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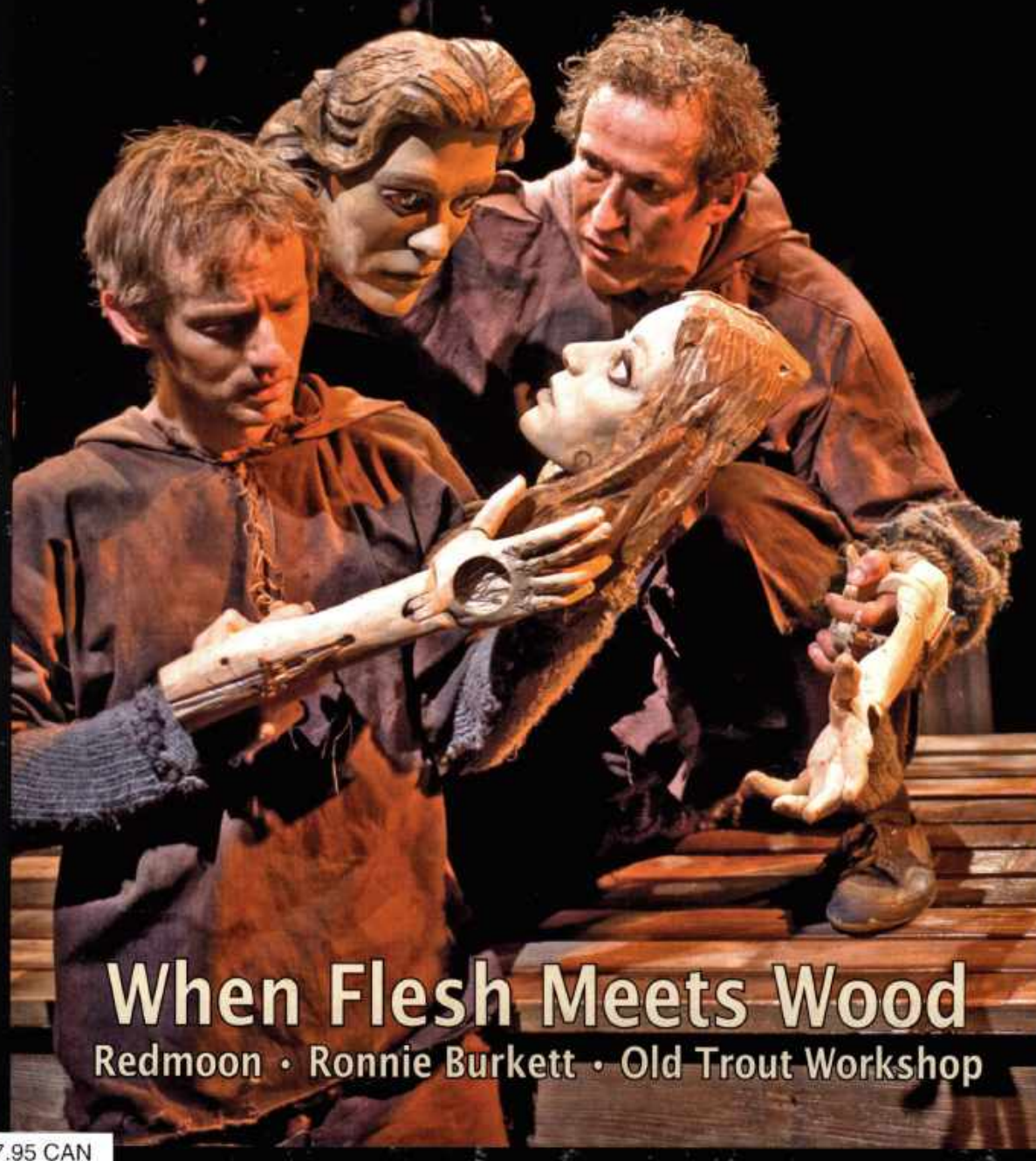

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PUPPETRY INTERNATIONAL

issue no. 33

WHEN FLESH MEETS WOOD

REVIEWS

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On the COVER:

The Feast, an intimate *Tempest*
(see page 14)
photo: Michael Brosilow

When Flesh Meets Wood

Editorial by Andrew Periale

The popular image of a traditional puppet show, such as one might find in 19th century prints of an open air Punch and Judy play at Brighton Beach, a solo Chinaman in a bag stage or perhaps the great touring marionette performances of Tony Sarg's company, is one of puppets performing for an audience. The puppeteers are, for the most part, hidden, which makes it easier, presumably, for onlookers to "suspend disbelief." I'm quite certain that our collective memory of a golden age of puppetry in which there were humans in front of the stage and puppets on stage and *basta* is little

IMAGE FROM *THE FEAST*, AN INTIMATE *TEMPEST* [PAGE 14]
FIGURE 1—AT PROSPERO'S BEHEST, ARIEL AND CALIBAN ACT OUT THE MEETING OF MIRANDA AND FERDINAND.
PHOTO: MICHAEL BROSILOW.

more than a delusion fueled by a kind of romantic nostalgia. As my father says: "They don't make 'em like that any more...and they never did."

Yes, there have been puppet shows of that sort for a long time, and this model is still with us in companies like The Salzburg Marionettes, but if we expand our field of vision a bit, we find humans and puppets sharing performance spaces in a variety of ways. This may seem like a contemporary phenomenon, but consider Dadaist performances of nearly a century ago or the visible three-man teams manipulating figures in 17th century Japan. In Mali, relationships between musicians, puppets, puppeteers, masked dancers and the public change fluidly over the course of daylong celebrations. In the classic tragedies of 5th century BC Greece, oversized, masked gods (essentially walk-around puppets) mingled with human-scale actors and chorus members.

Furthermore, I think the whole concept of the "willing suspension of disbelief" has been oversold. I'd always thought this was a coinage of Walt Disney to explain our enjoyment of his fantastical animated films. In fact, it was first used by Samuel Coleridge in 1817 to explain a reader's ability to enjoy literature containing supernatural, or at least romantic, elements. I prefer Philippe Genty's take on this phenomenon, namely, that the very young child's "preconscious" mind does not distinguish between illusion and reality—the magician's sleight of hand is *real* magic. The "enlightened" adult mind always knows that the vanishing cigarette, for instance, is a trick. The preconscious, animistic mind, though, is still present amid all that the adult has learned about the world and its physical laws, so there is no need to suspend anything when enjoying a puppet show: the viewer is simultaneously tricked and in on the trick, and I believe it is the tension inherent in that paradox that contributes to our enjoyment of puppetry.

In this issue, we look at what happens when humans meet puppets on stage—as animators, collaborators or fellow performers, and how the human's presence on stage does not detract from our enjoyment of the puppet but enhances it. Ronnie Burkett is a potent example of the visible soloist who is by turns godlike puppeteer and a character sharing the spotlight with marionettes that he himself is animating [Brandes, page 4]. Penny Francis relates the challenges of working with actors at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama as they learned to project character through an object [page 8]. Dr. Paul Piris looks at "co-presence" in the solo performance styles of Neville Tranter and Nicole Mossoux [page22], a principle that is also well illustrated by Carolyn Roark's Punch lecture [page 36]. We have many more examples, each with its own twist: The Trout Workshop's "bearded, naked men," Redmoon's *The Feast* (an intimate *Tempest*), Spain's Títeres Etcétera and much more. *Good reading, everyone!*

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Finding Hope in Ronnie Burkett's Theatre of Marionettes

by Dawn Tracey Brandes

Canadian puppeteer Ronnie Burkett's Theatre of Marionettes regularly boasts complex, large-scale narratives and casts of characters in the double digits. And yet, Burkett's theatre is essentially a one-man show.[1] Since he founded the Theatre of Marionettes in 1986, Burkett has penned his own scripts, designed his own puppets, and stood alone onstage amidst his large cast of exquisitely-crafted marionettes.[2] While a variety of designers and builders collaborate with Burkett behind the scenes, it is ultimately his body that the audience encounters onstage, deftly breathing life into the puppets he manipulates.[3] As is the trend in contemporary puppetry,[4] Burkett is always visible onstage, to greater or lesser degrees. The virtuosity of Burkett's solo performances is part of the appeal of his theatre; the rapid-fire shifts between character voices, or the detailed individual gestures of each marionette, are outstanding in part because it is Burkett alone lending his voice and pulling the strings. The relationship between Burkett and his cast of miniatures is not an accidental byproduct of these productions; rather, it is intrinsically linked to the emotional power of Burkett's theatre. In this article, I will draw on two examples of Burkett's work that reveal this link in different ways: the 1998 production *Street of Blood*, and Burkett's most recent offering, *Penny Plain* (2011).[5] I will argue that Burkett's performance style works in combination with the texts of his plays to produce a sense of community, both on the stage and in the audience.

Characterized by Burkett as "a big, sprawling, gothic prairie epic" (Qtd. in Morrow 322), *Street of Blood* defies succinct summarization. Country bumpkin Edna Rural pricks her finger on her quilting needle and sees Christ's face in the blood on her quilt. Her adopted son Eden, a self-defined queer radical who has been bombing gay haunts in an attempt to organize the queer community against the crusading Christian Right, returns home to Turnip Corners, Alberta, after receiving a letter supposedly from his birth mother. He hopes to discover that his real mother is Esmé Massengill, a Hollywood icon and, unbeknownst to Eden and the rest of the town, a vampire. She and her entourage have come to town to perform a musical and secretly collect clean blood from the townsfolk, a venture that the recently-returned Jesus Christ tries somewhat ineffectually to discourage. Eden dies at the hands of Esmé, Esmé is vanquished by Jesus, and Edna finally admits that her husband Stanley died of AIDS after receiving infected blood during an operation, and that he had unknowingly passed the disease on to her. Yet the show ends with a dose of Edna's infectious optimism as she chooses to leave Turnip Corners for the big city and triumphantly drives off into the prairie horizon.

Visually, the stage in this production was separated into three acting areas, roughly corresponding to the three main characters: Eden, Edna and Esmé. The backdrop of each playing area was decorated with a faded symbol connected to the character: a pink pride triangle for Eden, a red cross for Edna, and a yellow star for Esmé. These panels could raise or lower to reveal new locations, such as Edna's living room. Three feet above the stage was an upper deck from which Burkett manipulated the long-strung marionettes. Most of the marionettes were long-strung, meaning that Burkett could operate them from a standing position on the bridge, but a handful were short strung, allowing Burkett to work the marionette on his own level. The marionettes themselves stood approximately two feet tall, adhering to a scale of 5" = 1'. Their arms, legs, and feet were carved from wood, while their heads, hands, and torsos were made from paper clay. Their features were detailed but slightly caricatured, from Edna's plump, matronly face to Esme's vampiric sneer, and their costumes were equally precise. An extensive network of strings and articulated joints allowed the marionettes an impressive range of subtle motion.

In no place is Burkett's presence as a solo performer more felt than in the moments when he invades the puppet world as one of the characters in it. In *Street of Blood*, Burkett performed a handful of characters sans puppet, including the character of Jesus. According to Burkett, the choice to play Jesus himself came well into the creation of the piece, and was based largely on choosing "the easiest, cheapest, most economical piece of vocabulary" (Interview). But it also gave Burkett a way to avoid the iconic image of Jesus; indeed, Eden complains that he looks more like an "aging club boy" than the "Sunday school" Jesus he's accustomed to (*Street* 114). In fact, without the typical trappings of the iconic Jesus, Burkett's Jesus is far more human than deity, more a part of the puppet-scale drama than the mastermind pulling the strings. Although Burkett's Jesus physically loomed over his subjects, recalling the oft-cited metaphor of human beings as puppets whose strings are pulled by a (oftentimes uncaring) god, this incarnation of Jesus is far from domineering; he laments that "no one lives by my rules" and, later, jokingly

EDNA AND TIBBY FROM "STREET OF BLOOD"

encourages Eden to "lighten up" (*Street* 114). He even articulates the fundamental qualities that he and Eden share: "We have a lot in common," he tells Eden. "Silent fathers and saintly mothers" (*Street* 114). Thus, Burkett's Jesus emphasizes his similarities with other characters rather than his differences.

In addition to Jesus, Burkett played a second character in *Street of Blood* without the aid of a puppet: Stanley Rural, Eden's homophobic father. With this character, Burkett emphasized the diminutive size of his puppets in relation to his own body. In a flashback sequence, Stanley (Burkett) catches a young Eden puppet dressing up in his mother's wedding dress. Burkett "grabs the strings of the marionette and violently pulls the puppet of young Eden up to his level" (*Street* 118). In contrast to the tender treatment Burkett usually affords his miniature charges, this moment of violence stood out as what *National Post* theatre reviewer Robert Cushman called "the most terrifying embodiment of parental oppression I have ever seen on a stage" ("Compelling"). Burkett-as-Stanley captured the larger-than-life power of Stanley in the eyes of young Eden. But this is not the only moment when Stanley took to the stage. When Edna told the story about the day she found out she could not have children, Burkett once again performed Stanley, this time climbing down from the bridge to join the Edna puppet on stage level. Burkett continued to narrate the story in Edna's voice, but hung the marionette controls on a steel rod at bridge level, so the marionette remained upright without Burkett's intervention. As he narrated the flashback in Edna's voice, he physicalized her description of Stanley, tenderly tying a miniature apron around the marionette's waist, miming feeding her bacon and eggs, and finally ending in tableau embrace of the small puppet (*Street* 102-3).

As in the case of Jesus, this moment humanizes Stanley. More importantly, it highlights the fluidity with which Burkett slips between characters. He is at once Edna (voice) and Stanley (body); the two distinct characters simultaneously find expression through the single puppeteer. While this interaction between Stanley and young Edna spotlights this concept, the fluidity of character was present throughout the production. Even when Burkett was not the focus of the scene, he was not operating in darkness; the audience was always aware that these character voices are emitted from the same mouth, and that the same hands move the various characters from above. There is a commonality that unites this otherwise ragtag cast of characters, and it is made visible by Burkett's omnipresence in this production.

This sense of commonality within difference can be described using theatre scholar Jill Dolan's term "utopian performative," which refers to "small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense" (5).[6] Dolan sees a power in the kinds of performances she describes—those that touch spectators in such a way that promotes community, hope, and love, and evokes a change in the spectator that stays with them long after they leave the theatre. This can happen in a variety of ways for Dolan, but the mode that most connects with Burkett is the monopolylogue, a term coined by performance scholar Michael Peterson to describe the performance of multiple characters by a single actor. Dolan argues that performances of this genre are uniquely capable of enacting what she calls "revised humanism" (20)—an interest in what connects us as human beings without ignoring specificities of gender, sexuality, race, etc. or relying on a transcendental universality which inevitably leads to problematic hierarchies of what it means to be human. Dolan's humanism is, instead, "contextual, situational, and specific" (22), seeking out similarities between people while remaining vigilantly

EDNA

FLUFFER, SPANKY AND UTA

aware of the limitations of a totalizing humanity. The monopolylogue, by channeling multiple characters through a single performer, "can stage various cultural identities on the same body in ways that highlight difference but also perhaps point toward commonalities among people" (67).

Indeed, the text of *Street of Blood* consistently reminds the audience of the surprising connections between seemingly opposite characters, a theme exemplified in the relationship between Edna and Eden. Edna Rural is the quintessential prairie matriarch, able to "succinctly embod[y] all the contradictions of the provincial character" (Morrow, 319). Eden actively distances himself from his mother and childhood home, changing his last name to Urbane, moving to the big city, and searching for his birth mother. But Edna and Eden both marvel over Esmé's fantastic costumes. Eden says that he spent much of his time watching Esmé's movies admiring her clothes, gushing that, "Even playing a spinster from Bumfuck U.S.A., she looked fabulous!" (*Street* 11). Meanwhile, Edna reminisces about the homemade wedding dress fashioned after Esmé's in the movie *Passport for Love*, admitting that "I was still just lumpy Edna. But when I put on that dress, well, didn't I just feel like a princess" (*Street* 33). The dress represents romance and femininity for Edna, reinforcing her sexuality much in the same way that it does Eden's. In the hands of Burkett, the differences between Edna and Eden, while still pronounced, seem to fade in comparison to their shared origins, shared manipulator, and shared humanity.

The sense of community described by Dolan and sought after by Burkett does not end at the proscenium arch; rather, it extends into the audience. When a show is going well, Burkett says, the audience will begin breathing for the puppet and, in turn, breathing together: "On those nights where people are willing to just dive in [sic] and start breathing for the characters because I've whispered something, or held my breath, so they start breathing in unison for a nanosecond. Then you have them" (Interview). Ideally, says Burkett, the audience transforms into "that thing in the dark which is one thing" (Interview)—that is, individuality gives way to a sense of community in the shared experience of one of Burkett's performances. It is not my intent to argue that the sense of community evoked by Burkett is unique to his puppetry alone. However, I do contend that the text of *Street of Blood* and Burkett's mode of performance complement each other, and that the characters' discoveries about their own interconnectedness is mirrored in the experience of watching the play from the audience.

Part 2 of this article, in which the author discusses Burkett's latest work—Penny Plain—*may be found on our website, along with all the footnotes and cited sources.*

www.unima-usa.org/

Dawn Tracey Brandes is a Ph.D. candidate at Northwestern University. Her dissertation considers the philosophy of consciousness as it finds expression in contemporary puppet theatre.

Contacting Puppets

by Penny Francis

The Master's course I taught at the (now Royal) Central School of Speech and Drama in London mixed various theatre disciplines. The students were required to collaborate in order to make pieces of devised theatre with the accent as much on visual expression as textual. Our aim was to produce practitioners who would be at home in a modern professional context, ready to contribute to the contemporary and avant-garde theatre landscape. The students came with a range of professional expertise, from the recently graduated to moderately experienced pros. There were scenic and sound designers, directors, dramaturgs, writers, producers, performers and (for the first time in a British Higher Education programme) puppeteers. The collaboration made for exciting work and some expansion of individual choices, with a few writers finding a preference for lighting design, designers finding a talent for performing, and actors very occasionally finding another "home" in puppetry. For all the students except the puppeteers, puppetry was the spicy stranger, an unknown territory for which most declared a fascination, a wish to learn more. At the end of a year almost every one of them, whatever their preferred discipline, left with a knowledge of the dramatic purpose and potential of the art form. Through workshops, a few talks, contacts with top professionals and preparation of the devised shows, they gained, willy nilly, a familiarity with it which, I believe, had wide and positive repercussions in the outside world.

