lot of lines on the spot because I guess I am never done writing.

JB: How is shooting a film version of a toy theater show different from performing a live puppet show?

PZ: With a film, you try to get it right for the camera, so you do a few takes, and then you move on. Problem solved (or not, if it stinks). With a live show, you keep doing it over and over, trying to solve the problem every night. Also, hitting the marks with the little puppets is so precise that we'd close one eye to hit our marks. I learned to do that on the closeups on *Beakman*: If you use just one eye, you can hit the spike easier. Two eyes show you two places close up; one eye shows you one.

JB: How does this project connect to the California paradigm that Sandow used for *In Smog and Thunder*? In other words, how do you connect the Renaissance Italian context of Dante's work to the present-day world of California? What kinds of ideas did this connection yield?

PZ: The problem was: How do we interpret the text? Sandow and Marcus Sanders took the original and paraphrased it into today's vernacular and culture but didn't really change the content of the scenes in the book. When we began trying to convert that text into a puppet show, it became clear we had to reconceive all of the scenes. They just were not going to work or be interesting if we didn't. We wanted our Hell to have car dealerships and obese people gorging at strip malls, obnoxious Fox News reporters and corrupt lobbyists, money launderers, insider traders, and Spiro Agnew. We were interested in making a political satire in the spirit of Dante, who put all his political friends and enemies in *The Divine Comedy*.

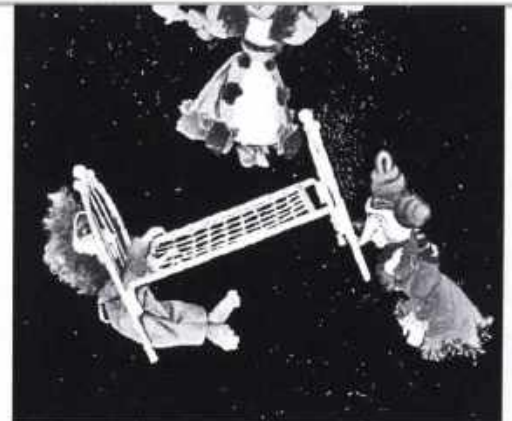
JB: How long is the final film?

PZ: I have no idea. But I'm really hoping feature length (ha ha!).

John Bell is on the theater faculty at Emerson College, Boston.

ARLYN AWARD for Outstanding Design

The Arlyn Award, a worldwide search for outstanding design in the puppet theatre, is open to puppeteers anywhere in the world. Created in memory of Arlyn Coad, co-founder and artistic director of Coad Canada Puppets for over 30 years, the



2001 - "The Nose," by Nikolai Golgol
Vladimir Oskolkov, Jura Samiulov Puppet Theatre
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2004 - "Catch Your Breath"
Sophia Clist, theatre rites
London, England

Arlyn Award's purposes are to recognize excellence and to stimulate growth in puppet theatre design. "Design," said Arlyn, "is the visual impact of a theatrical production. It instantly sets the tone of the production through the manipulation of shape, texture, colour, and light."

Administered by an independent charitable society, the Arlyn Award competition is held every second year. A trio of qualified judges are selected to set their own standards then study the submitted entries for the one production that excels those standards. Only one Arlyn Award may be presented in each competition but all entries that remain in the final round of judging are presented a Citations of Excellence.

<http://arlynaward.org>

Muppets and Miniature Spaces:

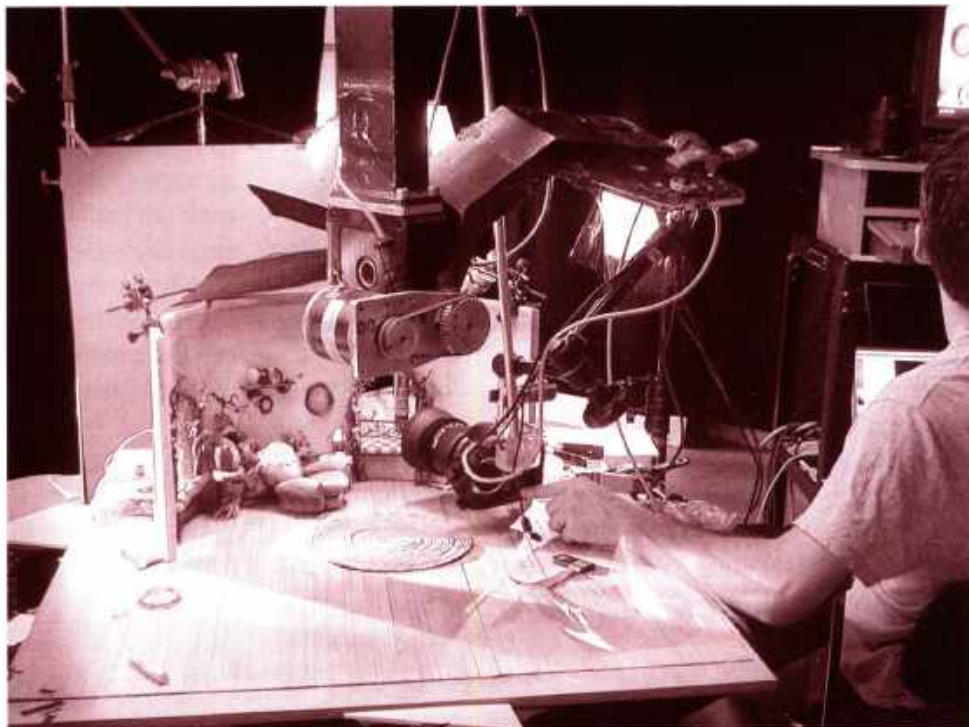
THE MAKING OF *SESAME* BEGINNINGS

BY JOHN BELL

Veteran puppeteer and director Kevin Clash is excited about *Sesame Beginnings*, a new series of *Sesame Street* DVDs for very young audiences, because they mark a new departure: the combination of live-action Muppets with painstakingly detailed miniature sets. Clash, the hands and voice behind the popular Muppet character Elmo, had explored the combination of live-action puppeteering with crayon-like digital sets in the *Elmo's World* segments for *Sesame Street*, and over his past twenty years with the Muppets had been involved in other varieties of live/digital combinations through Jim Henson's film and television work.

But the *Sesame Beginnings* project is different because of the heightened degree of realism provided by intricate doll-house scale sets composited with footage of live-action Muppets. "We wanted to do something different from *Sesame Street*, but connected to it," Clash said in a recent interview, "and Sesame Workshop producer Jocelyn Hassenfeld said, 'Use stop-motion backgrounds.'" Sesame Workshop chose Boston-based Handcranked Films as their principal collaborator on the project, something of an unusual choice because Handcranked, founded by Rhode Island School of Design animation majors Bryan Papciak and Jeff Sias, is much more well known for its challenging experimental work, often characterized by dark, abstract, and thought-provoking surrealism.

For Sias and Papciak, the *Sesame Beginnings* project was a change from their normal work, but an exciting challenge. "We like making miniatures," Papciak recently said; "We like making lush images, and it was a great experience to pull it all together" with the large-scale Muppet images. In addition, there were real educational advantages to using the full-set possibilities of the miniature settings. As Clash notes,



"The environment of a baby is normally on the ground, and we wanted to show that." The normal methods for filming Muppets require hidden puppeteers operating the puppets from beneath, making floor-level action difficult. The combination of "Head-to-toe" puppetry, as Clash calls it, with the footage of miniature sets provided by Handcranked offered the possibility of showing Elmo and his friends in complete environments (crawling on the floor, or sitting in highchairs or couches) which could be seen from any angle or eye level.

Basically, the *Sesame Beginnings* series is the combination of recorded puppet action sequences created by green-clad puppeteers in front of green screens, which are then composited with the footage of miniature sets and props which have been carefully filmed to follow exactly the camera movements of the puppet sequences. The following is a description of how the process works.

Storyboards

The whole process, according to Clash, began with storyboards, created by Sias and Papciak in close consultation with Clash, despite the fact that Clash was in New York and the Handcranked studios were in Boston. According to Sias, he and Papciak proposed “Realistic, but stylized” sets with a storybook feel, in which the younger versions of the Muppet characters could comfortably exist. Clash approved their designs because, as Sias put it, “The sets maintained a Henson sensibility.” The storyboard phase of creation was key not only because it established the design and layout of the sets, but also because camera angles were determined, as well as the nature of interactive set pieces. “That’s one of the most interesting parts of the shoot,” Sias said. “If a character needs to take a book out of a shelf, for example, there needs to be interaction between the live-action Muppet and the animated background.” In addition, careful thinking in the storyboard phase allowed the creators to figure out when a life-size prop used in the live-action shoot, such as a high-chair, would need an exact miniature replica for Handcranked Films’ part of the production.

After the storyboards were created, Kevin Clash directed (and performed in) the live-action filming of puppet scenes in New York. Clash enjoyed the green-screen composite process of the *Sesame Beginnings* project because such characters as Elmo could be represented as fully-formed “head-to-toe” characters, with complete torsos and legs as well as arms. These full-body Muppets were operated by as many as four puppeteers, in a modified Bunraku style. Because the puppeteers were completely covered by their green costumes, and the puppets were operated by green-colored rods, their presence could be completely eliminated in the next phases of the production process, which erased all green images.

Papciak came to New York to view the live-action shooting “mostly to make sure that what was being shot would fit into our sets.” At times, Papciak’s understanding of the technical demands of the upcoming miniature shoot led him to make specific requests of the live shoot. “Kevin and the puppeteers would want to be as much of

SCENE 6: BIG BIRD “BEGINNING TO SAY ‘HI’”

6.1



BIG BIRD SITS ON THE WINDOW BED IN A CU STILL SHOT. THE STILL SHOT COMES TO LIFE AS THE CAMERA BEGINS TO WIDEN. BIG BIRD IS LOOKING AT GRANNY BIRD, WHO IS STANDING OUTSIDE THE WINDOW ARCH, GETTING READY TO LEAVE.

CU Big Bird, PULL OUT to LS Window

6.2



NANI BIRD ENTERS FRAME.

GRANNY BIRD:
I'll see you later, Big Bird! Have a good time with your Auntie Nani!

Camera stays WIDE

6.5



Camera TRACKS SCREEN LEFT in MS with Nani Bird, as she carries Big Bird to the chair.

Camera ends on a MS.

CAMERA TRACKS WITH NANI AS SHE CARRIES BIG BIRD ACROSS THE ROOM.

NANI SITS ON THE BIG CHAIR, SETTLING BIG BIRD ON HER LAP.

NANI BIRD:
Now say, "Hi Nani Bird."

an ensemble as possible,” Papciak said, but sometimes the close interaction of two puppets could lead to control rods or green-clad puppeteers overlapping the puppets themselves, which, after the green elements were eliminated, would create holes in the Muppet images. However, eliminating all puppet overlap, Papciak said, was sometimes impossible, and a delicate balance had to be achieved between the puppeteers’ need to perform together in the same space at the same time, and Handcranked’s need to work with images that could be composited cleanly into the footage of the miniature sets.

Live-Action Edit

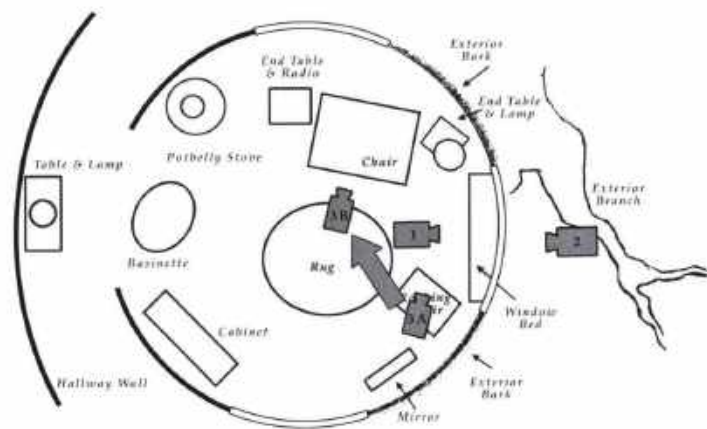
After the green-screen Muppet footage was shot, “on standard-definition digital Beta Cam,” according to Sias, it was edited in New York on an Avid system by Kevin Clash and Creative Bubble studios. “It must have been a hard edit,” Sias says, “because there was no background.” Clash and Creative Bubble were “editing blind” with the Muppet images alone. However, all editing decisions were made at this stage, and then “locked in” before the footage was sent to Handcranked Films.

