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issue no. 32

The Editor's Page 2

PUPPETRY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Stephen Mottram interview *by Alexander Winfield* 4
Gerry Anderson and the Thunderbirds *by Quincy Thomas* 8
Independent Eye's *Frankenstein* *by Conrad Bishop* 12
Uncanny Dolls: Alison deFren *interview by Marsian* 19
Puppeteer in Hollywood *by Christine Papalexis*..... 22
Puppets at DragonCon *PI interviews Beau Brown*..... 26
UNIMA at Chengdu, China *images by Bradford Clark*..... 28
Buck Rogers at Chicago World's Fair *by Dmitri Carter* 32

PUPPET HISTORY

Puppetry, Science Fiction and Fantasy *by John Bell* 16

BOOK REVIEWS

Godzilla, Mr. Punch in Scotland, & Handpuppets in Mexico *review by John Bell* 34
Puppets of Mali *review by Andrew Periale* 37
Karakuri Ningyo *review by Bradford Clark* 38

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On the COVER:

Our homage to the poster for the
classic *Creature From the Black
Lagoon*: 1954, Universal.



This project is supported, in part, by an award
from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Robots...Aliens...Spaceships...Superheroes...
You want 'em, we got 'em!!!

Welcome to Puppetry International's Sci-Fi issue. Our original theme was to be "Sci-Fi/Fantasy." We'd imagined that "Fantasy" would bring puppetry based on genre fiction into the mix—*Riddley Walker*, *Lord of the Rings* and so on—but, judging by some of the articles we received, there is no puppetry anywhere in the world that does not have an element of fantasy about it. Can puppetry even exist without fantasy? Not exactly Fermat's Theorem, but something to ponder.

So let's take fantasy as a given and shine our light on "Puppetry and Science Fiction!" Puppets are, naturally, at the forefront of science fiction performance, whether live, on film or other medium. Early robots, a staple of the genre, were necessarily puppets, as they predated the microelectronics needed to function on their own. For a good example, check out "Electro, the Westinghouse Moto-Man," in John Bell's history column [page 16].

Christine Papalexis has had quite a career as a puppeteer in science fiction films where – in the portrayal of aliens,

monsters, reanimated corpses and mutant cockroaches – puppets have proven very useful (and, before the age of CGI, indispensable). She details some of her adventures in "A Puppeteer in Hollywood" [page 22].

Conrad Bishop throws new light on the story behind the story of Frankenstein in a discussion of the Independent Eye's production, which is based on Mary Shelley's novel. For the first time I understood how an eighteen-year-old could have mined her own experience for this dark tale of death, and how far Hollywood has led us from its actual genesis and meaning.

We had planned to have an article by Zaven Paré about his time in Japan studying both the latest in performing robots and the amazingly lifelike figures of the National Bunraku Theater. Before we committed to publishing it, his article was picked up for inclusion in a book on robotics (*see page 21*). In it, he brought up the concept of the "uncanny valley," a term coined by robotics professor Masahiro Mori to express our discomfort at humanoid robots to the extent that their mimicry of human appearance and behavior is less than convincing. Media maker and researcher Alison deFren takes up this subject with a different point

of view when she is interviewed by Marsian in "Valley of the Uncanny Dolls," a reflection on lifelike "artificial companions" and the men who love them [page 19].

Then boldly go where no reader has gone before – to Alexander Winfield's portrait of Stephen Mottram, whose gorgeous and surprising puppetry will haunt your dreams [page 4]. Quincy Thomas brings us the story of Gerry Anderson's earliest television puppetry, and the innovations that culminated in *Thunderbirds*. From the archives of the Cook/Marks collection, Dmitri Carter brings us images of the Tatterman Marionettes' 1934 production of *Buck Rogers*.

We also have Bradford Clark's photos from the recent UNIMA Quadrennial Congress and Festival in Chengdu, China, and reviews of some fantastic new books on a wide range of puppetry subjects: puppets of Mali, Japanese *karakuri ningyo*, Punch, *Godzilla* and more!

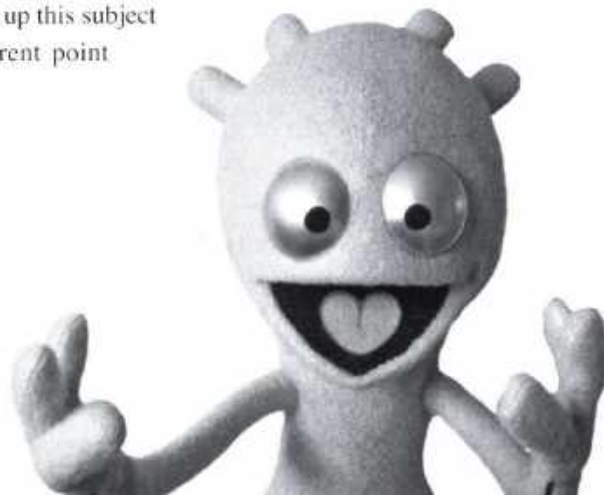
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Gothic monsters!

Credit Where Credit is Due

In *Puppetry International* #30, our race issue, we reviewed Kenneth Gross's wonderful book, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*. We also ran an article on Mabou Mines' *Peter and Wendy* by Emma Halpern and Dan Venning. Professor Gross

read this article with great interest, as he happens to be married to Liza Lorwin, the show's co-conceiver, adaptor and producer. While he found the article absorbing and insightful, he did point out one error—namely, their assertion that “the show is performed using puppets designed by Basil Twist.” This has appeared in enough reviews of the show that it is on the way to becoming urban legend. Thanks to Kenneth Gross's sharp eye, we are happy to set the record straight:

The principle puppets in the show—Peter, Hook, Nana the Dog, Smee, and Jane—were all made by Julie Archer, who also designed the sets and lights. She is, indeed, always listed in programs as one of co-creators of the show, along with Liza Lorwin (adapter and producer), Lee Breuer (director), and Johnny Cunningham (music).

The marionette of the Neverbird was made by Basil Twist (who was also the lead puppeteer for Peter in the premiere in 1996).

The figures of the Lost Boys were made by Walter Stark, the shadow figures were made by Stephen Kaplin, the mask and tail of the Crocodile were made by Jane Catherine Shaw. •

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STEPHEN MOTTRAM: Puppetry's Dark Fantasist

by Alexander Winfield

In Oxford there is a house where the body of a Great White Shark has plunged headfirst through the lovely tile roof, its erect tail extending straight into the atmosphere like a vaguely menacing weathervane. A sculptural response to nuclear fears, its loud breed of eccentricity may distract from the house of English puppeteer Stephen Mottram, just across the street, whose wonders are a bit more discreet.

In style and ambition, Mottram has no peers within the puppet world. His puppet shows are a startling combination of outrageous vision and technical craft. While puppetry has always co-habitated comfortably with fantasy, Mottram's world building is of such sophistication that it bears comparisons with the work of Tolkien— with a heavy dose of Franz Kafka's anxious dream imagery.

Mottram has been directing and producing his own extremely eclectic puppet shows for over twenty years. His most famous productions are *The Seas of Organillo* and *The Seed Carriers*. Both are silent, dark and intensive forays into utterly alien landscapes. Lacking a narrative or protagonists, they are instead dramatic natural histories of these surreal worlds, where the secret particulars of life and death are slowly revealed.



FROM *THE SEED CARRIERS* PHOTO: PADDY SOMERFIELD

I was surprised to learn that Mottram never planned on being a puppeteer, and indeed fell into the profession through a series of accidents. He was originally pursuing a degree in Politics and International Relations, when he won a scholarship to study in Sweden. "By an administrative mistake," he explains, "I ended up in an Arts School, where I studied woodcarving

for a year." That moment of bureaucratic serendipity nurtured a skill that has served him well over the years: Mottram's puppets are exquisite, lithe creatures of such quality that they secured him work with the then-newly opened Norwich puppet theatre. Shortly after, he won a 1982 Arts Council Bursary that allowed him to study with Decroux-trained mime artist Desmond Jones, and later he was invited by the Hungarian State Puppet Theatre to study for six months with their first year students. From then, he started devising his own puppet shows—the rest, as is said, is history.

Sitting for tea in his workshop, surrounded by bird-faced merchants and dangling mermen, Mottram is a contained and focused presence. I interviewed him shortly after the announcement of the Arts Cuts of last year, and he immediately sallied forth into his thoughts on funding bodies. "There's this tendency to think that nothing can be done without funding," he says thoughtfully, "I think that's a problem. I think you can do a great deal without money. It's the energy, the drive, the force of personality that gets things done more than the amount of money that people have."

Force of personality is not lacking with Mottram. He states his *raison d'être* almost immediately: "The Artist's job is to produce magic for an audience. You want to produce something that is a glimpse through a chink into some other place." Saying this, he begins toying with two disembodied hands on rods—seen in *The Seas of Organillo*. Despite their simplicity of form, he demonstrates with them an almost balletic elegance, as they float through the air while making the gentlest of gestures. I remembered seeing them, isolated by light amidst the embryonic darkness of the theatre, holding the audience captive by their movements. Yet though the scene seemed to last many, many minutes, Mottram reveals they had the spotlight for a few moments only—a technique he learned early in his first show, *In Suspension*: "The audience is never left with anything to watch for more than a few seconds before something develops out of it. I was always fearful that the audience would get bored with what I was doing in the way I get bored watching puppets do the same thing for a few minutes."



FROM *THE SEED CARRIERS* PHOTO: SIMON ANNAND

Mottram describes his work and his puppets in cool, analytical terms. He even seems to be wary of the puppet, and the adoration it can provoke. "The insistence on the puppet is the real problem in puppet theatre," he muses. He insists on maintaining a sort of professional distance between himself and his creations. While he admits to going through a period where he collected any puppetry items he could find, he now employs drastic measures to insure the love of puppetry does not interfere with the delivery of good theatre. He has even gone so far as to deliberately hire directors with little or no puppetry experience—and thus hopefully no bias. "You need to have a non-puppet director to direct puppets," he says. "I think it helps to have someone who doesn't really like puppets and isn't seduced by them...because when they say 'That's all right,' you really know it is."

Mottram feels there are many limits in the puppet arts: "I never find the idea of a puppet appearing to emote convincing. I'm more interested in physically what the creatures are doing in front of me and whether they appear to live for different reasons other than what's going on inside their heads, because I'm quite clear that there's nothing going on inside their heads. They're made of wood. Rather, it's about moving the centre away from yourself as an actor, taking it out from here," Mottram drums his chest, "and putting it somewhere else."

That somewhere else could be within any number of wooden figures that dangle about us as we sip our tea. Mottram allows me to examine and even operate a few of them, making me rather embarrassingly giddy. There is a particularly impressive marionette from *The Seed Carriers* that resembles a human couple locked within the throes of a passionate sex act. Yet, as their bodies undulate together, their limbs growing ever more spastic with the rising heat of ecstasy, they suddenly rise up and scuttle away into the shadows. Human lovers have become a monstrous spider... or has a monstrous spider passed itself off as human lovers? It is a fantastic and chilling theatrical moment, suggestive of the filmic, fleshy abominations of David Cronenberg and the literary plasticity of

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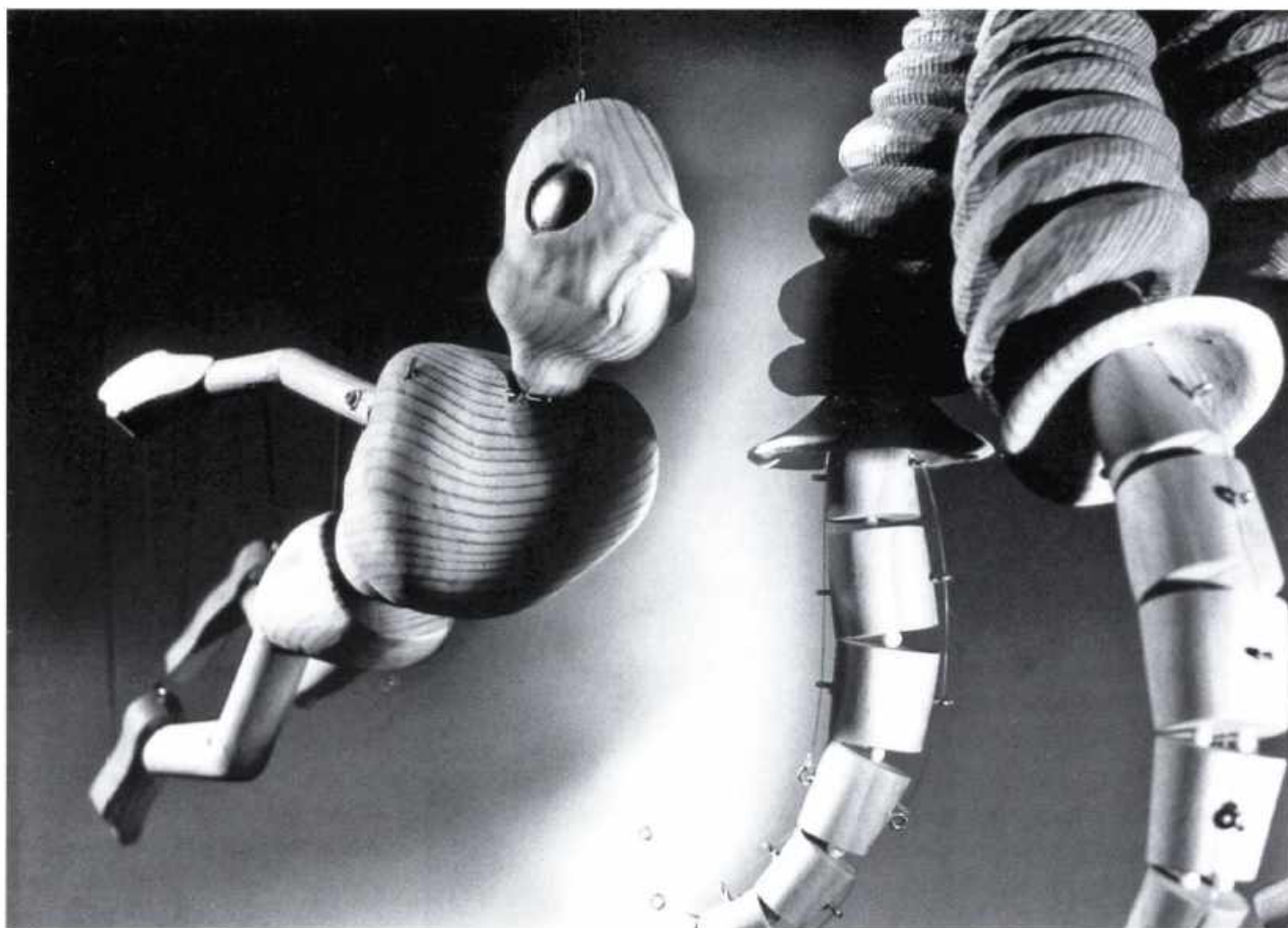
Boris Vian, but of a character unique to Mottram. He creates black poetry with marionettes, and yet holds them in such low esteem! “They’re really difficult, marionettes. It’s hard to find material for them— they can’t do very much.”