If any of them struggled with the puppetry, it was the actors. By 'actors' I mean the students with a background in script-learning and interpretation, with a talent for characterization by means of their own body and personality. Other kinds of performers whose background lay in dance or mask or mime did not have the same problem, for obvious reasons.

Most actors come to the stage determined to manipulate their own physical form and sensitivities in the service of a character. They are themselves their resource. To hand them a puppet with a built-in character and appearance different or even alien to their own, and to ask them to neutralize this "own," to get under the skin, as it were, of the object in their hand and to project a persona onto that object and thence out to an audience...,well, it's a lot to ask and for most actors very difficult. It goes against the grain.

Some of the actors proved to be natural puppeteers, and found enjoyment in picking up the practice figures, finding a voice for it and playing with ideas for a scenario. Some of them could not forget themselves: their puppet died in their hands as they communicated with their own face and voice with the other characters on the stage. Some gazed fixedly at the back of the puppet, fiercely willing themselves "into" the creature that was too obviously a barrier to their personal freedom of expression. The poor puppet was in both cases lifeless.

We, the tutors, encouraged the actors to improve their animation and manipulation skills through various exercises, experiments and workshops with objects, from newspaper to rope to sticks, and also with figurative puppets. One form of encouragement was through insisting that to be able to perform and operate convincingly with an inanimate object was to add another talent to their cv or resumé, improving their versatility and their chances of employment in a frighteningly overcrowded profession. In today's theatre productions puppetry is far more common, and the competent actor-puppeteer not easy to find.

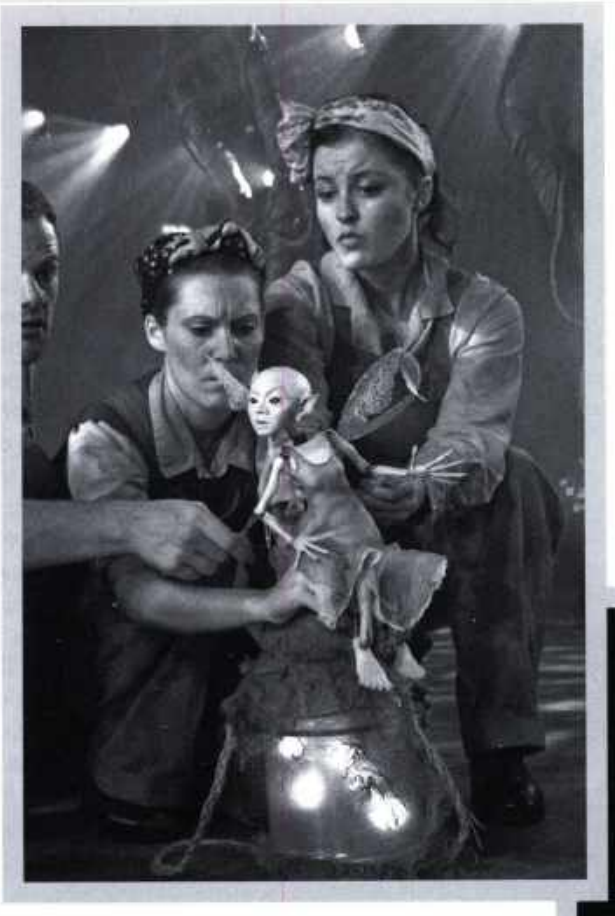
The search is not so much for the Über-marionette as described by Edward Gordon Craig, but for the über-performer, the super-actor. Now that the puppet operators are usually visible with their characters, they must be at home onstage, able to neutralize their native personality in favour of the puppet's. More than that, they may be required to play a separate character who interacts with their puppet and with other characters in the show. Even more than that, they may be asked to operate more than one puppet character with a different physicality and voice.

The super-performer par excellence is the Canadian Ronnie Burkett, who, acting alone, produces plays with at least a dozen puppet characters, all with a distinctive voice and gait. He is able to switch between his own persona and that of each character with astonishing ease. (He's a good example of the art that conceals art, by the way.)

There are lessons for the actor in the manipulation of a puppet: stillness is one, the use of gesture only when the gesture adds to the understanding of a character is another. The tilt of a head, the placing of a hand, the carriage of a body and the speed of its moves about the stage are all signifiers of its "mentality." Control is key: concentrated work and long rehearsals pay good dividends.

My conviction is that a good actor who is also a good puppeteer is one above the crowd, a rare bird.

Among her many accomplishments, Penny Francis has been a puppetry consultant and tutor at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London, and is author of *Puppetry: A Reader in Theatre Practice*.



"...*Faeries* casts a spell because its fusion of people and puppets deftly parallels the fluid blend of real and make-believe in a child's imagination."
- *The Guardian*

From Blind Summit Theatre's production of *Faeries*. One of the founders of this company was an MA student at The Royal Central School.

BEARDED, NAKED MEN
The Puppeteers of the Old Trout Puppet Workshop

by David Lane photos by Jason Stang

As the houselights dim, the sound of rhythmic stomping cuts through the darkness—slow to start, and then increasing in tempo, like a rail-train gaining ground in the distance. A light fades up, to reveal the source—rounding the corner of the two story set come four bearded men, each in a cowl, army surplus boots and sporting classic-red long johns, the kind you might find yourself wearing had you sneaked into a chicken coop at night on a farm in 1930—Steinbeck long johns—Pa Ingalls long johns—the undeniable dead opposite of a navy blue turtleneck. The four figures, moving in rapid synchronization now, are...well, who?...who could they be? Yes, friends, they are indeed: The Puppeteers.

This was the first public sighting of the Old Trout Puppet Workshop during their inaugural performance at One Yellow Rabbit's High Performance Rodeo in Calgary, in 2000. In his *Globe and Mail* review of the show, Martin Morrow described the troupe as "looking like a cross between the Flying Wallendas and the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers."[1] The Wallendas were a German circus troupe dating back to the 1930s and the Freak Brothers were the central characters in a late 1960s, underground comic strip drawn by Gilbert Shelton. Originally from Texas, Shelton's comic was published by a press in Berkley and was known for the misadventures of a pair of pot-smoking, hairy men. This *collision of the strange* has been a persona that has remained a part of Old Trout performances in one form or another over the course of their thirteen-year history.

The puppeteers in an Old Trout show are not hidden—like the paper and ink that express the thoughts of the writer, they are the symbolist, poet-scribes wielding puppet-quills in place of conventional narrative instruments. Each show begins with a prologue of sorts, in which the puppeteers are often presented to the audience sans puppets, usually dressed in a pair of long johns, and usually a balaclava of some sort which covers the ears and gives them a sort of holy look, somewhat medieval, but at the same time reminiscent of chilly Canadian children waiting for their school bus in the dead of January.

Of course, their costumes sometimes contain nods to Theatre of the Absurd and to the French Avant-Garde, such as the grey long johns in *Tooth Fairy*, adorned with a black spiral borrowed from Jarry's woodcuts of King Ubu. The motif is strengthened by the Dada-esque playfulness that exudes from the puppeteers' performance and by the theatricality of their first entrance, which is followed immediately by a choral prologue the style of which feels lifted from a Victorian era grammar school.

The costume also alludes to the physical nature of what is about to unfold, but to say that what follows is in the realm of French acrobats or buffoons would be misleading. If anything, these bearded, chesty men (and occasionally women) are something closer to high priests of the animated arts. Their mission, it seems, is to depict the timeless, philosophical chronicles of the human heart and delve into the oceans of human inadequacies, triumphs and ambiguities. Their uniform helps to put them on a par with the likes of Santa's elves—selflessly working in service of a greater good—and in the case of the Trouts, illustrating truths and falsehoods so that we may better understand the misgivings of our troubled souls and in doing so, each work to repair, patch and heal our imperfect self.

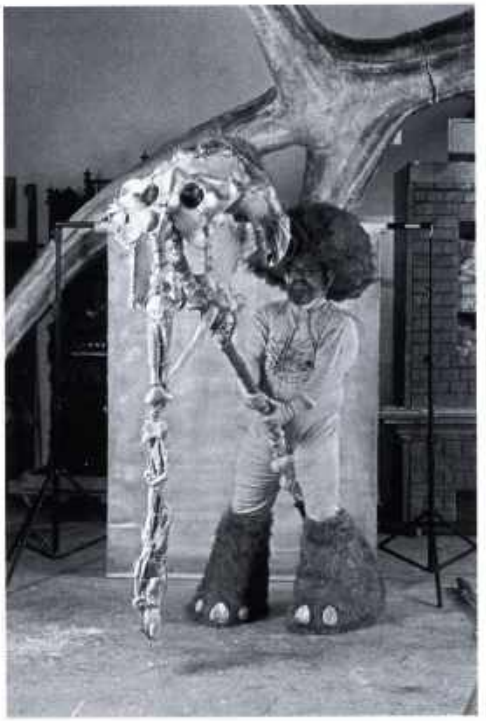
The performance requirements of the actors are physical. We see puppeteers sweat, we see them heave and dance about. While the construction and carving techniques of the troupe have evolved into something sublime, the early puppets were chunky and crude, beautifully simple, but very often constructed from whatever readily available hunks of wood they could put their hands on. They were pretty darn heavy and required a considerable level of fitness to perform. The "This" and "That" puppets from *The Unlikely Birth of Istvan* were carved from railway ties and the *Tooth Fairy Puppets* from pieces of pine glued together to form a block.

The remarkable and ingenious thing about these early puppets was that they were worn directly on top of the head with controls for the mouth or eyebrows connected to the chin. In this way the performance of such a puppet was still very much rooted in some kind of ancestral mask and had a unique kind of immediacy in performance. When the performer turned his body, the puppet/mask would follow; when the performer looked down or up, so did the puppet. The puppet and performer were thinking, moving, indeed, feeling, as one.

In many cases, the Trout Puppeteers are able to make use of the performer's body and use it to add to the life of the puppet such as when "Bleak," the mercenary pirate in *The Tooth Fairy* walks with a wooden leg, or Eve from *Ignorance* enters the scene, by slinking her naked calf and pointed toe between the tangs of a giant antler. Both are achieved by the puppeteer creating an extension of the puppet with his own body—in the case of Eve, with the grey long johns rolled up to his knees.

For an audience, the visual presence of the performer is a constant reminder that there's a show at work here—and any slip-ups in terms of the imaginary reality of the story or the inner life of the puppet must be the shared responsibility of the puppeteer *and* the audience. It is as if the Trouts are reaching out with a playful hand from an experimental sandbox and inviting the audience to join them on a journey. To hear a Trout explain it, "Once the audience is complicit in the theatrical event, they open up emotionally and are moved by the puppets." Another explains, "On one level, our shows are a replacement for the communal experiences of our tribal pasts—theatre, concerts, raves—these are all vestigial remnants of the bacchanalian orgies of the Greeks and fire-lit storytellers of our cave-dwelling ancestors."

If the Trout puppeteers seem to be playing in a sandbox, then the puppets themselves are made for heavy lifting. In the Old Trout's latest touring show *Ignorance*, traditional doll-like puppets have been replaced with large, often boney and organic-looking puppets, the placement of which demands the descriptor: phallic. The "Alpha-male" who scares Adam and Eve, arrives on the scene as



THE MASTODON FROM *IGNORANCE*

ANGRY BULL PUPPET OPERATED BY THE DEVIL FROM *THE EROTIC ANGUISH OF DON JUAN*

ABIGAIL TAKES TO THE HIGH SEAS IN HER GRANDFATHER'S BOAT FROM *THE TOOTH FAIRY*

a toothy, engorged meathead, stealing Eve from her cozy burrow, before the eyes of the emasculated Adam. His rounded girth suggests his brawny behavior is backed up by a similarly sized sexual organ. Later in the show we are treated to another gargantuan beast—a mastodon puppet built (apparently) from the bones of a Paleolithic specimen, and whose physical origins are right below the (proud) puppeteer's belt. But these are not just genital-like in a metaphorical sense—if *The Unlikely Birth of Istvan* and *The Tooth Fairy* were experiments in "head-puppets," then *Ignorance* might be said to be a study in "The Unfortunately Named Crotch Puppet"—so dubbed by the Trouts to describe this style of ridiculously fun puppet.

The genealogy of The Unfortunately Named Crotch Puppet placement can be traced back to Trout experiments during *Famous Puppet Death Scenes* when two ferocious tantrum-children burst through the doorway in the vignette entitled *Why I am so Sad, by Sally*. The puppets are attached to the performers' waist and feet with the energy center—the emotional and visual focal point—being about four inches below the navel, and from which, or, er, through which, phallic male energy doth rush. Interestingly enough, this also happens to be quite near a place of energy and focus in martial arts, opera singing and Suzuki, not to mention some LA varieties of tantric "arts." At the moment the two crotch characters take the stage, the puppeteers' faces mirror those of the puppet masks, which further heightens the comical impact of the entrance.

Historically speaking though, The Unfortunately Named Crotch Puppet could be said to have descended from several theatrical traditions of yore. The Elizabethans were very fond of their cod-piece, a triangular costume accessory worn about the waist and over the genitals, which has the effect of drawing the eye toward the actor's manhood and in turn has the effect of magnifying the confidence of the actor wearing it.

Similarly, the Greek tradition of the Satyr play (from which we derive the word *satirical*) often employed a costume piece known as the phallus—an oversized male member, often erect, and used for playful effect by devilish half-fawn, half-man comic performers.

And so it's probable that Trout puppeteers are closer to the Pan-like performers of old than stately Bunraku masters. In *Ignorance*, this is almost certainly so. Looking at the puppeteers' costumes once again, the performers in *Ignorance* are adorned with snaggle-tooth-like horns, projecting directly up from the performers' heads. In a talk-back with the audience in Montreal this past January at Espace Libre, one of the Trouts justifies the apparently uncomfortable costume appendage by saying that "the puppeteer needed to be more mystical in appearance—that the horn emphasized the archaic and magical suspension of disbelief surrounding ancient storytellers—it is talisman-like—and serves a mimetic function similar to those found in religious ritual the world over." This also speaks to the dominant aesthetic of the show in which a Paleolithic story of genesis is retold by early-man, narrated in an ever so slightly ironic tone in the style of a 1950s documentary film you might have been shown in 4th grade social studies class.

While the message of their latest show, *Ignorance*, seems to dance on the cusp of suggesting that the most beautiful moments of our lives are fleeting, and that the very pursuance of such moments may cause us to miss them, I for one am happy that there are still places where we can gather together in the dark and ponder the vastness of the universe and celebrate humanity in all its mysterious beauty and triumphant imperfections.

MARIA DOLORES FROM *THE EROTIC ANGUISH OF DON JUAN*

Speaking with one of them about the earlier work, I realized that despite the hilarious costumes and satyr-inspired appendages, there is a kind of nakedness to their approach, and there is a sense of being on the edge of transcendence when you are in the audience of a Trout show. The Trouts may be the unlikeliest of guides, but we simply need to take a deep breath and follow: "I remember presenting ourselves at the start of *Istvan* and *Tooth Fairy* was like revealing ourselves as venerable and fail-able humans about to undertake the most impossible task—and we were asking the audience to join us in this venture. We were facing our own fear—as though the audience was the abyss and we were about to jump into it, ending our lives as we presently know them."

[1] Morrow, Martin. "These puppets are rated R." The Globe and Mail, 14 Nov. 2000: Reviews.

David Lane is the co-director of the New England Puppet Intensive, a summer training program for puppeteers, performers, educators and visual artists in the Berkshires, Massachusetts. He teaches acting and improvisation at Siena College and is one of the original members of the Old Trout Puppet Workshop.

YOU DEMI-PUPPETS: Playing for Humanity in *The Feast*, an intimate *Tempest*

by Sara Boland-Taylor

A pin light rises on Prospero, seated alone at his dinner table. "Twelve years," he says, as he proceeds to produce a clipped version of the story of his arrival on the island; it is a condensed version of the tale Prospero tells to his daughter, Miranda, in act one, scene two of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. This is not *The Tempest*, but *The Feast*, a co-production between Chicago Shakespeare Theater, the 2008 Regional Theatre Tony Award recipient, and Redmoon, a company whose mission is to transform civic spaces into "a public art form that is equal parts pageantry, gadgetry, puppetry, robust physical performance and visual art" (Redmoon website). Co-created and co-directed by Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri in 2012, *The Feast* tells the story of Prospero, a man possessing despotic mystical powers, and his two captives, Ariel, the airy sprite, and Caliban, the earthly monster. Every day Prospero compels them to perform the story of his reclamation of the Milanian dukedom.

Prospero takes great delight in watching the reenactment of his revenge and success. Puppets of his creation represent the other characters in the play, brought to life by Ariel and Caliban's performances. Conversely, the puppets, endowed by Prospero with life and agency, eventually confer humanity upon Ariel and Caliban. Within the Prospero-Ariel-Caliban triad, the audience perceives the unhuman in Ariel, the inhuman in Caliban, and the inhumane in Prospero, leaving them to question what it means to be human and if one can earn humanity (Bucola). During the course of the play, all three characters do just that: Ariel and Caliban are finally able to earn their humanity (and freedom) by appropriating the agency of those who were once human. Prospero, recognizing the consequences of his despotism, regains his humanity through an act of mercy and appeal for forgiveness.

As a puppeteer, Ariel enacts all of Prospero's favorite characters in the play: he is the puppeteer for beloved Miranda, good Gonzalo, and both clowns, Trinculo and Stephano. Caliban plays Alonso and Antonio, the two men who had the strongest hand in deposing Prospero. He also plays Ferdinand, embodying the two threats to Miranda's chastity, "one by rape and the other by marriage" (Bucola). Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Caliban plays a monstrous version of himself.