Filming the Miniature Sets

In Boston, Papciak and Sias, together with four set designers, prop designers and fabricators, had already hand built the six sets needed for the *Sesame Beginnings* stories, as well as all the miniature props needed for these domestic interiors representing the homes of Elmo and his friends. After receiving the edited footage from Clash, Handcranked began the painstaking process of shooting the background scenes in exact synchronization with the live-action edits. Sias and Papciak had to duplicate camera angles, camera movements,



particular camera angles, and gave them the ability to shoot the set from any angle in a 360° radius. “I like the fact,” Papciak said, “that this approach allows you to see all the different areas of a room; it makes it feel a little more cinematic,” and allows for more flexibility than the television version of *Sesame Street*, where camera angles are far more limited.



and lighting qualities of the live-action scenes, but since Handcranked Films had been involved in the storyboard process at the beginning, they already had a clear idea of what was required. “We did a rough composite right on the set,” Sias said, so they could have a general idea of how their footage would synchronize with the Muppet scenes. For 90% of the live-action shots, the camera remained still, but the remaining 10% involved a moving camera, and those shots “probably took 99% of the time,” Sias said. The miniature sets “had to be modular, built in such a way that they could be put together or taken apart realistically and cleanly.” This design feature allowed Papciak and Sias to remove walls when necessary for

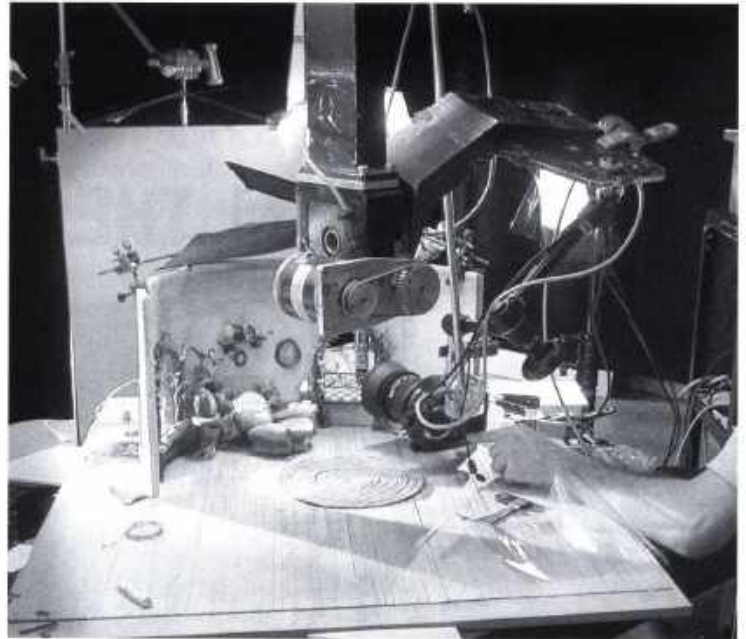
Compositing the Miniature and the Life-Sized

After the miniature set footage was filmed, Sias said, “we took it into a program called After Effects, to composite the Muppet footage onto it.” This process, however, had its own finicky details and challenges, because the puppets needed to be integrated into the background with a high degree of realism. If shadows didn’t exist in the live-action puppet footage, they had to be painstakingly created in digital form. And there were



even harder challenges. In one of the green-screen scenes shot in New York, Elmo stood behind a couch upon which three other Muppets were sitting. The back of the couch was represented by a piece of green cardboard, which was to be replaced by its miniature double at the Handcranked studio. However, according to Bryan Papciak, the green cardboard representing the couch was proportionately too tall, and the insertion of the miniature couch with its lower back into the composite scene would not cover the hole left by the absence of the green cardboard back. Consequently, the After Effects operators had to digitally create the missing parts of Elmo's body, a process made harder because Elmo, needless to say, did not stay still.

Sometimes the digital animators went to extraordinary lengths to "sell the realism" of the images, as Sias puts it. "One of the composers," Sias said, "put the reflection of a Muppet onto a chrome teapot sitting on the kitchen stove" behind the puppet, a moment of minute detail which, although it might barely be noticed, will contribute to the overall effect of the production.



when filming their live-action sequences. According to Sias, for the next series "we're going to try to keep the camera movements a bit simpler, and figure out how to shoot most economically." Part of the success of the collaboration, it seems, is that both sides work together well. "It's very easy working with Sesame Workshop," Sias says. "They take our suggestions, and they explain their suggestions very clearly."

It would appear that the combination of miniature puppet sets and life-size puppets is a technique which will become ever more prevalent in the twenty-first century.



More to Come

Having completed the first installments of the *Sesame Beginnings* series, both Kevin Clash and Handcranked Films are eager to continue their collaboration. "It was a fun thing, a challenge for us," Clash says, "and the environment worked very well." Papciak concurs, saying "It was a good combination." For the next *Sesame Beginnings* episodes, Handcranked Films will use the same sets, and make digital storyboards which Clash and his puppeteers can already use



The publication of this article marks the initiation of our peer-reviewed section, dedicated to articles by academics interested in the broad and deep implications of puppetry. Committee members are listed on page 2. As always, we welcome your feedback.

THE PUPPET IN IMAGINED SPACE:

VENTRILOQUISM, THE DISTANT VOICE



photos: Joe Luis Cedillo

Ventriloquist Sex, by the author, with John Hansen, Katrinka Wolfson, Brent Blair (with Rodney)

AND INVISIBLE PUPPETRY

BY RICK MITCHELL

Although ventriloquism, as a popular form of entertainment, does not always rely on performing objects—some ventriloquists, for example, will “throw their voice” to a distant place, such as an attic or back room, that is out of view of the audience—the ventriloquist usually utilizes puppets during most of his performance. Ventriloquism, however, has received scant attention from puppetry scholars, and the form remains on the margins of what many now refer to as the theater of performing objects. But ventriloquism deserves more attention, both for its unique position within puppetry and its implications within modern society. While enabling the ventriloquist—who today, on the professional stage, is just about always also a puppeteer—to suggest, through “voice throwing,” unseen space and characters in ways that the sole puppeteer *sans* ventriloquism cannot, ventriloquial performance can implicitly critique modern notions of space and subjectivity.

In ventriloquial performance, the actual source of the ventriloquized voice—the ventriloquist—remains in full view of the audience while creating voices that seem to emanate from spaces and objects exterior to the ventriloquist’s body. To create this illusion, the ventriloquist utilizes misdirection, primarily through puppetry, i.e., the “vent” moves a puppet’s or dummy’s mouth in sync with ventriloquized words while seeming to listen to and carry on a conversation with the animated object. As suggested above, the ventriloquist may also create characters without the use of objects or puppets. For example, he may suggest through acting and other cues that a voice is emanating from a roof, basement, or telephone. The technique utilized to create such effects is known in ventriloquist parlance as the “distant voice.” If accompanied by successful misdirection and proficient ventriloquial technique, a voice that sounds as if it could feasibly be coming from an attic will seem, to the audience, to be actually emanating from that particular space.

A typical ventriloquial performance will utilize one or more puppets, and often includes an unseen character or two created with the aid of the distant voice. At times, the puppet may even be an accomplice of sorts in the creation of the illusion of an unseen, speaking character. Witness, for example, the puppet who shouts from the inside of a closed trunk for the ventriloquist to let him out. The ventriloquist’s act of putting the puppet into the trunk helps to set-up the subsequent illusion that the puppet is continuing to move and speak once the trunk is closed.¹

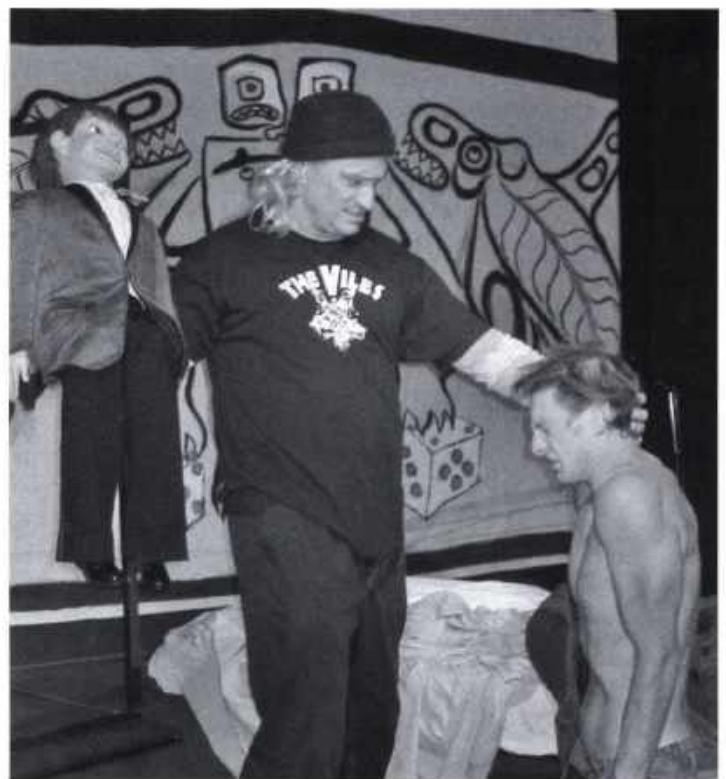
Although ventriloquism is unique in the way it employs vocal illusion and misdirection to create unseen, speaking characters, numerous forms of puppetry, including “vent,” feature objects that both move and speak. Yet some theorists choose to exclude vocal performance when discussing the theater of performing objects. Frank Proschan, for example, leaves out the vocal aspects of performance from his definition of “performing objects,” which he defines as “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or

manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance” (Proschan 3). Also emphasizing puppetry’s visual aspects, Ana Maria Amaral writes that “(t)he Theater of Objects or the Theater of Animated Forms is based on movement” (52). A more inclusive definition is Jiri Veltrusky’s, which states that the theater of performing objects “tends to impose a threefold structure: inanimate figure/motion imparted to it/voice performance— upon the *signans* made up of stage figure and action” (78). In other words, the object, the animation of it, and the voice imparted to it create the dramatic character that the spectator sees and hears within the theater of performing objects. Although some definitions of the performing object do not include voice, Veltrusky’s inclusion of puppetry’s vocal aspect is not atypical. Henryk Jurkowski, for example, states that “the speaking and performing object makes temporal use of physical sources for its vocal and driving powers, which are present beyond the object” (“Transcodification,” 31). Jurkowski suggests elsewhere, however, that among artists and theorists of performing objects (Jurkowski distinguishes objects from puppets), voice is seen as less important than movement.² These artists and theorists believe, he writes, that “the puppet or the object’s stage character was born on the stage by the same means— that of movement” (“Theater of Objects,” 47).

Ventriloquism, however, does not always require movement in order for an object to be animated. For example, a competent ventriloquist can create the illusion that the watch on his wrist is talking, or that a microphone in a mic stand is telling him to brush his teeth. As these examples suggest, the creation of a character within the theater of performing objects does not necessarily require motion, although it does require some sort of animating force, such as voice or movement. Additionally, ventriloquism does not depend solely on a visual object being present and/or manipulated. The puppet in the trunk, for example, is— in the spectator’s mind— still animated even when it is separated from the ventriloquist and out of view. Edgar Bergen, with his “vent figure” Charlie McCarthy, became the most famous ventriloquist of all time, even though his puppet character was primarily known through Bergen’s popular radio show. Of course, the success of the performing object in the trunk and on the radio often remains dependent on the audience’s prior visual familiarity with the object/puppet, and the spectator’s visual and vocal memory facilitates the audience’s ability to imagine that a figure is a distinct, embodied character when it is heard yet unseen. Images of Charlie McCarthy, for example, were widely circulated through the U.S. media, and the figure actually starred with Bergen in several movies. So when Americans heard Bergen producing Charlie’s voice on the radio, they were able to readily connect the voice

with the wooden character. Similarly, after a vent figure that has been speaking for several minutes is put into a trunk against its will, the audience can easily imagine that the figure is hollering from inside the closed trunk when the ventriloquist creates a muffled version of the figure’s voice. Ventriloquial misdirection does not always rely, however, on a particular object, whether present or remembered. During distant voice performance, for example, ventriloquial misdirection can help the spectator to imagine both a body and a space for a never-before-seen woman in a basement or man on a roof in spite of the fact that there is no specific, animated object and that the actual voice emanates from a source that’s standing right in front of them: the ventriloquist.