This is Mottram’s particular attitude to the puppet: an attitude not born of a love of something sustained from childhood, and so perhaps less a slave to that thing— to puppets in and of themselves. As our conversation continues, it becomes increasingly clear that Mottram is a man with a vision he wishes desperately to impart, with the puppet being more a tool to serve that purpose than the purpose itself. “If I think about manipulating in puppet theatre then I, if I’m being honest, am thinking about how you manipulate the audience, so that the puppet is less important— a technique.”

“There is real life,” he says intently, gesturing at our mundane surroundings, “and you can stab a hole in real life and look through. There you can see this other world, the taboo, the stuff we can’t see. Because we’re so used to them we don’t notice them.”

Mottram’s fascination with the taboo, with the hidden thoughts— what he calls the “midnight fears”— is coupled with a fierce urge to confront those thoughts. In theatre, this means of course that he invites the audience along with him for the ride. But where does he drive them? What is his destination— the hard core of his themes?

“It’s about a simple phenomenon,” explains Mottram. “When you walk through the kitchen in the middle of the night, you don’t realise it, but there’s a beetle on the kitchen floor. And



FROM *THE SEAS OF ORGANILLO* PHOTO: STEPHEN MOTTRAM



FROM *THE SEAS OF ORGANILLO*

PHOTO: DAVID FISHER

you walk to the fridge and get yourself a drink and you don't even realise that you've crushed that beetle. The beetle's life ended at that moment and the beetle could be you. It's about that fear really, the fact that at any moment you could just be snuffed out, without having any importance in history. My father died just before I made (*The Seed Carriers*) and I wasn't expecting him to die... it was a bit of a shock to suddenly be hauled up and confronted with my own mortality. I realised when he died that I of course would probably die as well at some point."

Mortality is an ever-present reality in Mottram's shows, as if he were making it as difficult as possible for the audience to grow neglectful of their own fragile grasp on life. In *The Seed Carriers*, little human-like animals scurry desperately into the corners and hidden places of a strange world, fleeing bird-faced monsters

that seek out the valuable seeds the animals contain within them. Inspired by the concept of the "selfish gene" as described by Richard Dawkins, these seeds and their luckless carriers become the cornerstone of a great industrial society. A complex of gears, cages and pulleys appear on stage, with the fragile, feature-less human animals put through machines, torn apart, processed and squeezed dry. In one harrowing sequence, the human animals are caught in nets, struggling desperately, until Mottram's hands reach down and impassively snap their necks, leaving the puppets to dangle lamely, revealed for the dead material they are. In this universe, death is so common as to be banal—and the comparison to our own regimented and vicious existence becomes increasingly clear and uncomfortable.

But is there nothing but bleakness here? Is this only a confrontation with inevitability? When pressed, Mottram admits "There's a motive for making the show: it's about your fears, not about something you actually experienced. Hopefully, if everyone keeps on feeling fear for these things, then they may not reproduce."

"We all do bad things and we all try to survive... we're all naked creatures and we do what we need to, not to be preyed upon by our neighbours. It's more genocidal than good guys/bad guys. Everybody's potentially the bad guy next door."

In Mottram's work there is this meeting of intense, almost crushing pessimism for the stark realities of the universe, with a slim but persisting glimmer of hope—mankind is wretched and animalistic, but perhaps it can be taught to be otherwise! The delicate human animals from *The Seed Carriers* adapt, change and eventually outsmart their beaked adversaries—after a fashion. To reveal more would spoil just one of the many marvels Mottram has fashioned for the theatre. While his vision may be dark, it is brutally honest—if Mottram creates monsters, it is because he sees monsters. Yes, sometimes the monsters are beautiful, such as when the hunted animal becomes a bird of paradise, or when groaning batches of sea-eggs erupt to release smooth and subtle beings, who dance amidst shadow and light and, once seen, can never be forgotten.

Yes, there is hope in Mottram's work, at least as I see it. When I asked the man himself whether there was room for hope in his work, however, he had this to say: "Let's not exaggerate!"

Alexander Winfield is a Bermudian Puppeteer and Writer currently living in London.



MAN ON A WIRE: Gerry Anderson and The Thunderbirds by Quincy Thomas

Gerry Anderson has worn many hats—as a producer, a director, and a writer—but he is most renowned throughout British popular culture for his work as the cultivator of the Supermarionation process (which I will hereafter refer to as SM). This process, an alteration of the marionette puppetry technique, was the foundation of several of Anderson's action-adventure television series, such as *Supercar* and *Fireball XL5*, but the most popular of Anderson's SM television series is undoubtedly *Thunderbirds*.

A great deal of work went into Anderson's SM shows, and his vision created a franchise which, almost fifty years after its premiere episode, has influenced comic books, video games, and movies. Gerry Anderson's legacy is just one of many examples that showcases the power and impact that puppetry has on popular culture.

The scope of this article does not allow me to touch on all of Anderson's work, and so we start with some of his earlier shows that most directly affected the creation of *Thunderbirds*, specifically with *Four Feathers Falls* (25 February 1960 – 17 November 1960). This was a show that captured the allure of a fictionalized Wild West, and saw Anderson putting puppets in scenes with studio lighting and fully realized three-dimensional sets. In the show, rugged loaner Tex Tucker acquires four magic feathers, which give his

dog and horse the power of speech and allow his guns to operate independently. *Four Feathers Falls* introduced two features that would become standard in AP films' (named for Anderson and cinematographer Arthur Provis) sci-fi adventure shows: the rugged, handsome hero, and the "talking" puppet. Anderson was not pleased with the inconsistencies of his manipulators' lip syncing. *Four Feathers Falls* puppeteer Roger Woodburn claims, "Gerry, who had been an editor, had trouble with the syncing because the trouble with humans (when operating puppets) is that you start behind and catch up. It's not like the sync was always out by 10 frames or 4 frames. It was different every time...but it was difficult to edit." According to John Taylor, the man in charge of recording all the dialogue tracks and sound effects, this was a natural progression because Anderson always wanted to make his marionettes work more efficiently. This desire to better his work led Anderson to the creation of the SM process.

An explanation of the "Electronic Natterer Mark 1," the device that is the foundation of the SM technique, is not unlike the explanation of an audio meter. A tape deck housed recordings of the actors' voices, and sounds went through the tape deck and traveled along wires down to the puppet's head. Those electrical pulses, that would normally make the needle on an audio meter



VIRGIL AND ALAN TRACY



A PROMOTIONAL IMAGE FROM THE FIRST THUNDERBIRDS MOVIE, *THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO*

bounce left and right, traveled along the wires and activated an electromagnet connected to a hinge that opened and closed. "When installed inside the head, the electromagnet, when active, would force open the lower lip, and when inactive, a small return spring would cause the lip to close." The articulation of syllables was achieved by adjusting the sensitivity of the unit, thus altering the ways in which the puppets' lips opened and closed. The invention of this new talking procedure was a revolutionary concept, but it required a redesigning of the puppet's head. Puppet manipulator Mary Tuner describes the difficulties of constructing the new skulls:

The Torch [Anderson's 1957 show] heads were in wood in a traditional way....They were hollowed out to a certain extent in order to accommodate the moving eyes and mouth.... To move the mouth mechanically...meant the head needed to be made with a thin shell to leave more room for the solenoid, along with a more sophisticated eye bracket.

The design team created a process using a flexible rubber called Vinamold, wooden squares, a fiberglass resin, and a soft chamois leather to create the new, thinner heads that would house the electronic lip sync technology, and with this the SM process was born. With the beginnings of the SM process established, the next element that was vital to the birth of *Thunderbirds* was the concept of high tech vehicles, something that came about with the introduction of *Supercar* (1961-1962).

The premise of *Supercar* was really brilliantly simple: clean cut, all-American Mike Mercury piloted Supercar, a vehicle that could travel at amazing speeds, fly, and even dive under water. Whereas many people saw the car as the perfect element of action-adventure, Anderson's intentions for *Supercar* were far more pragmatic. "As we progressed with the puppet shows, we managed to get them to do more or less what we wanted— or with cinematic tricks make them look as though they did what we wanted." Instead of trying to come up with a convincing way to get puppets to imitate walk





THUNDERBIRD 2 PREPARING TO LAUNCH FROM TRACY ISLAND

cycles for extended periods of time, he created a premise with a built-in element that would get his characters from one place to another. Anderson's previous works, the placement of puppets in three-dimensional environments, the creation of the SM process, and the introduction of clever ways to get puppets from one place to another, all contributed to the development of the genre-changing *Thunderbirds*.

In 1965, Anderson was asked by Lew Grade and his company Associated TeleVision, for a new show. Inspired by the tragic story of a mine collapse in Germany, Anderson imagined positioning depositories of rescue equipment all over the world. Although Anderson was nervous about proposing his idea for a show built around this

concept, Grade quickly quelled his fears: "He [Grade] leapt out of his desk, strode around the desk, grabbed me by the scruff of the neck, hauled me to the centre of the office then said, 'Do you see that light bulb up there?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Gerry, if you want to make a series about that light bulb, I'd back it.'"

Anderson's vision for his seventh show, *Thunderbirds*, was rather grand, and there were some things that would have to be taken into consideration if this show was going to work. *Supercar*, *Fireball*, and *Stingray*, had been successful, but the cost of producing shows of that ilk was skyrocketing. Anderson realized that to get the money that they wanted (American network money), they needed to appeal to American audiences. Not only did *Thunderbirds* include American



LADY PENELOPE

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

locations, but it also included a large number of American characters. The main cast members of the show comprised the handsome, hardy, Tracy family— wealthy ex-astronaut Jeff and his five sons: Scott, Virgil, Alan, Gordon, and John. Not wanting to neglect his roots or discard the importance of “transatlantic appeal,” Anderson created two final members of International Rescue; The members of their British branch were Lady Penelope and her butler, Parker.

In his book *Peter Jackson: from Prince of Splatter to Lord of the Rings*, Ian Pryor offers a succinct account of the plot of *Thunderbirds*:

When disaster strikes, the Tracy family retreats into the bowels of the island to launch a fleet of specialised rescue vehicles.

Each...episode plays like a motion picture in miniature, complete with square-jawed heroes, pyrotechnics and cliffhanger rescues, lifted by full orchestra and ambitious special effects.

Anderson and his team decided that the Tracys would all be based on well-known actors, and the specialized vehicles they commanded ranged from a small submersible to a space station. With the vehicles and puppet models created, it was time to bring all these concepts together in the first episode, *Trapped in the Sky*. As we move through through the amalgamation of processes that brought this feat about, let’s not forget that this level of dedication, labor, and detail went into every *Thunderbirds* episode.

Anderson and his team were designing multiple puppets so that various episodes could be shot at the same time. The entire main cast had to have different heads, not only for different scenes and expressions, but to accommodate the SM technology. There was also the construction of vehicles that went beyond those of International Rescue: the cars, jets, helicopters, and boats that came into play in every episode— most importantly Fab-1, Penelope’s fashionably pink Rolls Royce. Finally, Anderson’s team also had to create the exterior locales, buildings, alien planet surfaces, homes, and the interiors of all the International Rescue vehicles and all the rooms, hallways and compartments that these “actors” inhabited. To bring the show’s characters to life, the voice actors, many of whom had a background in theatre, would record two or three episodes on

tape every week. Meanwhile, the set crews were putting together the aforementioned interiors and exteriors using everything from toothpaste caps to train set pieces to model kit parts, and the special effects crews were figuring out the most precise ways to blow things up. While all this was going on, puppeteers would be on a gantry thirty feet above the puppet shooting stages, practicing the movement of the puppets about the stage spaces.