Each of the puppets is made of a wooden face with a built-in mechanism for a specific mode of articulation. For Miranda, Maugeri "chose the most powerful element of a woman...and exercise[d] that." Miranda's eyes are the only part of her face that move; her lids move softly up and down, reflecting both the gaze of Ferdinand and the way in which Prospero remembers her. Similarly, Ferdinand's movement reflects the way Prospero constructs his memory of his daughter's suitor: his "shifty" eyes move only left and right, highlighting Prospero's initial distrust of the young prince. The other element of the Miranda and Ferdinand puppets include fully articulated arms, used throughout the play to connect the young lovers. (Figure 1, *see Ediditorial page 2*) (Figure 2)

FIGURE 2
CALIBAN (ADRIAN DANZIG, RIGHT) AND ARIEL (SAMUEL TAYLOR), ANIMATE THE LOVERS

Maugeri felt that Alonso and the courtiers needed "a new trick." In the workshops, he realized that, because they were "chattering little creatures," their mouths should be their mode of expression. They also have a different texture; rather than the soft, youthful look of Miranda and Ferdinand, Alonso and the courtiers are wrinkled, scarred, weathered, and rough-hewn. As Ariel and Caliban begin to tell the story of the courtiers' arrival on the island, they pull the four puppets out of a sandbox built into the downstage end of the table. As they exhume the courtiers from the beach, Ariel and Caliban force the puppets to 'cough,' dumping piles of sand out of their mouths. This action simultaneously signifies the characters' beached dilemma as well as their excavation from Prospero's memory. (Figure 3)

Caliban's puppet-mask, completely distinct from the rest of the puppets, rests on top of the actor's head. In order for the audience to see the mask, the actor must force his body into an ape-like position; wearing the mask causes Caliban to physically and psychically

photos by Michael Brosilow

transform into an inhuman monster. (Figure 4) The mask allows the audience to see the face of the man and the monster simultaneously, permitting the actor to shift between Caliban, as he truly is, and Caliban, as Prospero chooses to remember him. While Caliban resists playing the role of the monster and attempts to seize the humanity he desires, Prospero forces him in to it through the promise of physical violence. Upon donning the grotesque mask, Prospero forces Caliban into a kind of monster-minstrelsy. He leaps and bounds on all fours, athletically throwing himself on, off, and around the table, making a spectacle of himself to Prospero's delight.

Throughout the workshops and rehearsal process, the actors began to "accumulate double meanings of the words" (Thebus) with the help of the puppets. For example, Prospero, desirous of drink and comedic relief, calls on Ariel to perform Trinculo and Stephano's shipwreck and subsequent arrival on shore while Caliban serves him wine. As Prospero drunkenly falls asleep, Caliban begins to conspire with Ariel in an assassination plot. Ariel, fearful that Prospero will wake to discover their plotting, refuses to engage Caliban except through the Trinculo and Stephano puppets, crafted as a Punch and Judy duet. (Figure 5) In this moment, act two, scene two of *The Tempest* is reconstructed, wherein Caliban convinces a drunken Stephano to murder Prospero in exchange for rule over the island. In an attempt to stave off Prospero's suspicion, should he wake to hear them, Ariel refuses to plainly conspire with Caliban and instead communicates with him by way of Trinculo and Stephano's "script," employing a kind of double-speak. At this point in the play, it becomes difficult to know when Ariel is speaking as himself, or as one of Prospero's creations. He manages to slip in and out of his performance in order to engage with, or disengage from, Caliban's conspiratorial advances. When Caliban finally turns to Ariel and asks, "Within this half hour he will be asleep./Wilt thou destroy him then?" Ariel slips back into himself, while hiding behind the puppets: "Ay, on mine honour" (III.ii.107-09). In Shakespeare's text, this line belongs to Stephano, who is drunk and swearing to Caliban he will help to assassinate Prospero. In *The Feast*, Ariel masks his own oath using the Stephano puppet, but the deal is nevertheless struck. This nuanced slippage from puppet to puppeteer allows Ariel and Caliban to begin usurping the humanity and agency Prospero has bestowed on his puppets.

Throughout the play, Ariel and Caliban speak in this coded language as they cement their agreement to assassinate their captor and take the island back for themselves. The next moment of subterranean conspiracy comes as Miranda and Ferdinand agree to marry. Ariel and Caliban speak the lines as scripted, but there is another layer to their engagement that Prospero does not see. As Miranda and Ferdinand take their oath, Ariel and Caliban take another:

MIRANDA/ARIEL
My husband, then?

FERDINAND/CALIBAN
Ay, with a heart as willing
As bondage e'er of freedom. Here's my hand.

MIRANDA/ARIEL
And mine, with my heart in't.

(III.i.87-90)

With a sleight of hand, Ariel and Caliban shift the puppets so that the actors look into one another's eyes. They subtly become themselves as they take the oath. Once they have completed their vows, they nimbly shift the puppets back into place, deftly becoming Miranda and Ferdinand again.

This double-speak continues to run through *The Feast* as the event for which the play is named approaches. The four courtiers enter the stage space complaining of hunger and fatigue after the day's strange adventures. Shortly before the feast that they have been promised, Sebastian and Antonio speak of their own assassination plot aside from their travel companions:

ANTONIO/CALIBAN
Do not for one repulse forgo the purpose
That you revolv'd t'effect.

SEBASTIAN/ARIEL
The next advantage
Will we take throughly.

ANTONIO/CALIBAN
Let it be tonight.

(III.iii.12-14)

FIGURE 3
ENACTING THE KING OF NAPLES'S SHIPWRECK

Here Caliban and Ariel keep their backs to Prospero, lower their puppets, and look into one another's faces. Again, it is clear to the audience, but not to Prospero, that Ariel and Caliban have slipped "out of character" to confer upon themselves the humanity and agency Prospero has bestowed upon the characters in his play. With every step they come closer to gaining their freedom and, thus, their humanity.

When he realizes that Caliban means to assassinate him, Prospero attacks his slave with the first item on which he lays his hand: the Gonzalo puppet. In his blind rage, Prospero savagely beats Caliban with Gonzalo, the man who saved Miranda and Prospero from death when his dukedom was usurped. Prospero is horrified when he looks down and sees Gonzalo's face staring up at him, covered in Caliban's blood. Ariel, who managed to keep Prospero from killing Caliban, takes the Gonzalo puppet and relays the reality of the courtiers' suffering to Prospero:

PROSPERO
How fares the King an's followers?

ARIEL
Brimful of sorrow and dismay; but chiefly
Him that you term'd sir, "the good old Lord Gonzalo,"
His tears run down his beard like winter's drops
From eaves of reeds. Your charm so strongly works 'em
That if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.

(V.i.5-20)

FIGURE 5
TRINCULO AND STEPHANO ARRIVE ON PROSPERO'S ISLAND

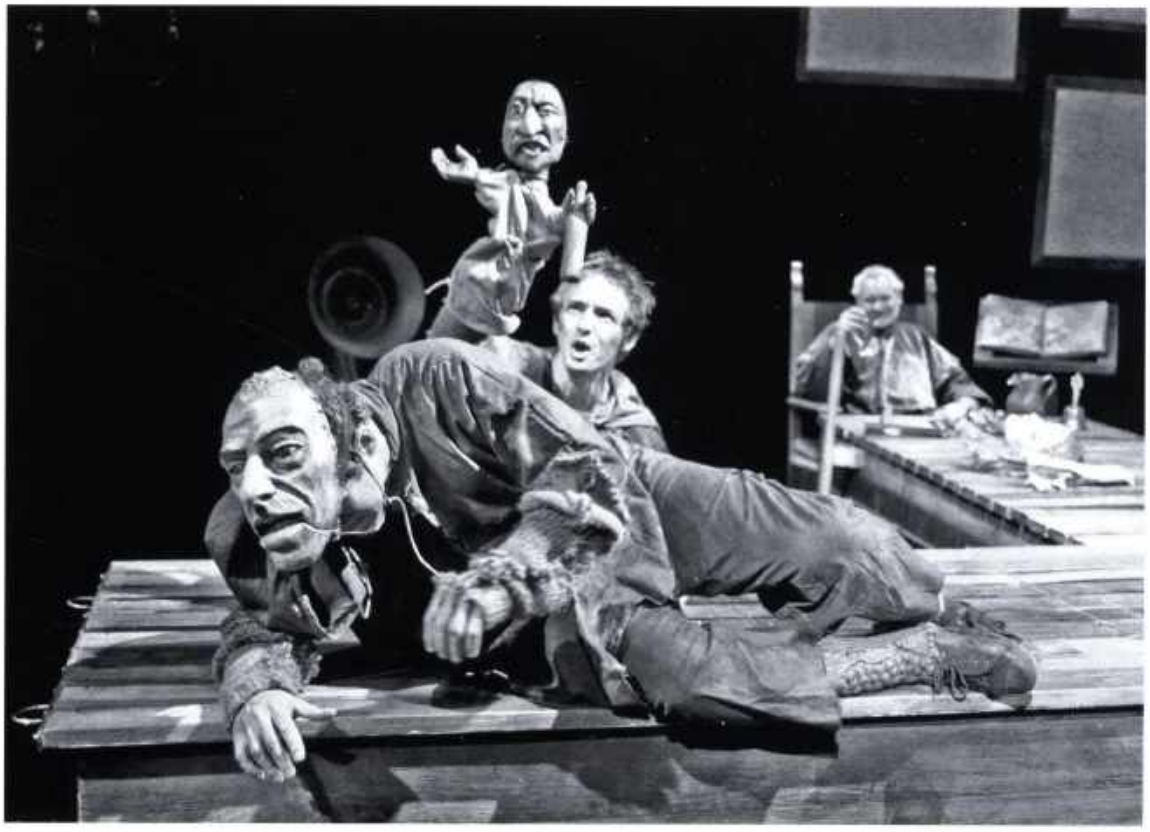


FIGURE 4
A DRUNKEN TRINCULO ATTEMPTS TO HIDE UNDER CALIBAN'S CLOAK, WHILE PROSPERO (JOHN JUDD) WATCHES IN AMUSEMENT

During this moment, Ariel communicates through Gonzalo. As he speaks, Ariel does not play Gonzalo but, rather, holds the puppet away from himself while operating the mechanism, down whose oak-hewn visage stream tears "like winter's drops from eaves of reeds." This account of the courtiers' misery implicitly links their suffering with Ariel and Caliban's own miserable enslavement, catalyzing Prospero's recognition of his slaves' humanity. Upon seeing the suffering his despotism has caused, Prospero is ready to relinquish his tyrannical powers, release his prisoners, and drown his promptbook. Finally recognizing the agency and humanity of his two captives, Prospero relinquishes his control over the two of them as well as the island they inhabit. (Figure 6)

Throughout *The Feast*, it becomes clear that freedom and humanity are inextricably tied together. While Caliban and Ariel attempt to take humanity (and, thus, freedom) by force, they ultimately earn their freedom through Prospero's recognition of their humanity; they earn their humanity when Prospero grants their freedom. Prospero must learn to not only reconcile with the ghosts of his past as represented by his cast of puppets, but he must come to accept his slave-actors as independent agents of their own fate and release them from this endless cycle of tortuous reenactment. Finally, Prospero leaves the island, setting himself free from the prison of his malevolent directorial despotism, and, in doing so, becomes human(e) once again.

Sara Boland-Taylor is a doctoral student in Theatre History and Criticism at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses on Shakespeare in contemporary and early modern performance, with particular attention paid to performances of maternity. From 2008-2010, Sara served as an Associate Director and Dramaturg for Shakespeare Dallas where she directed her adaptation of *Venus and Adonis*.

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FIGURE 6
PROSPERO MOURNS THE END OF THE WORLD HE IMAGINED FOR HIMSELF

LENDING EXPRESSION:

A Conversation about Actors and Puppets

by Amber & Zeb West

Amber: We've both been involved with a lot of productions where actors and puppets meet on stage, but why? Was it watching so much Pee-wee's Playhouse growing up? Is that how we both ended up eventually being led through our other art forms to puppetry?

Zeb: Pee-wee had this amazing appeal because he is so invested in his imagination: all the objects around him respond and have their own personality, their own problems.

Amber: I always loved Dog Chair and wanted him to have a bigger part.

Zeb: Dog Chair really did play second fiddle to Chairy.

Amber: I've got a thing for underdogs.

Zeb: Well, I got into puppetry in a sidelong fashion. I was brought into Trouble Puppet as an actor. I'd done a lot of mask work and physical theater, so I had applicable skills. [Commedia] gives you an opportunity to design a performance physically. And that's exactly what you do with a puppet. They both take away some options you usually lean on [as an actor] like your face: acting from the neck up.

Amber: What's similar or different between acting with other actors and acting with puppets?

Zeb: From my experience, there's an additional layer involved. You can sort of call an actor's character that layer, but with a puppet or mask, it's a literal layer. You play this game with the audience. You make this agreement that, for a period of time, we're all going to agree this object is alive. Not to make it too mystical, but there's some sort of totemic power that resonates with people on another level, more so than "Meat Theater."

Amber: Meat Theater?

Zeb: The Trouble Puppeteers call it meat theater: humans interacting with humans, rather than humans interacting with papier-mâché.

Amber: Right! And so the extra emotional power comes somehow from the exaggeration or "un-realness." Poetry can be that way, too. The audience is participating more in the creation because things are stripped down to a level of symbols, so they fill in the blanks on their own. I helped make Alphabet Arts' Puppets Got Talent show, and Sam [Traylor West] played the host. So he was the one human actor, sort of an American Idol style host, introducing each of the puppet acts, soliciting improvised responses from the three puppet judges and the audience. It was a nice effect, in a show that was interactive where the audience picks the winner, to have a human mediating all that.

Zeb: That was a street theater show, right?

Amber: We'd designed it for a block party [in Brooklyn, NY]. So it's free, there's noise all around, the audience has no obligation to stay or go. Having an actor for that seems important: somebody who can deal with the chaos and keep things flowing.

Zeb: The street theater element often demands that someone step forward. And the human-puppet interaction is a conduit for the audience. The puppeteers on Sesame Street really fulfill that role for children watching. It's hard to think back to that first time I watched Sesame Street, but I can imagine it was like, "Is magic real? Are monsters real?"

Amber: But that actor sitting on stage with Cookie Monster, talking to him...

Zeb: ...makes me know this nice creature has interesting things to say. That actor makes it OK for me to have this make-believe connection.

Amber: And with Trouble Puppet, you were the only actor on stage with puppets?

Zeb: We did a production of *The Jungle* in 2009, an adaptation of Upton Sinclair's well-known novel from 1906, directed by Connor Hopkins. The play is about immigrants who come to Chicago, where their only opportunity is in the meatpacking industry. We're "pre-" child labor laws, "pre-"workers' rights. The factory is a slaughterhouse for humans in some ways. And that's the metaphor: these puppets become meat in the same way we treated workers like meat in the factory. In Sinclair's novel, he talks about people falling into the vats, and everyone is so scared to lose their job that no one says anything and those people are just let go.

Amber: And puppets were playing the workers?

Zeb: These were small, unpainted, brown papier-mâché tabletop puppets. And the puppeteers were dressed not in blacks, but in factory worker clothes, dirty rags pulling back their hair, bloody aprons, grimy hands. And they are acting as puppeteers, but my character was the boss so I didn't puppeteer at all. I would treat the puppets in their hands as if they were holding a hammer or a saw. And if they were failing at their job or too slow, I would rip it out of their hand.

Austin's Trouble Puppet Theater Company performing *The Jungle* in 2010, adapted by Connor Hopkins from the Sinclair novel, photo: Christopher Owen

Poet Amber West and musician Chris Borchardt in *Fable of the Flying Fox*, at Alphabet Arts' 2nd annual Puppets & Poets festival, 2012

SAM T. WEST, HOST OF PUPPETS GOT TALENT, AT HAWTHORNE STREET BLOCK PARTY IN BROOKLYN, NY, 2010

And in that moment, the puppet dies, which is very jarring for the audience because they're invested in these objects.

Amber: And that was for dramatic effect, trying to express Sinclair's themes?

Zeb: Right. And the puppeteers had this focus on their work as if they're toiling in an oppressive environment. "Keep your eyes down, don't rock the boat." Meanwhile, I'm the power-drunk capitalist. I come up behind a female worker and she bristles. Her concentration on her puppetry also functions as the worker's sense of, "I must focus on my work. Don't make eye contact. I don't want him near me today."

Amber: For the audience, the puppets are workers in the factory, but so are the puppeteers: humans as objectified, exploited things.

Zeb: Exactly. I also want to make sure we talk about the experience we both had going to London for The Big Grin in 2012 ...

Amber: ...the 350th anniversary of the first documented English Punch performance!

Zeb: Yeah, in Covent Garden. That's where we encountered kugutsu, this ancient Japanese street puppetry style where the puppeteer has a small box slung from his neck. The back is open so he can operate hand puppets and small rod puppets from behind the box. [Shiro Ito and Eimei Katami] were there from Japan to perform their version of Punch, but they also displayed this kugutsu style.

Amber: Right, at The Little Angel Theater. I think kugutsu is a form that may pre-date Punch, an even older form, but one that seems very related.

Zeb: Well, in kugutsu you see the puppeteer—he wears no mask, his face is not hidden. In traditional Punch you have the booth. The puppeteer is hidden inside.

Amber: But as a street form the puppeteer is still very present. They dress in some kind of costume, often that stripy-suit, and often come out to say something and pass the hat.

Zeb: Kugutsu has that feeling that the puppeteer is lending his expression to the puppets. In Snow White and the Seven Dwarves [performed in kugutsu style in Japanese], the dwarves were scant finger puppets. But you could see in [Shiro's] face and focus the differentiation of each dwarf. If there was a chase you could see his body pull to the right, along with the character, and pull to the left to run the other way. You're focused on the puppets, but you're absorbing a lot from the puppeteer.

Amber: You've performed with Trouble Puppet and now also toured your own kugutsu shows. Is this "lending of expression" idea something you've come to through this work?

Zeb: I first thought of it watching *Avenue Q* in 2005. Those puppeteers are very "Broadway" actors and singers. They're unmasked and visible, so you're absorbing both the actor and puppet as one thing. I saw that convention again with the kugutsu puppeteers, and as an actor I thought it looked fun. So I ended up building this kugutsu box and street performing with it in Canada along the Fringe Festival circuit. I used very static little puppets: a princess, white knight and black knight. They're not articulated at all, so there's a great opportunity for me to lend a quality and expression to each character. In some ways the characters are being played more by me than by the toys on fondue sticks I'm presenting.