Without being tethered to a visible object, the ventriloquist— more so than other creators of “live” animated characters— is able to create (imagined) space populated by one or more (imagined) characters. Do we dare call these characters puppets? Certainly, if we know a puppet’s voice— i.e., the one that now seems to be speaking from inside a trunk during a “live” performance, or Charlie McCarthy’s, during a taped radio program featuring W.C. Fields as his nemesis— we will usually associate that unseen voice with the image of a particular, speaking puppet. But can we consider the voice from the distant space— the roof, for example— a puppet? Placing this voice within the context of Veltrusky’s definition of the performing object, we can say that the man on the roof is a “figure,” or character, animated— out of thin air— by ventriloquism. That is to say, through misdirection and vocal performance, the ventriloquist creates both a space



and a character (located at a distance and invisible). Since, from the audience's perspective, the imagined rooftop figure is speaking, there is some "motion imparted to it" (especially within the audience's imagination)³, and— of course— "voice performance" remains central to ventriloquial manipulation of space (and the audience). Since ventriloquism acts that utilize the distant voice usually feature, for most of the act, a puppet character, or characters, and since the man speaking on the roof is— in addition to being proof of the ventriloquist's skill— another character in the act, we can consider distant voice performance one aspect of a ventriloquial puppet show, and not something outside of it. Indeed, the distant voice enables the ventriloquist to create out of thin air a sort of *invisible puppetry* dependent, primarily, on the materiality of the always-present (and misdirecting) ventriloquist and his various voices, rather than on the materiality of the manipulated object that is at the center of both Proschan's and Amaral's notions of the theater of the performing object.⁴

Although Proschan and Amaral seem to be excluding from their definitions an important component of object performance, voice, their emphasis on the object itself may be symptomatic of a modern society that prioritizes the visual over the aural. Objects, for example, particularly in the form of commodities, have become increasingly predominant within modern, everyday experience. Since the mid-nineteenth century, as industrialization and modern capitalism burgeoned, and up through today, as consumer society's appetite for new goods continues to expand, commodities have— so to speak— commanded center stage. And their relatively new prominence may be related to Western society's fascination with performing objects that began a little over a hundred years ago. As Harold B. Segel points out in his book on puppets and avant-garde drama, inanimate objects were suddenly personified in record numbers on European stages towards the end of the nineteenth century. Jurkowski,

making a similar observation of avant-garde art in general, tells us that artists "were inspired to use objects in their art [in new ways]" ("Theater of Objects," 48) at the turn of the century. A possible explanation for this phenomenon might be found in the profoundly different ways in which people began relating to objects, or commodities, as industrial capitalism became entrenched in Europe and America. Writing amidst the rapid industrialization of London in the mid-nineteenth century, Karl Marx anticipates a world in which inanimate objects would become as real as the people who thought they controlled them. As Marx perceptively points out in *Capital* in 1867 (sixteen years before the publication of Carlo Collodi's wildly popular tale of a wooden object that becomes "real," *Pinocchio*), in the famous section on commodity fetishism, inanimate objects were increasingly dominating capitalist "man"— or at least becoming more like him, as he became more like them— as ever increasing numbers of objects (as commodities) and people (as wage workers) were bought and sold on the market.

While the commodification of society continued unabated, the popularity of performing objects among artists and scholars eventually waned. But, as Jurkowski points out, after a lull of several decades the theater of performing objects suddenly "became very popular in the eighties" ("Theater of Objects," 48), and its popularity continues to increase. Echoing Marx, Jurkowski suggests that the current emphasis by many on the performing object (rather than the puppet) has something to do with our historical moment:

The era of the consumer society in which we now live puts emphasis on different kinds of objects. We might even speak of a dictatorship of objects in everyday life, which obliges us to buy various things whether we want them or not ("Theater of Objects," 48).

In a commodified world increasingly dominated by objects, even "puppets appear to be old-fashioned and belong to a handicraft almost forgotten in our time" ("Theater of Objects," Jurkowski, 48). Yet as Stephen Kaplin points out, "Over the past several decades, puppet theatre in America has experienced extraordinary growth" (28). This is particularly evident within mass culture, in the popular, digitally animated movies and TV shows which Kaplin views as forms of puppetry.

All (visible) puppets are, of course, also objects, and, like puppets, performing objects (that were not created as puppets) are usually personified. So, in spite of some of their differences (i.e., the fact that an object may not appear to be a potential theatrical performer until acted upon), puppets and simple (performed) objects have much in common.⁵ And, as Jurkowski points out, the object's very object-hood is particularly apropos today, within our increasingly commodified society. From a socio-historical perspective, it makes sense

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL
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Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy "on the air"

that both the theater of performing objects and puppetry are increasingly popular, unlike distant voice performance, which is not seen very often these days, either "live" or on television.

In his book *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, Steven Connor, suggests that the way in which the distant voice takes up residence in unseen spaces implicated by the ventriloquist is especially unusual in modern society. According to Connor the modern Western subject lives in a world dominated by seen, apparently knowable, "explicated space," where the visual predominates (an example from puppetry would be the visible, animated object), although the subject's experience was once dominated— during "the late classical and early medieval periods" (13)— by "implicated space," where "the insides and outsides of things are not so powerfully distinguished as they are in later conceptions; insides and outsides change places, and produce each other reciprocally" (13). For example, during this earlier historical period, the body is readily inhabited by spirits and demons, and plagued by ecstatic behaviors. Contagious agents can easily move from body to body, causing the visible person to become the foreign presence, i.e., the evil spirit who has taken up residence, although it is often not at all clear what (if anything) is affecting an individual, whose boundaries remain quite permeable. As Connor explains, "The body is seen as both open to and in complex interchange with manifold external influences, agencies, and energies, natural, divine, and demonic" (13), as "individual bodies are seen as much more radically open to processes, influences, and agencies coming from the outside than they are in the modern world" (13).

As society hurtles towards the Enlightenment and through modernity, however, the subject becomes more isolated from outside influences. Its boundaries solidify and the subject becomes much less prone to invasion by exterior forces, as well as to the possibility of its insides traveling outward, and into other bodies. This modern conception of the subject, more dependent on sight and radically different from conceptions of the subject prior to the late classical period, may help to explain why ventriloquism can still be startling at times, not only when an object— an audience volunteer, for example, who comes up on stage and becomes a passive vessel for the ventriloquist's words— "speaks," but also when the ventriloquist, in a *tour de force* performance, vocally creates (through suggestion and voice performance) all sorts of unseen spaces that undermine our preconceived, delimited notions of the propriety of space and the speaking subject, whose socially and historically constructed boundaries we regularly accept and mimic. Certainly, the theater of performing objects, with its emphasis on the transformation of the object, can provide an antidote of sorts to commodity reification,⁶ but ventriloquism— particularly when featuring the distant voice— seems a bit more shocking within societies that rely heavily on vision for navigating the everyday. As Connor observes:

The fascination and the menace of ventriloquism [which was first practiced in "primitive" society] derived from a belief that it represented the power of sound to countermand the evidence of sight. When we hear a voice from nowhere— from thin air, as we say— or from some improbable location (the belly of a prophet, the depths of the earth) we hear something which our eyes assure us is not possible [...] the disturbing effect of ventriloquism may derive from its transcendence or disruption of seen space (15).

Even without the materiality of conventional puppetry, the ventriloquist's manipulation of (unseen) space (and the spectator's imagination) enables him to send his voice outwards, into spaces conventional puppeteers— tethered to the materiality of the performing object— could never approach. Thus, today's professional purveyor of the distant voice, who is just about always also a puppeteer, often utilizes implicated space— created through misdirection and ventriloquism— in addition to visually dependent puppetry's explicated space, to create a "spaced-out theater" of the performing object that may have more in common at times with the magic of "primitive" and premodern societies— where, for example, the subject's boundaries are permeable and immaterial spirits can be as "real" as flesh and blood neighbors— than with our own "rational" society, where seeing is believing.⁷

Most frequently, however, contemporary ventriloquial performance utilizes both explicated space (the speaking puppet) and implicated space (the unseen but vocally present

character). And it is the oscillation between these two spaces that makes ventriloquism, with or without visible objects, a distinct and significant branch of puppetry that warrants further exploration by both scholars and artists of the performing object.

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Footnotes

¹ Ventriloquists utilize a "muffled voice" when creating the illusion that a dummy is speaking from the inside of a suitcase. One way of demonstrating this particular ventriloquial skill is to open and close the suitcase periodically, in the midst of the dummy's speech. The moment the suitcase is opened, the dummy's voice is clear. When it is shut, the voice suddenly becomes muffled again. The "distant voice," a faint yet clear voice that is produced, in part, by tightening the abdomen and chest muscles, is utilized to suggest that a voice is emanating from some distance, such as a roof or basement, and it is also utilized during ventriloquial telephone conversations. It is worth noting that, to the average spectator, the distant voice is just as convincing when placed in an attic or a telephone receiver. Misdirection, created, for example, by shouting to an (imaginary) electrician in the attic or by talking into a telephone, always plays a huge role in creating ventriloquial illusions.

² Unlike a "simple object," a puppet, says Jurkowski, is explicitly "manufactured for theater use" ("Theater of Objects," 47).

³ Such imparted motion is enhanced when the ventriloquist suggests movement beyond speaking. For example, after having the imagined figure on the roof says that he's going home, the ventriloquist might create the sound of a distant door closing, followed by the sound of footsteps descending a stairwell.

⁴ The creation of characters out of thin air, sans the assistance of objects, brings to mind Prospero's spirit characters in *The Tempest*, such as Ariel, "which art but air" (V.i.21). Once Prospero's magical tour de force performance is over, these characters "are melted into air, into thin air" (IV.1.150), and — unlike the performed-upon object — they "leave not a rack behind" (IV.i.156).

⁵ While acknowledging their different emphases, according to Jurkowski, "object theater is nothing more than an extension of puppet theater" ("Theater of Objects," 47).

⁶ As Jurkowski points out, radically altering the standard meaning of an everyday object by acting upon it is a form of cultural resistance: "By using [objects] on stage we liberate ourselves from their everyday power. On behalf of the consumer society an artist takes his small revenge on things and objects, proving that he is their master and when he needs or wants he can give them new values—spiritual and aesthetic ones" ("Theater of Objects," 48).

⁷ By "spaced out" I mean a theater whose boundaries — normally delimited by the visually present object and, at times, a visually present subject/performer, such as the ventriloquist — are imploded through a ventriloquial practice in which characters (both seen and unseen) are seemingly projected outwards from a ventriloquist who, with still lips, seems to be taking no part in the animation of the characters (unlike, for example, the visible manipulators of Bunraku characters, or the puppeteers in the Broadway musical, *Avenue Q*, who move their mouths as their puppets speak). As suggested above, one of ventriloquism's more characteristic aspects, distant voice performance, has much in common with puppetry, as well as a significant difference, the lack of a visible, performing object. Since the professional ventriloquist who practices the distant voice usually combines it, within his act, with puppets and, often, other performing objects, the various characters that he creates, both seen and unseen, near and distant, are all part of his performance, which exists along a continuum that can extend from visible performing objects (i.e., a dummy), to visually and aurally remembered but unseen performing objects (i.e., the speaking dummy in the trunk, Charlie McCarthy on the radio), to never seen but audibly animated characters, such as the person on the roof. Rather than wrenching distant voice performance (as practiced on the stage) out of its performative context and categorizing it as something other than puppetry, I believe that we should consider it an aspect of puppetry — invisible puppetry — which, unlike some other theaters of the performing object, privileges voice as the main animating factor rather than the object itself and the motion imparted to it.

Rick Mitchell, as well as being a practicing ventriloquist, is on the faculty of the California State University at Northridge.

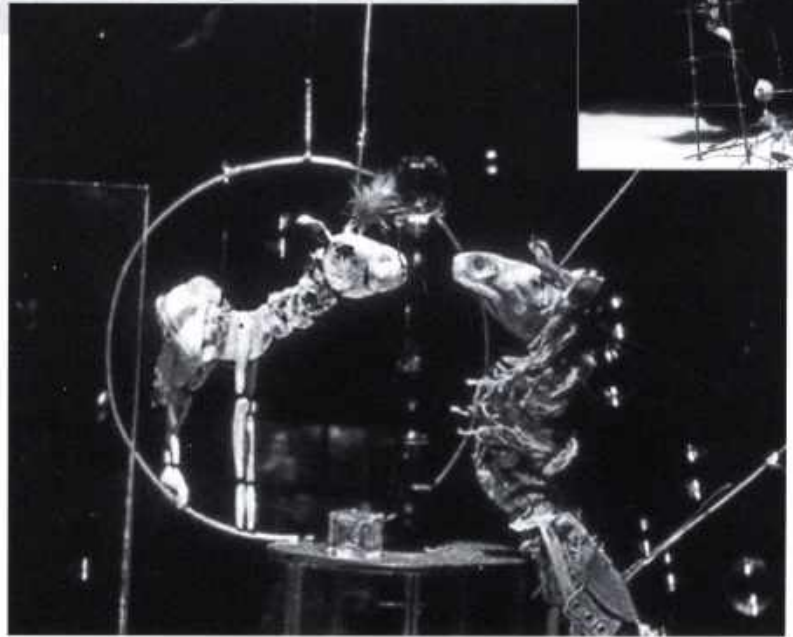


A number of people contacted us with regard to the scenography of *The Battle of Stalingrad*, by Rezo Gabriadze's Theatre Studio of Tblisi, Republic of Georgia. The visual elements of the production are stunning—well worth googling.

At center stage stood a marionette platform, perhaps twenty feet long, with the rest of the stage draped in black. As a requiem played, lights came up on a side marionette stage, no more than four square feet total in area, an empty box filled with snow-white sand. A hooded puppeteer manipulated a rag-wreathed, desiccated character out from under the sand/snow, then unearthed various iconographic objects: a red flag, a Soviet red star, an Orthodox cross, and finally an army helmet. These emblems of this ideological and military conflict were then pared down to an ominous final image: the empty helmet hung on the cross.

The Battle of Stalingrad

photos: Vladimir Meltser



From *Theatre Journal*—Vol 52, Number 4, Dec. 2000, pp. 575 (The Johns Hopkins University Press), by David Hammerbeck, Loyola Marymount University.

HANOI WATER PUPPETS

photos: Bradford Clark



Curtain call



The miracle of Water Puppetry—everyone can walk on water!