The success of *Thunderbirds* was not restricted to the love of the television show. *Thunderbirds* is not only Anderson’s most successful franchise, spawning two seasons and two movies, it also generated more than fourteen original fictional novels, nineteen action-adventure mini albums, eight video games, six comic books, a stage play, the creation of a real-life International Rescue, and a



AN IMAGE FROM *FOUR FEATHERS FALLS*

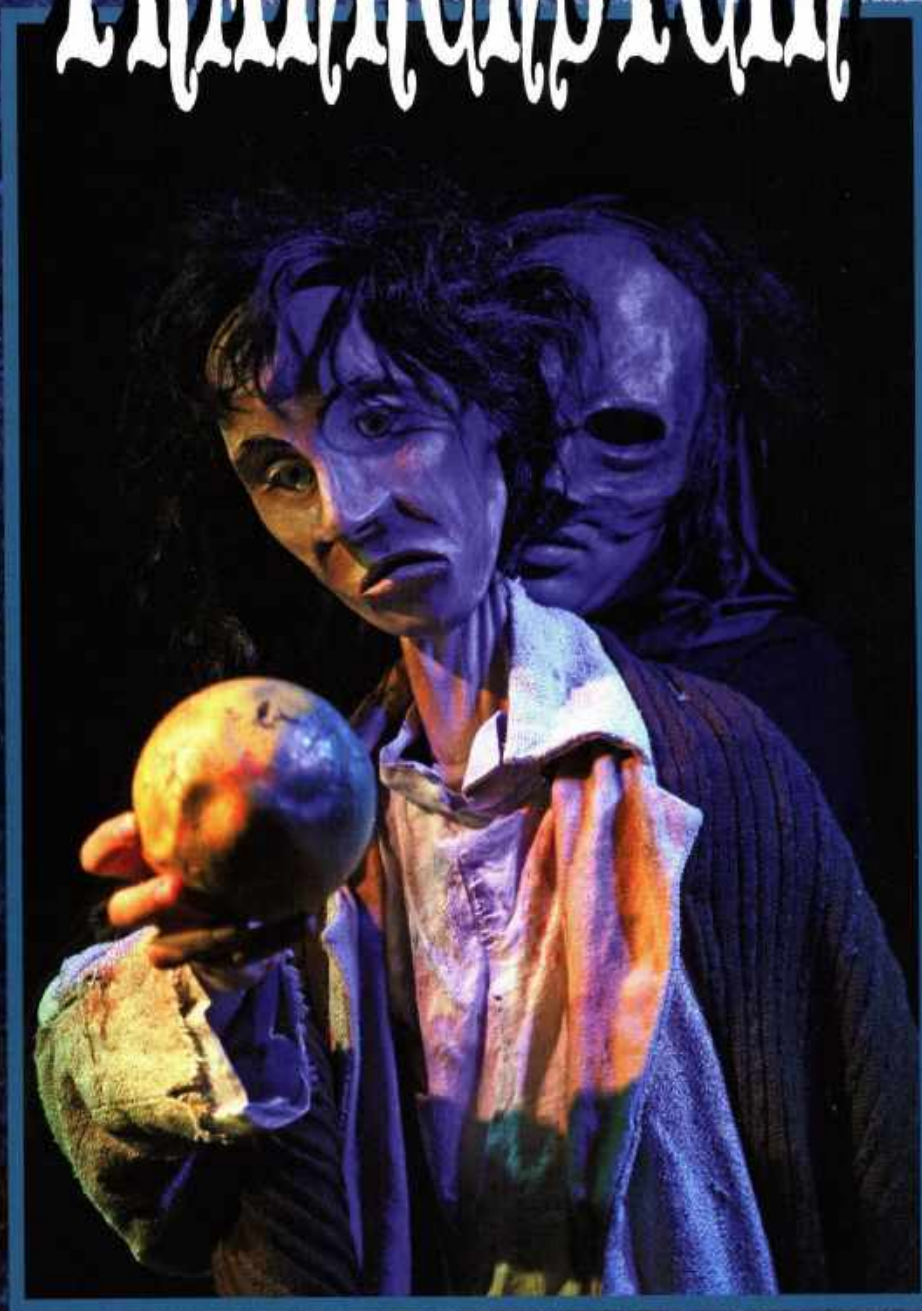
mime act entitled *Thunderbirds Fab*, which author Barry Purves claims paid great respect to Anderson, with a twist: “The brilliant stage show, *Thunderbirds Fab*, a loving homage to the Gerry Anderson oeuvre, reversed the trick of seeing puppets act like humans and imagined stringless actors behaving like marionettes.” Between DVD releases and re-broadcasts of the show in the U.K., the *Thunderbirds* franchise is still thriving through media sales, the internet, toys, movies, and anime series, proving itself to be one of the most lucrative puppet franchises in history.

My fanboy fascination for Gerry Anderson stems from the way a show like *Thunderbirds*, with non-human actors, not written or performed ironically, in the name of comedy, or with any tongue-in-cheek profanity, has spawned a Japanese anime, a big budget American movie, albums, video games, and British commemorative stamps. Anderson’s work with marionettes truly changed the landscape of televised British puppetry and, more importantly, showed the world what could be done with marionettes and an illimitable imagination.



Quincy Thomas is a third year PhD student in the Department of Theatre at Bowling Green State University, Ohio. His current research is centered around the performance and representation of the twentieth century superheroine.

FRANKENSTEIN



by Conrad Bishop

The Independent Eye's production of *Frankenstein*

sixteen-year-old girl, of notorious radical parentage, is swept off her feet by a would-be poet who's been expelled from college, married, and fathered children. They flee the country, impoverished save for heavy borrowing from friends. At 18, she's lost one child and is pregnant with another. As an entertainment among a small circle of social misfits, she accepts a challenge to write a horror story.

The result is *Frankenstein*, a work that's had as wide a range of interpretations as any ancient myth. Usually it's seen as a cautionary tale about the dangers of science, of seeking forbidden knowledge, of Man usurping the role of God. But for us, its resonance is deeper.

In Mary Godwin Shelley's novel, Victor's obsession with creating life has its genesis in his mother's death, which may echo her own mother's death in childbirth. His scheme is a grand "denial of death," the quest to bypass conception and birth in order to conquer mortality. He seeks a world subject to his will. His passion for Elizabeth is bloated with sentimentality but bereft of fecundity. His gestures never betray a hint of uncertainty, though by the end his will manifests only in desperate spasms.



The result of this denial-of-death is death. We can draw parallels to our present-day alienation from the natural world, our attempts to save nations by destroying them, our drive for bigger bank accounts, bigger cars, bigger bellies to make ourselves too big to fail— whatever strikes you.

For those unfamiliar with any but the movie versions: Victor is a student, not a mad scientist. He has no dwarfish assistant. We don't see electrodes buzzing or cauldrons bubbling: it's not clear how Victor animates the Creature. Nor do we know what makes him appear "monstrous," except for vague descrip-



tions of watery eyes and unusual size. There's no mistaken transplant of the brain of a criminal, and he learns to speak eloquently. There's no torch-bearing mob of peasants: Victor and the Creature pursue each other into the Arctic, Victor dies, and the Creature is lost on an ice floe.

Shelley was cutting very close to the bone. Victor's abandonment of his creation echoes her lover/husband Percy Shelley's own mix of idealism and irresponsibility. The Creature's first murder is a child named after Mary's dead first-born. The principles espoused by her parents, the radical philosopher William Godwin and notorious feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, permeate her vision of the Creature's innate goodness, yet fall to the assaults of the real world.

For *Frankenstein*, we utilized our signature type of puppet: a 2/3rds-life-size figure, one hand inside the head (moved by wrist and fingers, weight supported by a fingerless glove), the other hand as the puppet's hand. We also used versions of the principal characters as 20" dolls and finger puppets, as well as hand puppets, video projection, and an enlarged form of toy theatre with 15" cut-out figures— the civilization the Creature encounters— all set in our 10x8x8 ft. aluminum frame, with lighting apparatus self-contained.



We had a huge plastic tarp that we'd taken on our one trip to Burning Man— heavy, a waffle texture, grimly industrial— that we used as the basic fabric of the set, hung flat in not-quite-symmetrical rectangles. Another element also derived from salvage. We had acquired five large bags of foam rubber, a puppeteer's godsend. But after picking it up from our donor, we were disappointed to find that it was in 18" squares, an inch and a half thick, filthy, and all bright blue.

Oddly, there was something about the blueness that called to mind an art installation we'd seen long ago, with small, linked figures crawling along a walkway. Now, we saw blue figures crawling along the pipes of our aluminum frame, frantic to get somewhere. The color gave life to the dismal hangings. And in starting to play with the blue figures, we saw more of a focus on



the human figure. This crystallized in a discussion with Hob, our toy-theatre designer, who was concerned that his figures might be out of style with the other puppetry. The solution was to use enlarged outline shapes based on these two-dimensional figures, spray-painted as reverse silhouettes on the flat panel hangings. The same motif was used on a black scrim hung in front of the rear projection screen, disappearing when projected through but at other times bringing the rear of the stage into more organic relation to the rest of it. And the sliver of red fabric emerging from a crack between two levels of the front masking? Well, *Frankenstein* is about death and birth. So that was for shock value.

Who were the puppeteers? In our staging of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, they were masked spirits of the island, slaves to Prospero. In *Frankenstein*, the action is driven by Death. Victor's combat with death means that Death dictates every action. So the puppeteers, when seen, wore skull half-masks, recalling Brueghel's painting in the Prado wherein the hundreds of tiny figures are skeletons, bedecked in armor or silks or homespun as their station dictates, but linked in Death's triumph. Our three actors were sometimes seen behind the puppets, sometimes concealed. They also doubled as stage crew, operating the 24-channel lighting system, the heavy music score, and the video rear-projections from an offstage laptop.



Finally, the first question we always ask: Why puppets? To a degree it emerged from the metaphor of "control": At one point in his obsession with creating life, Victor dangles a string of paper dolls, then a foam-rubber puppet, then a tangled marionette. At another, trying ritual magic to animate the Creature, he is astonished to find he's sprouted a third hand. At another, the bashful Victor and Elizabeth speak to one another through doll versions of themselves.

But the main reasons, more simply – to tell a large story with a small cast; to create the fractured reality inhabited by both Creator and Creature; to maintain realism of detail while expanding its mythic dimension. Simply put, because we believe in the enormous power of puppetry. •

FRANKENSTEIN

Produced by The Independent Eye
in cooperation with 6th Street Playhouse,
Santa Rosa, CA, presented in October 2011

Text by Conrad Bishop & Elizabeth Fuller
Directed & designed by Conrad Bishop
Music by Elizabeth Fuller
Puppets by Conrad Bishop
Costumes by Julie Kwitchoff & Conrad Bishop
Toy-theatre figures by Hob

Funded in part by a grant from
the Jim Henson Foundation

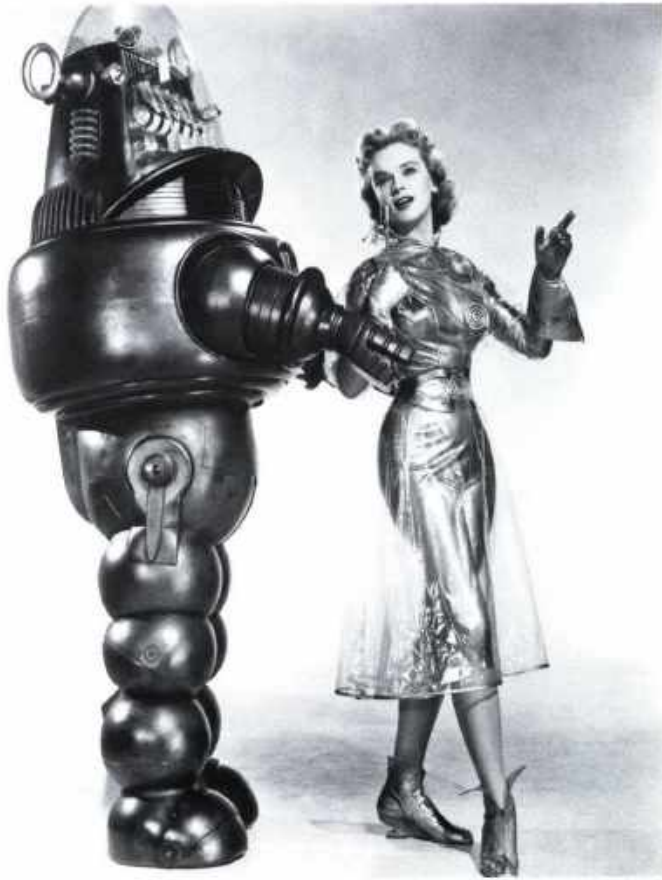
DVDs of *Frankenstein* are available at:
www.independenteye.org/media.html



PHOTOS: ERIC CHAZANKIN

Puppetry, Science Fiction and Fantasy

by John Bell



ROBBIE THE ROBOT AND ANNE FRANCIS, FROM *FORBIDDEN PLANET* (1956)

When I was growing up in suburbia in the 1950s, Science Fiction was considered a kind of low, popular-culture art form, and not something to be considered seriously as literature (at least by my mother, who was concerned with such things). However, like other fifties kids, I was fascinated by the possibilities of space travel and other worlds, even though I sensed the horror of the recently ended second world war, the science-and-technology-induced horrors it had just delivered around the globe, and the threat of nuclear annihilation that modern technology had placed over us. I loved Robbie the Robot in the 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*, the wild possibilities of the proto-steam-punk 1960 film *The Time Machine*, and the idealized modern morality play at the center of the 1950 film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*—films that all depended upon puppets, masks, and special effects to communicate their urgent messages. On television, *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64) routinely delved into science fiction and fantasy, using puppets (such as a malevolent ventriloquist dummy in the 1962 episode, “The Dummy”) when needed; and by the time *Star Trek* appeared in 1966 (also routinely using miniatures, puppets, masks, performing objects, and other special effects), it seems that American audiences were fully ready to welcome Science Fiction as an essential means of representing our world, an affinity that has only grown since then.

The presentation of Science Fiction and Fantasy stories in live or recorded performance clearly connects to puppetry because puppets have always been used around the world to visualize or represent other-worldly realms. However, at least in the West, the almost simultaneous arrival of rationalism, secular society, capitalism, and the aesthetics of realism in the 16th and 17th centuries—in other words, the Enlightenment’s creation of the “modern” world—problematized the dynamics of traditional mask, puppet, and object theater and the other worlds they represented, which would now be associated with pre-modern and “primitive” cultural practices.

Modern Problems with Puppets

Rationalism, and the application of rationalism to the natural world via the scientific method, turns away from, or at the least problematizes religious belief systems. Scientific ways of thinking about the nature of life are not at all interested in the possible existence of God, saints, angels, and miracles; and in addition are also somewhat uncomfortable and embarrassed about the persistence of ancient rituals that depend upon the power of puppets, objects, and masks for their efficacy.