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Amber: So maybe that lending of expression is "acting on overdrive" in street styles like kugutsu? Where the puppeteering is more articulated or detailed, as in bunraku, there's still some lending of expression, but it's the puppetry that's on overdrive?

Zeb: Maybe so. That level of amazing precision of a footfall that a bunraku puppeteer can spend years practicing: in the street, that's wasted effort. You don't have lights to focus people's attention, or the quietness of the theater. [Laughing] And you haven't been paid yet, so there's a certain level of marketing you're doing there on the spot.

Amber: In toy theater, the puppeteer's presence often necessitates an "actor-ish" quality like kugutsu. With Alphabet Arts, we created a toy theater piece called *Fable of the Flying Fox* based on one of my poems. I recite the poem, and two puppeteers operate the toy theater. The fox's gluttony causes him to fall asleep in a nest, and a mama bird comes to avenge her babies. It's a fable about greed, and the language is highfalutin to go with the fox's overblown ego. So I open with, "He fancies himself/ paedophagus pirate." And in rehearsal I suggested the puppeteers react confused to the obscure word, and then maybe I could respond and explain. I wanted to add this "acting" element, but make it appear improvised. We kept trying it in rehearsal, but I could tell Kirsten [Kammermeyer, our lead puppeteer/designer] didn't like it. Her instinct as a trained bunraku and found object puppeteer is to maintain a level of invisibility through concentration. I felt like there was this acting element needed, but neither the puppeteer nor the poet wanted to do it! I decided not to worry about it for our adult audiences, but when we were doing it for families, I felt like, "I don't want this to just wash over these kids so they think it's boring and they don't understand." So after reciting that first line I interrupted myself with an aside, saying, "It means he eats babies!" And the kids shrieked, "Eww!" As much as I'm not comfortable acting, it just came out of me because I wanted to connect with that audience.

Zeb: In that live setting, you want that connection. I feel like something gets unlocked for me through puppets and masks. There's a power for both the performer and audience. They don't perceive [the puppet or mask] as you entirely. It's like Triumph, the Insult Comic Dog! How does he get away with it? If that comedian was saying those things to someone's face, in the same way he gets that dog up in someone's face with its little cigar…

Amber: He would have been killed already.

Zeb: I find I have access to so many things in puppetry and mask that I don't have access to in my normal acting. Often when you hand a puppet to an actor who is unfamiliar, they'll let the puppet droop because they're acting so much themselves. That's why it's good for actors. You learn how much you need to channel through gesture. A young actor often thinks, "Instinctually I'll make gestures because I'm in a certain emotional state." I think puppetry can give actors a much better sense of what's necessary to get the audience to engage in make believe.

Amber West is a poet, puppet-playwright/dramaturg & PhD candidate at University of CT. Her study of Charlotte Charka will be published in Material Performances: New Perspectives on Puppets and Performing Objects in 2014. A co-founder of the NYC-based Alphabet Arts, she produces & directs Puppets & Poets, an annual festival blending puppetry, poetry and other arts.

Zeb L. West is a puppeteer, actor & writer. He is a graduate of San Francisco State University & The Dell'Arte School of Physical Theater, where he studied Commedia Dell'Arte, clown, puppetry & mask making. Based in Austin, Texas, he is a member of Trouble Puppet Theater Company, and works by day as a producer in the video game industry.

The Co-presence of the Performer and the Puppet in Solo Performances

by Dr. Paul Piris

Since the early 1980s, a number of puppet artists have created shows in which visible manipulators interact with their puppets, among them Neville Tranter, Duda Paiva and Ulrike Quade in the Netherlands, Ilka Schönbein in Germany, Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté in Belgium, Yael and Revital in Israel, Dondoro Theatre in Japan and Philippe Genty in France. In these performances, a co-presence takes place between two beings that are ontologically different: one is a subject, in other words a being endowed with consciousness, and the other is an object, in other words a thing. There is something uncanny in the encounter of two beings which seem to share a relationship but who are ontologically opposed. This strange feeling is particularly heightened in solo pieces because it creates the impression of a multitude of presences on stage despite the solitude of the performer.

Defining co-presence

Co-presence inherently supposes that the performer creates a character through the puppet but also appears as another character whose presence next to the puppet has a dramaturgical meaning. For this reason, co-presence is different from the simple visible presence of puppeteers on stage because, in this case, puppeteers bear little dramaturgical presence. They are physically present but dramaturgically absent.

The dramaturgical presence of the performers requires a combination of acting skills with puppetry techniques. Although acting and puppetry can be considered as related forms of performance because they both aim at creating characters on stage, there is a major difference between them. In acting, the body of the character is the body of the actor. In puppetry, there is a split between the body of the performer and the character. The experience of the world of the character is evoked through the puppet and requires the puppeteer's body to experience the world in another way than the actor's body. Puppetry implies the co-existence on stage of the actual body of the puppeteer and the apparent body of the puppet.

The combination of both forms of performance supposes solving a contradiction. In acting, the actors' aim is to focus the audience's attention on their body, whereas the puppeteers' aim is to focus the audience's attention on the puppets. The co-presence of the puppeteer and the puppet requires that a double focus on both the performer and the puppet is achieved. Co-presence requires a fine calibration of the presence of the performer with that of the puppet. If the puppet is too present, the performer mostly appears as a visible operator. If the performer is too present, the puppet mostly appears as an object.

Co-presence is very difficult to achieve as it takes a lot of time and dedication. Sylvie Baillon, artistic director of French puppet company Ches Panses Vertes and member of the pedagogic team of L'Ecole Supérieure Nationale des Arts de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières, one of the best schools of puppetry in Europe, reported that in 2011 only one student of the school decided to develop such a form of performance for her final piece because it takes a very long time to gain adequate skills.

Two productions such as *Cuniculus* (2008) by Neville Tranter and *Twin Houses* (1994) by Compagnie Mossoux-Bonté establish a co-presence between the solo performer and the puppet through very

distinct methods of practice. *Cuniculus* was written, designed and performed by Neville Tranter while *Twin Houses* has been initiated and performed by Nicole Mossoux and directed by Patrick Bonté. Through his approach to text, characterization and dramaturgy, Tranter's work can be categorized as dramatic theatre. Mossoux's and Bonté's work is a hybridization of theatre and dance, dance being used as a tool to articulate their theatrical work. The absence of narrative and text, as well as the rejection of psychological forms of acting, suggest that their work can be labeled as postdramatic.

Tranter initially trained in Method acting before training in puppetry. Since 1982, he has created solo shows that explore the relationship between humans and puppets. Mossoux initially trained in contemporary dance at Maurice Béjart's Mudra School in Brussels while Bonté's theatre influences are Grotowski and Kantor. They have been collaborating together since 1985 and, apart from *Twin Houses*, which is still part of their repertoire, and *Kefar Nahum* (2009), their other productions do not use puppetry. The different training backgrounds and style of theatre have led each company to develop a distinct form of co-presence.

Cuniculus: a co-presence through speech

Cuniculus is a piece about survivors living in a world ravaged by violence and chaos. It tells the story of a small group of starving rabbits embodied by puppets. They live confined to their warren to remain safe from a war happening above them. Amongst these rabbits lives a human character performed by Tranter. This character does not have a name. He wears a pair of red plastic rabbit ears and thinks he is a rabbit. The rabbits hate human beings, but behave as if Tranter is one of them.

There are seven rabbits in *Cuniculus*, and Tranter sometimes manipulates two puppets at the same time. It is important to specify that Tranter is not a ventriloquist. Spectators can see him producing the voices of all the puppets as well as that of his own character.

Most of the puppets share the same design principles. They are about thirty-two inches tall. They can sit upright on their own without the intervention of Tranter to stabilize them because the trunk and the legs form one solid element. All the limbs seem petrified in a dynamic tension. They do not hang freely even when not animated. The only movable parts of the puppet are the head and occasionally the arms. The head makes similar movements to a human head. The puppets' mouths are articulated and twice as large as Tranter's. Their eyes are the size of golf balls and are protuberant. A glittering material that reflects light is used to indicate the pupil in order to reinforce its resemblance to a real eye. These elements support the impression of a visual agency, which is read as cognitive activity on the part of the puppet.

Manipulation is by direct contact. Tranter places one of his hands inside the head of the puppet through the back in order to move the head as well as the mouth. His other hand can directly grip the wrist of the puppet to move the rabbit's arm. These puppets can stand on their own, speak and look at the world around them but are not designed to grab objects or to move into space. When a puppet needs to go to a different point of the stage, Tranter simply lifts it in the air and places it in its new location.

To establish a co-presence with the puppet, Tranter is physically positioned next to the puppet he manipulates. In that setting, he becomes part of the surroundings of the puppet because the puppet can potentially "see" him. The character who is supposed to speak is the one who moves. Characters engaged in speech display their mouth and eyes to the audience. When Tranter makes the voice of one of the puppets, he positions his own head in such a way that it is less visible from the audience's point of view. His head is either tilted sideways and looking down or placed behind the puppet's body. He keeps the opening of his mouth to a minimum and he occasionally uses the hand of the puppet to mask his own mouth. Moreover, the direction of the gaze also indicates to the audience which character is talking. When Tranter's character talks, he always looks at the face of the puppet, except when the puppet does not look at him. When a puppet talks, just before delivering the lines, it looks at Tranter's face for a very short moment, but then faces the audience to speak. This coordination of the directions of the gazes between Tranter and his puppets contributes significantly to the construction of co-presence.

The relationship that Tranter's character establishes with the puppets is mainly based on dialogues and exchanges of gazes. Tranter's puppets are made in the image of the dramatic actor. They express emotions through text and intentions. These puppets talk and look at Tranter exactly as Tranter talks and looks at them. Co-presence is achieved by giving human behaviors to the puppets.

photos: © Mikha Wajnrych

Twin Houses: a co-presence through body movements

Twin Houses consists of a series of situations separated by blackouts that invoke a woman surrounded by five puppets which resemble her. A general feeling of oppression emerges from the performance. Most of the time, the puppets seem to control Nicole Mossoux. Unlike *Cuniculus*, there is no utterance in *Twin Houses*.

Mossoux looks like her puppets, wearing make-up and a synthetic wig to enhance her resemblance to them. Her face remains still, but not neutral. The heads of the puppets are made from a mold of Mossoux's face. Their construction varies depending on whether they are fastened to Mossoux's body or detached from it. To schematize their design, they can be described as a head with a neck prolonged by a piece of cloth. The neck of the puppet is either strapped to one of Mossoux's shoulders or is held by Mossoux's hand.

Mossoux uses a dance technique called body-parts isolation to develop co-presence with her puppets. This technique allows Mossoux to create distinct rhythmic and movement qualities within her body which give the impression that her body is split lengthways into two parts with a head at the top of each half. These two half bodies can move simultaneously but with distinct gestures. Mossoux and her puppets appear as conjoined twins.

The puppets attached on Mossoux's shoulders have a large range of leg and arm movements, as these body parts actually belong to Mossoux. However, they cannot look at Mossoux because the latter cannot turn her shoulders inward enough for the eyes of the puppet to meet her own eyes. Moreover, the shoulder does not allow fine manipulation movements. The result of that is the inability of the puppet to exchange gazes with Mossoux and to precisely focus its gaze on the objects that surround it. To counterbalance this issue, Mossoux has developed a particular strategy. Instead of exchanging gazes, Mossoux and her puppets look at the same object which appears at the centre of the action. Moreover, Mossoux displays an unfocused gaze. For instance, in one scene, Mossoux writes in a book without looking at what she is doing, but slightly above the book. This is not normal human behavior when writing. People usually tend to look at what they are writing. The fact that there is no direct eye contact between Mossoux and the puppet, but that they both gaze at the same object, indicates that Mossoux has built a co-presence based on what the protagonists are physically doing together. Mossoux's ability to gaze is similar to that of the puppet because they seem to share the same limitation of movements. This choice allows Mossoux to balance her presence with that of the puppet. Mossoux loses parts of her human nature in order to share an equal mode of existence with the puppet. She balances her presence with that of the puppets through a "puppetization" of herself.

Despite differences in both training backgrounds and the forms of theatre produced by each company, the work of Tranter and Mossoux discloses that the fabrication of a co-presence between the performer and the puppet requires that both of them exist on apparently close ontological levels. Tranter shapes the puppet to behave like a human being. He concentrates his manipulation on the head of the puppet to reproduce human ways of talking and gazing. Mossoux shapes herself to behave like a puppet. She explores the whole body of the puppets and integrates their limited range of movement with her own performance. Both productions are significant examples of the diversity of methods of practice that can produce co-presence.

Dr Paul Piris is a researcher and theatre director in interdisciplinary performances rooted in puppetry. His academic research explores the puppet as a figure of alterity. His directorial work has been performed across UK and France under Rouge28 Theatre (www.rouge28theatre.co.uk).

USELESS DISCOVERIES:
Reflections on process in the development and performance of Cryptid Theatre's *The Burrow*

by Alexander Winfield

"Work is mere play in fairy tales, and this comfort of mine belongs to fairy tales, too...and that is not the end of my useless discoveries." (Kafka 1979: 118)

In the early summer of 2011, I met with two other theatrical performers and formed a theatre company we called Cryptid. These performers and their disciplines were, respectively: Joey Morse, a technician and media artist; Jacqueline Coombs, a trained ballerina and dancer; and myself, a puppeteer and writer/director. As our first production, we decided to adapt a short story by Franz Kafka entitled "The Burrow."

REHEARSALS

It was one of the first decisions of the company to create work using a devising, non-hierarchal structure. This structure, we felt, would help to provide an environment where our respective disciplines would receive due attention without the danger of an assigned director coming to dominate the proceedings.

"The Burrow" follows the story of a subterranean creature that has spent its life obsessively constructing a burrow, a prey to paranoia and neurosis. We had to deal with the essential problem of adaptation: "To act what is unreal, imagined, barely conceived – this is the province of the short story and the novel. How on earth can one stage that, the theatre of the impossible?" (Berkoff 1988: 72)

We created a rehearsal regime designed to generate material in response to the short story. In one exercise, working individually, each performer would generate three movement pieces he would then present to the company. After all three performers had presented, we then opened up the space and allowed all three performers to interact using each other's movements. Objects from the space, such as chairs, and on occasion prepared props, became integrated into the performance spontaneously.

Prior to our involvement with Cryptid, Jacqueline Coombs and I had participated in a workshop led by Sesame-trained practitioner Tania Batzoglou. This workshop used improvisational exercises informed by Jungian theory to lead performers into personifying figures of Greek myth, a training exercise also encountered by Butoh performer Sondra Fraleigh:

> ...we were structuring compositions that explored a collective unconscious...we choreographed and danced solos based on such characters as Electra...our work dwelt not on plot but on psyche, on archetypes as exemplified in characters...
> (Fraleigh 1999: 35)

PHOTOS: THE PUPPET CENTRE (LONDON)

This intensive training made us extremely sensitive to unconscious impulses and to the potential in exploring archetype over character. The problem in applying this experience to "The Burrow" is that the creature in the story was not as clear an archetype as the Greek gods, and indeed how to characterize him was a persisting discussion. Nevertheless, the instincts honed in those workshops were of great importance in our rehearsal sessions, and Tania acted as a mentor during our development.

In our improvisation sessions, the puppet began to crawl over the dancer, leading to the idea of using the bodies of the performers to represent the walls of the cavernous Burrow itself. In one sequence that stayed with us from rehearsal to final production, a smaller (about 12 inch high) version of the larger puppet crawls over our bodies, our limbs and torsos

standing in for the collapsing walls and tunnels of the Burrow. Here the theme of the play was perfectly encapsulated – here we, the performers, were the Burrow itself but also the Puppeteers: the creature was tortured by us yet dependent on us, an apt metaphor for the creature's relationship with his home. Jacqueline, as a dancer, made the most elegant Burrow and gave the most opportunities for novelty in movement (she effortlessly became tunnel, bridge, stalagmite, etc.), and it was her elegant, strangely motherly interactions with the puppet in rehearsal that remains one of the most powerful memories I have of the process.

THE PUPPET

> Ambiguity has never been considered an elemental force; it is precisely this in the stories of Franz Kafka. (Heller 1979: xxvii)

It was my opinion that one of the best avenues for an audience to get at these "elemental ambiguities" in the Kafka story would be through the medium of the puppet. A puppet can be many things at once: it can be a beast and trash, a performer and a prop, living and dead. This is the essential power of the puppet, and like Kafka's ambiguities, it can be a fantastic means of accessing the audience's unconscious response. Despite being made of paper and rags, "the audience see in the mask or the puppet a second, doubled version that turns action into an effigy and the actor's work into a kind of dream." (Monks 2010: 66)

The design of the puppet meant we as performers were on a collision course with this "dream" of the actor's work, for we were performing the puppet in full view of the audience. Save for the puppet's head that was made out of papier-mâché, the puppet was comprised only of an empty coat filled with our bodies: its limbs were our limbs. In this sense, the close relationship of puppeteer and object was made inextricably more intimate. We began to ask: "What are we to the puppet?" Rehearsals broke down into animated discussions several times on this matter: at one point it was decided we represented aspects of the unconsciousness of the puppet. Later we attempted to work with the conception that we were actually the living presence of the Burrow itself (which would account also for

our roles as manipulators of the set and props – it would be the Burrow shaping itself). This issue was not concluded before our performance at the crypt; for my part, I would have preferred lo leave the matter resolutely unsought for. There is always a certain delicate mystery inherent in the puppet, and to attempt to codify it too strongly within the play in our case at least led to anxiety and confusion, and "confusion can lead an audience member to retreat from a piece of work or lose patience with it...(a) mystery is compelling despite the distance and/or difference it helps maintain as part of the spectator's comprehension." (Bailes 2010: 94)

The puppet's design was also problematic inasmuch that, with all three of us performing it and with only one trained puppeteer, it required a great deal of rehearsal time and energy during the performance to synchronize our movements. This can be dangerous, for "if you continue to work the physical expression to the maximum when performing, you prevent the inner life from becoming accessible to the audience." (Oida/Marshall 1997: 42) Performing on the puppet was not comfortable, which of course made performing difficult. We attempted to combat this difficulty through a technique learned from the Handspring puppeteers, of ensuring that the puppet continued to "breathe" during its performance. We also attempted to learn to breathe in unison while providing the puppet breath, creating a strangely schizophrenic scenario well described by Barrault:

> When you act you are two people, the actor and his part, so it is perfectly normal to have two breathings. The first for the actor, to keep him alive, the second for his part...by suitable exercise in breathing, the unconscious can be attained... (Barrault 1951: 54)

All living things breathe, and so creating breath in the puppet gave it the aliveness that our overt efforts threatened to take away from it. The synchronicity in breath we achieved as performers also helped to synchronize our performance on the puppet.