Vietnamese Water Puppetry [*mua roi nuoc*] is an ancient art form. Written evidence of performers working in water dates from 1121 AD. This was the time of the Ly Dynasty, when dikes and canals were built in great numbers to aid in agriculture and flood control. The water has proven a versatile playing space, at times acting as solid ground, at other times it is used as the shallow water of the rice paddy, or as water deep enough to be a home to dragons.



THE BIGGAR THE BETTER IN SCOTLAND

BY ROLANDE DUPREY

In South Lanarkshire in the Scottish Borders, deep in the rolling hills dotted with sheep, lies the little town of Biggar. Like so many places in Britain, there are vestiges of ancient settlements: a hoard of Neolithic pottery was discovered here, and the A702 was built over the old Roman road through the town. Because there are so many museums in and around Biggar, it is known as Scotland's Museum Town. It is also the home of the Biggar Puppet Theatre, owned and operated by Jill and Ian Purves and their family.

Ian Purves began puppeteering at age five, using toy theatre puppets. He worked as a stage designer and actor before teaming up with his wife Jill over thirty-five years ago to form the Purves Puppets, a professional touring company. Twenty years ago, they turned a Victorian coach-house into a permanent puppet theatre, with a café, a shop and, in the tradition of Biggar, a museum. The gardens are also beautiful, complete with a maypole for spring dances.

The theatre is essentially an enlarged "Toy Theatre," complete with box seating (not for the audience, but for puppets). The audience space is very comfortable, seating about one hundred. A medallion of Queen Victoria with the words "We ARE amused" is at the center of the proscenium. The ceiling is decorated with paintings of the constellations so that when the lights go out, the "stars" shine. This way, the audience isn't in total darkness. It worked wonderfully for the show I saw, since when the lights first went out, a little boy

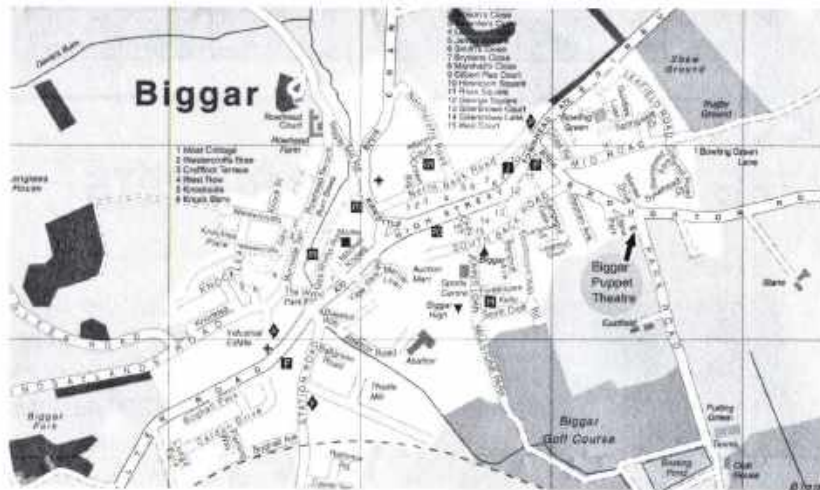
began to cry in fear, but his cries were soon quelled by the wonder of the star-lights in the "sky." At the back of the theatre is a fantastic mural, done in the style of the Russian lacquer boxes, which Ian painted and adorned with gem-stones.

These lights do not interfere at all with the performances, which are in Black Light. The Biggar Puppet Theatre is the only permanent Black Light Theatre in Britain. The full-length shows include a variety of types of puppets, from rod and glove to marionette and shadow. The shows are filled with wonderful effects. Ian has found or mixed his own fluorescent paint colors I never knew existed. He has pushed the medium incredibly far. He and his wife Jill write the shows:

We find that it is best if puppeteers write their own material because they know their puppets' capabilities best... We write completely original plays like 'Nessie The Loch Ness Monster,' and also our own versions of folktales, etc. This year is the bi-centenary of Hans Christian Andersen, so we mounted a special production of 'The Tinderbox.'

With our family and the other puppeteers we record all the voices, music and sound effects. This has to be done in many languages because we travel so widely. We do most of the European ones ourselves, but we have friends who do the Chinese, Polish, Gaelic and Welsh ones – we don't stretch to those!

The theater has been recognized with awards: The Regeneration of Scotland Design Award, 1989; The Come to Britain Trophy 1987, and Scottish Tourism Oscar Winner, 1993 (as part of the town of Biggar and its facilities), but has never received consistent funding from any organization.



The Scottish Arts Council provides some grants for individual artists. Simon Hart, the director of the Puppet and Animation Festival, which is backed by the Scottish Arts Council, says that many artists apply once, and if they don't receive a grant, they stop applying.

But then, very few groups in Scotland receive funding to do their work. Since the days of Margaret Thatcher, many theatres across Britain have suffered. Some were given a choice of self-censorship or budget cuts. The puppet theatres have never been well funded, except by some local governments. And yet, there is a psychological barrier in the expectation of funding. The public assumes that the theaters are funded, and few contribute money to them. There is not a tradition of volunteerism as there is in the states. So, with no funding for staff, and few volunteers, the puppet theatres and touring groups are pressured to be commercially viable. The "Catch 22" seems to be – *You're successful? Then you don't need funding. You're taking a loss? Then we can't back you.*

Ian agrees:

What you say, about the public assuming we are funded, is very true! We have approached any number of funding bodies without success. Indeed we have tried unsuccessfully for the last eighteen years just to get an Arts Council representative to visit our theatre - it is forty-five minutes by car from their main office in Edinburgh!

We have never received regular funding from any Arts Councils. We have occasionally had small amounts— up to a quarter of costs— towards particular projects, but that was many years ago.

There are many forms to fill out, many hoops to jump through.

The Puppet and Animation Festival is a "moveable feast," running for about two months each spring throughout Scotland. It is one of the most cohesive organizations for puppeteers, perhaps in all of Britain, providing work and exposure for many during those two months. Puppet companies from abroad are invited as well. The venues include schools and theatres in many parts of Scotland. Ian hopes that the Biggar Puppet Theatre will be included in next year's festival.

But, the mood is always festive at the Biggar Puppet Theatre. The rabbits hold children's attention in the gardens. The views of the hills are soothing; the café offers a respite to older visitors. It is easily reached from Edinburgh or Glasgow, about forty miles from either city, and the routes are very scenic. Buses from Edinburgh run daily.

While one company continues to perform for family audiences in Biggar, another company tours, performing for schools and theatres around Britain and overseas. There is a repertory of over eighteen different shows, which are performed both at home and on the road.



The schedule of their performances is located at: www.purvespuppets.com. Phone or e-mail for details, and to make reservations.

Roland Duprey has an MFA in puppetry from UConn, and is a frequent contributor to PI.

A PERFECT SPACE: DESIGNING THE THEATER TO FIT THE PUPPETS



BY CHRISTOPHER PIPER

Possibility and flexibility are the keystones of the Puppet Co. Playhouse design. On the surface, the stage cage is simply a 20-foot cube raised 18 inches above audience level. Underlying the stage however is an eight-foot deep pit with trap doors opening in the stage floor. Above the stage is a fly loft for scenery changes. Similarly, the shop and audience areas are kept as level and open as possible. Audience seating is primarily a posh carpeted area with two eight-inch rises, bordered by upholstered benches. An ADA compliant ramp on the entrance side of the theater provides an aisle for seating and for character entrances. A short partition separating ramp and audience sometimes serves as a playboard. Seating on the carpet is extremely flexible, accommodating wheelchairs as well as children large and small. Benches face inward toward the carpet so parents can see their children as well as the show. Chairs can be set up for adult activities. A catwalk overhead allows for a follow spot, and for over-the-audience manipulation of flying characters. The shop area has rolling walls that can be adjusted when more room is needed for costuming, scene painting, construction, or the green room. Electrical outlets, phone jacks, and data ports line the walls.

The artistic core of the Puppet Co., Allan Stevens, Mayfield Piper and the author, attempts to continually surprise its audiences - using hand puppets, rod puppets, marionettes, bunraku-style figures, and some innovations of its own, often in combination. On stage: Mowgli can swing across the proscenium, let go of the rope and fall through the traps into the "river," come up on bamboo stilts and avoid a crocodile that snaps at him from the water. Mowgli is snatched up by monkeys that carry



him away to the treetops above the audience; humanette Munchkins come up from the floor to stand at half-height to Dorothy; a chandelier flies out while giant ornaments fly in as Clara-Marie shrinks to the base of her Christmas tree. Any of these effects would be possible in a well-equipped "legitimate" theater. The difference is that everything about the Puppet Co. Playhouse is designed and scaled for puppets, from the tapering of the walls from the back of the house to the stage, to sightlines that accommodate a variety of playing areas: floor, table top, playboard, marionette stage, or combinations. The advantage of 20 years of working together touring, in-residence, and in two previous "found" theater spaces has enabled the Puppet Co. to design and build their Playhouse as a perfect space for puppet performance.

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Drawing of Russian puppetry
from 1636

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THREE THEATRES
FOR THE JAPANESE

NINGYŌ JŌRURI

BY BRADFORD CLARK

The *ningyō jōruri*, embodied in the performances of the three-operator puppets of the National Bunraku Theatre, demands a specific approach to stage space. Spectacle has long been an important aspect of these performances, and in the most sophisticated theatres, turntables were developed to carry away one scene and replace it with another. Proportionately wide stages and scenic designs are required to accommodate large numbers of manipulators. To the side of the stage, a raised revolving platform holds the team of *tayu* narrator and shamisen musician. While one pair is most common, for effect, sometimes many pairs perform together, crowding the area and spilling onto the stage proper. Onstage platform levels provide both visual interest and allow upstage puppets to be seen past the manipulators of downstage ones. The low play rail wall, which serves as a visual stage floor for the floating puppets, stands at about thirty inches or so. At times an upstage play rail may part, creating an opening that allows figures and operators to pass downstage.

The National Bunraku Theatre of Japan has long been recognized as the premiere home of the traditional *ningyō jōruri*. In 1966, a theatre was built within Tokyo's National Theatre for their tours to the capitol. For years, they performed in a theatre on Dotonburi Street, Osaka's primary shopping district, but in 1984, they moved to a much larger purpose-built theatre a few blocks away. Their current theatre, holding over 750 audience members, was sponsored by the Japanese government, and is quite possibly the most sophisticated theatre in the world designed specifically for puppetry. Equipped with a full fly system and many technical amenities, the Bunraku-za is as impressive as all but the best-equipped "human" stages. Features include a large built-in turntable for quick changes and, for ease of use and speed of control, a hand turned rotating platform to whisk *tayu* narrators and shamisen musicians on and off stage between acts. Support rooms surround the stage (for puppet maintenance, actor green rooms, and others). A first floor lobby contains a book kiosk, a video station offering an introduction to the art, and a gallery, featuring historically significant heads, a research library, and examples of puppets produced by schoolchildren through the Bunraku-za's outreach programs. The gallery also displays wooden heads, unpainted and in different stages of completion, carved by the late master Oe Minosuke. One features glass eyes, a very unusual innovation. A second floor lobby

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Outside the new National Bunraku Theatre, Osaka

leads into the theatre. Surrounded by display cases featuring designs and puppets from performances, it contains gift and food kiosks as well as seating for audiences (members of whom typically eat between acts).

While the National Bunraku Theatre impresses with its scale and technical sophistication, the lesser known, smaller regional puppet theatres throughout Japan exert their own charm and possess their own historic significance. Two are in the Iida city area, in Nagano prefecture, where four companies are established, two being especially active. The Imada Ninyō and the Kuroda Ninyō groups have histories that go back over 300 years. Kuroda Ninyō's home sits next to a shrine within a residential area in Iida, not far from the city center. Kuroda boasts two remarkable theatres – one that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, while a new rehearsal and performance space, designed in a traditional manner, boasts a magnificent auditorium, elegant rehearsal rooms, and highest quality *tatami* mats. Hallway showcases display part of the company's historic collection of puppets, scripts and associated materials. Kuroda's magnificent space, a warm, richly hued wooden structure of tremendous charm, is one of the most beautiful puppet theatres that I have ever visited. Such structures in Japan are now unusual, due to fire codes; special permission was required to build this one, and most of the valuable puppet collection is stored in a separate building.

Kuroda's first theatre, now rarely used due to its historic importance, offers a fascinating glimpse of the traditional carpenter's art, especially evident on the second floor, which



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functioned as a green room for performers waiting to go on. A magnificent beam, irregular in width, balances on a post, off-center. On the first floor, outside panels can be removed, opening the front of the theatre to allow audiences to sit inside the space, on cushions and *tatami* mats, and on the ground beyond. The new theatre and rehearsal hall has this capability as well, creating an indoor/outdoor audience space that allows visitors to recall Japan's rich folk theatre traditions.

