FALL and WINTER 2013 Issue #34

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the puppet in contemporary theatre, film & media

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On the COVER:

Jon Ludwig (see page 32)
photo:
Center for Puppetry Arts,
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When I was a theater student, back in the early seventies, I took a directing class. It was a required course, but I'd been looking forward to it as a sort of initiation into a secret world. That is, acting was second nature to me—a calling. Directing, though, was still opaque; how did one captain the ship of a great theatrical enterprise, with its diverse midshipmen, technicians, designs and moving parts through the storms (and occasional mutinies) of rehearsal, safely into the port of opening night, its cheering throngs gathered on the docks? This was uncharted territory with plenty of hazards (extended nautical metaphors, for instance), and I was eager to learn. There were four professors in our modest, though busy, theater department. Each of them directed a play during the year, but Dr. Colbath always taught directing. He was a dashing man—had been at RADA with Brando and had published plays. He also smoked, but in a cool, James Dean way (if Dean had survived and grown old and taught at a University). Whether by dumb luck or design, Dr. C. assigned me Peter Schumann as the topic of my research paper. Perhaps the love of puppets was already visible in my aura. I'd grown up with Howdy Doody, Lambchop, Snarky Parker and others of their ilk, but did not yet know the work of Bread and Puppet, even though they were then actively protesting US involvement in Vietnam. I was dumbstruck at the notion that puppets could do serious (or farcical) theater for adults. When I was subsequently assigned the first three mystery plays in the Wakefield Cycle (*The Creation of the World*, *The Garden of Eden* and *Adam and Eve's Expulsion*) as my directing assignment, I knew I had the perfect vehicle with which to launch my puppetry career.

This was U. Maine, Orono, and back then the winters were Arctic. The school shut down for several months that year to save money (the fuel Crisis of '73) which gave me enough time—I thought—to build a mess of giant, Bread and Puppet-type figures. My inexperience was evident in all aspects of the show. Into the chicken-wire frame of God's enormous head, I wove a wig from long strips I'd cut from rolls of pink, fiberglass insulation, thoughtfully left in the garage by our landlord in the ludicrous hope that we might use it to insulate the house. The pink hair and beard were spectacular, if itchy, and added no more than twenty pounds to the overall weight of the figure, so it was worth all

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Terrie Ilaria, *(Thank you, Lillian Meier)*
STEINWAY STUDIO

the time and effort. Directing the show was a real adventure. First off, the puppets weren't done until opening night—I mean, I was tying arms to bodies as the audience was filing into the auditorium. Fortunately, I'd pre-recorded the dialog, but rehearsals consisted of actors walking around holding ski poles and various lengths of bamboo, pretending to manipulate…something. I was lucky that my cast members were housemates and other theater students, battle-hardened by years of rehearsing six or seven shows simultaneously.

Eventually, the lights came up and I stood at the back of the audience, watching my giant puppets in action for the first time. When God moved his arm from stage right to stage left in one sweeping gesture, the scales, as they say, fell from my eyes. Adam and Eve, my masked dancers, were dwarfed by the presence of the Almighty (and what chance did they have against the serpent—twenty-five feet of writhing, devious duplicity, convincingly inhabited by two housemates in what I later learned was an "altered state").

In that moment, I realized both the power of the puppet and my shortcomings as a director. Forty years later, I continue to be impressed by the former and to battle with the latter, while Peter Schumann celebrates fifty years as director of Bread and Puppet Theater [John Bell, page 16]. He is still strong, and still "speaks truth to power."

Also in this issue, Alissa Mello profiles the long collaboration between Mary Underwood and Philippe Genty [page 4]. We have two articles about Iranian directors, both by Iranian writers [Mirsajadi, page 28, and Mirfindireski, page 36]. Together, they give us a fascinating look at what it means to be a director in a challenging political landscape. Irina Niculescu [page 24] and Richard Bradshaw [page 8] reflect on their careers as directors. We also have interviews with Dadi Padumjee and Peter J. Wilson, and articles on Jon Ludwig, Burr Tilstrum and Oriza Hirata.

LE METTEUR EN SCÈNE, PERRY ALLEY THEATRE

Bonnie continues to work here as art director, and gives me notes whenever I forget my blocking. Many thanks to our wonderful crew of John Bell, Dassia Posner, our peer reviewers and our dedicated staff and board of directors.

–Andrew Periale

Be sure to check out the additional material on our website:

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Setting the Record Straight

We'd like to correct some information that appeared in our last issue in Amber and Zeb West's conversation:

The photo on the bottom of page 19 in Issue #33 was taken by Jenn Villanueva. The corrected caption for this photo is: Puppeteer/designer Kirsten Kammermeyer in *Fable of the Flying Fox* at Alphabet Arts' 2nd Annual Puppets & Poets Festival in NYC in 2012. The photos of Puppets Got Talent on page 20 were taken by Nick Foster.

PI #33 contributor Amber West's study of the 18th-century actor/puppeteer Charlotte Charke (not Charka) will be published in *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*, forthcoming in 2014.

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Puppetry International's peer-reviewed articles explore how the puppet functions dramaturgically, investigate larger philosophical questions provoked by puppets and performing objects, and trace the integral place of puppetry in world performance culture. We publish work by both emerging and established scholars who are pioneering new discoveries based on archival, field, or practice-based research.

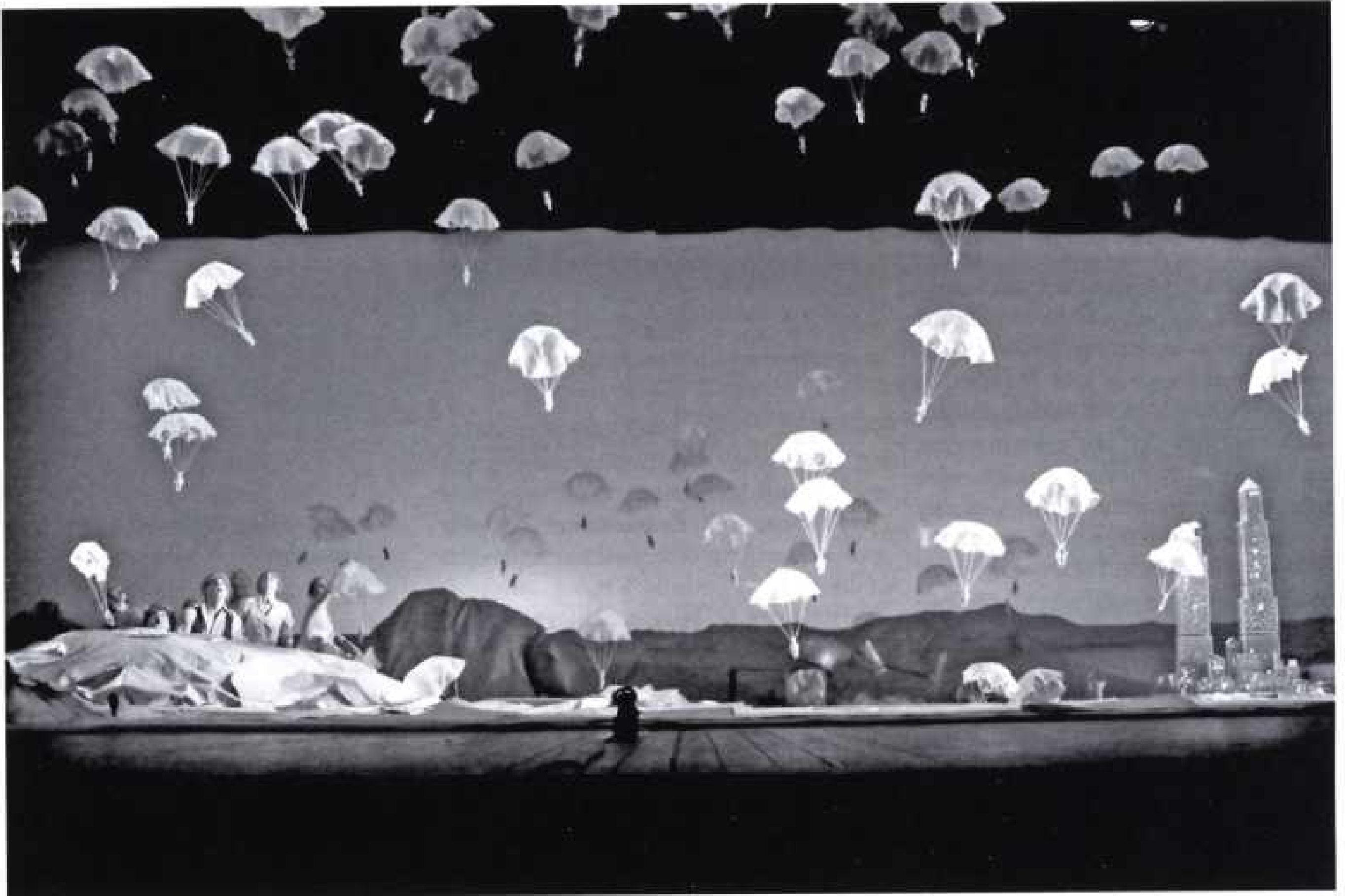
This issue of *Puppetry International* features two peer-reviewed articles that examine the intersections between puppetry and directing: Pat King analyzes the inspirations, aesthetic, and influence of Burr Tillstrom, while Alissa Mello investigates the collaboration between puppeteer Philippe Genty and choreographer Mary Underwood. Both authors' analyses of how directors function in puppet theatre also provide insight into how we might think about the director in the theatre more broadly writ.

–Dassia N. Posner

Compagnie Philippe Genty:

ON DIRECTING AND COLLABORATION

by Alissa Mello



VOYAGEURS IMMOBILES, IN ENGLISH, *STILL TRAVELLER*.

Compagnie Philippe Genty, founded in 1968, is widely considered one of the foremost contemporary European theatre companies. Founded by director Philippe Genty and choreographer Mary Underwood, their work integrates live human and puppet performers with acting, dance, clown, special effects, magic, and raw materials using a self-styled surrealist sensibility to create non-linear dreamscapes. By surrealist, Genty and Underwood mean startling images, dreams as source material, and automatic writing, each of which is aimed to visually disarm audience participants and to tap into their subconscious. Their work is categorized variously as visual, interdisciplinary and, in some cases, dance theater, but as Joseph Seelig writes, "Genty imposed puppetry as a major, multidisciplinary art on the general public. Perhaps for the first time audiences watching a Genty show stopped thinking about the puppets, dumped preconceptions and just marvelled at the images unfolding in front of their eyes" (Seelig 41). Though Genty typically receives the greatest attention, it is Genty's directing specifically in combination with Underwood's choreography that brings the live performer forward in collaboration and co-presence with puppets and raw materials. This co-presence, and the company's exploration of visual stage language that uses self-styled surrealist techniques from visual art, defines their work.

A Brief History

Genty's first puppetry project was a documentary film, *Blue Like an Orange*, screened in Paris in 1967. This UNESCO-funded film was based on footage from *L'Expédition Alexandre*, a four-year world tour to forty-seven countries, during which Genty and a collaborator[1] performed with a string marionette named Alexandre and filmed local puppet performances. As Underwood recalls, that same year she discovered "Philippe Genty totally tangled up trying to coordinate some movements" for *The Ostrich Ballet* (1968), a whimsical, humorous ballet for three bright orange ostriches, and that she "provide[d] a few suggestions" (Underwood 2009). As Seelig writes: It "became so successful as a franchised cabaret act that it paid for the company's early development and for the purchase of a large studio space in the centre of Paris" (Seelig 41). This ballet became a featured scene in two evening-length productions: *Facéties* (1974-1979), which also included Genty's *Le Pierot* and *Rond Comme un Cube* (1980-1985). The company also developed two children's television shows: *Les Onyx* (1971-1972), *Gertrude & Barnabé* (1975) and an object theatre piece, *Sigmund Follies* (1983-1984). Throughout this period in the company's work, Underwood puppeteered and provided choreography, which Genty transposed to the puppets (Underwood 2010).

The financial stability that *The Ostrich Ballet* and evening-length productions provided allowed Genty and Underwood to pursue a new phase in their creative research and practice and to evolve Underwood's role. Their first experimentation began during a two-year exploration (1973 - 1974) with fifteen other artists of various approaches to making theater. Following this, the company integrated Underwood's focus on and use of the live body among puppets, objects, and raw materials, and their overt use of surrealist[2] techniques, such as automatic writing and self dream analysis, as a source of visual production images.

The results of these experiments are palpable in *Désirs Parade* (1986), as is apparent in two scenes from the show:

> A small brown package is in a pool of light. A nude woman appears, circles it, and enters the light slowly. She unties the package, which grows into a mound of craft paper that engulfs her. The woman disappears; the paper reappears again as a small package.
>
> A live, human man enters and discovers the paper package. As he opens it, small bits of plastic emerge, leading to a gigantic pile. Buried in and partially made from the plastic and craft paper is a three-quarter-scale female puppet. The puppet performs with four manipulators and undergoes a number of material and physical transformations.

Structurally reminiscent of their cabaret-style family entertainments, most if not all of the elements that came to define the company's work are present here, including: use of illusion (especially appearances and disappearances of objects and bodies facilitated by lighting and trap doors in the stage floor), surrealist imagery to interrupt audience expectations, raw materials (particularly craft paper and plastic), juxtaposition of realistic and pop-cultural references, objects and performers at different scales, masks with bodies made from fabric, inflated, billowy landscapes, mirroring and multiplication of images, and, most significantly, the co-presence of live human performers with puppets, objects, and raw materials. During this creative period, according to Andrew Periale, Genty likened himself to the skipper of a ship, adding, "I make decisions, but everyone else is collaborating." Although Genty's metaphor is apt to a certain extent, it does not adequately account for the importance of his collaboration with Underwood, which radically shifted the aesthetic of the company's work beginning with *Désirs Parade*. The increasing emphasis on the live actor's role within the narrative is also apparent in their more recent productions *Fin des Terres* (2005), *Boliloc* (2008/2009), and *Voyageurs Immobiles* (1995/2010).[3] As their productions have evolved, so have their creative development processes, manner of direction, and use of workshops and training techniques as integral aspects of creating productions.

Tapping the Audience's Unconscious– How to "See" Differently

While specific images and vocabularies change from one production to the next, [4] according to Genty, the goal of their work is to explore visual language, "a language where the 'scene' is the place of the unconscious, a language that shows the conflict of man against himself" (Genty 2010). This conflict may be his, Underwood's, the performer's, or the spectator's. As Genty explains: "All the images have...doubled or tripled significations, layers of reading. In other words, the spectator has a possibility to have a sort of interactive relation to the image that he sees and from one spectator to another we would have a different interpretation" (Lucas). To accomplish these multiple levels of reading, Genty and Underwood explicitly use what they refer to as startling and surrealistic imagery, magic, and illusion to subvert notions of the normal and to shock the audience participant into a different way of seeing, thus beginning a journey into a personal interpretation of what is unfolding on stage. This imagery is unexpected or unlikely to be seen in one's everyday experience: *Stowaways* features a singing kangaroo on skis, while in *Ligne Fuit* a large, inflated woman eats the human actors' heads.

In the manner of the surrealists, Genty and Underwood develop these images from personal dream analysis and their adaptation of automatic writing in a game they developed call ping-pong, during which two or more people quickly exchange images without editing

PHOTOS: PASCALE FRANÇOIS, COURTESY OF COMPAGNIE PHILIPPE GENTY.

Ne m'oublie pas, in English, *Forget-me-not*. Performer: Maja Bekken.

or critiquing their responses. During their 2009 workshop, Genty noted that these exchanges can either be verbal description or can be documented as drawings but, like automatic writing, the key is speed with no preconceptions (Hopkins 67). Like the surrealists, they seek to create an "experientially transforming poetics/aesthetics" (ibid) and to create a theatrical experience that allows the audience to "see" differently.

Production Development Method

Compagnie Philippe Genty's production development process is roughly divided into three phases– storyboarding (a relatively private process), rehearsal collaboration with performers, and synthesis of final elements. These phases are not always clearly segregated and may overlap and influence each other throughout a production process. Within this structure, Genty and Underwood have developed a four-phase "process of creation" (Genty 2010) that they use iteratively, especially during the rehearsal phase. These four phases are: dispersion/ description (which overlaps with storyboard development), croisement/ crossing, réécriture/rewriting, and évaluation/evaluation. Since 1997, workshops during which Genty and Underwood identify and train cast members have become an important influence on their development processes.

According to Genty (2010), their work begins with the development of a storyboard that includes writing and defining the visual landscape. Most often storyboards are based on Genty's dreams but also sometimes include Underwood's. The initial, detailed storyboard includes most if not all of the types of puppets, objects, and raw materials that will be explored during rehearsals, as well as the overall production concept. However, as Scott Koehler, cast member in *Ligne Fuit* and *Boliloc*, stated during my interview with him, Genty does not typically share a production storyboard with performers (although because of a shortened rehearsal period, the cast of *Boliloc* insisted and Genty agreed). Rather, as Underwood put it, they prefer to go into rehearsal with an "open door" (Interview, 2009), meaning that, although the storyboard defines the visual elements, as director and choreographer they are interested in what happens in the rehearsal room. During rehearsals, collaboration with the performers using structured improvisation is key to developing both performer-generated movement and text as well as specific interaction(s) between performers, puppets, objects, and raw materials. This rehearsal material, which influences the final version of the show, is used to construct the action, language, and movement details.

Although the rehearsal phase is a collaborative process between Genty, Underwood and the performers, this process begins during workshops that are used to cast and train performers before rehearsals begin. Often the actors have a mix of experience and backgrounds such as acting, dance, clown, and puppetry. During intensive workshops, potential performers are trained in Genty and Underwood's specific techniques for puppet manipulation, and work with raw materials, actor/dancer performance and skill building, movement improvisation, and their project development methodology. These workshops and later rehearsal improvisations use performer memories as raw material to create text and movement that will support visual elements developed by Genty. In other words, although Genty and Underwood's dreams are the premise for the visual imagery, the performer's memories—physical, textual, and emotional—are the foundation for building movement and text vocabularies from which Genty and Underwood select elements. Though Genty and Underwood are the decision-making director-auteurs, the performer-generated material directly influences their decisions. For example, despite being a re-staging of their 1995 show, Genty stated during a 2009 workshop at Institut International de la Marionnette (in which I participated) that the current *Voyageur Immobile* would largely follow their normal development process: The production would still require a development period of three months to account for the entirely new cast, which would have different skill sets, text, and movement abilities (Genty 2009).

Compagnie Philippe Genty is largely associated with Genty himself, but its aesthetics and content are the result of a deep collaboration between Genty, with his particular interest in puppets and raw materials, and Underwood, with her exploration of the live human body on stage. Together, Genty and Underwood have developed new methods of working that have radically shifted our notions of puppet theater and the relationships among the live body, puppets, and raw materials.

Alissa Mello is a director, performer, writer and teacher. She is a founding member of Inkfish (www.inkfishart.com), is working on her doctoral thesis on contemporary puppet theater practice at Royal Holloway, University of London, and has taught at Royal Holloway and Central School of Speech and Drama.

Endnotes

[1] Genty began the tour with Serge George, who was replaced in Japan by Michiko Tagawa and then by Yves Brunier in Panama (Genty 1967).