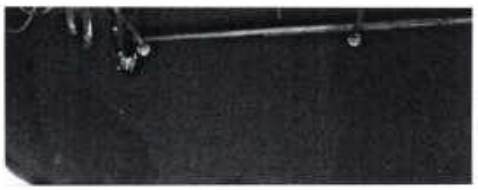
It is worth mentioning the puppet's influence on the media elements in the play, which was to act as an expansion of the themes of mystery and unreality within the original text. What new liminal space is breached when the video image is not a reflection of a "live" actor, but of an artificial performer, a puppet "performed" by a live actor (who, in our staging, is also visible to the audience directly behind the puppet)? A puppet offers a further layer of unreality as an unliving thing made to appear living, and then made to confront its own image or appearance of unlivingness. The problem of media in modern performance is that "a spectator...of digital performance comes into the realm, site or space of the performance already as a thoroughly initiated citizen of the cyberworld." (Remshardt 2010: 137). A method of subverting this audience complacency with media and returning its attention to the elemental ambiguities of Kafka would be through inserting the puppet's unlivingness, turning Fewster's "double image" into a "triple image," or even a shattered mirror. This was the appeal of mixing the puppet with media.

THE STAGING

The scenography of our show was dictated by our miniscule budget. We had to rely on objects found on the street (such as a discarded umbrella which featured as part of the set in late rehearsals), and cheap material, such as the hessian fabric which, when draped over the furniture, helped bring a rough texture to the Burrow. This informed the play's subtext: the creature has always been alone, and as such the "used" quality of the set suggested an entity that has no conception of vanity or pleasing others. He was often described as a "hoarder" in rehearsals, after stories of lonely people who had obsessively collected useless items till their apartments became literal warrens. In our (forced) adaptation to a restricted budget we resembled New York's Elevator Repair Service company:

> ...the everyday reality (was) the impoverished material conditions in which they have had to learn to

PHOTOS: THE PUPPET CENTRE (LONDON)



our staging in subtle ways: upon entering the scene, I slid my hand over a wall, letting loose masonry crumble to the floor as I walked to the audience. This was discovered spontaneously during our first dress rehearsal, and provoked strong feedback from the crowd. ("Very affecting," an audience member told me afterwards.) As the play continued, the performers become

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> make work... "Found" objects rather than sophisticated sets focus the space and rehearsal activities, and the compromises each rehearsal environment demands contribute to major artistic decisions... (Bailes 2010: 87)

This philosophy was extended to our lighting design: the play was lit entirely by old table lamps. As such we worked with relatively little light and the space was prey to great and sudden shadows. While not as strong or precise as theatrical lighting, this very anarchy became intriguing. Unpredictable, overwhelming shadows can give an additional aliveness to performance. I do feel that modern lighting by its very precision robs a theatrical spectacle of certain mystery – when it is too easy to see something, we come to take its existence for granted. We forget the power of shadows to undermine the very solidity of material existence: an object vanishing unpredictably into shadow becomes untrustworthy, fluid. There is danger there.

Mention must be made also of the performance space itself, a crypt that once held 3000 bodies, constructed shortly after the London fire of 1666. The walls were crumbling stone, the air cool, with dust underfoot. Being underground, it fit the subterranean setting of our play perfectly. It affected our staging in subtle ways: upon entering the scene, I slid my hand over a wall, letting loose masonry crumble to the floor as I walked to the audience. This was discovered spontaneously during our first dress rehearsal, and provoked strong feedback from the crowd. ("Very affecting," an audience member told me afterwards.) As the play continued, the performers become covered with foul and clinging dust—dust that once crumbled from the thousands of bodies stored in the crypt before it was opened to the public. It made for an excellent visual metaphor of the decay of the puppet's mind over the course of the performance.

"The Burrow" was a half success that yet contains "great potential" (another frequent comment from spectators). A rethinking of the puppet so that it is not so cumbersome to perform, and a new attitude in regards to the performers' inner lives would both respectively release unneeded stress from the performers' work and add an interior, secretive vitality which would help make the play more evocative and provide an underlying connective element throughout the performance. Yet, despite the uncertain results, it was a wondrous, highly instructive experience. As for the play, much work must be done, and at present it remains to be seen if "The Burrow" will grow into something worthwhile or simply become another of Kafka's "useless discoveries."

The bibliography for this article may be found on page 39.

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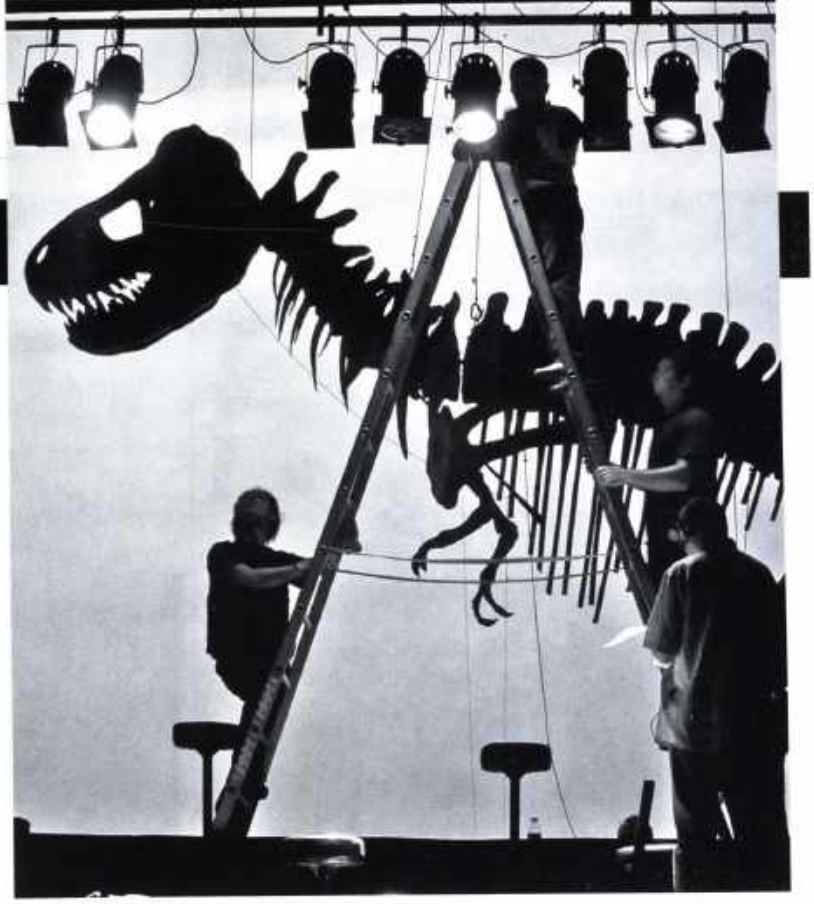
Thirty Years of Títeres Etcétera

by Miguel Romero



On a chilly wet morning, the small orchestra playing music of Saint-Saëns is seated on risers on the stage at the Bilbao Opera where a performance of *Dreaming the Carnival of the Animals* is under way. A violinist leaves his chair and walks toward the auditorium completely filled with children. From under the risers a giant turtle appears. Without missing a beat, the violinist steps off the risers onto the turtle's shell on which there is a chair and a music stand. He sits and plays atop the turtle moving slowly to the edge of the stage. The opera house explodes with laughter and cheers. I get goose bumps. This was my introduction to Puppets Etcétera, and I remain one of their biggest fans. Given Enrique Lanz's rich pedigree as a puppet artist and the esteem with which he is held in his native Spain, it is curious that his work and that of his company are not better known in the USA and other centers of puppetry outside the Iberian Peninsula.

A magnificent exhibition charting Lanz's thirty-year career is currently on view at the major Andalusian museum, Parque de las Ciencias, in Granada. It has already been seen by more than 200,000 visitors and has been extended until February, 2014. The exhibition is richly supplemented with text (in English as well as Spanish), video and photos on the company's bilingual website, titeresetcetera.com — an essential complement to this article.

I first met Enrique Lanz in 2006 when we both offered week-long courses at the Seventh International Puppetry Workshop in Cuba. I was then intensely interested in the puppet plays of the great Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca and was amazed to learn that Enrique's grandfather, Hermenegildo Lanz, a multifaceted visual artist, whose life was cut short in the early days of the dictator Franco, had created the glove puppets and sets for the first performances of the Lorca puppet plays, as well as the 1923 premiere of Manuel de Falla's puppet opera, *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*. Enrique continued the Lanz family's artistic legacy by founding Etcétera, which performs throughout Spain and brought the Falla connection full circle with his own production of *El Retablo* at the Liceu Opera House in Barcelona in 2009.

Over the years, in visits to Granada, I learned about Etcétera's philosophy and practice. Attending the exhibition's opening, I have come to love and admire this company. At the helm, Enrique Lanz conceives the shows, designs puppets, scenery and lighting, builds intricate mechanisms, directs, performs, drives the truck and creates the posters himself. He's quick to credit the collaborative talents and dedication of Fabiola Garrido, Lorena Badillo and Yanisbel Victoria Martinez as being of significant artistic and moral support throughout the past thirty years. Depending on the scale of the project and not counting the musicians, two to ten share the stage or bring puppets to life with Etcétera.

As demonstrated by the exhibition, Lanz is highly regarded as an artist in Spain, even though he respectfully declined a prestigious chair in Granada's Royal Academy of Fine Arts because being an academic did not align with his personal interests. He responded to the Academy's award declaring that "his main goal as an artist is to counter the relentless and methodical destruction of human sensitivity with his work as a puppeteer," which seems ungracious but perfectly illustrates his candor, honesty and his mission. Not the prototypical gregarious Andalusian, Enrique's shyness gives a first impression of being sullen and aloof. At close range, one can experience a generosity of spirit, deep humility, extremely sharp wit and strong work ethic balanced by a sense of humor and profound dedication to his three children.

Children and how they perceive his work inspire Enrique as a puppet artist. As a schoolboy, unable to answer a question correctly, he was sentenced to spend time in an old-fashioned puppet booth. Instead of producing the dread and fear intended by the teacher, this gave him enormous joy and pointed to his vocation. On another occasion, having forgotten to buy him a proper birthday gift, his father consoled him by presenting Enrique at the last moment with his own collection of vintage paper toy theaters that to this day inspires his work. His respect for children's intelligence and sensibility informs his curiosity and the sense of adventure that in turn initiates new work.

His hobbies, photography and videography, amply illustrated on the Etcétera website, also serve to document his work. As a result, the exhibit provides a virtual catalog in English and Spanish accessible to anyone who can get online. The very lavishly produced and profusely illustrated 192 page exhibition catalog designed by company co-founder Fabiola Garrido may be ordered online through the exhibition link on titeresetcetera.com. It sells for the equivalent of only $22 + shipping. Surely, it has to be the last bargain left on Earth. The website is a marvelous resource, but is no substitute for a live performance or the magnificence of the immersive experience provided to visitors in Granada. Like any other company, Etcétera and its puppeteers make a living by performing. Because of the exhibition, long profitable tours have had to be curtailed. Duplicates of some puppets have had to be built to maintain the demand

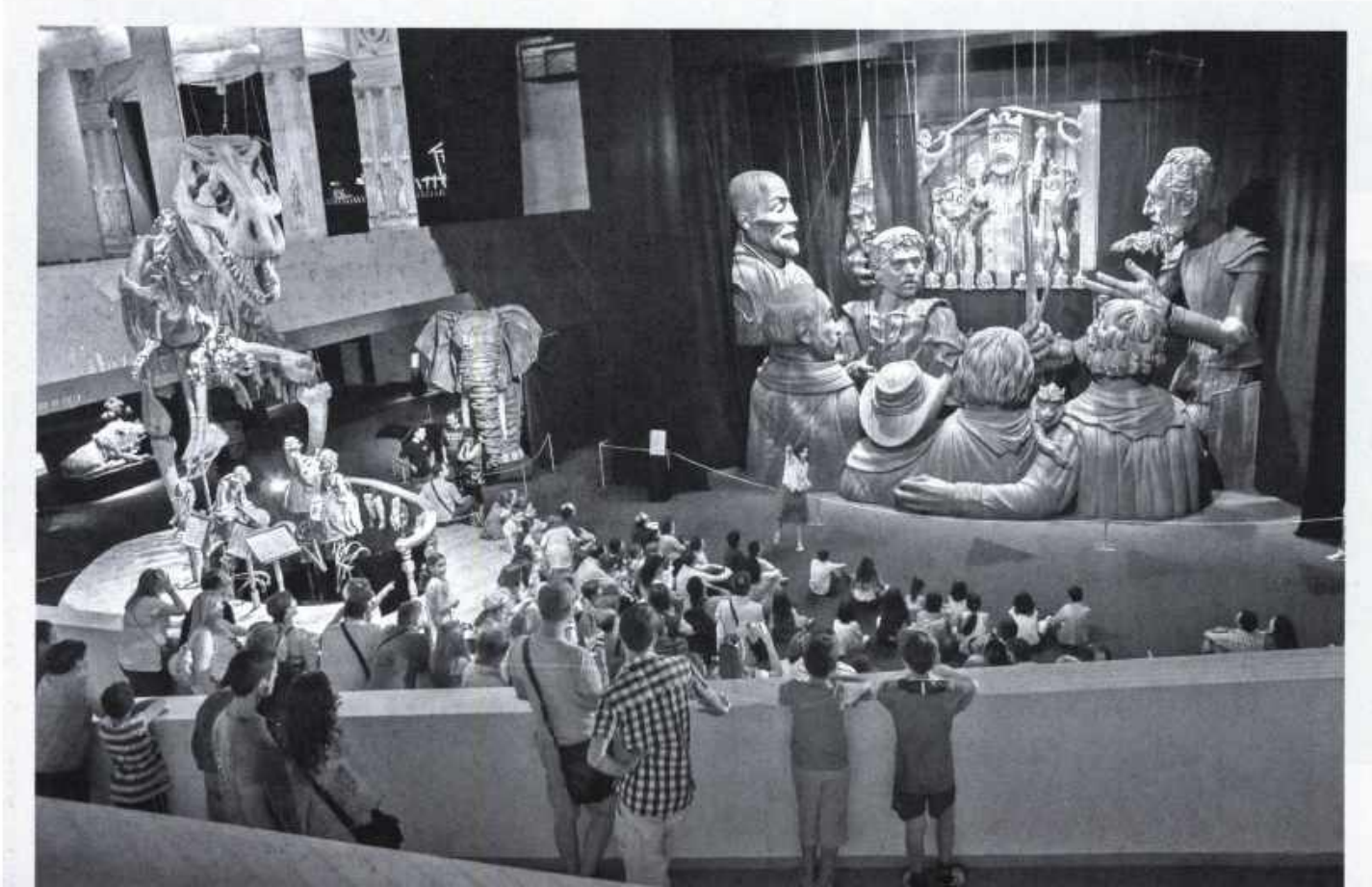
for some shows. I saw three different sets of puppets for *Peter and the Wolf*, one of which performs with recorded music weekly in its own charming theater in the museum. Typically, Lanz turned a drawback into an unexpected feature for visitors by installing his shop in the museum where he himself is on view building and making prototypes and experiments for a new production and answering questions. For the moment, he is adapting to the country's economic crisis by working on shows that can travel in a suitcase and is constantly experimenting with traditional and new materials.

The integration of puppet and live performer is definitely an attribute of Lanz's work, although by no means its only and most fascinating characteristic. During my visit to the exhibition over the summer of 2012, I interviewed Lanz and his partner Yanisbel Victoria Martinez, who now run the company. True to tradition, Lanz usually hides the puppeteer from view — either behind masking or disguised in black, rendering the manipulator invisible. This reinforces the illusion that the puppet has its own inner life, in sharp contrast to musicians or actors with whom it shares the stage. In Lanz's work, instrumentalists and singers are often in the foreground of the scene, and are always asked to be more active — to play, react and have a stronger physical presence on stage. Lanz is interested in a relationship between the puppet and the live performer that contrasts reality and fantasy. This has evolved over the years with fantasy and reality getting closer or farther apart, alternately confusing and permeating each other. The essence, however, is to establish a relationship between the human and the object while maintaining the illusion that the object lives alone, having a magical life.

When working with live musicians, Lanz avoids the image of the formal, stiff classical performer. He believes that if the audience sees a musician so much as turn to look at what is happening on stage while he or she is playing, the music will better reach the viewers because they see the musician enjoying and joining in the spectacle. This puts the musician and the very music he or she is producing onto another plane of reality. The puppeteer's invisibility and the musician's involvement in the scene underline the illusion that the object inhabits its own universe.