Orchards surround Imada Ningyō's theatre, situated far away from the city center. Like Kuroda's space, the wooden floored venue is situated next to a historic Shinto shrine, which is honored with performances at certain times of the year. Audiences fill the floor and spill out into the front yard, the shrine to their right. A magnificent sunset may be seen from the balcony each evening. The theatre can be seen through the fields when pulling into the train station; one passes over the magnificent Tenryukyu River when traveling from there to the theatre. Not far away, another theatre, once used for *ningyō jōruri*, kabuki and other kinds of performance, is currently being restored by local community members, including those

associated with Imada; it boasts an early revolving stage for quick set changes.

Theatre spaces are both performance machines and living entities – practical tools necessary to the presentation of live enactments as well as repositories of history and atmosphere, affecting audiences in ways that transcend their pragmatic functions. While the National Bunraku Theatre impresses with the beauty of its design, its scale and technical sophistication, these local theatres, serving companies with smaller-scale repertoires and productions, exert a real charm over the visitor and are of equal importance to the living *ningyō jōruri* tradition.

Information and plans for Osaka's National Bunraku Theatre:
www.kisho.co.jp/WorksAndProjects/Works/bunraku/

Kuroda Ningyō's new rehearsal stage:
www.city.iida.nagano.jp/puppet/sisetsu/kuroda.html

Imada Ningyō's rehearsal and performance space:
www.city.iida.nagano.jp/puppet/sisetsu/imada.html



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Historic nineteenth century Kuroda Ningyō Theatre in Iida, Japan. Panels on right open to audience outside.

Summer, 2005. Performing in their new space.

SHADOWS ON THE MOVING SCREEN

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
BRAD STEINMETZ



In his retelling of the Bohemian fairytale, *The Three Spinners*, adapter/director Dr. Joe Brandesky sought to employ an aesthetic common to contemporary Czech puppetry, the use of puppets of wildly contrasting scales. From this seed, our production at The Ohio State University-Lima grew into a broad synthesis of old and new styles that incorporated rod puppets, spectacle objects, live actors, and a full-stage moving panorama that doubled as a screen for shadow puppets and projections.

The Three Spinners was a show for young audiences which followed the fortunes of a girl named Lidushka as she traveled from her family's shack in the countryside to a regal palace, where she was to prove her prowess spinning wool, and finally to a pastoral wedding with a prince. In collaboration with myself as designer and Loo Brandesky as costumer, our small production team set out to create a broad and colorful world for Lidushka's story that also integrated the diverse sizes and types of actors and objects. We also needed to create a visual language that conveyed the motion of travel.

Shadow puppets, which often exist in a surreal, monochromatic world, proved difficult to synthesize into the colorful and broad style of the production. In early design meetings, the shadow puppets were too easily consigned to a discrete fragment of the stage or to a world that seemed detached from the rest of the story. In an effort to make the shadow puppets more central, we employed them specifically to tell the story of Lidushka's travels from place to place.

The use of rolling paper scrolls as a screen for shadow puppets is an ancient technique that helps produce diverse locations or scenic movement. In fact, the art of shadow puppetry itself was likely derived from the narrative picture scrolls of ancient Indian performance (Mair). A contemporary example of rolling paper scrolls can be found in the works of Blair Thomas, a Chicago-based artist who focuses on visual theatre and puppetry. In his *The Blackbird* (2002), Thomas used a series of back-lit paper screens that scrolled independently, allowing for a more dynamic interplay between the shadow puppets and scenery.

This technique of stretching paper between rollers is,

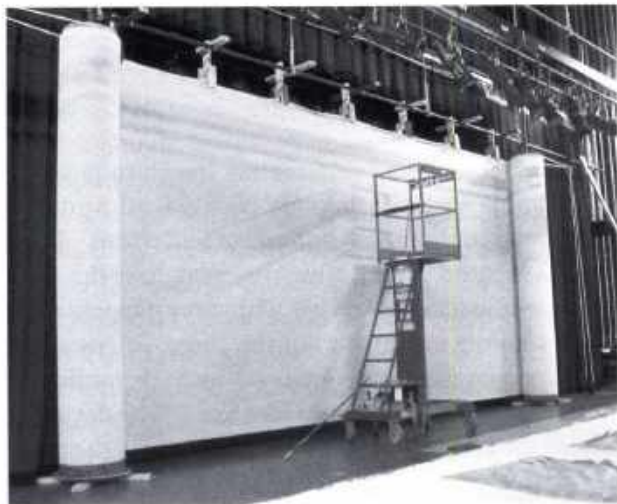
unfortunately, limited in its scale. Whereas the paper scrolls for *The Blackbird* produced square screens of around 4 feet, *The Three Spinners* required a space 12 feet tall and 20 feet wide for our shadow puppets to be on equal footing with the actors on stage. It was the idea of a large moving panorama, comprised of both painted and translucent portions, that finally seemed to unify world of the play and give it mobility.

The moving panorama, which in the early nineteenth century was one of the most popular spectacles in American theatre, is now almost entirely relegated to small-scale toy theatres and the like. The act of scrolling a large painted backdrop across the stage is both an engineering challenge and a labor-intensive effort for painters as the drop is many times wider than the stage itself. We solved these problems in part by looking back at the centuries-old technology of moving panoramas.

In his *Panorama of the Mississippi River* (1846), John Banvard developed a mechanism for scrolling what was at the time the largest panorama ever exhibited. The drop, made of heavy canvas pieces sewn together, was spooled on either side of the stage and wound with a large mechanism of gears and cranks. To support the top edge of the drop and prevent sagging, he used a series of rollers that supported a rope sewn to the top of the drop and hidden behind an upper curtain ("Banvard's," 100).

Our resources were more modest and our needs for both a painting and shadow surface differed from traditional moving panoramas, but we were able to both adapt and re-imagine such a mechanism for *The Three Spinners*. We began with a drop made of white landscaping fabric, a translucent material that had a far-from-perfect painting surface but which made financially possible a seamless drop of 12 feet in height and 100 feet in length. Casters similar to Banvard's rollers supported a wire rope sewn inside the top of our panorama for vertical support. A series of ropes and pulleys allowed backstage control of the panorama in either direction.

Stage mechanics were only a portion of our challenge. On the other side of the panorama, Dr. Brandesky was working with actors on a variety of puppets and objects. In a



Upstage side of moving panorama mechanism

dream sequence, Lidushka's fear that her family would meet the three magical yet grotesque spinners played itself out using rod puppets. Each actor manipulated a puppet version of their identically-dressed character through Lidushka's dream.

Between each of the three main scenes, the shadow of the royal horse and carriage galloped along the landscape as Lidushka journeyed from countryside to castle to wedding. Simultaneously, the panorama scrolled, revealing the terrain and scenery of their travels. Lidushka traveled over drawbridges and valleys, past trees and birds, through sunrises and sunsets. With such a large screen to manage, these sequences became a ballet of five or six puppeteers and stage hands pulling ropes, manipulating lights, and embodying puppets.

Inside the castle, three large windows revealed projected images of un-spun wool in huge piles awaiting Lidushka's arrival. While she slept, the magical three spinners turned the piles of wool into colorful spools of yarn. Three puppeteers, each with an



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overhead projector and a series of transparencies, worked the magic in the windows.

This versatile and dynamic space for actors and puppets of all types helped to unify the world of the play while embodying the boldness and motion of the story. In addition, it offered more proof that ancient styles and old technology are often more engaging to the minds and imaginations of children than the new.

Works Cited

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Scene 3. The wedding.

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MR. PUNCH IN LITERARY SPACE: Post-Apocalyptic Performance Ritual in *RIDDLEY WALKER*

BY K. A. LAITY

RIDDLEY WALKER

EXPANDED EDITION



RUSSELL HOBAN

Although he sets his novel *Riddley Walker* (published in 1980) in a post-apocalyptic future, Russell Hoban makes use of the medieval world to mark this future as a site of the “primitive.” For this stunted society, the most apparent aspect of the Middle Ages is the explicitly medieval legend and wall

painting of St. Eustace, which still exists faintly on the wall of Canterbury Cathedral. Perhaps more important is his appropriation of the medieval mystery plays, which illuminate biblical narratives and are traditionally performed on mobile wagons. As performed in *Riddley Walker*, the “Eusa Show” (a garbled version of the St. Eustace story) takes on many of the mystery plays’ aspects, transmitting the truths of the culture and entertaining people with education. This modified Punch and Judy show conveys the only narrative that remains after the apocalyptic devastation of English society. The ritual of the puppet show picks up the religious meaning of the mystery plays, but it also takes on a social and governmental function that medieval dramas typically lacked. Just as various dissenters from Lollards to Pelagians threatened the orthodoxy of Christianity in the Middle Ages, the young protagonist’s discovery of a real Punch puppet sets off a chain of events that destroys the carefully scripted Eusa show. Hoban’s use of Punch history gives this superb novel its authority, while the familiar art of puppetry provides a vivid connection to this bizarre future world for the modern reader.

The novel begins with the naming day of twelve-year-old Riddley, his right of passage into manhood. If he seems advanced for a twelve year old, his surprisingly acute mind may in part be tied to his job as “connexion man.” Half shaman and half bureaucrat, the job of connexion man centers on

explaining and interpreting the Eusa puppet show to his small community each time the government men bring the show to their settlement. The much repeated ritual commences when the Mincery (Ministry) men arrive with their puppets and fit up (mobile stage), set up the stage, interact with the people via their connexion man, then offer the traditional lessons via the puppets like Eusa. The day after their departure, the connexion man must interpret for the people the subtle meanings encoded in the puppet show. Perhaps it is his job as connexion man that helps Riddley understand he has found something significant when he comes across a buried Punch figure while working at a dump. Although he does not recognize the crooked figure, he is quite familiar with puppets from the government-sanctioned Eusa show. We’re more than half-way through the book before he learns the identity of the enigmatic figure. As puppeteer and “Pry Mincer” (a devolution of Prime Minister), Goodparley explains in the patois of their post-nuclear England, “This here figger his name is Punch which hes the oldes figger there is. He wer old time back way way back long befor Eusa ever ben thot of. Hes so old he cant dy...” (131).” At this point in the novel, Riddley is unaware of the puppet’s history; nonetheless he recognizes intuitively the power of the figure who cannot die.

He risks everything he has—position, power, safety—for the puppet he finds in the muck of the dump (disturbingly, with the severed hand of his last puppeteer still in place). Knowing that all items found must be turned over to the Mincery’s control (because, unbeknownst to the general populace, they are searching for the keys to nuclear power), Riddley nonetheless finds himself unable to give up the figure. “It wer a show figger like the 1s in the Eusa show,” he says, but “this here figger tho it wernt like no other figger I ever seen...the head wernt like no other head I ever seen in a show nyther. The face had a big nose what hookit down and a big chin what hookit up and a smyling mouf” (72-73). Without understanding why, Riddley immediately pockets the figure, tosses the nearby Mincery man head first into the mud and hightails it over the fence into the forbidding wild lands outside. This defiant act moves him from the center of his social group—and pivotal role as connexion man—into outlawry and danger, most immediately from the wild dogs that encircle the human settlements. In the medieval world, the safety of society was fringed by the horrors of dangerous wastelands; yet only those hardy souls who braved the wilderness could receive the blessings of insight. It is only fitting then (if we agree that this society mirrors medieval society) that once Riddley decides to chance the dangerous

space outside his settlement, the wild dogs unexpectedly befriend the boy. Thus, as he begins a journey that uncovers the deepest secrets of his society and the fractured history the Mincery has sought both to deny and to recover: the secret of nuclear power.

Like the Christian mythic pattern of paradise, banishment and redemption, the approved Eusa puppet show reconstructs the nuclear annihilation of much of the world. It is a story of lost comforts and horrible apocalypse, which have scarred both the language and the people. The medieval legend of St. Eustace, as found in a description of the fifteenth century wall painting of Canterbury Cathedral, supplies the narrative context for the Eusa puppet show. The legend of Eustace follows the normal pattern of medieval hagiography: revelation, suffering, death and miracles. But reconstituted as the story of "Eusa," it is a show both fractured and misunderstood—rather than the tale of a saint, it becomes the tale of the country's destruction by nuclear holocaust. As connexion man, Riddley must memorize the story—which exists only in oral form, as far as he knows (unaware of the original medieval painting)—but even he is unsure of its true meaning. While he can quote from this "scripture," he cannot provide exegesis. In part this is due to the intermingling of narratives and the breakdown of many years of oral transmission. Two narrative strands have been joined together, each confusing the other. To the story of St. Eustace, who first recognized divinity when he sees a vision of Christ between the antlers of a stag, technical information on nuclear fission has been added, represented by the figure of the "Littl Shyning Man." A further layer is added because both Eusa (Eustace) and the Littl Shyning Man have taken center stage in the puppet show that once was Punch's domain, pushing the anarchic anti-hero aside in favor of the government's mouthpiece. We can see a transmission much like medieval narratives that developed in oral form, transferred from one region to another and one teller to another, only to be written down, then translated from one language to another. The authority of the church provided one constant. But frequent calls for reform over the centuries betray that the movement toward chaos and splintering was ever imminent. Similarly, the Eusa story has taken on the weight of the authority, yet even the Mincery feels the desire to adapt, change and revise the story according to its own aims.