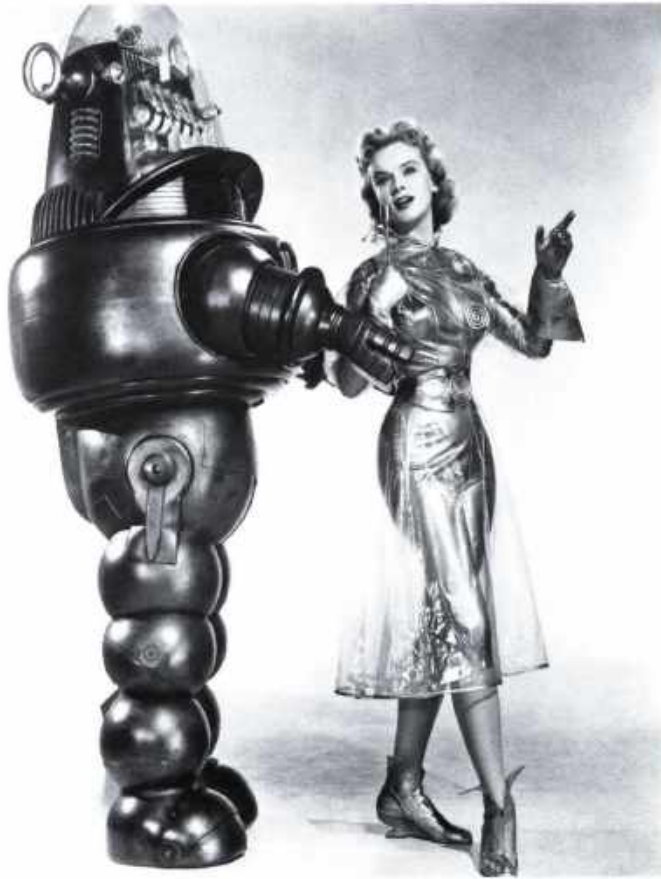
In Renaissance England, for example, the dramatic world and theatrical techniques of Christopher Marlowe’s 1604 tragedy *Dr. Faustus*, with its strong roots in medieval English ritual theater and its dependence on popular puppet, mask, and special effects, would be superseded by the different dramatic world and more “realistic” production aesthetics of such dramas as Shakespeare’s 1601 *Hamlet* which, even though it includes a ghost, is largely concerned with the travails of a very real and very ordinary human being. No puppets at all needed for this classic harbinger of the modern condition.

On the other hand, despite the supposed decline of the ancient art of puppetry in the face of modernity, puppets and objects have remained immediately and viscerally popular forms of communication. It’s just that they can’t be explained very well in a rational manner. They are always “uncanny,” as psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch (and later Sigmund Freud) realized at the beginning of the 20th century.

Anton Chekhov’s 1896 play *The Seagull* includes a famous symbolist-tinged outdoor performance of a “terribly modern” spectacle, created by the young artist Treplev, which wants to present an image of the world a hundred years in the future in a show performed with actors, but full of objects and stage effects, including a sea monster with “blood-red eyes.” But Chekhov presents this abortive futurist spectacle as a farce: a sign of how such fantastic fiction inevitably fails as theater. And Chekhov’s sense of modern symbolist spectacle as an impossibility became common among 20th-century high-culture circles.

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The presentation of Science Fiction and Fantasy stories in live or recorded performance clearly connects to puppetry because puppets have always been used around the world to visualize or represent the actual world. In the late twentieth century, “modern” puppetry, which includes marionettes, which are used in theatrical and television productions, and which are used in the

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“Eider Falls at Lake Tahoe”
KATE BUSH

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKPHA3_cB



SPECIAL EFFECTS IN GEORGES MÉLIÈS' 1912 FILM *CONQUEST OF THE POLE*

However, at the same time, even though puppet theater was considered by many as a sign of anti-modern primitivism, technical innovations in puppet, mask, and object theater were on the forefront of modern developments in performance techniques involving machines, non-Western culture, and the modification of traditional performance norms for 20th-century contexts. New media technologies such as film and the technical possibilities of the modern stage spurred such filmmakers as Georges Méliès and Fritz Lang (who directed the robot-centric 1927 film *Metropolis*), as well as the American dancer Loie Fuller, and various Futurists, Expressionists, Dadaists, Constructivists, and Bauhaus innovators to create new types of quite successful puppet and object performance which, while conscious of the past, also sought to envision the new technology-based future—the essence of Science Fiction.

Science and Fiction

The performance of Science Fiction fulfills a quite amazing role in these contexts, because it creates a way for modern culture to fully connect with puppet-, mask-, and object-theater without turning “back” to religion and traditional ritual and thus seeming to deny the idea of modern progress. “Science” and “fiction” are compelling concepts because they appear to exist in stark contradiction to each other. Science wants to deal with what can be proved by the experimental method as objective fact, while fiction marks the opposite: the worlds of the decidedly-not-real, that which can never be “proven.” The union of these opposites—Science Fiction—allows us to seem modern, and yet indulge in the same flights of fancy that religion, mythology, and ritual practices had been happily providing us before the modern era.

Robots and Puppetry

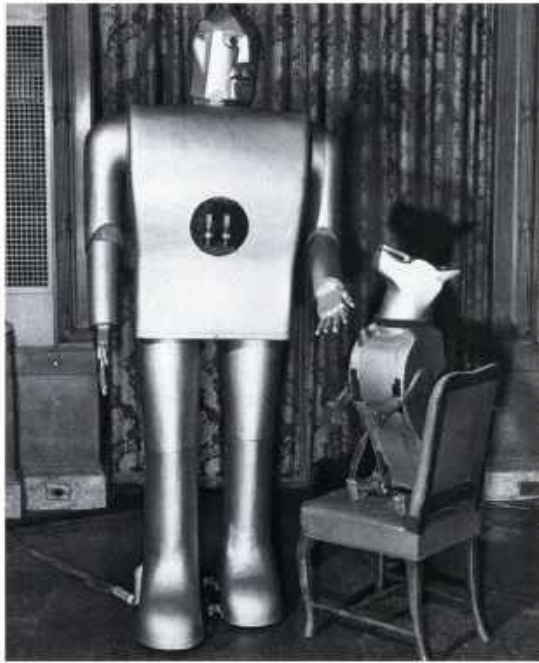
Since Science Fiction and Fantasy articulate the existence of alternative worlds and alternative beings, puppets, masks, and objects (including special effects) have become essential means of realizing those worlds in performance. Moreover, in the case of Science Fiction, modern culture can visualize its dreams of progress generated by rationality, the scientific method, and a human command of nature, in structures and machines that (we imagine) could be simple and perhaps inevitable extensions of the machines we live with now. The most compelling and ambivalent version of this dream of technological progress is the robot.

When the Čapek brothers invented the term “robot” for their 1920 play *R.U.R.* (the initials stand for “Rossum’s Universal Robots”), they were imagining something more akin to human clones than mechanical devices. Robots have since then tended to be thinking machines rather than scientifically produced humanoids, but the world of robots nicely and specifically conjures up a problematic overlap between human and machine. We like to imagine robots as autonomous machines with artificial intelligence approaching or achieving independent consciousness itself. Robots answer long-existing human desires to create life, but since independent robots can also cause havoc, or evil, they can also embody our deep fears about technology.

Robots can exist in two ways: first, as actual machines that work for us, or second—and this is the more interesting and theatrically more common version—as puppets that mimic what actual machines might do. The history of performing machines—from Hero of Alexandria’s 1st-century B.C. special effects for Greek temples; through the Babylonian engineer Ibn al-Jazari’s fantastically theatrical 12th-century water clocks; to the Japanese *karakuri ningyo* and European automata of the 18th and 19th centuries that played chess, wrote poetry, performed acrobatics or mastered musical instruments—is full of situations where the public desire to see human-made autonomous beings is happily granted by builders and performers who present the science of the robot by means of the fiction of puppetry.

Electro, the Moto-Man

You can see this in the performances of “Electro, the Westinghouse Moto-Man,” who was a popular performing robot at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York City. (A YouTube video of Electro is easily accessible.) The 1939 Fair was rife with modernist visions of tomorrow, which were more often than not achieved by puppetry. (According to the late Rod Young, an active puppeteer in the 1930s, every puppeteer in the New York area found a job at the Fair.) The YouTube clip of Electro features a scientist-type narrator (like the “bottler” in a Punch and Judy show) putting Electro through his paces, in a vaudeville-style comedy routine somewhat like a ventriloquist act, with Electro wisecracking, acting up, and making jokes with exactly the kind of rough humor Punch had established centuries earlier. The conceit—the pitch—is that Electro is almost human: He can walk, move his mouth, smoke a cigarette, count on his fingers like an “educated” animal in a county fair, talk back to his scientist handler, call out to specific members of the audience, and otherwise appear to approach human function.



ELECTRO, THE WESTINGHOUSE MOTO-MAN, AND HIS DOG SPARKO, AT THE 1939 WORLD'S FAIR

In the act, Electro's voice (originating from one of the puppeteers hidden in a booth underneath the performance platform, and heard through a speaker in the robot's chest) says, in-the-now-familiar-halting-toneless-tones-of-a-robot: "I am a smart fellow, as I have a very fine brain of 48 electrical relays. It works just like a telephone switchboard. If I get a wrong number, I can always blame the operator." (Ba-dum-bump!) The YouTube clip is part of a dramatic film set at the Fair, and one of the characters watching (a father figure in a suit) says, "That's the most remarkable thing I've ever seen," and the grandmother exclaims, "Why, he's almost human!" The young boy asks, "How can he do all those things?" and Jim, the handsome male lead, answers, "He's full of motors, gears, cams, and photo-electric cells— you can fill a book with all the electro-mechanical principles involved in the thing."

Of course, Electro is really a very simple conglomeration of wheels, motors, and moving parts— what would later be called "animatronics" by the Walt Disney Company; in other words, puppetry. And while puppetry, as so many theorists have pointed out, is always ambiguous and uncanny in the way it uses dead materials to give the illusion of life, the modern puppetry of this 1939 robot gets at the same paradox and contradiction via contemporary technology: Maybe, in the fantastic world of modern technology, we humans can indeed create, on our own, a new kind of life on earth!

Did the large audiences at the Westinghouse Pavilion at the World's Fair actually believe the robot could see, think, move, and wisecrack with the expert timing of a vaudeville comedian? It's hard to tell, but certainly there was a desire to believe that such robot autonomy was possible, since that would be just one more feather in the cap of American technological innovations in the 1930s, together with the new interstate highway system, modern medicine, and other bright new futures on display at the Fair. Actual robots may not yet have existed, but puppet robots like Electro were essential for the realization of the idea of the robot.

Science Fiction and Fantasy

This has been the case ever since, and the ambiguous distinctions between autonomous robots and theatrically operated puppet machines have intrigued audiences from the early 20th century to the appearance of R2D2 and C-3PO in *Star Wars* and Steve Jobs' live stage performance of the new iPhone in 2007. *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and other Science Fiction films pursue machine dreams about the hopes and dangers of technology by creating worlds populated not only by humans and their robot colleagues, but also by fantastic living creatures from other worlds. In other words, these artistic productions— some of the most popular entertainments of the 20th and 21st centuries— combine Science Fiction and Fantasy in hybrid worlds that give us both the theatricality of machine life and the kinds of imaginary, animistic worlds that pre-modern rituals routinely provided.



JABBA THE HUTT AND FRIENDS

These worlds, combining faster-than-light spaceships, lightsabers, and the Death Star with such fantastic beings as Chewbacca, Yoda, and Jabba the Hutt, give us both sides of the modernist divide: the mythical, powerful, and spiritually mystic world of non-human beings, together with the utter triumph of modern technology. In this way, Science Fiction and Fantasy join forces and, performed by puppets, objects, masks, and special effects, articulate visions of the past and the future.



Valley of the Uncanny Dolls:

an interview with Allison de Fren on **The Mechanical Bride**

by Marsian

The Mechanical Bride is a feature-length documentary that explores the sf fantasy of creating the perfect woman and the current-day reality of artificial companions in the sex and robotics industries. Filmmaker Allison de Fren approaches her subjects with depth and sensitivity, exploring the roles of Doll/Owner, Real/Synthetic, and Living/Dead. I caught up with her in LA, where she teaches in the Media Arts & Culture Program at Occidental College.

—M



Marsian: *For those readers unfamiliar with the kinds of dolls featured in the documentary, could you briefly describe them?*

Allison de Fren: Yes, they are life-sized sex dolls, many achieving a remarkable degree of verisimilitude. Materials and appearances vary; the American dolls are made out of solid silicone, shaped around articulated skeletons, whereas the Japanese dolls have a silicone cyberskin stretched over a foam interior, which makes them lighter weight and somewhat more flexible (in fact, I think there is an analogy to be made in the differences between American and Japanese love dolls and cars). The documentary also looks at the current attempt to animate and enliven the dolls through such technologies as motion sensors, actuators, and artificial intelligence.

M: *What inspired you to make this documentary?*

AdF: I have a longstanding interest in the human relationship to anthropomorphic objects, whether dolls, puppets, automata, or robots. The seeds of the documentary were planted over a decade ago, in my former life as a digital interaction designer, while working at a future technology R&D company in Silicon Valley. It was there that I first learned about the Realdoll (the most famous sex doll in the world), and it was from a robotocist friend there that I first learned about a theory espoused by the father of industrial robots in Japan (Masahiro Mori) called the theory of “the uncanny valley” or *bukimi no tani*. The theory suggests that as anthropomorphic creations, like robots, start to approximate humanness both in appearance and movement—therefore raising expectations of humanness—but don’t quite achieve it, they will seem creepy or scary (think old-time Disney animatronics). At the time, most roboticists like my friend avoided realism in robots for that very reason, but I couldn’t help but wonder what would happen as Realdolls started to move and

act more like humans: Would their uncanniness undermine not only their attractiveness for the men who buy them, but also the kinds of fantasies that are often projected onto them? Those were some of the questions that eventually inspired me to make the documentary.