In Etcétera's *El Retablo de Maese Pedro*, enormous puppet characters, including Don Quixote, are the audience for the play within the play. They are sculpted with the intricacy of detail prevalent in baroque statuary. These colossal figures loom over the orchestra, inspiring awe yet remaining unobtrusive by their dark antique bronze texture. We as the audience are seeing Maese Pedro's puppet show over their shoulders. *Dreaming the Carnival of the Animals* (which also includes music from Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun*) does not terrorize children when the full-size skeleton of a Tyrannosaurus Rex charges the stage and confronts the orchestra. Rather, it is an image of wonder and delight. Whether it is the pianist participating in the puppets' fantasies in *El Teatrino de Bernat* or the actors who portray adult brother and sister in Debussy's *A Box of Toys*, the connection of the human and the puppet worlds exemplifies the special excitement that Etcétera provides their audience. I can only record my experience of these wonders. Viewing the video clips at titeresetcetera.com — or better yet, experiencing an Etcétera performance live — will do much more to take us to the heart of an amazing puppet company and show us their very generous soul. *(see photos, page 32)*

Miguel Romero is a set designer and director. He is on the theater faculty of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



• Etcétera photos by Enrique Lanz

• Peter and the Wolf

• A Box of Toys

• El Retablo de Maese Pedro

• Dreaming the Carnival of the Animals

PUPPETS DANCING, DANCING PUPPETS: Some interconnected thoughts

by Linda C. Ehrlich

A puppet who becomes human is the stuff of legends.
A human who becomes a puppet is the stuff of nightmares. Or is it so?
The Million Puppet March in Washington D.C. showed that puppets and humans can interact in ways to effect change, or at least draw attention. As one sign read: "If puppets are outlawed, only outlaws will have puppets."
What can dancers learn from puppets? What can puppets learn from dancers?
Puppets and dancers resemble each other in their love of the pose (moments of stillness) and their love of movement.. But can puppets actually *dance?*

Many of the links between puppetry and dance stem from Asia. In India, for example, Kathakali dancers emerge from behind a richly-colored cloth, as if from behind a puppet screen, and the movements of classical dancers from Mynmmar (Burma) mimic the rise and fall of marionettes from that country.[1] But the connections also stem from the Western belief since antiquity of a link between the shadow and the soul. Puppets and shadows. Eros and Thanatos. Where does the puppet end, and other forms, like animatronic figures with their closed movement options, begin?

Puppets and dancers bring us stories of entrapment. And expansion. And enchantment. They help us question the "representational hierarchy" of "the opposition of player and puppet, author and object."[2] Where does the puppet end and the automaton begin? How large of a step is it from the automaton to the dancer?

ENTRAPMENT

Think of Pinocchio in Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio: Story of a Puppet* (1881-83)—a puppet brought to life, whose dream is to become a "real boy." But how much more interesting he was as a puppet!

In Ernst Lubitsch's early film *The Doll* (1919), a woman comically transforms herself into a mechanical doll to win the husband of her dreams. And the ballet *Coppelia* (first performed in 1870) where a young woman pretends to be a doll to show her delusionary fiancé that he has fallen in love with toymaker Coppelius's doll, mistaking her for a real "ideal" girl. This dance, based on "The Sandman" by E.T.A. Hoffmann, and made famous by the film *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressberger, 1951), stars several famous dancers: Moira Shearer, Leonide Massine, and (as the puppet master) Frederick Ashton. But in the end, dancers and puppets enter separate worlds; the live dancers triumph.

Real boys. Real girls. Moving away from puppets.

But let's move away from the trickery of the puppet-human switch of *The Doll* or *Coppelia*, or even from the moving dolls in the *Nutcracker*, to the tragedy of Petrushka which "cannot be dismissed as a fairy tale because the puppets are simply too human."[3]

Petrushka (premiered 1913) shows freedom to be as illusory as a marionette dangling without a puppeteer. Or is it so? In the ballet with glorious music by Igor Stravinsky and choreography by Michel Fokine, puppets are brought to life by music, by the magic flute of the Wizard (aka The Magician, The Charlatan). The self-satisfied lugubrious Moor dances *en dehors* (outward-facing steps), the vacuous Ballerina (Columbine) only knows a few steps, and Petrushka, the timid puppet (dancing *en dedans*, inwardly) yearns for the Ballerina but has no rights. The Ballerina is pushed and pulled by these two men (puppets).

The ballet *Petrushka* whisks us away with its music —a clash of cymbals and tambourines, dancing bells, slowly stalking bass to evoke the pre-Lenten Shrovetide Fair of St. Petersburg of the 1830s. The puppets are also inspired to move by cellos of triumph, and nervous violins. Stravinsky offers us the rather aimless wandering of the music for the Moor, and the "Petrushka chord" —a cry that combines the white keys (a major broken chord) and the black keys (an F#major chord) in heightened dichotomies.[4]

Nijinsky, Nureyv, Barishnikov—All the great male dancers have asked for the role of Pierrot-Petrushka, not for the role of the extraverted Moor. Why might that be? They all wanted to transform themselves into the pathetic but defiant puppet who moves in an angular yet flexible manner. Could it be that Petrushka has something that transcends the Wizard?

In the end, the puppet is shown as dead, but the dancer triumphs. The puppet's soul/ghost ascends to the rooftop and taunts the terrified Wizard-puppeteer below.

(In an ironic twist, Basil Twist directed a purely puppetry version of *Petrushka* at Lincoln Center in 2001. As dance critic Joan Acocella reports, at the end of the production, Petrushka "sticks his face out of a black curtain at the side of the auditorium. He has jumped out of the puppet theatre."[5])

ENRICHMENT

But what if the puppet-human mix could arouse not only pity or humor, but awe? In Java, *wayang kulit* shadow puppets and *wayang wong court* dancers move along a horizontal plane, with the dancers following in the model of the puppets. Puppets of shadow are best reserved for gods, heroes, and sacred clowns. Puppets of history and eternity toss their stories against a translucent screen, and become terrifyingly large when held up behind a screen. The shadows emerge and disappear like figures in a dream.

In contrast to the kinds of movement patterns of the three dancers in *Petrushka*, the *wayang wong* dancers are the epitome of gracefulness, like figures moving under water.

Revered puppets(in Java, Sicily, a few other countries) are preserved in special boxes and passed down for generations. Consider these words about stop-motion *ningyō* (puppets/doll) animation by masters like Kawamoto Kihachirō who wait to see what the puppets themselves reveal, how their *jinsei* (life) is revealed in performance.

"Puppets that perform whole-heartedly are quite admirable and have a wonderful power of expression that no living actor can come close to ...The strength of expression apparent in the heroism and devotion of the *ningyō* who act whole-heartedly and in a highly focused way, somehow relates to the way their real nature is originally an inanimate one. When actors play the role of a protagonist in a drama, they live the life of the protagonist while performing. When no longer performing the role, actors have lives of their own. For a *ningyō* in a puppet play, the moments when the puppet is performing are the sum of its human life (*jinsei*) They have no human life of their own. When the *ningyō* leaves the role, they just return to being a wooden figure, an inanimate object. The *ningyō* is born to play that role and only when playing the role, life (*seimei*) is breathed into it and it lives its unique life earnestly."[6]

ENCHANTMENT

Some puppets and dancers are tricksters: "ridiculous-looking, disobedient, obscene, backward, disrespectful, funny, powerful, or paradoxical characters."[7] The Japanese *kappa*, Native American coyote, Polynesian Maui, West African Anansi, the raven of the Pacific Northwest, Harlequin of the commedia dell'arte— tricksters that delight us and restore balance to our world.

In the film *Monkey Business* (directed by Norman Z. McLeod, 1931), Harpo Marx unites the trickster puppet and the trickster dancer. To escape the clutches of the rigid ship's steward, the stowaway Harpo literally enters into a Punch-and-Judy show, pretending to be a puppet in the performance for children on the ship.

As Wayne Koestenbaum writes of Harpo's performance in *The Cocoanuts:* "Demonstrating a pointless, antiutilitarian beauty, [Harpo] puts effort and artistry into a motion unseen by companions."[8] The audience of children adores him, as do we, watching from the other side of another screen.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Admittedly, to assert a connection between puppetry and dance is a "hard sell." In a review in *New Theatre* (Sept. 1936), noted dance critic Lincoln Kirsten wrote that dance on film needs both "a choreographer educated not only in ballet but in all the fullest possibilities of the film...By the fullest possibilities one means a treatment of human bodies comparable to the way Disney treats his puppets."[9] What exactly might he mean!

Puppets whose souls are entrapped in societal limitations turn dancers into instruments of despair.

Puppets who serve as windows onto the sacred, turn dancers into hierophanies of heroes and gods.[10]

Puppets. Easily carried and also easily forgotten. The miniature attracts and evades our gaze. Where does the dancer take over from puppetry, and how does it return? Both puppetry and dance open us to new realms of enchantment. Puppets and dancers—how they enrich each other and ourselves.!

Linda C. Ehrlich is an associate professor at Case Western Reserve University. She has published widely in the fields of both cinema and poetry, and co-edited *Cinematic Landscapes*, an anthology of essays on the interface between the visual arts and cinemas of China and Japan.

Portions of this article were given at the "Dancing Across Disciplines and Cultures" conference at Long Island University/Post campus, November 14-16, 2012.

Endnotes

1 Note the entry on "Influence of Puppetry" in the International Encyclopedia of Dance (Oxford Reference online) written by Jo Humphrey (www.oxfordreference.com).

2 Scott Shershow, Puppets and Popular Culture (Ithaca: Cornell Up, 1995): 210-211.

3 Andrew Wachtel, "The Ballet's Libretto," in Wachtel, ed. Petrushka: Sources and Contexts (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1998): 31.

4 Lecture by Dr. Paul Kim at the "Dancing Across Disciplines and Cultures" conference, Long Island University/Post campus (2012).

5 Joan Acocella, "Doll Houses," The New Yorker (21 April 2008): 140. Translation by Hiroko

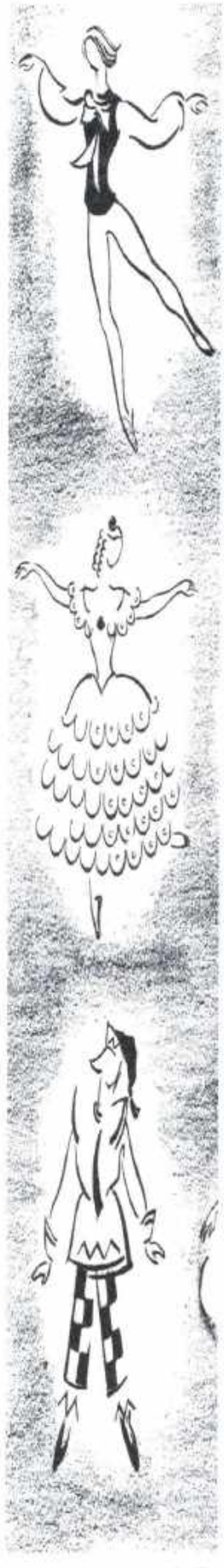
6 Takada-Amick and Linda Ehrlich, of Kawamoto Kihachirō, "A Puppet's Life," originally published in July 1983. Translation published in International Journal of Comic Art 14: 1 (Spring 2012): 525-529.

7 Kimberly Chritsten, Clowns and Tricksters: An Encyclopedia of Tradition and Culture. (Denver: ABC-CLIO, 1998).

8 Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Anatomy of Harpo Marx*. Berkeley: Univ.of California Press, 2012: 11.

9 Lincoln Kirstein, "Dancing in Films," New Theatre (Sept. 1936), reprinted in Lopate ed. , American Movie Critics (NY: The Library of America, 2006): 101.

10 See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1959). Translated from the French by Willard Trask.



ENDPAPERS FROM THE VINTAGE "TALES FROM THE BALLET (SWAN LAKE, PETROUCHKA)" BOOK BY DERYCK LYNHAM, ILLUSTRATED BY SYLVIA GREEN, SYLVAN PRESS. 1946.

[The following text was originally conceived by Roark as a performance/lecture. –Editor]

Young in Spirit and Old in Sin:

Mr. Punch the Trickster God

by Carolyn Roark

CAROLYN: In the beginning, there was Punch. Where he came from and who his progenitor was…opinions differ. There is consensus on one topic: Punch is a SINNER. Max Beerbohm calls him a great sinner, "this wife-beater, with his homicidal and infanticidal ways."

MR. PUNCH: Root-i-toot-toot! Ladies and gentlemen, how do ye do? If you all happy, me all happy too! Is most vicious slander to say Punch not good, Punch is no sinner, me misunderstood!

CAROLYN: Mr. Punch, this audience is a very intelligent, educated group of people. You can't fool them that easily. They have heard of you, and they know you're bad company.

MR. PUNCH: No no no! Nice lady is mistaken! Punch is a fellow whose intentions are good!

CAROLYN: Good intentions? Mr. Punch, every time you take the stage, do you not throw your own baby out the window?

MR. PUNCH: Yes!

CAROLYN: And don't you beat your wife Judy to death with a stick?

MR. PUNCH: Yes, yes!

CAROLYN: And the Doctor, your friend Scaramouche, the Beadle. Same treatment?

MR. PUNCH: Yes, yes, yes!

CAROLYN: And even Jack Ketch, you trick him into swinging from his own rope?

(Punch chuckles)

CAROLYN: So, you murder your family, most of your friends, you obstruct justice, and sometimes you even steal from the blind! Good people do *not* do these things! Very, very wicked people do. And everyone knows that the wicked are, by definition, sinners.

(Punch looks at Carolyn for a moment)

MR. PUNCH: Does the Devil take Punch?

CAROLYN: Well, no….you get the better of him, too.

MR. PUNCH: Does Punch have to pay for his crimes?

CAROLYN: (*sighs*) No….

MR. PUNCH: Ergo, Punch is no sinner!

CAROLYN: Punch, is this some kind of materialist argument?

MR. PUNCH: Material what?

CAROLYN: Well, Scott Cutler Shershow speaks of you as representative of the working-class, expressing their contempt for authority, punishing the powers-that-be for them.

MR. PUNCH: Eh?

CAROLYN: Yes, he says this was a relatively inert form of rebellion, because it didn't really stimulate change. For the middle class it confirmed their low opinion of the proletariat and their own moral superiority. So, they provided the financial means for the tradition to flourish.

MR. PUNCH: This is material?

CAROLYN: No, Mr. Punch, materialist.

MR. PUNCH: I give you material! (*Hits Carolyn two or three times with stick*) At's-the-way-ter-do-it! This kind of material good for everybody's soul!

CAROLYN: (*catches stick*): Punch, *please*. These are my colleagues. They expect me to be a professional. Or at least not to hit myself in the head with a stick.

MR. PUNCH: I thought you say these people in theatre.

CAROLYN: Punch, that is **beside the point!** Anyway, I never said Shershow is altogether right. I mean, there is definitely a material character to your world. The problems of domestic abuse, the codified social structures. (*Punch brandishes his stick, Carolyn makes a placating gesture.*) And even you have to admit—you're pretty susceptible to the temptations of the flesh. The sausage incident? Gluttony. And Pretty Polly? That's lust, plain and simple.

MR. PUNCH: So you so smart? You a theo – lo –gi-an? What you think?

CAROLYN: God seems to be on vacation every time you show up!

MR. PUNCH: You saying Punch's world has no God?

CAROLYN: No, I'm not saying that at all. But I am saying that he's awful quiet when you're around. Look. There's always a ghost; sometimes its Judy's, sometimes someone else. And the Devil shows up to play his part. But where is the Almighty?

MR. PUNCH: Maybe he here!

CAROLYN: Who, you?

MR. PUNCH: Why not Punch?! Punch killed the Devil, now everybody can do what he wants. Ergo, Ego, Oswego, Punch! *(Whacks Carolyn once more, laughing.)*

CAROLYN: *(turns to audience)* Actually, Mr. Punch has a point. He has the most agency, and others always emerge the loser in a direct confrontation. In many ways, he determines the rules of his universe, and then breaks them at will. But Punch is in no way omniscient, nor all-powerful; although, as a puppet he has a certain kind of immortality, he isn't invulnerable. Others occasionally beat him at his own game.
(to Punch) Sorry, Punch. The play's traditional narrative is grounded in Christian culture and values even as it flouts them, so you don't fit the profile, not even if we consider the vindictive, unpredictable God of the Old Testament. There's only room for you to be a sinner.

MR. PUNCH: So what? The audience like Punch that way.

CAROLYN: True. Alice Early and Shershow both document the public's angry response to any Punch professor who tried to have you repent or get carted off to hell. They describe incidents where such professors fled under a hail of stones and mud for performing the wrong sort of ending to the story. Beerbohm and others have insisted that your unrepentant badness is why audiences have loved you; you provide a release valve for our own negative emotions. He says:
I suppose there never will be a time when we shall not now and again need to imagine all our dismal old restrictions and inhibitions being kicked gaily about by some unscrupulous and overweening creature who goes unpunished for doing so and indeed thrives. For Shershow, you offer a safe form of social rebellion and an ultimate affirmation of bourgeois values; For John Collier, you are a manifestation of the English spirit.

MR. PUNCH: Bah! Punch is not listening! You talking to yourself.

CAROLYN: Actually, in a way I am, Punch. [*They both look down at the arm working the puppet.*] Traditionally speaking, we shouldn't be having this conversation. I should be hiding in a booth, and you should be addressing the bottler or the audience, not me.

MR. PUNCH: Then why you interrupt Punch's show?

CAROLYN: Your show?! Punch, this is my presentation...listen. I want to tell the audience what Lewis Hyde says about trickster figures in various mythologies, and how "social life can depend on treating antisocial characters as part of the sacred."

MR. PUNCH: At's-the-way-ter-do-it! Punch is holy, holy, holy!

CAROLYN: *(laughing)* No, you're not. But I think you have a lot in common with the mischief-making gods of ancient mythology—like Hermes, Mercury, Loki, and Puck. I'm saying that a context for your particular sacredness must be found by looking across cultures, instead of within a particular one, you old sinner. Hyde says that tricksters "cross the line and confuse the distinction" between our typical categories for the world. Like other tricksters, you could be considered "the mythic embodiment of ambiguity and ambivalence, doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox." You're at the bottom of society.

MR. PUNCH: Hrmph!

CAROLYN: You meet characters both humble and mighty. You commit the most dastardly acts of mayhem, and your audience cheers. And like Prometheus's theft of fire or Raven's theft of the sun, your mischief might benefit humanity, as suggested by Collier, Shershow, or others.

MR. PUNCH: *(nodding approvingly)* Yes. Punch is nice guy.

CAROLYN: I wouldn't go that far. A trickster need have no fellow feeling for those who benefit from his mischief. Besides, you're still a liar... which is something else Hyde says about tricksters—that they practice a distinct form of lying.
"Trickster feels no anxiety when he deceives. He is often dependent on others, to be sure, but that dependence rarely constrains him. He does not fear separation. ...the *eternal* child who cannot be significantly damaged and so may cleave to the pure and playful delight of floating fiction in the face of stern reality."
(to audience) Punch is a consummate deceiver. Though he enjoys Judy's favors, he has no compunction about tossing their baby out the window. He lies about the baby's whereabouts; he lies about Judy's fate. And when his lies are exposed, he resorts to his stick. When the gallows trumps the stick's might, he plays dumb and tricks Jack Ketch. And like many of his brethren, he is occasionally duped by others who use his own methods.