The performance Riddley grows up with takes on a codified form, but it also contains many elements of uncertainty. The ritual of the Eusa show begins with the connexion man leading the audience through the rote opening of call and response, reminding them that they are all going together "down that road with Eusa" and "wher them Chaynjis [changes] take us" (44). Just as in the medieval mystery plays, the audience knows the familiar format as well as the gist of the stories. But the power of the stories comes alive with each performance,

and the meaning changes as the audiences do, too. Riddley comments upon this phenomenon when he sees Eusa at the first show in which he must participate, following the death of his father, the previous connexion man. His job requires close observation, to prepare him to explain the nuances to his people:

Eusa come up then slow and scanful like all ways terning his woodin head this way and that and his paintit eyes taking us all in. Many and manys the time Id lookit back at them staring blue eyes. Since back befor I cud member it even. Only this time it seamt like it wer the 1st time I wer seeing him and I wer afeart of him. (46)

Riddley's fear in this scene could be written off as nervousness about his new responsibilities, but it seems to signal a subconscious discomfort not just within his own mind, but that of the Mincery staff as well. His unease proves prescient: that night the Eusa men change the familiar script. Eusa, whose well-known story has been told times innumerable, has always borne the blame for the "I Big 1," as they term the nuclear war. But that night, the puppeteers offer another opinion—that the blame instead belongs to Mr Clevver (whose red color and horns make him recognizable to readers as the devil puppet from the original Punch show). The puppeteers anticipate the audience's alarm and discomfort (imagine a medieval Christian audience reacting to Judas suddenly being absolved of blame for leading to the crucifixion) and explicitly address it with argument and reinterpretation of "scripture." Orfing, the narrator of the show, quotes Eusa Chapter 18 from memory, then asks the puppet, "What in the worl makes you think weare going to beleave a new story now?" But Eusa responds, "This aint nothing new dint I tel you this is trufax and wrote down the same at the Mincery." These are true facts, he claims, and more than that, they are based on written records—available, of course, only to those in authority. Writing carries a powerful impact in this oral culture, just as books





Why puppets? Punch and Judy had been in my thoughts ever since reading, some time before coming to England, two New Yorker articles by Edmund Wilson about English Puppeteers. I hadn't yet seen a show but, soon after my Canterbury visits, I saw Percy Press and Percy Press, Jr. do one in Richmond; after that it was inevitable that Mr. Punch would find his way into Riddley Walker, sooner or later.

—R Hoban

were themselves talismanic objects in the Middle Ages. Orfing predicts the resulting confusion of the people gathered there and presses the puppet further, asking, "Whyd you pick now to change your story?" (51). Eusa's answer, as spokesperson for the Mincery, is that the question of blame isn't really a change to the story, countering, "What the diffrents any how?" because in the end, "If I hadnt some I else wudve done" (52-53). There is change, but the the Mincery men attempt to comfort them with the thought that it is not *significant* change.

The puppeteers use their established authority, both through the ritual of the show itself and through the audience's trust in and ignorance of the written records of the Mincery, to prepare people for new goals—finding the previously forbidden secrets of nuclear power. The audience has no way to question the "trifax" because its local culture is only oral and entirely dependent upon the Eusa men and the Mincery, and to a lesser extent, their connexion man, Riddley. But the deviation from the script seems to have disturbed Riddley, although he lacks the sophistication to articulate his discomfort. Sitting alone in the rain after the Eusa show, he muses, "You know some times you get a fealing you dont want to put no words to" (54). The sense of trouble continues the next night as he prepares his first connexion. Riddley has had a chance to ruminate upon the changed show, but so too have his people, and there seems to be an additional sense of urgency as they await Riddley's elucidation. Again, the ceremony begins with ritual, another call and response as the crowd awaits his words about the altered Eusa show. Yet, Riddley is unable to heal the rupture. In fact, his first connexion only puts him into a kind of trance. He believes he conveyed all its strange images (of Eusas' head growing to gigantic proportions and a blackness beyond darkness) to the eager audience; however, they hear none of his thoughts and his revelation that "Eusas head is

dreaming us" remains obscure both to Riddley and to his audience: "So every I wer lef hanging. Me and all" (62).

The rupture caused by the incomplete ritual and the changed narrative disturbs everyone. Just as the medieval mystery plays offered narratives that became part of daily life, like Noah the hen-pecked husband or Herod the bombastic blowhard, the Eusa show had provided stability to the people of Riddley's settlement. The failure of the ritual rends fissures through the fabric of their society. These fissures show up first in the children's taunting rhyme "Riddley Walker wernt no talker" (63), but shortly thereafter result in his hasty exodus from society at the dump with the Punch figure in his pocket. When he finds Punch, Riddley sets off on a journey of discovery that eventually finds him in the ruins of Canterbury Cathedral and, inadvertently, at the center of the Mincery's attempts to reconstruct the power of the "1 Big 1."

The gruesome discovery of the muck-blackened Punch fuels Riddley's search for knowledge, but it also offers him another voice with which to investigate and eventually narrate his discoveries. The unaccounted figure of Punch opens his mind to the possibilities of a world beyond the Mincery's teachings; if there are other puppets than the Eusa show troupe, what other surprises might be out there? Riddley sees familiar places with new eyes, and seeks out the secrets of the past in the rubble of Canterbury. He sees in the ruins of the cathedral the shape of a woman and understands the devastation of the earth that she represents with her blasted shell of a body. Lifting a stone, he finds in the wreckage a Greenman figure—its face of leaves and vines undoubtedly once part of the Cathedral's masonry—which he had seen first in a vision, imagining "it wer the onlyes face there wer. It wer every face" (166). The face is "rapt up in a bit of red and black stripet hard clof it wer the same and very clof the Eusa show men use for ther fit ups" (167). Always the Eusa show has been there before him, but for Riddley, the Eusa show men are not always to be trusted. The puppeteers prove a malleable authority, just as the Eusa men Orfing and Goodparley form and break alliances several times in their pursuit of the 1 Big 1, just as if they were puppets on a stage. As Orfing comments later, "You know as wel as I do if you put I figger on your right han and a nother on your lef the I wil go agenst

the other some how some time" (198). Riddley comes to see himself initially as the puppet of these men, asking himself, "If I wer a figger in a show what hand wer moving me then?" but avoids seeking an answer to the seemingly unknowable question, brushing it off with, "Theres all ways some thingwl be moving you if it aint 1 thing its another you cant help that" (173). Riddley cannot escape being someone's puppet, but conscious of that inevitability, he can choose which thing will be moving him.

In the end, it is only through the puppets that Riddley can begin the process of healing the rupture of the changed Eusa story and the revelation of the 1 Littl 1 (gunpowder) after which the 1 Big 1 (nuclear power) can't be far behind. But by then the Mincery is in ruins too, just like Canterbury Cathedral, its members either dead (like Goodparley) or disgraced (like Orfing). Riddley signals the change in authority by the creation of his own original story about stones in which he intuits the weight of history that they contain, and by his recognition that the only power is no power. Those who thirst for power, like the Mincery men, inevitably seem to be destroyed by it. The new story is not so much a throwing off of history as providing an alternative track, a kind of post-nuclear Reformation movement. Suddenly the world is a larger place than just the Eusa show, and Riddley begins to adapt to being "programmit diffrent" after his visions of the woman, the Greenman and the stones in Canterbury (166). He begins to adjust to the changes with a dialogue between the Greenman figure and the blackened Punch, who asks, "Whats it all about then?" (172). Riddley is unable to reconcile the new knowledge gained with the world he has known through the Eusa show, although he intuitively makes the connection part of the show now, rather than its epilogue. However, he still needs a revelation to show the new way. His savior has already been prophesized, but Riddley has not yet recognized him.

The shift in his cosmology begins in earnest when Riddley discovers the existence of a second bag of figures in the late Goodparley's puppet show fit up. Riddley recognizes Punch of course (even in his less dilapidated state), but not all the other Punch and Judy figures familiar to a modern audience like Judy herself, the baby and the Judge. He realizes that now he has all the figures needed to bring the new narrative to the community. Riddley has learned much more about the world and about the kind of stories we tell ourselves about our own cultures. He articulates that understanding, too, saying, "It aint in the natur of a show to be the same every time it aint like a story what you pas down trying not to change nothing which even then the changes wil creap in" (205). Even though he doesn't understand the nature of all the creatures he finds in the second bag (the crocodile, for one, is a complete mystery) he intuitively grasps their purpose in the storytelling. The other figures provide resonances, often

unconnected with the official Eusa story, but to familiar parts of life such as family life and sexual coupling.

Riddley understands the power of the puppets themselves, how they have some existence and meaning beyond what he or the Eusa men give to them. While his understanding cannot express the ontological weight of the puppets as the vehicle for their cultural memory and mythology, Riddley can recognize that ability in the figures themselves. As he puts it, crudely but insightfully:

You take a figger out of the bag nor it aint nothing only some colourt clof with a paintit wood head and hans. Then you put it on. You put your head finger in the head you put your arm fingers in the arms then that figger looks roun and takes noatis *it has things to say* [emphasis added]. Which they wont all ways be things youwd think of saying o no them wood heads the hart of the woos is in them and the hard of the wud and all. They have ther knowing and they have ther saying which you bes lissen for it you bes let it happen. (204)

Riddley recognizes the interplay between puppet and performer, the frisson between performance, performer and audience. He is done with scripted stories and returns to the shaman half of his role, both in healing the community and in accessing the mythic level to find the stories they all need to hear. As he puts it, "In emty-ness and ready to be fult. Not to lern no body nothing I cant even lern my oan self all I can do is try not to get in front of whats coming" (204). No more scripts (or scripture); no more Mincery, no more central authority—there's only the puppeteer and the puppets, the performer's intuition and audience. He puts his trust in the figures, especially Punch himself, and they reward him with access to new knowledge and a re-entry into society. When Riddley and Orfing approach the first settlement they come across after the disastrous deaths of Goodparley and the Mincery, the initially tense encounter between Riddley the outlaw, Orfing the ex-Mincery man and the nervous community erupts into laughter when Punch emerges with his stick in hand to beat Riddley about the head.



A final word about my friend with the hooked nose and the hunch: Mr. Punch has appeared at my house twice in shows performed by the great Percy Press, now dead, and Percy Press Jr. The look of Punch and the sound of his swazzele voice, the whole rampant idea of him stayed with me through five and a half years of revisions and rewrites: it is with me still. 'He's so old, he can't die.'

Percy told me. 'He's a law unto himself.' He's certainly a reliable performer, and Riddley Walker would be a poor show without him.



Once in the camp, the two puppet men have to negotiate the changes the new show brings. They are regarded with suspicion, naturally enough, because the Eusa show is the only story people have known and the destruction of that central authority is painfully fresh. Imagine a medieval crowd gathered for the Corpus Christi festival and met with pageant wagons and using costumes traditionally associated with Abraham and Noah portraying the mysteries of Buddhism: Riddley and Orfing are presenting a radical change in mythos in a disconcertingly familiar form. While Punch replaces Eusa on stage, other figures—including the indomitable devil, Mr Clevver—are exactly the same. The ritual opening immediately causes problems for they must leave Eusa out of the ritual

greeting because “it aint no Eusa show its some kynd of a new show” (213). The ritual call and response cannot begin for the old script no longer suits the new circumstances. Yet the new show includes audience participation, not simply in the ritual opening and closing but in the narrative itself. For example, in keeping with the traditional form of the Punch show, the audience must promise to help watch the baby because, of course, Punch cannot be trusted to keep the child safe. The new narrative Riddley provides offers a greater role for the member of the community, but it also gives them more attendant responsibility. They cannot simply watch but must take part in the show. It is a significant step in social development—no longer can they remain passive consumers of culture, they must contribute, too. This requirement carries risks. If the audience has to watch the baby, are they complicit in its inevitable demise? Or is it simply a reminder of the need for constant vigilance against the danger posed by those like the Mincery, who endanger the individual members with their own struggles for power? Riddley’s Punch show does not give easy answers. The risk is manifest almost at once when one viewer takes the responsibility too literally, yelling at the Punch puppet, “You littl crookit basset I tol you not to try nothing here!” then grabs Punch off the surprised hand of the puppeteer (219). The fit up goes over, and Riddley with it, as everyone struggles to control the discourse and Punch.

While initially it seems that their first show may be their last, the apparent disaster proves ultimately rewarding. The performance collapses in shambles, but as Riddley and Orfing set out from the settlement later, others follow. Perhaps none of them may understand the journey they are undertaking any more than Riddley, but they all are taking up a new quest for understanding. No longer willing to accept the Mincery’s version of the world, they ask questions as Riddley does, like “Why is Punch crookit? Why wil he all ways kil the babby if he can? Parbly I wont ever know its jus on me to think on it” (220). But like Riddley too, they have chosen this path, which leads them away from the blind faith of the past into a new world of possibilities. There is no way to undo the sins of the past and its many devastations, but through the re-imagined ritual of the Punch show, they can all begin to explore new mysteries. The magic of the puppet show in the end is its ability to transform the inanimate into animation, to turn movement into story, and to bring to life all manner of dreams and stories.