M: *Julie Newmar who played Rhoda the Robot on the short-lived sixties TV series My Living Doll could not have been a better choice for your narrator for this documentary. How did she get on board?*

AdF: When I was a child, Julie Newmar was my favorite catwoman on the TV show *Batman*, so getting her to narrate the documentary was a real thrill. Early on in production, I looked for old episodes of *My Living Doll*, but was told by everyone (including one of the main writers for the show, Howard Leeds—who, by the way, went on to create *Small Wonder*, a sitcom in the eighties about a little girl robot) that CBS had buried the series and I would never be able to find any episodes, let alone license them. As I continued to work on the documentary, however, the estate of Jack Chertok, the producer of the show, was searching out, restoring, and re-licensing as many of the old episodes as they could find (in fact, they just recently released a DVD through MPI Home Video). Their licensing manager, Peter Greenwood, not only made the episodes available to me, but also put me in touch with Julie Newmar.

M: *You draw comparisons at various points between love dolls and puppetry and interview Victoria Nelson, author of The Secret Life of Puppets. What connections do you see between the two?*

AdF: Dolls, puppets, and automata are obviously all humanoid objects falling somewhere along the spectrum of the “uncanny valley” and endowed with varying degrees of animation and life-

likeness. Although their cultural functions differ, I'm particularly interested in their connections as performing objects. An artificial companion is one thing in the privacy of her owner's home and another when presented in my documentary or a film like *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007)—or better yet Fellini's *Casanova* (1976)—where her inertness or mechanicalness helps to defamiliarize what might otherwise seem like a stereotypical romantic encounter, a role that has resonances with some forms of puppetry and puppet animation. Within German Romantic literature, one finds a connection between the mechanical females in the work of E.T.A. Hoffmann— who serve as ciphers of metaphysical possibility— and the figure of the puppet in Heinrich von Kleist's "On the Marionette Theatre." It is the performative, literary, and representational aspects of synthetic companions— rather than their use as human surrogates— that, I think, has particular relevance for puppetry.

M: *You interview Robert Parigi, director of Love Object (2003)— the first film to use a Realdoll as a character— who noted that the dolls are not as convincing in real life as they appear in advertisements and, thus, require of their owners a large degree of "willed psychological projection" to bring them to life. Is this the same as the suspension of disbelief on the part of puppetry audiences?*

AdF: One of the things that I try to draw out in the documentary is the tension between fantasy and reality, as well as the subjective and objective experience of the dolls. Realdolls, in particular, are ordered piecemeal (head type, body type, hair color, etc.) so that they are constructed to the exact contours of their owners' desires, and doll owners often speak about their dolls in highly idealistic terms, as if their dream girl had become a reality. The stark reality, however— the dead weight and immobility of the doll; the degraded silicone around the eyes, mouths, and joints of older dolls; hair and fingernails that have been rendered askew through repetitive use— is apparent to anyone who looks closely. The impression given by men and their dolls is not all that dissimilar from that of a child and a favorite plaything whose eyes and fur have been loved off. No matter how much obsessive specificity goes into ordering the doll, at some point, it becomes so emotionally and libidinally cathected that the exterior reality fades from view. One might say

that a similar phenomenon happens in love relationships between people. I'm not sure, however, that this is the same thing as the suspension of disbelief achieved by puppetry, which is often experienced at a remove and requires a skillful operator.

M: *One of the doll owners you interview has a fondness for Japanese culture, which he believes has more of a reverence towards dolls because of Shintoism, the belief that everything has a soul. What differences did you find between Japanese and American dolls and the relationships that their owners have with them?*

AdF: Japan as a culture seems to be more comfortable with anthropomorphic objects, in general, and to cultivate relational attitudes towards them in a way that we don't in the U.S. Indeed, Japan has the largest love doll AND humanoid robotics industries in the world, the latter funded by mainstream corporations like Honda and Sony, whereas the doll and humanoid robot efforts in the U.S. tend to be small-scale and driven by individuals rather than corporations. The difference might be attributable to Japan's long-standing history of dolls, puppets, and automata, but yes, there is also Shintoism, which one might contrast with the Judeo-Christian fear of playing god (or Frankenstein complex) in the West. What I find particularly interesting is the way that these two disparate mythologies inflect the appearance of anthropomorphic objects in each country. In the U.S., we tend to like our robots and dolls realistic or hyper-realistic (Realdolls, for example, look like playboy models or women who have had plastic surgery), perhaps all the better to convince ourselves that we should fear being replaced by them. In Japan, where such objects have their own ontological status and where traditional aesthetics as influenced by Buddhism favor evocation over description, dolls are doll-like and robots are robot-like or toy-like. To put it another way, because it is culturally acceptable in Japan to have relationships with inanimate (or animated non-human) objects, it seems that there is no need for them to "look like us."

M: *You interview the Geppettos of kink who are attempting to make the dolls robotic. How technologically advanced are they?*



OPENING GRAPHICS SEQUENCE FROM
THE MECHANICAL BRIDE

AD: Unlike roboticists, who tend to work from the inside out, pushing the technological envelope and then trying to fit their advances into a humanoid body, the love doll industry works from the outside in. The beautiful body comes first, after which they attempt to incorporate various kinds of functionality, so the dolls are not particularly impressive technologically. I was, however, somewhat blown away by the movements of the Andybot, a “sexual android” currently in development in Nuremberg, Germany. (Of interest: the Andybot’s developer likes to call himself “The Creator”—clearly referencing Germany’s legacy of mad scientists— and sees himself as part of the tradition of toy and automata building in the area. In fact, the first automaton in human form was purportedly built in Nuremberg in the mid-sixteenth century.) I had already seen prototypes capable of “pelvic motion” in the U.S, however, in each case the movement was a strictly forward and backward affair, accompanied by the distracting sound of a powering motor. The Andybot gyrated in silent, fluid, circular waves; it was beautiful, erotic, and disturbing all at the same time, and it really brought to mind the “divine geometry” of Kleist’s marionettes.

M: *Towards the end of the film, we see dolls with blue skin, pointed ears, wings, horns, and even cartoonish features. Have you noticed a growing taste for non-human features?*

AdF: I think that the American market has, to a certain extent, followed the lead of Japan, where anime dolls, in particular, are quite popular. Also, I think the trend is influenced by the growing cultural influence of Comic-Con and the popularity of cosplay (“costume play” in which participants dress like characters from anime, manga, fantasy, and sf films, etc.). As experimentation with alien and fantastical costumes, masks, and features becomes increasingly mainstreamed, I think we’ll see a growing trend toward sf and fantasy erotic play, including within the love doll industry.

M: *What are you working on next?*

AdF: I would eventually like to get back to media making, but at present, I’m working on turning my doctoral dissertation—which explored “uncanny” or “disarticulated” artificial women in art, literature, and media—into a book.



Allison de Fren is a media maker and scholar based in Los Angeles, who divides her time between creating, writing, and teaching about media, gender, and technology. She holds a masters degree from the Interactive Telecommunications Program at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts and a doctorate from USC’s School of Cinematic Arts. She is an Assistant Professor of Media Arts & Culture at Occidental College in Los Angeles. You can find out more about *The Mechanical Bride* at:

www.mechanicalbridemovie.com.

Marsian is a Los Angeles-based performance artist and secretary of UNIMA-USA, whose artist talk, “Object/Fetish: Staging the Suspension of Disbelief in Everyday Life,” examines erotic practices that exist at the margins of what is traditionally considered puppetry and object theatre. Marsian is writing a show inspired by people who fall in love with buildings and inanimate structures, “Object of Her Affection”—an animistic foray into a woman’s search for love that is just beyond her reach.



IT LOOKS AT FIRST GLANCE LIKE A MEET-N-GREET AT A BOARD RETREAT. IN FACT, THE WOMAN PICTURED IS THE ROBOT, GEMINOID F. SHE APPEARS IN THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES WITH HUMAN ACTORS AND WITH OTHER ROBOTS.

Zaven Paré’s article, “Robot Drama Research: from Identification to Synchronization” will appear in *Social Robotics*, Springer Publishing Company in October, 2012.

www.springer.com



ZAVEN PARÉ WITH WAKAMARU, MITSUBISHI SHOWROOM, TOKYO (2010)

COURTESY PHOTOS, ZAVEN PARÉ

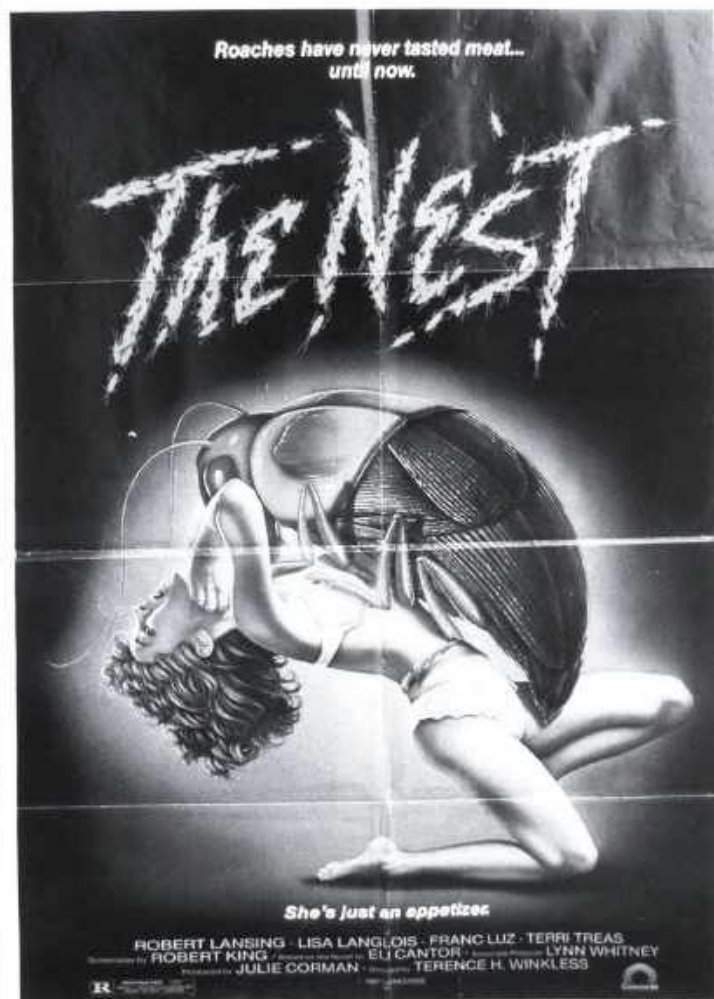
A PUPPETEER IN HOLLYWOOD

I grew up loving movies and TV, especially the magical moments when something inanimate would come to life—like when Mary Poppins's umbrella talked to her, or Captain Kangaroo chatted with Mr. Moose... so it is a dream come true to actually work on movies and television shows. After several years of performing in live puppet shows (Bob Baker Marionette Theater, on deck at the Queen Mary, a short stint for Jim Gamble and a variety of theater productions) I worked on a low budget film for Roger Corman, well-known king of the B movie. It was called *The Nest* and was only in theaters for about a week, but for me it became a new direction. We were working in Bronson Caves in Hollywood, famously used as the Batcave for the beloved *Batman* television series in the 1960s. The puppet was a strange amalgamation of human faces on neckstalks atop a six-foot tall cockroach-type creature with about forty cables running out of the base. These were connected to huge controllers that took massive muscle power to get even the smallest movements out of the half-dead faces. There were several four-foot egg sacks hanging from the ceiling, dripping blood and slime. Between each take we had to run in and add more blood and slime to the dripping sacks. We would do our rough performance of the creature. Fortunately, with the help of a savvy camera operator, we were able to make this static creature actually look sort of menacing. It was a blast.

That was the beginning of a career in the world of creature effects, working at various shops in LA, helping to create the magical beings of our dreams and the monsters of our nightmares. The shops are mostly

populated with guys who were inspired by the monsters of the early movies—*Frankenstein*, *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, *The Wolfman* and the original *King Kong*, as well as later movies like *American Werewolf in London*, the original *Planet of the Apes* and *Alien*. These guys were so passionate and talented (and they were mostly guys), the type who used to use crazy makeup and make bloody hands in their garages for Halloween. Eventually, they found a way to make a living doing it. I saw great opportunities for utilizing my skills at crafting (sewing, soft sculpture, foam sculpting) and at bringing life to these puppets.

One of the first movies I worked on was *Batman Returns* for Stan Winston Studios, with Danny DeVito as The Penguin. I was



one of forty puppeteers who worked the cable and animatronic penguin puppets. We would sit outside in the 80+° heat, waiting to be called into the 30° stage, where we would each crawl under the tiny island to get to the controller for our own penguin. We had monitors to see what the camera was shooting, but the monitors were about seven inches across, barely big enough to be able to find the right penguin. It was freezing-cold on the stage because there were also a couple dozen real penguins. They would occasionally mix in with the puppet penguins and stand strangely still. Once Stan Winston was trying to figure out who wasn't working their penguin because it was not moving—*was it broken? Did the puppeteer not hear the cues?* No, it was a real penguin, sitting peacefully amidst the puppets just hanging out, not moving.

Working on *Michael* at Amalgamated Dynamics, Inc. was a real joy—we had to

make two versions of a bull, one was a soft head, the other was a full body puppet that the puppeteer got into in order to work the legs and head. In the movie, John Travolta's character butts heads with the bull, and the bull sits down in a daze from the impact. We dug a hole to partially bury the puppeteer, hid cables for the legs to move and used radios for the facial movements. Through the magic of editing, it looks like Mr. Travolta made contact with the bull.