(*Punch's attention wanders. Perhaps he even falls asleep from boredom. Carolyn notices.)* I try to keep that in mind. As you have already seen, just because I'm the puppeteer doesn't mean I'm exempt from his abuse or deceit. Why do you think I'm playing devil's advocate? In the Devil he finds an opponent against whom his lies do not work—Satan is, after all, the Father of Lies. Punch eventually triumphs through his stick and sheer force of will. And his victory proclamation, "The Devil is dead. Now everyone can do what he likes" is pure trickster—grounded entirely in the satisfaction of desire and appetite. *(Punch hears this.)*

MR. PUNCH: So, you see, it is just as Punch says. Punch is a trickster god!

CAROLYN: Punch, two pages ago, you tried to convince us that you were God. The Almighty.

MR. PUNCH: Never!

CAROLYN: You did, too!

MR. PUNCH: Never said it!

CAROLYN: Well, I hate to be the one that has to break it to you, Mr. Punch, but Hyde actually makes a pretty strong argument for why you can't be any kind of trickster at all.

MR. PUNCH: The hell you says!

CAROLYN: Honestly, he does. He says: "If the spiritual world is dominated by a single high god opposed by a single embodiment of evil, then the ancient trickster disappears." He says that such a spiritual ethos does not allow for the trickster's "great ambivalence."

MR. PUNCH: Lies! Lies! Lies! (*punctuating with hitting Carolyn with his stick.*)

CAROLYN: Punch, quit it! I haven't said I agree with Hyde! *(Punch stops. Looks expectant.)* There is plenty of trickster behavior in monotheistic folklore, stories that resemble ordinary reality, but with magic, bending of natural or social laws, or behavior that would be considered extraordinary on the normal plane. Many feature an uncommon character who meets and bests the Devil. Some have a predominantly good nature and find trouble through cockiness or foolishness. Others, such as yourself, have a wicked but charming nature and get in trouble for their appetites. You all fit into what Hyde calls "the paradoxical category of sacred amorality." In the salvation/damnation binary you form a third, exempted category. You don't go to hell for your crimes, but heaven also bars its doors to you. So, you wander the earth in perpetuity.

MR. PUNCH: Root-i-toot-toot! Punch is immortal!

CAROLYN: Well…there is more competition in popular entertainment now. There are still professors performing your story, but people have lost their sense of humor about domestic abuse. But there are still trickster figures out there, evolving as cultures become more pluralist.

MR. PUNCH: Who?

CAROLYN: Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp, the Riddler of the *Batman* Comics, almost any movie character played by Jack Black. You could even make a case for Bugs Bunny.

MR. PUNCH: Bugs Bunny?! *(Now the beating commences in earnest. Carolyn "ouches" for a few seconds.)*

CAROLYN: Punch! Calm down! Stop! Behave yourself! Try to be professional….. Good God, Punch, what's that?! *(Points off. Punch looks away. Carolyn snatches the puppet off of her own hand, sits on it.)*
Mr. Punch, and others like him, actually do serve a spiritual and moral purpose, though it is not quite the one that some of his early apologists have suggested. These stories are, as he says, "made in and for a world of imperfections." Rather, by exposing moral ambiguity, forcing us to address its consistent presence, we become (as Hyde suggests) more able to avoid "unconscious cruelty masked by inflated righteousness." Ow! *(jumping up)* But that does not mean they won't bite you in the ass.

Carolyn Roark is the founding editor of *Ecumenica*. A scholar whose work has been focused on religion and performance, social pedagogy, and performing objects, her writing has appeared in *Theatre History Studies, Youth Theatre Journal, Ollantay, Puppetry International*, and other publications. She has served as Focus Group Representative for Religion and Theatre at ATHE, and currently convenes the Articles-in-Progress workshop for MATC. She has a mild obsession with puppets.

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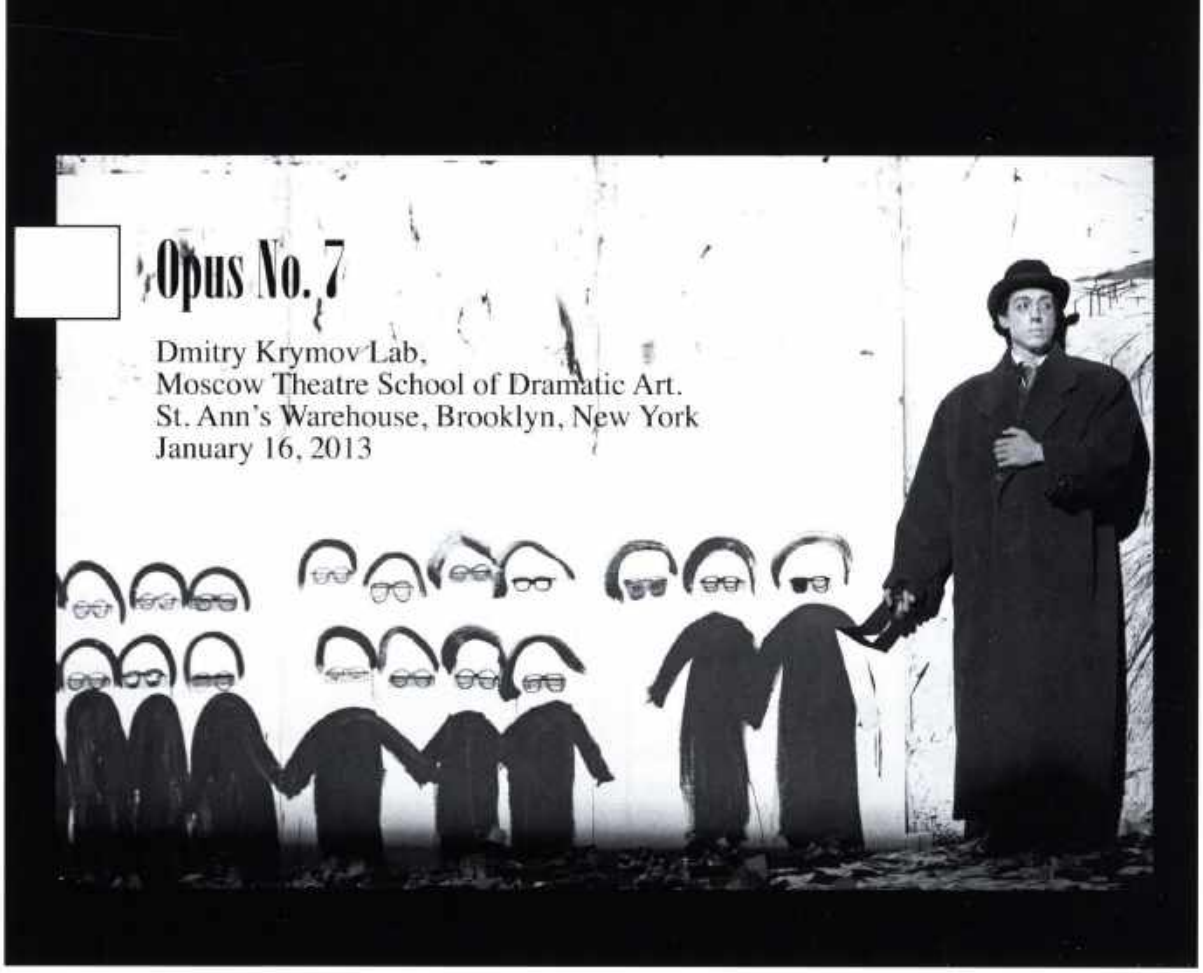


Opus No. 7, from Russian artist-designer turned director Dmitry Krymov, consists of two one-hour pieces, *Genealogy* and *Shostakovich*, conceived together and thematically related in dealing with victims of totalitarianism. In *Genealogy*, the long, white, cardboard wall that establishes the set becomes an active participant in calling back to life the persecuted and murdered Jews of Soviet Russia. The wall and the spirits it evokes are exemplary manifestations of the inanimate reanimated. The piece uses minimal language, instead providing its memorial narrative through the engagement of a group of young actors with the material world around them to create a flow of visual images.

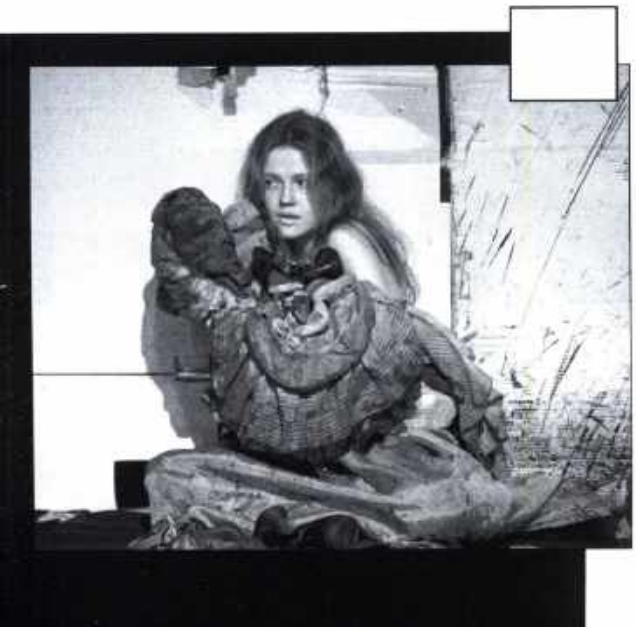
Genealogy begins with the ensemble of young men and women, one of them pregnant, ready for a concert. Their haunting singing accompanied by tuba brings the wall to life as a knife punches through it, cutting out a high rectangular hole, out of which peer a pair of eyes. Two more cuts reveal a pair of feet. Another allows the arm holding the knife to push through to then cut a hole for a final arm to emerge. The contrast of living human flesh with the blank wall that encases it is both humorous and eerie. Each actor takes a bucket of black paint and splashes a huge swash at distinct points across the wall. They frantically staple black papers atop the splashes for skullcaps and twisted ropes to evoke pais, creating, with quick gestures, abstract representations of Orthodox Jewish men. Using box-cutters, they slice up the wall around the figures' heads and, as spotlights fall on each silhouette, the cutout shapes sway back and forth as if davening.* Through empty spaces behind the shapes, harsh lights flash on as thousands of small newspaper squares blow violently out to cover the audience and the long black stage floor. These actions provide a means of remembering Jewish figures, extracting them from both real and metaphorical white walls of silence, their brutality also recalls the violence that led to the population's demise. The thousands of shreds of paper come to represent the dead as the actors read Jewish names from them

Through further elaboration of imagery, the Jewish characters become fleshed-out. Again hands push through the wall, this time finding their way into the sleeves of hanging black coats, bringing the headless clothes to life to replay familiar gestures, like cleaning a pair of glasses. When the coats hold hands, the actors join in: together, momentarily, they form a ring that binds the living and the dead, the present and the past. Projections of black and white photographs of Jews of the past replaced by moving, filmed images, add further steps to fleshing out this lost population. Little pairs of glasses that poke through the wall, as if staring at the audience, invoke the children who died in the Holocaust. The actors set up children's shoes in front of the glasses, painting the outlines of heads around them and little black coats under them. With this young crowd assembled, one of the actors picks up old photographs from the ground and offers snippets of memories of the people (heard in only smaller fragments earlier) adding historical detail and personality to imagery: "I remember Uncle Isaac. He was in the army then." "Clara and Senyon left for Chelyabinsk in 1941." "Mosya did everything himself. He had hands of gold." The final image is the pregnant actress giving birth to a further collection of children's shoes as a voice proclaims: "And a boy was born, his name was Christ." This statement rounds off a genealogy that began the show with "Abraham begat Isaac." *Genealogy* interweaves metaphorical threads of birth, death, and rebirth with historical ones, to enliven fragmented memories of a lost population.

Shostakovich uses actors, objects, and an enormous processional style puppet of Mother Russia to enact the famous composer's struggle with the totalitarian state, both the protection it gave him and the demands it made. Conceiving of *Shostakovich* as a kind of Chaplinesque clown, humorous and pathetic, the show plays out a series of circus-style acts, accompanied by Shostakovich's music and recordings of his famous speech to the Communist Party leadership, in which his voice falters as he expounds on Soviet realist art.

The grand puppet figure of Mother Russia enters the arena stage through red velvet curtains, her charge in tow, Shostakovich (Anna Sinyakina), in concert tails, wrapped and gagged with cloth. He is forced in front of the roughly constructed, unfinished frame of an enormous wooden piano. He enacts a series of violent acrobatic moves trying both to climb on and escape the piano. At one point it falls over, at another workers affix the top while Shostakovch cowers inside.

In another act, the ensemble dance with cardboard slabs showing images of important figures executed by Stalin. The placards are lined up in a tableau. Mother Russia, now sporting a military cap along with her print dress and severe jacket, takes a cardboard pistol in her hand and shoots the figures one by one. Shostakovich, however, seems unstoppable, requiring repeated shots. The puppeteer operating one of the puppet's hands even lets the hand go to take a pistol of his own. Although Mother Russia exits with Shostakovich still alive, her impossibly long puppet arm soon slithers out from the curtain to enwrap him like a snake. Accompanying officials pin a huge medal on him; its prong stabs through him, coming out his back. He is forced to kiss the hand before it retreats.



Shostakovich now appears like a puppet himself, immobile, carried around the arena by ensemble members who come in to set up the next act, a high wire event in which a man is suspended with a chandelier. They position Shostakovich underneath, at another mock-up piano, in the middle of a three-walled set. Actors spin the makeshift, idealized setting representing an incapacitated Shostakovich on display. When the walls and piano (a fire blazing inside) roll out, Shostakovich, thinking he is alone, again exhibits agency, lighting a cigarette. Only then does he notice the spying man hanging with the chandelier above him and, in attempting to get him, the two sway from the ropes like an aerial team. Later a series of large metal pianos roll onstage, like an army of tanks, and smash into each other to some of Shostakovich's harsher musical strains. By the end of the show, a small rag doll replaces the actor playing Shostakovich. Mother Russia, now in a flowery shawl, carries it to her breast while crooning bleak, sentimental folk songs. In the final moments, the cast abandons both puppets in a heap on the floor as they retreat behind the curtain.

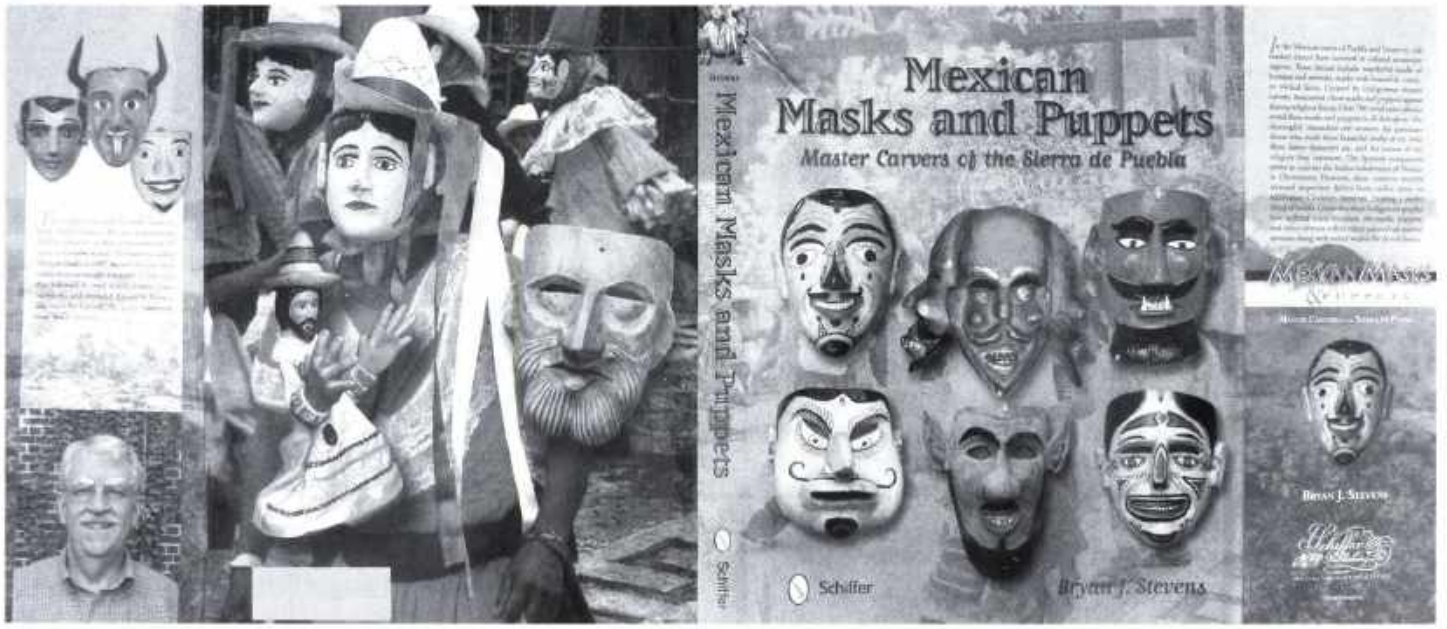
Both pieces show Krymov and the students he collaborates with in his experimental laboratory employing a wide-ranging language of stage imagery to dig into emotionally charged moments in Russia's past. They wrestle history into the present through a layering of music, visual elements, and physical actions that put Krymov's design background center stage.

*daven: to recite the prescribed liturgical prayers. [Yiddish]

review by Claudia Orenstein

Something New from South of the Border

Mexican Masks and Puppets,
Atglen, Pennsylvania,
Schiffer Publications, Ltd. 160 pp. $49.99



Bryan J. Stevens's *Mexican Masks and Puppets* is another ethnographic volume from Schiffer (see review of their *The Colorful Sogo Bò Puppets of Mali*, PI #32). Like their previous titles, this is a fascinating and detailed account of a traditional culture and its art. It is likewise richly illustrated with hundreds of color photographs. For the reader, it is a treasure trove. For the writer, it was a labor of love based on research spanning a quarter of a century.