[2] Genty was familiar with Surrealism before his explicit use of its techniques. The name of his 1967 documentary film is likely a reference to the Paul Éluard poem, "The World is Blue as an Orange."

[3] In addition to restaging *Voyageurs*, Genty directed an object theater piece, *La Pelle du Large*, in 2011. This project, initiated during the 2009 workshop that I participated in, is based on the story of Ulysses. It is performed by Hernan Bonet, Antoine Malfettes, and Yoanelle Stratman.

[4] Specific images recur in their work, including a face within a field of raw material, performers dressed in trench coats and hats, expanses of fabric that create a billowing landscape for live human and puppet performers, live humans transforming into material objects such as craft paper forms or silhouette cut-outs, balloons that fill the entire stage, and tiny houses that erupt in flame.

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A Surprising Approach to Directing Puppet Theatre

by Richard Bradshaw

ALL IMAGES FROM *SMILES AWAY*

Usually, a director begins rehearsals with a pretty good idea of what the final show will be like. But if instead the director and the puppeteers start working on a show with only the germ of an idea, they may be embarking on a creative journey with some surprising discoveries that will also delight their audiences.

In the eight years from 1976 through1983, I was the artistic director of the Marionette Theatre of Australia (M.T.A.), a government-funded company that was created in 1965, under the leadership of Peter Scriven, initially to tour large-scale marionette shows throughout Australia and in Southeast Asia. Peter was a skillful and experienced puppeteer with an entrepreneurial flair and had taken Australia by storm with his show *The Tintookies* which had opened in a large theatre in Sydney in 1956. He had been fortunate in enlisting the aid of Igor Hychka (originally spelt "Hyczka") who had worked for the famous Italian marionette company of Vittoria Podrecca in the Argentine after World War II. For years afterwards, if you mentioned "puppets" to Australians, the *Tintookies* came first to mind, not *Punch and Judy*.

The Tintookies, and the following marionette shows directed by Peter, were performed using a large fit-up and marionettes with very long strings worked from an overhead bridge. The dialogue and orchestral music was pre-recorded on tape by leading artists. Peter experimented with large rod-puppets and a live mime-artist for *Tintookies 2000* which toured to EXPO '70 Osaka, but his final show for the Marionette Theatre of Australia was a remake of *The Tintookies* which opened in late 1974 and toured in Asia in early 1976. By then Peter himself was living in Asia and I had become artistic director of the company.

The cost of touring such a large show had become prohibitive and I was not alone in thinking this kind of show was a bit dated. I decided to extend the company's work to embrace other forms of puppetry and where possible I wanted voices to be live. We experimented with various forms: table-top puppets, black-theatre, rod-puppets and even shadow-puppets. Sometimes I felt obliged to use recorded dialogue to get the quality of sound I wanted. At other times, to get the quality of live voices needed, I auditioned for actors who exhibited an understanding of what was needed to work puppets.

A big problem was that M.T.A. productions were created along lines similar to those followed by regular drama companies. A script would be written, designers chosen, puppets made and finally the puppeteers would assemble for a 4 to 6 week

rehearsal period. Although there was room for some creativity in the rehearsal period the final show was pretty much what was envisioned by the director and designer after reading the script. And there's the problem. Is that vision of the script more exciting than anyone else's? Clearly you hoped it would be or you wouldn't go ahead with the show. But are there better ways of creating puppet shows?

Some performing companies, especially dance companies, do not start with a script or detailed plan for a show. The creation period lasts months, and while there has to be an initial concept, the show develops as the company explores possibilities. I liken this approach to that of a scientist who starts investigating a problem in the hope that the he/she will stumble on something quite new on the way. Some great scientific discoveries are called "accidental," but they would never have happened if the right person had not been investigating something! Similarly with puppet theatre it seems a good idea to allow for fortuitous "accidents" in the creative process. The hope is that, if we can be surprised and delighted by what we discover, the audiences will respond similarly.

When the M.T.A. applied for its annual funding for 1981, I had the good fortune to be working alongside a brilliant young ... and ambitious ... administrator, Stuart Thompson. (He left soon after to work in the U.S. and is now a leading Broadway producer.) Stuart found that we could apply for special funding to engage specialist tutors in voice, movement, etc. to develop the skills of our puppeteers. I decided to combine the work with these tutors with the development of a show, but we had to choose a starting point.

In the 1970s, there was a new wave of Australian theatre. In a deliberate effort to break free from imported theatre new companies worked to develop a very Australian flavor in theatre, in the words of one writer, "extrovert, athletic, rough and impudent." In the local slang it was very "ocker." I wanted our puppet shows to have some of this "ocker" flavor.

Earlier we had worked on a small series for television called *The King of Bungawallop* using large puppets whose hands were the gloved-hands of the puppeteers. It had been inspired by the Hutt River Province situated in Western Australia about 350 miles north of Perth. That supposedly independent territory was created in 1970 by a wheat-farmer named Leonard Casley. He is now known as Prince Leonard of the Principality of Hutt and members of his family have corresponding titles. (In our TVseries, the uncle in the family had the role of Archbishop and wore a miter made from a corn-flakes packet.) Although it has doubtful legal status, the principality issues its own coins and stamps. (Web-site: www.hutt-river-province.com)

I decided to create a stage show around a similar theme. We had four puppeteers and our Royal Family comprised King Roy, Queen Madge and their Princess daughter. Their Kingdom would be a sheep "station" somewhere in the Outback. We began without a story-line and had discussions with the puppeteers (and anyone else!) to play with ideas. Meanwhile, voices and movements for the characters were explored with the tutors.

The show was to open for a school holiday season in the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House. This spectacular building's name is a bit of a misnomer, especially since the Opera Theatre is the smaller of the two main theatres and the larger space, originally designated for opera, is the Concert Hall. The building has other theatre spaces under the Concert Hall including the Drama Theatre which seats about 500 and has a relatively low, wide proscenium opening. We had used it for other M.T.A. shows and our puppets, even quite large rod-puppets, often looked quite small within their own puppet-stages.

This time we wanted to use the whole stage, including the two small side-stages at either side of the proscenium opening. We didn't want a puppet-stage within a stage, and we didn't want black-theatre. We decided to use puppets a little smaller than life-size, worked by puppeteers from behind. The arms had rods from the elbows,w and the puppets' shoes had extensions at the back into which the puppeteers' feet could easily slip for walking. For the design of the puppets I engaged Patrick Cook,

a political cartoonist we had worked with on another show. His drawings had the kind of rough Australian feel we wanted.

The puppeteers were dressed as farm-workers, and although they spoke for the puppets, we never heard them speak for themselves. A puppet could be worked and spoken for by different puppeteers. The puppets referred to the puppeteers as "yobbos," a derogatory term, and ordered them about. In the final show, Queen Madge was worked and spoken for by each of the four puppeteers at some time, three men and one woman, and remarkably their different voices didn't change the character. The character work with our tutors had helped.

I wanted to have a Diprotodon in the show, a large extinct wombat-like animal. It was to be like a "pantomime horse" with two people inside, but I wanted the people inside to be quite comfortable and standing erect. The body was supported by padded parallel rods resting on their shoulders and the front puppeteer operated the head almost as if it was on a steering wheel. Ross Hill was our brilliant puppet-maker at the time and the construction was wonderfully light. The puppeteers were able to take the Diprotodon on long walks outside in the Opera House's forecourt without tiring. The creature and its little dance became a hit of the show and the source of a doubtful joke. When the Princess fed it an apple that popped out from under the tail, the Queen said: "See what happens when you don't chew your food."

There comes a time in a group creation when a director needs to step in to get rid of loose ends. It's thirty years ago now, so I don't remember the exact process, but I do know that at one point I felt the need to impose a story-line, not a very original one. It became the story of a princess who wouldn't smile. We gave the show the punning title *Smiles Away*. When the audience entered the Drama Theatre, there was a bicycle with a fixed microphone on one of the side stage projections, and a bed with a figure in it on the other. The lights went down and the curtain went up on a dark stage as a spotlight picked out a singing sheep playing a guitar centre-stage. The puppet sheep was sitting on the lap of the puppeteer-guitarist whose own hands became the sheep's "forepaws." The lights then came up on the King and Queen sitting in front of a hut labeled "Bucking-Ram Palace." In the centre of the stage was a wooden outdoor "dunny," i.e. outhouse. King Roy and Queen Madge had joined in the song and the King was first to speak. "The singing was great but the sheep stank." The mood was set!

THE PRIME MINISTER'S WIFE INSPECTING THE DIPROTODON.
(THE P.M. IS STANDING BEHIND LOOKING BEMUSED.)

The Flying Doctor was called to check the health of the unsmiling Princess and he "flew" in using crutches as wings. He diagnosed boredom and recommended some entertainment. One of the yobbos was chosen to do a Punch and Judy show and the "dunny" became the booth. His show quickly deteriorated as Punch threw baby after baby out of the "window" and the "dunny" fell apart exposing the seated yobbo. An emu race was organized with two puppeteers "riding" the emus, their own legs becoming the emus' legs while their fake legs sat on the emus' backs. Perhaps the unsmiling Princess needed a pet? That was when the Diprotodon arrived, only to be chased off in the end by an angry Princess.

In desperation the royal parents decided to offer the Princess's hand (and the rest of her) in marriage to any suitor who could make the Princess smile. This was announced from the pedal radio on one side of the stage and on the other side Willy woke up and decided to be a suitor. Interval.

In the second half, three suitors arrived. The first was a mute Pierrot whose name the King misread as "Pie-Rot." He did a "moving" dance with a butterfly, which the King unfortunately stamped on, mistaking it for a cabbage moth. The second was a little fat clown who started singing *Tea for One*. When the Queen said the words were wrong, he miraculously became two, creating an impossible choice for the Princess. Willy then attempted to amuse the Princess with magic tricks that failed dismally, causing her to laugh. A smile appeared on her face. It wasn't quite the end of the story because the Princess said she wasn't ready for marriage yet and with Willy's help she decided to become a welder. Smiles appeared on the faces of the King and Queen also. The words of the song appeared on a chart lowered from the flies and were picked out by a tight follow-spot as the audience was invited to sing with the puppets, *I Want to Be Happy*.

The show was a great success. The audiences enjoyed it and so did we! After a tour, it had a return season at the Opera House. One Sydney critic wrote: "The best adult show in town at the moment is one for kids." You can find that review and two others by Googling: "Smiles Away," "Marionette Theatre of Australia," Google news.

We used a similar technique for *Aussie Rules*, the opening show at our new theatre on the opposite side of Circular Quay to the Opera House in 1983,

and there would have been more such ventures had I not returned from a tour of Japan with my shadow puppets in early 1984 to find I had been unexpectedly replaced as artistic director!

But my advice to people who want to create a puppet show is to leave as much room as you can to allow the puppet show to grow and surprise even yourself.

Richard Bradshaw is known and loved all over the world, particularly for the humor and insight of his shadow puppetry. He was one of six puppeteers featured in the series: *Jim Henson Presents The World of Puppetry*.

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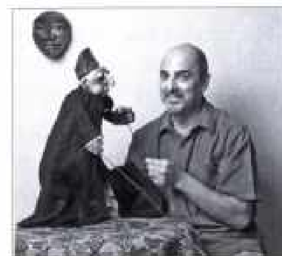
An interview with Dadi Pudumjee

conducted by Karen Smith



Indian puppeteer, puppet theatre director and festival director, Dadi Pudumjee was born in Pune, Maharashtra, India, in 1951. His interest in puppetry began in childhood. Graduating from Wadia College, Pune University (BA, 1971), he studied Visual Communication at the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad, Gujarat (1971-1975) and trained in puppetry under Meher Contractor at the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts. Performing with Mrs. Contractor's company in Charleville-Mézières, France, for a 1972 festival, he saw the diversity of the discipline and resolved on a career in puppetry.

Dadi, what did you learn from Meher Contractor? How has she influenced your life as a puppeteer and director?

Dadi: I first met Meher Contractor in 1971 in the small, first floor attic of the Darpana Academy puppet studio while I was studying in Ahmedabad at NID. She was the first one who introduced me to the world of traditional Indian puppets as well as to the creative and educational uses of puppet theatre. Being associated with the Darpana puppet group was an eye opener for me. And, besides Meher being an all round guru, she was also a great cook, so Sunday lunches were always at her home in Shaibang. Performing a Ramayana production of Meher's, with Andhra shadow puppets, we travelled through Europe: Italy, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, etc.

What specifically impressed you about the shows you saw at the 1972 Charleville-Mézières festival?

Dadi: For any puppeteer, a first time visit to the Charleville-Mézières international puppet festival is an eye opener. The sheer energy, spectacle, madness/frenzy and performances from around the world is unimaginable! The year 1972 was also a UNIMA congress in Charleville. At that time Jacques Félix was the general secretary of UNIMA, and meeting him and his group, Petit Comédiens de Chiffon… and André Tahon, Philippe Genty and Mary Underwood, puppeteers and artists from many countries left an unforgettable impression on me…

How did this experience influence your own career in puppetry over the following years?

Dadi: It opened up the world of puppetry - from objects, to epic, musical, cabaret, to puppet theatre for adults. We performed the shadow show, *Satyavan Savitri*, in the main theatre at the festival, based on the version of Shri Aurobindo.

What lasting influences has the experience of working at the Marionette Theatre Institute in Stockholm under Michael Meschke had on your own work as a director?

Dadi: I was a guest student at the Institute, which was located at the Fine Arts school building. During my first few months there I was on a UNIMA scholarship, and then it was extended by the Swedish Institute. At the Institute, under the guidance of Michael Meschke and many other teachers, I was introduced to various techniques and materials to build puppets, marionettes, glove puppets, shadow figures, bunraku techniques of manipulation, mime (especially the Decroux method of corporeal mime), etc.

Of course, also instructive and influential was seeing shows at the Marionette Theatre for children and the adult shows created by Meschke, such as *The Life and Death of Murrieta*; taking part in the building of puppets for *Antigone* in the bunraku technique… Seeing great theatre and puppet productions at the Stads theatre and Dramaten was a dream come true, leaving a lasting impression. Perhaps the high point for me was when the Bunraku theatre performed at Riks theatre, which was perhaps the first time the company performed outside Japan, and then Semonske Yoshida staying back in Stockholm, which allowed me to take workshops from him in the manipulation techniques in preparation for the *Antigone* performance, something they, i.e. the Japanese, had perhaps never done before for foreigners.

What I learnt in those few days from the master Yoshida still remains with me. I treasure the fan he used to whack us with… he gave it to me at the end… Years later he visited Delhi and we met again. He is one of our greatest Masters.

How has Bunraku influenced your own work?

Dadi: The use of visible puppeteers in most of my productions came from this meeting (as well as from Meschke's adult productions), and also the process of synergising actors, puppets and puppeteers…

Returning to India in 1980, Dadi Pudumjee was founding artistic director of India's first modern puppet repertory theatre, the Sutradhar Puppet Theatre (later Shri Ram Centre Puppet Repertory) based in New Delhi. The group combined traditional and modern artists, including Rajasthani *kathputli* puppeteers and *bhopa* story singers, along with university-educated designers and performing artists. From 1980 to 1986, the group, with Pudumjee as the principal director, designer and also puppeteer, established puppetry as a dynamic theatrical art for both children and adults.

What was your "vision" as a director of India's first modern puppet theatre repertory, Sutradhar/Shri Ram Centre Puppet Repertory?

Dadi: The offer came just the night I was preparing to leave India to be a guest director at Puppen Theatre in Berlin, GDR, and after that, guest director for one year at Vär Theatre in Stockholm. As I had signed contracts for the year 1979, the Shri Ram Centre waited for me to return. This was an exciting period to have a studio, a place to perform each weekend in the basement theatre and a fixed group of talented persons to work with.

We created new interpretations of folk tales, improvised stories and epics in a new way, using puppets, actors, dance, etc., etc. Each performance was very different from the one before... and in the process we created a new vocabulary for puppetry in India.

Was there an intended audience for the Repertory's productions?

Dadi: Each of the shows were for both adults and children as in India children do not come alone to a show, but always with parents or elders, unless they come as part of a school program. And so some of our productions were more for children, while some were more for adults.

Did you consciously want to work with traditional puppeteers?

Dadi: Yes. The traditional puppeteers involved with the Shri Ram Centre Puppet Repertory were from Shadipur Depot (the "tent city" on the outskirts of New Delhi where many Rajasthani traditional performers had settled since the 1960s). The late Malu Ram's sons, Jagdish Bhatt and Puran Bhatt, immensely talented artists, became principal performers and puppet builders of the Repertory.

It was also an eye opener for them to see the new materials, different styles of making puppets and the various puppetry techniques that were employed at the Repertory over the years, as these were quite different from their traditional carved kathputli marionettes... Puran says it was working here in the 1980s that he came back to puppet theatre, and today Puran is a respected artist in his own right, both in traditional and modern puppetry.

What are the important lessons you took from the six years of directing Sutradhar/Shri Ram Centre Repertory?

Dadi: Looking back, I would say I learnt to be patient, to value the opinions and ways of various people coming from very different backgrounds, traditional, urban, college-educated. Respecting the traditional artist above all... not always breaking the wall but starting by making a small dent/hole/way... to change or at least try to change things...

In 1986, Dadi Pudumjee established Ishara Puppet Theatre (now Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust) and created many productions often combining dance-movement, puppetry, object theatre, projections and music.

Dadi, could you briefly describe the focus of Ishara?

Dadi: The name of the company, Ishara, means "a gesture"; it suggests "pointing a way" or a face gesture, like a wink, a come hither. The name of the company was actually suggested by Ms. Gitanjali Shree, a famous Hindi author/writer, in 1986 while on a collective workshop in Kasauli, directed by Anuradha Kapoor.

Ishara's aims were essentially to create and approach stories, poems, visual images through puppetry as a means, and not just an end in itself, as Meschke said... synergizing dancers, music, narration, etc. The dance aspect came in more after a collaboration with modern Indian dancer, Astad Deboo, on a piece called *Friends*, and then *Thanatomorphia*, about the many faces of death. Ishara plays with scale: small puppets to giant figures and human beings in between.

Later, all this became more elaborate with *Transposition*, a show with three talented dancers

TRANSPOSITION, BASED ON A BIKRAM BETAL STORY AND THOMAS MANN'S TRANSPOSED HEADS

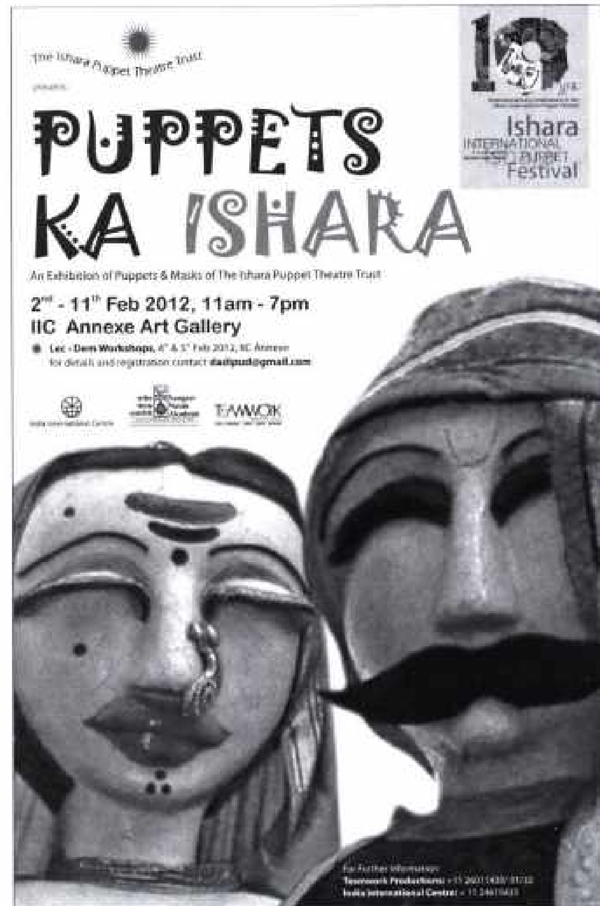
and puppeteers and archetypal puppets. The puppeteers manipulated the puppets; the dancers were separate as dancers; sometimes it was only puppets; at other times puppet and dancer. The show opened the puppet festival at La Mama in New York in 2004.