Alien Resurrection was great fun—I worked for several months at ADI with dozens of other craftspeople. We built the new incarnation of the alien, recreated the mama alien from the series, and made several of the traditional alien suits. I was fortunate to be able to be one of several puppeteers on set

by Christine Papalexis

working different parts of the aliens. Often in creature effects, a puppet performance is a collaborative effort; each person is responsible for a different limb or function of the puppet. In one scene, I worked the lower jaw of the mother alien. By talking or making roaring alien sounds, we were able to create a unified performance. In another scene, I had my hands tightly strapped together inside a "facehugger" that had to scamper out of an alien egg, on cue. There was a twelve-foot boom camera that traveled from several feet to my right, above an egg with a facehugger puppeteered by Van Snowden, (best known as PufnStuff and Chucky), then to my egg, then to the body of water behind me where Sigourney Weaver, Ron Perlman and several other actors were swimming. It was a classic Hollywood moment. After more than two hours of working, I no longer had any feeling in my fingers; a small price to pay for a great time.

Another memorable Hollywood movie experience was working on *Hollow Man*, also for ADI. We built several animals for the shoot. The most unusual was a damaged gorilla. In the movie, he goes through a process that is supposed to make him invisible, but things go terribly wrong and he emerges with his flesh turned inside out. It is a grisly scene that is only on screen for a few minutes, but we spent *months* building it. The performer, Tom Woodruff Jr. (a great suit performer and one of the owners of ADI), laid on a slant board with his head in the gorilla's animatronic head and the rest of his body underneath the deformed beast. Puppeteers worked different parts of the creature— the facial features (I usually puppeteered the eyes and cheeks), and another puppeteer, underneath the slant board, worked the rods of the gorilla's limbs. In the movie, the testing on the human scientist (played by Kevin Bacon) goes awry and his invisibility causes him to become more and more evil. Mr. Bacon spent a great deal of time in a green screen suit to record how his movements affected the world around him, though the audience rarely sees him in the movie. In one scene, his charac-

ter touches a female scientist while she is asleep. Since my hands are close in size to Mr. Bacon's, I had the opportunity to puppeteer one of the strangest puppets ever— an actress's right breast. Though it's quite offensive in the film, it was great fun and quite funny to shoot. They were respectful of the actress; they closed the set to visitors, had a female camera operator and me, a female, for a puppeteer. Another scene required several puppeteers to undress a different character by unbuttoning her blouse. This took special rigging and green screen rods to create the appropriate close-ups; another great challenge. Paul Verhoeven has directed several acclaimed films and was terrific with the puppeteers. We spent a couple days rehearsing a scene where the invisible intruder attacks a girl in bed, which helped greatly when shooting the scene. It's rare to have that much time to rehearse. Mr. Verhoeven let us work out the best approach, which meant less time on the day of shooting and a better performance.

Team America: World Police used over forty puppeteers (though not all at one time). Miles of marionette string was specially ordered from Cortland Line, and I was fortunate to work at Chiodo Brothers Inc., in Burbank, helping to devise marionette controls and figure out special rigging as well as being a puppeteer. From the beginning, Trey Parker and Matt Stone wanted to do all the effects on camera, staying away from the convention of using computer effects to achieve the desired effects. The puppets were designed similar in size to those on Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds*, but were required to do so many stunts and effects that there were huge challenges every day. Many puppeteers contributed to the outcome. It also required the talents of hundreds of craftspeople

to create the gorgeous miniature sets, props and cars. The Director of Photography, Bill Pope, brought with him a wealth of experience in shooting challenging features such as the *Matrix* series, *Spider-Man 2* and *3*, and many others.

Stand-out moments include:

- I often puppeteered Sarah, and one of my favorite moments was her dance scene. I was trying to make her look like she was an awkward but bold dancer. I think I succeeded, at least at the awkward part.
- Training the sharks to attack the puppet in the water. During the first session, they immediately went after the little prop briefcase (crafted of leather) instead of the puppet. After removing the briefcase and placing a chunk of fish on the puppet the sharks did what was needed for the shot.
- We spent many hours in cherry pickers, high above the sets trying to puppeteer the twenty-two-inch tall marionettes from fifteen feet in the air. It went well until another puppeteer started to walk in the cherry picker, rocking the whole bucket. It's hard to get a marionette to walk gracefully when the world under your feet is shifting uncontrollably.
- We had to shoot the scene at the Taj Mahal four times— the explosion made the puppeteers flinch slightly which looked like a huge jump on camera. The props/set department set up a rig to pull the puppets off their feet at the right moment. Then there was the time the set caught on fire...



NEWBORN FROM *ALIEN RESURRECTION*, 1997

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



PENGUIN PUPPET FROM *BATMAN RETURNS*

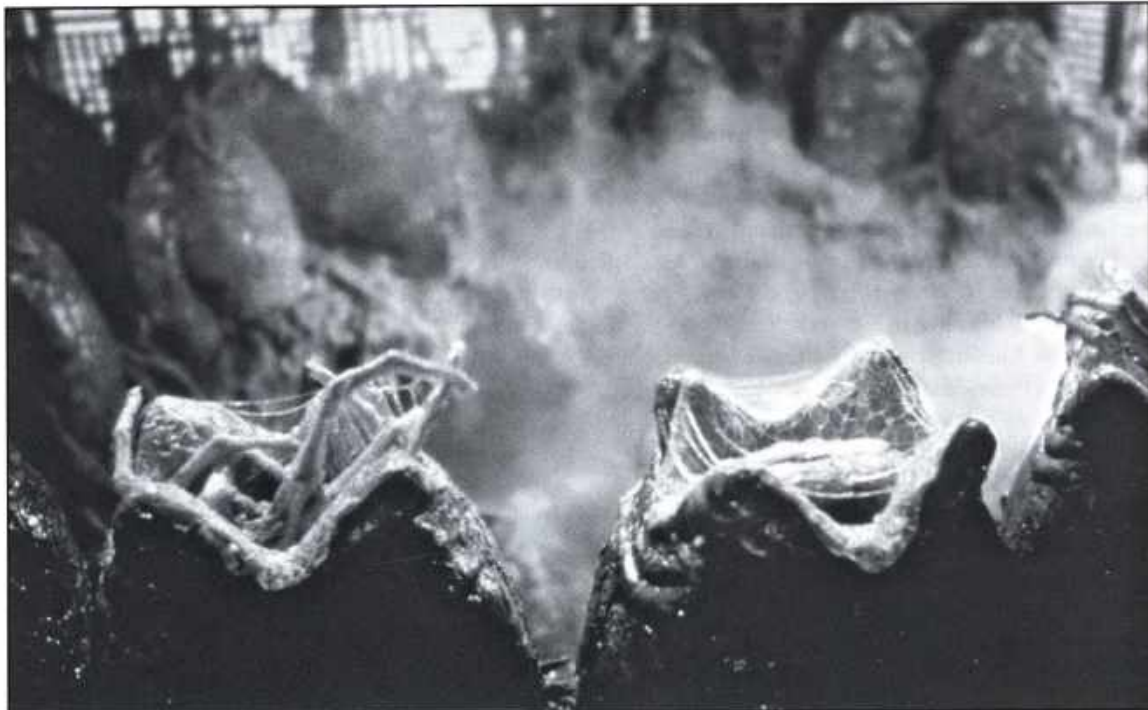
Every puppeteer who worked on *Team America: World Police* has their own story. It was challenging and exciting and frustrating and amazing. There were probably more marionettists working *Team America* than any other feature film in history, and there may never be another film to use so many puppeteers. I feel honored to have had the opportunity to work side by side with so many talented people.

These are some of the highlights of a puppeteer's working in the world of movies. Most of the people I work with love the look of practical effects (as opposed to computer effects). As computer effects continue to improve, that may change. In the mean time, we continue to enjoy the work that comes our way, strive to contribute in a real way to the history of filmmaking and to the iconography of dreams and nightmares. Filmmaking includes visual impact along with good story telling. When these elements combine to make something memorable and, perhaps, life-changing, then we have done our job well.



Christine Papalexis began her puppetry career working at Bob Baker Marionette Theater and has worked in film, television and onstage for over 25 years. She is a past president of the LA Guild of Puppetry, belongs to UNIMA-USA and the Puppeteers of America.

**A facehugger is the second stage in the life cycle of a Xenomorph. Its bony, finger-like legs allow it to crawl rapidly, and its long tail can launch it great distances.*



EGGS FROM *ALIEN RESURRECTION*

UNIMA-USA Citation of Excellence Winners for 2011 -2012

UNIMA-USA is pleased to announce the winners of the 2011 – 2012 Citations for Excellence

The live performance winners:

The Headless Horseman of Sloppy Hollow

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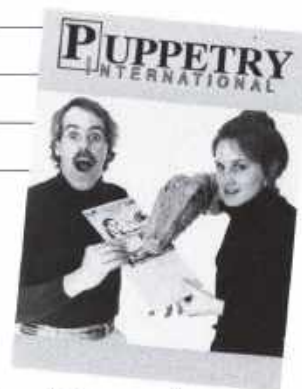
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UNIMA-USA Citation of Excellence Winners for 2011 -2012

UNIMA-USA is pleased to announce the winners of the 2011 – 2012 Citations for Excellence

The live performance winners:

The Ghastly Dreadfuls



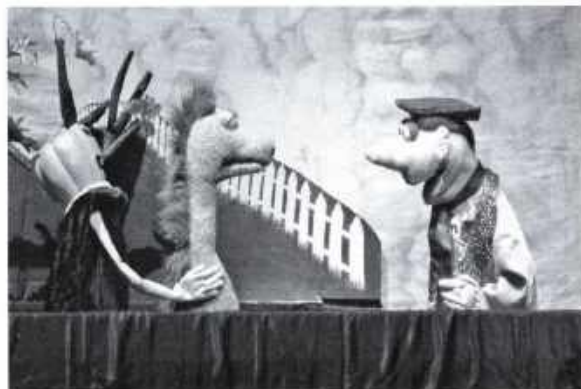
from the Center for Puppetry Arts:
Jon Ludwig, artistic director,

Jason von Hinezmeyer, resident puppet/set builder

This annual offering for the Halloween Season has been described as having “never a dull moment in this show. There was resounding applause after the show – feet stomping, clapping along with the music.” And “There was lots of attention to detail with costuming, makeup, the choice of stories, and the puppet manipulation. The stories and show content ranged from light to a little bit “scary” but a perfect blend to keep you interested in all that was going on, and keep the audience wondering what would happen next. Great show!” Another reviewer said: “This was an amazing amalgam of vocal and instrumental music, dance, costuming, and puppetry! The performers were all first rate and the show was lively and chillingly creepy in a fun way!”

With no PoA national festival this year and few regional festivals, the board of UNIMA-USA decided to award the certificates next year at the 2013 National Festival in Swarthmore, PA.

The Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow



by Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers:
Eric, Brian and Robin Torbeck

A reviewer said “This production was filled with lots of action, humor, great puppet manipulation, and a wonderfully fun script. The essence of excellent puppetry... These three siblings have worked hard at their craft and it really shows in their work. BRAVO!! They are much deserving of recognition.” Another said “This troupe always has a funny and fresh way of telling a story. The puppets and sets are rather simply made, but they are very expressive! The manipulation and characterization of the puppets make them come to life! This show is fall-down funny! Extremely witty and engaging!”

The recorded media winner:

Junk Palace



by Lyon Hill. Heather Henson, executive producer,
Columbia Marionette Theater, associate producer

This film, made by manipulating paper cut out puppets has been described as “amazing” “haunting” and a “tour de force.”

Puppets at DragonCon 2012

interview with Beau Brown

Beau Brown is directing the new Puppetry Track at DragonCon, which, according to their website, "is the largest multi-media, popular culture convention focusing on science fiction and fantasy, gaming, comics, literature, art, music, and film in the universe!" Clearly, we had to find out more and conducted an interview with Brown via e-mail. —Ed

Like many wonderful things in my life, my involvement with DragonCon's new puppetry track started at a puppet slam. I was hanging out one night with good friend and role-playing game writer Michael Goodwin, when it occurred to me that, despite all of his amazing writing credits and my puppet shows, we had never collaborated on anything. So we sat down, and he banged out the script, and I sketched the puppets for what would end up being called "Clean Up." It was about two janitors working at Area 51 (How is that for science fiction?). I built the puppets and got together with friend and local actor Matt Nitchie to perform the show at the Dad's Garage Late Night Puppet Slam in Atlanta. Another friend, Patrick Freeman, was in the audience that night and spoke with us after the show. Patrick co-created and produces DragonConTV (DCTV) for DragonCon and thought the show would work well as a video piece. He offered to help us film it so he could play it at the convention. You can watch that video online here:

<http://youtu.be/rxx3acEIOas>
(WARNING: contains strong language)

While we were filming, Patrick left the camera on and Matt and I just starting goofing around and improvising with the characters. The resulting footage became the first "season" of The Sci-Fi Janitors. Suddenly we didn't have just one video but twelve!



Patrick edited them and they screened on DCTV at DragonCon 2010. DCTV plays on a closed circuit TV channel in all of the hotel rooms in the five major host hotels for the Con, as well as on large projection screens before events at the convention. Suddenly we had hundreds of fans. We created www.scifijanitors.com and began filming and releasing more videos.



At this point, I had taken the reigns of another local puppet slam called The Puckin' Puppet Show and was in the business of putting on puppet slams. Using the popularity of the puppet characters, I contacted DragonCon and convinced them to let me put on the Late Night Puppet Slam at DragonCon 2011, hosted by the Sci-Fi Janitors. At the convention that year, I managed to catch the chairman of the Con, Pat Henry, and thanked him for the opportunity to put on the slam and that I was very interested in bringing more puppetry events to the convention if he thought that there was enough interest. The slam packed a 250-person room and we had to turn away the more than 700 other people waiting in a line that wrapped out of the building, down the street, and around the corner. We could not believe that many people got in line to see a puppet show—it seemed to us that the interest was there.