The specific subject matter is tightly circumscribed, as is made clear by the subtitle: *Master Carvers of the Sierra de Puebla*, an inland region slightly west of the Gulf of Mexico and just north of Oaxaca. To understand the proliferation of mask carvers in the area, one must understand the dance and, in addition, the spiritual life of the region's inhabitants. The original residents were Totonacs, who were later dominated by the Nahuatl. Both languages continue to be spoken in the region and their respective mythologies have not only fused but have blended with Christian beliefs introduced at the time of the Spanish Conquest, such that the Trinity has melded with local nature-based gods.

Most of the book is focused on mask carvers and, in fact, has preserved information about many current and recently deceased carvers whose names might well be lost to us otherwise. We also learn how each carver brings his own style to this very codified tradition. (I say "his" as the mask carvers have traditionally been men, though there is reference to a carver's daughter who is now beginning to make masks.)

There is a tradition of puppetry, too, though there are fewer pages devoted to this. These puppets are used in the dances of the Huehue and Tejonero. Typically, a puppet set contains figures of a man, a woman, a *chénchere* (a woodpecker) and a wooden box to hold them. The chénchere is made to climb a tall bamboo pole by means of a string running up the center of the pole. This pole represents the spirits of the trees in the forest, important deities from the time prior to the arrival of the Spanish. The male and female puppets combine elements of Joseph, Jesus and the Virgin Mary with those of the traditional nature spirits. The male and female figures are all hand puppets. Their most striking feature is the hands, typically much larger than the heads.

The photos are informatively captioned, and there is an extensive bibliography and an index. In the afterword, Stevens discusses the complexity of the religious beliefs (of which the masks and puppets are a reflection), to what extent the old beliefs have lost their power and even whether his speculation on the meaning of the religious character of the dances are entirely correct. Certainly, he writes, "an important mystery remains," and thus an opportunity for further research.

Review by Andrew C. Periale

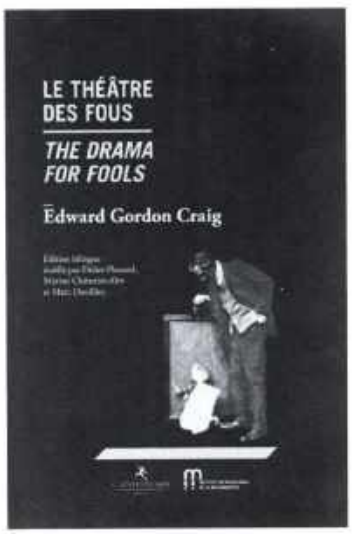
Puppet Drama, Shadow Theater, and Dolls: Revisiting the Past

Edward Gordon Craig, *Le Théâtre des Fous / The Drama for Fools*. Paris: L'Entretemps/Institut International de la Marionnette, 2012. 425 pp. €35.

Autour du Chat Noir: Arts et plaisirs à Montmartre, 1880-1910 / Around the Chat Noir: Arts and Pleasures in Bohemian Montmartre, 1880-1910. Paris: Skira Flammarion, 2012.

Kenneth Gross, ed., *On Dolls*. London: Notting Hill Editions, 2012. 130 pp. £10.

These three books mark recent 21st-century efforts to offer more examples of the wealth of historical precedents to the current flurry of interest in puppets and object theater. In a way none of these books breaks new ground, but by looking at the recent past of puppets in the West—particularly from the late-19th century to the mid-20th—they help give us a stronger sense of how we have gotten to our particular moment of understanding the field.



Edward Gordon Craig, the undoubted patriarch and grand visionary of modern Western puppetry, has been a constant presence in puppet history, but not necessarily well understood beyond his clichéd caricature as the man who ridiculously wanted to replace actors with the *Übermarionette* (whatever that was...). Craig has always been considered more seriously in France, and the first-ever edition of his Drama for Fools, a series of plays for marionettes, has been lovingly assembled and edited by a talented team from the Institut International de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mézières, including the renowned Didier Plassard, Marion Chénetier-Alev, and Marc Duvillier. This bilingual edition approaches Craig's texts as a valuable legacy of puppet literature, and is graced with beautiful puppet and stage designs by Craig, copious footnotes, introductory passages, a bibliography, and other useful scholarly accouterments.

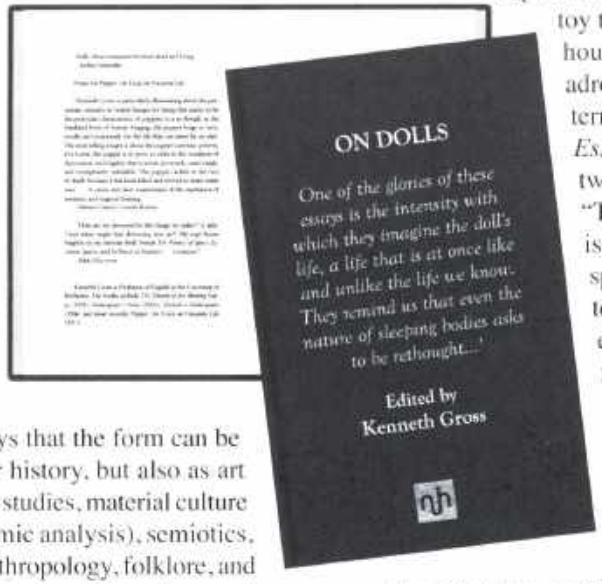
Craig's ***Drama for Fools***, a collection of mostly unproduced marionette plays written between 1916 and 1918, had a grand scope: to "rewrite the history of humanity," as Plassard puts it, including "all the known worlds and epochs, from biblical times, Greek mythology, and classical antiquity until the First World War." The main characters are Cockatrice, Craig's version of a mythical Elizabethan beast somewhat like a cross between a worm, snake, and dragon; a rather innocent and good Blind Boy; and a venturesome Parrot. These three traverse space and time, as Plassard states, and are also capable of transformation themselves. One wonders if, in creating this mythic puppet world, Craig was envious of the possibilities of the puppet cycles of Javanese *wayang kulit* or the various Indian performance incarnations of the *Mahabharata* or *Ramayana*, and seeking to create his own version of their vast historical scope, combinations of high and low culture, comedy, romance, and conflict.

While Craig is well known as a director and theorist, it is interesting to see him strictly as the playwright of *Drama for Fools*. The short plays in this loose epic are redolent of much that had happened and was happening on the turn-of-the-century European stage: the hallucinatory world of Strindberg's 1901 *Dream Play*; the symbolist wonder of Maeterlinck's 1908 *Blue Bird*; and the outrageous pseudo-Shakespearean anarchism of Alfred Jarry's 1896 *Ubu Roi*. Craig's playlets also bring to mind the Gothic nastiness of Grimm's fairy tales, and even the quirky magic of Lewis Carroll's mid-19th-century *Alice in Wonderland*.

Even more, Craig was writing *Drama for Fools* at exactly the same time that Dada was being invented in Zurich and Futurism was happening in Italy (where Craig was living). However, in comparison to the concerns of those puppet-friendly avant-garde movements, Craig's interests seem rooted in the 19th rather than the 20th century, and particularly concerned with modernism as it affected Britain more than anywhere else in the world. In this sense, Craig's funny, odd, and often perplexing little plays seem like an inspired expansion of 19th-century English marionette theater and its transforming trick puppets, music-hall humor and pantomime theatrics. The plays seem, in a way, immensely private, and the meaning of the scenes is often impenetrable (perhaps less so for British readers?). Spinning out his stories as an expatriate in Florence, Craig seems to be working through some combination of his difficult childhood in England; his ongoing war on "legitimate" theater; his difficulties with women; his conflicted sense of sexuality and gender; his general cantankerousness; his pronounced disapproval of modern life, Democracy, Americans, and Socialism; and his yearning for a reactionary return to aristocratic rule (he was, one must remember, an ardent admirer of Mussolini). Craig's *Drama for Fools* shows us one version of how modernism destabilized a talented artist, but inspired him to respond to the challenges of the 20th century by turning to puppetry. This is an eye-opening addition to the ongoing saga of Edward Gordon Craig.

Around the Chat Noir: Arts and Pleasures in Bohemian Montmartre, 1880-1910, is another bi-lingual book from Paris (available via the internet if not in American bookstores) that treats us to a sumptuous view of European puppetry from the turn of the last century. The Chat Noir cabaret, in the bohemian environs of the Montmartre neighborhood of Paris, was a center of avant-garde culture which, as is pretty well known, put puppetry, and particularly shadow theater, at the center of its performance life, and inspired talented visual artists, musicians, and performers to re-invent the 19th-century *ombres chinoises* shadow puppet traditions as a contemporary form through which these artists and their audiences could visualize their modernist aspirations. There have been numerous studies of the Chat Noir, including Armond Field's exemplary 1993 book *Le Chat Noir: A Montmartre Cabaret and its*

Artists in Turn-of-the-Century Paris. This new volume is the catalogue of a 2012 exhibition at the Musée de Montmartre (a great museum, according to recent visitors), and examines not only the shadow shows created by the group of artists that came to be known as Les Nabis, but also the development of the whole Montmartre area as a nexus of artistic innovation, and the life of the Chat Noir in the larger context of Parisian music halls of the time. Puppeteers in particular will be inspired by the photographs and sketches of numerous Chat Noir shadow puppets and, above all, set designs—especially by the amazing Henri Rivière—which evoked the worlds of such productions as *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1887); *Cruel Enigma* (1891); and the "symbolic review" *Ailleurs! (Elsewhere!)* (1891). The complex cut-out background sets for these shows are a particular revelation, visions of a rapidly changing urban landscape that the Chat Noir artists felt compelled to try to understand.



Kenneth Gross's anthology ***On Dolls***, published in a beautiful pocket-sized volume by London's Notting Hill Editions, is, in a way, a kind of source book companion to his 2011 collection *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*. One of the many challenges we face in trying to figure out what exactly puppets do and have done in their many centuries of world-wide performance history is the vast variety of ways that the form can be understood—not only as theater history, but also as art history, philosophy, performance studies, material culture (a newly popular mode of academic analysis), semiotics, phenomenology, playwriting, anthropology, folklore, and mass media studies. The fact that puppetry touches on all these areas makes it hard to bring together examples of the different modes of thinking that have inspired writers to try to understand the form. Gross's anthology of essays from the early 19th to the early 21st century makes a coherent statement by focusing on objects themselves—toys, dolls, household objects, tailors' dummies, wax effigies, automata—objects generally outside the realm of puppet performance proper. Gross does give us Heinrich von Kleist's famous 1810 essay "On the Marionette Theatre," and excerpts from Freud's iconic 1919 psychological study of "The Uncanny," but adds to these classic foundations of Western puppet theory with a 1928 analysis by Walter Benjamin of a toy exhibit; Charles Baudelaire's 1853 ruminations on "The Philosophy of Toys"; and Rainer Maria Rilke's wild and inspiring 1914 essay "Dolls: On the Wax Dolls of Lotte Pritzel." The fact that these essays are about dolls does not, of course, mean they are irrelevant to puppetry studies. The difference is that we are again and again considering the objects themselves, outside of their life on stage and in ritual performance. The enigma of lifelike and not-so lifelike human representations, or simply utilitarian objects, thus comes to the fore in the silence and stillness of their simple presence. Except for Kleist's writing, the essays and excerpts in *On Dolls* don't give us much to consider about what happens to the life of our puppets when we set them in motion with others in sequences of action that tell stories. Instead, the tone of these analyses is contemplative; they are musings on the material nature of dead objects, the psychological effects they have on us, and the ways we imagine such objects to embody certain powers and effects. This, in its limited way, is useful to puppeteers.

A real contribution Gross makes here is to expand our sense of puppet and object theorizing beyond the oft-cited Kleist and Freud texts. Baudelaire's essay on toys is a fine 19th-century consideration of the power of animism, which modernism in general wants to transcend, and a revelatory look at the range of traditional and mechanically innovative toys of the mid-1900s. "The toy," he writes, "is the child's earliest initiation into art." Rilke's analysis of Lotte Pritzel's waxen art dolls emphasizes the fact that such diminutive figures are bearers of intense, sophisticated, and sometimes violent thoughts and feelings for adults as well as children. Kafka's 1919 depiction of "Odradek," a kind of spool-like wooden toy that mysteriously moves all over the narrator's house, is a fine example of the Prague writer's adroit ability to combine domestic comfort with terror. Gross focuses on Odradek in *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*, and it is great to see the two texts in tandem. Bruno Schulz's 1934 story "Tailors' Dummies," which Gross excerpts here, is entertainingly insane—the narrator's father spins out wild lectures about the power of objects to an audience of seamstresses, who more than effectively counter that power with a simple revelation of a seductive female foot "tightly covered in black silk." Equally wild is "The Marionette Theater" by the late Israeli poet and playwright Dennis Silk, who for some reason is just now beginning to be recognized as a powerful theorist and creator of object (or "thing," as Silk would prefer) performance. Countering the infectious and happy craziness of Schulz and Silk is Marina Warner's 2006 essay on wax figures, from medieval Christian saints' effigies to anatomical models, Madame Tussaud's museum figures, and contemporary sculptures by Cornelia Parker and Ron Mueck. Warner approaches these subjects from the perspective of art criticism, which, again, does not offer insight into the nature of objects in motion. But, like all of the essays in Gross's pocket-sized collection, Warner's writing gives great insights into the nature of these objects we play with.

Reviews by John Bell

BEAUTY IS EMBARRASSING

A new documentary explores the career of Wayne White. Many puppeteers will know White's work as the creator and puppeteer of many iconic figures on the incomparable 1980s TV phenomenon, *Peewee's Playhouse*, notably Randy and Dirty Dog. "Puppeteer," though, does not begin to adequately describe White's career. Even puppeteers may not know that for all four season's of *Beakman's World* he was a one-man animation department—an impossible task at which he nonetheless triumphed, though at a cost: "My wife took to calling me "the thing in the basement." Using an old Commodore computer, he was cranking out animation at an amazing rate: "But," he chuckled in our phone interview, "it was going out on national TV."

Beauty is Embarrassing does a first-rate job of presenting Wayne White as a man for whom there is no separation between art and life. Which is not to say his life is one-dimensional—strong family ties and deep friendships are at the core of his being—but everyone in White's life all seem part and parcel of his creative vortex. His wife, Mimi Pond, is a comic book artist, both of his kids are embarking on careers in visual arts, and his friends are collaborators and/or fans.

One can't but be impressed with the breadth of White's artistic output. Beyond the TV puppetry and animation, he draws and paints, designs sets, creates kinetic sculpture, music videos (including the iconic Smashing Pumpkins "Tonight, Tonight!" steampunk masterpiece), large-scale art installations and plays banjo. The documentary moves from clips of White's various projects, to intimate moments with the artist in his home studio in LA and his childhood home in Tennessee, to moments from White's recent solo performance—a sort of multi-media lecture-cum -stand-up routine entitled (what else): *Beauty is Embarrassing*.

Beyond the sheer amount, variety and quality of White's art, though, is his attitude and the seemingly bottomless well of good humor and love that pervades his work and life. His recent paintings, for instance, are basically "found artworks"—thrift shop finds—over which he has painted profoundly ironic words or phrases. "And if you don't like it, *fuck you*!" he shouts to the universe, but always with such joy that it elicits laughter and cheers from his audiences. While these paintings were at first dismissed by the establishment ("Entertainment is a dirty word in the art world," says White), critics began to understand the depth of White as both a technician and social critic. Before long, he was getting major one-man shows.

There is also a lot here for puppeteers to love. When he first started to build for *Peewee's Playhouse*, he had little experience with puppets: "Sure I can make puppets," he assured the producers. He told me that the original Randy was carved out of a solid block of pine. "It weighed about fifteen pounds. Dirty Dog was built on an oven mitt." The first season was shot in a NYC loft—completely inadequate for TV production. After that, the show was moved to LA and had a real budget and crew. "Randy got a lot lighter, was cast in polymer and had an eye mechanism." There is some great backstage footage from *Peewee's Playhouse*. While the show was being taped, White and the two other puppeteers spent the long hours when they weren't needed on the set in their own room, where they'd built their own puppet booth out of cardboard and junk and were constantly improvising puppet shows. They called it the Flock Box Theatre. When *Peewee's* shut down after season 4, they hauled it up to the roof of the studio and tossed it off in a grand final gesture. For all the fantastic projects chronicled in *Beauty is Embarrassing*, those sessions of Flock Box are the ones I'd most like to see.

A lot of Wayne White's work can be found on the internet. In addition to *Peewee, Beakman's World*, and the Smashing Pumpkins video, you can find a local children's show called *Mrs. Cabobble's Caboose*, an installation called Big Lick Boom, and a time lapse video of the construction of "Big Lectric Fan."

A Google search will undoubtedly turn up more. Above all, check out the trailer for *Beauty is Embarrassing*. It will be a welcome addition to any artist's video library, and you can stream or download the film for under ten bucks!

www.beautyisembarrassing.com/the-file/wayne-white/

review by Andrew Periale


"A future perennial favorite on the order of Crumb."
- Austin Chronicle
"A laugh out loud portrait of the wild & wacky Wayne White."
- Indiewire
"Zippy, delightful."
- Hollywood Reporter
"Surreal and very funny."
- Wired Magazine
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Photo: Stefan Hagen

The Peculiar Extremeties of Perseus
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Photo: Courtesy of the Artist

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Emily DeCola
Mapping Up

Andy Gaukel
Schweinehund

Kyle Loven
Mr. Moon

Jeanine Padgett & James Sheehan
Soul of Wood

Skysaver Productions
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The Head

Christopher Williams
Wolf-in-Skins

Photo: Lauren Jost

Wink
Spellbound Theatre

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Liz Joyce & A Couple of Puppets
The Doubtful Sprout & the Secret World of Soil

Madcap Puppet Theatre
Amahl and the Night Visitors

Mettawee River Theater Company
Taliesin

Spellbound Theatre
Wink

Photo: Courtesy of the Artist

Taliesin
Mettawee River Theater Company

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The Old Alpha Male puppet from *Ignorance*, Old Trout Puppet Woshop

(see article, page 10)