Images become more powerful seen in an objective way using the theatre of objects and puppets, masks combined with actors and dance/movement.

Our techniques are simple. I prefer that the puppeteer imbues emotion into the figures. The possibility of putting in the emotions, transferring emotions and making the puppet alive, came from bunraku master, Yoshida.

Could you choose one or more of these shows that you created and directed which are especially important to you, and talk about why they are so special?

Dadi: I think *Images of Truth, Satya ke Pratirup* in Hindi, which was commissioned by IGNCA [Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts]. It was a challenge to do a non-verbal presentation to world music. The challenge was to create a story around Gandhi's life and legacy, and we did this using flashbacks and flash-forwards. Today, due to the theme of the show and also its presentation, the production is still popular. We performed *Images of Truth* at the Eisenhower Theater at the Kennedy Center two years ago to a full house as part of the amazing India Festival.



How important is music and movement in your productions? Could you discuss, with examples?

Dadi: A lot. It began with the show *Allegory*. I listen to a lot of music—Indian, Western, Asian... and am influenced by it... and also the work with the modern dancer/choreographer, Astad [Deboo]. After *Allegory* came *Journeys* and *Transposition*. I believe that at times I prefer to use music as my text rather then words, but I do see now a gap and have started working again with language. However, I prefer a visual theatre.

Could you briefly talk about the evolution of your work as a theatre director since you established Ishara?

Dadi: One keeps looking for new ways, but ends up reinterpreting. Yes. But the base of actors, dancers and the recognition has grown...

Training younger, new puppeteers also came about... Ishara has become a style... I think you see that you can do what you have decided to become ... against all odds that may surface—even if you go bald doing so—it's worth the effort in the long run.

In 1984, when I was with the Sutradhar [Shri Ram Centre] puppet troupe we attended the 14th UNIMA congress and festival in Dresden (then GDR). We presented *Dhola Maru* (a production based on a Rajasthani heroic/romantic epic about King Dhola and Pricess Maru). This was possibly the first time that a modern Indian puppet presentation was seen at such a large and important puppetry event. All of us in the troupe were overcome with the emotion-charged standing ovation. And for me, to see both my Gurus– Meher Contractor and Michael Meschke come up onto the stage with flowers for us... What a reward that was... .

Karen Smith has been active in puppetry in her native Australia as well as in Indonesia and India, where she worked with Dadi Padumjee. She currently lives in the USA, where she is on the board of UNIMA-USA, and is overseeing the translation of the *World Encyclopedia of Puppetry* into English.

The complete text of Smith's interview with Dadi Pudumjee, including a discussion of his early time in television, his work with street children and impoverished youth, the founding of the important Ishara International Puppet Festival, additional photos and much more can be found on our website:

www.unima-usa.org/publications

Productions designed and directed by Dadi Pudumjee

PHOTOS: ANAY MANN

IMAGES OF TRUTH, BASED ON THE IDEOLOGY OF MAHATMA GANDHI

PERFORMANCE OF *SIMPLE DREAMS*

TRANSPOSITION, BASED ON A BIKRAM BETAL STORY AND THOMAS MANN'S *TRANSPOSED HEADS*, , DESIGNED AND DIRECTED BY DADI PUDUMJEE, MUSIC BY SAWAN DUTTA

Peter Schumann as Director

by John Bell

I started working with Bread & Puppet Theater the summer I graduated from college, in 1973, and then, beginning in 1975 was a member of the company for a decade. In college I had acted in as many theater productions as I could, but quickly saw that the nature of Bread & Puppet performance was quite different in almost every way from actors' theater (much to my liking!). Even more than its difference from actors' theater, I think Peter Schumann's work as a director has its own particular method, which I will try to describe here from my experience performing in different Bread & Puppet shows.

"It Hasn't Been Invented Yet"

In the late 1970s, Bread & Puppet took part in a conference of Latin American theater companies at Connecticut College. Among other directors and companies there, we met Augusto Boal, who was already well known for his Center for the Theater of the Oppressed, but had not as yet codified that approach and taught it as an appropriate method for any political theater context. What struck me later on was that, although thousands of puppeteers have worked as volunteers, interns, and company members with Peter Schumann, he has never laid out a method of making Bread & Puppet-style shows (as Boal did in the with "CTO," and Anne Bogart and others have done with "Viewpoints"). Instead, each time our company approached the creation of a new production, Schumann would typically say "it hasn't been invented yet," meaning that it did not make sense for us to rely on previously proven techniques, but instead attempt to develop the possibilities of the different elements of the show (puppets, our bodies, texts, lighting, sets). There has never been a codification of Bread & Puppet technique into a series of principles and techniques that could be boiled down to a list or instruction manual.

I believe this attempt to redefine technique with each new show was deeply connected to Schumann's work as an active member of the downtown NY performance scene in the early sixties. At Judson Church and other locales, dancers, playwrights, musicians, and visual artists attempted to invent new techniques and new definitions of performance ("happenings" and post-modern dance for example) that defied traditional categories and approaches. In this way, one could say that Schumann's approach to puppetry is the opposite of the classical master/apprentice method by which the precisely developed secrets and details of puppet design, movement, and show construction are carefully handed down to a new generation.

Balancing Collaboration and Directing

The kind of puppet theater Peter Schumann creates as a director is a combination of intense precision defined by Schumann at particular moments, and open, self-invented, and sometimes improvised movement at others. For this combination to succeed, the puppeteers and director need to achieve a mutual sense of appropriate movement and timing, which in our case emerged from years of work together with Schumann, whose particular sense of these and other theatrical elements is specific and clear.

Schumann's Bread & Puppet shows differ from most other forms of puppetry in their variety of elements, performance spaces, and dramaturgical structures. Hand puppets, rod puppets, masks, "big heads," flat cardboard cut-outs, over-life-size and giant puppets are all possible choices for a Bread & Puppet show (the only puppet forms Bread & Puppet has traditionally avoided are string marionettes and, until quite recently, shadow theater). Typically, Schumann will combine different scales of puppets in one show, shifting from giant to life-size to miniature, often in the same scene, for dramatic effect. Given this variety of potential, one could say that the directing process begins long before rehearsals, starting weeks earlier with the choice of objects and other theatrical elements.

When I was a Bread & Puppet company member, our initial meetings about a new production involved Schumann explaining what theme or story he wanted to pursue, and what elements of the production were already in his vision. In my experience, Schumann rarely began with an absolutely clear sense of everything he wanted to do in a show. Instead, the kernel of the production might be a theme, a story, some sketches, an idea about color (black and white? red? blue? multi-colored?), and particular ideas about what kinds of puppets would be involved. At that point, we puppeteers began building puppets with Schumann—who sculpts and paints almost everything for his shows—designing control systems and costumes, and thinking about what kinds of movements, gestures, musical instruments, texts, or other elements might work with the ideas he was going after.

In this way, even before rehearsals began, Schumann's directing process extended into the very non-theatrical work of design, construction, music creation, and dramaturgy.

"Let's See What the Puppets Can Do"

Different, I believe, from classic puppet practices, in which it is clear how a puppet should be operated, a central element of Schumann's process is the moment when new puppets have been built but not yet tried out. The first rehearsals with new puppets (and even older puppets brought back as possibilities for a new show) are always exciting because Schumann's directorial prompt is typically: "Let's see what the puppets can do." In these early rehearsals certain stage elements may already have been chosen—the puppets, the nature of the stage, general ideas of which puppets might interact with each other, and the theme or story to be pursued—but the work of the puppeteers is to discover what might be possible in such given circumstances—what needs to be invented. In our rehearsals we would take turns trying out different puppets, learning what "the puppet wants to do," as the rest of the company watched, noting what gestures or positions seemed to work for a particular figure; and then perhaps copying the movements our colleagues had created. Often Schumann would send us off to work on our own, singly or in small groups, to develop movement sequences that could be incorporated into the show. Schumann's role in such rehearsals was principally that of an "outside eye," who could look at the way we were moving his sculptures, and then choose what seemed to work. As we watched each other's movements, and Schumann noted that one particular gesture was good, while another wasn't, we began to share an aesthetic sense of a Bread & Puppet style.

In the 1970s and 1980s, there was an increasing fashion in theater circles for "collective creation," and an impatience with the top-down authority of the director (especially a white male like Schumann); this clearly connected with post-Vietnam War concerns of the leftist or countercultural circles with which we identified. But unlike the Living Theater, which for a time in the late 1970s experimented with collective creation, Bread & Puppet has always been based on Schumann's directing choices. However, Schumann's directorial mark is already strongly present in the design of the puppets, masks, and sets, and he opens up his process to invite invention within the existing material and visual parameters. In fact, excluding the sculpture and painting elements of new shows, Schumann's directing process depends upon the creative contributions of his colleagues, whom he counts on to invent movements, music, texts, and other aspects of the show.

The process includes individual inventions of design, construction, costume, and movement, but Schumann as director makes choices about which inventions to include during the entire creation process. My experience designing, building, and experimenting with puppets, masks, control systems, rigging, costumes, texts, music, and movement with Bread & Puppet was one of continual consultation with my colleagues and with the director, who would in general have strong opinions about what worked and what didn't, and decided which elements to include accordingly.

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCO'S LEGEND OF THE TRUE CROSS 2013 PHOTO: MASSIMO SCHUSTER

Working with this balance of individual invention and a strong directorial hand, a scene including solo or group movements invented by the performers might arrive at a very specific tableau defined by Schumann, in which each pose and gesture is codified. For example, in Scene 6 of Bread & Puppet's *Joan of Arc*, the action (described in *Bread & Puppet Theatre: Spectacles en noir et blanc* by Christian Dupavillon) proceeds as follows:

> A bell rings. Lights. The curtain rises. The set shows chairs. Joan is center stage. Stage right and stage left, a judge played by three people dressed in black, the center one holding a nose and the other two ears. There is a dialogue between Joan and her judges, composed of tapping shoes. At the end, Joan collapses. The judges leave, holding high their noses and ears. A door creaks. The faces of four professors cut out of wood, with bald heads and glasses, appear over the backdrop and stare at Joan. The lights go out and the curtain is closed. Music.

As one of the Judge performers (operating the long nose in the photograph) I was attending to a number of different facets of performance during the scene. In terms of puppet movement, I was conscious of the angle and position of the nose, and its relation to my puppeteer colleagues who held their left and right ears either side of my nose, each with an arm wrapped over my waist so we could move together across the stage as the two Judges interrogated Joan of Arc in a question-and-answer session composed only of alternate foot stamping. In performance we were listening intently to the rhythm of the foot stomping: moving only when we "spoke," and attentive to keeping still when either Joan or the other Judge was speaking with their feet. I think we all had in our mind's eyes a sense of the successive stage pictures we were creating, and were intensely attentive to the rhythm of the scene. It started slowly, with short but aggressive statements tapped on the floor by each Judge; and defiant responses from Joan (who wore wooden clogs for a louder sound). The tempo of our exchanges built, and Joan herself rose to standing position as the interrogation proceeded. In the end, both Judges stomped furiously at the same time, beating Joan back down to the floor (her collapse). Then we exited, breathless and exhausted, only to quickly get to the flat Professor heads, which we inserted between the stage right and stage left gaps between the back curtain and the sides.

How does this scene reveal Peter Schumann's directing style? First of all, reflecting Schumann's trajectory into puppetry as a sculptor, painter, and choreographer rather than as a traditional puppeteer, the scene is more than anything else a dance with sculpture and painting. We puppeteers are not speaking (except with our feet); and unlike many forms of puppetry, we are not even manipulating one puppet. Instead, each Judge character is divided into three elements, and we

puppeteers are trying to figure out how best to move our nose or ear in the most effective theatrical way with the other two appendages. I recall this scene (and all the other scenes of *Joan of Arc*) to be similarly focused on rhythms of action, pauses, and tableaux. The curtain opens on a stage picture, and the development of the scene is a succession of extraordinarily succinct movement sequences that build to climaxes, and then descend in denouement. The particular movements we employed in the show were those we had invented with Schumann's prompts and edits in rehearsal. Onstage, the inevitable variations in each performance allowed us, in the intense collaboration of three puppeteers co-creating one Judge character, to improvise each time, within the understood limits of the scene. The punctuation marks—the places where we stopped and stood still to create scene rhythm—might also be improvised, but our sense of the shape of the entire scene (as well as the whole show) was defined by the choices Schumann had made about design, his selection of elements and the movements we suggested, and an overall Bread & Puppet aesthetic that he had been developing since before the theater's birth in 1963, and which we absorbed, contributed to, and felt worthwhile as a possibility for modern theater.

John Bell is a Founding Member of Great Small Works (NYC) and is the director of the Ballard Institute and Museum of Puppetry at the University of Connecticut. He is also our book review editor and our historian.

JOAN OF ARC NOSES

Interview with Peter J. Wilson

by Elizabeth Ann Jochum

Peter J. Wilson is an internationally acclaimed director, writer, producer and puppeteer and has been instrumental in the development and advancement of puppetry in Australia for the past thirty-five years. Wilson has developed over sixty theatrical productions, many of which were intercultural collaborations such as the Australian-Indonesian *Theft of Sita* (2000-2002), *Bali Agung* (2010) and the Australian-Chinese bilingual production of *Cho Cho* (Beijing 2013). His productions have toured to New York, Tokyo, Doha, Kuala Lumpur, Berlin, London, Paris and Beijing. A founding member of Handspan Theatre Company, Wilson was a member of Polyglot Puppet Theatre, Tasmanian Puppet Theatre and the artistic director of Company Skylark until 1998. He directed the "Nature" segment for the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000. In 2002, Peter was Senior Creative Fellow at the Victorian Arts Centre and was awarded a prestigious Australia Council Creative Fellowship from 2002-2004. Wilson's book *The Space Between* (Currency Press, 2004) documents the achievements and contributions of puppetry artists in Australia since 1974. I spoke with Wilson in Melbourne following the world-premiere of Global Creatures' *King Kong* at the Regent Theatre, for which he was the director of puppetry.

EJ: *Let's start with the gorilla in the room.* King Kong *features the most technologically sophisticated puppet ever designed: It is a six-meter tall silverback gorilla that weighs 1.1 tons, controlled through hybrid marionette puppetry and animatronics. Inside the puppet are 200 meters of electric cable, sixteen microprocessors and an on-board hydraulic power system and cooling pump. How do you approach working with this level of technology?*

PW: Creature Technology Company is home to many amazing artists; the company develops incredible animatronics and creative software programs. Sonny Tilders [founder of Creature Technology Company] is a brilliant maker and designer, but probably less a puppeteer. I am not a maker, but I am interested in how these things come together. I am interested in the movement of taking something that is essentially a sculpture and giving it a breath and heart and an importance onstage. That's what I feel my role is, to give an "intelligence" to the puppet. We can see through the veneer if we don't have that intelligence. I had to make a big shift to marry the technique of animatronics with my previous work, which is primarily direct-contact puppetry. I have had other opportunities to do animatronics but I have always resisted them because I am primarily interested in the relationship between the puppet and the human.

EJ: *What changed your mind about this production?*

PW: Last year I worked as an advisor on [Creature Technology Company/Dreamworks Theatrical's] *How To Train Your Dragon* and I was really fascinated by what I had a seen, although the characters in that show were mostly aerial and nowhere near as animated as Kong. I knew that this puppet would have much more of an articulation than the dragons, and would need to have the capacity to run, walk, lift and emotionally channel the intelligence of an ape. The director Daniel Kramer had a magnificent vision for this piece and that's something I responded to.

EJ: *The puppet is controlled through a hybrid system that combines traditional animatronics with programmed automation and "voodoo puppeteering"—a term for puppeteers that control the gross motor and facial movements using remote controls from the back of the auditorium. Ten puppeteers (the "King's Men") operate Kong's limbs by manipulating enormous strings and through direct-contact puppetry. What are the challenges of combining these different techniques?*

PW: The area that I most love working in is *bunraku*, which is based on direct manipulation and contact with the puppet. What you see in *Kong* is the marriage between the technology and direct control. The King's Men had never heard of *bunraku*—they are trained acrobats and circus performers—but we trained them over several years. The challenge for me with something as large and massive as Kong was to find the tenderness. You have to consider in great detail how large puppets work in movement, how they are choreographed. We always went back to the reference of the ape. Obviously you know it's not a real monkey, but the puppet was designed in such a way that the suspension of disbelief would allow you to say: "Hell, that *is* an ape, and I believe in it, and I will go on a ride with that." And after three seconds you don't even see the puppeteers.

The fifteen servo motors in Kong's face are operated by a team of three voodoo controllers using joysticks and buttons. All of Kong's gross movements are pre-programmed and automated, while the King's Men control the gestural movements from the floor. Trying to work all of these departments in concert was the biggest challenge. Puppeteer Jacob Williams calls cues from off set

Interview with Peter J. Wilson

by Elizabeth Ann Jochum

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and offers the full shape of the body and breath, and the other puppeteers work in concert with him. There are many times the ropes are not even used and the puppet is only *bunraku-ed*: We take the ropes off and manipulate Kong's hands directly.