Footnote

* All quotations come from Russell Hoban, *Riddley Walker: Expanded Edition*, Indiana University Press, 1998.

K.A. Laity, PhD Medieval Studies, faculty, University of Huston, Downtown, has also published short fiction and a novel—Pelzmantle (2003)

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Anne Frank: WITHIN & WITHOUT

Directed by Bobby Box
The Center for Puppetry Arts

A large dollhouse served as the central icon of The Center for Puppetry Arts' *Anne Frank: Within & Without*. The freestanding unit rotated, revealing the Frank family's hiding annex, a conceptual approach inspired by Anne's cousin's memory of playing with the young girl and her puppets. Working directly from Anne Franks' diary, and supplemented with extensive research and cooperation of the Georgia Commission on the Holocaust, director Bobby Box utilized an "overt puppetry" approach within a freely transforming space to tell Anne's tragic, yet ultimately uplifting story.

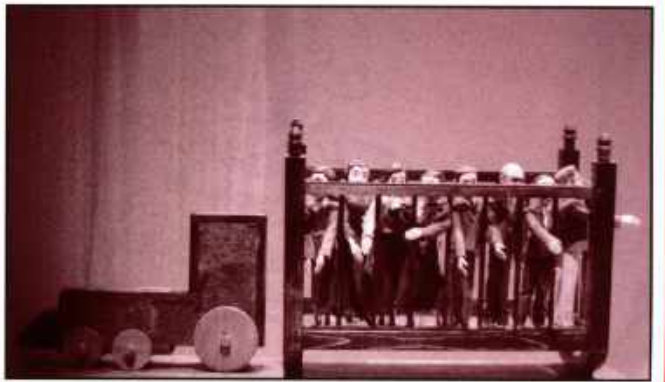
Two visible, similarly clad actors, one representing Anne's adolescent awkwardness and complexity, the other her internal maturation and spiritual development, shared identities with puppets built in several scales, playing all other parts as well. Designed by Jason von Hinezmeyer, the smaller figures functioned largely as simple dolls; the performers visibly manipulated the larger, more articulated tabletop figures, approximately 18" tall, with a much greater degree of expressiveness.

The spare, elegant set, designed by F. Elaine Williams, afforded multiple possibilities for staging, without superfluous stage dressing. Pale, delicately patterned, ghost-like curtains in the background functioned as shadow screens and as projection surfaces for contemporary photographs. A desk and cabinet, a clock tower and a toy piano surrounded the dollhouse. The desk and cabinet surfaces became play boards, and the mottled stage floor represented an iced pond for Czech-type string and rod puppets to skate upon. The toy piano, played by a live musician who also played violin, provided a musical counterpoint to Anne's inner world, frequently disturbing in its innocence. A panel in the town clock flipped open and provided a hand puppet stage for what turned into a violent, racist Kaspar show, foreshadowing the horror of the Holocaust to come.

An element as simple as a cradle could transform, chillingly, into a train car bound for Auschwitz, filled with innocent dolls peering out between the bars. As each member of the Franks' extended family was cruelly "eliminated," his or her doll-corpse found itself filed away into a desk drawer. The setting provided a powerful metaphor for Anne's world. By the end, we saw that even the most innocent, cultured, quaintly charming exterior could contain horrible possibilities; yet even the most oppressive prison could not contain the spirit of this remarkable young woman.

REVIEW BY BRADFORD CLARK

Associate Professor Bowling Green State University
Department of Theatre and Film



photos: Bill Jones

SHADOW THEATRE, VOLUME III THEORY AND PRACTICE

BY RAINER REUSCH

160pp, lots of photos, 8pp color
29Euros + postage
Einhorn-Verlag+Druck GmbH
kontakt@einhornverlag.de

Reusch's latest volume is preceded by *Volume I: Authors and Actors*, and *Volume II: Art and Technique*. His 1991 *Rebirth of Shadows* was spectacularly illustrated.

His latest book is intended to be most useful in amateur and educational settings, though experienced puppeteers may find it inspirational as well. Reusch is a longtime practitioner of shadow puppetry, but he is also a missionary for the art form, and his zeal for its long history and diverse manifestations is unmistakable. This is a bilingual (German/English) edition, making it useful to a fairly broad audience. The translation (by Colin McDougall) is sometimes needlessly literal, and can be confusing when materials are referred to by names that might be more comprehensible to Brits (Perspex, Opera foil, Acrylic glass) than to their American cousins, but is generally quite good.

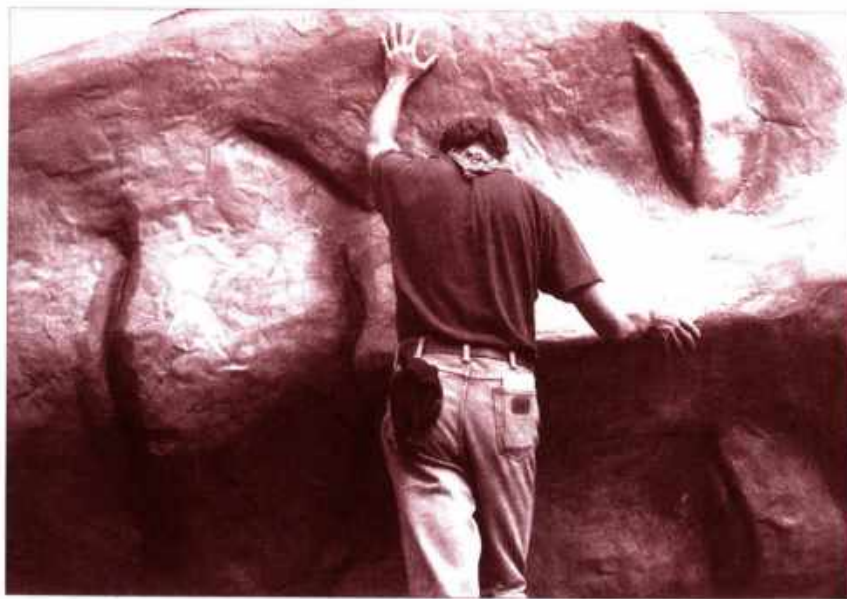


Part One gives the reader a basic education in the history of the art form and its special characteristics. This is followed by a fairly detailed examination of the nature of Shadow. Reusch looks at shadow in folklore, literature, fine arts, psychology, science, film, advertising and so on. There are numerous illustrations alongside his thought-provoking discussion. He also takes a broad look at the state of contemporary shadow theatre.

Part Two takes up the majority of the book and is packed with very specific information on how you can succeed in a number of the art form's most basic styles: small table-top, large table top, large shadow theatre, human shadow theatre, hand shadow theatre. In each case, the options for lighting are presented, as well as construction techniques, exercises and so on. These subsections are followed by suggestions for working with text, music and sound effects, narration, as well as techniques of manipulation, rehearsal and performance.

For puppeteers, much of this will cover familiar ground, but Reusch casts a broad net, and there are likely nuggets in there that will enrich the work of even seasoned performers. That said, the material is always accessible to those who wish to try their hand at this most ancient of art forms. Perhaps Reusch's biggest gift to his readers is just that—he makes us feel as if we can create something truly spectacular by simple, inexpensive means, while at the same time making it clear that this is an art with unlimited possibilities.

REVIEW BY A. PERIALE



Photographs and Essays on the Bread & Puppet Theater

Photos by Ron Simon. Essays by Marc Estrin.
 Forward by Grace Paley. Chelsea Green Publishing Co.
 White River Junction, Vt.

The Bread and Puppet Theater is already one of the best-documented puppet troupes in North America. Nevertheless, *Rehearsing With Gods* is a welcome addition to the B&P canon. This expansive collection of black-and-white photographs and essays evokes the textures and feel of the mega-spectacle that was the annual Bread and Puppet Domestic Resurrection Circus. It succeeds in the near-impossible task of translating to the flatness of print and picture the enormous, multi-faceted performance event that took place one weekend every summer for a quarter of a century on Peter and Elka Schumann's farm in Glover, Vermont.

Such a photogenic undertaking naturally attracted lots of cameras. Any direction you pointed a lens, it would pick out some odd, poetic juxtaposition of horror and whimsy, framed against the backdrop of bucolic Green Mountain hills and fields. Yet the theater made a policy of shunning media exposure. Peter Schumann was ever suspicious of the manner that cameras crop and diminish the unmediated event, imposing their own, simplistic narrative thread upon what he intended to be a complex visceral experience—felt on the skin (sweaty or clammy, depending on the weather) and in the muscles, or swallowed (eucharistically) as slices of sourdough rye bread slathered with garlic aioli which form a pungent bond between audience and performers. Cameras

would have cropped out the real nexus of the DRC—the creation of a *communitas*, a utopian production company, anchored to a particular season and place, cognizant of both the great historical struggles of the times, and the grasshoppers and slugs in the kitchen garden.

Ron Simon, the photographer of this volume, addresses this very dilemma in an essay he wrote for a 1994 B&P newsletter:

The “confining power of photographic illusion” compresses the subject into a frame, ignoring the depth and dimension of the event. Opposition of purpose extends to a photographer trying to be a puppeteer. You can't adapt the dual consciousness to watch and be watched. As a photographer and observer, crossing into the world of puppetry remains mostly a fleeting experience, like a privileged spectator with a seat on the stage, because photography is not prerequisite for puppetry.

Yet despite his reservations, over the years Simon has managed to capture the DRC in all its fractured, slightly hallucinatory complexity. His little battered Leica camera was everywhere, not only photographing the performances themselves (where he could be invariably found front row center, clicking away ferociously), but also documenting the performers backstage, behind the bus, in the storage shed, resting, hauling, mending rehearsing, cooking. Like a war correspondent embedded in a battle unit, Simon reduced his technical needs to a bare minimum— one camera for color, one for black and white, a few select lenses, no flash units or tripods. He could snap pictures one-handed from behind one of the ubiquitous giant cardboard figures, from beneath the cloth body of a lumbering puppet beast, or on top of the bus alongside the dozens of white clad, flag-wavers as it bounced down the rutted driveway towards its grand Circus entrance. He could photograph it all from the inside, while the rest of us were mainly focussing on our next task or cue, or trying hard simply not to fall off the careening bus.

Perhaps as much for sheer persistence and physical endurance than for stellar photographic technique, Simon became B&P's official DRC archivist. Every year, he would come down from Canada with a large, hand-bound album of sequentially arranged photos from the previous Pageant.

In these albums we could see, for the first time, the narrative arc connecting all those creatures and enigmatic forces we had inhabited the summer before—the herds of sheep, bison, frogs, goats; groves of anthropomorphic trees and ambulatory flower beds; claques of assorted demons, tree choppers and corporate carnivores in suits and ties (only the forces of evil ever wore ties on the B & P farm); and, of course, the gods themselves, watching mutely though perhaps with some amusement. Leafing through Simon's albums, we could comprehend the opaque iconography that we had so laboriously embodied previously, catch sight of the wider frame of reference, and begin to find an answer to the nagging question of why we were there in the first place, sweating our brains out on those hilly fields in Northern Vermont.

Marc Estrin is another Circus insider, having participated in the very first DRCs at Goddard College's Cate Farm in the early 1970's, but unlike Simon, Estrin was always fully immersed in the performances as a puppeteer and also as the unofficial music director and choral-meister.

His writings have a visceral feel that could only have been penned by someone who has sweltered under the coat of many an ungainly puppet, yet they maintain a reflective distance as though they were scratched into his journal by candle light in his tent, or upon returning home to the "real" world after the DRC's end-of-summer conclusion. Perhaps because of this temporal distance, he manages to distill the essential nature of the DRC in a manner quite different from the immediacy of Simon's photos. For example, his meditation on the difficulties of playing Bach's C-Major Suite on the cello, enshrouded in the burlap robes of a goat puppet, while riding on the back of a flatbed truck captures the curious battle between transcendent aspirations and mundane inanities that all performers in B & P productions must negotiate. His terse description of the Pageant, the DRC's climactic performance, reads like a poem:

It began in the daylight and moved into twilight and the edge of night. The Godhead was honored with song. She looked over the World, and it was Good. And Evil came, and killed it. In the end, Evil is defused or destroyed, and the dead were gathered up by Mother Earth, and marched off in her great arms to re-root. Next year in Jerusalem.

Estrin's essays organize the book around eight archetypal themes that run through virtually every B & P performance: Death, Fiend, Beast, Human, World, Gift, Bread, Hope. These symbolic headings help focus and condense Estrin's rambling ruminations, and also give a solid jumping off point to the often enigmatic imagery of Simon's photos. Not that Simon in any way attempts to illustrate Estrin's texts, nor is Estrin merely footnoting Simon's pictures. The result of their collaborative effort is a curiously bifurcated viewpoint. But this is for the good, because a unified point of view is not a particularly useful tool for capturing and analyzing the enormity of the DRC. Going inside, over, beneath and behind gives a stereo-optic view of the panoramic process of creating, performing and living the event.