In January of this year, I got a call from Pat Henry asking me if I was interested in becoming the

Track Director for a new Puppetry Track at DragonCon. I said, "Yes."

My two main goals with the track were to celebrate puppetry in pop culture (The Muppets, *Star Wars*, *Farscape*, etc) and to expose DragonCon attendees to the world of live puppet theatre (since many of them are only familiar with puppetry on TV and in films).

This first year of the Puppetry Track, Peter Linz and Leslie Carrara-Rudolph are our headlining guests along with Heather Henson and a host of professional puppeteers who are providing performances, workshops, lectures, film screenings, and panels. Puppeteers include: Honey Goode-nough, Madison J. Cripps, Alissa Hunnicutt, Gregg Van Laningham, Gordon Smuder,



Andrew Young, Amy Rush, Reay Kaplan, David Stephens, Liz Vitale, and Ryan Dillion. It will be like a puppetry festival as part of a larger convention.

As far as the connection to science fiction and fantasy genres goes, the Late Night Puppet Slam at DragonCon has a geek/nerd subject matter requirement. Last year, the shows featured connections to *Doctor Who*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Transformers*, *MythBusters*, *Pigs in Space*, and *Super-*

man. Of course there is always the Sci-Fi Janitors show screening on DCTV, which almost always features Sci-Fi/Fantasy content. There is so much other Sci-Fi/Fantasy programming going on in the rest of the convention that I am mostly focusing on bringing a general understanding of puppetry to the convention-goers. It might be fun to focus on those elements at a puppet festival, though.

I hope that conferees who attend events in our area realize the limitless potential of puppetry and especially how ideas in the worlds of sci-fi and fantasy are achievable through puppetry. I hope that they are inspired to try some puppetry at home from what they learn in the workshops, and that they seek out live puppet theatre back in their home towns, whether shows for their children or a local puppet slam.

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UNIMA CONGRESS and PUPPET FESTIVAL

a photo essay by Bradford Clark

UNIMA, founded in 1929, is the oldest international theater organization in the World. After a hiatus during and after World War 2, it was reconstituted in 1957. There are currently 73 national centers of UNIMA. Puppetry International magazine is the publication of UNIMA-USA (which was founded in 1966). The organization's mission is to promote international understanding and friendship through the art of puppetry. Every four years UNIMA holds an enormous Congress and Puppet Festival with participants from all over the globe. This event was held in Washington, DC, in 1980– the only time it has been held in the US. This year, the quadrennial Congress and Puppet Festival was held in Chengdu, China. Former UNIMA-USA board member, Bradford Clark, sent us these images from the event.



THE GATHERING OF INTERNATIONAL TROUPES AT THE OPENING CEREMONY AT THE INTERNATIONAL INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE PARK

PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



IMPRESSION OF PUPPETRY BY THE SICHUAN PUPPET TROUPE OF ZIZHONG, PRC
(MASKED PUPPETEERS WITH ROD PUPPETS)



THE TRUE AND FALSE MONKEY KING BY THE GUANGDONG PUPPET ARTS TROUPE, PRC

A CHARACTER FROM *DAMING MANSION* BY THE FUJIAN PUPPET TROUPE OF ZHANGZHOU, PRC



PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL



CELEBRATION OF FLIGHT BY IBEX PUPPETRY, USA

A DEMONSTRATION OF A MONKEY KING FIGURE
BY THE JINLONGSHIGE WIRE PUPPET THEATER IN
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A PUPPET STORE IN A MODERN YET
TRADITIONALLY-THEMED SHOPPING
AREA IN CHENGDU

第21届国际木偶联合会暨国际木偶节
The 21st UNIMA Congress and World Puppetry Festival

闭幕式

Closing Ceremony



THE CLOSING CEREMONY



Bradford Clark is a professor at Bowling Green State University.

For a more comprehensive look at the UNIMA Quadrennial Congress and Festival, see the article by Nancy Staub and Karen Smith in the Fall 2012 issue of The Puppetry Journal.

Tatterman Marionettes' "Buck Rogers"

by **Dmitri Carter**

These are a few images of the 1934 production of "Buck Rogers" by Tatterman Marionettes.

According to the Puppetry Yearbook:
As of November 24, 1934, Tatterman Marionettes performed "Buck Rogers" 1,219 times. The prior year, Tatterman had over 1,000 performances of another show at the Chicago World's Fair. The puppeteers who performed the first year at the fair, also performed in "Buck Rogers."



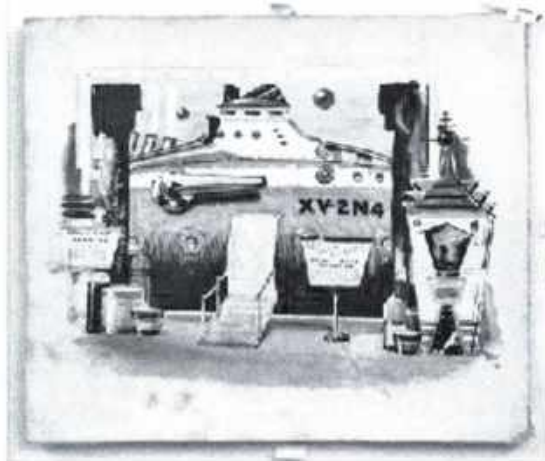
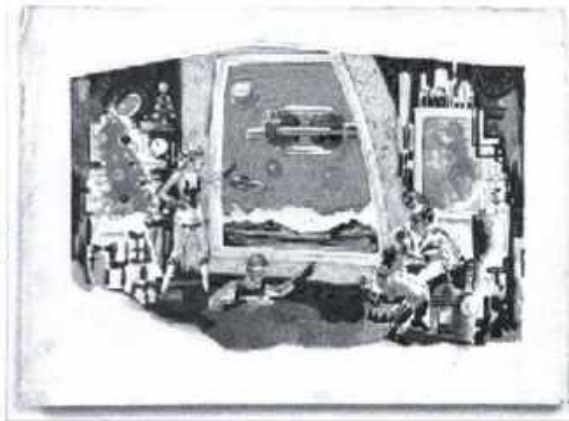
Photos:
Northwest Puppet Center,
The Cook/Marks Collection

Scenery & Costumes:
Mary King

Technical Direction:
Isadore Marmelstein

Puppeteers:
Ellen Mahar
Jerome Slusser
Elden Smith

Director:
William Duncan



"Buck Rogers," Spaceship Theatre, Lorraine Dille Williams.
Original designs for the 1933 World's Fair. They were sold at auction from the family of the newspaper.

It seems to be a walk-through design where the visitors go through different rooms and see various things. One drawing looks remarkably like a marionette proscenium.



One part of the display at the fair was the first film of Buck Rogers, a short with actors (not puppets). Here is the film and some info on it:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=qm418B3bFUA

caferoxy.blogspot.com/2010_09_05_archive.html



Souvenir pin (right) given to audience members who attended "Buck Rogers 25th Century Show" at Chicago's World Fair in 1934.

Dmitri Carter is the director of Seattle's Northwest Puppet Center and a lifelong puppeteer with the Carter Family Marionettes.



Puppet Books in Review

Three recent books show the expanding range and detailed focus of writing on the global past, present and future of puppetry.

August Ragone, Eiji Tsuburaya,

Master of Monsters.

San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007. 114 pages.

The deep connections between science fiction and modern-life anxieties could not be stronger than those found in Japanese monster movies of the post-war era. Eiji Tsuburaya was the acknowledged master of the form, creating the puppet monsters, robots and aliens who astonished moviegoers in such films as *Gojira* (1954, and re-titled *Godzilla* for the American market), *Rodan*, *Master of the Sky* (1956), *Mothra* (1961), and other sequels and combinations (such as *King Kong vs. Godzilla* [1962] and *Mothra vs. Godzilla* [1964]). The *King Kong* connection is important because, as August Ragone points out in this wonderfully illustrated history, Tsuburaya was greatly influenced by the ground-breaking special effects that Willis O'Brien created for the 1933 film about a giant, misunderstood ape. Tsuburaya's talent for special-effects filmmaking involved him in Japanese propaganda films of the World War Two years, including a scale-model re-creation of the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor that was so realistic it was taken by some Americans to be an actual documentary of the Japanese assault.

Such connections between special-effects filming and real events are not coincidental. News of the 1954 radioactive contamination of Japanese fishing vessels by American hydrogen bomb tests in the Marshall Islands spurred Tsuburaya to make the first movie about *Godzilla*: "a prehistoric creature [...] resurrected by H-bomb tests in the South Pacific," as Ragone puts it, "and its eventual assault on Tokyo." Ragone explains that the film's producers "decided to set this improbable scenario in the real world and wanted the film to reverberate with current geopolitical, national and social concerns, as well as evoking the specter of the Tokyo Fire Raids and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War Two. When Tsuburaya realized it would take seven years to make the film if his studio employed the stop-motion techniques O'Brien had used in *King Kong*, he decided to use "a live actor in a monster costume" instead, and thus Japanese monster movies were born. *Master of Monsters* is, in a way, a fan's book, and satisfies the movie-monster aficionado's desire for backstage details by including numerous

production photographs and anecdotes about the making of these science fiction classics. Like most analyses of the genre, Ragone's study of Tsuburaya is quite unaware of the pre-history of monster movies in puppet, mask and object theater, which is a shame. How interesting it would be if a scholar could consider the use of larger-than-life masks and puppets, especially in the political contexts Ragone sees in Tsuburaya's work, as a continuum ranging from medieval dragon puppets to Zúñi Shalako figures, Chinese parading dragons and Godzilla himself! For now, such detailed pop histories as *Master of Monsters* will help those interested in modern puppet history make the connections themselves.

Martin MacGilp:

A Timber Idol: Mr Punch in Scotland.

Inverness: Gilpress, 2012. 206 pages.

Martin MacGilp's self-published history of Punch and Judy in Scotland is a welcome addition to our understanding of European puppet history. The broad outlines of different European puppet traditions have been laid out by Henryk Jurkowski, John McCormick and other puppet historians; and specific studies of different national forms have been written by such writers as George Speaight, Paul Fournel and Wolfgang Till. Martin MacGilp brings new light to the specific traditions of Punch performance in the environs of Edinburgh, Glasgow and other Scottish cities and towns, by assembling an immense trove of stories and statistics from newspapers, municipal records and personal interviews, and weaving these sources together in an informative and entertaining history. MacGilp chronicles the existence of puppet performance in Scotland from the mid-17th century— at that point mainly by French and Italian minstrels at court. The Italian Pulcinello appears, begins to morph into a Scottish Punch, shifts from a marionette to a handpuppet, and Scottish puppeteers themselves take up the tradition (although the Codona family, transplanted from Italy, becomes a multi-generational source of Scottish Punch performers). Scottish Punch performers played on beaches, street corners and other public places, but also in somewhat higher-class venues including church bazaars and private houses. MacGilp recounts how Punch came to be seen in the 20th century as particularly fit for children's audiences, but also retained its adult-directed capacities for social and political commentary. A particularly fascinating aspect of MacGilp's meticulous research is the way he describes the colorful array of individuals who took up the Punch tradition. In the 19th century they were a varied lot of performers also involved in minstrel shows, magic lantern performance, pantomimes, magic acts, ventriloquism, and theater prop construction. Multi-taskers by necessity, these Punch performers often survived by constant touring and living in caravans for most of their lives. MacGilp furthers our understanding of Punch in Scotland with useful data about the frequency and location of performances, and concise individual histories of specific puppeteers. The kind of close regional focus MacGilp brings to puppet history simply furthers our understanding of the depth and breadth of the form.

Marisa Giménez Cacho, editor:

El teatro guiñol de Bellas Artes: Época de oro / The Puppetry of the Institute of Fine Arts Golden Age.

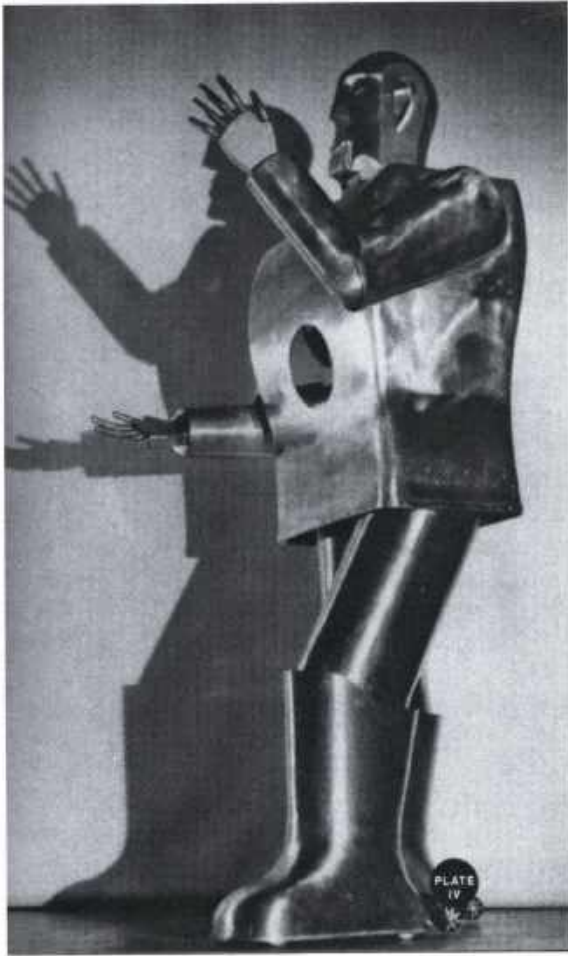
Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2010. 128 pages.