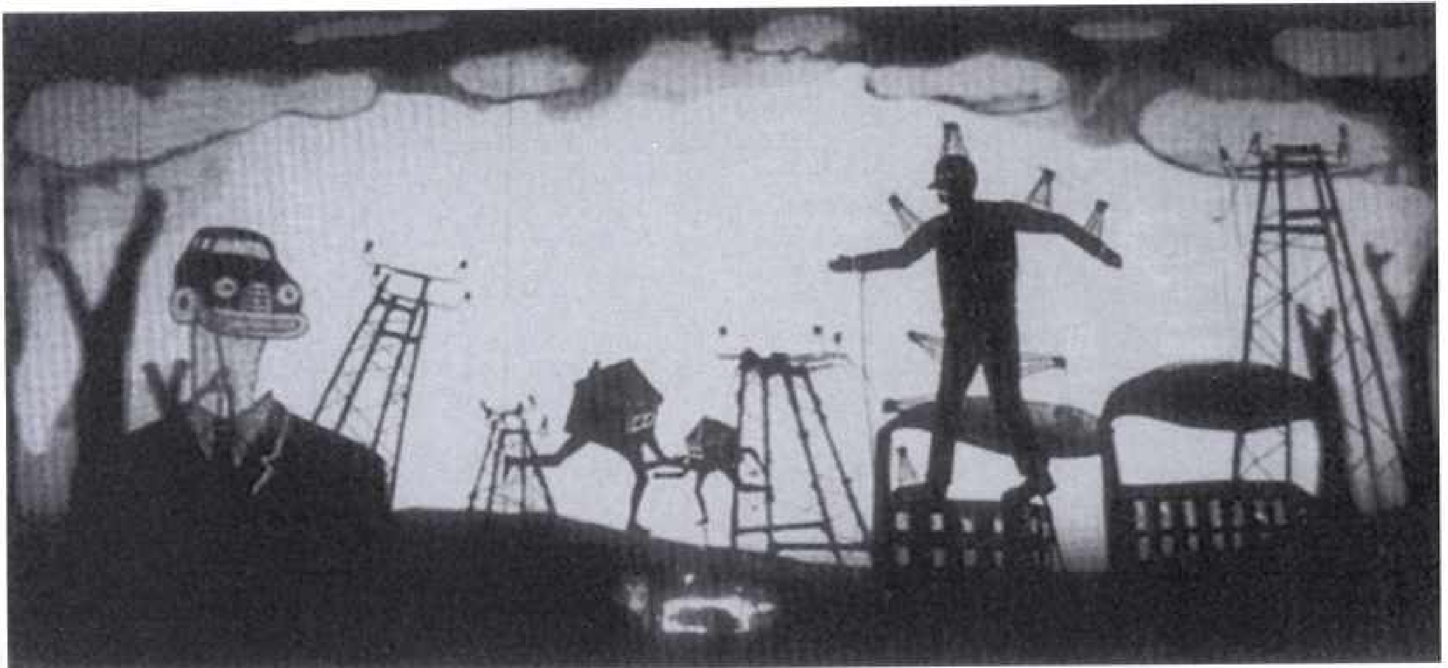
EJ: *You mention the importance of* bunraku *to your work. How have your intercultural experiences contributed to the development of your own aesthetic?*

PW: I am particularly interested in Asian puppetry. I first saw *bunraku* in 1979—Japan was the first country I went to perform in and I studied for a very brief period of time at the National Bunraku Center in Osaka. I was five years into my career as a puppeteer and this experience has always influenced my work. A lot of my work has taken on that technique—I call it a sort of bastardization—and it seems to work quite wonderfully in a lot of productions.

I've been going to Bali since 1981, where I met I Made Sidia [1] who has become a dear friend and collaborator. Bali is an incredibly spiritual place. To be inside the culture and sit with these beautiful storytellers and story makers is an unbelievable gift. In 1999-2002 I co-developed a production called the *Theft of Sita*—a theatre piece told in the style of traditional *wayang kulit* and based on an episode in the *Ramayana*. At the time, Australia was having challenging relationships with Indonesia and we elected to include the politics of the day by weaving references to the internal protests and student demonstrations into the narrative.[2] The production toured throughout the world. Although traditional techniques were strongly embedded in the production the puppeteers were keen to include more contemporary techniques. For example, the production used front and rear projection on a stage that measured 9 x 9 meters. The screen was much larger than the traditional screen and we had to develop a method for travelling from one side of the stage to the other. I introduced trolleys for the puppeteers to lie on their backs and roll from one side of the stage to the other with puppets in hand.

Later I was asked to develop an intercultural performance for a long-term engagement in Bali. I put together a creative team of Australian and Balinese artists and over six months we created *Bali Agung*, a live production that combines 150 dancers, puppeteers and musicians with elephants, tigers, farm animals and birds. Earlier in 2013, I directed *Cho Cho* in Beijing, a revival of an extraordinary production that originated at Handspan in 1994.[3] It's an epic theatre piece with actors performing in Chinese and English.

EJ: *Your freelance productions are quite unique: You directed the "Nature" section for the Opening Ceremony of the Olympics in Sydney (2000), the Asia Games in Doha and the Commonwealth Games (2006), Colours of Malaysia (2007-09) and an event for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in Indonesia (2013). Apart from these international works, how do you see your role in advancing puppetry in Australia?*



Theft of Sita at the Adelaide Festival

Bali-Agung at the Bali Safari and Marine Park

PW: In 2002, Arts Centre Melbourne offered me a fellowship to create an international puppetry summit, to author a book on Australian puppet theatre, and to develop the curriculum for a post-graduate program in puppetry. It was a wonderful moment in my career. The puppetry course at Victoria College for the Arts ran for six years, but unfortunately closed in 2009. Some short-sighted folks at the college had a very limited understanding of the importance and power of the puppet. They just didn't get it. They called it elitist and claimed it was too expensive to run the course. I recently spoke out publicly about this topic because it is important that the truth be known.[4] If you try to strip away support for an art form like puppetry, which has always held an interest in most cultures, you take away a vital art form. If you don't train musicians, dancers or actors you end up with a bland, mediocre arts scene. There has been an internal review at the university since then and there is talk of bringing puppetry back. I hope that happens.

EJ: *Currently you are the director of puppetry for the Sydney Theatre Company production* Storm Boy, *an adaption of the 1964 children's book by Colin Thiele. The story is practically a national treasure for Australia and has inspired many dramatizations, including a 1976 film. What is your vision for this production and what discoveries have you made from working with the creative team?*

PW: The book is very much in the hearts of most Ozzies[5]—Mr. Percival, the pelican, is the much-loved central character. I didn't feel any sense of pressure to get the character "right." It was more about making the right choices for the style and look of the puppet, to create variations of Mr. Percival as a beautiful character, sympathetic in its look and full of charm and playfulness. The designer was keen to make the puppets out of found objects that one might discover on a beach, but that approach became unworkable due to the puppet's lack of durability. The puppets were designed by Annie Forbes and Tim Denton of AboutFace Productions. Once we all agreed on the look of Mr. Percival, we explored different ways in which he and the other pelicans should be operated. Once I feel we have made the right choice in the style and technique, I have the confidence to begin finding "character" on the floor with the puppeteers, who also function as "spirits of the land."

EJ: *You've had an incredibly prolific year, both nationally and internationally. What's on your agenda for 2014?*

PW: There are discussions of touring *King Kong* in Europe and perhaps the U.S. *Cho Cho* will tour Shanghai and Hong Kong before commencing a national tour of Australia. I have been asked to direct two works in Malaysia—both large, colorful celebrations known

as *Colours of Malaysia*. The 2014 event promises to be a grand occasion, including a water nighttime parade on Lake Putrajaya. In September I will deliver a paper—"Traditions to Technology"—at an international puppetry festival in Bali. And somewhere in there I must find time for some meditation and personal reflection.

Elizabeth Ann Jochum is a postdoctoral fellow in robot aesthetics at Aalborg University in Denmark. Her review of *King Kong* will be published in the *Theatre Journal* (in press).

Endnotes

[1] I Made Sidia is a fourth generation dalang and son of Balinese dalang I Made Sija. He teaches at the Arts Institute in Denpasar in Bali.

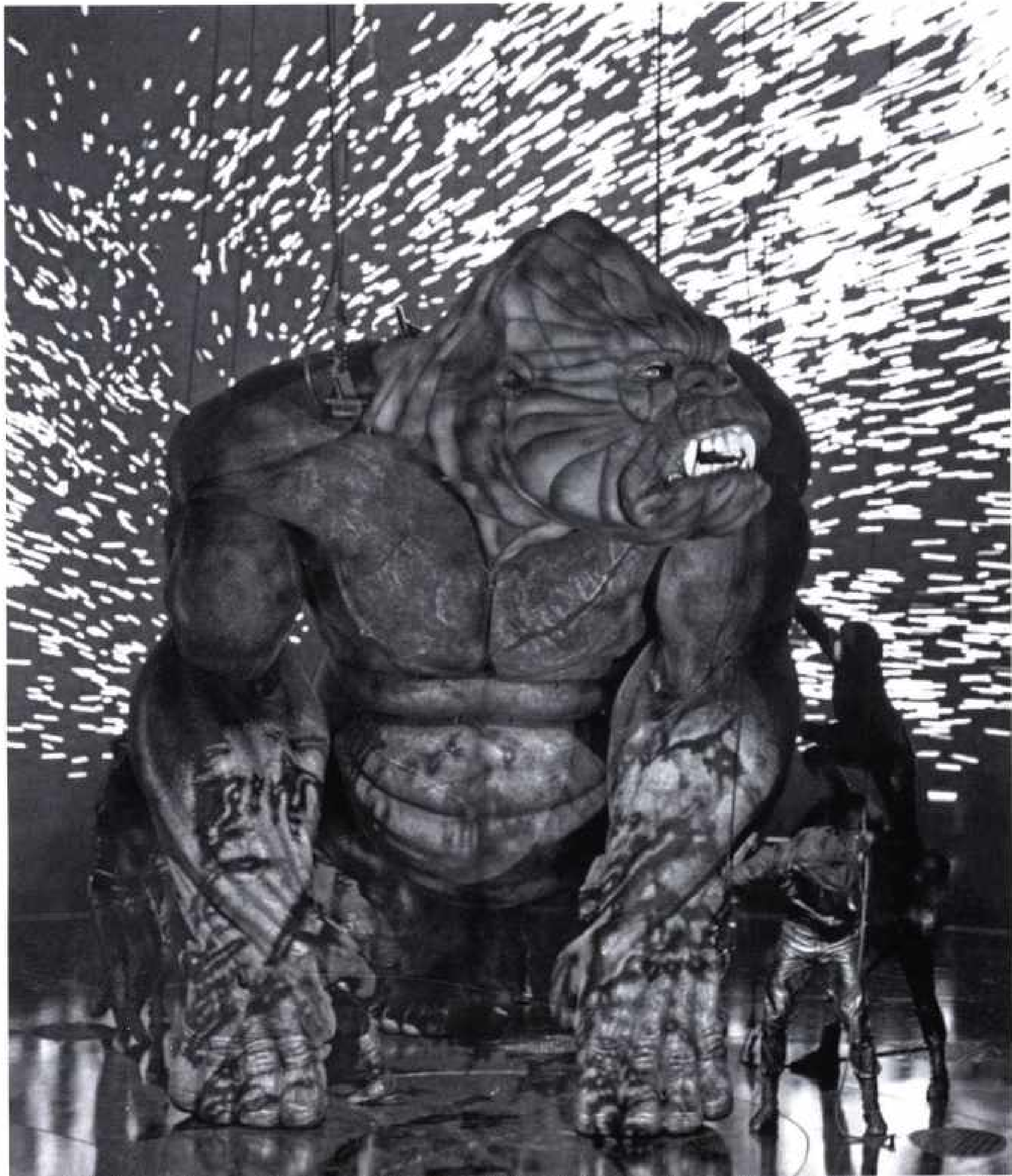
[2] Wilson refers to the 1999 East Timorese crisis, which resulted in violent protests and demonstrations following the popular vote in East Timor to declare independence from Indonesia.

[3] Wilson co-founded Handspan Theatre in 1977 and the company ran until 2002. The company left a fantastic legacy for puppetry in Australia.

[4] "Meet King Kong with Jon Faine Live." Web. Accessed 29 July 2013. Interview available at http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/local/melbourne/faineconversations/201306/r1128413_13881165.mp3

[5] A local, affectionate term for Australians.

King Kong at the Royal Theatre, Melbourne   photo: Peter England



The Art of Directing– *To Create and to Teach*

by Irina Niculescu

*"Staging a play is an enterprise that requires the hand, the head and the heart all employed with such sensitivity as to contain all the attributes of humanity. The method corresponds to the theory only after the fact."** –Louis Jouvet

Directing– *my path in life*

I am a director. The world of puppet theater is, for me, everything. I tell stories that speak of the human soul. My productions express and share with the audience my reflections on life, my joy, my search for answers, my fears and my utopian fantasies. On this journey, I am accompanied by poets, writers, painters and sculptors. The puppet is for me a tragi-comic essence because it is always linked to the manipulator's visible or invisible hands. It is a metaphor for the human condition. The act of manipulation, as well as the interdependence of the puppeteer and the puppet, contributes to the double effect of innocence and irreverence that the puppet exercises on us with all its charm. The puppet is extraordinarily evocative. It exists at the fragile boundary between the animate and the inanimate. It leads us into a fiction that becomes more real than "reality."

Thought and Practice

I am of the generation of creators that led the puppet out of its booth. This change has been essential to the theatre's renewal, it has generated an exhuberant creative energy. A new idea of performance space and, subsequently, of lighting; a different way of looking at scale. Raw materials and the elements of construction have been rediscovered and chosen for their dramatic potential. The creative spirit has breathed life into our fantasy and has enriched the palette of its means of expression, a new approach to writing for the stage, a fresh angle on stage directing. The result has been the birth of a great diversity of theatrical forms

To deal with these new conditions, we have changed the status of the puppeteer: an actor trained in a variety of theatrical practices, knowledgeable about traditional techniques and in applying them, open to new techniques.

Directing and Dramaturgy– *a relationship of complicity*

Inspired by the potential of these new means of expression, artists coming from the worlds of dance, of mime, of the plastic arts, were turning to the puppet. This encounter gave birth to forms unedited and spectacular. The mixing of the puppet and the actor's body converged at the intersection of the puppet play and corporeal mime.The world of fantasy invaded the stage. More than ever, directing became an act of creation.

What sort of drama should one devise for a theater that is constantly redefining itself and is in a constant state of flux? What are the marks of the writer, the playwright, the director? Should they create rules and primers? Is that even possible? We know well that there is no definitive truth.

The contemporary theater rarely begins with a script written for the stage. Its beginnings are more often a literary text, a piece of music, a theme, an idea, a desire to question reality. The dramaturgical foundation is laid for a given production: The writing and the staging must work as co-conspirators, evolving together until the moment when the creative process reaches its conclusion.

The Play– *a ceremonial complex*

It is difficult to define "director" because of its diverse funtions, none of which are definitive. Somehow, being professional means to be authentic, to be honest, to draw its water from the well of humanity, so to speak. The heart of my work sits at the intersection of "the story" that I want to tell, and the expressive means that will give it life. It always has to do with the desire to share a reflection or to pose a basic question about life.

I think it is the language of aesthetics that best expresses what I wish to recount. I construct the universe of the play : I define the space, the raw materials, the type of puppet and I decide what will be their dramatic funtions. I look for a material that shimmers, that speaks to the senses. Ideally, I imagine a dramatic staging that begins when audience members first enter the theatre space and ends with their departure. Later, in the rehearsal process, I require meticulous work on animating—the means through which an actor invests the object with life. It is important to achieve mastery, such that one attains virtuosic control of manipulation techniques, as they are the instuments that form the foundation of animation. But technique alone will never be sufficient to create "those magic moments" in which the puppet becomes more "real than reality." The relationship between the puppeteer and the puppet is essential in order that the latter "live" and display emotion.

"The Dragon," after Evgueni Schwartz,
a co-production between Madcap and Know Theatre of Cincinnati

puppet design: Andrew Hungerford, music: John Lewandowski

photos: Deogracias Jerma

If I succeed in making dramatugical sense of this relationship such that it becomes something necessary and therefore legitimate, it will generate a great dramatic power.

The work of building this relationship demands a rigorous devotion. Animation is a mysterious aspect of this work, and one must establish a technique, or multiple techniques. How does one arrive at projecting oneself through the puppet? Invest oneself? How do we make it speak? What is the presence of the puppeteer? How can he erase himself while remaining visible? One must explore the gestural language of the puppet, its immobility, its silence, its clumsiness, its fragile sense of balance.

I could pretend that I have a particular method of working, but that would only be partly true. This method must certainly exist—it serves to bouy up the crew—writers, set designers, composers, actors and myself—at the outset of a new project. But it evolves during the rehearsal process. My tools are truths observed, stolen, tried out and "verified" through long practice, but it is always my intuition that guides me.

Teaching Directing–
Is directing teachable? Which directing? For which theater?

I studied directing for puppet theatre, and I received my Masters from the Theater Department in Prague. I left school carrying in my suitcase a solid theatrical culture—history, aesthetics, dramaturgy, writing—a certain practical foundation in directing, enriched by my encounters with innovative directors of that era. I knew very well what I DID NOT WANT to do, and I felt the impulse to begin creating plays. I had the thought that directing was learned "on the job." In part, that was true ! I learned quite a lot "on the job." But school gave me an overarching understanding of theater, of the evolution of the art of puppetry, and how it is intimately connected to the progress of society, time for experimentation and discovery, learning how to work as a part of a team and to first try my hand at directing actor/puppeteers.

I have always focused on creating. I am a teaching nomad. I adapt my courses to the level of the program, to its duration, to the level of students' knowledge and to their practical experience. I try to approach, as much as possible, their reality. The workshops are always intensive because I travel two tracks, each of which feeds the other—one concentrates on conceptual and dramaturgical notions, the other on the practical. In sum, they are the tools of the trade of the director.

Few school or professional training programs in puppetry include "Directing" among their course offerings. The DESS (diplôme supérieur spécialisé) in modern puppetry at the University of Québec is one that does.

In 2008, in my first meeting with the students of DESS, one female student asked, "What exactly *is* a puppet nowadays?" An essential question, because it alludes to the multiplicity of forms found in contemporary puppetry, the product of an inventiveness that is boundless, almost obsessive, that forgets sometimes the qualities of the metaphor of the puppet and that diminishes its importance.

I like to think that the director is at once an architect and a poet. To be a director is a very personal thing, and each artist must find his or her own path.

As an educator, my principal goal is to work on the development of a concept of staging a play. It's less about teaching a truth, than for the students to develop the tools with which they can find their own truths. The important thing is to give students the means that will permit them to express their feelings in the theater arts– to develop aesthetic knowledge of the student, his analytical mind, his dramatic insight and practical know-how. Therefore, I propose a theoretical introduction on the history and evolution of directing, the genres of puppetry, their dramaturgies, the threads that connect the respective dramaturgies and asthetics of each genre, and then we observe the power and charm of each genre.

We continue with practical exercises. The students will be led toward the development of their own concept of directing, while confronting "learning by doing." After the first stage of theoretical lectures, I will again take up the conceptual discussions based on their actual "hands on" projects.

The dramaturgical foundation of each project (story, play, poem, act-without-words, musical), the aesthetic elements, however (puppets inspired by traditional forms, abstract forms, objects, shadows, toy theater, actors and puppets, video projections, virtual images or a mix of all the above), are their own choice.

It is necessary to decide on the story one wants to tell, come up with a dramaturgy for the chosen aesthetic, and to play with the connections between directing and dramaturgy. One must take up the challenge of structuring the project as well as each scene and discover the importance of the links between the scenes. One must clarify the purpose of each scene, give directions to the actor, edit, cut and start again. One must know each of the director's concerns. Afterwards you can use or invent others. My image is of a triangle that points skyward. The higher we want to go, the more we must develop and enlarge the base of our knowledge.

In an intensive course, the practical level is without doubt the most important. I try to understand the personalities of the students, their sensitivities. I lead them through work in which they feel supported, I attempt to prod their imaginations, to stimulate their capacity for invention. I see my work in teaching as a dialog between professor and student. But, of course, I place all those tools I have at their disposal, tested through years of work. These instruments will help them to be structured, to be rigorous and consistent. Most important is that each student discovers herself, arrives at formulating her own questions, finds her own voice.