Unlike John Bell's straightforward and scholarly treatment in "Landscape and Desire: Bread and Puppet Pageants in the 1990's" (which also uses Simon's photos) Simon and Estrin have crafted in this book a very personal testimonial—a kind of gritty, grainy travelogue that describes the journey towards the event as much as it documents the performance itself. Leafing through this book, this writer (a veteran of eleven DRCs between 1985 and 1999) could practically taste the garlic aioli and feel the rough burlap abraiding my sun-burnt skin. But you don't have to be a "Bread-head" to appreciate *Rehearsing With Gods*. It is a work that intimately recollects an important historical pinnacle of American and World modern puppet theater.

REVIEWED BY STEPHEN KAPLIN



BY CAROLYN ROARK

Following the completion of the renovations to its facilities in 2003, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of the University of Texas at Austin (HRC) has a new look and more accessible facilities for welcoming visitors to its galleries and users eager to access materials from its collections of manuscripts, rare books, and memorabilia from a variety of humanities disciplines. With that in mind, this is an opportune moment to make practitioners and enthusiasts of puppetry arts aware of HRC puppet holdings. There are approximately 100 puppets in various collections—a diverse representation of figures from a variety of traditions—puppet-related materials, and several hundred published books and periodicals on the topic. These holdings fall into four major categories: figures; peripheral materials such as scripts and musical scores; documentation including photographs; video footage and other publicity information; and publications on the history and practice of puppetry.

The most popular and frequently exhibited portion of these holdings is the Stanley Marcus collection of Sicilian Marionettes. It includes a large group of over sixty *pupi* from the tradition of Sicilian marionette performance, standing up to four feet tall and weighing up to eighty pounds. Featuring characters from the *Orlando Furioso* story cycle, many of the puppets are armored warriors equipped with sword and shield. They are operated by a central control rod emerging from the head, together with a simple string mechanism for each arm. The puppets were imported from Italy by retail mogul Stanley Marcus, who kept them as a private collection for a number of years. Excepting a few puppets that Marcus gave as personal gifts, he donated this collection to the HRC in 1965. The figures are, on the whole, in good condition, with armor featuring the intriguing insignia unique to many major characters; a few wear reconstructed costumes, after the originals were damaged in an off-site exhibit, but most are in their original garb. The holding also includes a large painted backdrop (ca. 1850) intended for the Sicilian marionette stage, acquired from a separate source. In addition to the Marcus collection, the HRC holds a number of resources on the Sicilian marionette tradition, including videotaped interviews and performances of the Manteo family, a family of Italian immigrants who performed the *Orlando Furioso* cycle in the U.S. for years. Library curator Maria Wells has written two articles on the figures and the performance tradition.



The Hoblitzelle Theatre Arts holdings also include a set of thirty-three Kathputli Marionettes from Rajasthan, India. Acquired in 1982, most are well preserved and in good condition. These figures stand about twenty inches high and are constructed of wood, cloth, and a mixture of cotton batting and sawdust stuffing. They are controlled by strings connected to the head and hands; the human figures generally have no legs, but long skirts. The collection includes male and female human figures of various ages and social stations, several androgynous figures with male and female faces/aspects, and a number of animals.

The Overton gift of Paul Clemens Marionettes features sixty-two figures—mostly marionettes of various sizes, in addition to a few hand puppets—as well as short play scripts, print programs, photographs and other materials. Created by vaudeville performer “Puppetmaster” Paul Clemens, who used them between 1930-1960, many include an unusual mechanism for manipulating moveable eyes. Some are identifiable as characters from popular stories such as *Treasure Island*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. These were a gift of his stepson David Overton (a former university employee). While Clemens is not a well known figure among puppeteers or vaudeville historians, this large holding represents a long career in puppet-making and traveling performance; as such, it should prove interesting to both visitors interested in the craft of puppet-making and students of popular culture.

Better known are the Yale puppeteers, a troupe who ran the Los Angeles Turnabout Theatre from 1941-1956, and whose members included Harry Burnett, Forman Brown, and Richard Brandon. While the Los Angeles Public Library holds the bulk of archived papers on the group (<http://dbase1.lapl.org/turnabout/>), the Ransom Center also features a solid representative sample of the group's work, and includes 5 marionettes, figures from parody performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Amphitryon 38*. In addition, there are transcribed lyrics and tablature for music used in their variety shows, scripts for monologues and sketches, and publicity materials such as programs, articles, press clippings, and photographs (depicting Brown, Burnett, Lotte Goslar, Elsa Lanchester, Leotta Lane, Dorothy Neumann, and Frances Osborne).

The Karagöz features 16 leather crafted shadow figures with moving limbs—including several that transform from human to animal—together with the scenery pieces necessary to perform the traditional Turkish Karagöz story “The Witches.” Puppets in this collection were all crafted by Metin Özlen, a well-known Karagöz puppeteer of Istanbul. All have a paper label attached to the back identifying the character or character type, and the maker's name and dates 1959-1992. The provenance on their acquisition is uncertain (though the purchase might have been facilitated by UT

Anthropology professor Joel Sherzer), these present a good sampling of the stock characters traditionally used by Karagöz, as well as attractive, functional examples of the style.

Smaller sub groups of puppets include a set of nineteenth century hand-carved Punch & Judy characters (ca. 1880-1885), used in the Swift Brothers touring tent show, which toured Texas, Oklahoma, and Illinois until 1956. There are seven figures in the set, in varying condition; all have clearly seen extensive use and wear. Built of wood, leather, cloth, and hair, they feature a simple, interesting mouth mechanism and rod. There are also samples of individual Wayang Golek and Wayang Kulit figures, and a few miscellaneous marionettes in varying styles.

The Harry Ransom Center holds archival materials in addition to its groupings of puppet figures and their accompanying materials. The Joel Sherzer Collection, for example, contains close to 1,000 slides, contact sheets, and negatives relating to puppetry festivals between 1980-1985, as well over 200 audio and videotapes from the fieldwork of Joan Gross in the U.S., Canada, Europe/Sicily, and the Middle East/Asia. While the total contents of these has not been catalogued, much of the footage includes performances and interviews with puppeteers, including the Manteo Family. All of these documentary materials are classified using the donor's own alphanumeric system. Separate files contain a wide variety of souvenir programs, press clippings, photographs, as well as other documents, related to diverse performers such as Bil Baird, the Tony Sarg Marionettes, Bread & Puppet Theatre, Howdy Doody, Higley's Bible Puppets, and Tatterman Marionettes, among others. There are also a number of materials connected to the WPA Federal Theater Project, including the *Puppet Teaching News Bulletin*, and twenty-nine scripts for puppet plays from U.T. Extension Library, 1936-1938. The archives general book holdings also contain a number of rare and first edition puppetry publications, apart from those texts housed in other library collections around campus. While a definitive bibliography of these has not been assembled to date, the university's electronic catalogue allows for exhaustive subject and keyword searches that will turn up most, if not all, of those housed at the HRC.

The puppetry collections of the Harry Ransom Center provide a rich opportunity for study, and all materials listed here can be accessed by visitors to the facility, following a simple orientation and materials request. My own experience of working with the archive's holdings, as a volunteer cataloguing the collection during my graduate studies in UT's theatre department, did much to expand my understanding and appreciation of the puppet arts. During my time in the chilly rooms of stacks and item storage, curators and librarians alike expressed the desire for these collections to be better known in academic and artistic circles, and to promote their use for research into the history and practice of puppetry. The library and viewing rooms are open 9-5 Monday to Friday, and 9-12 on Saturday, in accordance with the university calendar. Visitors may enter without



Metin Özlen (Turkish, 1940-)

"Karagöz as a Donkey"

appointment, though all must file paperwork and complete a short orientation before entering the reading/viewing rooms, and may request access to most materials in the archive's possession. The library also provides a number of fellowships to facilitate travel to Austin in order to spend one to four months researching in the facility; smaller grants are available to offset travel costs and to fund dissertation research in the facility. Other opportunities to access collections can be arranged through internships (for graduate students of the university), and volunteers (anyone living in the area willing to commit 3-5 hours of volunteer labor per week). More information about the HRC and the puppetry holdings can be accessed at: www.hrc.utexas.edu/home.html. If internet access is not available, interested parties may call 512.471.8944 or write Harry Ransom Center, P.O. Box 7219, Austin, Texas 78713-7219. With policies that actively invite materials use, funding opportunities, and newly remodeled facilities ideally suited to the extended study of holdings, there has never been a better time to visit the Harry Ransom Center and its puppets.



AD DEADLINES

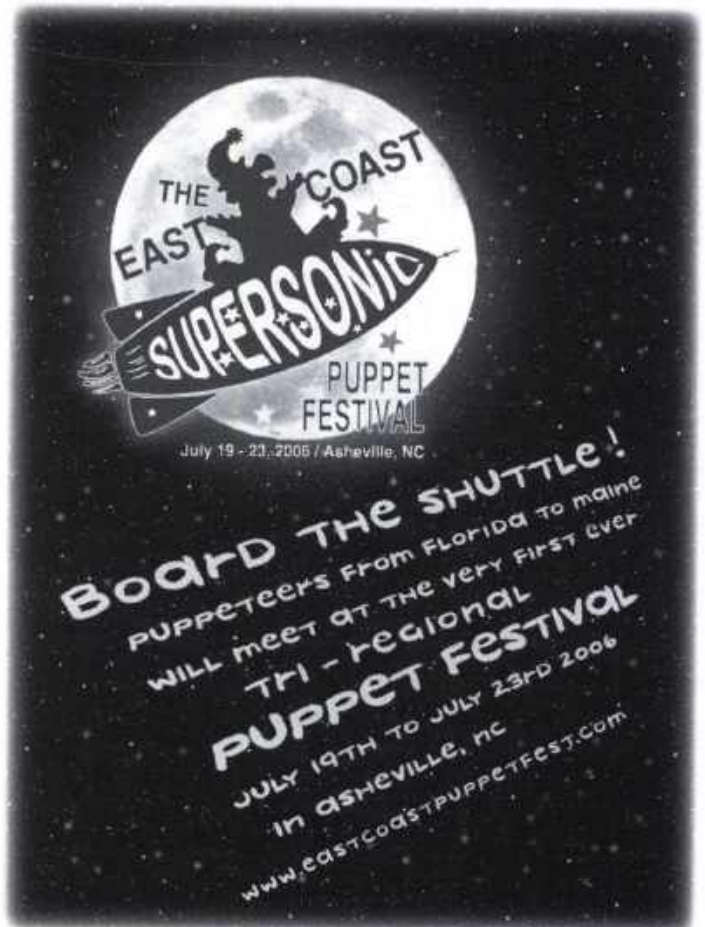
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AD submissions or inquiries to:

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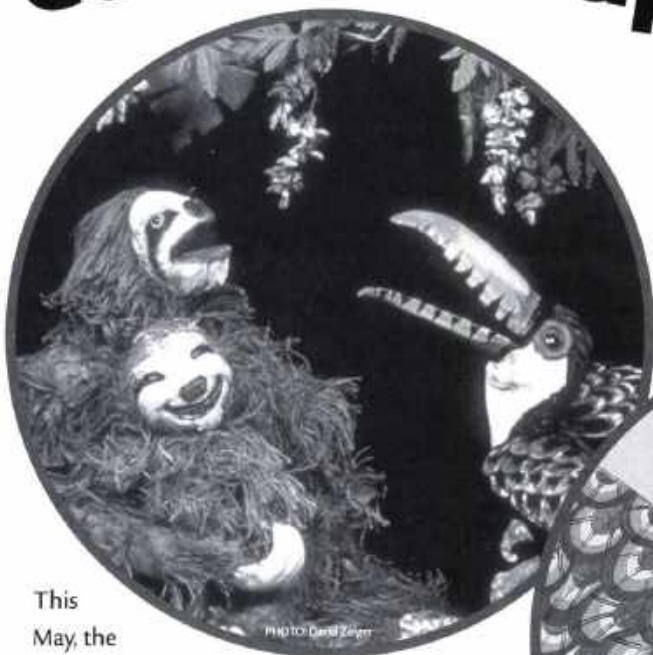
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What's new at the Center for Puppetry Arts?



This May, the Center for Puppetry Arts presents *Xperimental Puppetry Theater*. *XPT* is all about fresh twists on puppetry. Ages 18 and up only. In our shows for families, take a trip to the Amazonian rainforest, enjoy Aesop's fables and meet a not-so-jolly giant as we round out the season. Join us for *Rainforest Adventures* (pictured above) by Jon Ludwig, playing through April 9th. February through May, see *The Tortoise & The Hare & More* by Clint Thornton and May through June, join Jack in *Jack & the Beanstalk* by Lee Bryan. Fee, Fi, Fo, FUN!

See our Web site at www.puppet.org
for more info and to buy tickets online!



An exciting new exhibit is coming this July to the Center for Puppetry Arts Museum - *Gods and Demons, Monkeys and Men: Masks from Southeast Asia* (pictured above). Masks and puppets from Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia will be on display. Mask theatre is one of the oldest performance forms in Southeast Asia, exploring issues of social and political nature. Be sure to check out these colorful and cultural wonders of art!



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Large puppets...



in tiny spaces

New digital technology allows creators of *Sesame Beginnings* to put it all together (see page 8).

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