While it is possible to learn a good deal about the growth of modern puppetry in the United States in the 20th century, our North American sense of the simultaneous development of puppetry in Latin America is pretty slim. *El teatro guiñol de Bellas Artes* catalogues and chronicles the emergence of modern puppetry in Mexico as a movement in many ways similar to what was going on in the U.S., but also, in its most important principles, quite different from the American experience. U.S. puppeteers in the 1930s and 1940s created a puppet modernism inspired by the idealism of Edward Gordon Craig, the community-art ideals of the Little Theater Movement, the commercial possibilities of small marionette touring companies, and a sense that puppetry could play an important role in childhood education. In Mexico, there were parallel visions of the possibilities of puppet modernism, but with a more highly charged, intense and urgent purpose.

Emerging from years of revolution, Mexico in the 1930s, under President Lázaro Cárdenas, embarked upon aggressive campaigns in support of land reform, workers' cooperatives and, most importantly for puppetry, nation-wide educational efforts including the establishment of a secular school system to create a "rationalist" alternative to the dominance of Catholic schools. This, of course, was the era of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, in which a generation of highly trained artists in all fields decided to direct their creative efforts towards a common national purpose: to raise Mexico up into the modern era as a society based on equality, mutual aid and opportunity for all. The inspiration for many of these artists was the Soviet Union, which had likewise mobilized its artists for similar revolutionary goals. The national radicality of the Mexican movement sets it apart from the American experience (although there were significant radical elements in 1930s American culture as well).

Puppetry in the Soviet Union of the thirties was specifically directed by the centralized state to provide educational shows for children, often about specific social(ist) goals such as literacy and hygiene. Mexico, with a massive rural population and endemic illiteracy, was ripe for similar efforts, and thus scores of visual artists, writers, performers, musicians and teachers came together in a national effort, supported by the National Institute of Fine Arts, to create the Teatro Guiñol de Bellas Artes. (Guiñol in these contexts does not refer to the archetypal French handpuppet character, but to the form of handpuppet theater in general.)

As playwright and director Hugo Hiriart puts it in an essay here, this "Golden Age" of Mexican puppetry "was a time when teachers [...] would go to the countryside, while Lola Cueto, as well as



other great performers, would put on fantastic shows with their puppets, designed by illustrious visual artists. They would travel to the four corners of the country, always carrying around scripts written by the foremost authors of their generation, as well as painters, actors, composers, musicians and teachers." *El teatro guiñol de Bellas Artes: Época de oro* brings together articles, excerpts from plays, music, a chronology, biographies of the artists involved and, above all, striking new color photographs of the puppets created for the productions, as well as period snapshots of the performances and players themselves. It is a stunning account of amazing puppet artistry by puppeteers so close to the U.S. geographically and culturally, and yet again (then as now), so solidly grounded in a different approach to their work. How good for Americans to learn about this!

reviews by John Bell

Our long time Historian and Book Review Editor, JOHN BELL, has just been named Boston College's Rev. J. Donald Monan, S.J., Professor in Theatre Arts for the 2012-2013 academic year.

Congratulations, John!

In Memoriam



We were saddened to learn of the passing of several colleagues in the puppetry world, each of whom had substantial impact on the field.

Rachel Ribas

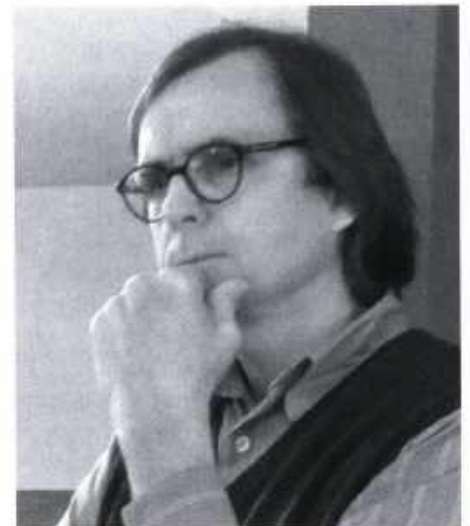
(August 5, 1948-May 4, 2012) Paraty, Brazil
Ribas was a talented puppet maker, and a sensitive, nuanced performer. She and her husband Marcos were Grupo Contadores de Estórias. They performed all over the world and had a formative influence on many puppeteers.

Brunella Eruli

(died August 8)
Eruli was the editor of *Puck: La Marionnette et les autres arts*, now published in collaboration with the L'Entretiens publications, since its creation in 1988, when Margareta Niculescu invited her to take up this responsibility. A lecturer at the University of Sienna (Italy), she greatly contributed to the reintroduction of the art of puppetry into the history of live theatre. Issue 19 of *Puck* will be dedicated to her.

You may read tributes from Eric Bass (Ribas) and Sophie Wathlé (Eruli) on our website:

www.unima-usa.org/publications



Sogo Bò Puppets of Mali

Mary Sue Rosen, Paul Peter Rosen:
The Colorful Sogo Bò Puppets of Mali.

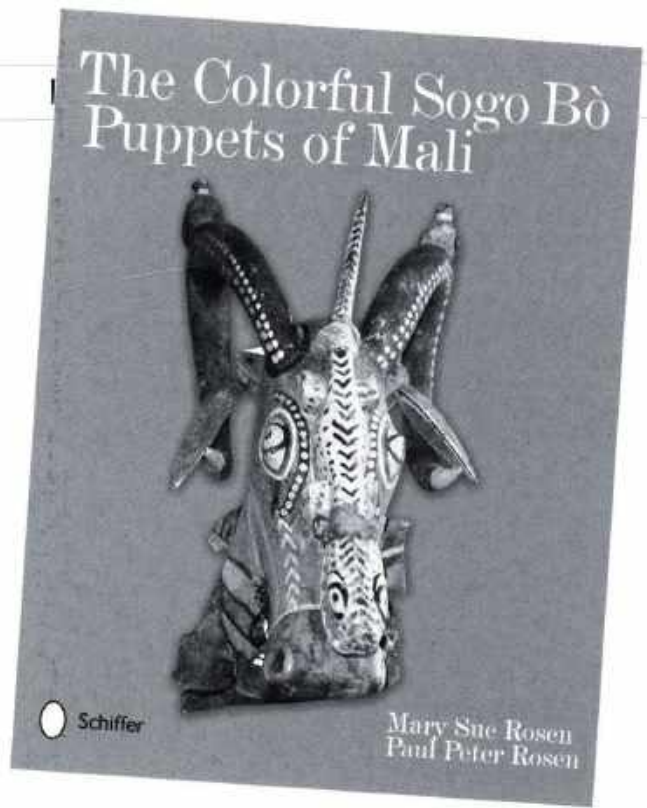
Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publications, Ltd., 2012.
 160 pages.

The Rosen's passion for African art, they write, began with the occasional acquisition of sculpture and masks found at New York City street fairs. But what began innocently enough blossomed into a full-grown obsession, it seems, with the diverse expressions of African culture. Though neither anthropologists nor theatre academics, the Rosens make a significant contribution to both fields with *The Colorful Sogo Bò Puppets of Mali*.

The bulk of the book, printed on heavy glossy paper in generous 9" x 12" format, features nearly 200 glorious color photos, many of them taken on their trips to Mali. The introductory text, detailing their personal journey, the origins and history of puppetry in general, and of Sub-Saharan puppetry in particular, takes up the first tenth of the book. The remaining text is a series of brief essays on various aspects of the puppetry and masks of the Bamana and Boso peoples. They pay a lot of attention to Yaya Coulibaly, a puppeteer born into a traditional puppetry family, who studied for a time at the Institut International de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières, France. His Sogolon Theatre has collaborated with such non-traditional artists as South Africa's Handspring Theatre. [PI #31, page 4]

From there they examine the traditional Sogo Bò puppetry of both the Bamana and Boso. The photos are a treasure trove, well integrated with the text, but all images are also supported by detailed, informational captions. They include insights into the outdoor performance setting, archetypal characters common to both traditions and the use of color and other embellishments in puppet and mask construction.

What the Rosens have accomplished here as so-called "passionate amateurs" is remarkable, but should not be surprising. Paul Peter Rosen spent his career in cancer research. I found a description of his work in "Alumni Notes: The Memorial Hospital Alumni



Society, vol. 21 spring 2009," in which he is referred to as "the world's foremost academic surgical pathologist working in the area of mammary cancer," and is praised for research that is pioneering, rigorous and painstakingly annotated.

That Dr. Rosen brought his painstaking attention to every detail of this book is part of what makes its reading so satisfying. The other part is the contribution of Mary Sue Rosen, who is on the faculty of NYC's New School, where she teaches creative writing. She has published three books of poetry, the last of which garnered this on-line review by S. Quesenberry:

Africa Written Down: A Poetic Journey ... is more than just poetry. Her words blend together to form the voice of love— her love of the country of Africa, its food and, most of all, its people.

I daresay the same could be said of *The Colorful Sogo Bò Puppets of Mali*.

review by Andrew Periale

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KARAKURI NINGYO

JAPANESE AUTOMATA

by Yasuko Senda

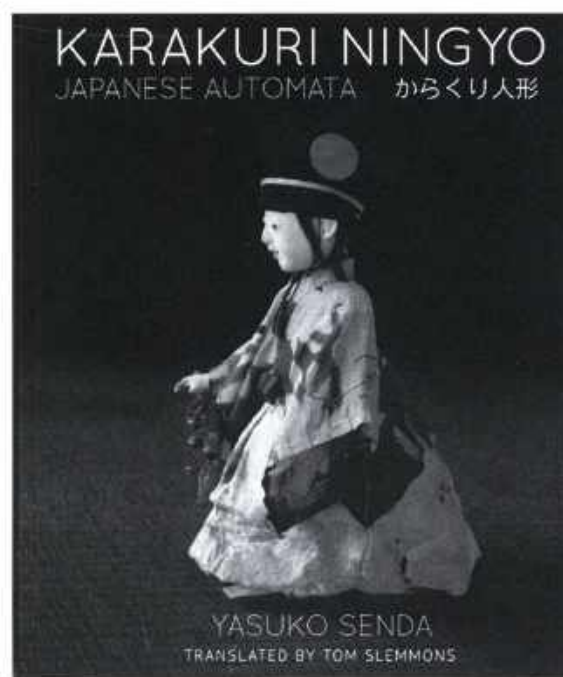
Senda Yasuko Publishing, 2012; 215 pp
ISBN 9784990621407

My first direct encounter with Japanese *karakuri ningyo* was in 1989, when I attended a demonstration of a mechanical calligrapher that could dip his brush in ink and write a poem. Other than material in a slim 1985 exhibition catalog, for years I could find almost nothing in English that discussed the figures or their traditions. Even later visits to collections and the viewing of further demonstrations and DVD performances did little to help me understand the meanings associated with the individual figures. Yasuko Senda's *Karakuri Ningyo*, a very important survey that is based upon one of her three previous Japanese-language books, miraculously manages to cover many different aspects of *karakuri ningyo* performance and provides readers with the tools for further explorations.

Ms. Senda defines *karakuri* as a "mechanism that moves on its own," although it later became associated with other advanced mechanisms and technologies. "Ningyo" is the Japanese word for "doll," and when used in a modified context refers to puppets of various types. Such Japanese automata can be traced back to China and references began appearing in Japanese chronicles in AD 850.

The best-known *karakuri ningyo* in Japan are the large figures still used in the massive Japanese festivals called *matsuri*. These are usually performed by a group of manipulators, hidden within giant rolling parade floats, who pull on chords from below that control both the figures and the various rigged scenic elements that allow the *ningyo* to perform a series of complex actions, including acrobatics and transformations. Such figures should satisfy even a conservative's definition of puppet, as they are no more autonomous nor limited than many a trick marionette.

The book begins with an introduction to the *karakuri* world, followed by discussions of individual festivals and the figures presented by each. Many of these profiles discuss the mechanisms and their means of operation in depth, offering clear step-by-step descriptions of the movements accompanied by clear diagram. I have seen detailed drawings in the past, but this was the first discussion that I have seen in English that describes the methods of manipulation—methods that in many cases were once considered secrets to be kept within families or performance societies. Ms. Senda also provides detailed listings of festivals, their locations and dates (some take place annually, others much less often) and contact information. A chronology of major developments is provided, along with beautiful photographic documentation and detailed illustrations.



Ms. Senda's book discusses individual *karakuri* figures in ways that place them in clear contexts inaccessible to the uninitiated. While some figures are essentially trick figures, others are associated with well-known mythological, folkloric and literary narratives, in some cases sharing them with other forms of Japanese theatre, such as the dramas performed by the *Bunraku-za* in Osaka. (In 1662, Takeda Omi established an Osaka theatre where *karakuri ningyo* performed scenes from play). In some festivals, *karakuri* performances are presented upon the same procession floats as *ningyo joruri* puppet performances, further underlining their relationship.

As a beautifully illustrated survey, a historical study, a technical / performance manual and a travel guide for those wishing to experience traditional automata for themselves, *Karakuri Ningyo* provides an excellent, extremely satisfying introduction to an aspect of puppetry virtually unknown outside of Japan.

review by Bradford Clark,
Bowling Green State University

Karakuri Ningyo: Japanese Automata may be ordered directly from Yasuko Senda. The cost is US\$44.20 + postage or 36 euro + postage. Orders may be emailed directly to her at senday@ams.odn.ne.jp. (She will provide necessary bank transfer information).

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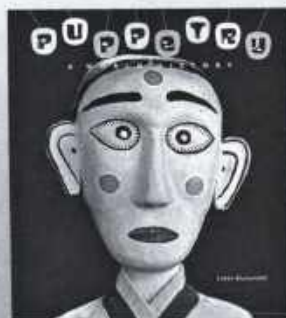
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Photography: above, Richard Termini; right, Chinese Theatre Works.

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Puppets from the Tatterman Marionettes show, *Buck Rogers*, 1934 (see page 32)