The puppet theatre is in constant motion, and it needs a pedagogy that is also evolving. Directing and dramaturgy perhaps pose the biggest challenge to contemporary puppetry, to its performance and installation. Whatever form of theater or theatrical event we create, it must tell the story of humanity in its search for the answers to life's ultimate questions.

In addition to her teaching and directing around the world, Irina Niculescu is a board member of UNIMA-USA.

– translated by A. Periale

* *"La mise en scène c'est un tour de main, un tour de tête et un tour de cœur, une fonction d'une telle sensibilité qu'elle peut contenir toute chose humaine. La méthode correspond à la théorie, seulement après les faits."* –Louis Jouvet

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Tom Huddleston, *Time Out*

"The purity of the nostalgia turns this franchise film into a love letter to childhood."
Bruce Diones, *The New Yorker*

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This photo, reprinted in the Spring 2013 Barbershop Harmony Society magazine, *The Harmonizer*, shows the Fairfax Jubil-Aires' president, Chuck Hudson, Jane and Jim Henson and a quartet of Muppets.

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Provocative Puppetry:

Zahra Sabri's *The House of Bernarda Alba* and Subversive Performance in Contemporary Iran

by Ali-Reza Mirsajadi

While puppetry is often seen as a marginal art form in many cultures, Iran has recently enjoyed a widespread resurgence in puppet theatre productions. Brave new directors are mounting elaborate puppet plays, both in the traditional Iranian style and in post-modern reappropriations of it. What's more, the Iranian government itself is going to great lengths to support this theatre and maintain the classical traditions. In fact, in July 2012, the Iranian government held its 14th Annual International Puppet Theatre Festival (also named "Mobarak," after the beloved Persian blackface trickster marionette). In an age when puppetry is often viewed as stale or antiquated, a child's amusement, the situation in Iran is truly an anomaly. It immediately poses the questions: *Why now? Why here? Why puppets?*

Perhaps these questions can best be answered by taking a look at Zahra Sabri's work with her company, *Yas-e Tamam*. For instance, in her recent high-profile production of Federico García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, which toured internationally in 2011 after enjoying a successful run the year earlier in Tehran, Sabri used puppetry in a highly subversive manner, charging the production with a political sensibility that is rarely seen in mainstream Iranian theatre. With the fervent and often senseless policing and censorship of Iranian Theatre, helmed by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, getting any play produced is quite a feat, partilarly one as critical of social oppressions as *The House of Bernarda Alba*. What is it about the production that allowed for its approval and subsequent funding from the Iranian government? And what does this say about the larger context of contemporary theatre and censorship within the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Zahra Sabri has been working in the Iranian theatre since 1990, when she formed her puppet troupe, *Yas-e Tamam* (literally, "complete despair"). Born in 1967, Sabri is among the generation of Iranian artists who grew up during the Revolution, and has lived in Tehran under both the Shah's reign and the Ayatollahs. Sabri attended the Islamic Azad University, majoring in stage design, and while she has worked as a director, designer and actress outside of puppet theatre, she is best known for the work she has done with *Yas-e Tamam*. Her company's most famous play, *Zamin Va Charkh (The Earth and the Universe)*, is an adaptation of seven stories from *The Masnavi*, a collection of poetry by the Persian Sufi mystic, Rumi. As with all of *Yas-e Tamam*'s work, Sabri served as both the stage director and puppet designer, and the play was rife with the group's signature poetic artistry and intricately choreographed movement. After receiving acclaim in Iran (the play won the jury's special prize at the Mobarak International Puppet Theatre Festival in 2008), Sabri took the production abroad, where it played in France, Germany, Tunisia, and India, and won first prize at both the International Festival of Puppetry Art in Poland and the Prague International Puppet Theatre Festival.

The beauty of Persian culture is at the heart of much of Sabri's work, and *The Earth and the Universe* features not only classical Persian literature, but also traditional Iranian music and puppet dance sequences.[1] With *The House of Bernarda Alba*, however, Sabri and *Yas-e Tamam* were making their first foray into the Western theatrical canon. Despite the success of her previous productions, Sabri was still having to combat the common notion in Iran that puppet theatre, while ubiquitous, is insubstantial. As she explains, "This time, I intentionally used a foreign play, a very famous and respected one, so I can show that it's possible for these canonical plays to be performed as puppet theatre, while still attracting audi-

ences."[2] Even though the production did not stray far from Sabri's typical lyrical aesthetic as a director, the politicized nature of the text was new territory for her, and Sabri's interpretation of Lorca is evocative within a contemporary Iranian context.

When asked why she chose to direct Lorca's play, Sabri replied, "*The House of Bernarda Alba* is a play with a message. I think that when a director goes and selects a script, the director sees her own messages and preoccupations within the world of the play. But

without any autonomy. The very idea of being a puppet, having one's actions dictated and manipulated by some greater force, itself speaks to the plight of Iranian women in the Islamic Republic. This narrative of institutionalized female obsequiousness is nothing new for Iran, but its vivid depiction on a major Iranian stage is completely novel. Sabri effectively brings the metaphor to its completion by the use of her live actors/puppeteers. These three individuals are costumed as mirror images of the puppets: they, too, sport the nun's

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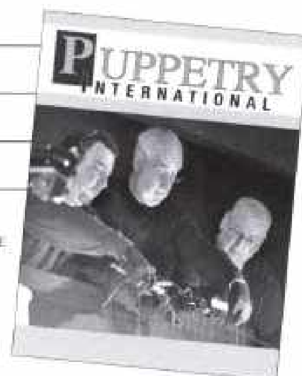

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ences."[2] Even though the production did not stray far from Sabri's typical lyrical aesthetic as a director, the politicized nature of the text was new territory for her, and Sabri's interpretation of Lorca is evocative within a contemporary Iranian context.

When asked why she chose to direct Lorca's play, Sabri replied, "*The House of Bernarda Alba* is a play with a message. I think that when a director goes and selects a script, the director sees her own messages and preoccupations within the world of the play. But these words are presented even more beautifully by the playwright himself."[3] She uses Ahmad Shamlou's Farsi translation for her production, which she considers faithful to Lorca's text, and has cut very little from it, aside from a few minor characters.[4] In the play, Sabri uses fifty-seven human puppets, fifteen horse glove puppets of various colors, and three actor/puppeteers to embody the world of the classic piece. The human puppets are not attached to any strings, but rather resemble a child's cloth dolls, and are manipulated as such. The theatrical image of these adult actors - who remain visible throughout the performance - playing with doll-like puppets heightens the sense that Bernarda's daughters are suffering from a lingering and maternally-imposed adolescent naiveté, an arrested development in which the entire family is stuck in their childhood home, behaving like teenagers. The puppets are dressed to resemble nuns, with full-body length black robes and wimples covering their hair. The similarity between this imagery and the government-instated dress code for Iranian women, the shared costumes of hegemonic oppression, is too close to be coincidental. Although Sabri never admits to this intention, the theme is certainly a recurring one. For instance, during most of the play, these puppets do not have the free use of their own arms - their hands are sewed together, neatly resting on their laps, a position of subordination and helplessness. Most evocatively, the puppets' faces are covered in a white sack cloth, marked by a black cross and colorful stitches, as if scars were literally sewn into them. They resemble mummies, a walking creature of death. Stitches become a metaphor for trauma and the voiceless in Sabri's play. As a London critic relates, "At one point the mother, angry at being challenged, violently mimes sewing up her daughter's lips."[5]

Sabri's puppets are inscribed bodies of female suffering and mourning. They bear the weight of invisible, mute histories, women who have gone through entire lifetimes of precarious existences without any autonomy. The very idea of being a puppet, having one's actions dictated and manipulated by some greater force, itself speaks to the plight of Iranian women in the Islamic Republic. This narrative of institutionalized female obsequiousness is nothing new for Iran, but its vivid depiction on a major Iranian stage is completely novel. Sabri effectively brings the metaphor to its completion by the use of her live actors/puppeteers. These three individuals are costumed as mirror images of the puppets: they, too, sport the nun's habit/burka, wimple/headscarf, and white masks with colorful stitches. The actors, then, are merely life-sized puppets themselves. In one particular *coup de théâtre*, Sabri has an actor position herself behind a seated colleague and manipulate the latter's hands and body as she puppeteers, creating an extra layer of manipulation. Sabri explained to me in an interview that this moment "relays the message that these girls don't have any control over themselves or their fates. Someone else has to come and control their direction, tell them where to go, where not to go." [6]

Sabri's decision to prerecord the dialogue and have the actors mime along to it only serves to emphasize this notion that the live bodies, themselves, are puppets. They have no control over their own stories, their narratives are premeditated, they have no voice with which to speak up. Sabri's actors are perfect manifestations of the voiceless victims, the oppressed women in contemporary Iran. Since the puppeteers and puppets are actually all alike (in dress, disability, oppression, individual autonomy), then these sweeping brushstrokes of collective identity are effectively covering up the women's individual identities. The very act of imposing this uniformity in dress code erases the woman's personhood, creating instead a performative whitewash of female subservience. Sabri, herself, emphasizes this point: "All of the women are the same, the puppets are the same, their dreams are all the same." [7]

Always one to add confounding and compelling layers to her plays, Sabri also comments on the very idea of this female/puppet universality. While the three puppeteers are obscured by nun's habits, wimples, and masks throughout the entire course of the play, during curtain calls, they remove their masks, revealing that there were actually two female actors and one male. While Sabri's intentions for this moment are not fully clear (one Iranian critic claims that this is in fact an anti-feminist statement, showing that the struggles of hegemonic oppression are universal[8]), she is nonetheless effectively

creating a subversive portrayal of male cross-dressing on the Iranian stage, while criticizing the absurdity of the Islamic Republic's rules about female dress. With so many seemingly blatant attacks on the oppressiveness of contemporary Iranian laws, how was Sabri's play not only permitted to be produced in Iran, but also allowed to tour abroad? What is happening in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, and why is it being treated differently from most plays on the Iranian stage?

A recent news article in *The Stage* by Nuala Calvi claims that the answer lies in the play's use of puppetry, as opposed to live actors. The article quotes Anousheh Adams, a "British-Iranian expert on international arts," who explains, "A puppet can do and say a lot more than a human can on stage in Iran."[9] Calvi continues, explaining how "rules around women covering their hair do not apply to puppets– nor are they prohibited from dancing in public..."[10] Looking at *The House of Bernarda Alba*, this certainly seems to be the case. Adela's sexuality, the daughters' uncovered hair, the implications of forbidden desire, all of these occur in the production, while their counterparts on the typical Iranian stage would be prohibited.

Still, *why* is Iranian puppet theatre policed differently? Adams answers that, "It is deemed okay for puppets to touch because they are essentially not human... We all know puppets can't really have sex, so that's not considered provocative."[11] Is this enough of an explanation, though? It is true, puppets are not exactly human, they cannot have sex in the same way people can (although some puppeteers might beg to differ). But is that, alone, enough of a puppet-human distance that it should provide such a glaring exception to the rules of Iranian theatrical censorship? After all, the Iranian visual arts are censored in a very similar way as theatre. For instance, paintings of women cannot portray anything remotely sexual, the subjects must always wear full body coverings, there can be no contact between men and women, etc.[12] To appropriate and restate Adam's logic, this *should not* be the case, since paintings "are essentially not human." Paintings "can't really have sex," so why should they be so provocative? There must be something deeper at play that is allowing for these exceptions in regards to puppetry.

It seems to me as if Sabri's play is functioning at what Judith Butler terms the convergence of historical norms.[13] While puppets are allotted more performative and thematic freedoms on the Iranian stage than human bodies, this seems to arise from a long tradition of provocative Iranian puppetry dating back centuries. With the aforementioned character of Mobarak, for instance, we see an anarchic political subversion akin to Punch, which gives Iranian puppets the power to overturn societal conventions. Likewise, with the postmodern puppet plays of Bahram Beyzai, the traditional and oft-repeated narratives of Iranian puppet theatre are shaded to allow puppets to comment on their own conditions and fates. Yes, puppets are inanimate and their "bodies" are not policed like those of human actors, but the performative freedom in Iranian puppetry lies in the cultural understanding that puppets are somehow allowed to speak out of turn. It is in this gap within the foundational structure of Iranian censorship that subversive directors like Sabri are allowed to flourish.

In the end, the case of *The House of Bernarda Alba* should be seen as a model for how puppetry can function within Iran, allowing new potential spaces for theatrical subversiveness, as opposed to being emblematic of recent trends in Iranian theatre. As of yet, Sabri's play seems to be an anomaly in contemporary Iran. Fortunately, with her next project, we may get to see Sabri push the limits of this politically subversive puppetry even further; after all, how else could one direct an Iranian *Macbeth*?

Ali-Reza Mirsajadi is an M.A./Ph.D. candidate in Drama at Tufts University. His research primarily focuses on contemporary Persian performance and verbatim theatre.

Endnotes

[1] For videos of this artistry, see <www.kewego.com/video/iLyROoaflYWb.html>, <www.youtube.com/watch?v=PK1EZYWUrsE>, or < matvideo.france2.fr/video/iLyROoaflYuC.html >.

[2] Alireza Naraghi and Zahra Sabri. "An Interview with Zahra Sabri, the director of *The House of Bernarda Alba*." *Iran Ta'atr*. Ali-Reza Mirsajadi, trans. <www.theater.ir/fa/print.php?id=20526>.

[3] Zahra Sabri and anonymous. "An Interview with the Director of *The House of Bernarda Alba*." *Ta'atr*. Ali-Reza Mirsajadi, trans. <www.bfilmnews.com/pdf/1389/06/25/p09.pdf>.

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[5] Carmel Doohan. "The House of Bernarda Alba." *thoughts on theatre and other stories*. Blog post. Nov. 4, 2011.

[6] Zahra Sabri and Ali-Reza Mirsajadi.

[7] Zahra Sabri and Ali-Reza Mirsajadi.

[8] Reza Ashofteh. "A Look at *The House of Bernarda Alba*: A Person Can Be a Puppet, Too." *Asemaneh*. Ali-Reza Mirsajadi, trans. <7honar.blogfa.com/post-940.aspx>.

[9] Nuala Calvi. "Iranian Puppet Theatre: Where Humans Fear to Tread." *The Stage*. Oct. 28, 2011. <www.thestage.co.uk/features/2011/10/iranian-puppet-theatre-where-humans-fear-to-tread/>.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Article XIX. *Unveiled: Art and Censorship in Iran*. Sept. 2006. <www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/iran-art-censorship.pdf>.

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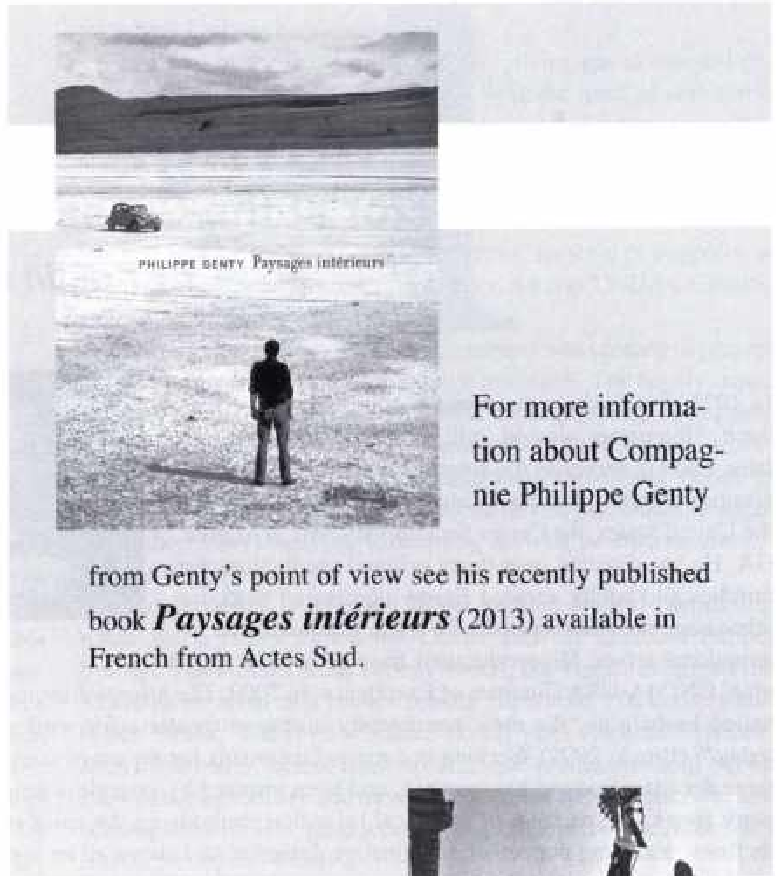

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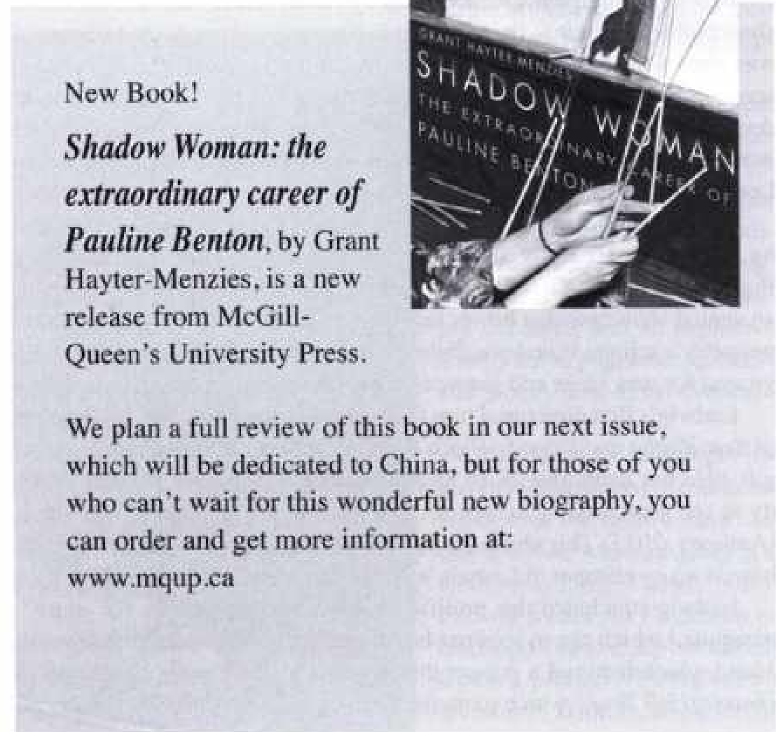

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Jon Ludwig:
Director at the Crossroads of Puppetry
by Kristin Haverty

In 1978, Jon Ludwig answered a newspaper advertisement, "Puppeteer wanted, will train." Thirty-five years later, Ludwig serves as the Artistic Director of the largest non-profit organization dedicated to the art of puppetry in the United States, the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, GA. He has directed over thirty original productions for families and adults, created Emmy nominated work for television, and collaborated with leading national and international artists. His productions have garnered a record nine[1] UNIMA-USA Citations of Excellence. In 2009, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution* hailed Ludwig as "the most consistently inventive theater artist working in Atlanta today."[2] (Brock, 2009) Working at a major crossroads for the art of puppetry for over three decades, Ludwig has inspired, and been inspired by, countless artists. Ludwig's work spans the spectrum of theatrical invention, embodying the spirit of puppetry at its finest. Exacting puppeteer, imaginative designer, and above all an ingenious director, Ludwig has been and continues to be a tireless creator and proponent for the rich artistic medium of puppetry.

In 1980, the Puppeteers of America and UNIMA-USA sponsored the World Puppet Festival in Washington, DC. Directed by Nancy Staub, the festival showcased over 50 shows from 21 nations– the very best in international puppetry. (Abrams, 2008) Ludwig was one of the many early career artists at that festival who found inspiration in the scope of the art form exhibited there. Kick-started by the World Festival, this seminal decade saw the development of many of today's leading puppetry directors. Ludwig worked with many, including acclaimed artists Theodora Skipitares, Bruce D. Schwartz, Lee Breuer, and Janie Geiser.

The 1980s was an especially fertile decade for the artists working at the Center and by 1983 they were ready to take on a new challenge. This was the birth of Xperimental Puppetry Theater– XPT. The program still promotes unorthodox puppetry for adults in an annual showcase that brings together artists from all disciplines to experiment with puppetry's infinite visual possibilities. For Ludwig, XPT served as an important testing ground for new ideas and showcased his talent for creating compelling work.

Ludwig's first directorial turn for the family stage came in 1984, with his adaptation of *Brer Rabbit and Friends*. Vince Anthony, founder of the Center, recognized Ludwig's gift. "He has incredible skills as a puppeteer, writer, and director as well as the ability to see great artistry in others…He meets every challenge with vigor and vitality." (Anthony, 2013) This ability, to appreciate and draw from the talents of those around him, is a key element in Ludwig's directorial style.

Ludwig concluded this prolific decade with three works for adults: *Cirque Pataphysique*,[3] which ran to sold out houses for an unprecedented nine weeks; *The Bound Man*,[4] which featured a puppet that remains in the Center's museum today; and *The Heaven/Hell Tour*,[5] which garnered Ludwig his first UNIMA-USA citation.

While the 1980s was a time of development, the 1990s saw an explosion of opportunity for Ludwig to showcase his work on the national stage. At the same time as NEA funding of controversial artists was causing national debate, Ludwig's work *Zeitgeist: Der Geist Der Stets Verneint*[6] caught the ire of prominent Evangelist Pat Robertson.[7] (Andrews, 1990) While heavily promoted as an adult work, the controversy over the performance highlighted the perception of puppetry as a medium solely for children's entertainment, a belief Ludwig's work consistently transcends. Performed during the height of the culture wars, *Zeitgeist* truly captured the spirit of the times.

Opportunities to train with Josef Krofta of Theatre Drak in the Czech Republic and theater artist Ping Chong were to lay the groundwork for future collaborations. Invitations to perform came from the Puppeteers of America Festival, PS 122, and The Jim Henson International Festival of Puppet Theater. There Ludwig presented *Safe as Milk*.[8] The Henson festival archives sum up the performance: "It's the kind of show only a genius could give birth to. Outrageous, astounding and absolutely brilliant." (Henson, 1994) Following his work with Krofta, Ludwig worked with Petr Matasek from Theater DRAK on *FIRE!*, which enjoyed a pyrotechnic display and two separate runs at the Center.

In 1996, the World Olympics presented another opportunity for Ludwig when the Center was selected to participate in the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games Cultural Olympiad. Ludwig's adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* received international acclaim. Heralded as one of the highlights of the festival, the production led *Newsweek* magazine to call the Center "one of the most exciting companies in American theater." (Newsweek, 1996) Lorna Howley, former Head Puppeteer and a member

of the Center company for over ten years, reflected on working with Ludwig for the groundbreaking production:

> I was just learning puppetry and one of the only novices in the ensemble. He was so adamant about some moments and then completely open about others. [...] What I learned he was doing was always looking at the whole picture of the show and what the audiences' journey would be. (Howley, 2013)

Following the success of the Arts Festival, in 1997 the National Puppetry Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center invited Ludwig to workshop a new production, *Home*. The result, as documented from one reviewer, seems true to Ludwig's style.

"Probably the most ambitious project is Jon Ludwig's *Home*, which presents (take your choice) Noah's Ark and/or The Garden of Eden and/or Heaven, on acid if not Quaaludes. Midway through the piece a life-sized mobster marionette interacts with similarly black-suited live performers. There are blue monsters, an adorable monkey (who will die via a noose), angels and a sleek yellow snake. Forget explanations--all that matters is it's never boring. The piece could be a technical nightmare, but it comes off with Swiss-watch precision." (Evans, 1997)

In the late 1990s, Ludwig created the shadow puppet segments for *Bear in the Big Blue House*, a TV series created by Mitchell Kriegman with The Jim Henson Company for the Disney Channel. This collaboration led to work on Kriegman's *The Book of Pooh*. In 2005, along with Kriegman and Dean Gordon, Ludwig received an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Director.

Another collaboration brought Ludwig together with Ping Chong of New York and Mitsuru Ishii of Japan to create *Kwaidan*.[9] A critical and popular success, the production enjoyed a successful international tour.[10] The New York Times raved: "*Kwaidan* brilliantly blends puppetry, live acting, music, artistic scenery, sound and projections with old-fashioned spellbinding storytelling."(Van Gelder, 2000)

The 1990s also saw an incredible creative surge in Ludwig's productions for the Center's Family Series. Shows such as *Space!*, *The Body Detective*, *Rainforest Adventures*, and *Weather Rocks!* brought together science curricula with the innovative storytelling, technical boundary pushing and sense of play for which Ludwig had become known.

The turn of the century brought war, rising gas prices and declining financial support for the arts. With the need to reach new audiences while remaining fiscally responsible, Ludwig turned his attention to older classics. Each remount required extensive rewrites, consultations with experts, and input from his team of designers and performers. Ludwig's incorporation of all forms of puppetry is a hallmark of his work. No visual effect, no style of puppetry, is left unturned in the service of the story. As one UNIMA-Citation panelist observed in *The Plant Doctors*[11]:

" . . . a "visual shout" of an environment was created to present science information to a broad range audience. The highly dense dialogue carries a mass of scientific data. Hand puppets, rod puppets, body puppets, actors with masks, shadow scenes and assorted articulated scenery turn the stage into a continuous moving adventure of plot-carrying information. . . A wide variety of performance styles made the show satisfying to learning as well as entertainment." (UNIMA-USA)

This tendency is reflected in yet another fruitful partnership when Jason Hines joined the Center staff as Resident Puppet Builder. Their first collaboration, *Avanti, Da Vinci!*, imagined the Renaissance artist as a crime-fighting superhero. "In Ludwig and Hines' hands," one review noted, "no lily goes ungilded." (Brock, 2004) Dubbed a "comic masterpiece," the production sold out its 2004 Atlanta premiere and traveled to the Slovak Republic, where it became the first U.S. production to be performed at the Bábkarska Bystrica Puppetry Festival.

The duo's next project was the highly acclaimed *The Ghastly Dreadfuls*.[12] Running during the Halloween season seven years straight, the production celebrated storytelling as only puppetry can.

"Performing with a puppet is like an extension of yourself. You're not making it do something, you're sending your energy through it out to the audience," Ludwig explained. (Long, 2012) Ludwig's character, Simply Dreadful, sent an explosive energy out as puppeteer, guitarist and motley host of the evening.

The decade also brought innovative adaptations of traditional tales for the family stage. As one reviewer wrote of Ludwig's *Cinderella Della Circus*, "Only Ludwig would put Cinderella in clodhoppers and make her fall for a clown prince. With the showmanship of Barnum, he packs big

FIRE!

ideas into tiny spaces; even his children's shows have irony and edge. How surely this man jests." (Brock, 2008) Productions like *Duke Ellington's Cat*,[13] a fanciful biography of the great jazz legend, continued to push the boundaries of puppetry for family audiences. As reflected in a year-end review, the production:

"...blended biography and funny animal comedy with timeless jazz standards and designs inspired by the artwork of the Harlem Renaissance. When the title feline fails to get into the Cotton Club ("This entrance is for white cats only!") and croons "Mood Indigo" in an alley, *Duke Ellington's Cat* presented 2008's most strangely affecting musical number." (Holman, 2008)

While continuing to add to his resumé of new works and collaborations, 2010 also brought a new focus for Ludwig– training the next generation. Ludwig is committed to fostering the talents of young artists who show promise in the field of puppetry. As Ludwig reflected in a recent interview, "A leader is someone who guides others so that they can in turn lead. Communication and listening are two main ingredients in being an artist...it is a lot easier to succeed when you have others to help you. Leave your ego at the door!" (Harper, 2010)

His work continues to inspire others as he was first inspired by the performances of the 1980 festival. Julie Scarborough, former Head Puppeteer and company member for over ten years, recently spoke to Ludwig's directorial style:

> From his many years of experience, he has divined how to balance maintaining his vision as a writer/director while respecting and using what new inspiration his designers and performers bring to the piece and keeping the entire show "on track" as far as how it will work for its intended audience. No small feat, and it has led to its fair share of watershed moments, disappointments, passionate outbursts and joyous triumphs...but it all comes from that generous place in Jon's heart where he strives to always give the best of himself to his work—no compromises, no excuses, nothing indulgent—just what is exactly right. To use Jon's phrase: "Shoelaces not too tight, not too loose." (Scarborough, 2013)

Reflecting on Ludwig's influence, former Center Education Director Alan Louis writes:

> When you see one of Jon's shows at the Center, you get on the ride when the house lights go down and it lets you off at the curtain call. Fifty minutes fly by. You are so engaged in the show that you lose track of time. That sort of tight, flowing action was definitely what I was going for when it came time for me to direct a show of my own for the first time. (Louis, 2013)

No matter the project, Ludwig brings a sense of play to his source material that enlivens and supports the story. "More important than talent," Ludwig observed in a recent interview, "is courage and trust to keep going." (Emory University, 2010) Ludwig's courage is inspirational—and he's still training thirty-five years later.

Kristin Haverty is a puppeteer, stop-motion silhouette animator and musician. She has toured with Tears of Joy Theatre and studied with Dan Hurlin at Sarah Lawrence College and I Wayan Nartha in Bali, Indonesia. She currently serves as the Associate Producer at the Center for Puppetry Arts. Her personal website can be found at www.jarvissilhouettes.com.

The Bound Man

Endnotes

[1] Eight of Ludwig's citation-winning productions were produced by the Center for Puppetry Arts. The ninth is Ludwig's adaptation of *Pinocchio* for Tears of Joy Theatre in Portland, OR.

[2] In 2007, Ludwig was honored by the Charles Loridans Foundation as an artist who has made significant contributions to the arts in Atlanta.

[3] Premiered in 1987, based on the work of Alfred Jarry

[4] Premiered in 1988, based on a German short story by Ilse Aichinger

[5] Premiered in 1989, UNIMA Citation in 1991

[6] Translated as The Spirit of Our Times: *The Spirit That Always Denies*

[7] Performed at the Arts Festival of Atlanta during an evening performance, the work contained what Robertson claimed to be unacceptable content. According to Ludwig, he sat down with the Reverend who had been in the audience that night and had reported the event to Robertson. The two laid out their viewpoints and agreed the media fury had blown the situation way out of proportion. A joint press conference put the controversy to rest. (Ludwig, 2013)

[8] Premiered in 1992, UNIMA Citation in 1995

[9] Premiered in 1998, UNIMA Citation in 2001

[10] The production enjoyed two runs at the Center, a U.S. tour (including the New Victory Theater, La MaMa, the Kennedy Center, the Spoleto Festival USA, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and the Walker Arts Center), a six-week tour of Japan, and a sold-out run in London.

[11] Premiered 1999, UNIMA Citation in 2001

[12] Premiered in 2006, UNIMA Citation in 2012

[13] Premiered 2008, UNIMA Citation in 2010

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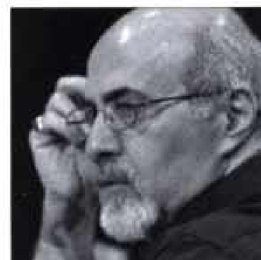

Mohsen Abolhassani and Samareh Mirfendereski

Behrouz Gharibpour—stage director, designer, and author—is one of the most celebrated Iranian theatre artists. He was born in Sanandaj, a northwestern city in Iran, in 1950. He earned his BA at the College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran. Then he traveled to Italy and started studying at Dramatic Arts Academy in Rome but left before completing his studies there.

Behrouz was first charmed into the world of puppet theatre by watching a Kheyme-Shab-Baazi[1] when he was ten years old, and there he has remained. After enrolling in the University of Tehran, he maintained his studies and research on Iranian traditional puppetry. In 1973, he joined a puppet theatre company directed by Oskar Batek, where the idea of becoming a playwright and theatre director began to grow in him.

His spectacular repertoire of marionette operas that have been his focus in recent years include *Rostam and Sohrab* (2004), *Macbeth* (2007), *Ashura* (2008-2009), *Rumi* (2010), and *Hafez* (2012). They have brought him wide recognition at home and abroad.

When talking about combining music and vocal songs to build up drama, we can discuss Taziyeh[2] and Naqqali[3], the ancient Iranian dramatic traditions, but opera in its pure Western form found its way into Iran only as late as the Qajar dynasty (ruling from 1785 to 1925). "Although opera came to Iran as a European souvenir, Iranian artists had written operettas and performed operas ever since. Ali-Mohammad-Khan Oveysi was the first to write a play in verse titled *Sarnevesht-e Parviz* (Fate of Parviz). Others also wrote operas, but the best among them is Mirzadeh Eshghi's[4] *Rastakhiz-e Shahryaran-e Iran Opera* (Resurrection of Persian Kings)," Shadravan observes (56). Up to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, renowned national and international ensembles performed operas in Tehran's Vahdat Hall which was constructed for that purpose.

It was Gharibpour who tried to revive opera by staging marionette operas that would appeal to a wide audience in Iran. With his knowledge and experience of both stage and music, he founded "Aran Puppet Theater Company" in 2004 and began the production of marionette operas. He has been the director and designer of all five of Aran's productions.

Apart from his second opera, *Macbeth*, he has heavily relied on Persian classical literature to build his repertoire. *Rostam and Sohrab* is a tragic story from Ferdowsi's[5] grand epic *Shahnameh*. *Ashura* is based upon Mohtasham Kashani's[6] Persian elegy on Imam Hossein. *Rumi* is composed primarily of Rumi's poems, and his last production, *Hafez*, is based upon Hafez's poetry.

MACBETH MARIONETTE OPERA (2007)
DIRECTOR: BEHROUZ GHARIBPOUR
PHOTO: HADIS ESHGHINEJAD
SOURCE: FARS NEWS AGENCY

MACBETH MARIONETTES OPERA'S PUPPETS (2007) PHOTO: MOHAMMAD FARNOOD SOURCE: FARS NEWS AGENCY

After watching Mozart's *Magic Flute* marionette opera in Tehran in 2002, Gharibpour decided to stage the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab as a marionette opera (Arasteh 41). Here began the formation of his signature style. This tragedy is the story of two hero warriors: Rostam being the father and Sohrab his son. Rostam met Sohrab's mother just once when Tahmineh conceived Sohrab. Then Rostam, the Iranian national hero, leaves and never meets his son until many years later in a war. In this battle, Sohrab—who is in pursuit of his father—is the heroic commander of the army that opposes Rostam. They fight a duel while oblivious of their blood bond. Eventually Rostam fatally wounds Sohrab.

For his first project, Gharibpour persuaded Loris Tjeknavorian the Iranian composer to let him produce a show based on his *Rostam and Sohrab* opera, the libretto of which is selected Persian verses from *Shahnameh*. This opera premiered in 2004. The show begins when Ferdowsi's marionette is on the stage contemplating and composing *Shahnameh*'s stories. His imaginings are shown as shadows on the back screen. Then the actual story begins and we see palaces interiors and exteriors, garden, bedchamber and battlefield as the opera goes on. Between scenes of lively music and dance, tranquil garden-walking, lovemaking and fierce battles, Ferdowsi appears on the stage and narrates

HAFEZ MARIONETTE OPERA (2012)

the story on a starry night. The important scene of the filicide is performed as a shadow show and the opera ends when Rostam and Tahmineh are mourning the death of their son.

The marionettes for this opera were produced as Marionettentheater Vienna in Salzburg style, where the Aran Puppet Theater Company members learned to produce marionettes for their subsequent projects. Although Gharibpour's *Rostam and Sohrab*, compared with his later productions, may now seem primitive in terms of puppet fabrication and manipulation, stage design and mise-en-scene, it has succeeded in turning many heads and has attracted a large audience to date.

Gharibpour's second show appeared three years later. He directed a puppet spectacle on Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth* opera in 2007. This project can be considered a big jump in his career. Aran Company fabricated accurate marionettes with fine costumes based on historical facts. The puppet manipulations improved significantly to synchronize more with the music and the moods of the scenes, and puppets became livelier as a result. In creating *Macbeth*, Gharibpour used video projection, detailed scenery, moving light projectors, smoke, and live parts of the human body like arms and heads on the stage to improve the theatrical illusions. For instance, in the scene when Macbeth meets three witches to ask them questions, the stage is in red light and full of smoke and the three witches are flying. Then a live head of a bald man with a crown and several live hands and arms appear from the stage-floor and start moving, all while accompanied by music—a very impressive scene.

Ashura premiered in last days of 2008 as the third part of Behrouz Gharibpour's repertoire. *Ashura* is the factual tragedy of Imam Hossein, the third Imam of Shias who, with his family and companions, were murdered in an unequal battle in 680.

Gharibpour based *Ashura*'s libretto upon popular Mohtasham Kashani's elegy on Imam Hossein and a compilation of Persian Taziyeh verses. Behzad Abdi composed this splendid opera based on the libretto. "This is the first opera composed in Iranian style and vocalization," (Pourghanad, *A Look Upon Ashura Opera*, harmonytalk.com) Pourghanad claims. This opera's melodies and vocalizations rely heavily upon Taziyeh's musical traditions as "the recitative quality of the songs throughout the opera follows the tradition of Iranian Taziyeh, in which antiheros avoid singing sweet melody in order not to leave a positive impression on the audience." (ibid)

In *Ashura*, like in *Rostam and Sohrab*, a poet narrates the whole story. We see Mohtasham Kashani singing his elegy between or during the scenes. In this production, Gharibpour created scenes with the aid of strong religious visual symbolism, which mostly comes from Taziyeh; like the color green for the good and red for the evil characters. He designed splendid scenes of dancing, boasting, fighting, mourning, oration, and metaphysical spirituality by employing perfect sets, mise-en-scène and puppet manipulation.

Ashura has played an important role in Gharibpour's success, as its religious subject matter and theme appealed to the State, and it has brought his company unexampled support.

One year later, Aran Puppet Theater Company performed *Rumi Marionette Opera*. This show, which first went on the stage in 2010, appears to be Gharibpour's most popular show. Behrouz compiled the libretto mostly from Rumi's poems and was lucky to cooperate again with Behzad Abdi as the composer.

Mowlana Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi or Mowlana (1207 to 1273) is one of the most renowned Persian mystic poets, whose account of rapturous life and its contemporaneous historical events are portrayed in *Rumi*. The show begins with an impressive scene of the Mongol invasion of Iran. We see ruins of the city on fire. Women, men, and children lament the deaths, addressing horse-riding Mongol enemies while Mongolians do not stop the slaughter. The magnificent lighting, believable city ruins, smoke, and fire projected on the back screen, along with very delicate puppet manipulation, create an impressive scene in silhouette. The mourning, like the rest of the opera, are delivered in the style based on the Iranian system of vocalizing and appear very empathetic here.

In the next scene, Shams Tabrizi appears (1185 to 1248), the mystic for whose character Mowlana finds immediate passion later on in the show. Shams first sings solo, then other marionettes emerge. Puppet manipulation has matured in this opera and Gharibpour has grown significantly braver in blocking and mise-en-scène since the puppets seem to move more freely—even singing with their backs to the audience for a considerable length of time. In *Rumi*, Behrouz more willingly uses darkness between and during certain scenes and this accentuates and lengthens the impression of the fantastic.

The opera continues on Behzad Abdi's illustrious composition while Rumi's philosophy is embedded in various moments of the opera through his poetry, recited by characters in the show. The young Mowlana and his famous scholar father are leaving Khwarazm's ruins, bidding the city farewell.

In the following scenes we see various settings. There's a marketplace in which a Naqqal and his apprentice are performing a Naqqali ritual for the overturn of Mongol rule. Other settings include: the death of Mowlana's father, Mowlana and Shams's crucially impressive encounter and the beginning of Rumi's bewilderment, after which he quits his high social positions as jurist and teacher and devotes himself to mysticism and the "religion of love." There are scenes of Mowlana's eccentricities in public and people mocking and scorning him, Mowlana and Shams's meetings with fervent discourses on Shams Tabrizi's ideology and insights, wife and companions of Rumi trying to dissuade him from his love for Shams, spiritual Sama dances of Shams and Mowlana and his companions, a nightmare of executing Shams, and Mowlana's wife and companions' eventually mollifying him and begging his pardon. In the final scene, everybody is in a Sama dance and the Mongolian army cannot harm them anymore.

Hafez Marionette Opera—the latest production of Aran—premiered in 2012. Behzad Abdi composed the intricate opera for a libretto compiled by Behrouz Gharibpour, who based it, in part, upon Hafez's poems.

Hafez is one of the most eminent Iranian poets and held to be the most popular one (circa 1325 to circa 1389). Compared to Rumi, Hafez seems to encounter fewer dramatic events in his lifetime. This fact negatively affected Gharibpour's libretto which lacks an effective dramatic structure.

Gharibpour says "*Hafez Marionette Opera* is a mission to give a historical report of the age and life of Hafez" (*Gharibpour to Stage Hafez Opera*, interview, mehrnews.com), but he hardly fulfills this claim as he appears to manipulate some historical facts to achieve a favorable outcome. For instance, in some scenes he draws on the life of Obayd Zakani'and portrays it parallel to the account of Hafez

to fortify the story, or he depicts historical figures from a period that predates Hafez. Nevertheless, *Hafez* is a superb production, considering what visually occurs on the stage. Everything, including accurate puppets, their fine costumes and graceful movements, sets and colors, video projection and lights achieve their aesthetic zenith.

In *Hafez*, Gharibpour has created tableaux that beautifully foster strong moods for such settings as tavern, dungeon, seashore, and court. Now we will await his next production that is said to be the romantic opera of *Leyli and Majnun* to see what innovations or alterations he brings into his new show, both for stage techniques but more importantly for the dramaturgy of this classic story.

Endnotes

[1] Kheyme-Shab-Baazi is a traditional Iranian puppet show.

[2] Taziyeh, the Persian Passion Play, is a ritual dramatic tradition consisting of numerous scripts mainly on the passions of Imam Hossein.

[3] Naqqali is the Iranian dramatic story-telling in which a skilled Naqqal recounts ancient heroic stories in verse and prose, using appropriate gestures.

[4] Mirzadeh Eshghi is a poet and satirist (1893 to 1924) who wrote during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution era.

[5] Ferdowsi was the Persian poet (circa 940 to circa 1020) who composed the Iranian national epic: *Shahnameh*.

[6] Mohtasham Kashani (1528 to 1588) was a Persian poet who is mainly known for his elegy on Imam Hossein.

[7] Obayd Zakani is a Persian poet and satirist (circa 1300 to 1371).

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Rostam and Sohrab Marionette Opera (2004)

Oriza Hirata: SAYONARA

PHOTO: TSUKASA AOKI

by Alain Cloarec

When we think of robots or androids, we are likely to conjure images of Arnold Schwarzenegger as the T-800 Terminator and his practically indestructible nemesis, the shape-changing T-1000 Model Terminator, in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). Other images of robots that may pop up in our minds would probably be linked to the theme of technology gone awry. After all, since a robot is created by man, it must be flawed—and the flaw must result in violence, at least in fiction. However, for Japanese playwright-director Oriza Hirata, the robots and androids in his plays not only clearly follow science fiction author Isaac Asimov's *Three Laws of Robotics*,[1] but go beyond these precepts in order to help humans overcome fear and grief. In doing so, Hirata's artificial intelligent beings have only one purpose, to serve. Interestingly, the word "robot" was coined by early 20th century Czech writer Karel Čapek in his 1920 science fiction play entitled *R.U.R.* (Rossum's *Universal Robots*). Čapek gives credit to his brother for inventing the word "roboti" from "robota" in the sense of "serf labor," "slave" or "forced labor" in Czech. These definitions could certainly apply to Hirata's robots, but the robots in his plays are treated with respect, not as serfs. They behave almost like human beings and are thus imbued with a life-of-their-own quality—very much like puppets.

Oriza Hirata was born in Tokyo in 1962 and, while still a university student, established the progressive Seinendan Theater Company in 1983. In reaction against westernized Japanese theater, Hirata developed a "contemporary colloquial theater theory," which became known as uniquely Japanese, mirroring the pace and restrained qualities of life in Japan. The company's plays depicted the quiet everyday moments of Japanese society. Hirata became a major figure in Japanese contemporary theater and regarded as a pioneer in what was called the Quiet Theater movement of the 1990s. As playwright-director, Hirata writes uncomplicated texts and directs his actors in an extremely naturalistic acting style. Both his dialogues and his actors' performances resemble film acting reminiscent of Pinter—without that looming threat of violence—but with a profound depth of unexpressed emotions that comes through the simplicity of his dialogues, the actors' pauses and the specificity of blocking and gestures. This is minimalistic acting, writing and directing, and his robots and android actors fit perfectly into this style.

Hirata's move towards robotic theater, featuring android, robot and human actors, may seem a bit radical to westerners, but is perhaps more natural for Japanese people whose long relationship with robots is very much integrated into their daily lives. In Japan, robots are used in assembly lines for manufacturing; in warehouses for inventory keeping; as cleaning devices replacing clunky vacuum cleaners; as toys; as bomb-detecting devices; during rescue missions after natural disasters; as greeters in hospitals; as roving information kiosks; as school crossing guards; as night office security guards. And more societal robotic roles are constantly being created. Whereas Western culture has almost always portrayed robots as menacing, in Japan, robots are helpers and heroes. For these reasons, Hirata's leap to use robots as actors was not as big as western audiences might think. Another reason why robots are so widely accepted and even often revered in Japanese society is due to Japan's long history of its indigenous Shinto religion, which blurs boundaries between the animate and the inanimate. In his book *Inside the Robot Kingdom: Japan, Mechatronics, and the Coming Robotopia*, Frederik L. Schodt states that "...robots are inspired by Japan's tradition of animism...the belief that anything in the natural world—not just living things—can have a conscious life or soul." Hasn't this exact thought also permeated the hearts and minds of puppeteers and their puppets for centuries? If so, robots and androids could certainly be looked upon as puppets.

In 2008, Hirata contacted Dr. Hiroshi Ishiguro, a leading robotics researcher and the director of Osaka University's Intelligent Robotics Laboratory, and asked him to collaborate on the *Robot Theater Project*. The result was two one-act plays: the android-human theater play *Sayonara* and the robot-human theater play *I, Worker*, described as "A Double Bill of One-Acts from Android/Robot Human Theater."

The opening piece, *Sayonara*, is about a young woman who, we find out, is presumably in the last stages of dying. The minimalistic setting seems to be the woman's apartment with two chairs and an area rug. Sitting in the second chair is an android that very much looks like a real woman. During the course of the play we learn that the young woman's father purchased this android to keep her company. The android's function here is to recite poetry to the woman in order to console her—however, the poetry proves to be quite mournful. After some discussion about death, the android continues reciting poetry and the lights fade out. When they fade back in, the young woman is no longer in her chair and we are made to construe that she has died. The android is still reciting poetry but this time continuously repeating the same lines as if stuck in a loop. The original play ended here but an additional scene was

added after Japan's 2011 Fukushima nuclear plant earthquake and tsunami disaster. In the added scene, a Japanese man enters and calls someone on his cell phone. We understand that he is a technician who has been called to retrieve this android and troubleshoot its malfunctioning system. After a slight shove on the android's back, the robot seemingly reboots and appears to be functioning properly once again and confirms this with the technician who then tells the android its next assignment: to be delivered to the Fukushima nuclear meltdown site to recite poetry there. As the technician puts the android on his back, the android starts once again to recite poetry as they exit.

During the first part of the play, as the young woman and the android exchange feelings and thoughts, respectively, one gets the sense that the android empathizes with its "client" —even though it plainly states that it cannot feel emotion. However, after the young woman's departure we have the feeling that the android, now alone and reciting poetry in a loop, is actually grieving: Its grief is reflected by its malfunction. This is a touching moment. But the most poignant moment is when the technician tells the android that it will be sent to the nuclear disaster zone, and will be transported there by robots because it is too dangerous for humans. The android pauses for a moment then states that it understands and is glad to be of service

SEINENDAN THEATER COMPANY AND OSAKA UNIVERSITY, ANDROID THEATER PROJECT: *SAYONARA*.

PHOTO: JULIE LEMBERGER WWW.JULIELEMBERGER.COM

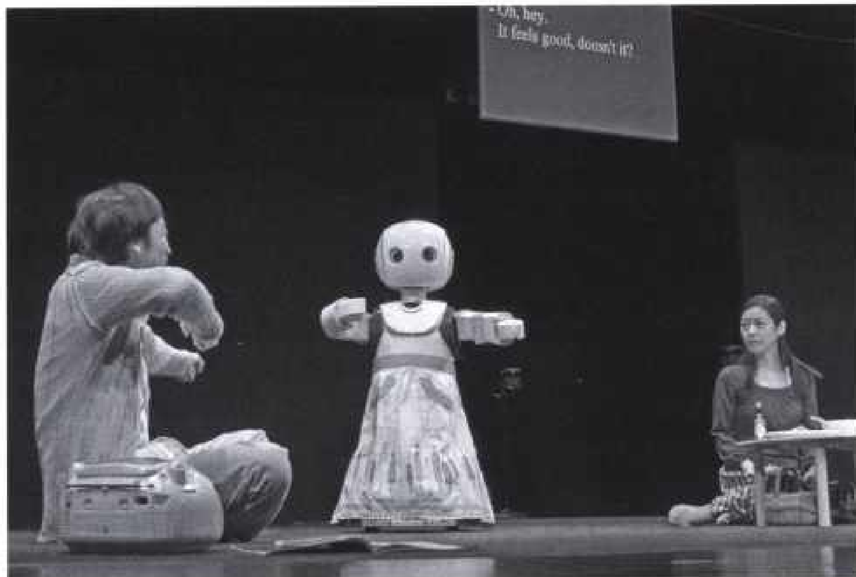
to humans. Then, in a sign of respect, the technician bows very low and for a very long time to the android, as if bowing to a human being who understands the sacrifice agreed to. A touching moment between man and android is established creating a social relationship between humans and objects on a human level. The android is no longer an object. It has become equal to a human being because it has agreed to become a sacrifice—as only a human can.

The second play, *I, Worker*, is about a married couple and the relationship between themselves and the two robot-helpers who function as manservant and maid/cook. Here, the machines are not androids but pure robots, although their features were seemingly built to reflect a male and female with happy and young demeanors. Whereas *Sayonara* possesses a serious tone with some humor *I, Worker* presents comedic qualities with some serious touches. The human couple appears to be a bit estranged and we understand from what the "male" robot says that the couple is grieving for the loss of a child. We also find out that the husband no longer has a job and his malaise is mirrored by the "male" robot's sudden loss of interest in work. However, the robot's decision to basically quit its job is quite comical and the audience laughed whole-heartedly when it rolled away—in three perpendicular motions—and exited the stage, only to reappear a bit later in the background just silently rolling from stage right to stage left as if sulking or depressed. The play concludes with a sense of optimism with the wife and the husband off-stage looking at a beautiful sunset (and the feeling that they may try to have another child) and the two robots on stage also looking up at the reddish glow of the sunset as if enjoying it as much as any human being.

In this play, although the robots do not have humanoid features like the android in *Sayonara*, they possess a child-like quality and the audience immediately responded to their cuddliness as soon as they appeared. Interestingly, the less human-like robots seemed to engage the audience much more than the android, perhaps because we view these smaller-sized machines as toys, pets or children—all of which do not judge us—instead of adults.

Whether intentional or not, there is an interesting link between these plays. The actor playing the technician in *Sayonara* is the same actor playing the husband in *I, Worker*. One could interpret that they are the same character and that the technician husband in *I, Worker* perhaps lost his job because the android in *Sayonara* had malfunctioned or was destroyed at the Fukushima nuclear meltdown site. If intentional, this could be looked upon as a bridge linking both plays through this robotic technology theme.

Hirata's two plays seem to pose the question: Is theater ready for an "inter-robotics" cast of androids, robots and humans? And if so, can robots—once animated with movement, voice and character—be considered not live actors of course, but animated objects, i.e. puppets? However, the word "puppet" itself presents a problem. When the word is mentioned, our minds immediately call up the image of Pinocchio, the Muppets or Guignol—or other mostly string or glove puppets—and we also immediately think of a puppet booth and only children as spectators. But puppetry has been shown to be much more than the preconceived forms of entertainment that the general public thinks of it. Robots and androids, such as those used in Hirata's plays, can be considered puppets because they are *inanimate objects manipulated by humans*—even though by remote control or computer programming instead of strings, rods, gloves or



SEINENDAN THEATER COMPANY AND OSAKA UNIVERSITY ROBOT THEATER PROJECT: *I, WORKER*
PHOTO: JULIE LEMBERGER WWW.JULIELEMBERGER.COM

any other type of manipulation. Without the robot operator, the robot cannot move; and without the android's voice, provided here by an actress, the robot cannot act. These live operators and voice performers are in fact, puppeteers. By mixing his "contemporary colloquial theater theory" of intense naturalism, it would seem that Oriza Hirata and his Android/Robot Human Theater have found a way to create real-looking artificial beings that live and interact in a very plausible world and perhaps not too distant from our present one. And with the no-strings-attached manipulation of robots and androids on stage, puppetry has taken another new leap into the future.

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Seinendan Theater Company and Osaka University's *Robot Theater Project* features performers: Geminoid F (*Sayonara*), Bryerly Long (*Sayonara*), Hiroshi Ota (*Sayonara* and *I, Worker*), Minako Inoue (*I, Worker* and voice/motions of Geminoid F in *Sayonara*) and Robovie R3 (*I, Worker*).

Alain G. Cloarec is a New York City based filmmaker and playwright. He holds a BFA from NYU Film and an MA in Theater Arts from Hunter College, and is one of the translators of UNIMA's English version of the *Encyclopédie Mondiale des Arts de la Marionnette*.

Endnotes

* Laws of robotics:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

2. A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

3 A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

And in Asimov's later works, a fourth law was added:

4. A robot may not harm humanity, or, by inaction, allow humanity to come to harm.

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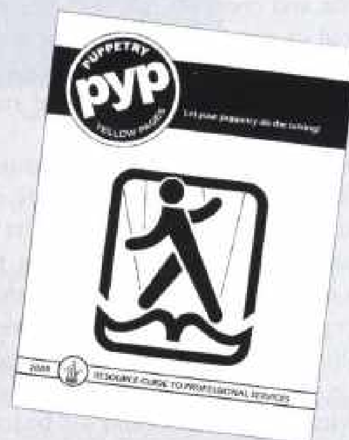

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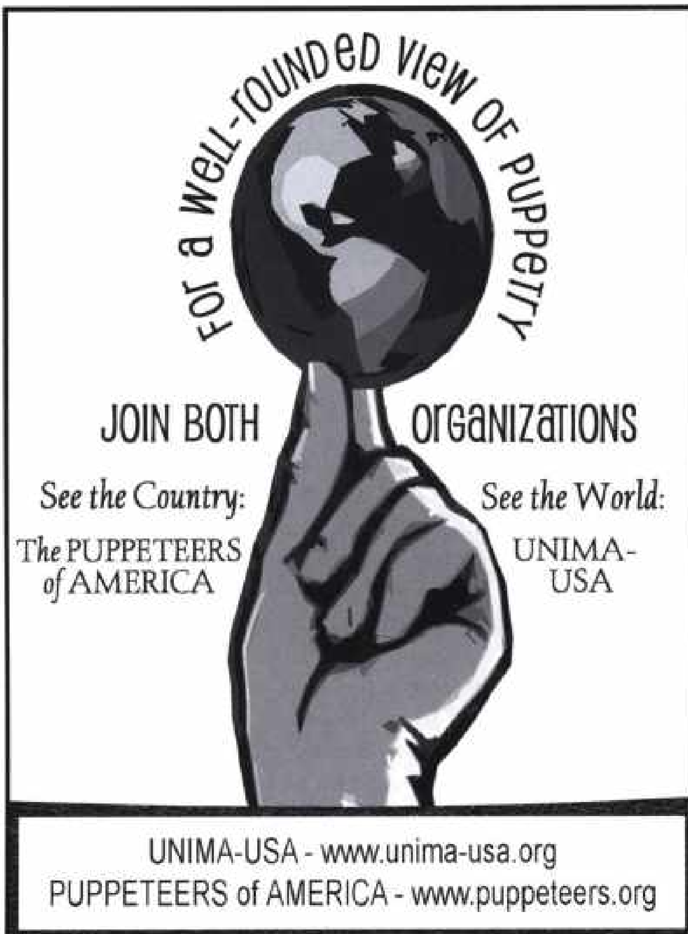

"It Isn't Easy to Be Simple"

Burr Tillstrom and Early Televised Puppetry

by Patrick King

Burr Tillstrom's televised puppet show *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* is one of the first examples of puppetry on television, its 1947 premiere placing it at the early edge of experimentation in the medium. Despite the program's apparent simplicity, Tillstrom's formulation of an ethos for the form and the lingering effect of his program's aesthetic framework deserve more scholarly exploration. Driven by his lifelong affinity for live theatrical performance, Tillstrom established a vocabulary and approach for mass-media puppetry by deploying the mechanics and routines of the vaudeville stages of his youth and the puppetry booths he frequented in his native Chicago. In translating the tropes of centuries-old glove puppetry and theatrical practice to the screen in *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, Tillstrom merged the nimbly immediate nature of live performance with the broad reach and imaginative capabilities of television's broadcasting technology, providing a template that endured for decades beyond his program's cancellation in 1957. In examining Tillstrom's oeuvre and archives, I hope to illuminate the influence Chicago's performing arts had on him, the live performance history that fueled his development as an artist, and the lingering influence of his work through the inheritors of his legacy, from Jim Henson to the heckling robots of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

An undated interview transcript in Tillstrom's archives centers on his childhood memories of Sophie Tucker, Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, and the Duncan Sisters performing in Chicago's 1920s movie houses as warm-up acts for the cinema. The juxtaposition of filmed and live entertainment, common in early cinema's function within a novelty show, set the template for Tillstrom's unique position in early televised puppetry, the improvisational liveliness of theatrical performance set in conversation with a replicable, homogenized, and widely-circulated medium. Inspired by vaudevillian headliners, the young Tillstrom set about transforming live theatrical performance into a simple kind of puppetry, deploying teddy bears and dolls to recreate routines in the pint-sized proscenium of a window sill. "Kids would come up on the porch and I'd use the drapery for the draw curtain and the shade running up and down was my asbestos. I have never lost the fascination for curtains and the function of a curtain in the theater" (Tillstrom Interview).

Tillstrom's archives reveal the avid focus of his early years: At sixteen, he attended Marshall Field's Exhibition on Marionettes and Puppets, and by 1937, at the age of twenty, he performed at the American Puppetry Festival, his program scrawled with an exuberant: "We'll have our credentials tattooed on our chests" (American Puppetry Festival Program). By this time, Tillstrom had created Kukla, the diminutive center of the Tillstrom's stock company of "Kuklapolitans." Kukla, who somewhat resembles Punch, is a one-handed glove puppet with an immobile face and stubby arms performing in a proscenium showbooth. Kukla's personality, however, sets him apart from his Victorian predecessor, Punch's violence giving way to Kukla's childlike vacillation from delight to worry, his darkest mood a prickled irritation. Kukla's design is a blank canvas: arched eyebrows perched above his dot eyes, blushed cheeks, and an O-shaped mouth alternately surprised, upset, or delighted. Kukla emotes through quality of gesture (his arms flailing, soothingly petting his companions, or clutching his head in consternation) and through vocalization, his falsetto ranging from a lilting croon to a piercing yelp.

Tillstrom's Chicago years saw him follow the tradition of the wandering player, performing at Gold Coast social events, YWCAs, Chicago's Art Institute, carnivals, and most reliably, in the Chicago Parks District through the WPA, which engaged him as a marionette operator. Through these pre-war years, he experimented extensively with glove puppets as an improvisational, freely expressive form offering contrast to the scripted work the string figures offered him. When Marshall Field hired Tillstrom to perform in their department store's puppet theater in 1939, he won the security of a long-term gig, a partnership with an explicitly commercial enterprise, and a playground in which to develop his work. He wrote later of the education the job afforded him: "To date we've given about 1000 performances in the marionette theatre, and about 400 with hand-puppets... building new characters, new sets, new scripts for a different show each week. I've learned a helluva lot about theatre these past few years and it's a good stimulant to keep on the move creatively" (Grapevine 6).

While Tillstrom developed his characters through Marshall Field and his private engagements, the onset of World War II brought him employment with the war department and paired him for the first time with Fran Allison, a Chicago actress who worked with Tillstrom selling war bonds with a live show. Allison's work in the war department shows consisted of song and patter, acting as a bottler. This role would prove invaluable in the leap to television, as Bil Baird pointed out, serving "to bridge the space between Kukla's fantasy world and the one we live in" (Baird 233), an audience surrogate whose engagement with both the television camera and the puppets encourages the viewer at home to accept the bizarre figures as "real."

Tillstrom's unpublished scripts for the war bond shows playfully jab at the seriousness of his sponsor while suggesting the full development of Kukla's personality, whose noisy patriotism melts to bashful mumbling when confronted by a hectoring, abusive Hitler. Prioritizing comedy and character over even the seriousness of the war effort prefigures Tillstrom's subsequent determination to control his creations in the mercenary world of broadcast television, but that sense of artistry paired with the business savvy that would make *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* possible. Through his work at Marshall Field, Tillstrom met RCA Victor, which hired him to stage a closed-circuit show for their television display in the store; this demonstration offered him a tutorial in the emerging medium and forged a relationship with the company that would sponsor the early years of his nationally syndicated show.

By 1947, Tillstrom had assembled the Kuklapolitans. Kukla's fellow headliner, friend, and foil Oliver J. Dragon featured one drooping fang and a "marshmallow heart" (Corrigan), lacking any real menace despite his imperious personality. The duo was joined by stagehand Cecil Bill, young brat Mercedes, frenetic mailman Fletcher Rabbit, drawling Southern gentleman Colonel Crackie, regal soprano Madame Ooglepuss, and the gratingly ingratiating Buelah Witch, among others. When WBKB-Chicago hired Tillstrom and Allison to produce a show on only four days' notice, these figures became its core, animated by the improvisational style of Tillstrom's live shows. The Kuklapolitans hit the airwaves in October 1947; originally *Junior Jamboree*, the show was retitled *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* within a few months of its premiere. By the following fall, the spread of coaxial cable brought the show across the Midwest on NBC, and by 1949, it reached the East Coast to critical and popular acclaim; the New York Times later reported that it "probably has almost as many adult fans as it does young admirers" (Gould X9).

The televised Kuklapolitan universe was a simple one. Its action sprang from minor events or holidays, with plot nearly an afterthought: Kukla starts a lemonade stand only to be overrun by Ollie's fast-talking marketing strategies; the Kuklapolitans celebrate Valentine's Day; Kukla and Ollie put up and decorate a Christmas tree. The episode's inciting incident provided fodder for banter, a song or two, and a pitch for the sponsor's product before the titular trio ended each episode in a peaceful, happy embrace, framed by the proscenium of Kukla and Ollie's puppet-booth home.

The program's cross-generational appeal was deliberate; Tillstrom avoided writing to children's tastes, outlining his ambivalence regarding his audience:

> Goethe and Maeterlinck wrote works for puppet theatre as well as Mozart. In this country the lover of Alice in Wonderland or Oz is just as likely to be an adult as he is a child. But since the puppet theatre was not established in this country per se, it has been linked to where it has appeared, to children... But the largest part of the program's appeal is to adults, and we know from our mail that the adults are as loyal as the children (Letter to Frank Orber, 23 March 1956).

Tillstrom's assertion of a lineage tracing back to Goethe, Maeterlinck and Mozart is telling, as *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* drew its inspiration as much from the dramatic stage as it did the puppet booth. Episodes featured nods to the vaudeville of Tillstrom's youth (including the Duncan Sisters' "Baby Sister Blues"), but also to grand opera, albeit filtered through the gently anarchic world of the Kuklapolitans. Their attempt at Carmen, for example, collapses when Ollie mistakenly casts three Carmens. Kukla decides to play a bullfighter instead of Don Jose, and Fran shows up unprepared, having watched the ballgame in lieu of rehearsing. Tillstrom, an opera aficionado, relished off-the-air work in the form, producing Kuklapolitan concerts with the Boston Symphony, at Chicago's Ravinia Festival, and through a benefit for Chicago's Lyric Opera.

Kukla, Fran and Ollie is imbued with Tillstrom's affection for his pre-televisual work. While a 1958 letter from Henry Coleman of GAC-TV refers to Tillstrom's design for a dolly rig that would allow the Kuklapolitans free range of the studio (Coleman), Tillstrom ultimately eschewed the technology's offer of mobility in favor of the familiar proscenium booth. He used technology instead to support his traditional theatrical approach, employing a scrim to see Fran from behind the booth and a backstage television monitor to view the puppets as they appeared on camera; such rigs remain common in the work of Henson and his successors. Tillstrom also amplified and broadcasted theatrical forms through the early adoption of the Zoomar lens and color broadcasts,* effectively turning

his program into a mass-media rendition of a private, domestic performance. His intense focus on interaction with fans further enhanced the program's intimacy. Unwaveringly answering fan letters himself, and citing the thousands of letters received weekly as a marker of success, Tillstrom mined them for material, aspiring to a meaningfully interactive experience with his remote audience and shifting the program's content in response to viewer suggestions. Significantly, Tillstrom never put an audience onscreen (unlike the child-packed set of *Howdy Doody*), the occasional laughter of the crew the only suggestion that its cast performed for anybody but the viewers at home. Through direct address to the camera and the bridging efforts of Fran, the lens, camera, and broadcasting apparatus would be the only mediating elements between the Kuklapolitans and their audience.

Tillstrom's theatrical material, direct engagement with a distant audience, and use of time-tested glove-puppet tropes reverberate well past the run of *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*. Jim Henson's Muppets later demonstrated a complexity far beyond Tillstrom's one-handed glove puppets (many of Henson's creations requiring multiple operators or controlled remotely), but the Muppet universe relies heavily on bottlers, from the guest stars of *The Muppet Show* to the human cast of *Sesame Street* and the Muppet films. *The Muppet Show* relies on music hall numbers in much the same way that Tillstrom mined the vaudeville circuit and the opera house for his program, and it shares with *Kukla, Fran and Ollie* a proscenium frame with a thick red curtain. *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* features one-handed glove puppets engaging with human bottlers, occasionally performing "operas" of Rogers' own devising. Even the sarcastic bots of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, tonally a far cry from Tillstrom's amiable society, rely on a human bottler and settle into the frame of a theater to entertain their audience; early seasons even included segments responding directly to fan mail, a more overt version of Tillstrom's engagement with his far-flung audience.

Tillstrom's simplicity of approach can be misread as primitive, a product of limitation rather than a deliberate choice, but the effect was hard-won; in a letter written late in the run of *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, he argued: "It isn't easy to be simple.... It's easy to be simple when you start, because you don't really realize what you have.... Then, suddenly, you realize that you're an artist, and the dangerous times begin... It's a constant struggle to return to the joys of early discovery" (Letter to Dan Jenkins, 19 September 1954). In his frequent return to the vaudeville routines of his youth and the frames and techniques of his live performances, Tillstrom chased after this hard-won simplicity, a vaudevillian performing in front of a silver screen, pulling the virtues of live performance into the technological frontiers of the future.

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Note

* Nick Hall's "Closer to the Action" highlights the usefulness of the Zoomar lens in enhancing the Kuklapolitans' intimacy with their audience (Hall 282-283).

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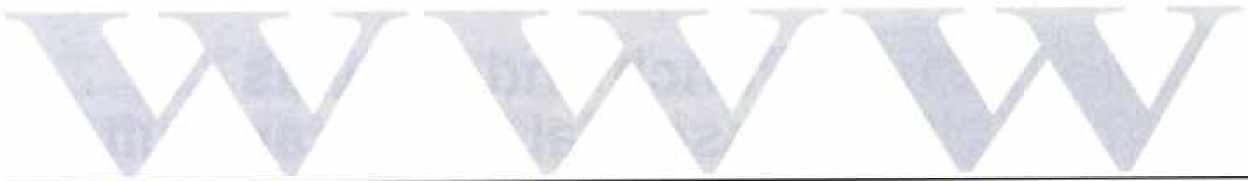

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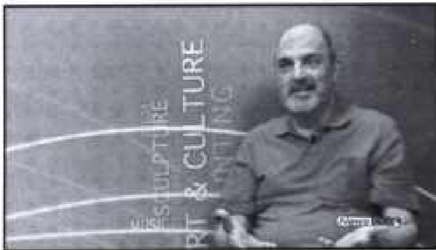

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www.theaterofmemory.com/art/bread/sideshow/

Punch and Judy as Essential American Culture

Ryan Howard, *Punch and Judy in 19th Century America: A History and Biographical Dictionary*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2013. 284 pp. $55.

The embarrassing void of historical studies of American puppetry since Paul McPharlin's 1949 *Puppet Theatre in America* is redressed to a great degree in Ryan Howard's fascinating, multi-faceted history of Punch and Judy in the United States during the nineteenth century. Howard, who performed a great service to American puppet history with his 2006 biography of McPharlin himself (*Paul McPharlin and the Puppet Theater*), now turns to the most iconic figure of English-speaking puppetry ever known, tracing the history of Punch as the big-nosed handpuppet, like millions of other European emigrés, arrives in the New World and becomes American.

Punch and Judy in 19th Century America shows that, like many forms of puppetry around the world, Punch and Judy has been both ubiquitous and unknown. Although intensely popular across the entire American continent as a low-culture entertainment most often performed together with other forms of popular culture, Punch and Judy shows were rarely reviewed or documented. So the primary sources Howard has had to rely on are short notices and advertisements from local newspapers across the country, municipal records, and, quite rarely, an extensive article about a Punch performer, such as the 1872 "Interview with Mr. Buttercups" that appeared in the *New York Times*; or the Punch and Judy play script that Thomas A. M. Ward published himself in 1874. These "often disconcertingly uninformative" sources, as Howard puts it, suffer from the 19th-century view of popular entertainments as "inferior forms of expression," and he somewhat wistfully looks forward to a time when the multitudinous, yet-uncorrelated local records he has examined page by page in small-town and big-city archives across the country might be searched in a flash in a database.

Howard's years of hard research result in the *Biographical Dictionary* that accounts for almost half of his book. Paul McPharlin, for similar reasons of necessity, employed the same technique in his 1949 American puppet history, and Ryan Howard's version is equally fascinating and compelling. His entries on over 330 different Punch performers range from one line ("Saunders's Punch and Judy appeared at the new Dime Museum in Buffalo, New York, in 1895") to the seven pages he can devote to a puppeteer such as William J. Judd (born circa 1841), who was active in New York City. The puppeteers described here are much like those of today: multi-taskers, jacks of all trades, seasonal workers, and itinerant performers whose puppet skills are often mixed together with other talents in music, elocution, dance, magic, design, construction, and "legitimate" theater.

Part of the challenge here is a disarmingly simple question of definition: What exactly was a Punch and Judy show? We have the iconic Punch and Judy story of an anarchistic and violent trickster whose slapstick rebellion against all rules begins with the family, extends to all parts of society, government, and finally the higher moral and godly forces; but "Punch and Judy" was so popular that the phrase entered into the vernacular as a term for any handpuppet show, and sometimes any type of puppet show at all. The German immigrant Julius Hansen, active in New York in the 1860s and 70s, was apparently "arrested and held to bail for violation of the Sabbath laws" in Jersey City on November 21, 1875, according to a *New York Times* article Howard found, for "exhibiting a Punch and Judy show." But, as a German immigrant performing for a German-American audience, isn't it more likely that the Lübeck-born puppeteer was performing some version of the German hand-puppet trickster Kasperl?

This is simply one aspect of the "known knowns" and "known unknowns" (as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld used to say) that currently characterize this particular aspect of puppet history. Howard's tactic in response to the vagaries is to approach the subject from different angles and points of view, developing a network of perceptions that together lay out at least the foundations of an American Punch and Judy history, entirely conscious of the fact that this is above all a first step.

Punch and Judy in 19th Century America gets off to a slow start with a general history of the tradition focused primarily on well-known English sources. These initial chapters will probably be useful to the general reader, but historian George Speaight did a much more thorough job of this in his 1970 book *Punch & Judy, A History*, and I found myself aching for Howard's story to jump over from London streets to the New World. However, once Howard settles into a chapter on "The American Punch and Judy Show," he is off and running.

Howard illuminates fascinating differences between the English and American versions of the venerable handpuppet tradition. Whereas the English Punch performers generally performed in the streets and, in the summer, on England's numerous seaside beaches, U.S. Punch and Judy men (they seem to have been overwhelmingly male) rarely performed on street corners, but instead in circuses and other traveling shows in the warm months, and then in the numerous dime museums, popular theaters, and taverns over the winter. The classic images of English Punch men gathering passersby on a London street are thus largely irrelevant to the American experience. Instead, American Punch performers were intricately connected with mainstream popular performance forms, and Punch in the United States was often presented as one particular element of a larger and longer show in Barnum's museum, a wild west show, circus, minstrel show, vaudeville, or medicine show. Punch performers often doubled (as they do now) as magicians (Houdini was also a Punch and Judy man), masters of ceremonies, scene painters, stage managers, musicians, jugglers, and actors.

Punch and Judy shows in England never started out as children's entertainment, but the heyday of American Punch and Judy (1865-1900, according to Howard) coincided with the emergence of late-19th-century ideas about the lives of children. A Victorian development in social thinking was that children were not simply smaller versions of adults, but beings who led distinctly different lives than adults, and who consequently deserved their own literature (a florescence of children's literature appears at this time) and performance. As a perennial favorite among children already, Punch and Judy seemed to fit the bill, even though its innate violence against the family was never hidden. Punch's "obstreperous nonconformity" (as Howard puts it) was, in Victorian terms, much more appropriate for children than for proper 19th-century adults. One can see from this thoughtful analysis that the late 19th century was the particular moment when puppetry in the West began to be pigeon-holed as primarily children's entertainment, a situation from which we are still only slowly emerging.

But although the late nineteenth century may have marked the beginning of a puppetry-as-children's-entertainment movement, Punch and Judy's roots were still in the mainstream of popular adult entertainment. Towards the end of his history, Howard attempts to come to terms with the larger question of what the eternal trickster Punch meant for the development of American culture. In fascinating detail, Howard has shown how the American Punch, like the other forms of mass entertainment of which it was a part, reflected essential questions of American identity, and above all ethnicity and race. The heterogeneous mix of characters in the continental Punch shows became a specifically American array of ethnic stereotypes: Irishmen, Italians, Germans, and above all, African-Americans. Nineteenth-century questions of American identity raised by enormous waves of immigration and the still-unresolved situation of black Americans, of which the massive trauma of the Civil War was still a recent reminder, emerged naked on the puppet stage, just as they did in actors' theater.

In developing a theory about the meaning of Punch, Howard explores the nature of the trickster as a physically deformed creature (Punch typically has a hunchback and herniated stomach) reflecting the cultural disorder of the environment. This all seems right on target, as does his analysis of Punch as an "uncanny" figure, although strangely enough Howard does not connect Punch as uncanny trickster to the vast array of other puppet tricksters around the world—not just the European ones, but Semar from Java, Monkey from China, Karagöz from Turkey, and so on. But this train of thought, touching on anthropology and what otherwise is known as Performance Studies, reaches the entirely fruitful idea that "Punch as a puppet offered an archetypal image of humanity under the control of something or someone, and simultaneously as a character, he represented an individual out of control, so that the Punch and Judy show as a whole provided a cathartic expression of the revolt against authority," and also represented the "fragmented society" which characterized the U.S. in the late 1800s. In this way, Howard argues, American audiences came to Punch and other forms of popular entertainment to help understand and reinforce their sense of national identity.

European puppet theater has for many decades benefitted from focused histories of particular forms of puppetry: George Speaight on Punch, Paul Fournel on Guignol, Catriona Kelley on Petrushka, and John McCormick on Italian puppet traditions. And specific aspects of Asian and African puppet and object theater have also received similar treatment (although often from the perspective of anthropology). Paul McPharlin began to consider American puppet history sixty years ago, but his initiative has been followed only sporadically. In this context, Ryan Howard's *Punch and Judy in 19th Century America* is not only an enlightening combination of deep research, perceptive analysis, and colorful detail, but also a good next step in the development of puppet history that can inspire more historians to come.

– review by John Bell

Peter Schumann, 50 years of Bread & Puppet Theater

(see article, page 16)